

To Dwell as a Poet or an Assassin?

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I: *“Technology is no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing.”*
 –Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*

The Question Concerning Technology by Martin Heidegger is widely considered a dystopic critique on the disturbing consequences of modern technology. For Heidegger, the essence of modern technology is “enframing,” an instrumental orientation that defines the significance of objects by way of their quantifiable resource. The rise of modern science exacerbated the impetus for “enframing,” the result being the pursuit to attain complete mastery over Nature. This instrumental definition of technology is pervasive, the consequence of which is what Heidegger calls “one-track thinking,” where Nature is considered an external object, its essence being delimited to a quantifiable resource. For Heidegger, one-track thinking neglects the multi-dimensional questioning of Being, and ultimately substitutes the necessary depth of philosophical thinking for efficient and productive modes of living. Heidegger warns us of the inevitability of what is to come: the human subject will become just another object to “enframe,” a resource, a means to an end.

The instrumental definition of technology derives from the modern impulse to categorize technology as *either* a weapon which destroys people *or* a tool that produces goods. In this definition, technology encompasses the world of neutral, mediating objects. The extrinsic

distinction itself is contingent on the basis of usage, limiting the definition of technology to that of an empty form, a chameleon whose content is dictated by that of the subject's intentions.

Refer to the image above: the scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) where Kubrick explores the seminal moment when an ape transforms a bone into a weapon. The dormant bone has no definitive purpose until the thinking subject uses it for some *objective*, thereby ascribing it meaning. This extrinsic distinction, while helpful in understanding very basic, surface-level adaptations of technological history, is a shell of a definition; it is to cast technology as subjectivity's puppet. While Heidegger is undoubtedly convincing and in many respects foresaw the dystopic effects of such an empirical orientation, to frame *The Question Concerning Technology* as a solely dystopic text is to gravely misread Heidegger; for Heidegger engages in a questioning that is meant to evoke a curiosity, not a disparaging determinism.

All too often, analyses of technology are forced into an either/or logic of a moral impetus: technology must *either* be a weapon for dystopic destruction *or* a utopic tool for creation. Regardless of whether one believes technology to be a force of creation or destruction, the underlying principle remains the same: technology is an object that is created and dictated by the human subject. In both cases, the concept of technology is neutral only insofar as it is molded by the human subject towards a moral impetus. Technological objects are understood as external to the human subject, functioning outside of the realm of being. The responsibility is thus placed on humanity, as the dictators of meaning, to either inhibit or perpetuate its growth. By assigning technology to a determined moral cause, as *either* good *or* evil, the subject becomes distinctively situated in a particular moral orientation, to *either* rebel against *or* passionately support the progress of technology; ultimately concretizing the ontological hierarchy of the human subject.

The Question Concerning Technology is not an entirely dystopic analysis. Heidegger does not delimit the essence of technology as purely a dangerous force, for Heidegger constantly expounds that “enframing” is inextricably bound to a “revealing.” Heidegger writes: “precisely the essence of technology must harbor in itself the growth of a saving power” (Heidegger 28). Heidegger ultimately expresses the living paradox of technology, the dual-headed god that can be considered both dystopic and utopic.

The modern tendency to think about technology as either a dangerous weapon or a saving power is a manifestation of Heidegger’s “enframing;” it is to attempt to objectify the “problem” of technology in order to solve it, a desire that ultimately reifies its peril: “so long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain fast in the will to master it” (Heidegger 32). It is an impossible feat that places mere subjectivity into an illusory dictatorship, which diffuses the contemporary fear of technology gaining too much control.

To assert a complexity onto Technology as simultaneously existing as *both* a force of danger *and* a saving power undercuts the foundation of that causal system; for the relationship between technology and the human can no longer be reduced to the subject dictating the object. Rather, in situating technology within a both/and logic, Heidegger subverts the question of technology into a more complicated force, and no longer validates the moral distinction of an individual; that is, when technology is defined as a force that is morally ambiguous, it becomes much more difficult to feel as though one has individual agency over such a force.

This is not subversion for the sake of subversion. Conceptualizing technology solely within a dualistic framework convinces the optimist and the cynic that they are fundamentally opposed to each other. Though, in truth, they are under the guise of the same existential anxiety. Fearful of just how far the breadth of human agency reaches, they are cut from the same cloth. While this

existential anxiety is compelling, it fuels the never-ending, addictive game of cat and mouse where our fear becomes a tool to simplify the philosophically complex concept of technology. In such a case, we are subjugated by the very dualism we are too fearful to question.

The etymological root of the word Technology is the Greek word *techne*, so often forgotten, hidden amongst the scientific association of modern technology. The Greek word *techne* is the name for *both* the skills of the craftsman *and* the arts of the mind; “[Techne] is as revealing and not as manufacturing,” a multiplicity of knowingness, is a divergence to the instrumentality of modern technology; “*techne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic” (13).

Such a poetic consideration requires an ontological dethroning of the human subject, ultimately releasing the fixation of mastery. To conceptualize technology as both a saving power and a danger force allows for a complexity that cannot be objectified or mastered by the human subject: “human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it” (33). To embrace *techne*, the poeticism of its revealing, is to embrace the incommensurability of experience. To be a poet is to accept the paradoxical without attempting to solve it.

For Heidegger, it is the realm of art that allows for an essential reflection upon technology, a poetic revealing that may “expressly foster the growth of the saving power” (35). The reflection must not “shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are questioning,” but rather bear witness to both the challenging and revealing nature of technology. Heidegger points towards art precisely because of its non-scientific approach, a reflectiveness that encourages subverting the instrumental notion of technology as existing as either dystopic or

utopic. What does such a reflectiveness look like? Can a poeticism go beyond the pervasive existential fear of technological agency? And ultimately why is such a reflectiveness necessary?

My major, titled *Technology and The Human*, is the exact manifestation of the dualistic thinking, perpetuating the notion that technology is an intricate object, codified and waiting to be cracked, and it was I, the human, who was going to find the skeleton key. As the major itself grew out of a concern with the Millennial addiction to technology, I was drawn to the texts which viewed technology as a fundamentally dystopic and deterministic force. This was a trend that induced many fits of self-loathing and anxiety: I am not some Luddite, hiding beneath a rock, waving my finger at whoever indulges, I am as addicted to technology as the next Millennial. While the major was a product of an unwavering curiosity about technology, I could not help but be caught in the seductive confidence of the either/or logic. When I first read Heidegger's *Question Concerning Technology*, the cynic in me felt validated in its unabashed concern. The optimist in me felt as though it was my duty to figure the question of technology into a verified solution. Yet questions of self-doubt haunted my intellectual multiplicity: How could I critique technologies that I was so undeniably addicted to? Who am I to judge a force that I cannot live without?

Such is the nature of this thesis: to parse two non-scientific texts, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and *Infinite Jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace, which both subvert the traditional dualistic notion of technology as either a weapon or a tool. Both texts are manifestations of Heidegger's call for a reflective questioning of technology. *A Thousand Plateaus* elucidates a process of ideas that speak to the complex and necessarily paradoxical role of technology in modern life, while *Infinite Jest* gives a powerful narrative to these paradoxes in ways that philosophy often cannot.

II: “*Dualisms are an entirely necessary enemy. The furniture we are forever rearranging.*” – Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 20

In the introductory plateau (chapter) of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari identify three figures of books: a root-tree, a radicle system, and a rhizome. A ‘root-tree’ is the oldest and weariest type of thought, the classical image of the world that has binary logic as its spiritual reality. Proceeding by way of dichotomies, the root-tree is *arborescent*, each branch of thought a derivative of the root principle. Think of the Oedipal complex wherein every action is dictated by one determined desire. The “radicle-system” is the crest of the modern age, a system of representation and signification that does not have one principle root (like that of the root-tree), but rather ‘a fascicular-root,’ derived from the Latin *fasciculus*, meaning bundle or multiple. The radicle system is composed of “biunivocal” relations that install a dimension of transcendence onto the multiplicity, but ultimately enforce a subjection of endless, cyclical referral. That is, the radicle-system masquerades as escaping from the binary logic of the root-tree, but really its “unity of totalization asserts itself even more firmly in another, circular or cyclic, dimension...A strange mystification: a book all the more total for being fragmented” (D&G 6). Think Joyce’s *Ulysses*: a stream of consciousness that is supposedly without unity, but in truth is self-reflexive, constantly referring back to itself.

“The multiple *must* be made,” D&G proclaim, by way of the third system, the “rhizome.” To be clear, a rhizome is not simply a book, but a system that assumes many different forms. A rhizome is a de-centralized multiplicity, “an endless self-adjusting network developing in all directions” (128) that ceases to have any relation to the principle root (the One). Unlike the root-tree and the radicle system, the rhizome evades any form of unity: “There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (8).

A rhizome will never be a structural model, for rhizomes are not measured in quantifiable units but in *multiplicities*, which are in state of constant flux. The theory of the rhizome brings the binary of the root-tree and biunivocal of the radicle under the same oppressive, dualistic heading.

“Dualisms,” Deleuze and Guattari famously proclaim, “are an entirely necessary enemy. The furniture we are forever rearranging” (20). *A Thousand Plateaus* does not aim to deconstruct the importance of dualistic thinking entirely; for that would just revert us back into a dualistic way of assigning good and evil, i.e. rhizomes are good, root-trees are evil. “The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map... It is a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again” (20). This process of flux, of movement, of departing and returning to dualistic logic is a necessary feature of a rhizome. This movement is what Deleuze and Guattari call *reterritorializing* and *detrterritorializing* away and towards dualistic thinking. The figures of the root-tree and radicle-systems are then a necessary point of reference in order to arrive at a rhizomatic process that challenges all models.

The agenda of *A Thousand Plateaus* (*ATP*) is to subvert traditional linguistic modes of structuralism. The book is composed of original philosophical concepts; amalgamations of words that Deleuze and Guattari structure into phrases birthed in conjunction with the book. And if there is any good place to begin, it is with the rhizome. The rhizome is the *system* of *ATP*; it is the title of the introductory plateau, and it is in the wake of the rhizome that both the brilliance and the extreme difficulty of parsing *ATP* becomes apparent. “The rhizome is alliance,” its breath touching everything, its voice heard in every whisper of the book: “the fabric of the

rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and’ ... ‘and’ ... ‘and’” (25). Though the rhizome does not fix its own order, any point of its system is in a necessary connection with anything other. While the structure of this thesis is not itself “rhizomatic,” the content of the thesis draws from concepts of ATP that, by their very definition, fail to have meaning without a theoretical grasp of the rhizome.

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For Deleuze and Guattari (D&G), technology is not a representation of human progress, it is not the all-encompassing expression for machines, tools, weapons, or the technical, all of which are used commonly to further the dichotomy of objects as extrinsic to subjects. Deleuze and Guattari are less interested in parsing the meaning of the concept “technology” than in elucidating the characteristics of the collective mechanisms behind all technology, the principle by which they deconstruct the technological as a force that is inextricably tied to humanity. D&G map a theory of technology that defines the human subject as immanent in rather than transcendent to technology.

Deleuze and Guattari offer an open, dynamic systems-theory of matter, comprising of three processes: coding, stratification, and territorializing. Everywhere there is “the flow of matter in continuous variation, conveying singularities and traits of expression... This flow is as much artificial as natural: it is like the unity of human beings and Nature” (407). Within any given body, there are components of this matter-flow. *Coding* is the process of ordering matter into components. Deleuze and Guattari argue that these component parts are not stable or fixed, but rather in perpetual flux of displacement and replacement within and among other bodies. Stratification and territorialization are the processes of ordering the bodies into “assemblages.”

If the rhizome is the system, *assemblages* (agencement) are the constellations deduced from the matter, a formation of bodies that establish and organize the multiplicities drawn from the different orders of flow. The ordering of the bodies, the assemblages, are not static by any means, but in constant flux. Assemblages territorialize both *forms of content*, material bodies (nonhuman and human alike), and *forms of expression* (incorporeal enunciation).

Reterritorializing is the act of stabilizing the identity of the assemblage, while deterritorializing is the act of destabilizing the assemblage, which requires a component exiting the assemblage, this act is otherwise known as *a line of flight*.

For Deleuze and Guattari, “A technical element,” (what we’d call a technological object of any sort) “remains abstract, entirely undetermined, as long as one does not relate it to an *assemblage* it presupposes... Weapons and tools are not merely distinguished from one another in an extrinsic manner, and yet they have no distinctive intrinsic characteristics. They have internal (not intrinsic) characteristics relating to the respective assemblages with which they are associated” (398). The weapon and the tool have no characteristics that are intrinsic in and of themselves, for they are only technical elements, neutral, until one exposes their respective assemblages. A weapon is no longer delineated to a destructive, mutated tool; nor is the tool defined solely as that which creates.

Assemblages, in this sense, are the “veritable inventions,” the flowing structures that delineate technological innovation: “tools exist only in relation to the intermingling they make possible or make them possible... A society is defined by its amalgamations, not by its tools” (ATP 90). Assemblages are the apparatuses of meaning, “weapons and tools are consequences, nothing but consequences” (496). For Deleuze and Guattari, in order to understand internal distinctions of technology, one must understand the amalgamations, the assemblages that dictate

their purpose. Technological objects, in this sense, are not in direct causal relationship with a single, human subject, but rather are in relation to their connective assemblages, which ultimately reforms the agency of ‘the subject’ to a role to that which is in accordance but does not determine the purpose of any given technological object.

The assemblages of weapons and of tools exist in relationship to free-action and work models. The *free-action* model can be characterized by an exercise of force; weapons stand in an internal relationship to speed, that is, they are *projective*. The *work*-model, by contrast, expends movement by way of gravity: tools are *introceptive*, perpetually encountering resistance. "It is as though the weapon were moving, self-propelling, while the tool is moved (397). The tool presupposes work, "it prepares matter from a distance in order to bring it to a state of equilibrium or to appropriate it for a form of interiority" (395); whereas the weapon can be characterized by the counterattack, it is projected outwards, "which by its essence unleashes the power of repetition as a mechanic force that multiplies its effect and pursues an infinite movement" (498). A free-action model creates "a milieu of exteriority," whereas the resistance of the tool, the work-model, creates a "milieu of interiority." In this sense, weapons can be best characterized in their relation to compositions of desire, an infinite pursuit, a passionate extension outward that implies a regime of *affects*. Tools have a different order of passions. They manifest the order of *feelings*, they imply "an *evaluation* of matter and its resistances, a sense of form and its developments, an economy of force and its displacements, a whole gravity" (497).

These assemblages, however, are not concretely defined. These two models of assemblages are in conjunction with one another, meaning they are not opposed but rather constantly in conversation, "the more mechanisms of projection a tool has, the more it behaves like a weapon, potentially or simply metaphorically" (75). By being contingent on the

assemblages, the distinction between a tool and a weapon is thus in constant flux: “There is a schizophrenic taste for the tool that moves it away from work and towards free action, a schizophrenic taste for the weapon that turns it into a means for peace, for obtaining peace. A counter-attack and a resistance simultaneously” (403).

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett asserts the ecological sensibility of assemblage theory: “objects appear as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics” (Bennett 9). To decentralize the human from the ontological center, one must first accept the vitality of nonhuman entities, which thus “presents individuals as simply incapable of bearing full responsibility for their effects” (37). Bennett asserts the ethical significance of a distributive agency wherein the subject is no longer the root cause of an effect. In this sense, assemblages are not governed by any one cause: “no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory of impact of the group” (24). Bennett offers the example of the North American Blackout of 2003: “which is better understood as a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, heat, lifestyles, profit motives, water, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mystery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire, and wood” (25). Bennett explicates the equally tempered roles of each component, that still to this day, we were unable to pinpoint the exact cause of the failed system. Ultimately, Bennett illustrates the inadequacy of conceptualizing the grid as simply a machine or a tool or a weapon.

From assemblage theory arise the question of innovation and ethical responsibility. The value of state-of-the-art technologies is the “pure possibility” of creating a new assemblage, a mutation that is the ‘shared’ *line of flight* of the weapon and the tool. “There arise subterranean technicians who belong more or less to the world order, but who involuntarily invent and amass

virtual charges of knowledge and action that are usable by other, minute but easily acquired for new assemblages” (403). For Deleuze and Guattari, the new assemblage of the weapon-tool, the affinity that is required, is a marker “however fleeting for revolutions and popular wars” (403). The schizophrenic taste is an affinity that occurs only when the weapon-tool assemblage exists in what they call a “holey space” in which the technology is a ‘hybrid, an alloy, a twin formation” (415). This idea of the weapon-tool assemblage subverts the contemporary understanding of innovation; for the virtual paradigmatic shifts in technology are not the intention of one brilliant individual who invented an object of technology anew but rather the outcome of the many agentic components of a weapon-tool assemblage.

Evidently, Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of technology is difficult to parse. All of their concepts are in conjunction with countless others, the multiplicities within their theory are endless. What I find particularly brilliant about their expansive philosophy is simultaneously what I find to be the most infuriating: they are calling for a revolution of thought using a pragmatics filled with language that is impenetrable to most. So much of the reason why I took “a line of flight” from the Philosophy major, and created my own, was to avoid this problem. I felt that narrative breathes in such ways as to make the complex penetrable. *Infinite Jest* embodies assemblage theory without over-coding its complexity.

III: “*Only that which narrates can make us understand.*”
- Susan Sontag, *On Photography* 23

The rhizome is the driving force which connects the conceptions within *A Thousand Plateaus*. To assert that *Infinite Jest* is itself a rhizome is a difficult task in that it requires the tedious undertaking of verifying that *Infinite Jest* achieves all six principles of rhizomatic theory.

For the purpose of this argument, I will be elucidating that *Infinite Jest* does not function by way of arborescent or fascicular roots, but instead attains a rhizomatic direction. These negations are a necessary point of departure in order to arrive at the objective of the argument, which is to demonstrate how *Infinite Jest*, in conjunction with particular concepts in *A Thousand Plateaus*, subverts a dualistic questioning of technology. Thus, if I am going to analyze *Infinite Jest* by way of the conceptual terms of *A Thousand Plateaus*, I must first prove that the novel takes on rhizomatic qualities, since the rhizome itself is the system throughout which all of the remaining concepts take meaning.

The Anti-Rebel

At first *Infinite Jest* seems to function by way of a *radicle-system*: there is no one essence, no one climactic moment of philosophical refuge. The fragmented and non-linear narratives successfully reject the dichotomous essence of the root-book's claim to One objective capital T Truth. *Infinite Jest* celebrates the contradictory certainties of the character's experiences and the paradoxical orientations with which they live respectively to truth. *Infinite Jest*, with its multiple, fragmented narratives goes beyond ironizing the impossibility of One Truth—it does more than displace a principal root with a fascicular cause.

In the essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," Wallace asserts that the contemporary postmodern technique of self-reflexive irony has become hyperbolic and meaningless. The post-modern reliance on irony has become an empty technique that has shifted the psychological orientation of the writer and the reader. For Wallace, the function of the contemporary fiction writer mirrors that of the hyper-mediated world of television: to validate the reader by way of self-referential irony.

For Wallace, in post-modern fiction, the construction of meaning shifts from the author's intention wholly onto the perceptive response of reader. The principle role of the reader is to self-reflexively construct the meaning of the narrative. And what seems to be a genuine use of a fragmented, rhizomatic multiplicity transcends into "a comprehensive secret unity, or a more extensive totality" (D&G 6). The supposed multiplicity is contrived—a technique to manipulate the reader. Its contradictions and paradoxes empty of a function besides that of achieving a technique. In this sense, postmodern fiction can easily take the form of the radicle-system, "which does not *really* break with dualism, with the complementarity between a subject and an object, a natural reality and a spiritual reality: unity is consistently thwarted and obstructed in the object, while a new type of unity triumphs in the subject" (6). Even though there exist no objective unity in the novel, the reader is given the capacity to uncover the secret unity for herself, and the multiplicities collapse by way of the reader's authority on unity.

The anti-rebels, for Wallace, are the post-post modern fiction writers to-come who must be "willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs...Accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Credulity" (43). In *Infinite Jest*, the reader is repositioned, and no longer is forced into a principally self-reflexive, analytic orientation: "it's trying to prohibit the reader from forgetting that she's receiving heavily mediated data, 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*" (Wallace, *An Interview*). In this sense, *Infinite Jest* is a humanistic pursuit, one that reaches beyond the role of the critic. The reader, no longer the centralized dictator of meaning, is now faced with the consciousness of the writer. The reader becomes forced to *play* a role that she practices every day, that of a human being. And the role-playing is not in the sense of Louis

Althusser's notion of interpellation, the ideologically oppressive "Hey You!" that propagates subjection and validation. Rather, *Infinite Jest* is a conversation between two consciousness, wherein the author's role is of equal importance; a meeting halfway between writer and reader that allows for a multiplicities of meanings to arise.

With *Infinite Jest*, there is no shortage of linguistic work on the reader's side. The novel is tedious and dense. There are one thousand pages of endnotes, some of which are necessary for the plot, others seemingly void of meaning. Out of fear of missing an integral plot point, the reader must constantly flip back and forth from the text to the endnotes. Meanwhile, the multiple, intense narratives are flowing in and through each other all within a time-scale that never gets explained. The chaotic nature of the linguistic work is deepened by the fact there is no one resolve, the reader will never understand the whole picture, for there is no totality, no one picture in place. *Infinite Jest* is an impossible puzzle: "Reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows" (D&G 21). *Infinite Jest's* most apparent rhizomatic quality lies in its profound chronological gap: the first seventeen pages, narrated by Hal Incandenza, one of the novel's protagonists, alludes to a pivotal crisis that occurred sometime after the remaining one thousand pages. The novel's end seems less like an ending, for its elusive and mystical imagery is a "direction in motion" towards the novel's beginning. *Infinite Jest* has neither a resolved end nor a beginning, for both are contingent on one seminal occurrence, an untouchable void, a literal middle (*milieu*) that propagates the events of the novel.

A rhizomatic literature must "move between things, establish a logic of the *AND*, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings" (25). The seminal void ultimately forces the readers to realize the limit to their linguistic work, that they do

not hold the authority to propose a unified foundation. The fragmentary reality of *Infinite Jest* is so tedious that it forces the reader to decisively submit to the incoherence. The reader is now faced with a different task, one that does not require the high-pressure role of constructing unity out of fragments. In relinquishing the capacity for unity, the reader can *feel* the paradoxes without needing to solve them, and in turn, actually *play* the role of the reader as opposed to the role of the critic. Both the writer and the reader actively play different roles of constructing meaning that fundamentally hold equal weight; because it is a meeting half-way, a conversation, there is no expectation for unity, for the multiplicity of meaning is always becoming between the two.

“A multiplicity,” Deleuze and Guattari assert, “never allows itself to be overcoded, never has available a supplementary dimension over and above its number of lines” (9). *Overcoding* always operates by way of a realized transcendent unity (a supplementary dimension), which is systematic of arborescent (root-tree) thinking. The chronological gap in *Infinite Jest*, the milieu through which the novel exists out of, denies the availability of such an over-coding. The seminal crisis of *Infinite Jest* is actually void of content, a black-hole impervious to any sort of analysis. The milieu, the seminal void, constitutes the a-centered and asymmetrical logic of the rhizome, the multiplicitous beauty of the conjunction, the and/or logic, which is thwarted by the dualistic system of the fascicular and the root-tree.

“The Entertainment” in *Infinite Jest* potently exemplifies the multiplicity of such a rhizomatic questioning by functioning as a weapon-tool assemblage: “it is an event of an entirely different nature, one that hides outside the image, takes place outside” (D&G 375). *Infinite Jest* does not delimit entertainment to the logic of *either* existing as a good *or* bad force. Instead, *Infinite Jest* subverts the philosophical tendency to force the contradictory dynamism of

technology into the confines of the dualistic model of utopic/dystopic ends. *Infinite Jest* is a rhizomatic mapping of entertainment, one that makes it impossible to over-code the paradox of a technologically addicted society.

The Illusion of Control

By its very title, *Infinite Jest* is an inquiry into the modern addiction to entertainment. The novel is centered around the hunt for the Master-Copy of *Infinite Jest* a.k.a “The Entertainment,” a film so seductively entertaining that it immobilizes the desire for anything else. The viewers, lethargic and limp, lies dormant wanting nothing else but to view “The Entertainment” on endless loop. Their instincts for survival dissipate, their body only a vessel for their desperate and desiring mind, their subjectivity a function for self-pleasure: “I couldn’t even stand to be in the same room, see him like that. Begging for just even a few seconds—a trailer, a snatch of soundtrack, anything. His eyes wobbling around like some drug-addicted newborn...No desire or even basic survival-type will for anything other than more viewing” (Wallace 507). Once any other subject attempts to save the viewer, that subject, too, falls captive to the forces of the film. Inevitably, death takes anybody who interacts with the film. *Infinite Jest* is a fatal spectacle, one that exploits the seemingly infinite resource of the desire to be entertained. A play on words on the addicting sensation that occupies the moment when we’ve just begun to be entertained, where it seems as though our desire can be infinitely satiated.

At first, the concept of the “The Entertainment” seems in line with a hyperbolic critique of consumerist culture; an Entertainment to consume all entertainment. A dystopic spin on the compulsive indulgence, our ravenous appetite for a desire that will surely lead to a self-fulfilled death of high-culture. This dystopic trajectory is famously presented in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s chapter, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *The*

Dialectic of Enlightenment, where they propose that the entertainment business transposes art into the sphere of consumption. The entertainment *business*, by its definition, is a deceptive force, one that commodifies desire by perpetually cheating what it continuously promises. The consumption of Art becomes a petrified formula, and the particularity of the “subject” becomes a mere derivative of the schematism of production: “*All gone. His world's as if it had collapsed into one small bright point. Inner world. Lost to us*” (Wallace 508). The poetic revealing that Heidegger finds hope in becomes lost in a struggle for an interior individual validation.

Marshall McLuhan famously stated in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* that “the medium is the message.” The medium, for McLuhan, is the extension of the human consciousness, the very form by which we outwardly express our internality. The *medium* of the technology is what dictates the ways in which that consumption affects the social and psychic message. Similar to D&G, McLuhan emphasizes the complex structural relationship between mediums: “no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media” (McLuhan 26). For McLuhan, the message of the medium is then the “change of scale or pace or pattern” that is introduced into human affairs by the technology, the psychic effect. McLuhan believes that the transition from mechanical to electrical media, particularly the rise of television, has a particularly narcotic effect unlike any other medium before. The content of any given medium is comprised of previous media, a mechanism that blinds consumers from the character of the present medium itself. This is particularly insidious with regard to entertainment as a medium, for it is dangerously effective at blinding the viewer to the medium by seducing an emotive response to the content.

Anyone who has watched T.V. can attest to the infallible seduction of the content. The purpose of one’s consumption seems to be tied to how one self-relates to the entertainment, the

content is appropriated to the individual viewer's relationship to their own life. The idea of seducing the illusion of an individualistic relationship to a medium that is designed for mass-consumption is one of the key aspects of Wallace's essay, "E Unibus Pluram," (literally meaning "from one, many" a play on the American motto "E Pluram Unum," which means "out of many, one"). Wallace and McLuhan similarly assert that entertainment is representative of a modern technological system (the digital revolution) that is paradigmatic in this illusion of individual agency. Both posit that the illusion itself is a form of a narcosis: the medium of entertainment convinces the viewer that she is "clicking" through the content of her *choice*, and it is the very feeling of agency that perpetuates her consuming of the medium. The medium of entertainment validates agency without requiring much activity: "an ironic permission slip to do what I do best whenever I feel confused and guilty: assume, inside, a sort of fetal position; a pose of passive reception to escape, comfort, reassurance. The cycle is self-nourishing" (Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* 165). No wonder it is addicting: entertainment is a tool through which individual agency takes its most potent illusion.

Infinite Jest suggests that the modern expectation for uninterrupted entertainment is pernicious—a conditioning of self-indulgence that is made possible only by way of an American fixation on convenience and the surfeit of choice. While this desire to escape, to be entertained is by and large universal, it is the American illusion that taunts the fulfillment of a *personal* desire. The cultural critique of *Infinite Jest* points specifically towards American notions of individual freedom, "to associate the Freedom-To-Choose and the Right-to-Be-Entertained with all that was U.S. and true" (Wallace 412). *Infinite Jest* provokes a cynicism in questioning whether there exists a choice at all if the desire is so ideologically embedded in American culture: "Made by an American man in the U.S.A. The appetite for the appeal for it: this is also U.S.A. The U.S.A

drive for spectatorship, which your culture teaches” (319). The appeal stemming from an American belief that one deserves freedom from the pain of self-consciousness:

“Someone taught you that temples are for fanatics only and took away the temples and promised there was no need for temples. And now there is no shelter. And no map for finding the shelter of a temple. And you all stumble about in the dark, this confusion of permissions. The without-end pursuit of a happiness of which someone let you forget the old things which made happiness possible” (320).

The American addiction to satiating an endless desire inhibits the possibility of making any choice at all; for in choosing any and all that validates one’s singular existence, you are choosing nothing for yourself—a product of the ideological conditioning of the American people, doomed by their own oblivion. “We will force nothing...we will only make it available,” “The Entertainment” being the ultimate consequence of “an appetite of a people unable to choose appetite,” *Infinite Jest* submits, “this is the death” (319). In believing there exists an individual agency in entertainment, we fall victim to the captive forces of capitalist ideology, an ideology that brilliantly hides behind the mask of individualism, that convinces its subjects that they have the ultimate freedom of choice, chanting, ‘We are not ideological! We are free.’ Yet in such a case, “your temple is self and sentiment. You are a fanatic of desire, a slave to your individual subjective narrow self’s sentiments; a citizen of nothing. You are by yourself and alone, kneeling to yourself” (108). We are depressed, petrified by the complexity of self-consciousness, and we’d rather pleasure ourselves to death than live at all.

“The Entertainment” very easily fits a symbolic critique of American ideological desire; the initial “availability” of the “The Entertainment,” which gives room for individual choice, easily falls in line with the illusion of individual agency in American entertainment, which is the

self-nourishing cycle that McLuhan and Wallace assert. The fatality of *Infinite Jest* appeals to the critic of this ‘iWorld’ we are now irreversibly entrenched in, and the toxic normalization of the self-indulgence that it inevitably provokes. *Infinite Jest* points at the elephant in the room, a question that probes a deep-seeded guilt. The cynic shakes her head at the oblivion of those who assert the beauty of such technology and probes: Seriously? Have we lost our-*selves* to an ideological desire for pleasure? Has the escape become the reality?

In walks the optimist. “The Entertainment” is technically a *choice*: to fatally indulge or to abstain are the two presented routes. She points her finger at the cynic. It is the very premise that “The Entertainment” is made *available* as a choice and not a forced proposition that allows “The Entertainment” to become a weapon-tool assemblage; an idea that surpasses solely a dystopic critique.

Every assemblage has two sides: a “machinic assemblage of desire,” which defines the *form of content* (corporeal), and “collective assemblages of enunciation,” which denotes *form of expression* (incorporeal). “The Entertainment” exists in two-fold form: *form of content*, the initial materialized choice of indulging, and *form of expression*, the incorporeal act of consuming “The Entertainment.”

The *form of content* of “The Entertainment” is the initial choice to indulge; materialized desire that necessitates the individual’s corporeality. It is through the human body that one acts upon a desire. The action is content-filled—a physical decision that is behind any form of consumption. As exemplified in the paragraphs above, the illusion of individual agency, the right to be entertained, is a mechanism, a tool to which *Infinite Jest* acknowledges:

“the purportedly lethal final cartridge was nothing more than a classic illustration of the antinomically schizoid function of post-industrial capitalist

mechanism, whose logic presented commodity as the escape-from-anxieties-of-mortality-which-escape-is-itself-psychologically-fatal, as detailed in perspicuous detail in M. Gilles Deleuze's posthumous *Incest and the Life of Death in Capitalist Entertainment*" (792).

Though the title is fake, the reference to Deleuze is pointing towards the overtness of such an analysis. Of course *Infinite Jest* can be misread as a classic critique on the addictive mechanism of entertainment, just as Heidegger's "enframing" can be read purely as an illustration of the dangers of a purely scientific society. This is to strike the presence of a saving grace, to categorically cast a concept into the dualistic confines of either/or logic. While the initial desire to indulge is by some measure deceptive, an illusion of control that can be psychologically insidious, it nonetheless functions as a tool through which an individual's feelings become realized—a mechanism through which the individual interiorizes their respective interests, fears, confusions. It is in this sense where a tool takes on a more complicated meaning, one that is not just limited to producing goods.

The act of consumption, however, takes the *form of expression*, and the materialized desire enunciates into an exteriority of multiplicity that undercuts a simple analysis of *Jest* as dystopic critique. "The Entertainment" is also referred to as "the samizdat": "Russian compound noun. Soviet twentieth century idiom. *Sam* –stem: 'self'; *izdat* –undeclined verb: 'to publish'" (Wallace 1011)—it is self-published. At first, it seems as though all entertainment is self-published-- necessitating a viewer's feelings, a self through which the content becomes more than just a mirage of pixelated images. However, "The Entertainment" is pure form, devoid of any and all content, and exists *only* insofar as it is reflecting in and through a viewer. "The Entertainment" is a black-hole of form, transforming the initial desire, the *feelings* of each

viewer, the organizing principle of content of general entertainment, into that of pure affect.

Thus, the *self* in ‘self-publishing’ is not in reference to the content of the film, but to the “self” of the viewer through which “The Entertainment” perpetuates itself. “The Entertainment” externalizes all subjective desire into that of a collective form: “no longer a content held within a form of interiority; rather, it becomes a form, identified with the form of exteriority that is always external to itself” (D&G 356).

The interior desire for an individual freedom in the viewer “become[s] uprooted from the interiority of ‘subject,’ to be projected violently outward into a milieu of pure exteriority” (D&G 356). The particularity of the viewer’s subjectivity dissolves into itself. Their *self* materializes into the exterior form of “The Entertainment,” a pure collective, expression for *more*; “an incredible velocity, a catapulting force: love or hate, they are no longer feelings but affects...Affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are weapons of war” (356). What at first seems to be a simple critique on the modern tool, a freedom-*to* be entertained, becomes a weapon.

“The Entertainment” is not in it and of itself a weapon; it is a void. However, the void is necessary for the body of the viewer to become the expression of “The Entertainment.” The body is the ultimate projection. Becoming that of a free-action model, “which by its essence unleashes the power of repetition as a mechanic force that multiplies its effect and pursues an infinite movement” (D&G 498), “The Entertainment” takes the viewer as its projectile weapon. For the viewer, now existing as the exteriority of desire, wanting only to watch “The Entertainment” on loop, becomes pure affect. The ‘self’ perpetuates the ‘publishing’ of “The Entertainment.” Through the *self* of the viewer “The Entertainment” becomes a weapon that projects itself onto any other subject that it encounters: “failing to get any response to her, he still staring straight

ahead; and eventually and naturally she — nothing that the expression on his rictus of a face nevertheless appeared very positive, *ecstatic*, even you could say — she eventually and naturally turning her head and following his line of sight to the cartridge-viewer” (Wallace 79). “The Entertainment” expresses the interiority of subjectivity into a pure, exterior desire by way of an infinite movement, or one could say, an infinite jest.

This *double-articulation* is meant to give equal weight to content and expression: “it would be an error to believe that content determines expression by causal action, even if expression is accorded the power not only to ‘reflect’ content but to act upon it in an active way” (D&G 86, 89). Furthermore, it is not the content which transforms into expression, but within “The Entertainment” exists both forms simultaneously. *Infinite Jest* echoes this simultaneity in a description of the fatal viewer: “Not inanimate. More like the opposite. The expressions seem more like stuck in some way. Stuck. Fixed. Held. Trapped. As in trapped in some of middle. Between two things. Pulled apart in different directions” (Wallace 648). To be both a content and an expression, corporeal and incorporeal. “The Entertainment” functions as a tool by way of allowing the viewer to organize and direct their interiority; It functions as a weapon by means of projecting the fatality of the individual—a collective “self” which paralyzes the viewer’s body into an uncontrolled expression—a weapon-tool assemblage. The question becomes: how does this double-articulation of “The Entertainment” express something more than a dystopic critique of technology?

IV: “*Was the allegedly fatally entertaining and scopophilic thing Jim alleges he made out of her unveiled face a cage or really a door?*” – *Infinite Jest* 228

On the literal level, the narrative thread that runs throughout all of *Infinite Jest*, the one unifying component for the myriad of characters, is the extravagant hunt for a master, redistributable copy of “The Entertainment.” Whether or not “The Entertainment” exists in Master-Copy form is one of the philosophical propositions of the book. The existence of the Master-Copy is in itself a paradox: how can one copy pure form—an externality that is external to itself? The search for a Master-Copy to a film that is exterior to itself is more than just a paradox, it is a narrative device that drives the literary substance of the novel. While the fragmented narratives never unify completely, the search for the Master-Copy of “The Entertainment” is the ultimate projection of the plot-line within which the deep exploration into the lives of *Infinite Jest*’s characters occur.

One often forgets that *Infinite Jest* is both the official title of “The Entertainment” as well as title of novel itself. That is, the reader, while being consumed by a hypothetical consideration of “The Entertainment,” is in the act of materially consuming *Infinite Jest*, the novel. In this sense, *Infinite Jest*, the novel, is a double articulation, a weapon-tool assemblage onto itself.

Infinite Jest is not the only name for “The Entertainment,” in fact, there are multiple. The film gets interchangeably referenced as “The Entertainment,” “Samizdat,” “the Master-Copy,” and “Infinite Jest.” The function of the multiple titles mirrors McLuhan’s notion of the blinding nature of media, that the content of any given medium is another medium, which ultimately inhibits the consumer from understanding the present medium that they are consuming. While the reader believes they are solely taking part in a linguistic hypothetical, the medium they are simultaneously consuming is *Infinite Jest*, the novel, *the form of content*. All the while, the narrative device of “The Entertainment” is *a form of expression* that probes the reader’s interiority with an incorporeal proposition: Would *you* choose to indulge? Could *you* resist it?

The experience of reading *Infinite Jest* simulates that of viewing “The Entertainment”: the reader is stuck between two forms of existence, feeling the simultaneous and equal pull of both, alike to that of “stretching between things, and between thoughts, to establish a whole new relation between thoughts and things, a *vague* identity between the two” (D&G 408). It is in simultaneity of being pulled towards both the corporeal experience of reading *Infinite Jest* as a novel and the hypothetical questioning of “The Entertainment” as a linguistic expression, that *Infinite Jest* becomes a weapon-tool assemblage for the reader.

The “meeting half-way” of the writer and the reader then becomes a compelling and dynamic tool through which *Infinite Jest* asserts the paradox of entertainment. By having the language live not just in but through the reader, *Infinite Jest* constructs a phenomenological relationship between the reader and the concept of entertainment. In order for the reader to comprehend the theoretical implications of entertainment, *Infinite Jest* must arouse within the reader the physical sensation of being *entertained*. The twisted narrative of *Infinite Jest* begs the reader with all its might: *play*, the chaos will ensue regardless. Breathe in a world that is not your own, laugh and cry outrageously without needing to know why, empathize with narratives that you will never live out, fall in love with a voice you will never hear, be *entertained*. *Infinite Jest* is undeniably entertaining as a novel, and the reader’s own sensations of being entertained become a point of subversion: “saying [entertainment] is bad is like saying traffic is bad, or health-care surtaxes, or the hazards of annular fusion,” *Infinite Jest* tells us, “nobody but Ludditic granola-crunching freaks would call bad what no one can *imagine* being without” (Wallace 620, my emphasis). By provoking the reader into a role where they can *play* (with jest) and be entertained, the reader becomes a tool to illustrate the imaginative quality of entertainment and the beauty with which that sensation can hold.

Ultimately, *Infinite Jest* blinds the reader into a multiplicity by utilizing the unforgiving illusion that as a subject, one needs to believe that they are both in control of the content with which they are consuming and the ways in which that content effects their subjectivity. It is not so much a blinding, in a negative sense of the word, as it is the realization of the always-fluctuating assemblages—the complexity of simultaneity that we so often over-code. The trickery itself is not malicious, but rather a knowingness about the merciless ego of modern subjectivity, which prioritizes a self-justifying ontological hierarchy rather than engage in the deeply poetic paradox of technology. The reader is placed in a paradox that is deeply poetic; for they are engaged in a critique of a technology [The Entertainment] that they are simultaneously getting pleasure from [Infinite Jest]. The technology of *Infinite Jest* is thus a weapon-tool assemblage mutating from both an exteriority of critique and an interiority of a subjective desire. A subversion through which *Infinite Jest* articulates the phenomenal intertwining of the weapon and the tool, which are no longer intrinsically morally defined, but a part of an assemblage through which the cynic and the optimist of technology hold equally valid roles.

V

The reality being: I fall straight into the dualism that I have waged war against. I cannot pay attention for more than 20 minutes without being entertained. It is unforgiving, this paradox of consciously escaping to entertainment when the very premise of this thesis is exposing the arrogant need to escape from the paradoxical.

I am the hyper-conscious cynic who watches the watching in paralyzing fear, shaking in terror with the realization that the present is no longer relevant anymore. I hallucinate vibrations that were once there and will be again; I compulsively indulge the adrenaline-rushed tick of my one small inner point, a brightness sliding out of my pocket, a refrain that will only end when it

dies. Aware all along that selfies are a commodified form of validation; that I am addicted to this infinite-scroll custom-made to seduce, disembodiment required; and the guilt—the guilt of surrendering to it all, letting myself self-consciously fall victim to the cheap delight of quantified validation. Happily, I fall.

It is the cynic in me that fuels such an addiction to being entertained, the clicking of the computer keys with which I currently type through. It is of no consequence, I tell myself, to indulge. What will I lose but my own time? It is the initial decision, the emotional insecurity of the present which accepts and then dictates the future state of my disembodiment, the numbness which makes me forget the gravity of the current task ahead. Thesis, that is. Life, that is. I do this all of the time. Desiring to forget what lies ahead by escaping the present. Categorizing my addiction to technology as either productive or insidious depending on the vulnerability of my emotional state.

The moment of initial indulgence that feels like a pulse of anesthesia: I become akin to the modern subject, conflicted, entertained into delirium. Blissfully inflicted by the ultimate weapon in the ceaseless war against the self we will never live without. We are all running somehow, why would I be any different? How can I be a poet when I have been given all of the tools of an assassin?

Though, it is the optimist in me that writes so desperately through the subversive logic of this thesis. The optimist that forgoes the easy task of only attributing modern technology to an evil that I am myself completely subsumed by. The optimist that needs to believe that there exist complex assemblages at play, that my addiction is not just a result of the arrogance of a scared self. My subjectivity must transcend the boundaries of a dualistic thinking into an immanence wherein these books and this computer, this world of objects, becomes a fantastical multiplicity;

I float through fear without capturing it. I search for the in-between when writing knowing that I am always multiple—the cynic and the optimist simultaneously. The poet sow seeds, and the assassin hurls complexity into dark holes. It is the very self-destruction of the addicted cynic that provokes the optimist to love the paradox, to dwell as a poet or assassin.

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