UNIVERSITY OF KENT

"Creeping Always Back"

The Grotesque Body in the Work of David Foster Wallace

Isabella Norton

01/24/2021

This dissertation considers the role of the body in the fiction of contemporary American author David Foster Wallace. I describe the ways in which the body is perceived as unruly, disgusting, and uncomfortable, ultimately calling this embodiment "grotesque." However, the body provides a uniquely tangible and vibrant experience of life, in spite of and because of its grotesquery. I study the ways in which the body interacts with the environment, politics, other bodies, and its own abstracted self. The materiality of the body illustrates these interactions in grotesquely excessive detail, making them legible to scholars and general readership alike. The various deformities, quirks, mutations, and betrayals of the especially non-normate body serves to defamiliarise lived experience itself, making every body strange.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

In David Foster Wallace's work the human body occupies a strange place. By this I mean both that Wallace's conception of the body and its various literary uses are unusual, and that the bodies in his work provide a site of unfamiliarity, discomfort, and fascination – they themselves are strange. Whether it is the widely populated world of *Infinite Jest* or the singular "Depressed Person" in the story of the same name, most characters (with notable exceptions) exist specifically as a person with a body that *must* interact with other bodies, objects, and itself. Immediately from Hal's mangled cry "I am in here" in the opening pages of *Infinite Jest*, we see these interactions are often torturous and fracturing (3). For Wallace the body is "a two way conduit: on one hand, it is a circuit for the transmission of information from outside the organism, conveyed through the sensory apparatus" and also the (perhaps solitary) "vehicle for the expression of an otherwise sealed and self-contained, incommunicable psyche" (Grosz 9). The ability to express that stifled interiority is, to Wallace, to express humanity. It is crucial to the human experience, if not to human life itself. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz mentions that one of the many problems with a Cartesian mind/body split is that the necessity of the body as an information mediator requires "a belief in the fundamental passivity and transparency of the body" (9). Hal's communication breakdown implies that Wallace does ascribe to the need for a body to "express his or her interiority," but not that the disconnection of mind and body necessitates a submissive, reliable body, though the individual may desperately desire one - their own, or someone else's (Grosz 9). Meditating on the disparity between the rational mind and a

body which is awkward, disobedient, ugly, and prone to a myriad of failures, Wallace wonders, "Can anyone doubt we need help being reconciled?" ("Federer Both Flesh and Not" 8).

It is my belief that many of the topics which scholars of Wallace Studies consider to be centrally important – solipsism, failure, communication, hope, pain – can all be read through Wallace's consistent occupation with the human body in his writing. For Wallace, to have a body is an affair which ranges from begrudgingly to tragically necessary. One's organs of speech (including the hands of the writer) are necessary to have a dialogue with another person, for example, but they often fail to make clear to others what is perfectly understandable in our own minds. The forms of suffering attributed to the mind – loneliness, embarrassment, confusion – can often be blamed on some infuriating gap between the will of the mind and the action of the body. To have a body is, in many ways, to be continually betrayed by it. Wallace describes a number of its drawbacks, material and otherwise, in "Federer Both Flesh and Not": "pain, sores, odors, nausea, aging, gravity, sepsis, clumsiness, illness, limits – every last schism between our physical wills and our actual capacities" and perhaps most treacherously, "it's your body that dies, after all" (8). These examples are quickly rattled off, as Wallace first remarks that the observation "there's a great deal that's bad about having a body" is likely "so obviously true that no one needs examples" (8). And perhaps it is – the suffering bodies that populate Wallace's work so densely are sometimes mentioned in scholarship, and his use of bodily deformity as a motif was noted by Tom LeClair shortly after *Infinite Jest's* publication in 1996, and yet no extended study of the body's place in Wallace's work has yet been undertaken. The universality of the frustrations, disappointments, and joys of having a human body is so complete that even what I argue are constant attempts to defamiliarise the experience may be ineffectual. This dissertation attempts to see the forest for the trees, to both create readings of the body as literary

device, as well as question why the body is so easily readable in the first place. The strange bodies that Wallace writes are easy to read as individual metaphors or analogies, but their sheer numbers implies a wider attempt to communicate what it means to have and/or be a body. In Wallace's work merely having a body is largely an uncomfortable, confusing, demoralising affair. As such, we should not be surprised that so many of the bodies in Wallace's work are outwardly uncomfortable, confusing, and demoralising to live in or look at. Even the bodies of great athletes in *Infinite Jest* which "catalyze our awareness of how glorious it is to touch and perceive, move through space, interact with matter" are revealed to be hellacious to actually live in ("Federer" 8). In order to encapsulate these churning concerns, questions, and distastes for the body and embodiment, I have come to describe the types of bodies Wallace often presents in his work, in all their variety, as "grotesque."

While the body in general has been discussed in previous Wallace scholarship, this dissertation aims to emphasise the grotesque qualities often given to the body, and to place the body at the forefront of discussion. By speaking about the body, we also invite discussion on aesthetics of ugliness and beauty, of subjectivity and objectivity, of affects, and more. This work often builds upon the work of other Wallace scholars, such as Catherine Nichols, and addresses popular opinion as well as specialist research, but intends to expand upon these works as well as tread new ground in areas such as ecology. As with my interest in the body, my interest in research is in gaps, overflows, and amalgamations. I have chosen to focus on the overall motif of the body in Wallace's literature rather than commit to any specific method of reading, such as psychoanalytic, because I feel it is important to acknowledge and explore how many different ways the grotesque body and its experiences can be read, and how many disciplines are bound up with each other within discussions of the body. My understanding of Wallace in particular is

based on the claim made by Tom LeClair and furthered later by Joseph Tabbi of Wallace as a writer of "systems novel[s]" (13). LeClair grouped *Infinite Jest* and novels like it as "prodigious novels influenced by information theory and scientific systems" in "The Prodigious Fiction of Richard Powers, William Vollman, and David Foster Wallace" and purported that "these young writers more thoroughly conceive their fictions as information systems, as long-running programs of data with a collaborative genesis" (13, 14). Tabbi focuses on the bureaucratic system which Wallace delves into most clearly in *The Pale King*, where he uses Wallace's own description of "a large and intricately branching system of jointed rods, pulleys, gears, and levers radiating out from a central operator such that tiny movements of that operator's finger are transmitted through that system to become the gross kinetic changes in the rods at the periphery," and the statement that "The crucial part of the analogy is that the elaborate system's operator is not himself uncaused. The bureaucracy is not a closed system: it is this that makes it a world instead of a thing" (Tabbi 235). The relationship between Wallace and information theory explored perhaps most notably by Katherine Hayles is an influence on my work, particularly my chapter on The Body and The Environment. However, her thorough dedication to actual computer information science and cybernetics has proven less apt as an organising principle than Tabbi and LeClair's more layperson-friendly exploration of systems. My project attempts to utilise the idea of the systems novel in a way which is updated to reflect the acceptance of interdisciplinary research in the public and academic consciousness following the emergence of intersectional feminism and its related movements, as well as increasing demand for interdisciplinary work in the academic sphere such as 2018's "David Foster Wallace Between Literature and Philosophy" conference. By introducing interdisciplinary and, wherever possible,

intersectional research to my literary criticism, I hope to provide more rounded, elaborate ways of understanding this topic.

While Wallace's encyclopaedic writing style may explain my desire to research across disciplines, the importance of reading David Foster Wallace's work with a dedication toward intersectionality may seem strange, initially. Wallace's work occupies an uncomfortable and perhaps even paradoxical space regarding intended and perceived audience. Wallace himself often expressed his desire to write across perspectives and experiences, to effectively convey emotions and trials from the very base of human experience. As I will expand upon in the next chapter discussing how Wallace may read himself through the predominantly white work of David Lynch; Wallace's work aspires to apply universally by resisting overt engagement in intersectionality. In a way which is both opposite of this universal intent and inevitable due to its execution, Wallace's work has been criticised as being only "for" a very narrow group of people who share his own economic, academic, regional, and gender background. And so Wallace leaves behind work which very often does describe depression, loneliness, fear, and grief with cutting precision and shattering force, but does often does not explicitly detail the ways in which racism, misogyny, ableism, or homophobia and the intersections thereof may uniquely inform these universal emotions and their affects.

I say Wallace's work does not *explicitly* detail these experiences and because regardless of their subtlety or possibly even Wallace's own intent, these intersections can be read into his work. Wallace's work does still contain women, gay characters, people of colour, people of size, people with disabilities, and all manner of other non-normate people. These variations on human experience are arguably handled incompletely, less frequently, even poorly at times, but they are not omitted. And just because an institutional or social framework is uncommented upon this

does not mean it does not exist, especially in fiction as concerned with systems as Wallace's is. Whether or not Wallace intended, for example, the implications of *Infinite Jest's* group of black female friends possessing the ability to stomp heads "as only female [n-----s] can stomp," does not erase those implications or remove Wallace's writing from a tradition of literature which at least excuses misogynoir (827). Tabbi describes "feedback" (which is to say tension, confusion, etc.) occurs "not so much between a system and a never fully perceived or cognised environment as between one system and another, across boundaries that each partially share and all can only partially understand" (236). I hope to exhibit the body as a space where these boundaries are often located, and how these boundaries are plainly and powerfully violated, blurred, or mutated by systems of institutional misogyny, ableism, and racism. I feel it is important to highlight these systems *as systems*, "not uncaused" and therefore changeable, rather than aspects of a vast and static environment. The body and its boundaries are in some ways universal, totally shared – its mortality, for example – and just as naturally its variances make another person's body unknowable. In "David Lynch Keeps His Head" Wallace remarks on the quintessentially human tendency toward "muddy *both*ness" which succinctly describes the body's unique ability to encapsulate seemingly opposite positions, such as the dual familiarity and unknowability of the bodies of others (211). I keep this idea of messy multiplicity in mind during my readings in order to contribute new research into the field which is simultaneously able to introduce un- or understudied topics while building upon established knowledge in Wallace Studies. In current Wallace research, the body is often mentioned, but studied in depth relatively rarely. Generally speaking, much of this research falls into three categories: the athletic body/sport, medicalised approach to mental health, and focus on racial/gendered Otherness.

Scholarship on the athletic body and sport differs quite immediately from my research in that it focuses on an idealised body, rather than a demonised or disdained body. *Infinite Jest* tends to be the most prevalent primary source for this research, due to the importance of the tennis school plotline and the linking of sport with ways of being by the character Schtitt and others. Wallace's frequent engagement with tennis in his nonfiction work ("Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley," "Tennis Player Michael Joyce's Professional Artistry as a Paradigm of Certain Stuff about Choice, Freedom, Discipline, Joy, Grotesquerie, and Human Completeness" "Federer Both Flesh and Not," and "Tracy Austin Broke My Heart") means that this field offers a very promising ground for critical review of Wallace's nonfiction. The concept of sport in Wallace's work has been linked to other modes of play, such as Wittgensteinian word games. The athletic body has been discussed as a kind of ideal body which may help soothe the anxiety around being a creature with a mortal body. Rather than evoking jealousy, the athletic body is often seen as inspirational, it is a wellspring of hope for an embodied human experience. Because Wallace often drew on his own tennis experience and due to the aforementioned focus on *Infinite Jest*, articles on sport often focus, as does Wallace, on the male athlete. The male athlete's body speaks to how Wallace conceives of masculinity in his work – see for example "Both Flesh and Not," and how Wallace negatively compares the muscular Rafael Nadal to the more lithe Roger Federer. Nadal is described as brutish, even beastly – reflecting the uneasiness Wallace feels toward traditional masculinity as read by Mary K. Holland in "By Hirsute Author." One aspect of this field which does relate to my research is the paradoxical positioning of the male athletic body as both strong and fragile. Aesthetically and kinaesthetically, the athletic body is meant to convey power and masterful control. It is the peak of able-bodied-ness. However, it has also been noted by Emily Russell in "Some Assembly Required: The Embodied Politics of *Infinite Jest*"

that this sort of body is not static, it is the result of rigorous discipline and fated to dissolve by age or injury (150). This tension also links Wallace's work to the field of disability studies, which is quite relevant to my work. The precarity of the athletic body that Russell writes about clearly aligns with Susan Wendall's declaration that "Unless we die suddenly, we are all disabled eventually" in "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability" (108).

The second major category of study regarding the body in Wallace's work focuses on a medical approach to mental health, often addressing addiction specifically. An exemplary piece of work from this field is Stephen J. Burn's "Webs of Nerves" essay, which discusses (among other things) the influence of psychologist Robert Laing on Wallace's fiction and Wallace's tendency toward diagnosis without cure. Consciousness, epistemology, and logic are rich fields in Wallace Studies, and a medical perspective offers another approach to these topics. I am interested mostly in the external body (skin, growths, limbs, etc.) and bodily pain, while most existing scholarship focuses on the brain. The biological effects of chemical addiction are another frequent topic of study in Wallace scholarship which does also figure into my work, though my focus on organs other than the brain distinguishes my analyses here. Burn and others have written already on how chemical addiction affects the brain's ability to manage habit formation, impulse control, mood regulation, cravings, self-image, and other processes. I do touch on these, but in my studies I also explore how chemical addiction affects the body's ability to regulate other processes such as digestion and excretion, and how these more outwardly visible losses of control contribute to the humiliation and depersonalisation that stigmatised groups such as addicts feel; while additionally serving as a metaphor for a character's loosening grasp on a personal identity. Personal identity comes up often in Wallace's work and studies on Wallace, and the ways in which Wallace's characters create, adapt, and lose their identities is

often studied through a psychological lens. The aforementioned essay by Burn traces Laing back to Lacan, who is often mentioned in studies of Wallace. While I do not often directly apply Lacan's writing to Wallace (partially because so much quality work has already been done in this vein), I do utilise authors who were themselves influenced by Lacan, such as Julia Kristeva. Other authors prefer Freudian readings, as Wallace himself often uses Freudian imagery, especially in *Infinite Jest*. I believe such readings could be easily made and very fruitful, but my interest in multiplicity has led me to refer to feminist and multidisciplinary analyses inspired by Freud, namely Barbara Creed, rather than stick to a strictly Freudian analysis. Utilising Kristeva and Creed has allowed me to more adeptly understand how other fields such as gender or the visual weave into the psychological or psychic landscape of Wallace's work.

The last major arena of study regarding the body in Wallace's work is scholarship based on the racial/gendered Other. Both are relatively new topics in Wallace Studies generally, though they seem to be growing exponentially as the field ages and attract a more diverse population of scholars. Additionally, personal details have come to light about Wallace since his death which some have found relevant to his treatment of gender specifically, such as accusations made against him by Mary Karr during the #MeToo movement. Though a relatively new field, it is already full of nuance in its criticism regarding Wallace's portrayals of gender and race in his work. "White Guys: Questioning *Infinite Jest's* New Sincerity" by Joel Nicholson-Roberts and Edward Jackson accuses *Infinite Jest* of denying empathy and complete subjectivity to its black and female characters, while Clare Hayes-Brady argues that Wallace's (still problematic) acknowledgement of difference actually attempts to acknowledge subjectivity as well. While I do not necessarily agree with their reading of Adam Kelly's seminal "New Sincerity" essay, the authors of "White Guys" raise important points regarding who sincerity is afforded to in *Infinite*

Jest, and how Wallace often problematically presents the lived experience of the white male as default or apolitical. Lucas Thompson offers a very measured approach in "Wallace and Race," providing three possible readings: Wallace attempted to criticise automatic privileged thought patterns from the inside, he intentionally wanted to provoke readers, or he preferred to focus on what he believed to be commonalities. This dissertation does contain a chapter on the Body and the Other, detailed further below, so much of the theory and criticism already performed in this field has been influential on my research. However, though bodily difference is a part of racial and gendered Othering, much of the existing scholarship does not focus on the body specifically. It is present at times, such as discussion of female sexual objectification or skin bleaching regarding African American characters, but generally the focus is on internal life and subjectivity in general. My work focuses on the body and visual difference much more heavily, exploring how instances of difference are created and coded.

This tendency to mention bodily traits or experiences in service of other scholarly goals is common throughout much of the existing work in Wallace Studies. There are works which are focused on the body and do inform my research, but currently none exist at dissertation length. Others only devote a few paragraphs to the body specifically, and in that case I have found space to continue their research. I agree with David Hering that extended study allows "a degree of granularity in analysis that is of serious value to an evaluation of Wallace's extensively detailed, often encyclopaedic narratives," and believe that the topic of the body deserves such granularity (*David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form* 3). For background texts during the preliminary reading phase I found Stephen J. Burn's *David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest: A Reader's Guide* and Marshall Boswell's *Understanding David Foster Wallace* to work excellently as starting points. As the titles imply, these works provided a well-balanced introduction to their title topics,

with information on theoretical influences on Wallace such as Wittgenstein, as well as practical explanations of things like the timeline of *Infinite Jest*. Another foregrounding concept in my work was Clare Hayes-Brady's conception of gender as alterity in Wallace's work. I believe this concept of unknowable difference appears in many contexts in Wallace's writing of bodily difference, though Hayes-Brady often seems to view Wallace's intentions more optimistically than I do. Hayes-Brady's book, *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace*, also greatly improved my understanding of Wallace's work. She does not go into explicit detail regarding the body and (or *as*) failure often, but given the nature of many of Wallace's bodies, the theme of failure is clearly relevant in my reading. Her insistence on Wallace's failures being necessary and often generative added unexpectedly but crucially to my readings of disability in particular. Disability studies resists conventional readings of disability as barren, decaying, or otherwise doomed, and I believe the notion of generative failure aligns unexpectedly but well with this resistance.

Catherine Nichols's "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival" has also proved important, as it directly links Mikhail Bakhtin Bakhtin and Wallace. Bakhtin provides the most immediate association with the term "grotesque" in literary theory, so Nichols's work is obviously relevant to my study of the grotesque body. As the title suggests, she is largely focused on the concept of the carnival and how it has been perverted in the realm of *Infinite Jest*. She studies many motifs which I have covered in this dissertation such as masks and bodily deformity. However, due to the length of her piece, I felt there was more to say on these subjects. Nichols brings up videophony in her discussion of carnivalesque masking, for example, which I am able read more closely in The Body and the Environment. The Body and the Environment in also owes much to Katherine Hayles and Heather Houser. Their focus on annularity and environmentalism in

regards to Wallace's fiction became relevant to my work as I was interested in the Concavity/Convexity, which encompasses these themes. Other specific influences include Olivia Banner's essay on fragile masculinity, and Bradley J. Fest's article on the role of the apocalypse in Wallace's early fiction, which inform the Body and the Self chapter by fleshing out how many of Wallace's point-of-view characters embody a kind of doomed masculinity. I base the majority of my readings on *Infinite Jest*, but many of the observations Fest makes regarding the early work seems to have held true throughout Wallace's career, and what has shifted or been disregarded is equally relevant.

Returning to Bakhtin and popular understanding of "the grotesque," I wish to establish that by using this term I hope to evoke, but not necessarily parrot, previous popular theoretical conceptions of the term "grotesque." Rather than focus on any particular strand of theory or discipline, this project aims to construct an interdisciplinary and multifaceted understanding of Wallace's view of the grotesque body. As the bodies Wallace presents are by description (sometimes literally) fluid, one concrete definition of the term would act much like the steel head brace of Marathe's skull-less wife (which is to say, minimally serviceable but prone to significant leakage.) Fluidity is dangerous, "it is like a cross-section in a process of change. It is unstable, but it does not flow. It is soft, yielding and compressible. There is no gliding on its surface. Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it" (Douglas 47). However this danger, and these dangerous bodies, contains thrill, revolution, and life. The concept of the grotesque which first comes to mind in an academic context is Bakhtin's notion of an exuberant, universalising grotesquery, most notably explored in *Rabelais and His World*. In the festive body of grotesque realism, "the leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance" (Bakhtin 19). The primary

function of the grotesque is degradation, but degradation itself is not given a negative connotation, it refers merely "coming down to earth" (21). When Bakhtin's degradation does contain violent language, it is blurred with language of renewal: "To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better" (21). The application of this concept to Wallace's work has been performed before, most notably by Catherine Nichols in "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*" and David Hering in *David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form*. Nichols focuses on the decadence of the carnival, and how its degrading properties have been perverted into empty distraction in the diegesis of *Infinite Jest*. Moving away from the body, Hering utilises Bakhtin in his explanation of how Wallace contends with the post-Barth death of the author and his move toward a polyphonic dialogue between author and reader. The traditional Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque as a satirical, carnivalesque source of relatability and even joy is still present in my reading, particularly in the chapter The Body and Politics, which examines how the body interacts with government, but this definition is not always sufficient. Often Wallace's grotesques more closely resemble how Bakhtin described the Romantic mask, "A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it" (40).

In order to expand my thinking of the grotesque beyond the joyful Bakhtinian concept, I have considered philosophies which deal with disgust to further understand how certain bodies come to be considered grotesque, and how humans react to those they find grotesque. In the case of this dissertation, I found Julia Kristeva's writing on disgust to align nicely with my own interest in the grotesque and Wallace's tendency toward Freudian symbolism, especially in *Infinite Jest,* which is the primary focus of the dissertation. For Kristeva, the grotesque is that which triggers disgust and fascination. She specifically refers to such disgusting things as

"abject," the point at which "desire turns aside; sickens, rejects" (*Powers of Horror*, 1). I believe this rejection (and the interest that usually precedes it) is necessary to understanding the grotesque, harkening back to its connotations of "freak show" exhibitions which profited on the dual desire to both gawk at and quarantine non-normative bodies. In Kristeva's work disgust and life itself are also bound up, as "these body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly, and with difficulty, on the part of death" (3). Parts of one's own body must be abjected to sustain biological life, and for Kristeva other people are abjected so the individual may thrive. I also consider the term "grotesque" in relation to the work of David Lynch, whose films and characters are often described as "grotesque" by professional reviews and by popular audiences.[1] In both uses we can see shades of Freud's socially-derived uncanny, both familiar and unfamiliar, evoking horror and disgust. Consider the original *unheimlich*, or "unhomelike" in relation to Wallace's illustration of human experience as a consciousness inside a body (Freud 2). If another person's body can be called "unhomelike," that positions both one's own body as a home, with all of the connections thereof, and recognises other bodies as "unlike the place where I live."

Refracting from Kristeva, this work utilises the theories of related authors who do not always use the exact word "grotesque," but engage with themes of the non-normate body, ugliness, and the gaze. Laura Mulvey's idea of the spectacle and its frailty applies to both the strangeness of the feminine in Wallace's work, and the "freak show" looking dynamics mentioned previously. The interplay of looks determines self-definition, the understanding of others, and subjectivity. Barbara Creed unites Kristeva and Mulvey in her film criticism, which examines different kinds of (generally feminine) monstrosity and how difference provokes fear

[1] Examples include *Masters of the Grotesque: The Cinema of Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam, the Coen Brothers and David Lynch* by Schuy R. Weishaar, and Wallace's own "David Lynch Loses His Head" for *Premiere* magazine.

and disgust responses in the viewer. In these theories, the Other is expected to have certain qualities and functions, and when those expectations are not met the dominant figure which relies upon negative definition to know himself is thrown into confusion and fear. Through her examination of the woman as possible castrator rather than castrated, Creed illustrates how these expectations are often specifically about passivity or receptivity and action. These fears can be linked with Grosz's history of the dualistically-conceived body and mind in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. The historic cultural linkage of the body with the feminine co-produces fears of a body which is not passive, which threatens to subjugate the (masculine-aligned) rational mind. At times, the dissertation draws on both Samuel Cohen's explanatory introduction to *Monster Theory* and various scholars of disability, feminism, and fatness to examine how Wallace or his characters treat figures that fall outside of the imaginary ideal body. As the prevalence of horror film studies in feminist scholarship, such as Creed, may suggest, the difference between a monster and a non-conforming person is often indistinct.

The importance of Mulvey and Creed evidences that film theory is crucial to my examination – more than one might expect from a literature dissertation. However, Wallace's own complicated relationship with visual media was incredibly influential on his writing. "E Unibus Plurum," the essay often used as a sort of explanatory guide to Wallace's thought process was described by Wallace during an NPR interview as being "about being a fiction writer who watches a lot of television" (NPR.org). Television and film are often the subjects of his work, ranging his entire career. Wallace's first shot fiction collection, *The Girl with Curious Hair* features "Little Expressionless Animals" about *Jeopardy!* and "My Appearance" about a guest on *Late Night with David Letterman*. The longest piece and the capstone of his final story collection, *Oblivion* is "The Suffering Channel," which is 91 pages detailing how tabloid

magazines and television are made. In between there is *Infinite Jest*'s search for the lethally perfect film, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* has an interview (#59) about the hand motions of *Bewitched* being used to indulge in a sexualised god complex, and "Tri-Stan Sold Sissee Nar to Ecko" raising television executives to the level of Greek mythic gods. Due to Wallace's own occupation with ideas of the visual and of visual difference specifically, the application of film theory to these written works provides a new way to examine themes which have already been very successfully examined by scholars based in literary theory and philosophy. I hope that my use of film theory in this dissertation both enhances the reader's immediate understanding of primary texts such as *Infinite Jest*, and opens up space for others to consider how the narrative and technological advancements in visual media coincide with Wallace-era writers similarly attempting to reproduce reality in the hyperrealism movement.

The title of this dissertation, "Creeping Always Back," refers to another key quality of the grotesque in Wallace's work. The title phrase occurs in *Infinite Jest*, in a conversation between an American and a Quebecois film student. Alain, the Québécois, is attempting to describe the miasma of hubris, toxicity, and doom that lingers over the dually-named Concavity/Convexity. The name of the radioactive garbage pit alone introduces ideas of double-ness, excess, and subjectivity. The Concavity/Convexity's name changes based on how the border line appears on the opposing nation's map, and connotes both the initial landfill hole and overflowing trash heap. Alain explains that "You cannot give away all your filth and prevent all creepage, no? Filth by its very nature it is a thing that is creeping always back" (233). The Concavity/Convexity provides a zone for the abject which is revealed to be only a comforting delusion. Fluids spread, the repressed past returns, filth creeps always back – the things which we associate with the disgusting, unclean, the overall grotesque are also almost always associated with dreadful

persistence. In *Infinite Jest* and many of Wallace's other works, these grotesque elements are symbolised, visualised, and contained within the body. This is evidenced by Alain's explanation being intercut with another film student describing being duped into participating into an experimental film about vomiting. Kristeva identifies food loathing (gagging, vomiting, turning the face with the mouth clamped shut) as "perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (2). This disgust serves an evolutionary purpose and a personal one, as refusing food from the parents is often one of the first acts of self-defining abjection. Explored more fully in the body of the dissertation, the most visible by-products of the Concavity/Convexity are non-normate bodies, as its toxicity results in a staggering variety of birth defects. The proliferation of these bodies into society triggers uncomfortable acknowledgement of the irresponsibility that formed them, it is a confrontation which interrogates comfortable self-definitions of one's place in and responsibility for their nation, environment, economy, and culture.

Another use of the term "grotesque" which is important to consider is Wallace's own. For me, the most striking use of the term appears in "Federer Both Flesh and Not" when Wallace is attempting to even imagine explaining the potential of human bodies for both greatness and tragedy. At Wimbledon, the disciplined and honed bodies of the athletes are thrown in sharp relief against the game's special guest: William Caines, a small boy who contracted liver cancer at age two and a half. Wallace wonders, "How did [his mother] answer her child's question — the big one, the obvious one? And who could answer hers? What could any priest or pastor say that wouldn't be grotesque?" (25). Wallace is specifically highlighting the insufficiency of Christian dogma to answer the unspoken question, but arguably a representative of any discipline could be included. What could the philosopher or scientist say to the mother of a toddler with cancer that would not also be grotesque? By "grotesque" Wallace does mean disgusting, but it is

a disgust quite different than what Kristeva feels toward the skin on warm milk. It offends sensibilities, rather than senses. This use of grotesque brings to mind etiquette and moral judgment rather than instinctual rejection, it is "against common decency," sharing a realm with the sacrilegious and the pornographic. Again connoting freak shows of the past, the grotesque is a mockery, but not the revolutionary mockery of Bakhtin; it settles into cruelty. The offense here is partly due to American cultural taboos around talking about death (particularly child loss), but also due to the qualities of those un-imagined words. A priest speaking to a worried parent in general is not inappropriate; the grotesqueness of a proposed explanation lies in its triteness. Whatever the priest may say strikes Wallace as so staggeringly insufficient that he finds it grotesque. Throughout this work we will examine many categories of non-normate body: the deformed, the mutated, the disabled, the feminine, the fat, and the mentally ill. Each carries with it is own associated tropes, metaphors, stereotypes, and attractions, but each is also presented solidly in the realm of the abnormal. Wallace's use of grotesque means something which may be ugly, but is certainly insufficient. Postcolonial studies, feminist studies, and other arenas have identified a common trend in that the Self must be defined against an Other; for the principal group in question to feel complete, another group must be conceived of as incomplete. Though Wallace's reasons for presenting non-normative bodies in his work range from satirical, to empathetic, to outright stereotypical, it is worth keeping in mind the closeness he has shown between disgust and incompleteness.

Wallace ascribes a similar notion of the grotesque signifying lack to the act of writing in "The Nature of Fun," but here the term is explicitly tied to a body. Wallace borrows a metaphor from Don DeLillo's *Mao II*, where the unfinished book is "a kind of hideously damaged infant" that doggedly chases its creator, "hideously defective, hydrocephalic and noseless and flipper-

armed and incontinent and retarded and dribbling cerebrospinal fluid out of its mouth as it mewls and burbles and cries out to the writer, wanting love, wanting the very thing its hideousness guarantees it'll get: the writer's complete attention" (193). Readers already familiar with Wallace's work may notice that many of these specific deformities appear in his fiction oeuvre, such as the hydrocephaly of Marathe's wife in *Infinite Jest* and "the Asset" in B.I. #40 described as "an itty tiny little flipper" ("Brief Interviews with Hideous Men" 82). Wallace uses a similar description to conceptualise being "really human" in *Infinite Jest*, that one must be internally "some sort of not-quite-right-looking infant dragging itself anaclitically around the map, with big wet eyes and froggy-soft skin, huge skull, gooey drool," a "hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need" (694). The infantile self and the book in progress are things which evoke a process of becoming which can never quite be achieved. About the book, Wallace writes that "You love your infant very much. And you want others to love it, too," but in order to reap that love the ugly infant must be seen by others ("The Nature of Fun" 194). Being seen by others is both necessary to fulfil that most fervent hope, and is itself the author's most striking fear and shame, because they know the hideousness of their infant and how it reflects onto them. We may extrapolate this duality of hope and fear to Hal's observations on the infantile sentimental self. The metaphorical drooling infant is both too much (hydrocephalic, drooling) and not enough (other people's infants are "perfect and pink and cerebrospinally continent") ("Fun" 193). Exemplifying the slipperiness of the term "grotesque," incompleteness is not necessarily tied to total scarcity – the lack is of something important, not of all that is presented. Often Wallace's grotesques are, like his writing style, defined by excess. Another of Wallace's key influences, Wittgenstein, wrote "Whereof one cannot speak, one must be silent" (7). The grotesque also

occurs when one speaks where one should be silent, where to share is inappropriate, unwelcome, or irrelevant. It signifies empty excess.

After this introduction which seeks to foreground my own understanding of and interest in the grotesque, I begin the dissertation with a chapter which further explores Wallace's own connection to this concept. The first chapter considers wider commentary on Wallace's work in light of the influence that specific creators have had on his work, focusing on those who have only been touched on in existing scholarship such as David Lynch and Franz Kafka. Tracing Wallace's artistic influences is a well-established, often illuminating methodology for understanding his work. The plurality of voices used in Wallace's work rewards investigations into most fields of philosophy, literary theory, and even science and mathematics. To even mention this plurality implies the role of Bakhtin's heteroglossia. Wallace was obviously well-read and well-educated, so convincing arguments have been made tying Wallace to a huge range of other scholarship. Previous examinations have discussed Wallace's intellectual debts to philosophers like Wittgenstein and Rorty, psychologists such as Lacan and Laing, and other authors like Joyce and Barth. This chapter aims to add to the rich field of existing scholarship based on investigating and detailing Wallace's influences, but also to add context for the dissertation as a whole. While not always explicitly called out in the dissertation, concepts such as the Lynchian and the Kafkaesque form an undercurrent that is present in the portrayals of the grotesque and the non-normate body which I examine in subsequent chapters.

For example, the subject of humour has occupied a strange and, at times, tense place in the reception of Wallace's work. Many readers, reviewers, and scholars have noted that Wallace's work liberally employs many kinds of humour, ranging from esoteric mathematics jokes to low-brow scatological puns. These observations are quite frequently directed at *Infinite*

Jest specifically, which contains the aforementioned elements as well as inclusions of popular jokes, such as the man whose legs are each shorter than the other, and a construction worker who becomes hoisted into the air by a comically misplaced bucket of cement. Wallace himself, however, insisted that *Infinite Jest* was not meant to be generally funny in several interviews, such as on *Charlie Rose* in 1997. In order to understand the confusion over *Infinite Jest*'s un/funniness and the humour of Wallace's work in general, it is important to consider his admiration of Kafka as I do in the chapter on Wallace and His Influences. Wallace's self-professed artistic intent was to "aggravate this sense of entrapment and loneliness and death in people, to move people to countenance it, since any possible human redemption requires us first to face what's dreadful, what we want to deny" (McCaffery 55). One can imagine how stories such as "The Metamorphosis" expertly confront the reader with the abject, but Wallace celebrated how these dark themes could naturally provide dark humour, writing: "no wonder they cannot appreciate that really central Kafka joke – that the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle" ("Laughing with Kafka" 26). This chapter explores how writers such as Kafka affected Wallace's humour, as well as the implications of a humour which relies on suffering, usually of those who are already marginalised and unvalued, such as Poor Tony Krause, the gender nonconforming drug addict in *Infinite Jest* whose debasement easily rivals Gregor Samsa's transformation. This chapter also explores Wallace's well-known admiration for David Lynch, who also often marries the grotesque and the humorous. As in "Laughing with Kafka," there are several moments in "David Lynch Loses His Head" where one could easily apply Wallace's commentary on Lynch's work to his own writing. By reading how Wallace interprets the voyeuristic gaze, racial representation, and the uncanny in Lynch's work, we may come to better

understand the ways in which Wallace often problematically portrays non-normative bodies as contemporary freak show exhibits.

The second chapter is one of the most varied in the dissertation, as it draws upon concepts from biology, physics, mathematics, history, and environmental criticism to examine how Wallace creates a body which is inextricably melded with its environment. After establishing an understanding of Wallace's relevant influences, the dissertation begins to examine Wallace's treatment of bodies as part of a web of relationships by moving from large systems to increasingly small and personal ones. The environment is the first of the large systems, and contains within it relationships with one's atmosphere, geological place, and nation. This chapter heavily utilises the work of Heather Houser and Katherine Hayles, the former having performed what is likely the most in-depth view of Wallace as an ecological author in her essay "*Infinite Jest's* Environmental Case for Disgust." From outside Wallace Studies, I also draw from a range of sources in ecological studies. These include theory by Tian Song about the definition and nature of garbage, as well as scientific data and observations from organisations such as NASA and others. As in the previous chapter, I provide new angles with which to view Wallace's work which may interest those outside the field of literature. As we advance further into the Anthropocene, the mutated environments portrayed by Wallace become increasingly pertinent. This chapter imagines the relationship between Wallace's bodies and environments as a toxified recursive loop, where both halves are locked together in a perpetual process of consumption, waste, and mutation. The presence of recursive relationships between the body and environment in Wallace's fiction means that not only do human bodies mutate as the environment is poisoned, but the environment also reflexively takes on human characteristics. The "bodies" of the environments are similarly misshapen and deformed, such as the Boston area

described in terms of limbs and cysts. Though this chapter will attempt to detail mathematic and scientific phenomena clearly, these are concepts which are necessarily complicated and often overwhelming. But because these concepts are evidenced in the body, the relatable physical intimacy/immediacy makes them accessible to a variety of readers.

While the chapter on the environment necessarily touches on political (in)action in the age of the Anthropocene, the following chapter on The Body and Politics more carefully considers how non-normate bodies are both weaponised and victimised in a political context. This chapter relates most closely to Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque body and its connections to the carnivalesque and universality. The Bakhtinian grotesque was often fabricated by the peasantry in order to humorously exaggerate the usually abject reminders of bodily materiality such as excretion and the birthing process. The effigy would often represent a local authority, such as a religious leader or king, and serve to remind the lower class that the divinely appointed leadership were also limited human beings. While many of DFW's grotesques operate on the edge of society and represent disadvantaged groups such as the poor, many of his grotesque characters are also members of privileged groups. Few characters are described as non-white, many are male, and very many are heterosexual. A significant amount, like almost the entire student population of E.T.A., is at least upper-middle class as well. This homogeny is obviously problematic, as addressed by Clare Hayes-Brady in both her essay "". . .": Language, Gender, and Modes of Power in the Work of David Foster Wallace" and her book *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity, and Resistance*. In "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*," Catherine Nichols proposes that the celebratory indulgence of the carnivalesque has been commercialised and government-sanctioned in order to keep the general population distracted and desirous, and any

of the useful satire involved in grotesquery has devolved into transgression for its own sake. Working backward from this conclusion, we must more closely examine the role that grotesque bodies play in this shift from satire to useless shock. This chapter will explore the co-option of Bakhtinian grotesques by the state and other privileged groups, as well as the possibility of Wallace using metafictional techniques to provide an additional level of satirical discourse about that co-option. This chapter also studies how the disabled bodies produced by the state are categorised and humiliated based on appearance, leading to further discussion on visual difference in the subsequent chapter.

The following chapter on The Body and the Other utilises Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze and scopophilia to consider how Wallace's work presents Othered bodies. Most of the differences which I examine are visual – the female body, the fat body, the disabled body. These are differences which can be noted and judged without any deeper sort of interaction with the Other. It is important here to keep in mind Wallace's love of film, which privileges the image and uses visual cues to quickly convey messages to the viewer. The readability of these messages is directly proportionate to how faithfully the image follows cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes. Wallace's treatment of these Others sometimes challenges the status quo, but often it is problematic, as I have suggested previously. Wallace's most consistent issue is falling back on stereotypical bodily symbolism and tropes: the greedy fat man, the femme fatale, the kindly cripple. The use of these tropes allow Wallace's readers to instantly and easily understand certain messages about these characters and the stories they live in, however, this tactic prioritises facile readings over the nuanced humanity of certain types of person. The female, fat, or disabled body is never allowed to just be a body (if there can be such a thing), it is always laden with meanings meant for others. As the previous chapter outlines Wallace's artistic intention and hopes for his

readership, we can proceed to question if these kinds of portrayals are not only insensitive, but counterproductive. How can Wallace call for deeper empathy when all of his fat characters are caricatures? How does using such well-trod tropes further his mission to provide a difficult yet rewarding reader experience?

Following this, I aim to explore the intimate, immediate, complex relationship between the grotesque body and the Self which inhabits it. In Wallace's work, this Self is generally written or coded as masculine, white, and intelligent. It aligns neatly with the history of Cartesian dualism which Elizabeth Grosz lays out in *Volatile Bodies*, which associates the body with the uncontrolled feminine and the mind with the disciplined masculine. The Self is inextricably bound with masculinity, and it is a form of masculinity which attempts to navigate both traditional demands on men and the insecurities and fears of contemporary men. As such, Wallace's readership is also generally viewed as masculine. Wallace's writing and readership are so categorically masculine that it has become a literary pop culture meme - a quick search brings up "Men Recommend David Foster Wallace to Me" on *Electric Literature*, "David Foster Wallace, Beloved Author of Bros" on *Slate,* and *Infinite Jest* appears as #4 on *The Toast's* "Books That Literally All White Men Own: The Definitive List." While the meme has a place, it is also important that we examine why Wallace's writing is considered so authentic and relatable to these readers. Returning to our initial discussion on toxicity, recursive loops, and abjection, this chapter studies how the Self negotiates with a body which cannot be pushed away, isolated, or fully dominated. In a way which reflects our initial examination of the relationship between the body and the environment, Wallace's men experience a toxic masculinity which creates a toxic selfhood, and as before this poisoning becomes literally embodied.

In this dissertation I hope to contribute to ongoing scholarship by exploring how the body provides a key to understanding how Wallace believed we negotiate life, death, and the complexities thereof. I believe that the body has thus far been understudied in this discipline, despite the clear motifs of bodily disfigurement, pain, and physicality in Wallace's work. My work is chiefly focused on *Infinite Jest*, as it features the highest concentration of non-normate bodies to study, with a clearer focus on environmental and political interactions. However, *The Broom of the System* appears in The Body and the Environment, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* is used heavily in The Body and the Other, and the novella "The Suffering Channel" from the *Oblivion* collection is the basis of a large portion of The Body and the Self. Other stories and sections of *The Pale King* also appear in the work, but primarily these texts are referenced to support observations about Wallace's writing in general or as predecessors or successors of *Infinite Jest* in particular. I also utilise a number of interviews, biographies, and articles about Wallace or his life, as well as sources which may seem unconventional in a literature dissertation, such as NASA data. As mentioned earlier, Wallace was known to be a voracious reader and watcher, and I believe that pulling inspiration or support from many disciplines to be a rewarding methodology in studying his work. I hope that this approach captures some of the concept of heteroglossia present in both Wallace's work and the Bakhtinian grotesque in a way which is faithful to both, while also including perspectives which may be new or underrepresented in the original. In this dissertation I challenge the labelling of Wallace as a strictly cerebral writer, and invite readers to consider him as a visceral writer. By reading the site of the body, I believe that we can achieve new understanding of both the triumphs and failures of Wallace's work, and the ways in which they, like the body, may not be so clearly defined.

Chapter 2: Wallace and His Influences

Although David Foster Wallace is now positioned at the forefront of several new and developing literary movements such as maximalism, hysterical realism, and New Sincerity, Wallace's influences are both numerous and often readily identifiable.[2] D.T. Max covers many of the books and stories Wallace would have studied during his undergraduate English degree and later his M.F.A. in Creative Writing in *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story*, and the syllabi Wallace crafted for his own courses later are easily found in popular magazines such as *Salon*. Many books, essays, and articles in the field focus on specific influences and they how affected Wallace's work, including *Global Wallace: David Foster Wallace and World Literature* by Lucas Thompson, "The Formative Years: David Foster Wallace's Philosophical Influences and *The Broom of the System*" by Thomas Tracey, and "Generational Succession and a Possible Source for the title of David Foster Wallace's *The Broom of the System* by Stephen J. Burn. Wallace was known to be a voracious reader and annotator, so authors of many disciplines have found fruitful work in examining the lingering presence of other writers in Wallace's oeuvre. Wallace, however, often seemed reluctant to address his references, even lying in some instances, "ever nervous of his debt" (Max 31). Wallace tried several times to deny his influences, stating that he had never read *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon or *Less than Zero* by Bret Easton Ellis, when the influence of both authors is obvious (Max 31, 73).[3] Beyond other postmodern writers, Wallace's work is deeply and noticeably influenced by years of literature, philosophy, psychology, film, literary theory, and criticism consumed over his

[2] New Sincerity is the most directly related to Wallace, as the term is derived from his appeal to emotions in "E Unibus Plurum." Adam Kelly was the first to name the New Sincerity movement in his essay "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction."

[3] Editor Gerald Howard also mentions that Wallace denied reading Ellis to him: "an obvious lie that I let pass" directly after *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* was published in his article "I Know Why Bret Easton Ellis Hates David Foster Wallace" for *Salon* in September 2012.

lifetime. Though D.T. Max and others have done an incredibly thorough job outlining many of Wallace's major influences in one place, detailing all of them would be a monumental and monumentally difficult task, given their numerousness and scope of disciplines. This chapter will only be focusing on only a few of Wallace's influences, those which impacted how Wallace conceived and portrayed the body and the Other as deformed figures. These are mostly influences that Wallace himself wrote about and examined publically, but we shall be expanding beyond Wallace's published observations to study the numerous ways in which his work was affected by others.

This chapter will begin with the influence of Kafka on Wallace's work, particularly his influence on Wallace's oft-lauded sense of humour. Entwined with dark humour are the themes of pity, loneliness, and alienation which are dominant in both Kafka and Wallace's work. Two scholars have written about this connection at length, Toon Staes in "'Only Artists Can Transfigure': Kafka's Artists and the Possibility of Redemption in the Novellas of David Foster Wallace" and Lucas Thompson in the aforementioned *Global Wallace*. Kafka was one of the relatively few influences that Wallace wrote on specifically in "Some Remarks on Kafka's Funniness from Which Probably Not Enough has Been Removed," but Staes and Thompson neatly demonstrate how those "Remarks" figure into Wallace's fiction. Though covering similar topics regarding the role of humour and art, I hope to add to this discussion largely by expanding on the role of "imaginative literalization" in Wallace's work (Thompson 128). This chapter will also examine Wallace's relationship with David Lynch, which he both talked about in interviews and wrote about in the essay "David Lynch Keeps His Head." The similarity of comments Wallace made about both Kafka and Lynch seems to imply that he used one to view the other, or at least had a continuous interest in certain dream-like, grotesque elements present in both

creators. It is possible that Wallace viewed Lynch as a sort of guide for how to present "abstractions [that] are given human form" (Thompson 128). That section will discuss Wallace's engagement with "the Lynchian," and Wallace's critique of Lynch's racial politics despite their glaring similarity to his own. Each of the aforementioned influences affects the ways in which bodies are portrayed in Wallace's work, and how both those bodies and Wallace's wider "body of work" are deformed and defamiliarised.

The Kafkaesque

"Laughing with Kafka" first appeared as a speech at the 1998 "Metamorphosis: A New Kafka" symposium, then as an essay in *Harper's Magazine* the same year, and a transcript of the original speech was included in Wallace's *Consider the Lobster* collection as "Some Remarks on Kafka's Funniness from Which Probably Not Enough Has Been Removed" in 2005. The re-emergence of this piece with such minimal editing suggests that the ideas within were important to Wallace, and remained relatively unchanged for almost a decade. Wallace's view of art seems informed by many of the sentiments he held about Kafka's work. Wallace prized the ability to "to aggravate this sense of entrapment and loneliness and death in people, to move people to countenance it, since any possible human redemption requires us first to face what's dreadful, what we want to deny" (McCaffery 55). His difficult prose, subtle and sometimes outright hostility to the reader, and prodigious use of non-normate bodies in his work all signal an attempt to create discomfort in the reader alongside the usual pleasures of reading. Wallace's view of art and its relationship with discomfort, dread, and emotional suffering can also be linked to his view of the human condition in general, which he expressed in "Some Remarks": "No wonder they cannot appreciate the really central Kafka joke - that the horrific struggle to establish a

human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle. That our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home" (64-65). Wallace's own humour has been studied academically, and widely admired by non-academics. In addition to Lucas Thompson in *Global Wallace*, examples include Heather Houser's academic essay "*Infinite Jest's* Environmental Case for Disgust," as well as NPR and David Lipsky's piece "Wallace Invented 'New Style, New Comedy," and the prevalence of humour-related questions in interviews like ZDF's (2003). Lucas Thompson focuses much of his study on Wallace's reading of Kafka on the humorous elements of exformation and literalization. Wallace defines exformation as "a certain quantity of vital information removed from but evoked by a communication in such a way as to cause a kind of explosion of associative connections within the recipient" ("Some Remarks" 61). Thompson gives the endings of *Infinite Jest* and *Broom of the System* as examples of exformation, as the reader is able to guess what happens after the book formally ends, but no actual resolution is provided (127). Though the particular exformation of the ending is not funny, *Infinite Jest* particularly is almost as well known for being humorous as it is for being strenuously long. Wallace himself expressed displeasure with all of the reviews praising *Infinite Jest* for being so funny; telling Charlie Rose in a 1997 interview for PBS:

> I didn't read a whole lot of the reviews, but a lot of the positive ones seemed to me to misunderstand the book. I wanted it to be extraordinarily sad and not particularly post-modern or jumbled up or fractured and most of the people -- the reviewers who really liked it seemed to like it because it was funny or it was erudite or it was interestingly fractured. (21:05-21:25)

Heather Houser comments on the use of humour in *Infinite Jest* in a way which addresses this sadness: "The humor becomes less salient as scenes of pain and anguish aggregate. Flooded by

tortuous textual moments, engaged readers reflect on how horrific content had previously seemed so funny and potentially reorient their responses" (140). This reflects how Wallace felt that "Kafka's comedy is also always tragedy," and that despite their funniness are "*not* fundamentally jokes" ("Some Remarks" 63). An example of comedic tragedy in Wallace's writing would be Poor Tony Krause in *Infinite Jest*, a transvestite drug addict.[4] The disparity between Tony's certainty of his own beauty and the ridiculous portrait described to the readers may initially be funny, and Wallace introduces us to the character with a humorous scene of Tony clattering down the street "bizarrely outfitted in a strapless cocktail dress, spike heels, tattered feather boa, and auburn wig" (*IJ* 143). A comic literalization occurs when Poor Tony snatches a purse containing the artificial heart of a woman, who gives chase shouting "'She stole my heart, stop her!'" which onlookers interpret as "yet another alternative lifestyle's relationship gone sour" (141-142). Poor Tony smashes the heart when it continues "to beat and bleed" in the "rudely disconnected purse," evoking Poe's "The Tell-tale Heart" (143). It appears to be just an amusing vignette, one of distractingly many, playing on clichés about heartbreak.

Poor Tony's name is clearly a literalization – it becomes clear that absolutely nothing goes right for him, especially after smashing the heart. He makes poor choices, but the lurid detail and violence of his confrontations with withdrawal and later the Wheelchair Assassins may spark pity in even the most begrudging reader. The next time Poor Tony shows up in the book is page 299, with the flat line "Poor Tony Krause had a seizure on the T." Poor Tony first starts to withdraw in a Dumpster, where "he had terrible shivering-attacks and also perspired. He had a sty that had scraped one eyeball as pink as a bunny's. His nose ran like twin spigots and

[4] Poor Tony is referred to in *Infinite Jest* as a male transvestite, so I do so here, however it could be argued that Poor Tony's actual portrayal is more similar to a transgender woman due to references to gender dysphoria (*IJ* 301, 690). The term "transgender" did exist at the time of *Infinite Jest*'s writing, but Wallace may not have been familiar with the terminology, or purposely used the more offensive term to convey roughness or insensitivity in the speaker, as he does with other slurs.

the out-put had a yellow-green tinge he didn't think looked promising *at all*" (300). The Dumpster is new when he takes up occupancy in it, and "for a brief interval it had seemed like a break, fortune's one wan smile," until a sanitation crewman tells him that the reason no one approaches the Dumpster is Poor Tony's own stench; he is more disgusting than even hot garbage (301). He possesses an "uncomely dry-rot smell" and "fluids of varying consistency began to pour w/o advance notice from several openings. Then of course they stayed there, the fluids, on the summer dumpster's iron floor" (300, 301). When this becomes too much for Poor Tony to bear, he goes not to a hospital or clinic, but a public restroom. Wallace's work often describes bathrooms as places of extreme intimacy, they are the place where the façade of the perfect social human both falls (because others can perceive you excreting) and is repaired (fixing makeup, recovering from emotionally difficult moments) in shared secrecy.[5] When Poor Tony takes up residence in a public bathroom cubicle, the reader is forced into this tight, intimate space with him. "Alternately swilling and gushing," Poor Tony suffers total misery (301). Wallace uses the language of sexual assault to describe Poor Tony's suffering; his withdrawal is not just mundane sickness but a violating, overpowering, violent attack by something malicious. The experience "moved in and out of him like the very most feared prison-shower assailant," his shivers are "jagged and cold and smelling oddly of deodorant" and "entered his body via several openings" and make him feel torn up inside, "time spread him and entered him roughly and had its way and left him again in the form of endless gushing liquid shit he could not flush enough to keep up with" (302, 303). The same "abstractions [. . .] given human form" which drives Kafka's comedy for Wallace is used for horror by personifying Withdrawal (capitalised in the novel, like

[5] It may be worth noting here that American public restroom cubicles are somewhat unique in construction. The stall door is generally cut so that the person inside is visible to the mid-shin on the bottom, and there is an approximately ¼ inch gap between the wall and door which you can see the occupant's whole body through. So while these stalls are meant to symbolize privacy, they are in fact uncomfortably public.

a person's name) as the perverse and horrifying male-on-male rapist. Poor Tony becomes the literalization of the drug addict Body Without Organs from Deleuze and Guattari, who "erect[s] a vitrified and empty body" (285). "Vitrified" meaning to be made of glass – Poor Tony's bones are filled "with ground glass," "he could hear his joints glassy crunch," he feels he "had become an hourglass (*IJ* 302, 303). The deluge of faeces Poor Tony cannot halt or explain (he has not eaten solid food in days) gives abject form to the "empty BwO" which "empties itself too quickly, disarrays itself too much, so that it closes in on itself, unable to transmit its intensities differently, stuck in repetition" (Grosz 171). In this cyclical debasement, it is Kafka's German that materialises in his head: "he was haunted by the word *Zuckung*, a foreign and possibly Yiddish word he did not recall ever before hearing" (*IJ* 303).[6]

In his reading of *Infinite Jest*, Thompson relates Hal's opening breakdown scene to Gregor Samsa's insect transformation, and further connects both to Ken Erdedy, who becomes fascinated by, then identifies with, and then becomes an insect. The addiction cycle of his life is likened to the "endlessly repetitive movements of the insect," and Thompson reads Erdedy's paralysis as "being splatted or squashed like a small bug, bereft of the interior thought processes that separate humans from animals" (153, 154). Thompson identifies the collapse of distinction between human and animal as a key Kafka motif. Insects follow Poor Tony's withdrawal as well, first in the Dumpster which "contained already a colony of ants along one wall, which insects Poor Tony had ever since a neurasthenic childhood feared and detested in particular," and then when "the true D.T.-type big-budget visuals commenced, when the first glossy and hirsute army-ant crawled up his arm and refused ghost-like to be brushed away or hammered dead" (*IJ* 301, 303-304). The deodorant smell from earlier is given a source, Poor Tony's father, when he

[6] The word is German, not Yiddish, but could be a reference to Kafka, a German-speaking Jewish person. *Collins Dictionary* translates it as a "convulsion," "convulsive movement," or literally "the death throes" (Collinsdictionary.com).

smells it as he is unwillingly entered again: “Withdrawal’s ants skittered glossily up into his mouth and nose and disappeared,” eating him on the way down (305). This is Poor Tony’s Rock Bottom, the point where A.A. wisdom finds the potential for brutal redemptive grace. He begins to hallucinate about his father holding a fish with “PUSH” inscribed on its skin, while he flops like a fish in the thrall of a seizure, again collapsing the distinction between human and animal (305). The inscribed fish evokes Kafka’s “Punishment Machine” from “In the Penal Colony,” a shuddering harrow which imprints a sentence on the victim which they must feel to internalise: “You have seen how difficult it is to decipher the script with one’s eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds” (Quoted in Grosz 73). The “PUSH” directive is what Poor Tony feels in his wounds, perhaps gesturing towards another linkage in Wallace’s influences. At the end of “Some Remarks,” Wallace describes reading Kafka as “approaching and pounding on this door, increasingly hard, pounding and pounding, not just wanting admission but needing it; we don’t know what it is but we can feel it, this total desperation to enter, pounding and ramming and kicking. That, finally, the door opens…and it opens *outward* – we’ve been inside what we wanted all along” (65). Thompson notices that Wallace lifted this sentiment from Wittgenstein’s *Culture and Value*: “A man will be *imprisoned* in a room with a door that’s unlocked and opens inwards; as long as it does not occur to him to *pull* rather than push” (Thompson 130, quoting Wittgenstein 42e). However, Wallace’s door opens outward – rather than pull, one needs to “PUSH.” Poor Tony reads the instruction as a birth, because his father was a gynaecologist. The birth association evokes Toon Staes’s reading in “‘Only Artists Can Transfigure,’” the thesis of which is that hardship (represented by bodily pain and the emotion of shame) can be a productive act. After the Bottom, one either learns and attempts to sober up, or they die. When Poor Tony wakes up from his seizure in an ambulance and almost immediately commits another purse-

snatching, the reader can anticipate the next bodily torture, like remembering the punchline of a joke they have heard before. Poor Tony is chased to the Antitois shop, where the A.F.R. is testing the Entertainment, the literalisation of destructive indulgence. Poor Tony's specific reaction to the Entertainment is not detailed, a bit of grisly exformation reads only that Randy Lenz (captured after the Ennet House fight) "was discovered to have been being severing and pushing beneath the room of the storage's closed door the severed digits of the second of the newly acquired test-subjects – this was a mis-dressed and severely weakened or addicted man dressed in the clothing of a gauche woman" (*IJ* 845).

In the inverse of this comedy-turned-tragedy, Wallace's work also contains many moments where something humorous is described in a way that provokes pity. In *Infinite Jest,* for example, he dramatizes a popular joke (one man with each leg shorter than the other) and makes it a pitiful situation by describing how this disability ruins the man's life and traumatizes his child (493). In "Adult World (I)" and "Adult World (II)," a wife is forced to come to terms with her husband being completely sexually uninterested in her, as well as constantly lying about his actual interests (both directly and by omission). The wife is driven nearly insane thinking that there might be something terribly wrong and unattractive with her, or that her husband is carrying on an affair, when really he just prefers to enjoy pornography at the Adult World store alone. The reader seems meant to pity both her passionless marriage and her husband's compulsion to hide his otherwise normal interests. "Adult World (II)," the second part of the story, is presented as the author's outline and notes. Wallace marks points which are meant to be "trmndsly [sic] moving & high-affect," showing that the wife and her plight are not meant to be annoying, like the Depressed Person (184). The wife berates herself for worrying so much about her husband, often calling herself selfish or undeserving of love, happiness, believing in general

that he is “far better than she probably deserved” (“Adult World (I)” 163). Her name, Jeni, is not even mentioned until 16 pages into the story and it is in parentheses, like an afterthought (“Adult World (I)” 177). She is contrasted with the title character of “The Depressed Person” in the same story collection, a woman whose worrying is blatantly narcissistic, who Wallace meant to be repugnant and found repugnant himself (ZDF 2003). The Depressed Person also exhibits obsessive, toxic thought patterns, but over nothing in particular. Jeni’s anxious thoughts are exaggerated, repetitive, and can become annoying as the story’s two parts drag on, but the base of her obsessions is understandable, possibly relatable: she is afraid that someone is only pretending to like her. It is a valid concern – the collection’s opening story, “A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life” opens with a man and woman performing enjoyment of each other, “hoping to be liked,” before shifting to the “the man who’d introduced them” who “didn’t much like either of them, though acted as if he did” (0). The reader can figure out the husband’s secret long before Jeni does, and knowing that the problem is so simple while reading Jeni’s excruciating anxiety symptoms is meant to create discomfort in the reader, wanting them to get the seemingly inevitable confrontation over with for Jeni’s sake and our own. This is another Kafka technique Wallace extolled in “Some Remarks,” called compression, referring to a joke or story’s narrative pressure. Wallace writes that “What Kafka seems able to do better than just about anyone else is to orchestrate the pressure’s increase in such a way that it becomes intolerable at the precise instant it is released” (61).

However, instead of offering a more dramatic, depressurizing, satisfying end to resolve our pity, such as Jeni confronting her husband, she just privately accepts that they will lead separate sex lives. The tension has already been released from the story at this point, however, due to the metafictional details in “Adult World (II),” which presents the intended emotional

responses and use of literary devices alongside brief descriptions of the action. The final line is a humorously matter-of-fact "were ready thus to begin, in a calm and mutually respectful way, to discuss having children [together]" ("Adult World (II)" 189). Her jarring reaction, that estrangement in their relationship means they should move it further, and that their disinterest in sex with each other means they should start having sex with each other more often, is humorous in its unexpectedness, and it reframes the entire situation. She accepts the truth so readily that her previous worrying and obsession becomes funny in retrospect, though this humour is purposely deflated by the dramatic tension fizzling out early in the second story. The flat statement of her final thoughts reveals another joke to the reader: the "Adult World" title does not in fact refer to the adult novelty store her husband secretly frequents, but her own (somewhat sad) maturation. By accepting that they can have secrets and separate interests while still loving each other, Jeni is free to fully live in the "Adult World." The erotic passion has dissolved from their marriage, but like the outline structure of "Adult World (II)," there is stability in unexciting predictability, even without the (nearly erotic) explosive tension and release of compression. Up until this point, Jeni has felt alienated by her husband's secretive behaviour, and she weeps thinking about "how *lonely* his secrets must make him" ("Adult World (II)" 186). Most of Wallace's (and Kafka's) works have themes of alienation and loneliness, with many of the stories in the *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* collection dealing directly with contemporary people being unable to communicate effectively. *Infinite Jest* presents these themes as well, showing many characters who are seldom alone (such as the E.T.A. students and halfway house residents) but are incredibly lonely and emotionally isolated.

Wallace calls Kafka's humour "a religious humor, but religious in the manner of Kierkegaard and Rilke and the Psalms, a harrowing spirituality against which even Ms.

O'Connor's bloody grace seems a little bit easy, the souls at stake pre-made" ("Some Remarks" 64). One may recall Gregor Samsa, humorous as he wakes as an insect and only thinks about how he can get to work, and pitiful as he is nearly beaten to death by thrown garbage. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard surmises that humour is based mostly on incongruity: the difference between what is expected, and what is experienced (459–468). This is why mistakes or misunderstandings are often used to comedic effect. Thomas C. Oden writes that Kierkegaard classifies human experience mostly as a "synthesis of extreme opposites" such as "body/soul, "temporality/eternity," and "finitude/freedom" (12). These sets of opposites may be sites of humour themselves, but these contradictions of life also make incongruity understandable to the average person. Similar to Kafka, who locates essential humanity within struggle, Kierkegaard believes that both humour and humanity exist within gaps of understanding, in places which can be dark, uncomfortable, or painful. This explains why Jeni's predicament in "Adult World (I) / (II)" and Gregor's initial, innocent worries are humorous – things are strange and worrisome but also familiar; we are free to laugh. Ulf Zimmerman defines Rilke's humour more seriously in "Malte Ludens: Humor, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Significance in Rilke's Novel," where humorous techniques are "literary devices of distance" (50). There is a crucial difference between empathy and pity in this approach. Pity is essentially directed *at* something or someone, where the reader feels sorry on a character's behalf, regardless of what that character is feeling. Similarly, the ability to laugh *at* someone both requires and confirms emotional distance: Poor Tony clattering down the street like a deranged bird is alien to how most of us dress and go about business in the street, laughing at him confirms "this is not me." Jokes establish what is normal and what is not, and where the teller and the subject both reside regarding in- and outgroups. Most of the humorous moments in *Infinite Jest* are times when the

reader is laughing at someone, rather than with them. The most notable exception being in A.A., when the attendants laugh uproariously at a speaker's earnest celebration of his first solid bowel movement: "Gately and the other White Flaggers fall about, laugh from the gut, a turd that practically had a pulse, an ode to a solid dump; but the lightless eyes of certain palsied backrow newcomers widen with a very private Identification and possible hope, hardly daring to imagine. ... A certain Message has been Carried" (*IJ* 352).[7] The veteran members can laugh with the speaker because they too have seen their bodies recover from addiction, reinforced by the newcomers all experiencing the same issues. It is a story that relates to everyone in the room somehow, but the distance between the veterans and the newcomers is only time (and probably only a few weeks, for many), rather than race, gender, sexuality, etc.

Moving away from bodily suffering; most of the greatest psychological suffering in Wallace's work comes from juggling the desire to connect with others, the inability to do so authentically, and the conception that wanting to be liked is pathetic and vain. This theme is present in *Infinite Jest*, *Brief Interviews*, and the Meredith Rand sections of *The Pale King*, "The Suffering Channel" and "The Depressed Person" from *Oblivion*. It can also be read into some personal interviews, such as when Wallace told David Lipsky "In person, like at these readings, I feel like my job is to be exactly as much of myself as I can be. Without looking, without *making* myself naked in front of people who might be mean to me" (41). He acknowledges that the voice he uses in *Harper's* for nonfiction is a persona, "a little stupider and schmuckier" than he actually is, but the Wallace of readings is authentic (Lipsky 41). Wallace does not seem to equate being only "exactly as much" of himself as tolerable with being inauthentic, and becomes frustrated when Lipsky suggests as much, asking "Isn't what you just said an example of the faux thing? You don't want to take the risk, the effect, of giving the full you?" (41, 42). Wallace

[7] Punctuation *sic*.

bristles at the question, and responds "I don't know whether you're a very nice man or not" and the conversation does not recover (42). In fiction, Catherine Nichols's description of Hal's university-interview breakdown presents the inability to communicate with others as something out of the horror genre.[8] In the relevant scene, Hal Incandenza is asked to verify that he has written several essays, to make sure that E.T.A. has not been doctoring his grades so they could use his body for tennis. Hal seems to speak directly to the reader within his consciousness, and he is clearly both articulate and emotionally sensitive. More emotionally sensitive than in any other point in the novel, actually. Hal speaks passionately about his emotions, he also frequently uses the "I" pronoun, expresses varied personal interests, and generally shows a solid sense of self. In later chapters he rarely refers to himself or uses more distanced pronouns like "you." But when he opens his mouth to speak, the university faculty reacts with absolute horror and disgust. The common interpretation is that Hal can only communicate in these "subanimalistic" noises, but Nichols proposes that Hal's speech is, in fact, totally unaffected (*IJ* 11). The issue is actually the content of his communications, and Hal is now speaking in "pure sentiments," and these totally honest and unmediated sentiments are so alien to the others that they are perceived as literally repulsive (Nichols 14). It is no coincidence that the place Hal is sent just before the psychiatric ward is the bathroom, as Hal serenely notes "U.S. restrooms always appear to us as infirmaries for public distress, the place to regain control" (*IJ* 10). (Recall how Poor Tony drags himself to a bathroom, not an infirmary.) When the ambulance arrives and Hal is carried away on a stretcher, he muses "And who could not love that special and leonine roar of a public toilet?" (12). It is the sound of the disgusting, the unwanted, the weird intersection of private and public

[8] Perhaps specifically Harlan Ellison's famous "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream," which is about a man who suffers paranoia and delusions due to technological interference, and after a moment of clarity, becomes a helpless consciousness trapped inside a useless body.

shame being sent away, that which you hope will not return. For the university faculty whose "sleep has been forever compromised," Hal represents the same waste (12).

The next chapter to possibly feature Hal blurs the line between fictional layers in the novel, as it may be either a scenario between Hal and J.O.I. which was later adapted into a film, or a complete fantasy filmed by J.O.I.[9] In the scene, Hal enters an office to see his father disguised as a professional conversationalist because Himself is having delusions that Hal opens his mouth and nothing comes out, very similar to what befalls Hal in the opening chapter. In this chapter, the last thing Hal says is "And are you hearing me talking, Dad? It speaks. It accepts soda and defines implore and converses with you" moving from a "me" to an "it" as he realises that his father cannot understand him (*IJ* 26). J.O.I.'s next line picks up on a verb, implying that he has been talking over Hal, continuing his own last sentence: "Praying for just one conversation, amateur or no, that does not end in terror? That does not end like all the others: you staring, me swallowing?" (26). This again echoes the opening scene, where the university administration stares in horror at Hal, afraid he is going to swallow his own tongue. Using Nichols's interpretation of pure sentiment can complicate this scene beyond its most obvious use as a foreshadowing opportunity. J.O.I. tells Hal many things about O.N.A.N., Avril, and the Entertainment which are nonsense to both Hal and first-time readers, like how there is a "priapistic-entertainment cartridge implanted in [Hal's] very own towering father's anaplastic cerebrum" (30). The same rant professes that both Hal and Himself are being dosed with mind-altering drugs by Avril, Avril's involvement with the first known victim of the Entertainment, and a number of strange surgeries which may relate to the extended medical trip J.O.I. takes closer to his death. Even after reading the novel it is impossible to tell if J.O.I. is essentially

[9] J.O.I. stands for James Orin Incandenza, who often goes by his initials or Himself in *Infinite Jest*. The film is *It Was a Great Marvel That He Was in the Father Without Knowing Him*, found in the filmography on page 992.

giving half of the political intrigue plot away, or drunkenly making things up. J.O.I. claims that he wants to have a real conversation with Hal, but instead bombards him with information. In the beginning of the section J.O.I. is revealed to not even know how old Hal is, mistaking him for 14 rather than 10 in a display of either misguided attention or ineptitude. His fear about being unable to connect with Hal is what leads J.O.I. to pour himself into his film work, drawing him away from home and Hal's interests. Hal does speak briefly about his interests in this section, but his tone is snarky even before realising that he has been tricked, and after realising that the conversationalist is J.O.I., he becomes more dismissive. Hal has to be the adult in the situation and ask how his alcoholic father drove up the hill; he has a full and precise schedule to keep (31). After J.O.I. changes the subject from Hal's interest in Byzantine pornography, a conversation which J.O.I. cannot dominate, because he is only faking interest, Hal is silenced. Hal's concerns and protestations are real, if not the raw emotional content that J.O.I. was after. Both are speaking in ways that they consider to be truthful, while simultaneously being bound up in charades, metaphors, and sarcasm. Because it takes place several years before the beginning of the novel, perhaps this scene is meant to show the difficulty in expressing any sort of sentiment, let alone the purest ones Hal attempts later. Like the mould Hal may already be poisoned by, the effects of these failed communications are left to fester and mutate.

The Lynchian

As mentioned earlier, in his piece "Some Remarks on Kafka's Funniness from Which Probably Not Enough Has Been Removed," Wallace states that Kafka's central joke is that "the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle. That our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home"

(64). This belief resonates closely with the themes of another of Wallace's inspirations, David Lynch. It is, after all, the uniquely human feeling of shame which spurs John Merrick to cry out "I am not an animal! I am a human being!" in *The Elephant Man*. Lynch's films regularly explore shame, guilt, and disgust, emotions which occur at uneasy intersections of desire and social expectation. Though all emotions can result in physical affects (such as smiling, wrinkling the nose, etc.) Carl Plantinga points out how disgust is particularly able to meld both bodily and social reactions in *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Plantinga describes both "physical" and "sociomoral" disgust, noting that physical disgust is triggered by things that violate actual bodily integrity (like gruesome violence, putrid food) and social notions of bodily purity (such as miscegenation) (204-205). Both casual film enthusiasts and professionals such as Michel Chabon in *David Lynch* advise that one's first viewing of a Lynch film should privilege opening oneself to such feelings over conscious efforts to figure out the plot, allowing bodily affects and emotions to control the viewing experience.

One can trace the effect Lynch may have had on Wallace through this privileging of affects, as Wallace's work after *Blue Velvet's* release in 1986 shifts from the "coldly cerebral" *Broom of the System* to the nonlinear, image-rich *Infinite Jest* (McCaffery 41).[10] Returning to Kafka, Wallace observes that "The exformative associations Kafka's work creates are not intertextual or even historical. Kafka's evocations are, rather, unconscious and almost sub-archetypal, the little-kid stuff from which myths derive; this is why we tend to call even his weirdest stories *nightmarish* rather than surreal" ("Some Remarks" 62). The same statement could apply to Lynch's work, especially to Wallace's first introduction, *Blue Velvet*. Chris

[10] Wallace recalls his first experience with *Blue Velvet* to the exact day: "30 March 1986, a Wednesday night" ("David Lynch Keeps His Head" 200). *Broom of the System* was published in 1987 and *Girl with Curious Hair* in 1989, but both were mostly written during Wallace's university career. *Infinite Jest* (1996) was the first work to be completely written after 1986, and the stylistic changes are dramatic. *Infinite Jest* also follows *Twin Peaks*, which premiered in 1990.

Rodley writes, “The feelings that excite [Lynch] most are those that approximate the sensations and emotional traces of dreams: the crucial element of the nightmare that is impossible to communicate simply by describing events” (*Lynch on Lynch* IX). Dreams were important in Wallace’s earlier work, such as Rick Vigorous’s dreams in *Broom of the System*, but these dreams tended to feature as contained episodes within more traditionally structured scenes. Wallace heavily praises how “true” Lynch’s confusing, nonlinear stories seem in “David Lynch Keeps His Head,” and his next major work after *Blue Velvet* contains both dream scenes and nonlinear, unexplained, imagistic dream logic (200). Wallace expressed to Charlie Rose in an interview and later in “David Lynch Keeps His Head” that the film became extremely important to his growth as an artist, despite (or because of) his friends leaving the theatre either dazed or revolted to the point of rage (“David Lynch Keeps His Head” 207). *Blue Velvet* does not contain any acts of violence that an American adult could not see today on premium cable television, but these scenes affect the desensitised viewer by accessing primally discomforting imagery. One of the most studied scenes of the film, for example, is a violent rape scene where the antagonist, Frank Booth, refers to his victim Dorothy Valence as “Mommy” and refers to himself as both a baby and “Daddy,” with the audience forced by the camera into a cramped closet with the main character, Jeffrey. Jeffrey’s breath is audible from a mixture of terror and arousal, and the camera angle, mimicking Jeffery’s point of view, places the audience alongside him. Wallace suggests that “Lynch carefully sets up his film both so that we feel a/f/w[11] Jeffrey and so that we (I, anyway) find some parts of the sadism and degeneracy he witnesses compelling and somehow erotic” (“David Lynch Keeps His Head” 167). The rape scene is made initially repulsive (but not un-fascinating) by the allusions to the Freudian primal scene, but the full emotional power of it is not compounded until the climax of the film where the audience is again forced into Jeffrey’s

[11] “About/with/for” (“David Lynch Keeps His Head” 167).

perspective and Frank tells both Jeffrey and the audience "You're like me." Jeffrey punches Frank in the face for this accusation, but the audience cannot do anything but ruminate on the line with "no such luxury of violent release" ("David Lynch Keeps His Head" 207).

Wallace's friends referred to Frank's accusation afterward as "possibly the creepiest and least pleasant moment in their personal moviegoing histories" (207). Plantinga theorises that "[Direct emotions] may be followed by a meta-emotion that we might call a species of pride, in which the spectator self-satisfyingly judges him or herself to be the kind of person who responds negatively to villainy or injustice" (182). When viewers are unable to place themselves in a position to judge the villain (in this case, by enjoying Dorothy's abuse on some level), the audience may be left frustrated and disturbed. This disorientation is made worse by the lingering sense of sociomoral disgust felt toward the roleplayed incest, which cannot now be satisfied (and therefore dissolved) by clear rejection of Frank. Lynch's ability to inspire and manipulate negative feelings which outlive a 90-minute runtime is his artistic specialty. Wallace was enamoured of the unsubtlety and force of Lynch's affects, remarking that part of the discomfort Lynch inflicts is due to his insistence on showing disturbing/fascinating content "sincerely, without postmodernism's abstraction or irony" ("Lynch Keeps His Head" 197). Lynch may be one of the "born oglers" that Wallace would go on to champion in "E Unibus Plurum," those who are "Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naïve, anachronistic" who would use their own unflinching looks to communicate plainly with others (192-193). Wallace's description of these "anti-rebels" seems superficially more cheerful than many perceive Lynch's work to be, but Wallace associates them with banality – something which is inseparable from the Lynchian.

"The Lynchian" is a term which can be used to describe how Lynch is able to sincerely offer his audience disgust, shame, and morbid curiosity in a way which differs from obviously

manufactured horror. "The Lynchian" is essentially a version of the uncanny which uses repetition, lingering, and obliviousness as well as grotesque visuals and sounds to induce horror and dread. Wallace describes it as "the idea of the unbelievably grotesque coinciding with the unbelievably banal…" (*Charlie Rose*). In "David Lynch Keeps His Head," the definition appears as "a particular kind of irony where the very macabre and the very mundane combine in such a way as to reveal the former's perpetual containment in the latter" (161). Lynch's work features many homely, familiar scenes, with one element unavoidably and uncomfortably twisted.[12] Lynch's tendency towards long takes on obviously disturbing content can manifest discomfort, but the repetition of short glimpses is also used. In "David Lynch Keeps His Head," Wallace stresses the importance of repetition to create a Lynchian effect. To create a Lynchian effect, something which may have been strange or surprising once has to be repeated or lingered on until well past where the audience gets the point. For example, "a sudden grotesque facial expression won't qualify as a really Lynchian facial expression unless the expression is held for several moments longer than the circumstances could even possibly warrant, is just held there, fixed and grotesque, until it starts to signify about seventeen different things at once" ("David Lynch Keeps His Head" 162-163). If the situation is remarked on, it is in a way which only creates more confusion and dread in the audience. A clever remark about a character "not seeming like themselves" after swapping actors is a joke once, but "with repetition stops being an arch pun and becomes truly frightening" (158). The strange event cannot be explained, which separates the weirdness in a Lynch film from magical realism, where similar events may be odd

[12] Wallace's example is a pair of policemen talking about peanut butter at the scene of a domestic murder, or Jeffrey Dahmer keeping heads in his refrigerator next to regular food products ("David Lynch Keeps His Head 161-162).

but are either already familiar within the diegesis or soon become so.[13] In Lynch's films strange happenings or appearances are not accepted so much as wilfully ignored, while simultaneously the camera forces the audience to stare. The uncomfortable lingering triggers something like semantic satiation, defamiliarising the familiar. Semantic satiation is the phenomenon where repetition or prolonged concentration on a word or phrase alters the perception of the reader/listener so that it loses its actual meaning and becomes meaningless runes/noises. So even if the Lynchian event in question is something fairly normal, like an insect or naked woman, it becomes confusing and mysterious. The use of repetition is prominent in Wallace's work as well, and *Infinite Jest* utilises unexplained moments of harmless weirdness (such as Lyle casually floating above a towel rack) as well as brief, horrifying, unexplained images such as the nightmarish Face in the Floor.

Lynch's camera acts as a proxy for the eyes of the audience, and his insistence on prolonged, static (and so stare-like) shots of deformity and similar strangeness goes against the upbringing of people who know it is impolite to stare. Plantinga's examination of the pleasure of horror films can be applied here, to a degree: "It is the narrative itself that holds our interest and provides pleasure by eliciting and satisfying a direct emotion, that is, a curiosity about the nature of a seemingly impossible and unknown being, the monster [. . .] Disgust and fear are the price spectators are willing to pay for the experience of a particularly intense form of curiosity" (180). Lynch's camera satisfies the viewer's voyeuristic enjoyment of physical difference, suffering, and/or sexuality, but remains focused on the subject until the audience not only remembers that they should not enjoy these things, but actively desire escape from them. Like shoving the viewer into Jeffrey's perspective during Dorothy's rape in *Blue Velvet* or implicating the

[13] Wallace was a fan of the magical realist/horror author Borges, and there is a sense of magical realism in his work. Please see Lucas Thompson's *Global Wallace* for more on Borges and Wallace, or Stephen J. Burn's *A Reader's Guide to Infinite Jest* for a reading of the Eschaton game through "Of Exactitude in Science" by Borges.

audience in John Merrick's exhibition in *The Elephant Man*, the inability of a camera to replicate the human affect of blinking shut or reflexively turning away creates discomfort. In *Cooking with Mud*, David Trotter says that nausea, the physical manifestation of disgust, "is fascination's limit, the point at which it becomes aware of itself in its own excess" (211). Plantinga's observation implies that there is an unspoken contract between viewer and filmmaker stating that the negative emotions induced by the grotesque will be secondary to the positive satisfaction of curiosity. Plantinga states that viewers generally only complete the more extreme rejecting actions of disgust by leaving the theater or turning off the film in "strong cases," because viewers inherently trust filmmakers to assuage and justify their discomfort by removing the disgusting object in a satisfactory conclusion (212). In Lynch's work, the audience must realise that they have misunderstood the situation – film "dominates" the viewer, and the artist is not obligated to make this escapist surrender entirely comfortable ("David Lynch Keeps His Head" 169). This combines with the fact that very little is actually explained in a David Lynch film in order to justify these exploitative looks, deepening the sense of dread and uncertainty. The final effect is similar to a nightmare, where one is totally defenceless – one cannot predict what a nightmare "wants" from you, you cannot control its narrative or sensory experience, and its events are largely unexplainable.

One can see the relationship with Wallace's work, populated by strange forms, burdened by uncomfortably detailed descriptions, and often stopping short of a traditional ending. One example these strange forms is Wallace's description of depression in *Infinite Jest*, which is a tremendous, billowing, vaguely triangular shape which threatens to pass over one's life like the shadow of an ominous sail. A very similar shape passes over Agent Dale Cooper as he confronts the ghost of Laura Palmer in the Red Room in Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (see fig. 1). Though Lynch is

well known for unexplained strangeness in his film work, *Twin Peaks* was made for a general television audience and tends to have more explanation, but the ominous shape in the Red Room was never explained in-universe.[14] The only thing that is clear about the shape is that it is somehow connected to the spirit BOB, which represents absolute evil, and which both produces and feeds off of human suffering and pain in an annular cycle. When comparing experiences with the mysterious shape in *Infinite Jest*, Geoffrey Day tells Kate Gompert "I understood what people meant by hell. They did not mean the black sail. They meant the associated feelings" (651). Beyond this conversation the black shape is only mentioned once more, but images of billowing (curtains, coats, blankets, etc.) occur often throughout the novel. One of the most relevant references concerns Randy Lenz, who wears a billowing coat and traps small animals in a billowing plastic trash bag in order to either suffocate or beat them to death.[15] Lenz is absolutely vile, and his animal cruelty would have been a mark of evil for a well-known dog-lover like Wallace. In fact, it is killing a dog with a blade which provokes the discovery of Lenz's behavior, and ultimately lands Gately in the hospital. The smaller creatures were caught, killed, and disposed of within the confines of the bag. From Day and Gompert's conversation, one can interpret that the shape's presence promises that the depressed person will suffer terribly and invisibly. Human interaction seems to make the shape temporarily disappear in *Infinite Jest*, but once the reader has noticed it, it is difficult to ignore in almost every section.[16]

---

[14] This is not to say that everything in *Twin Peaks* is totally clear, but some vague explanation is usually offered. For example, Nadine's superhuman strength is clearly brought out by a traumatic head injury. Why a head injury would result in feats of strength is not outlined, but the basic connection between the two is present. Alternatively, the shape in the red room is not acknowledged in any way, ever.

[15] This may be another *Twin Peaks* reference, as the same episode reveals that BOB uses a "deathbag" on his victims (Episode 2). (Laura Palmer's corpse is found wrapped in plastic.) Lenz also briefly alters his methods to setting cats on fire, which ends when a flaming cat chases him, perhaps as a joking nod to BOB's famous "Do you want to play with fire, little boy?" line (*Twin Peaks* Episode 2).

[16] The word "billow" or "billowing" occurs 30 times, with a concentrated eight uses during Day and Gompert's conversation, but the rest spread out quite evenly through the whole novel.

Fig. 1: The Red Room, upper right corner (Lynch *Twin Peaks: Episode Two).*

Some fan articles and websites for *Twin Peaks* theorise that the shape is meant to be an owl, a symbol which is connected with the Black Lodge and BOB.[17] Wallace's black shape is also sometimes described as "wing rising inside" the afflicted, again connecting the impending misery of major depressive disorder with Lynch's symbol of evil and pain (*IJ* 651). Wallace also describes withdrawal in avian terms, such as "the Old Cold Bird," "Cold Turkey," etc. Wallace clearly did not invent the term "Cold Turkey," but it is thematically appropriate, and the other bird-themed euphemisms do seem to be unique to *Infinite Jest*. Additionally, this bird is also described as wingless in Poor Tony Krause's withdrawal scene: "a shape above and apart, a huge, musty-feathered, orange-eyed wingless fowl" which perched atop the stall and spoke "the

[17] The Black Lodge is the home of malevolent spirits like BOB. The Red Room in which the strange shape appears is apparently a Purgatory-type place which connects the Black (evil) and White (good) Lodges.

same things, over and over. They were unrepeatable" (*IJ* 302). The orange eyes, to me, suggest an owl. In a scene which uses similar language of sexual assault as Poor Tony's ravaging by Withdrawal, Leland sobs that BOB propositioned him as a child, then "he opened me, and I invited him in, and he came inside me," and describes his own abuse and the cyclical abuse he inflicts on Laura as "he made me do things" (*Twin Peaks* Episode 16). Wallace reads Lynch's "fetish for floating/flying entities" as "the whole point of these animals is that they're mobile" ("David Lynch Keeps His Head" 204). This may indicate that withdrawal is more constant threat, it does not possess the mobility to disappear and reappear, it is constantly haunting addicts. The image of a wingless bird is also connected to Orin, who appears early on in the novel dressed as a bird, being forced to glide through the air on fake wings by his football team, the Cardinals (*IJ* 65-66). When he is rejected by Helen Steeply and feels he has gone too long without a sexual partner, Orin remarks that he feels like he is at a precipice "without even idiotic red wings," so he is a wingless bird, evoking withdrawal even though Orin does not self-identify as a sex addict (*IJ* 483).

Bird imagery is also used to describe Delores Rusk: "E.T.A.'s staff counselor is the bird-of-preyfaced Dr. Dolores Rusk, M.S., Ph.D., and she's regarded by the kids as whatever's just slightly worse than useless" (*IJ* 371-372). Rusk is meant to help the students cope with the varying and obvious issues they all have with their insane mental and physical demands, so her uselessness is actually harmful. Other mental help professionals are portrayed as similarly useless in *Infinite Jest*: the psychiatrist Hal sees after his father's death only wants to see Hal move through the textbook 5 Stages of Grief, counsellor-led group therapy produces hideous man-babies, etc. When official sources of mental help are, like BOB, just people voyeuristically feeding off pain and humiliation, those who are suffering turn to addictive substances and

practices. The only effective sources of mental help seem to be A.A., which is peer-led, and Lyle, who represents Eastern forms of stress management such as meditation and yoga. Gately turns to an even more granular version of the A.A. dictum to contend with the suffering represented by The Bird when suffering from his most abrupt and final withdrawal: "An endless Now stretching its gull-wings out on either side of his heartbeat. And he'd never before or since felt so excruciatingly alive [. . .] A whole day at a crack seemed like tit, when he Came In.[18] For he had Abided With The Bird" (722). Gately is forced to live by the second again when he is recovering from a gunshot wound without pain medication and "tries to imagine what kind of impossible leap it would take to live that way all the time, by choice, straight" (722). His questioning is juxtaposed with Joelle Van Dyne discovering that she can function one day at a time, and by supporting her progress, Gately realises that soberly living by the moment is actually possible for him. The recurring theme seems to be that the most real, helpful advice comes from people who are empathetic peers, rather than professionals; and the Kafkaesque notion that people must accept that suffering is not only part of the human experience, but a method of self-production.

Lynch, Wallace, and Race

Another commonality between Wallace and Lynch is the demographics of their main characters. One of the most common criticisms of Wallace's work is that he tends to focus on the lived experience of heterosexual, white, able-bodied men and boys. Other figures do populate his work, but they tend not to have point-of-view experiences, and the few that do are generally stereotypical or problematic in other ways. Examples include the gay characters from *Infinite*

[18] Referring to "Coming In" to A.A. and their slogan/philosophy of taking recovery "a day at a time."

Jest and “Little Expressionless Animals”; and Clenette Henderson of *Infinite Jest*, “so black she's got a bluish cast,” (527) who speaks in an attempt at A.A.V.E. dialect, comes from a dysfunctional home, is a drug addict, was pregnant before 18, steals from E.T.A. trash, and is one of the only women to get involved in a physical fight (the other woman is also African American) and they kill a man “getting the shit stomped out of him as only female [n-----s] can stomp” on page 827. When writing about actual people Wallace does seem more respectful, for instance including a section called “Entitlement” in his and Mark Costello’s short book *Signifying Rappers*, which acknowledged that both authors were white and their interest in rap was enthusiastically, uncomfortably, touristic. Like Wallace’s other nonfiction short book, *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity*, the piece was more concerned with enthusiasm and fondness for a topic rather than mastery of it, both works having multiple, easily checked errors. Music critic Robert Christgau’s review for *Village Voice* points out that Wallace and Costello’s discography omits an entire Run-DMC album. He also sardonically wonders, “Costello says his ‘favorite rap ever’ is an ‘untraceable 5-minute cut’ he taped off the radio with an ‘inscrutable chorus’ about a ‘Honeychild.’ Er, that wouldn't be Ice-T's ‘The Hunted Child,’ would it? B side of ‘High Rollers,’ later on *Freedom of Speech*? Nah, it's his favorite. Surely he cares too much to have missed anything so obvious” (Web). Christgau is specifically poking at Costello here, but both authors are responsible for the conclusion. So Wallace’s only piece of work which speaks about race openly risks coming across as somewhat disingenuous, or perhaps just careless, when a perfectionist like Wallace was not bothered to check if important lyrics were correct. Again, *Everything and More* was also printed with errors, but the account of its publishing in *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* is much more detailed about the back-and-forth edits made to try to correct them (Max 274). Wallace was extremely interested in mathematics

but did only take undergraduate level courses, and the book had a scheduled publishing date as part of a series, so these errors are understandable. Max's coverage of *Signifying Rappers* is less detailed, but the book seems to have been written mostly for fun with a friend, and was not as rushed to print.

Wallace did not discuss the casual treatment of race in his non-fiction work and near-lack of it in his fiction, and the common interpretation seems similar to Clare Hayes-Brady's explanation of why Wallace avoids representing women. Essentially, their experience is so alien to Wallace's own that it would be inappropriate for him to even try, though Wallace's characters of colour do not radiate power and influence from the periphery the same way that Hayes-Brady argues that his female characters do ("'…': Language, Gender, and Modes of Power in the Work of David Foster Wallace" 136). Avril, Amber Moltke, even Helen Steeply are all either (or both) powerful, femme fatale knockouts or all-consuming archaic mothers when filtered through the eyes and words of male characters, but people of colour remain mostly as figurants.[19] In her later book, *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace*, Hayes-Brady specifically addressed Wallace's interests and concerns in rap music as being potentially based in in/out-group positioning (169). In "Authority and American Usage," Wallace describes a hypothetical scenario where he, "resoundingly and in all ways white," approaches "two hard-core young urban black guys" and addresses them in what he calls "Young Urban Black English" (102). He assumes "Either these guys are going to think that I am mocking them and be offended or they are going to think that I am simply out of my mind. No other reaction is remotely foreseeable," which is obviously debatable. Wallace notes the age and geographical origin of the youths, but

[19] Explained by J.O.I. as his biggest fear for Hal, a figurant is an extra who is hired to mouth words in a crowded scene behind the lead actors. They mouth words so that the scripted dialogue can be heard clearly. J.O.I. refused to use them in his work, leading to a cacophony of unrelated voices which one can relate to the seemingly random sections of *Infinite Jest*.

the contrast of himself as simply "white" implies where he assumes the tension arises, his own whiteness vs. their blackness. Moments like this contribute to the widespread reading of Wallace as anti-intersectional, and it is understandable why. Wallace's age, apparent economic status, and thick Midwestern accent might all contribute to usage of the word "Yo" seeming out of place beyond being "in all ways white," and most social situations could foreseeably conjure more than two reactions (102). As Hayes-Brady suggests regarding Wallace's feelings on rap, he seems concerned that A.A.V.E. may be a kind of "closed system," which is uncomfortably unavailable to him (*Unspeakable Failures* 169).

I suggest that in addition to current readings of Wallace's treatment of race, we consider his reading of Lynch's mostly-white filmography as a subtle explanation of his own avoidance. Curiously, Wallace seems quite aware of disproportionate whiteness in David Lynch's work. He spends an entire section in "David Lynch Keeps His Head" wondering "has there ever been even like *one* black person in a David Lynch movie? There've been plenty of dwarves and amputees and spastics and psychotics, but have there been any other, more shall we say culturally significant minorities?" without the slightest acknowledgment that the same could be said about his own work (189).[20] By raising the question about Lynch, Wallace is able to provide an answer to the unspoken comparison to his own writing:

> Lynch's movies are essentially apolitical. Let's face it: get white people and black people together on the screen and there's going to be an automatic political voltage [. . .] And Lynch's films are in no way about ethnic or cultural or political tensions. The films are all about tensions, but these tensions are always in and between individuals. (189-190)

[20] Almost as a wilful display of cluelessness, Wallace ends the thought referring to Josie Packard from *Twin Peaks* as "that sultry oriental sawmill owner [whose] ethnicity was, to say the least, overshadowed by her sultriness" (189). In addition to the obviously offensive terminology, Josie's specifically Chinese origin was a major plot element in season two.

Similarly, Wallace's work tends to portray intimate interactions between or within individuals, even when they commenting on larger systems, and perhaps he felt that adding race politics (no matter how implicitly) would have served as a distraction from the universality of issues he was hoping to focus on like boredom, communication, and dis/satisfaction. His regular calls for community action and involvement would have (rightly) been immensely complicated by questions of institutionalised racism, ableism, and misogyny. However, while the reader may understand being unable to fully answer questions of difference in Wallace's short stories in the same way Lynch's racial erasure may be ignored for a two hour film, this understanding evaporates regarding *Infinite Jest*. Politics constantly inform its plot in implicit and explicit ways; the plot strands are held together by the political struggle for the master Entertainment tape. The novel features international, domestic, and environmental policy-making, terrorism and counter-terrorism, and government/societal failure to deal with mental health crises, abuse of children, poverty, and the War on Drugs. It is more suspicious that the novel does not even attempt to deal with racial issues; the problems which Clenette, Poor Tony, and other marginalised characters experience are ascribed to one or more of the aforementioned problems rather than examined intersectionally. While Wallace's intent was likely not malicious, it is ironic that his attempts to stay out of conversations he may not have felt qualified to take part in undermines his own community-driven message by reducing those most in need of empathy to objects and figurants. Individuals like Clenette and Poor Tony are treated painfully simply in Wallace's fiction, and the difference between comedic and tragic moments is often only how explicitly Wallace reminds the audience that they are viewed as trash. These characters are not just queer or black but also desperately poor, further marking them as detritus to mainstream society. A mostly white, cisgendered, educated audience might laugh at Clenette's general

"ghetto" characterisation and Poor Tony's cheap wig because they are often described as caricatures, not people. If they are afforded some compassion by the reader, it is mostly a result of the explicit torture of their bodies, such as Poor Tony's withdrawal or Wardine's back which has "pink stripes and around the stripes the skin like the skin on folks lips" from being beaten with a metal clothes hanger as punishment for suffering sexual assault (*IJ* 37). Clenette remarks that Wardine's injuries make her "sick down in [her] insides to look at," and the reader may agree. However, when their bodies are not actively in pain, compassion can be harder to come by.

Wallace also fails to plainly identify the perspectives that he is qualified to write as their own unique experience. Mark McGurl writes that Wallace's writing style reads as a "paradoxically nonethnic ethnicity, or technicity" in "The Institution of Nothing: David Foster Wallace in the Program" (44). Hayes-Brady observes that "his protagonists are not simply white, they are rather without ethnic identifiers," and "while Wallace envisaged some of his peripheral characters as nonwhite, their race existed mostly as a linguistic context" which is "problematically rendered" (*Unspeakable Failures* 170, 171). Edward Jackson and Joel Nicholson-Roberts's "White Guys: Questioning *Infinite Jest's* New Sincerity" takes a harder stance against Wallace's portrayal of race, arguing that *Infinite Jest* in particular "presents as universal an experience that it in fact implicitly codes as white and male," while either silencing or assimilating accounts of lived experience by its black and female side characters (2). Jackson and Nicholson-Roberts's overall argument is based in what Adam Kelly describes as a misreading of his original "New Sincerity" essay, but regardless their close readings of the A.A. scenes in *Infinite Jest* note subtle details that do appear to erase the subjective lived experiences

of marginalised people.[21] A particularly strong reading is made about a scene where Joelle overcomes her annoyance over the black-coded verbal and gestural expressions of a speaker she constantly refers to as "colored" (*IJ* 710). "Seemingly, beyond one's prejudices is identification with the universal, loveless suffering of addiction," they write, identifying a problematic but perhaps well-intentioned point to the scene (Jackson, Nicholson-Roberts, Web). The issue which immediately arises is that in order to show the reader how universal the pain of addiction or honest storytelling is, Wallace exaggerates other differences. The "chasm" Wallace describes as existing between cultures must, to him, appear humongous in order for its bridging to be impressive (Schechner 108). However, additional details spoil assumptions of good intent – Jackson and Nicholson-Roberts note that the man works for "Universal Bleacher," which combines with his description as "colored" to "suitably demonstrate the violent process of 'bleaching' that he must undergo in order to access the 'universal' realm of subjectivity" (22). As Joelle grants the speaker her empathy, his "face has lost its color, shape, everything distinctive" (*IJ* 710). The existence and popularity of skin bleaching products in actual life deepens an already troubling metaphor, enforcing an ugly cultural tradition where black bodies must undergo physically and/or emotionally painful change in order to be deemed deserving of recognition as human. Taken in conjunction with Wardine's mutilation, her dark skin split to reveal the lightness underneath, we can see a troubling pattern.

Again, we can borrow one of Hayes-Brady's explanations of Wallace's gender relationships, proposing that racially different voices: "enact a powerful dynamic struggle between Self and Other whose conflict cannot be resolved but must instead be accommodated" (132). There is space for racially different characters to peripherally exist in Wallace's work, and

[21] Please see Kelly's response in "David Foster Wallace and New Sincerity Aesthetics: A Reply to Edward Jackson and Joel Nicholson-Roberts" for his address toward the theoretical elements.

there is space for discussion about intersectional issues of race, gender, and class, but ultimately there is no attempt at resolution. Hayes-Brady understands Wallace's gender relationships as basically a Hegelian master/slave dialectic, where the dominant group's position only exists because of the existence of the oppressed group, thus according a modicum of power to the oppressed group. Hayes-Brady uses this position to examine the ways in which this dialectic renders masculinity fragile, and her argument could be extended to any in/outgroup. His misogynist language "is based in instability, in which the feminine functions as a stabilizing Other for the masculine Self" ("[. . .]" 134). Wallace's white, heterosexual, able-bodied men are formed by abjection, defining themselves by what they are not: "you (human), but not you (male/heterosexual/able/white)." This view brings up one of the fundamental issues with Wallace's presentation of apolitical universality. There are extremely broad concepts and experiences which are universal (such as death), but each one is experienced differently by different people. Wallace and Lynch both present whiteness as the default, neutral experience. In this view, a situation between two white people is not inherently political; it is only the addition of people of colour which makes things sticky. This of course ignores all gender and body politics, while diverting the discomfort of racial strife away from the group that, in American history, caused most of the issues. It is simply not true that heterosexual white men only have a sexual orientation, race, or gender when Others are physically present. While Wallace may have said that the issues he tackled were meant to be universal, the difference in the way in which he attempts to write women and people of colour belies those claims.

However, while the subjectivity that Wallace presents as universal may be actually coded as specifically white (and generally male), it is still academically relevant. Olivia Banner, for example, provides a sympathetic examination of "wounded white masculinity" in Wallace's

work; a fragile masculinity which is riddled with fear of replacement and obsolescence ("'They're literally shit': Masculinity and the Work of Art in an Age of Waste Recycling" Web).[22] This essay positions Wallace's engagement with toxic/fragile masculinity as interesting and important, but it is not the sort of universal that Wallace seems to want to engage with. Lucas Thompson suggests that Wallace's use of coarse language, such as Joelle and Gately's repeated use of slurs, "has the potential to show how various white internal voices can incorporate reflexive racist assumptions into their own self-narration" (208). That these characters can speak this way and still be characterised as basically good or relatable overall shows how "the self is imprisoned within structures and systems of various kinds, as well as the impossibility of ever escaping those systems" (Thompson 208). While Joelle and Gately may be making strides to connect with people from different backgrounds and races than their own, they are working from a place of structural separation. Wallace writes that Lynch's characters are "essentially alone (Alone): they're alienated from pretty much everything except the particular obsessions they've developed to help ease their alienation," which can be traced onto the obsessive characters of *Infinite Jest*.

The subject of race in David Foster Wallace's work has become an increasingly popular subject, and the volatility of the matter ensures that it will likely be a point of heated discussion for the foreseeable future. Although nothing definitive can be said, I believe looking to how Wallace explains the work of a similar artist can add to this conversation. In this dissertation, Wallace's labelling of certain bodies as inherently apolitical is pertinent because it necessarily places the political as an external force, which includes the existence of certain categories of

[22] Banner focuses mostly on these fears in the context of men vs. women, acknowledging but not fully engaging with the "white" portion of her descriptor. Though there is not the space to fully explore it here, one cannot avoid the very dark implications of these fears in a contemporary racial context, especially when the current slogan of American Nazism is "You will not replace us" (Lithwick, "You Will Not Replace Us," *Slate*).

people. This positioning Others these marginalised groups, intentionally or not. If David Lynch has contributed to diversity in Wallace's work in any way, it can be seen in the array of non-normate bodies that populate his fiction. Wallace's fiction also contains an array of "dwarves and amputees and spastics and psychotics," which future chapters will argue employs the same reliance on narrative prosthesis that Lynch does ("David Lynch Keeps His Head" 183). Beyond the treatment of race, David Lynch and Franz Kafka both contribute major themes and motifs to Wallace's work, including alienation, disgust, and horror. Both authors often feature bodies in excruciating pain, or undergoing a gauntlet of degradations. All of these elements feature into the recurring importance of the grotesque in Wallace's work. In particular, they characterise the body and the environments they attempt to navigate as potential sites of unfamiliarity and danger. In the next chapter, The Body and the Environment, I hope to clearly show how these grotesque motifs and visual themes are used to both humanise and defamiliarise the physical environment.

Chapter 3: The Body and the Environment

Now that I have examined two of Wallace's more widely influential inspirations from the world outside his writing, I will examine the first of several complex systems which Wallace explores within *Infinite Jest* and other written work. In looking at how Wallace portrays the environment and the bodies that inhabit it, I draw from aspects of biology, physics, mathematics, history, and environmental criticism as well as literary theory and current Wallace scholarship. As this wide range of topics may suggest, Wallace creates a body and environment whose relationship is inextricable from every aspect of life. Bodies are always treated as parts of systems in Wallace's work, and the environment is the largest of these systems. It contains multiple subsystems within it, such one's orientation within geographic space and geological time, and introduces the individual's relationship with their nation. Wallace's engagement with the environment as a topic is not necessarily new to Wallace Studies – before now we have seen pieces such as Katherine Hayles's "The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and *Infinite Jest*," Heather Houser's "*Infinite Jest*'s Environmental Case for Disgust," Graham Foster's "A Blasted Region: David Foster Wallace's Man-Made Landscapes," and Paul Quinn's "'Location's Location': Placing David Foster Wallace." While many of these works do mention human bodies or the anatomical composition of many of Wallace's landscapes, I believe that the enmeshed, mutually-affecting relationship that Wallace portrays between the body and environment can be drawn out further. As I will argue, the ways that the environment and body may act upon each other can be seen in the prevalence of deformity and toxicity in both the human body and environment. Hayles's focus on recursivity and Houser's importance on disgust are the most influential upon my readings,

and I hope to add on to their work by offering new disciplinary lenses with which to view these themes.

In Wallace's fiction, the human body and the environment are both presented as complex conglomerations of macro and microsystems, sites for interactivity which can be both consciously and unconsciously influenced. While both systems can still be viewed independently to some degree, Wallace's work confuses boundaries between the individual human body and the contemporary environment. In "Termite Art, or Wallace's Wittgenstein," Lance Olsen playfully proposes *The Broom of the System* might be renamed "*Confusion of the system*" because of this tendency toward muddiness, including systems "of language, of meaning, of identity, of narrative, of reality, of, well, you name it" (209). For now, I would like to focus on the confusion of the environment and the human body's place within it. The body and the environment that it is enmeshed in are constantly shifting and mutating in tandem in *Infinite Jest* and *The Broom of the System*. As mutation and toxicity enters one system, they seep into the porous boundaries of the other. By adding fuel (which in Wallace's case is often trash and poison) into the system, it expands and amplifies this osmosis until the lines between each is blurred.[23] I aim to show how this osmosis functions in Wallace's writing, and to study how porosity, toxicity, and mutation are often shown materially in the non-normate human body. Unlike chemical osmosis, which would halt once both components reached equilibrium, Wallace's body/environment interplay more closely resembles a recursive loop. A recursive loop is a mathematical phenomenon where the by-products of a process can be used to feed that same or a connected process to produce a cannibalistic loop. Like a fractal or Fibonacci sequence, the

[23] Osmosis is basically the process by which a solvent in a highly concentrated area passes through a semi-permeable membrane toward an area of low solvent concentration. An example would be fingers pruning in a pool, where water (a solvent) crosses semi-permeable human skin from an area of high concentration (the pool) to an area of lower concentration (the human body), resulting in bloating.

system grows exponentially, compiling mutagens until both bodies and the environment are monstrous. While fractals and other systems can be beautiful in nature and in art, there is a trace of the uncanny in how Wallace deploys these repetitions. As we have examined in the previous chapter, Wallace adopts the Lynchian idea that sustained repetition "stops being an arch pun and becomes truly frightening," which adds a layer of dread to the sheer volume of deformities and echoing references ("David Lynch Keeps His Head," 158). Wallace's "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way" is an early example of Wallace's experiments with metafictional techniques, including elements of recursion such as mixed references, nonlinear time, and layered narrative. He referred to the story later as an example of "the kind of pretentious loops you fall into now if you fuck around with recursion" (McCaffery 142).[24] Recursion is especially prevalent in *Infinite Jest*, but this chapter will also examine relationships between the human body and the environment in works such as *The Broom of the System*.

While not the focus of his essay "David Foster Wallace and the Ethical Challenge of Posthumanism," Wilson Kaiser makes a concise observation about the connection between body and environment, which this chapter aims to expand upon:

> *Infinite Jest* houses an almost unlimited number of contact points, physical places, like the Ennet Drug and Alcohol Recovery House or the Enfield Tennis Academy, that become relational spaces in which diverse experiential webs are woven and find uneven edges of contact. At the same time, the *Umwelten* of Wallace's characters transform their bodies in important ways: the drug addicts bear the physical and psychological effects of their addictions; the tennis players develop disproportionate bodies from overpractice; the Assassins are connected by their amputations. In fact, it is difficult to locate normative

[24] See Hayes-Brady's *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace* for more on this short story and metafiction.

> bodies in Wallace's fiction, because they are each transformed by the perceptual circuits they develop with the specific environments they inhabit. (60)

Katherine Hayles explores the imagery of circuitry as well as the joined concepts of environment and recursion in "The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and *Infinite Jest*," but she does not mention specific types of mathematical recursive phenomena, as it focuses on a computer science approach. Her essay presents the paradox of civilization and wilderness being fundamentally incompatible while coproducing each other, and moves on to discuss social connective frameworks. Hayles attacks "the fetishizing of autonomy" by stressing the complex and interconnecting nature of our modern existence, both in regards to the environment and interpersonal relations. Hayles focuses mostly on explaining a computer program that uses a hive mind-type AI with reinforceable behaviour, which, while incredibly helpful when considering the natural/philosophical notion of the rhizome, is less concretely applicable to Wallace than mathematical theory.[25]

Relating directly to the junior tennis focus of *Infinite Jest*, Wallace credited much of his own adolescent tennis success to understanding his environment in mathematical terms; most plainly in the essay "Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley," where he reveres the wind by which "Midwestern life is informed and deformed" (5).[26] In this essay, Wallace describes how he came to understand the flat Midwest as a plane, and how the flatness of the landscape allowed wind to pass over long distances with astonishing speed and power.[27] Wallace's familiarity with the wind

---

[25] Wallace's lifelong interest in maths is well-documented beyond his tennis capabilities; one of his B.A. degrees was in Philosophy concentrating on modal logic and number theory (culminating in the capstone project "Fate, Time, and Language: An Essay on Free Will"), and he published a pop maths book titled *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity*.

[26] Analysis of Wallace's uniquely Midwestern attachments can be found in Paul Quinn's "Location's Location: Placing David Foster Wallace."

[27] Wallace claims in this essay that he was once lifted off the ground and carried halfway across the court by the fierce wind. D.T. Max follows this claim by quoting Amy Wallace saying "We quietly agreed that his nonfiction was

allowed him to mentally graph the flight of a tennis ball to his athletic advantage, and he was equally as amazed by the wind's sudden and disastrous formation of tornadoes. Beyond Wallace's writing and personal tennis theory, recursive phenomena are abundant in nature, which strengthens Wallace's application in fiction. Fractals and Fibonacci sequences are both regularly observed in plant life, such as the geographically unnatural tropical flora that grows lushly in irradiated Canada in *Infinite Jest,* or the cacti transplanted into the manmade desert in *The Broom of the System*.[28] The fractal Wallace mentioned by name in connection with *Infinite Jest* is the Sierpinski Gasket, which is a pyramidal fractal which relies on inversion and negative space for its shape and intricate design (Silverblatt 01:54). The Sierpinski Gasket contains two kinds of infinity, as the primary triangle contains an infinitely large amount of triangles that range to infinitely small in size. The Sierpinski Gasket also resembles a book in that it has a containing boundary, like a book's covers, but inside the content reproduces infinitely in a process of exformation. Hayles's analogy to hive mind AI and stress on interconnectivity is helpful in understanding this concept, where every reference (especially pop culture) blossoms into a cloud of associations, which can be more deeply researched individually, in perpetuity. Though Hayles does not mention it, the Sierpinski Gasket and *Infinite Jest*'s web of connections also fits into Wallace's Derridean framework, giving geometric shape to the concept of slippage. Each word on the text can be associated with many things, and Wallace's work depends on meanings slipping into and around each other in the reader's mind. This is clear in the amount of

---

fanciful and his fiction was what you had to look out for." This is one example of many in Max's biography, which reinforces the theme that Wallace's nonfiction was often greatly exaggerated or totally invented (318).

[28] A Fibonacci sequence is a string of numbers where the next number in the sequence is derived from adding the two numbers preceding it (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13…). In nature, it can be found in the way leaves grow on some plants, the petals of flowers, or the "scales" on pine cones and pineapples. The Fibonacci sequence can also be translated into a Fibonacci spiral, which in film is known as "the golden ratio" for shot composition. The Fibonacci spiral resembles a nautilus shell, and mimics the way that the eye travels over a frame, so shots that can have the Fibonacci spiral neatly traced over it are naturally pleasing to the eye. While it is never mentioned in the novel, James Incandenza from *Infinite Jest* came from a physics/mathematics background, and likely utilized the Fibonacci spiral in the lethally pleasing film the novel is named for.

abbreviations used which are also relevant words, such as O.N.A.N. (Organization of North American Nations) and Onan (the biblical character and source of onanism). The text presents its own mimesis of the reader's neurons firing with the endnotes, which spring off certain words and phrases into associative anecdotes or definitions, which sometimes branch off into footnotes just as the endnotes inspire more connections in the reader's mind. These fractals represent an orderly natural world which can be accurately predicted and reproduced, as long as one knows the proper formula. However, these phenomena can also be mangled or made wild by human intervention, and natural recursivity takes on the characteristics of tumorous growth.

Environment as Twisted Body

The environment of Wallace's fiction may exemplify several cold mathematical concepts, but the environment can also take on human attributes, especially in urban environments. Heather Houser observes that "as social norms, values, and symbols sediment in built spaces and are taken up by the bodies that move through them, cities take on the evolving forms and norms of the human body" (129). Several of the key settings in Wallace's work are personified, such as Enfield Tennis Academy in *Infinite Jest* and the call centre where Lenore Beadsman works in *The Broom of the System*. They contain venous pipes, cables, and tunnels, and are often described as twisted in both the literal and metaphorical sense. Houser's statement recalls imagery of human sediment building up in the environment like cholesterol in an artery, echoing Wallace's complicated conflation of organs and the organic. Wallace's urban environments are full of structures which are deliberately shaped into natural forms, such as the M.I.T. Student Union, which is a brain. When the environment is purposely built to resemble scattered human organs and limbs, Hayles's description of "bodies moving through them" takes

on different meanings, and the human bodies take on extra bodily characteristics, becoming like blood in a vein or waste in a colon. The Sierpinski Gasket is again brought to mind here, as large artificial organs house smaller organic human bodies who act as metaphorical body parts. The artificial organs shift and evolve both with and without human intervention, as the environment changes organically to accommodate human activities such as pollution and terraforming. However, the "norms" that these environments adopt in Wallace's work cannot be considered normal. Like Wallace's grotesque bodies with their various growths, amputations and missing skeletal tissue, these spaces lack a traditional centre and are both fragmented and sprawling.

A notable instance of the non-normate human body becoming imbricated with the environment is in *The Broom of the System*. Similar to *Infinite Jest*'s focus on waste, according to *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story*; the title of the novel refers to a Wallace family in-joke about fibre-rich foods (Max 47).[29] The character who best serves as the broom of the novel's system is not the main character, Lenore Beadsman Jr., but her great-grandmother, Lenore Beadsman Sr. Lenore Sr.'s body is very strange in that she cannot regulate her own body temperature. While she can easily manipulate other humans, her body is incredibly sensitive in regards to temperature, and she must be kept in environments of 98.6°F (37°C) to survive. This is extremely uncomfortable for most other people, and alienates Lenore Sr. about as much as her acerbic personality does. Several characters in *The Broom of the System* are also obsessed with hygiene, and fear the possibility of outside contaminants breaching their bodies. Lenore's boyfriend, Rick Vigorous, and her therapist are the chief representatives of this hysteria. Contact with Lenore Sr., whose medically necessary connection to the environment induces severe sweating, is incredibly frightening to these characters. Vigorous refuses to ever visit Lenore Sr.

[29] Clare Hayes-Brady explores the title's (very possibly truer) Wittgensteinian origin in *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity, and Resistance* (69).

with his girlfriend, and many of his nightmares include hallucinations about uncontrollable sweating, which would become reality if he had to interface with Lenore Sr. His inability to meet Lenore Sr. because he will not exchange his insides with the outside by opening his pores echoes his failed relationship with Lenore, who he desires to know intimately without ever opening up about his emotional and physical insecurities.

When Lenore Sr. comes to secretly inhabit the call centre that Lenore Jr. works in, that environment also takes on bodily characteristics through both the metaphorical power of her influence and her actual anatomical requirements. The temperature inside is raised to 98.6F, like a human body, and the heat causes the telephone equipment to malfunction. The repairman called in at the end of the novel observes that the "subpar service is due to your lines…bleeding calls into each other," and that the centre has "kind of decided it's a real freakin' human being or something" (Wallace 457). The repairman says that the calls are "bleeding," but "sweating" is more accurate, as the hardware malfunctions are due to overheating and melting of barriers. The wires in the centre serve as a kind of nervous system, allowing for connections to be made and communication to take place between the town's inhabitants. But as Lenore Sr.'s machinations cause confusion and breakdown of communication amongst the different characters, supporting her body also leads to more literal communication breakdown when everyone starts calling/receiving wrong numbers.[30] Many of the mix-ups lead to calls being directed to/away from sex lines, creating an instance where the failure of barriers leads to disgust. The fundamental inability to communicate perfectly between individuals is a theme Wallace would wrestle with his entire career, and its presence in the novel is crystallised by the call centre's malfunction. As the call centre becomes more human, sustaining a precise 98.6F temperature, it

[30] Hayes-Brady focuses on the linguistic fallout of Lenore Sr.'s disappearance and its effect on Lenore Jr. in *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity, and Resistance*.

becomes unable to communicate effectively. Lenore's Sr.'s presence and the personification of the call centre focuses on the complex relationship between alienation and excess in communication that would later drive *Infinite Jest*. Lenore Sr. is often described as alone, but not lonely; her only regular visitor in her retirement home is Lenore. Yet, she was a student of Wittgenstein, so she treasures language and wordplay as a communal, playful effort. When Lenore searches Leonore Sr.'s room she finds little drawings of paradoxes and word games such as "the barber who shaves all, and only, those who do not shave themselves," who is depicted as a man with a densely scribbled head of unruly hair, erupted brain matter, or an attempt to conceal the state of the barber's facial hair entirely (as one scribbles out mistakes) (*Broom* 42). When Lenore Sr. cannot play her language games with Lenore and her communication turns inward, the result is muddled and mysterious. When she moves into the call centre, she continues to muddle communication. The issue is not that calls drop or are blocked from reaching their destinations, but that they reach unintended places. The callers know exactly what they mean to say and the switchboard operators know who they mean to say it to, but a literal meltdown of the wires means that there is a gap between what is said and what is understood from their communications when their words enter the wrong context.

Similar gaps occur throughout the novel: Rick Vigorous tells Lenore stories which are plainly about him as a substitute for satisfying her sexually; Lenore understands them as fiction and falls asleep during Rick's intimate confessions. Lenore's pet cockatiel, Vlad the Impaler, greatly expands his vocabulary at the same time Lenore Sr. goes missing, and begins to speak in full sentences. Vlad can only repeat what he has heard humans say, so there is a series of disconnects between the sounds Vlad makes, what they mean to him as a bird (probably nothing, other than attention-seeking), what they mean to humans, where his statements originated, and

their intention, since he repeats things that Lenore has never said.[31] Lenore Sr.'s occupation of the call centre comes to represent all of this miscommunication, an excess of words that mean nothing or are misunderstood, leading to a meltdown.

In *The Broom of the System* it is not only urban settings which are transformed by human intervention. Local officials decide to reconfigure a large swath of land into the Great Ohio Desert, referred to unsubtly as the G.O.D. The governor of the state announces, "Guys, the state is getting soft [. . .] People are getting complacent. They're forgetting the way this state was historically hewn out of wilderness. There's no more hewing [. . .] We need a wasteland. [. . .] A desert. A point of savage reference for the good people of Ohio. A place to fear and love. A blasted region [. . .] An Other for Ohio's Self" (53-54). In the introduction to the book *Monster Theory*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen describes a monster as "that uncertain cultural body in which is condensed an intriguing simultaneity or doubleness," necessitating a reaction of both negative and positive affects and emotions (IX). Cohen goes on to describe how the monster unites the "repressed" past into the present, creating an "eternal return" of the past (IX).[32] The monster accomplishes this by demanding that the viewer fill in the blanks of its incomplete body, to ascribe it meaning. The body of any monster is imbued with expectations of what should be where their deformed or missing parts are, triggering comparison between their parts, the ideal part, and the parts of the viewer. This allows the viewer to define themselves by negation, as well as develop or confirm ideas about what is normal in categories of ability, beauty, etc. Cohen's

[31] The connection between Lenore Sr.'s disappearance and Vlad's new phrases is never made explicit, but there are hints that the bird was fed either experimental baby food or LSD. Many moments and themes in *The Broom of the System* appear later in *Infinite Jest*, and Vlad's probable dosing is an interesting precursor to Hal's in *Infinite Jest*. While Vlad begins to make noises which mean nothing to him but hold meaning to his listeners, Hal's poisoning by mold or DMZ causes him to make noises which sound meaningful to him but like animal shrieks to others.

[32] Cohen is drawing at least partly on Nietzsche's concept of eternal reoccurrence, that time is infinite but possible events, ideas, and matter is finite, and so must repeat. If one's life is not worthwhile, this possibility is a vision of Hell. A particular monster's body may be a new variation, but it will represent something familiar and awful (a fear of technology, sex, or the environment, for example) and force the viewer to at least subconsciously relive that old fear by ascribing meaning to its body.

use of psychoanalytic phrasing also suggests the role of the mind and its unconscious associations and desires in ascribing meaning to the monster's body. The G.O.D. is given this self-defining function in *The Broom of the System*; it is a huge blank space for people to define for themselves, as a form of entertainment. The citizens may be meant to love the desert in the form of local pride, but that sort of love is based on pleasure in ownership rather than fondness for the thing itself. After the G.O.D.'s creation, however, the memory of its original environment renders its sudden appearance scar-like and jarring. Similar can be said of the irradiated waste-lands and boneless grotesques in *Infinite Jest*, which always gesture back toward an American social and political climate that privileges consumption and short-sighted selfishness.

Lenore's neighbourhood contrasts with the haunting expanse by being shaped like a classic film starlet. The architect wanted to create beauty in the environment, but could only relate to Hollywood aesthetics. The manicured neighbourhood literalises Paul Giles's notion that "young Americans bond more easily according to which TV programs they have shared than according to the old tenets of geographical proximity" by replacing the geographic with visual media reference entirely ("Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace" 328). The Jayne Mansfield neighbourhood may also be related to Wallace's interest in literary theory, particularly Deleuze and Guattari.[33] In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari make the distinction between a map and a tracing. A map is rhizomatic, it has multiple points of entrance, lines of flight, and can still be understood when viewing it in different parts. The tracing is its opposite, it is a concrete series of lines that form a specific image, it is not open to new points of entry, and

[33] Wallace invented a fake Deleuze book called *Incest and the Life of Death in Capitalist Entertainment* that appears in Molly Notkin's library which details the "antinomically schizoid function of the post-industrial capitalist mechanism," perhaps referencing *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*IJ* 791). Notkin's description of Deleuze's writing as "perspicuous" appears to be a joke (*IJ* 791).

can only be comprehended as a whole. The neighborhood is a literal map which is also a tracing of a person, without viewing the entire image there is only disconnected body parts. The neighbourhood cannot grow or otherwise evolve with time, because if it did Mansfield's image would appear to be growing tumours, its beauty would quickly become horror. The G.O.D. is similar: it lacks the sublime natural aesthetic of a normal state park because the people of the state are so removed from any kind of wilderness, and its ordered emptiness imparts an uncanny imprint of humanity on the viewer. The G.O.D. is meticulously manicured, much like the surrounding suburban environment. It was designed to symbolise an unrecognisable Other, but the fact of its design precludes this. One cannot help but remember that it is a product of human interference. In "'Then Out of the Rubble: The Apocalypse in David Foster Wallace's Early Fiction," Bradley J. Fest notes:

> Ohio is a thoroughly developed, machinic landscape—indeed a network of human relationships has totally replaced any "wilderness" (to the point that one suburban development is "in the shape of a profile of Jayne Mansfield" [45]). Consequently, rather than commune with nature in some protected wilderness area, Ohioans go to a manufactured post-apocalyptic wasteland—ordered like a garden, built and maintained, but ultimately more savage than the landscape that was there in the first place (292).

The G.O.D. can be seen as a sort of proto-Concavity, a space which was meant to tread the line between manufactured and chaotic. The G.O.D. is both purposely built and maintained and frighteningly empty and vast. The people of the state are meant to bond over it as a local attraction and blank space to ascribe meaning to freely, but for most of the novel it is more like an open wound. *The Broom of the System* is a novel about human connections, and until its conclusion there seems to be a gaping space between individuals, like the G.O.D. Fest goes on to

write, “The desert is a kind of ordered deconstruction, a breakdown necessitated by the ubiquitous (though failed) connectivity of a projected future.” (292). To return to the map and the tracing, the G.O.D. also straddles the line between the two. The G.O.D. may be an attempt by the governor to create a “body without organs,” a blank space for multiplicities to gather and form assemblages, creating meaning. In at least one way, it succeeds. Lenore and her new love interest, Andrew Lang, meet in the G.O.D. to begin their relationship, forming a couple. As a flat and empty space, the G.O.D. can be entered and left from any point like a map, and any cross-section of it could be understood, as the entire expanse is the same. However, it still has boundaries, which, as mentioned, divide it completely from the area surrounding it. The G.O.D. may be meant to bring people like Lenore and Lang together, but for the most part, people seem uninterested in it.

When Lenore enters the G.O.D. to meet Lang, she disappears completely from the novel. “The G.O.D., and specifically Lenore Jr.’s experience there, functions as an object of narrative resolution and synthesis. It is assembled and accumulated while always already being a space of ordered destruction” (Fest, 292). Lenore is fleeing the brain-like call centre and her human-shaped neighbourhood to enter a space which is manmade but inhuman. Throughout the novel, Lenore’s body is objectified and claimed by others through language; her boyfriend Rick Vigorous has nightmares about other men seeing and writing on her body, Bombardini threatens to eat her, the novel opens with Lang and his frat brothers forcing Lenore and some other girls to write their names on the boys’ backsides. While Lenore is never a victim of physical violence, all of these interactions are written with an undercurrent of sexual menace. Apparently forgiving Lang’s past transgressions, by entering the G.O.D. Lenore is allowed to willingly erase her body and enter a healthier relationship with a man of her choice by returning to her own past.

Contrasting previous scenes which describe to the reader Lenore's skin and open legs, whatever occurs within this new relationship is hidden from the reader, private to Lenore but free for us to ascribe meaning to. Fest writes that "the desert is a textual space that materialises the narrative's limits represented by Bombardini and Lenore Sr. and there she escapes both representation and observation, transforming from an object to a subject and leaving the narrative behind" (292). After so much of the novel obsesses about Lenore's beauty, her only reprieve can be found in ugliness. Lenore is plagued by suspicions that she may only be words, as flat as the G.O.D., so her disappearance from the narrative is a form of destruction. *The Broom of the System* is a long and sometimes arduous novel, and Lenore disappears at what would have been one of the most interesting points in the story, denying readers entertainment by obliterating herself.

Curiously shaped man-made environments carry on from Wallace's first novel to his second, *Infinite Jest*. Enfield Tennis Academy in *Infinite Jest* is said to be carved out of a hill into the shape of a cardioid by its mathematically obsessed founder, James O. Incandenza. Hal Incandenza describes it as a heart, with the tunnels as veins, which leads to an immediate conclusion that Enfield Tennis Academy forms the "heart" of the novel. In "David Foster Wallace and the Mathematics of Infinity" Roberto Natalini describes the environment anatomically, as the heart-shaped E.T.A. lies "just near a 'lung,' which is regularly inflated" (51). However, the shape of E.T.A., with a round, rather than pointed bottom like a love-heart symbol (which itself looks dissimilar to an anatomical heart), and the general focus of *Infinite Jest* on waste (bodily and otherwise) may actually suggest a Bakhtinian re-privileging to the lower body. E.T.A. possesses none of the symbolism one might generally attribute to a heart – it is not a particularly loving or kind environment, most of its inhabitants are emotionally dysfunctional, and the multiplicity of point-of-view characters and plot lines challenge the notion

of any one narrative "heart." The tunnels are intestinal rather than exclusively venous, which has far different and more grotesque implications for those that live inside them. The fact that E.T.A. is shaped like a huge bottom is funny in a sort of low-brow way, but becomes less so upon further consideration. Despite its upper-class presentation, E.T.A. is not a pleasant space to inhabit. Quite a few of its inhabitants, like Avril Incandenza (who travels by tunnel exclusively, never above ground) who molests her students, very possibly including her own son Orin, are essentially human excrement.[34] Directly under the E.T.A. hill is the Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House (repetition intentional), where the cast-off dregs of society live. Some of them work at E.T.A. as janitors, cafeteria workers, and groundskeepers. While E.T.A. has scholarship students and Ennet House has some formerly well off residents, generally the social stratification between settings is evident. The privileged, upper class children and administrators of E.T.A. live in/on the rump-shaped hill and at the end of the working day the menial labourers exit and settle below it.[35] Natalini refers to places like Ennet House as sites of "excremental activity," and logically that excrement must come from somewhere (51). If one prefers the heart analogy, then the tunnels underneath E.T.A. which serve as its veins are still clogged with trash, making the "heart" of the novel (in its geographical shape and role in the plot) diseased. At one point Avril commissions a group of children to catalog the trash accumulating in the tunnels, and when they find a refrigerator they shriek about "Death" and run away (*IJ* 672). This symbolises the rot at the core of E.T.A., a decay which is hidden underground, in a metal box, but only

[34] Another example would be Charles Tavis, who almost certainly fathered Mario Incandenza with his (step?)sister Avril and is obviously disgusted by him, despite Mario being one of the most loveable characters in the novel.
[35] Some employees steal habitually from E.T.A.'s garbage, and the only time these thieving ex-addicts are described, the women are two of the novel's only black characters (the others are also in slums), which potentially adds race as well as class issues.

worsens over time until its horrific discovery.[36] E.T.A.'s large campus contains other organ-themed structures, like the Lung, but it is still more like a collection of parts than a recognisable human body.[37] It is both sprawling and fractured, like the structure of *Infinite Jest* as a novel and many of the novel's deformed characters. On page 240 the entire Boston area is described as a body with ribs and limbs, and E.T.A. is a cyst on its arm. On page 2 of the novel Hal Incandenza is described as having a cyst on his face, but it is called a "wen," which can also refer to a city, so even when Hal leaves Boston for Arizona, it is still literally under his skin.

While the cardioid shape of the E.T.A. hill and descriptions of Enfield as an arm suggest a bodily theme, one setting in *Infinite Jest* calls it to the forefront. In the novel, the Student Union of M.I.T. is shaped like a giant brain. While not as major a location as E.T.A. or Ennet House, the M.I.T. brain synthesises many of the novel's disparate plot points and themes. Geographically speaking, M.I.T. is Boston's brain, an institution which is well-known for fostering some of the brightest scientific minds and sponsoring the most cutting-edge research in the country. The Student Union is an intermural place where these intelligent students would go to relax, study, or work creatively. Though its sponsor is not explicitly stated, the reader can parse that the Student Union was funded by James Incandenza, who hired the same architect (A.Y. Rickey) to design E.T.A. Additionally, while M.I.T. does have a tennis team, most architects/donors probably would not have dictated 24 tennis courts to be built in the corpus callosum of a technology school (*IJ* 182).[38] The corpus callosum is, significantly, a swath of

[36] There is a sense of recursivity to this excavation as well; the children hope to see the Concavity's giant hamsters, and the toxic fridge is similar to how the actual U.S. currently stores most of its nuclear waste, subtly joining narrative threads.

[37] "The Lung" is a billowing plastic structure where E.T.A. students play in the winter. It is only up for a small portion of the novel. Wallace more commonly utilises the "Lung Pump Room," which is where Hal Incandenza secretly inflates his own lungs with marijuana smoke.

[38] The actual M.I.T. has twelve outdoor tennis courts, and four indoor courts in the J.B. Carr Tennis Bubble, which is likely the inspiration for the Lung (MITathletics.com).

nerve fibers which connect the two hemispheres of the brain just as tennis connects J.O.I.'s (and Wallace's) passions for maths and aesthetics disciplines popularly believed to originate in separate brain hemispheres. Themes of international tension and Avril's possible espionage emerge when it is revealed that the centre was rebuilt after being "gutted by C4" in the Grammar Riots, which Avril was heavily involved in (*IJ* 996). The Union also houses the radio studio where Madame Psychosis (J.O.I.'s muse) records her shows in the "coaxial medulla," linking both the themes of communication and the Ennet House storyline with the tennis academy (*IJ* 183). The medulla oblongata is actually unrelated to communication; it controls involuntary functions such as breathing and vomiting. By locating the radio station in the medulla oblongata, Wallace equates communication with actions that both involuntary and necessary to survival. The studio itself is described as a mash-up of parts, located in the medulla but "laryngeal," with pink "gynecological" walls (*IJ* 183). To add to the tangentially related elements being combined in this brain, Madame Psychosis's sound engineer is an annular physicist. Specifically, his "graduate research specialty is the carbonated translithium particles created and destroyed billions of times a second in the core of a cold-fusion ring" with the aim of explaining "gaps and incongruities in annulation equations" (185). The young physicist shares similarities with J.O.I., who developed holography to model annular fusion reactions based on equations and first enabled Joelle's work in entertainment. Both scientists worked on something cerebral: J.O.I.'s holography was a form of imagining that could be shared, and the sound engineer's particles act like thoughts. Specifically, they resemble thoughts as someone reads a book as complex as *Infinite Jest,* creating and discarding connections between references from moment to moment. However, when the sound engineer sets his levels and Madame Psychosis's show starts, he climbs out of the giant brain to listen. By using the brain as a set piece, Wallace is able to

illustrate how enjoying art or entertainment requires one to "get out of their head." Additionally, the doomed tennis match where the students of E.T.A. would be set upon by the A.F.R. is moved by Avril to "somewhere in the deep-brain tissue of the M.I.T. Student Union," possibly resulting in Hal being subjected to Technical Interview or forced Entertainment-viewing (*IJ* 996). These processes may be what destroy Hal's external communication skills, signifying that the "deep-brain" is also a trap, a site of extreme trauma.

The Concavity and Seepage

In *Infinite Jest*, all of America's garbage and nuclear waste is sent to a portion of Canada.[39] Essentially, Canada is strong-armed into allowing the United States to redraw North American territorial maps under the name of O.N.A.N. This refers to Onan, a biblical character who is generally known for committing the sin of "wasting his seed."[40] O.N.A.N. is created purely as an exercise in waste management, referred to by the novel's politicians as "ecological gerrymandering." The explanation of this process begins on page 398 of *Infinite Jest* as a list of newspaper headlines, immediately presenting it as a mediated experience. The area that is cordoned off for waste disposal is called the Great Concavity (from the Canadian side) and the Great Convexity (from the American side). The area is full of regular garbage that American

[39] Tian Song provides a succinct definition of garbage: "In general, garbage includes solid garbage (the original meaning of this term), liquid garbage (waste water) and gaseous garbage (waste gas), as well as dissipated heat (waste heat), the final state of all types of energy after usage" ("Global Warming as a Manifestation of Garbage").

[40] There is some theological debate about the exact nature of his sinfulness. The common modern interpretation of Onan (and onanism) is used to discourage masturbation, but Onan actually committed coitus interruptus. He was meant to provide his widowed sister-in-law with an heir of his brother's line, but refused, hoping to take the inheritance for himself. Either way, the common element in the popular teaching and biblical story is that Onan perverted something meant for creation into waste. The recursive themes of *Infinite Jest* and Wallace's fascination with popular culture suggest that the name is a masturbatory pun, but the biblical story's elements of selfishness and deceit (as Onan effectively used Tamar for sex) are equally relevant, as the US uses Canada to dump its waste on.

cities no longer had room for, but the majority of the ecological and biological damage was caused by radioactive waste.[41] The US was running on cheap nuclear energy and unwilling to lower material consumption, but the waste from both was beginning to literally pile up. The "toxic effluvia" is "choking our highways and littering our byways and grungeing [sic] up our sunsets and cruddying [sic] those harbors in which televised garbage barges lay stacked up at anchor, clotted and impotent (*IJ* 383). As Tian Song notes in his article "Global Warming as a Manifestation of Garbage," "Even if the size of the city does not expand, and the living standards are not raised, new land for dumping garbage is still necessary" (Web). Though Song does not use the word "autopoesis," he describes a system which sustains and reproduces itself continuously, the biological analogue of a recursive loop. The most simple biological autopoetic system is the eukaryote cell, which reproduces itself and sustains the organism it comprises through mitosis. Despite the energy crisis being effectively ended with the invention of annular fusion,[42] the US seems to be in a stasis which only produces garbage. If annular fusion is able to act as a sort of fuel for industrial mitosis, garbage is a visualization of uncontrolled growth, cancer. The novel is set in an alternate present/near future, and though many were impressed with Wallace's ability to anticipate internet functions like video streaming, it still lacks much of the futurism one might expect from a setting with cheap, abundant energy.[43] In fact, a conversation between Hal and his friend Michael Pemulis in Hal's relevatory last scene awkwardly interjects that J.O.I.'s promotional film on annular fusion has been mislabeled "Annular Fusion Is Our Fiend" (*IJ* 360). The tech level of *Infinite Jest* is advanced enough that

[41] The precise political complexities of this practice are detailed in the chapter on the Body and Politics.
[42] Wallace does not explain this process, but it may be based on hypothetical cold fusion and some elements of the (fission powered) IFR. "Annular" means "ring-shaped," so it may refer to the donut-shaped tokamak which shapes plasma into a torus in nuclear fusion processes, or the waste-recycling process that fueled the IFR.
[43] The internet analogue in *Infinite Jest* is called "Interlace" networks or systems, and are essentially a combination of databases for research, on-demand television, and Netflix's streaming/home delivery service.

people can practice nuclear fusion, holography, and laser-cleansing easily, but the average person does not experience an improved lifestyle. Rather than invest in electric cars or robotics, the energy boom has only seemed to result in an increase in consumerism. With the cost of production assumingly lowered, and the threat of burning through fossil fuel reserves removed, every market became oversaturated. However, people were unable to enjoy their new possessions fully when their streets were choked with garbage. Tian Song hypothesizes a similar situation when contemplating China's real consumer/waste problem: "For example, if cold fusion is realised, theoretically, we will possess infinite energy. But, this will make the garbage and resource problems all the worse. The more energy an engine uses, the more raw materials it needs to take in, and the more garbage it generates" (Web). Though he is speaking of the novella "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" from Wallace's *The Girl with Curious Hair* collection, Bradley J. Fest could also be summarizing O.N.A.N. as:

> A culture that was about to lose its Other with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and see the grand narrative of Mutually Assured Destruction begin to fade. Lacking a coherent reference point outside of its own, the US culture 'Westward' interrogates could only turn in on itself, parasitically consuming not only its own cultural products, but its waste and detritus as well. (256)

Citizens were confronted daily with the "unpleasant debris of a throw-away past," and old newspaper headlines suggest that the nation was on the verge of extreme political unrest because of the aesthetic state of the country (*IJ* 382). With the advent of Subsidized Time, even the passing of time is a confrontation with waste culture. Some of the most prominent years in *Infinite Jest* are The Year of the Depends Adult Undergarment and The Year of Glad, objects

which Elizabeth Freudenthal notes "contain waste while creating more of it" (198).[44] Rather than changing their wasteful practices, the public grows increasingly frustrated and disgusted by the inability of their local waste authorities being unable to hide the consequences. Houser describes the sort of behavior shown by the American people and government as a natural reaction to the repulsive:

> The disgusting object comes at us as a threat; on this, philosophers from Kant to Derrida agree. Cousins explains that we have two choices in the face of this threat: 'to destroy the object, or to abandon the position of the subject. Since the former is rarely within our power, the latter becomes a habit. The confrontation with the ugly object involves a whole scheme of *turning away*. (135)

This turn occurs when the government basically attempts to hide its excess by shoving it in the corner (the northeast corner, to be specific) like a child. They act under "a pretense of hygiene created by the refusal to recognise those parts of oneself which are considered unclean, a process that, when it takes place in the psychological realm, is known as abjection" (Hayles 685). The pollution begins as illegal dumping, so the effects of the sickening environment parallel decaying international affairs as the US sneakily tries to hide the un-hideable. Though certain things may be hidden from sight, nuclear waste gives off measurable effects, and the criminal irresponsibility of Gentle's government was discovered relatively quickly. At this point in the timeline of the novel, the toxic dumping is occurring when part of the region was still American soil (New York), and the outrage over the public health crisis spurs the creation of the Concavity. Garbage is given a place to metastasize, within the walls of the Concavity it is allegedly contained, but growing as more garbage is catapulted into it every day.

[44] Depends is a brand that sells adult diapers, and Glad makes a wide variety of containers, but is most well-known for rubbish bags.

The actual cordoned-off area is officially lifeless, as any creature that thrived in the lush eastern zone of the Concavity would die off when exposed to the toxins that must be "steadily dump[ed]" in to both power the fusion process and hamper the growth of the aggressive flora (*IJ* 572). Hidden behind walls and odor-deflecting fans, from the US side the Convexity is meant to appear totally self-contained and forgettable while American towns are well-manicured and free of garbage. As Heather Houser notes in "*Infinite Jest's* Environmental Case for Disgust," "by quarantining contamination, by giving it a designated place, the U.S. neutralizes 'the Menace' of waste and distances itself from the ugly, globalized consequences of unfettered consumption" (125). But the Concavity has its own sort of autopoesis, it reproduces itself: it is a tumor on the nation's landscape whose radioactivity causes tumors within its citizens. Hayles writes that "the large project of *Infinite Jest* is to demonstrate the fallacy of the dump by exploring the underground seepages and labyrinthine pathways through which the abjected always returns in recursive cycles of interconnection that inexorably tie together the sanctified and the polluted," which in this case includes the literal seepage of the Concavity's pollution (687). The toxic waste has effects similar to those of actual nuclear fallout on nearby inhabitants, such as birth defects. One tabloid headline reads: "MY BABY HAS SIX EYES AND BASICALLY NO SKULL" (*IJ* 399). The sustained pollution on Canadian territory means that there is a much larger population of affected people living in Canada after O.N.A.N. and the Concavity became official, but the original dumping and subsequent exodus may partially explain the prevalence of birth defects among current US citizens as well. Identifying the abject with the improper and unclean in *Powers of Horror,* Julia Kristeva calls it "neither subject nor object" because the abject is at once cast out from the self and yet somehow also unmistakably belongs to the self (135). It is the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" that "does not respect borders,

positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). Kristeva notes that it is not actually “lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity system, order” (4). The abject is cordoned away for the very reasons that it cannot ever truly be banished, it is “creeping always back” (*IJ* 233).

What the Concavity both attempts to conceal and ultimately represents may be the concept of the Anthropocene, a concept which was popularised in the 1980’s which posits that the Earth has entered a new phase of geological time due to human interference. Human industry has affected the environment on such a global scale that the combined climate, biological, and geochemical states of the planet are indicative of an entirely different geological epoch. The landscape of the Concavity is an exaggerated image of the Anthropocene, because the human scientists and government officials who oversee it are directly responsible for the climate/biological/geochemical state of the area. Elements are regularly introduced and extracted from the Concavity as waste and fuel, and the hyper-growth and decay periods of the Concavity resemble natural geological epochs. Prehistoric epochs were able to support larger life forms because the environment contained more oxygen, and climate change and astrological impacts caused massive extinction events throughout Earth’s history. Similarly, the “rhythmic lushness” of the eastern zone of the Concavity is rumoured to produce “rapacial feral hamsters and insects of Volkswagon size and infantile gigantism and the unmacheteable regions of forests” (*IJ* 560, 573). Rather than astronomical events, the growth of the eastern Concavity must be carefully monitored and re-contaminated, so the area “goes from overgrown to wasteland several times a month” (*IJ* 573). The Concavity represents an autopoietic image of the Anthropocene, a ring-like system which continually feeds itself and spirals into chaos. The real life advent of a new geological epoch is arguably incredibly accelerated; the Holocene was/is between 11,500 and 12,000 years old, and Earth has not endured enough volcanic activity or meteor impact to justify

the onset of another mass extinction event.[45] For comparison, James Owen of *National Geographic* states that geological epochs "typically last more than three million years" And yet, "the sixth mass extinction is in progress, now, with animals going extinct 100 to 1,000 times (possibly even 1,000 to 10,000 times) faster than at the normal background extinction rate, which is about 10 to 25 species per year" (Endangeredspeciesinternational.org). The Concavity displays the entirety of Earth's post-cooling history through the lens of the Anthropocene: creatures and flora evolve, live, and die out within months instead of millennia. If the real Anthropocene is already an accelerated state, then the Concavity is pushing wildly unstable bounds. The growth cycle of annular fusion is too aggressively fast, things seem to escape faster than the government can improve containment, and many in Quebec are resigned to battling "front lawns they have to beat back with a machete to get to their driveways" (*IJ* 1017). Likewise, the decay portion is wildly destructive, forming an instantly barren wasteland out of rainforests. The partially contained environment is meant to hide the wider effects of the Anthropocene from the general public, but the fans and walls enclosing it are ineffectual against biological damage. However, for many the illusion is satisfactory enough, and consumerism and environmental misuse continues as normal. But as American societies continue to consume and expand, their energy demand increases along with their garbage production. More garbage is consequently catapulted into the Concavity, and annular fusion processes are pushed to increase energy production, further toxifying yet more garbage and increasing the effects that seep out into the surrounding countries.

[45] The accuracy of "was" or "is" to describe the Holocene has shifted multiple times throughout the writing of this text. As of May 2019, *Nature* reports that the Anthropocene Working Group officially voted to designate the start of a new epoch, the Anthropocene, beginning in the mid-twentieth century. The AWG is set to formally propose the new epoch to the International Commission on Stratigraphy in 2021, which oversees the official geological time record (Subramanian).

Environmental Mutants and Monsters

Jeffrey Cohen succinctly defines the monster as "a construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrum is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,' a glyph that seeks a hierophant" (Cohen 4). For Cohen, the monster is uniquely constructed by the culture which conceives it, and essentially embodies the diagnosis of those specific cultural anxieties and desires. It is the hybrid of what the reader regrets, suffers, and may someday become. The Concavity and surrounding area forms a monstrous, decaying environment, and the mutations that bleed out of it can be read similarly. The Concavity itself is monstrous in its size and composition, and the fans and walls around it may minimise the smell and sight of the rotting material within, but they are ineffectual against the leak of radiation, greenhouse gases, and other carcinogens/mutagens. Outside of the walls, the Concavity's pollutants cause spikes in birth defects across the nation, producing warnings that cannot be simply walled off, mutated human warnings which walk (or roll, or crawl) among the American public. Skeletal defects are perhaps the most common deformity in *Infinite Jest*, characters with misshapen or missing bones pop up often, forming a darkly humorous contrast to a novel seen as meticulously structured. A key Quebecois rebel, Marathe, takes up his anti-US/ONAN cause after struggling to care for his wife, who was born with no skull due to the radiation. Mario Incandenza, who is raised as the son of a Quebecois transplant and an American, has an extensive list of skeletal deformations, including a curved spine, underdeveloped arms, and an enlarged, softened skull. These examples represent a society which has lost its structure, which spreads uncontrollably. Despite claiming to be interdependent, O.N.A.N.'s borders are at the centre of an entire plotline in *Infinite Jest*, and the political ramifications of these issues leech into the other plotlines like toxins in groundwater. If the entire conglomeration of nations that

comprises O.N.A.N. can be seen as a body, its borders are its skeleton, legally supporting and delineating specific nations. In order to gerrymander the Concavity into Canadian territory, the U.S. bends the U.S./Canadian border into something unrecognizable and deeply disturbing. The dual name of the Concavity/Convexity is derived not from the shape of the actual dump, but how each nation views its border. The Concavity is actually a convex curve if one is looking at it as an American, but Americans only refer to it as the Canadians would see it, and vice versa. By switching the names, each side attempts to mentally categorise the area and warped border as someone else's problem.

The concept of a twisted or lacking structure is also applicable on a personal level, as many of the characters in *Infinite Jest* are paralyzed by their lack of direction or morality. Mario Incandenza ironically has the strongest and simplest sense of morality in the novel, regarding different feelings or actions as "good," or "sad," and preferring places like Ennet House where people are trying to reform themselves to the rigidly structured Enfield Tennis Academy. While often playing to the trope of the loveable "good cripple," Mario's skeletal deformities are disgusting to at least one person, whose indiscretions those deformities reveal. Charles Tavis is the only character who knows Mario and does not feel at least endearing pity towards him, in the only section readers have featuring Tavis's point of view he refers to Mario exclusively as "it" and "the thing" (Wallace 451). Tavis's disgust derives from the fact that Mario's deformities are ''that which reveals'" his incestuous parentage, as Mario is hinted to be the child of Tavis and his half/step-sister, Avril.[46] To Tavis, Mario's deformities compile several possible layers of

[46] There is some ambiguity here, but the two are referred to as half siblings on pages 3, 13, 63, 64, 81, 285, 312, and 316. Even if they are not actually blood-related, Avril and Tavis were raised together since Tavis's infancy, so the relationship would still be a sort of emotional incest. Boswell notes that relationship would also be a nod to *Hamlet*, where the protagonist's mother is in a relationship with the uncle who succeeds his father in *Understanding David Foster Wallace* (166). *Infinite Jest* also contains hints that Avril sexually abused her oldest son Orin, so incestuous relations are not out of the realm of possibility for her character.

shame, leading him to reject Mario and call him "it" and let James Incandenza raise him as a son. In addition to the genetic damage that can be caused by incest, Tavis's mother is theorised to have had dwarfism, which could contribute to Mario's skeletal issues and very small size, this similarity recalling an abusive childhood that Tavis would probably rather forget. The Mondragon/Tavis family farm is now buried in the Concavity, and E.T.A. is close enough for environmental damage like the permanent discolouration of the Charles River to occur, so Mario's deformities would also serve as a painful reminder of the ecological cyst forced onto Canadian territory by O.N.A.N. Both indicate a return of the past which are associated with the abject. In the same way the Concavity is deferred to others by name, Tavis (and Avril) give Mario the Incandenza surname.

Avril's habits provide further explanations for Mario's defects that follows Wallace's theme of addiction and toxicity. In addition to her indiscriminate and incestuous sexual activity while married, one line hints at possible substance abuse in her past; her only pregnancy symptom was unnoticed because "she threw up some mornings but who didn't in those days?" (312). The casual tone suggests that J.O.I. may not have been the only binge drinker in the house; if vomiting is a regular occurrence for Avril then it would not be unreasonable for Mario to have a fictionalized version of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome compounded with his other genetic damage risks. While Tavis's point-of-view section renders him more immediately unsympathetic to the reader, Avril's monstrosity is hinted throughout the novel with anecdotes and speculations about her destructive behaviours, culminating in Hal telling Mario "'Boo, I think I no longer believe in monsters as faces in the floor or feral infants or vampires or whatever. I think at seventeen now I believe the only real monsters might be the type of liar where there's simply no way to tell. The ones who give nothing away'" (*IJ* 774). Hal proposes a kind of monster that is

wholly different from Cohen's "'that which reveals,'" to re-categorise the monstrous as that which hides, complicating every monstrous encounter in the novel (4). While figures such as Mario, Marathe's wife, the giant infants, and other mutated and deformed individuals serve Cohen's monster function by revealing the past which created them, Hal shifts the monstrous label to those originating forces: the parents, the state, society as a whole.

In addition to the reality of two generations full of deformed children, persistent urban legends argue that American excess has created giant babies who trample everything in their paths. One of the themes of *Infinite Jest* is the role of entertainment and consumer culture in the mass infantilization of modern society and the suspicious lack of giant children years after the appearance of the infants illustrates how these influences create a population of oversized, destructive, permanent babies. The myths are peppered throughout the Enfield Tennis Academy sections of *Infinite Jest*. During the first occurrence on page 211 Hal interrupts Pemulis's description of the drug DMZ as "the gargantuan feral infant of—" which implies that the rumours are so common that they require no further illustration.[47] Hayles observes, "the myth of the Infant hints that the recursivity of annular fusion, fed on nuclear waste, is connected through underground seepage with the nuclear family" (689). E.T.A. is full of shattered and toxic families, including the dysfunctional Incandenzas, but also privileged students who are shipped across the country to be raised by the school rather than their parents, and scholarship students like Michael Pemulis who attend E.T.A. to escape abusive or neglectful parents. The youngest E.T.A. students are generally about 11, and attend the academy until they graduate at 18, where

[47] Whether or not these myths are true is unclear in the novel. Another mention of the giant infant occurs on page 400, during Mario's political puppet show, in a group of headlines which range from plausibly real to obvious comic relief. The headline is "CRANIALLY CHALLENGED, ACROMEGALIC INFANTS LOST IN EXPERIALIST SHUFFLE?" which could refer to individuals like Marathe's skull-deficient wife, who also have gigantism. The endnotes contain a citation for the J.O.I. film *Stand Behind the Men Behind the Wire*, which is listed as a documentary about state officials attempting to locate an "outsized feral infant alleged to have crushed, gummed, or picked up and dropped over a dozen residents of Lowell," though it contains no mention on if the creature was found (991).

they are expected to either go pro (with managers and handlers) or enter top-tier universities (with continued dorm life). While the academy does impose strict regulations and schedules on its students, the instructors are not parental in any kind of emotionally warm or guiding way. The students are in a strange position where the school meets every physical need, preventing them from having to develop any life skills, while leaving them bereft of any substantial parental affection or advice.[48] Though it does not involve literal physical deformity, one of the most surreally grotesque moments in the novel describes Hal Incandenza attending what he believes to be a Narcotics Anonymous meeting which is actually a male Inner Child Support group, where grown men act like infants to attempt to access repressed emotions.[49] These are also infants grown horrifically large, and when Hal recognises the older brother of Orin's best friend crawling toward him, tears and mucus dripping, the return of the infant also signals the return of the past. The acquaintance, Kevin Bain, is made disturbing and pathetic by his self-infantilization as he relives crying for an absent parent to pick him up. The Bain parents ignored their children to focus on themselves, "leaving him and his brother with Hispanic nannies while they devoted themselves to their jobs and various types of therapy and support groups" before dying in a freak accident on the way to therapy (*IJ* 803). Refracted across space and time, one immediately forges a connection between Bain and the giant infants who destroy everything in their path, crying for something that will never occur.

[48] Students presumably communicate with their parents, but this is never mentioned, and even Hal only sees his mother once or twice a week despite her working and living on campus.

[49] A co-ed version of the Inner Child Support group also appears in the story "The Depressed Person," which is about a woman whose depression is so severe that it consumes her every thought and conversation. She is aware of the monotony of her constant, urgent conversations, which leads her to believe that her friends must find her incredibly narcissistic and annoying (which the obtuse style of the prose ensures), which amplifies her depression. She attends a retreat focused on finding one's Inner Child, and while throwing a tantrum helps her realise some "deep vestigial rage" about her parents' divorce, the embarrassment of throwing such a childlike tantrum in front of others drives her to immediately leave the group (*Harper's Magazine*, 60).

A grotesque aside later in the novel introduces the rumour that the infants are not lost children at all, but improperly disposed abortions (*IJ* 562). The symbolism of this possibility is fairly obvious: (pre)human lives rendered into trash and treated just like the radioactive waste that the government was too ashamed to contain responsibly. However, it is important to note that this variant on the feral infant myth is told in Ennet House, the rehab facility. The story is told by Randy Lenz, who regularly relapses on cocaine, to several other house members with various lengths of sobriety (*IJ* 562).[50] Just as the students of E.T.A. could identify with abandoned children, the addicts living in Ennet House could identify with these literal dregs of society, and Lenz's name (Lenz/lens) marks him as the filter by which we may see humans-as-garbage. The facility is tucked away in a state-owned group of medical offices, and its residents often have jobs which require them to work away from the general public.[51] Lenz describes "abortions hastily disposed of in ditches that got breached and mixed ghastly contents," and consequently affected not just by radioactive waves but physical contact with nuclear waste chemicals (*IJ* 560). The fallout is then not only a problem which can be pushed on to future generations; the consequences are immediate and monstrous. Houser observes in "*Infinite Jest's* Environmental Case for Disgust" that "disgust is a primary means of making bodies physical," despite ecological gerrymandering and any other method of wilful ignorance, the grotesque bodies of those subjected radiation poisoning or the terroristic Entertainment are un-ignorable (134). Mario Incandenza expresses similar thoughts more simply, and more optimistically: "It's a lot easier to fix something if you can see it" (*IJ* 55). Mario is the ideal character to make this observation, as the story of his birth ties him to these abandoned foetuses as much as his E.T.A.

[50] Stephen J. Burn notes Lenz's homophonic name in "'Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing': *Infinite Jest* and the Science of the Mind," but in the context of the "general act of vision" and its importance to Wallace's conception of the mind (71).

[51] Don Gately is a night janitor, and the Ennet House residents who work at E.T.A. up the hill are generally custodians or cafeteria workers who are unseen or unnoticed by students.

upbringing aligns him with the abandoned children. Avril showed no symptoms of pregnancy other than vomiting, and had to be rushed to the hospital for an emergency Caesarean section to pry away Mario, who was "spiderishly clinging" to her womb (*IJ* 313). In the account of the surgery, Wallace describes that Mario was "scraped" out of Avril "like the meat of an oyster," which is not how C-sections are performed (313). It is, however, how the curettage portion of a D&C abortion is performed. D&Cs are also prescribed to follow incomplete miscarriages, and Mario's extremely premature birth and deformations and Avril's sudden pain uncomfortably mixes descriptions associated with both birth and miscarriage. Mario often thinks and speaks in simple vocabulary, but his mental processes seem mostly intact, while his body never matures fully. Mario is described as looking a bit like a T-rex, but his large head, curved spine, and short arms also recall the appearance of a human foetus (Wallace 313-316). In Mario's character, the E.T.A. and Ennet House variants of the feral infant stories are united, which is further evidenced by Mario being the only character to freely travel between both locations.[52] But unlike the mythicized giant infants/foetuses, Mario can be clearly seen, and his appearance means that he is not easily forgotten. Mario becomes obsessed with filmmaking, especially documentary, so his entire function revolves around being and creating objects to be seen by others to learn from.

Houser also links waste and the return of the past when she writes: "As Americans distance themselves from the filthy detritus of consumption, they also jettison the ethical implications of experialism and ecological gerrymandering. Like the waste that's fated to return, American policies come back to haunt it" (217). Houser is referring to Quebecois birth defects here, saying that the deformed children produced by ecological poisoning are necessarily hidden from American view. A Quebecois film student argues "Filth by its very nature it is a thing that

[52] Ennet House residents do often travel up the hill for work, but Mario is the only one who is not bound to either location by academic or employment agreements.

is creeping always back," repeating himself several times as an American student attempts to correct his experience of the Concavity (Wallace 233). This quote is even placed in the realm of the bodily and disgusting by Wallace's use of the film editing technique of "cross-cutting," continuing the theme of relating disgust and the filmic. The Quebecois student's arguments are fragmented by the separate conversations and interjections of several American students, including one who attended an avant-garde film set disguised as a lavish feast:

> "Fans do not begin to keep it all in the Great Convexity. It creeps back in. This your nation refuses to learn. It will keep creeping back in. You cannot give away all your filth and prevent all creepage, no? Filth by its very nature it is a thing that is creeping always back. . . .
>
> "I think you mean Great Concavity, Alain."
>
> "I meant Great Convexity. I know the thing I meant."
>
> "And then it turned out he'd put ipecac in the brandy. It was the most horrible thing you've ever seen. Everyone, all over, spouting like whales." (233)

Vomit is also a return, induced when something nutritious or indulgent turns out to be poisonous. By interspersing this scene with the Canadian's explanation of American waste culture, Wallace is able to highlight its relationship with toxic societal practices, international tensions, and bodily consequences. Alain's authority on the Concavity/Convexity is immediately challenged by an American who attempts to force Alain to claim the area by its American name; despite Alain's own name and accent showing that he is likely Quebecois, and much more locally influenced by the dump, summarizing O.N.A.N.'s foreign policy in one line. The reality of the situation includes the additional care that these disabled people require (such as Mrs. Marathe's extensive hospital routines and ungainly prosthetics) as well as the mere sight of deformity signalling an

oppressive infliction by Americans. The constant visual reminder of the landscape and people who have been disfigured by American excess feeds anti-American sentiment amongst Canadians, giving rise to groups such as the A.F.R., whose terrorist actions produce more mutilated individuals. The third student's story parallels the American point of view of the Concavity/Convexity situation, where what appeared to be an excuse to indulge in free gluttony was violently revealed to be poisonous.

Porosity and Humanity

The interchange of chemicals and mutations in *Infinite Jest* are facilitated by treating the human body as incredibly porous. Obsession with porousness, particularly of human skin, can be seen throughout Wallace's work.[53] Marlon Bain, Cusk from *The Pale King*, and several other scattered characters sweat uncontrollably, embodying human insides seeping uncontrollably outwards. This and other excretory bodily functions cause shame and anxiety to those affected, but not the obsessive fear inflicted by the process inverted. In *Infinite Jest*, President Johnny Gentle is elected on his promises to "Make America Beautiful Again," satirizing the corporate-funded Keep America Beautiful foundation. Gentle passionately argues to literally clean up the country, promising first to send American trash into space, and then creating the Concavity/Convexity. Gentle's regular career was as a Las Vegas crooner, and he had no experience in politics before running for elected office. His success is credited to having a "white-gloved finger on the pulse of an increasingly asthmatic and sunscreen-slathered and

[53] Human skin is a semi-permeable membrane, with relatively low permeability. Material is more easily secreted by our skin than absorbed by it, though exchange occurs both ways and the skin's effectiveness as a barrier can be both compromised and overwhelmed by things such as radiation. (Examples include both skin cancer caused by UV rays and the ionizing radiation in radiotherapy.)

pissed-off American electorate" (*IJ* 382). The ridiculousness of spending billions of dollars to blast trash into space is negated by the fact that he has any sort of plan at all, promising, "he wasn't going to stand here and ask us to make some tough choices because he was standing here promising he was going to make them for us" (*IJ* 383). Gentle may present himself as the paternalistic figure that pairs with cultural mass infantilisation, but his actual motives for cleaning up America are personal. Gentle is "a world-class retentive of the Howard-Hughes kind," and political asides throughout the book reveal that everything except media and national hygienic demands is actually the work of Vice President Rodney ("Rod the God") Tine (*IJ* 381). Gentle takes exfoliating "showers" several times a day which burn the top layer of skin cells off of his epidermis and forces his staff to do the same, which tops an extensive list of obsessive hygienic behaviours. Elizabeth Freudenthal relates Gentle's compulsive behaviour with his popular politics in her essay "Anti-Interiority: Compulsiveness, Objectification, and Identity in *Infinite Jest*." She writes:

> Gentle's outlandish, destructive compulsiveness is a mode of anti-interiority. A Dermalatix 'flash' shower burns the outer borders of one's body, creating a new exterior without affecting internal body parts. C.U.S.P. envisions domestic recovery as 'an essentially aesthetic affair,' changing the way America looks instead of changing its underlying systems and structures (IJ 383). (199)

Gentle is uninterested in actually running the country, he only craves control over its appearance, as he attempts to force hygienic control over his chapped, burnt skin. The very top layer of skin that Gentle burns off is not sustained by blood vessels, but oxygen supplied by the air. In the face of "Interdependence," Gentle is willing to destroy anything that requires interaction with the

outside. Gentle will not even take conventional showers, he uses light pulses so that not even water will touch him; he is as self-contained as possible.

Johnny Gentle's fear of contamination can be traced earlier to *The Broom of the System*, where Rick Vigorous and his psychologist both fear and obsess over the integrity of their skin barriers. The presence of environmental and personal uncleanliness is directly equated with mental or emotional destruction for these characters, and Gentle's voting constituency. People affected by nuclear radiation are not only abject figures because they personify a failure of responsibility to both human populations and the environment, but because their grotesque bodies display the skin's compromised failure. A body like Marathe's wife's, which is described in ominously moist detail, serves as evidence of the disgusting consequences of the outside seeping in as her own orifices drip saliva and cerebrospinal fluid. These bodies are constructed as sites of fear and disgust, by locating the argument of environmental pollution in the body, those obsessed with cleanliness are driven to ignore industrial actions and focus on insulating their own bodies. Ideally, this confrontation would force action to help fix the issues, as it is "a lot easier to fix something if you can see it," but most citizens prefer to look away (*IJ* 55). As a representation of the consequences of waste, deformed bodies in the novel are themselves waste, and able to be dealt with in a similar way by pushing them away into hospitals and urban legends. Unfortunately for them, it is not only grotesquely deformed Canadians whose bodies must interact with the environment, their own are also subject to exchange despite all efforts toward insulation.

Grasping for hygienic and aesthetic control through furtive cleansing has ironic consequences for America, and specifically Johnny Gentle. Song writes, "Wastewater is ceaselessly discharged into rivers, lakes, and seas; and waste gas is interminably sluiced into the

sky. They aggravate air pollution and water pollution on a global scale, regardless of how they are treated. In this way, environmental pollution can be viewed as garbage in a dispersed state." There is no way to escape contamination when the very act of breathing, even through a mask, requires one to pull the filth inside them. In addition, the porosity of human skin can be manipulated so that it becomes more amphibious. There are several ways of increasing permeability of the skin, and they are all prevalent in *Infinite Jest*. One cause is ultraviolet radiation, and the pollution pre-and post-Concavity contributes to global warming, leading to an increase in global susceptibility to UV rays. Adam Voiland of NASA has documented an increase in global UV exposure since 1979, and explains that UV exposure causes human DNA to unravel and tangle, compromising the integrity of both the skin barrier and immune system (NASA.gov). This makes the skin more vulnerable to all kinds of nanoparticles from chemical pollution, and living near the Concavity results in compounded damage to those exposed to UV radiation and whatever radiation annular fusion waste gives off.[54] Skin permeability can also be increased with non-genetic damage like abrasion and chemical application. One chemical, PVP, is used in many everyday items (pills, soaps, etc) as a binder, and a form of it (PVPP) has been linked to cardiac issues when people take oral narcotics intravenously (a behavior likely performed by *Infinite Jest's* opioid addicts). Another, DMSO, is used in transdermal skin patches and as a topical analgesic, so it both numbs and increases permeability. The last is oleic acid, which occurs naturally in plant and animal fats, and therefore can be found in fatty junk foods. It is the most common oil in human fat tissue, creating another instance where the source of decay is housed in the human body, just under the skin. Oleic acid is also often used in soaps as an emulsifier, so attempts to sanitise one's outer layer only increases vulnerability to chemicals and

[54] In real life, nuclear power production can result in alpha particles, beta particles, neutrons, gamma radiation, and x-rays being released into the environment. How dangerous each product is depends on its abundance and method of containment, and neither is mentioned in *Infinite Jest*.

abrasive microtears, creating an annular fractal of susceptibility. With all of these taken together, it ironically seems that the person who may be most susceptible to environmental toxins is Johnny Gentle. Before installing his laser-cleansing system he constantly showered and then continued to obsessively wash his hands, using an exceptional amount of soap. His skin is described as deeply tanned and leathery when it is not freshly burnt, which suggests overuse of UV tanning beds during his career in Las Vegas. The laser-cleansing he advances to is a form of light-abrasion, habitually destroying first layer of his epidermis. These are just the actions directly taken against his body; Gentle is also likely affected by traces of cleaning chemicals left on surfaces and in the air, like bleach fumes. So by trying to become clean and independent, by killing the extra-body dependent epidermal cells, he is actually weakening his skin barrier significantly. As the president of the United States and unofficial leader of O.N.A.N., Gentle's function as a figurehead indicates that his neuroses and vulnerabilities can be read into the entire population that chose him to represent them. Specifically, Gentle's preoccupations can be seen as a crystallization of the self-absorption and paranoia associated with video-calling in the general population.

In *Infinite Jest* the invention and subsequent abandonment of video-calling is driven largely by human vanity, but the core of the issue was more than mere vanity:

> People were horrified about how their own faces appeared on a TP screen. It wasn't just 'Anchorman's Bloat,' that well-known impression of extra weight that video inflicts on the face. It was worse. Even with high-end TP's high-def viewer screens, consumers perceived something essentially blurred and moist-looking about their phone-faces, a shiny pallid *indefiniteness* that struck them as not just unflattering but somehow evasive, furtive, untrustworthy, *unlikeable.* (*IJ* 147)

This description is one of many in *Infinite Jest* which echoes throughout the book, though this is its first (non-chronological) appearance. The moist, wobbly "indefiniteness" described here is also repeated later when Madame Psychosis describes the effect of the lens that makes The Entertainment so lethally fascinating, and when Hal describes his fearful conception of what it means "to be really human," to admit need for sentiment and companionship (*IJ* 695). The blurred vision is often equated with how new-born infants see the world, and the draw of The Entertainment is that it allows one to return to a state of total infantilisation for as long as your own mortality allows. Based on characters such as Kevin Bain, the reader can imagine how this sort of infantile fantasy would be appealing to the people of *Infinite Jest*. However, though Hal describes a mutated "not-quite-right-looking infant dragging anaclitically around the map, with big wet eyes and froggy-soft skin" we know that infants are not generally shiny and moist. The description of skin and eyes that Hal and the videophone callers use is more reminiscent of amphibians. Like an infant, amphibians are also creatures of liminality, as they are not strictly land- or water-dwelling. Instead of acknowledging the coproduction that binds together the subject and the environment, the self clings to its precious autonomy and creates a liminal space in which the distinction between inside and outside, self and other, momentarily blurs (Hayles 685-686). The reason why the videophone callers recoil in horror from their own image is not because they feel they look fat, but utterly inhuman, froglike. As is typical of Wallace, the name of the technology reveals its nature: it is video-*phony*, presenting its users with an uncanny imitation.

The revulsion felt about the inhuman images seen in video-phony can be felt intermittently throughout the novel, threatening to rise like bile. Both E.T.A. and the hospital is haunted by the wraith of James Incandenza, and infrequently E.T.A. students and A.A. members

mention seeing a "face in the floor" in their bedrooms (*IJ* 62-63, 254, 347, 774). Part of the reason that the *unheimlich* or Lynchian remains so effectively unsettling is that even when these monsters enter the domestic sphere, they are not domesticated, though they may superficially appear to be.[55] As we have examined in the previous chapter, the basis of Lynchian horror and the uncanny is to de-familiarise the familiar, and this perversion is what tips fascination into repulsion. The subtle but constant warping of the familiar creates in *Infinite Jest* what Cohen refers to as "ambient fear": "a kind of total fear that saturates day-today living, prodding and silently antagonizing but never speaking its own name" (VIII). As with the other unexpected face, the grotesque reflection in videophony is "unfelt by others and unseen by you until you knew just as you felt it didn't belong and it was evil: *Evil*" (*IJ* 62).The passage quoted earlier from *Infinite Jest* about videophony representations (page 147) makes clear that the froglike appearance is not perceived in others, only in video of oneself. Videophony takes what should be extremely familiar (one's own mirrored appearance) and makes it unfamiliar; and worse, induces the anxiety that others will see you as inhuman. Consumers are driven by a need to be theoretically seen which prevents them from merely turning the video function off (until it becomes fashionable to do so), but paranoid that their appearance will be unlikeable. Though these people are afraid of their own froglike appearances, the novel contains several characters that do actually appear this way. Mario and Charles Tavis both have greyish-green, mottled skin (though Mario is shaped more like a dinosaur), and many of the deformed side characters, such as Marathe's wife, have creepily soft, moist flesh.

Frogs and other amphibians are uniquely and almost literally connected to their environments because of how their skin functions. Amphibians have very porous skin, and they

[55] The "*unheimlich*" translates to essentially the uncanny, described by Freud as "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long to us, once very familiar" ("The Uncanny, 2-3).

use it to absorb nutrients and air from the environment.[56] Because of this, amphibians are extremely susceptible to genetic mutations and death due to negative influences on their environments. In the 20th and 21st centuries amphibians began suffering monumental population decline due to habitat loss, toxins entering the ecosystem, and temperature increase from global warming. The IUCN Redlist states that "nearly one-third (32 %) of the world's amphibian species are known to be threatened or extinct" and that "at least 42 % of all species are declining in population, indicating that the number of threatened species can be expected to rise in the future." The effects of annular fusion in *Infinite Jest* combine each of the greatest threats to population decline: the area cleared for the Concavity resulted in habitat loss, the radioactive byproducts of nuclear fusion[57] would seep into their skins to cause death and birth defects, and the cyclical suction and release of elements into the Concavity causes fluctuations between rainforest and desert temperatures in a northern zone. The Concavity is enclosed with Lucite (acrylic) walls and large fans, but no roof. If the Lucite was a leaded variant it might shield the surrounding area from radiation (but only from the sides), but fans would do nothing other than displace the smell of garbage if harmful gases were being released, and the groundwater would certainly be contaminated. This oversight in the containment of the Concavity and the refusal of those around it to demand more effective measures reflects the national policy which spawned the Concavity in the first place. National borders were altered to protect Americans from the

[56] Some amphibians, such as lungless salamanders and frogs, rely on their skin entirely for respiration.

[57] Exactly what the waste products from Wallace's annular fusion are is unknown. In regular D-T (deuterium and tritium) fusion, the by-products are helium and a neutron. The loose neutron could cause radioactivity, but likely only to the structure of the building. The issue with annular fusion (or at least Pemulis's description of it) is that the giant infants and hamsters imply that one of the by-products is oxygen, as an abundance of oxygen encourages growth (as in prehistoric periods). Without a background in physics, the best hypothesis I can make is that annular fusion uses electrolysis, a process involved in (non-D-T) theoretical cold fusion, which might create an excess of oxygen by charging the heavy water which is used to slow down neutrons. The by-product could also be carbon dioxide, which would accelerate plant growth and photosynthesis would produce excess oxygen, but I cannot discern a nuclear reaction that would cause this. Carbon dioxide is a well-known cause of global warming however, which is a source of possibly irreparable harm to amphibian populations. (More on carbon dioxide and global warming can be found at Climate.nasa.gov/causes/)

responsibility of the dump by lining its perimeter with new Canadian borders, completely disregarding the fact that contaminants seep downwards and greenhouse gases rise and disperse without regard for arbitrary demarcations. Even with nominative precautions taken by the O.N.A.N government, humans are still displaying the same symptoms as frogs are in the present mass extinction event, because pollution on such a scale cannot be contained. Radiation and other types of pollution seep out of the Concavity, and even those who are not mutated or sick are constantly affected by the existence of the Concavity. "Filth by its very nature it is a thing that is creeping always back," and the waste produced by consumerism and annular fusion creeps steadily away from the Concavity through the environment and human migration (*IJ* 233). Though Wallace may not have considered this, it is important to note that the leading contributor to amphibian populations beyond environmental destruction is caused by human migration and industry. Both causes are directly related to the Anthropocene, as humans drastically and permanently alter the ecosystems around them. Similarly to the humans hastily relocated out of the Concavity who then spread their damaged genetic material throughout the population, forced migration of frogs is causing massive death spikes due to forced migration by habitat loss, trade in animals, or invasive species accidentally released by humans. The extremely contagious cause of death in this case is a fungus called chytridiomycosis, or *Bd*. *Bd* kills by causing an excess of keratin to build up in the skin of frogs and other amphibians, making their skin resistant to injury in the short term but ultimately causing either suffocation or heart failure. Notably, one of the mysterious threats in the novel is the psychotropic fungus DMZ, which Hal may be poisoned by at the end of the novel. The drug's migration is driven by humans, and its path is sketchily traced from a Project MKUltra-like government programme, to some Quebecois terrorists, to Michael Pemulis, crossing national borders and decades. With the spectre of DMZ and the mould it is

derived from haunting the novel,[58] the parallel between humans and amphibian decline becomes clearer. Even to those not exposed to DMZ or exhibiting deformity, the threat of leeching contaminants through the skin remains relevant to the humans of *Infinite Jest* through radiation and other environmental poisoning. *Bd* metastasizes just under the outer layer of skin cells, so a creature could have it inside them invisibly, gradually becoming unable to function. Looking at themselves in the video screens, people recoil with a dread they cannot consciously name, which makes it all the more frightening. What they cannot articulate is that they are the next wave of "frogs," that the disease is already inside them, a fear which ironically spawns an industry to make rubber masks, life-size cut-outs, and other accessories which would become yet more garbage when videophony died out several years later. Made grotesque by their complicity in ruining the environment, the natural reaction to push away that which disgusts you in fact pulls the grotesque closer.

The mutated environments and bodies of Wallace's work serve to show how each co-produces the other. The influence of humans and the advent of the Anthropocene creates environments with organs and illnesses, while the complex macrosystem of the environment blurs lines between human and animal. In *Infinite Jest* particularly, every facet of these joined systems are threatened by the choking prevalence of garbage and poison. This chapter has begun to explore how the nation-state is empowered to alter the territory of what it considers to be its map borders, such as the establishment of the G.O.D. in *Broom of the System* and the Concavity/Convexity in *Infinite Jest*. The recursivity that Wallace utilises in many aspects of his work is especially and literally visible in the context of the environment and the body, as the individual interacts constantly and closely with both. Despite the best efforts of individuals and

[58] This is a literal haunting, because if Hal's breakdown at the end of the novel is the result of a DMZ dose, one popular theory is that his toothbrush was contaminated by the ghost of his father (Infinitesummer.org).

institutions to hide their misdeeds, the seeping nature of the grotesque ensures that it makes itself known eventually. In the chapter to follow, the Body and Politics, these themes will remain relevant as we focus on how non-normate bodies are weaponised and victimised by the governments that produce, categorise, and oppress them.

Chapter 4: The Body and Politics

Advancing from my examination on government policy and how it affects the environment and those who live in it, this chapter will look more closely at the structure of government and its citizenry. Like the environment and the body, national politics and individual bodies are described by Wallace as interlocking systems. On Wallace and politics, Paul Giles observes that "Rather than beginning, like Updike, with familiar human perspectives and then trying (often uneasily) to make inferences about larger social and political contexts, Wallace starts with abstraction and then uses the human element to subvert rigid technocratic patterns" ("Sentimental Posthumanism" 333). Sweeping and incomplete facts about the O.N.A.N.ite government are clarified to horrifying degree by detailing the effects of that system on the human body. While the deformity that occurs as a result of bad practices in the environmental relationship is described as toxicity, the misshaping of bodies in the political context may be more helpfully thought of as corruption. Dynamics of power are always present in the interactions between the metaphorical governing body and the literal governed body, and in Wallace's work this power is often abused or squandered. I focus on disability in direct connection with the political in this chapter because in *Infinite Jest* disabled bodies are perhaps the most policed of any kind. As explored in the previous chapter, altering the bodies of its citizens is a practice O.N.A.N. performs with relative impunity. They show that they can perform widespread violence upon their own population and the population of nearby countries without ever even threatening armed conflict. The resulting bodies serve as a visual gesture toward that power – unless the individual refuses and uses their body to write a different, more revolutionary

message. This refusal is hard-won, as we will also explore the ways in which the general population assists in policing disabled bodies through ableist infantilisation and fetishisation.

However, while the government as an institution and political leaders specifically are not always portrayed kindly in Wallace's work due to this tendency toward authoritarianism and violence, the structuring function of the government is clearly but uncomfortably necessary to Wallace. Much of Wallace's work attempts to navigate an uneasy balance between an innate desire – or perhaps even a need – as a human being to be governed and a similarly strong desire for personal freedoms. Wallace described the postmodern era as "a bit like the way you feel when you're in high school and your parents go on a trip, and you throw this wild and disgusting fabulous party. For a while it's great, free and freeing, parental authority gone and overthrown, a cat's-away-let's-play Dionysian revel" but eventually the decadence becomes exhausting and joyless (McCaffery 52). Wallace feels that "it's 3:00 a.m. and the couch has several burn-holes and somebody's thrown up in the umbrella stand and we're wishing the revel would end" (McCaffery 52). His example of the party that never ends encapsulates not only the an/hedonic characters of *Infinite Jest*, but across all of his work. In his first novella, "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way," the young writers (based on himself and his Creative Writing Workshop classmates) struggle with a need for both the approval of authority figures and a desire to rebel and create new art. In his posthumously published novel, *The Pale King*, Wallace essentially rewrites Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" so that his main character, Lane Dean Jr., considers his girlfriend's upcoming abortion as a conflict between a fear of responsibility and the knowledge that "*we're* going to have to be the parents now" (McCaffery 150). Without responsible, well-defined structure, we begin to see a prevalence of distorted figures – literally de-formed.

This chapter will consider how the multitude of non-normate bodies in Wallace's work may relate directly to his statements about the core purpose of art as catalyst to "to aggravate this sense of entrapment and loneliness and death in people, to move people to countenance it, since any possible human redemption requires us first to face what's dreadful, what we want to deny" (McCaffery 55). Because the dreadful object in these works is often another human being, we should consider how Wallace's interacts with stereotypes and tropes related to disability and (in an introductory manner) gender.[59] While some of Wallace's characters challenge conventional notions of disability, such as the ruthlessly efficient and stridently anti-A.D.A. Wheelchair Assassins, many other enforce harmful notions, such as the good/bad cripple dichotomy.[60] This section will define what makes a "good" or "bad" cripple according to Disability Studies research, how Wallace's work is often problematic in these regards, and how this treatment of bodies affects his message. Drawing on our previous discussion on Wallace's published work extolling David Lynch and Franz Kafka, this chapter will explain how Wallace's glut of grotesque bodies aims to "make the familiar strange" by defamiliarising what should be the most familiar thing in most people's lives – their own bodies ("E Unibus Pluram" 52).[61] By studying Wallace's reactions to these inspirations, we may better understand how Wallace uses deformity/disability as a literary device, and how his own critique raises questions about his own

[59] Considerations of gender are more fully addressed in the next chapter, the Body and the Other.

[60] A.D.A. is the common abbreviation for the Americans with Disabilities Act, first passed in 1990. The act ensured equal employment rights to people with disabilities and dictated the measures that must be taken by businesses and public transport to accommodate disabled people. The Wheelchair Assassins take particular offense at the regulation that wheelchair ramps be installed in all buildings, which they feel "treated wheelchaired persons with the solicitude that the weak substitute for respect," like "a sickly child" (*IJ* 723).

[61] Wallace covers similar ground in an interview with Charlie Rose. Wallace may have known Shklovsky's original use of the term to essentially differentiate prose from everyday language due to his fascination with Wittgenstein's word games, but in conversation he seems to explain defamiliarisation as something closer to Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (distancing effect). Even if Wallace did not study Brecht, he would have been familiar with this technique through David Lynch's films. This brand of defamiliarisation seeks to draw attention to physical and art forms (as Wallace does with his famous footnotes) in order to prevent the viewer from becoming mindlessly engrossed in their entertainment, and force critical analysis of the piece. (Please see Lucas Thompson's *Global Wallace* for further elaboration on Wallace and Brecht.)

work which may have been too uncomfortable to deal with directly. Catherine Nichols illustrates some of these devices in her essay "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, such as the assumption that physical abnormality signals mental aberration. As the title suggests, Nichols bases her argument in the Dionysian revelry Wallace described earlier, providing a basis for my own reading. Finally, we will return to Wallace's views on art, with a special interest in a theme which Wallace struggled to properly convey for his entire career: citizenship. If art is meant to aggravate our sense of mortality, examine our humanity, and draw attention to the fact that attention itself is a valuable resource, what is the ultimate direction these emotional energies? The answer is broadly to act as a true citizen, using our precious attention to be an active participant in one's local, national, and international communities, and to cherish and perform one's civic duties.

Bakhtin, Politics, and the Body

This section will discuss the research already performed in linking Wallace's work with Bakhtin's in order to gauge what elements have already caught critical notice, and what may be expanded upon. Chiefly, we will be looking at Catherine Nichols's "Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*" which studies how "David Foster 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" (3). Nichols places huge emphasis on the mask, and how for ordinary people in *Infinite Jest* the mask has become such a crutch that it consumes the entire identity. Using the mask and other carnivalesque conventions, Nichols presents *Infinite Jest* as a carnival which never ends. For Nichols, the revelry of the party and the shock of abandonment and responsibility are respectively sustained

and suspended by the use of carnival devices. “Although carnival’s masks, disguises, ironies, and intertextualities are used in Bakhtin’s vision to negate unitary interpretations of reality, Wallace articulates the carnivalesque qualities of 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” (Nichols 3-4). Rather than a tool for temporary escapism and anonymity, the mask has symbolically melded to the face, replacing the real with the desired illusion. The most obvious display of this idea is the videophony phenomenon discussed in the previous chapter, where the public was so uncomfortable with their repellently moist faces that they purchased increasingly ridiculous and beautiful masks, and then refused to leave the house so others would not realise how different their flesh faces were from their plastic ones. It was obvious when a mask or tableaux was being used on videophone, and ubiquitous enough that the shame was not caused by merely using one. The source of fear and shame was that someone’s perception of you would now be fractured; there would be two images of you in their minds rather than a single one, which you had complete control over. This fear helps explain why *Infinite Jest* features so many addicts and people who are emotionally guarded; they are obsessed with perception and control. Those who are emotionally open are seen as disgusting, such as the infantile men in the Inner Child help group Hal accidentally attends, who provoke “a wave of nausea” (*IJ* 802). Later, Wallace describes the essence of Hal’s problems, which he attempts to distract himself from with drugs: “One of the really American things about Hal, probably, is the way he despises what it is he's really lonely for: this hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need, that pules and writhes just under the hip empty mask, anhedonia” (*IJ* 695). Nichols proposes that the opening scene of Hal being restrained and carried bodily off a college campus while his interviewers retch and scream is not because he is actually making the bestial

sounds they describe. Instead, the mask of anhedonia has been removed and he is speaking in pure sentiments, and his sincerity and emotional vulnerability is alien and therefore disgusting.

Nichols's essay is incredibly informative, but this section will seek to extend and complicate her work by considering the political, something largely missing from her piece. While the idea of *Infinite Jest* as a dark carnival which has spiralled out of control seems accurate, Nichols does not consider the systems of power which were originally at play in the carnivalesque. Nichols correctly links the carnivalesque and Wallace's wariness towards postmodern irony, but does not address the complicated ways in which Wallace still engages with carnivalesque satire on several metafictional levels. By studying the character of Johnny Gentle and the U.H.I.D. and O.U.S. organisations, Nichols's ideas can be complicated and expanded to view how the carnivalesque has not only been grotesquely overextended, but twisted in order to benefit powerful institutions. She does comment on the existence of the O.U.S., and observes that "self-exposure is displaced by donning heterodox costumes that further the surveillance, information gathering, and violence that serve as instruments of social control rather than subversion" (Nichols 8). I will attempt to carry Nichols's point further, to detail *how* these costumes further government action, not just that they do. We will also ask questions which Nichols could not address in her short paragraph on the O.U.S.: why are Americans unable to see through Steeply's awful disguise, and even drawn to it? Why can Marathe see through it immediately? Why does the O.N.A.N. government take this approach in the first place? Because her essay tends to deal more with specific characters and the carnivalesque, Nichols does not fully express how purposeful and widespread the government domination of grotesquery is. The pieces are present within her argument – that the contemporary age is a nonstop carnival; that masks have become mutated and co-opted, that Bakhtinian renewal has

been traded for stasis – but I will extrapolate on how these events have been caused to benefit an authoritarian government.

Despite the concerns and arguments made above, the political and social situation presented by Wallace is not entirely bleak. In order to explore some kind of hope within this dark political landscape, we may begin by extending Nichols's view of *Infinite Jest's* title. She writes that the Shakespeare quotation dedicated to Hamlet's fool "reflects the potential for wit to mock authority without attending to its displacement" and Wallace's interviews present distaste for "critical negation" (6).[62] However, I believe it is important to consider that unlike in *Hamlet*, *Infinite Jest's* "Yorick" is still present. James Incandenza (J.O.I) named his company Poor Yorick Entertainment Unlimited, and named his lethal Entertainment for the same quotation, and at the end of *Infinite Jest* he is revealed to have been present throughout the novel as a wraith. It is possibly even J.O.I. who narrates the novel, as "Even a garden-variety wraith could move at the speed of quanta and be anywhere anytime and hear in symphonic toto the thoughts of animate men" and even "use somebody's like internal brain-voice if it wanted to try to communicate something" (*IJ* 831). J.O.I. demonstrates by planting words like "CHRONAXY and POOR YORICK" into Don Gately's mind (*IJ* 832). In the text, none of J.O.I.'s dialogue with Gately is encapsulated by quotation marks, his words are presented as if they were Gately's own thoughts, and the reader only knows differently because Gately is aware of an exchange and there is a huge difference between Gately's diction and J.O.I.'s. It is entirely possible that J.O.I. has been flitting between characters and time throughout the novel, able to interject his own commentary (such as through footnotes) or even subtly implant it in their narratives. This might

[62] Nichols does not specify exactly, but I believe she is referring to Wallace's criticism of writers such as Bret Easton Ellis using sardonic writing as a form of laziness, as a shortcut to appearing cool and disaffected without actually making an effort to change an unpleasant/unjust situation, only complain about it. In German television interview, Wallace summarised such writers as "a bird which has come to love its cage" (*ZDF* 03:03).

explain why *Infinite Jest's* dialogue only occurs in single quotation marks, which imply unseen double quotation marks around a monologue. J.O.I.'s presence and power shows that irony and satire may be dead, but they are still very formidable. Even if, like Hal and Don towards the end of the novel, J.O.I. is attempting to speak from a "position of marginality," his position as a wraith means that he can still subtly communicate through the voices and bodies of others (Nichols 16). Readers even learn that Mario's puppet show, the source of almost all political background in the novel, is based on a J.O.I. film called *The O.N.A.N.tiad*. Nichols likens J.O.I. to Wallace, the wraith's commitment to radical realism's "history-mining attention to character, narrative, and etymology also provides an accurate description of Wallace's own approach to crafting *Infinite Jest*" (14-15). However, we might instead imagine him as a stand in for Pynchon, Barth, and the other "dead" fathers in the patricidal late post-modernist era, still able to speak through the mediated work of sons.

In "Conjuring David Foster Wallace's Ghost: Prosopopeia, Whitmanian Intimacy and the Queer Potential of Infinite Jest and The Pale King" Vince Haddad writes that the ghostly presences in Wallace's fiction "provide a conceptual metaphor for how Wallace conceives of each novel as a relational mode between the author figure and his readership" (2). David Hering writes similarly in *David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form* about the author as a revenant ghost seeking to establish a new kind of relationship with the reader (16-17). Following Barth Hering believes Wallace considers the author both present and "dead" (16). There cannot be a direct return to pre-Barthesian times, but the author insists on speech and presence despite his death. He explains, "I do not read the revenant author as a direct 'revival' of the pre-Barthesian author figure, but rather a 'ghostly' return of the dead author, one aware of his existential contingency upon readerly presence and interpretation and committed to a dialogic engagement with those

readers" (Hering 18). This is perhaps why the narrator of *Infinite Jest* is so playful – his continued existence depends upon being entertaining. This relates to the very serious role that the act of play takes in Bakhtin's philosophy as well as Wittgenstein's. Dialogic play may not be strictly necessary to biological human life, but its political and psychological ties to freedom and joyful connection make it necessary to life which is not torturous. Hering writes that "the revenant author accepts 'the birth of the reader,' but refuses to submit to its own effacement, instead proposing an author-reader relationship that is explicitly dialogic" (38). Hering continues his exploration on ghosts in Wallace's work from his 2016 *David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form* in his 2017 article "Reading the Ghost in David Foster Wallace's Fiction." He continues to argue that the ghost is representative of authorial presence which seeks to deviate from traditional monologic norms. He reads J.O.I. specifically as a ghost concerned with the anxiety of influence, characterised by his own aforementioned habit of possession (9). Hering writes that the mixing of J.O.I. and the possessed Gately's voices shows a possession which is "framed, however problematically, in terms of *dialogue*" (12). However, I believe that J.O.I.'s could just as easily be read as a "possessor" ghost who simply speaks like a "companion ghost" (34). His possessive enforces the previously mentioned refusal to submit, as the revenant author relinquishes figurative control over the reader but exerts total control over other narrative figures. If we read this forceful possession as hostile, this may complicate how Haddad sees the device of the ghost as crucial to establishing intimacy between the author and reader (2). When Gately feels violated by the wraith and begins to question the nature of his presence, J.O.I. responds that "Gately may as well stop trying and just try to capitalise on its presence" because their relationship is uniquely free of the need to communicate by physically speaking, which Gately is currently incapable of doing and J.O.I. was quite bad at in life (*IJ* 830). This dismissal may seem

callous when read as a reader and author relationship, but Haddad challenges this idea by revealing the entire conception of the revenant author as a phantasm: "His presence […] was always already a fiction" (22). Returning to the idea of Bahktinian dialogism which Hering focuses on, the logical knowledge that the author's presence is a fiction does not mean that it is not a compelling or useful one, just that it is a fiction which readers can negotiate on their own terms, through their own experiences.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin proposes that the common people can strategically use the grotesque body in art and the celebration of the carnival as a means of satirizing institutional figures. By focusing on a body which is ruled by its primary (often ugly) functions, such as eating and defecating, the figures are made undoubtedly human and therefore laughable. The body parts which are most often depicted as grotesque are the ones which interact most with the external world, orifices and protuberances. The carnivalesque use of the grotesque does not shame these functions or body parts, and often highlights how joy and disgust may exist simultaneously in acts such as eating and sex. The carnivalesque understands that these functions/parts are generally shameful, which plays into its use of humour, but the focus of the revelry is not "the king urinates" as much as "the king urinates *too*." Bakhtin clarifies that in modern times "the satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it," whereas Rabelaisian laughter includes the whole world (12). Though the grotesque may appear to be wildly deformed, its purpose is ultimately to humanise and to define the world by universality, rather than negation. The grotesque instigates an inversion, where what is low (both anatomically and in terms of class structure) is celebrated and what is high (the mind and the state/clergy) is brought low. The lower body is re-classified as a place of renewal, where the organs and orifices which evacuate toxins and create new life are

located. The privileging of the lower stratum itself is a rebellious act, shirking the importance of the brain and the mouth's use for language mirroring a snubbing of the figurative head of state.

In *Infinite Jest*, Gentle builds upon the hygiene anxiety introduced in *The Broom of the System* to make his body immune not only to foreign contamination, but satire. Gentle is elected on the promise that "he wasn't going to stand here and ask us to make some tough choices because he was standing here promising he was going to make them for us" and needs to live up to that patriarchal image for the rest of his presidency (*IJ* 383). The "anxiety" portion of the term arises from the desire to "want to have your membrane and eat it too," to only "tear down distinctions the way *you* want them torn down" (*Broom* 138). Gentle lists one of his primary directives as president will be to unite the American people, even if he must invent an enemy for them to unite against, so it is clear that he is not a radical individualist (*IJ* 384). He is willing to blur personal distinction in favour of a national identity, but only if he is seen as the driving force of the unification. Jay's definition of hygiene anxiety consists of an active and a passive role, enacted by a Self and an Other (*Broom* 138). To perform the active role is validating and empowering, achievable by impressing one's emotions upon another or enacting one's will upon them. To take the passive role, willingly or not, is to dirty the pristine Self. For a narcissist such as Gentle, the appeal of being acknowledged by the great many is substantial, but extremely threatening to his sense of control. Gentle aspires to be at the head of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. The citizen of the Commonwealth declares "I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition; that thou give up, thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in this manner" (Hobbes Web). Hobbes continues that "mortal god" Leviathan becomes the source of all action, he is "enabled to form the wills of them all" (Web). For the sovereign, hygiene anxiety may dissipate. The strong group rhetoric of nationalism

assuages feelings of alienation or solitude, but the sovereign himself is made exceptional. Because the sovereign is given leave by Hobbes to "use the strength and means of them all as he shall think expedient for their peace and common defence," the threat of force underlies every relationship and action between the sovereign and his institutions and the common people (Web). Gentle's administration exhibits some large displays of social control to enforce this Leviathan-image, such as constant surveillance by the O.U.S., and the show of military and political force by essentially bullying Canada into accepting the Concavity/Convexity.

Gentle himself is also obsessed with exhibiting a multitude of small displays of control, specifically control over his own body. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gentle is obsessed with removing or neutralizing every "dirty" part of his body, and these parts are often sites of Bakhtinian celebration. For example, he commonly covers protuberances like his mouth and nose, seems to be entirely asexual, and undergoes several colonic irrigations a day to prevent himself from even defecating like a normal person. A tabloid newspaper from Mario's puppet show features a janitor "Holding up a Mammoth Plastic Barrel He Claims Held Just One Day's Haul of Dental Stimulators, Alcohol-Soaked Cotton Puffs, GI-X-Ray-Grade Colonic Purgative Bottles, Epidermal Ash, Surgical Masks and Gloves, Q-Tips, Kleenex, and Homeopathic Pruritus-Cream Containers" (393). Mario's puppet show does contain both real and fictionalised stories, but because the photo does not seem to be of a puppet, we may assume that this is a real story. Even if it is not, it would illustrate how hygienically obsessed Gentle appears in the eyes of the American public. It also illustrates an incredible irony to the reader, showing that while Gentle is panicking to find a place to dispose of the nation's garbage, he is producing yet more garbage. Duke University and the U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce estimates that "The average person generates 4.3 pounds of waste per day," so Gentle produces that much, plus at

least one extra barrel of garbage (USGreenChamber.com). And because his trash is all body-related, his body is inextricably bound to it. Both his innards and outside surfaces are represented in the trash, from his mucus in Kleenex, to the gloves and masks he presents to the world as his visage, to vaporised remnants of the skin he hides underneath the gloves. However, this obsession with protecting his image from Bakhtinian subversion leaves him vulnerable to pure mockery. While carnival effigies familiarised authority figures even while utilizing strange imagery, Gentle's behaviour renders him totally unfamiliar, and mockery is a common response to the unfamiliar. We can see this sort of mockery in the text at E.T.A., where it has become a tradition to show Mario's satirical puppet show once a year for the students to watch together and laugh at. The event is even linked to the carnival, as it is the one time per year when the students are allowed to freely indulge in candy, and the smaller children perform all sorts of pranks on their teachers. They "tied Aubrey DeLint's shoelaces together and Krazy-Glued Mary Ester-Thode's left buttock to the seat of her chair," engaging in suitably Bakhtinian joy over the rump and protruding feet (*IJ* 384). This showing is the most we ever see of Gentle, so the only interaction between the public and Gentle in the novel is one of mockery. The students throw candies at his screened image, "giving the smooth sterile Gentle a sort of carbuncular look that everyone approves" (384). The ugliness and infection of the cyst destroys the image of Gentle as inviolate, and this destruction brings the common people joy.

In addition to being a site of mockery within the novel, Gentle is also satirized on a metatextual level. The most obvious interpretation of Johnny Gentle is as a Reagan caricature, as both men were conservatives with backgrounds in show business and Gentle's promise to "clean up America" echoes Reagan's work with Keep America Beautiful, including the Clean

Community System.[63] Gentle runs on a proposal to "Shoot Our Waste into Space," which seems to combine Gentle's obsession with mess and Reagan's similarly overblown "Star Wars" programme (*IJ* 387).[64] However, in *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story*, D.T. Max states that Wallace voted for Reagan (259). He did not vote for Reagan's vice president, George H.W. Bush, in his second election in 1992, and campaigned for the Independent fiscal conservative Ross Perot (Max 259). *Infinite Jest* was begun in 1986, but mostly produced between 1991 and1992. It is possible that Wallace was originally supportive of Reagan's presidency, but became disillusioned by the time Bush succeeded him. In an interview with The Atlantic, D.T. Max theorises that "He came from a liberal academic family in the Midwest, and it was a little bit of an épater of the bourgeoisie in voting for Reagan. I also think that there's a little aspect of Ayn Randism in his confidence in himself" (Been, Web). In the same interview Max also accredits Wallace's later liberalism and interest in politics to his wife, Karen Green, and the fact that Wallace would benefit from social services. Wallace did not marry Green until 2004 – well after Infinite Jest – but Reagan's cuts to government spending may have negatively affected Wallace as a student and later a university employee. This shift seems to be supported in later novel *The Pale King*, where several IRS agents have a discussion about the upcoming 1980 election. They theorise that someone could win by declaring themselves an outsider, someone who agreed with the general public that politics were essentially boring. This exciting person could win, and all of the actual political work could be done by a traditional Establishment Vice President (150). This is basically the set-up of Gentle and Rod "The God" Tine in *Infinite Jest*.

[63] Unrelated to Reagan but very relevant to *Infinite Jest*; Keep America Beautiful would go on to team up with Glad for the Glad Bag-a-Thon clean-up programme. GLAD is prominent in *Infinite Jest*, as the book begins(/chronologically ends) in the Year of Glad, and James Incandenza's father was the spokesman character "Man from Glad." In 1990, Canada became the first international affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, and a video conference on solid waste was held. (Kab.org/about-us/mission-history\)

[64] "Star Wars" was the popular name for the Strategic Defense Initiative, which was announced as a network of satellites surrounding the globe to protect the USA from missiles and strategically return fire.

Gentle is easily elected on a party ticket which is partly comprised of the non-traditional Green party, and he is the face of the government, announcing the gerrymandering and providing gossip fodder with his odd habits. Even in Mario's puppet mockumentary, Tine seems to direct most of the meetings as Gentle's sanity declines. However, it is difficult to tell how much of the political heavy lifting is actually being done by Tine. The waste-focus of the Concavity would point to Gentle's hygienic obsession, but it is Tine who runs the O.U.S., is called "the God," and who the Canadian rebels ultimately target. If Gentle and Tine are indeed models of Reagan and Bush, then Wallace adds another layer of satire onto these characters. Not only is Gentle subjected to mockery by the citizens in the novel through outrageous headlines, but by Wallace and his readers as well. While Tine is eventually present during a Technical Interview, we only ever see Gentle as a puppet. (Tine is not free from mockery, however. Page 548 of *Infinite Jest* reveals that the phallically-named Rod Tine is obsessed with measuring his penis, and does so ritualistically every day.) Moreover, Mario's puppet film compiles a huge list of headlines about Gentle and his administration, and while the viewers of the film would know which were real and which Mario wrote, the readers do not. They are all presented as equally truthful, most are in the all-caps style of newspaper headlines. Some are not, seeming way too long and strange to be real, but Steeply is later revealed to have worked for several news organs during his cover, and all of his titles are excessively long. For readers, there is simply no way to tell which stories are "real" in a fiction book where ghosts and bus-sized infants exist.

The O.U.S. and Government-Sponsored Grotesques

The Office of Unspecified Services is a sort of C.I.A. analogue which purposefully assigns its agents to undercover positions they are not suited for. The main interaction most

characters have with the O.U.S. is with Hugh Steeply, a beefy middle-aged ex-American football player who is assigned as a woman named Helen. The O/U.S. purposefully creates characters who will be spectacles:

> Casting men as women, women as longshoremen or Orthodox rabbinicals, heterosexual men as homosexual men, Caucasians as Negroes or caricaturesque Haitians and Dominicans, healthy males as degenerative-nerve-disease-sufferers, healthy women operatives as hydro-cephalic boys or epileptic public-relations executives, nondeformed U.S.O.U.S. personnel made not only to pretend but sometimes to actually suffer actual deformity, all for the realism of their field-personae. (*IJ* 419)

This section will study this practice, which Canadian triple agent Marathe calls "sadistic" on page 419. Recalling earlier definitions of Bakhtinian grotesques, we will discuss how a government body altering the bodies of its employees and citizens falls under the realm of sadism, and how these cruelties preserve the balance of power by exploiting spectacle and the unfamiliar. The attempt of the state to flip the traditional Bakhtinian script of humanising shame may be thought of as a more sinister understanding of Olsen's comment on Lenore Sr.'s mysterious manipulations: "If we don't fully know the rules, we don't fully know the games" (213). It is beneficial to the state that its subjects do not understand how to effectively play games of power and control, because winning these games are imperative to its continued growth.

The co-option of the grotesque by authority in order to obscure the rules of law and human rights is not only seen in the Office of Unspecified Services. As explored in the previous chapter on the environment, the majority of the deformed characters in *Infinite Jest* are ordinary American and Canadian citizens. Through acts considered criminal negligence at best and

deliberate crimes against humanity at worst, the Concavity/Convexity is allowed to affect a huge number of people, and will continue to cause deformities through continued pollution and genetic defects. Perhaps one of the reasons that the Office's agents are so effective is because their appearances are – though not yet "normal" – unsurprising. The government has the power to irreparably alter the bodies of its subjects, and those alterations serve as a visual reminder of that power and presence. They are not only signals of the environmental damage caused by the erection of the Concavity/Convexity, but the government's right to displace individuals through a combination of FEMA-type disaster management[65] and after-the-fact eminent domain rights.[66] Those who are deformed because of the radioactive Concavity/Convexity, like Marathe's wife and several E.T.A. students, seem to be immediately recognised as such. These people are reduced to their deformed bodies like similarly non-normate characters, but they are further dehumanized as their bodies serve merely as gestures toward the power of the government. They are the products of an event that was itself a bold act of political strength: the mass relocation of U.S. and Canadian citizens and the remapping of the entire North American continent. Their presence could inform the widespread paranoia of the other characters (sometimes exacerbated by marijuana consumption) who act as if they are being watched even when they are not. Hal is

[65] FEMA is the Federal Emergency Management Agency. During Wallace's lifetime FEMA handled two incidents which could be related to *Infinite Jest*. The first is the Three Mile Island Accident in 1979, where a nuclear reactor partially melted down. The damage from leaked radiation was minimal, but the incident has scarred the public perception of nuclear energy production (United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/3mile-isle.html). The second was the Love Canal Disaster, where a corporation dumped 21,000 tons of toxic chemicals on a site which later became a school and residential neighborhood in the 1950's. The school's construction broke many of the waste containers, allowing the contamination to spread through the groundwater and rain. By the late 1970's when the site was finally declared a public health emergency, disease, miscarriage, and birth defects (including enlarged heads and extremities like many in *Infinite Jest*) were well above average. A mass relocation similar to *Infinite Jest*'s was necessary. (New York Health Department)

[66] The UK equivalent would be compulsory purchase laws, though it is unclear if the citizens moved from their homes were ever compensated, as both practices require (in the US Constitution, it is a right under the 5th Amendment). It is viewed by some as a violation of private property rights and has been abused in the past, and Wallace may have been illustrating such an example by having the government frame the evacuation as disaster relief rather than an eminent domain case. In fact, the government had already been using the land as if they owned it and dumping public waste on it, and afterward the site was expropriated for official federal use.

even aware of it, admitting that he "likes to get high in secret, but a bigger secret is that he's as attached to the secrecy as he is to getting high" (*IJ* 49).

It is telling that the only person who is able to see through Steeply's disguise is not American or even strictly Canadian, Marathe is Quebecois. Quebec is described as being incredibly anti-Interdependence, there are seven registered anti-O.N.A.N. terrorist groups listed on page 58, of which six are explicitly Quebecois.[67] The remaining group, the Calgarian Pro-Canadian Phalanx, is in Alberta, but they are an extreme environmentalist group and would focus on the Concavity/Convexity in Quebec. These are people who have not been fooled by O.N.A.N.'s gerrymandering, back-channelling, and erroneous public statements, and they are not fooled by O.U.S. agents either. Despite the distraction of the spectacle, Marathe immediately sees Steeply for what he is, listing all of his masculine physical features and tics as well as stating "he appeared huge and bloated as a woman, not merely unattractive but inducing something like sexual despair" (*IJ* 90). This appears to be true only for Marathe, however. Orin Incandenza and the rest of his football team, who could (and frequently do) romance any woman they desire are mesmerized by Steeply; in a phone call to Hal he describes Steeply as "more imposing than like most of our starting backfield. But weirdly sexy. The linemen are gaga" (*IJ* 247). Joelle Van Dyne does not realise her disguise either, after being questioned by the Office of Unspecified Services she says that she almost removed her veil to escape "the outside-linebacker of a federal lady," suggesting that while Joelle finds Steeply unattractive, she does not

[67] The FLQ (Quebec Liberation Front or "Front de Libération du Québec" is a real separatist paramilitary group who committed many terrorist acts, mostly during the 1960's, but the most public was the October Crisis in 1970 when a Cabinet Minister named Pierre Laporte was murdered. Wallace rewrites this in *Infinite Jest*, and the A.F.R. and F.L.Q. commit several high-profile assassinations.

guess Steeply's true sex (*IJ* 958).[68] In *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, Marshall Boswell draws a link between Marathe's disability and his unique sense of clarity:

Ironically, Marathe and his fellow members of the Assassins des Fauteuils Roulants (A.F.R.) are literally immobilized, incapable of independent ambulation, but like Odin's sacrifice of his eye, the loss of Marathe's lower members has apparently been compensated for by the gifts of freedom and enlightenment, and it is Marathe who is able both to diagnose the malady and suggest a cure. (179)

This passage refers to Marathe suggesting that the danger of the Entertainment not being the actual fatal cartridge, but that so many people would freely choose to watch it. Marathe also correctly identifies Hugh Steeply as a man, and gives Kate Gompert sage (but unheeded) advice on clinical depression, choosing, and purpose. As a Canadian and a disabled person, Marathe's position as an outsider is presented as a source of wisdom, he is able to correctly advise his American contacts because he is removed from the situation.

In addition to Bakhtin's concepts of carnival and the grotesque when examining the O.U.S. and how it functions, it is also helpful to consider Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Face. The Face does not refer exactly to the anatomical face, but rather the ideal of the face.[69] Deleuze and Guattari theorise that the Face has become so powerfully coded that it can be conceptualised separately from the head, which allowed primitive cultures to use masks to facilitate becoming-animal. The use of masks in *Infinite Jest* is mostly concerned with the videophony phenomenon, where people attempted to use masks to become "better" humans

[68] This line, for me, also sheds light on the nature of Joelle's disfigurement. By implying that she could have used her face as a weapon against Steeply, Joelle seems to suggest that she is actually hideously deformed.

[69] Deleuze and Guattari use the example of the "West Point chin," which may refer to someone's actual pronounced/cleft chin, but may also be easily imagined without referencing any specific person, as a separate unit which is coded to military prowess (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 198). Deleuze and Guattari also say that the combination of units can transform a concrete face; to carry on that example, the same strong chin in the presence of other features may be more "Movie Star" than "West Point."

rather than animals, assembling heavily coded facial features to convey messages of attractiveness, youth, etc. However, actual masks are present less often than the motif of the Face in general. Unidentified young E.T.A. students[70] and drug addicts both complain of horrific visions of a "face in the floor" which represents absolute evil (*IJ* 62-63, 254, 347). Both the Infinite Jest cartridge and addiction are represented by a male figure with a generic yellow smiley for a face, linking evil to not only gnashing teeth but an innocuous representation of joy.

Infinite Jest also highlights the symbolism of the Face by including it in its catalogue of Bostonian slang. Most of the slang in the novel is real, but the colloquial "map," meaning "face," is invented and may have become popularised in the setting of the novel by Gentle threatening to turn America's nuclear warheads inward and "ELIMINATE [HIS] OWN MAP OUT OF SHEER PIQUE" (407). Specifically, "eliminating one's map" is used as a colloquialism for suicide in the novel, generally by shooting oneself in the head as Eric Clipperton does, destroying the anatomical face (IJ 231). The idea of the map as a representation is explored during an Eschaton game where the young players and older spectators argue about the difference between a map and territory, and if changes to the map can be said to affect the territory (*IJ* 333). O.N.A.N. is not mentioned in the exchange, but readers can easily follow the argument to O.N.A.N.ite politics, where the U.S. forcibly altered both the map and the territory of North America. The argument is complex: sometimes changes to the representing image of the territory do affect the territory itself, like Canada being forced to accept the Concavity/Convexity. However, the fact that O.N.A.N. exists on maps at all does not seem to affect the territorial reality that people still consider themselves rigidly American or Canadian, rather than O.N.A.N.ites. This is also the

[70] At least one of these E.T.A. students is Hal Incandenza, who tells Orin that he used to dream about a face in the floor after discovering his father's corpse (*IJ* 254). The earlier section of the unnamed child seeing a face in the floor could be Hal, the timing matches up, but there is also no reference of Mario being present and the room is decorated uncharacteristically (*IJ* 62).

moment when Hal starts to become detached from himself, culminating in his watching a horrific accident and having to feel "at his own face to see whether he is wincing" (*IJ* 342). The map of his face has ceased to represent the territory of his inner emotions, a feeling which Hal later recognises as "completely and uncomfortably bizarre," similar to the vein of uncomfortable strangeness that runs through the entire videophony phenomenon (*IJ* 342).

The functionality of the O.U.S. depends on both the ideal of the Face and the desire to connect both "map" and "territory". By including certain coded markers in their disguises, O.U.S. agents are able to utilise the dependence on faciality and subvert the carnivalesque. Steeply, for example, has a masculine figure but by wearing makeup and presenting feminine physicality (such as smoking with his elbow in the opposite hand), the Face over-codes the head. People naturally seek to turn their attention away from sources of cognitive dissonance, which is why O.U.S. agents make excellent spies. Most people do not want to look at them directly for very long, because the symbols representing a certain class of individual (woman, Hassidic Jew, etc.) and the real terrain of their bodies are uncomfortably disparate. People want the two to match, and when they do not they do not want to look any longer. This is perhaps why Marathe feels such acute disgust for Steeply's appearance – in Steeply's electrolysis rash and lopsided breasts Marathe sees only a grotesque caricature of femininity superimposed upon a man. The avoidance of unfamiliarity and willingness to divert perception may also explain why Orin and his football team find Steeply so attractive. Steeply is described as having the figure of a line-backer, so in some ways his body should be immediately familiar to the team he is attempting to deceive with his female disguise. A section where Orin describes his habit of watching recordings of himself playing football and becoming aroused is yet another example of *Infinite*

Jest's motif of onanism, a desire for the familiar. In Steeply, Orin and the other football players are able to experience this desire with a "safe" object, a woman.

U.H.I.D. and the Veil

The Union of the Hideously and Improbably Deformed is a support group for non-normate people in *Infinite Jest*, one of many Alcoholics Anonymous-type groups, which focuses on the "the openness of concealment" that wearing a veil at all public times can afford their membership base (126). The duality of their name reflects their philosophy of being both obvious and concealed – the acronym reads "you hid," there is no guessing about the nature of the organisation, which is based in hiding. This group is in one aspect the direct opposite of the O.U.S., which creates highly visible and variable grotesque bodies; U.H.I.D. champions universal concealment. This section will explain how U.H.I.D. acknowledges and navigates the ways in which disabled bodies are politicised using several theoretical frameworks. While disability studies works such as "Posthuman Disability Studies" by Goodley, Lawthorn, and Runswick will be brought in, we will also consider concepts from W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "The Veil" from *The Souls of Black Folk*. Though U.H.I.D. members can hide their exact deformity under the veil, wearing it immediately marks them as Other in ways that their original bodies may not have (the flyer Madame Psychosis reads on air says that U.H.I.D. welcomes "chemists and pure-math majors" among the deformed on page 74). By covering their bodies, are the members of U.H.I.D. performing a toxic, hegemonic version of disability which defines non-normate bodies as disgusting, shameful, something to be hidden away? Or are they taking control by removing their visages from opportunities of ridicule and morbid fascination?

Rosi Braidotti's book *The Posthuman* opens by stating that "Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now," and *Infinite Jest* seems to confirm this notion by continually relating non-normate people to monstrous creatures, like dinosaurs and Gorgons (1). Braidotti later clarifies that the "human" is specific: "he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied" (24). Braidotti's explanation aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's image of the Face, as "racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face," and those who are dissimilar are reduced to subhuman Others (178). Goodley, Lawthom, and Runswick explain that minority groups (non-Europeans, the disabled, etc.) "become known in terms of what they are not," strangeness that is thought of in terms of grotesque lack rather than Bakhtinian excess. For the members of U.H.I.D., the goal is not to deny difference or deviance, but to conceal its degrees. By donning a white linen veil, U.H.I.D. members create a uniform appearance of lack. Joelle Van Dyne's list of U.H.I.D. eligible persons spans from page 187-192, and includes everything from common obesity, to chemists, to "them that seep" (187). The veil is strange – inhuman, even – but its featureless expanse also offers no purchase for those attempting to attack individual deformities by comparing them to the "default" human face. It does offer what one U.H.I.D. representative calls "the openness of concealment" (*IJ* 317). By eliminating their own map (face), the U.H.I.D. member denies access to the territory of their entire self. Joelle Van Dyne explains that the veil allows them to "stand very straight and walk briskly wherever we wish [. . .] completely up-front and unashamed about the fact that how we appear to others affects us deeply, about the fact that we want to be shielded from all sight," expressing a complex negotiation between vulnerability and stubborn dignity (*IJ* 535). U.H.I.D.

members admit to feeling shame about their own bodies, and voluntarily de-face themselves so that others cannot dehumanize them first.

In order to understand the "openness of concealment" that makes U.H.I.D. attractive to some non-normate people, we can compare it to W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "the Veil" from *The Souls of Black Folk*. Though his concept was written to explain black experience in the United States, several of the Veil's concepts can be applied to other marginalised groups, including the disabled or otherwise bodily different. Intersectional feminist Patricia Hill Collins wrote in "Gender, Black Feminism, and Black Political Economy" that "Du Bois saw race, class, and nation not primarily as personal identity categories but as social hierarchies that shaped African-American access to status, poverty, and power" (42). Additional social hierarchies such as dis/ability also figure into access to personal success and power, and distort how an individual is perceived of by the dominant crowd. The Veil is essentially the dominant image of that group in the mind of the majority. Du Bois describes the image of "a clownish, simple creature, at times even lovable within its limitations," applicable to both a minstrel show representation of an African American and someone like Mario Incandenza (38). The viewing group can only see the Other's Veil, not their interior self, and the Other can only see the world through their Veil. The Veil is effectively the barrier between the Other and full humanity, DuBois imagines the Southern whites thinking "—some of them with favouring chance might become men, but in sheer self-defence we dare not let them, and we build about them walls so high, and hang between them and the light a veil so thick, that they shall not even think of breaking through" (38). We see this in *Infinite Jest* as well, some of the strangely formed characters, such as Gately and Marathe, journey towards full humanity as the novel progresses, and arguably they both

fail.[71] Even Mario, who many readers posit is the emotional heart of the novel, is admonished by Hal for not being "a fucking human being," as Mario's loveable limitations include him being incapable of anger, sexual passion, understanding written language, and many other markers of full human experience (*IJ* 874). Mario, in particular, does not need the linen veil offered to him by the U.H.I.D. representative that Hal chased away. Mario already exists completely behind a Veil – he is one of few characters whose internal monologues readers are never explicitly detailed, he is constantly infantilised by E.T.A. students who vie to cut up his food for him and Hal, who calls Mario "kid" even though Mario is 2 years his senior. Hal chases the U.H.I.D. representative away because he is insulted that anyone would assume Mario's appearance is shameful and would require a ritual of concealment (*IJ* 317). This is because Hal only understands shame and secrecy in the context of ritual, such as his dope smoking; hiding in plain sight simply does not occur to him. Mario enjoys listening to people, so he nimbly utilises the Veil he was born with. People enjoy talking to Mario, because they only interface with his "visibly damaged" exterior, to them "nobody's really in there" (*IJ* 81). Though they hide in different ways, the Mario and Joelle are both able to use visual demarcation to navigate life as they prefer it, they are basically left alone to pursue their art interests (film and radio) and mostly are free from the violence suffered by those who conceal themselves less adeptly.

The Veil can be a place of refuge, but the obstruction of communication also allows resentment and misunderstanding to fester on either side. Clare Hayes-Brady begins to explore gender and the Veil in a focused analysis of Madame Psychosis in "'…' Language, Gender, and Modes of Power in the Work of David Foster Wallace." However, she presents the veil as an

[71] Gately either ends up being accidentally given Demerol in the hospital, or perhaps helping Hal dig up J.O.I.'s head to retrieve The Entertainment and finding it already stolen. Marathe's fate is also unclear, but the leader of the A.F.R. plans to make Marathe view The Entertainment on page 1055, and Marathe seems to still be with the A.F.R. as they plan to invade the E.T.A. gala.

acknowledgment of alterity and radical delineation of Joelle's female body (137). While Joelle's face may be a delineated space, free from the male gaze, her body in general is not. While admiring Joelle's body in an oversized old sweater (clearly not trying to attract sexual attention) Erdedy notes that "it's also the veil, wondering what horrific contrast to the body's allure lies swollen or askew under that veil; it gives the pull a perverse sideways slant that makes it even more distracting" (365). So Joelle is in some ways even more objectified by the male gaze as a faceless, dehumanized body. Erdedy is free to imagine what is under the veil and enjoy the possibility of fascinating deformity without actually having his view of Joelle's body spoiled. Joelle herself is often misunderstood, she has a tendency to mix code switch (academic/rural) and use sarcasm, which is made more confusing by her lack of facial expressions. She can see others through her veil (and Veil), just as Mario and Marathe can, noticing "people looking at her like you look at the blind, naked gazes, not knowing she could see everything at all times" (*IJ* 221). The Veil affords a "second sight," as outsiders those who live inside it are able to gather unique perspectives and experiences, which are both coloured by the Veil and alienated by it (Du Bois 2). Joelle attempts to open up to someone about her appearance only once in the novel, to her romantic interest (Gately), a moment which conventionally would have led to acceptance and understanding. Instead, they have a back-and-forth where Joelle explains her condition and Gately either acts like she is not there (referring to Joelle as "her" and "she" rather than "you") or is lying:

> 'I am deformed with beauty.'
>
> 'You want to see my professional Staff face here's my Staff face. I nod and smile, I treat you like somebody I have to humor by nodding and smiling, and behind the face I'm

going with my finger around and around my temple like What a fucking yutz, like Where's the net.' (*IJ* 538)

When Joelle attempts to figuratively lift the Veil she is unable to, both because of her physical barrier (Gately cannot read her expressions or see her perfection for himself) and the cultural barrier of what Gately expects a deformity to be.

The "Good/Bad Cripple"

While characters like Mario and Don Gately are often praised by readers for being the most likeable, sympathetic characters in *Infinite Jest* and perhaps Wallace's entire catalogue of work, they also fall into strictly defined archetypes of disability. Mario is a sort of "Tiny Tim" figure, he is physically and emotionally infantilised, very weak, and his malformed body tends to elicit feelings of pity rather than disgust. In a novel where all of the athletes are emotionally stunted, Mario's deformed body makes him proportionally sentimental. Mario's scenes are some of the most heart-wrenching in the book – he was the only friend in the world to Eric Clipperton, and watches the boy shoot himself in the head when Mario is ten years old. Mario insists on cleaning up the room alone afterwards, and people can hear him falling and struggling back up "again and again" for the entire night (*IJ* 434). When Hal discovers his father's corpse at a later age he is rightfully sent to therapy, while Mario is left to process the act of scrubbing away his friend's brains alone. This does not seem to be a result of active malice on behalf of his parents, people "somehow regarded it as healthy that Mario Incandenza's perfectly even smile never faltered even through tears at Clipperton's funeral" (*IJ* 433). This is unsurprising, as Mario is what many in the disability movement refer to casually as a "good cripple." Mario does not complain, he does not wish to be a burden, he does not refer to himself as disabled or seem to

mind it, and he uses the emotional abilities he apparently receives as a direct trade for his physical disabilities to help others. He is so incredibly caring and pure that it dehumanizes him, when he does not express anger at Hal for lying to him, his brother tells him to "be a fucking human being for once" (*IJ* 784).

Don Gately is more "human" than Mario, but he becomes that way by the readers' familiarity with him as one of the two main perspectives of the novel. Unlike Mario, whose interior life is a mystery, readers follow Gately's emotional progression over the course of years through flashback and nonlinear storytelling. Gately is definitely a "simple gentle giant" type, and while he is not stupid, he almost certainly has an undefined learning disorder which makes Gately think he is, and the narrator readily excuses black people and gay men being referred to exclusively in Gately's sections as "n[-----]s" and "fags" because it is "unfortunately still all he knows" (*IJ* 1026). Don Gately embodies his peers (and his own) negative view of his learning disability by self-mutilating as a teenager. Gately makes light of his perception as a "big dumb guy" by slamming his head in elevator doors, resulting in his skull becoming oddly square (*IJ* 55, 476, 902). Gately is literally a blockhead, a loveable idiot. The balance of poor school performance and his whiteness make Gately's sections the easiest to read, because he forgoes the pretentious erudition of Hal's perspective and the dialect Wallace attempts with the black characters from similar economic backgrounds, helping to humanize Gately by making him more easily understandable. All of Wallace's "good cripples" share traits common to the archetype; they are generally born with their disabilities or they are cosmic accidents, they try their best "in spite of" their disabilities, and they are infantilised in some way.[72] Even Joelle Van Dyne, who seems emotionally and intellectually mature, is literally treated as a baby by her father before her

[72] In Gately's case he was born with a learning or mental disability, and developed the physical deformity later on. His head is described as quite "square" as a child, but definitely exacerbated by the repeated injury (*IJ* 55, 746).

deformation, and living expenses and a brownstone left to her by James Incandenza mean that she will never have to earn her own way. While this archetype may seem relatively harmless, disability scholars criticise this characterization as promoting the infantilization of disabled people and the idea that disabled people must be meek and friendly to deserve humane treatment.

Wallace's "bad cripples" are again quite typical; his most numerous examples of "bad cripples" are fat people, a common trope. These characters possess traits that would make them bad people regardless of their body types; they are sexually aggressive, selfish, and greedy. But because these characters are fat, their bodies are coded as direct representations of these character flaws. Norman Bombardini, for example, only begins his quest to eat literally everything during the timeline of the novel, but he is already disgustingly fat. Lance Olsen refers to him as "grotesque," and "right out of the *Meaning of Life*" skit from Monty Python (212). His fatness marks him as an easy symbol of greed and consumption before he even announces his plan. Amber Moltke from "The Suffering Channel" is similar, her hunger for television fame is presented alongside her hunger for processed snack cakes, but being female she also represents the "fertility goddess" archetype, and Wallace's language mixes sexualised descriptions with those connoting disgust.[73] Conversely to how "good cripples" are generally born with their deformities or they can be blamed on someone else (like Mario, whose deformities may be punishment for his parents' incestuous union) these "bad cripples" have shaped their own bodies. By willingly departing from the ideal image of a human body, these characters are seen as all the more disgusting. Because they have altered their own bodies beyond the acceptable norm, they are not entitled to pity or sympathy.

[73] Both Amber and Bombardini are examined further in the next chapter, but they are relevant in this context as well.

Those who utilise their disabilities for their own advantage are also coded as "bad cripples." If "good cripples" never complain or attempt to draw attention to their bodies or identity as a disabled person, then "bad cripples" are those who can be seen as egregiously seeking pity or recognition as victims. One of the most obvious examples is an unnamed man in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men,* the subject of B.I. 40, who is hideous both physically and metaphorically. The man was born with a malformed arm which resembles a flipper, referred to as "the Asset" (82). The animal theme is consistent in Wallace's portrayal of non-normate people: Mario is compared to a dinosaur, Joelle is called the "P.G.O.A.T.," Gately is compared to a bull, and this man has a dolphin flipper. It is literally dehumanizing, and this man in particular is meant to be a very poor excuse for a human. He recognises the fear and disgust that his deformed arm elicits in people and uses it to coerce women into sleeping with him. By complaining about how difficult it is to live with one arm and be so ferociously ugly, the man puts women in a position where they must either hide their disgust and confirm their own desire to be seen as kind, unprejudiced, or non-confrontational by sleeping with him, or look like bad people (85). Because women in general are socialised to avoid conflict and appear sympathetic, this strategy works quite well for him.

The Deformed Body, Art, Activism:

Now that we have examined the varied ways in which Wallace uses non-normate bodies as politicised symbols, we can begin to theorise what his overriding purpose may have been. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Wallace's view of art hinged on its ability "to aggravate this sense of entrapment and loneliness and death in people, to move people to countenance it, since any possible human redemption requires us first to face what's dreadful,

what we want to deny" (McCaffery 55). This statement relates to his admiration for the central joke of struggle in Kafka's work, which also focuses on discomfort and dread. Additionally, the horrific, the grotesque, and the disgusting body functions from Bakhtin's work are inseparable from regular human experience. By populating his worlds with unfamiliar anatomies Wallace is able to make visible the strangeness which often remains hidden in his readers' lives. Obesity, environmental pollution, and drug use are all real and common, but even if their effects are seen regularly they do not force the kind of philosophical confrontation with oneself that Wallace desires.

Wallace's work often views art as an intimate emotional interface between two people, the author and the reader, which attempts to satisfy the monumental goal of communicating what it is to be and feel fully human. However, Wallace's art also attempts to express a concept which would link together many people at once, a rhizome of duty and selflessness. Wallace began thinking about citizenship formally in "E Unibus Pluram," but did not return to fully until later in his career, most explicitly in his unfinished novel *The Pale King*. Though Wallace's portrayal of advertisement from "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way" onward shows plainly that he did not support corporate or State-sponsored "low art," he did believe that art could stir individual people to action. One of the main themes of *The Pale King* is how to be a good citizen even when it is not fun or easy, as detailed by Boswell in "Trickle-Down Citizenship: Taxes and Civic Responsibility in David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*." In *The Pale King*, which Boswell notes is significantly the only one of Wallace's major works which is not set in the future; Wallace attacks the tax cuts Reagan made in the early 1980's (465). The sense of impending doom expressed by the IRS agents in the novel is not due to financial fears, such as low taxes ruining the economy in some way. Instead, they are afraid of what the American

public's vehement insistence on paying as little tax as possible signifies: selfishness, short-sightedness, and ignorance of one's duties as a citizen. Taxes do not only pay for social services such as food stamps and unemployment, though wanting to deny these things to people is presented as concerning, they provide practical services. For Wallace, one cannot demand to enjoy the comforts of a first world country (paved roads, reliable police and fire departments, etc.) without accepting responsibility to help pay for them. It is an understandable and widely acknowledged fact that no one enjoys having to fill out tedious forms in order to confirm you have had enough money "taken" from you. *The Pale King* presents taxes as the deadly union between two things contemporary Americans hate most: boredom and losing money. *Infinite Jest* and other works include these concepts as well, *Infinite Jest* being largely about the avoidance of boredom and *Oblivion* containing many short stories about corporate greed. Though unfinished, what *The Pale King* tries to do is show that these tasks need to be reframed, and to do so we must stress the importance of citizenship.

Part of why taxes and other forms of dutiful minutiae are so boring to the average individual is that they are often almost completely disconnected from the material world. The deluge of data in both *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King* shows how choosing what to pay attention to can be a gruelling task. Gately's role in the novel is to embody these themes of community engagement, choice, and duty, which makes them legible to a much wider variety of readers. Gately's past shows a blockhead jock, a callous criminal, and a pathetic drug addict. He is characterised by selfishness, and his interactions with others privilege popularity rather than cooperation. While the descriptions of Gately's past are sometimes humorous, he is not particularly likeable or relatable. The sections which serve to humanize Gately are those in which he acts like a responsible citizen, even when he would prefer not to. He looks after new

House members, holds two wildly unglamorous jobs, and attempts to be self-sufficient by learning to cook and organise. He even protects his fellow House members from a foreign threat when Lenz triggers a brawl with a group of Canadians. Gately's ultimate failure to reach his full potential, however, seems to carry on thematically in *The Pale King* as well. Individual IRS agents, like Chris Fogle (nicknamed "Irrelevant") find purpose and recognise the importance of behaving like part of a united nation, but most of the characters are more concerned with personal desires and schemes. The novel ends abruptly and mysteriously (like Gately's storyline), which obviously is due in large part to Wallace's suicide. However, in the forward to *The Pale King* Wallace's editor Michael Pietsch is adamant that the novel was clearly meant to be published as it was, unresolved (McGrath). Because the novel takes place in the past, certain aspects of it have been resolved by history, such as the effects of Reagan's tax cuts. Though Wallace's insistence on confrontation and contemplation through art may not have been aimed singly at citizenship, it is clear that Wallace's use of the grotesque, shock, and dread attempted to spur readers into becoming more aware, more present, and less complacent in their socio-political lives.

In Wallace's fiction, the government is often portrayed as an oppressive force which produces and inscribes the grotesque bodies of its citizenry. Organisations such as the O.U.S. make the submission of the individual to the state appear as a cruelly, absurdly humiliating affair. However, Wallace's clear critique of these abuses of power is complicated by other uses of bodies which promote national unity. The repeated themes of community and duty within Wallace's work often appear as the individual's responsibility to their country. For Wallace, active citizenship was the difficult but achievable ground between blind fascism and solipsistic anarchy. Though Wallace's critiques and endorsements may be understandable and agreeable, in

this chapter we have also seen ways in which his approach can be problematic in its treatment of minority groups. Our discussion on race in Wallace's work in the first chapter (Wallace and His Influences) examined how Wallace believed that the interaction of certain groups was always political, and we can see how this may be read into his portrayal of disabled and feminine people. In these cases, non-normate individuals serve as useful literary devices because their bodies are always coded. The next chapter, The Body and the Other, examines the ways in which certain bodies are read in an interpersonal context, rather than a national one.

Chapter 5: Body and the Other

In Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she establishes her now well-known theory of the male gaze. Referring back to Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Mulvey explores how "there are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at" (835). For Freud (and Mulvey), looking is unusual in that it may generate pleasure without any physical stimulation of erotogenic zones, "tak[ing] other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (835). Mulvey's emphasis on a lack of consent is clear in her word choice: "taking" others, a "subjecting" and "controlling" gaze. While there can be mutual pleasure in looking and being looked at, other, more selfish formulations of looking are also pervasive. In this context her earlier remark on the unphysical pleasure of looking appears more sinister, it leads to worries about the wide-ranging voyeur – the Peeping Tom, the catcaller, the consumer of revenge pornography – those who receive sexual pleasure by looking without consent or reciprocation. However prevalent these voyeurs may actually be in reality, there remains (perhaps token) public disdain for this sort of perversion. Mulvey argues that film viewing provides a way to indulge in scopophilia in a socially acceptable way, as the film viewer will necessarily never looked back at, or have their looking acknowledged. The gaze of cinema, in particular, is applicable to Wallace Studies in its focus on narcissism: "The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but is also goes further, developing scopophila in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic" (61). We have already seen how Wallace anthropomorphises "scale, space, [and] stories" in The Body and the Environment, and in "David Lynch Keeps His Head," Wallace speaks about one of film's appeals being "the being able to see the people on screen

without being seen by the people on the screen" (169).[74] Mulvey is interested in how film satisfies gendered scopophilic desires, but we can apply many of her claims to looking in general. The idea of the male gaze, for example, has been applied to everyday women's fashion, makeup culture, and more, theorizing that even without cameras to emphasise a woman's body with zoom-ins or slow tilts, their appearance is still "coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (837). As I hope to have displayed in previous chapters describing the non-normate bodies in Wallace's fiction, these figures are also visually striking and narratively lingered upon, evoking that same "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" Mulvey describes (837).

I am interested in the "Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look" concept which Mulvey originates and others have expanded, but I believe these concepts can be applied to other modes of visual difference including fatness and disability (837). In all cases of visual difference, there is a positioning of the normate viewer as the active party and the non-normate person as the passive object. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explores these dynamics in "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," which historically traces the ways in which non-normate bodies have been visually objectified and exploited. In Wallace's work, this "controlling and curious gaze" is wielded by his characters, but it is also simulated for the readers, and perhaps exhibited by the author. Before addressing the categories of people most often subjected to exploitative stares in Wallace's work, I provide a reading of James Incandenza's *Cage III*, which transparently illustrates the politics of looking. This chapter will begin in earnest with the familiar territory of the Feminine Other, continuing to refer to Mulvey but also referring to the work of Clare Hayes-Brady and others. It will follow with the

[74] This observation plays into how Wallace views Frank Booth's disturbing fourth-wall-breaking accusation to the audience which I cover in Wallace and His Influences.

objectification of the fat body, continuing this avenue of feminist discussion by examining "The Suffering Channel's" depiction of Amber Moltke in relation to articles such as "Fat Women as 'Easy Targets': Achieving Masculinity Through Hogging" (Prohaska and Gailey) before opening into more general discussion of Wallace's continually problematic depictions of fatness. The problematic nature of these depictions is mostly rooted in Wallace's adherence to harmful stereotypes and cultural symbolism, which is continued in discussion of disabled and deformed bodies in Wallace's work. I consider these issues in light of Mitchell's theory of narrative prosthesis, which proposes a sort of narrative version of "to-be-looked-at-ness," where the non-normate body is thought of as inherently storied. Whether their defining quality is beauty, fatness, or deformity, Wallace's non-normate characters are rendered grotesque by the excess which these qualities appear in. In *Cooking with Mud,* David Trotter proposes that "Nausea, we might say, is fascination's limit, the point at which it becomes aware of itself in its own excess. It is the most bitter of disillusionments" (211). The excess of Wallace's characters enhance their *to-be-looked-at-ness,* which oozes into an excess of looking. As the chapter progresses, it is crucial to remember this bitterness, to see how it is turned toward the object of looking as repulsion, ridicule, and violence. However, as Trotter illustrates, these outbursts are often a reaction to anxiety or excess on behalf of the viewer, not the viewed. The objectifying gaze is anchored in fragility, and can be shattered by a wide range of behaviours. As Mulvey notes in "The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970": "The spectacle is vulnerable. However intricately planned it is, a handful of people can disrupt it and cause chaos in a seemingly impenetrable organization. The spectacle isn't prepared for anything other than passive spectators" (5). This shattering can also be seen in Wallace's work, when the object of the gaze stares back.

Dynamics of Looking in *Cage III - Free Show*

The importance and mechanics of the look in Wallace's work is transparently displayed in the relatively understudied filmography of James Incandenza in *Infinite Jest*. J.O.I. produced a series of films under the title *Cage*, a title which combines obvious symbolic meaning and possibly a reference to real-world media which was typical of Wallace, in this case, composer John Cage. John Cage is best known for his composition *4'33"*, which dictates that the musicians should simply be present for the duration of the track, so the song is comprised of small human noises such as shifting, breathing, etc. mostly created by fellow audience members. J.O.I.'s "found drama" cinema takes inspiration from this composition, most obviously in films like *The Joke* where "two Ikegami EC-35 video cameras in the theatre record the 'film's' audience and project the resultant raster onto screen – the theater audience watching itself watch itself get the obvious 'joke' and become increasingly self-conscious and uncomfortable and hostile" (*IJ* 988-989). The *Cage* films appear throughout J.O.I.'s filmography at significant times. The original *Cage* is the first in his filmography; *Cage II* is sandwiched between a comedy that evokes J.O.I.'s unhappy childhood and his first film with Marlon Bain.[75] *Cage III* was produced between a film obviously about J.O.I. and Avril (featuring a man "sitting in a dark bedroom drinking bourbon" while his wife has sex with a stranger on the other side of the door) and the film which convinces Joelle Van Dyne to meet him, *The Medusa v. The Odalisque* (988). The final *Cage* films were begun after a film which seems to be a dramatization of J.O.I.'s failed attempt to connect with Hal while dressed as a conversationalist, evocatively titled *It Was A Great Marvel That He Was In The Father Without Knowing Him*. Both *Cage IV – Web* and *Cage*

[75] Bain was Orin's classmate and close friend, whom J.O.I. seemed to view as a surrogate son due to his repeated presence in J.O.I.'s films and how he "practically lived" with the Incandenzas in their home before E.T.A. (*IJ* 1043). Hal lists Bain as one of Avril's previous lovers (*IJ* 957), and it is possible that his name is the one traced into the steamy car windshield which triggers J.O.I.'s rapid downward spiral (*IJ* 999).

V – Infinite Jim were unreleased, but the few films that follow them seem to indicate both J.O.I.'s rapidly advancing suicidal depression and his perfection of *Infinite Jest* (also a series, ending in the fifth instalment). *Cage III – Free Show* depicts:

> The figure of death (Heath) presides over the front entrance of a carnival sideshow whose spectators watch performers undergo unspeakable degradations so grotesquely compelling that the spectators' eyes become larger and larger until the spectators themselves are transformed into gigantic eyeballs in chairs, while on the other side of the sideshow tent the figure of Life (Heaven) uses a megaphone to invite fairgoers to an exhibition in which, if the fairgoers consent to undergo unspeakable degradations, they can witness ordinary persons gradually turn into gigantic eyeballs. (988)

The film is obviously about looking, the extents that people will go to in order to indulge in scopophilic pleasure. The eye becomes more than a synecdoche for the viewer; it expands until the viewer is literally only an eyeball. Looking is set up as a practice which both sides participate in, but the fact that it is an exchange is not actually known by those participating. (As it is billed as two separate attractions, rather than one people could choose roles within.) The viewers form a contract with the figure who is selling the experience, who stands outside the tent, removed from the actual experience, rather than with the object of their looks. Both sets of spectators view the process endured by the Other as both dehumanizing (literally) and titillating. One of the chief pleasures of film is "the impression of looking in on a private world unaware of the spectator's own existence," defined by Linda Williams in "When the Woman Looks" (17). There is imbalance in that Death does not seem to gain consent from her spectators, those who enter the sideshow in order to watch people being degraded are gradually transformed, presumably without their knowledge. Those who enter on the side of Life give consent to be

degraded, with the promise that their pain and humiliation will be literally transformative. The name of Life's actor, Heaven, evokes transcendence and happiness. There is still suffering involved in the process, just as one must die in order to reach heaven in Christian theology. Toon Staes describes how "If the work of art consequently transmits an experience of suffering, it allows the individual self 'imaginative access' to the suffering of other selves" (465). In the context of his essay ("'Only Artists Can Transfigure': Kafka's Artists and the Possibility of Redemption in the Novellas of David Foster Wallace) and other points in Wallace's work, this access is used to ablate loneliness, it is a unifying force. However, the same performance of suffering can also result in cold voyeurism. The difference between titillating and redemptive suffering seems to be based on the emotional and intellectual labour that the viewer is willing to contribute. Thus on the side of nourishment, Life, we see people willing to debase themselves to see change, and on the side of Death we see people who have been lured in by the promise of a "free show." The film is 65 minutes long and credits actors besides Life and Death, so presumably it features depictions of some of these "unspeakable degradations" as well as animated bits of the eyeball transformation. The viewer of *Cage III* and the filmmaker metatextually play out a version this mediated interaction, but the film viewer is able to view the entire "free show." Staes notes that in the context of television, "to be commercially viable, spectation bars all chances for identification. The self no longer connects with other, the abject is turned into pure spectacle," which seems like a likely comment for J.O.I. to be making in his film.

The Feminine Other:

In the context of this dissertation, it is critical to follow the understanding of gender relations in Wallace's work that Clare Hayes-Brady presents in her essay "'. . .': Language, Gender, and Modes of Power in the Work of David Foster Wallace." For Hayes-Brady, Wallace's treatment of women (or relative lack thereof) in his work lies not in misogyny, but alterity:

> In brief, the idea of alterity should be taken to refer to the untouchable otherness, which might perhaps be referred to as a "foreign-ness" of a differentiated self. In other words, the idea of alterity should highlight the otherness of an other, with emphasis not on the interdependent self/other dynamic, but rather on the disconnectedness that is also part of that relationship. (149)

Positively perceived emotions such sympathy, admiration, and reverence are still possible in such a relationship, but accurate and complete understanding of the Other's lived experience or interiority is assumed to be impossible. However, we can also see that emotions such as fear, disgust, lust, and hatred can also well up from the chasm between interiorities – more easily, perhaps. While Hayes-Brady's essay focused on gender (and this chapter will cover it as well) we may also read this concept of alterity onto other kinds of relationships between bodily different people. The notion of "the look" or "the gaze" layers onto this concept, as the assumed impossibility (or at least extreme difficulty) of achieving understanding leads to increased reliance on visual cues such as first impressions, body language, appearance, etc. In "Pornography and the Dread of Woman" Susan Lurie posits that the actual mother/son trauma is not the Freudian scene of a boy believing that his mother has been castrated, but that she *has not*. Rather than accept the real "power in difference" (Williams 25) he convinces himself that

"Women are what men would be if they had no penises – bereft of sexuality, helpless, incapable" (Freud 83). In this reading we also see that the relationship with the Other is based in alterity, but the horror arises from a self-protective unwillingness to understand, rather than imagining the Other as a neat inversion of the Self.

In this chapter, I plan to examine two of Wallace's major female characters: Q. and Joelle Van Dyne. Both of these characters experience objectification as distinct aspects of their characters. Joelle Van Dyne's looks are a key point in both how other characters interact with her in individual ways, and the overall narrative of both her life and the novel, as her unveiled appearance is suggested to be part of The Entertainment's seductiveness. Q., a reoccurring character in the short stories of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, is identified only by a single letter, and her questions to the men she interviews are left blank. We will return to discuss Joelle more fully later in the chapter, but for now we shall explore the dramatic self-abjection which Q. learns about and possibly performs, which is revisited by Wallace again by Toni Ware in *The Pale King*.[76]

Rather than lay out the stories as monologues with pauses for the men to acknowledge a question being asked, Q. and her subject (a double meaning) are given alternating space on the page, with Q.'s sections all clearly blank. It is obvious that she is continuously present and engaging in a conversation, but the reader can only guess at what she is saying based on the reaction of a man. Wallace spoke about Q. in an interview with Michael Silverblatt in 1999, saying:

> The thing that I was most interested in was, umm, I mean I was far more interested in the interlocutor than in the people who were speaking. I, I don't know that I expect a reader

[76] Toni Ware pretends to be a corpse in order to avoid being murdered, abjecting herself in a paradox where her own vitality must be what is "thrust aside in order to live," and the corpse becomes essential to life (Kristeva 3).

> to be because the ways in which the interlocutor's developed are very oblique, and very umm…umm…she, I mean she's defined….she's defined almost exclusively through what she, in her transcription process, allows men to - to direct toward her. (3:33 – 4:03)

Wallace goes on to say that he became interested in the dark, predatory aspects of heterosexual male psychology and thought processes later on in the development of the text, after several drafts. So the first goal was, as he says, to show how women like Q. *allow* themselves to be degraded, and are defined by that degradation. Wallace still uses the present tense to talk about how Q. is defined, so even though the project expanded to also examine the behaviours of the men, it is at best a parallel and perhaps a secondary goal. We can see this allowance in Q.'s silence – while her name suggests that she is mostly presenting questions (as in a "Q&A"), her blank lines presumably include deflections to the various disgusting things her interviewees say to her. Most of these comments are about both her body and sex in one way or another, ranging from veiled come-ons to outright rape threats, to gendered insults that focus on the female body (specifically genitals). Q. does not even get unheard responses in some of the worst cases, as the threats serve as the ending lines of the story, shutting her down completely by asserting that she has nothing to add narratively in addition to making the space clearly violent in a gendered way. The man identified as B.I. #46 07-97 assumes that Q. could or would not understand his feelings about (possibly his own) sexual assault, so he first invents a woman as the event's victim, and then ends this round of interviews with: "What if I did it to you? Right here? Raped you with a bottle? Do you think it'd make any difference? Why? What do you know? You don't know shit" (124).[77] The last round of interviews ends with a man again recounting the violent rape of a woman he claims to be close to, and assuming the Q. does not empathise with him: "Judge me,

[77] This section only describes the Jack Daniels bottle, but the entire event the interviewee is threatening to either replicate or physically perform for the first time also involves "a dick or a fist or a plumber's helper or this cane right here" (122).

you chilly cunt. You dyke, you bitch, cooze, cunt, slut, gash. Happy now? All borne out? Be happy. I don't care. I knew she could. I knew I loved. End of story" (318). To these men Q. is not a full person, but a straw-woman to project their desires and frustrations onto. Calling Q. a "dyke" indicates that the interviewee is not accusing her of failing to understand how Granola Cruncher's story would make her loveable, as a "dyke" would obviously know how to love a woman. It is more likely that he is referring to the "man-hating lesbian" stereotype, and is actually accusing her of discarding or excluding men, in this case himself. In the same *Bookworm* interview with Silverblatt, Wallace says the book "has a fair about to do with heterosexual male attitudes and orientations toward heterosexual females, umm…but as far as I can tell that's just kind of a unifying principle for something that's just sort of about loneliness, which is as far as I can see…everything that I write ends up being about that" (4:50 – 5:12). The men of the collection assume that they are essentially alone in their feelings, and act out in ways that either attempt to illicit sympathy or to push the object away before it can push them.[78]

What the interviewee who threatens to assault Q. with a bottle is essentially trying to convey is that there are people in the world who can and will view you as an object in the truest and ugliest sense, and what that does for one's perception of themselves (120). In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz muses that "If minds are private, subjective, invisible, amenable only to first-person knowledge, we can have no guarantee that our inferences about other minds are in fact justified. Other bodies may simply be complex automata, androids or even illusions, with no psychical interior, no affective states or consciousness" (7). As both popular culture and academic criticism note the centrality of cerebral-but-lonely young men in Wallace's work (both as subject and reader), we may use this to help understand how the attackers in the story explain their behaviour. The interviewee describes how his wife came to the realisation that she could

[78] This loneliness is further explored in the next chapter.

view herself as an object, just as the men attacking her were. It is described as an abjection, a pushing away: "how easy and powerful that was to do that, to think that, even while the violation's going on, to just split yourself off and like float up to the ceiling and there you are looking down at this thing getting worse and worse things done to it and the thing is you and it doesn't mean anything" (122). While this astral projection-like dissociation only lasts the duration of the attack, the wife survives with the notion that "you can *choose* to be more if you want, you can *choose* to be a human being and have it *mean* something," and every day that she chooses to be a person is affirming (122-123). This notion, discovered through awful suffering, aligns with an earlier statement from Wallace: "The grotesquery reflects an inescapable truth about who we are and how we see who we are" ("Mediated Immediacy" 126). Heather Houser also notes that confrontation with the grotesque compels the individual to either destroy the grotesque object, or to "abandon the position of the subject. Since the former is rarely within our power, the latter becomes a habit" (135). If we take the interviewee's story of assault as something which happened to him, we can see the loneliness and abjection present in his need to invent a female victim. He perhaps believes that because Q. belongs to a different category of person, women, she will not extend him any compassion – as it is clear he would not. Additionally, he may believe that the category of "sexual assault victim" is generally female, and so he abandons his position as the actual "subject" of the anecdote in order to maintain an illusion of social normalcy, mirrored by the abandonment of subjectivity in the narrative. The awful trauma was probably actually his own, but it is more difficult to judge whether or not his wife exists at all, because ultimately her existence does not matter to the story. Within both the interviewee's anecdote and the meta-narrative of the story, her only narrative purpose is to suffer and find validation in that suffering. Judith Butler speaks on this during the "Why Bodies

Matter" conference, stating that living in a body which suffers normalised or institutional violence "leads to a de-realized way of living in the world, living in the shadows, not as a human subject but as a phantasm – someone else's phantasm – but you're living it" (24:39).

The penultimate story in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* features, as the last interview discussed, a man relaying the sexual assault of a woman he knows. The narrator relays the experience of a sexual partner he seems feel both irritation and endearment for, called The Granola Cruncher, being raped by a serial killer. She manages to live by looking at her rapist and would-be murderer with compassion, rather than turn her head in fear and pain like his previous victims. She is able to save her own life, but her attacker does not discontinue his assault. Mary Ann Doane, in "The 'Woman's Film': Possession and Address," observes that "The woman's exercise of an active investigating gaze can only be simultaneous with her own victimization" (72). The Granola Cruncher is able to discern enough about the serial killer to appeal to him, eventually her rapist accepts the joy of being compassionately seen but must acknowledge that she is a person who can see. This acknowledgment is conveyed through the body, as the Granola Cruncher attempts to establish intimacy by smoothing her rapist's hair and he eventually "tentatively attempted to stroke her own head in return" (314). The interviewee speaks about the event with a tone that seems jealous of the serial killer, as he laments his concurrent seductions were "such an empty way to come at women. Not even or predatory or sexist – empty. To gaze and not see, to eat and not be full. Not to just feel but to *be* empty" (314). Hayes-Brady notes the interviewee's repeated invocation of the Granola Cruncher's name, but never its actual utterance, as if he is keeping it to himself (176). His language evokes the old superstition that if you know an entity's true name, you can control them. Despite being condescending towards and seemingly annoyed with the Granola Cruncher, the interviewee clearly wants to at least appear

close or intimate with her. He envies the empathetic, validating gaze which the Granola Cruncher bestows upon her attacker. The entire section appears to be predicated on a section of "David Lynch Keeps His Head" which Wallace presents uncharacteristically without comment, where Patricia Arquette describes *Lost Highway's* plot as: "Is he the kind of woman-hater who goes out with a woman and fucks her and then never calls her again, or is he the kind who goes out with a woman and fucks her and then kills her? And the real question to explore is: how different are these kinds?" (191). Wallace, or the story at least, seems unsure.

While the male storyteller seems to find tremendous meaning in the Granola Cruncher's simultaneously selfless and self-sustaining look, it is worth mentioning that Wallace's imaginary reader always seems to be female. Many of the stories in the collection seem to want to repel the reader for some reason or another, they are all generally either sexually repulsive, structurally tortured, or both. Setting aside the stylistic choices, Linda Williams explains that "there are excellent reasons for this refusal of the woman to look, not the least of which is that she is often asked to bear witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation, and murder" (17). Both of the women in these short stories are asked to do this, the interviewee's girlfriend disassociates to see her own torture and the Granola Cruncher sees herself in the eyes of her rapist. The female reader is also asked to endure these stories. The abhorrent views conveyed by the male characters in the collection are obviously their own, not Wallace's, and techniques such as not letting Q. get the (implied) last word enforce character views. However, Wallace's earlier usages of female pronouns to describe his readers and the importance of making the reader of serious art go through an ordeal combine uneasily in regards to this collection. In the case of a male reader, the uncomfortable yet productive struggle might occur as unwanted moments of self-identification with the interviewees, evoking Wallace's own nauseated reaction to Frank

Booth's "You're like me" (*Blue Velvet*). For the female reader, it is as Williams describes – she must bear witness to gendered violence which could affect her, or already has. Cooperative, nourishing suffering abounds in Wallace's work, his ability to make it feel rewarding is likely a main source of his popularity – but is there an ethical limit to what a reader may be asked to bear?

Moving from the concept of woman as lover which is explored in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, I wish to move onto another characterisation of women which is common across literature – woman as mother. Although in *Infinite Jest*, the categorisation of women as lovers or mothers becomes muddled in a way which inspires confusion and disgust. Despite the novel containing an actual ghost (J.O.I.'s wraith), Avril is probably the character who most closely resembles a horror figure. She is an emotional vampire, a metaphor illustrated by the fact that she refuses to go out in daylight. When Hal describes a true monster, it is implied that the person he is talking about is Avril. He says, "Boo, I think I no longer believe in monsters as faces in the floor or feral infants or vampires or whatever. I think at seventeen know I believe the only real monsters might be the type of liar where there's simply no way to tell. The ones who give nothing away" (*IJ* 774). Avril is such a person, who constantly claims to trust her children and want to nurture their independence while actually attempting to obsessively cling to them. "[Kristeva] sees the mother-child relationship as one marked by conflict: the child struggles to break free but the mother is reluctant to release it" (Creed 43). The mother's own place within the symbolic realm is uncertain, because she is more or less defined by her relation to surrounding men and her place in the family unit. Avril's father and husband are both dead, so her function as a mother is her only organising principle. As a former agitator in violent revolt over grammar, Avril is characterised as being intensely dedicated to structure, organisation, and

strict definition of meaning. “By refusing to relinquish her hold on her child, she prevents it from taking up its proper place in relation to the Symbolic. Partly consumed by the desire to remain locked in a blissful relationship with the mother and partly terrified of separation, the child finds it easy to succumb to the comporting pleasure of the dyadic relationship” (Creed 44). These themes of monstrous clinging are shown in the novel in multiple instances where Avril’s head appears strapped to Orin or Hal’s heads. One of Orin’s frequent nightmares begins with the fleshy “blank dark rose color of eyes closed against bright light, and there’s the ghastly feeling of being submerged and not knowing which way to head for the surface and air,” evoking the womb from which he escapes to find himself still trapped with his mother (*IJ* 46). The maternal womb cannot be linked to castration as neatly as the vulva/vagina, as “it is its own point of reference,” refusing comparative self-definition (Creed 58). Orin’s dream continues when he emerges to “the Moms’s disconnected head attached face-to-face to his own fine head” by the gut string of his tennis racket, and “no matter how frantically Orin tries to move his head or shake it side to side or twist up his face or roll his eyes he’s still staring at, into, and somehow through his mother’s face” (*IJ* 46). They are strapped face to face, so the son’s entire worldview is limited to his view of his mother, and he is unable to discern his own place in it, possibly causing Orin’s arrested emotional development.

Continuing this theme of doubling, Samuel Cohen observes that “The monster is that uncertain cultural body in which is condensed an intriguing simultaneity or doubleness” (IX). Avril’s character is full of doubles – she is the Madonna and the Whore, smothering and distant. She teaches the school’s girls how to report sexual exploitation by teachers in the same room where she is caught enacting an incestuous roleplay with her student John Wayne. In a dream, J.O.I. projects what may be explanation of The Entertainment’s allure to Don Gately; a nude

Joelle explains that "the woman who either knowingly or involuntarily kills you is always someone you love, and she's always your next life's mother" (*IJ* 850). The giving of life and death are explicitly entwined, evoking the archaic mother developed by Freud and tied to film by Barbara Creed in "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine." The archaic mother represents an abyssal, oceanic womb which threatens to unbirth all life, both the maker and destroyer. She evokes the ultimate power in difference, as she is so radically different from both the son and the docile cultural image of the doting mother. Joelle/J.O.I. explains that "This is why Moms are so obsessively loving, why they try so hard no matter what private troubles or addictions they have of their own, why they seem to value your welfare above their own, and why there's always a slight, like, twinge of selfishness about their obsessive motherlove." Not "mothers," but "Moms," as in "the Moms," an Incandenza family nickname for Avril. Avril is linked to both creation and destruction by her connection to the terrorist spy Luria Perec.[79] There is debate about whether or not she actually *is* Luria, but the similarities are such that even if the characters are not actually the same person, they appear together in the reader's mind. Luria's name is a near-anagram of Avril's, the difference being notably the "v" versus the "u," letters which appear similar. Luria is a pro-Quebecois insurgent, like Avril, from the same county. In both scenes where Orin and Luria go to bed together they begin with a specific acrobatic pose where Orin supports Luria's weight in his hands – it is written as "he bears her" and "he bore her," inverting his birth with a woman connected to his mother (*IJ* 566, 655).[80] Luria ends up being Orin's destruction, as well as a strange analogue of his mother, as she sets up the ambush that sees him captured for Technical Interview. At the start of the Interview, Wallace makes a clear reference

[79] Stephen J. Burn provides an explanation of Luria's name and its implications in "'Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing': *Infinite Jest* and the Science of the Mind."

[80] There are other small things as well, such as Orin finding footprints on the windshield of Avril's car then making his own "smeared footprints on the glass" when he tries to escape the A.F.R. (*IJ* 971).

to *1984* as Orin demands the terrorists "Do it to her" instead (*IJ* 972). In *1984* the line is the main character begging for the torture to be transferred to his lover instead of himself, and in *Infinite Jest* it could be the same. However, it is reasonable that at this point Orin would know that Luria is working with his captors, as she is standing next to them, free. Orin's "Do it to her" makes more sense if it is directed at the woman most likely to know where J.O.I.'s grave is, as it is in her family plot – Avril.

Madame Psychosis – "so beautiful I'm deformed":

The theme of multiplicity also applies to Joelle Van Dyne, but she is often tripled, rather than doubled. She is the veiled woman who is perhaps unspeakably facially deformed, perhaps maddeningly beautiful, and these things are perhaps not mutually exclusive. She is Joelle Van Dyne, but also perhaps Lucille Duquette, and sometimes Madame Psychosis. Her contradictions do not preclude or negate each other, but rather enhance. This is displayed in how her attractiveness is felt by others:

> Part of this new Joelle girl's pull for Ken Erdedy isn't just the sexual thing of her body, which he finds made way sexier but the way the overlarge blue coffee-stained sweater tries to downplay the body thing without being so hubristic as to try to hide it – sloppy sexiness pulls Erdedy in like a well-groomed moth to a lit window – but it's also the veil, wondering what horrific contrast to the body's allure lies swollen or askew under the mask; it gives the pull a perverse sideways slant that makes it even more distracting. (*IJ* 365)

Joelle's actual deformity is unclear, she has either suffered an acid attack that ruined her conventionally beautiful face or her veil is concealing that she is mind-bendingly gorgeous. This

section will explore both possibilities, using the first to detail the significance of acid in the act of gendered violence and the second to question the idea of female beauty as a deformity. This section will consider *Infinite Jest's* film/television/scopophilia motif to examine Joelle's literal defacing and concealment.

As examined earlier in the chapter, the conflicting descriptions of the Infinite Jest tape's contents show either Joelle "sitting naked, corporeally gorgeous, ravishing, hugely pregnant, her hideously deformed face either veiled or blanked out by undulating computer-generated squares of color or anamorphosized into unrecognizability as any kind of face" (787) or wearing "an incredible white floor-length gown of some sort of flowing material" while "not exactly veiled" (937, 938). It is important to note that the lethally fascinating Joelle has either a bare face or a bare body, the face being traditionally associated with subjectivity and the female body with objectification. Molly Notkin's description also focuses more on the association with the maternal and death, whereas Joelle mainly describes apologizing to a camera in a bassinet. The flowing white gown connotes purity and the angelic, her face positioned above the viewer serves as a comforting mirror image of the nightmarish Face in the Floor that haunts the novel. Deleuze and Guattari conceive of The Face as a concept which is inextricable from subjectivity, and mention the importance of mother-child eye contact in psychology. The first interpersonal interaction a person will have is this contact, with the mother's face above and close to their own, united in a "four-eye machine" (169). Joelle's face is not even her own personal face, but half of the "four-eye machine" formed with the viewer, who is paralyzed by feelings of total safeness and perfect connection with another person. It is visually similar, but tonally opposite to the face-to-face engulfment displayed in the nightmare about Avril. Molly Notkin's description begins with the appeal of Joelle's body, and then her maternal aspect is evidenced by her

pregnant belly. The mother here is not a person, but a role represented by an isolated body part. She is an object of visual pleasure who will care for every need of the infantilised viewer, her previous role as their Death cementing her care, as noted earlier. Her care is assured because it is a penance for past violence, instilling a sense of security in the viewer.

Looking and being looked at is a theme in Joelle's portrayal as a whole, not only in her role as the mother/death figure in the *Infinite Jest* tape. She majored in Film Studies at M.I.T., and agrees to meet J.O.I. based on her own interest in filmmaking. Orin immediately and unabashedly begins to fantasise about Joelle as a visual filmic object, using similar language to Mulvey's possessive description: "He'd had this stubborn idea that Himself would want to use her. In the Work. She was too pretty for somebody not to want to arrange, capture," "Orin predicted that his father wouldn't be able to '*resist using*' her" (*IJ* 739). Orin's plan to advance his own social value to his father using Joelle's looks reveals the joke in her fictional hometown's name – Shiny Prize. Marshall Boswell observes that "As the P.G.O.A.T. and the source of the so-called Actaeon complex, she is also a Medusa figure, a woman so lethally beautiful that she transforms anyone in her field of vision into an inanimate object" (*Understanding David Foster Wallace* 132). Madame Psychosis's beauty, the thing that objectifies her (she is given an animal nickname, she is seen as a trophy by Orin, etc.) enables her to objectify others in a more literal way. She identifies with both the Medusa and the Odalisque, which is an invented Quebecois version of a Medusa figure which is beautiful rather than horrid and transforms those who meet her gaze into gemstone. Molly Notkin lifts Joelle's veil high enough to kiss her cheeks at a party, implying that whatever it is about Joelle's face which is either horrific or horrifically beautiful is likely located on the upper portion of her face (*IJ* 228). Like the Medusa, it is her own physical gaze, staring back, which is lethal.

Throughout the novel, it is unclear exactly what is hidden under Joelle's veil. It is important not just to the narrative, but to Joelle personally, that we never know exactly what her veil conceals. Because Joelle prizes her privacy so highly, the reader must piece together her absent face from hints in the narrative. Wallace's typical use of exformation provides readers with two general theories and adds possible variations occurring along their timelines. One story suggests that she was hit in the face by acid, leaving her with horrific facial scarring. Her comments about being "deformed by beauty" are either denials or jokes (*IJ* 538). Another possibility is that, after years of "the prettiness getting visibly worse day by day," Joelle has naturally come into terrible beauty (*IJ* 298). The third option contains aspects of both, but leads to essentially the same outcome as the second – she was hit with acid, but it acted as a cosmetic "acid peel" and revealed the full potential of her beauty.

Acid attacks play an unfortunately common role in acts of gendered violence. A woman's face is often culturally positioned as one of her most valuable assets, in addition to the general importance that humans naturally place upon the face. Deleuze and Guattari's theory on the Face as the key to processing other humans is rooted in biology – it is theorised that part of why puppies and kittens are found cute is their similar facial proportions to human infants, triggering similar urges of caring and affection (Kringelbach et al. Web). Destroying a woman's face attempts to destroy both her humanity and her social capital. In Joelle's case, her acid attack was either an accident where her father attempted to hit Orin and hit her instead; or her mother threw the acid at Joelle for inadvertently seducing her own father. The latter seems more supported by the fiction – while generally untrustworthy, Molly Notkin claims that after the attack, Joelle's mother stuffed herself into the garbage disposal, which would explain why later Joelle remarks that her mother is dead. Joelle's father seems to be living regularly in Kentucky and has found

time to be remarried, suggesting that he has not suffered any of the legal ramifications one might expect if he did throw the acid (*IJ* 238).[81] If this is the case, Joelle's acid attack also includes themes of jealousy, as well as those previously mentioned. It would not be the first attack of this kind in the novel, as Wardine's mother mutilates her daughter for a very similar imagined offense. Joelle's mother is revealed to have been abused by her own father, and married Joel at only sixteen in order to escape him, so she is crushed to discover her own (child-marrying) husband is the type to "spurn his ordained mate and wants his daughter" (*IJ* 794). In an article about acid attacks for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, Nita Bhalla writes that these attacks are "often driven by the mentality 'If I can't have you, no one shall'" (Web). However, in this case Joelle did not refuse sexual or romantic advances – she did not know about her father's obsession until moments before her attack. It is certain that she would have refused him, if given the opportunity. Her acceptance or denial of male desire is irrelevant – merely by existing she is framed as a seductress. Joelle's perceived threat to her mother's place in the family organisation is her passive "*to-be-looked-at-ness*," so that is what her mother felt compelled to destroy. Additionally, being implicated in the incest taboo triggers abjection. Kristeva mostly writes about the more well-known mother/son incest of psychoanalytic theory in *Powers of Horror*, but the topic in general is defined as one of the two most base human fears (the other is murder) (57). When confronted with this disgusting practice, Joelle's mother first attempts to abject by "destroy[ing] the object," Joelle's beauty, and then immediately "abandon[ing] the position of the subject" by destroying herself (Houser 135).

If Joelle is "deformed by beauty," then we should consider what this means in the context of disability and deformity already established in the novel (538). In the reading of the U.H.I.D.

[81] Though her stepmother is in a "Locked Ward," so perhaps she threw the acid and both stories are incorrect (*IJ* 239).

membership brochure, Joelle includes many people with non-typical disabilities, including those exhibiting the trans-human beauty: "the fatally pulchritudinous [. . .] the Actaeonizing, side by side with the Medusoid. [. . .] Medusas and *odalisques* both" (*IJ* 190). Even before her attack, Joelle's beauty did not seem particularly advantageous. She was socially isolated, used as a pawn to negotiate Orin and J.O.I.'s relationship, pushed toward acting and away from her technical passions, and possibly made complicit in the creation of the lethal Entertainment, for which she is then marked for Technical Interview by the terrorist A.F.R. Afterward, her veil acts as a prosthetic in a similar way to other disability aids. She is visibly different, but able to function normally. She explains to Gately that the U.H.I.D. veil allows her and others like her to "stand very straight and walk briskly wherever we wish, veiled and hidden, and but now completely upfront and unashamed about the fact that how we appear to others affects us deeply, about the fact that we want to be shielded from all sight" (*IJ* 535). The fear of being looked at runs throughout Wallace's work, but for Joelle this uneasiness is amplified, as she and other non-normate people receive an increased amount of subjecting stares. Donning the veil improves her quality of life, she is able to move freely throughout the world, in addition to providing a sort of emotional safe space where her specific disability cannot be ridiculed or fetishised. On Joelle, Hayes-Brady writes that "Joelle's veil might therefore be read as a declaration of her own selfhood, the delineation of her body as inviolate [. . .] Joelle's veil, then, precludes the violation of her self by the gaze of another, or – it is implied – her violation of their mental state by her beauty" (137). Her simple joy of being able to "walk briskly wherever we wish" makes the veil seem appealing not only to the hideously deformed, but all women who feel afraid to walk the city in certain clothes, at certain times, or always, reticent to enter "the visual meatgrinder" of public life (*IJ* 534).

The Fat Body

While not as numerous as people with congenital or acquired deformities, fat individuals in Wallace's work tend to also embody familiar, and therefore easily legible, tropes. This propensity is visible in early work, such as *Broom of the System*, and remains relevant through later inclusion in the *Oblivion* story collection. While individual characters of size have been studied before, there has not been a discussion about fatness in general as it appears across Wallace's work. Marshall Boswell explains Norman Bombardini's metaphoric hunger in *Understanding David Foster Wallace*, Clare Hayes-Brady provides a more extensive reading of his solipsistic philosophy in *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace*, Patrick O'Donnell states "his name says it all" in "Almost a Novel: Broom of the System" (5). Amber Moltke is read extensively in Olivia Banner's "They're Literally Shit': Masculinity and the Work of Art in the Age of Waste Recycling" due to her great influence on the story's male characters. While they may be comparatively few in number, Wallace's fat characters tend to have a big presence, as I hope to show by reading these characters together, with support of fat studies criticism.

In *The Broom of the System*, Lenore's boss, Norman Bombardini, serves a minor but memorable role. His scenes are somewhat humorous in Bombardini's wild excess, evoking the famous Monty Python "Mr. Creosote" sketch as Lance Olsen observes in "Termite Art, or Wallace's Wittgenstein" (212). Bombardini embodies most of the common tropes which fatness has come to be metaphoric of in media: greed, selfishness, sloppiness, thoughtlessness.[82] While

[82] While Bombardini is the focus of this examination, he is not the only character of his kind in Wallace's work. *The Pale King* features a character called Fat Marcus the Moneylender, a grossly fat man in a position of power who likes to dominate other people with his body. (He would sit on their faces.) Criticism (both positive and negative) of *Broom* often relies on it being juvenilia, but these stereotypes, and more, exist through to Wallace's final work. For

many of the male characters in the book want to figuratively consume Lenore, Bombardini mentions that he would like to literally eat her and every other item in existence. Rather than protect himself by disappearing, as Lenore eventually does, "Bombardini rejects this solution in favor of its mirror opposite, namely to maximise Self by eating himself to infinite size. In this way he hopes to create universe of one, a closed system with nothing in it but his Self" (Boswell 54). Fat and feminist intersectional critics Lucy Aphramor and Jacqui Gingras summarise "the large *body* seen as noncompliant, disobedient, and undisciplined," fears which are present in Wallace's fat caricatures ("That Remains to Be Said", 98). Many scholars quite easily note Bombardini as a metaphor of a postmodern struggle to negotiate the relationship between Self and Other by enveloping the Other completely inside the self. He is a symbol of solipsism, one of Wallace's philosophical enemies, as well as an example of Wallace's characteristically hyperbolic humour. Marshall Boswell relates Bombardini to solipsism, writing that he Bombardini aims to "to maximize Self by eating himself to infinite size. In this way he hopes to create universe of one, a closed system with nothing in it but his Self" (54). The fact that this metaphor is so facile in an author who is otherwise known for deliberate slipperiness/multiplicity of meaning is perhaps notable. Wallace never meant to write solely for an academic audience, and his popularity amongst the general reading public as well as professional scholars of literature may be bolstered by the humour and understandability of some of his metaphors. Why does this work so well? Perhaps because we are trained to see characters with some kind of bodily difference as laden with meaning. Their missing and deformed parts are automatically markers of some kind of significance, defined by their lack in ways that able-bodied characters never are. By placing the discussion within a body, Wallace immediately grounds complex

---

example, the narrator unconvincingly notes that the Moneylender "was a Jew but I don't think that had anything to do with it" (352).

discussions in something relatable to everyone. The Self/Other complex and other Wittgensteinian ideas are difficult to grasp even by some academics, but the idea that a man could become fat enough to fill the universe is immediately understandable as absurd. We understand eating and the limits of the human body, and Western society certainly understands fat jokes. Wallace himself refers to Bombardini's solipsistic plan as "Norman's gag," as in, a joke (McCaffery 45). Hayes-Brady determines this use of gags as "one of the trademarks of Wallace's fiction, literalizing difficult questions and working them out in a living context" (12).

Femininity and Fatness:

The way that Wallace portrays fat bodies in his work is heavily tied to the gender of the character he is portraying, so in this section I include the work of several intersectional fat and gender studies authors to help illuminate how gender and fatness intersect. Both Bombardini and Marcus the Moneylender are linked to capitalist greed due to their financial positions, while Amber Moltke and Randy Lenz's mother are heavily associated with femininity. Like Avril, who is physically large in another way, both women possess aspects of the Madonna and the Whore, but their fat bodies link these characterisations with classic imagery such as the *Venus von Willendorf*. The fat female body evokes both modern stereotypes and ancient expressions of desire. Metaphorically, they carry the same assumptions in literature that Christina Fisanick notes fat women endure in real life: "American culture sees fat women as silly, sloppy, lazy, and dishonest, among other negative qualities" (108). Additionally, "'The White Man's Burden': Female Sexuality, Tourist Postcards, and the Place of the Fat Woman in Early 20th-Century U.S. Culture" by Amy Farrell incorporates history: "the 20th century inherited from the Enlightenment a dualistic and oppositional relationship of mind to body that continues to project

the hatred of the body onto the female while associating the male with the rational" (257). Farrell continues to note how, regardless of actual obesity statistics: "that women were considered more likely than men to exhibit 'bodily excess' because their rational qualities were not sufficiently developed to control their bodies. Fatness also posed a bigger transgression for women than for men, however, because women were expected to maintain that line of civilized control" (257-258). Chromosomally female bodies can be more inclined to conserve fat, leading to generally higher body fat percentages. The body's natural inclination to retain fat in order to support a possible pregnancy requires additional discipline to control weight, leading to higher instances of extreme dieting and other maladaptive behaviours in women. An added expectation of control is also expected of women in that certain areas *should* retain fat, according to their specific culture. In American culture for example, a woman might be expected to lose softness around her belly and thighs, but retain (or surgically mimic) a high concentration of fat in the breasts and buttocks. Targeted weight loss, while widely advertised, is not actually possible through exercise, resulting in another instance where women are doomed to fail in bodily control (Perry). These disciplining techniques are tied to the idea of the gaze by Dina Giovanelli and Stephen Ostertag in "Controlling the Body: Media Representations, Body Size, and Self-Discipline:"

> Self-discipline and control through time and space reflect subjectivities thoroughly infused with patriarchy, where women's bodies confer a status in a hierarchy not of their own making; this hierarchy requires constant body surveillance and maintenance, often taken form in self-disciplining practices. Such control requires docile bodies (Foucault, 1977) and cannot be maintained without the internalization of patriarchy, saturating the soul through unremitting surveillance. (289)

They identify media, like the tabloid magazines Amber is obsessed with, "as cosmetic panopticon through its ability to pass judgment, stigmatize, and pressure people to manage their identity" (294).[83]

In "'They're literally shit': Masculinity and the Work of Art in an Age of Waste Recycling" Olivia Banner observes that "What Atwater doesn't realise but quickly becomes clear to the reader is that Amber resembles Atwater's mother. When Amber seduces Skip, she wears the same style of clothes as Atwater's mother wore" (Web). Atwater's mother shares the same religious strictness and propensity for physical abuse that traumatised Brint Moltke. The same article notes that "Amber, then, and her Midwestern roots are linked with these other Midwestern mothers to form a group of maternal figures that threaten, wound, surround, and swallow up the story's two central male characters, its artist and its writer." While Amber has no children of her own, her sexual relationships are bound up in motherhood. Unlike the statuesque Avril, who Hal imagines in sort of a fugue state during sex (*IJ* 958), Amber's body is a constant and somewhat menacing force. The choice of the words "swallow up" are apt – Amber does not want to literally eat her sons/lovers, as Bombardini threatens to do to Lenore, but during her seduction of Skip Atwater she overwhelms him in descriptions evoking *The Blob*. Her bulk spreads through the car they are sitting in until "A very muffled set of what could have been either screams or cries of excitement began to issue from the tilted vehicle; and anyone trying to look in either side's window would have been unable to see any part of Skip Atwater at all" (288). Atwater disappears from narration for fifteen pages, and when he returns, he is wounded from the event. A bruise on his knee documents the event: "certain features of the car door's armrest and the window's controls were directly imprinted in the bruises center and already yellowing" (312). It

[83] Oliva Banner discusses this judgement through the policing of thin women's bodies in "'They're literally shit': Masculinity and the Work of Art in an Age of Waste Recycling."

is a record of him being used by Amber and represents objectification, but paradoxically the wounded knee "now somehow existed in a more solid and emphatic way than the rest of him around it" (313). In addition to the car door, Amber's solidity apparently also leaves an impression.

While Amber is by far the most well developed fat woman in Wallace's work, there is one other character that is worth studying briefly. Randy Lenz's mother is a much more minor part of the overall story and therefore offers less to analyse, but her basic similarities with Amber are notable. Both are working class women who enjoy eating, sex, and mixing imagery of the two. When Lenz's mother wins a large amount of money in a lawsuit the first things she acquires are a "1.5-meter-wide recliner" that she watches romance films in while eating "mammoth volumes of high-lipid pastry brought on gold trays by a pastry chef she'd had put at her individual 24-hour disposal" (*IJ* 576). [84] Amber believes that a *Style* profile will lead to money and fame, and is willing to seduce Skip Atwater to get it. Ariane Prohaska and Jeannine Gailey detail the conception that fat women are sexually voracious and desperate in "Fat Women as 'Easy Targets': Achieving Masculinity Through Hogging." The aforementioned stereotype of fat bodies as "undisciplined" extends to fat women as being as incapable of turning down sex as they are of food. The image of Amber's bulk expanding to envelope the passive Atwater evokes Farrell's observation that "[Fat women] not only take up too much geographic space; they also are portrayed as taking up excessive sexual space" (258).

Another significant fat person in Wallace's work is Jim Incandenza Sr., the grandfather of Orin, Mario, and Hal of *Infinite Jest*. While not as morbidly obese as the former two characters, Jim Sr. is fat and physically grotesque in other ways, partly due to a horrific tennis

[84] She got her backside stuck in the window of a bus toilet. The entire situation is a slapstick scene based on the absurd size of her bottom; the reader is not inclined to feel she deserved thousands of dollars for humiliation and suffering.

accident in his youth. Jim Sr.'s kneecaps were essentially ground away after he tripped and skid, and the excruciating detail which Wallace uses to describe the accident serves to highlight how deeply Jim Sr. has been betrayed by his body. In "Some Assembly Required: The Embodied Politics of *Infinite Jest*" Russell states that "the extraordinary athletic body is not a permanent form, but in an evanescent state, perpetually subject to change" by either muscle loss or injury (150). Jim Sr.'s accident showcases the moment where failure instantly transforms the idolised athletic body into "just meat wrapped in a sort of flimsy nylon stocking" (*IJ* 168). Jim Sr.'s physical appearance and behaviors reflect the fact that he acquires most of his calories through alcohol, rather than food. Jim Sr.'s ruination is linked to his future alcoholism as "the drunk and the maimed both are dragged foreward out of the arena like a boneless Christ" (*IJ* 169). While Amber and Bombardini's appearances focus on their substantial (and even sumptuous) mounds of fatty flesh, Jim Sr. appears bloated, like a corpse. He constantly spurts gas and vomit, as if putrefying before J.O.I.'s (and the reader's) eyes. This is reflective of Jim Sr.'s experience of death in life: after his tennis accident he has no identity of his own, he becomes an actor and plays one in a series of Men from Glad, then transfers his tennis aspirations onto his son.[85]

Jim Sr.'s attempts to consume his son can most obviously be seen in his name, passed on to his son (but notably not his grandsons). Jim Sr. forces his childhood passions and squandered talents onto J.O.I., discouraging his intellectual capabilities and encouraging him to view himself only a machinelike body. The overall thrust of Jim Sr.'s rant is that there essentially is no abstract mind, only electric pulses in the brain, and that the human being is essentially one body amongst many which respond in subtle but predictable ways. Drunken tangents and remarks

[85] The Man from Glad was the real life mascot of the Glad company; the same Glad which sponsors the final year of Subsidized Time in *Infinite Jest*. Glad product ads from the time of the real Man from Glad focused on the brand's unsurpassed ability to tightly contain unpleasant waste and odors. Ironically, Jim Sr. cannot contain his own bodily waste and smells. For example: while in costume his sweat melts off his orange makeup, staining the white suit emblematic of Glad's sanitary image.

throughout the rant betray that in fact Jim Sr. hates his own body because of its inability to obey his mind (it will not play sports, it will not stay awake, it will not be thin); but by espousing that one is only a body he can effectively objectify others. Jim Sr. compares J.O.I.'s body to a fine car, stressing that proper care of the machine is necessary for its functioning. However, a car obviously does not own, maintain, and control itself. By removing the mind altogether from what is otherwise a standard allusion to dualism, Jim Sr. makes space for himself in the "driver's seat" of his son's body. After encouraging J.O.I. to see himself as a machine, Jim Sr. is able to control him, manipulating his son's body to practice sports, to win matches, and to drink. Along with tennis, Jim Sr. forces his son to inherit his own fatal alcoholism; this same chapter describes him forcing J.O.I. to take his first drink at 10 years old.[86] J.O.I.'s thoughts at least are consumed by his father; he spends a short life time poorly trying to negotiate between mind and body, trying to draw out his introverted son Hal in a similar way, and is eventually destroyed by alcoholism.

The Disabled Body and Narrative Prosthesis:

James Sr.'s life-changing accident marks a shift in his body from one which is admired and envied to one which is considered aberrant. He is not the most spectacularly or severely disabled person in Wallace's fiction, but his characterization shares elements with many others. As this dissertation has already shown, *Infinite Jest* contains a huge variety of people who may be considered disabled in some way – James Sr., Joelle, Marathe's wife, Mario, the entire A.F.R., the numberless victims of environmental birth defects caused by the waste crisis. Beyond *Infinite Jest* there is also Julie's autistic brother in "Little Expressionless Animals," LaVache

[86] Jim Sr. is usually shown drinking beer, but J.O.I.'s first drink is from a flask, which the reader can presume is filled with the Wild Turkey bourbon that would become J.O.I.'s signature drink. Relating back to the theory that J.O.I. is in some ways a stand-in for Wallace himself, *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* states that Wallace's drink of choice was also Wild Turkey (146).

Beadsman in *Broom*, the interviewee with the Asset from "Brief Interviews," and more. Broadly speaking, they hold in common what David Mitchell asserts all narratives about disability does – engagement in "narrative prosthesis" (16). "Narrative prosthesis (or the dependency of literary narratives on disability) is the notion that all narratives operate out of a desire to compensate for a limitation or to reign in excessiveness," a phenomena which can be read into many of Wallace's disabled characters (20). This sort of characterization is not unique to Wallace, as Mitchell observes that "Disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphoric device" (15). It is true that some of Wallace's works, especially *Infinite Jest*, may utilise disability more often than even "stock feature" implies, but otherwise his depiction of disabled bodies falls quite neatly into Mitchell's description of narrative prosthesis (15). Mitchell notes that stories are always borne out of strangeness – a perfectly average person in a perfectly average body who lives a perfectly average life does not constitute a narrative (or not one anyone would find interesting, anyway) (15). Set amongst normative bodies, the disabled body always provides the opportunity for narrative: it is believed to invite speculation on its creation, its metaphoric meaning, its hardships, and its potential cure. This seems to align with Wallace's stated desire to "make the familiar *strange* again" (McCaffery 38). Mitchell observes that assigning metaphors to disabled bodies in literature is appealing to writers because "the passage through a bodily form helps secure a knowledge that would otherwise drift away of its own insubstantiality. The corporeal metaphor offers narrative the one thing it cannot possess- materiality" (28). Even if it must be constructed in the mind's eye, the tangible, visual nature of the body grounds and strengthens metaphors.

This common, reliable strategy in storytelling is perhaps why Wallace's disabled bodies often seem to be little more than vessels for metaphor. Wallace was very plainly attempting to weave philosophy, criticism, and didactic lessons into his fiction, and narrative prosthesis provides a way to do this. If anything, Wallace's metaphoric use of fat and disabled bodies seems uncharacteristically transparent. A large part of why Wallace Studies has been able to grow exponentially is that Wallace's work can sustain a huge array of convincing but differing readings. Compared to the discourse on narrative elements like how Hal broke down, fat people representing over-consumption seems weirdly simple. The prevalence of narrative prosthesis offers an explanation (though not a justification); we are equally as practised at reading these metaphors, they are just as culturally ingrained in us. In "Anti-Interiority: Compulsiveness, Objectification, and Identity in Infinite Jest" Elizabeth Freudenthal refers to Mario as a "stereotype of disability" which is "one of the unfortunate low points of [an] otherwise breathtaking novel" (211). Mario *is* a stereotype of disability, just as Don Gately is a stereotype of the working class everyman, Joelle is a stereotypical femme (literally) fatale, Erdedy is a stereotypical stoner, and Hal is a stereotypical millennial. However, their typicality does not denigrate the novel, or even necessarily register, as they do not possess the particular ability to capture attention and facilitate reading like Mario does. Mitchell notes that "The body calls attention to itself only in the midst of breakdown or disrepair," which for many of the main characters is a plot element, but for Mario it is a fact of his life (28). Mario's characterization conforms mostly to what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls the "wondrous" and "sentimental" categories of staring at disabled people. The wondrous "capitalizes on physical differences in order to elicit amazement and admiration," and has evolved from ancient to early modern ways of viewing disability as augury, common in the contemporary as the "supercrip" (59). The

sentimental rhetoric "produces the sympathetic victim or helpless sufferer needing protection or succor and invoking pity, inspiration, and frequent contributions" (63). Elements of both can be seen in Boswell's succinct reading of Mario: "It is no accident, moreover, that Wallace's most visible figure for the truly human is a horribly deformed boy. Apparently, pure sentiment and naiveté are, in his world, so rare, so much a 'miracle,' that they represent a deformation of the norm" (158). Mario possesses the extraordinary abilities of the "supercrip," trading a nimble body for deft emotional intelligence, as well as the infantilization of the sentimental mode. Note that Boswell refers to Mario as a "horribly deformed boy," when Mario is 19, and therefore technically a man.[87] Boswell's use of "boy" is not malicious, and deconstruction of Mario's metaphor seems exactly correct, but it is nonetheless infantilising.

During perhaps one of the only insights the reader receives into Mario's interior life, Wallace writes "Mario is basically a born listener. One of the positives to being visibly damaged is that people can sometimes forget you're there, even when they're interfacing with you. You almost get to eavesdrop. It's almost like they're like: If nobody's really in there, there's nothing to be shy about" (*IJ* 80). As a description of a disabled person, the word "damaged" immediately catches attention. It is objectifying, but also carries the implication on something that has been done to something else. As discussed in the Body and the Environment chapter, in Mario's case his body represents a punishment for the actions of his parents, who may have broken the incest taboo. Also, the connection between the speaker and the damaged listener makes a clear connection between mind and body. If the body is not intact, then the mind also must not be. It is not worded as if Mario's inner self is somehow damaged, but as if it does not exist. To others, Mario *is* his wrecked body, his listening ears, and nothing else is possible. Mario observes that

[87] Obviously very many 19 year olds are not adults in any sense but the legal one, however, this sort of thing is often directed toward disabled people.

"only he can feel" the emotional connection between himself and a speaker who assumes he is empty (80). He exists only externally; he can be looked at, but the auditory information he receives is not perceived as going anywhere. Perhaps because of this emphasis on externality, Mario is very interested in film. "Photography authorizes staring. Photos are made to be looked at" (Garland-Thomson 58). Thomson refers to the actual objects, but the photographer or filmmaker is also an authorised looker, in most cases. By taking up the hobby of film, Mario shifts himself from "viewed" to "viewer." He has a particular interest in lenses, emphasizing an interest in different ways of looking. Mario can only use a camera in a particular way – it is a prosthetic metal brace which holds the camera out in front of him. Due to the immobility of the metal and his foreshortened arms, Mario cannot turn the camera toward himself. This relates to his position as a "born listener," he can only direct his attention outward (*IJ* 80).

This inability to look inward is part of what spurs Hal to scold Mario near the end of the novel, from Hal's perspective. He believes that Mario is refusing to honour his own feelings by getting angry with Hal's secret-keeping and lying. In fact, Hal is merely assuming the lack of interiority that Mario notes often happens, in addition to some probable projection. Hal believes that Mario's lack of anger comes from a wilful ignorance of guile, or the incapacity to understand it. However, this is not entirely true. Mario may not be able to directly lie, but before this conversation with Hal he purposefully omits telling Avril that he believes Hal is seriously sad, despite her repeated efforts at prying. In the conversation Hal is having a difficult time believing that Pemulis would do a truly friendly act for him, so it is unsurprising that he does not even fathom that Mario would lie to their formidable Moms on his behalf. The melodrama of ritual, stress of withdrawal and school pressures, unresolved trauma over his father, and fear of addiction have compounded into such self-absorbed self-loathing for Hal that he cannot

comprehend that Mario is just genuinely not angry. Like Erdedy trapped between the phone and doorbell, Hal is also paralyzed between binaries and cannot imagine any of the "both/or" feelings that Mario may be experiencing. Hal believes himself to be a lying, manipulative addict – Mario insists that "pretty much all I do is love you and be glad I have an excellent brother in every way" (*IJ* 772). Hal reacts with anger, because he cannot believe that he can be both, while to Mario, Hal's excessive weed smoking does not erase how his brother threatened to physically fight the man who tried to get him to hide under the U.H.I.D. veil, or cuts his food for him, or changed his diapers until he was in his early teens. Hal does profess to believe Mario, but only because he seems to believe Mario blindly loves all things, and cannot actually *choose*. One of the novel's many small tragedies occurs when because of Mario's disabilities; his healthy and potentially nourishing refusal to reduce his brother to the subhuman-coded "addict" is disregarded and misunderstood as mental retardation.

This conversation reveals an unfortunate trend in Wallace's fiction where the non-normative person is often used as a sort of prosthetic for a normative person, rather than only the narrative in general. Mario is the emotional foil to Hal's flat affect, Marathe's wife provides the sense of responsibility he requires to live, and Julie's autistic brother represents the blankness of the men who ruined her childhood. The disabled body is not just a metaphor, but one that is carefully tailored to another character. The disabled person becomes like a seeing stone, which the normative person may use to better understand the world and themselves. As Mario notes, "It is easier to fix something if you can see it," and this is true of the materiality of the body. As we will explore in the next chapter, the torture of the interior self is often inscrutable, and cannot be reconciled unless made external.

Chapter 6: The Body and the Self

As we have explored in the previous chapter, Wallace's portrayal of the feminine is one based in bodily and subjective difference which is often used to help develop the sense of the male self by embodying what they are not. The relationship between femininity and negative definition in pieces such as *Infinite Jest* establishes a pattern of (sometimes literally) shrouded femininity which seems mysterious and suspicious to its male characters. As Hayes-Brady explains, the influence of the feminine may be incredibly powerful (such as in Avril's machinations or the emotional sway of the Granola Cruncher) but it is often a peripheral force (". . ." 136). The feminine may be interacted with directly in Wallace's work, almost exclusively in sexual or parenting relationships, but it is as likely to be experienced as a subtle permeation. Refusal or fear of interacting directly with the feminine arises both from this conception of alterity[88], and from toxic masculinity, where ideas and behaviours traditionally seen as feminine are classified as humiliating or dirty.[89] For Wallace's male characters, the permeation of the feminine is not unlike the permeation of the Concavity/Convexity[90], where that which was sent away "creeps back," both in toxic relationships with women, and with shameful experience of feminine behaviours (*IJ* 233). As the last chapter detailed ways in which femininity (and fatness, and other alternate ways of being and embodying) has been inextricably linked to the Other, this chapter shall focus on the Self, and the place that masculinity holds in relation to it in *Infinite Jest* and "The Suffering Channel." By examining the (dis)connection between the self and the body, I hope to expand on Marshall Boswell's piece in "'The Constant Monologue Inside Your

[88] Barbara Creed stresses that the male child must push away the mother to come into his own (patriarchal) selfhood; and the archaic mother refuses this by consuming the child, as mentioned in the previous chapter.
[89] Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* explores this idea thoroughly, but it is a common subject in feminist film criticism. It is most easily seen in horror films, such as *Alien*.
[90] Which is itself a confusion of the Rabelaisian conception of gendered parts, a female hole and a male protuberance.

Head': *Oblivion* and the Nightmare of Consciousness" which asserts there are "multiple ways in which [Wallace's] characters are not only alone inside their heads but also controlled, sometimes to the point of madness, by the layered, nested, entropic workings of their interiors" (151). Wallace's conception of a Self which is either separate of the body or would like to be is one which is both rooted in classic thought and emblematic of current tensions in male experience. In *Volatile Bodies* Elizabeth Grosz outlines the influence of Cartesian dualism on how we conceive of the mind and body as two separate, gendered entities (48-51). Men are associated with the mind, the seat of selfhood, rationality, and philosophy, while women are associated with the body, its uncleanliness, and its urges. Masculinity and the self are bound together, and Wallace's men experience a toxic masculinity which necessarily creates a toxic selfhood. While the feminine Other may be interacted with as an outside object to be pushed away or possessed, the masculine and the Self associated with it in Wallace's work is based on insularity, control, and alienation.

These themes of insularity, control, and alienation are seen mostly strongly when analysing the monologic thought patterns of characters such as Hal in *Infinite Jest.* I have discussed in previous chapters, particularly The Body and Politics, that Bakhtinian dialogism is associated with connection, upheaval, and joy. It follows, then, that monologic patterns relate to disconnection, entrapment, and misery. Rather than the supernatural and exciting figure of the ghost which Hering connects to Wallace's reach for dialogism, I find the illustration of monologism in Wallace's most mundane figures. The protagonists that Wallace is most well-known for are white, articulate young men, who often exhibit what Wallace described as "Marijuana Thinking": obsessive, circular thought patterns which imitate *Infinite Jest's* frequent annular imagery (*IJ* 1080). Similar patterns in thought entrap those with mental illnesses such as

depression and anhedonia in Wallace's writing, but these are not described as explicitly as "Marijuana Thinking." In "*Oblivion*" David Hering states that Wallace's *Oblivion* story collection uniquely contrasts "disembodied oblivion against a sense of embodied suffering, which presents itself in extremes of physical agony and relentless emotional distress" (97). I believe that "Marijuana Thinking" and the mental illnesses which it imitates in *Infinite Jest* evidence this dynamic much earlier in Wallace's writing. I have already discussed extreme bodily and emotional suffering in previous chapters in reference to the earlier works *Infinite Jest* and *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, but I believe that annular thought and the more subtle ways in which it makes a grotesquery of the body are also worth studying.

Labyrinthine Monologue and Loneliness

In "Marijuana Thinking," afflicted individuals "think themselves into labyrinths of reflexive abstraction that seem to cast doubt on the very possibility of practical functioning," leading to physical paralysis as all energy is unwillingly directed to the brain (*IJ* 1080). This echoes the effect of *Oblivion's* settings, where "the enforced, unnaturally hermetic *stillness* of these spaces restricts physicality and provokes thought, leading to a painful, involuted consciousness that manifests as extended reveries on troubling elements of the protagonists' lives," except here the terrible setting is one's own mind (Hering 98). The "cute" A.A. term for this contrast between mental overstimulation and physical shutdown is "Analysis-Paralysis" (203). I consider the terms essentially interchangeable, but "Marijuana Thinking" is technically the term given definition. The clearest example of "Marijuana Thinking" is in Ken Erdedy's early section in *Infinite Jest*, where he agonizes over the extensive preparations he has made for a smoking binge: taking off work, renting videos, buying snacks, establishing alibis to present to

work and friends, how he will systematically destroy his paraphernalia after the binge, and whether or not the dealer will even show up.[91] These thoughts patterns are all-consuming, difficult to disengage from, and generally upsetting to the thinker. In characters who actually do consume marijuana and other substances, many of the worries associated with "Marijuana Thinking" are enhanced by socially-enforced ideals of drug addicts as depraved or otherwise incompatible with civilised life. These obsessive attempts to control public perception of themselves as non-addicts results in a loss of mental control, as every thought and fear of the afflicted person gives rise to several more, recalling the tumorous garbage-eating growth of the Concavity/Convexity. Managing "Marijuana Thinking" and illicit substance use ironically demands more time and effort the more the user fears exposure, infecting sober life almost completely. If the character involved is, as most of Wallace's characters are, already predisposed to circular depressive thinking, this infection can occur quite insidiously. For Hal and Wallace himself, it is difficult to separate literal "Marijuana Thinking" from the isolated and paranoid labyrinth that depression creates of one's own mind.

A letter on the Granada House website believed to be written by Wallace gestures toward this tangled kind of thinking, linked to both drug use and general inability to share one's thoughts: "I was denied 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 in to my body," "a lot of my early recovery consisted of learning to say aloud the stuff about drugs and alcohol and recovery I was thinking, instead of keeping it twisting and writhing around inside my head," and "[staff] also recognised bullshit, and manipulation, and meaningless intellectualization as a way of evading terrible truths" (Granadahouse.org). The letter states that

[91] Please refer back to the Wallace and His Influences chapter which covers Lucas Thompson's comparison of this scene to Kafka's writing.

"one of the kindest and most helpful things the House staff did for me was to sit down and listen – to complaints, cravings, questions, confessions, rants, resentments, terrors, and insights both real and imagined" (Granadahouse.org). "Marijuana Thinking" is essentially a monologue, voluntarily kept inside at first due to shame, then involuntarily through analysis-paralysis. The presence and engagement of another person shatters the monologue, potentially leading to the self-absorption of the sufferer eventually fading and producing genuine dialogue. A.A. provides the same help to those who are willing to open up in *Infinite Jest*, but readers also see many characters who suffer without social help. Hal, for example, has what many would consider to be a strong support network: his mother is concerned about his wellbeing, he has a loving and understanding older brother whom he lives with full-time, he has an established and available friend group, his school has its own counsellor, and his family has the financial means to purchase whatever additional medical care he might need or want. Even Orin is surprisingly supportive of Hal, given his selfish characterisation throughout the novel. In their extended phone conversation Orin shows interest in Hal's grief counselling, and shows sympathy during the grisly bits by referring to Hal by a diminutive family nickname (Hallie) (*IJ* 251). While Orin is obviously not the best confidant due to other inappropriate behaviours, I still do not feel that he would reject Hal outright. Overall, Hal seems to have very little to rationally fear about seeking help with his chemical and mental issues and the torturous self-imprisonment they cause. We have already discussed predatory behaviours that dissuade Hal from trusting his mother or psychiatrists in previous chapters, but why would he refuse to share his depressive thoughts with his friends?

Despite living, attending school, and playing together for approximately eight years, Hal's friendships with Pemulis, Schacht, and the others seem shallow. They speak mostly about

activities (like tennis or drugs), and relatively little about their thoughts and feelings. Contrastingly, even when they are mistaken about the actual depth of that connection, female characters like Joelle Van Dyne and Molly Notkin feel some emotional intimacy with their friends. Molly Notkin seems to overestimate how well she knows Joelle, and is more concerned with the performative aspects of friendship (physical familiarity such as cheek-kissing or social capital such as holding privileged information about Joelle) than actually caring about her. In "The Suffering Channel" the female employees of *Style* are more likely to use intimate information about a friend to cut her down than to build the relationship. Wallace's women do not necessarily have healthier relationships than his men, but the opportunity to engage in emotionally intimate behaviour at all makes them fundamentally different. Traditional gender roles assign acts of caring, such as listening, to women, while men are expected to stoically keep their own counsel. Little boys are briefly allowed to lean emotionally on their mothers, but this behaviour is discouraged at a young age by insults like "mama's boy," or insinuations that a strong bond with the mother causes male homosexuality. A man may occasionally be allowed to seek emotional comfort from a female romantic partner, but doing so too often or for too trivial a reason might lead to the man's dominant position in the relationship being called into question ("who wears the pants," being a "manchild," etc.).

Western men are generally not socialised to give or expect emotional labour from other men, even those they deeply care about. James Incandenza attempts to provide emotional support for Hal early in the novel, but it is clear that he does not possess the skills to do so, as discussed earlier in the dissertation. He lies, speaks over Hal, and generally does not actually listen to his son, only claims that he wishes to do so. Even Mario, who is shown to be incredibly emotionally perceptive, consults Avril about Hal's feelings of depression before he asks Hal what is wrong.

While Orin is portrayed as lonely because he actively and subconsciously sabotages emotional connections with women, Hal's isolation is more subtle. Hal does not seem to believe that his friends are cruel or aloof - they have fun, and rely on each other for other things, such as homework help and evasion of discipline. Hal does not lament that his friends are unavailable for emotional support, because he does not view them as an option in the first place. Whether or not Pemulis or the others would be supportive listeners and thus able to break his monologism does not actually matter. Because Hal believes that he has no one to talk to, his circular, paranoid thought patterns become a matter of necessity and he is locked into them. Hal's thoughts are left "twisting and writhing around inside [his] head," with no one to point out "bullshit, and manipulation, and meaningless intellectualization as a way of evading terrible truths" (Granadahouse.org).

As mentioned previously, these circular thought patterns come to resemble *Infinite Jest*'s annular fusion, a process which feeds on waste and does provide energy, but also produces more waste. Wallace's portrayal of depression and anxiety differ from many interpretations in that he does include ways in which, like annular fusion, these afflictions can produce positive effects. Hal's paranoia and feelings of low self-worth are beneficial to some degree – the fear of failure and being overtaken bolsters his competitive drive and work ethic. Part of why Hal's suffering is invisible to other characters is because it manifests in these positive masculine-aligned traits. While Hal is aware of his own suffering, the positive effects of his illnesses serve to discourage him from seeking help, as he fears that alleviating his self-worth issues would also destroy his investment in competition. Having lived with anxiety and depression for years, Hal is no longer able to separate traits of his illness from traits of himself. The mixed effects of Hal's grotesque thought patterns are readable in his body, in his misaligned body parts. Hal's essential fear is of

not being "enough:" not talented enough, not smart enough, not likeable enough, so he and the other anxious players develop parts which are "too much" for their adolescent bodies, such as "a gorilla's arm pasted on the body of a child" (*IJ* 173). While Mario's body is also deformed, it is in a way which is consistent with his personality. His physique is likened to a dinosaur or a foetus, which aligns with his antiquated and childlike sentimentality.[92] Wilson Kaiser notes that "it is difficult to locate normative bodies in Wallace's fiction, because they are each transformed by the perpetual circuits they develop with the specific environments they inhabit" (60). We have already examined the physical environments that these characters inhabit, but the descriptor of a "circuit" also applies to the highly restrictive psychological landscape that characters like Hal and his brothers inhabit, which inform and deform their bodies.

Ritual and Control

The themes of insularity, control, and alienation which define Wallace's portrayal of a highly private and guarded self are visualised by the ritualistic act of drug-taking in *Infinite Jest.* Page 49 of *Infinite Jest* starts with "Here's Hal Incandenza, age seventeen, with his little brass one-hitter, getting covertly high in the Enfield Tennis Academy's underground Pump Room and exhaling palely into an exhaust fan." Most of the passage resembles this sentence in tone and progression – the narrator speaks directly and casually to the viewer ("Here's Hal," "because let's face it," an extraneous "like"), they describe some practical methodology of getting high, then comment on the secrecy of the act. The casual tone, detailed directions, and specific emotional state give the act the qualities of a familiar ritual, which is reflected in the predictability and repetition in sentence structure and content. The reader can see Hal's

[92] See "The Body and the Environment" for an in-depth discussion on Mario's body and Wallace's belief in the absence of sentimentality in a postmodern world.

commitment to isolation in his weed ritual – he "likes to get high in secret, but a bigger secret is that he's as attached to the secrecy as he is to getting high" (*IJ* 49). The fantasy of this attachment quickly becomes clear to the reader, as Hal mentions fourteen people who know or may know about his weed smoking (*IJ* 49-50). It is possible that Hal is overestimating this number in a moment of marijuana-induced paranoia, but the actual number of people who know is irrelevant. As with his emotional state, there is a kind of doublethink occurring where Hal perceives himself to be both totally alone and overwhelmingly scrutinised. He encourages himself to crave secrecy and the fantasy of being unperceived, displacing any natural desire for emotional intimacy or acknowledgement.

Considering Hal's initial ritualised commitment to secrecy while getting high earlier in the book and the claim that most of his addiction is actually to this isolation, it is surprising that as the novel progresses Hal's commitment weakens. Despite no longer being physically alone while taking substances, he does not become any less lonely or trapped in his internal labyrinth. If anything, the disconnected presence of others worsens his condition, and Hal's willingness to do drugs in public can be mapped onto the deterioration of his communicative faculties. He gets publically high for the first time at the Eschaton game, which as the name suggests, is the beginning of the end for Hal's communicative control (*IJ* 335). He loses some control over his body (leaning over to spit, and pausing for two pages) which advances with time (laughing without realising it when he meets Ortho later, then writhing on the ground in the opening scene). The paralysis is repeatedly paired with uncontrolled absorption. Wallace writes that "Hal finds himself riveted at something about the degenerating game that seems too terribly abstract and fraught with implications and consequences that even thinking about how to articulate it seems so complexly stressful that being almost incapacitated with absorption is almost the only

way out of the complex stress" (*IJ* 340). Hal's inward absorption is linked with disconnection from both his own body and social interaction. At the time of the quote, Axford is talking at Hal, who does not answer due to these ruminations. Hal is also unable to summon enough saliva to spit, although he would like to. At the climax of the disastrous Eschaton game, Hal sees his friends wincing and "for a brief moment that Hal will later regard as completely and uncomfortably bizarre, Hal feels at his own face to see whether he is wincing" (*IJ* 342). These are not random actions and affects, but ones necessary to communication via speech and facial expression, and their absence separates Hal from the crowd that his efforts imply he would like to be part of.

It is unclear what caused the condition that readers find Hal in at the beginning of *Infinite Jest*, but it becomes apparent that it is likely caused by some kind of poisoning. We can trace its first bodily symptoms to the scene studied above, but its origins and eventual progression are unknown. While the theory that Hal's communicative faculties were destroyed by DMZ is foreshadowed by the childhood scene of Hal eating mould, the theory which attributes his breakdown to marijuana usage may be foreshadowed by Ken Erdedy's first scene. I have already touched on the scene in this chapter and in previous, but now I would like to visit it in a new context, remembering the readings of insectoid dehumanisation and pitifulness as I consider it as a dark portent of Hal's breakdown. Erdedy's analysis-paralysis scene takes place (narratively, not chronologically) directly after Hal is carried away on a gurney in the book's introduction. Hal imagines that a nurse's aide will "catch what he sees as my eye," continuing the defamiliarisation of the body typical of Hal post-Eschaton and ask "'So yo then man what's your story?'" (*IJ* 17). This line sets up a sort of metatextual gag – Hal's story is everything following that line, the actual book *Infinite Jest*. Additionally, portraying Hal's grotesque and mysterious

condition to pique the reader's curiosity and then whipping the perspective away from Hal allows that curiosity to stew within the reader as typically Kafkaesque tension. In addition to introducing the reader to the nonlinear progression of the novel early, the writing style of Erdedy's section arguably encourages the reader's curiosity towards at the expense of sympathy toward Erdedy's addiction. The section is ten pages long, with very few paragraph breaks, which combine with the novel's thin margins to present goliath blocks of text (one paragraph is five pages long). The sentence structure varies from clipped, inane sentences about a bug in the room to a 17 line long sentence about Erdedy being unable to choose between answering the phone or the intercom. The content of the passage differs in granular detail from Hal's Pump Room smoking scene, but certain key elements are present in both. Like Hal, Erdedy is obsessed with secrecy, he explains elaborate protocol about his drug use, and he dwells on the ritualistic trappings of weed smoking far more than how the drug actually makes him feel. The circular, repetitive aspects of weed thinking that Wallace (allegedly) identified in the Granada House testimonial are easy to see here, because these thoughts have ten pages to churn around. The length of the passage also emphasises the ritualistic quality of the experience, as Wallace is able to provide minutiae like the specific snacks Erdedy must procure before a binge. These are typical "stoner foods," perhaps allowing Erdedy to feel part of a wider subculture of people indulging in the same ritual, even if he is compelled to do it alone. The snacks also represent a self-defence mechanism: "Note that the overwhelming hunger (the so-called "munchies") that accompanies cannabis intoxication may be a natural defense mechanism against this kind of loss of practical function, since there is no more practical function anywhere than foraging for food" (*IJ* 1080). The primacy of the body and its urges offers a way of grounding for the person trapped in labyrinthine thought, but it also offers more unhealthy coping mechanisms which

encourage retreat into the Self. One line in the passage explicitly ties marijuana use to the self-absorption of onanism: “When he smoked marijuana he tended to masturbate a great deal, whether or not there were opportunities for intercourse” (21). Although this scene exaggerates everything that Hal obsesses over while he is high, in this scene Erdedy is sober. Much like Hal, the majority of Erdedy’s addictive behaviours are attached to the practice of ingestion, rather than the ensuing high. Both young men are tortured by labyrinthine thought regardless of intoxication, but by creating strict rules around their substance intake they are able to inflate the role that marijuana actually plays in their misery, and construct fantasies of discipline by regulating what enters their physical bodies and how, rather than face the possibility that the real issue is an interior one.

So we may see similarities to Hal and Erdedy in thematic and structural ways, but the placement of this scene remains confusing. To return to the original question of the scene – why is it here? Multiple scenes in the novel serve the same purpose in a less annoying way (most readers will like Hal or Joelle by merit of them being more major characters, at least). The scene which follows it is J.O.I. attempting to talk to Hal as a child and telling him about the Entertainment (or it is a film which features a fictionalised version of this event). This subsequent scene both repeats aspects of the introduction (Hal speaking but not being heard by an older male authority figure) and foreshadows many key plot threads and motifs in the novel to come (Avril as a spy, the Entertainment, disguise, etc.). To flash back to a formative childhood moment is a perfectly reasonable scene to follow “what’s your story,” in general (*IJ* 17). The placement of the Erdedy scene has many practical and thematic uses – it introduces the nonlinearity of the book, it exemplifies a characteristic of depressive thinking (intrusive thoughts) – but it also *is* Hal’s story - or will be. Cohen describes the merging and confusing of

past and present as the role of the monster – the vicious cycle of circular thinking ensures that the past is always seeping into the present by drawing out every decision into painful review (IX).

Hal is not the only Incandenza brother who struggles with alienation and imbalance which is written onto a body mired in ritual. Hal and Orin are both physically and mentally imbalanced, but in different ways due to their separate sports careers (Hal has one giant arm, Orin has one huge leg). Both characters agonize over their mental and emotional issues in different manners, with Hal tending towards the over-cerebral (and eventually losing the capacity to speak) and Orin using physical pleasures as a form of escapism. Orin's body in particular reflects his dual desires to be seen and acknowledged by others, and to remain inviolate. Orin is associated with a number of pictogram symbols which may at first seem simpler and more straightforward than Hal's characteristically labyrinthine thought process, but the very simplicity of these shapes leaves them open to many interpretations. For example, Orin ritualistically traces an infinity symbol on the sleeping bodies of his lovers. The actual shape of the symbol resembles the idealised female body, which is the only aspect of these women that Orin is interested in. He usually traces the symbol in the morning, soon before his companion leaves, never to be seen again. The connection between Orin and any specific woman is anything but infinite; however, Orin seems to believe that this routine of seduction, sex, and separation is unending. The infinity symbol also resembles his nickname, O., mirrored. This is significant in the context of Orin's fears about romantic commitment, and what he seeks to gain from casual sex. Orin fears how over time couples are often perceived of as one unit, how the "I" is subsumed into the unit "We" (*IJ* 566). During sex Orin aims to overwhelm his partner, to erase any thought of herself and replace it with pure devotion and gratitude to himself. If his lover is satisfied, Orin does not see her pleasure, but his own sexual prowess. While there are two people physically present in the

situation, for Orin, there is emotionally only himself and a validating reflection of himself, connected (OO).We can observe this way of thinking when Orin watches video recordings of himself playing football. Wallace writes, “Sometimes he got an erection. He didn’t masturbate; Joelle came home” (298). In both cases, Orin is excited by his own ability, and here Joelle is clearly acting as a masturbatory aid. The language of the sentence implies both that Orin’s watching is timed for Joelle’s return home, and that she is constantly available for sex. Whether in a committed relationship or not, Orin’s interactions with women operate in structured routines. Despite their differences, both Hal and Orin exhibit this sort of annularity in behaviour. The O. and the infinity symbol are visually representative of this annularity, and the traced infinity symbol literally embodies the physicality that Orin relies upon. However, when he sleeps he sweats so badly that it builds up lines of salt. The white outline is reminiscent of a crime scene outline around a corpse, but salt circles are most classically used to keep demons or evil spirits out of an area. Orin’s sweat acts as an unconsciously constructed boundary between himself and his Subjects, reflecting his fear of blurred identity.

Mario, the middle brother, seems to be the only person in the novel who is capable of prolonged joy, self-awareness, or meaningful human connection. Mario knows how other people view him based on his deformities (as an object, generally) and accepts it while remaining secure in his self-conception as an artist. He is arguably the only continuously “good” person in the novel (though others have redemption arcs). However, Mario’s extreme disabilities prevent him from engaging in many activities and he politely refused to learn to read, because he prefers to watch and listen (*IJ* 188). Mario can never enjoy sports, or sex, or literature, and when the novel’s technology moves on from film cartridges his contributions to art will be lost, as he is unable to write scripts. Mario is more emotionally giving than the other Incandenza brothers, but

he still does exhibit traits of insularity and control which are displayed on his body and its prosthetics. He seems to accept help with most mundane tasks, but he physically pushes himself and actively refuses help when the task is an act of care, such as cleaning up Eric Clipperton's suicide or dragging a wagon full of dictionaries to Hal with his teeth (*IJ* 433, 317). Mario has essentially one interest outside of film, which is Madame Psychosis's show. He listens to it on the lowest possible volume, with his ear practically on the radio so his interest does not impose on anyone, while sleeping on the floor. While he does not seem to attribute any negative connotations with the word, Mario refers to himself as "damaged" (80). Despite Mario's relative self-acceptance and tranquility, Wallace is not suggesting that we seek to emulate his behaviour, which is naïve, over-trusting, and often short-sighted. As Mario's dinosaur-like body suggests, he is an artifact. He is only able to function in contemporary life due to reliance on prosthetics, and their effectiveness and comfort is arguable. While Hal worries about being not enough, Mario's body is actually characterised by lack and clumsy adaptation.

Prosthetics

Wallace's work features many individuals who use devices which we commonly refer to as prosthetics. LaVache Beadsman from *The Broom of the System*, for example, uses a plastic prosthetic leg. Mario uses a homemade metal brace to help him stand and walk, and Marathe's wife utilizes a wheelchair and an array of quality-of-life improving equipment. These prosthetics are often described as clunky or cumbersome, and sometimes antiquated. Prosthetics in the 1990's could be made of lightweight, comfortable materials such as carbon fibre, with computerized support to help hydraulic function and terrain detection to help with everyday tasks such as climbing stairs. LaVache's leg prosthetic is described as more like the 1950's-1970's

Blatchford prosthetic leg. LaVache keeps a lot of things in his leg, which suggests a prosthetic with a hollow plastic thigh and calf. More modern prosthetics seem to have a plastic thigh which is mostly filled by the user's own thigh, and a metal rod calf. As another example, Pat Montesian uses crutches walk following a stroke, when other assistance (braces) were available in the real 1990's. Technological developments beyond the real 1990's do exist in the book, such as the prevalence of video calling, a precursor to streaming/downloadable film, and annular nuclear power, so it would not have been out of place for Wallace to imagine advanced prosthetics. The physical prosthetics used in *Infinite Jest* particularly are often highly visible. Limb and other body part prosthetics easily fall into the uncanny, as objects which seek to emulate a natural human body part but rarely do so perfectly. Flesh-toned plastic or rubber prosthetics may be considered more unsettling than devices such as metal braces or wheelchairs, because they are obviously attempting to "look human" but fail due to differences in tone, texture, or movement. These qualities differentiate the prosthetic limb from the natural, and take on the unpleasant connotations of "unnatural" which equally inorganic bionic-looking limbs do not. The complicated metal braces worn by Mario and Marathe's wife (particularly her full-head prosthetic) may also be considered creepy by the reader, but that can be attributed to visual similarity to cages. While many individuals in Wallace's work use physical prosthetics, society as a whole (particularly in *Infinite Jest*) seem reliant on social prosthetics which prop up the user figuratively as a back brace does anatomically. LaVache Beadsman combines the two.

LaVache provides another example of recursivity muddling issues of selfhood and the body. Like his sister, Lenore, LaVache is named for someone else in the family. His full name is Stonecipher LaVache Beadsman, after their father's first name and their mother's maiden name. (Lenore's middle name is Stonecipher, so they are both named for their father, and her first name

is her paternal great-grandmother's name.) However, LaVache is generally called by their otherwise mostly-forgotten mother's name, or The Antichrist. His family does not usually call him The Antichrist, probably believing it to be a silly university nickname, but the ways that they do describe him are not much more positive: his mother describes that "I gave birth to a blister in the flowers," Lenore refers to him as "a waste-product," Lenore Sr. concludes he "needed to be 'stamped out'" as a child (Electronic Edition, NP). Additionally, the narrator states:

> "There was simply no getting around the fact that Stonecipher LaVache Beadsman looked satanic. His skin was a dark, glossy red, his hair an oily black and swept back without care over a deep widow's peak, his eyebrows Brezhnevian in thickness and starting up high off to the side to slant down evilly over his eyes, his head small and smooth and oval and not too securely attached to his neck and tending to flop, like the head of a shoe tree." (NP)

These descriptions are often paired with comments on LaVache's great intelligence, generally categorizing him as an incredible waste of potential and failure as heir to their family business.

For his own part, LaVache tends not to refer to himself as a person – he generally defers his identity to his prosthetic leg (usually just called "the leg"). He knows what others say, and is resigned to playing a kind of character: "Everybody here has a thing. You have to have a thing here. My thing is being the Antichrist, more or less being a waste-product and supporting my leg. A tragically wasted intellect. So to speak. You can't be thingless, Lenore" (NP). His tutoring sessions are referred to as "an appointment with the leg," payment in drugs is to "feed the leg" (NP). The prosthetic is never referred to as "his" leg, either as an equivalent to an organic limb, or as a material object that LaVache owns. It is always "the leg" or "a leg," as LaVache jokes when he says he has "a leg to support" rather than having a leg which physically supports him.

LaVache attributes the labours of his mind to the leg, which he distances from himself. The object that LaVache associates with his thinking is artificial, burdensome (in his characterisation), and hollow.

Self-Love, Solipsism

LaVache's willingness to defer his personhood to his artificial leg recalls the process discussed in the previous chapter whereby a person in threat can either resist being seen as an object or voluntarily accept the position. Their choice does not seem to be judged within the work either way, because it is the element of choice itself that matters in the decision. The interviewee stresses the importance of choice in his statement: "you can *choose* to be more if you want, you can *choose* to be a human being and have it *mean* something" ("Brief Interviews" 122). The inverse of this choice is the decision to objectify another person by denying them empathy and acknowledgment as beings equally as important and complex as oneself, which is technically a choice but unfortunately comes invisibly and naturally to many. Wallace's *This is Water* speech gives examples of a more subtle form of this than the examples of *Brief Interviews* describing a typical day ruled by "MY hungriness and MY fatigue and MY desire to just get home," inconvenienced by others and "how repulsive most of them are, and how stupid and cow-like and dead-eyed and nonhuman they seem" (Web). The speech continues to clarify that this objectifying mode of interaction is a choice, albeit one that is so easy that it masquerades as instinct. The practice of objectifying another person in order to embody a fractured or compartmentalized self illustrates a solipsistic practice, which Wallace wrote and spoke against for much of his career, including in the *This is Water* speech. Many of his works and interviews deride the narcissistic content of the Brat Pack novels, and Wallace often represents a solipsistic

existence which is both seductive and hellish. *Infinite Jest* is rife with references to self-obsession (Northern American countries merge into O.N.A.N., most obviously) but most of the stories in *Oblivion* present similar themes; as Hering explores more deeply in "*Oblivion*." One possible example of what Wallace used to represent the horror of narcissism in his earlier work is the disturbing amount of incest in *Infinite Jest* and its grotesque consequences. The act of incest itself is naturally repulsive to many people, and Wallace's depiction of it tends to look like the mirroring sort of objectification discussed previously. With the exception of Avril Incandenza and her adoptive/half-brother C.T., all of the incest is also rape, and the victims are very often children. In addition to making these scenes as disgusting as possible, these violent acts form a sort of Ouroboros, where characters effectively objectify bodies connected to themselves for selfish pleasure in unions which are either sterile or deformed. While similar to the notion of fatness and consuming the Other, there is here a difference between both intent and effectiveness in obliterating the Other's humanity. To return to Avril, it implied that C.T. is in fact Mario's father, rather than James Incandenza. While Orin and Hal are misshapen, they cannot compare with Mario's deformities. Mario is a constant visual representation of shame for C.T., who continues to live with Avril but will not be in the same room as Mario. It is also implied that Avril sexually abused Orin, who grows up to be physically imbalanced and sexually exploits mothers of young children. In each case, rampant narcissism enacted bodily is similar to Wallace's view on narcissist literature, in that it produces nothing of value and only destroys opportunity for genuine human connection and understanding.

Confrontation with the Grotesque

Wallace does encourage human connection and empathy in his work; it is potentially the most important goal of his writing. If solipsistic hell is defined by "evading terrible truths," then logically its opposite is "to face what's dreadful, what we want to deny" (McCaffery 55). Much like David Lynch, Wallace does not feel obligated to make moments of connection beautiful or even necessarily enjoyable. In a merging of dark humour and body horror which runs throughout the novel, page 777 of *Infinite Jest* describes Marathe's slapstick-type struggle to contain his future wife's head when her prosthesis is damaged: "Without the containing helmet all energies in her were committed to the shaping of the oral cavity in a shape that allowed breathing, which was a task of great enormity, for her head it had neither muscles nor nerves. […] I had not the ability to shape my wife's head into a shape that I could stuff the sac of her head into the hat." Marathe is one of the more self-aware and philosophical characters in the novel, and his attempts (though futile) to take responsibility for his future wife's humiliating and repulsive experience is one of the only moments where someone interacts physically with the grotesque, and the consequences of political apathy and environmental destruction they embody. Other mathematical jokes are made using page and footnote numbers, so I would theorise that this scene occurring on page 777 is not a coincidence.[93] After this event, Marathe is pulled out suicidal anhedonia and devotes his life to something larger than himself – by wrestling with the grotesque, Marathe is saved. "This [sick body as producer of experialist injustice] causal relay between body and environment – a degraded form of the latter yields a disfigured form of the former – yields an ecological awareness that the narrative enhances through a conceptual relay

[93] The number 7 is considered a holy number in Christianity, and 777 may represent the Holy Trinity or the antithesis of the unholy number 666.

between body and environment" (Hayles 128). It is also relevant that this confrontation pulls Marathe out of his masculine-coded self by confrontation with an uncontrollable female body, returning to our earlier relation of Wallace's body/mind separation to gendered dualism.

Interactions with grotesque bodies or gross bodily functions often serve as a moment of connection in *Infinite Jest*. One of the most well-known and emotionally touching segments of the novel is the memory of Corbett Thorpe's social experiment. He sets out to prove human empathy by dressing as a homeless man and asking for a handshake, and actually becomes homeless, addicted, and deeply depressed after months of refusals. He is only pulled from his depression when Mario Incandenza touches his filthy hand. Thorpe also devotes himself to a larger cause from that moment, and becomes a high-ranking tennis instructor at E.T.A. (*IJ* 971) Another example is the "Rock Bottom" moment of Don Gately, who binges on so many painkillers that he and his friend are too apathetic to walk to the restroom, and Gately's lowest point inches towards him symbolized in a puddle of urine. After that event Gately joins A.A. and finds sobriety and validation by offering himself to the organization's guidelines and community (982). Though Gately's emotional and physical paralysis was more blissfully numb than agonizing, each instance displays a pattern of apathy, to contact, to surrender. Each represents a necessary confrontation with the grotesque; they depict points where it becomes impossible to turn away.[94] Wallace clearly presents these moments as the only way that autopoiesis can ever be disrupted and improved. Gately's memory supports the annularity of the novel, however. Depending on interpretation, Gately either is unwillingly medicated with Demerol, possibly returning to his addicted beginnings, or he is recalling waking up from his last high on the beach,

[94] Wallace mentions Flannery O'Connor in his listing of greatest fiction writers on at least two occasions ("David Foster Wallace" by Laura Miller in *Salon* Magazine and "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace" by Larry McCaffery) and "A Good Man is Hard to Find" appears on his 2005 Spring syllabus, so he would have been familiar with savage moments of grace.

ready to “Come In.” This earlier chronological moment ends the novel, while the book begins at the most current point with Hal Incandenza isolated and desperate to communicate.

In the beginning of the novel, Hal Incandenza’s facial expressions and attempts at speaking are horrifying to onlookers because he resembles some kind of nonhuman animal. One arguable cause of Hal’s transformation is exposure to the drug DMZ, which is a mould that grows on mould. Hal’s consumption of the mould details an encounter with the grotesque that provides a path to redemption which is ultimately not followed. Beginning possibly from a mould-ingestion instance in his childhood, this natural toxin could be what led Hal to gradually lose his subjectivity and become what his father called a “figurant,” a piece of the environment (*IJ* 12, 839). This theory hinges upon the possibility that the environment has truly invaded the human body, a bit of the childhood mould surviving inside Hal to incubate the DMZ, a body as biome. In the opening chapter Hal also resists scratching at a “wen” on his face (*IJ* 2). A wen can refer to several skin impurities, such as boils or odd growths, but generally refers to a sebaceous cyst. It can also denote a large city, such as Boston, which Hal has left to interview in Arizona. However, like the mould that symbolized the rot inside Hal’s successful and privileged life, this wen evidences infection he cannot escape. It is literally under his skin, and the itching makes it something he cannot ignore. And while the disgusting contents of a cyst are under the skin, they are not generally unnoticeable, especially on someone’s face. Hal’s life in Boston is dragged out; the university interviewers go as far as to read essays he wrote when he was 12. Hal attempts to hide the ambiguous affliction that his (possible) DMZ poisoning left him with, but his inability to communicate is no longer hidden like the mould was inside of him. There is a gap between when Hal is most obviously poisoned (by DMZ, marijuana withdrawal, or something else) at the end of the novel and his university interview in the beginning, so the reader cannot know what

transpired between Boston and Arizona. But one of the only times where Hal is described as tranquil is in the midst of his sickness, when he goes into a viewing room to listen to his father's films play while he lies on the ground. He notes serenely, "I had understood myself for years as basically vertical, an odd forked stalk of stuff and blood. I felt denser now; I felt more solidly composed, now that I was horizontal. I was impossible to knock down." (*IJ* 902) Hal thinks about himself now as rhizomatic rather than arboreal as the rhizomatic mould interacts with him chemically.

Another trade name for DMZ is "Madame Psychosis," which is both the name of another character in *Infinite Jest* and a pun on the word "metempsychosis," which refers to the transmigration of the soul into another form, particularly after death. After being poisoned by the DMZ, Hal changes physical states – from vertical to horizontal – as his soul (or his Self) transfers from an arborous template to a rhizomatic one. Hal is struck with the sudden need to lie down, and later thinks, "I had understood myself for years as basically vertical, an odd forked stalk of stuff and blood. I felt denser now; I felt more solidly composed, now that I was horizontal. I was impossible to knock down" (*IJ* 902). When Hal first lies down, his first chain of thoughts is an unprompted review of his family tree while surrounded by the films his father made. In addition to recalling their parentage, Hal states his parents' heights: "She is 197 cm. tall in flats and still came up only to Himself's ear when he straightened and stood erect" (*IJ* 898). When Hal's parents are described physically throughout the novel, their unusual height is always mentioned, J.O.I.'s being somewhat understated by severe slumping and Avril's heightened by her rigid posture. If Hal is now rhizomatic, his parents (particularly Avril) are arborescent, signifying literally Deleuze and Guattari's statement that "there is always something genealogical about a tree" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 8). As the scene progresses, Hal's character

makes a rapid series of connections to other characters and moments in the novel. He is struck by the horizontality of the other objects in the room, echoing both the essential lateral connection of the rhizome and the discussion about the "aura" of subjectivity of objects that J.O.I. is subjected to in his own childhood. J.O.I.'s film *Good-Looking Men in Small Clever Rooms That Utilize Every Centimeter of Available Space with Mind-Boggling Efficiency* plays in the background, but it is *Cage*, which we examined in the previous chapter, that he is thinking about. Hal acknowledges the academic discourse around his late father's filmography criticising his work as style without emotional substance, but for the first time he privileges his own empathetic response over the recognized intellectual one:

> 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 [. . .] in a monotone as narcotizing as a voice from the grave — and yet all the time weeping, Paul Anthony Heaven, as an upward hall full of kids all scan their mail, the film-teacher not sobbing or wiping his nose on his tweed sleeve but silently weeping, very steadily, so that tears run down Heaven's gaunt face and gather on his underslung chin and fall from view, glistening slightly, below the lectern's frame of sight. Then this too began to seem familiar. (*IJ* 991)

Part of the reason it may seem familiar to Hal is because of the complex arrangement of events in *Infinite Jest*. The novel begins with Hal essentially experiencing a mirrored version of this film scene, where he is a student attempting to speak to academic professionals and is met with hysteria instead of boredom. In both scenes, the speaking character attempts to convey intelligent, personally meaningful information, but the listeners do not absorb any of the

intentions because they are delivered in an incomprehensible way (academic jargon to the students, keening to the academics). Both are acutely aware of their inability to communicate, conveyed by Heaven's weeping and Hal's earnest insistence that "I'm not a machine. I feel and believe. I have opinions. Some of them are interesting. I could, if you'd let me, talk and talk. [. . .] 'I'm not just a creãtus, manufactured, conditioned, bred for a function. [. . .] Please don't think I don't care" (*IJ* 12). The connection here is only visible to the reader; however, looking at the novel's events as if from above, because when Hal notes "this too began to seem familiar," his failure of communication has not yet occurred chronologically (360). Hal's sense of familiarity here may be referring to his consistently guarded personality preventing him from making intimate interpersonal connections, but Wallace includes a further connection. The scene in the beginning of the novel is interrupted by the story of Hal eating the mould that would (possibly) later synthesize DMZ inside him, the DMZ that forces Hal to the floor to view Heaven's weeping. The memory of the mould-eating is full of circular imagery, both Hal and Avril repeat similar words ("I ate this" and "my son ate this") and the repetition is described the same way ("over and over"), Avril runs in a circle as she screams, and the memory was related to Hal by his brother Orin, who is called "O." throughout (*IJ* 11).

The rhizomatic shift that Hal endures can also be witnessed, to greater effect, in the character Don Gately. Gately is Hal's counterpart in many ways: he grew up desperately poor and neglected, whereas Hal is privileged and over-sheltered by Avril, Gately is described as physically blocky whereas Hal is sleek and handsome. Both are drug addicts, but during the timeline of the novel Hal struggles to hide his addiction to marijuana and later goes into withdrawal, while Gately's storyline covers his entire journey of addiction, withdrawal, treatment, and possible relapse with oral narcotics. Gately begins at the point Hal reaches at the

end of the novel; he is described as "Lying there gurgling and inert with a fluttery-eyed smile. One shoulder blade and buttock pooch out over the side of a sofa that sags like a hammock. Gately looks less built than poured, the smooth immovability of an Easter Island statue" (*IJ* 277).[95] Gately's plotline is in many ways a classic redemption arc; he struggles to morally nullify the crimes he committed during his addiction by devoting his life to helping others recover, and ends up hospitalized for heroically defending one of the most vile, irredeemable characters in the novel.[96] Some of Gately's progress is due to his amiable personality, but much of it is due to his diligence to adhere to his Alcoholics Anonymous programme. Don's character arc is essentially him trying to achieve the ability that more grotesque characters such as Mario and Lyle intrinsically have (by virtue of being "damaged" as Mario explains on page 80) to privilege interaction over selfish reaction. The fundamental problem of contemporary individuals being unable to confront their shameful actions which cause harm to the environment and others is directly addressed in the 9th step of A.A.: "[Make] direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others" (Alcoholics-Anonymous.org.uk). The reappearance of a minor character struggling to complete this step occurs at the climax of the novel, when everything is beginning to bubble over politically (and chemically, for most of the addicted characters) suggests its importance, as well as being the only A.A. step seriously

[95] To compare, at the end of the novel Hal describes himself as "I was completely horizontal. I was comfortable lying perfectly still and staring at the ceiling. I was enjoying being one horizontal object in a room filled with horizontality" and later in the passage "I had understood myself for years as basically vertical, an odd forked stalk of stuff and blood. I felt denser now; I felt more solidly composed, now that I was horizontal. I was impossible to knock down" (*IJ* 902). Both Hal and Gately's descriptions include horizontal positioning of the body, restfulness, and resilience in Hal's denseness and Gately's comparison to a stone statue.

[96] Randy Lenz, whom Wallace writes as a collage of awful traits which range from annoying to sociopathic. Lenz spews false boasts constantly, objectifies women, sneaks cocaine into rehab, spends his time "lying on [his roommate's] mattress with his shoes on and trying to fart into the mattress as much as possible," and murdering animals (*IJ* 215). The incident that hospitalises Gately occurs because Lenz is caught slitting a dog's throat by its owners. Wallace was described as incredibly fond of his own dogs in D.T. Max's *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story* and other sources, so Lenz's ritualised dog-murders were likely as uncomfortable for Wallace to write as they are for others to read, highlighting how crucial it is that Gately's sacrifice seem noble and altruistic.

mentioned in *Infinite Jest* (961). Everything in Gately's experience at Ennet House points to a advocation for a more empathetic, rhizomatic way of living. A.A. and Ennet Drug House are shown to be made up of a diverse mixture of classes, ethnicities, genders, and addictions. Gately's very presence in A.A. speaks to his desire to join a vast community – Gately is a drug addict, and so probably should be in Narcotics Anonymous, a splinter group, but he dislikes its narcissism, saying, "so many relapses and un-humble returns, so many war stories told with nondisguised bullshit pride, so little emphasis on Service or serious Message; all these people in leather and metal, preening" (227). Gately's conscious decision to join a more egalitarian, emotionally open community represents why his rhizomatic shift leads to positive growth as a human being while Hal's ends in alienation.

Hal continues to let his mother and stepfather steer him through highly regulated institutions (professional sports, universities) after having a nauseating vision of "the number of times I would have to repeat the same processes, day after day, in all kinds of light, until I graduated and moved away and then began the same exhausting process of exit and return in some dormitory at some tennis-power university," an eternal return that Hal passionlessly allows (*IJ* 897). Gately's life is also repetitive, A.A. dogma dictates that certain rituals must be done each day, certain clichés said in response to typical sets of issues, and certain social tools be consciously invoked at all times (such as Identification, A.A. code for empathy). But Gately's repetitions are clearly depicted as choices; he chooses to enter rehab rather than continue drug use, he chooses A.A. over N.A., and he chooses to Identify in situations where his first reaction is to disregard the situation or person as crazy. Unlike Hal, Gately is able to make choices that place him in an environment where others from diverse backgrounds are also attempting to Identify communally.

Gately's character arc and what his personal developments may or may not signify open up many interpretations about the end of the novel, which depicts Gately lying on a beach, about to begin his recovery (*IJ* 982). This could be just the end of a flashback, but another popular theory speculates that the scene represents Gately being unwillingly injected with the same sort of medical-grade opiates he used to abuse. Gately's community has failed him here, the A.A. model depends so much on personal choice that his sponsor does not tell the doctor that Gately is in recovery and cannot have anything stronger than aspirin. Isolated from his meetings and the halfway house and placed into a rigid institution, a hospital, Gately's ability to communicate immediately breaks down. His chart is meant to say "HISTORY OF NARCOTICS DEPENDENCY NO SCHEDULE C-IV+ MEDIC," but either no one reads it or the sign was never printed (*IJ* 814). Even when he doctor acknowledges Gately's dependence issues, he assumes to know best and repeatedly offers Gately his two drugs of choice (Demerol and Talwin) as well as oxycodone, which has well known abuse potential, because he feels he knows best as a doctor. Gately attempts to communicate with a drawing, but the results are the opposite of his intention, "he draws a crude syringe and arm and belt and then tries to draw a skull-and-bones over the whole shaky ensemble, but the skull looks more like a plain old smiley-face" (*IJ* 887). Gately is able to resist while he is conscious but his doctor's dismissal of Gately's legitimate issues in favour of which drugs correspond to what level of trauma during medical training supports the theory that he would readily drug Gately while he was unconscious if medically justifiable. And though he has made a lot of progress, Gately still has the mind of an addict, and the doctor's appeals to authority affect Gately. In one sentence Gately justifies "A quick Rx-squirt of Demerol — probably at the outside two, three days of a Demerol drip, maybe even one where they'd hook the drip to a rubber bulb he could hold and self-administer the

Demerol only As Needed" (*IJ* 888). If he can shift so quickly from total abstinence to personally administering multiple doses a day, one cannot assume that Gately's devotion to A.A. and previous progress would mean he would be safe from rekindling a full-blown addiction. Alternatively, waking up on the beach could signify that Gately will continue his recovery, but must now start from the beginning. In either case, the entire ordeal echoes Deleuze and Guattari's description of the institutional treatment of Little Hans and their criticism of psychoanalysis: "they kept on BREAKING HIS RHIZOME and BLOTCHING HIS MAP, setting it straight for him, blocking his every way out, until he began to desire his own shame and guilt" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 14). Gately's drawings are misunderstood and broken down into easy symbols, such as the smiley-face, he is isolated from his community in a place where they cannot or will not speak for him, so someone farther up in the arboreal medical hierarchy (the doctor) speaks for him. *Infinite Jest* is a largely political novel, and hierarchical structures perform similar oppressions throughout the novel. The O.N.A.N. government's disregard for human life and the environment, professional sport's treatment of athlete bodies as units of entertainment, E.T.A.'s rigid commitment to almost mechanically producing those athletes, and the many dysfunctional parent/child relationships in the novel can all be reduced to this single moment where a man's life is thrown into crisis because someone has been assigned to make decisions for him. It is as Deleuze and Guattari write, "Strike the pose or follow the axis, genetic stage or structural destiny – one way or the other, your rhizome will be broken" (14).

Though a horizontal rhizomatic framework seems to provide some hope in *Infinite Jest* the vast majority of systems that tie people together in Wallace's work are toxically circular. These systems range from annular, with each feeding off the other, to cannibalistic, such as the incestuous relationships. Many characters do not undergo character arcs, as they are either

paralyzed by inability to communicate or by narcissism. The treatment of the environment is portrayed as similarly toxic. In many cases, Wallace's characters seem to be almost written into a corner, inextricably mired in alienation. The hole appears so deep, at least to the characters, that continuation of the plot or character arc can only be accomplished by deus ex machina. For Wallace, this device often takes the form of an apocalyptic event. "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way," *Infinite Jest, The Pale King*, "Mr. Squishy," "The Suffering Channel," and other stories all feature a catastrophe in some way, one which either looms over the story like a storm cloud ("The Suffering Channel"), passes without comment ("Westward" and *Infinite Jest*), or is gestured to (*Infinite Jest*). For example, at the end of *Infinite Jest*, the A.F.R. is about to descend upon the tennis school. Hal's brother, Orin, has already been captured and subjected to an Orwellian "Technical Interview," and may be killed afterward, given the usual operation of the brutal A.F.R.. Gately may or not be given Demerol, ending his sobriety. The reader is not told what exactly occurred at the school, but the beginning chapter happens chronologically latest, telling us that Hal and CT survived the A.F.R., something terrible has happened to Hal (possibly Technical Interview), and the school itself is presumably intact. Society itself seems to also be intact, hinting that either the A.F.R. was not able to retrieve a Master copy of *Infinite Jest* from the school, or that their entire presumption about how Americans value entertainment over life was incorrect. However, it remains unclear how the "flash forwards" portraying another, equally dramatic, event plays into this fairly understandable, circular plot. Several times in the book we see Hal, Gately, and John Wayne digging up Himself's grave in the Concavity to retrieve the Master. As the book develops, this scene becomes increasingly complicated. Himself is buried in an area of Canada which is only accessible during a certain time because of the annular fusion cycle, Gately never meets Hal or Wayne but does meet Himself's ghost, and John

Wayne is revealed to be a double-agent. During the scene Hal brandishes Himself's head and screams, "It's too late!" implying that someone has the Master, and suggesting that Hal's speech may have been stolen later than generally assumed (*IJ* 934). Either that, or these are Hal's "last words," the only thing is he able to say and be understood.

"The Suffering Channel," the Self, and Waste

The shame, paralysis, and fear Hal struggles with regarding communication and vulnerability in *Infinite Jest* is crystallised in Wallace's later story, "The Suffering Channel." In "The Suffering Channel," an artist struggles with shame over his body and its functions competing with his compulsion to share his art (and himself) with others. Brint Moltke's artistic talent is defecating perfectly formed sculptures, and its reception initially causes a predictable mixture of fascination and revulsion. This skill is developed after the artist endures horrific child abuse by a mother obsessed with control during approximately Brint's own anal (control-focused) Freudian developmental stage. Brint's wife, Amber Moltke, reveals that Brint "saw her take and beat a little baby kittycat to death with a skillet for messing on the kitchen floor. When he was in his highchair, watching," and prompts the reader to imagine "What do you suppose a little boy's toilet training is going to be like with folks like that?" ("Suffering" 269). Brint's art is inextricably tied to shame, violence, and fear. However, later dialogue reveals this art's unique ability to connect based on a Bakhtinian view on the universality of excretion. Not only do characters discuss the sculptures directly, but they prompt funny conversations about people's own usually-private bathroom experiences. Thus, Brint's controlling upbringing backfires tremendously while still leaving Brint traumatized. The original goal of his strict toilet training was to dictate exactly when and where substances were allowed to leave Brint's body, the most

important aspect being that his waste was never to be seen by others, and if it was he would be made to experience unspeakable shame as well as physical pain. Accidents are not something that small children can immediately prevent, so it is implied that Brint was brutally punished to the point where he did not feel the need to inform a doctor whenever he started producing sculptures.[97] Brint's talent is only noticed when his army maintenance crew discovers one of his sculptures in an open latrine ("Suffering" 256). Brint acknowledges that he had noticed similarly unique excretions in the past, and presumably continued to produce them until his wife Amber discovered his talent sometime later, but the situation he tells as the first occurrence was both public and surprising. Brint did not expect anyone to notice his shit because to him, that is all it was. Based on Amber's description of his childhood and Brint's fuzzy memory, it may not even have occurred to him that his excrement was in any way remarkable. He invisibly produced these sculptures for years because it is a bodily necessity to do so.

Wallace's work nearly always connects waste (bodily and otherwise) to art or higher meaning, and "The Suffering Channel" does so transparently. Brint Moltke's excretions will happen with or without an audience, just how some people will write, paint, etc. before securing an audience. Brint undervalues his own abilities, and is undervalued by others. Despite initial protestations that his work is disgusting and could perhaps be momentarily fascinating but never artistic, Brint's sculptures move the jaded Skip Atwater and open up conversations about usually private experiences which help bond everyone in the office. Comparisons can be made with Wallace's MFA days, where his professors apparently hated anything that was not a Raymond

[97] Amber leaves the exact circumstances of Brint's toilet training mysterious, but she does say that Brint's parents "whipped on him with electric cords and burnt on him with cigarettes and made him eat out in the shed," (268) and details another shameful emission where "one time when he was a boy [Brint's mother] came in and I think caught Brint playing with himself maybe, and made him come down in the sitting room and do it in front of them, the family, that she made them all sit there and watch him" (269). She also describes Brint's mother as a ferociously "churchy" woman, giving Brint's shame and guilt a religious element (368).

Carver clone (Max 110). Wallace apparently admired Carver, but samples of his early writing show that he just was not a minimalist. Eventually, Wallace and other "Great White Male" writers such as Jonathan Franzen and William Vollman with similar hyperrealistic styles would become popular, and critics seemed to present them more as a pop culture fad than potential future figures in literary canon. Produced later in his career, "The Suffering Channel" insists that the vulnerability expressed by Brian Moltke by agreeing to put himself and the abject contents of his body out there is incredibly important, because the emotional responses his shit elicits are important.

Of course, like most of Wallace's work, there is another interpretation. Skip Atwater is a journalist for *Style* magazine, where the piece on Moltke's excretions is originally meant to run in a "What in the World?" column. Later, it is picked up by the Suffering Channel, which shows people undergoing various pains and degradations.[98] These spaces are not art galleries, they are contemporary freak shows. Despite the sincere reaction Atwater ends up having to the sculptures and his personal determination to have them come across as more than just weird excrement, *Style* is not a fine art publication, and Brian Moltke is not going to be portrayed as an artist. Brint's personal feelings are unclear, but Amber specifically wants them to become famous rather than just appreciated, she wants "to be known, to matter," comparing their potential fame to a soap opera star she met in a mall rather than a revered sculptor (283). One can read another Wallace parallel here: Wallace felt that fiction was his calling, but he was often distracted from it by being asked to do journalistic pieces. Despite knowing the painful editing process that would occur after commissioning a piece, magazines wanted things in his voice. Wallace's journalistic

[98] A precursor to The Suffering Channel can be seen in the Vinely and Veal ad campaigns featured in *Infinite Jest*, which feature "excruciating" paintings about cranio-facial pain, liposuction ads featuring "procedures that resembled crosses between hyperbolic Hoover Upright demonstrations and films autopsies and cholesterol-conscious cooking shows that involved a great deal of chicken-fat drainage," and tongue-scraper ads focusing on a "near-geologic layer of gray-white material" on an actor's tongue (*IJ* 412, 413, 413).

character was "a little stupider and shmuckier" than he was in real life, a man magazines could sell as a genius that one could laugh with (or at) (Max 208). Despite the difference in goodwill or respect which would be given to Wallace versus Brint Moltke, both the men and their work would be presented as entertainment rather than art, viewed mostly by spectators rather than true participants. This is enforced when The Suffering Channel recontextualises Brint's story by altering the camera setup of his live excretion. Brint is led to believe that they are filming and broadcasting his actual excretion with a camera set up below a clear plastic toilet, when actually that feed is only being shown to Brint, and the broadcast footage is of his face. The subject is not the creative process, or the product, even after the story's extensive discussion on the fascination/revulsion both incite, but the artist's reaction to being as exposed as a human can possibly be to a crowd he cannot perceive.

Brint's discomfort becomes the entertainment, similarly to Wallace's role in "Shipping Out: On the (Nearly Lethal) Comforts of a Luxury Cruise" and "Ticket to the Fair" for *Harper's Magazine*, and "Consider the Lobster" for *Gourmet*. While Wallace took many magazine jobs which he was immediately qualified for such as book reviews or cultural reflections, he was sought after for a number of topics which he had no expertise in and often involved crowds. We can surmise that these magazines knew that Wallace was not a travel writer or a culinary expert, and were "looking for a piece of the Wallace voice" more than actual reportage (Max 208). Max focuses on the humour and relatability of this voice, which garnered these magazines and Wallace personally additional readership, particular amongst young adults, but does not fully examine the implications of Wallace's "stupider and schmuckier" persona becoming popular, or why this famously anxious man would be sent to such large-scale events.[99] Wallace's relatability

[99] Though more reserved pieces like book reviews do outnumber these, we must take into account that Wallace would have been more likely to accept those, and the actual number of published pieces does not reflect the

arises directly from his discomfort in his nonfiction – he writes in a way which plainly states how awkward and alienated many of us feel in unfamiliar places, surrounded by unfamiliar people. We can relate this back to the *Style* interns in "The Suffering Channel" bonding over embarrassing bathroom stories. In both instances, the participants connect over their shared feelings of disconnection. These feelings of connection between the author and audience and between audience members are important, and probably one of the chief reasons that Wallace consented to any travel assignments. This validation, however, is a fringe benefit. The main selling point of these articles is obviously watching Wallace-as-schmucky-genius go through an awkward experience. In this instance, magazine readers are those "human characters who are adrift in this sea of commercialism to try to retain an idea of human otherness as a means of resisting incorporation into imperial forms of homogeneity" (Giles 331). *Harper's* cut Wallace's suspicion that straight reportage was not the actual point of what would become "Shipping Out," which exists in the full essay "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again" as "They are sort of disingenuous, I believe, these magazine people" in regards to *Harper's* paying over $3000 in expenses "before seeing pithy sensuous description one" (*A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, 256-257). Phrases which were kept include the cruise (and therefore, the assignment) instilling deep despair in Wallace, "wanting to die in order to escape the unbearable sadness of knowing I'm small and weak and selfish and going, without doubt, to die" ("Shipping Out," 35). This despair is made more palatable in the *Harper's* version, which clips many of Wallace's characteristically long observations, so the reader is moved along to lighter, more eccentric anecdotes before too much wallowing. While Wallace was not afraid to use low culture references in his own work, he remained critical of the media itself, crystallized in "The

---

amount of social pieces he would have been offered. D.T. Max describes a few, including "a week at a nudist colony," (Max 208) which seems obviously geared toward generating discomfort in Wallace.

Suffering Channel's" story – reality television and lifestyle magazines are literally trying to sell you shit.

The distraction of contemporary life in "The Suffering Channel" and *Infinite Jest* clearly threaten the construction of a Self which is already on shaky ground. Many of his male characters are trapped within their own minds, attempting in vain to think themselves out when in fact "the cage is consciousness itself" (Boswell 168). The body is paradoxically shackled to the mind and disobedient of it, reflecting the unbalance of the mind by shrinking or swelling and making the inner struggle for control shamefully visible to others. The bodies of Hal, Orin, Mario, and Brint Moltke betray them by displaying their dysfunctions to the world, but their bodies are also one of precious few things these men feel they can exert any tangible control over. David Hering wonders, "Is there any escape then, from this purgatorial state of conscious suffering?" and continues that "A possible solution presented in several stories in *Oblivion* is a more dramatic kind of literal disembodiment, an escape from the body itself as a liberation from suffering" ("*Oblivion*" 100). Given Wallace's remarks on how the human body so often betrays and disgusts its conscious mind, we may understand how escape from the body is an appealing fantasy. However, Hering notes that the characters in *Oblivion* achieve "only varying degrees of success" in this escape (Hering 100). In inverse also proves to be true, and it is only temporarily and incompletely that the men of *Infinite Jest* are able to retreat into their bodies. Hal, Orin, and Erdedy attempt to distract themselves from the abstract problem of their mental states with the immediate pleasures and pains of the external body. The punishment that the mind inflicts on itself through processes like "Marijuana Thinking" is draining, lonely, and seemingly inescapable. The speech and touch organs of the body offer some kind of relief from this

loneliness, if only one could both accept the vulnerability of trying and gain the skills to communicate effectively, both of which are intensely difficult.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

As I hope to have established in the preceding chapters, annularity is a key theme in *Infinite Jest* in particular and in Wallace's work in general. The idea of cycles, of causes and effects, of continuation, of birth and legacy all bound up together is crucial to understanding the plot and subtext of *Infinite Jest* and many of his other pieces. Following Wallace's example, I would like to return to where I started this dissertation – to William Caines, the small child with liver cancer Wallace speaks about in "Federer Both Flesh and Not." Wallace derails from his celebration of human achievement and kinetic beauty to explore Caines's situation, and the feelings of those around him, asking "How did [his mother] answer her child's question — the big one, the obvious one? And who could answer hers? What could any priest or pastor say that wouldn't be grotesque?" (25). This question is absent from the original "Roger Federer as Religious Experience" article for the *New York Times*, and its inclusion in the final piece "Federer Both Flesh and Not" implies its importance. Perhaps the original question was too dark for the news article, or simply cut for space, but it was returned to in a longer consideration of this child who embodies many of the huge dichotomies and questions Wallace explored in his work. The tiny child's mere survival sparks hope, but that he should have contracted cancer as a child at all instils crushing despair at the unfairness or uncaringness of biological life. In literature a child is often a symbol of new beginning, yet this actual boy's cancerous body threatens an end. Visually he is blonde and cherubic, but under the surface his insides had been mutated and irradiated. Wallace also records the reaction of the crowd he is part of to the paradox that is William Caines, noting that, "There's a feeling of something important, something both uncomfortable and not, about a child with cancer tossing this dream-final's coin" (12). That important thing is not vocalised until later, in a footnote where it might have been

missed, where Wallace writes, “the truth is that whatever deity, entity, energy, or random genetic flux produces sick children also produced Roger Federer, and look at him down there. Look at that” (IV). Though their bodies and the experiences those bodies incite and house may seem radically different, Wallace binds them together in his meditation on biology and spirituality. William Caines and Roger Federer are both flesh, and not. They are their physical bodies, and whatever meanings those bodies might signify to themselves and others. While this illuminating experience did not occur until 2006, I feel that this way of thinking about the body, its failures and its miracles, have been present throughout Wallace’s oeuvre and most explicit in *Infinite Jest*. Wallace has been traditionally called a cerebral writer, but my largest contribution to the field of Wallace Studies is an understanding of him as an equally visceral writer. After reading this dissertation, I hope that readers return to his work paying equal attention to how Wallace portrays both flesh and whatever is housed within it.

The “bothness” represented by Federer and Caines also calls back to Wallace’s writing on Lynch, which I examined in the Wallace and His Influences chapter. In “David Lynch Keeps His Head,” Wallace writes about the criticisms Lynch faced when key character Laura Palmer of *Twin Peaks* appears alive in the *Fire Walk with Me* film. Wallace responds to a review wondering if Laura is innocent or damned or both with “*Or* both? Of *course* both” (211). This bothness is expressed through Laura Palmer’s body; in the ways she and others use her body to exert control over her personhood. Her body is a site of both physical pleasure and violence, and the metaphysical battle of good and evil. Wallace sees Laura’s complexity as the unconscious trigger of widespread dislike for the film: “the real reason we criticized and disliked Lynch’s Laura’s muddy *both*ness is that it required of us an empathetic confrontation with the exact same muddy *both*ness in ourselves” (211). If Laura’s bothness can be read through her body, then

perhaps so can ours; which leads to a proliferation of conflict with and about bodies in Wallace's work in order to explore the muddiness within. I pay special attention to the word "muddy" here versus synonyms such as "cloudy" or "opaque" – this bothness is dirty and primeval. It is important to note how Wallace's analysis of Laura echoes his own statement of artistic intent to "aggravate this sense of entrapment and loneliness and death in people, to move people to countenance it, since any possible human redemption requires us first to face what's dreadful, what we want to deny" (McCaffery 55). I believe that just as Lynch provoked this confrontation using Laura Palmer's body, Wallace often provokes his readers with similarly muddy bodies. In *Infinite Jest* this includes disabled assassins, neurologically crumbling athletes, and thriving abortions.

Wallace expands upon Lynch's portrayal by mapping out how these bodies are inextricably tied to the society that produces, sustains, and restricts them. In this way he is more like the "Metamorphosis" writer Kafka, who I also connected Wallace's thesis of confrontation with the dreadful to in Wallace and His Influences. Like Gregor Samsa whose transformation into a vermin cannot be read separately from his entrapment in a society which treats common workers as less than human, Wallace's characters speak directly to both their wider environments and the mental state shaped by those settings. This is why I have organised the dissertation as it is, moving from large systems to internal landscape, beginning with the ecological environment. While Joseph Tabbi states in "David (Foster) Wallace and the (World) System" that Wallace "addressed himself specifically to the operations of bureaucratic systems," I hope that I have shown how Wallace's engagement with systems using the body as a node of connection is much more ambitious. In *Infinite Jest* alone Wallace utilises the body to show how people interact with the physical world of the environment, with their governments (through bureaucracy and

resistance), with binary gender construction, and with the formation of the Self in a web of influences. In this dissertation I have focused on tensions, rejections, and grasping near-misses between these systems and the bodies that interact with them because these sites of discomfort and pain are both more numerous and more prescriptive than Federer-like instances of pure bodily wonder. As Mario Incandenza observes, "it's a lot easier to fix something if you can see it" (*IJ* 54). The many failures of the body lay bare and readable the issues which influence them. To speak of ugliness alone is to invoke alienation, loneliness, gender, ableism, self-doubt, and attraction. In "Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing," Stephen Burn writes that "In the world of Wallace's novels, the diagnosis is painstakingly exact, but the final steps – whether cure or resolution – hardly ever comes" (62). The deformed bodies of Wallace's characters certainly contribute to these diagnoses, just as cysts and tumours contribute to medical diagnoses in reality. I agree with Burn that cures are elusive in Wallace's work, especially with *Infinite Jest* which provides no clear answers to many of its largest plotlines and concerns. However, I also agree with Clare Hayes-Brady's assertion that many of Wallace's failures are generative – by translating these failures into bodily phenomena they are positioned as maladies which *can* be cured. Wallace himself does not offer specific cures, but by medicalising the problems we may extrapolate the path to cure: experimentation rife with failure, or solutions like chemotherapy which demand suffering before relief.

Many of the mutations and failures which can most clearly be linked to another system are those which are caused by the environment and human actions upon it, as I explored in The Body and the Environment. The effects of pollution and other toxicities on the human body exemplify, to me, Tabbi's explanation that "feedback happens not so much between a system and a never fully experienced or cognized environment as between one system and another, across

boundaries that each partially share and all can only partially understand" (236). (Tabbi is referring to environment as surroundings, where I am referring to environment as a set of ecological processes comprising a system.) In the case of the environment, the characters of *Infinite Jest* show that humanity and the wider world share many more boundaries than we might want to understand. I attempted a very interdisciplinary approach to this chapter by bringing in information from biology, physics, and chemistry to help flesh out the system of the environment and show how these processes include humans, whether as the driving force or casualties. The feedback that results in the tensions between the system of human civilisation and the environment is often a feedback loop, which sheds light on the role of annularity in *Infinite Jest*. I have also included Tian Song's theory on garbage in this chapter, as the tumorous growth of the United States in *Infinite Jest* creates a society in danger of choking on its own detritus. This theory on real life garbage seepage and other scientific data I have included on phenomena such as water pollution and nuclear decay provide what I hope to be a compelling and convincing way of understanding how *Infinite Jest's* mutated individuals are not as fantastic as they may first appear. The abject object of garbage is one which is "creeping always back" in *Infinite Jest*, and its easily visualised return in overflowing dumps and congenital deformities provides a map for less concrete repressed abjections which I explore further in the dissertation (233).

One of these less concrete repressions is the ways in which people (mostly Americans, in the case of *Infinite Jest*) reconcile the desire for personal freedom with life under increasingly authoritarian governments. In The Body and Politics I carry on from the discussion of government-mandated destruction of water reservoirs and animal habitats to the destruction of human happiness and dignity. This chapter explores the ways in which the state acts upon the bodies of its citizens, both subtly and brutally. I utilise Wallace's connection to Bakhtin and the

work Catherine Nichols has already done on this project to link the classic literary usage of the word "grotesque" to the non-normate bodies which we see inhabiting the world of *Infinite Jest*. In keeping with the natural mixing of disgust and joy within the body and its functions, the Bakhtinian grotesque in *Infinite Jest* is able to challenge centralised power, not just be dominated by it. I contrast the filthy joy of the Bakhtinian grotesque with the hygienic control of *Leviathan*, adding to the political theory sources that future scholars may choose to view *Infinite Jest* through in the future. Nichols specifically focuses on the Bakhtinian idea of the mask, and one of the ways that I sought to expand her work was by considering the mask in relation to Disability Studies by examining the masked members of U.H.I.D. and other disabled or non-normate figures. The mask frees the visually different by refusing the onlooker the voyeuristic pleasure of seeing their difference, but simultaneously invites speculation and even fetishisation as a marker of difference in and of itself. In this chapter I quote Rosa Braidotti's observation that "Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now" (*The Posthuman* 1). The bodies of Wallace's characters challenge normate ideas of who fits into the category of "human," and how it is justifiable to treat those who do not fit into that category. In this instance I am mainly focused on disabled individuals, but the rigidity of human categories and swift punishment of outliers remains a theme in the subsequent chapter on The Body and the Other. This chapter on the Body and Politics shows how Wallace sometimes fails to include the "muddy *both*ness" of humanity in some of his non-normate characters, and instead perpetuates harmful stereotypes and simple dichotomies for the sake of a metaphor's readability. The example I focus on in this section is the "good/bad cripple," which opens up discussions to follow on other dichotomies such as the Madonna/Whore and Masculine Mind/Feminine Body dichotomies. Criticism of

Wallace's depiction of people who are visually different than himself are not new and becoming increasingly popular, but I hope that by introducing Disability Studies to the subject I can provide a new way of voicing these criticisms. The intensity of Braidotti's statement that abjected individuals are not merely second-class citizens or less important people but fully not-human in the eyes of society foregrounds the stakes of these flawed depictions.

The Body and the Other explores the consequences of denying certain bodies the right of respect and dignity which was begun in the previous chapter. While the violence of the state is oftentimes indirect in *Infinite Jest*, the violence in this chapter exemplifies systems of misogyny, ableism, and fatphobia working through individual bodies upon other bodies. Much of this chapter is focused on gendered violence, which as mentioned is not entirely new to Wallace Studies, but (understandably) does not dwell on the trauma done to the bodies of Wallace's female characters and potentially the emotional safety of his female readers. By focusing on the body and the tortures that may be inflicted upon it, I am able to explore these acts and themes in a literally and figuratively visceral way. The visceral and instinctive ways in which readers are able to understand metaphors told through the body is, I argue, one of the reasons why Wallace relies on the convention so often. As I stated in the introduction of the thesis, the experiences of the body are both unique and universal. For the Bakhtinian grotesque, this universality is key to a united lower class and check against the purported divinity of the ruling class. The ugly counterpart to this joyful universality is the acknowledgement that many instances of bodily suffering are also more universal than we may like to admit.

As I began in The Body and Politics, in The Body and the Other I explore how categorising certain bodies differently than others justifies and even encourages ridicule and violence against marginalised individuals. Specifically, I detail how the process of looking

dehumanises women, people of size, and people with disabilities. For this discussion I turn to Film Studies, which I feel is apt given Wallace's personal affection for and, as I hope to have shown, influence by visual media. Despite not being as easily trackable as looks in film, the characters of Wallace's work are clearly mired in the dynamics of looking. These looks follow the traditional gendered dynamics introduced by Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" with men as the "Bearer[s] of the Look" and women as the "Image", as well as the more specific freak show dynamics of looking between audience and exhibit (837). The dynamic set up in looking, or staring in Disability Studies, is echoed across numerous sets of ingrained behaviours of "active" masculinity and "passive" femininity, though the participants may not always be a man and a woman in the active and passive roles respectively. For Wallace, passivity is sometimes elevation to total self-dehumanisation as the Othered individual relinquishes their pain entirely to the realm of the objectified body and retreats to the solitude of the mind, as with the subject of "B.I. #46 07-97" (*Brief Interviews* 116). Wallace's relationship with Cartesian dualism begins to come into greater prominence in this chapter, characterised by a lonely rational mind and a somewhat disgusting interactive body. I consider Grosz's thoughts on the subject from *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Femininty*: "If minds are private, subjective, invisible, amenable only to first-person knowledge, we can have no guarantee that our inferences about other minds are in fact justified. Other bodies may simply be complex automata, androids or even illusions, with no psychical interior, no affective states or consciousness" (7). Many of the interactions discussed in this chapter depict characters that seem to think this way, that bodies beyond their own may just be empty objects, and the responsibility of asserting or abjecting humanity belongs to the character being objectified. While I believe the abhorrent views the aptly named "Hideous Men" and other characters to their own and not Wallace's, I do believe

that it is important to look at them critically considering Wallace's apparent preference for female readership. Wallace's frequent mentioning of a female ideal reader is mentioned by Clare Hayes-Brady in "". . .": Language, Gender, and Modes of Power in the Work of David Foster Wallace" and others, though I hope to encourage further discussion on why this may have been, or if it was a fair hope for Wallace to have when "she is often asked to bear witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation, and murder" (Willliams 17). The chapter goes on to discuss other tropes related to non-normate bodies present in *Infinite Jest* and other works, including tropes related to fatness, which I have found to be thus far understudied. Like the authors of "White Guys: Questioning *Infinite Jest's* New Sincerity," Joel Nicholson-Roberts and Edward Jackson, I am interested in who tends to have their subjectivity challenged or denied in Wallace's work. Their essay focuses on anti-black racial marginalization, and I hope that by pointing out other marginalised groups which receive similar treatment this topic gains further traction within the field. The quintessential Wallace character is one defined by a (terribly) complex inner life, and I feel it is important to explore who is assumed to have such an inner life, and who may merely be fleshy metaphor.

In the Body and the Self chapter, I look more closely at that inner life and how the suffering of the mind is often writ upon the body in *Infinite Jest*. Because the characters whose inner thoughts are most often men in Wallace's work, this chapter focuses more on masculinity than the previous chapter, which mainly explored portrayals of femininity. Though Wallace states "there's a great deal that's bad about having a body" and details many of these bad things, the Body and the Self details how there are also quite a few issues with having a mind ("Federer" 8). I return here to the theme of toxicity from The Body and the Environment, looking at toxic masculinity and how in Wallace's work it often manifests in actual bodily sickness, such as Hal's

refusal to seek mental health help contributing to his eventual facial paralysis and speech disorder. This chapter is particularly concerned with alienation and how several point-of-view characters in *Infinite Jest* attempt to cope with it, and how their failing methods are reflected in their imbalanced and often immobilised bodies. Mental health disorders and psychology have been touched on already by scholars such as Stephen Burn in "Webs of Nerves," but I believe that my consideration of how the external body is affected in these circumstances gives readers an additional point of study on the topic. As my reading mainly focuses on *Infinite Jest,* I feel similar readings could be done on many of the characters in *The Pale King*, or earlier figures such as the inward-eyeballed Sternberg from "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way." I identify a trend of characters who attempt to communicate sensitive, meaningful information to the outside world, but become trapped in the gap between what is said and what is understood. The guilty party in these circumstances is presumed to be the unruly body, as the pure intent of the mind is lost in a jumble of tongue, lips, and foreign ears. The inner Self of *Infinite Jest* is portrayed as horrifically lonely, and the duality of the body arises again when it becomes clear that it is both our only way of connecting with other people while also being prone to disobedience and failure. One's own body in Wallace's work is often treated as something which must be controlled and strictly regulated, perhaps even more harshly than the bodies of political or social subordinates. *Infinite Jest*, in particular, can be viewed after this reading as a novel which is largely about harsh self-punishment, and how the tragedy of the novel may be how such punishment is both brutal and ultimately useless. Gately, for example, assumes responsibility for himself, but he achieves fulfilment through friendship and responsibility to others. Conversely, Hal rejects the potentially redemptive love of his brother because he is not yet ready to stop torturing himself for his past mistakes and future anxieties and ultimately breaks down entirely.

On the subject of self-torture, I also examine the exploitation of Brint Moltke in "The Suffering Channel" and briefly compare it to the discomfort Wallace himself felt during one of his more popular assignments, "Shipping Out." This portion returns to the topic of writer/reader relationships which I looked at in the previous chapter, this time focusing on the expectations readers placed upon Wallace. In this section I wonder how readers may reconcile receiving enjoyment from Wallace "wanting to die" on a cruise ship, and how he was edited to ease the discomfort that might have been caused to readers if Wallace's musings on helplessness and death ceased to be funny ("Shipping Out" 35).

One of the difficult things about Wallace, and *Infinite Jest* in particular, is that death and suffering are often written as quite funny. As an admirer of Kafka, perhaps Wallace felt they had to be. *Infinite Jest* certainly recalls "that really central Kafka joke – that the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle" ("Laughing with Kafka" 26). By visualising much of this struggle on the external body, Wallace produces a body which is at once immediately legible and generally repulsive. The universality of the body provides a metaphor which is uniquely tangible and innately understandable to the reader, even if the specifics of a certain body may be strange. The repulsiveness of the body which bears the everyday burdens and indignities of life as well as the extraordinary suffering of addiction or violence is itself universal. However, in the Bakhtinian sense we may see that many of the disgusting things our bodies are involved in are not only crucial to life, but actually fulfilling. The materiality of the body, its functions, and its interactions position it as an incredible tool for speaking about the human experience. I argue that the myriad of quirks, deformities, mutations, and tortures of the body present in Wallace's work are all important in understanding how each character, or people in general, interact with the world and the wider

systems within it. By studying these grotesque bodies we can better understand Wallace's views on the environment, politics, gender relations, and lived experience in general. The sheer volume of grotesque figures in *Infinite Jest* and other pieces may seem to suggest a pessimistic view of the previously mentioned topics, but I hope to have shown that this is not entirely true. There may be "a great deal that's bad about having a body," but there is also freedom, joy, defiance, and connection ("Federer" 8). This uneasy mix of emotions towards the body recalls Wallace's description of the collective feelings toward William Caines, "both uncomfortable and not," as he viewed a little child who had suffered so deeply being celebrated at an event he felt showcased the pinnacle of human physical achievement and beauty ("Federer" 12). For Wallace, the body is capable of such highs and lows that it must be related to one's humanity, perhaps as its source, perhaps as its prison. Or, in that inseparable Kafkaesque way, both. I feel I might be derided here in the same manner as the Lynch critic: "Of *course* both" ("David Lynch" 211).

Works Cited

Alcoholics Anonymous. “The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Annonymous.” *Alcoholics Anonymous UK*, www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/About-AA/The-12-Steps-of-AA.

Aphramor, Lucy, et al. “That Remains to Be Said: Disappeared Feminist Discourses on Fat in Dietic Theory and Practice.” *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by Esther Rothblum, New York University Press, 2009, pp. 97–105.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky, First Midland Book ed., Indiana University Press, 1984.

Banner, Olivia. ""They're literally shit": Masculinity and the Work of Art in the Age of Waste Recycling." Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies 10 (2009): 74-90. https://doi.org/10.17077/2168-569X.1084

Been, Eric. “David Foster Wallace: Genius, Fabulist, Would-Be Murderer.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 6 Sept. 2012, www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/09/david-foster-wallace-genius-fabulist-would-be-murderer/261997/?fbclid=IwAR0iy2pNO9IS19rhImTsFcCEeJJID2-qWtDHWbXIdg_8PHKzi_M9tq8rYZg.

Bhalla, Nita. “Government Not Trying to Stop Acid Attacks: SC.” *Reuters*, Https://Www.reuters.com/Article/Acid-Attack-India-Supreme-Court/Government-Not-Trying-to-Stop-Acid-Attacks-Sc-idINDEE9680CY20130709, 9 July 2013, 1:12PM.

Boswell, Marshall. “‘The Constant Monologue Inside Your Head’: *Oblivion* and the Nightmare of Consciousness.” *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, edited by Marshall Boswell and Stephen J. Burn, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 51–70.

---. *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. University of South Carolina Press, 2009.

Burn, Stephen J. *David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest: A Reader's Guide*. 1st ed., Bloomsbury Academic, 2003.

---. "'Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing': *Infinite Jest* and the Science of the Mind." *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 59–86.

Christgau, Robert. Review of *But Seriously, Folks*, Review of *SIGNIFYING RAPPERS: Rap and Race in the Urban Present Village Voice*, 1990, www.robertchristgau.com/xg/bkrev/rbsignif-90.php.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, by Jeffrey Jerome. Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 3–26.

Creed, Barbara. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection." *Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, Univ Of Texas Press, 2015, pp. 37–67.

Deleuze , Gilles, and Felix Guattari. "A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia." *University of Minnesota Press*, 1987, doi:10.5040/9781472547989.ch-001.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

"English Translation of 'Zuckung': Collins German-English Dictionary." *English Translation of "Zuckung" | Collins German-English Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2019, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/german-english/zuckung?fbclid=IwAR1rzBhK8oTT48jHapPgH3eaJfY7Ep74yvlL5esWCXfw74WWpE6L_ztWZVk.

"An Ex-Resident's Story." *Granada House*, Granada House, 2019, granadahouse.org/testimonials/an-ex-residents-story/?fbclid=IwAR2ABactlj6zmg8V3m1Q64Dg-xTPdnpbxdo1UqGVcj37K5SHnkN_1cxKigs.

Farrell, Amy. "'The White Man's Burden': Female Sexuality, Tourist Postcards, and the Place of the Fat Woman in Early 20th Century U.S. Culture." *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by Ester Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, 1st ed., New York University Press, 2009, pp. 256–262.

Fest, Bradley J. "'Then Out of the Rubble': David Foster Wallace's Early Fiction." *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing"*, edited by Marshall Boswell, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, pp. 85–105.

Fisanick, Christina, and Esther Rothblum. “Fatness (In)Visible: Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome and the Rhetoric of Normative Femininity.” *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by Sondra Solovay, New York University Press, 2009, pp. 106–112.

Freud, Sigmund. “Moses and Monotheism.” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud Vol. 23*, Hogarth Press, 1964, p. 83.

---, 2015. "The Uncanny" Trans. Alix Strachey. *Imago,* 1919. *MIT,* https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf

Freudenthal, Elizabeth. “Anti-Interiority: Compulsiveness, Objectification, and Identity in *Infinite Jest*.” *New Literary History*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2010, pp. 191–211. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40666491.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. “The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography.” *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, edited by Sharon L. Snyder et al., 1st ed., Modern Language Association, 2002, pp. 56–75.

Giles, Paul. “Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2007, pp. 327–344. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20479816.

Giovanelli, Dina, and Stephen Ostertag. “Controlling the Body: Media Representations, Body Size, and Self-Discipline.” *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, New York Unviersity Press, 2009, pp. 289–298.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana Univ. Press, 1994.

Haddad, Vincent. “Conjuring David Foster Wallace’s Ghost: Prosopopeia, Whitmanian Intimacy and the Queer Potential of *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King*.” *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1, 22 Mar. 2017, pp. 1–28., doi:https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.139.

Hayes-Brady, Clare. “". . .": Language, Gender, and Modes of Power in the Work of David Foster Wallace.” *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 131–150.

---. *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity, and Resistance*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Hayles, Katherine N. “The Illusion of Autonomy and the Fact of Recursivity: Virtual Ecologies, Entertainment, and *Infinite Jest*.” *New Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1991, pp. 675–697. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/24474.

Hering, David. *David Foster Wallace: Fiction and Form*. Reprint ed., Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

---. “*Oblivion*.” *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace*, edited by Ralph Clare, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 97–110.

---. “Reading the Ghost in David Foster Wallace’s Fiction.” *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1, 22 Mar. 2017, pp. 1–30.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edward White, and David Widger, 2009.

Holland, Mary K. “‘By Hirsute Author’: Gender and Communication in the Work and Study of David Foster Wallace.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2017, pp. 64–77., doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2016.1149798.

---. “Mediated Immediacy in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*.” *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 107–130.

Houser, Heather. “*Infinite Jest's* Environmental Case for Disgust.” *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*, edited by Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou, University of Iowa Press, 2012, pp. 118–142.

Howard, Gerald. “I Know Why Bret Easton Ellis Hates David Foster Wallace.” *Salon*, 7 Sept. 2012, 8:20PM (UTC), www.salon.com/2012/09/07/i_know_why_bret_easton_ellis_hates_david_foster_wallace/.

Jackson, Edward, and Joel Nicholson-Roberts. “White Guys: Questioning Infinite Jest’s New Sincerity.” *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1, 22 Mar. 2017, pp. 1–28., doi:https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.182.

Kaiser, Wilson. “David Foster Wallace and the Ethical Challenge of Posthumanism.” *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 47, no. 3, Sept. 2014, pp. 53–69., doi:10.1353/mos.2014.0030.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Revised ed. ed., vol. 1 3, Princeton University Press, 1992.

Kringelbach, M.L., et al. "On Cuteness: Unlocking the Parental Brain and Beyond." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, Elsevier Current Trends, 19 May 2016, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1364661316300420?fbclid=IwAR3LLi5gvIQzXevKBJ9Pphkz4L11AnTYRhtxMYen0BsHGHmQYBXDsYP3DTk.

Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: an Essay of Abjection. Columbia University Press, 1982.

LeClair, Tom. "The Prodigious Fiction of Richard Powers, William Vollmann, and David Foster Wallace." *Critique*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1996, pp. 12–37. *Taylor and Francis Online*, doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.1996.9936496.

Lipsky, David. *Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*. Crown Publishing, 2010.

Lithwick, Dahlia. "They Will Not Replace Us: Nazis Can March on My Hometown, but They Can't Win." *Slate Magazine*, Slate, 13 Aug. 2017, slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/08/dahlia-lithwick-on-the-nazis-in-charlottesville.html.

"Love Canal: A Special Report to the Governor & Legislature: April 1981." *Department of Health*, Apr. 1991, health.ny.gov/environmental/investigations/love_canal/lcreport.htm.

Lurie, Susan. "Pornography and the Dread of Women." *Take Back the Night*, by Laura Lederer, New York: William Morrow, 1980, pp. 159–173.

Lynch, David, director. *Blue Velvet*. High Fliers Films, 2014.

---, director. *The Elephant Man*. Paramount, 2001.

---. creator *Twin Peaks: The Television Collection*, Paramount, 2019.

Max, D.T. *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story*. Viking Penguin, 2012.

McGurl, Mark. "The Institution of Nothing: David Foster Wallace in the Program." *Boundary 2*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1 Aug. 2014, pp. 27–54.

Miller, Laura. “David Foster Wallace.” *Salon*, 9 Mar. 1996, 11:00PM (UTC), www.salon.com/1996/03/09/wallace_5/.

Mitchell, David T. “Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse.” University of Michigan Press, 2000. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.11523.

Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Natalini, Roberto. “David Foster Wallace and the Mathematics of Infinity.” *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, edited by Marshall Boswell and Stephen J. Burn, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 43–58.

Nichols, Catherine. “Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2001, pp. 3–16., doi:10.1080/00111610109602168.

Oden, Thomas C., and Søren Kierkegaard. “Introduction.” *The Humor of Kierkegaard*, edited by Thomas C. Oden, 1st ed., Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 1–42.

O'Donnell, Patrick. “Almost a Novel: *The Broom of the System*.” *Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, edited by Marshal Boswell and Stephen J. Burn, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 1–22.

Olsen, Lance. “Termite Art, or Wallace's Wittgenstein.” *Review of Contemporary Fictiom*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1993, pp. 199–215.

Plantinga, Carl. *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. 1st ed., University of California Press, 2009.

Prohaska, Ariane, and Jeannine Gailey. “Fat Women as ‘Easy Targets’: Achieving Masculinity Through Hogging.” *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, New York University Press, 2009, pp. 158–166.

Russell, Emily. "Some Assembly Required: The Embodied Politics of *Infinite Jest*." Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory, vol. 66 no. 3, 2010, p. 147-169. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/arq.2010.0001.

Silverblatt, Michael. “David Foster Wallace: Infinite Jest.” *KCRW*, KCRW, 4 Aug. 2006, www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/bookworm/david-foster-wallace-infinite-jest.

Staes, Toon. “‘Only Artists Can Transfigure’. Kafka’s Artists and the Possibility of Redemption in the Novellas of David Foster Wallace.” *Orbis Litterarum* , vol. 65, no. 6, Nov. 2010, pp. 459–480., doi:https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.1111%2Fj.1600-0730.2010.01003.x.

Subramanian, Meera. “Anthropocene Now: Influential Panel Votes to Recognize Earth's New Epoch.” *Nature News*, Nature Publishing Group, 21 May 2019, www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01641-5?fbclid=IwAR3pEPOQa9bLgkAAxlo_xzGBAr-fmk84K6neSZp3jmdq_RhNok85iwlx1Jo.

Tabbi, Joseph. “David (Foster) Wallace and the (World) System.” *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace*, edited by Ralph Clare, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 235–248.

Thompson, Lucas. *Global Wallace: David Foster Wallace and World Literature*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

---. “Wallace and Race.” *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace*, edited by Ralph Clare, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 204–219.

Trotter, David. *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction*. 1st ed., Oxford University Press, 2000.

U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce. “U.S. Green Chamber Advocating For Waste Prevention.” *U.S. Green Chamber*, 26 Jan. 2016, usgreenchamber.com/advocacy/waste-prevention/#:~:text=According%20to%20Duke%20University's%20Center,does%20this%20waste%20all%20go%3F.

Voiland, Adam. “UV Exposure Has Increased Over the Last 30 Years, but Stabilized Since the Mid-1990s.” *NASA*, 16 Mar. 2010, www.nasa.gov/topics/solarsystem/features/uv-exposure.html.

Wallace, David Foster, and Terry Gross. “David Foster Wallace: The 'Fresh Air' Interview.” *NPR*, 14 Aug. 2015, www.npr.org/2015/08/14/432161732/david-foster-wallace-the-fresh-air-interview.

Wallace, David Foster, and Mark Costello. *Signifying Rappers*. 1st ed., Back Bay Books, 2013.

Wallace, David Foster, and Larry McCaffery. "An Expanded Interview with David Foster Wallace." *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, edited by Stephen Burn, University Press of Mississippi, 2012, pp. 21–52.

Wallace, David Foster, and Charlie Rose. "David Foster Wallace." *The Charlie Rose Show*, 27 Mar. 1997.

Wallace, David Foster, and Mark Schechner. "Behind the Watchful Eyes of Author David Foster Wallace." *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, by Stephen J. Burn, University of Mississippi Press, 2012, pp. 104–110.

Wallace, David Foster, and ZDF. "David Foster Wallace: The Big, Uncut Interview." Open Culture, 20 Feb. 2012, www.openculture.com/2012/02/david_foster_wallace_the_big_uncut_interview_2003.html.

Wallace, David Foster. *Both Flesh and Not*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2012.

---. *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Abacus, 2000.

---. *The Broom of the System*. Abacus, 2004.

---. *The Broom of the System*. Kindle ed., Penguin Books, 2004.

---. *Consider the Lobster And Other Essays*. Abacus, 2007.

---. "David Foster Wallace's Amazing Fiction Syllabus: 'We Can Talk about Whatever You Wish to — Provided That We Do It Cogently and Well.'" *Salon*, 4 Nov. 2014, 5:00AM (UTC), www.salon.com/2014/11/04/david_foster_wallaces_amazing_fiction_syllabus_we_can_talk_about_whatever_you_wish_to_%E2%80%94_provided_that_we_do_it_cogently_and_well/.

---. "The Depressed Person." *Harper's* , Jan. 1998, pp. 57–64, harpers.org/wp-content/uploads/HarpersMagazine-1998-01-0059425.pdf.

---. *Girl with Curious Hair*. New ed., Abacus, 1997.

---. *Infinite Jest*. Abacus, 2008.

---. *Oblivion*. Abacus, 2005. ---. *The Pale King*. Penguin, 2011.

---. “Roger Federer as Religious Experience.” *Play Magazine*, The New York Times, 20 Aug. 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/sports/playmagazine/20federer.html.

---. “Shipping Out: On the (Nearly Lethal) Comforts of a Luxury Cruise.” *Harper's*, Jan. 1996, pp. 33–56, harpers.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/HarpersMagazine-1996-01-0007859.pdf.

---, David Foster. *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Argument*. Abacus, 1998.

---. “This Is Water by David Foster Wallace (Full Transcript and Audio).” *FS*, 2012, fs.blog/2012/04/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/.

Wendell, Susan. “Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability.” Hypatia, vol. 4, no. 2, 1989, pp. 104–124. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3809809.

“Wildlife in a Changing World - An Analysis of the 2008 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species .” Edited by Jean-Christine Vié et al., *IUCN*, 2008, www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/wildlife_in_a_changing_world_1.pdf.

Williams, Linda. “When the Woman Looks.” *Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, Univ Of Texas Press, 2015, pp. 17–36.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractacus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.

Zimmerman, Ulf. “Malte Ludens: Humor, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Significance in Rilke's Novel.” *Germanic Review*, vol. 68, no. 2, 1993, pp. 50–50.