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“Let’s Throw Our Wastes into Space!”: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and the Commodity in
Infinite Jest

The medicalization of personality difference has engrained itself in contemporary culture, whose fixation on anxiety and personality disorders such as obsessive compulsive disorder (classified as both in US psychiatry’s latest diagnostic manual) is evident in a rash of films, novels and television shows. Many novels that portray disorders like this oppose them to multinational corporate capitalism. OCD is a slippery disorder, not only between personality and anxiety disorder in the DSM IV TR, but between physical and mental disability and between biological and cultural origins. This slipperiness indicates that a theory of compulsivity may have implications across fields as diverse as disability studies, cultural studies, history and philosophy of medicine. One of the most important contemporary novels, David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, features OCD almost literally *ad nauseum*, in a narrative abounding with garbage and bodily excretions. All major characters have crippling OCD, crippling compulsive substance abuse, or both. Also, the novel’s near-future world is dominated at very level by a global commodity system, from the plethora of brand name goods to the dangerous sources of the nation’s energy in its waste. Still, no critics have performed a sustained critique of the relation between the novel’s portrayal of multinational commodity capitalism and the bodily subjectivities of its characters. This presentation will examine the ways OCD in this novel is produced by multinational corporate capitalism, is a tool of it, and can, in limited way, provide mobility within it. In particular, OCD is part of the novel’s presentation of exclusively external identity. Compulsiveness is a subjectivity performed in relation to the object world. And investment in the object world. An investment that, at times, can enable some significant mobility within this extraordinarily commodified environment. This investment into the object world allows for an iterative reshaping of the commodities composing that world and constructing individual subjectivity.