

**Reading the Post-postmodern Formal Strategies of David Foster
Wallace and Mark Z Danielewski**

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Abstract

“Reading the Post-postmodern Formal Strategies of David Foster Wallace and Mark Z Danielewski” by David Hering

This thesis addresses the formal narrative strategies of two American authors, David Foster Wallace and Mark Z Danielewski, in terms of their relationship to postmodernism. Wallace’s novel *Infinite Jest* (1996) and Danielewski’s debut *House of Leaves* (2000) are substantial works, with an encyclopedic employment of large amounts of information (Wallace’s novel runs to around 1,100 pages, while Danielewski’s is a little over 700 pages) and complex structuring principles. These two novels also represent the most explicit and lengthy programmatic dialogue with postmodernism that these writers have produced. The only manner in which to engage in serious and close critical detail with this element of Danielewski’s and Wallace’s formal strategies is to study these works in close and lengthy detail. Therefore, *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* are the basis of this study, with references made to other works by Wallace and Danielewski where appropriate.

It is the contention of this study that, while it has been critically posited that *Infinite Jest* occupies a position that is interrogative of the tenets of postmodernism, no critic has yet outlined in extensive detail Wallace’s crucial employment of specifically formal narrative strategies to dramatise this interrogation. Furthermore, critical positions on *House of Leaves* are only just beginning to consider that the novel might adopt an combative position towards postmodern tropes. This study suggests the essential importance of reading Danielewski’s novel as a post-postmodern text by outlining how, through its formal narrative strategies, the novel dramatises and interrogates its own roots within postmodernism.

“Form” in this study is taken to mean both the pervasive employment of particular spatial, temporal and paratextual tropes to construct a narrative with a particular “shape”, as well as an interaction and hybridisation with other, non-literary forms. The critical analysis within this study reveals the remarkable similarity of the formal narrative strategies of the two writers, with both Wallace and Danielewski employing a number of formal structuring principles that underpin the spatio-temporal form of their works, principles that draw from (among other areas) mathematics, poststructuralism and cultural theory in order to enact an interrogation of postmodern tropes. This study also suggests that the formal employment of cinematic terminology, theory and technique within both *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* is substantial and fundamental to the post-postmodern position of both works.

Author's Declaration

Some material from this thesis has already been published or approved for publication. Material from Chapter 1 has been published as a book chapter under the title "Infinite Jest: Triangles, Cycles, Choices and Chases" in my edited collection *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays* (Austin/Los Angeles: SSMG, 2010). A substantial part of Chapter 2 has been published in the peer-reviewed journal *US Studies Online* (Issue 18, Spring 2011) under the title "Theorising David Foster Wallace's Toxic Postmodern Spaces".

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Wallace during my research visit to Texas. John Bucher also designed the excellent maps which accompany my description of the street chase in *Infinite Jest*. Dr Roberto Natalini and John Armstrong both helped to clarify and correct the mathematical and geometric principles I employ in Chapter 1, and my thanks to them for their advice. A number of individuals also provided a general conversation throughout my research about the writers and ideas that constitute this movement in American fiction, and I would like to offer my thanks to Dr Adam Kelly, Dr Thomas Tracey, Dr Philip Coleman, Dr Clare Hayes-Brady, Dr Greg Carlisle, George Carr, Maria Bustillos and Chris Thomas for their invaluable and ongoing assistance in discussion of post-postmodern scholarship and literature.

Introduction

Wallace, Danielewski and Post-Postmodernism

Postmodernism is dead. Long live postmodernism (Charles B. Harris, "PoMo's Wake I")

The above quotation, made by Harris in a 2002 *American Book Review* article about the future of postmodern fiction, points towards the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in trying to theorise or categorise a literary or cultural movement that succeeds or rejects postmodernism. The publication of three articles in 1990, 1995 and 2007 titled "What Was Postmodernism?" suggests a desire to both periodise the movement and to attempt to explain what might follow, as well as indicating that the 1990s and first decade of the twenty-first century were the locus of several sustained enquiries into the vitality of postmodernism. The articles, by Malcolm Bradbury, John Frow and Brian McHale respectively, approach postmodernism from different perspectives, from a more totalising sense of cultural pronouncement towards specific developments within contemporary literature and its relationship to the postmodern.

The scope of Bradbury's article is broad, suggesting that postmodernism as a condition was commensurate with the Cold War. Bradbury suggests that in "the world after the wall" (772) postmodernism begins to lose the coherency achieved by its development in a pre-1989 cultural stasis, locating the perceived end of postmodernism's vitality in the 1990s. However, characteristic of Bradbury's approach is an uncertainty about the end of postmodernity as an era, most tellingly related in the suggestion that postmodernism defined "the cultural flavour of the epoch that ended—or did it?—in 1989" (764). Rather than this new movement consisting of original and distinct features, Bradbury suggests that evidence of the end of postmodernism can be extrapolated from the fact of its cultural re-employment, explaining that now "what post-modernity quotes from is post-modernity itself" (771), an intriguing formula that is nevertheless difficult to practically schematise; how to tell the difference between the postmodern and its cultural re-employment when Bradbury himself acknowledges that "nostalgia deco" is "one of the defining features of the postmodern condition" (Ibid). Despite this

practical difficulty, the suggestion that the movement after postmodernism might derive its content from a retelling of or re-engagement with postmodernism itself is worthy of consideration, albeit a consideration that must further analyse the degree and manner of this engagement.

Frow, like Bradbury, is more immediately interested in periodising postmodernism than categorising the characteristics of the movement that follows. Frow's article, while more explicitly concerned with the socio-economic legacy of postmodernism, resists defining the movement as a pan-global condition in the manner of Frederic Jameson's landmark study *Postmodernism*, favouring instead a model of uneven development over "the assumption of an organic epochal transition" (Frow 148). Frow, like Bradbury, assigns a sense of stasis to postmodernism, the better to offer an alternative to the trajectory of the modernist project which by necessity of its character "requires its own obsolescence" (141). However, Frow also acknowledges that in the confusion resulting from whether postmodernism constitutes a definitive break from modernism or a continuation of the project (a paradox embedded in the very term itself) postmodernism is "caught between contradictory imperatives: to change/to be still; to be historical/to be the end of history" (142). The ambiguity produced by this contradiction is interesting; in ascribing both stasis and rapid renewal to the same condition it raises questions about the status of the successor of *that* condition. Must whatever emerges after postmodernism incorporate or retain this ambiguity, or revert to a less ambiguous temporal status?

McHale's essay makes reference to Frow's approach to temporality and also incorporates analysis of other cultural criticism, most notably Charles Jencks' 1986 study *What is Postmodernism?*, in a discussion of the "year zero" of postmodernism.¹ Mchale's essay ultimately tends towards a more specific discussion of the representations of postmodernism in art and prose fiction. Unlike Frow's sense of temporal ambiguity, Mchale makes a direct case for

¹ Mchale's position can be contradictory. He opposes the idea that postmodernism begins on a particular date (an idea exemplified by Jencks' famous assignation of postmodernism's inception to July 15th 1972), dismissing it as "not my position", but has previously stated in response to Jencks that "I like to think of 1966 as year zero of postmodernism" (Harris).

postmodernism's built-in obsolescence, suggesting that the movement's self-consciousness about its own identity as a historical period contains an implicit acceptance of its eventual ending:

...the question "What was postmodernism?" could have been asked, and was asked, almost as soon as the term "postmodernism" had emerged into general circulation [...] not because it was already over, but because it knew from the very outset that it would one day be over (McHale)

By downplaying the ambiguous co-existence of stasis and renewal from Frow's account, McHale posits the suggestion of postmodernism's eventual demise. However in practice McHale, like Bradbury and Frow, struggles to identify exactly how the end of postmodernism could be identified. The specific case studies used by McHale ultimately focus upon two specific motifs in postmodern art; angels and apocalypse. McHale uses examples of the appearance of both motifs in characteristically postmodern works (angels in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Satanic Verses*, apocalypse in the fake ruins of Charles Moore's Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans) and suggests that the diminishment of these motifs within cultural production is a sign that postmodernism may be over ("it follows, then, that if the angels have come and gone, maybe that means that postmodernism itself is "over", here at the beginning of the twenty-first century" [Ibid]). Such an approach speaks of a more direct attempt to locate the artistic motifs of a movement after postmodernism, but the same issues of periodisation that inform both Bradbury's and Frow's accounts cause uncertainty for McHale, who cannot ultimately produce a schematised model of what this new art might resemble.

However, this triple ambiguity (the uncertainty of Bradbury's cultural re-deployment of postmodernism; Frow's paradoxical sense of temporality; McHale's attempts to find motifs in specific works of art and literature) nevertheless offers a makeshift platform from which to assess the possible cultural implementation of a movement after postmodernism. Four motifs in particular can be extrapolated: that critical discussion of the movement following postmodernism is a millennial preoccupation; that a succeeding movement would appear to constitute a direct engagement with and perhaps even a re-employment of the motifs of

postmodernism; that questions of temporality will be central to a critical discussion of this movement; that the traditional “cleaner break” between, for example, Classical and Romantic ideologies is not replicated in the culture of ambiguity and uncertainty that is a feature of postmodernism and its successor.² The terminology of this movement creates a further question: given the lack of a clean break from postmodernism itself, how to persuasively term such a position? Bradbury suggests the term “post-postmodernism” (766).³ While Bradbury’s employment of this term is perhaps not entirely serious (drawing our attention to the possibility of a pile-up of “post” prefixes) and the term itself is rather unwieldy, it is ultimately a more appropriate method of classification than terms such as “late postmodernism” or “second-wave postmodernism”, which are potentially confusing as they suggest a more direct intensification of postmodernism rather than an inquiry into its characteristics.

Postmodernism and Post-postmodernism: Problems of Definition

This study is concerned with the characteristics of post-postmodern literary fiction; specifically works of American millennial prose fiction. In order to discuss post-postmodern fiction, it is necessary to schematise the complex distinction between postmodern and post-postmodern categories within literature, and what postmodern literature will be taken to represent within this study. The use of “postmodern literature” as an umbrella term for a plethora of wildly different styles and approaches is noted by Bradbury, who notes how the term paradoxically seems to incorporate “Beckett’s minimalism and Thomas Pynchon’s glut and excess [...] the random methods of William Burroughs and the bitter political irony of Milan Kundera [...] the black humour of Joseph Heller and the vital political and cultural satire of Salman Rushdie” (769). Moreover, in focusing here upon a general field of writers whose careers germinate between the 1950s and 1970s Bradbury excludes a

² See M.H. Abrams’ *The Mirror and the Lamp* for an example of the more direct disjuncture between depictions of the world in Classicism and Romanticism.

³ Stephen J. Burn, whose criticism is discussed below, also uses this term.

further generation of American writers, such as Mark Leyner and Bret Easton Ellis,⁴ who began to publish in the 1980s, and whose narratives of post-industrial stasis and availability bear the characteristics of cultural “obscurity” associated with Baudrillard’s theorising of the postmodern.⁵

With such a large and unwieldy field of postmodern literature, how to categorise a post-postmodern approach? The most appropriate way to do this is to accept that, as with Bradbury’s multiplicity of postmodern writers, there are a number of approaches to literature that could be considered post-postmodern. Harris suggests that one approach could be a “rush gratefully back into the arms of psychological realism” (Harris), an approach that he suggests was behind the snubbing of Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* for the 1997 National Book Critics Circle Award in favour of Penelope Fitzgerald’s *The Blue Flower* and that also lies behind the praising of the “novel of character” exemplified by the criticism of James Wood (Wood, “Abhorring a Vacuum”). This approach establishes itself in opposition to the deliberate fragmentation of character in certain postmodern fiction such as Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, whose protagonist Tyrone Slothrop, rather than achieving the clarification and development of character commensurate with the bildungsroman or picaresque form, is ultimately “broken down instead, and scattered” (738). Such an approach may also lie behind the attribution of a post-postmodern status to the strongly character-based writing of Raymond Carver and Saul Bellow, with both W.M. Verhoeven and Bradbury himself both using the term when discussing the fiction of these writers.⁶ It is notable that Harris quotes Wendy Steiner (describing her advocacy of Fitzgerald over DeLillo) and James Wood as suggesting, respectively, that the fiction that comes after postmodern will be

⁴ Two key works here are Ellis’ *American Psycho* and Leyner’s *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*. David Foster Wallace has an adversarial relationship with Ellis’ and Leyner’s fiction, which is discussed in more detail below.

⁵ See Baudrillard’s *America* for extensive discussion of the “obscurity” of the postmodern American environment.

⁶ See Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s Intellectual Heroes” in *Saul Bellow at Seventy-Five: A Collection of Critical Essays* (38) and Verhoeven, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Raymond Carver: Or, Much Ado About Minimalism” in *Narrative Turns and Minor Genres in Postmodernism* (58).

characterised by “depth of feeling—for people, for language—that is intensely moving and satisfying” and “the novel of intimacy, of motive, of relation” (Steiner). Taken in isolation, these terms look absurdly reductive, appearing at once to collapse (by way of example) the strongly character-based novels of DeLillo into the fiction of strong abstraction of character and storytelling that produces works such as Robert Coover’s “The Babysitter” and David Markson’s *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, though this apparent absurdity is an inevitable result of the complexity of categorising a response to such a broad field of writing. Robert L. McLaughlin is also vague when he suggests that the purpose of this new movement in fiction is “to make us newly aware of the reality that has been made for us and to remind us—because we live in a culture where we’re encouraged to forget—that other realities are possible” (McLaughlin 67), though in his suggestion that this new writing might encourage a heightened sense of the position of a world outside the self (whatever the status of that world) and a communicative trajectory between the self and others there is a slightly stronger sense of a gesture towards categorisation.

This focus upon communication and “depth of feeling”, if not necessarily a full-blown reverse movement towards a kind of late 19th century psychological realism, is also a facet of a more specifically engineered response to certain particular works of postmodern literature from a group of American fiction writers who emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a group that includes David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen and William T. Vollmann.⁷ These writers share, in whole or in part, an approach to literature that is a synthesis of some or all of the four motifs extrapolated above from the articles by Bradbury, Frow and McHale: a millennial focus or date of publication; a re-employment of certain tropes from certain postmodern novels of the preceding generation; a strong engagement with multiple temporalities, and a lack of a “clean break” with the contexts and methodology of said postmodern fiction. There is also a notable tendency by certain members of this group to write manifesto-style essays on the engagement of their work with specific postmodern fictions written between the 1950s and 1970s, in

⁷ Tom LeClair’s article “The Prodigious Fiction of Richard Powers, William Vollmann and David Foster Wallace” is an early attempt to corral some of these particular writers into a group. However Powers’ work is less directly interrogative of specific earlier postmodern fiction.

particular the writings of the generation that includes William Gaddis, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth and Robert Coover. These manifestos implement an approach that chimes with McLaughlin's suggestions about communication and an engagement with the world outside the self. For example "American Writing Today: A Diagnosis of the Disease", Vollmann's very short essay about the apparent redundancy of the trajectory of literary postmodernism, suggests a move away from a literature that is "producing mainly insular works" and towards writing that prizes "understanding without approving or hating [...] empathizing":

Unless we are much more interesting than we imagine we are, we should strive to feel not only about Self, but also about Other. Not the vacuum so often between Self and Other. Not the unworthiness of Other. Not the Other as a negation or eclipse of Self. Not even about the Other exclusive of Self, because that is but a trickster-egoist's way of worshiping Self secretly. We must treat Self and Other as equal partners (Vollmann, "American Writing")

Franzen's essay "I'll Be Doing More of Same" suggests a commitment to "mediating between the author's subjectivity and the world in which she finds herself by subjecting that subjectivity to the rigors of conventional form and permanent language; and the whole battery of stuff like honesty and responsibility and love and significance that constitutes "humane values."" (Franzen, "Same" 37), while Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" suggests that the next generation of literary rebels might "have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles" (*Supposedly* 81). Franzen's later essay "Mr Difficult" explicitly takes William Gaddis to task for "breach of Contract", suggesting that the act of publishing of his densely constructed postmodern novel *The Recognitions* is "to serve the reader a fruitcake that you wouldn't eat yourself" (Franzen, "Mr Difficult"). This adversarial approach to specific authors, an establishment of a kind of Oedipal struggle with a postmodern father figure, is common to both Franzen (Gaddis) and Wallace (Barth) and also suggests a synthesis between the rejection of "insular" fiction and the interrogation of the kind of postmodern metafiction practised in, to use a key example for Wallace, Barth's

collection *Lost in the Funhouse*. In the novella “Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way”, Wallace’s response to Barth’s collection, the tropes of self-reflexivity associated with certain postmodern fictions are explicitly dramatised as a kind of hazardous, solipsistic self-consciousness. This association is developed further by Wallace within his next fictional work, *Infinite Jest*.

Stephen J. Burn attempts a categorisation of this field of post-postmodern writing in the introduction to *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism*. Burn states, in a threefold proposition, that this writing firstly “looks back to, or dramatizes its roots in postmodernism” but still retains “the kind of ambition to produce an encyclopedic masterwork” (Burn, *Franzen* 19) associated with postmodern fiction writers such as Gaddis, Pynchon and William Gass.⁸ Secondly, according to Burn the post-postmodern writer, in reaction to the postmodernist writer’s textual allusions to linguistic scepticism and Deconstructive linguistics, tends to “*more obviously* address the idea of a real world beyond the problems raised by nonreferential discourse” (21, italics original), this address incorporating a movement towards “an engagement with the social world” (22). Thirdly, Burn suggests that post-postmodern literature expresses interest in a “more fundamental belief in the shaping influence of temporal process”, incorporating “the shaping influence of genetic inheritance” (25).⁹ While Burn’s categories are generally sound, and his connection of the problematic temporal legacy of postmodernism to the implementation of genetic motifs is both acute and inspired, the very process of definition acknowledges the difficulties of persuasive categorisation, with Burn’s suggestion that post-postmodern fiction must necessarily respond to a broad brief of encyclopedism, familiarity with Deconstruction and a lack of social engagement. The lack of certainty over the specifics of engagement with a so-called “real world” or “social world” remains, as it does in the work of McLaughlin, Wood and Steiner. The use of the expression “*more obviously*” by Burn is understandable, though the

⁸ Burn is referring here to Gass’ novel *The Tunnel*.

⁹ Burn suggests as an addendum to this third area that certain post-postmodern writers (Powers and Franzen in particular) have focused increasingly upon neuroscience as a recurrent leitmotif. While Wallace does not pervasively focus upon this area, the analysis in Chapter 1 of this thesis suggests that he does indeed make reference to it.

definition of what exactly constitutes that “real world” nevertheless proves resistant to persuasive categorisation, creating an uneasy terminology that combines a connection between Self and Other, a move beyond Deconstructive linguistics and a disavowal of metafiction.¹⁰

Moreover, the problem of categorisation is also raised when considering that several contemporaries or near-contemporaries of the above writers are engaging with similar subject matter in their fiction. The narrative of Canadian author Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X* adopts an approach towards interaction between self and other in a postmodern environment through a mode of story-telling similar to that of meetings at Alcoholics Anonymous, an approach strongly reminiscent of Wallace’s focus upon AA in *Infinite Jest* (“It’s simple: we come up with stories and we tell them to each other. The only rule is that we’re not allowed to interrupt, just like in AA, and at the end we’re not allowed to criticize” [Coupland 16]). Nicholson Baker’s *The Mezzanine* uses footnoting to replicate the digressions of the individual’s thought process, much like Wallace’s short fiction in *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*. Dave Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* employs a metatextual awareness of the postmodern status of footnotes and addenda to relate a narrative of human tragedy and communication that is partially based upon a true story. Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*, published in 1987, the same year as Wallace’s debut novel *The Broom of the System*, dramatises the apparent futility of pursuing the relationships between texts over so-called “real world” relationships (the protagonist, Daniel Quinn, becomes ostracised from society and physically unrecognisable to himself after investigating an intertextual paper trail that reaches back as far as the 17th century). While these works present a similar *thematic* engagement with the postmodern environment, they nevertheless lack the

¹⁰ Burn also argues for Franzen’s codification and rejection of the motifs of postmodernism throughout his career through the implementation of certain methodologies such as chaos theory, seismology (1992’s *Strong Motion*) and neurology (2001’s *The Corrections*) as influences upon the formal “shape” of his narratives. In Chapter 1 I address the influence of chaos theory upon Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*.

direct sense of confrontation with postmodern authors that is characteristic of Wallace and Franzen, and indeed Burn's schema for post-postmodern writing.¹¹

It is evident, then, that attempts at a persuasive corraling of post-postmodern prose fiction create disjunctures or broad ambiguities in the process of general categorisation. In the following study, a critical response to this quandary is posited; a deliberate move away from an attempt at classifying or codifying a uniform post-postmodern fictional approach across an entire field of literature and towards an analysis that is engaged with reading certain post-postmodern texts very closely, the better to more thoroughly analyse their formal engagement with certain elements of cultural and literary postmodernism. This approach is useful twofold: Firstly, it prevents an interminable broader process of categorisation and counter-categorisation in a field that, as has been demonstrated above, continually resists straightforward labelling of genre or approach. Secondly, it allows lengthy opportunity to discuss the formal detail of certain works that, as Burn has noted, tend towards encyclopedism in scope and length.¹² The prevailing foci of this study are two lengthy and formally complex novels; David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. These novels have been chosen because of their extremely intricate and oedipal relationship to literary and cultural postmodernism (a relationship that requires considerable time and space to fully extricate) and for their enormous scope, which generally encourages a broader and

¹¹ In another attempt at categorisation, Larry McCaffery uses the term "Avant-Pop" in his introduction to *After Yesterday's Crash* to describe the kind of millennial fiction that engages with a hyperreal postmodern environment to "revitalise artists suffering from info-overload" (xvi). The attempt to create a unified field is ambitious, but becomes problematic under closer inspection due to the inevitable presence of internal divisions within the group. For example, in a move symptomatic of the problematic categorisation of post-postmodern fiction described here, McCaffery also includes in the definition of Avant-Pop the work of post-war postmodern writers (including John Barth, with whom Wallace, a member of the millennial generation, takes issue).

¹² Burn adopts an approach of close reading in his study of Franzen. However, Burn's analysis is based upon a novel-per-chapter approach that displays the formal evolution of Franzen's fiction over several works, while the following analysis discusses two individual novels in extensive detail. The development of Wallace and Danielewski's writing is extrapolated here principally from analysis of the individual novels in question.

more discursive reading by virtue of sheer content, a reading that risks overlooking the formal manner in which the works interact with the motifs of postmodernism. Additionally, intricate structuring processes underpin the narratives of both books, creating narrative “shapes” that are connected specifically to a dialogue with postmodern literature and culture; these “shapes” can only be extricated and analysed through a lengthy process of close analysis. As the following critical survey demonstrates, the work of Wallace and Danielewski has not yet received this level of close textual analysis.

Wallace and Danielewski: The Critical Field

In his 2010 article “David Foster Wallace: The Death of the Author and the Birth of a Discipline”, Adam Kelly seeks to classify the “waves” of critical scholarship that have attended Wallace’s work throughout his career. Kelly argues that the first wave of Wallace criticism is configured largely “in terms of its emphasis on science and information systems and its intersection with American postmodernism” (Kelly, “Death”).¹³ The second wave changes direction somewhat, responding explicitly to Wallace’s landmark 1993 essay “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction” in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*. The essay, a rumination on the poisonous co-opting of postmodern fiction’s radical strategies by television and the subsequent challenge to contemporary fiction created by that process, becomes critically positioned within this second wave as Wallace’s literary manifesto and, as Kelly outlines, the importance of this essay underpins much of the criticism within the two 2003 monographs on Wallace that emerge as the pre-eminent scholarly works of this critical wave, Marshall Boswell’s *Understanding David Foster Wallace* and Stephen J. Burn’s shorter *Infinite Jest: A Reader’s Guide*.¹⁴

¹³ See here LeClair’s above mentioned article on Wallace, Powers and Vollmann, James Rother’s “Reading and Riding the Post-Scientific Wave: The Shorter Fiction of David Foster Wallace” and N. Katherine Hayles’ “The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and *Infinite Jest*.”

¹⁴ A.O. Scott’s article “The Panic of Influence” also foregrounds the importance of “E Unibus Pluram” to Wallace’s literary evolution.

Boswell's monograph offers the most thorough critical appraisal of Wallace's work up to the publication of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* in 1999, devoting a chapter to each published work of fiction (*The Broom of the System*, *Girl with Curious Hair*, *Infinite Jest*, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*). Boswell analyses Wallace's early engagement with structural linguistics and the philosophy of Wittgenstein (*Broom*) through the interrogation of Barthian metafiction (*Girl*) towards the more totalising engagement with both of the above in *Infinite Jest*, which Boswell also discusses in terms of the novel's engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Through *Girl with Curious Hair* to *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, Boswell uses "E Unibus Pluram" to underpin his analysis about Wallace's engagement with the dangers of solipsism as implemented through metafiction and irony in postmodern fiction, with his analysis underpinned by the suggestion that Wallace "uses irony to disclose what irony has been hiding [...] the work is both diagnosis and cure" (Boswell, *Understanding* 17). Boswell also engages, as does Burn, with a lengthy interview given by Wallace to Larry McCaffery in the Summer 1993 issue of *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, which has come to stand alongside "E Unibus Pluram" as a kind of secondary literary manifesto and is engaged with consistently by Wallace academics and critics after its publication. Within this interview Wallace strongly criticises a type of fiction that has incorporated at second order the temporal elements of stasis and perpetual renewal characteristic of postmodernism without question:

Look, if the contemporary condition is hopelessly shitty, insipid, materialistic, emotionally retarded, sadomasochistic and stupid, then I (or any writer) can get away with slapping together stories with characters who are stupid, vapid emotionally retarded, which is easy, because these sorts of characters require no development [...] If what's always distinguished bad writing—flat characters, a narrative world that's clichéd and not recognisably human, etc—is also a description of today's world, then bad writing becomes an ingenious mimesis of a bad world [...] In dark times, the definition of good art would seem to be art that locates and applies CPR to those elements of what's human and magical that still live and glow despite the times' darkness (Interview, McCaffery 131)

This response is, in the context of the interview, pointedly directed at Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. A more sustained and slightly different criticism is made in "E Unibus Pluram" of Mark Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*, which Wallace suggests is "doomed to shallowness by its desire to ridicule a TV-culture whose mockery of itself and all value already absorbs all ridicule", leaving Leyner's novel "dead on the page" (*Supposedly* 81).¹⁵ "E Unibus Pluram" and the McCaffery interview, and their warnings about the redeployment of both postmodern irony and a simple mimesis of a "bad world" are therefore central to an understanding of the second wave of Wallace criticism.

The third wave, a field that Kelly claims is still emerging, is suggested as being based partially around an "engagement with Wallace's literary ethics" (Kelly, "Death"), a focus compounded after the publication of Kelly's essay by the increasing focus upon Wallace's academic background in philosophy, marked most notably by the 2010 publication of his undergraduate thesis under the title *Fate, Time and Language: An Essay on Free Will*.¹⁶ However, Kelly also correctly points out that this third wave (which it might also be possible to term a "posthumous wave", as it begins to emerge following Wallace's death in September 2008) takes account of the importance of reading Wallace's non-fiction outside of the context of his fiction, and Wallace's increasingly explicit political engagement towards the end of his life (as evidenced in the essays "Up Simba" and "Host" in *Consider The Lobster*).¹⁷ The publication of Maria Bustillos' controversial article "Inside David

¹⁵ Leyner responds to this criticism by irreverently caricaturing Wallace in his short story "Geraldo, Eat Your Avant-Pop Heart Out".

¹⁶ Kelly's own essay "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction" represents a sustained engagement with ethical intention in Wallace's fiction, as does Daniel Turnbull's "*This is Water* and the Ethics of Attention: Wallace, Murdoch and Nussbaum". The example used by Kelly in the article to illustrate ethical engagement is Timothy Aubry's essay "Selfless Cravings: Addiction and Recovery in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*", which is discussed in Chapter 2.

¹⁷ See Paul Jenner's essay "Don't Compare, Identify: David Foster Wallace on John McCain" for an example of this critical engagement with Wallace's political writing. The footnoted Kelly, Turnbull and Jenner essays all appear within my edited collection *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*, which should also be considered part of the posthumous wave of Wallace scholarship.

Foster Wallace's Private Self-Help Library" in April 2011 indicates a further development in Wallace criticism that postdates Kelly's article; the analysis of Wallace's drafts and notes, made available to the public in the Harry Ransom Centre in late 2010.¹⁸

Across these waves of criticism, there has not yet been a sustained analysis of Wallace's employment of specifically formal narrative strategies to dramatise a dialogue with or interrogation of postmodernism. While Burn has in his monograph provided a useful and close analysis of the formal narratives of Franzen's novels as a response to postmodernism, a comparable study of Wallace's use of "post-postmodern" narrative form does not exist.¹⁹ "Form" in this study is taken to mean both the pervasive employment of particular spatial, temporal and paratextual tropes to construct a narrative with a particular "shape", as well as an interaction and hybridisation with other, non-literary forms. This study of Wallace's post-postmodern formal strategies employs analytical approaches from across all three of the critical "waves" of Wallace scholarship outlined by Kelly above, incorporating discussion of information systems (first wave), the codification of certain postmodernist fiction as a self-conscious, solipsistic dead end (second wave) and the ethical approach of "diagnosis and cure" exemplified by the third wave. This approach makes the formal analysis of Wallace's post-postmodern narratives a fundamentally holistic one, able to incorporate and respond to the broad field of existing Wallace scholarship.

Mark Z Danielewski, whose published output consists of the two novels *House of Leaves* and *Only Revolutions*, the short children's book *The Fifty Year Sword*,²⁰ and the expanded and separately issued *House of Leaves* appendix *The*

¹⁸ The first chapter of this thesis makes substantial use of some of the archive draft material for *Infinite Jest*.

¹⁹ Burn does draw from formal elements of Wallace's work (as well as the novels of Richard Powers) in his study of Franzen, but this is understandably performed in the service of the analysis of Franzen and does not afford Wallace's work the scope that it is afforded here.

²⁰ *The Fifty Year Sword* has thus far only been made available in a limited run of 2,000 copies through Dutch publisher De Bezige Bij, and has never been released outside of The Netherlands. It has been out of print since 2006, though as of 2012 there are plans for a first American printing.

Whalestoe Letters, is not traditionally bracketed with the post-postmodern fiction discussed above. However, this study will suggest the importance of regarding Danielewski's *House of Leaves* as a post-postmodern novel by suggesting that through its formal narrative strategies it both dramatises the problems of postmodernism and proposes possible new forms of narrative. The analysis in this thesis will show that in a similar manner to the schematising of the post-postmodern derived from Bradbury, Frow, McHale and Burn the narrative of *House of Leaves* re-employs and interrogates its own basis in postmodernism, describes the problematic legacy of the ambiguities of postmodern temporality, downplays the possibility of a clean break from postmodern literary form and gestures towards an encyclopedic narrative (the novel runs to over 700 pages and contains a number of appendices).

Perhaps as a result of the relatively small scale of the field of Danielewski criticism, several existing critical positions upon the relationship of *House of Leaves* to the postmodern have tended towards a somewhat reductive analysis of the novel as either a mere diagnosis of the alienating or disorientating effect of cultural postmodernism upon the individual or an asserting of the primacy of the form of the book over the culture of image in the age of digital technology. While this critical position suggests that the novel is conversant with elements of postmodernism, the following study will argue that this fails to take into account that Danielewski's post-postmodern narrative is ultimately more concerned with hybridising the problems of postmodern fiction and digital culture into a new narrative form. Again, a strategy of close textual analysis is required to avoid lapsing into a discursive misreading of the novel. Danielewski's post-postmodernism, as will be argued in this study, is more concerned with an explicit *development* in form rather than a defence of an existing literary position.

Critical work on Danielewski is in its infancy. Until 2010 the strongest material on his work was a small number of journal articles and some more sustained analysis in the work of N. Katherine Hayles, whose authorship of the articles "Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*" and "Mapping Time, Charting Data: The Spatial Aesthetic of Mark Z Danielewski's *Only Revolutions*", as well as a chapter on Danielewski in her monograph *Writing Machines*, arguably positions her as the current critical authority on his work. Hayles' work on

Danielewski focuses upon “what print can be in a digital age” and the possibility of a “hybrid discourse” (Hayles, “Saving the Subject” 781) between forms, an approach that informs the suggestion in Chapter 5 of this thesis of *House of Leaves* as a text-film hybrid.²¹

Other relevant pre-2010 journal articles on Danielewski are Mark Hansen’s lengthy essay “The Digital Topography of Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*”, Jessica Pressman’s “*House of Leaves*: Reading the Networked Novel” and Katherine Cox’s “What Has Made Me? Locating Mother in the Textual Labyrinth of Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*”, all of which are engaged with during the discussion of Danielewski in this thesis. Hansen’s essay makes overtures towards the novel’s interaction with postmodernism by suggesting that it “signals away from the tired postmodern agonies bound up with the figure of simulation [...] mediation has become so ubiquitous [...] as to simply *be* reality” (Hansen 602, italics original).²² Pressman’s article focuses upon the influence of digital technologies upon *House of Leaves* and contains the intriguing suggestion that the novel is a central “node” in a network of texts including *The Whalstoe Letters* and Danielewski’s sister’s album *Haunted*.²³ Cox’s article makes useful inroads into discussion of the textual puns and anagrams that litter *House of Leaves*, as well as foregrounding the question of genetic inheritance, a move that recalls Burn’s formulation of temporality in post-postmodern writing.

Since 2010, two more substantial studies have appeared. The first, *Mark Z. Danielewski*, is an edited collection of essays that span all published works and constitutes the most extensive published critical study of Danielewski thus far. A number of the essays in this collection are referenced and analysed throughout this study. Finn Fordham’s “Katabasis in Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* and Two Other

²¹ Hayles’ work does not specifically approach the novel from the position of its dialogue with postmodernism, but her commentary upon hybridity of form is important to a consideration of the form of *House of Leaves* and informs the textual analysis in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

²² By way of response to Hansen, it will be argued in Chapters 4 and 5 that there is also evidence within the text that suggests that this uncertainty actually breeds a terrible ontological anxiety.

²³ It will, however, be argued in Chapter 5 that Pressman misreads some of Danielewski’s statements about the influence of the digital upon his novel.

Recent American Novels” and Paul McCormick’s “Houses of Leaves, Cinema and the New Affordances of Old Media” attempt to develop critical understanding of the novel’s relationship to the cinematic, and are discussed in detail in the analysis of *House of Leaves* and cinema in Chapter 5, while Mel Evans’ “This Haunted House: Intertextuality and Interpretation in Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* and Poe’s *Haunted*”, discussed in the same chapter, builds upon Pressman’s critical model of nodes and networks and questions Hansen’s suggestion that the networks by which the reader can enter the novel are limited. Alison Gibbons’ “This is Not for You” is built around and named after the anti-dedication that begins *House of Leaves* and is discussed in the analysis of the novel’s paratexts in Chapter 6, as is Hayles’ aforementioned article on the spatial and paratextual aesthetics of *Only Revolutions*.²⁴

The other study, Nicoline Timmer’s *Do You Feel It Too?*, is an account of three novels that have post-postmodern characteristics. Notably, two of the novels are *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* (the third is *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*). While the general thrust of Timmer’s methodology differs from the approach of this thesis, taking a “narrative psychological” approach to the texts concerned (a position that draws extensively from research in the field of social psychology), the study also performs two important functions that are directly relevant here. Firstly, Timmer makes a claim for Danielewski’s narrative in *House of Leaves* as being characteristically post-postmodern. Secondly, as outlined above, there is an understanding that with the above-mentioned difficulty of identifying a thoroughgoing generational or group “movement” in post-postmodernism it is more fruitful to analyse specific works in close detail. Finally, Michael Hemmingson’s 2011 article “What’s Beneath the Floorboards: Three Competing Metavoices in the Footnotes of Mark Z Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*” revives McCaffery’s term “Avant-Pop” in a discussion of the narrative voices within the novel.

²⁴ Other essays of note in the collection include Bronwen Thomas’ essay on Danielewski’s webpage, “Tricky Authors and Tricky Readers on the MZD Forums” as well as two essays by Mark Hansen and Brian McHale on *Only Revolutions*, which address, respectively, the “poetic” form of that novel and its engagement with the philosophical concept of A-series and B-series time (both works are referenced in the Works Cited section).

The often remarkable similarity of both Danielewski's and Wallace's formal dialogue with the postmodern narrative has not been critically addressed in serious and extensive detail. Shorter critical articles necessarily tend towards a more general discussion of overarching formal principles without addressing the structural basis of the intricately constructed narratives of *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest*. For example, in Finn Fordham's article from *Mark Z Danielewski* on katabasis in *House of Leaves*, the problem of competing forms (in this case film and text) is discussed without an elaboration upon how Danielewski's structural formula for the narrative of his novel *hybridises* these forms to enact a dialogue with the postmodern. Even in the lengthy study of *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, where Marshall Boswell allots a full seventy pages to discussion of *Infinite Jest*, analysing in satisfying detail the novel's relationship to metafiction, irony and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the formal narrative structures devised for the *implementation* of these post-postmodern strategies are not addressed in any serious detail. Both writers employ a number of formal structuring principles that underpin the spatio-temporal form of their works, principles that draw from (among other areas) mathematics, linguistics, aviation and cultural theory in order to enact an interrogation of the postmodern. Importantly, both writers are also explicitly concerned with addressing the postmodern through the use of cinematic form. This formal employment of cinematic terminology, theory and technique within both *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* is substantial and fundamental to the post-postmodern position of both works. Both novels revolve around the presence of a mysterious missing film, and the process of ekphrasis employed by both writers (particularly Danielewski) is of considerable significance here.

Both *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* are substantial works, with an encyclopedic employment of large amounts of information and complex structuring principles. These two novels also represent the most explicit and lengthy programmatic dialogue with postmodernism that these writers have produced, and the most authoritative way to engage in serious critical detail with this element of Danielewski's and Wallace's formal strategies is to study these works in close and lengthy detail. When occasion merits a digression into discussion of other works by these writers (for example, the ramifications of these formal strategies on the later fiction of Wallace and Danielewski), these works will be addressed principally in

reference to the two novels in question. In order to elucidate these formal constructions in the detail that their importance warrants (the explanation of, for example, the non-Euclidean mathematical structure of *Infinite Jest*, needs a sustained period of analysis in order to correctly and lucidly analyse the manner of its construction), throughout the majority of this study the novels will be analysed separately in dedicated chapters (Chapters 1-3 focus upon *Infinite Jest*, while Chapters 4-5 deal with *House of Leaves*), with reference made to the other work, or other works by the writers, where appropriate or necessary. Chapter 6 presents an opportunity to address both works together, as their respective employment of paratexts provides the basis for complementary analysis.

The specific focal areas of the chapters of the following study are presented here:

Chapter 1, “The Porousness of Certain Borders: Systems, Restraint and Geometry”, addresses how the formal structuring principles of the narrative of *Infinite Jest* enact an interrogative dialogue that both diagnoses and reconfigures the situation of solipsism (a motif pervasively conflated with postmodern self-reflexivity by Wallace) from a closed, self-conscious system into an open, communicative one. While the movement towards communication in *Infinite Jest* has been critically remarked upon, the chapter expands upon this position by illustrating that Wallace has been significantly formally influenced by Tom LeClair’s model of the “systems novel”²⁵ in this communicative strategy, and that this model partially underpins *Infinite Jest*’s formal narrative strategies. Moreover, the analysis in Chapter 1 also reveals a hitherto neglected formal strategy employed by Wallace to dramatise the problems of communication within the narrative of *Infinite Jest*. Building upon Wallace’s admission that the novel is structured along specifically mathematical principles (a self-similar “fractal” formula), the analysis posits a narrative that is substantially constructed around forms of Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry that both concretise into depictions of physical constraint and act interrogatively towards the “closed” systems enacted in the novel’s interrogation of postmodernism. These geometric strategies are examined at both macroscopic and microscopic levels (the overarching form of the novel, the minute implementation of implicit geometric

²⁵ A model also invoked by Burn to characterise Franzen’s post-postmodern approach to narrative.

shapes and vectors within key sequences). The analysis is performed throughout the chapter in a threefold manner: analysis of the formal evolution of the drafts of *Infinite Jest*, a discussion of the conflation of geography and geometry and the physical body, and finally an addressing of the explicitly geometric principles that underpin the novel's reconfigurative "opening up" of communicative principles.

Chapter 2, "Time Began to Pass With Sharp Edges: Wallace's Spatio-Temporal Strategies", expands upon the motifs of formal constraint outlined in Chapter 1, analysing how Wallace's dramatisation of specifically spatial and temporal terminology in *Infinite Jest* diagnoses and attempts to supersede a postmodern perception of time and space. Three overarching examples from the novel underpin this analysis: the formal interrogation of postmodern preoccupations with eschatology, the system of "annular fusion" that takes place in the area known as "The Great Concavity" and the intensive focus on the awareness of temporality encouraged during the process of recovery from substance abuse. Throughout Chapter 2 Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the novelistic chronotope is addressed and employed, both to explain Wallace's reconfiguration of postmodern eschatology and also to provide a workable model for how time can be "recovered" for the rehabilitated substance abuser. In the analysis of this latter problem, Fredric Jameson's definition of "depthlessness" is also employed to illustrate Wallace's interaction with of the spatio-temporal characteristics of the postmodern.

Chapter 3, "Seeing by Mirror-Light: Wallace's Cinematic Narratives" analyses how Wallace's formal employment of the language of cinema and the appropriation of cinematic techniques in his fiction enacts a complex address of both postmodern tropes and his own fictional evolution. By arguing that Wallace's position must be aligned with that of *Infinite Jest*'s deceased filmmaker James Incandenza,²⁶ the analysis posits that Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is not only a literary "remaking" of the eponymous postmodern film of its narrative but also of his *own* preceding fiction. The analysis in this chapter also reveals for the first time a detailed account of the formal cinematic influences upon Wallace's narrative from

²⁶ The relationship between the two can be more easily and reductively codified as having patricidal characteristics, with Incandenza reductively aligned with postmodern writers like John Barth and Thomas Pynchon.

both the mainstream and avant-garde cinema, and the process whereby Wallace employs specifically cinematic techniques (with particular attention to the terminology of focus and lenses) to both control and engender reader inference within the narrative. The analysis in Chapter 3 also considers the importance of the individual viewer to the narrative of *Infinite Jest*, and Wallace's employment of interpellation and inference in configuring a narrative model that reaches "outward" and requires communication from the reader to be completed, an analysis that also builds upon the mathematical and systems-based material in Chapter 1 to outline the possibility of the partial construction of a work of art (be it film or literature) by its audience. Chapter 3 also contains the most sustained analysis of Wallace's fiction outside of *Infinite Jest*, arguing that the later fiction, and in particular the 2004 collection *Oblivion*, represents a specific development in Wallace's employment of cinematic terminology to interrogate a postmodern "closed" system of self-consciousness, a fictional development that bears a strong relationship to the oneiric cinematic narrative strategies of director David Lynch.

Chapter 4, "Endless Hallways: Danielewski's Narrative Labyrinths" introduces Danielewski's *House Of Leaves* in detail and suggests, through a "mapping" of the novel's narrative, that Danielewski is engaged in a dialogue with postmodern texts that is formally configured in spatial terms. Building upon the analysis of Wallace's enacted formal strategies of postmodern constraint, it is suggested that Danielewski concretises elements of the postmodern in specific forms, namely labyrinths and spatio-temporal disjunctures. The multiple instances of the labyrinth motif in *House of Leaves* are analysed in terms of their spatial reconfiguration of the postmodern, with a distinction made between Danielewski's definition of "maze-treading" and "maze-viewing". It is argued that this strategy has kinship with the post-postmodern motifs of directional entrapment practiced by Wallace in *Infinite Jest*, and that both Wallace and Danielewski enact similar formal strategies whereby a constrained and solipsistic postmodern position is reconfigured into the possibility of free movement and communication. It is also argued that Danielewski's motif of the echo in *House of Leaves* not only offers a model for reader inference similar to that presented by Wallace in *Infinite Jest*, but also suggests a process by which elements of preceding postmodern literary works are reconfigured and "echoed" in Danielewski's narrative as a process of

communication. The climactic analysis in Chapter 4 argues for a previously undiscussed spatial model employed by Danielewski in his argument with postmodernism, the “arboreal” model of the tree. The diagnosis of this formal model is inherently bound up with the relationship between *House of Leaves* and the work of Jacques Derrida, specifically *Glas*.

Chapter 5, “It’s Impossible to Photograph What We Saw: Danielewski’s Text-Film Hybrid”, is an analysis of how Danielewski disarms certain postmodern critiques of the relative value of the image to the word and also an overturning of several existing reductive critical positions on Danielewski’s employment of cinema and cinematic technique. Through the assertion that within the narrative of *House Of Leaves* Danielewski constructs a formal text-film hybrid in which no form takes pervasive precedence, it is suggested that the postmodern scepticism about the toxic “depthless” quality of the image (outlined here through an interaction with Katherine Fitzpatrick’s study *The Anxiety Of Obsolescence*) can be nullified. The analysis in this chapter also performs an enquiry into the terminology of some existing criticism of Danielewski, a criticism which, it is argued, often succumbs to exactly this default position over the relative values of text and image and also fails to classify the form of Danielewski’s narrative as explicitly cinematic. This analysis is partially illustrated via the employment of a largely critically undiscussed sequence from *House of Leaves* in which, it is argued, Danielewski himself performs an interrogation of this very critical position. Finally it is suggested that through an allusion to the uncertainty engendered by digital film technology Danielewski foregrounds the importance of a communicative “co-directorial” strategy in the novel.

Chapter 6, “Postmodern Paratexts in Wallace and Danielewski”, concludes this study by bringing together both writers and considering how their innovative employment of paratexts (Wallace’s endnotes, Danielewski’s footnotes and appendices) enacts the same interrogation of the postmodern found within their previously discussed formal narrative strategies. The paratext in Wallace and Danielewski is considered in relation to two post-postmodern strategies: the escape from postmodern solipsism and the implementation of scepticism towards the authority of text over paratext that involves a focus upon the sharing and inferential

creating of narratives. An appendix contains explanatory diagrams which complement the geometric analysis performed in Chapter 1.

Chapter 1

The Porousness of Certain Borders: Systems, Constraint and Geometry

In an interview conducted for KCRW's *Bookworm* programme in 1996 following the publication of *Infinite Jest*, the following exchange took place between David Foster Wallace and host Michael Silverblatt:

Silverblatt: It occurred to me that the way in which the material is presented allows for a subject to be announced in a small form, then there seems to be a fan of subject matter, other subjects, and then it comes back in a second form containing the other subjects in small, and then comes back again as if what were being described were – and I don't know this kind of science, but it just – I said to myself this must be fractals.

Wallace: It's – I've heard you were an acute reader. That's one of the things, structurally, that's going on. It's actually structured like something called a Sierpinski Gasket [...] it went through some I think “mercy cuts”, so it's probably kind of a lopsided Sierpinski Gasket now. But it's interesting, that's one of the structural ways that it's supposed to kind of come together [...] it looks basically like a pyramid on acid. (Interview, *Bookworm* 1996)

A Sierpinski gasket is a fractal (see Fig.1, Appendix). The triangular boundary of the fractal consists of three smaller triangles. Those three smaller triangles then consist of three even smaller triangles. While the outer perimeter of the largest triangle is bounded, the inward subdivision of the triangular shapes inside that large triangle can continue indefinitely.²⁷ Greg Carlisle's discussion of *Infinite Jest*'s division into chapters helpfully illustrates this fractal structure, explaining how the novel is a construction of twenty-eight chapters, each containing a series of smaller subchapters. The novel begins with fifteen chapters over the course of 179 pages and climaxes with just one chapter of 173 pages (Carlisle, *Complexity* 17), and this structural format is analogous to the fractal form of the Sierpinski gasket. The reader gradually becomes aware of an increase in the size and focus of the chapters as they read, as the initial smaller chapters (relatable to the smaller triangles of the

²⁷ An image of the fractal actually appears within the novel, with “an enormous hand-drawn Sierpinski gasket” (*Jest* 213) attached to Michael Pemulis' wall at Enfield Tennis Academy.

gasket shape) are later retrospectively understood to form part of the overarching structure so we are ultimately aware of the gargantuan system of relationships between character, incident and location that operate across the entire novel. The final, enormous chapters, which in their length could constitute entire novels in themselves, bring much of the novel's thematic content together and also hint at the solution of several overarching mysteries, while not persuasively solving any of them. These chapters relate to the overarching larger triangles of the gasket, and an understanding of these final chapters necessitates a previous understanding of the component parts of the gasket, the previous, shorter chapters.

However, Wallace's deliberate obfuscation of straight answers to the principle mysteries of the novel's plot reminds the reader that they are regarding a schema characterised as much by absence as by presence. In the process of construction of the Sierpinski gasket each configuration of three triangles is also accompanied by the visible absence of another triangle. Accordingly, a number of pivotal plot events within Wallace's novel are entirely absent from the text, and must be inferred through surrounding information. For instance, a series of linked incidents involving the death of James Incandenza, the director of the lethally entertaining film "Infinite Jest",²⁸ are absented and referred to so elliptically (and often in contradictory accounts) that it is impossible for the reader to form a definitive picture of whether Incandenza's death was suicide or foul play.²⁹ Incandenza's death is the apparent result of putting his head inside a microwave oven, the aftermath of which was discovered by his young son Hal. Subsequently, a

²⁸ The film will be referred to here as "Infinite Jest" and the novel as *Infinite Jest*.

²⁹ *Infinite Jest* consists primarily of three plot strands. The first strand relates the affairs of the three sons (Hal, Mario and Orin) of the dysfunctional Incandenza family, who reside in the hilltop tennis academy founded by their late filmmaker father James. The second depicts the arduous recovery of substance addict Don Gately in the halfway facility Ennet House, which is located at the bottom of the hill. The third and broadest strand details the near-future dystopian version of the United States within which the action of the novel takes place, a union with Canada and Mexico having formed the alliance O.N.A.N. (Organisation of North American Nations). The three plot strands are united by the attempts of both Quebecois separatist terrorists and the O.N.A.N. secret service to locate the master copy of James Incandenza's final film "Infinite Jest", which is apparently so entertaining that it renders the viewer unable to perform any task other than to watch it.

long and evasive conversation about the discovery between Hal and his brother Orin would appear to suggest that Jim's head might have exploded:

'Or have you for example, say, ever like baked a potato in a microwave oven?

Did you know you have to cut the potato open before you turn the oven on?

Do you know why that is?'

'Jesus.'

'The B.P.D. field pathologist said the build-up of internal pressures would have been almost instantaneous and equivalent to in kg.s.cm. to over two sticks of TNT.'

'Jesus Christ, Hallie.'

'Hence the need to construct the scene.' (*Jest* 251)

This runs contrary to another reference by Hal to a mysterious incident alluded to but not directly depicted within the main narrative, where "Donald Gately and I dig up my father's head" (*Jest* 17). To add to the confusion, Gately is the novel's second principle protagonist, and has no direct knowledge of or contact with Hal within the main narrative. Further suggestions that James may have had the master copy of "Infinite Jest" buried inside his head or that he may actually have been murdered create a plethora of confusing absences for the reader.

Wallace's narrative creates absence (details deliberately withheld) and inference (enough suggestion to allow the reader to conjecture, if not definitively), a strategy that operates in the same formative manner as the construction of the Sierpinski gasket. Carlisle's discussion of how the Sierpinski Gasket is created ("an iterative process of cutting smaller triangle-sized holes out of larger triangles" [Carlisle, *Complexity* 20]) is a useful paradigm for the process by which Wallace's narrative schema operates: a structure constructed through a process of both presence and absence, of explanation and inference. Wallace, in interview, has explained that "this process is a relationship between the writer's consciousness and [the reader's] own, and that in order for it to be anything like a full human relationship, she's going to have to put in her share of the linguistic work" (Interview, McCaffery 138). In terms of the amount of specific attention that a

general reader needs to pay to the intricacy of the fractal structure of the narrative, Wallace himself feels the need to clarify his project:

I know that when I was a young writer I would play endless sort of structural games that I think, in retrospect, were mostly for myself alone; I didn't much care. I don't really...I mean, *Infinite Jest* is trying to do a whole bunch of different things at once, and it doesn't make much difference to me whether somebody...I mean, I would expect that somebody who's a mathematician or a logician or an ACS guy might be interested in some of the fractal structures of it [...] I know that for doing something this long, a fair amount of the structural stuff is for me, because it's kind of like pitons in the mountainside. I mean it's ways for me to stay oriented and engaged and get through it.

(Interview, *Bookworm* 1996)

This candid response suggests both an imposition of structures for personal orientation during the composition process and a lack of concern about whether the general reader is interested or not in the eventual structural format of the piece. While this may indicate that Wallace does not consider the general reader's recognition of the specific fractal structure essential to an understanding of the novel's content, the response stops short of fully absolving the reader of responsibility in terms of recognising why the narrative is structured like it is, and Wallace's responses to Silverblatt indicate that the schema originated from the subject matter of the novel and is not a mere stylistic affectation. Therefore, while it is not necessary that in order to understand the essential meaning of the plot the reader must be on terms with overarching and implicit structural templates, a close reading and analysis of the narrative and chapter structures within *Infinite Jest* reveals a series of intricate geographic and geometric narrative "shapes" that both complement and enhance significantly the overarching propositions of the novel. Among these structures is a pre-occupation with differences between Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry that suffuses many formal and thematic aspects of the

narrative of *Infinite Jest*, to which the analysis throughout this chapter will periodically return.³⁰

Moreover, in addition to the implementation of these mathematical, geometrical and geographic structures as a complement to the thematic material of the novel, Wallace also uses said structures to enact an interrogation of his debt to and movement beyond the tenets of postmodernism outlined in the introduction to this study. The analysis in the following chapter is employed twofold; to identify and analyse these formal “shapes” closely and to determine their status in relation to Wallace’s approach to postmodern writing. This analysis is clarified through an understanding of how these original narrative forms evolved and were developed during Wallace’s construction of the narrative of *Infinite Jest* during the drafting process of the novel, as well as their structural function in the finalised, published text. It is often necessary to read very closely across the narrative of the novel to identify pervasive connections between employment of imagery, formal structure and the response to postmodernism, and the following analysis will take a teleological approach to the construction of the narrative, beginning with the drafting process before progressing to the construction of the published novel.

Form in the Drafting Process

Firstly, for the purposes of clarity, an outlining of the state of the existing draft material. The drafts for *Infinite Jest* are held in the archive at the Ransom Centre in Austin, Texas, and this is the material that will be used for the following analysis.³¹ When considering the daunting navigation of Wallace’s drafting process, the following quote from a 1999 interview is immediately brought to mind:

³⁰ With an awareness of the potential dangers of casually using a plethora of technical language in an academic discussion of literature, the employment of mathematical and geometrical language in this chapter is not intended as a rigorous technical study, rather as an argument that allusively and metaphorically employs technical models with which Wallace would have been familiar and which, it will be posited, influenced the formulation of his narrative.

³¹ The drafting material is so extensive that references to the material in the text will, for the purposes of succinctness and clarity, note the relevant box and folder (e.g. 15.1 means Box 15, folder 1). The titles of the relevant folders are listed in detail in the Works Cited section of this thesis. This method avoids over-elaborate and confusing references in the text of this chapter.

I am a Five Draft man. I actually learned this at Amherst, in William Kennick's Philosophy 17 and 18, with their brutal paper-every-two-weeks schedules. I got down a little system of writing and two rewrites and two typed drafts. I've used it ever since. I like it. (Interview, *Amherst Magazine*, 1999)

The reality of tracing the formal evolution of the drafts of *Infinite Jest*, however, is not as straightforward as one might assume from the above quote. Rather than several clean and linear versions of the novel displaying a clear trajectory in composition, Wallace's drafting is somewhat protean and messy, with extensive use of fragments, inserts and marginalia, while pages alternate between typescript, handwriting and magic marker. Even Steven Moore's pithy description of one draft ("it's a mess – a patchwork" [Moore, "First Draft"]) does not accurately describe the condition of the *Infinite Jest* draft material in the archive, which runs to well over 4,000 pages, much of which is currently undated.³² While the form does begin to stabilise as the drafts evolve, extensive handwritten notes pepper later drafts, and even the copyedit of *Infinite Jest* is unstable, with material marked to be cut.³³ Wallace's minute handwriting (often allowing up to four lines of writing within a single line of ruled paper) further adds to a reader's sense of disorientation.³⁴ With

³² Wherever possible, the drafts have been dated here. On occasion pieces of work are dated by Wallace, though this is extremely infrequent. Sometimes dating has been possible by using knowledge of the relative development of drafts that apparently precede or follow the draft in question, while at other times a throwaway margin reference can be used to indirectly date a draft (for example, one reference to cinema listings for the films *Scent Of A Woman* and *A River Runs Through It* successfully dates the material in box 15.5 to December 1992).

³³ There has been some confusion in the past among researchers over how much material was removed from the manuscript. Wallace has said "The manuscript that I delivered was 1700 manuscript pages, of which close to 500 were cut" (Interview, Salon.com), which is not entirely borne out by the archive material, or indeed a May 1995 letter from Wallace to Don DeLillo in which he states that "Little Brown made nice noises but said it was too long. I, largely unaided, cut 310 pages from the fucker over the winter (it is, still, pretty long), and now even as it's at the copyeditor they say they'd like another 100 or so cut" (Box 101.10). Based on the material currently in the archive the amount removed seems to be in the region of 200-250 pages.

³⁴ Having studied these drafts in detail I do not believe that the Ransom Centre archive currently holds all of the material pertaining to *Infinite Jest*. The total absence of notebooks or initial plotting

these factors taken into account, the formal evolution of the novel will be traced here from the available drafted material in order to illuminate the structures of absence and inference within. While development across the drafting process will be analysed, the early stages of composition also provide some particularly interesting information about how the form of Wallace's novel came together.

There are, broadly speaking, four full drafts of *Infinite Jest* that precede the published book. However, the archive also contains an earlier partial draft entitled "First Two Sections" and numerous draft fragments that predate the partial and full drafts quite substantially. The early fragments cover the years 1985-1992, while the partial draft dates from early 1993. Subsequent drafts cover the years 1993-1995, the year before the book's publication. A list titled "Section 1" dates from early 1993 and is a key document in charting the evolving structural form of *Infinite Jest*, as it brings together a number of documents and points the way towards some of the future draft structures. The list is reproduced here:

Section 1

It Was a Great Marvel That He Was In the Father without Knowing Him

Three Protrusions

Las Meniñas

Untitled

(Box 16.1)

These four subsections are all relatable through the resulting documents to certain early sequences from *Infinite Jest* that still exist (albeit in amended form) in the published novel. "It Was A Great Marvel..." is a very early version of the scene in which James Incandenza converses with Hal while disguised as a "professional conversationalist" (*Jest* 28) and originally opened the novel until it was replaced by the Year of Glad scene that opens the published text. "Three Protrusions" is a fairly close version of the sequence involving Ken Erdedy waiting for his marijuana (17-27). "Las Meniñas" is the episode that deals with Clenette and Wardine (37) and "Untitled" appears to be the early sequence featuring Mario and Hal's night-time

notes, in addition to making research difficult, suggests that either the work has been lost or destroyed by Wallace or retained by his estate.

conversation (39-42). None of these sequences follow each other chronologically, so even at this early stage it is evident that Wallace was not writing the events of the narrative chronologically from start to finish.³⁵

Another significant aspect of the “Section 1” list is that it seems to indicate a desire that the novel be divided into parts or sections. The division of the finished novel into 28 chapters, as described at the start of this chapter, is the final shape of the narrative, but there is also manuscript evidence that Wallace may have originally intended to divide the novel into two parts. In both Steven Moore’s draft and the subsequent draft, insert page “228A” has the handwritten heading “Pt. II open?” (Box 16.5). While it could be argued that the finished novel features an indirect half-way point (the death of Lucien Antitoui [*Jest* 489]) there is no actual division of the final text, and the more complex fractal format described above ultimately replaces a two part structure. The manuscripts also reveal that several further sequences originally had section titles that were dropped for the published novel. Tellingly, there are two sequences involving Mario and Hal talking at night that are both titled ‘Nocturne’ (Box 16.3 has “Nocturne 1” and Box 16.7 has “Nocturne 2”) which might indicate an early desire to have mirroring sequences on either side of a two-part division.³⁶ These sections sometimes appear to have been composed initially as single pieces or sketches rather than as components in a narrative, appearing on separate pieces of paper in handwriting distinct from the sections that follow.

³⁵ The “professional conversationalist” sequence is a good example of how Wallace’s drafts change over the course of the composition process. The sequence first turns up in a file of papers from 1990-1991 under the title ‘WHAT ARE YOU EXACTLY: unadorned autobio automabiography’ and the subtitle ‘i. April 1, 1974 DICTATIONARY’ (Box 15.7). In this earliest available version, Hal is called David and the date and character age corresponds almost exactly to Wallace’s age in April 1974. The scene is set in Washington and there are references to a Welsh embassy and a political crisis in Sierra Leone, all of which were subsequently scrapped. The sequence that immediately follows this – on the same sheet of paper – is an embryonic version of the Tucson chapter set in 1960 (*Jest* 157-169) in which James’ own father teaches him to play tennis and is evidently meant to draw inference between both dysfunctional father-son relationships, a thematic rather than a teleological narrative connection.

³⁶ Another Hal and Mario sequence, completely cut from the final novel, is titled “Aubade”. As well as referring to a song of late night/early morning, the title is probably also a reference to Philip Larkin’s 1977 poem of the same name, considering Wallace’s admission that he reads Larkin’s poetry ‘more than anyone else’ (Interview, Salon.com).

Evidently, the form of *Infinite Jest* evolved initially from a number of discrete sections which were then expanded before being streamlined into the final narrative, with a two-part structure ultimately jettisoned in favour of the more iterative fractal composition.

This evolution of the formal “shape” of *Infinite Jest*’s narrative is instrumental in understanding how Wallace achieved his technique of absenting plot data and fragmenting information to create the final form of the novel. Another question for those interested in *Infinite Jest*’s formal qualities is likely to revolve around the amount of plot information in the draft relative to the published novel. As explained above, in the final text a number of key plot events are absented from the narrative. A study of the drafts should therefore reveal whether Wallace wrote the entire plot into the novel and then deliberately absented data and moved the chronology around, or wrote the whole narrative in the final form that it appears, with no actual deletion of the absent plot events. The answer to this inquiry actually lies somewhere between the two presumptions. The drafts of *Infinite Jest* are broadly written to incorporate the same plot information that appears in the published book. Wallace did not draft the novel with the missing plot information intact and then deliberately remove important data. Therefore any researcher hoping for a direct depiction of Hal Incandenza and Don Gately at James Incandenza’s grave, or an explanation for Hal’s condition in the Year of Glad, or a revelation of Orin’s fate after interrogation, will be disappointed. While a considerable amount of material has been cut, none of it relates to the overarching mysteries and absences of the plot.³⁷ However during the drafting process Wallace makes a number of marginal handwritten comments that hint at the missing information. These notes appear to be for the purposes of Wallace’s own navigation more than anything else, and are clearly not intended for incorporation into the finished novel. Nevertheless, there are a number of references that hint at Wallace’s own suggestions for the absent data. A

³⁷ The nearest the cut material comes to thoroughly clarifying an absent plot detail is in the explanation of Hal’s mysterious non-sequitur in the Year Of Glad that “I once saw the word KNIFE finger-written on the steamed mirror of a non-public bathroom” (*Jest* 16). The cut material indicates that the young Hal wrote the word himself as a child, and frightened his mother Avril when the word reappeared in steam at a later date (Box 16.5). The importance of the information is minor, and it seems somewhat strange that Wallace left any reference in the finished text.

few examples: “they (the AFR) must find out somehow master is buried w/JI. Plan to dig him up”(Box 16.7), “Pem (Pemulis) and Hal go cold turkey – Pem ok, Hal flips in withdrawal”(Box 15.6), “Hal and Helen, Hal and Exhibition, Pemulis and DMZ” (Moore draft), “Stice’s bed on ceiling – (Hal sees after DMZ?)” (Box 17.1) and (from Hal’s perspective) “the thought came into my head that I could kill myself by [...] taking so much DMZ I left the planet” (Box 17.2).³⁸ These comments have obvious significance and interest for researchers and readers, but there is no textual evidence in the archive that the missing plot events were written into the original drafts.

However, there does appear to be evidence in the archive for a strategy of deliberate narrative fragmentation being performed by Wallace *while* drafting. That is to say that on a number of occasions lengthy pieces of narrative have been written out complete and then deliberately broken up and moved around the text. At one stage, a number of individual sections are listed (“MAIN BODY OF LENZ-DOG AND GATELY FIGHT, WITH WORKED-IN INSERTS OF DIALOGUES, MARIO AND MADAME, GATELY & JOELLE ON UHID, ORIN & SLANSKER, SLANSKER CV”) followed by the note “This needs to be broken up” (Box 16.6), so evidently extensive pieces of the novel were written in entirety before being broken up and redistributed. This persuasively illustrates that Wallace did not formally compose *Infinite Jest* in anything resembling a linear fashion. The final major formal change that took place during the drafting of *Infinite Jest* is the move to footnoting information, which occurs across a number of drafts and eventually leads to the endnote section in the published novel.³⁹

An analysis of the drafts also suggests that Wallace originally planned to include a degree of metafictional reference to himself within the text. As stated above, in the original iteration of the “professional conversationalist” scene Hal is called David and his age corresponds closely to Wallace’s own age. Moreover, at a later stage of drafting it is revealed that the character of Marlon Bain was originally

³⁸ DMZ is a drug that causes severe personality dissociation, and it could be speculated that Hal’s ultimate mental breakdown is a result of ingesting the drug. However, the event itself is never directly depicted in the narrative.

³⁹ The formal significance of footnotes and endnotes in the work of both Wallace and Danielewski will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this study.

called David Foster Wallace (16.5). Both Lenore and LaVache Beadsman in *The Broom of the System* and “Dave” in *Girl with Curious Hair*’s novella “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way” represent, respectively, implicit and explicit appearances of Wallace in his previous fictional texts. Notably, the appearance of “Dave” in the latter text is connected to an overarching structure in that novella that interrogates and criticises elements of certain postmodern writing, specifically the metafictional technique of John Barth.⁴⁰ *Infinite Jest*, Wallace’s next fictional work, is concerned with being “the projected work laid out in that novella” (Boswell 119) and it is enlightening to witness a drafting process whereby Wallace approaches and subsequently draws back from direct metafictional authorial presence in the text. While Hal, Orin and James Incandenza and Don Gately do represent facets of Wallace’s personality,⁴¹ metafictional appearances by the author have evidently been tried and rejected during the drafting process in favour of a more implicit narrative strategy, one less concerned with what Wallace once described in interview as “a godawful trap”:

My idea in “Westward” was to [...] get the Armageddon-explosion, the goal metafiction’s always been about, I wanted to get it over with, and then out of the rubble reaffirm the idea of art being a living transaction between humans (Interview, McCaffery 142)

The erasure of the metafictional self from the text of *Infinite Jest* during the drafting process provides an example of Wallace’s enactment of the break from a preceding form of postmodern fiction while still in the process of formally structuring the novel, and this engagement is (as will be discussed below) yet more implicitly formally embedded in certain structures and “shapes” within the narratives of the published text. Some of these symbolic, graphic and thematic shapes bear the formal influence of a number of other non-literary forms such as systems theory,

⁴⁰ The college fiction teacher in Wallace’s novella is named Ambrose, a clear reference to Barth’s metafictional persona in his collection *Lost In The Funhouse*. Wallace’s geographical interrogation of postmodernism in this story will be outlined further in Chapter 2.

⁴¹ For example, Tom LeClair suggests that Incandenza’s “tall, lexically gifted, and etymology conscious “wraith”” is a representation of Wallace (LeClair, “Prodigious” 32).

physiology, geometry and astronomy. Moreover, the employment of these shapes through strategies of containment and entrapment is central to an understanding of Wallace's interrogative relationship with postmodernism in the published novel.

Form in the Published Novel

i. Systems Theory

Among the items in the Wallace archive in the Ransom Centre is Wallace's personal copy of Tom LeClair's study *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel*. In his copy of the book, Wallace has underlined most of the following statement by LeClair:

At the same time that systems theory "masters," it admits its own limitations – its perspectivism, the tenuousness of categories, linguistic constraints. Systems theory is thus a science of ambitious uncertainty, anti-reductive, an exemplar of its own assertions about open and equi-final systems: and therefore an attractive model for writers who would attempt to continue the modernist tradition of synthetic masterpieces, now synthesizing ranging abstractions, detailed attention to the world, and a looping self-examination of both theoretical frames and empirical insights. If the book itself, especially the long book, was under attack by both the media and the deconstructive postmoderns, that was all the more reason for the systems novelists to place in the communications loop large "mastering" works that could resist the media's miniaturization of historical experience and the postmodernists' abandonment of it. Such works would both explain and register uncertainty, in contrast to the media's simplification of ideas into commodities for markets and the postmodernists' certainty about uncertainty; they would transform the reader's understanding of wholes, rather than please his engineered appetite for parts. (LeClair, *Loop* 11-12)

LeClair's statement, with its invocation of systems theory as a possible riposte to the "deconstructive postmoderns", has evidently caught Wallace's attention. LeClair's book provides a rigorous study of the work of DeLillo (a key influence on Wallace) and the concept of systems theory as a new template for the postmodern novel.

Stephen Burn, in his discussion of Jonathan Franzen's novel *Strong Motion*, posits a concise reading of LeClair's position as well as clarifying how systems theory operates, and its importance to the post-postmodern novel:

The term systems novel was coined by Tom LeClair to describe the work of DeLillo and his contemporaries, and the body of thought underlying this designation was the systems theory that derives from the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy. An Austrian biologist, Bertalanffy attempted to replace the mechanistic approach to living systems with a mathematical and biological approach that worked from both the "top down" and the "bottom up", stressing reciprocal relationships between the two. In this new epistemology, the emphasis was on open rather than closed systems; *dynamic, reciprocal relationships rather than separate static components*, and so on. The classic systems novelists, for LeClair, were writers who attempted to replicate the systems understanding of the world rather than the crude mechanistic model of cause and effect that we find in a traditional novel. These writers comprised a sophisticated strand of scientifically informed contemporary fiction that "use[d] postmodern techniques to model the dense and tangled relations of modern history, politics and science". (Burn, *Franzen* 75, italics mine)

Using both LeClair's statement and Burn's positing of LeClair's position, Wallace's approach to the idea of the systems novel and the ramifications for the formal narrative structure of the published text of *Infinite Jest* begin to become clearer. LeClair's position on DeLillo's employment of the "loop" in the systems novel assists an understanding of how Wallace formally and structurally employs images of open and closed systems in *Infinite Jest*. LeClair discusses how DeLillo's fiction is concerned with "communications loops, loops that are both saving and destroying, evolutionary spirals and vicious circles" (LeClair, *Loop* xi). Wallace, a longtime friend of DeLillo,⁴² is also concerned (as will be explained below) with the opposition between open and closed systems and throughout the gargantuan

⁴² The Ransom Centre holds numerous letters between Wallace and DeLillo, in which Wallace is candid about asking DeLillo for his "general aestheto-ethical input" on his writing (Box 101.10). Wallace also lists DeLillo's novel *End Zone* as a source for *Infinite Jest*'s apocalyptic tennis game Eschaton (Box 16.1).

polyphonic narrative of *Infinite Jest* is concerned with, in LeClair's terms, transforming "the reader's understanding of wholes, rather than [...] his engineered appetite for parts". Essentially, Wallace in his methodology has a substantial degree of kinship with the approach of the systems novelist LeClair describes in his study. When LeClair says of the protagonists of systems novels that "they try to understand new information rather than cause events to happen; they learn the processes in which they participate, rather than dictate circumstances" and that "the novels' movements are digressive, rather than linear, suggesting a ranging simultaneity of information that the protagonist and reader must sort" (LeClair, *Loop* 17) he could be describing both the rehabilitative processes of the recovering substance addicts of the plot of *Infinite Jest* and the a-temporal "fractal" narrative structure of the novel itself. Indeed, LeClair's delineation of how systems novelists approach postmodernism (in a crucial distinction he suggests that the conception that these writers have a pessimistic approach to postmodernism is actually the result of a critical misreading [19]) and how the systems novel "manifests possibility, futurity" (Ibid), suggests a form that is already beginning to interrogate certain "destructive" elements of postmodern fiction.

Marshall Boswell has identified some formative connections between the closed system and solipsism in Wallace's debut novel, 1987's *The Broom of the System*:

In Wallace's world, the solipsism of the logocentric thinker is a closed system that always results in a symbolic sort of heat death, figured here as a gradual transformation of a living entity into an inanimate object [...] solipsists cannot recognize a larger system outside their own closed system (Boswell, *Understanding* 53)

Furthermore, Boswell astutely suggests that "An exhausted literary tradition, in Wallace's terms, is a closed system" (60) and when one considers the above delineation of Wallace's break from metafiction and his interrogation of the postmodern narratives of John Barth, it is possible to see how the closed system is additionally conflated by Wallace with the conversation with the self exemplified by a particular type of postmodern metafiction. Wallace takes LeClair's definition of an

open system as “reciprocal” and positions it against the non-reciprocal conversation with the self he perceives as characteristic of the author-centric metafiction of *Lost in the Funhouse*.

In his analysis of *Broom* Boswell also suggests that “a break in the closed system [...] is also linked to *freedom* and multiplicity of meaning” (Ibid, italics original), and the narrative of *Infinite Jest* represents an important development in Wallace’s dramatisation of the formal possibilities of escape from the closed system. In the narrative of *Infinite Jest* Wallace further conflates and concretises LeClair’s tropes of the closed system (“causality [...] one-way [...] either/or” [LeClair, *Loop* 8]) with solipsism, narcissism and addiction, actively dramatising the closed system as a dialogue with the self (an enactment of Burn’s above categorisation of closed systems as “separate, static components”) through the depiction of various states of substance addiction and self-consciousness. Crucially, through the central conceit of the redemptive power of rehabilitation and detoxification, the novel is concerned not only with a narrative diagnosis and opposition of open and closed systems but also with how a closed system can be redemptively *transfigured* into an open or communicative system. The approach to postmodernism is therefore configured as an “inoculation” derived from the elements of that postmodern system.

This redemptive strategy begins at the level of overarching narrative construction. Stephen Burn, in his study of Franzen’s novel *Strong Motion*, invokes the importance of chaos theory, quoting N. Katherine Hayles, in relation to open and closed systems:

One of the key concepts of chaos theory is the phenomenon of so-called self-similarity, which derives from Benoit Mandelbrot’s critique of Euclidean geometry. Examining the presence of irregular forms in nature, Mandelbrot found formal overlaps that could be described as examples of “recursive symmetry.” N. Katherine Hayles explains: “a figure or system displays recursive symmetry when the same general form is repeated across many different length scales, as though the forms were being progressively enlarged or diminished” [...] But while *Strong Motion* replicates Mandelbrot’s recursive symmetries, it also employs the nonlinear conception of cause and effect that characterises Lorenz’s butterfly effect. The classical doctrine of scientific

discovery was founded upon the Laplacian principle that the components of a process could be considered as part of a closed system, where each discrete unit could be isolated and analysed to identify a linear flow of cause and effect [...] by contrast, chaos theory envisions every action to take place within an open system that is inherently dynamic [...] (Burn, *Franzen* 81)

Burn's positing of the concept of self-similarity is reflected in Wallace's construction of the above-discussed Sierpinski gasket as a synecdoche for the narrative of *Infinite Jest*, which suggests that Wallace is not only aware of the "open system" of chaos theory but has also incorporated it into the formal structure of his non-linear narrative. Through the above-defined process of reader inference Wallace suggests a reading strategy whereby straightforward narrative cause and effect is rejected in favour of a scheme whereby the reader must combine a series of "closed" chapters and work out their position within a totalising non-linear "open" narrative, an enactment of the rejection of a reader's "engineered appetite for parts" outlined by LeClair. However, in addition to constructing an overarching narrative schema that is characteristically "open" Wallace embeds throughout the narrative of *Infinite Jest* several detailed processes of diagnosis and cure for those operating within closed systems. These formal strategies operate both as a postmodern diagnosis of physical or psychological constraint (a depiction of the closed system and the individual trapped within it) and a post-postmodern positing of release (how that individual might find autonomy, communication and reciprocation). The addicted subject in *Infinite Jest* is idiomatic of the individual trapped in a closed system, and the implementation of the rehabilitative processes of Alcoholics Anonymous allows those individuals, through escape from the solipsistic (and for Wallace, characteristically postmodern) urges of the self and dialogue with others, to enter an open system which facilitates, to use LeClair's term again, the "understanding of wholes, rather than [an] engineered appetite for parts", reciprocal communication with others, and the ultimate ability to describe their own spatial trajectory. Not all characters are ultimately released and some remain trapped within their closed systems of addiction or solipsism, but this is characterised in *Infinite Jest* as a failure to engage with the existing processes of release available to them. Wallace enacts this post-postmodern strategy through invocation of a series of narrative formal

“shapes” informed most specifically by physiology and geometry. These shapes, which are described below, provide within the narrative concrete actualisations of the concept of the closed system, with the physical position of characters within these systems illustrating both how the individual is trapped and the relative possibility of escape.

ii. Physiological Systems

Within the fictionalised Boston area of *Infinite Jest* Wallace places a series of landmarks (primarily cities or buildings) that resemble or are comparable to areas of the human body, from the inflatable tennis court cover known as “The Lung” to the heart-like “cardioid” shape of the E.T.A grounds. The architecture of the M.I.T. building from which Madame Psychosis broadcasts her radio show is described with extensive recourse to physiological terminology (“acoustic meatus”, “sephenoid sinus”, “laryngeally fissured”, “tracheal air-filters”, “coaxial medulla” [*Jest* 182-3]) and the roof of the building resembles the shape of the human brain. Nationally, Bridgeport, Cincinnati is referred to as “the true lower intestine of North America” (984). The attribution of organ-like characteristics to geographical areas invokes an image of the city and nation as a dynamic system, a gigantic Hobbesian body that depends upon the cooperation of all areas in order to operate correctly. A surface reading of these locations might disclose that M.I.T’s association with technical intelligence suggests the image of the brain, that the placing of the emotional locus of the narrative around E.T.A. suggests that that is where the “heart” of the narrative resides and that “The Lung” refers ironically to Hal’s proclivity for smoking underneath it. However it is also essential to consider that certain organs invoked here (the lower intestine, the heart, the lungs) are strongly connected with systemic directional movement and flow. In *Infinite Jest*, to become fixated upon one’s own internal physiological system leads to confusion, addiction and self-destruction due to a focus upon the “closed” body, rather than that body’s interaction with other bodies.

In a number of incidents in the narrative individuals attach themselves implicitly or symbolically to particular parts of the body at the expense of a reciprocal relationship with other bodies, and this focus upon one system within the body causes the individual to become trapped. The juxtaposition of heart and lungs

at E.T.A. invokes the closed cardiovascular system of pulmonary circulation, whereby the lungs re-oxygenate blood from the heart that is depleted in oxygen. Wallace invokes the pulmonary characteristics of “The Lung” below:

The pump room is essentially like a pulmonary organ...the intake fans pull ground-level winter air down into and around the room and through the three exhaust fans and up the outtake ducts into networks of pneumatic tubing in the Lung’s sides and dome: it’s the pressure of the moving air that keeps the fragile lung inflated (52)

Within the pump room during this descriptive episode is Hal Incandenza, who regularly escapes down to the pump room to smoke marijuana alone, activating one of the fans to diffuse the smoke he creates. He can only do this when The Lung is down, because when it is inflated the fan would blow smoke into the inflated Lung and people would notice the smell. In Wallace’s diagnosis, Hal (increasingly dependent on marijuana and becoming self-conscious to the point of psychological paralysis) is subservient to a physical enactment of a closed system. Through his addictive subjugation to the Lung’s systemic processes Hal can only operate within this already closed pulmonary-style system when it is in its smallest and most restrictive spatial “closed” state.⁴³

The focus upon intestinal and colorectal imagery (the aforementioned Bridgeport CT and the intestinal tunnels below E.T.A. are just two examples) prompts a similar systemic association, with some characters in the grip of addiction becoming subservient to their digestive system. Doony Glynn suffers from chronic diverticulitis during his rehabilitation, while the Arabic-Canadian medical attaché (whose speciality is ‘the maxillofacial consequences of imbalances in intestinal

⁴³ Burn’s description of characters in Franzen’s work complements Hal’s avoidance of an open system. *Strong Motion*’s Renée “cannot withstand the taint of chaos that emerges in open systems” and that her bare, clean apartment “embodies the zeal for isolation and closure that rules her life” (Burn, *Franzen* 83) immediately recalls how *Infinite Jest*’s Joelle Van Dyne “used to like to get really high and then clean” (*Jest* 736) It is also interesting to note, in the light of Hal’s eventual solipsistic regression to the status of an ‘infantophile’ (16), that the pulmonary system is virtually non-operational in the human foetus before birth.

flora' (33)) works for a Saudi minister whose inability to stop eating Toblerones causes him medical problems. Teddy Schacht has the debilitating intestinal illness Crohn's Disease, which he attempts to ignore with increasing futility, and Poor Tony Krause suffers a particularly horrendous detoxification during which he spends ten days sitting upon a toilet, a servant to the damage his heroin addiction has caused his body and in a position of total physical subservience to the gastrointestinal system.

While the brain-like building at M.I.T. does not suggest directional movement in the same manner as the pulmonary or digestive systems described above, it is important in an understanding of how Wallace depicts apparently closed and restrictive systems that also contain within themselves the possibility of release. A line cut from the published book helps to illuminate how the shape of this building is particularly relevant. Part of the deleted line mentions, in allusion to part of the M.I.T. building, that "if the MIT Union's neurography's accurate, this is probably the deep-brain portion that in persons controls circadian and other rhythms" (Box 18.6). In a line that survives in the published text it is pointed out that it is possible to fall off a balcony area in the building:

[...] 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 safe shimmy down to the good old oblongata (186)

This assisted descent down to the brain stem (the ladder offers help) provides an interesting analogue to the mentality of the addict, and complements the imagery above regarding Hal's regressive retreat into a closed and spatially restrictive system. Burn suggests that in *The Corrections* Jonathan Franzen employs a similar image to describe the offices of the fictional Midland Pacific company (*Corrections* 407). Burn suggests that "the tripartite division of the brain that Franzen maps on to this building – providing a vertical hierarchy of reptilian brain, midbrain and cerebral cortex – follows the research of neuroscientist Paul D. MacLean, who used this three-way division as the foundation for his theory of the "Triune Brain"" (Burn,

Franzen 118). Burn explains that the reptilian brain is MacLean's term for the brain-stem, and has "primitive functions", whereas the cerebral cortex has "language skills and abstract problem-solving abilities, and its characteristic response to the world is a rational one" (119).

Wallace dramatises here a strategy of entrapment and possible release. A downward directional movement in the building (falling off the M.I.T. balcony and being helped down by the emergency ladder) could be analogous to the addict's surrender to the primitive reptilian brain. However it is also possible that the comfort supplied by the emergency ladder could also refer to the process of recovery, away from the rationalising cerebral cortex and down into the primitive brain (after all, one of the slogans of Alcoholics Anonymous in the novel is "My Best Thinking Got Me Here" [*Jest* 1026 n135]). Moreover, the ambiguity of the image rests upon the question of which parts of the brain are used, and the ability of the individual to employ them at the expense of others.⁴⁴

The process of digestion discussed above involves intestinal peristalsis (the contraction of muscles for the direction of excreta through the lower intestine). Peristalsis is characterised by the one-way movement of the surrounding environment to assist an object that will not move of its own accord, and presents in biological microcosm the following spatial conundrums faced by many of the addicted and confused characters in *Infinite Jest*: Am I moving or am I being moved? Is my movement in this system a result of my personal choice or am I being assisted by a larger system or higher power? Should I put my faith in the system that is moving me or attempt to fight it? These questions, and their relation to the concept of open and closed systems outlined by LeClair and Burn, are dramatised throughout *Infinite Jest* with specific reference to geometry.

iii. Geometry

Burn's reference, in his positing of Franzen's characteristically post-postmodern narrative, to the open system of chaos theory includes the fact that "one of the key concepts of chaos theory is the phenomenon of so-called self-similarity, which derives from Benoit Mandelbrot's critique of Euclidean geometry", and this

⁴⁴ Newcomers to AA are reported as being in a position whereby they "identify their whole selves with their head" (*Jest* 272).

reference to Euclidean geometry is adopted by Wallace not only into the overarching Sierpinski Gasket structure of *Infinite Jest*, but also into formal structures within the narrative itself. Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry are characterised throughout the narrative as analogous to the processes of, respectively, closed and confined systems, and open systems and the possibility of release.

One element of Wallace's own "critique" of Euclidean geometry can be understood through the implementation of Euclidean vectors throughout the narrative, and the associations of paralysis or physical entrapment that accompany their presence. A Euclidean vector is a geometric object with both magnitude and direction, and is depicted graphically as a directional arrow. The graphic appearance of the object is therefore both static and directional.⁴⁵ *Infinite Jest* teems with imagery of vectors: the "six-vectored wind tunnel" (52) of the Pump Room, the compression of a voice on the telephone "vectored right into your ear"(146), the addict Erdedy's "living in quick vectors"(20), the E.T.A. charter to "stretch your faculties along multiple vectors"(53), the "parabolic southwest vector"(342) taken by the airborne Eschaton equipment, and Land Barge waste being "vectored into the Sonora region of Mexico"(428). Significantly, the Latin meaning of the word "vector" roughly translates as "one who carries", and the most direct employment of vectors within the text is associated with the abandonment of responsibility to others (an irresponsible and self-indulgent wish to be "carried"). Joelle Van Dyne's freebasing overdose is traced through the image of the implied descent of the arrow in Bernini's sculpture "The Ecstasy of St. Teresa", with the apex of the high represented as a "graph reaching its highest spiked prick, peak, the arrow's best descent" (240). Later in the narrative an image of a paralysed and catatonic woman in front of a teleputer is compounded by a joke-shop device cruelly attached to her by two Ennet House residents, with the effect that she appears to have an arrow through her head. Two references to Cupid's arrow (125, 373) also remind the reader of the conjunction of the arrow with the individual's helpless abandonment to

⁴⁵ This is not Wallace's only invocation of arrows within a text. Wallace also uses graphic arrows to direct the reader's eye in *The Broom Of The System*, "The Suffering Channel" and "Host". In "The Suffering Channel" arrows are used between paragraphs as shorthand to denote whether the following paragraph takes place previously or concurrently with the preceding action. Mark Nechtr from "Westward The Course Of Empire Takes Its Way" also carries an arrow with him at all times.

love. Throughout *Infinite Jest*, the vector and its graphical analogue the arrow are the loci of the same conundrum prompted by the peristaltic imagery discussed above: whether an individual is moving of their own accord or whether they are being moved.

However, through AA's attempts to reclaim the arrow as an image of directional choice and control by encouraging members to think in terms of "the arrow of responsibility" (377) Wallace thematically enacts the possibility of a redemptive strategy that frees the individual from the entrapment engendered by vectors. This strategy is complemented by an episode that implicitly plays upon the epidemiological and parasitic definition of the word "vector". In this context the term "one who carries" denotes a carrier of disease, most often a parasitic insect or animal that attaches itself to a host. The lethally entertaining film "Infinite Jest" is referred to early in the novel as "some beastly post-annular scopophiliacal vector" (233) and drug addiction is also conflated with the image of the parasite:⁴⁶

Eugenio Martinez over at Ennet House never tires of pointing out that your personal will is the web your Disease sits and spins in, still. The will you call your own ceased to be yours as of who knows how many Substance-drenched years ago. It's now shot through with the spidered fibrosis of your Disease. His own experience's term for the Disease is: The Spider. You have to Starve The Spider: you have to surrender your will. This is why most people will Come In and Hang In only after their own entangled will has just about killed them. You have to want to surrender your will to people who know how to Starve The Spider (357)

The "disease" of psychological and physical subjugation is implicitly linked to the image of the parasitic vector. This passage both compounds Wallace's dual employment of the term "vector" and also connects the directional and parasitic connotations explicitly to the addicted and constrained subject.

Vectors also play a significant role in the tennis matches played at Enfield Tennis Academy. The term is employed on a number of occasions to describe the

⁴⁶ A murderous vector is also presented during the deaths of the Antittoi brothers at the hands of the A.F.R., as Lucien Antittoi is skewered downwards through his digestive tract with a broom handle (488).

movement of tennis balls; objects with a trajectory described by an external force. There is confusion within the training philosophy of E.T.A. between the urge to give oneself away to the causative pursuit of technique and the indulgence of the individual that results from that very act. Ortho Stice's impressed reaction to "several balls' sudden anomalous swerves against wind and their own vectors" (637) is representative of this confusion. The balls themselves do not possess any animate power to choose their own trajectory, though what impresses Stice is the apparent ability of the balls to escape their pre-determined paths. The indulgence in drug abuse that is rife throughout E.T.A. results at least partially from the uncertainty for the students of the extent to which they have chosen their own trajectory through the academy, or whether in fact their "personal vectors" have already been described for them. Crucially, the non-Euclidean "anomalous swerves" that defy the ball's own vectors imply the possibility of escape from the closed system of cause and effect that is ideologically implemented throughout the academy (the geometric knowledge required to master tennis, the slow progression from beginner to professional player) and suggest the possibility of a non-Euclidean movement outside the boundary of the kind of causative closed system outlined by both LeClair and Burn.⁴⁷

Don Gately, *Infinite Jest*'s exemplary recovering addict, appears to enact behaviour analogous to the "swerve against the vector" that so impresses Stice. Gately drives his superior Pat Montesian's car on an unnecessarily long round trip across Boston to pick up some groceries. Gately is evidently driving East from Ennet House along Commonwealth Avenue "through bleak parts of Brighton and Allston and past Boston U. and toward the big triangular CITGO neon sign and the Back Bay" (476). Wallace then appears to suggest that Gately accesses Cambridge via the Storrow 500 Memorial Drive, ending up at "Prospect St.'s Ramp Of Death" (478), which seemingly means that he doubles back on himself, heading West again, before crossing the Charles River to Prospect Street via Central Square. According to a road map of Boston, the more direct route would be to cross the Charles River from the Storrow 500 via the Harvard Bridge. Even if Wallace's directions are suggesting that Gately actually does cross via the Harvard Bridge, he is still doubling back as he elects to go "right, north, and take Prospect St. through Central Square" (478).

⁴⁷ Wallace's formal employment of geometry in the description of tennis will be returned to presently.

Gately has been asked to buy the groceries from Allston, but decides instead to drive through Allston and go completely off route, ending up over the river and nearly in Somerville, which is north of Cambridge. The list of choices and directions taken by Gately during his drive and his actions in this sequence present a schism between the command he has been given (his overarching errand for the groceries) and the method by which he chooses to carry out that errand. The broad trajectory of Gately's directive remains intact (he is still acting under instruction), but the manner in which he performs his task illustrates a recognition from Gately that within an overarching command issued within a rehabilitative structure there lies the possibility for anomalous individual action.⁴⁸ This individual action is not the same as the solipsistic actions previously performed by Gately when under the influence of narcotics. Instead, Gately's choices occur within an understanding that he will perform a task for a higher power that is generated outside of himself (the AA system of 12-step recovery). Embedded within this short sequence, then, is the delineation of a mindset that bypasses the paralytic confusion experienced by the E.T.A. students. Gately retains an unyielding belief in the rehabilitative structure that surrounds him, and this allows him to achieve a level of autonomy from the constraint of the "personal vector".

It is also worth reading this sequence alongside the following comments about the position of the novelist in relation to literary postmodernism made by Wallace to Larry McCaffery in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* interview conducted during the composition of *Infinite Jest*:

If you operate, which most of us do, from the premise that there are things about the contemporary U.S. that make it distinctively hard to be a real human being, then maybe half of fiction's job is to dramatize what it is that makes it tough. The other half is to dramatize the fact that we still "are" human beings, now (...) What's engaging and artistically real is, taking it as axiomatic that the present is grotesquely materialistic, how is it that we as human beings still have the capacity for joy, charity, genuine connections, for stuff that doesn't

⁴⁸ This is not unlike the position of the individual within Gerhardt Schtitt's philosophy of tennis, which will be discussed below.

have a price? And can these capacities be made to thrive? And if so, how, and if not why not? (McCaffery, 131-2)

Gately's ability to alter his driving trajectory is an effect of his belief in the rehabilitative structure that surrounds him, but also the resultant ability to indulge his whim that such security allows. Such episodes are important for Wallace, whose delineation of strong fiction also includes criticism of a mode of writing that is simply diagnostic of the problems of the postmodern environment it describes. Wallace addresses McCaffery thus: "In dark times, the definition of good art would seem to be art that locates and applies CPR to those elements of what's human and magical that still live and glow despite the times' darkness" (Interview, McCaffery 131). The importance of being able to choose one's trajectory is dramatised here in miniature through something as relatively mundane as a driving route. Gately has performed an "anomalous swerve" against the confinement of his addictive personality.

Gately's trajectory should be contrasted here with the indulgent and ultimately murderous routes taken by Randy Lenz during his journeys home from AA meetings. Lenz, who is still taking cocaine in breach of house regulations and is lying about his rehabilitative status, follows a series of paths of his own devising through "the streets' cockeyed grid around Enfield-Brighton-Allston"(539). Lenz has abandoned the overarching rehabilitative structure embraced by Gately, and thus his solipsistic trajectories are characterised not by the whimsical and spontaneous choices afforded to Gately, but rather increasingly by violent indulgence and a "cockeyed" trajectory. Lenz's journeys begin to incorporate the slaughter of animals, moving from rats to cats and eventually dogs (the latter being a catalyst for a shooting that puts others in hospital). Lenz's surrender to his solipsistic urges is also reflected in an odd geographical impulse; he has "a strange compulsive need to be north of everything, and possibly even northeast of everything" (277), his movements systemically directed not by him, but by his addiction. Gately's adherence to the overarching control of the rehabilitative programme ultimately allows him the possibility of autonomy of movement whereas Lenz, despite the apparent choice of route home, is actually trapped within a closed system, a

“cockeyed grid” (a fundamentally non-fractal image) that is a component of his solipsistic addictive psyche.

iv. Narrative Circles And Triangles

The implicit geometric description of closed systems enacted by the employment of Euclidean vectors is expanded further in *Infinite Jest* through Wallace’s implementation of geometric shape diagrams across the novel’s narrative. The implicit triangular structures suggested by the Sierpinski gasket narrative model suggests that the narrative has an overarching triangular “shape”, and specifically delineated triangular shapes make appearances at important junctures throughout *Infinite Jest*, with the reinforcing effect of making events within the narrative itself physically resemble the fractal schema for the overall narrative. For example, as well as the appearance of several specific visual triangular shapes within the novel such as the concentric triangular pattern of the CITGO sign (which is significantly described as “a triangular star to steer by” [476]) and the young James Incandenza's body forming one side of the outline of a “right dihedral triangle”(495) as he helps his father to examine a faulty mattress, there are also implicit triangular shapes in *Infinite Jest* which recall the absent triangles essential to construction of the Sierpinski gasket. Useful thematic examples include the suggested triangular shape made by the thread connecting Lucien Antitoui to both his gun and his dead brother’s ear (487), the punishing Star Drills practised by the ETA students across the tennis courts (456) that conflate implicit triangular shapes with the directional vectors discussed above and Mario Incandenza's stance when braced against his cantilevered police lock creates an implied triangular shape formed by the front of his body, the ground and the lock (the apex of the triangle is marked by Mario's heart).⁴⁹

That the Sierpinski gasket’s outer structure is an ultimate boundary (as explained at the start of this chapter) allows the triangle to represent the outer frame of the narrative, a boundary that encompasses and *contains* the system of the novel’s environment. However, as explained above, the process of reproduction can occur

⁴⁹ An illuminating marginal note in one of the drafts of the novel suggest that Mario (whose condition is never clarified) suffers from Dubowitz Syndrome (Box 16.5). One of the symptoms of Dubowitz Syndrome is a triangular-shaped face. Victor Dubowitz, after whom the syndrome is named, wrote a book in 1980 titled *The Floppy Infant*, which is a medical analysis of infantile hypotonia, and the connection with Wallace’s social thesis in *Infinite Jest* is surely not coincidental.

infinitely inside the boundaries of the triangle (an “infoliating” process [*Jest* 83]). Therefore a “closed” boundary is, in a post-postmodern gesture by Wallace that invokes LeClair, defied by the infinite processes of variation and communication that can occur within and across it, *because* of it. However, Wallace’s employment of this triangular structure does not merely limit itself to an implicit narrative framework. Instead, triangle shapes throughout the novel implicitly serve to illustrate the confining structures of a closed, non-reciprocal system, and the autonomy of those within or adjacent to these triangular shapes is dependent on their psychological approach to the system they inhabit. Some can move beyond the boundaries of the system, while others can only move in increasingly limited fashion within those boundaries. Wallace also employs another geometric shape alongside the triangle, the circle. In *Infinite Jest* the circle, like the triangle, can graphically represent a closed system (a circle or cycle of behaviour) but the rehabilitated individual has the power to transfigure the postmodern image of the closed circular system into a post-postmodern open system of communication. Crucially, LeClair’s definition of the reciprocal system uses the terminology “loop”. The circle in *Infinite Jest* can represent both entrapment (a “vicious circle” of addiction or self-consciousness) and a redemptive, reciprocal communications loop that can be engineered from that previously restrictive circular shape. This connects explicitly to Burn’s formulation that the post-postmodern narrative “explicitly looks back to, or dramatizes its roots in postmodernism [...] it is a development from, rather than an explicit rejection of, the preceding movement” (Burn, *Franzen* 19). Wallace’s novel employs and dramatises the terminology outlined by LeClair throughout its narrative to posit the development from a deconstructive postmodern position via a transfiguration of the closed circle into a reciprocal, post-postmodern “loop”.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The “massive pseudocartographic right triangle”(571) described by Michael Pemulis to illustrate the process of annular fusion, the enormous self-contained waste-based energy system employed by O.N.A.N., presents a triangular variation on the circle/loop duality, acting as a kind of toxic and static “closed system” counterpoint to the infinite reciprocal possibilities of the Sierpinski triangle that orders Wallace’s narrative (the latter affords infinite reproduction while the former offers only a repetitive stasis). The triangulated process is underpinned by self-generation, a “type of fusion that can produce waste that’s fuel for a process whose waste is fuel for the fusion” (572). The young James Incandenza’s description of a simplified image of the process of annular fusion as “someone

A graphic illustration of the dangerous potential of the circle occurs when Don Gately tells Joelle Van Dyne about an occasion on which he walked a critically injured man around in a circular manner to try and keep him conscious, only for the man to eventually die (532), while Randy Lenz's inexplicable "fear of disks" (277) also implicitly suggests an awareness, albeit possibly a subconscious one, of the destructive effects of this circularity. However, Wallace's post-postmodern strategy envisions a process whereby the processes of entrapment in this geometric actualisation of a closed system can be reconfigured and made safe. Wallace presents the work of the Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous groups in *Infinite Jest* as an attempt to reclaim the image of the circle, making the choice to employ circular motifs in a manner that acts against solipsism rather than perpetuating it. The best example of this is the "traditional huge circle" (503) employed by the NA group attended by Ken Erdedy and Kate Gompert. By employing the image of the circle as a process of unification and identification with others, the "vicious" circle and closed system is recontextualised and disarmed, turned into a reciprocal communication loop, an image defined by a connecting and unification of individuals, a sharing of experience and an escape into an open system consisting of the component parts of individual closed systems.

Wallace further hints at the importance of the circle as a motif for potential communication through the occasional appearance within *Infinite Jest* of circular chapter markers with a shadowed crescent on their right-hand side. In an odd convergence James Wood, in his review of *Oblivion*, seems to accidentally stumble upon the potential importance of the shaded circular markers to Wallace's intentions for the narrative of *Infinite Jest*:

The gibbous moon, not full but fuller than a semicircle, is a part that represents a whole, and there are evenings when we seem to "see" the shadow of this wholeness: we naturally complete the circle. ('The Digressionist')

(trying) to turn somersaults with one hand nailed to the floor"(503) further compounds the annular process in the reader's mind as a non-reciprocal, self-generated "closed" process within which the individual is physically confined.

Whereas Wood uses the implied circular shape within the gibbous Moon as a point of departure for discussion of “immersion fiction”, the image could also refer to the inferential formal structure of *Infinite Jest*, and the manner in which the Sierpinski gasket narrative relies upon a reader’s inference to complete or infer the convergence of particular narrative threads. A shared process between writer and reader (like the sharing of narratives in the “huge circle” in AA) is the only way that one can “complete the circle” and reach understanding.

v. Defying Euclid: Tennis and Formal Limits

Having taken these systemic and geometric processes into account, a return now to the image of the “anomalous swerve” of tennis balls against their prescribed vectors discussed above begins to bring together the respective elements of Wallace’s post-postmodern systemic and geometric formal strategies in *Infinite Jest*, strategies that implicitly incorporate the critique of Euclidean geometry inherent in Burn’s above definition of self-similarity, a process that underlies the overarching structure of the narrative.

The game of tennis, and the individual player’s relationship to the game, is an essential formal component of not only the narrative of *Infinite Jest* but also a significant amount of Wallace’s non-fiction. Five essays written between 1990 and 2006 concentrate on different aspects of the sport and those who play it. 1990’s “Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley” addresses Wallace’s “near-great” childhood tennis playing (*Supposedly* 3). A 1996 article for *Esquire* about player Michael Joyce, originally entitled “The String Theory,”⁵¹ the 2006 *New York Times* article “Federer As Religious Experience” and the 1994 *Philadelphia Enquirer* article “How Tracy Austin Broke My Heart” deal with the technical ability and required psychological make-up of professional players. The 1996 *New York Times* article “Democracy and Commerce at the U.S. Open” concerns itself primarily with the corporate sponsorship of tennis. All of the above essays are concerned in some part with the psychology of the tennis player, though the formal structure of the court and

⁵¹ The alternate title of the essay as reproduced in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again* is “Tennis Player Michael Joyce’s Professional Artistry As A Paradigm Of Certain Stuff About Choice, Freedom, Discipline, Joy, Grotesquerie, and Human Completeness”.

the physical and geometric importance of the game are explored most thoroughly within the narrative of *Infinite Jest*.

“Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley” is a particularly significant precursor to *Infinite Jest*, and the essay’s original title “Tennis, Trigonometry, Tornadoes”⁵² hints at the formal influence on the novel’s narrative. The geometric shape of the tennis court is a consistent formal model throughout *Infinite Jest*, and is paradoxically connected to both physical and psychological development and confinement. In the earlier essay, the geometrical influence of the natural environments within which the young Wallace played competitive tennis is also foregrounded. Wallace at least partially locates his skill for tennis (and mathematics) in the geometric landscape of his Midwestern childhood, noting that “I’d grown up inside vectors, lines and lines athwart lines, grids – and, on the scale of horizons, broad curving lines of geographic force” (*Supposedly* 3). Wallace is even more direct about the connection between geometry and sport, explaining that “sharply precise divisions and boundaries, together with the fact that – wind and your more exotic-type spins aside – balls can be made to travel in straight lines only, make textbook tennis plane geometry” (*Supposedly* 7), and describing in his essay on Tracy Austin how tennis champion Pete Sampras “defies Euclid” (*Lobster* 142).

The shape of the tennis court itself contains a game that is played across a series of marked areas of different sizes, and the game is described by Gerhard Schtitt as “Cantorian and beautiful because *infoliating, contained*” (*Jest* 82).⁵³ The image of a contained and boundaried area within which there lies a “diagnate infinity of infinities of choice and execution” (*Ibid*) is indicative of the aforementioned formal schema that contains the whole narrative of *Infinite Jest*: the Sierpinski gasket.⁵⁴ The philosophy of Gerhardt Schtitt, the head coach and athletic director at the academy, provides a model not only for the court as psychological space but also, crucially, dramatises a geometric relationship that underpins

⁵² The title under which it was published in *Harper’s* in 1992.

⁵³ Wallace wrote at length about Cantorian mathematics in 2003 in his non-fiction book *Everything And More*.

⁵⁴ It could be posited that as the reader moves from front to back as they read the endnotes, they are actually performing a gesture analogous to enacting the tennis player’s movements from the left to right areas of the tennis court during the game.

Wallace's post-postmodern narrative strategies of open and closed systems, constraint and release.

Stephen Burn astutely observes that Schtitt was aggressively headhunted by James Incandenza "as a kind of antidote to reductionist sporting strategies" (Burn, "Machine" 42), and an analysis of Schtitt's philosophy of tennis further reveals the presence of both Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry as formal paradigms for the psychology of Wallace's characters (the relevant differences between Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry will be outlined presently). Schtitt has formulated a psycho-geometric theory of tennis as a system of self-transcendence, which Wallace deliberately grounds within some decidedly suspect political ideology. Schtitt, a septuagenarian Austrian, is presented as a caricature of the disciplinarian whose educational ideas were formulated against the context of Hitler-youth and National Socialism. Indeed, Wallace's reference to his previous dismissal from another academy as a result of "a really unfortunate incident involving a riding crop" (*Jest* 79) embellishes the image of fascistic severity, as well as clearly comic references to his "shiny black boots" and "old F.R.G.-era BMW cycle" (*Ibid*). Wallace guardedly acknowledges this political imagery during an interview shortly after the novel's publication:

[...] the guy who essentially runs the academy now is a fascist, and, whether it comes out or not, he's really the only one there who to me is saying anything that's even remotely non-horrifying, except it *is* horrifying because he's a fascist (Interview, *Bookworm* 1996)

What Schtitt *is* saying is that his theory of tennis, formed when "athletics was basically just training for citizenship" (*Jest* 82), is a philosophy about how the citizen can "vanquish and transcend the limited self" (84). Despite the fact that Schtitt's knowledge of mathematics "is probably about equivalent to that of a Taiwanese kindergartener" (82) his philosophy incorporates, directly or indirectly, a degree of cynicism towards Euclidean geometry. For example, in his rejection of the "whole myth of efficiency and no waste that is making this continent of countries we live in" he suggests that this myth is "an efficiency of Euclid only: flat. For flat children. Straight ahead! Plow ahead! Go! This is myth" (80). Crucially, his

rejection of the presiding philosophy of O.N.A.N. is also couched in geometric terms, his scorn directed at the “acknowledged primacy of straight-line pursuing this flat and short-sighted idea of personal happiness” (83).

This philosophy of the “boundaries” of tennis suggests a willingness to embrace the kind of chaotic open system that underpins the novel’s narrative, and the opposition to a Euclidean strategy of geometry inherent in this process. In Euclidean (plane) geometry given a line and a point off the line there is a line through the given point parallel to the given line. In non-Euclidean geometry the two ways of breaking this assumption are for there to be no parallel or for there to be more than one parallel. Schtitt’s philosophy of tennis is structurally influenced by a type of non-Euclidean geometry called hyperbolic geometry. If one sets up geometry on a hyperboloid (a shape that resembles the surface of a saddle) there are infinitely many parallel “lines” to a given line through a given point. Additionally, in this example lines which initially seem parallel will gradually move further and further apart.⁵⁵ Consider this model in regard to Schtitt’s philosophy above and both, in their respective geometric and philosophical ways, describe the defiance of an apparent planar trajectory and the possibility of a number of possible trajectories. When considering Schtitt’s philosophy of tennis further, the influence of chaos and the open system emerge:

[...] real tennis was really about not the blend of statistical order and expansive potential that the game’s technicians revered, but in fact the opposite – *not-order*, *limit*, the places where things broke down, fragmented into beauty. That real tennis was no more reducible to delimited factors or probability curves

⁵⁵ Additionally, the trajectory of Hal and Don Gately’s narratives resembles a model of non-Euclidean elliptic geometry. When defining geometric terms on an ellipsoid shape (for example, the surface of a sphere) two apparently parallel lines will eventually converge and touch. The two characters’ narrative arcs operate for the most part as parallel lines, progressing consistently in proximity to one another (Ennet House being physically near to Enfield Tennis Academy) before a steady convergence that occurs towards the end of the narrative (Gately meets the wraith of James Incandenza, Hal and Gately eventually meet outside of the narrative to dig up James’ head). It therefore appears that the formal “shape” of the chronology of the principal narrative strands of *Infinite Jest* is elliptical.

than chess or boxing [...] a matter not of reduction at all, but – perversely – of expansion, the aleatory flutter of uncontrolled, metastatic growth – each well-shot ball admitting of n possible responses, $2n$ possible responses to those responses, and on to what Incandenza would articulate [...] as a Cantorian continuum of infinities of possible move and response (81-2, italics original) ⁵⁶

Schitt's suggestion that the player can "transcend the limited self whose limits make the game possible in the first place" (84) draws together Wallace's aforementioned post-postmodern strategy for both diagnosing and positing a potential cure for one trapped within a closed system. In the tennis metaphor, as in the narrative structure of the Sierpinski gasket, confinement within a formal boundary and a closed system of rules can be the loci of infinite variations. The closed system *contains within itself* the redemptive possibility of an open system, incorporating both the apparently infinite trajectories of the ball and also the infinite possibilities of self for the individual player. Schitt elaborates upon this, stating that "tennis's beauty's infinite roots are self-competitive [...] you compete with your own limits to transcend the self in imagination and execution" (84).⁵⁷ Furthermore, the necessary presence of another within the apparently closed system (the tennis player's opponent) suggests that the discovery of an open system within an existing closed system is made possible, as in the reconfiguration of the closed circle in AA meetings, only through a degree of reciprocal communication with another. Schitt's stated belief is that the opponent is "more the partner in the dance [...] *excuse* or *occasion* for meeting the self. As you are his occasion" (Ibid).

⁵⁶ An antecedent to this formal model can be found in "Derivative Sport In Tornado Alley". Wallace initially describes how in his youth he was able to "Play The Whole Court [...] I knew my limitations and the limitations of what I stood inside, and adjusted thusly" (*Supposedly* 4) but goes on to explain how the direction of the wind "transformed the game into 3-space" (9) and how he was "willing to expand my logistical territory to countenance the devastating effect a 15- to 30-mph stutter-breeze swirling southwest to east would have on my best calculations" (10).

⁵⁷ E.A. Abbott's book *Flatland* is "inescapable-at-E.T.A" (Jest 281). Burn suggests that this book, depicting "a world that exists solely in two dimensions" may owe its inescapability to James Incandenza's "coldly mathematical take on tennis" (Burn, *Reader's Guide* 42).

However, as with his concerns about Schtitt's politics, Wallace also dramatises a degree of ambivalence about the implications of Schtitt's position with an implicit warning that the dialogue between the player and opponent must be equilateral, and Schtitt's own dialogue is found wanting during his conversations with Mario Incandenza, "the one kid at E.T.A. whose company Schtitt seeks out"(79). Mario is so physically and mentally disabled that he "has a severely limited range of verbatim recall" (82) and, perhaps more significantly given that tennis is the basis of Schtitt's philosophy, he "can't even grip a stick" (79). The narrator relays Mario's thought processes to the reader, but for the majority of this episode Mario does not have the time or the ability to vocally respond to Schtitt's pronouncements. The result is an oddly lopsided dialogue, a warning that in order to configure an open system one must always be in reciprocal communication with another, a dialogue exclusively with the self representing merely another closed system. This implication is bathetically supported by Schtitt's subsequent revelation that he once fell in love with a tree (83). The tree is fixed to a spot, largely inert and cannot engage in dialogue, much like Mario. The final image of Mario laughing at Schtitt's joke because "he has this involuntary thing where he laughs whenever anyone else does" (85) potentially underlines the pitfalls of the incorrect application of Schtitt's philosophy.

The Cambridge Street Chase

This chapter will conclude with an analysis of an event dramatised by Wallace towards the end of the narrative of *Infinite Jest*, an event that concisely draws together and enacts all of the elements previously critically discussed within this chapter. The episode in question is a frenzied series of simultaneous events involving several characters in the area between Central Square and Inman Square in Cambridge, MA, an area in which Wallace lived during his brief research tenure at Harvard in the late 1980s.⁵⁸ To communicate the analysis of this sequence as clearly

⁵⁸ Wallace lived with the writer Mark Costello just North of the areas where the action of this sequence takes place, 'in the soot-path of the Monsignor McGrath Highway' (Costello 235). The episode in question here is by some distance the most clearly delineated example of real geography in the novel, the variant and overlapping paths of the protagonists recalling Joyce's mapping strategy in the "Wandering Rocks" chapter of *Ulysses*.

as possible, it is necessary to provide a brief summation of the situation and characters:

- Poor Tony Krause has discharged himself from Cambridge Hospital following a detox seizure and is heading to a shop owned by the Antittoi brothers, located – following Wallace’s descriptions – somewhere in the area between Prospect Street and Broadway (689).
- Ruth Van Cleve and Kate Gompert are walking along Prospect Street, their bags being eyed by Poor Tony Krause (698).
- Randy Lenz is following two Chinese women, looking at *their* bags, the other way along Prospect Street (716).
- Matty Pemulis is in a Portuguese restaurant right next to Inman Square, and sees the beginning of the action from the window (682).

Both Krause and Lenz snatch the bags of their prospective victims and run away, with Poor Tony pursued by Ruth Van Cleve. The initial directional movements of both Krause and Lenz broadly mirror each other in relation to the location of Prospect Street (see Fig.2, Appendix), though this mirroring appears to descend into chaos when both men disappear into a hellish system of labyrinthine alleyways off the main thoroughfares, and Wallace’s fairly lucid geographical descriptions disappear. The climax of both men’s journeys are, again, absent from the narrative, though much later (845) we discover, largely by inference, that their journeys (and lives) have both ended in the electronics shop run by the Canadian Antittoi brothers, where they have both been subjected by A.F.R. terrorists to the lethally entertaining film cartridge “Infinite Jest”.

The behaviour of the characters in this sequence is naturally subject to the geography of the streets that surround them, though Wallace also embeds within that city geography a suggestion of physical constraint placed upon the individual by a state of addiction and pathological behaviour. Both Krause and Lenz instigate separate chases, and move from clearly delineated spaces (Wallace’s explicit directions) to more confusing geographical areas (the alleyways), and eventually to death. This is instigated through an apparent moment of personal choice; their separate, addiction-driven decisions to commit theft. This process of physical subjugation is represented in this sequence through the explicit and implicit employment of a series of geographical and geometric motifs. These motifs,

principally triangular and circular in nature, also incorporate the narrative employment of directional vectors, the suggestion of the infinite possibilities of trajectory outlined by Schtitt, and a cautionary tale of the loss of the possibility of transfiguration of a closed system by the solipsistic addict, while the overarching shape of the incident recalls the construction of *Infinite Jest*'s narrative framework, the Sierpinski gasket.

Wallace has already established the circular motif as potentially representative of a closed system of constrictive pathological behaviour and the sequence contains a number of geometric circular allusions or movements that, filtered through the unrepentantly addicted perspectives of Krause and Lenz, represent increasingly restrictive spatial configurations. Lenz sees a man firing a suction arrow at the wall of a building, then "drawing a miniature chalk circle on the brick around the arrow, and then another circle around that circle, and etc., as in a what's the word" (718). The narrative voice during this episode, which incorporates Lenz's prejudices through a series of racist observations about the Chinese women, remembers the word later in the narrative ("Bull's-eye" [719]).⁵⁹ The distance between the observation and the definition, and the fact that the circular image is only eventually perceived by the narrator as having a centripetal function, suggests a focus directed only upon the immediate centre and a lack of awareness of the other potential association, that of the concentric circles.⁶⁰ In a narrative that suggests the possibility of a circle as analogous to an imprisoning, "closed" cycle of addictive behaviour, concentric circles suggest something even more impenetrably inescapable.

The significance of the arrow in this sequence also relates to the aforementioned pictorial description of a Euclidean vector. Lenz's personal vector in this sequence is being juxtaposed with the image of an arrow directed towards the centre of a series of concentric circles. The significance of the concentric circle image at this point in the narrative locates the addict Lenz's notion of choice (to

⁵⁹ A similarly described bulls-eye reference appears in a cut sequence from one of the draft manuscripts. Orin's "one photograph of his mother is inside his locker, on the inside of the locker door, with marksman's concentric rings imposed" (Box 16.3). This representation of a bulls-eye refers to Orin's apparently inescapable mother fixation.

⁶⁰ Lenz's aforementioned fear of disks may also underlie the apparent ignorance of the circular shape.

steal the bag or not) as in fact only a delusion of choice, trapped within several unrecognised closed boundaries of addictive or pathological behaviour.⁶¹ Lenz's obsessive compulsive disorder and by-product of his addiction, his "need to be north of everything, and possibly even northeast of everything" (277), restricts his movement and position, and is responsible for his geographical location here. Lenz's decision to enter the alleyways and his desire to be northeast of everything provide a paradigm of the self-limiting processes that Schtitt's formal teaching strategy attempts to warn against. Lenz is over-aware of the limiting, reductive effect of boundaries and not of the infinite "Cantorian" possibilities of the self that boundaries can engender, seeing only increasingly reduced and restrictive spaces. By following his own addiction-imposed boundaries and relying upon something that is, in Schtitt's words "reducible to delimited factors", Lenz eventually progresses to the alleyways, "a kind of second city" (728) and a labyrinthine, intestinal place associated exclusively with waste (the alley is full of dumpsters and smells of "ripe waste and rotting skin" [729]). Lenz's peristaltic journey through the alleyways is also characterised by his apparent belief that he is somehow in greater control of his trajectory than the vagrants who inhabit the area. "Jesus what a lot of fucked-up ass-eating fucking *losers*" (729) says Lenz, pathetically unaware (or perhaps subconsciously afraid) that said losers are merely further down the same addictive intestinal path as himself.

Consider now the order of the narrative during the street sequence. Matty Pemulis notices Krause briefly on the street around Inman Square (683). Subsequently Poor Tony is depicted in a later chapter in more detail walking alone from Cambridge Hospital to the junction of Inman Square (690) where Matty Pemulis sees him before heading down Prospect Street. Poor Tony subsequently sees Kate Gompert and Ruth Van Cleve walking. In subsequent chapters the reader receives details of the two women and the reason for their walk (692). Shortly after this, the reader is presented with Randy Lenz at the other end of Prospect Street (716), widening the scope of the geography of the sequence, before the two

⁶¹ The image of concentric circles and both their association with danger and a lapse in personal awareness are implicitly foregrounded earlier in the novel, when at the cleaning of the 'perfectly [...] geometrically round' public duck pond the M.I.T. engineer's fixation on "the concentric rings of pond and crowd and trucks" (621-22) fails to alert him to his imminent kidnap by terrorists.

subsequent bag-snatch chases finally converge the narrative threads, as Lenz hears Krause's rolling of the barrel at Van Cleve (728). The reader is presented with small details of a sequence involving multiple personae which steadily increases in scope before converging to reveal its "shape", which actually resembles a miniaturised version of the novel's overarching Sierpinski gasket structure.

If one looks at the map of Cambridge (see Fig.3, Appendix) and traces Krause's route from the hospital to Inman Square, it can be observed that Krause's entry in Inman Square is also his entry into the apex of a north-west pointing triangular shape made by Beacon Street/Hampshire Street, Cambridge Street and Prospect Street. That triangle in turn exists as a component of an even larger north-west pointing triangular shape made by Beacon/Hampshire Street, Cambridge Street and Cardinal Medeiros Avenue. Inman Square is also at the apex of an even larger north-east pointing triangular shape (towards the apex of which the north-eastern orientated Lenz is initially making his way) made by Beacon Street/Hampshire Street, Cambridge Street and Broadway. Finally, all of these triangular shapes are subsumed within a gigantic north-west pointing triangular shape comprised of Cambridge Street, Cardinal Medeiros Avenue and Broadway. Although Lenz approaches initially from outside, the principal significant action and the Antioi's shop are located within the large triangle. By apparently choosing to enter the initial small triangular area, Poor Tony finds himself subjected to events beyond his control occurring within the overarching larger triangles. Poor Tony enters into the apex of the initial small triangle and is swept into a series of events that steadily increase in size and complexity to incorporate the largest triangular shape. His directional vectors have existed in this sequence between two fixed points of oblivion (the seizure at the beginning, the paralysis and death induced by the cartridge at the end). His integration into the bounded schema of the triangle is, because of his solipsistic addicted behaviour, characterised only by entrapment rather than by the infinite possibilities of an open system that can be engendered by such boundaries. Notably, several essential events within the triangle, most notably the bag snatch and the two characters' deaths, are absences, which must be inferred by the reader and themselves comprise part of the larger inferential structure engendered by the Sierpinski gasket model, a construction created "as much out of what's missing as what's there"(681).

A final, admittedly more speculative, detail, but an entertaining conjecture nonetheless. With Prospect Street and the Antittoi Shop being the epicentre of the action (both explicit and implicit) in the sequence, we can speculate that the Centroid or centre of gravity of the largest triangle – that is, the point where the three medians⁶² meet (see Fig.4, Appendix) – is indeed located by Prospect Street and the likely location of the shop (see Fig.5, Appendix). Moreover, in drawing the medians to locate the Centroid, the Prospect Street location is then revealed to be at the apex of a series of implicit triangular shapes created by the medians within the largest triangle. The shop forms the centre of a circle or cycle of entrapment operating within an overarching triangular schema of action and also containing within itself references to other concentric circles, the characters within it driven directionally along vectors imposed by their addictions. That the Antittoi shop is full of mirrors positioned to reflect the centre of the room at all times only further compounds the suggestion that the relation of the shop to the narrative is deliberately central, and that an example of Wallace's overriding formal schemas for the narrative of *Infinite Jest* is presented, explicitly and implicitly, within this sequence.

Having considered the systemic and geometrical formal narrative strategies employed by Wallace in *Infinite Jest* in the preceding chapter, discussion will now move to Wallace's formal strategies of the spatio-temporal in the novel, and the manner in which these strategies engage with postmodernism.

⁶² The three medians of a triangle being the lines drawn from the vertices to the bisectors of the opposite sides.

Chapter 2

'Time Began to pass with Sharp Edges': Wallace's Spatial and Temporal Strategies

Wallace's formal strategies of entrapment in *Infinite Jest* are not restricted to the employment of the geometric diagrams and invocation of systems. Throughout *Infinite Jest* Wallace also makes use of the narrative representation of space and time, as both historical teleology and as psychological event experienced subjectively by the individual. These strategies, when analysed, are revealed to be in dialogue with certain spatial and temporal motifs that are associated with the postmodern. Although it is not "aware" of postmodernism *per se*, a useful theoretical framework against which to discuss Wallace's formal strategies of space and time is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the narrative chronotope, as outlined in the extended essay, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel". Firstly, and with attention to existing postmodern literary narratives, Wallace's post-postmodern narrative in *Infinite Jest* will be located in relation to the novelistic chronotope described by Bakhtin, while Wallace's non-chronological novel structure and notions of historical and individual space and time will be connected to Bakhtin's "horizontal" and "vertical" axes. The characteristics of eschatology and "endings" in *Infinite Jest* also interrogate the kind of vision of eschatological postmodernism outlined by Fredric Jameson in his seminal work *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, which will be discussed alongside Bakhtin's theory throughout this chapter to complement Bakhtin's pre-postmodern narrative framework with a postmodern context.

The discussion within this chapter primarily focuses upon a major spatio-temporal example of Wallace's narrative strategy in *Infinite Jest*, the toxic space known as the Great Concavity and the temporal disjuncture caused by the "annular fusion" process taking place within. Discussion of space and time in the Great Concavity and annular fusion will be informed not only by Bakhtin but also by an understanding of how, through enacting a fictionalised geographical temporal disjuncture, Wallace is in dialogue not only with the formal narratives of certain postmodern literary predecessors but also the modernist predecessors of *those* writers. The narrative method by which Wallace attempts to recover the spatial and the historical for the individual will be analysed through attendant consideration of

Fredric Jameson's postmodern invocation of Lacanian schizophrenia, and finally a discussion of Wallace's spatial and temporal construction of sentences will explain how temporal disjuncture can be reconstructed through language.

Beyond The Postmodern Chronotope

Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope" expresses "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 84). Bakhtin notes several variations within chronotopes, with his overall teleological study depicting a steady temporal and spatial separation that increasingly favours the individual consciousness. Although Bakhtin lived long enough to witness the emergence of postmodernism in literature, his writings do not elaborate on a postmodern element to the chronotope. In her article "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival" Catherine Nichols offers a useful definition, suggesting that the postmodern chronotope shares characteristics with what Bakhtin describes as the rebellious "carnival" and "folkloric" chronotopes, referring to the connection between Bakhtin's definition of the "carnival" and the fiction of recognisably postmodern writers such as Thomas Pynchon and Angela Carter. Bakhtin's definition of the carnival, discussed alongside his celebrated discussion of the folkloric chronotope in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, is an emancipatory gesture that aims to mock and suspend totalitarian and hierarchical systems of power.

Nichols states that "carnival's liberatory vision has been used to counter hegemonic notions of stable identity, gender, language, and truth" (Nichols). This definition primarily views the postmodern literary style as a celebratory, liberating "play". Nichols' definition of the postmodern chronotope suggests a temporally and spatially "loose" narrative form that interrogates established narrative forms (including literary modernism) with its a-temporality and employment of pageantry, dissociative styles and pastiches, and is also allied to the Bakhtinian chronotopes of carnival and folklore that seek to undermine hierarchical structures and systems of power. A useful example is Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which scatological and "low" humour and comic-book pastiches sit alongside oblique religious methodology, "high" literary references and descriptions of molecular science and engineering technology. This narrative style is allied to a story concerned with an

anti-hierarchical “counterforce” that undertakes guerrilla action against gargantuan totalitarian corporate and military complexes. Even the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson (whose work will be discussed below in relation to Wallace’s strategies) concedes that the postmodern narrative is characterised by a degree of free-floating temporal and spatial play and pastiche, although he is not convinced that the temporary emancipatory effect this affords ultimately engenders a persuasive action against prevailing hierarchical structures.

In her analysis Nichols is primarily concerned with what Wallace is doing with an existing postmodern chronotope, and in the Course of the article describes an amendment to the carnivalesque aspect of the postmodern chronotope whereby Wallace “turns the carnivalesque against itself to reveal a literary vision that foregrounds the line between transgression for its own sake and the use of art for redemptive purposes”, describing a postmodern culture as “a permanent, though superficially heterogeneous, mask that is used to avoid confrontation with a wider scope of human vision than its “cult of ambiguity” accommodates” (Ibid). While the analysis in this chapter is not specifically concerned with the carnivalesque employment of the “mask”, Nichols’ critical point about the “anti-employment” of postmodernism requires discussion.

There is a substantial amount of critical analysis still to undertake in regard to Wallace’s spatio-temporal amendments to an existing postmodern strategy. While both Nichols and Boswell correctly contend that the strategy of using irony to disclose what irony has been hiding is an integral part of Wallace’s literary manifesto, Wallace also pursues a number of as yet undiscussed specifically formal narrative strategies that both interrogate and posit a redemptive reconfiguration of certain spatial and temporal elements of postmodernism. An analysis and codification of these as-yet critically neglected structures is valuable and necessary to an understanding of Wallace’s narrative aim in *Infinite Jest*. The following analysis in this chapter will draw primarily on Bakhtin’s writings on forms of chronotope within the novel form and Fredric Jameson’s account of spatio-temporality in postmodernity (which is notably uncelebratory and contains many of the same concerns about the postmodern self outlined by Wallace throughout his career). By reading the work of these critics alongside Wallace an extensive account

of Wallace's hitherto unanalysed spatial and temporal strategies in *Infinite Jest* can be outlined.

Calendar Time and Eschatology

In the future version of the United States depicted within the novel (an uneasy alliance of the USA, Canada and Mexico known as O.N.A.N.), a significant change has taken place relative to the manner in which calendar time is perceived. Rather than a system of ordinal year numbering, the numeral method of presenting years has been replaced by a system of corporate calendar subsidisation. Years are now named after specific products ("Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment", "Year of the Perdue Wonderchicken"). This system of "subsidised time" suggests somehow an appropriation of the way in which individuals temporally orientate themselves by the process of corporate advertising (Brian Jarvis, in his study of "postmodern cartographies", suggests in a succinct formulation that even within an apparently playful postmodern environment "space [...] is always represented in relation to cultural codes that are embedded in social power structures", identifying "the nodes of capital as they are materialised in space" [Jarvis 7]). Wallace's allotment of sponsorship to years of the calendar therefore displays an awareness of certain critical positions on temporal elements of the postmodern. When Bakhtin talks of the breakdown of the folkloric chronotope, he contrasts the unification of folkloric time with what comes subsequently, in a paradigm that will prove useful for discussion here:

(Folkloric) time is *unified* in an unmediated way. However, this imminent unity becomes apparent only in the light of later perceptions of time in literature (and in ideology in general), when the time of personal, everyday family occasions had already been individualized and separated out from the time of the collective historical life of the social whole, at a time when there emerged one scale for measuring the events of a *personal* life and another for measuring the events of *history* (Bakhtin 208)

The problem of calendar time in *Infinite Jest* outlined above represents something of an extreme development of this paradigm, and a comic hyper-development of what

Fredric Jameson regards in *Postmodernism* as the problem of the spatial breakdown of a historical signifying chain in postmodernity (27). The postmodern individual, already personally adrift from historical time in the postmodern chronotope, now suffers yet another degree of displacement by having yearly numerical markers removed (the fact that the replacement is corporate sponsorship complements Jarvis' above argument). However, Wallace crucially refuses a simple diagnosis of historical displacement and scatters across the narrative of *Infinite Jest* partial solutions whereby ordinal time can be recovered from this corporate morass. Notable examples of these solutions include the earlier chapters that are located within pre-subsidised time, for example the ages of the characters during the chapter set in "B.S. 1960" (*Jest* 157), the appearance of a calendar from before subsidised time (234) and also the suggestion that the Year Of Glad (the final chronological year that is depicted in the narrative) is the last year of subsidised time. The presence of these solutions crucially enables the reader to allocate ordinal calendar years to subsidised time (the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment correlates to the year 2009, for example), therefore yoking the drifting temporal postmodern dystopia described by Wallace in *Infinite Jest* to a recognisable calendar with which readers can orientate themselves.⁶³ The implicit suggestion of the forthcoming demise of subsidised time posits an additional forthcoming recovery of the historical. Importantly, no events actually presented within the novel take place after the end of subsidised time, with the reader instead invited by implication to imagine and infer an end to this anumerical era. The imminent recovery of history (that is, the return of the society of *Infinite Jest* to an ordinal numerical calendar system that connects it implicitly to past and future rather than an endless disconnected postmodern chronotopic present) is representative of Wallace's determination to avoid simply diagnosing a problematic, highly individualised state of postmodernity. Wallace's

⁶³ The years correspond as follows: Year of the Whopper = 2002, Year of the Tucks Medicated Pad = 2003, Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar = 2004, Year of the Perdue Wonderchicken = 2005, Year of the Whisper-Quiet Maytag Dishmaster = 2006, Year of the Yushityu 2007 Mimetic-Resolution-Cartridge-View-Motherboard-Easy-To-Install-Upgrade for Internation/Interlace TP Systems for Home, Office, or Mobile (sic) = 2007, Year of Dairy Products from the American Heartland = 2008, Year Of The Depend Adult Undergarment = 2009, Year Of Glad = 2010.

aforementioned comments on Ellis' *American Psycho* in an interview with Larry McCaffery provide a useful analogue to these sentiments:

Look, if the contemporary condition is hopelessly shitty, insipid, materialistic, emotionally retarded, sadomasochistic, and stupid, then I (or any writer) can get away with slapping together stories with characters who are stupid, vapid, emotionally retarded, which is easy, because these sorts of characters require no development [...] If you operate, which most of us do, from the premise that there are things about the contemporary U.S. that make it distinctively hard to be a real human being, then maybe half of fiction's job is to dramatize what it is that makes it tough. The other half is to dramatize the fact that we still *are* human beings, now. Or can be. (Interview, McCaffery 131)

This is one of the most direct statements given by Wallace about his desire to move beyond the programme of writing provided by certain postmodern authors. Although the statement is not a temporal manifesto *per se*, the above example of subsidised time displays that Wallace is clearly concerned with the problems of the individual in time engendered by the condition of postmodernity, for which Bakhtin's chronotope provides such a useful analytical model.

The recovery of ordinal calendar time is not the only significant temporal event that lies outside the boundaries of the narrative of *Infinite Jest*. Towards the end of the novel (that is, towards the physical end of the book itself – the distinction is important) Wallace hints at an impending catastrophic occurrence involving Quebegeois terrorists, the Enfield Tennis Academy, Hal Incandenza and the possible dissemination of the lethally entertaining film "Infinite Jest". There must necessarily be a preoccupation within a postmodern chronotope with the characteristic concerns of "endings" and eschatology. The concept of eschatology, in the sense that it refers to some ultimately affecting end event in the future, permeates the narrative of *Infinite Jest*. Throughout the novel several uneasy frameworks, from the alliance of nations in O.N.A.N. to the equilibrium of the drug recovery programme in Ennet House, are implied as being on the edge of collapse, of some ultimate destruction. These implied eschatological events are more often than not described in spatial or temporal terms (cartographic instability in the case of O.N.A.N., the breakdown of

timed and controlled entry into and out of Ennet House, the aforementioned end of subsidised time). Wallace qualifies this theme by providing a miniaturisation and qualification of these events in the lengthy description of the game Eschaton (a Cold-War style strategy game played across a miniaturised map of the world by students at Enfield Tennis Academy), which itself inaugurates several tensions that will constitute part of the implied armageddon event that lies just beyond the boundaries of the written narrative.

Fredric Jameson outlines a concern with “endings” as a characteristic of the postmodern:

...premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that [...] taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism (Jameson 1)

Jameson’s “ends” refer primarily to the perceived ends of ideologies (a classic example is Marxism) but the term has ramifications for postmodern literature too. Examples can be located in the unresolved character arcs of Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity’s Rainbow* or Wyatt Gwyon in *The Recognitions* where a traditional character narrative, rather than reaching a state of resolution, instead fragments into the possibility of several “surface” identities or disappears from the narrative altogether. When reading Bakhtin’s definition of the eschatological narrative an interesting comparison can be located. Bakhtin is obviously not talking about postmodernism, but his thesis bears repeating here:

Eschatology always sees the segment of a future separating the present from the end as lacking value; this separating segment of time loses its significance and interest, it is merely an unnecessary continuation of an indefinitely prolonged present (Bakhtin 148)

Bakhtin and Jameson differ slightly on their definitions of eschatology. It would appear that Jameson is separating the “catastrophic” future event (a characteristic of eschatology) from the postmodern preoccupation with “ends”, although one could argue that his subsequent abiding concern with those imminent “ends” of narratives

stills seems characteristically eschatological; he is, after all, still talking about a condition of being that is inherently focused on the imminent end of a narrative and the state that will follow. The fact that it is a teleological model that Jameson regards as under threat does not fundamentally alter this eschatological focus. In this context, one can then consider Bakhtin's statement about eschatology as sharing some fundamental characteristic with Jameson's concerns about postmodernity. This close comparison is made because it is essential to consider both of these statements in relation to Wallace's formal spatial and temporal eschatological overtures in *Infinite Jest*, and how they react to the postmodern chronotope discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Consider the approach to the eschatological and the traditional narrative resolution in *Infinite Jest*. The preoccupation with an unseen armageddon event that lies outside the written narrative has been outlined above. Fundamental to a recognition of Wallace's spatio-temporal strategy for the narrative of *Infinite Jest* is to remember that he is operating from within a postmodern template (recall how, in Burn's phrasing, the post-postmodern text "explicitly [...] dramatizes its roots in postmodernism" [Burn, *Franzen* 19]), while regarding the ultimate aim as an escape from what he regards as the confinement of the apparently "free" postmodern literary text, where "the cage's exit is actually the bars of the cage" (*Jest* 222). Therefore the world depicted in *Infinite Jest* should be recognised as a dramatisation of the postmodern environment. The catastrophic events that are implied as being imminent are represented by both prefigured and retrospective information, respectively the escalating tension at ETA towards the end of November in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment and the post-traumatic syndrome exhibited by Hal Incandenza in the following year, the Year of Glad. These cataclysmic events have either occurred or have been initiated between these two temporal periods, and there is a textual space between these times that is never directly depicted. Only one apparently solidly real event from that absent period is related (indirectly) to the reader, and that is the digging up of James Incandenza's head by Hal and Don Gately, referred to by Hal in the Year of Glad as if it has actually taken place (several months earlier, the hospitalised Gately has experienced a premonition of this event). This mysterious, absent period of time is key to an understanding of Wallace's attempt to move beyond the chronotopic form that is characteristic of the

postmodern approach to endings. Wallace's narrative mystery (what happens in the intervening, unrelated period of time) directly addresses the postmodern problem of eschatology, as well as taking issue with the aspects of the postmodern chronotope addressed above such as the carnivalesque "play" of textures, styles and surfaces which began as a challenge to an established hierarchy but has now become "a godawful trap" (Interview, McCaffery 142).

Wallace's strategy operates as follows. The absencing of what would be a satisfactory ending to the narrative presents a literary paradigm of the oft-articulated hostility of postmodernity to metanarratives (recall Lyotard's famous definition of postmodernity's "incredulity toward metanarratives" [Lyotard xxiv]). However, rather than a simple termination of the narrative, leaving the reader stranded in an unresolved series of characteristically dissolute postmodern scenarios, Wallace deliberately invokes and foregrounds a series of potential events to fill that absent temporal void. These events are often contradictory, and impossible to fully reconcile with one another. The reader is left with many questions about this absented period: What happens to Hal between the November of the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment and his deranged breakdown during his interview in Year of Glad? Does he ingest the drug DMZ? Does he watch the film "Infinite Jest"? Is he simply suffering from marijuana withdrawal, or has he finally experienced an authentic delayed grief-reaction to his father's suicide? On a larger scale, what happens to the configuration of O.N.A.N.? What is the significance of Hal and Gately having to dig up James' head? Why does this 'Continental-Emergency important' attempt come "too late" (*Jest* 934)? Do the Quebecois separatist groups manage to disseminate copies of "Infinite Jest" across O.N.A.N.? How does Hal's brother Orin survive his torture at the hands of Quebecois terrorists (he is apparently alive in the Year of Glad [14])? Why is Canadian tennis academy student John N.R. Wayne "standing watch in a mask" at the exhumation (17)? These mysteries (which, as one can see, are both legion and narratively fundamental) form part of a narrative strategy that wryly invokes the aforementioned Bakhtinian suggestion about "the segment of a future separating the present from the end as lacking value" in eschatological narratives. Indeed, this absented time is apparently absolutely *essential* to an understanding of what happens, with the reader given enough information to strive to understand what causes these world-threatening

events as much as the fact that it is imminent. This strategy is ultimately threefold. Firstly, Wallace employs the importance of understanding this temporal void (which must constitute a period of about one year as Hal mentions the “November heat” [3] in the Year of Glad) to criticise the postmodern focus upon endings. In *Infinite Jest* the space and time that presages the armageddon event is as important as the event itself. Secondly, the actions depicted in the Year of Glad appear to have occurred *after* the suggested “Continental-Emergency”. Therefore in *Infinite Jest* eschatology is also mocked by presenting events that have taken place apparently after that apparently destructive event, and the postmodern importance of the “end” is narratively undermined. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly for Wallace’s overall strategy in the novel, the absent period of space and time is invoked through a process of reader inference.

This reliance on reader inference, and Wallace’s dividing up of the narrative into non-chronological order (the first chapter is the last chronologically), presents the strongest deviation from a postmodern chronotope dominated by a “play” of dissonant and un-temporally connected individual narratives and voices dissociated from historical time. The method by which Wallace’s strategy for year-naming situates itself within an a-historical postmodern chronotope before, through reader inference, consciously “recovering” the connection of the subsidised years to a historical calendar has been discussed above, and Wallace’s reliance on reader inference to understand the temporal void between Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment and Year of Glad operates in a similar manner. While unlike the assignation of the 21st century calendar to subsidised time there is no absolute historical reality to recover here, Wallace relies upon the reader’s inference of his presaging and retrospective markers to create an ordinal timeline of events. The reader then hermeneutically recovers the events leading to the future themselves, therefore resurrecting a new type of narrative “end” that is composed by both author and reader. By Wallace’s tilting at several possible outcomes, one reader’s definition of the narrative resolution may differ from another’s, and by this method Wallace avoids criticism of the redundant return of authorial didacticism in determining the

narrative.⁶⁴ Such is the manner by which Wallace moves towards an amendment to the postmodern chronotope, by incorporating a methodology that looks outward to incorporate reader inference in the task of completing the narrative and recovering both a historical analogue and an ordinal sequence from a characteristically postmodern world of play. In *Infinite Jest*, eschatology engenders in part a new hermeneutic aspect to the chronotope.

Furthermore, such reliance on reader inference of the events taking place outside of the narrative of the novel invokes a similar reconfiguration of a closed system to an open system as has been posited in Chapter 1. The apparently bounded timeline of the postmodern environment in the novel (and indeed the physically bounded narrative of the novel itself) cannot contain the hermeneutic multitude of inferential possibilities that the narrative engenders. Through the reader's recovery of the "missing" sections of time, a limitless set of narrative outcomes mimic the infinite Cantorian possibilities within the bounded space that characterises Wallace's fractal construction of the novel.

Annular Time and Concavity Spaces

There is narrative strategy embedded by Wallace within *Infinite Jest* that addresses both space and time and is relevant to a specific environment within the novel while ultimately maintaining influence over the nature of the entire narrative. This strategy involves two components, annular time and Concavity space. Annular time refers specifically to the temporal changes that are the result of the multitude of chemical reactions taking place in the Great Concavity/Convexity in the area that, in Wallace's reconfigured map of the United States, used to constitute most of New England. The Concavity/Convexity site,⁶⁵ a massive governmental toxic and

⁶⁴ That is, Wallace does not wish to return to a solid author-determined narrative, this being a retrogressive step rather than one that incorporates certain postmodern enquiries about the position of the author.

⁶⁵ To prevent unwieldy terminology, the site will subsequently be referred to as the Concavity. Wallace's invention in *The Broom of the System* of the Great Ohio Desert, an enormous man-made void-like desert of black sand, provides something of a physical prototype for the engineered space of the Concavity. The Desert, with its genesis as "a point of savage reference" (*Broom* 54) has a different function to the Concavity, operating as a dramatisation of an absent referent in accord with that earlier novel's focus upon linguistic scepticism.

chemical waste dump, is the ideal location for the employment of the energy-creating circular process of annular fusion, a strategy that can “produce waste that’s fuel for a process whose waste is fuel for the fusion” (*Jest* 572). During a comically exposition-heavy conversation between Enfield Tennis Academy students Michael Pemulis and Idris Arslanian, the processes of annular fusion and the associated temporal disjuncture become clearer. It is necessary to quote the conversation at length:

‘the resultant fusion turns out so greedily efficient that it sucks every last toxin and poison out of the surrounding ecosystem, all inhibitors to organic growth for hundreds of radial clicks in every direction [...] You end up with a surrounding environment so fertile lush it’s practically unlivable [...] and you find you need to keep steadily dumping in toxins to keep the uninhibited ecosystem from spreading and overrunning more ecologically stable areas, exhausting the atmosphere’s poisons so that everything hyperventilates. And thus and such. So this is why E.W.D.’s major catapulting is from the metro area due north [...] Which eradicates the overgrowth until the toxins are fused and utilized. The satellite scenario is that the eastern part of Grid 3 goes from overgrown to wasteland to overgrown several times a month. With the first week of the month being especially barren and the last week being like nothing on earth.’

‘As if time itself were vastly sped up. As if nature itself had desperately to visit the lavatory.’

‘Accelerated phenomena, which is actually equivalent to an incredible *slowing down* of time.’

[...] ‘Decelerated time, I have got you.’

‘And this is what the Boog’s saying is eating him alive the worst, conceptually. He says he’s toast if he can’t wrap his head around the concept of time in flux, conceptually. It jacklights him for the whole annular model overall. Granted, it’s abstract. But you should see him. One half of the face is like spasming around while the half with the mole just like hangs there staring like a bunny you’re about to run over (573)

Such is the ruinous psychological effect upon the individual of the temporal discrepancy engendered by annular fusion within the Concavity, and this ruinous condition is ultimately concurrent with the particular effect of space and time as experienced in a state of postmodernity. It is worth stating here that Nichols has critically established a connection between the Great Concavity and the postmodern in “Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival” during her analysis of Wallace’s employment of the postmodern carnivalesque chronotope against itself, in which she also discusses the problem of postmodern narratives as analogous to the “circularity” of the process of annular fusion in the Concavity. However, this model requires critical development and expansion for a number of reasons. Firstly, Nichols seems to attribute the terms Concavity and Convexity to, respectively, the Western and Eastern areas. This is incorrect, as the terminology “Concavity” and “Convexity” is described in *Infinite Jest* as being used relative to the perspective of the nationality or geographical/political position of the speaker (to Canadians it is a Convexity, to US citizens it is a Concavity). This is dramatised perhaps most literally and decisively in an overheard argument over the terminology that takes place at Molly Notkins’ apartment:

‘Convexity.’

‘Concavity!’

‘Convexity!’

‘Concavity damn your eyes!’ (234)

Secondly, the distinction between the geographical areas of the Concavity requires further discussion and more detailed information in terms of how they represent different problems of narrative and, crucially, the spatial and the temporal problems of postmodernism. Thirdly, the attribution of “stasis” to the Concavity by Nichols, while certainly not inaccurate, actually underestimates the ferocity of Wallace’s depiction of the postmodern.

In positing a spatio-temporal account of the Concavity which addresses these problems, it is important to locate the problem of postmodern space and time in relation to the geography of the Concavity. The Concavity is described by a number of characters as having two distinct geographical areas, the “barren Eliotical wastes”

(574) of the Western Concavity and the Eastern Concavity described in the extract above, which is “so fertile lush it’s practically unlivable” (573).⁶⁶ The schema outlined here graphically dramatises spatio-temporal characteristics of both modernism and postmodernism. Bakhtin’s teleological schema for the novelistic chronotope is characterised by a slow spatial and temporal separation between individual and environment. By the era of high literary Modernism, the individual subjective account takes precedence over historical time within the written narrative. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” represents the fracture between individual and environment (a fracture that Bakhtin is also beginning to map) as an “arid plain” (Eliot 39). That the Western Concavity is explicitly referred to as “Eliotical” in *Infinite Jest* inevitably encourages the reader to mentally associate the Western Concavity with the Modernist landscape. The Western Concavity’s neighbour, the lush and “greedily efficient” Eastern Concavity, is clearly something quite different, and the representation of this latter area is inherently bound up with the problems of Postmodernism as a narrative form and as a spatio-temporal strategy.

Why then should the reader associate the lush Eastern Concavity with postmodern narrative? Firstly, it dramatises a characteristic strongly associated with certain postmodern literary narratives through the description of the Eastern Concavity as a thermodynamically entropic system. The employment of entropy is implicitly evocative of the entropic postmodern strategies of Thomas Pynchon. Several of Pynchon’s works focus on the paradigmatic problems of entropy, most graphically the story “Entropy” which describes, in a schema not unlike the Concavity, two adjacent zones (in Pynchon’s story two apartments that share a floor/ceiling) that Malcolm Bradbury delineates as “the world of hermetic containment” and “the world of undifferentiation” (Bradbury 220). The outlining in the introduction and previous chapter of both the post-postmodern text’s tendency to dramatisise its roots in postmodernism and the manifest awareness and configuration

⁶⁶ The temporal simultaneity of these environments of stasis and constant renewal is remarkably similar to the model of postmodernity proffered by Frow (see Introduction).

of systems in *Infinite Jest* suggests that the entropic characteristics of the Eastern Concavity have a particular kinship with literary postmodernism.⁶⁷

In addition to the entropic postmodern characteristic, the description of the Eastern Concavity as “greedily efficient” and “so fertile lush it’s practically unlivable” chimes thematically with the statements Wallace makes to McCaffery about the problem of postmodernist narrative in literature. Essentially, the postmodern literary form, conceived as a new process to supplant the hierarchical structures of modernism, is running amok. The trajectory of the kind of literary postmodernism addressed by Wallace in his work (metafictional writing and general textual self-consciousness) is analogous to the closed system of annular fusion, a system that runs in a continuous cycle and perpetuates itself by continuously taking its own material as fuel. However, it is important when discussing the Eastern Concavity to remember that the annular fusion system is not the same thing as the lush and dangerous wilderness. Rather, it precedes and engenders that wilderness. Therefore, the wilderness itself is the *result* of postmodernism, the “greedily efficient” and uncontrollable by-product of the original idea.

This process mirrors Wallace’s concerns in his manifesto-style essay “E Unibus Pluram” that the tools of literary postmodernism have been co-opted through capitalism as a voraciously effective and insidious way of advertising. The original objective of literary postmodernism has spawned a monster, so to speak, that feeds off the nutrients that nourish the original form but uses them for its own corporate and ultimately pan-national and pan-global ends.⁶⁸ Therefore, in an important distinction, the continuous barrage of toxic waste sent into the Concavity to control the forests is as representative of the frantic attempts to contain the corporate horror engendered by postmodernism as it is representative of the stasis of literary form

⁶⁷ It is also worth noting, in a furthering of this entropic dramatisation, that during the drafting process Wallace actually reduced the geographical scope of the novel to within the borders of the American continent, axing references to mainland Europe (Box 15.5) and moving the area of political instability from Sierra Leone to Quebec (Box 16.3) while conflating Canada, Mexico and the U.S. into one single geographical alliance. The plot of the novel therefore takes place within a more manifestly “closed” geographical system.

⁶⁸ This position is more in accordance with Jarvis’ and Jameson’s formulations than the anti-hierarchical position of Nichols.

which Wallace associates with postmodernism in “E Unibus Pluram” and the McCaffery interview. Postmodernism, essentially, has become toxic and dangerous as well as static. Additionally, in *Infinite Jest* the system for containing the hazardous contents of the Concavity is far from perfect. Reported occasions of spillage and leaking toxicity pervade the novel, while additional damage is caused by mis-catapulted waste receptacles that fall short of their target and cause death and injury in civilian areas adjacent to the Concavity. The comically monstrous herds of feral hamsters engendered by the toxic waste are “*rarely* sighted south” (670, italics mine) of the Concavity, indicating that some indeed do escape. This system of spillage suggests that the current system of keeping the Concavity under control is not efficiently dealing with the problem. The apparent “stasis” of postmodernity is, in fact, more dangerous and insidious than has been predicted. The problem of the postmodern Concavity calls out for a new solution before it engulfs everything around itself.

The physical geography of the Great Concavity is itself an explicit development of the postmodern Illinois geography outlined in Wallace’s preceding novella, “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”.⁶⁹ Connie Luther astutely notes in her essay on this novella that the endless fields of corn can be described as analogous to the postmodern landscape:

Postmodern cultural expansion is reflected, not only in the huge but worthless yields of corn in Wallace’s Funhouse, but also in its geographical features. It is not enclosed and restricted, like Ambrose’s original carnival Funhouse, but a terrifyingly wide-open place [...] an image of immense cultural expansion, and that it is not only worthless but disorienting (Luther 52)

Additionally, the description of the fields as “disorienting, wind-blown, verdant, tall, total, *menacingly* fertile” (*Curious* 275, italics mine) displays an attribute that could also easily be applied to the ever-expanding forests of the Eastern Concavity.

⁶⁹ This novella is, as mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, a very direct and pointed response to John Barth’s seminal postmodern collection *Lost in the Funhouse*, and points towards Wallace’s narrative strategies in *Infinite Jest*, his next full published fictional work.

“Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way” has been described as a “programmatically declaration of intent” (Boswell 102) and this is never more evident than in the development of these menacing, lush postmodern spaces. It is also worth considering the question of an East-West trajectory in relation to both “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way” and *Infinite Jest*. When one considers the West as what Luther identifies as a “ubiquitous symbol of hope and progress throughout American literary history” (52), one would then surely expect the Eliotical Modernist dryness to occupy the *Eastern Concavity*, and the lush horrors of postmodernism to occupy the *Western Concavity*, the historical narrative trajectory moving characteristically Westward. As it is, the area West of the lush jungles of the *Eastern Concavity* is a dry wasteland. However, this spatial conundrum can be explained by an understanding that the geography of the dry *Western Concavity* can represent both Modernist past *and* postmodern future. Its barren wasteland suggests graphically the horrors of Modernist subjectivity, against which the *Eastern Concavity* can define itself as characteristically postmodern, but it also invokes the suggestion through its *Western* positioning that the trajectory of Postmodernism is heading towards just such a barren, a-historical world. Luther, invoking Fredric Jameson, speaks in her discussion of “Westward The Course of Empire Takes Its Way” of “a flat, featureless and frightening place, stripped in postmodernity of its historical content” (53), and in *Postmodernism* Jameson defines the postmodern culturescape as suffering from a kind of a-temporal Lacanian “schizophrenia [...] a series of pure and unrelated presents in time” (Jameson 27).⁷⁰ In the eternal postmodern present, past and future are both stripped of feature and connection to the present. Therefore the barren *Western Concavity* occupies a dual temporal position, as past and future simultaneously. Finally, consider the fact that the geography of the *Concavity* is underpinned by a cyclical process and it becomes evident how the wasteland of the past is occupied, evacuated, then returned to once more.

⁷⁰ The “depthless selves” (Burn 46) of Edwin Abbot’s *Flatland* (referred to in the previous chapter), which has been read by a number of *Infinite Jest*’s characters, also suggest a connection to the Jamesonian concept of postmodern “depthlessness”.

Before concluding discussion of the spatial and temporal characteristics of the Great Concavity, it is important to analyse the above mentioned “decelerated time” as a potential further problem of a postmodern chronotope. Annular fusion, as explicated by Michael Pemulis above, results in a massive temporal disjuncture between Concavity and the non-Concavity space, a disjuncture that can be interpreted, dependent on perspective, as a slowing down or speeding up of time, something referred to by Pemulis in the above extract as “time in flux”. This temporal and spatial schism reminds the Bakhtinian reader of the discussion within “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel” of the strong association between natural environment and collective public life outlined in the folkloric chronotope, a chronotope associated with an extremely early stage of narrative development:

The agricultural life of men and the life of nature (of the earth) are measured by one and the same scale, by the same events; they have the same intervals, inseparable from each other, present as one (indivisible) act of labor and consciousness (Bakhtin 208)

Now consider Bakhtin’s analysis of the developmental trajectory of this narrative chronotope:

Such a time is *unified* in an unmediated way. However, this imminent unity becomes apparent only in the light of later perceptions of time in literature (and in ideology in general), when the time of personal, everyday family occasions had already been individualized and separated out from the time of the collective historical life of the social whole, at a time when there emerged one scale for measuring the events of a *personal* life and another for measuring the events of *history* (ibid)

Bakhtin’s theory of chronotopic development lends itself to discussion of the spatio-temporal problem of annular time. This severe dissociation between the temporal unity of directly adjacent natural spaces represents a new postmodern narrative of wild chronotopic flux which supersedes the steady separation between the individual and nature seen by Bakhtin as a characteristic of narrative. Natural

time and space themselves have become not only violently unyoked from the individual but also from one another. The adjacency of two spaces that possess entirely different temporal characteristics invokes the a-historical postmodern trope of many “pure and unrelated presents” outlined by Jameson, as the disjuncture in time and space between O.N.A.N. and the Concavity invokes a geographical actualisation of a postmodern chronotope of multiple “intensities” (as Jameson, invoking Lyotard, puts it [Jameson 16]). However, as suggested above, the toxic and entropic nature of the Concavity space not only presents a chronotope that is characteristically postmodern but also interrogates it. This toxic “pure and unrelated present” is an insidious closed system that also has the ability to poison and contaminate adjacent “presents”. To paraphrase concisely; in *Infinite Jest* postmodern spatial and temporal “play” is not harmless, or even static and stagnating. It is actively toxic and threatens destruction of the overall environment within which it operates.

Moreover, Pemulis’ description of “time in flux” (for which read the postmodern focus on the a-temporal and a-historical) is described as being not only physically toxic but psychologically ruinous to the individual. Pemulis’ physical description of the individual unable to psychologically process this concept (“One half of the face is like spasming around while the half with the mole just like hangs there staring”) suggests that the psychological confusion caused by the concept of annular time causes the human face to actually physically reflect the temporal discrepancy between the two different areas, with one half of the face in perpetual change and the other half static in comparison.⁷¹ Indeed the bifurcated areas of the Concavity could also suggest a macro-model of the respective hemispheres of the postmodern human brain, with the disjuncture in activity between both areas representative of a psychological degeneracy. Burn helpfully highlights Wallace’s invocation of the neurophysiologist A.P. Luria (who is alluded to via the name of the

⁷¹ This psychological-geographical disjuncture appears to have an indirect antecedent in Wallace’s “Order and Flux in Northampton”, a short story from 1991 that contains several ideas (absented endings, Quebecois separatism) that will reach full maturity in *Infinite Jest*. Wallace describes the character of Barry Dingle as being “in a state of utter emotional flux whereby up and down, good and bad are as indistinguishable as right and left”, a state of flux that subsequently leads to “rampant ingrowth” (Wallace, “Order And Flux In Northampton” 96, 99).

terrorist Luria Percec) and suggests that A.P. Luria's 1972 book *Man With A Shattered World*, a case study of a Russian soldier with severe damage to the left hemisphere of his brain, can be implicitly connected to Hal's mental and linguistic dissociation in the Year Of Glad (Burn, "Machine Language" 48).⁷²

Wallace's post-postmodern strategy, as argued in Chapter 1, does not only diagnose the problems of postmodernism but posits a redemptive and reconfigurative cure for those problems. How then does Wallace offer or infer a route by which the individual can escape from a postmodern arrangement of space and time? While, as outlined above, the narrative strategy explaining how the inference of an ordinal calendar helps to partially "recover" a recognisable history from the a-historical concept of subsidised time, Wallace also suggests another narrative method in *Infinite Jest* by which the individual is capable of recovering a unitary sense of time and space from postmodern flux.

The Recovery of Space and Time for the Individual

In order to discuss the manner in which Wallace's characters can recover space and time it is first necessary to outline further the models described by Bakhtin and Jameson that will underpin the subsequent analysis here. Bakhtin, throughout his delineation of the novelistic chronotope, employs a schematic of horizontal and vertical axes when discussing temporal events. Historical time and temporal continuity is aligned with the horizontal axis. In his specific discussion of the metamorphic narrative of Apuleius, Bakhtin notes that, in respect to the way in which the individual life is represented in specific events along the temporal axis:

Time breaks down into isolated, self-sufficient temporal segments that mechanically arrange themselves into no more than single sequences [...] the novel provides us with two or three different images of the same individual,

⁷² Fitzgerald posits an earlier literary model in *Tender Is The Night* as he conflates the division in Nicole Diver's brain with the tropes of realism and modernism, with Nicole's letters reading alternately like realist or modernist texts (Fitzgerald 136), as well as the implicit suggestion that Europe and America correspond to different hemispheres of the brain.

images that have been disjointed and rejoined through his crisis and rebirths (Bakhtin 114-115)

Later in the essay, in an important definition, Bakhtin invokes the vertical axis:

There is a greater readiness to build a superstructure for reality (the present) along a vertical axis of upper and lower than to move forward along the horizontal axis of time. Should these vertical structurings turn out as well to be other-worldly, idealistic, eternal, outside time, then this extratemporal and eternal quality is perceived as something simultaneous with a given moment in the present; it is something contemporaneous, and that which already exists is perceived as better than the future (which does not yet exist and which never did exist) (148)

Of course, Bakhtin does not refer here directly to characteristics of postmodern narrative. However, Bakhtin's vertical and horizontal spatio-temporal stratagems as laid out above provide a very useful model for discussing the manner in which Wallace suggests the individual can "recover" a unitary sense of space and time from the postmodern while not ignoring the sense of eternal "present" that is a characteristic of postmodernism. This leads naturally into the second theoretical argument that underpins this discussion, Jameson's delineation (invoking Jacques Lacan) of postmodern temporality as "schizophrenic" and a-historical. Jameson refers to Lacan's theory of linguistic schizophrenia:

The connection between this kind of linguistic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic may then be grasped by way of a twofold proposition: first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present; and second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic

is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time (Jameson 26-7)

Consider how this breakdown of the signifying chain might look as represented by Bakhtin's vertical and horizontal axes. If, as Jameson indicates, the postmodern is characterised as a series of pure and unrelated presents, where "the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organise its past and future into coherent experience" (25) then this postmodern representation of space and time would be represented as a consistent vertical axis composed of a series of eternal un-historicised presents, one that, to quote Bakhtin, does not "move forward along the horizontal axis of time". Wallace's stated interest that fiction should not be merely diagnostic of a condition of postmodernity but also seek to reconfigure and move beyond it includes a presentation (discussed in the previous chapter, as well as being extrapolated at great length within both the Larry McCaffery interview and *Infinite Jest*) of the "cage" of postmodern narratives as analogous to the condition of solipsism. That is, that the a-temporal vertical axis delineated as being concurrent with a postmodern narrative represents also the "godawful trap" of the postmodern de-historicised individual, living purely in their own solipsistic present.

How then can Wallace point towards a reconfigurative fictional narrative solution for the characters in *Infinite Jest* that will align their solipsistic "vertical" postmodern narratives with a re-engagement with the horizontal axis of time? This recovery of space and time for the individual, an establishment of a form that is intended to supersede the postmodern chronotope, comes in the relation of time and space to the process of recovery and rehabilitation, specifically in the overarching structures of Alcoholics Anonymous. The critical discussion of Alcoholics Anonymous in *Infinite Jest* as a precursor to communicative emotion and escape from postmodernism has been both discussed in the previous chapter and established in a number of articles and monographs, and is currently part of the generally received critical discussion of Wallace's fiction.⁷³ However, the narrative form through which Wallace constructs this recovery process has not yet been analysed in

⁷³ See Carlisle, Holland, Boswell, Kelly and Aubry here.

detail, and by reading Bakhtin and Jameson alongside Wallace, a new and illuminating account of the strategy in *Infinite Jest* for the recovery of the individual emerges at a level that is not only spatio-temporal but also linguistic, and Jameson's invocation of Lacan's "sentence" proves to be a valuable asset in understanding Wallace's strategy of escape.

This strategy of escape and recovery is inherently connected to how the process of time in *Infinite Jest* is experienced by the individual recovering from addiction to drink or drugs. Wallace devotes an extraordinary amount of the novel to the manner in which the recovering individual experiences the passing of time (Ennet House "reeks of passing time" [*Jest* 279]), and several examples from *Infinite Jest* illustrate this preoccupation. The most persuasive examples can be found in the characters of Randy Lenz, Poor Tony Krause and Don Gately. The manner in which these three characters psychologically experience the passage of time during their individual narratives of recovery illustrates the contention of this argument about how time can be "recovered" on Bakhtin's horizontal axis.

Randy Lenz, as well as a fear of disks and a compulsion to be North of things, has "a tendency to constantly take his own pulse, a fear of all forms of timepieces, and a need to always know the time with great precision" (279). This compulsion to always know the exact moment, coupled with the phobia of actually being able to look at the time oneself, connects the psychology of an addict struggling with the passing of time to Jameson's theory of a series of postmodernism as a series of continuous, unrelated "presents". Lenz's constant need to take his own pulse conflates the continuous sense of dissociated presents with establishing whether one is still alive. That is, the individual trusts himself only to be alive in that exact present temporal moment, a temporal moment which they have to keep checking still exists, and fears any future moments on that basis. Considering that Lenz is an example of the unreconstructed addict (he continues to surreptitiously abuse substances with disastrous consequences) this method of experiencing time as dissociated instants, associated here with the postmodern series of dissociated presents outlined by Jameson, is evidently flawed. Lenz's pathological obsession with the present is, at base, an inherently postmodern one, and can be illustrated on Bakhtin's axes as a continuous vertical, a series of stagnated "instants" or presents with no ultimate progression.

Poor Tony Krause has a nightmarish encounter with time during his hellish detoxification process. Krause locks himself alone in a bathroom stall in an attempt to defeat his addiction by going “cold turkey”, and suffers, in one of Wallace’s most disturbing and sustained passages, a terrifying and hallucinatory physical and psychological ordeal. One of the most notable details of this sequence is the moment where the passage of time takes on a material dimension and becomes malevolently personified in Krause’s hallucination:

Time began to take on new aspects for him, now, as Withdrawal progressed. Time began to pass with sharp edges [...] By the second week in the stall time itself seemed the corridor, lightless at either end. After more time time then ceased to move or be moved or be move-throughable and assumed a shape above and apart, a huge, musty-feathered, orange-eyed wingless fowl hunched incontinent atop the stall, with a kind of watchful but deeply uncaring personality that didn’t seem keen on Poor Tony Krause as a person at all, or to wish him well. Not one little bit. It spoke to him from atop the stall, the same things, over and over. They were unrepeatabe. Nothing in even Poor Tony’s grim life-experience prepared him for the experience of time with a shape and an odor, squatting; and the worsening physical symptoms were a spree at Bonwit’s compared to time’s black assurances that the symptoms were merely hints, signposts pointing up at a larger, far more dire set of Withdrawal phenomena that hung just overhead by a string that unravelled steadily with the passage of time. It would not keep still and would not end (302)

Throughout the sequence, and complemented by the agonisingly small space of the bathroom stall, time becomes ever more spatial, more concrete and inescapable, becoming less abstract and more physically rendered. It is notable that time here is described as “lightless at either end” and ceases “to move or be moved or be move-throughable”. That the recovering addict is here unable to move through time is a remarkable physical actualisation of both Jameson’s diagnosis of the postmodern condition and Bakhtin’s vertical axis. All temporal continuity and process are suspended during this process of recovery and time itself becomes a confined space, steadily *more* difficult to move through. Tony eventually temporarily “escapes” time

by having a withdrawal seizure, although his subsequent failure to escape the traits of his addictive behaviour leads him, like Lenz, to disaster and death.

How, then, to recover from this process? How can the recovering addict transfigure the postmodern sense of the eternal present to aid their recovery and move beyond their addiction, avoiding the spatial trap that time has become? The answer provided by Wallace in *Infinite Jest* is best exemplified by the behaviour of recovering addict Don Gately. Gately is essentially the heroic figure of *Infinite Jest*, a postmodern subject trying his best to escape the clutches of his addiction and make a new life for himself through the tenets of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, the manner in which Gately interacts with the process of space and time has not yet been articulated with the thoroughness warranted by its depiction in and centrality to the novel. Gately's relationship with time via Alcoholics Anonymous is notably different from those recovering addicts mentioned above. This temporal relationship underpins Wallace's narrative strategy of recovery from the series of unrelated presents and movement towards a re-association with progressive movement through time as represented by Bakhtin's horizontal axis.

Gately's progress is inherently tied to one of the central maxims of Alcoholics Anonymous, one that is essential to a strategy of recovery: "One Day At A Time". The slogan, along with many others employed by the organisation, is recognised variously as "trite" and "cliché" by a number of recovering addicts throughout the novel. However, Gately's attempts to engage with the slogan beyond the simple dismissal of it as cliché are key to his ongoing recovery. Importantly, Gately's memory of his initial residency at Ennet House is identified almost identically with Krause's detoxification. For Gately, "he'd felt the sharp edge of every second that went by" (280), while for Krause "time began to pass with sharp edges" (302). With their initial stages of detoxification established as identical, the diverging paths of Gately and Krause's recovery can be established as residing in the psychological approach to the tenets of recovery. Gately chooses to abide by the regulations, even praying when he feels that the very act of praying is redundant due to having "nothing in the way of a like God-concept" (467), and increasingly adopts subservience to the methodological time and process-based approach of recovery, paralleled comically but also sincerely in his approach to following a recipe:

[...] if he just followed the motherfucking directions, and had sense enough to get help from slightly more experienced bakers to keep from fucking the directions up if he got confused somehow, but basically the point was if he just followed the childish directions, a cake would result. He'd have his cake (467)

More directly, the instructions on how to perceive time in recovery (“the primary need not to absorb a Substance today, just today, no matter what happens” [360]) are perhaps most graphically articulated by Joelle Van Dyne, talking to Gately after he has been shot:

Pat in counselling keeps telling me just to build a wall around each individual 24-hour period and not look over or back. And not to count days. Even when you get a chip for 14 days or 30 days, not to add them up (858)

This image of “walling up” days separately is key to how the addict can employ the series of unrelated, a-historical “presents” outlined by Jameson towards regaining an escape back into historical time, and away from the Bakhtinian vertical and towards the horizontal. In a postmodern condition where the “signifying chain” (Jameson 26) between the past, present and future is broken, one might assume that to embrace the concept of living solely in isolated spatio-temporal units is an embracing of postmodernism, rather than an escape from it. However, the absolute commitment to approaching of day as a single unconnected unit is revealed to ultimately assist the escape from that very approach. In a similar manner to the method of “treating cancer by giving the cancer cells themselves cancer” outlined elsewhere in the novel (*Jest* 572), the isolated “present” is embraced and isolated absolutely. Just as the addict does not allow himself to think of the arduous, apparently endless path of rehabilitation ahead, the postmodern subject does not allow himself to think of the lost histories engendered by postmodernity, rather to build a new history out of the intense consideration of every single day in isolation. The spatio-temporal present, in effect, is recaptured and recovered from its centrality to postmodernism and realigned along a historical axis.

Consider this approach along the vertical and horizontal axes established by Bakhtin. This process would, instead of finally constituting a prolonged and endless vertical axis, ultimately re-establish a series of isolated temporal units along the horizontal axis. The entry back into historical time is achieved indirectly. What might look at first like a series of vertical “presents” will, at the end of the rehabilitation process, be revealed to have actually been a teleological, historical horizontal process with a past, present and future (the future a new future free from the eternal present of substance abuse). The substance addict and the a-historical postmodern subject have recovered their historical chronology and the Jamesonian/Lacanian “schizophrenia” has been transcended. The actual formal structure of the novel mirrors this process – a series of isolated, a-chronological moments in time that must be considered alone before the reader can climactically order them into a historical sequence.⁷⁴ Lenz’s botched method of recovery apparently involves the continuous awareness of time (the constant checking of watches) but is tragically flawed because his attention is drawn to *how* time is passing rather than actually passing the time. Lenz considers units of time only in how they relate to earlier and later units, a fundamental mistake in a spatio-temporal philosophy of recovery that prizes awareness of the isolation of the present moment. Much like his attempts to always be North of something, Lenz’s subjugation to the totality of a large, unfocused and unwieldy system is the root cause of his failure to escape addiction.

Timothy Aubry carries out a perceptive analysis of a lengthy sentence from *Infinite Jest* about the process of recovery, astutely noting that “the temporal experience of reading this page-long sentence mimics the arduous experience of recovering in AA” and how “the mechanical form of obedience AA insists upon

⁷⁴ The reader of Bakhtin might draw a connection between these discrete units of vertical time and the schema employed by Bakhtin for his concept of character metamorphosis in narrative during his discussion of the “adventure novel of everyday life” (Bakhtin 111), which is described as “a line with “knots” in it [...] portraying the whole of an individual’s life in its more important moments of *crisis*: for showing *how an individual becomes other than what he was*” (113, 115, italics original). This analysis does not suggest a direct narrative regression on Wallace’s part (he is committed to dealing with postmodernism on its own terms) but the ultimate metamorphosis of character in *Infinite Jest* appears to run along similar narrative lines.

necessarily leads dialectically to its opposite” (Aubry 211). Rather than directly reproducing the entire 500-word-plus sentence here, important component parts (including the beginning and end) are reproduced to illustrate the subsequent argument:

And so you Hang In and stay sober and straight, and out of sheer hand-burned-on-hot-stove terror you heed the improbable-sounding warnings not to stop pounding out the nightly meetings even after the Substance-cravings have left and you feel like you’ve got a grip on the thing at last and can now go it alone, you still don’t try to go it alone, you heed the improbable warnings because by now you have no faith in your own sense of what’s really improbable and what isn’t, since AA seems, improbably enough, to be working, and with no faith in your own senses you’re confused, flummoxed, and when people with AA time strongly advise you to keep coming you nod robotically and keep coming [...] like a shock-trained organism without any kind of independent human will you do exactly like you’re told, you keep coming and coming, nightly [...] you Hang In and Hang In, meeting after meeting, warm day after cold day ...; [...] older guys who seem to be less damaged — or at least less flummoxed by their damage — will tell you in terse simple imperative clauses exactly what to do, and where and when to do it (though never How or Why); and at this point you’ve started to have an almost classic sort of Blind Faith [...] and now if the older guys say Jump you ask them to hold their hand at the desired height, and now they’ve got you, and you’re free (*Jest* 350-1)

It is not the intention of this analysis to discuss the ironic interplay of this sentence (indeed Aubry astutely discusses the paradox of “they’ve got you” and “you’re free” in his article), with the focus instead on the spatio-temporal constitution of the sentence and its ramifications for the Bakhtinian/Jamesonian/Lacanian models employed throughout this chapter.

The length of the sentence, as Aubry has indicated, encompasses the journey of the recovering addict from initial induction into the doctrine of the rehabilitation programme to final acceptance of and subservience to the overarching narrative the programme demands, and thus “freedom”. Therefore, the trajectory of the sentence’s

narrative is also inherently temporal. Because the whole process is incorporated within a continuous sentence, there is an unbroken spatial *and* temporal narrative unity drawn between the initial point of “Hanging In” and final acceptance. The spatio-temporal narrative of this sentence enacts an attempt to recover the entire unity of a historical narrative arc from the Jamesonian a-temporality of the postmodern present, while also invoking for the reader Jameson’s employment of the linguistic Lacanian “schizophrenic” sentence model as the basis for his historical diagnosis. In the same manner as the “one day at a time” approach outlined above, the understanding of the historical (“horizontal”) process of the journey taken by the subject is only fully actualised at the end of the sentence. The sealing of the sentence with a full stop creates the definitive end point of a space that now encompasses a teleological journey of recovery, one in which the recovering addict can retrospectively discern a definite historical process to the narrative of their rehabilitation.

The preceding chapter has mapped the formal narrative strategies employed by Wallace in *Infinite Jest* in relation to the chronotopic interplay of the processes of space and time, and how these strategies are employed both from within and against prevailing postmodern literary tropes. The analysis in the next chapter focuses upon a very different formal interrogation of postmodernism employed by Wallace, the alignment of the postmodern text with a specifically cinematic technique.

Chapter 3

“Seeing By Mirror Light”: Wallace’s Cinematic Narratives

David Foster Wallace: I mean, I'm not a film scholar.

Charlie Rose: But you like movies.

David Foster Wallace: I do like movies.

Charlie Rose: A lot.

David Foster Wallace: Front row. (Interview, Charlie Rose 1997)

In “E Unibus Pluram” David Foster Wallace mentions a collective term for a type of fiction produced by his generation of writers. The term that Wallace uses in this essay is the “fiction of image” (*Supposedly* 171). It would appear that the reason that “fiction of image” did not become habitually employed as a pervasive descriptive term is because it ultimately proves rather reductive and specific, especially in relation to Wallace’s writing. Wallace describes this fiction as a form which “uses the transient received myths of popular culture as a *world* in which to imagine fictions about “real”, albeit pop-mediated, public characters” (Ibid, italics original) and mentions antecedents such as Robert Coover’s *The Public Burning* (which infamously features Nixon as a character) and Don DeLillo’s *Great Jones Street*. While the Wallace of *Girl with Curious Hair* appears to adhere fairly consistently to this definition with its fictional depictions of real celebrities such as David Letterman and Alex Trebek, the fiction Wallace produces after 1989 is less fixated on this agenda. *Infinite Jest*, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* and *Oblivion* are largely free of the tropes of “image fiction” as described in Wallace’s essay. In the post-1989 fiction, and particularly in *Infinite Jest*, Wallace reconfigures his interest in “image” more broadly as a thematic focus upon watching and being watched, and in *Infinite Jest*, the focus on the lives of those celebrities who inhabit the world of popular culture is increasingly marginalised in favour of an analysis of the viewer and the audience.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* highlights the problematic relationship between cultural critics and the importance of the “image” in a postmodern culture, and the associated proclamations of the death of the book. As Fitzpatrick explains, a number of writers and critics ascribe toxic qualities to the

image, which is often associated by these writers and critics with television. The “dangerous potential” (Fitzpatrick 105) of the image is countered by these writers with a case for the primacy of language, based upon the concept that ““meaning” can be produced only syntactically” (107) and that in the words of Neil Postman, the image “lacks a syntax, which deprives it of a capacity to argue with the world” (Postman, quoted in Fitzpatrick 107).⁷⁵ What is significant about Wallace’s relationship to this argument is that he differs from the original generation of postmodern fiction writers in a significant way, growing up *with* television rather than before its cultural dominance. He makes this explicit in “E Unibus Pluram”:

This generation gap in conceptions of realism is, again, TV-dependent. The U.S. generation born after 1950 is the first for whom television was something to be lived with instead of just looked at. Our elders tend to regard the set rather as the flapper did the automobile: a curiosity turned treat turned seduction. (*Supposedly* 43)

While in the same essay Wallace warns against the consequences for fiction as a result of the prevailing televisual culture of irony, this is not representative of the same fear of the vitality of image shared by the critics addressed by Fitzpatrick above. It is therefore unsurprising that the formal representation of the culture of image in Wallace’s fiction diverges from these earlier positions. Instead of focusing upon the fear of the eradication of the book, literature is already largely absent in the future nation depicted within *Infinite Jest*. The culture is dominated instead by the Teleputer, a device that allows the viewer to choose any programme they wish to watch (in a symbolic image, ETA student Kent Blott’s bookshelf is stacked only with teleputer cartridges). Rather than an encroaching menace, the centrality of image culture in *Infinite Jest* is essentially a matter of fact, as it was for writers of Wallace’s generation. Furthermore, while undoubtedly wary of the cultural effects of overexposure to television, Wallace does not believe it is fruitful to blame the

⁷⁵ Fitzpatrick’s argument also provides a useful framework for discussion of Danielewski’s cinematic tropes, as will be evidenced in Chapter 5.

television itself (“Treating television as evil is just as reductive and silly as treating it like a toaster w/pictures” [*Supposedly* 37]).

The aforementioned employment of image culture in *Infinite Jest* operates as a dramatisation of Wallace’s cultural distance from a preceding generation of postmodern writers, and through a formal appeal to a specific type of image culture, namely cinema and film, Wallace also performs an interrogation of that earlier postmodern position. Kathleen Fitzpatrick quotes an article from *The New York Times* that suggests that “the image’s reign “began” with television and was “reinforced” by film”, a thesis that Fitzpatrick decries, suggesting that “final cause has become first cause” (Fitzpatrick 101) and an underestimation of the influence of cinema and film has been a characteristic of criticism of Wallace’s work thus far.

While it would be counterproductive to deny the central importance of television to Wallace’s fictional thesis with so many examples from Wallace himself that foreground his relationship with that medium, film and cinema have a very specific thematic and formal influence on the form of Wallace’s narratives, an influence that should be separated from discussion of television, lest criticism blurs into a more general discussion that does not take into account Wallace’s specific narrative dialogue with film on its own terms.⁷⁶ Considering that the titular central plot device of *Infinite Jest* is a film, it is remarkable that no criticism of Wallace has yet discussed the element of cinema at any significant length. The analysis in the following chapter is therefore concerned primarily with the formal influence of cinema on Wallace’s approach to narrative primarily based around *Infinite Jest*, with attendant discussion of Wallace’s other fiction and non-fiction. The key areas of discussion relate to the specific influence of films and filmmakers on Wallace’s narratives, Wallace’s employment of specifically cinematic formal techniques as devices within his own fiction as response to the question of the relationship between author, director and audience, and how Wallace uses these formal strategies in his literature alongside film theory and criticism as an interrogation and reconfiguration of postmodern literature. The specific influence of certain forms of cinema, most notably American avant-garde cinema, is also important to an

⁷⁶ While “Infinite Jest” (an unreleased film) is watched on Teleputer, the overriding terminology of film production in the novel is specifically cinematic rather than televisual.

understanding of *Infinite Jest*'s formal narrative technique and Wallace's reconfigurative post-postmodern strategies.

Wallace apparently had no formal practical training or theoretical education in avant-garde cinema.⁷⁷ However, among the items of his personal library in the Ransom Centre archive is a copy of *The Cinema Book*, a substantial textbook on cinema.⁷⁸ Molly Schwartzburg, an archivist at the Ransom Centre, has written a brief and helpful article on the notations found in Wallace's copy of *The Cinema Book*, in which she notes that Wallace's use of film citations in *Infinite Jest* mirror those of the book's editor Pam Cook, that the book is so heavily used and annotated that it is held together with tape, and that the inside cover has the inscription "D. Wallace '92", which places it firmly in the compositional period of *Infinite Jest* (Schwartzburg). Therefore, based upon the information available, this book would appear to be Wallace's primary source text for the references to cinema in *Infinite Jest*, and key to understanding how Wallace's reading on film influenced the employment of cinematic references and forms in his narrative. As a result, the book will be consulted and referenced significantly throughout this chapter.

The Influence of the Avant-Garde

The narrative in *Infinite Jest* is formally influenced by the works of a number of filmmakers from the avant-garde to commercial Hollywood. Avant-garde cinema, and in particular the work of two avant-garde directors, Sidney Peterson and Maya Deren, exerts a strong influence on the form of *Infinite Jest*. Wallace's knowledge of avant-garde cinema is substantial and largely critically undiscussed. The parodic nature of some of James Incandenza's filmography can perhaps mislead the reader to assume that many of the names are comical inventions, created to foster a convincing image of the fictional cinematic world of James Incandenza. However, with the exception of the names of Incandenza's collaborators, the vast majority of

⁷⁷ DT Max has suggested that Wallace "claimed to briefly audit Cavell at Harvard but that would be Hollywood stuff" (Personal Correspondence 22/6/2011)

⁷⁸ The only other wholly cinema-based book in Wallace's library in the Ransom Centre is J. Hoberman and Jeffrey Shandler's *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies and Broadcasting*, which dates from 2003 and thus cannot have influenced the composition of *Infinite Jest*.

the individuals are genuine. Wallace has placed Incandenza amongst a plethora of real avant-garde filmmakers, with his employment of certain works being particularly illuminating in terms of his narrative strategy. Notably, Wallace employs several images and techniques suggested by these filmmakers as visual paradigms for the self-conscious or solipsistic individual in *Infinite Jest*.

Incandenza's film *Every Inch of Disney Leith* (*Jest* 989) is evidently influenced by the avant-garde filmmaker Willard Maas's 1943 film *Geography of the Body*. Both films consist of macroscopic photography of body parts, and this intense and unwavering focus on the individual's body is a useful paradigmatic image representation of the solipsistic, literally "navel-gazing" position in which many of the characters in the novel find themselves. Wallace also embeds a joke about the ever increasing focus upon the self in the future America of *Infinite Jest*; while Maas's film is seven minutes long, Incandenza's approaches four and a half hours. Elsewhere, Takahito Iimura is mentioned twice in the Incandenza filmography and is the dedicatee of Incandenza's *Dark Logics*. Iimura's works *Self-Introduction* (1982) and *TV Confrontation* (1983) show, respectively, the filmmaker interviewing himself and two television sets facing one another, images that conflate the aforementioned thematic "focus" on the individual with a particular emphasis on the mediation of that focus through image technology.⁷⁹

Another strong influence is the director Sidney Peterson, whose films are also referenced pervasively throughout Incandenza's filmography. The most notable of these references is to Peterson's 1947 film *The Cage*, which inspires the title of five Incandenza films, the subtitle of the fifth ("Infinite Jim" [*Jest* 993]) even suggesting a link to Incandenza's most important work.⁸⁰ *The Cage*, an abstract work that

⁷⁹ The only enjoyment Orin Incandenza can gain from watching films is if he watches footage of himself (*Jest* 298).

⁸⁰ Peterson also makes extensive use of distorting lenses in all three of his films referenced here. One of the technical motifs of Incandenza's "Infinite Jest" is a particular type of distorting lens, which it is suggested is partly responsible for the film's addictive effect (Incandenza's employment of lenses will be discussed presently). Marshall Boswell suggests that Incandenza's titling of his *Cage* films is "a clear reference to John Cage's music" (Boswell 162). This is not necessarily an incorrect reading (and indeed Cage himself was involved in avant-garde filmmaking circles and even appears in Maya Deren's film *At Land*), but Peterson remains the principal narrative touchstone for Incandenza here.

features imagery of a man with a caged head and a disembodied eyeball rolling around various environments, can be seen playing in the background of Incandenza's film *Good-Looking Men In Small Clever Rooms That Utilize Every Centimeter Of Available Space With Mind-Boggling Efficiency* (911), while Joelle Van Dyne is a fan of the director (185) and one of Molly Notkin's director-shaped chairs is moulded in the form of Peterson (788). The image of the cage is a regular motif throughout *Infinite Jest*, employed by Wallace to represent self-imprisonment, and Peterson's recurrent image in *The Cage* of a man walking down a crowded street with a cage around his head is a potent visual paradigm for Wallace's invocations of the "godawful trap" of a particular kind of postmodern solipsism and loneliness. The following passage, which details Joelle Van Dyne at her lowest and most self-absorbed, demonstrates the influence of Peterson's imagery in Wallace's narrative:

What looks like the cage's exit is actually the bars of the cage. The afternoon's meshes. The entrance says EXIT. There isn't an exit. The ultimate annular fusion: that of exhibit and its cage. Jim's own *Cage III: Free Show*. It is the cage that has entered her, somehow. (222)

In this short passage Wallace creates a synthesis of solipsism, the image of the cage and also Incandenza's avant-garde filmmaking, with an implicit nod to Peterson. However, Peterson's influence extends beyond the cage image. His 1946 film *The Potted Psalm* (a co-direction with James Broughton) is also referenced in the novel, with an endnote making a claim for Peterson's influence on Incandenza's narratives:

Peterson's *Potted Psalm*'s mother-and-Death stuff and *The Cage*'s cranial-imprisonment and disconnected-eyeball stuff are pretty obvious touchstones in a lot of Himself's more parodic-slapstick productions (1072)

Of course, that “mother-and-death stuff”,⁸¹ “cranial imprisonment” and the “disconnected-eyeball” are all also facets of *Wallace’s* narrative interrogation of postmodernism through Incandenza’s film work.⁸²

In the “cage” passage above, a reference can be detected to another avant-garde filmmaker. The phrase “the afternoon’s meshes” is a direct allusion to Maya Deren’s 1943 film *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Deren’s film, an accepted landmark in avant-garde cinema, features a series of repeating visual motifs that also appear in *Infinite Jest*, most notably mirrors, knives and reflective glasses (a pair of which are worn by one of Fackelmann’s torturers at the end of the novel [*Jest* 981]), but a more notable connection between Wallace’s and Deren’s work is the formal employment of circular narratives. In Deren’s films, the events of the narrative are revealed to be part of a narrative loop which may or may not be a dream of the female protagonist (played by Deren), while Wallace’s narrative begins with its final chronological event and invites the reader to begin again to recontextualise the beginning of the narrative with their knowledge of the end. Moreover, the never-ending and endlessly repeating dream state presented at the outset of Deren’s film recalls the circular imagery of the closed system attributed to the postmodern addict by Wallace and outlined at length in Chapter 1. It is no coincidence that Deren’s film should be referenced primarily through Joelle at her most self-absorbed,⁸³ and indeed the appearance in Deren’s film of a mysterious figure veiled by a mirror is an

⁸¹ Marshall Boswell has already made a case for Incandenza’s employment of the “Death Mother cosmology” as an attack by Wallace on Lacan (Boswell 160).

⁸² Peterson’s *The Cage*, like Bunuel’s *Un Chien Andalou* (another film referenced by Wallace in the novel) ends with an image of bodies on a beach, which is how Wallace chooses to end *Infinite Jest* (Peterson’s 1949 film *The Lead Shoes* and Maya Deren’s *At Land* also feature people lying on beaches). *The Potted Psalm* features a headless man and an open grave, both images that are strongly connected with James Incandenza’s death and resurrection (the latter also reminiscent of the passage in *Hamlet* that gives the novel its name). *The Lead Shoes* features the sung refrain “What will you say when your father comes back?”, which considering that Hal’s father James *does* come back after death, and that he is preoccupied with not being able to hear Hal speak, suggests that Peterson’s narratives bear more than a passing influence on plot as well as theme.

⁸³ The connection between the film, the dream and postmodernism is also important to the development of Wallace’s fiction in the collection *Oblivion*, discussed in detail below.

image that recalls Joelle's use of a veil. While Joelle may be using it to cover a disfigurement, there is also the implicit suggestion that the employment of the veil reflects her self-absorption.⁸⁴ Deren's mirror-veil is an ideal analogue for the "closed" system of solipsism that Wallace ascribes to Joelle (an opaque, impenetrable covering that reflects the outside without ingress to the inside).⁸⁵

In an image that draws a remarkable connection between Wallace and Deren's narratives, Deren's closed narrative cycle is finally broken by the breaking of a mirror, revealing the image of a beach beyond and, ultimately, a prone body covered in seaweed. If one takes Don Gately as the figure whose commitment to sobriety and communication allows escape from self-absorption, then Deren's final image is strikingly similar in execution to the manner in which Wallace ends the narrative of *Infinite Jest*, with Gately breaking through his "rock bottom" (his apocalyptic drugs binge with Fackelmann) to an image of a beach upon which he used to sleep. The correlation of the images between Deren's film and Wallace's narrative also points towards Wallace's engagement with this cinematic imagery as an analogue for both diagnosis and cure, by reconfiguring the final destruction of the mirror in conjunction with Gately's final breakthrough.⁸⁶

As stated above, references to a substantial number of avant-garde filmmakers can be found in the elaborate filmography of James Incandenza located in the

⁸⁴ Joelle dislikes Deren's work (*Jest* 185), which could suggest that the mirror-veil imagery is an uncomfortable reminder of her own unhappy situation.

⁸⁵ This is not the only occasion within *Infinite Jest* that Wallace employs a mirror in conjunction with cinema to represent a state of self-absorption. The mirror motif, as will be discussed below, is also used for its resemblance to a cinema screen.

⁸⁶ There are also a whole host of more throwaway and implicit film references in *Infinite Jest* that represent less important programmatic formal influence on Wallace's narrative but that nevertheless appear tangential to some of the overriding themes of the novel. For example, the amputees of the AFR climb the walls of the Antitoi shop with plungers in a sequence virtually identical to a scene in Lon Chaney's 1920 film *The Penalty* (in which Chaney, in a proto-Method gesture, had his legs painfully taped to his back), while entertainer turned president Ronald Reagan, an obvious inspiration for *Infinite Jest*'s Johnny Gentle, had a breakthrough role playing a man who loses his legs running across a train track (an identical method to how AFR members lose their own limbs) in 1942's *Kings Row*, a film that, like *Infinite Jest*, uses incest as a major plot point.

endnotes of *Infinite Jest*. A close analysis of this filmography and the position of James Incandenza within the text reveals a remarkable dialogue with postmodernism. This dialogue, rather than simply suggesting that the filmography of James Incandenza creates something of a postmodern “straw man”, positions Wallace and the deceased director far more closely in relation to one another than is initially apparent.

Film As Literature

Wallace remarked in a 1997 interview with Charlie Rose that he did not want to write screenplays because of his resistance to having his writing mediated by others as part of a process (“I think I would have a very difficult time writing something that's a product that other people would mess with [...] I can't imagine putting in the time and energy to do a good screenplay” [Interview, Charlie Rose 1997]).⁸⁷ Instead, several invented partial screenplays or transcripts of films are incorporated into the narrative of *Infinite Jest*, the endnotes of which feature an eight-page fictional filmography of James Incandenza. While this extensive filmography may initially appear to be an extended comic riff on art cinema, a closer analysis reveals that Wallace’s discussion of this area carries more significance than simple parody.

The film work of James Incandenza, at face value, can be taken to represent a rather generalised shooting gallery of the kind of self-reflexive metafictional postmodernism that Wallace criticises in “E Unibus Pluram” and the Larry McCaffery interview, the work of a deceased father figure whose work must be supplanted. The positioning of the filmography as a separate endnote has potentially contributed towards critical opinion that it functions as a sort of comic aside. However, in the creation of the filmography and attendant discussions of Incandenza’s filmmaking technique Wallace in fact outlines a detailed patterning of

⁸⁷ Wallace wrote a twelve page treatment for a never-completed film adaptation of *The Broom of the System*. His discomfort with the processes of adapting a novel for the screen (particularly one as heavily based around specifically linguistic terminology as *Broom*) is evident in the language of the treatment. At one stage Wallace breaks off from trying to describe Rick Vigorous’ story about the woman with a tree toad in her neck, suggesting “here see novel, Viking, pp. 180-194; it’s tough to summarize these interior stories” (“Broom of the System: Theatrical Movie, Sample Outline”).

the evolution of film criticism and theory as a paradigm for not only the rise of “theory” in the discussion of literature and the position of the author in the text, but also as a metaphor for Wallace’s own formal literary evolution, and that the employment of James Incandenza’s filmography is, within the world of the novel, critically misunderstood as being aligned exclusively with a postmodern metafictional position.

Film criticism and theory, a process still in relative infancy, spans a period of roughly a hundred years. While the field was still emerging, the implementation of structuralist thought and “theory” in the academic humanities across the latter half of the twentieth century had a fundamental impact upon the study of film, much as it did upon the study of literature. When tracing the evolution of cinematic critical thought, it is noticeable how theoretical approaches to both film and literature closely parallel one another, and how closely the role of the film director often relates to the role of the literary writer, despite the creative apparatus being fundamentally different.⁸⁸ Through James Incandenza’s opinions of prevailing methods of cinematic critical thought it is possible to trace both a paradigmatic relationship with not only Wallace’s postmodern predecessors and Wallace’s abiding concerns about his own writing’s relationship to postmodernism. This assertion bears repeating because it is easy to see James Incandenza as somehow separate to Wallace, a metafiction-producing father figure who precedes him rather than a component part of Wallace’s own evolving literary programme.⁸⁹

The repositioning of authorial presence across the last two centuries of literature, a process that moves through omniscient single-narrator realist narratives of the 19th century through the focus upon subjective narration and multiple perspectives in literary modernism and most recently the ontological flux of the authority of the narrator and author in literary postmodernism, has a broad analogue

⁸⁸ Illustrative critical examples of this position are deployed during the analysis below.

⁸⁹ This conflation is only reinforced when one considers how in both “Derivative Sport In Tornado Alley” (*Supposedly* 3) and his interview with Larry McCaffery (138-139) Wallace discusses how he moved from being good at something (tennis, mathematics, philosophy) to abandoning focus on that thing and moving to something else, which parallels James Incandenza’s career trajectory (optics, mirrors, filmmaking) in form if not in subject.

(one that Wallace thematically encourages) with the erecting and dismantling of the absolute authority of the studio and star system, the rise of the subjective process of method acting and, latterly, the postmodern art of cinematic pastiche or “quoting” of films in other films.

An appropriate example of this analogue is James Incandenza’s father’s disquiet with Marlon Brando.⁹⁰ James’ father feels that Brando “ruined it looks like two whole generations’ relations with their own bodies and the everyday objects and bodies around them” and that “The disrespect gets learned and passed on. Passed down” (*Jest* 157). Despite being of the opinion that Brando’s method acting meant that his disaffected posturing was actually the product of some great authority and control, James’ father despairs of the second-generation copyists who retain the posturing but not the authority. Much of this disquiet boils down to a general concern about a decline in systems of absolute authority and also the anti-authoritarianism inherent in pastiche. Considering that the conversation takes place in 1960 (a time period concurrent with the full flowering of literary postmodernism in America), James’ father’s concerns about a cultural authority as relayed through cinema, and indeed James’ subsequent pastiche-heavy film career, can be seen to represent the shift from a system of absolute authority to an extreme “relativising” of the concept, a conflict on the verge of being played out in literary postmodernism.

This discussion of relative authority highlights another connection between film and literature encouraged by Wallace; the position and authority of the individual author or director. In the study of literature, the challenge to the authoritative author or narrator laid down by theoretical developments in structuralism and poststructuralism has a number of strong parallels with the position of the director in film theory. Essentially, both author and director go through a similar process of authoritative power followed by ontological uncertainty, with the concept of the cinematic “auteur” being put through a series of deconstructive socio-linguistic processes in the 1960s and 1970s, a period roughly concurrent with the major developments in literary poststructuralism.

⁹⁰ The film being discussed is evidently Laslo Benedek’s *The Wild One* (1953), which courted enormous controversy with its anti-authoritarian stance.

A brief account of the prevailing critical trends: The “politique des auteurs” in film criticism, a movement partially heralded by Alexandre Astruc’s 1948 essay “The Birth Of A New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo”, held that “the individual artist could express his or her thoughts, using the camera to write a world-view, a philosophy of life” (Cook 390), and this position is concurrent with the beginning of the concept of the cinematic “auteur”. However, in the late 1960s new critical writing on cinema (exemplified by the prevailing trend of criticism in the influential French journal *Cahiers Du Cinéma*) began to consider the figure of the auteur as not only emblematic of a hierarchical society, but also as only a component or regulator within interchangeable pre-existing structures, especially in an inherently collaborative medium. The critic Peter Wollen, in his 1972 study *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, claims that

There can be no doubt that the presence of a structure in the text can often be connected with the presence of a director on the set, but the situation in cinema, where the director’s primary task is often one of co-ordination and rationalisation, is very different from that in the other arts, where there is a much more direct relationship between artist and work. It is in this sense that it is possible to speak of a film auteur as an unconscious catalyst. (Wollen, quoted in Cook 454)

The relationship to literature at work in the above statement is evident. Wollen’s theory, an “auteur structuralism”, reminds the literary reader and critic of structuralist and poststructuralist debates over the position of the author in the text, and the idea of the director as an “unconscious catalyst” in particular is positively Barthesian.

In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace gives James Incandenza a notable response to one film theorist in particular, and Wallace’s choice of theorist reveals much about both Incandenza’s cinematic project and the formulation of Wallace’s own narrative. The theorist in question is André Bazin, a hugely influential critic and one of the founders of *Cahiers Du Cinéma*. There are two references to James Incandenza’s opinion of Bazin in the novel. The first occurs during a recollection of his childhood when “I was eating lunch and reading something dull by Bazin” (*Jest* 491). The

second is recollected by Joelle Van Dyne, who recalls that “Joelle and Dr. Incandenza found themselves in a small conversation about Bazin, a film-theorist Himself detested, making a tormented face at the name” (745). Bazin’s most noted work occupies an ambiguous and contradictory area within film theory, as it precedes the structuralist overhaul of film theory in the 1960s but is not wholly sympathetic to the theory of the auteur. Bazin argues in his study *Qu’est-ce que Le Cinéma* that directors fall generally into two categories, “directors who believe in the image and directors who believe in reality” (Bazin, quoted in Thompson 525). In the former camp Bazin places montage and technique experts such as Eisenstein and Hitchcock, while directors such as Orson Welles and Jean Renoir fall into the latter category. Bazin is sympathetic to the latter group, who he believes extrapolate on his own thesis that “looking at a photograph, we are looking directly at the object photographed” (Thompson 526) and that photography is a “process of mechanical reproduction from which man is excluded” (Bazin, quoted in Thompson 526). Bazin’s favoured directors were those who, he claimed, revealed “reality” as much as possible, removing their personalities from the process and essentially giving themselves the status of recorder. It is evident from this description that Bazin did not strongly sympathise with the auteur theorists, and also that, unsurprisingly, his positions on “reality” and the camera as a transparent mediator met with criticism during the rise of structuralist film theory.⁹¹

What exactly is it that James Incandenza detests so much about Bazin, particularly that he would find him “dull” even in childhood? And why does Wallace use Bazin in particular? Wallace’s choice of Bazin as an enemy for Incandenza foregrounds the contentious notion of “reality”, of the idea that a film can represent the world outside itself. Incandenza is clearly perturbed by any theorist who claims that film should represent reality, apparently placing himself firmly in the camp of “directors who believe in the image” and opposed to a critic who shows “disparagement of self-conscious directorial expression” (*Jest* 745). Many of the

⁹¹ Bazin’s work is not purely reducible to this strategy (he concedes that cinema “is also a language” [Bazin, quoted in Thompson 526]), but this is a prevailing trend in his criticism and the focus here is specifically upon this trend because it is for this element of his criticism that Wallace includes him in *Infinite Jest*.

narratives of Incandenza's films are densely self-referential and full of pastiche, calling attention to their own processes and references rather than having an interest in attempting transparently to reveal any attempt at depicting "reality" outside the film. However, when Incandenza apparently returns from the dead as a "wraith" at the end of the novel, he expresses regret that "Infinite Jest", a film he was making as a method of communicating with his son Hal, has failed. Incandenza's after-death confession actually reveals the filmmaker's hitherto unrevealed desire for a more open and communicative dialogue in his work, a desire that aligns itself with Wallace's own prevailing literary narrative strategy.⁹²

Therefore it should not be inferred that James Incandenza and Wallace occupy mutually exclusive programmes of narrative, and identifying the filmmaking of James Incandenza purely with the postmodern Barthian father figure proves a reductive analysis. In addition to providing a comic digest of developments in avant-garde cinema Incandenza's filmography, and Joelle Van Dyne's commentary upon it in the main body of narrative (739-741), also implicitly traces another trajectory, that of narrative developments in Wallace's own fiction. Scattered amongst the plethora of genre parodies (*Death in Scarsdale*, *Fun with Teeth*) and purely technical exercises (*Kinds of Light*) in Incandenza's filmography, two crucial elements are detectable. Firstly, an increasing number of the later films deal with problems in communication. Secondly, the form of Incandenza's work becomes progressively more implicitly autobiographical as his career progresses. Certain latter works from the filmography (for example *Valuable Coupon Has Been Removed*, *It Was A Great Marvel That He Was In The Father Without Knowing Him* and *As Of Yore*) are simply filmed versions of episodes from Incandenza's life as depicted by Wallace in the main narrative of the novel.⁹³ Joelle, in her analysis of Incandenza's work,

⁹² The analysis in Chapter 1 has outlined how Wallace's post-postmodern narrative methodology for *Infinite Jest* is configured towards being "open" (formal boundaries are intended to engender possibility rather than limit, and reader inference and participation are essential).

⁹³ *Valuable Coupon* refers to pages 491-503, *It Was A Great Marvel* refers to pages 27-31 and *As Of Yore* refers to pages 157-169. As an aside, the original title of the opening sequence as discussed in Chapter 1 (*It Was A Great Marvel...*) has been assigned by Wallace in the published novel to a filmed version of that event.

classifies it broadly as “technically gorgeous [...] But oddly hollow, empty [...] no emotional movement towards an audience [...] like a very smart person conversing with himself.” However, she goes on to recognise that “there had been flashes of something else [...] when he dropped the technical fireworks and tried to make characters move [...] and willingly took the risk of appearing amateurish” (740-1).

If all of these elements are considered together, Incandenza’s filmography also functions as a palimpsest narrative, an admission of Wallace’s own struggle with postmodern fiction and form. Wallace has been vocal about his difficult relationship with elements of his earlier works, most notably the two works that precede *Infinite Jest*’s composition, *The Broom of the System* and *Girl with Curious Hair*. While he does not disown the two works in question, he explains in interview his feelings that the narrative thesis is underdeveloped and immature:

The popularity of *Broom* mystifies me. I can’t say it’s not nice to have people like it, but there’s a lot of stuff in that novel I’d like to reel back in and do better. (Interview, McCaffery 136)

My idea in “Westward” was to [...] get the Armageddon-explosion, the goal metafiction’s always been about, I wanted to get it over with, and then out of the rubble reaffirm the idea of art being a living transaction between humans [...] God, even talking about it makes me want to puke. The *pretension*. Twenty-five-year-olds should be locked away and denied ink and paper. Everything I wanted to do came out in the story, but it came out as just what it was: crude and naive and pretentious. (Ibid 142)

These comments reveal Wallace’s concern with the evolution of his own literary form, and his difficulty in emerging from the traditions of postmodern metafiction.⁹⁴ However, it is interesting to consider that despite Wallace’s displeasure with elements of “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”, nevertheless “everything I wanted to do came out in the story” despite the form of the piece being

⁹⁴ Scarsdale, of Incandenza’s earlier and more parodic film *Death In Scarsdale*, is a location in the narrative of Wallace’s more playful debut novel *The Broom Of The System*.

“crude”. Furthermore, Wallace’s aim (“art being a living transaction between humans”) should also be considered as applicable to Incandenza’s film narratives. An increasing amount of Incandenza’s late films parallel Wallace’s narrative concerns preceding *Infinite Jest* by appearing to broach such issues of communication and a “living transaction.”

The importance of this reconfiguration of Incandenza’s apparently parodic postmodern work is ignored by the three unreliable fictional editors who have compiled the filmography. It is important to remember that, as part of Wallace’s narrative structure of multiple and often unreliable narrators, there is not necessarily any guarantee that these critics have correctly interpreted Incandenza’s sentiments in his later work. This means that an unwary reader can be misled, and the implicit links drawn by Wallace between Incandenza’s films and his own narrative strategies can be missed. Indeed, the positions of these critics correlate with Wallace’s concern in “E Unibus Pluram” about the cultural disarmament of the more radical elements of postmodernism through its co-opting by structures of advertising and capital, the critics being sceptical of the postmodern technique of Incandenza’s films because they are products of a culture in which those initially radical techniques have been trivialised. To take just one example, their entry for the sentimental *Wave Bye-Bye To The Bureaucrat* suggests that the film is a “possible parody/homage to B.S. public-service-announcement” (*Jest* 990) without taking into account the possibility that Incandenza could be attempting to make a sincere filmic statement about communication, a possibility given credence by the fact that it is Mario’s favourite of his father’s films precisely for its “unhip earnestness”, and, just as importantly, that the outwardly unaffected Hal “secretly likes it” (689). Perhaps the most substantial clue to the unreliability of the compilers of the filmography is the attribution of critical quotes from those who have seen “*Infinite Jest*”, despite the fact that the addictive nature of the film renders people critically, and possibly physically, inarticulate. The fact that one of the reviews is anonymous (993) does not help their case.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ As Incandenza has spent much of his career deliberately alienating precisely these critics, the possibility of a personal agenda against Incandenza becomes a possibility. The above quoted extract from the *Wave Bye-Bye* entry footnotes an article titled “Has James O. Incandenza Ever Even Once

The position of the implicitly autobiographical films is also a matter of critical importance. The autobiographical events are disguised and dramatised so that only those familiar with Incandenza's life (which includes the novel's readers but crucially not the critics who compiled the filmography) can detect the traces of real-life events and traumas. If this is considered alongside Wallace's admission that *The Broom Of The System* is "a coded autobio that's also a funny little post-structural gag" (Interview, McCaffery 142), the reader can begin to comprehend how Wallace is not merely positioning Incandenza as a postmodern ancestor but as part of his own literary persona, with Incandenza's filmic narratives mirroring some of Wallace's own forms. At the time of the novel's publication in 1996, both Incandenza's and Wallace's most recent works are titled *Infinite Jest*. *Infinite Jest* (the novel) acts in a similar manner to "Infinite Jest" (the film); an endpoint of experimentation with previous narrative forms and the first full stage in a reconfigurative attempt at a new more communicative programme from the elements of that narrative.⁹⁶ Incandenza's postmodern "Infinite Jest" ultimately fails, but Wallace's post-postmodern *Infinite Jest*, in film parlance, "remakes" Incandenza's film by incorporating that failure into itself, building upon the past narratives (both Wallace's and Incandenza's) to create a new, more open and communicative model.

Brief Interviews with *Hideous Men* and *Oblivion*: A Cinematic Development

In "E Unibus Pluram" Wallace suggests that "the next real literary rebels in this country might well [...] dare somehow to back away from ironic watching [...] have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles" (*Supposedly* 81). In an extract from another essay in the same collection, "David Lynch Keeps His Head", Wallace recalls an incident when he attended a screening of Lynch's 1986 film *Blue Velvet* and underwent an "epiphanic" experience. His reference to this incident leads to a more general discussion of how Lynch's films

Produced One Genuinely Original Or Unappropriated Or Nonderivative Thing?" (*Jest* 990). The reader does not have to work hard to infer the critic's likely answer.

⁹⁶ Obviously "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" makes overtures towards this change in narrative, but that story is more an enacting of Wallace's intention than a full realisation of it, as Wallace himself implies in the interview extract above.

attain their power, and contains a surprisingly candid admission of the extent of Lynch's influence on Wallace's literary and narrative strategies, an admission that has yet to attract the critical attention it deserves:

(Lynch's) heavy Freudian riffs are powerful instead of ridiculous because they're deployed Expressionistically, which among other things means they're deployed in an old-fashioned, pre-postmodern way, i.e. nakedly, *sincerely*, without postmodernism's abstraction or irony [...] This was what was epiphanic for us about *Blue Velvet* in grad school, when we saw it: the movie helped us realise that first rate-experimentalism was a way not to 'transcend' or 'rebel against' the truth but actually to honour it (*Supposedly* 198, 201, italics original)

When considered in the context of the above comments on the future of US fiction from "E Unibus Pluram", the critical positions are essentially paraphrasings of the same sentiment, a sentiment that would appear, in Wallace's phrasing, to underpin the explosion of "the delusion that cynicism and naïveté are mutually exclusive" that is fundamental to the narrative of *Infinite Jest*. However, while as illustrated above any Lynchian influence is enacted within the narrative of *Infinite Jest* in an implicitly programmatic fashion (configured largely as an agreement over the approach to irony), the influence of Lynch on Wallace's later fiction, in particular *Oblivion*, is much more overt.

Wallace's appropriation of Lynch as a "pre-postmodern" artist is potentially controversial, as Lynch's work is often understandably described with recourse to the tenets of postmodernism. Brian Jarvis, in an arresting image, refers to the treatment of history within Lynch's *Blue Velvet* as a "junkyard of materials for casual appropriation" (Jarvis 176) and also makes reference to Lynch's apparently postmodern employment of brands and advertisement (the prominent references to Pabst Blue Ribbon and Heineken in *Blue Velvet* being a case in point). Furthermore, sly metafictional touches in Lynch's work, particularly the show-within-a-show *Invitation to Love* in the TV series *Twin Peaks*, also suggest a characteristically postmodern approach. However it will be suggested here that the specific employment of the motif of the dream in Lynch's cinema is programmatic upon a

strategy within Wallace's work whereby the cinematic and the oneiric interact to dramatise and interrogate the postmodern.

On the surface, Lynch and Wallace's artistic methodologies are very different. Lynch, a proponent of transcendental meditation, has talked often about the instinctive, un-self conscious nature of his composition. Take, for example, this extract from an interview about *Lost Highway*, the subject of Wallace's Lynch essay:

You've gotta really fall in deep to go to this place where you catch ideas [...] one thing leads to another and you forget where you started. You forget that you're even thinking for a while. You're lost, and if you suddenly drop through a trapdoor into the big idea bank, then you've got a thing happening (Rodley 222)

Contrast this almost comically nebulous description, with its abundance of non-specific language, with Wallace's self-conscious response to Charlie Rose when asked about his writing process:

Wallace: I will -- if past -- if past experience holds true, I will probably write an hour a day and spend eight hours a day biting my knuckle and worrying about not writing.

Rose: Worrying about not writing?

Wallace: Yeah.

Rose: Not worrying about what to write.

Wallace: Right. Yeah. Worrying about not writing. (Interview, Charlie Rose 1997)

Despite these compositional differences, there is evidence to suggest that there has been some formal influence in terms of Lynch's narrative motifs, most notably in the employment of the imagery of dreams. Lynch's use of dream in his film work is extensive. His debut feature *Eraserhead* is subtitled "A Dream of Dark and Troubling Things" (Biodrowski), and every one of his films has employed dreams or dream sequences as a narrative motif. *Blue Velvet*, which had such an influence on

Wallace, explicitly connects the dream to coming of age and the end of adolescence, culminating in a sequence in which the protagonist Jeffrey Beaumont is forced to listen to a gangster in feminised make-up sing Roy Orbison's song "In Dreams". In Lynch's 1992 film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, a film released at the same time that Wallace was composing *Infinite Jest*, a character exclaims in horror in a key scene that "We live inside a dream". Moreover, in an important narrative development in his later Hollywood-based works *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* Lynch explicitly connects the dream to film, with the cinematic world conflated explicitly with the oneiric. For example, the failed actress protagonist of *Mulholland Drive* experiences an extended delusional dream which plays out the murder of her partner (a murder she sanctioned) as a noir-style Hollywood mystery in which she stars, waking to a horrified realisation of her actions before the traditional happy ending can be enacted. To return to Wallace's rebuttal of Lynch as postmodernist, the model in Lynch's post-1997 work by which the film is essentially conflated with the dream may potentially offer a response to criticisms of postmodern "Oedipal overdetermination" (Jarvis 181) in Lynch's earlier work. By providing an explicit separate zone (the dream-film) in which unconscious Freudian material is generated and placing this against the waking world, Lynch can move away from the earlier depthless model in which an overdetermination of psychoanalytical possibilities in the "real world" can understandably lead to a "parody of significance" (Ibid).

While Lynch generally refrains from overanalysing the meaning of his work in interview it is evident that one use of the dream image across his canon is to represent the transition between psychological thresholds. Often Lynch's dreamers are on the threshold of a new life and in a state of denial (*Eraserhead*'s Henry suffers hallucinations after he becomes a parent) or obsession (*Blue Velvet*'s adolescent Jeffrey Beaumont becomes fixated upon the hyper-sexualised Dorothy Valens at the expense of his chaste relationship with a virginal schoolfriend) and the dreams experienced by these characters begin to infect their waking lives, leaving them in a "fugue-state" between two realities.

Both Wallace and Lynch use the term "fugue" to describe the behaviour of characters in their work. The term originates in music where it describes a form of imitative counterpoint, but it has since been employed to describe a dissociative

psychological state, a state described in an important phrasing by Chris Rodley as “a form of amnesia which is a flight from reality” (Rodley 239). The term was explicitly used by Lynch in the publicity for *Lost Highway*, where the lead character Fred Madison undergoes a delusional “psychogenic fugue” (Ibid) after murdering his wife which changes his personality completely. In a key passage in *Infinite Jest* Wallace describes an ill ETA student in a semi-dreaming state:

It's one of those unpleasant opioid feverish half-sleep states, more a fugue-state than a sleep-state, less a floating than like being cast adrift on rough seas, tossed mightily in and out of this half-sleep where your mind's still working and you can ask yourself whether you're asleep even as you dream (*Jest* 61)

The employment of the dream and the “fugue-state” here by Wallace, in tandem with the heavy emphasis throughout the novel placed on dreams and nightmares experienced by the students at ETA (“Expect some rough dreams. They come with the territory” [174]) thematically complements the biological and psychological thresholds being experienced and transgressed by the students in their lives at the academy. Wallace also depicts an adolescent as being in a fugue-state with a reference to drug use (“opioid”), which conflates this condition with both the widespread drug abuse at Enfield Tennis Academy and the recovery programme at the nearby Ennet House.

The idea that “you can ask yourself whether you’re asleep even as you dream” also explicitly connects the dream to self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, and it is in Wallace’s stories “Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders (XI)” from 1999’s *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men* and “The Soul is Not a Smithy” and “Oblivion” from 2004’s *Oblivion*, where this aspect of Lynch’s cinema (in particular his post-1997 work) displays a remarkable influence in the development of Wallace’s fictional style. The short piece “Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders (XI)” represents an early and less developed movement towards the conflation of these tropes without the more explicitly cinematic references that develop later in *Oblivion*. The protagonist relates a dream in which they suddenly realise that they are blind, a realisation that brings with it a terrible sadness and a compulsive fit of crying. They awake and discover that “I was

dreaming and I'm awake and not really blind", spending the following day in a state of hyper-visual awareness of "how fragile it all is, the human eye mechanism and the ability to see" (*Brief* 29). In this story, the trope of waking from the dream carries with it both a visual motif (the ability to see/watch) and an increased sense of engagement and empathy. The emotionally draining day subsequently experienced by the protagonist is representative of the effort required to empathise so directly with others. Wallace here conflates a visual revelation with the trope of waking from a dream and the process of empathising with the experience of others. While the visual element of the story lacks an explicitly cinematic element here, the tropes of visualisation and of waking from a dream are developed much more explicitly within the narrative of "The Soul is Not a Smithy", a story with much stronger invocations of the cinematic.

In "The Soul is Not a Smithy", a young boy with an unspecified psychological condition daydreams a sequential narrative in wire mesh panels in a classroom window while his substitute teacher suffers a psychotic mental breakdown in class, his peripheral awareness of the teacher's frightening behaviour subsequently darkening the tone of his window-mesh story to one of terror and mutilation. In the following passage the narrator's visualised narrative displays some stray dogs being attacked by rats and insects in a sewage pipe:

The tableau, complete with the unfortunate piebald dog's mouth open in agony and a rat or mutated roach abdomen protruding from his eyesocket as the predator's anterior half consumed his eye and inner brain, was so traumatic that this narrative line was immediately stopped and replaced with a neutral view of the pipe's exterior [...] the lone, nightmarish panel appeared in the window as just a momentary peripheral snapshot or flash of a horrifying scene, much the way such single, horrible flashes often appear in bad dreams [...] its very instantaneousness in the dream meant that your mind had to keep subconsciously returning to it in order to work it out or incorporate it (*Oblivion* 94)

The horrifying images in the window panels (images conflated explicitly with dreaming) are an attempt by the narrator's brain to warn him of the peripheral and

very real danger posed in the classroom at that moment. The narrator's response to the horrifying image in the narrative is to censor it, to place a barrier (the wall of the pipe) between his eye and the dying animal. The narrator's continued investment in the fantasy, even as it moves from an entertaining diversion to a horror show, puts him in physical danger in reality. The traumatic images eventually bounce the narrator's consciousness out of the orderly sequence of imagined mesh panels and back into the reality of the classroom, the better to make him aware of the real, physical danger presented by his psychotic teacher.

It is interesting to note, considering the aforementioned conflation by Lynch of the film with the dream, how the narrative device employed in "The Soul is Not a Smithy" to censor the image of the dying dog equates the control of the dream with a "cutaway", a cinematic technique often employed as both a way of leaving the more horrific details of a scene to the viewer's imagination and also as a segue between two sequences. This cinematic allusion is almost immediately reinforced by the narrator's recounting of a time later in his life when he and his wife effectively performed the same action by leaving a screening of *The Exorcist* after witnessing a particularly gruesome scene of mutilation. Moreover, the construction of a visual narrative here through movement of a series of square images is implicitly representative of the viewing of a strip of celluloid.

In "Oblivion" a narrator named Randall discusses, in a lengthy monologue, how sleep problems are affecting his marriage but as his narration continues we become aware that some great unspoken trauma lies beneath the marital strife, the implication being that Randall may be abusing his stepdaughter. In one of the most extraordinary narrative shifts in all of Wallace's work, the final lines of the story, apparently spoken by a woman emerging from sleep, suggests that the entire monologue has been dreamt by an unknown *female* narrator, perhaps Randall's wife or even the stepdaughter herself. The fragility of the dream state manifests itself throughout the story through a process of implicit suggestion and innuendo and an italicised palimpsest narrative that keeps breaking into the main text. Randall's delusional narrative is peppered with typographically distancing devices such as inverted commas, parentheses and multiple sentence clauses that serve continually to distance the reader from the narrator's real feelings and agenda, suggesting that information is being suppressed or defended:

It was, I was, of course, aware, perhaps petty to be so fixated on vindication or ‘proof’, but, by this point of conflict, I was often nearly ‘not’ or ‘beside’ myself with frustration, choler or anger or fatigue (202)

The eventual discovery that the narrative has been a dream means that the reader retrospectively views everything Randall says as a process of digression and fabrication with the express intention of keeping the truth secret. Later in the narrative, a series of bracketed italicised words begin to appear apparently at random within Randall’s monologue:

[...] Wednesday nights during which the actual filmed sleep ‘experiments’ had been conducted; and this youth and the (“*only hurt a tiny*”) Somnologist conferred together [...] utilising a sheet of coded (“*Please!*”) Somnological data and the hand-held remote (234-5)

These intrusive words and their emotional intensity can initially be interpreted by the reader as representative of the traumatic guilt of Randall’s abuse of his stepdaughter emerging into the main narrative, but once the final revelation emerges that the whole story has been a dream, it is equally possible to see the italicised words as the pleas of the disturbed dreamer’s companion breaking through the rapidly thinning carapace of sleep. Both of these interpretations contribute to the understanding, as in “The Soul is Not a Smithy”, that the delusional dream is unsustainable, and will eventually break down.

While the narrative of “Oblivion” contains less explicit references to the cinematic than “The Soul is Not a Smithy”, the narratives of both stories bear striking resemblance to Lynch’s scenarios for 1997’s *Lost Highway* and 2001’s *Mulholland Drive*. In both films, a protagonist attempts to evade trauma by escaping into a fantastical world that cannot fully sustain the delusion and is penetrated by the external trauma before breaking down. In the strongest narrative connection between Lynch’s work and the *Oblivion* stories, the image of a ringing telephone is employed to suggest an imposition from the waking world forcing its way into the dream or fantasy state. A ringing payphone recurs in Randall’s monologue a number of times,

most incongruously at the climax of the narrative when the real female narrator is on the verge of waking from her dream and terminating the narrative of the story. Similarly in *Mulholland Drive*, the image of a ringing telephone by a red lamp appears within the dream narrative in the first half of the film. When a character awakes, revealing the dream status of the preceding narrative, Lynch's camera reveals that the same phone and lamp are on her bedside table, the implication being that the imposition of a noise in the waking world has been intruding and threatening the status of the dream. A similar device in *Lost Highway* involves the same jazz music played by the protagonist Fred Madison before he kills his wife suddenly blasting from a radio during his later psychological escape into a post-murder fantasy "fugue" persona, Pete Dayton.

This Lynchian employment of the mediation between the daydream and interaction with the world outside the dream represents a formal development in the dramatisation of Wallace's interrogation of postmodern self-reflexivity. The dream or daydream is connected in *Oblivion* specifically with denial or immaturity (the narrator of "The Soul is Not a Smithy" informs us that his problems with interpretation of data later vanished virtually overnight around his tenth birthday) and is always presented as something unsustainable, a device that unsuccessfully distances the individual from confronting the reality of their situation. The dreamer's final communication with the world outside themselves, redemptive or otherwise, is ultimately revealed to have been generated and conducted entirely within the self. To wake, as the dreaming individual must necessarily do, is to break that self-generated world, this position suggesting another strategy by which the possibility for the reconfiguration of a closed system is actually contained within that system. The implicit influence of Lynch's "naked" and "sincere" tropes in *Infinite Jest* have developed into a formal adoption of *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*'s cinematic dream motifs as a representation of the isolated, self-conscious "closed" postmodern individual in *Oblivion*.

Wallace's Cinematic Techniques

Wallace has addressed the correlation between literature, cinema and postmodernism through the character of James Incandenza, and also revealed the substantial influence of the methodology of a number of filmmakers on the form of

his narratives. However, in *Infinite Jest* Wallace also applies a number of specifically formal and theoretical cinematic techniques to literature. In *The Cinema Book*, Pam Cook discusses the influential critic David Bordwell's definition of "art cinema" as follows:

In art cinema, then, the informed, educated audience looks for the marks of authorship to make sense of the film, rather than to the rambling story or the characters, who are often aimless victims rather than controlling agents. Audience identification shifts between characters and author: the audience is often given privileged information over the characters (as with the "flash-forward" device), which strengthens identification with the author [...] this controlling authorial discourse provides the final guarantee of "truth" for the audience [...] This textual organisation differs from that of the "classic realist text", which follows the logic of cause and effect, features goal-oriented characters and strives for resolution [...] However, the dominance of authorial discourse is by no means secure in art cinema: Bordwell sees the art film in terms of a shifting, uneasy relationship between the discourses of narrative, character and author. In this way, art cinema maintains hesitation and ambiguity rather than the resolution of problems (Cook 389)

While it would be overly speculative to suggest that Wallace patterned his novel directly after Bordwell's model of art cinema, the model and description (which appears in a book that Wallace is known to have read thoroughly) are included because of the remarkable confluence of Bordwell's definitions of the art film and Wallace's formal narrative template for *Infinite Jest*, and the usefulness of this to a discussion of how Wallace's narrative in the novel employs formal techniques that are aware of cinematic conventions. Bordwell's "hesitation and ambiguity" of form mirrors Wallace's absenting of convergence of narrative, as well as the non-chronological order of the novel's chapters. Moreover, there is a pleasingly complementary relationship between both Bordwell and Wallace's unease over the author's position. *Infinite Jest* is one of only two of Wallace's works (fiction or non-fiction) in which Wallace does not make a direct appearance under his own name in

the published text (*The Broom Of The System* is the other)⁹⁷ and Wallace's concerns about authorial intervention and postmodern metafiction that immediately precede *Infinite Jest* ("E Unibus Pluram" and "Westward The Course of Empire Takes Its Way" in particular) relate his ambivalence about the author's position in the text.⁹⁸

It is important not to forget that Wallace's novel is partially named after James Incandenza's film (as argued above, the novel constitutes a post-postmodern "remaking" of Incandenza's film). Incandenza's "Infinite Jest" is an art film and Wallace's novel, naming itself after an art film, necessarily posits the inheritance of some of those conventions. Indeed, there is little about the narrative of Wallace's novel (a narrative that, like Bordwell's, foregrounds "hesitation and ambiguity" rather than, in Wallace's words, "distinct problems and univocal solutions" [Interview, McCaffery 136]) that adheres to the convention of either cinematic or literary "blockbusters" such as the works of James Cameron or Dan Brown.

This analysis of Wallace's formal cinematic technique in *Infinite Jest*, and the relationship of those techniques to Wallace's interrogation of postmodernism, covers three specific areas. The first relates to the formal "shape" of narratives (like those outlined by Bordwell above), with additional reference to the cinematic narrative theories of Bazin. The second area of discussion relates to Wallace's employment of specific technical visualising techniques employed by filmmakers, namely lenses and focus. The third and final area relates to the relationship between the filmmaker and audience and incorporates discussion of the audience in *Infinite Jest*.

i. Cinematic Narrative "Shape"

When Bordwell states that art cinema "maintains hesitation and ambiguity rather than the resolution of problems" it reminds the reader of Wallace's formal ambiguity in terms of the resolution or confluence of narrative lines, a formal schema with a chaotic "shape" that, as argued in Chapter 1, is aligned with elliptical

⁹⁷ It has been explained in Chapter 1 how Wallace removed several explicitly metafictional elements from the narrative of *Infinite Jest*.

⁹⁸ Another reason for reproducing Bordwell's descriptions at length is to draw attention to the point at which the models diverge. This divergence lies in the author's relationship to his or her audience, which will be discussed below.

non-Euclidean geometry that dramatises an “open system”. A number of Incandenza’s films are referred to as “anti-confluent” (*Jest* 985). Anti-confluentism, also known as “Digital Parallelism” and “Cinema Of Chaotic Stasis”, is defined as “a stubborn and possibly intentionally irritating refusal of different narrative lines to merge into any kind of meaningful confluence” (996). Not only does Wallace’s use of the nickname “Digital Parallelism” add credence to the geometric narrative modelling argument advanced in Chapter 1, but the notion of “Chaotic Stasis” is also important to a discussion of Wallace’s narrative form. Greg Carlisle, in his article “Wallace’s Infinite Fiction”, posits a model for the structure of Wallace’s narrative in *Infinite Jest*:

Wallace’s narratives are often more analogous to a mathematical function the numerical values of which become large without bound (tend to infinity) as the independent variable of the function gets closer and closer to a particular value [...] when Wallace’s narratives approach a crisis or climax, the tension becomes large without bound and does not resolve. (Carlisle, “Infinite” 33)

While Wallace’s employment of unresolved and nonconverging narrative threads has been documented in this study already, Carlisle’s model and the related mention of chaotic stasis is included here because there is a striking similarity between the “infinite” narrative model outlined by Carlisle and a model of cinematic narrative employed by Andre Bazin, the importance of whose presence in Wallace’s novel has been outlined in detail above. In *The Cinema Book* John Thompson outlines “one of Bazin’s favourite images for the relation between film and reality: an asymptote, a curve that gradually approaches a straight line but that meets it only at infinity” (Thompson 526). As stated above, it is reductive to characterise Bazin as simply a film critic who unquestioningly believes that a film can be “reality”, and indeed this asymptote is an example of how Bazin understands how a film and reality are not confluent. The cinematic asymptote model is used by Bazin, Wallace and James Incandenza, whose deliberate avoidance of narrative confluence is either unwittingly influenced by his enemy Bazin, or is performing an ultimately unsuccessful service to realism that the hostile compilers of his filmography have failed to comprehend or ignore. For Wallace the asymptote model is a deliberate narrative strategy of the

removal of concluding events, one that necessitates the reader's participation, as well as an invocation of the chaotic, infinite possibility of the narrative. Just as Wallace "remakes" Incandenza's "Infinite Jest" as his own novel and thus corrects the problematic postmodern elements of that film, he recontextualises Incandenza's employment of the asymptote model to invite communication and inference from the reader.

ii. Focus and Lenses

Throughout *Infinite Jest* Wallace also uses a particular formal literary gesture with a correspondence to a certain cinematic focal technique. "Deep focus" is a process of cinematography whereby, rather than the elements in the foreground being in focus while the background is out of focus, all elements in the frame are in focus at the same time. Perhaps the most famous example of deep focus is the work undertaken by Gregg Toland and Orson Welles on Welles' *Citizen Kane* in 1941.⁹⁹ Andre Bazin prized the deep focus in *Citizen Kane* as being an enabling device for a director to display "reality" more faithfully (Thompson 526).¹⁰⁰ James Incandenza's film work is associated with a particular type of cinematic deep focus, with a reference made to "the chiaroscuro lamping and custom-lens effects for which Incandenza's distinctive deep focus was known" (*Jest* 65).¹⁰¹ Not only is Incandenza's work associated with the visual process of deep focus, but during a conversation between Incandenza's "wraith" and Don Gately, Incandenza outlines a similar cinematic technique employing sound. The wraith outlines his rejection of

⁹⁹ Probably the most famous use of deep focus in *Citizen Kane* is the sequence in which the camera tracks backwards from the back window of Kane's childhood home to a room at the front of the house, while keeping in focus the image of the young Kane playing in the snow through the back window.

¹⁰⁰ Cinematographer Gregg Toland confirmed that this was indeed one of his aims, saying that he hoped "the audience would feel it was looking at reality, rather than merely at a movie" (Allen & Kuhn 149).

¹⁰¹ An Italian term that literally translates as "light-dark", usually employed to describe severe tonal contrasts in images. Certain cinematic effects, for example the lighting in "Noir" films with their sharp contrasts between light and dark, could accurately be described as chiaroscuro. The term is also employed by Danielewski in *House of Leaves* (see Chapter 5).

the process whereby characters in the background of a scene silently mouth dialogue to give the impression of speech, allowing the audience to hear the dialogue between protagonists in the foreground:

[...] he goddamn bloody well made sure that either the whole entertainment was silent or else if it wasn't silent that you could bloody well hear every single performer's voice, no matter how far out on the cinematographic or narrative periphery they were [...] it wasn't just the crafted imitation of aural chaos: it was real life's real egalitarian babble of figurantless crowds, of the animate world's real agora, the babble of crowds every member of which was the central and articulate protagonist of his own entertainment. (*Jest* 835-6)

This technique is a kind of aural variant on deep focus (the available sound from all aspects of the scene being audible). Tom LeClair has suggested that the process is intended to give voice to “the mute, background characters of most literary fiction” (LeClair, “Prodigious” 32), though given Wallace’s configuration of an open system of communication (outlined in Chapter 1) the process can also implicitly represent an early and problematic attempt by Incandenza at an open and communicative conversation taking place within a narrative frame. Wallace, in his literary variation on Incandenza’s technique, corrects the misguided attempt at creating a self-centred narrative where “every member [...] was the central and articulate protagonist of his own entertainment” in favour of a narrative which prizes the open communication *between* protagonists.

To elucidate this process, Wallace’s literary “deep focus” can often, when regarded as isolated fragments, appear to adhere to the same self-absorbed principles as Incandenza’s aural technique outlined above. Consider for example Ken Erdedy’s tormented ten-page thought process on whether his marijuana will arrive [*Jest* 17-27]) or Hal’s self-absorbed microscopic description of the fittings and objects in a particular room. The following extract from the latter episode is only a small part of an exhaustive extended description that approaches five pages of text:

The following things in the room were blue. The blue checks in the blue-and-black-checked shag carpet. Two of the room's six institutional-plush chairs,

whose legs were steel tubes bent into big ellipses, which wobbled, so that while the chairs couldn't really be rocked in they could be sort of bobbed in, which Michael Pemulis was doing absently as he waited and scanned a printout of Eschaton's highly technical core ESCHAX directory, i.e. bobbing in his chair [...] Each chair had a 105-watt reading lamp attached to the back on a flexible metal stalk that let the reading lamp curve out from behind and shine right down on whatever magazine the waiting person was looking at [...] the magazines (some of whose covers involved the color blue) tended to stay unread, and were fanned neatly out on a low ceramic coffeetable. The carpet was a product of something called Antron. Hal could see streaks of lividity where somebody'd vacuumed against the grain. Though the magazines' coffeetable was nonblue — a wet-nail-polish red with E.T.A. in a kind of gray escutcheon — two of the unsettlingly attached lamps that kept its magazines unread and neatly fanned were blue, although the two blue lamps were not the lamps attached to the two blue chairs (*Jest* 508-9)

These isolated narratives use intense levels of descriptive “deep focus” to locate Erdedy and Hal as “the central and articulate protagonist of his own entertainment”, but both characters are deeply unhappy and self-absorbed. However, by placing these inward-bound “closed” narratives within a broader “open” narrative template Wallace reconfigures the closed systems of these narratives into elements of the open system of the novel, which crucially requires hermeneutic completion on behalf of the reader. Wallace’s characters, therefore, become located in relation to others through a reading of the text via a literary variation on a cinematic technique.

Incandenza’s problematic directorial technique is further dramatised through his use of another specific type of lens. There is a particular emphasis on Incandenza’s use of lenses throughout the novel, and how central lenses are to his cinematic vision.¹⁰² Joelle mentions that “He paid more attention to the lenses and

¹⁰² When one considers that the novel is largely mediated through the eyes of a series of idiosyncratic narrators there is also (given the focus on Incandenza’s relationship with lenses throughout the novel) an implicit narrative conflation of individual perspectives with lenses. Mario, the most empathetic character in the novel, always has access to a box full of different lenses. Fackelmann’s unmerciful torturer has opaque metal lenses in his glasses. There is also a double entendre running throughout the

lights than to the camera [...] Lenses Jim said were what he had to bring to the whole enterprise. Of filmmaking. Of himself. He made all his own" (*Jest* 939) and the key to the addictive nature of "Infinite Jest" is a particular type of lens that reproduces an infant's visual field. This lens is referred to by Joelle as "astigmatic", which suggests a radical *lack* of focus. The addictive nature of the astigmatic lens in Incandenza's "Infinite Jest" is implicitly connected to an infantile wish to withdraw from "open" communication with the world at large and into the "closed" infantile self. Wallace's inherently communicative technique of literary deep focus in his *Infinite Jest* necessarily denies the reader the escapist and solipsistic pleasure of blurred, astigmatic vision in an attempt to fight the nature of infantile pleasure and addiction.¹⁰³

Incandenza's wraith explains that "Infinite Jest", a work which was intended to please his son Hal ("a magically entertaining toy to dangle at the infant still somewhere alive in the boy" [839]), ultimately failed (it is the only work that Incandenza personally declares a failure in the novel).¹⁰⁴ In Wallace's novel, his "remaking" of Incandenza's "Infinite Jest", he amplifies his own communicative formal variation on Incandenza's deep focus technique across the narrative and corrects Incandenza's failed "lens", denying the reader any "astigmatic" or infantile focus, asking instead the reader to follow the same path of inference and communication as the sober twelve-stepper Don Gately rather than the unfocused indulgence of the addict. The conflation of cinematic technique and literary narrative form are therefore essential to Wallace's project, and his post-postmodern correction and reconfiguration of the closed system from within.

iii. Audiences and Inference

A number of James Incandenza's films (including *The Joke*, *The Medusa Vs. The Odalisque* and *Cage III: Free Show*) apparently feature audiences as bemused

novel in relation to Incandenza's affiliation with "optics" that implies the director's concurrent alcoholism.

¹⁰³ It is surely no coincidence that one of the most indulgent and unreconstructed addicts in the novel carries the innuendo-heavy name Randy Lenz.

¹⁰⁴ "A Failed Entertainment" was the novel's original title (Moore, "First Draft").

victims or as the butt of an elaborate practical joke. In the latter two films fictional audiences undergo horrible transformations (variously into stones, gems and giant eyeballs) in reaction to what they are seeing performed in front of them, while *The Joke* consists of live footage of the unsuspecting audience who are actually watching the film itself, to their eventual annoyance (it always ends when the last audience member leaves).¹⁰⁵ Wallace's insistence upon the reader's inference in constructing the order of the narrative of *Infinite Jest* is explored implicitly through Incandenza's relationship with his audience and also relates to existing critical ideas about the spectator in film theory outlined in *The Cinema Book*. Wallace engages with the configuration of the audience in order to articulate the importance of paying attention, and the manner of the audience's engagement with the information being presented to them.

At the heart of this argument is the image of the spectator watching the screen, the attendant problems relating to the direction of the flow of information between image and eye and Wallace's employment of the viewer as an analogue for the reader. In a traditional cinema set-up, a spectator sits and watches a one-way flow of information from the screen. The viewer is not "giving" information to the screen in the same manner but each audience member is processing the information to a certain idiosyncratic degree. The so-called "apparatus" theory of cinematic spectatorship operates along similar guidelines to the Althusserian concept of interpellation. Pamela Robertson Wojcik explains:

Due to the specific way the cinema is arranged spatially, perceptually and socially (the darkness of the cinema, the spectator's seeming isolation, the placement of the projector behind the spectator's head, and the framing and structure of the film's image) [...] the spectator imagines himself or herself as a transcendent meaning-making subject (mobile rather than immobile, active rather than passive, creating rather than absorbing meaning). The cinema, according to apparatus theory, works to acculturate and interpellate viewers to

¹⁰⁵ Wallace is still playing with this conceit during the composition of *The Pale King*, in which a character outlines their desire to write a play that begins as soon as the last audience member has walked out in boredom at the lack of activity on stage (*Pale* 106).

structures of fantasy, dream and pleasure that are aligned with dominant ideology. (Wojcik 538-9)

While it would be reductive to class Wallace as a hard-line Althusserian (his recurrent voicing of the constitutive importance of the reader in the creation of narrative would suggest an opposition to the idea of a completely interpellated subject), *Infinite Jest*'s central metaphorical image is that of a spectator too paralytically entertained by a screen to be able to do anything else, with the prevailing postmodern culture of O.N.A.N., a "confusion of permissions" (*Jest* 320), making individual comfort and pleasure easily available. Moreover, the image of the delusional audience member in cinematic apparatus theory, imagining themselves as a "transcendent meaning-making subject", appeals to both Wallace's depiction of the encaged solipsist in the novel and Incandenza's above methodology of aural "deep focus".¹⁰⁶ Transfer the spectator from the cinema to a Teleputer, or indeed a classroom, and the conflation between the viewer in apparatus theory and Wallace's characters becomes evident. The self-absorbed narrator in "The Soul is Not a Smithy" is temporarily convinced that the meaning of the daydream narrative in the window mesh panels is entirely self-generated, when in fact the ever darkening tone is in fact being influenced by another authority (the psychotic teacher) outside himself, the danger coming from his initial failure to receive communication from outside of his own mind.

Moreover, the isolation of the interpellated subject in apparatus theory is compounded through their lack of understanding that they are a constituent part of an overarching narrative, instead incorrectly imagining themselves as a "transcendent meaning-making subject". Rather than a matter of the thing being watched as interpellating cultural apparatus, the issue for Wallace is *how* one watches (and by extension, reads). Wallace implicitly dramatises this question in *Infinite Jest* when he details how Quebecois separatists "dragged huge standing mirrors across US Interstate 87 [...] Naively empiricist north-bound U.S. motorists [...] would see impending headlights and believe some like suicidal idiot or Canadian had transversed the median and was coming right for them" (311). While

¹⁰⁶ Note also the use of "dream" in apparatus theory in the light of the analysis of Lynch's influence.

“empiricist” drivers swerve to their deaths at the last minute, a valium addict “saw the sudden impending headlights in her northbound lane as Grace” (312), driving straight ahead, shattering the mirror and surviving (and saving the lives of others by alerting them to the plot).¹⁰⁷ Those drivers who do not see themselves as an active and constitutive component of the image perish, while those who attempt to physically respond survive (the visual scenario of an individual responding to an enormous planar screen is also implicitly cinematic). Survival is also ensured for the narrator of “The Soul is Not a Smithy” at the point at which he realises that his empiricist experience of the horrific narrative in the window mesh panels is actually a subconscious inducement to pay attention to the life-threatening situation unfolding outside of his consciousness.

In a calculably similar manner, a simple stock-taking of the individual narrative elements of *Infinite Jest* will not assist a reader in the ultimate formulation of the whole. The narrative of *Infinite Jest* relies upon a series of absences of information, from which the reader must proceed through a process of inference. It is prudent to recall Wallace’s assertion about the reader that “this process is a relationship between the writer’s consciousness and her own, and that in order for it to be anything like a full human relationship, she’s going to have to put in her share of the linguistic work” (Interview, McCaffery 138). In the postmodern culturescape of entertainment and pleasure depicted within *Infinite Jest* it is vital that the spectator has the capability of an interaction with the image that results in a work that is ultimately constituent of information from both viewer and the image being viewed. The danger in the novel ultimately comes from a film (“Infinite Jest”) that asks *nothing* of its viewer other than to absorb sensory data empirically, that creates a horrifying solipsistic extrapolation of the interpellated cinematic subject. The film is a source of comfort only, with a sensory lens technique that apparently overpowers the watcher’s rationalist or deductive capacity. Wallace’s post-modern literary reconfiguration or “remaking” of Incandenza’s postmodern “Infinite Jest” reconstitutes its plot to make inference and deduction necessary, thus

¹⁰⁷ This image is thematically complementary to the motif of the breaking mirror in Deren’s “Meshes of the Afternoon” above.

negating the dangerous effect, allowing the reader to experience *Infinite Jest* safely, unlike its cinematic counterpart.

James Incandenza's film *The Joke* further elaborates upon the complex connections between both Incandenza and Wallace and both artists and their audience, dramatising an earlier doomed attempt by Incandenza to create an "open" communicative work. The importance of the film is highlighted through the similarity of its title to Incandenza's most important work, and *The Joke* represents something of an early but futile attempt from Incandenza to create an audience-constituted narrative. *The Joke* is "hated" by the critical establishment and allegedly referred to as "simple-minded and dumb" by Incandenza himself, though curiously he is reported to have confessed to loving elements of the film (*Jest* 398).¹⁰⁸ The film's live feed of the audience watching the film turns the cinema screen into a kind of mirror, another conflation of the cinema/mirror image and a foregrounding of the viewer's relationship with the work that seems to suggest a reception-based art. Therefore although *The Joke* (presumably at least partially thanks to its title) is considered critically as a monumental prank and a work of auteur-style arrogance by its critics, it represents a flawed attempt at a fundamental *giving away* of directorial power and the handing over of the constitutive element of the work to the audience, in a similar manner to Wallace's inferential gaps in narrative form. However, the postmodern director Incandenza is not brave enough to be nakedly sincere about this process, couching the apparent seriousness of the work in a deflective and implicitly metafictional humour by calling the film *The Joke*, a title that essentially protects the film (and by definition Incandenza himself) from accusations of a failure at a sincere communicative process, but ultimately leads to the redundancy of the overall project.

While recalling another of Incandenza's films, *Good-Looking Men in Small Clever Rooms That Utilize Every Centimeter of Available Space with Mind-Boggling Efficiency*, Hal's narration offers a direct rebuff to critical consensus on Incandenza's relationship with his audience:

¹⁰⁸ Incandenza is reported as being hostile to any critical interpretation of the film, though this sentiment is reported from Incandenza via Lyle via Mario to Hal, so as is characteristic of reported speech in *Infinite Jest*, the veracity of the claim is suspect.

The art-cartridge critics and scholars who point to the frequent presence of audiences inside Himself's films, and argue that the fact that the audiences are always either dumb and unappreciative or the victims of some grisly entertainment-mishap betrays more than a little hostility on the part of an auteur pegged as technically gifted but narratively dull and plotless and static and not entertaining enough — these academics' arguments seem sound as far as they go, but they do not explain the incredible pathos of Paul Anthony Heaven reading his lecture to a crowd of dead-eyed kids [...] all the time weeping (*Jest* 911)

The weeping derives, as Hal suggests, not from a lack of *desire* for communication but from sadness at the lack of communication itself, an implicit suggestion of the apparent sincerity that Incandenza consistently and defensively couched in humour during his career. Incandenza's failure while alive to communicate with Hal (as evidenced in the professional conversationalist sequence that, as explained in Chapter 1, originally opened the novel) is revealed as a source of great sadness for the director when he returns in "wraith" form, and the failure of Incandenza's "Infinite Jest" is that in the director's desperation to entertain his son and thus communicate with him, he has omitted that participative element within the narrative by making the film so lethally entertaining that no audience can respond to it, or indeed do anything but watch it.

As an intriguing epilogue, an interesting analogue to Wallace's audience-constituted narrative appears within *The Cinema Book*, when Christine Gledhill outlines the model for genre criticism advocated by Tom Ryall, a model that bypasses existing theories that place the auteur or social reality as the controlling principle of cinema. Instead, Ryall's model is

Triangular, with art product, artist and audience as three equally constituting moments in the production of the text – a view that posits a dynamic and mutually determining relationship between them (Gledhill 253)

Gledhill then explains that Ryall expands his triangular model thus:

Following the structuralist intervention and revival of Marxist aesthetics, genre analysis enabled film criticism to take account of conditions of production and consumption of films and their relationship to ideology. Thus Ryall placed his original triangle – film/artist/audience – in two concentric circles, the first representing the studio [...] and the second representing the social formation – here American society, Western capitalism – of which the film industry and cinematic signification are a part (Gledhill 253)

The model, which appears in a book Wallace is known to have read and with its shape diagram that echoes not only the logo of Alcoholics Anonymous but also the multiple uses of triangles, circles and concentric circles in *Infinite Jest*, is tantalising in its formal similarities and belief in the audience-constitutive sympathies of his post-postmodern art. A speculative prospect, then, but the similarities of models of narrative and reception are remarkable, even if Wallace has not highlighted its potential incorporation into elements of his narrative schema.

Chapter 4

“Endless Hallways”: Mark Z Danielewski’s Narrative Labyrinths

Since its publication in 2000, analysis of Mark Z Danielewski’s novel *House of Leaves* has primarily involved two critical approaches. The first is a reaction to Danielewski’s use of multiple unreliable narrators and the novel’s enactment of decentred textual discourse. The second approach, exemplified in particular in the work of N. Katherine Hayles and Mark Hansen, is based around configuring *House of Leaves* in relation to the concept of the “digital” or “networked” novel.¹⁰⁹ While existing criticism has partially addressed the conflation of form and function at the heart of this labyrinthine text a close reading of *House of Leaves*, a reading that pays particular attention to the framing of text, film and the materiality of the page as well as the importance of the location of objects inside and outside the body of text, presents a series of hitherto undiscussed formal strategies from Danielewski that are crucial to his overall project. Moreover, only very recently has Nicoline Timmer (in *Do You Feel It Too?*) explicitly suggested that Danielewski’s novel might belong to the field of post-postmodern writing, discussing *House of Leaves* in a book-length argument that also incorporates discussion of the work of David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers. Timmer’s work posits a useful suggestion that Danielewski’s novel has kinship of subject and form with the works of other post-postmodern authors. Timmer explores Danielewski’s novel primarily through a framework termed “narrative psychology” (Timmer 28), which she applies to all of the works in her study (the “narrative psychology” approach, which draws from the field of social psychology, revolves around the difficulties inherent in the construction of a postmodern “self”). However, while Timmer’s identification of the post-postmodern potential of *House of Leaves* is useful, this approach to the text is, to use an appropriate term, only one path into the project of Danielewski’s labyrinthine novel and specific questions of physical and literary form, strategies absolutely essential to the narrative, are left largely undiscussed.

¹⁰⁹ As is argued in Chapter 5, this approach makes reference to the relationship between literature and cinema in the novel, but critical work on this area of the novel remains relatively underdeveloped.

The analysis in the previous three chapters has closely “mapped” Wallace’s employment of certain formal motifs for the post-postmodern purpose of dramatising the postmodern roots of his work and positing a subsequent development. In a similar fashion, the critical discussion of *House of Leaves* across the next two chapters acts as a close textual analysis of the formal “shape” of the novel and also as an address of the novel’s relationship to cinematic technique and form. This analysis will inform a concurrent argument that, like *Infinite Jest*, *House of Leaves* actively formally dramatises its relationship to the postmodern. The following two chapters will also suggest a confluence between the manner in which both Wallace and Danielewski employ certain thematic and formal strategies (absent fathers, mysterious and dangerous films, strange narrative “shapes” and the crucial importance of reader inference) as part of this dramatisation.

The following chapter performs a textual “mapping” of *House of Leaves* and an analysis of the novel’s relation to postmodernism by exploring different formal strategies in Danielewski’s novel that have kinship with Wallace’s own post-postmodern techniques: the mapping of spaces and the problem of direction and constraint, the presentation of time and temporal “shape” and the configuration of open and closed systems. Finally, there will be an analysis of Danielewski’s individual and hitherto critically neglected employment of the formal model of the tree, crucial to both a formal understanding of the novel and the status of *House of Leaves* as a post-postmodern text.¹¹⁰

Direction, Constraint, Chaos

There are a number of “texts” that form the overall shape of *House of Leaves*, and an outlining of the component pieces of the complex narrative is necessary. The novel’s opening pages read “Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* by Zampano with introduction and notes by Johnny Truant”. The struggles for authority and narrative control that will dominate the novel are already evident, but less obvious

¹¹⁰ In the formal study of a novel like *House of Leaves*, which concretises and often combines both postmodern and poststructuralist tropes, it is important not to assume a reductive critical position whereby postmodern space is unquestioningly conflated with poststructuralist space. Therefore the postmodern and poststructuralist tropes being interrogated in Danielewski’s novel will be identified clearly on the occasion of their appearance and their relationship to one another within the text.

on a first reading is the fact that one of Danielewski's spatial strategies for the novel is already being implemented in miniature. The words "Mark Z. Danielewski's" are printed on the left hand page, while the rest of the information is on the right hand page, partially occluding the true ownership of the narrative, leaving Danielewski physically outside of the title page, the traditional space for inscription of the author's name. Accordingly, control of the text of *House of Leaves* is problematically split between a series of narrators commenting upon successive embedded narratives.

The outermost narrators are a group of editors who have recently compiled their second amended edition of a manuscript passed to them by a man named Johnny Truant. Truant's manuscript, bookended and intermittently interrupted by his own increasingly deranged journal entries, consists largely of a reproduction of a text, *The Navidson Record*, written by a recently deceased blind man named Zampanò and found by Truant in the old man's apartment after his death. *The Navidson Record* itself is both a written transcription and scholarly commentary upon a documentary film, itself also called "The Navidson Record",¹¹¹ directed by award-winning journalist Will Navidson. "The Navidson Record" details events that occurred at a house on Ash Tree Lane, Virginia owned by Navidson and his partner Karen Green. These events concern a mysterious doorway that appears in the wall of the house and leads to a black, windowless corridor that violates the laws of physics, containing an apparently infinite and permanently shifting series of rooms and corridors. However, despite the apparent veracity of the detail of Zampanò's account (the impediment of his blindness notwithstanding) Truant discovers that "The Navidson Record" does not exist in reality, and that many of the commentaries within must be false. Moreover, outside Truant and Zampanò's narratives there are a series of appendices, the most significant of which apparently contains letters written to Truant by his mentally ill mother Pelafina, hinting at a possible psychological motivation for Truant's derangement.

The word "apparently" is used here because the ontological status of *any* of the narrators in *House of Leaves* is perpetually in doubt. For example, a coded

¹¹¹ The film is referred to here as "The Navidson Record" and the text as *The Navidson Record*, in the same manner as "Infinite Jest" and *Infinite Jest* in the preceding chapters.

acrostic within Pelafina's letters mentions Zampanò, a man she apparently never knew (*House* 615). Appendicised information from Zampanò hints at plans for the fictional creation of a boy who may or may not be Truant himself (543). Apparent errors from Zampanò in *The Navidson Record* ("He might have spent all night drinking had exhaustion not caught up with me" [320]) and deliberate changes made by Truant to Zampanò's manuscript ("Zampanò only wrote "heater." The word "water" back there – I added that" [16]) continually undermine the reader's confidence in the veracity of the narrative. Moreover, the proliferation across the narratives of a series of specific items (a Spanish doll, a hand mirror) and plot devices (child abuse, twins, shipwrecks) mean that locating a definitive origin point for the narratives is essentially a pointless exercise.¹¹² The analysis of Danielewski's novel within this chapter will therefore not attempt to posit a solution to this narrative conundrum. However, by conducting a close formal study it is possible to elucidate the often oblique connections between narrative and form in *House of Leaves* and thus understand further the novel's structural composition and relationship to other works of literature and postmodernism.

It is important when discussing the construction at the heart of *House of Leaves* to first address the nomenclature of "labyrinth" as distinct from "maze", as the differences between the two are important to a mapping of the shape of this novel. While there are numerous cultural and geometric variations on the shape of both labyrinth and maze, a labyrinth is generally comprised of a single winding path to the centre, whereas a maze is a structure of multiple pathways and dead ends (Kern 23). The construction in the house on Ash Tree Lane is a hybrid structure, with the physical characteristics of a maze (a confusing, disorientating structure) and the cultural characteristic of a labyrinth (with the text's frequent references to the classical model of the labyrinth and the Cretan minotaur). Certain chapters of the novel (the most obvious being Chapter IX, which is actually subtitled "The Labyrinth") operate as a maze-like structure, the reader having to navigate textual

¹¹² A great deal of the discussion on the message boards at Danielewski's official web forum (houseofleaves.com) revolves around trying to definitively solve the puzzle of the origin point of *House of Leaves*' narrative, leading to a series of open ended discussions that sometimes unwittingly resemble the journeys into the unsolvable labyrinth in the house on Ash Tree Lane.

dead ends and retrace their steps through the chapter in order to progress to chapter X. Other chapters (such as Chapters X and XX) have a clearly defined and spatialised labyrinth-style unitary path through which the reader can progress with relative ease and speed, the text moving around the page to reflect the changing shape of the corridors and the positions in which the explorers find themselves (for example, when someone crawls under a low doorway, the text drops to the bottom of the page [427]). The mysterious architectural construction in the house of Ash Tree Lane also has a third characteristic that is not a feature of either the traditional maze or labyrinth model; it can change form apparently at will, endlessly reshaping its corridors or stretching to almost unfathomable distances. Throughout the novel it is speculated that the changes in the form of the structure are somehow connected to the psychology of the individual currently inhabiting the space, and that a different environment is presented to every individual who enters and attempts to navigate its corridors.

Within the labyrinthine Chapter IX, a quotation from Penelope Reed Doob's *The Idea of the Labyrinth* draws a distinction between those inside the structure and those who stand outside of it, employing a distinction between "maze-treaders" and "maze-viewers":

[M]aze-treaders, whose vision ahead and behind is severely constricted and fragmented, suffer confusion, whereas maze-viewers who see the pattern whole, from above or in a diagram, are dazzled by its complex artistry. What you see depends on where you stand, and thus, at one and the same time, labyrinths are single (there is one physical structure) and double: they simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos. They may be perceived as a path (a linear but circuitous passage to a goal) or as a pattern (a complete symmetrical design)... Our perception of labyrinths is thus intrinsically unstable: change your perspective and the labyrinth seems to change (Reed-Doob, quoted in *House* 113-4)

The central distinction drawn by Reed Doob is between an individual trapped inside a disorientating closed structure and an individual who can perceive the entire

structure from the outside. When a labyrinth or maze is viewed from above, its internal structure is easily navigable and disorientation refines into a legible pattern. There is a notable confluence here between Danielewski's invocation of Reed Doob's image of the labyrinth as a chaotic structure and Wallace's instantiation of the fractal Sierpinski Gasket structure as a figure for the narrative shape of *Infinite Jest*.¹¹³ Both Wallace and Danielewski invoke geometrical chaotic schemas for their narrative, and to be able to stand outside of these constructions (to be a "maze-viewer" in Reed Doob's parlance) is to be able to perceive and engage with a chaotic "open" system of narrative, while to be trapped within them is to be disorientated and confined, "closed". Both Danielewski's and Wallace's narrative models invoke the image of a bounded and "closed" space within which there lies the possibility for both an "open" infinite chaotic variation and a "closed" claustrophobic entrapment, dependent upon the position and mindset of the individual within that space.

However, Danielewski's invocation of chaotic "open" systems is slightly different to Wallace's strategy, with the systemic labyrinth-maze model within *The Navidson Record* specifically invoked as being the work of a postmodern author. Zampanò, the writer apparent of *The Navidson Record*, is dramatised as embodying a series of postmodern positions upon writing and thought. The most direct association is with Jorge Luis Borges, the blind composer of "The Garden of Forking Paths", a story in which a book and labyrinth are pervasively conflated into one object.¹¹⁴ Additionally, the labyrinthine Chapter IX of *The Navidson Record* is constructed in a blizzard of quotations, literary and cultural references, directions to appendices and occluded or missing information characteristic of a postmodern encyclopedic text like Gaddis' *The Recognitions* or Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*. This disorientating plethora of references is crucially not only presented in the form of scholarly annotations throughout *The Navidson Record* but also woven implicitly into Zampanò's direct narrative voice, as when in an aside he seems to suggest that

¹¹³ Danielewski's labyrinth, with its continuous shifting, development and overlapping of form, is closer to a chaotic structure than the traditional fixed pattern of the classical maze or labyrinth.

¹¹⁴ This is not the only Borges work invoked by Danielewski in *House of Leaves*, as will be detailed below.

Pierre Menard, Borges' invented rewriter of Cervantes, is a real person (42). The references to Borges, not to mention the invocation of John Barth's "domestication" of Classical mythology in *Lost in the Funhouse* in the rewriting of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur as a fight between a sensitive mutant and a drunken frat boy (403-6), also suggest a pervasive conflation between Zampanò and the position of the postmodern author.

However, while Zampanò's disorientating text, with its invocations of postmodern literature, depicts the lives of the "maze treaders" of the house on Ash Tree Lane, the reader of Danielewski has the ability to perceive Zampanò's text from a distance, as a component of a linked series of texts, to be a "maze-viewer". To be able to regard Zampanò's construction from "outside" is to be able to perform two tasks: to see the structure in its entirety and perceive patterns within the labyrinth-maze hybrid that elucidate understanding of the pervasive thematic mysteries of the narrative, and to relocate from the restrictive "closed" position of being within the structure to regarding the chaotic "open" potential of the labyrinth-maze hybrid, and this potential is only accessible to the reader of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*.¹¹⁵

Danielewski instigates the formal importance of this "maze viewing" strategy to his narrative by embedding in one of the appendices to *The Navidson Record* a photograph of a collage of objects that includes a Ground-Air Emergency Code chart (582). This chart details a series of shapes and letters that can be made on the ground to signal to an aircraft flying overhead. Danielewski's employment of this chart is twofold. The reader comes across symbols in the text of *The Navidson Record* that correspond to the symbols found in the code, which act as a thematic complement to the action currently taking place in the narrative. For example, when Kirby "Wax" Hook is shot by deranged fellow explorer Holloway during their exploration of the Navidson house, a footnote off the main text is marked as "II", rather than a number, with "II" corresponding to the direction "Require Medical Supplies" on the code chart (133). Secondly, the physical act of reading the book corresponds to looking

¹¹⁵ Additionally, Danielewski's invocation of certain cultural manifestations of postmodernism (notably architecture, which is discussed below) also constitute at times a more direct criticism of postmodern form.

down on the letters from a great height, as on the ground one would be so close to the letters that their overall shape would be unintelligible, or at least impossible to view as a distinct unit. A close reader will also notice that the initials of certain characters correspond to traits in their personality, and give implicit “signals” to the reader. Will Navidson’s initials (“WN”) correspond to the signals for “Require Engineer” and “Negative” respectively, an apt reflection of a character increasingly in need of psychological assistance and in the throes of a midlife crisis. Navidson’s partner Karen Green avoids the “Negative” correspondence because the pair are not married and she has not taken his surname, and the fact that “K” corresponds to the signal “Indicate Direction To Proceed” highlights her increasing importance to both Will and the ultimate direction and shape of *The Navidson Record*.¹¹⁶

Therefore, despite the difficulties encountered as the reader navigates the series of treacherous and dead ended references and footnotes of Chapter IX, Danielewski simultaneously positions his readers at the required distance to be able to view the construction from above, to tread the maze as they view it. The Ground-Air Emergency Code is also important in locating the novel’s relationship to the generational differences between Danielewski and the postmodern writers who preceded him, dramatised in the novel (as in *Infinite Jest*) through the appearance of failed father figures. The reader learns, through the inclusion of his obituary in an appendix, that Johnny Truant’s father was “a commercial pilot” who also “enjoyed performing aerial stunts in regional shows” (585). After failing a medical exam, Truant’s father had his pilot’s licence revoked and took up truck driving as a profession, only to be killed after crashing his vehicle. The grounding of Truant’s father and his subsequent death is connected, through Danielewski’s employment of the emergency code, with a previous attempt at “maze viewing” that ended in failure, which “crashed and burned”, so to speak. The death of fathers and the failure

¹¹⁶ One could also speculate that the initial of Zampano suggest a dogleg path, in which one has to go back to go forward (complementing the regressing to childhood of Truant before his understanding of the trauma of his mother’s committal to an institute). Additionally “the minotaur”, as N. Katherine Hayles points out, is an anagram of “O I’m he Truant” (“Saving The Subject” 798) which conflates Truant’s psychological disorientation with the creature that inhabits the classical labyrinth, a conflation reinforced when Truant dreams he is the minotaur (*House* 403-6). The anagram also complements the invocation of the man trapped inside the brazen bull torture device (337).

of their work is characteristic of the narratives of both *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest*, with both James Incandenza and Truant's father leaving their sons an uncertain and incomplete legacy. The end of the labyrinthine Chapter IX is marked by the appearance of the emergency code symbol ("I>") for "Will Attempt To Take Off" (151). The inclusion of this symbol at the end of this disorientating chapter is significant. Firstly, it appears to represent a desire to "take off", as in leave the chapter and the entrapment behind. Secondly it suggests a wish to "take off", as in trying to take flight again after the "grounding" of the father figure (both Truant's father and Zampanò, who are implicitly conflated throughout the narrative)¹¹⁷ and attempt a new aerial strategy, a "maze viewing" of the postmodern narrative. Thirdly, there is a sly double entendre in "take off" that suggests a thumbing of the nose to the preceding, characteristically postmodern narrative.

The labyrinthine narrative shape in *House of Leaves* is also formally conflated with another aspect of postmodernism that Wallace addresses at length in *Infinite Jest*: postmodernism as narcissism or extreme self-consciousness. In an interview with Kiki Benzon about his second novel *Only Revolutions*, Danielewski extrapolated on the "direction" of the narratives in his first two novels:

House of Leaves is what I would call a centripetal book. It's about interiorities and history and progeny and ancestors. Now this [*Only Revolutions*] was pointedly a centrifugal novel. It was about getting outside (Benzon, "Revolution 2")

Danielewski's description of *House of Leaves* as "centripetal" chimes with the inward-bound efforts throughout the novel to locate an apparently undetectable central point, be it in the corridors of the Navidson house or in Johnny Truant's

¹¹⁷ For examples of this conflation, see Zampanò's stated desire to "create a son" (*House* 543) and the apparent relationship between Zampanò and Pelafina (615).

paratextual attempts to locate the origin of his disconnection.¹¹⁸ The absent centre in *House of Leaves* is also intermittently allied with the decentring impulse of poststructuralism and linguistic scepticism, with quotations from Derrida both real and invented appearing in *The Navidson Record* (*House* 112, 364).¹¹⁹ The quote from “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” that appears in the labyrinthine Chapter IX address the importance of a centre:

The function of [a] center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure – one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure – but above all to make sure that the organising principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure (Derrida, quoted in *House* 112)

The protean nature of the corridors of the Navidson house would therefore suggest a structure in which poststructuralist “play” has concretised into form. When Timmer writes of the situation whereby poststructural theory has performed “a double deconstruction [...] one, a deconstruction of traditional frameworks of meaning, and two, a deconstruction of the subject” (Timmer 39) she identifies an abiding problem of the self in post-postmodern fiction. Indeed, the parallel attempts in *House of Leaves* of Navidson to find the centre of his house and Truant to find the origin of his childhood trauma are characteristic of a physical actualisation of the problem of the self informed by poststructuralism. Moreover, the reader’s attempt to find the origination point of the narrative of *House of Leaves* is essentially doomed as a central “Rosetta Stone” text is absent, with the meaning of each text (Truant’s journal, *The Navidson Record*, Pelafina’s letters) being apparently generated by each of the others. Even the odour of the postmodern writer’s room is decentred, as noted when Truant enters Zampanò’s apartment for the first time, coming into contact with

¹¹⁸ Hayles also codifies Danielewski’s second novel *Only Revolutions* as the mirror text to *House of Leaves*, saying that the latter is “an obsessively inward work [...] (*Only Revolutions*), by contrast, moves outward and expresses the wild desires of the 16-year-old protagonists in joyrides across the country” (Hayles, “Mapping” 168-9). This dimension of *Only Revolutions* is discussed in Chapter 6.

¹¹⁹ Danielewski worked as a sound technician on Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman’s 2002 documentary *Derrida*.

a scent that is “extremely layered, a patina upon progressive patina of odor, the actual source of which had long since evaporated” (*House* xv). After Truant’s exposure to Zampano’s text (and its invocation of the tropes of both postmodernism and poststructuralism), the process of decentring acts more like an infection than a linguistic or philosophical phenomenon, with Truant suffering subsequent panic attacks where he is stalked by a characteristically poststructuralist monster that is never actually visible but always “just beyond your peripheral vision” (26). Elsewhere, a rewriting of Rilke’s poem “The Panther” in Appendix F (559) involving a linguistic play on the “bars” of the original poem that conflates the panther with the barfly Truant, removes in its rewriting the mention of the “centre” around which Rilke’s panther moves. Furthermore, the invocation of Derrida’s 1974 work *Glas* in *House of Leaves* (545), an invocation that will be addressed more substantially towards the end of this chapter, reminds the reader that the typographical form of *Glas*, with its two separate columns on the left and right of the page, creates an absence at the centre of the page throughout the narrative. These formal actualisations of the concept of “play” and the absence or relativity of a centre lead to the emergence of a fundamental uncertainty over individual direction. As discussed in Chapter 1, in *Infinite Jest* it is characteristic for the individual to be uncertain of whether they are moving of their own accord or being moved by external forces. In the corridors of the Navidson house, where compasses fail to work (90), this continuous and psychologically destabilising uncertainty about whether the inhabitant is in control of their trajectory or vice versa is also represented through a geometrical shape.

This question of the individual’s control of direction in *House of Leaves* is formalised most concisely through Danielewski’s employment of the diagram of the spiral. The geometry of a spiral, with a single path outwards from its centre, invokes the single-path model of the labyrinth, and Danielewski employs two specific spiral models in *House of Leaves* to dramatise the individual’s control, or lack of control, over their direction.¹²⁰ The most pervasive spiral shape is a gargantuan spiral staircase located within the corridors of the Navidson house. This is a particularly

¹²⁰ The dust cover of the American edition of *House of Leaves* also features an embossed image of a spiral.

dangerous area due to its tendency to change dimension while the individual is walking up or down, at one stage putting a rescue operation in jeopardy when it suddenly and violently stretches (289). Navidson's brother Tom is too frightened to even descend the staircase, remaining at the top even while his fellow explorers are in danger and calling for help (272). The other prominent spiral shape within the novel, however, appears towards the end of the narrative and is characterised as a far more reconfigurative space. It appears in a dream experienced by Navidson shortly before his final journey into the labyrinth, after which he is reunited with his family. In this dream Navidson encounters "the shell of an immense snail" (399) through which he crawls:

Soon he is alone and as the passageway continues to get tighter and tighter, the candle he holds grows smaller and smaller. Finally as the wick begins to sputter, he stops to contemplate whether he should turn around or continue on. He understands if the candle goes out he will be thrust into pitch darkness, though he also knows finding his way back will not be difficult. He gives serious thought to staying. He wonders if the approaching dawn will fill the shell with light (Ibid)

These two formal spiral models, one threatening and one redemptive, reflect contrasting approaches to individual decision and direction.¹²¹ The difference in the individual's reaction to the respective spirals is codified in the formal textual typography of the page in which the episode appears. The difficult and hazardous descent of the stairwell in the Navidson house by Holloway, Hook and Jed Leeder takes place during the aforementioned labyrinthine typography of Chapter IX, while Navidson's dream, with its relative lack of concern or panic despite the tightening space, appears on a regularly typed page with only a single one-line footnote. Navidson's exploration of the snail's spiral is also characterised by his *lack* of a need to explore (he considers staying), while the aggressive and macho team leader

¹²¹ The two spirals are clearly intended to be seen as thematic counterparts. The sympathetic fictional critic Slocum "treats the snail in Navidson's dream as a "remarkable inversion" of the house's Spiral Staircase" (*House* 401).

Holloway sees his descent of the spiral staircase as only one component of an information gathering journey. Navidson's relative calm comes from the knowledge that if he remains where he is the dawn light will illuminate his space and guide him, whereas the spiral staircase (and indeed the whole construction inside the Navidson house) is characterised throughout the novel as a windowless, dark, unlit space. As explained above, Navidson's snail dream occurs just before and acts as an analogue for his final journey into the house, a journey which ends with him remaining still and ultimately being enveloped by light as he transcends the limits of the labyrinth and returns to his family. Crucially, on this final journey, the assertion is made that "direction no longer matters" (432). This spatial strategy recalls the reconfiguration of a closed system into an open system that characterises Wallace's post-postmodern narrative, and Danielewski's protagonist finds redemption through a strategy that is not dissimilar to that of the successfully rehabilitated addicts in *Infinite Jest*. In Alcoholics Anonymous the slogan "my best thinking got me here" (*Jest* 1026) is employed to discourage the addicts from intellectual over-analysis and towards tasks that are associated with the concept of passing time, of *abiding*, of reconfiguring a closed mindset into an open one. It has been outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 how those addicts who fail their rehabilitation suffer, as well as a psychological paralysis, an increasingly *spatial* entrapment. Navidson's moment of awareness (that if he continues into the snail's shell he will become trapped) opposes the trajectory of the headstrong, macho Holloway, who through his pathological (and increasingly psychopathic) need to explore and classify eventually finds himself trapped behind a row of doors, deep in the labyrinth, that are slamming shut one after another (*House* 219).

This analogue between spatial, directional and psychological constraint and entrapment is intrinsically linked to an implicit criticism by Danielewski of the postmodern environment, as the explorers of the Navidson house are presented with a spatial model that reflects Jameson's concept of postmodern architecture. One of Jameson's architectural examples of postmodernism is the apparently physically impossible structure of Wells Fargo Court in Los Angeles. Consider Jameson's spatial description of the viewer's perception of the building alongside both the visual representation of and disorientation among those trapped in the Navidson house:

(Depthlessness) can be experienced physically and “literally” by anyone who [...] suddenly confronts the great free-standing wall of Wells Fargo Court [...] a surface which seems to be unsupported by any volume, or whose putative volume (rectangular? trapezoidal?) is ocularly quite undecidable. This great sheet of windows, with its gravity-defying two-dimensionality, momentarily transforms the solid ground on which we stand into the contents of a stereopticon (Jameson 12-13).

“I’ve got some vertigo,” Jed confesses. “I had to step way back from the edge and sit down. That was a first for me.”[...] Even after seeing Navidson’s accomplished shots [...] the images still remain two dimensional (*House* 86-7)

This thematic conflation is further accentuated when considering both Jameson and Danielewski’s cultural analogues for their respective architecture:

The visual effect is the same from all sides: as fateful as the great monolith in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001* which confronts its viewers like an enigmatic destiny, a call to evolutionary mutation. (Jameson 13)

[...] the hallway offers no answers. The monolith in *2001* seems the most appropriate cinematic analog, incontrovertibly there but virtually inviolate to interpretation. (*House* 60)

The comparison of both the Navidson labyrinth and the Wells Fargo building to the monolith suggests an effort on Danielewski’s part to imply synchronicity between the disorientating perception of postmodern architecture and the directional disorientation evoked by the Navidson house, to suggest that there is something about the texture and structure of the Navidson house that is characteristically postmodern. Danielewski thus combines two postmodern motifs in his description of the explorer’s dangerous journey, one literary (the encyclopedic and labyrinthine typographical layout, teeming with intertextual references and footnoted dead ends)

and one cultural (the spatial disorientation of postmodern architecture).¹²² At the moment of experiencing this architecture (which upsets the “solid ground” of Jameson’s observer) one loses their sense of control over their direction or orientation and becomes lost or trapped. As in *Infinite Jest*, the individual in a postmodern environment suffers uncertainty over their spatial control.

Temporal Trauma and the “Loop”

Another element of Danielewski’s narrative involves the distortion of a regular temporal continuity or trajectory. Like *Infinite Jest*, *House of Leaves* has a non-chronological structure, but rather than Wallace’s method whereby the reader develops their understanding of the chronology of the text as they read and after they finish the narrative by re-ordering the temporal structure, in Danielewski’s novel this process becomes significantly more complex as the reader bears witness to characters (Truant, Zampanò) who are *themselves* subjectively re-reading their own past and present narratives as the text progresses. This process creates a number of overlapping temporal “loops” within a narrative that has already, through the model of the Navidson house, foregrounded an environment that appears to be subjectively generated. Danielewski’s employment of these closed loops, and the ultimate reconfiguration of and escape from those loops, bears kinship with Wallace’s post-postmodern transformation of closed into open systems in *Infinite Jest*.

The pre-eminent example of this temporal process (not least because the entries are dated), and an example worth considering in detail, is the representation of Truant’s journal. The first entry encountered by the reader in the book, Truant’s introduction, dates from October 31, 1998. The last entry, over five hundred pages later, has been composed on the same date and begins with the line “Back here again” (515). This locates the entirety of the text of *The Navidson Record* (with the exception of a short epilogue) within a temporal loop. However, considering that both Truant’s introduction and epilogue are apparently written on the same day, the

¹²² A useful example of the textual and architectural conflation occurs at the point in the narrative when Holloway kicks a hole in one of the walls of the labyrinth and a square space appears alongside the description of Holloway’s action, a space which can be read “through” over the next 25 pages (119-144).

content of the respective entries is significantly different in tone. The introduction begins with the words “I still get nightmares” (xi) and a warning from Truant, who sounds tormented, confused and paranoid, about the dangers of Zampanò’s text.¹²³ The final entries, however, involve Truant revealing the origin of his trauma (the loss of his mother to an institution during his childhood) and giving an apparently valedictory address to the reader which begins “of course there will always be darkness but I realize now something inhabits it” (518), suggesting a redemptive coda that allows Truant to be at peace and terminate the graphomaniac paranoia that has dogged him throughout the narrative (his last direct first-person address to the reader is “I’m sorry, I have nothing left” [518]). How can the short temporal distance between the two entries (written, presumably, only minutes or hours apart) have brought about such a sea change in temperament and understanding? Furthermore, how can anyone possibly explain the encounter Truant has with a band of musicians twelve days later, on the 11th November (an event occurring chronologically later but placed *before* Truant’s 31st October sign-off in the text), during which the band present him with a copy of the first edition of a manuscript titled *House of Leaves* “with introduction and notes by Johnny Truant” (513)? The answer to these temporal conundrums can be located through an analysis of the processes of re-reading and revisitation that inform the construction of Danielewski’s narrative. Additionally, the form of the novel incorporates two temporal frames which will be characterised here as “reader-time” and “character re-reading”, a strategy that bears a resemblance to Wallace’s post-postmodern model of reader inference described in Chapter 2.

Throughout *House of Leaves* the ability to construct an accurate timeframe is frequently obscured. In “The Navidson Record” jump-cuts make it difficult to tell how much time has passed between shots, with the viewer having to rely on changes in the time-code on the screen (186). The protean nature of the corridors of the Navidson house makes it impossible to construct a timeframe for an exploration, as the same journey that earlier took a matter of hours could stretch into several days.

¹²³ As an aside, this introduction has a form that is not dissimilar to the gasket model proposed by Wallace in *Infinite Jest*, consisting of a number of discrete pieces of uncontextualised information about characters (Clara, Thumper, Gdansk Man) who appear in greater detail in later episodes across Truant’s narrative.

Additionally, a quote within *The Navidson Record* from a Dr Haugeland suggests that “boredom, due to repetition, *stretches* time and space” (167).¹²⁴ Therefore the reader understands that the processes of time in *House of Leaves* are being characterised as strongly subjective and spatialised in nature.¹²⁵ In the analysis of Wallace’s temporal narrative strategies in *Infinite Jest* in Chapter 2 it is posited that the element of those strategies that make the work specifically post-postmodern is the manner in which a complete timeframe with a definable past and future can be recognisably “recovered” for the postmodern individual, freeing them from the Jamesonian condition of a postmodern eternal “present”. Navidson’s ultimate escape from the labyrinth, as outlined above, comes from his understanding of the importance of *abiding*, of not choosing a direction but remaining in one place, a position that ultimately transcends the space and allows the protagonist freedom to cross the imprisoning borders of the “closed” postmodern labyrinth outlined by Zampanò. Such a strategy recalls the success of Wallace’s recovering addicts outlined in Chapter 2, where the maxim “one day at a time” shows that an extreme commitment to the present actually allows one to reconfigure and transcend it, and eventually recover a “horizontal” timeline (to use Bakhtin’s terminology) with a future free from addiction.

A similar, if not identical, process underpins the recovery of Johnny Truant in *House of Leaves*, with the dangerous postmodern present being configured primarily not in the eternal present of drug addiction (though Truant is an addict) but in the concept of entrapment in the closed temporal system of the revisitation of trauma. This temporal entrapment figures thematically both in *The Navidson Record* and in Truant’s editorial commentary. A striking implementation of this strategy is employed within Chapter XIII. The chapter begins with the teacher of the Navidson

¹²⁴ Consider in comparison the strategies enacted to pass time in Ennet House outlined in Chapter 2.

¹²⁵ The most abiding conflation of the temporal, the subjective and the spatial in the novel is the frequently referenced “five and a half minute hallway”, which is ostensibly the name of the first piece of “teaser” footage released from “The Navidson Record”, but also ultimately refers to Truant’s revelation that the sectioning of his mother Pelafina, a traumatic event that Truant witnessed as a child, lasted for five and a half minutes and involved her being dragged away down the hallway of the family home.

children, Chad and Daisy, paying a visit to the family home after seeing some disturbing drawings made by the children at school and being confronted by a scene of mayhem as the body of Jed Leeder and the badly wounded Kirby Hook are brought out of the labyrinth. The chapter, which is principally subdivided into three non-numerical sections titled “The Wait”, “Holloway” and “Escape”, is also mysteriously subdivided again into further sections that are marked by a number in the left margin, in the manner of items on a list. Despite relaying a single event from the narrative, these subdivided numerical sections are not correctly temporally aligned, with overlapping occurring between events in respective sections. To give an example, the narrative begins with the teacher seeing the children’s pictures and heading to the Navidson house. At the end of section 2 she arrives at the house and is horrified at the carnage she witnesses (315). However, at the end of section 4 the same incident is played out again, only this time it is presented from the perspective of explorer Billy Reston, who opens the door to the teacher (317) and the reader discovers that what they thought was a linear narrative has actually temporally shifted backwards to repeat an earlier event from a different perspective. This narrative technique, one that details a moment of extreme trauma, parallels the physical entrapment suffered by those in the Navidson house, and suggests that the spatial dimensions of the labyrinth outlined above also have a temporal analogue. Literally, the narrative finds itself stuck, circling around and returning to the same moment in time.

This process of endless return implicitly parallels Truant’s inability to recognise the childhood trauma that lies behind his mysterious panic attacks, attacks that are kickstarted by his discovery of *The Navidson Record*. Unknown to Truant, who has repressed the memory, his attacks are the process of his subconscious recall of the sectioning of his mother.¹²⁶ This cyclical temporal process, this eternal return of the disguised repressed past within the present, is configured by Danielewski as actively destructive, as the attacks have an increasingly debilitating effect on Truant’s mind and physical appearance. Truant’s failure to identify the root of his

¹²⁶ The implication would appear to be that either the similarity of the events in *The Navidson Record* to Truant’s life have unlocked a repressed memory, or that Truant has written the text himself, unwittingly influenced by his childhood trauma, and thus reactivated long buried emotions.

trauma prevents him from identifying a future trajectory for himself and he becomes, as do Wallace's addicts, increasingly spatially confined and constricted, holing up in a hotel room and listening to "the shudders of time itself" (493).¹²⁷

As suggested above, this strategy is a variation upon the dramatisation within *Infinite Jest* of the residence in and subjugation to a single moment in time that recalls Jameson's definition of the endless, depthless postmodern present. Can Truant break out of the eternal Jamesonian present and attempt to create a future trajectory for himself? The addicts in Wallace's novel can "recover" their future through a temporal process of "one day at a time" rehabilitation, and Wallace's text also physically reflects the linear rehabilitation process of the addict (the example employed in Chapter 2 is the lengthy sentence that describes the recovery process). Danielewski's strategy, while employing a slightly different temporal strategy to do so, ultimately operates through a similar combination of both reader and character inference, and involves reading Truant's journal entries very acutely.

The chronology of Truant's climactic journal entries (which ultimately comprise, bar an epigraph, the whole of Chapter XXI of *The Navidson Record*) is extremely complex and relies on a system of both character and reader inference that upends traditional chronological reading and writing in order to create a final epiphany for Truant that violates a traditional linear process of understanding and revelation. For the sake of clarity the date order of the journal entries is reproduced here, not chronologically but *in the order they appear in the novel*, with page numbers:

- October 31 1998. Truant writes his introduction, having presumably already edited *The Navidson Record* (xi-xxiii)
- October 25 – 30 1998. Truant in hotel in a state of extreme psychosis, discovers he has written journal entries as far back as May 1, 1998 but cannot remember writing them (491-98)

¹²⁷ This process is strikingly similar to the fate of Poor Tony Krause in *Infinite Jest* who, like Truant, degenerates in physical appearance until becomes ghostly (he resembles an "apparition" [*Jest* 714] while Truant is indirectly conflated with a ghost [116]) and also witnesses time as a physical phenomenon (see Chapter 2).

- May 1 – October 25 1998. Reproduction of these journal entries, including Truant’s trip back to his childhood home, possibly while in the process of editing *The Navidson Record* (499-510)
- November 2 and 11 1998. Two entries detailing Truant’s leaving of Los Angeles (510-11)
- August 28 1999. Almost a year later in Arizona, Truant encounters a band of musicians who own a first edition copy of *House of Leaves*, with Truant’s own introduction, presumably published or distributed somehow by Truant between November 1998 and August 1999 (512-15)
- October 31 1998. Two entries from the same day, apparently written before and after Truant’s writing of the introduction. Truant comes to a full understanding about the source of his trauma. The last entry in the narrative by Truant (515-521)

The ordering of the journal entries in the novel itself incorporates a series of jarring temporal shifts back and forth in time that structurally complement Truant’s return home and his attempts to understand the traumatic origin of his psychosis and paranoia, with all the entries contained within an overarching temporal cycle that begins and ends Truant’s narrative on October 31 but also containing within that cycle a series of smaller jumps back and forth in time. In the latter stages of Truant’s narrative, the trauma and isolation that underscores his state of mind begins to rise to the surface of the text and becomes at least partially recognisable to him. Notably, this occurs when Truant makes an effort to confront his past by leaving his room and going in search of the site of both the asylum where his mother was an inmate (The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute) and his family home. The closer that Truant gets to the site of his childhood, the more his vocabulary employs words that have connotations of the “loop”. While attempting to find the location of his childhood home, Truant describes an afternoon spent “looping around”, “circling” and “mindlessly tracing and re-tracing the route I’d taken”, also describing “ringing” a doorbell and standing by “circular saws” (499-506). Finally on the site of his childhood home, now a lumber yard, Truant has what appears to be a partial epiphany:

However, as I write this down – some kind of calm returning – I do begin to recall something else [...] the way it plays in my head like some terrifying and wholly familiar song. Over and over again in a continuous loop, every repetition offering up this certain knowledge: I must have heard it – or something like it – not then but later, though when? And suddenly I find something, hiding down some hall in my head, though not my head but a house, which house? a home, my home? (506)

This recognition, which is prompted by a physical returning to the origin point of the trauma, finally draws the concept of the “loop” to the surface of Truant’s, and the reader’s, consciousness. In the final chronological journal entry (though not the final entry that appears in the novel) Truant encounters the band of musicians who own a copy of the first edition of *House of Leaves*. Leafing through their copy as the band play their set, the bewildered Truant writes that “I didn’t know whether to feel angry for being so out of the loop or sad for having done something I didn’t entirely understand or maybe just happy about it all” (514). The entry ends with the words “It’s going to be alright” (515).

By holding what appears to be a completed copy of his edited book in his hands Truant seems to have fulfilled an earlier ambition to somehow contain Zampanò’s postmodern text (“There’s only one choice now”, Truant writes in an earlier margin comment in *The Navidson Record*, “finish what Zampanò himself failed to finish. Re-inter this thing in a binding tomb. Make it only a book” [327]). Moreover, the discovery of the inscription of other people’s histories written in the margins of the first edition of *House of Leaves* seems to assist Truant in locating himself, to use LeClair’s terminology, “in the loop”. Truant’s sudden awareness and unhappiness about having been “out of the loop” suggests that Truant’s prior temporal confusion has represented his imprisonment within a closed system, outside the reciprocal communication loop that is characterised by the jointly-authored communicative text both read and written upon by the musicians. The steady and increasing awareness of the concept of the term “loop”, which appears more and more frequently in the text itself in the lead-up to Truant’s epiphany, suggests a final understanding of the LeClairian possibilities of “open”

communication with others and a defeat of the postmodern Zampanò's restraining labyrinth model.

The presence of the history of new readers somehow frees Truant from the burden of his own past, or allows him to locate his traumatic history alongside those of other individuals, no longer dwelling solipsistically upon his own trauma but reading it alongside others. This process, a method of *sharing* narratives, is not dissimilar to the recovery process outlined by Alcoholics Anonymous in *Infinite Jest*, whereby individuals can free themselves from their circular behaviour by sharing the root of their own trauma, and is also indicative of the post-postmodern chaotic schema that underpins Wallace's novel, whereby a closed system can, through effort, be reconfigured into an open system that is in free communication with others. Importantly, the space across which the musicians' narratives are inscribed (*The Navidson Record*) is a characteristically postmodern text, so in a textual sense the recovery of the individual's future for Danielewski is linked with the ability to rewrite the postmodern text by literally writing paratextually over and across it, and moreover writing a response or commentary that is configured *outward*, towards reciprocal communication with other readers, rather than the centripetal and metafictional commentary of the scholarly responses with which Zampanò has footnoted *The Navidson Record*. Thus in the closing stages of *House of Leaves*, Truant appears to escape the temporal trap of his past that has arrested his ability to imagine a future by overwriting, and allowing others to overwrite, the postmodern text.

However, there still remains the apparent anomaly of what happens immediately after Truant's assertion that "It's going to be alright". A line is drawn under the text, and the next entry below the line is a journal entry dated October 31 1998. This is immediately puzzling to the reader because, having just witnessed Truant's apparent removal from the closed system of his trauma, the narrative appears to have shifted again back to a time prior to Truant's recovery, the date on which he penned his paranoid introduction to *The Navidson Record* (indeed the second entry begins "I just completed the intro" [515]). The reader can be forgiven for their initial confusion at the appearance of this temporal shift, but when reading these entries from October 31st a number of chronological irregularities emerge in Truant's writing. The first entry after the jump reads "Back here again". Why would

Truant have written that on October 31st when he could not possibly have known that this was going to follow an entry written nearly a year later? Subsequently Truant recalls for the first time, and in considerable detail, the removal and sectioning of his mother, the traumatic event underscoring his narrative and responsible for his paranoia and psychosis. His recall includes the realisation that the mysterious “roar” in the Navidson labyrinth may have either been inspired by or unlocked in his memory his mother’s last cry for him as she was dragged away, as well as the evocation of the “five and a half minute hallway” referred to above. This entry appears to the reader as a suitable catharsis, an inherently satisfying final revelation that draws together the motifs of repression, architecture, trauma and memory that have characterised the narrative. Yet this revelation appears to have been written on the same day as Truant penned his unsettled, paranoid introduction. Why has Danielewski placed Truant’s resolution at the physical but not the chronological end of the narrative?

The answer lies in a twofold narrative strategy. This ordering of the narrative is predicated on an understanding of the discrepancy between character’s and reader’s experience of time. The journals have been re-ordered with an understanding of the manner in which the reader will move through the narrative, which even in a book of this typographical complexity is still from cover to cover. Despite the internal shifts in temporal order within the narrative, the reader’s teleological experience of actually reading the book (“reader time”) is apparently different. The reader will read Truant’s final set of journal entries in a linear fashion, despite the cyclical nature of the temporal narrative within. Therefore the placing of the final revelation of Truant’s trauma at the physical end of the book is predicated on an understanding that in “reader time” that entry will be encountered last, and cathartic satisfaction will be maximised.

Danielewski has also constructed another more subtle reading strategy that acts, palimpsest-like, underneath and alongside the reader’s experience. This strategy will be characterised as “character re-reading”. As outlined above, on October 30 Truant discovers that he has written several months of journal entries that he cannot remember writing. He ends that entry with a resolution to go back and read those past entries (“I must read. I must read. I must read.” [498]). The next twelve pages reproduce those missing journal entries. Now consider that the reader

is not experiencing those pages in the timeframe in which they were written, but *at the time that Truant is re-reading them*. Therefore the reader's experience of the journal entries occurs at the same time as Truant's, with both reader and character experiencing his return to his childhood home and his mother's asylum, events that are instrumental in his final understanding of his trauma. Both the reader and Truant's experience of the missing journal entries comes to an end twelve pages later. All subsequent entries are coloured with an understanding on Truant's part that he can escape from his past and leave his trauma behind (it is within these entries that Truant encounters the band and realises that he has been "out of the loop"). Moreover, the tone of the October 31 entries subsequent to that re-reading is strikingly different to the tone of the October 31 entry that forms the introduction at the beginning of the book. By re-reading his own writing, by being able to perceive his actions and behaviour from a reader's distance, Truant can begin to move out of the closed temporal trap in which he has been imprisoned.¹²⁸ The positioning of the final October 31 entry is therefore not only a satisfying cathartic ordering of the narrative for the reader, it is also essentially a victory over time for Truant. Therefore the re-reading of the self, the revisitation and understanding of the self from a temporal and authorial distance, becomes a redemptive strategy and provides an escape from residence within the postmodern temporal present.

This "character re-reading" is, rather than a metafictional motif, a strategy whereby a character can stand outside him or herself within a narrative. This is similar to the manner in which the recovering addicts in *Infinite Jest* share their narratives with others in order to escape from a self-perpetuating solipsism. To be able to "maze-view" one's consciousness from a distance, to re-read that past is, like the sharing of narrative, an opening of a closed system, a "way out"; that is, a way out of self-consciousness, of solipsism, of addiction, of the eternal present of postmodernism.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ This "re-reading" model gains credence with the consideration that the composition time of the second October 31 entry subsequent to the re-reading is given the ambiguous temporal heading "later" (515).

¹²⁹ The final short chapter of *The Davidson Record*, which is placed directly after Truant's final journal entries, has been completed on December 25th, a date specifically associated with a new birth

Moreover, this kinship of Danielewski's formal narrative strategy in *House of Leaves* to the post-postmodern reconfiguration of closed systems dramatised in *Infinite Jest* is also enacted through the relationship between the differently authored texts within the narrative, a relationship through which Danielewski's narrative definitively dramatises and concretises the rejection and transfiguration of closed systems in favour of open, dynamic intercourse.

Systems, Narratives and Containment

Recall Stephen Burn's positing of the influence of chaos theory on Franzen:

One of the key concepts of chaos theory is the phenomenon of so-called self-similarity, which derives from Benoit Mandelbrot's critique of Euclidean geometry [...] Mandelbrot found formal overlaps that could be described as examples of "recursive symmetry". N. Katherine Hayles explains: "a figure or system displays recursive symmetry when the same general form is repeated across many different length scales, as though the forms were being progressively enlarged or diminished" [...] [*Strong Motion*] also employs the nonlinear conception of cause and effect that characterises Lorenz's butterfly effect [...] founded upon the Laplacian principle that the components of a process could be considered as part of a closed system, where each discrete unit could be isolated and analyzed to identify a linear flow of cause and effect [...] By contrast, chaos theory envisions every action to take place within an open system that is inherently dynamic (Burn, *Franzen* 81-2)

The rejection of the "linear flow of cause and effect" is rejected by the configuration of the three principle narrators (Zampanò, Truant, Pelafina), as each narration is potentially generative of the other two. *House of Leaves* actually contains a moment that enacts the migration of one closed narrative system into another, and the subsequent reconfigurative "opening" and pan-systemic intercourse engendered as a

(Christ), a rebirth (God in Christ) and a new book (The New Testament). The final words of *Infinite Jest*'s narrative are "way out" (*Jest* 981).

result. Truant, commenting in his introduction upon the state of Zampanò's apartment, notes that:

All the windows were nailed shut and sealed with caulking. The front entrance and courtyard doors all storm proofed. Even the vents were covered with duct tape. That said, this peculiar effort to eliminate any ventilation in the tiny apartment did not culminate with bars on the windows or multiple locks on the doors. Zampanò was not afraid of the outside world [...] he sealed his apartment in an effort to retain the various emanations of his things and himself (*House* xvi)

Zampanò's apartment represents a dramatisation of a closed system, a hermetic sealing off of one space to avoid leakage between inside and outside, much like Renée in Franzen's *Strong Motion*, whose apartment "embodies the zeal for isolation and closure that rules her life" (Burn, *Franzen* 83), and indeed not unlike Joelle Van Dyne, whose tendency to obsessively clean her apartment provides "a preview of the discipline and order with which she could survive alone [...] solo in a dazzlingly clean space" (*Jest* 736). However, Truant's entry into Zampanò's apartment violates the delicate closed system that has been maintained, and his removal of the trunk with Zampanò's manuscript of *The Navidson Record* initiates from the elements of that closed system an explosive chaotic open system of discourse between his own life and Zampanò's life and text, his mother's letters and Zampanò, and (as will be argued presently) elements of the reader's own experience and inference. Truant initially reacts to this chaotic explosion much as Zampanò did, trying to seal up his own apartment in language strikingly similar to his description of Zampanò's apartment ("I nailed my windows shut, threw out the closet and bathroom doors, storm proofed everything [...] I wanted a closed, inviolate and most of all immutable space" [*House* xix]). It is, of course, too late, and until Truant leaves the sealed space and comes to understand the importance of communication engendered by the open system of the text (through his reading of the annotated version of his edition of *The Navidson Record* by the band of musicians in Arizona) he cannot be at peace.

Furthermore, in an important narrative development the open system of Danielewski's novel is not just confined to the book itself. Jessica Pressman and Mel

Evans have analysed how *House of Leaves* is actually “the central node in a network of multimedia, multi-authored forms” (Pressman 107)¹³⁰ which include the separate and expanded publication of *The Whalstoe Letters* and the album *Haunted*, written and performed by Danielewski’s sister, who records under the name Poe.

Danielewski has been vocal about the different points of entry to the narrative afforded by the network, and the appeal therein to different kinds of reader:

Well, there are many ways to enter *House of Leaves*. Do you want to go by way of Johnny Truant or by way of Johnny Truant’s mother? Johnny is young and “hip” (at least to a certain degree), which means that most younger readers will find his pathway the easiest, certainly easier than Pelafina’s way. But her voice is equally important, and for some readers her letters will prove the better path. (Interview, McCaffery & Gregory 111)

Haunted, which was written at the same time as Danielewski was writing *House of Leaves*, offers another “path” and is perhaps the strongest example of Danielewski’s commitment to a formal open system of intertextual conversation. Track names are thematically connected to the novel (“Hey Johnny”, “Exploration B”, “5½ Minute Hallway”, “Spanish Doll”, “House of Leaves”) and Danielewski himself reads from the novel on the track “Hey Pretty”, for which he is credited as a co-writer.

Tellingly, the back cover of the album tells listeners to “Read the House”, with a reference to the novel, suggesting that in this open system, there is no need to enter via the central “node” to understand the narrative, rather experiencing all components of the open narrative system allows for a richer interplay of media. In complementary fashion, the back cover of *House of Leaves* features an advertisement for *Haunted*. Evans persuasively argues against Hansen’s disputing of the extent of the openness of the narrative (he insists that Truant is always “first reader” [Hansen 619]) by pointing out how *Haunted* “removes the privilege of

¹³⁰ While Pressman’s classification of *House of Leaves* as the central node in a textual network is persuasive, claims that pervasively connect the novel to the internet are more speculative. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Truant's position" (Evans 69) and therefore acts as an independent work that also operates as part of a network with *House of Leaves*.¹³¹

In later editions of *House of Leaves* published after the publication of *Only Revolutions* in 2006, the first and last pages of the book display a symbol (two vertical lines inside a circle) that is the motif of the latter novel. This late addition to the narrative of *House of Leaves*, a motif that stands outside the main narrative, presents yet further evidence for the inclusion of *House of Leaves* in a larger, and continually emerging, "open" network of texts.

Reader Inference: Echoes And Absences

While Wallace's narrative in *Infinite Jest* relies upon the specific absencing of certain plot information to provoke reader inference, a similar, though not identical, process is configured within *House of Leaves* through the motif of the call and response, the *echo*. It is suggested in *The Navidson Record* that because of its vast scale "comprehension of (the labyrinth's) intricacies must always be derived from within" (114). The echo is a useful tool for this process, because "to hear an echo, regardless of whether eyes are open or closed, is to have already "seen" a sizeable space" (50). *The Navidson Record* devotes an entire chapter to the cultural and scientific meaning of the echo, which should suggest to the reader the thematic importance of the echo across the entire narrative.¹³² Indeed, significant areas of Danielewski's narrative are structured in a fundamentally "echoic" fashion, with the process of call and response textualised throughout not only *The Navidson Record*, but also Truant's journal and editorial entries and the associated appendices, with a "call" in one text being echoed in another.

This echoic shape locates itself principally through the spatial juxtaposition of information from different narrative voices. Sometimes the echo is thematically

¹³¹ Hansen's "first reader" position is problematic for reasons evident in the analysis in this chapter. The purpose of *House of Leaves* is not primarily to elucidate information about the character of Truant; rather information about each narrator is in turn generative of the identity of the other narrators.

¹³² During "Exploration A" Navidson successfully locates his position in the disorientating corridors of the labyrinth by using echo (68).

complementary or prefigures later action, while at other times the juxtaposition has a temporal quality, as an incident from a character's past will be echoed in an event in another narrative. An example of the former occurs when Truant's description of his stalking by an unseen psychological monster is immediately followed by Holloway's arrival (79-80) which echoes an initial concept (an obliterating monstrous force) with a reduced and partially transfigured version of that concept (a man who will become monstrous). An example of the latter: the positioning of Holloway as an "echo" of Truant's abusive stepfather Raymond (both men are identified by their beards and a proclivity for profanity and sudden outbursts of violence). Will Navidson's ultimate defiance of Holloway's methodology is therefore also an echo of Truant's youthful rebellion against his stepfather.¹³³ The recurrence of certain motifs throughout all narratives (Pelafina's doll and mirror [610, 615] with their analogues in Karen's mirror and Daisy's doll [58, 315], the hull-like hall within the Navidson house that recalls Truant's Alaskan fishing experience [103], the pervasive invocation of twins and brothers throughout the novel) only complement the idea that the whole book is constructed with the same "rare acoustic dynamics" as the whispering gallery in which Truant mistakenly thinks he has heard the voice of a ghost (131), or the seventeenth-century "artificial echo machine" that returns distinct new words that are all components of the original spoken utterance (44).¹³⁴ This process of echoing involves an original spoken (or in the case of *House of Leaves*, written) utterance, the partial return of that utterance with some information absented, and a new utterance inferred from the absence. The party who must transcribe and infer that new utterance is the reader. While Wallace's absenting of data in *Infinite Jest* can be inferred by the reader through a process of deduction using information from events before and/or after the absent event, Danielewski's

¹³³ Perhaps the most overt instance of Danielewski using the motif to echo Truant's fatherless past is in the sequence in which the Navidson's daughter Daisy is found "swaying in front of the hallway screaming "Daddy!" despite the absence of a reply, the absence of even an echo" (320).

¹³⁴ In the example given, the machine exchanges the word "clamore" ("O outcry") for the four echoes "amore" ("love"), "more" ("delays"), "ore" ("hours") and "re" ("King") (44). In *House of Leaves*, Danielewski also plays upon the pararhymes in certain words to make them echo one another, so "Holloway's" sounds like "Hallways" and "Hallways" sounds like "Always".

method in *House of Leaves* relies instead on inferring absences in one text based upon their transfigured appearance in another. In essence, in *House of Leaves* an absence is always deducible because it is present elsewhere in another form. In a similar manner to Wallace's post-postmodern reconfiguration in *Infinite Jest*, the reconstruction of communication across ostensibly sealed respective texts of *House of Leaves* (Truant, Zampanò, Pelafina) is ultimately enabled by the reader's inference.

Danielewski's employment of the echo motif in *House of Leaves* has been noted by Mark Hansen and Nicoline Timmer. Both critics have configured the echo as an analogue for the reader's completing of an enquiry engendered in the text. Hansen calls the process a "hermeneutics of embodiment" which suggests reading as a form of "analog echoing" (Hansen 629, 633), while Timmer offers a fairly extensive and well constructed argument in which she describes the construction of the story in *House of Leaves* as a process of "echolocation" (Timmer 289) that requires the reader to respond to and modify the partial, incomplete information in the text with their own experience:

Even without scribbling in the margins of the book (as the musicians did), without literally altering or adding to the text, the reading alone will already result in an "infinitely richer" version of the book [...] simply because the story is taken up in another context, is re-embedded, in the experience world of someone else who has her own set of associations, images, voices and ideas. (Timmer 295)

This analysis is not fundamentally in disagreement with Timmer's critical model. Indeed, Danielewski has vocalised the importance of reader inference himself:

(House of Leaves) is really saying to the reader, "Now you modify it." That invitational aspect of the book at least has been very successful [...] you're on the threshold of a whole series of stories that the book has allowed you to access but that are, at the same time, particular to you (Interview, McCaffery & Gregory 120)

Timmer also makes a persuasive argument for the importance of reader generated narrative in Danielewski's novel, that "one's engagement with the text then becomes much more like a conversation, spatially conceived, between many different voices, that perhaps eventually will allow one to recognize one's own voice" (Timmer 296). However, there is scope to expand upon both Hansen and Timmer's criticism in terms of the significance of the echo's relationship to postmodern literature.

Timmer, in her analysis of the importance of reader inference, cites the appearance in *House of Leaves* of Borges' fictional character Pierre Menard in a footnote, where Zampanò appears to treat Menard as a real person (*House* 42). Menard, of course, is the famous fictional re-writer of Cervantes from Borges' story "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*", a man who "did not want to compose another *Quixote* – which is easy – but *the Quixote itself*" (Borges 65). When Borges compares Menard's *Quixote* with the original, the two extracts are apparently identical, but Borges' narrator disagrees:

It is a revelation to compare Menard's Don Quixote with Cervantes's. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the 'lay genius' Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other, writes:

...truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor.

History, the mother of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin (Borges 69)

To be, in some way, Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less arduous to him – and consequently, less interesting – than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard. (66)

Timmer suggests that through the embedding of Menard's methodology in *House of Leaves* that Danielewski presents

an almost programmatic outline of the empathetic approach to text that Johnny (Truant) has gradually come to practice and that we may suspect is asked of the reader of *House of Leaves* also. The idea is not to identify completely, to project oneself imaginatively unto a narrator or character in an existing story of someone else [...] but to reach out for the text (and the other) from one's own experience, in one's own way. (Timmer 295)

From the interview evidence above, there is certainly no doubt that Danielewski encourages reader inference or the empathetic model of reading outlined here by Timmer. However, Timmer misses one of the crucial reasons for the inclusion of Menard by not considering the importance of Borges' story to one of the most enduringly influential diagnoses of postmodernism in literature, John Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion". In his essay Barth considers Borges' story at length as one of the examples of how to both exemplify and employ the "aesthetic ultimacies" (Barth, *Friday* 74) of contemporary literature, and suggests that Borges' story is a model for the contemporary postmodern writer:

Now, this (Borges' story) is an interesting idea, of considerable intellectual validity. I mentioned earlier that if Beethoven's Sixth were composed today, it would be an embarrassment; but clearly it wouldn't be, necessarily, if done with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we've been and where we are. It would have then potentially, for better or worse, the kind of significance of Warhol's Campbell's Soup ads, the difference being that in the former case a work of art is being reproduced instead of a work of non-art, and

the ironic comment would therefore be more directly on the genre and history of the art than on the state of the culture (75)

Barth exemplifies Borges' story as pointing towards a way beyond art's felt ultimacies, in a diagnosis that is now seen as characteristic of literary postmodernism. Zampanò's diagnosis of Menard's work is, like Barth's, laudatory, praising Menard's "exquisite variation" on Cervantes.¹³⁵ Truant's response to this appraisal is rather less congratulatory, asking "How the fuck do you write about "exquisite variation" when both passages are exactly the same?" (*House* 42).

This exchange is important because it locates Truant, who is allusively and pervasively connected with Zampanò's son throughout the narrative, outside of the praise of the postmodern text practised by Zampanò and Barth, and tellingly registers Truant's distaste at the apparently identical nature of the respective passages. This distinction is important in terms of how Danielewski's novel reacts against certain elements of literary postmodernism, and how this reaction relates to the phenomenon of the echo. Consider, as Barth does, Menard's identical retelling of Cervantes as characteristic of a useful strategy for postmodern literature. Timmer posits that Danielewski suggests Menard's writing has the quality of an echo, invoking Zampanò's statement¹³⁶ that an echo "has life. It possesses a quality not present in the original [...] can return a different and more meaningful story, in spite of telling the same story" (*House* 42). However, in attributing the sentiment to Danielewski, and not his postmodern narrator Zampanò, and also ignoring Truant's profane dismissal of Menard, Timmer makes two crucial errors. Firstly, an unreliable narrator's sentiment is configured as an author sentiment, and secondly (and more importantly) the echo motif across the entirety of *House of Leaves*, as outlined above, is actually primarily *partial* and *incomplete* in nature. Rather than reproducing the entirety of a sound, the echoes in Danielewski's text play upon the formal *difference* generated between the initial utterance and its echoed response. In *House of Leaves*, entirely new meaning is generated from the partial, the incomplete,

¹³⁵ While Zampanò may not recognise Menard's fictionality, the praise of the writer's enactment of Cervantes still locates him alongside Barth.

¹³⁶ A statement that appears in the text immediately before the Menard reference.

the *marginal*, not the identical regeneration associated with the ironic postmodern pastiche of form. For Barth (whose critical view is conflated with Zampanò's) an identical, ironic re-composition is a legitimate postmodern response to the felt ultimacies of literature. For Danielewski, an "exquisite variation" is instead achieved through the creation of manifold new narratives generated out of partial traces of the old form, born from the different reader interpretation of said traces across several texts and paratexts all contained within the same volume.¹³⁷ If one now connects this "anti-Menard" strategy to Timmer's aforementioned acute discussion of reader inference, a workable critical model is created: Danielewski's text employs echo to generate meaning through inference from the reader, while rejecting the inclination towards the more direct mirroring of earlier form displayed in Barth's model for postmodern literature.¹³⁸

Trees, Families, Roots

In his analysis of *House of Leaves*, Mark Hansen makes a reference to an unusual image that appears at the very end of the book, on page 709:

The final page—curiously situated *after* the index and credits page—bears the inscription "Yggdrasil" in the form of a *T* followed by four lines of text and a fifth line containing a single, large-font, bold *O*. A reference to the giant tree supporting the universe in Norse mythology, the page startles in its apparent randomness, reinforcing the well-nigh cosmological closure effected by the novel it culminates, yet shedding no new light on just what should be made of it (Hansen 598)

¹³⁷ Here Danielewski is performing a characteristic post-postmodern strategy, dramatising the roots of the text in postmodernism and then positing a development from that strategy.

¹³⁸ Additionally, both Danielewski and Wallace associate deep unhappiness and trauma with mutism (Hal's inability to make himself understood, Truant's mutism when unhappy with his stepfamily). The absence of any sound can generate no new narrative.

Hansen's confusion over the appearance of this figure is reflective of a general critical uncertainty over Yggdrasil's function in the novel. Pressman believes that the page may make reference to what she perceives as the digital roots of the novel:

The tree is believed to be ash, like the cavernous walls of the house on Ash Tree Lane. The reference to an ancient myth explaining the division of the world into separate but connected entities—a network—concludes the novel and my reading of it. This final allusion is not only metaphoric but material, for Yggdrasil was the name of an early version of the Linux Operating System (Pressman 122)

While it is indeed possible that Danielewski may have been aware of this reference when adding the Yggdrasil page to the narrative, there is a more persuasive motivation behind its inclusion. Pressman makes the connection between the legendary ash tree Yggdrasil and the house on Ash Tree lane, but curiously opts for a digital reading rather than an analysis of how the figure of the legendary tree might provide a formal model for the narrative. Yggdrasil, which appears in both the *Poetic Edda* (Larrington 24) and *Prose Edda* (Sturluson 58), is the Norse variant on the religious figure of the “world tree” or “tree of life”, and is central to the Norse mythological universe.¹³⁹ That the tree is supported by three roots (there are three principal narrators in *House of Leaves*) and that Pelafina refers to Truant as “center and whole of my world” (*House* 613) suggests that Danielewski's incorporation of Yggdrasil is more fundamental to the form of his narrative than has been previously critically discussed. Yggdrasil itself acts as the central metaphor in a narrative that employs the image of the tree as a fundamental thematic and formal structuring device. While critics have correctly noted that the title of the novel acts as a description of a book (a “house” for leaves/pages), there has been a lack of discussion regarding the original “house of leaves” (the tree) from which the book is produced. Moreover, the appearance of Yggdrasil and the novel's tree motif are also

¹³⁹ The references in the appendicised collection “The Pelican Poems” to Edison and light bulbs (*House* 578-9) not only imply the formal connection between *House of Leaves* and cinema but also, in a punning suggestion, an “Edda's son”.

fundamental to an understanding of Danielewski's reaction to both Deconstruction and postmodernism in *House of Leaves*.

Trees make numerous explicit and implicit appearances in the narrative of *House of Leaves*. While the location of the Navidson's house on Ash Tree Lane is the most evident, other references abound. Appendix II-F contains an extract from Pliny that compares the eruption of Vesuvius to a tree (647),¹⁴⁰ while footnote 123 resembles a tree shape (110) and when returning home, Truant finds that the site of his childhood room is now a lumber yard (505). There is also a pervasive conflation of the tree and the body or self. In a quote from a self-help book invented by Danielewski, "Patricia B. Nesselroade" states that:

If one invests some interest in, for example, a tree and begins to form some thoughts about this tree and then writes these thoughts down, further examining the meanings that surface, allowing for unconscious associations to take place [...] the subject of the tree branches off into the subject of the self (407)

The reader is also encouraged to infer the arboreal associations connected with the "trunk" that contains Zampanò's papers and thus engenders the central narrative, with the word "trunk" also a possible reference to the human torso. In the appendicised "The Pelican Poems", apparently written by Truant as a younger man, the roots of the mango tree are compared to thoughts (577). It is also worth noting that the selection of Polaroid photographs that appear on page 572 (which are presumably taken by Truant on his climactic journey home) are of both houses and trees, with the houses themselves frequently obscured by tree branches or shadows or branches.

The tree can be understood as a formal diagram of the family network that underpins the narrative. Danielewski has been vocal about how constructing a family is "at the core" of the novel (Interview, *Bookworm* 2000) and the model of the "family tree" pervades *House of Leaves*. The uncertain relationship between Zampanò and Truant, Truant and Pelafina and Pelafina and Zampanò (and the

¹⁴⁰ A comparison that is also implicit in the nuclear mushroom cloud described on page 381.

implicit father-mother-son configuration that results) is configured as a kind of ghostly family tree. While there may not be any evidence for Zampanò's parentage of Truant in the text, he adopts by default the position of the absent father figure in Truant's life. Pelafina's offer to her son that, like a tree, "you can hide in me" (*Whalestoe* 72), as well as her comparison of her hands to an "ancient tree" (*House* 623) conflates familial love with the image of the tree. Towards the end of his narrative Truant fears his actions are informed by "some wicked family tree" (496), a preoccupation notable primarily for how it combines the arboreal, the genetic (Truant fears the possible heredity of his mother's mental illness) and, ultimately, the literary and linguistic. The substitute father figure of Zampanò, with his inflections of Borges and Milton, combines the network of the family tree with a broader notion of literary "inheritance" that also plays upon the linguistic dimension of "roots". Through his created literary family tree Truant has inherited the status of re-writer or re-teller of his "father's" stories,¹⁴¹ and with Zampanò a Borgesian father figure, the focus upon retelling and rewriting is strong. For example, one can see in Truant's commentary on Zampanò's text specific reference to Borges' writings on mythical creatures, writings that themselves situated their author in an inherited chain of rewriters and retellers.

In *The Book of Imaginary Beings* Borges writes on three creatures (the minotaur, the panther and the pelican) of strong influence in the narrative of *House of Leaves*. The minotaur is for Borges "a late and clumsy version of far older myths, the shadow of other dreams still more full of horror" (Borges, *Imaginary* 101), the panther is "an exotic sound unsupported by any very concrete image" (113) and the female pelican a creature that kills its young with devotion, before the male resurrects the infant with his own blood (114-5). All of Borges' definitions are transfigured through the son-figure of Truant into his own personal and literary narrative. The figure of the minotaur becomes adapted into Truant's own "dreams still more full of horror" (the opening line of Truant's introduction is about his nightmares) and even comes to stand for Truant himself, a "late and clumsy version" of his long deceased father, a description that also highlights the difficulty of

¹⁴¹ Truant both retells, through his editing process of *The Navidson Record*, and rewrites, in his admitted changing of Zampanò's text (*House* 12, 16).

removing oneself from the father's influence, which in Zampanò's case is closely aligned, as discussed above, with the form and influence of postmodern literature. The panther not only comes to stand for the mysterious roar that Truant hears during his panic attacks (he can hear but not see the creature that stalks him) but also the decentred deconstructed subject.¹⁴² Finally, the pelican is dramatised perhaps most thoroughly with Pelafina and Zampanò taking the roles of female and male respectively. Pelafina is associated not only with smothering maternal love (as evidenced in her letters to Truant from the institution) but also with infanticide (Truant believes she attempted to strangle him as a child). Zampanò's text, through the process of editing, ultimately revives Truant and provides him with the impetus to escape. It is also notable that Borges explains that the etymological root of the word "Pelican" is from the Greek "I hew with an axe" (114), as Truant's dream in which he is the minotaur climaxes with him being hewed to death with an axe by a protean female figure who the reader is invited to conflate with his mother. The idea of the "root" is therefore exploited to incorporate the tree, the family, the inheritance and linguistic etymology.

The formal schema of the family tree is also in conversation throughout *House of Leaves* with another literary work. A quote within *The Navidson Record* from Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Existence, Space and Architecture* posits that:

In terms of spontaneous perception, man's space is "subjectively centred" [...] man since remote times has thought of the whole world as being centralized. In many legends the "centre of the world" is concretized as a tree or pillar symbolizing a vertical *axis mundi* (*House* 113)

The quote from Norberg-Schulz appears in the text in response to a quotation from Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", but Danielewski's image of the family tree and its formal ramifications for his narrative are connected far more emphatically to *Glas*, one of Derrida's less

¹⁴² A position also complemented by the removal of the "centre" in Danielewski's rewriting of Rilke's panther poem discussed above.

anthologised works. *Glas*, which was written after the death of Derrida's father,¹⁴³ is a study of Hegel and Genet that takes the typographical form of two columns. The left column discusses Hegel, the right Genet, with a third typeface occasionally interspersed as marginalia within or beside both columns. Danielewski foregrounds his awareness of the work through its reference by an unidentified narrator in Appendix B ("I merely wanted *Glas* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1974). That is all" [*House* 545]). The most immediately striking aspect of the typographical layout of *Glas* is that it is virtually identical to some of the pages of the labyrinthine Chapter IX of *House of Leaves*. However, Derrida's influence goes beyond typography, with Danielewski dramatising a number of Derrida's theoretical concepts through his characters in *House of Leaves*. Gayatri Spivak's comprehensive analysis of *Glas* ("A Compte Rendu") is particularly useful for identifying the areas of influence between Derrida and Danielewski, and will be employed here alongside both texts.

A certain liquid approach to heredity in *Glas*, as well as the formal figure of the family tree, appears to have influenced Danielewski's narrative approach. Derrida notes in his discussion of Hegel that "the metaphor of the tree turns up again as a family metaphor: the genealogical tree in a radical sense" (*Glas* 77) and that "the Hegelian tree is also turned over; the old Hegel is the young Hegel's father only in order to have been his son, his great-grandson" (84). Spivak's assertion that in *Glas* "Derrida will attempt to place the son's (his own) signature as a mourning for his natural father" (Spivak 23) is actively dramatised in *House of Leaves* through Truant's reaction to both the literary father Zampanò's text and also his own understanding of the death of his biological father. Moreover, Spivak's description of the Hegel column as a "discourse of the family [...] as if the argument of the family constantly comes to an end and is re-opened, as if it repeats itself ad infinitum" (32-3) is an excellent model for the interaction of the three principal narratives of *House of Leaves*. Perhaps most strikingly, Spivak's inference from the Hegel column that "for the divine son to become one with the divine father, the human mother must be dismissed [...] and the human son must be killed and buried" (36) is formally enacted in the narrative shape of *House of Leaves*. The mother,

¹⁴³ It is of note when considering the subject matter of *House of Leaves* that *Glas* is written by a son mourning the death of his father.

Pelafina, is “dismissed”, abjected to a sub-appendix, while Truant, in his final journal entry after completing his editing of Zampanò’s narrative, tells an enigmatic story in which an infant boy dies (*House* 518-21). Truant then disappears from the narrative for good. Derrida’s text also makes the conflation, essential to Danielewski’s narrative, between the two meanings of the word “legend”. Derrida’s assertion on the first page of *Glas* (“This is – a legend, Not a fable: a legend” [*Glas* 1]) draws the reader’s attention to the importance of the processes of inscription and overwriting that will characterise the subsequent narrative. *House of Leaves* contains references to a real legend (the Cretan labyrinth and minotaur) and is also “legendary” in that it comprises of several different inscriptions upon the same text.

Perhaps the most pervasive influence of *Glas* on the formal structure of *House of Leaves* occurs when Derrida outlines the following figure, a three-branched tree couched in the language of the family:

A tree which has three branches makes up *one single tree* (einen *baum*) with them: but every son of the tree, every branch (and also its other children, leaves and blossoms) is itself a tree. The fibers bringing sap to the branch from the trunk are of the same nature [...] as the roots. If the tree is set in the ground upside down it will put forth leaves out of the roots in the air, and the boughs [...] will root themselves in the ground. And it is just as true to say that there is only *one single tree* here as to say that there are three (*Glas* 81)

This model correlates very closely with Danielewski’s narrative structure. There are in Derrida’s schema (as there are in Yggdrasil) three branching structures (the three roots), just as there are three central narrative voices in *House of Leaves*. However, the three branches, as well as each forming their own narrative, are inescapably parts of the overarching “trunk” (a trunk being, of course, the physical item found by Truant that instigates all three narratives in the novel). Moreover, the model of an overarching structure that contains within itself the genealogical potential for an apparently infinite series of variations complements not only Danielewski’s post-postmodern commitment to the opening and interaction of separate narratives but also Wallace’s chaotic Sierpinski gasket model, in which a unified boundary also instigates patterns of chaotic variation.

However, while the formal structure of Derrida's work appears a strong influence upon Zampanò's postmodern text and Truant's editorial reaction to that text, the ordering of the narrative of *House of Leaves* ultimately makes an important climactic structural decision that posits a break with both poststructuralist and postmodern approaches to text, as well as a commitment to the interaction of narratives within and without the text discussed above. The importance of the aforementioned positioning of Yggdrasil outside of the narrative (after the appendices and index) is more fundamentally structurally essential to Danielewski's engagement with postmodernism and poststructuralism than has been previously critically noted. Finn Fordham correctly notes the difficulty or even impossibility of the spatial comprehension of the Navidson labyrinth:

[...] it reveals no outside or externality from which or by which an analytical observer might sense, measure, limit or comprehend that structure. We can map a maze or a house and represent it from outside in a plan, but we cannot see language as a whole from the outside (Fordham 50)

Fordham immediately afterwards quotes Heidegger's famous metaphor that "Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins" ("Language is the house of being"). Danielewski's response to Benzon when talking about centripetal and centrifugal narratives suggests that a way of escaping the centripetal is by "looking at the naturalists, looking at ecocriticism" (Benzon 2007). In this context, the appearance of Yggdrasil at the end of the novel becomes less mysterious and more illustrative of a strategy that resists the textualising totality and potential entrapment of the Deconstructive idiom, a strategy interested in getting "outside".

When Sueellen Campbell discusses the ecocritical reaction to poststructuralist theories of a textualised "world", she suggests, partially quoting Edward Abbey, that:

Like the idealist, the poststructuralist thinks the world into being; like the realist, the ecologist insists that "*out there* is a different world, older and greater and deeper by far than ours" [...] Edward Abbey also says, "To refute

the solipsist or the metaphysical idealist all that you have to do is take him out and throw a rock at his head: if he ducks, he's a liar" (Campbell 130)¹⁴⁴

"Getting out of the house" and locating the natural is therefore associated with leaving the structure of language and attempting to communicate with the different world "out there", a reconfiguration of the "closed system" of the physical book into a component of an open and communicative discourse outside itself. The position of Yggdrasil in the narrative is, figuratively, "out there", being structurally located outside of the textual labyrinth of the Navidson house as well as the narratives of Truant, Zampanò, Pelafina and even the editors of Truant's manuscript. Indeed, when Truant plans to escape and head to Virginia to locate the Navidson house (a journey which also involves him facing the roots of his trauma) his motivation is to "find some piece of reality that's at the root of that place, which might in turn – I hope; I do, do hope – help me address (sic) some of the awful havoc always tearing through me" (*House* 410). The juxtaposition of "reality" with "root" is sympathetic to the ecocritical association of nature with "reality".

This ecocritical reading of the positioning of Yggdrasil in Danielewski's narrative allows for a much more developed understanding of the choice of *House of Leaves* as a title for the novel, a reading which moves beyond the relatively straightforward employment of the title as a metaphor for a book. In an ecocritical reading, the tree is the original "house of leaves" that precedes the book. As the tree provides the raw material for the paper that will ultimately constitute the textual world of the book, it is an indisputable non-linguistic source that fundamentally precedes and stands outside of a textualised universe. Danielewski embeds references within his narrative that hint at this ecocritical escape from poststructuralism and its influence upon postmodern texts. In a footnote on gravitation, it is noted that "gravity speaks a language comprehensible long before the words describing it are ever spoken or learned" (113), while the assertion later in the text that material found within the house precedes the creation of the earth (378) would appear to suggest that a constitutive component of the house precedes the

¹⁴⁴ The references from Abbey are from, respectively, pages 37 and 97 of *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*.

development of language, of the textualised universe itself. This assertion (that the figure of the house is composed of natural material that precedes it and therefore stands outside of it) is mirrored in the position of the figure of Yggdrasil. Far from an “apparently random” inclusion, the diagram of the tree is fundamental to an understanding of the structural composition and post-postmodern project of Danielewski’s novel.

There also exists, alongside the spatial and temporal, inferential, systemic and arboreal models for *House of Leaves*, another formal dialogue that underpins the structure and “shape” of Danielewski’s narrative. The dialogue between text and image (specifically the cinematic image) is fundamental to both the spatial construction and the post-postmodern status of Danielewski’s narrative just as it is to Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, and in the next chapter this dialogue will be analysed at length.

Chapter 5

“It’s Impossible To Photograph What We Saw”: Danielewski’s Text-Film Hybrid

House of Leaves, like *Infinite Jest*, has at the heart of its narrative a mysterious film, and like Wallace’s lethal entertainment, Danielewski’s creation “The Navidson Record” is ascribed dangerous powers. Danielewski’s film occupies a similar position to “Infinite Jest”, residing at the centre of the narrative, acting as a fulcrum for the action of the characters that come into contact with it. Like “Infinite Jest”, the film is unwatchable, but in Danielewski’s narrative this is not because of the film’s debilitating effects. Rather, “The Navidson Record” is essentially unwatchable because it does not exist as an entity to be watched, existing in the text only as a description of an imagined film. Rather than being watched, “The Navidson Record” is a film that can only be *read*, through its painstaking, often frame-by-frame, description in the text of *House of Leaves*. While the true creator of “The Navidson Record” is never revealed, Danielewski cryptically suggests that the film could be the creation of Zampanò, Pelafina or even Johnny Truant himself. The text teems with references to the film from the entertainment industry and the academy, but the veracity of these accounts is highly suspect, and in some cases outright satirical. While James Incandenza’s filmography in *Infinite Jest* articulates and interrogates the relationship of Wallace’s own writing to his postmodern predecessors, Danielewski’s placement of an unwatchable film at the centre of *House of Leaves* initiates an innovative spatial and formal narrative hybrid form that combines the grammar of both film and text but also simultaneously uses that form to both enact and interrogate postmodern critical discussion of the relative superiorities of text and image.

Text and Image

To begin this analysis, however, the current field of criticism based around the filmic component of *House of Leaves* must be addressed and assessed. Criticism of Danielewski’s work is in its infancy and as a result a general critical consensus can sometimes be reached based on a relatively small amount of existing criticism. In the case of Danielewski, a not inconsiderable amount of criticism of *House of Leaves* has flagged up the supposedly “digital” nature of the novel. While not being

dismissive of the stronger critical work on the digital-style structure of the narrative of *House of Leaves* (notably the aforementioned work of N. Katherine Hayles and Mel Evans on networks and the novel), a couple of critical problem areas have arisen from the “digital” discussion of Danielewski’s work and its relationship to “The Navidson Record”. Firstly, there has been a tendency to downplay the influence of film as a formal structuring device for and influence upon Danielewski’s narrative in favour of an emphasis on some more speculative references to “the internet” as a structuring principle for the novel. Secondly, there can also be perceived a critical line which, through a lack of precision, conflates the digital with the internet with the cinematic. While these elements are certainly not exclusive (much of “The Navidson Record” is digitally recorded and analysis is warranted of the cinematic digital manipulation of image) the cinematic elements of Danielewski’s narrative are *not* an exclusively digital phenomenon, and to treat them as such risks ignoring the importance of specifically cinematic structuring devices to the novel. It is important to restate here that the critical assertion that *House of Leaves* has characteristics of the digital is not being dismissed. Instead, this chapter will recover and formally separate the discussion of film as an important structuring device for *House of Leaves* in a critical field where the digital has often been prioritised at the expense of the cinematic, while also downplaying the perceived importance of the internet as a synecdoche for the novel’s structure.

In order to elucidate these concerns and to suggest a corrective it is important to give some examples of this critical problem area. Perhaps the best example of the favouring of the digital over the cinematic, despite evidence to the contrary, is Jessica Pressman’s 2006 article “*House of Leaves*: Reading The Networked Novel”. Pressman’s article critically foregrounds Danielewski’s narrative as “digital” while operating without a particularly firm system of nomenclature, with the terms “digital” and “internet” often becoming conflated. Pressman’s description of *House of Leaves* as “a book that privileges print while plugging into the digital network” (Pressman 107) recalls Mel Evans’ superior outlining of the several points of possible entry to the narrative, but ultimately Pressman’s argument relies upon a series of rather speculative positions on Danielewski’s employment of digital media, at one juncture mentioning that the novel was “written in the age of the internet boom” (108) as an argument for its digital form. Pressman also accords the presence

of the digital in the novel to a “spectre in the background [...] the thing you know is there but can’t see” (111), elsewhere simply choosing to disbelieve Danielewski’s explanation that he does not intend the representation of the word “house” in blue text to represent an HTML link. “Taking Danielewski at his word is seductive but dangerous” (121) writes Pressman, despite including in the article the suggestion that Danielewski disabuses the HTML association because “the blue color of “house” is not meant to invoke digital technology but rather to represent cinematic effects”(Ibid). Nicoline Timmer makes a similarly speculative connection between the narrative of *House of Leaves* and the internet, arguing that the novel is similar to the “linking” structure of the internet, where “worlds are equally structured non-hierarchically. They are linked and connected, but not logically; there is no clear ontological hierarchy between them” (Timmer 290).

While the unreliable nature of the narrators of *House of Leaves* supports the idea of a non-ontological system (particularly as the issue of confused parentage is central to the narrative), it is surely incorrect to suggest that there is no formal reading hierarchy in Danielewski’s novel’s form. While the “reader” of the internet could conceivably claim that their process of navigation is non-hierarchical, there is simply no avoiding the fact that the narrative of *House of Leaves* implies a hierarchy. Even with its paratexts and different points of entry (*Haunted*, *The Whalestoe Letters*) there is an implied hierarchy of character, with “first level” narrators (Truant, Zampanò, Pelafina) taking precedent over the “second level” narrators within *The Navidson Record* (Will Navidson, Karen Green, Holloway).

A significant influence on the arguments that claim *House of Leaves* as an “internet narrative” is the publication history of the novel itself. Danielewski posted the novel online as a PDF file before he had a publishing contract, and in 2000 the novel was serialised by Random House online. This publication history casts a long shadow over critical discussion of the form of the novel, despite the fact that Danielewski has explained that he posted the novel online for economic rather than thematic purposes (Pressman herself reproduces Danielewski’s admission that “I didn’t have the money to Xerox and ship off this huge manuscript, so I got one of those terrible URLs and posted the thing as a PDF file on the internet” [Pressman 119]) and that Random House’s online serialisation was effectively a publisher’s marketing strategy. Indeed when Danielewski himself is interviewed about *House of*

Leaves, the formal influence that is discussed most extensively is cinema (Cottrell and McCaffery's interviews are cases in point).

More recently, some criticism has emerged that has begun to discuss the centrality of film to the formal construction of Danielewski's narrative. This new trend has manifested, with varying degrees of success, in essays by Finn Fordham and Paul McCormick in Bray and Gibbons' 2011 edited collection on Danielewski, and the relative successes and failures of these essays are important to a discussion of the importance of the cinematic in *House of Leaves*, and latterly how that discussion is connected to Danielewski's position in relation to postmodern fiction. Fordham's essay "Katabasis in Danielewski's *House of Leaves* and Two Other Recent American Novels"¹⁴⁵ is characteristic of a critical response to Danielewski's novel that suggests that the forms of written text and cinema are in combative dialogue within the narrative, but that the text ultimately "wins" the battle by defusing a potential threat to the form of the novel from cinema. Fordham discusses how Danielewski's novel is successful in "dissolving concerns about perceived threats to the book's status from the cinema and visual and digitized media more generally" by "producing narratives which enclose film, and by exploiting aspects of books which films do not have" (Fordham 34-5). Fordham subsequently suggests that the novel's physical layout gives it an innovative primacy of form over "visual media" which he claims "make few demands on the body of the viewer or consumer – there is no handling of the object which is being consumed" (46).

Fordham's assertions are characteristic of a critical approach that does not account for the specific importance of cinema to Danielewski's narrative. Fordham conflates cinema and "visual and digitized media", a position that conflates the cinematic and the digital into an umbrella term of "media" (or in Fordham's case "visual media") instead of extricating the elements of *House of Leaves* that engage explicitly with cinema and those that engage with digital culture. This homogenising of "visual media" also makes the later argument about the lack of demands made on

¹⁴⁵ It should be noted that one of the other novels is *Infinite Jest*. However, Wallace's novel is curiously never analysed alongside *House of Leaves* within the article, being invoked only in a page-long discussion, alongside DeLillo's *Underworld*, of the tropes of katabasis. Fordham's invocation of Wallace's novel is therefore not relevant to the analysis here.

the consumer's body hard to support. Presumably Fordham is excluding media such as multimedia installations and computer games (perhaps even the internet itself) which make demands on the consumer's body. Danielewski even includes a reference to role-playing and puzzle-based computer games in *House of Leaves* to imply a parallel between the interactive nature of role-playing computer games and the interactive nature of both the Navidson labyrinth and the form of his novel (*House* 99).¹⁴⁶ The most problematic element of Fordham's critique is the suggestion that Danielewski's novel engages with cinema in order to overwhelm it, to somehow confound and "defeat" the form in order to champion the primacy of text. This critical position, as will be argued presently, is symptomatic of the kind of "text beats image" argument that is characteristic of the postmodern position interrogated by Kathleen Fitzpatrick in *The Anxiety Of Obsolescence*,¹⁴⁷ and does not adequately represent Danielewski's more complex critical position on postmodernism.

A greater claim to relevance in terms of Danielewski's employment of cinema can be made by McCormick's essay "*House of Leaves*, Cinema and the New Affordances Of Old Media". McCormick makes the important step of playing down the primacy of the internet in discussion of the form of *House of Leaves*. Crucially, McCormick also suggests that rather than exploiting the material element of the book form to somehow challenge the potential of cinema, *House of Leaves*' formal combination of the literary and the cinematic actually sharpens and revitalises the narrative:

Indeed, it is both instructive and somewhat paradoxical to note how cinematic thinking allows Danielewski to reimagine the page for its imagistic potentials,

¹⁴⁶ Fordham also suggests that *House of Leaves* "clearly mocks the entire Humanities Industry" (46) despite Danielewski publicly disabusing this notion, stating in interview that "I've heard quite a few people say they sense a certain amount of antagonism in me towards critics, but quite the opposite is true [...] I do feel confident that engagement (between critics and the novel) will eventually happen, and I am honestly looking forward to seeing what finally comes out of it" (Interview, McCaffery 107).

¹⁴⁷ See the beginning of Chapter 3 for discussion of Fitzpatrick in relation to Wallace. Fitzpatrick's position is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

and thus to return to the very medium and materiality of books, its print, as a resource for formal experiments (McCormick 64)

Additionally McCormick suggests, referencing Hayles' *Writing Machines*, that

Danielewski's narration remediates various media to show how human subjectivity is created by representation, rather than just shown through representation [...] However, Danielewski accomplishes more than just revealing the interpersonal dynamics that are now possible with the technologies of the media environment. He also shows that literary narration can make us aware of their possibilities, that the novel can theorise about other media and their changing formal potentials by representing those affordances in narrative (Fordham 62)

Although not specifically about the cinematic, this argument is significantly more subtle and persuasive in its analysis of Danielewski than an argument that suggests the visual and the textual are locked in battle for the survival of their respective forms in *House of Leaves*. Admittedly, traces of this earlier argument do at times remain implicit in the essay, most notably when McCormick analyses the failure of Navidson's camera, resulting in the six minute black screen at the climax of "The Navidson Record":

Danielewski has used the orthographic failure of documentary cinema, its failure to capture the Real as symbolised by the black screen, to suggest why his literary art can thrive in an age of Photoshop inauthenticity and postmodern indeterminacy. The crisis of the unknowable is no crisis for this novel, for while the screen goes black, Navidson's readerly desire remains undiminished (McCormick 65)

This does at least suggest that the two forms are working in tandem, but there remains the nagging sensation that the literary does somehow have to ultimately operate at the expense of the cinematic for the sake of its vitality. It is also not entirely clear why this defeat has to necessarily take place in order for the literary to

thrive in an age of “postmodern indeterminacy”. Wallace’s “E Unibus Pluram”, for example, could be taken into account here, with that particular literary manifesto outlining the possibilities of literary engagement with the image culture of television without the suggestion that literature necessarily has to enclose and nullify that medium to retain a vitality of form.

McCormick’s essay is nevertheless an important and considered advance towards a stronger critical engagement with Danielewski’s employment of cinema in *House of Leaves*. However, there is still a significant degree of critical analysis to be performed on the novel’s formal use of cinematic technique and the significant influence of Danielewski’s filmmaker father Tadeusz, both of which will be addressed presently in this chapter. More immediately important to the engagement with the cinematic in *House of Leaves* is to address in detail Danielewski’s relationship to a certain postmodern position (a position interrogated by Kathleen Fitzpatrick) that allocates to text a degree of primacy over image. Danielewski’s frequently misquoted position on this argument is essential to an understanding of *House of Leaves*’ formal employment of the tropes of cinema and how this is strongly connected to an interrogation of literary postmodernism and a formal move beyond an antagonistic configuration of text and image.

Danielewski’s position on the relationship of text to image is more complex than is generally described, and quotes from interviews must be located in their context in order that they are not misinterpreted. The particularly contentious statements made by Danielewski on this subject come from the interviews with Benzon and Cottrell. Quoted often in the case for Danielewski’s advocacy of the supremacy of text over the culture of cinema and television are the pronouncements that “I’d like to see the book reintroduced for all it really is” and “if you want to see this movie, you’ll have to read the book” (Cottrell), as well as “my job is to write something that could not just as easily be seen on television or at the movies” (Benzon). It is essential to return to the sources here to frame Danielewski’s statements in their original context. When Danielewski explains to Cottrell that “if you want to see this movie, you’ll have to read the book”, he is referring not to a literary “defeat” of the cinematic but rather arguing against the trend for writing novels with one eye on the possible adaptation to film, explaining that “If you’re thinking the Hollywood deal while you write, you’re already selling out all the

possibilities you have right there on the page” (Cottrell). Essentially, Danielewski is arguing that the novelist should exploit most fully the possibilities of the medium in which he or she is writing, rather than write a work that is partially designed to be easily and accessibly translated into another medium. This is not a “text beats film” argument. Danielewski has created a novel with pervasive formal elements of the cinematic, but these elements are not employed to diminish the status of cinema. Rather *House of Leaves* explores the formal interaction of the literary and the cinematic within a specifically literary frame, instead of acting as a proving ground for one form over the other. Therefore, when Danielewski says “I’d like to see the book reintroduced for all it really is” it is *this* process to which he is referring. That is, to see the literary form exploited for its formal potential rather than as a component in an economic franchise process (book, film, novelisation of film etc).

The quote in the Benzon interview that “my job is to write something that could not just as easily be seen on television or at the movies” may at first seem a more straightforward outlining of a “text against film” argument. The immediate response from Benzon and Danielewski’s response to that suggestion would seem to reinforce this:

KB: Writing that does what television and film cannot do.

MZD: That’s my point. (Benzon)

However, while on an initial reading of this quote it may look like Danielewski’s novel is antagonistic to television and film, the response is actually located within a broader discussion regarding the importance of the evolution of text in response to new narrative or representative forms, as Danielewski subsequently outlines:

The comparison would be: what happened to painting when the camera came onto the scene? Suddenly it wasn’t about figurative representational art. It was “Let’s paint the way we feel.” So I view my books as a success if they’re offering an experience that you can’t get in other media. And that fits into your

Darwinian idea. Why should a novel survive that takes several weeks to read?
(Ibid) ¹⁴⁸

This is not a manifesto for the overturning of other media and the superiority of print, rather a suggestion that the novel form take account of the evolution of other representative and narrative media. In incorporating elements of cinematic form, including the description of an entire film, into his narrative Danielewski is taking formal account of other media while not arguing against their narrative validity. It is not difficult to see how from these statements a critical view has been derived that suggests that Danielewski is creating a text that attempts to nullify film and, in Hansen's words, champion the "superiority of print" (Hansen 599). It may be that this critical position has also been informed by the occasions within *House of Leaves* during which images fail and the text supplants their absence or failure, with perhaps the key quote occurring when the dramatic rescue of the Navidson children and the death of Tom Navidson is not represented directly on the page but instead via interviews conducted after the incident, with the note that it is "funny how incompetent images can sometimes be" (*House* 344). The important word here is "sometimes". When images fail, as in the climactic example explored by McCormick above, they are supplanted by text. However, this is not, as McCormick appears to partially suggest, a failure of the image. Rather it is, as will be outlined below, the creation of a hybrid text with the tandem employment of the cinematic and the textual.

Furthermore, Danielewski's novel actually incorporates into its own narrative an interrogation of the critical position (a position that will presently be shown to have postmodern characteristics) that asserts the superiority of text over image. This interrogation occurs towards the end of the narrative in the relatively under-discussed Chapter XVII, when Navidson decides to return to the house for what will be his final journey into the labyrinth. Zampanò's text describes how Navidson's

¹⁴⁸ This sentiment echoes the view of the 1960s British writer BS Johnson that "film could tell a story more directly, in less time and with more concrete detail than a novel [...] why should anyone who simply wanted to be told a story spend all his spare time for a week or weeks reading a book when he could experience the same thing in a version in some ways superior at his local cinema in only one evening? (Johnson 11). Danielewski speaks of his admiration for Johnson's "wonderful techniques" in interview (Interview, McCaffery 106)

motivation for that final return journey has been the subject of numerous academic and critical theses, and that current critical opinion has resulted in three particular schools of thought: The Kellog-Antwerk Claim, The Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria and The Haven-Slocum Theory (*House* 385) and it is necessary to outline these fictional critical theories in detail in order to articulate Danielewski's position. The Kellog-Antwerk Claim revolves around Navidson's possessiveness and suggests that Navidson's return to the house was an attempt to retrospectively "own" the space that had caused him such trauma. Zampanò's text both describes and questions the veracity of their claim:

Kellog and Antwerk argue that the act of returning was an attempt to territorialize and thus preside over that virtually unfathomable space. However, if their claim is correct that Navidson's preoccupation with the house grew solely out of his need to own it, then other behavioural patterns should have followed suit, which was not the case. For instance, Navidson never sought to buy out Karen's share of their home. He refused to lure television programmes and other corporate sponsors to his doorstep which would have further enforced his titular position, at least in the eye of the media [...] even if Navidson did mentally equate ownership with knowledge, as both Kellog and Antwerk assert he did, he should have more adamantly sought to name the aspects of his discoveries, which as others would later observe he most certainly did not. (386)

The Haven-Slocum Theory, devised by an academic married couple, is based upon an assemblage of interviews and sources to calculate the level of emotional damage visited upon those who inhabited Navidson's house, and the subsequent relationships between those people. Haven and Slocum also analyse in detail the dreams of Navidson (discussed in Chapter 4) as a subconscious revelation of a different trajectory through the house, with particular emphasis on the dream about the giant snail's shell:

These intimate glimpses of Navidson's psyche reveal more about why he decided to go back and what may account for the profound physiological

consequences that followed once he was inside [...] Slocum contends that the dream planted the seed in Navidson's mind to try a different path, which was exactly what he did do in Exploration #5 (398, 402)

The Haven-Slocum Theory concludes with the controversial suggestion that the events on Ash Tree Lane may have affected not only those who experienced the events firsthand, but also those who have read or written about the events. They talk about the effects on readers and writers thus:

Apparently, the former group shows very little evidence of any sort of emotional or mental change: "At most, temporary." While the latter group seems to have been more radically influenced: "As evidence continues to come in, it appears that a portion of those who have not only meditated on the house's perfectly dark and empty corridors but articulated how its pathways have murmured within them have discovered a decrease in their own anxieties. People suffering anything from sleep disturbances to sexual dysfunction to poor rapport with other seem to have enjoyed some improvement (407)

The Kellog-Antwerk Claim and the Haven-Slocum Theory respectively precede and follow the second and most controversial critical theory of the Navidson house, and it is the second theory, the "infamously influential Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria" (396) that carries the most significance in terms of *House of Leaves'* position on the relationship between text and image. Danielewski's presentation of the BFJ Criteria (as it is abbreviated in the text) is absolutely essential to an understanding of the novel's relationship to a postmodern position on the difference between image and text. First appearing at "*The Conference on the Aesthetics of Mourning* held in Nuremberg, Germany on August 18, 1995",¹⁴⁹ the BFJ Criteria is communicated through "an unnamed student [...] on behalf of his professors" (386) and is written in the first-person plural. It begins with a fairly savage refutation of the preceding Kellog-Antwerk Claim:

¹⁴⁹ The geographical location of the conference is potentially a comic reference to the authoritarian nature of the BFJ Criteria's position.

“Refutation One: We do not accept that filmmaking constitutes an act of naming. Image never has and never will possess proprietary powers. Though others may deny it, we believe that to this day the Adamic strengths of the word, and hence language, have never been or ever will be successfully challenged.” (386)

It is important to consider carefully the language and the circumstances invested by Danielewski in this opening salvo. The proponents of the BFJ Criteria do not make themselves present at the conference, instead choosing to hide behind a first-person plural voice and one of their students. The effect of this anonymity is alternately sinister and comic, with the absence of the authors of the paper presenting a sly actualisation of certain poststructuralist positions on the presence of the author. Moreover, the reader may wonder why “people everywhere” recognised the paper as the Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria (386) despite no overt evidence of the identity of the contributors. This would suggest that the professors involved have previous form with public announcements of this fashion, which somewhat deflates the mystery and authority of the anonymous address and makes the rebuke to Kellogg-Antwerk appear somewhat less incendiary.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, the BFJ Criteria’s rather pompously worded assertion about the primacy of the “Adamic strengths of the word” suggests an interrogation by Danielewski of the position on text and image outlined by Kathleen Fitzpatrick in *The Anxiety of Obsolescence*. Fitzpatrick critically addresses the position of a number of critics who suggest in their writing that the centrality of the image in postmodernism has hazardous potential for the survival of literature. While Fitzpatrick’s book slightly postdates the publication of *House of Leaves*, through the creation and implementation of the BFJ Criteria Danielewski is attempting to address and move beyond these critical concerns within the novel. Fitzpatrick suggests that there is a concern in certain criticisms of postmodernism about the influence of film as a factor in the decline of literary and print culture, that

¹⁵⁰ A rather more blunt suggestion of Danielewski’s implied attitude towards the BFJ Criteria can be derived from the fact that BFJ is an American slang acronym for “Big Fat Jerk.”

“contemporary scholarly interest in film as a form of art, or in television as a legitimate cultural artefact, hastens that decline, as the academy treacherously turns its back on the print-based epistemologies under which the university was founded” (Fitzpatrick 105). Fitzpatrick interrogates Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, which suggests that from the advent of photography the image “did not merely function as a supplement to language, but bid to replace it as our dominant means for construing, understanding, and testing reality” while in *Technopoly* Postman suggests that “new technologies compete with old ones – for time, for attention, for money, for prestige, but mostly for dominance of their world-view” (Postman, quoted in Fitzpatrick 104). Fitzpatrick also reproduces the criticism of Alvin Kernan and Joseph Slade:

Visual images don’t provide the same kind of truth as words. What they say is not necessarily inferior but it is different. Meaning is much more on the surface, experienced immediately rather than discovered by extended in-depth analyses of the image. The meaning of the visual image is also far less complex, lacking the multiplicity of meanings characteristic of single words and the ironic ambivalence set up between words (Kernan, quoted in Fitzpatrick 107)¹⁵¹

Images are more limited in terms of the distance between the object and the picture of it; images are direct representations of things and cannot be entirely decoupled or divorced from them [...] Images carry less *meaningful* information than words because they cannot be combined to the same levels of complexity (Slade, quoted in Fitzpatrick 107, italics original)¹⁵²

This conflict-based model of the postmodern relationship between text and image appears to lie at the heart of the scholarly criticism of *House of Leaves* that suggests that the book is attempting to re-assert the superiority of print culture over

¹⁵¹ From Kernan, *The Death Of Literature*. See Works Cited for full information.

¹⁵² From Slade, “Communication, Group Theory, and Perception in *Vineland*.” See Works Cited for full information.

image, specifically film. Fitzpatrick's riposte to this model of criticism disputes the stated simplicity of the image and highlights the complexity of how images must be "read":

This too-closeness of meaning implies an uncomfortable relationship with objects, with the image's referent. In this these authors echo Roland Barthes, who describes the photograph as a "transparent envelope" for the particular [...] In fact, while images may seem to be "direct representations of things" whose meanings are "experienced immediately," they are neither so direct and immediate as they seem, nor are they representations of particular things [...] on the contrary, images require reading just as do words. The chair signified by a photograph is no more "real" than the chair represented by the word; the photograph is a collection of iconic signs rather than a single indexical sign and communicates concepts through visual likenesses, not by directly presenting object traces (108)

Fitzpatrick then suggests why the image's status is so problematic for these critics:

The image is too concrete to be meaningful, and yet so ephemeral that it distracts from reality. It cannot create a sense of permanence, and yet it commands all desire. The problem with the image is that it is at once too real, not real enough, and, in fact, destructive of reality (110)

Fitzpatrick explains that the response of these critics to this postmodern problem of the image is to regress, to take refuge in words and language, to declare the image lower in the hierarchy of meaning creation than the word, a critical position shared by the BFJ Criteria in *House of Leaves*. The item of most importance to the BFJ Criteria in the whole of "The Navidson Record" is a drunken letter written by Navidson to his partner Karen, as for the Criteria the most authentic moment in a multi-media film project remains the "Adamic" written word. The letter is indeed useful to an understanding of Navidson's personality, the most significant discovery engendered by the letter being the revelation of the identity of "Delial", a mysterious word misinterpreted by Karen as a potential mistress. Delial is ultimately revealed to

be Navidson's name for a starving African child he photographed for a picture than won him the Pulitzer Prize, the photograph displaying the helpless child menaced by a vulture.¹⁵³ In an ironic flourish that undercuts the epistemological focus of the BFJ Criteria, this example of the written word (so important to their critical position) serves mainly to reveal the more significant narrative importance of an image. The drunken and often incoherent language of the letter results in misspellings and unwitting neologisms ("dydying", "threem", "pciking" [*House* 392]), which imply the fluidity and instability of the inscribed word, appeals to Fitzpatrick's suggestion that in a post-linguistic turn culture of text "each of the elements of ekphrastic fear could easily be turned back on language itself" (Fitzpatrick 116). Moreover, it seems that Navidson's guilt over the photograph derives from an initial underestimation of the claim of an image upon reality. Having viewed Delial initially as an abstraction, a component of an image, the real-world referent of that image has returned to haunt Navidson in later years. Here Danielewski implicitly and ironically foregrounds the life-altering importance of the image as a reference to reality within a critical argument that is supposed to counter that importance, thus hamstringing the claims of the BFJ Criteria (and indeed those critics mentioned by Fitzpatrick).¹⁵⁴

The subsequent Haven-Slocum theory, which unlike the BFJ Criteria is presented directly by its creators (a married couple), turns its attention to the effects of exposure to the house on those who inhabited it and those who have read or

¹⁵³ The Delial picture is an extremely thinly veiled reference to an infamous and near-identical photograph by the late photojournalist Kevin Carter (see McLeod, "The Life and Death of Kevin Carter"). Carter's picture sparked a debate over the intervention of the photographer in the events they record. Indeed Navidson's drunkenly composed letter displays a considerable amount of guilt over his involvement in the picture: "The real vulture was the guy with the camera preying on her for his fuck Pulitzer prize [...] should have taken 10 minutes taking her somewhere so she wouldn't go away like that" (*House* 392). The significance of this photograph is further discussed in the concluding section of this thesis.

¹⁵⁴ The BFJ Criteria's response to Delial is, according to Zampanò, "still considered harsh and particularly insensate toward international tragedy", their suggestion being that Delial operates more as a catalysing device than a real-world human being (The Criteria is quoted as saying "Memory, experience, and time turned her very bones into a trope for everything Navidson had ever lost" [395]).

written about it. Significantly, the locus of the BFJ Criteria's thesis is dismissed virtually out of hand by Haven and Slocum:

Where the Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria made Navidson's letter to Karen the keystone of its analysis, The Haven-Slocum Theory does away with the document in a footnote, describing it as "drunken babble chock-full of expected expressions of grief, re-identification with a lost object, and plenty of transference, having less to do with Navidson's lost brother and more to do with the maternal absence he endured throughout his life. The desire to save Delial must partly be attributed to a projection of Navidson's own desire to be cradled by his mother. Therefore his grief fuses his sense of self with his understanding of the other, causing him not only to mourn for the tiny child but for himself as well." (397)

Having (through the presentation of the BFJ Criteria) implicitly parodied the regressive critical position that elevates text over image, the discrepancy between the responses of the BFJ Criteria and the Haven Slocum Theory to "The Navidson Record" is key to an understanding of the relationship of Danielewski's narrative to a "reader-inferential" structure like that constructed by Wallace in *Infinite Jest*.¹⁵⁵

Unlike the inward focus of the BFJ Criteria, the Haven-Slocum Theory looks both inside and outside "The Navidson Record" in order to read it, with a particular focus on the psychological and physiological "real-world" effects of exposure to the Navidson house. Moreover, Haven and Slocum see reader response and inference as

¹⁵⁵ Consider Danielewski's 2003 suggestion to Larry McCaffery that "I've always wanted to create scenes and scenarios that verge on the edge of specificity without crossing into identification, leaving enough room, so to speak, for the reader to participate and supply her own fears, his own anxieties, their own history and future" (Interview, McCaffery 119-120) alongside Wallace's explanation to the same interviewer a decade earlier that "this process is a relationship between the writer's consciousness and (the reader's) own, and that in order for it to be anything like a full human relationship, she's going to have to put in her share of the linguistic work" (Interview, McCaffery 138).

an integral part of the process of building a critical model.¹⁵⁶ Their critical model is the PEER Table, an acronym that stands for “Post-Exposure Effects Rating” but also implicitly suggests the importance of peer consensus (and indeed the importance of viewing). Two tables appear, with the first (396) listing the subsequent psychological and physiological effects of exposure to the Navidson house on those who experienced it first-hand and the second (406) displaying the apparent improvement in these conditions once Navidson has returned to and ultimately transcended and escaped the labyrinth inside the house. What sets the Haven-Slocum Theory apart from the Kellog-Antwerk Claim and the BFJ Criteria is the focus upon the effects of “The Navidson Record” on those who have read and written about it, as “the concluding paragraphs claim that people not even directly associated with the events on Ash Tree Lane have been affected” (407). Their conclusions are indistinct and do not suggest a single unified effect on readers or writers, though, as outlined above, they do distinguish between those who have merely seen the film and those who have read and written about it. Reconsider the passage about reader and writer response originally reproduced above:

Apparently, the former group shows very little evidence of any sort of emotional or mental change: “At most, temporary.” While the latter group seems to have been more radically influenced: “As evidence continues to come in, it appears that a portion of those who have not only meditated on the house’s perfectly dark and empty corridors but articulated how its pathways have murmured within them have discovered a decrease in their own anxieties (407)

This would ostensibly suggest a regressive hierarchy of text and image, and that the textual component of “The Navidson Record” carries a more significant hermeneutic importance than the image component, and that the film itself cannot communicate

¹⁵⁶ This flies in the face of suggestions, like those outlined above in Fordham’s essay, that Danielewski is attempting to satirise the entire academic humanities industry. While Danielewski certainly satirises elements of postmodern academic thought, he is not on a crusade against all academic interpretation or institutions.

hermeneutically in the same manner (“little evidence of any sort of emotional or mental change”). However, Danielewski’s sly addendum to Haven and Slocum’s findings suggests that “an even greater number of people” who have dwelt on “The Navidson Record” have displayed “an increase in obsessiveness, insomnia, and incoherence: “Most of those who chose to abandon their interest soon recovered. A few, however, required counselling and in some instances medication and hospitalization. Three cases resulted in suicide.”” (407). If one then considers Johnny Truant’s increasingly psychotic reaction to Zampanò’s text, the apparent validity of the dominance of text over image is interrogated, as evidence appears to emerge that the most toxic component of “The Navidson Record” is actually related to text rather than image, to reading and writing rather than viewing. This suggests that, while both Wallace and Danielewski employ a mysterious film at the heart of their respective novels, the lethality of the central object is different. In *Infinite Jest*, the act of watching the eponymous film is fatal, whereas in *House of Leaves* the danger comes not from the film but from the textual description of the film. Danielewski’s ascribing of dangerous powers to, essentially, the “book of the film” undercuts the critical position that foregrounds the toxic potential of the image to text, revealing a determination not to elevate one form over another or to regress, in response to postmodernism, to a position where text takes dominion over image.

Danielewski moves beyond this critical position on postmodernism by locating within *House of Leaves* potency in text-image *hybridity*, rather than a simple hierarchical struggle between image and text. As argued in Chapter 3, in *Infinite Jest* Wallace uses the textual “remaking” of a lethal film to neutralise and move beyond James Incandenza’s failed experiment. In *House of Leaves* the potential toxicity of the text posits a movement beyond the concern over postmodern text-image hierarchy, towards a new post-postmodern potency engendered by the hybridising of both forms. As with the cinematic elements of *Infinite Jest*, the actual formal processes whereby Danielewski hybridises film and literature have thus far remained, with the exception of the work of McCormick (and McCormick’s aforementioned employment of Hayles), relatively critically undiscussed and it is important to outline the employment of the cinematic formal structure of Danielewski’s novel in detail. Danielewski’s implementation of cinematic techniques throughout the text of *House of Leaves* within *The Navidson Record* is

self-evident, as he is describing the narrative of a film. However the specifically technical cinematic processes described in *The Davidson Record* do not merely operate as terms descriptive of a filmic narrative. Instead, they play upon the relative material dimensions of the cinema screen and the page and also create and complement the pervasive thematic elements at play within the novel, this hybridised form ultimately being of importance to the novel's movement beyond postmodernism. As the first part of this process, it is necessary to describe the formal influence of cinema on the narrative of *House of Leaves* and how this hybrid form is enacted.

The Cinematic Text

In interview Danielewski describes how the narrative of *House of Leaves* is formally influenced by cinema, explaining how a general interest in typographical and design innovation in texts developed into a more specifically cinematic methodology while writing the novel:

The idea of how text might be placed on the page was something I'd always been interested in, probably due to all those discussions I'd had with my father about technical elements directors use to control the viewer's perceptions [...] I've always loved the way images insist on a certain sensibility, whether by Godard or Goya, Fellini or Blake [...] the visual experiments in *House of Leaves* are mostly based on the grammar of film and the enormous foundation of theory established over the last century. There's a complicated craftsmanship involved in controlling the viewer's perception. (Interview, McCaffery & Gregory 119)

Danielewski also admits to McCaffery and Gregory that he "used a pencil to storyboard the labyrinth section" (117), employing a cinematic production technique (storyboarding) in the production of a literary text. As suggested in the above quote, the wellspring of Danielewski's interest in cinematic form and narrative is fundamentally familial. Like *Infinite Jest's* Hal Incandenza, Danielewski had a filmmaker father with whom he had a difficult relationship. Tadeusz Z. Danielewski was a Polish-born acting coach and director of documentaries and features who

settled in the US after World War II. Danielewski has spoken about his father's screening of films for the family throughout his childhood, during and after which extensive questions would be asked and discussions held about techniques of filmmaking:

So while I was changing the reels, discussions would ensue about what we had just seen, my father asking very pointed questions like [...] "How has the director's use of this lens or those angles or that film stock influenced the way the viewer feels?" [...] "Who is the central voice here? What do we mean by 'voice' here, anyway?" (Interview, McCaffery 108)¹⁵⁷

Danielewski also recounts two illuminating stories about films described but not actually seen. The first relates to how his father would describe films that he was unable to obtain to screen for the family:

Over dinner he might also discuss a film he hadn't brought home with him – one he'd shown in a classroom or at a screening. He would describe it in great detail [...] the Danielewski family would sit around discussing a film not one of us had seen but which my father had so vividly re-created for us in our heads (Ibid)

The second anecdote about an unseen film concerns a project of Tadeusz Danielewski that was produced but subsequently lost. The film in question was a documentary made in the early 1970s entitled *Spain: Open Door*¹⁵⁸ which was subsequently confiscated by the Spanish authorities, although Danielewski explains that through his father's descriptions the film, which he never saw, "survives in my memory" (Interview, McCaffery 109). The reader of *House of Leaves*, in which a

¹⁵⁷ The final question here has particular resonance for the reader of Danielewski's novel. Hayles dryly notes that Danielewski's description of these probing question and answer sessions "no doubt sheds light on the theme of narcissistic parents running through *House of Leaves*" (*Writing Machines* 126).

¹⁵⁸ Danielewski himself remarks on the nod to Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*.

young man experiences a vivid description of a film he has not seen by an implied father figure, will immediately recognise the potential origin of *The Navidson Record* in both of these stories.¹⁵⁹ In the early 1990s Danielewski apparently wrote a short story, “Redwood”, about his relationship with his father, only for Tadeusz, who was then dying of cancer, to violently reject the piece, “taunting Mark by saying he should quit wasting his time writing and get a job at the post office” (*Writing Machines* 128). The text of “Redwood” was destroyed by Danielewski and subsequently retrieved and reconstructed for him by his sister. Although the text has never been made public, Danielewski has stated that “Redwood” operates as an early sketch for *House of Leaves*, and indeed the word “Redwood” appears on a couple of occasions in the novel (*House* 337, 547) as a trace of the text’s genesis.¹⁶⁰ The influence of Danielewski’s father therefore runs substantially through both the formal and thematic structure of the novel.

Danielewski’s father is not the only directorial influence upon the narrative of *House of Leaves*, with the films of Federico Fellini and Stanley Kubrick in particular displaying an influence upon the character and structure of the novel. Fellini’s 1954 film *La Strada* provides Danielewski with the name Zampanò, as well as a palimpsest influence on the novel’s narrative structure. Fellini’s Zampanò (Anthony Quinn) is an itinerant strongman who dominates and finally breaks the spirit of his performing partner Gelsomina (Guilietta Masina) in a narrative that recalls the implied relationship between Danielewski’s Zampanò and the similarly named Pelafina. In Fellini’s film the death of a third character, the clown Il Matto, in a potential love triangle with Zampanò and Gelsomina, recalls implicitly the death of Johnny Truant’s father, with Il Matto, like Truant’s father, dying adjacent to a

¹⁵⁹ Tadeusz Danielewski also directed a 1962 film adaptation of Sartre’s 1944 drama *No Exit*, which seems to have exerted some influence on the first of Navidson’s three climactic dreams. In Sartre’s play three dead people are locked in an impermeable room, only to reject escape when the opportunity finally arises. In Navidson’s first dream he finds himself in a similarly purgatorial room with an exit (in this case a well) that he dares not pass through, for fear that he will be sent to hell.

¹⁶⁰ The title of the work is an early indication of the importance of the tree to the structure of *House of Leaves*, as discussed in Chapter 4.

broken-down vehicle.¹⁶¹ The influence of Kubrick derives primarily from 1968's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and 1980's *The Shining*. Recall how (as previously invoked in Chapter 4 in relation to Jameson) the influence of *2001* is highlighted by Zampanò in *The Navidson Record* during a discussion of "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway":

Unlike *The Twilight Zone*, however, or some other like cousin where understanding comes neat and fast (i.e. This is clearly a door to another dimension! or This is a passage to another world – with directions!) the hallway offers no answers. The monolith in *2001* seems the most appropriate cinematic analog, incontrovertibly there but virtually inviolate to interpretation. (*House 60*)

Fordham remarks that in the invocation of the monolith Danielewski connects his house to a "famously overdetermined" symbol (Fordham 60), and indeed Danielewski employs the influence of Kubrick's overdetermined cinematic symbol as a paradigm for the pervasive critical interpretation of the meaning of Navidson's house. When considering the climactic moment in which Navidson's equipment fails him and "nearly six minutes of screen time is black" (*House 468*) the reader who is aware of *2001* may also recall the bold gesture made by Kubrick on the film's original release in which the opening of the film consisted of a black screen over which Gyorgy Ligeti's eight minute piece "Atmospheres" was played. Furthermore, Kubrick removed a sequence from the film before its release in which twenty-one scientists gave their critical analysis of the future of mankind (Barnes), an incorporation of critical opinion within and alongside a fictional narrative that invokes the footnoted structure of Danielewski's novel. The influence of *The Shining* is less directly present in the narrative, although Kubrick's repeated use of lengthy steadicam shots of endless identical corridors in that film, as well as the implicit references to genetic inheritance and parental instability (particularly in the

¹⁶¹ Larry McCaffery makes the bold suggestion that Danielewski's Zampanò is potentially the same character from the Fellini film (Interview, McCaffery 101).

longer American cut of the film), provide Danielewski with a visual and thematic paradigm.¹⁶²

Aside from discussion of directorial influences on the inception and structure of the narrative, Danielewski also employs formal cinematic techniques within his text to create a film-text hybrid narrative form that, in the acute observation of McCormick “allows Danielewski to reimagine the page for its imagistic potentials” (64), a reimagination that also functions as a movement towards hybridity and away from the aforementioned critical concerns about the postmodern hierarchy of text and image. This hybrid process begins in earnest with Zampanò’s first reports of the films made by Navidson. Danielewski shows an awareness of the process by which a film is “trailed” in order to excite audience interest, as the opening pages of Zampanò’s *The Navidson Record*, rather than featuring a digested description of the events that will follow, teases the reader for a time with two short edited excerpts from “The Navidson Record”. The shorts, titled “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway” and “Exploration #4”, are described as “a “teaser” and a “trailer”” (*House* 6) for the appearance of the main feature.¹⁶³ While Zampanò describes the appearance of the two shorts as resembling the traditional Hollywood campaign for selling a film to an audience ahead of its release, attention should also be drawn to the fact that Zampanò’s employment of these shorts represents Danielewski’s own formal textual “trailing” of the events to follow in the novel.

While Wallace uses the cinematic technique of “focus” to enact his interrogation of the films of James Incandenza, the significant technical conflation of

¹⁶² Kubrick himself actually appears as a character in the narrative of *House of Leaves* during Karen Green’s short film “What Some Have Thought”. In a comic allusion to his reputation for perfectionism, he complains about the technical quality of the footage shot inside the house (*House* 363).

¹⁶³ A “teaser” traditionally contains very little material from the film being advertised, and is sometimes purpose-made without any footage from the film. Teasers are often released before production has even started on the film being advertised. Occasionally a teaser will consist of a small part of one sequence from the film, as is the case with “The Five and a Half Minute Hallway”. A “trailer” is traditionally cut together from specific moments from across the narrative of the actual film itself, as is the case with “Exploration #4” (see Johnston, *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology*).

the cinematic and literary form that pervades Danielewski's narrative relates to the use of "framing". A "frame" is a term that can be employed in both a literary and a cinematic context, and *House of Leaves* relies for its effect on a number of specific narrative "frames" which alternately embody the structural, literary and cinematic meanings of that term. The respective narratives of Johnny Truant, Zampanò and Pelafina all offer "frames" through which to view *The Navidson Record*, with each respective author acting as both a frame through which to view the narrative (each frame is complemented visually by the use of specific fonts and colours employed by the different authors) and also an ever-shifting component of the overarching structural frame of the novel. As Timmer points out, the account of one author can "reframe" another, such as the way in which Zampanò's narrative reframes the context of Truant's account (Timmer 260). The novel's labyrinthine focus upon doors and windows also draws the reader's attention to the image and shape of the door or window frame, an erection through which one can either pass or view, in much the same manner as the narrative frames in *House of Leaves* alternately offer ingress into one another or resist entry.¹⁶⁴

The specifically filmic frame is actually a multifaceted term. It can refer to the actual single frame of film in a strip of celluloid and also to the general shape of the projected cinematic image. In Chapter XV, which contains detailed transcripts of Karen Green's short films "What Some Have Thought" and "A Brief History Of Who I Love", Danielewski slows the descriptive narrative down so that the reader

¹⁶⁴ It could be speculated that as a door frame is three-sided and a window frame is four-sided the respective frame constructions offer analogues to the reading experience and again highlight the importance of reader inference. The three-sided frame (aka the frame provided by the three narrators) represents the door, which is pervasively associated in *House of Leaves* with uncertainty and confusion, whereas the four-sided frame (aka the frame provided by the three narrators plus the inference brought to the narrative by the reader) represents the window, a construction absent from the labyrinth until Navidson is on the threshold of his redemption and escape from the structure ("Doorways offer passage but windows offer vision" [*House* 464]).

can absorb all of the information contained within Karen's films.¹⁶⁵ As the narrative slows, the mention of "frames" increases, from the "first black frame" of "A Brief History Of Who I love" (*House* 366) to the frames of photographs included in that film's montage of Navidson's photographs. The number of edits is mentioned ("easily over a hundred") and finally the exact number of frames in the film is counted ("8,160") after the description of the film has finished (368). Furthermore, as the narrative slows and concentrates so closely on the film's frames, a motif of four transparent squares appears between passages of the chapter. This creates the effect of making the paragraphs themselves actually resemble frames of film, with the transparent squares surrounding them resembling the sprocket holes that delineate the edge of a frame of film. The page is thus formally reconfigured into a hybrid of both text and film, with both being simultaneously "read", the prose taking the place of the image and the filmic sprocket holes framing the text.¹⁶⁶

This is not the only occasion where Danielewski makes the page resemble an actual frame of film. At the end of Navidson's final journey into the heart of the labyrinth inside his house, as he floats in complete darkness and awaits death, a speck of light appears, light that will herald his return to the outside and his ultimate survival and escape from the house:

Sure enough the final frames of Navidson's film capture in the upper right-hand corner a tiny fleck of blue crying light into the void. Enough to see but not enough to see by.

The film runs out.

Black.

A different kind of black.

¹⁶⁵ Green's films are made after she leaves the deranged Navidson, and are described at length within *The Navidson Record*, acting as a counterpoint narrative to Navidson's own filmed narrative of the events in the house on Ash Tree Lane. The films are discussed in more substantial detail at the end of this chapter.

¹⁶⁶ This motif closely resembles a similar pattern that occurs across the narrative of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, although it is thought that this motif may also refer to censored wartime correspondence (Howard).

Followed by the name of the processing lab (489)

Notably, this image is not only described but typographically represented by Danielewski on the page as follows:

[]
[*]
[]
[]
[]
[]
[]
[]
[]
[] (House 487)

Why choose to represent this image in this manner on the page? Danielewski evidently wants to foreground the importance of replicating the frame and the appearance of the speck in the top right hand corner of the image, and by reproducing this image textually Danielewski is also employing the cinematic motif of the “reel change”. In pre-digital projection, when films came on several reels, the top right-hand side of the film frames towards the end of a reel were marked in order to provide a visual signal for the projectionist that the reel needed to be changed, giving them time to cue up a new reel of film. The top right-hand corner of the image would be marked by a brief flash (visible to both projectionist and cinemagoers) before the reel ran out. The visual motif of the reel change is being employed here by Danielewski for thematic purposes, as Navidson is about to permanently exit the restrictive house that has caused him so much trauma and grief, directly into the arms of the partner (Karen Green) he has presumed lost to his obsession. The next chronological chapter (Chapter XXIII) begins with the critic Helmet Muir proclaiming “They both live. They even get married. It’s a happy ending” (526). The “happy ending” necessitates a changing of the reel from the previous narrative of Navidson’s lonely and desperate isolation in the darkness at the centre of the labyrinth, and this thematic change to the tradition (one both literary

and cinematic) of a happy ending is configured on the page as a formal typographical synthesis of text and image. Notably, in an echo of the systems motif that has characterised elements of Danielewski's narrative, this film-text hybridity also dramatises the moment in which a character moves from a constraining, closed structure (the house) into an open, reciprocal structure (the rejuvenation of his relationship).

The filmic frame is employed in a different manner elsewhere in the narrative. McCormick, commenting upon a sequence in which Chad prefers to play "well beyond the range of any camera" (315) extrapolates:

Chad is 'beyond the range' of the recording camera [...] Danielewski has used the embedded *The Navidson Record* to show that Chad's misery is beyond the ken of his father's knowledge. The camera becomes a figure for Navy's (Navidson's) retrospective conceptualisation of what happened to his family in the house. This figure metaphorises the reach of Navy's perceptual abilities with the physical range of a video camera (McCormick 62-3)

This explanation conflates the frame with the perception of the character, and uses negative, off-camera space to show the failure of Navidson's perception as a parent. However, Danielewski also employs the filmmaker's manipulation and the reader's subsequent perception of the cinematic frame to present information about the emotional lives of his characters:

He has done his best to keep from resenting Karen, but clearly feels it just the same. Not once are they shown talking together. For that matter not once are they shown in the same frame together [...] the entire segment becomes a composition of strain. Jump cuts increase. People stop speaking to each other. A single shot never includes more than one person. Everything seems to be on the verge of breaking apart (*House* 101)

This dual "reading" of both the page and the implied cinematic frame suggests that, through the frame/page conflation, Danielewski is also making the reader physically aware of *where* to look on the page. Rather than always suggesting the traditional

left to right scanning action performed by a reader, the typographic narrative of *House of Leaves* operates in a similar manner to the way in which a cinematic frame is read.¹⁶⁷ That is, the viewer focuses upon the area of the screen where the important action is taking place, rather than simply reading every shot in an identical fashion. Hayles reports the response from Danielewski when quizzed about this technique:

Drawing an analogy with filmmaking techniques that correlate the intensity of the scene with how much the viewer's eye has to move across the screen, he suggested that the typography creates a similar correspondence between how much time it takes to read a page and the represented action. His remark encouraged me to notice that in Chapter 9, reading speed slows down enormously as the reader struggles with seemingly endless lists, separate narrative threads in different page positions, type that runs in many directions, and proliferating footnotes that amble on for pages (Hayles, "Saving the Subject" 796)

The specific employment of this disorientating layout, with its large amounts of competing information in separate areas of the page, seems to also gesture towards an attempt at a faithful representation of the hybrid of cultural information that Wallace terms "the tsunami of available fact, context and perspective that constitutes Total Noise" (Wallace, "Deciderization 2007" xx). Danielewski's response to Cottrell would appear to confirm this:

Most people living in the 90s have no trouble multi-processing huge sums of information. They may not know it but they're doing it. It's the same as walking or looking for movie times, we're all involved - for the most part

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, the movement of the text to the bottom of the page (182-245) or the shifting of the text around the page (426-490) during journeys into the house's interior.

unconsciously - in a massive, usually successful, mental juggling act.
(Cottrell)¹⁶⁸

Danielewski's conflation of the page with the frame also engenders the suggestion that as the page resembles the cinematic frame, it may also (as implied by the "reel change" image discussed above) represent the cinema screen. The page (which, like the cinema screen, is white and blank before the narrative begins) is the surface upon which the narrative is inscribed or projected. Danielewski typographically draws attention to the white nature of both the surface of the page and the cinema screen, most notably on the four page spread on pages 308-311 where words are spread increasingly thinly over blank pages during Navidson's rescue of the explorers from the psychotic Holloway. The action narrated on these pages reports how the film in the explorers' camera runs out "leaving nothing else behind but an unremarkable" (308) "white" (309) "screen" (311). The placing of these single words of text upon vast white pages (pages that have only relatively recently been covered with many competing columns of text, footnotes and text boxes) and the invocation of the white screen acts as an example of Danielewski's conflation of the page, the frame and the screen.

Aside from this typographical synthesis, Danielewski plays upon the conceit of text as a "projection", referencing the manner in which a cinematic image is projected upon the page. The physical projection of an image on to a screen and the words on to the page is also allied to the motif of psychological "projection" that occurs throughout the narrative. The phenomena of psychological projection involves "the operation of expelling feelings or wishes the individual finds wholly unacceptable—too shameful, too obscene, too dangerous—by attributing them to another" (Gay 281). In that respect, the narrative of *The Navidson Record* could constitute an extended dual process of projection: the time-frame of the "projection"

¹⁶⁸ The narrative focus on the lead protagonist of *The Navidson Record* is similarly disorientating. Where the reader first expects the narrative to be based around Will Navidson, in the latter parts of "The Navidson Record" Karen becomes the film's indisputable "lead", and Will disappears from the narrative for a fairly lengthy period of time. Even supporting characters like Holloway get entire portions of the film to themselves (a subsection of "The Navidson Record", "The Holloway Tape" [House 333-38] features Holloway as the sole protagonist and de facto director of the footage).

of “The Navidson Record” within the narrative and the psychological projection of a narrator’s trauma on to other characters or narrators in the text. If Truant has invented the story of Zampanò and has actually written (or at least substantially altered) the text of *The Navidson Record* himself as a manner of projecting his repressed childhood trauma, then one can consider how Holloway represents a projection of the abusive stepfather who beat Truant as a child (Holloway shares physical attributes with the stepfather character), Karen Green represents a projection of Pelafina (both make reference to practicing their smile in the mirror) or indeed how Chad’s aggression in school is reflective of Truant’s own turbulent education, as suggested in Pelafina’s letters to her son.

In order for a film to be projected, and indeed for a page to be read, there must be a light source, and the formal conflation of page, frame and screen employed by Danielewski creates a particular distinction between what is revealed and what is hidden, foregrounding the relationship of psychological repression to textual obscurity to projected cinematic light. As in *Infinite Jest*, the term “chiaroscuro” is employed.¹⁶⁹ Whereas in Wallace’s text it refers directly to James Incandenza’s technique for lighting his films, in *House of Leaves* the term’s presence in the text indirectly invokes the manner in which Danielewski himself employs the form to cinematically “light” certain pages. In Chapter XVI, in which scientists attempt to date the fibres of the house and thus understand the origination of the structure, almost three whole pages (footnotes excepted) are covered with black “X” symbols obscuring all but a few syllables of the original text (373-6). Truant subsequently explains that “I wish I could say this mass of black X’s was due to some mysterious ash or frantic act of deletion on Zampano’s part. Unfortunately this time I’m to blame” (376). Truant subsequently explains that a bottle of ink with a hairline crack placed on top of the papers “tunnelled down” through the paper and obscured almost all the writing. It is notable that the (apparently) accidentally obscured pages mark an attempt to understand the originating point of the house, the implication being that Truant has unwittingly suppressed the information (a process analogous to the

¹⁶⁹ The term appears in the appendicised poem “The Panther” (*House* 559).

psychological repression of a trauma).¹⁷⁰ The result of this accident is that the whiteness of the page is obscured by blackness. Since, as has been argued above, the novel associates that white page with the cinematic screen, a black obscuration of the page is analogous to either a partial blotting out of the projected light source (a shadow on the cinema screen) or the deliberate partial lighting of a shot or frame within a film. In either event, important information is obscured, and the surface of the page becomes the locus of psychological repression, the suppressed text and the obscured cinematic screen or frame.

The page-as-screen model also provides a basis from which to consider the rather oblique reference made by Danielewski about how “the blue color of “house” is not meant to invoke digital technology but rather to represent cinematic effects” (Pressman 121). The cinematic effect that is most pervasively associated with the colour blue is the “bluescreen” composite process. During this process an actor (without any blue-coloured component on their person) is filmed before a blue screen. In the post-production process the blue screen area can then be replaced with a different background to give the impression that the actor is, for example, flying or walking through a fantastical environment. The cinematic dimension of the use of the colour blue therefore prompts the reader to consider the blue colouring of every instance of the word “house” throughout the narrative. If the white page represents the screen and the black text (as suggested above) is representative of the play of light and shadow on that screen, then the occasional appearance of the colour blue would appear to represent a malfunction of the blue screen effect, a temporary glimpse of the process of composition that constitutes the narrative, revealed through a combination of textual and cinematic production techniques.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ It is also of note that two of the eight fragments of words that remain legible after the ink spill are “volcan” and “metamor” (374). The implied completed words, “volcano” and “metamorphosis”, indicate respectively the explosion of pressurised material and the transformation of one thing into another (a process analogous to psychological “projection”).

¹⁷¹ The fact that the text itself is blue also suggests the term “blueprint”, which is the architectural plan for a house. Hayles goes so far as to suggest that the blank blue-bordered box that appears on page 143 of *House of Leaves* is an image of a bluescreen, as it “appears bereft of words but filled with light blue color” (Hayles 793). It would appear to be incorrect that the box is filled with the colour

Ultimately, the formal employment of the cinematic trope of bluescreen is analogous to the continuous textual struggle for narrative hierarchy taking place within the novel itself. The implementation of the bluescreen motif, in a synthesis of textual uncertainty and cinematic illusion, suggests that there is always another narrative outside the one being read, framing that narrative but invisible to the reader other than through an occasional, peripheral awareness of its existence. There are moments in the narrative when Truant seems to be party to the same peripheral glimpse of this great framing narrative as the reader, moments in which even Truant conflates the motifs of text and cinema:

A moment comes where suddenly everything seems impossibly far and confused [...] this thing has created me, not me unto it, but now it unto me, where I am nothing more than the matter of some other voice, intruding through the folds of what even now lies there agape [...] inventing me, defining me, *directing me* (*House* 326, italics mine)

There is something of postmodern metafiction about this ontological uncertainty, with the fear about the invented, “directed” status of one’s identity also carrying a poststructural association (recall also Wallace’s diagnosis of *The Broom Of The System* as “the sensitive tale of a sensitive young WASP who’s just had this mid-life crisis that’s moved him [...] to a coldly cerebral take on fiction and Austin-Wittgenstein-Derridaen literary theory [...] a fear that he was nothing but a linguistic construct” [Interview, McCaffery 142]). That this metafictional awareness is allied with a terrible sense of confusion and fear, rather than the freedom proposed by John Barth’s “literature of replenishment” suggests, as in Wallace’s interrogation of Barth’s fiction and James Incandenza’s cinema, the “godawful trap” that postmodern metafiction has become. Danielewski suggests that, as in *Infinite Jest*, this uncertainty over “direction” can only be overcome through a process of reciprocal, open communication. This process is dramatised in *House of Leaves* both through

blue, as any “blue” tint is actually the effect of the solid black square on the reverse side of the page, but Hayles’ point about the tracing of the outline of a screen on the page remains valid.

the aforementioned formal co-operative hybrid strategy of text and image and a remarkable instance of “co-direction” that occurs at the climax of the novel.

“Co-Directing” and Happy Endings

The nature of Will Navidson and Karen Green’s climactic reunion is inherently tied to their control of the cinematic medium that has caused them so much uncertainty and dissolution. Their breakthrough in communication comes from the *combination* of two visual narratives that are authentic to their own experience in one collaborative film project. “The Navidson Record” is a title that could suggest two possibilities: a record made by Navidson, or a record made *of* Navidson. In fact, the film is both of those things, because it is composed of distinct sections directed and edited by both Will Navidson and Karen Green. The sections directed and edited by Will Navidson, which make up the bulk of the film, detail the events within the house on Ash Tree Lane, while Karen Green’s sections of the film is comprised of two shorts, “What Some Have Thought” and “A Brief History Of Who I Love”. In Green’s first film, she interviews a series of critics, cultural commentators and artists about the earlier part of the film shot by Navidson. In the latter, she creates a love letter to Navidson which, significantly, never mentions the house but is composed of collections of his photographs and footage of his childhood. Both shorts are made by Green after her split from Navidson and before their climactic reunion in the house.

The part of “The Navidson Record” directed by Will Navidson (the material relating the fateful events within the house on Ash Tree Lane) acts as a depiction of inward-bound self-consciousness, the house providing a representation of Navidson’s increasing alienation from his wife and family and his failure to communicate with others. However, the addition of Karen’s films to the body of “The Navidson Record” ultimately acts, as Zampanò suggests, as “the perfect counterpoint to that infinite stretch of hallways, rooms and stairs” (368). The two step process of “What Some Have Thought” and “A Brief History of Who I Love” present a movement by Karen, using the same technological tools as Navidson, away from a closed system of self-consciousness towards other-directed open and reciprocal communication. Both of Green’s films are essentially selfless, with the focus of both projects being the consideration of others. While “What Some Have Thought” still bears the traces of self-consciousness (Green self-consciously asks

some of the commentators about her own appearance in the film), “A Brief History of Who I Love” is an entirely outwardly directed attempt at communion with another. The teleology of “The Navidson Record” therefore becomes a three step process, from “closed” self consciousness to the consideration of others to the devotion of the form to “open” communication with another outside the narrative. The union of the partner’s films within the greater body of the larger feature acts as a paradigm for their impending and aforementioned “happy ending” reunion outside the world of the films. Therefore that very same cinematic medium that has invoked and alluded to characteristically postmodern conventions of uncertainty, fragmentation and inauthenticity is ultimately employed in defeat of those conventions, employing a hybrid terminology of both film and text to result in a “co-direction” of forms that climaxes in an analogous reunion, a communication between people engendered by their collaboration in making a film. Moreover, the same strategy is being textually employed in the narrative that frames “The Navidson Record”, with Truant’s understanding that by allowing others to communicate their experiences across the inscriptive surface of his text (as is enacted by the band of musicians discussed in Chapter 4) his own text becomes characterised by communication rather than centripetal self-consciousness.

Danielewski’s climax, despite employing the term “happy ending”, is aware of the tentative resolve required to make communication work. Included earlier in the narrative is a grotesque account of how a Hollywood version of “The Navidson Record” would have ended:

Delial would have appeared at the heart of the house. Like something out of *Lost Horizon*, dark fields would have given way to Elysian fields, the perfect setting for a musical number with a brightly costumed Delial front and center, drinking Shirley Temples, swinging on the arms of Tom and Jed, backed by a chorus line which would have included Holloway and everyone else in Navidson’s life (and our life for that matter) who had ever died. (395)

The actual cinematic ending to the Navidson’s story is more ambiguous, a corrective to the Hollywood version, reuniting characters in a different manner with photographs of those who have died hung on the wall of the family’s new home. The

reunited couple have battled ill health and injury, and Navidson ends on a shot that “he knows is true and always will be true [...] he focuses on the empty road beyond, a pale curve vanishing into the woods” (528). The cinematic representation of the problems of the postmodern text within *House of Leaves* has acted as both diagnosis and corrective, in a novel in which the employment of cinematic conventions have created a hybrid form of textual and cinematic grammar that addresses and moves beyond critical concern over the postmodern hierarchy of text and image.

Chapter 6

Post-Postmodern Paratexts in Wallace and Danielewski

A discussion of the use of footnotes and endnotes in the work of both Wallace and Danielewski has been largely absent from the preceding analysis. The reason for this absence is a matter of formal composition, both in terms of the construction of the works in question and of this study. While Chapters 1 to 5 detail intricate formal schema within individual works that require extensive analysis, which benefits from a largely singular focus for the duration of the chapter, Wallace's and Danielewski's employment of footnotes, endnotes and appendices offer a number of complementary possibilities for joint analysis. While the enacted formal methodology of the two writers is often different, both Wallace and Danielewski find accord in a number of their paratextual strategies in *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves*. Both writers employ the paratext as a device which can be utilised as a "way out" of the main material body of text, a strategy that (as will be explained below) dovetails with the post-postmodern strategy of reconfiguration of closed systems within both texts and the move from spatial isolation and self consciousness to reciprocal communication. In order to engender this model of communication between narratives both *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* also employ paratexts as a way of disrupting a perceived hierarchy of information value between text and paratext.

House of Leaves makes extensive use of footnotes and appendices while *Infinite Jest*'s paratextual elements are the substantial endnotes that constitute the last hundred pages of the novel, and it is worth considering the formal implementation of these particular paratextual strategies on the material space of the page. While Danielewski's footnotes are specifically disruptive to the textual layout of the page (for example, as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 the labyrinthine narrative of *House of Leaves*' Chapter IX sees footnotes distributed across the space of the page in various different permutations), Wallace's endnotes allow the text of *Infinite Jest* to remain uninterrupted. The endnote format was a preoccupation of Wallace's from an early point in the composition process, the reason for this particular paratextual strategy being extensively outlined to his editor Michael Pietsch during the editing process of *Infinite Jest*. It is notable that Wallace makes reference to the

importance of physical directional movement as a component of his paratextual strategy:

In April, 1994, [Wallace] presented the idea to Pietsch, adding, "I've become intensely attached to this strategy and will fight w/all 20 claws to preserve it." He explained that endnotes "allow . . . me to make the primary-text an easier read while at once 1) allowing a discursive, authorial intrusive style w/o Finneganzing the story, 2) mimic the information-flood and data-triage I expect'd be an even bigger part of US life 15 years hence. 3) have a lot more technical/medical verisimilitude 4) allow/make the reader go literally physically 'back and forth' in a way that perhaps cutely mimics some of the story's thematic concerns . . . 5) feel emotionally like I'm satisfying your request for compression of text without sacrificing enormous amounts of stuff." (Max, "The Unfinished")

The implementation of the endnotes provides a significantly different material textual space than the pages of *House of Leaves*, or indeed some of Wallace's other footnoted works (most strikingly some of the stories from *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, which will be discussed below).¹⁷²

In neither of these novels do footnotes, endnotes or appendices carry out their traditional paratextual function. Danielewski's footnotes and appendices are a mixture of real and invented data, rendering their traditional informational status redundant, while Wallace's endnotes occasionally balloon into entire sub-chapters, some of a greater duration than chapters in the main narrative, thus also confusing their hierarchical status in relation to the text. However, the positioning of the footnotes, endnotes and appendices in both novels also point to narrative strategies

¹⁷² A potential antecedent in fiction for one type of paratextual approach proffered by Wallace in *Infinite Jest*, the information-heavy footnote, is Nicholson Baker's novel *The Mezzanine*. Baker employs footnotes to create a series of sub-layers of information about his protagonist that mirror the complex bureaucracy of his job, while Wallace employs footnotes in *Infinite Jest* to provide the manufacturer information for a prescription painkiller, or to explain a bureaucratic acronym. This strategy seems to dovetail with what Wallace terms the "information-flood and data-triage" and "technical/medical verisimilitude" in his letter to Pietsch above.

employed elsewhere in the texts by both authors that are in dialogue with elements of postmodern writing. As has been explained in the preceding chapters, Wallace and Danielewski employ strategies within their texts where postmodern tropes are codified, interrogated and reconstituted spatially, and the unorthodox use of paratexts by both writers offers additional scope for the spatial and thematic interrogation of postmodernism in the text. Where appropriate, this chapter will also address relevant developments in the post-postmodern paratextual strategies of both writers after the works in question, in particular Wallace's *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* and Danielewski's *Only Revolutions*.

Inside/Outside

In his influential study *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gerard Genette broadly classifies the paratext thus:

For us, accordingly, the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more, generally to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or – a word Borges used apropos of a preface – a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an “undefined zone” between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Phillipe Lejeune put it, “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls' one's whole reading of the text”. (Genette 2)

This definition, not least in the allusion to Borges, is remarkable in its similarity of image and methodology to Danielewski's formal strategy for the narrative of *House of Leaves*, with the conflation of paratextual boundary and threshold or vestibule appealing directly to the previously discussed imagery of doorways and windows in that novel. Moreover, this conflation of the paratext with the threshold can also represent the uneasy position of paratextual data in *House of Leaves* as it refers to data that has been generated within or without the narrative (on the “inward” or “outward” side, to use Genette's terminology). The mixture of real and invented

footnotes in *House of Leaves* acts as a textual enactment of the claustrophobic corridors in the Navidson's house. The reader looks to the paratext to provide some information about the text from an external source, only to discover that the paratext's "outward" status is actually false, and that the information and, often, author of the paratext is generated "inwardly", from within the text itself. Once this uncertainty has been established (not *all* of the paratexts are false), it becomes difficult for the reader to know whether the paratext offers a way "outward", i.e. a position not generated from within the text.¹⁷³ Danielewski's alignment of the paratext with the threshold, and the difficulty of finding a position "outward" of the text also parallels Truant's uncertainty about the generation of *The Navidson Record* discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, and as confusion about authorship becomes inextricably linked to an anxiety about identity and an increased self-consciousness, the importance of locating a route "out" of the text becomes crucial.

Before his final "escape" from the text of *The Navidson Record*, Truant's own paratexts within the narrative of *The Navidson Record* serve to spatially configure his increasing sense of claustrophobia and entrapment. Footnote 249, which is written by Truant, runs for eight pages and incorporates a number of its own internal lists and even a bordered table. On six of those pages the footnote dominates the space of the page to the extent that there is no room for the text of *The Navidson Record*. However, the presence of the text still spatially encloses the paratext, with a black line (the line that traditionally separates the main body of a text from its footnotes) running across the top of the page, reminding the reader of the presence of the framing text and confining the paratextual space in a similar fashion to the textual representation of the low ceilings in the corridors of the Navidson house (*House 427*).¹⁷⁴

Truant's final redemptive journey to his childhood home, the journey during which he begins to escape the oppressive influence of *The Navidson Record*, is

¹⁷³ This confusion is only accentuated by the attribution of false statements to real people (Derrida, Kubrick etc) within the text.

¹⁷⁴ The association is even more graphically evident when the end of Truant's paratextual note on page 181 is followed by two pages recounting events inside the corridors of the Navidson house, the text identically situated at the bottom of the page.

enacted not as a paratext but as a full chapter (Chapter XXI) written by Truant. Truant's font (Courier) is the same, but the aforementioned limiting horizontal line imposed upon his earlier paratexts is absent. Notably, the events in this chapter concern Truant getting out of the sealed-up apartment in which he has been hiding out since his first interaction with *The Navidson Record*, and the move from inside to outside appears to have coincided with Truant's "escape" from the paratextual status to which he was relegated during the preceding narrative of Zampanò's *The Navidson Record*. As if to reinforce Truant's move away from paratextual status, the sole footnote in this chapter (footnote 418) is missing (507). Moreover, Truant's final "escape" from Zampanò's narrative, which occurs when he is handed a copy of the book by the members of the band of musicians (his holding of the book rendering him physically "outside" of it) also involves a paratextual development. As discussed in Chapter 4, the paratextual contribution of others ("some pretty stunning personal riffs" [514]) assists Truant in his escape from his own centripetal commentary. However, it also creates a *new* generation of paratexts in the margins of Truant's own commentary, reconfiguring Truant's location from paratextual to text. The process of "getting out of the house" is therefore configured as not just physically leaving an enclosed space but escaping from paratext to text. The fact that the text handed to Truant is titled *House of Leaves* invokes a triple enactment of escape: Truant has physically got out of his own apartment, out of the fixation upon the Navidson house and finally out of the paratexts and into the main text of *House of Leaves*.

This escape from paratext to text is a process that is based around the reconfiguration of a system that has previously constrained and trapped (the text of *The Navidson Record*) to one that affords open, dynamic and free communication between individuals. This paratextual strategy from Danielewski complements the thematic textual and cinematic reconfigurations of the Navidson maze-labyrinth within the novel, as well as Truant's temporal move from self-consciousness to the "loop" of reciprocal communication engendered by his re-reading and sharing of his narratives (as outlined in Chapter 4), these textual strategies having been outlined extensively in the preceding chapters as a dramatisation and reconfiguration of the elements of certain postmodern writing. The strategy invokes Wallace's post-

postmodern reconfiguration of the solipsistic “godawful trap” into a process of communication and rehabilitation in *Infinite Jest*, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Notably, Danielewski’s second novel *Only Revolutions*, as Danielewski has stated (Benzon 2007) is about “getting outside” (most of the novel takes place outdoors or on the road) and the reciprocal communication between the two lovers Sam and Hailey, each bound to one another to the extent that the characters operate less as two distinct individuals and more as a kind of hybrid male-female entity. Hayles suggests that the text implements “a profound shift from narrative as a temporal trajectory to a topographic plane upon which a wide variety of *interactions* and permutations are staged” (Hayles, “Mapping” 159, italics mine), and the novel does indeed dispense with the text-footnote spatial template of *House of Leaves* in favour of four equally worded columns (two featuring the voices of Sam and Hailey, two featuring historical events parallel to their fantastical century-spanning road trip). While the ending of *House of Leaves* features the “freeing” of Truant from the paratextual restraint of the body of *The Navidson Record*, the complementary nature of the text columns of *Only Revolutions* enacts the next stage in that process of “getting outside” of the subjugating processes of paratext in the earlier novel.¹⁷⁵

Furthermore, in the enactment of a novel with a complementary relationship between text and paratext and a circular structure (*Only Revolutions* is structured in a “revolving” fashion, with 360 pages of text and a narrative that, *Finnegan’s Wake*-style, circles back to its beginning at its endpoint) Danielewski proposes a development of Truant’s climactic understanding of the “loop” in *House of Leaves* by making the circular narrative of *Only Revolutions* actually physically resemble the reciprocal “loop” of an open system, a loop that allows equal status to the hybrid narrative of the characters and, to use LeClair’s terminology, the “information” and “communication” (LeClair, *Loop* 8) of the historical paratextual data. The potentially toxic quality of the paratext in *House of Leaves* is interrogated and transcended towards the end of that novel before being replaced completely in Danielewski’s following novel by this new system of reciprocation.

In the collections of Wallace’s journalism *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again* and *Consider the Lobster* the purpose of the non-fictional footnote is

¹⁷⁵ Hayles posits *Only Revolutions* as “the mirror text to *House of Leaves*” (Hayles, “Mapping” 168).

primarily that of an explanatory and complementary non-fiction digression from the main text, in the same narrative voice. For example, in the essay on David Lynch a discussion of studio interference uses a footnote for a complementary piece of information:

The experience [of working on the big budget studio film *Dune*] could easily have turned Lynch into an embittered hack (though probably a rich hack), doing f/x-intensive gorefests for commercial studios⁶

⁶ Anybody who wants to see how the Process and its inducements destroy what's cool and alive in a director should consider the recent trajectory of Richard Rodriguez, from the plasma-financed vitality of *El Mariachi* to the gory pretension of *Desperado* to the empty and embarrassing *From Dusk to Dawn*. Very sad. (*Supposedly* 153)

The rather more adventurous employment of non-fictional footnotes in the essay "Host" from *Consider The Lobster* uses the positioning of the notes (arrows in the text directly after the annotated word lead to a text box which contains the note, these boxes positioned all over the page rather than exclusively at the bottom) to mimic the rapid influx of information into the evolving discourse of a radio talk-show. The overriding emphasis on explanatory non-fictional information in footnotes in Wallace's non-fiction can lead to a reductive assumption that the fictional footnotes and endnotes of *Infinite Jest*, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, *Oblivion* and *The Pale King* are being employed to carry out the same amplification of information or digression. In fact, it is to proceed from a mistaken position to assume that the paratexts in these fictional works simply provide surplus and complementary information to the main text. While this plethora of information is indeed an element of Wallace's paratextual strategy (as has been outlined above by Wallace himself), it is not the whole of it. While the formal and geometric textual strategies for the reconfiguration from self-consciousness to communication in *Infinite Jest* have been outlined in Chapter 1, the importance of Wallace's paratexts to that strategy has yet to be discussed.

The endnotes in *Infinite Jest* begin and end thus:

1. Methamphetamine hydrochloride, a.k.a. crystal meth. (*Jest* 983)

388. Talwin-NX—Sanofi Winthrop U.S. (*Jest* 1079)

The first two letters of the first endnote and the last two letters of the last endnote reveal a paratextual list that begins with “Me” and ends with “Us”, the endnotes in *Infinite Jest* implicitly indicating that the thematic trajectory of the paratext will trace a similar trajectory not only to the main text but also to Danielewski’s post-postmodern paratextual strategy of “getting outside”, moving from self-consciousness to reciprocation and communication. Burn suggests that this movement describes a trajectory “from the personal, to the impersonal, to the corporation” (Burn, *Reader’s Guide* 51) but this does not tally with the model outlined within Chapters 1 and 2 whereby reciprocal communication can be engendered from the very elements that alienate the individual. That the second sentence of the first chapter of the novel is “I am in here” (3) and the final words of the final chapter are “way out” (981) suggests that both text and paratext in *Infinite Jest* are following a similar strategy. In a novel in which the most pathological and gravely ill addicts “identify their whole selves with their head” (272) the importance of relocation and reconfiguration, of redirecting communication outside of the self, of “getting outside”, is essential and important to the formal construction of the narrative. Here, the expression “us” can be recovered from the impersonal and corporate manufacturer’s information. Moreover, the strong association drawn by Wallace between the “godawful trap” of certain postmodern writing and solipsistic self-consciousness is implicitly dramatised in the paratextual strategy within the novel.

The first endnote in *Infinite Jest* (the above example that begins with “Me”) appears during the addict Erdedy’s relentless internal monologue about buying marijuana (23). This juxtaposition is characteristic of a paratextual strategy that often presents the tone of an endnote as correspondent to the tone of the main text to which it refers, and the strong association with what Wallace terms “marijuana thinking” (335) in the first endnote suggests that the pause in the main narrative associated with consulting the endnote represents an enactment of a self-conscious, non-progressive and restraining thought process. As stated above, some of the endnotes are enormous, chapter-length paratexts that prevent or slow progress in the main body of text, and this paratextual strategy is developed in the process whereby

several of these larger endnotes are notable by the appearance of their markers at a threshold of extreme and destructive self-consciousness in the narrative. For example, the enormous endnote 321, which occupies over three full pages, is inserted into the main narrative at the moment when Hal warns Mario that

It seems different with me, Boo. I feel a hole. It's going to be a huge hole, in a month. A way more than Hal-sized hole [...] And the hole's going to get a little bigger every day until I fly apart in different directions. I'll fly apart in midair. I'll fly apart in the Lung, or at Tucson at 200 degrees in front of all these people who knew Himself and think I'm different (785)

This juxtaposition of the enormous digressive endnote with Hal's moment of extreme fear, self-consciousness and dissociation (a prediction that does indeed come true in the Year of Glad) associates a thematic textual representation of solipsism with a paratextual constraint of the progression through the narrative. Both text and paratext work in tandem to enact the growing confinement of Hal's drug habit and attendant self-consciousness.¹⁷⁶ The slogan suggesting that the addict in the halfway house reflect that "my best thinking got me here" (1026), and that relying on one's own thought processes can in fact slow the process of recovery (a position outlined by Wallace in interview as analogous to the construction of postmodern metafiction), is enacted through Wallace's employment of paratext to vary the speed at which the text is read. Conversely, during the recovering addict Gately's drive from Ennet House to Cambridge in Pat Montesian's car, the three endnote markers refer to endnotes comprising a total of approximately nine lines of text, all of which complement the main text before allowing the reader to quickly move back to it. The dynamic movement of the recovering Gately's mobile trajectory in the text is reflected in the speed in which the reader can move through the accompanying paratext. Thus, dependent upon the recovery status of the

¹⁷⁶ Further examples of this juxtaposition are the five-page endnote 324 (which appears after the extremely dissociated Hal has tried and failed to attain information about recovery programmes [787]) and the three-page endnote 332 (which appears between the description of Joelle Van Dyne's mother's suicide and Hal's mistaken attendance of the wrong recovery class [795]).

individual in the main text, the paratext can either facilitate or retard movement through the main body of text. Wallace's strategy also plays upon the endnote's apparent position "outside" the main text. The textual positioning of the endnote, and the paratext's traditional digressive function, suggest that a movement from text to paratext constitutes a digression of thought outside of the main narrative.

However, the escape "outside" suggested by the position of the endnote can, when that endnote marker is located within a textual episode of solipsistic thinking, become in fact just another manifestation of that introversion, in a paratextual enactment of Joelle's realisation that "what looks like the cage's exit is actually the bars of the cage" (222).

In "Death Is Not The End" and "The Depressed Person", two stories from the collection *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* Wallace employs an innovative counterpoint strategy whereby an antagonistic paratext can interrogate the self-involvement of the text itself. It is worth considering these stories as a specific development of *Infinite Jest's* aforementioned strategy of text, paratext and the reconfiguration of self-consciousness. Iannis Goerlandt's and Marshall Boswell's analyses of "Death is Not the End" and "The Depressed Person" from *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* offer a useful frame for the paratextual depiction of self-consciousness in these stories.

The subject of "Death is Not the End", a "fifty-six-year-old American poet, a Nobel Laureate" (*Brief* 1) lies on the decking outside his house, while the text of the story lists the multiple achievements of the poet and an apparently objective description of the poet's body and surroundings. There are a total of three footnotes providing additional information. The trajectory of these three footnotes moves from both complementing and complimenting the poet's achievements to an apparent interrogation of them. The first footnote explains that the poet has won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and is the first American-born poet to receive it. The second footnote deviates from this uncritical strategy somewhat to explain how the poet holds a grudge against the Guggenheim fellowship because "he had reason to believe that something personal and/or political was afoot with the Guggenheim Fellowship committee" (2). The third footnote appears at the end of the final sentence of the story:

[...] nothing but the pool's respiration and poet's occasional cleared throat, wholly still and composed and enclosed, not even a hint of a breeze to stir the leaves of the trees and shrubbery, the silent living enclosing flora's motionless green vivid and inescapable and not like anything else in the world in either appearance or suggestion.³

³That is not wholly true. (3)

The paratexts of the story move from a process of supplementation and complementing of the text to a challenge to the veracity of the narrative. Goerlandt astutely asserts that the poet “is implicitly criticized through the painfully detailed stasis of the narcissistic gaze that loses itself in endless repetitions” and that the third footnote “marks this stasis by refuting the alleged incomparability” of the stasis of the flora by “comparing it to the story itself” (Goerlandt 165). The exact location of the interrogative paratextual narrator who states “That is not wholly true” is uncertain, although due to the narcissistic nature of the poet the narrator must be implied as originating from outside the free indirect narration of the main text that mirrors the poet's consciousness. Goerlandt and Boswell also analyse this strategy as it is enacted within “The Depressed Person”, which features some of Wallace's most extensive footnoting, with the footnotes occasionally occupying more of the page than the main text. The footnotes in “The Depressed Person”, a controversial story¹⁷⁷ about a woman whose unhappiness is a result of “her own reliance on quick fixes for narcissism, which she has mistakenly, and self-aggrandizingly, diagnosed as depression” (Boswell, *Understanding* 206), are astutely codified by Boswell as representing a second order of self-absorbed narration from the protagonist herself, “the layered nature of the woman's obsessive self-absorption, in which thoughts have tangents that themselves become winding thought helixes running parallel to the first-order line of self-consciousness” (Boswell, *Understanding* 204-5):

¹⁷⁷ On publication in *Harper's* the story generated much antagonism from readers who regarded Wallace's position as “vicious” (Boswell, *Understanding* 205). Ironically, since his suicide “The Depressed Person” has become widely and somewhat bluntly interpreted as a workable paradigm for Wallace's own psychological state.

[...] she (i.e. the therapist) nevertheless wholeheartedly supported the depressed person in sharing whatever feelings the therapeutic relationship itself brought up in her (i.e., in the depressed person)⁵

⁵Though the depressed person had, she later acknowledged to her Support System, been anxiously watching the therapist's face for evidence of a negative reaction as she (i.e., the depressed person) opened up and vomited out all these potentially repulsive feelings about the therapeutic relationship, she nevertheless was by this point in the session benefiting enough from a kind of momentum of emotional honesty to be able to open up even further and tearfully share with the therapist that it also felt demeaning and even somehow abusive to know that, for example, today (i.e., the day of the depressed person and her therapist's seminally honest and important piece of relationship-work together), at the moment the depressed person's time with the therapist was up and they had risen from their respective recliners and hugged stiffly goodbye until their next appointment together, that at that very moment all of the therapist's seemingly intensely personally focused attention and support and interest in the depressed person would be withdrawn and then effortlessly transferred onto the next pathetic contemptible whiny self-involved snaggletoothed pig-nosed fat-thighed *shiteater* (*Brief 45-6*)

The footnote continues in this vein for four more pages. Although the retardation of the reader's progress through the narrative by the continual interruption of the digressive paratexts might recall the strategy in *Infinite Jest* that has been outlined above, the narrative voice of the above footnote, with its uneasy free indirect style that is apparently constituted from both inside and outside of the depressed person, operates in a different manner. Firstly, while *Infinite Jest*'s narrative-slowing paratexts retard progress of a specific series of plot events, a plot is essentially absent from the narrative of "The Depressed Person", with the story consisting almost exclusively of the relation of an increasingly static thought process. Secondly, the combination of the free indirect narrative voice in both text and paratext (Boswell's "unwinding thought helixes") creates an implicit contrapuntal narrative that both dramatises and interrogates this narcissism. This text-paratext enactment of an introverted and neurotic self-reflexive process is denied the absolute authority of the depressed person's unmediated consciousness through the employment of that third-person free indirect voice. A paratext that appears implicitly critical of the depressed person (the unflattering reporting of the

ostensibly self-centred and childish insults directed at the therapist's next patient¹⁷⁸) is actually interrogative for the purposes of diagnosis and cure; a text-paratext enactment of "tough love" from outside the individual's consciousness in order to reveal the most problematic and unflattering elements of the depressed person's narcissism. This process is a formal paratextual development of the narrative-slowing paratextual strategy that occurs within *Infinite Jest*, as in "The Depressed Person" the circular nature of the self-reflexive relationship between text and paratext (in which paratext digresses infinitesimally upon the text to the point of stasis) is reconfigured through the intervention of an outside party. As argued in Chapter 1, in *Infinite Jest* Alcoholics Anonymous reconfigure the self-reflexive "vicious circle" and dangerous vector as, respectively, the "traditional big circle" and the "arrow of responsibility", transfiguring those closed systems into open, reciprocal ones. In "The Depressed Person" the painfully self-conscious circular and closed thought process is reconfigured through the narrative mediation of the third-person narrator's presence in both text and paratext in order to "break the cycle".

This reconfigurative assignation to a paratext of a perspective other than that of the narrator or character in question has an antecedent of sorts in both *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves*, an antecedent that warrants separate discussion and is important to the narrative of both novels. While in "The Depressed Person" the interrogative paratextual perspective comes from the development of a single third-person free indirect style, in both *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest* paratexts make use of the voices of multiple characters and generative narrators commenting upon the nature and status of both text and paratext, and the following analysis will explain how this strategy of communicative multiple-narrator paratexts suggests a post-postmodern position.

The Communicative Paratext

The analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 has suggested how Danielewski's narrative strategy is not merely a material enactment of postmodern uncertainty, but rather an attempt to construct a narrative that can offer a textual reconfiguration of that

¹⁷⁸ This implicitly critical narrative voice is surely the motivation for those initial reader criticisms of the story upon its publication.

uncertainty through certain formal strategies of mapping, containing and viewing that uncertainty. That strategic approach also extends to the communicative multi-narrator nature of some paratexts within *House of Leaves*. Firstly, it is important to outline the uneasy hierarchical relationship between text and paratext in *House of Leaves*. A useful paradigm for an explanation of how the paratextual material works in this manner and the relationship to postmodern writing is Genette's analysis of Kinbote's notorious annotation of John Shade in the postmodern narrative of Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, a novel that bears a strong structural resemblance to *House of Leaves*. For Genette, Kinbote's notes are "a perfect example of textual appropriation, [and] this *apparatus* is also an exemplary staging of the abusiveness and paranoia always found in any interpretive commentary, supported by the unlimited submissiveness of any text to any hermeneutic, however unscrupulous the latter may be" (Genette 342, italics original). The key terms here are "appropriation", "abusiveness", "paranoia" and "submissiveness". Genette suggests an abusive, appropriating directional hermeneutic in the annotations of Shade's work by Kinbote. However, the arrangement of the paratexts in *House of Leaves* has a significantly more ambiguous relationship to the question of appropriation. Firstly, the reader is not presented with as direct a trajectory of appropriation as in Nabokov's text. Instead, the very ontology of appropriation appears in doubt, as the notes and appendices of Danielewski's novel all vie for the status of inception point for the narrative. Moreover, the trajectory of the narrative of *House of Leaves* is also specifically concerned with recovery from abuse, paranoia and submissiveness and a movement towards redemption and reconstruction of the postmodern text through a shared and inferred appropriation of the text by others, and the multitude of voices within Danielewski's paratexts are fundamental to an enactment of that strategy.

The structure of *House of Leaves* deliberately obfuscates the hierarchical status of text and paratext. While *The Navidson Record* would appear to be the central text around which the paratextual commentary of Truant and others revolve, Truant's unsteady position as not only editor but also potential writer of Zampano's text occasionally disrupts his paratextual status. If Truant has composed or amended sections of *The Navidson Record*, or if it is a fictional creation of Truant's created in order to confront his childhood trauma, then all of Truant's writing and *The Navidson Record* comprise the main text: paratext as text. However, in addition to

that ontological uncertainty, the most substantial other text (Pelafina's letters from the Whalestoe Institute) could prove to be the inception point for *Truant's* narrative, with Pelafina fictionalising her own son's life. Moreover, if Pelafina's letters are the generator of Truant's narrative, then they could also be considered as the inception point of Zampanò's narrative, which would mean that the text has been entirely generated from a paratext (one of the novel's appendices).¹⁷⁹ By paratextually questioning the status of the originating text and allowing any paratext a possible generative status, Danielewski avoids the process of "abusiveness" and "submissiveness" that Genette ascribes to the paratextual relationship in *Pale Fire*, suggesting instead a relationship of reciprocation and complementary creation. It is not possible for any part of the text of *House of Leaves* to be abusively appropriated by commentary from another, as the hierarchical and ontological status of *all* text and paratext is in doubt. Paratext in *House of Leaves* is not an infringement on the authority of the main text, as there may be no main text at all, or if one exists it may have been entirely generated from a paratextual source. Essentially, the paratext in *House of Leaves* functions as an interrogation of the authority of the text, but without "abusive" intention. Instead, both text and paratext are assigned equal communicative and generative status.

Secondly, an understanding of this equal generative status of text and paratext in the narrative is manifestly beneficial to Truant, whose psychological state before his recovery is characteristic of Genette's above terminology of the paratextual narrative ("appropriation", "abusiveness", "paranoia" and "submissiveness"). As explained in Chapter 4, Danielewski's narrative strategy involves both a formal *containing* of the tropes of postmodernism and also the possibility of escape from the postmodern text through a process of a shared rewriting of that text through

¹⁷⁹ The conceit that the appendices could be generating the rest of the text complements the formal generative model of the tree as outlined in Chapter 4. The positioning of the tree at the physical end of the book and the invocation of its "roots" also suggest a narrative that has been generated outside the main body of text and that develops through the appendices and subsequently the remainder of the body of the text. The use of "roots" on the final page of the novel and the word "leaves" on the first suggest a directional trajectory for this generation, a tree narrative that has literally grown "upward" (when the book is placed flat with the front cover upwards, the roots lie on the bottom while the leaves reside at the top, the roots having generated the narrative above it).

marginal and paratextual commentary. Another important constituent part of this post-postmodern strategy involves Truant's awareness about the communicative trajectory of the paratextual note. Genette suggests that "the addressee of the note is undoubtedly, in theory, the reader of the text" but there can also be "second-degree" texts, "those quoted with their notes in the primary text: the notes of these second degree texts are addressed in the first place to the reader of the quoted text and reach the reader of the quoting text only by proxy or rebound" (Genette 323-4). This process (one that often occurs in the epistolary novel) is reconfigured in *House of Leaves*. *The Navidson Record* contains a multitude of paratextual notes aimed at the reader of that text, who in the framework of the narrative is Johnny Truant (the reader of *House of Leaves* receives this information, in Genette's words, "by proxy or rebound"). However, unlike the epistolary format, where the text in which the note appears is directed outward at another individual with the purpose of communication, in *House of Leaves* Truant's own paratextual narrative is a journal, a text that has not originally been written with shared communication in mind, and operates principally as a kind of dialogue with the self.

Perhaps the most concise paratextual manifestation of this introverted dialogue is Truant's anti-dedication on the un-numbered page before his introduction: "This is not for you". Alison Gibbons has written on the semantics of this anti-dedication, and makes brief mention of Genette's notes on paratextual dedication. Gibbons suggests that in his study "Genette does not consider the possibility of a negative dedication" (Gibbons 29) but when considering Truant's trajectory throughout the text, Genette's classification of a "self-dedication" (Genette 133) actually appears to fit Truant's anti-dedication comfortably. In a text that involves Truant's subsequent katabasis into self-loathing and intense self-consciousness, his dedication could be seen to implicitly complete itself thus: "This is not for you (the reader) because it is for and about me (Johnny Truant)".¹⁸⁰

However, by the end of the narrative Truant has discovered the redemptive possibility of the other-directed paratextual note through the revelation that by opening up a self-conscious postmodern text to the marginal commentary of others it is possible to escape his own self-consciousness. One might then ask why

¹⁸⁰ The dedication is definitely by Truant as it appears in Courier (Truant's font).

subsequent to this revelation Truant has still seen fit to begin his text with the dedication “This is not for you”. In fact, the process of “character re-reading” outlined in Chapter 4 (the process by which Truant reconfigures his narrative by reading it again after composing it) allows the reader to ultimately reinterpret both the sender *and* addressee of the anti-dedication as Truant. The paratext retrospectively becomes, instead of an introductory dedication, a final second-person address from Truant to himself and an outwardly configured communication: “This is not for me (Johnny Truant); it is for you (the reader)”.

It becomes evident that subsequent to his recovery Truant has handed over control of the manuscript to a group of anonymous editors whose paratextual commentary provides the most “objective” commentary on the texts of *House of Leaves*, if indeed such a thing is possible. While this gesture may at first appear sinister (the appearance of these editors, after all, has heralded Truant’s disappearance) the passing on of the work to the editors actually represents another step in the redemptive process which begins with his reading of the paratexts of the proto-editors who are the musicians with the annotated copy of *House of Leaves*. The anonymity and plurality of the paratextual editors of Truant’s work, rather than a harbinger of mystery and uncertainty, is actually essential to a process by which the individual can escape from the postmodern text through a process of sharing narratives. An example of this process is the final substantial paratext of *House of Leaves* before the index. “Appendix III”, which is titled “Contrary Evidence”, is the creation of the editors of Truant’s work. Within this appendix there are a series of works of art (pages from a graphic novel, collages and paintings) that address the events in the house on Ash Tree Lane. These works, being different interpretations of the size, shape and texture of the house, contain paratextual information apparently created several years prior to Truant’s account of the house and dispute many of the elements of Truant’s narrative.¹⁸¹ For example, the final piece of evidence, an apparent still image from the film itself, would appear to contradict

¹⁸¹ “Another Great Hall on Ash Tree Lane” by Mazerine Diasen is dated 1994 (*House* 660), while Sarah Newbery’s Escher-like conceptual model of the house is dated 1993 (661). Tyler Martin’s graphic novel dates from 1993 (659) and the apparent still from “The Navidson Record” is dated 1991 (662). Truant’s journal dates from 1998.

both Truant's and Zampano's contention that the film is fake. The inclusion of "Appendix III" is therefore a validation of Truant's decision to leave his work in the hands of others.¹⁸² The narrative of Ash Tree Lane, according to this paratext, does not exclusively belong to Truant. The positioning of the paratextual data from the editors is important as it both interrogates and retrospectively frees Truant from the burden of a self-directed reading of the narrative. Indeed, the most telling contribution of the editors to this schema (and indeed one of the most important pieces of information in the narrative) is paratextually buried in a footnote on page 72:

Though Mr Truant's asides may often seem impenetrable, they are not without rhyme or reason. The reader who wishes to interpret Mr Truant on his or her own may disregard this note. Those, whoever, who feel they would profit from a better understanding of his past may wish to proceed ahead and read his father's obituary and Appendix II-D as well as those letters written by his institutionalized mother in Appendix II-E. (*House 72*)

As far as the editors are concerned, the reader of *House of Leaves* can take or leave Truant's self-directed reading of the text, disregarding those intensely personal appendices that inevitably lead the reader to view *The Navidson Record* through the frame of Truant's life. The suggestion that some apparently essential paratexts can be ignored (particularly the letters from Pelafina) may initially appear too dismissive of the importance of information related to Truant, but the editors are the only narrators able to suggest a narrative frame other than Truant's, with the implication that the protean symbol of the house on Ash Tree Lane can be mutable to any narrative. This is not a narrative schema that Truant has the ability to implement, and his decision to relinquish control of the narrative to the paratexts of the editors is representative of his escape from his own introverted reading of the postmodern text.

¹⁸² There is no evidence to suggest that the extra information provided by the anonymous editors is accurate (it could have been created by them) but the fact of their contribution nevertheless heralds Truant's commitment to communication of his narrative with others.

In this context, Truant's disappearance is reconfigured from a sinister vanishing into a redemptive escape "outside".

The main text of *Infinite Jest* appears to employ a small amount of narrators. An unidentified free indirect third person omniscient narrator narrates a significant amount of the narrative, though chapters are occasionally narrated by specific characters. Hal Incandenza narrates certain chapters, most notably the two dealing explicitly with his increasing bodily dissociation (*Jest* 3, 896), while both James Incandenza (491) and his own father (157) narrate chapters which reveal the effect of substance abuse and parental expectation upon successive generations of the Incandenza family. Two peripheral characters are also permitted first-person narratives: the mysterious "yrstruly", who narrates tales of street crime and drug abuse in the first person (128),¹⁸³ and Clenette, who recounts stories of abuse and unhappiness about herself and her family (37).

However, the endnotes of the novel not only lack but also interrogate the presence of a consistent controlling paratextual narrator. One of the most singular and important moments of character narration, a moment key to Wallace's paratextual narrative strategy in *Infinite Jest*, occurs in endnote 123, which is narrated thus:

Pemulis here, dictating to Inc, who can just sit there and make a steeple out of his fingers and pressing it to his lip and not take notes and wait and like inscribe [*sic*] it anytime in the next week and get it verbatim, the smug turd (1023)

When read closely this endnote, apparently narrated by Hal's friend Michael Pemulis, raises a number of significant questions about the identity of the overarching narrator of the endnotes. Who is actually narrating endnote 123? It would appear to be Pemulis, but the presence of the actual note itself in text suggests that it has been "inscribed" later by Hal Incandenza ("Inc"), borne out by the use of "[*sic*]", which is clearly not a part of Pemulis' original utterance (this is suggested

¹⁸³ To further convolute matters, "yrstruly" may be a nickname, which means that when the character is referenced the text could simultaneously be taken as written in first or third-person narrative.

by Pemulis' prediction that Hal will eventually write it down "anytime in the next week"). Given that the footnote is extensive (it runs to two pages and includes a series of complex mathematical diagrams and equations), a reader may be sceptical that all the information is exactly verbatim. According to Pemulis, Hal can recall information verbatim, but this note is written by Hal so the reader is not to know whether the transcription is verbatim or whether Hal has recalled incorrectly and rather self-aggrandisingly gilded his powers of recall in the footnote. Moreover, if this footnote is written by Hal, who has written all of the other footnotes? Why is Pemulis "dictating" this information? Moreover, if the paratexts are subject to this degree of uncertainty, is the entire narrative (both text and paratext) also unstable in the same manner? Is the whole narrative being "reported" by unperceived characters as events take place?

This indication of pervasive narrative uncertainty, by its inclusion in an endnote, highlights the importance to the reader of being suspicious of a hierarchy of text and paratext in *Infinite Jest*. It is also complemented by the aforementioned chapter-like behaviour of several paratexts, most notably endnote 110 (which is so lengthy it has its own set of endnotes) and endnote 234. Both of these endnotes have chapter headings that resemble the headings in the main text, and their length sometimes surpasses that of the chapters in which the note appears. Moreover, evident in endnote 123 is an unsettling mediating of narration which suggests a multitude of possibilities whereby the whole narrative could be being narrated by one individual, or a number of different individuals, or a number of unseen individuals transcribing a number of different narrators at second hand.

When the speaking or writing voice of the individual is perpetually in question, there cannot be developed a dominant self-conscious, "closed" narrative in which an individual is in dialogue with themselves. While there are moments of extreme narcissism in *Infinite Jest*, after reading endnote 123 the reader realises that one can never be completely certain of who is speaking or inscribing the narrative. Therefore the boundaries of the narcissistic narrative cannot be assigned to one individual and remain essentially porous, a collation of a community of possible communicating narrative voices. In the same manner as the formal re-employment of the geometric circle motif by Alcoholics Anonymous (as outlined in Chapter 1), a narcissistic narrative is disarmed by its recontextualising within an overarching

polyphonic narrative in which text and paratext are accorded equal narrative authority through the uncertainty of their respective authority, a similar function to that enacted by Danielewski through the “Contrary Evidence” of the third appendix of *House of Leaves*. The position of the narrative voice remains in a state of perpetual possibility, and the aforementioned anti-narcissistic trajectory implied from the inception of the endnotes (“Me”) to their conclusion (“Us”) is therefore enacted in the function of *Infinite Jest*’s paratexts.

Wallace appears to develop this anti-narcissistic paratextual strategy further in the *Oblivion* story “Good Old Neon”, where the protagonist’s final and most devastatingly self-conscious act (his suicide) is relegated to a footnote, a footnote that ends with the moment of death and “THE END” in capital letters (*Oblivion* 179). The text of the story continues after the footnote for another two pages and the site of the narration transfers from the first-person narrative of the suicidal protagonist to the perspective of another narrator reading about the suicide. Goerlandt astutely suggests that the continuation of the text after the apparently apocalyptic paratext, where the focus of the narrative shifts from the suicidal character Neal to his former classmate (one David Wallace) reading about Neal’s death “tries to offer closure, a way out of the nightmare – in expressly and tragically dramatizing “THE END” of hyper-conscious thought” (Goerlandt 171). By shifting the narrative away from self-conscious self-destruction and towards a form of relay between the consciousness of paratext and text Wallace offers a developed version of *Infinite Jest*’s anti-narcissistic paratextual schema, one in which, through a diverting of “THE END” to a paratext, allows another narrator to bring the narrative “outside” of self-consciousness.

This paratextual strategy of the relegation of “THE END” in “Good Old Neon” is itself an explicit formal extrapolation of the fact that neither *Infinite Jest* nor *House of Leaves* have narratives that persuasively “end”. The presence of “buffering” paratexts at the end of both novels (endnotes and appendices respectively) means that the reader does not experience the physical end of the book in the same manner as they would a traditional linear narrative. The final words of the main narrative in *Infinite Jest* (the last words that a reader will encounter chronologically when reading the narrative in order) come approximately one hundred pages before the end of the book, while the reader of *House of Leaves* will

have encountered most of the appendicised material at the physical end of the book long before they finish the narrative itself. The lack of a persuasive finality to these texts is the ultimate actualisation of the inferential structure of both novels, a structure that demands a hermeneutic completing of the narrative by the reader, with the understanding that an ending would also constitute, in its own fashion, a “closing” of the narrative system. The final words of the main narrative of *Infinite Jest* are “way out” while Danielewski’s narrative, as has been argued in Chapter 4, may not even end with the physical form of the novel itself, with *House of Leaves* one “node” (to use Evans’ terminology) in a network of accompanying texts that complement and inform one another.

Conclusions

The preceding analysis in this thesis has traced at length the interactions of these texts with postmodernism, a relationship that continuously moves between a process of dialogue and interrogation. In drawing the threads of this thesis together here to present conclusions, it is important not only to address the relationship of these particular works to the models of postmodernism outlined in the introductory chapter, but also to reaffirm, using the findings of this analysis, the qualitative formal difference between postmodernism and post-postmodernism implemented within these novels. It has become clear, as a result of this analysis, that the differences between a postmodern and post-postmodern text are often difficult to schematise. As stated in the introduction, the intention of this thesis is not to create a totalising definition of post-postmodernism in literature but instead to locate how those differences are implemented in specific works through a process of close textual analysis.

A discursive reading of both *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* may lead to the assumption that both texts are actually characteristically *postmodern*. A general survey of both novels yields, variously, multiple narrators, typographical playfulness and a foregrounding of authorial presence, all features that can be found in characteristically postmodern texts like *Lost in the Funhouse* or *Gravity's Rainbow*. This surface reading could understandably suggest that rather than a movement away from literary postmodernism, these novels present an intensification of its motifs. However, the close analysis in this thesis has revealed that rather than a straightforward intensification of literary postmodernism, the narratives of *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* actually represent a subtle *inflection*. This inflection is implemented in these novels through a particular relationship between form and content fundamentally concerned with creating a strategy of sincere communication, a gesturing “outside” of the text and away from a closed and solipsistic system and towards the importance of reader inference in constituting the narrative. Throughout their novels, Wallace and Danielewski employ some of the narrative conventions of literary postmodernism to highlight their departure from this strategy, locating the possibility of a development from literary postmodernism within its own materials. Therefore, a general glance at the formal properties of these novels reveals what

appear to be typically postmodern motifs, while a close textual analysis reveals the inflection essential to a post-postmodern narrative strategy.

In concluding, it is helpful to address a final example of that inflection in both novels: how the deliberate gesturing “outside” of the text is further advanced through a strategy whereby Wallace and Danielewski explicitly point not only towards the importance of the reader in the construction of the narrative, but also at the correlation with or even subservience to certain texts outside of their own. This approach, which positions another text as a specific generative influence upon the work in question, is implemented in both *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest* as an intertextual strategy that deliberately foregrounds the ancillary position of the post-postmodern text, and has two results. Firstly, it disarms the totalising power of these texts. The ambition and scope of the encyclopedic postmodern novel is enacted by both Danielewski and Wallace, whose narratives create extensive political and textual systems and contain intricate worlds of specified detail and structure. The suggestion that these gargantuan systems are specifically ancillary to another text undercuts the totalising ambition of the postmodern novel. Secondly, the giving away of generative power to a specific external work is another enactment of the movement away from solipsism extricated from the narratives of both *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest* in the previous chapters. The presence of this text suggests that the subjectively created work is in fact a generation of something outside of that world, and the potential danger of the closed “cage” of solipsism is averted. One might credibly ask how this process is different from the relationship of influence and counter-influence that is present in many literary texts. To respond to this enquiry; while the process suggests what might be considered traditional intertextual influence and counter-influence, the particular *choice* of text, and the location of that intertextual relationship within the context of these novels’ relationship to postmodernism, is significant to the form of the narratives of these novels. Furthermore, a crucial element of these generative texts in the cases of *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest* is that they are not engaged antagonistically (as Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* is interrogated in “Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way”, for example). This textual relationship draws together a number of the thematic and formal elements discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis.

In the case of *Infinite Jest*, this text is *Alcoholics Anonymous*. *Alcoholics Anonymous* is the so-called “Big Book” used by members of that group as a text to consult during the recovery process, and operates as something of an “ur-text” for Wallace’s novel.¹⁸⁴ The book physically appears or is mentioned a number of times in *Infinite Jest* (360, 367, 775, 856) and there are a series of striking correlations between the texts. *Alcoholics Anonymous* is split into two sections.¹⁸⁵ In the first, the authors address the alcoholic reader, informing them of the methodology of A.A. through a series of chapters. Typical chapter titles include “There is a Solution”, “How it Works” and “Into Action” (Anonymous 17, 58, 72). The second section, titled “Personal Stories”, provides forty-three case studies of varying severity under the subheadings “Pioneers of A.A.”, “They Stopped in Time” and “They Lost Nearly All” (Ibid 171, 317, 457). There are several structural similarities to *Infinite Jest* here. The first section is narrated almost entirely in the first person plural, while as has been argued above, the “recovery narrative” of *Infinite Jest* prizes the importance of moving from the first person singular to the first person plural, a strategy enacted in the endnotes and discussed above. The address to the reader in the first section of *Alcoholics Anonymous* is also stylistically similar to the passage on pages 200-205 of *Infinite Jest* that informs the potential addict of the terrible things that they will learn during their addiction and recovery:

We do not like to pronounce any individual as alcoholic, but you can quickly diagnose yourself. Step over to the nearest barroom and try some controlled drinking. Try to drink and stop abruptly. Try it more than once. It will not take long for you to decide, if you are honest with yourself about it (Anonymous 31-2)

Once you are sufficiently enslaved by a Substance to need to quit the Substance in order to save your life, the enslaving Substance has become so deeply important to you that you will all but lose your mind when it is taken

¹⁸⁴ As the book is anonymously written, it appears in the Works Cited section under “Anonymous”.

¹⁸⁵ Notably, the only time a copy of the “Big Book” actually physically appears in *Infinite Jest*, it is being offered to others as a gift; a tool to aid recovery (367).

away from you [...] That you can all of a sudden out of nowhere want to get high with your Substance so bad that you think you will surely die if you don't
(*Jest* 201-3)

The second section of *Alcoholics Anonymous* exerts a strong formal influence over the extensive Boston A.A. sections of *Infinite Jest*. In these sections (*Jest* 343-379, 442-447, 958-60) characters at meetings narrate harrowing stories of their addiction and recovery in a manner that parallels the stories of the ex-addicts in the “Big Book”. Two stories from *Alcoholics Anonymous* stand out as particularly influential upon Wallace’s methodology. “A Five-Time Loser Wins”, details the life of a recently released prisoner, while “He Who Loses His Life” is the tale of “a playwright [who] let his brains get too far ahead of his emotions” (Anonymous 531). Notably, the protagonist of “A Five-Time Loser Wins” uses the terms “inside” and “outside” to relate to prison and addiction, as well as explicitly locating addiction as a battle with the self:

Inmates in prison who attend A.A. have their chances of remaining free greatly enhanced—this is approved fact. Of course, an inmate must begin living the A.A. way “inside”, if he is to stand a chance “outside” [...] We always, or nearly always, had good intentions when we were released from prison. But with the first drink, our good intentions dissolved; our personalities changed [...] we found ourselves back in prison [...] Through A.A., we can experience freedom from self. After all, it was self (you, me) that stood in our own way, that ran the show and ran ourselves into bankruptcy, that hurt the ones we loved. All Twelve Steps of A.A. are designed to kill the old self (deflate the old ego) and build a new free self (458-9)

There is a significant similarity between the prose of “A Five-Time Loser Wins” and the terminology used by Wallace in his description of addiction and solipsism. The language of the ex-prisoner, with its eventual collapsing of the literal and figurative sense of imprisonment, is mirrored in Wallace’s use throughout *Infinite Jest* of the image of the cage as a representation of self-imprisonment, a strategy outlined at length in Chapter 3. Moreover, the suggestion that the process of recovery results in

freedom from constraint and confinement is paralleled in the lengthy sentence analysed in Chapter 2, a sentence that ends with the words “and you’re free” (*Jest* 351).

In “He Who Loses His Life” a playwright named “Bob” narrates a tale of attempted suicide through alcoholism, with dry Martinis “chosen as the slow, pleasant, private, gradual instrument of self-destruction” (Anonymous 532). This story is particularly interesting as the narrator, in a similar manner to Wallace, connects the grip of addiction with self-consciousness and irony:

It can best be explained in a little phrase I coined and sang to myself: “What happened to Bob? Bob found alcohol!” And having sung that phrase, I’d chuckle with amusement, turning into irony turning into self-contempt turning into self-pity, at the same fate of Bob, that wonderful, poor little motherless boy who was so smart in school (532)

It has been suggested, most specifically in Chapter 3, that this connection is employed by Wallace throughout *Infinite Jest* not only in relation to addiction but also to the creation of art. Wallace dramatises this relationship through the filmography of James Incandenza which, it has been argued here, is also a commentary on Wallace’s own writing. It is notable that “Bob” is a writer, and that his addiction creates a safe space for him to self-consciously become “the great author I longed to be” and to subject others to “some pretty highflown theories of literature and of genius” (537-8). Wallace’s account of his own recovery from addiction in the late 1980s shares some notable similarities with that of “Bob”:

I could go to a psychiatrist one day in tears and desperation and then two days later be fencing with her over the fine points of Jungian theory; I could argue with drug counselors over the difference between a crass pragmatic lie and an “aesthetic” lie told for its beauty alone; I could flummox 12-Step sponsors over certain obvious paradoxes inherent in the concept of denial. And so forth [...] I was denied [in recovery] the chance to sit chain-smoking in private and drive myself crazy with abstract questions about stuff that didn't matter nearly as much as simply not putting chemicals into my body [...] They also recognized

bullshit, and manipulation, and meaningless intellectualization as a way of evading terrible truths (“An Ex-Resident’s Story”)

The influence of *Alcoholics Anonymous*’ content and structure upon *Infinite Jest* (both of which are “big books” in one form or another) is significant in its suggestion that amid all of its playfulness *Infinite Jest* correlates to a collectively written text that is explicitly based around communicativeness. *Alcoholics Anonymous* is not attributed to one author; instead it is composed of multiple narratives authored by different people in the service of communication. The form of *Infinite Jest* not only points towards a text “outside” of itself but also one that is not composed by a single “self”; a gesture that correlates with Wallace’s strategy (a strategy analysed throughout this thesis) of relying upon someone outside of the text (the reader) to hermeneutically complete it.

Danielewski also points towards a text that has been generated outside of his narrative, one that has a significant influence upon *House of Leaves*. However, unlike Wallace’s more systematic engagement with *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Danielewski uses this work to gesture at a specific referent beyond the enclosed and solipsistic world of his characters. The work in question, referred to in Chapter 5, is the Kevin Carter photograph of a starving Sudanese toddler menaced by a vulture. In *House of Leaves* a similar photograph is attributed to Will Navidson (both real and fictional photographs won the Pulitzer Prize), but rather than relying upon the reader’s awareness of the Carter picture, the following footnote explicitly and unambiguously makes the connection:

This is clearly based on Kevin Carter’s 1994 Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of a vulture preying on a tiny Sudanese girl who collapsed on her way to a feeding center. Carter enjoyed many accolades for the shot but was also accused of gross insensitivity [...] On July 27, 1994 Carter killed himself.
– Ed. (*House* 368)

The editorial suggestion that Navidson’s picture is “clearly based” on Carter’s photograph is striking: in a stroke it acknowledges the fictiveness of the entire central story of *The Navidson Record* through the suggestion that Navidson is not

real, and points towards a generative text located outside of the novel (while also acting as a tacit acknowledgement of the processes of fictionalising taking place within Truant's own story and the potentially fictional nature of Truant's own persona). By highlighting that the image is "clearly based" upon a real-life referent, the novel explicitly points outside of itself and acknowledges the primacy of the Carter photograph over the generation of a significant constituent part of *House of Leaves*. The interminable and centripetal internal "conversation" between the voices of the novel's narrators is therefore challenged by the generative presence of this referent.¹⁸⁶ In a similar manner to *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the existence and disturbing content of the Carter image acts as a catalyst to action, to humanitarian assistance or intervention in the world outside the novel. In this manner, the correlation of both the Carter photograph and *Alcoholics Anonymous* to *House of Leaves* and *Infinite Jest* present examples of the inflection within these post-postmodern narratives: an awareness of a system of intertextual relationships, but an employment of that system to point towards works that encourage a kind of communication or action in the world outside the text. This is a variation upon the reconfigurative narrative strategy, discussed principally in Chapters 1 and 4, where an open system is engendered from the very elements of the closed system itself.

More broadly, the intricacies of this inflection can be detected in the manner in which *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves* relate to the attempts towards a theorising of the post-postmodern outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Both novels make use of Malcolm Bradbury and Stephen Burns' suggestion of the cultural re-deployment or dramatisation of postmodern motifs as a symbol of post-postmodernism, through the configuring of the aesthetic bases of literary and cultural postmodernism as the environments within which the novel takes place. However, in the case of both novels these bases are then specifically employed as a kind of toxic environment which must be interrogated, with solutions offered for an engagement with and movement beyond those dangerous spaces. The problematic postmodern model of

¹⁸⁶ There is a typographical status distinction between the "Ed" who has signed the footnote here and "The Editors" who sign the introductory footnote (*House* 4) and the appendices (567, 657). It could be speculated that the use of a singular "Ed" rather than "Eds", particularly in this footnote, draws the reader's attention to a potential confluence between Danielewski's voice and that of the single editor who signs this important footnote.

paradoxical temporality outlined by John Frow is also recognisable, particularly within the spatio-temporal models in *Infinite Jest* outlined in Chapter 2, the ambiguity over whether “to change/to be still; to be historical/to be the end of history” (Frow 142) implemented in the continuous and psychologically ruinous changes in time and space in the Great Concavity. However, the post-postmodern inflection in *Infinite Jest* is implemented as a strategy of *recovering* time (schematised in the same chapter), through an understanding that this postmodern temporal disjuncture exists but can in fact be overcome. In *House of Leaves*, Truant’s strategy of “character re-reading” performs a similar inflective function, stabilising a character within a disorientating postmodern temporal environment.

The extent to which these novels engage with Wendy Steiner and James Wood’s assertions that the post-postmodern work will be characterised by “depth of feeling—for people—for language” (Steiner) and be “the novel of intimacy [...] of relation” (Wood) is more problematic, as these terms are both structurally nebulous and also characteristic of the very works (namely DeLillo’s *Underworld*) being disparaged by the critics in question. However, the analysis in this thesis has consistently found that Wallace and Danielewski’s novels do foreground the importance of communication, with the “shape” of their narratives both dramatising and gesturing away from solipsistic closed systems. The focus upon individual “recovery” in both novels is an important part of this strategy. Whether through the A.A. recovery programme in *Infinite Jest* or Johnny Truant’s communicative paratextual overwriting of the postmodern text in *House of Leaves*, the notion of “relation”, as vague as that term can be, is an important element within both novels, in that it necessarily prefigures a kind of recovery (from addiction, from trauma, from physical or psychological confinement). However, the implicit association drawn by Charles Harris between the pronouncements of Steiner and Wood and a desire to return to a kind of 19th century psychological realism (an association given further credence by Wood’s regular praise of James and Flaubert [Wood, *How Fiction Works* 12, 32] in the same volume in which he explicitly criticises Wallace’s prose style [25]) does not really correlate to the post-postmodern projects of *Infinite Jest* or *House of Leaves*. The post-postmodern inflection in these novels, it has been argued, is performed through a gesture towards communication and away from a particular postmodern solipsism, but this is not implemented through a regression to

a literary style that precedes postmodernism. Rather, these novels employ the terminology of literary and cultural postmodernism to interrogate its own conventions. The function of the texts may correlate to Steiner and Wood's delineation, but the structural and stylistic approaches do not.

Finally, Burn's problematic suggestion of a post-postmodern engagement with the "real world" or "social world" does find an analogue within the structure of these particular texts, and is associated with the aforementioned move towards communication. This is partly performed through a move away from metafiction (particularly by Wallace) and through the technique, mentioned above, of having the work "point" outwards at a communicative text outside of itself. However, the analysis in this thesis has deliberately not attempted to fully schematise a concept of "real world" (leading as that does towards the possibility of an overly constrictive or loose categorisation) and has instead closely read these novels to identify the significant intricacy and complexity of the way in which these works interact with other texts outside of themselves. Throughout this thesis this system of close textual analysis has instead illuminated different *gradations* of intertextual interaction within Wallace and Danielewski's post-postmodern projects, rather than attempting to collapse the analysis into a more general schema of "text-world" and "real-world".¹⁸⁷

To conclude, it bears repeating that these significant problems of categorisation only accentuate the importance of a strategy of close textual analysis. As has been established, there is no easily definable programmatic "break" between postmodernism and post-postmodernism; instead, the differences are subtle

¹⁸⁷ The difficulty of a coralling categorisation of the motifs of post-postmodernism is further illuminated by Wallace's final work, the unfinished novel *The Pale King*. While the published text is in a considerably fragmented state, it is notable that *The Pale King* features an unexpected return to Barthian metafiction, with two lengthy chapters narrated by Wallace, both beginning with the words "Author here" (*Pale* 66, 256). This metafiction sits alongside a series of chapters focusing upon the aporias of Christian faith (36) and the declining importance of "civics" in 1980s America (130), the latter being related in a lengthy screed of unattributed dialogue that reminds the reader of the format of William Gaddis' postmodern novel *JR*. The novel also features angelic ghosts, which recalls McHale's attribution of the angel motif to a characteristically postmodern text in "What Was Postmodernism?" (McHale).

inflections located at the level of textual shape and hybridity of form. These inflections can be most thoroughly detected by treating broad categorisation with caution and instead approaching the formal idiosyncrasies of a particular text in detail, and the analysis in this thesis has shown that the analysis of post-postmodern motifs must take this reading strategy into account in order to thoroughly locate the difficult, intricate relationship between postmodernism and post-postmodernism in the works of Wallace and Danielewski.

Appendix

Explanatory Note: The images here depicting the street layouts were originally devised for my article within *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*. Because this article used an extra image, there is a discrepancy between the “Fig.” number embedded within the image and the correct “Fig.” number alongside the image on the right-hand side. Attempts to manually obscure the incorrect “Fig.” numbers within the image resulted in a significant degradation of the image and overall appendix, so the discrepancy remains in the service of clarity of image. Rather than placing the figures and this explanatory information in the main body of the text, they have been relocated to the appendix.

In all cases please regard the “Fig.” number **on the right-hand side of the image** as the correct one.

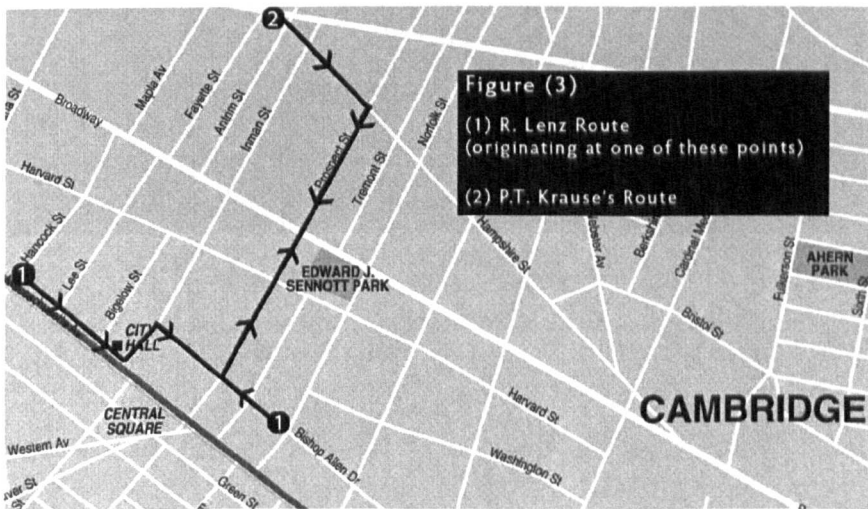
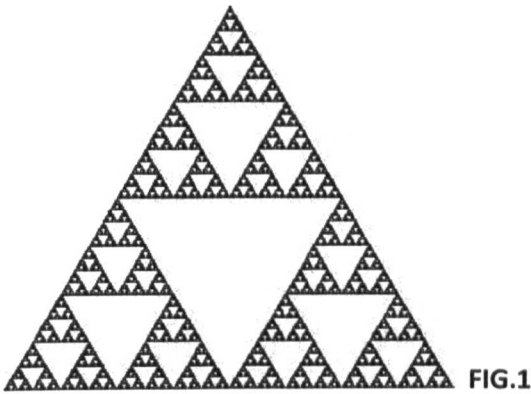


FIG.2

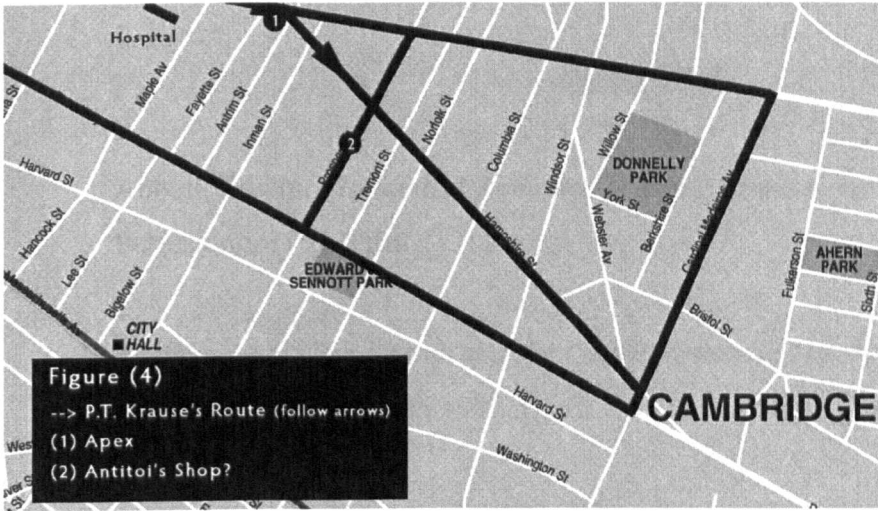


FIG.3

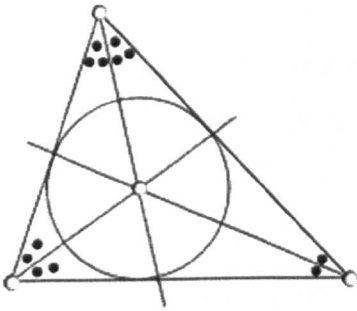


FIG.4

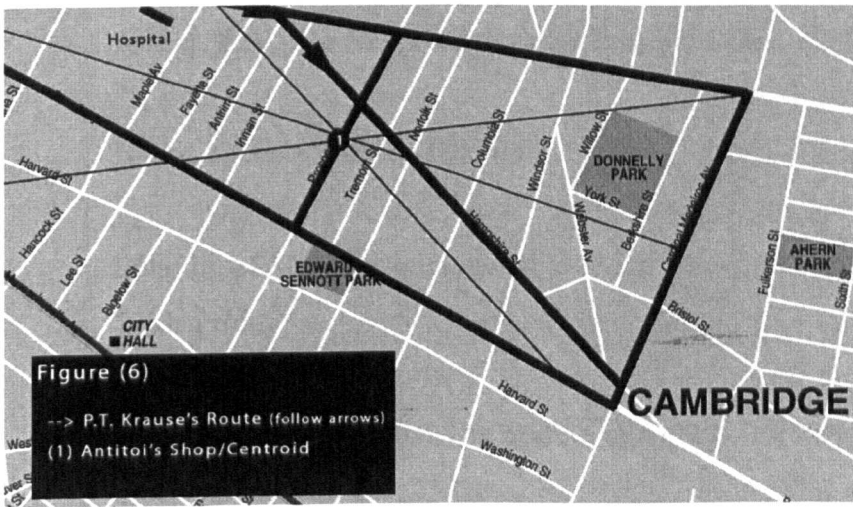


FIG. 5

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