Watching As The World Turns:

Performance, Everyday Life, and the Self

in the Novels of David Foster Wallace

Mr. Daniel South

A thesis submitted for the Degree of

Masters in Drama by Research

School of Arts, University of Kent

September 2015

33,421 words

Abstract

This thesis examines the manifestation of performance in the novels of David Foster Wallace. It argues that as Wallace engages with the theme of performance he concurrently addresses the related topics of everyday life and the self. Taking key theories of performance from the discipline of performance studies and applying these to an analysis of Wallace's novels, this thesis demonstrates how the views of everyday life and the self presented by Wallace are predicated on performance and uncertainty. It first compares Wallace's view of the everyday with theories put forward by Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord. Wallace's view of the self is then outlined, primarily through close readings of how choice, boredom, rituals, and masks are presented in Wallace's novels, alongside comparisons of his work with two further theorists of the everyday, Raoul Vaneigem and Erving Goffman. The thesis concludes by examining how Wallace presents audiences within his novels, suggesting that he often uses performance situations to articulate his thoughts on the relationship between the self and the other, before calling for further interdisciplinary research into Wallace's writing.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

I would like to thank Dr. Rosemary Klich and Dr. Juha Virtanen for their invaluable support in the completion of this thesis. Their knowledge and patience has been much appreciated, and their willingness to defer to each other and discuss ideas with me as they would with a colleague has enlivened my research and my attitude towards it. Further thanks are required for their many reference submissions, and generous help in securing me a place to begin my PhD next year. Equal thanks to Adam Kelly in this regard; I look forward to working with him at York, especially after reading and learning so much from his work throughout this year.

I would also like to thank Edward Jackson, Stephanie Lambert, Laura Morris, and Bart Thornton for kindly sending copies of various conference papers, and for expressing interest in the topic of this thesis. Questions and feedback from fellow research students at the University of Kent's School of Arts Research Festival was also much appreciated.

Last, and by absolutely no means least, many thanks are due to my wonderful and supportive parents.

<u>Contents</u>

Introduction – What We Talk About When We Talk About Performance

David Foster Wallace never wrote a stage play, directed a show, or published a review of a theatrical performance. Yet the author consistently engages with ideas of performance throughout his oeuvre. In this thesis I will examine how performance manifests in Wallace's novels, and explore how an understanding of performance might enhance readings of these works. Although this thesis makes occasional reference to Wallace's short stories and essays, which themselves address performance widely, his novels will remain my focus throughout. In doing so I will provide an in-depth analysis whilst also demonstrating that the writer's thematic engagement with performance is a wider trend applicable to more than just one of his works.

Wallace wrote two novels, *The Broom of the System* and *Infinite Jest*, before taking his own life at the age of forty-six. His third novel was compiled by his editor Michael Pietsch from a partial manuscript and other notes, and published posthumously as *The Pale King*. As Boswell and Burn (2013) note, "the dark shadow cast by Wallace's suicide [changes] the relationship between his own writing and his critics'" (x). With all of Wallace's novels now published, critical studies of the author have a complete corpus to address, and with the broad "contours of Wallace's achievement" mapped out, it is time to "accept his fiction's implicit invitation to connect his writing to larger individual currents" (ibid: xi). Indeed, in noting the "certain preponderance of key words" throughout the essays comprising *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*, the collection's editors offer a list which encompasses the

hitherto primary concerns (or currents) of Wallace criticism: "communication, connection, difficult, human, irony, mediate, personal, sadness, suffering" (Cohen and Konstantinou 2012: xi). Despite having received scant critical attention thus far, I would add 'performance' to this succinct inventory of what can be inferred to be Wallace's key thematic interests.

Although it is true that certain critics have addressed performance in Wallace's work before, I believe that its centrality to his novels has been underestimated. Cioffi (2000) suggests that Wallace "clearly […] has an interest in performance and its complex dynamic, because *Infinite Jest* […] thematizes performance" (161), and he is right to point out that Wallace, for example, "suggests addiction is [… a] self-destructive, deconstructing performance" (ibid: 161). Yet Cioffi's use of the term is also frequently too subjective, as when he suggests that "the reader's performance of *Infinite Jest* has a kind of pathological quality to it", and that "to read [the novel] is, in some way, to become" (ibid: 168) its characters. Such readings focus too exclusively on form, and the reader's individual reaction to it, and gloss over the myriad examples of performance in the content of the novel.

More than this, Cioffi's account of Wallace's engagement with the theme is not specific enough to Wallace's work itself, as when he suggests that "the vast array of personal fictions that a reader undoubtedly will bring to [*Infinite Jest*], makes for a highly charged and performative reading" (ibid: 169-70). This statement does not elucidate how the manifestation of performance in Wallace's novels is particular to them. Form is certainly important to this manifestation – as Kelly (2014a) points out, "what makes *Infinite Jest* the novel it is, rather than simply a representational drama

of contemporary ideas about sincerity, is that the reader is made to participate in [enacting these ideas] too". Rather than focussing solely on the *experience* of reading Wallace's novels, however, I will combine close readings with a contextual theoretical framework to map out his engagement with performance in a broader context, and better understand its origins and implications.

Elsewhere the "larger individual current" of performance that runs through Wallace's novels has primarily been explored alongside other topics. For example, Elderon (2014) notes that, in particular, "the relationship between performance and sincerity in [Wallace's] fiction is a vexed one, and it has been much commented on" (508), as has his writing about television and entertainment. This is unsurprising: Wallace was "nothing if not a maximalist at heart, a devotee of what he called the "long thing" at the level of sentence, paragraph, and work" (McGurl 2014: 36), and because of this even individual currents such as performance reveal themselves to comprise many streams of ideas. In attempting to outline performance's centrality to Wallace's novels, then, the "vast network of discourses and practices" (McKenzie 2001: 4) that the term 'performance' implies must always be kept in mind. The expansive complex of associations surrounding performance proves useful, in fact, as it directs readers to acknowledge both the obvious and the unclear. In short, performance in Wallace's novels often refers to more than one thing at the same time. As such, to riff on the title of a story by Raymond Carver, Wallace's engagement with this theme seems to seek to elucidate what we talk about when we talk about performance.

Wallace's novels suggest that such discussions of performance cannot be limited solely to the term's aesthetic connotations. As Auslander (2003) points out, five of the seven dictionary definitions of performance "associate the concept of performance with everyday life, implying that the activities we describe as performances are not necessarily restricted to certain artforms" (1). In Chapter One I will outline how Wallace's novels present a view of everyday life as permeated by performance, and will place his work in the context of two theorists of everyday life, Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord. Initially focussing on a close reading of a conceptual film described in *Infinite Jest* called Found Drama, I will suggest that Wallace's view of the everyday is linked to these theorists' work by a similar interest in uncertainty and performance.

Performance and uncertainty are also central to Wallace's notions of the self, and Chapters Two and Three will outline how, when Wallace's texts engage with ideas of the self, they often do so in situations linked to performance. Chapter Two in particular will introduce how Wallace's novels conceptualise the self, beginning by connecting Wallace's ideas about alienation and the self to those of two key theatrical practitioners, Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht. The bulk of this chapter will focus on the links between choice and performance in relation to the self, but I will also outline boredom's relevance to self-becoming in Wallace's novels. In Chapter Three I will develop these ideas and examine the 'performed self' as presented in his novels, establishing further links between Wallace and everyday life theory by comparing these ideas with those of Erving Goffman and Raoul Vaneigem, two further theorists of the everyday with interests in the self and performance. I will also

outline two additional ways in which performance manifests in Wallace's work, presenting close readings of sections involving rituals and masks.

Chapter Four rounds off this discussion with a broader view of the topic, suggesting that Wallace's uses of aesthetic performance situations function as a metaphor for the relationship between the self and others. Examining in particular the presence of audiences within his novels, this chapter will compare Wallace's texts with Jacques Rancière's idea of 'the emancipated spectator'. I will then go on to outline the implications for future research into the topics discussed, as these thematic tributaries come together, and I suggest that, for Wallace, talking about performance means talking not just about theatre, but about uncertainty, community, the self, and everyday life.

Chapter One – Wallace and Everyday Life

Found Drama's Uncertain Everyday

This chapter will begin with an example of how Wallace examines performance in conjunction with other themes. More specifically, I will argue that Found Drama, a conceptual film project from Wallace's second novel *Infinite Jest*, constitutes a clear indicator of Wallace's interest in, and the thematic overlap of, everyday life and performance. I will go on to suggest that Wallace's novels share many of the concerns of Everyday Life theory, mainly those of two key theorists: Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre. Debord was the founder of the Situationist International (SI), a radical collective of avant-garde artists and intellectuals set up in France in 1957, and Henri Lefebvre, a philosopher and sociologist, was for some time aligned with the SI. Both Debord and Lefebvre highlight performance as a key aspect of understanding and enacting the everyday, as well as maintaining the transformational possibility inherent in attending to everyday life, and this chapter will highlight similarities between their work and Wallace's in this regard.

The first mention of Found Drama comes in the twenty-fourth endnote of *Infinite Jest*'s 'Notes and Errata', which is presented as a filmography comprising the work of James O. Incandenza, the father of one of the novel's main protagonists Hal Incandenza. The filmography contains valuable plot information, listing as it does details of Incandenza's collaborations with Madame Psychosis, who is subsequently revealed to be a key character in the novel; descriptions of certain works that it later becomes clear are *films à clef*; and details of a film listed as *Infinite Jest (V?)*, often

9

referred to elsewhere in the novel as 'the Entertainment',[1] a search for the master copy of which links and affects most characters in the book which shares its name. Incandenza's wide-ranging career, his filmography's editors inform us, "presents substantive archival challenges" (Wallace 1997a: 985). One project which would appear to present unprecedented difficulty to the archivist is the "conceptual, conceptually unfilmable" (ibid: 989) Found Drama, eight versions of which appear throughout the list. Readers have to wait several hundred pages until they are directed to another endnote for an explanation of what exactly Found Drama is, when Incandenza's son Orin explains in an interview:

> All it was was you and a couple cronies […] got out a metro Boston phone book and tore a White Pages page out at random and thumbtacked it to the wall and then [Incandenza] would throw a dart at it from across the room. At the page. And the name it hit becomes the subject of the Found Drama. And whatever happens to the protagonist with the name you hit with the dart for like the next hour and a half is the Drama. And when the hour and a half is up, you go out and have drinks with critics who like chortlingly congratulate you on the ultimate in Neorealism.

> (ibid: 1027-8)

Found Drama's 'action' takes place in everyday life, and it is in this context that I will examine the 'film', and thus uncover its importance to Wallace's wider fictional project. With the oblivious Subject at its centre, and the unknowable details of plot for an absent 'audience', Found Drama foregrounds unknowability. Wallace reflects this in the way he delays defining the genre after introducing it to readers, as

---

[1] To avoid confusion, I will also refer to the fictional film *Infinite Jest* as 'the Entertainment' throughout the rest of this project.

I mentioned above, and it can as such be inferred that Found Drama's key aspects are its most overt: its portrayal of the everyday as an arena of uncertainty, and as a performance.

Here the conception of everyday experience that Wallace presents in Found Drama already begins to overlap with that of Everyday Life theorist Henri Lefebvre, and in fact seems to be a manifestation of two claims made by Lefebvre in his seminal study *Critique of Everyday Life Vol. 1*. The first claim, made by Lefebvre (1992) in his preface to the second edition of the study, is that "ambiguity is a category of everyday life, and perhaps an essential category" (18). This idea was one of many shared by Lefebvre and Guy Debord (2004a), who also identified the fact that "life is a sequence of chance situations" (46) – a sequence the Situationists sought to subvert by constructing their own 'situations' in everyday life, as a means of blending art and life.

Rather than seeking to amend the ambiguity of the everyday directly, however, Found Drama simply highlights its uncertainty, its status as "a problematic, a contested and opaque terrain, where meanings are not to be found ready-made" (Highmore 2002a: 1). In this way, Found Drama provides an example of the tendency of Wallace's fiction to "[employ] its descriptive energies to provide a diagnosis but not a cure" (Burn 2013: 80) for whatever topic it engages with. In doing this Wallace implies an active role for the reader beyond diagnosis, beyond the novel. In this case, readers are to understand the implications of an everyday life like Found Drama, predicated on uncertainty and performance, and decide for themselves what to do with that information. One key question implied here is that of whether, given that

everyday life can be thought of as a kind of performance, people would be better served by thinking of themselves as performers or spectators, and I will go on to address this quandary in Chapter Four. The question of how to deal with uncertainty is prominent too, however. Indeed, as Kelly (2010) notes, highlighting the intertwined nature of writer, reader, text, and everyday life, "uncertainty [in Wallace's fiction] is structural, allowing as it does for a genuine futurity that only the reader can provide" (143). Found Drama foregrounds this uncertainty: details of the life of each Drama's Subject are left deliberately unknowable to an 'audience', as the fact of the Drama is left unknowable to the Subject themselves, and each 'actor' comes to represent a potential within all of us to remain oblivious to the everyday. Wallace fervently warns against such an approach to everyday life in *This Is Water*, setting out the bleak reality of being "a slave […] to your natural default-setting of being uniquely, completely, imperially alone, day in and day out" (Wallace 2009: 60). Guy Debord also warned against the effects of the troubling fact that "there is nothing more natural than to consider everything from the standpoint of oneself, taken as the centre of the world" (Debord 2004b: 7).

Throughout his fiction, Wallace investigates and attempts to combat this problematic default-setting, and attending to this default-setting requires, as Smith (2009) puts it, "break[ing] the rhythm that excludes thinking" (268). For Wallace, this is a vital part of fiction's job, "to aggravate [the] 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" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 32). Wallace's fictional project thus begins to align with the most consistently agreed-upon aspect of Everyday Life theory, namely "the investigation

of the everyday as a non-conscious realm" (Highmore 2002b: 59). As "everyday life, for the most part, goes by unnoticed", and is lived through thoughtlessly, "the first task for attending to it will be to make it noticeable" (ibid: 23).

To do this, Wallace consistently makes overt the elusiveness of everyday life, ensuring that the uncertainty of the everyday also permeates our experience as readers, especially throughout Incandenza's filmography. Not least amongst the challenges to its editors of compiling the filmography appears to be the fact that "certain of [Incandenza's] high-conceptual projects' agendas required that they be titled and subjected to critique but never filmed" (Wallace 1997a: 985), such as Found Drama. Whilst for readers of *Infinite Jest* this statement evidently extends to incorporate all of Incandenza's projects, both him and his work obviously being fictional creations, Wallace does not include this stream of academic conjecture about such projects' "status as film [being] subject to controversy" (ibid: 985) solely as a metafictional wink at the reader. Rather, Incandenza's films become objects of uncertainty themselves, with forty-three of the seventy-eight included titles listed as "UNRELEASED", and five as a seemingly pointless combination of "*Untitled. Unfinished*. UNRELEASED" (ibid: 992). Citations to articles we cannot read litter the filmography, as ghosts of criticism evade attempts to be understood.[2]

---

[2] Later in *Infinite Jest*, James Incandenza recounts a long story from his childhood detailing the moving of a mattress with his parents, which readers are told in a footnote is in fact an extract from the extremely niche fictional tome "*The Chill of Inspiration: Spontaneous Reminiscences by Seventeen Pioneers of DT-Cycle Lithiumized Annular Fusion*" (Wallace 1997a: 1034). A similar narrative strategy is employed in Mark Z. Danielewski's (2000) *House of Leaves*, which also concerns a fictional film, and lists or 'quotes from' over eighty fictional works. A review by Steven Poole in *The Guardian* suggested that this "thorough synthesis of the mountain of scholarly and critical material that has grown up around the [fictional] film" supplements the book's main plot with "a delightful and often very funny satire of academic criticism" (Poole 2000). This is also one aim of *Infinite Jest*'s use of non-existent criticism, which I will go on to explore later in this chapter.

The ephemeral form of Found Drama gestures towards this uncertainty too, and the project could be said to have a companion piece in Edouard Levé's 2002 book *Oeuvres*, which "describes works that the author has conceived but not brought into being" (Levé 2014). This total embrace of the conceptual is reminiscent of those films of Incandenza's which were "titled and subjected to critique but never filmed" (Wallace 1997a: 985). A translated extract from *Oeuvres*, published in literary magazine *The White Review*, outlines a proposal for the ominously-titled "MUSEUM OF NOBODIES":

> Instead of the usual celebrities, a wax museum displays unknown characters. Chosen at random from the telephone book, the models are representative of neither an epoch, nor a region, nor a profession. At its inauguration, the museum shows thirty statues. Two new models are added to the museum's collection each year: as the years go by, an evolving, sculptural, and hyperrealist memory of society emerges.
>
> (Levé 2014)

In its egalitarian spirit, and same aleatory method of selecting subjects, Levé's museum obviously echoes Found Drama. Levé's presentation of a concept in place of a realised work, and the museum's presentation of a "memory", also chime with Incandenza's presentation of a thought: being a conceptual project, in Found Drama "nothing [gets] recorded or filmed[, r]eality being camera-free, being the joke" (Wallace 1997a: 1028), and 'audiences' are met with nothing but an idea. Found Drama affords all possibilities in its unknowability, and echoes Lefebvre's (1992) claim that "everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground" (97). As such, the unknowable Subject and action of Found Drama

create a sort of Schrödinger's Plot where both everything and nothing happens, and which highlights the everyday as, as Highmore (2002b) puts it, "a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic" (16).

Performing the Everyday

Following on from his claim that "ambiguity is a category of everyday life", Lefebvre's second "essential thing" about the everyday that I will highlight here is that "the people we live with have nothing in common with classical *characters*, precisely because they play a *role* in everyday life" (1992: 16). Again, the Situationist conception of everyday life overlaps with Lefebvre's here, an unsurprising fact given the influence both he and the SI had on each other, as Guy Debord also adopts the language of performance to interpret the everyday and point out its centrality to everyday life.[3] I will go on to address Situationist ideas regarding performance in the everyday later in this chapter, as well as further exploring notions of roles in Wallace's novels in Chapter Three, but the link here is clear. With Incandenza's Found Drama, Wallace highlights a similar idea: in its unadorned appropriation of everyday life as a piece of performance, Found Drama stresses less the coexistence of performance and the everyday, than the inseparable and interdependent nature of the two.

This interrelationship of performance and the everyday is common to all of Wallace's novels, and in recognising this one can see the author's work begin to align with the concerns of the discipline of Performance Studies. By using "a theatrical

---

[3] For more on Lefebvre's relationship with the Situationist International, and Debord particularly, see Merrifield (2013) pp. 30-38.

concept of performance to understand social rituals and everyday interactions" (McKenzie 2001: 3), those working in the discipline seek to articulate and illuminate the myriad instances of performance's intrinsicality to everyday life. Performance "so permeates US society", McKenzie writes, "that it evokes that mysterious circle of mist which Nietzsche said envelops any living thing and without which life becomes "withered, hard, and barren"" (ibid: 3). Concerned as they are with contemporary US society, performance seems to envelop Wallace's novels too, both in form and content. McKenzie could have been writing about Wallace's novels when he suggested that "today, as we navigate the crack of millennia, work, play, sex, and even resistance – it's all performance to us" (ibid: 3).

These four topics – work, play, sex, and resistance – are integral to the study of everyday life, and are bound up in the language of performance across Wallace's writing. The world of work is bleakly portrayed in the stage-direction-like §25 of *The Pale King* – "Howard Cardwell turns a page. Ken Wax turns a page. Matt Redgate turns a page." (Wallace 2012: 312) – the dual column layout of which Stephen Burn posits is designed "to overload our perceptual systems as they function during the reading process" (Burn 2014: 88). In other words, in a passage that reads like stage directions for the world's most boring play, a reader's physical performance – the very act of reading, of turning pages – is made apparent to them, just as it is when they are flitting back and forth between the main text of *Infinite Jest*, and any one of its three hundred and eighty-eight footnotes. In that novel, play is often considered in terms of performance too, most overtly in the continued reference to the professional tennis circuit as "the Show" (Wallace 1997a: 53, 109, 111).

In *The Broom of the System*, Rick Vigorous attempts to make up for his lacklustre sexual performance by performing stories aloud for his girlfriend Lenore, with Wallace once again highlighting different definitions of the term side by side. When Rick's failed physical performance is supplanted by his aesthetic performance, Wallace also gestures towards performance's ability to mislead – another element of his conception of the phenomenon that I will address later. Finally, in *Infinite Jest* the terrorist organisation *les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents*' attempts at resistance revolve around their aim to "secure, copy, and disseminate the Entertainment", inflicting its "fatal pleasures" (ibid: 722) on as many American citizens as possible, and in doing so provoking political upheaval.

Wallace's novels often situate the everyday as a site of performance, and in doing so join a host of other explorations of this phenomenon. Found Drama serves as a concise example of this performance-everyday paradigm that spans Wallace's novels, and in fact appears to recall various artistic movements and performance projects of the twentieth century. The concept shares the improvisatory and participatory character of Happenings, a kind of performance event originating from John Cage's work at Black Mountain College in the 1950s, and developed by avant-garde artists in 1960s New York. In their often ramshackle staging and consistent experimentation with space, Happenings "rejected the proscenium stage and the conceit that everyone in the auditorium sees the same 'picture'" (Kirby 1995: 3). Found Drama also allows its 'audience' to create unique experiences, albeit imaginatively, and shares further characteristics with Happenings, which also "had no plot, and were [often] improvised" and in which "chance played a key role" (Galenson 2009: 124). Importantly, however, "the author or authors of any particular

Happening did present a program and a sequence of events for viewing" (ibid: 124), unlike the necessarily unseen nature of Found Drama.

That said, in 1968 Allan Kaprow, the artist who coined the term Happenings, published an account of *Self-Service: a Happening* which had been performed across four months in Boston, New York, and Los Angeles the previous year. Kaprow called *Self-Service* "a piece without spectators" (Kaprow 1968: 160), which certainly chimes with Orin Incandenza's description of Found Drama as a genre with "no audience" (Wallace 1997a: 1028). Given than Kaprow instructed performers to complete certain tasks from a pre-selected list of possibilities, however, the vital difference remains that Found Drama is 'performed' by "oblivious actors" (ibid: 1028).

Whilst Happenings are undoubtedly a useful reference point in understanding Incandenza's project, it also conceptually connects with Augusto Boal's 'Invisible Theatre', which shares *Self-Service*'s forgoing of audience. The term 'Invisible Theatre' refers to performances that occur in public places with the express intention of drawing unknowing members of the public into the action, whereby they cease to be spectators and become, instead, as Boal labelled them, "spect-actors" (Morelos 1999: 75). Found Drama would seem to owe a debt to Boal,[4] both it and Invisible Theatre being "essentially an action that occurs in actual reality" (ibid: 75) but, similarly to Kaprow's *Self-Service*, Invisible Theatre's "detailed preparation of a skit

---

[4] If Wallace owes an inadvertent debt to theatre, it would seem that some theatre-makers owe an inadvertent debt to him too. In Incandenza's film *The Joke*¸ two "video cameras in [the] theater record the 'film''s audience and project the resultant raster onto screen" (Wallace 1997a: 988-9). A similar device is used by Belgian theatre company Ontroerend Goed in their 2011 show *Audience*, which begins as "a man trains a video camera on the stalls" (Barnett 2011), projecting the image of the audience onto the stage behind him.

with a complete text" (ibid: 75) undercuts the comparison by way of its partial rehearsal.

Further to these examples, Found Drama resembles the ideas of the Fluxus movement, which is referenced by Wallace in Incandenza's filmography. Fluxus was developed under the direction of George Macunias, who stated his aim for the anti-art movement in a manifesto: to "fuse the cadres of cultural, social [and] political revolutionaries into united front [and] action" (Beuys in Kellein 1995: 34). Amongst other activities, Fluxus artists made 'Fluxkits', also known as Fluxus boxes, "small boxes of inexpensive materials assembled for personal use" (Higgins 2002: 34) – an idea encapsulated neatly in the title of James Incandenza's sixth film, *Flux in a Box* (Wallace 1997a: 986). Found Drama certainly fits the brief of Fluxus' intention to "promote living art" (Beuys in Kellein 1995: 34), and moves a step closer to creating an art "grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals" (ibid: 34) – although the pre-requisite of being listed in the phone book does exclude certain groups.

More specifically, the 'Event Scores' of Fluxus share Found Drama's interest in the everyday, these 'Scores' often involving everyday objects and simple instructions for those participating to perform. Nyman's (1999) description of a particular 'Event Score', *Drip Music* by George Brecht, emphasises plurality – his events may "be simultaneously gags and quite serious exercises to reduce things to their essence" (77). The aspects of Found Drama that I have highlighted so far similarly point to the essence of the everyday, and as I will go on to outline later in this chapter, the genre was also originally conceived as a gag. Given, however, that

Fluxus artists are interested in "*non-theatrical* qualities of [a] simple natural event" (Maciunas in Phillpot n.d.; emphasis mine), the importance of performance to everyday life muddles this comparison too.

Wallace and the Situationist International

Most interestingly, to return to the ideas of Guy Debord, Found Drama invokes the spirit of the early exploits of the Situationist International (SI), who "consider[ed] cultural activity […] as an experimental method for constructing daily life" (Debord 2004c: 62). These cultural activities included such methods as the 'dérive', which involved "drifting around cities [in] a form of urban 'free association' that is designed to reveal the hidden secrets of the urban everyday" (Highmore 2002b: 140), but the overlap of the SI and Wallace has more to do with performance than perambulating.

Thornton (2014a), in a conference paper delivered at *Wallace Infini*,[5] highlights what he believes to be "a sly allusion to the Situationist provocateur Guy Debord" (1) in one of James Incandenza's films. Thornton outlines how "a translation to a Latin caption" in Incandenza's *Blood Sister: One Tough Nun* is given as "'We Are What We Revile or We Are What We Scurry Around As Fast as Possible With Our Eyes Averted'" and suggests that this "self-consciously defeatist and clunkily prolix title recalls that of Debord's final film, *In girum nocte et consumimur igni* [We Turn in the

---

[5] Whilst I attended the *Wallace Infini* conference where Thornton outlined his case for the significance of "the conjunctions between Debord's ideas and Incandenza's output" (2014a: 1), in later correspondence he was kind enough to also provide me with a copy of a second paper, delivered at Illinois State University. That paper focusses mainly on James Incandenza's ghost (known in *Infinite Jest* as 'the wraith'), arguing that "the Debordian strategies of dérive (meaningful wandering) and détournement (cultural hijacking) are deeply embedded in Wallace's novel and [the] wraith's frenetic movement through it" (Thornton 2014b: 1).

Night and Are Consumed by Fire] (1978)" (ibid: 1). Further to this, given that Wallace's

"knowledge of post-war European cinema was vast" (ibid: 1), as demonstrated by

references to such directors as Murnau, Pabst, Eisenstein, and Makavejev during one

section of *Infinite Jest* alone, it is also likely that Wallace was aware of the father of

Situationism. Indeed, in *The Culture of Narcissism*, a book that Wallace verifiably

owned – it is listed online as present, and annotated, in the archive of his personal

library at the University of Texas at Austin – Debord is mentioned in a section on "the

propaganda of commodities" (Lasch 1991: 72). Although this does not conclusively

indicate the extent to which Wallace was aware of or understood the SI, their

conception of performance in the everyday resonates well with Found Drama.

To understand the place of performance in Situationist theory, one must first

understand the overall purpose of their project. In "Perspectives for Conscious

Alterations in Everyday Life", an essay originally presented as a tape recording at a

conference organised by Henri Lefebvre, Debord (2002) states his belief that "to

study everyday life would be a completely absurd undertaking […] if this study was

not explicitly for the purpose of *transforming* everyday life" (238; emphasis mine).

This transformational intent resides at the core of Situationist thought, and as such

Situationist theory "demands practical realisation, and […] was only made possible by

the acts of rebellion, subversion, and negation which foreshadowed it" (Plant 1992:

ix). Even the two key theoretical texts of the movement – Raoul Vaneigem's *The

Revolution of Everyday Life* and Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* – are "written

with the deliberate intention of doing harm to spectacular society" (Debord 1992:

10).[6] *The Society of the Spectacle* is a diatribe outlining Debord's conception of society, which he argues "presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles [where] all that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (1994: 12).

In §19 of *The Pale King*, one character proposes a similar view of contemporary life, as several IRS workers discuss civics, taxes, and the American political climate of the late 1970s, whilst stuck in an elevator. The conversation is made up of unattributed dialogue, so it is often unclear who exactly is speaking. This is a tool Wallace used throughout his writing, starting in *The Broom of the System*, which he "adopted from William Gaddis" (Boswell 2014: 215). Although readers are often able to discern who is speaking in some scenes, such as when characters refer to each other by name or reveal personal details in dialogue, the layout of these passages also have the feel of playscripts without attributed parts, a style often used by formally experimental playwrights such as Sarah Kane in *Crave*, or Mark Ravenhill in *pool (no water)*. Towards the end of this chapter of *The Pale King*, one character offers a prediction of the state of 1980s America, which will exist under a

> rule of image, which because it's so empty makes everyone terrified […] and whose terror of not really ever even existing makes them that much more susceptible to the ontological siren song of the corporate buy-to-stand-out-and-so-exist gestalt.

> (Wallace 2012: 151)

---

[6] Although several anthologies have now collected the various issues of the SI's magazine *Internationale Situationiste*, pamphlets, and other writings associated with the movement (See McDonough 2004a and Knabb 1981), these two texts remain the SI's most well-known. I will address Vaneigem's relevance to Wallace's work in Chapters Three and Four.

If for "rule of image" one reads "society of the spectacle", Wallace's debt to the political legacy of the 1960s, Debord particularly, becomes apparent. Throughout this section the author "confronts directly the very real political rebellions […] of the 1960s and the insidious way that corporations co-opted this rebellious impulse for the purposes of marketing" (Boswell 2014: 217), and in the context of the other links between Wallace's fiction and Debord's theories that I will go on to discuss, one can identify the "rule of image" as being rooted in Situationist theory.

Both Wallace and Debord often use ideas from performance to articulate what they view as the consequences of this "rule of image". Despite all the incitement of action Situationist texts claim to aim for, the methods for practically realising the transformation of everyday life are often left unclear. Debord's initial call for the construction of situations that gave the SI its name never elucidates what these situations might explicitly entail, preferring to encourage spontaneity and autonomy in groups to collectively decide "which incitement of events suit the desired environment" (Debord 2004a: 47).[7] One thing does become clear, however: such a situation would "be some sort of performance, one that would treat all space as performance space and all people as performers" (Sadler 1999: 105). Participation and activity are seen as the means by which to revolutionise everyday life, and

---

[7] At this early stage Debord admits that "Situationist techniques have yet to be invented" (2004a: 47), and despite the later development of such methods as psychogeography and détournement (see McDonough 2004b), this extract from the "Report on the Construction of Situations[…]" highlights the initial ambiguities of the SI:

> Our central purpose is the construction of situations, that is, the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature. We must develop an intervention directed by the complicated factors of two components in perpetual interaction: the material setting of life and the behaviours that it incites and that overturn it.
> (Debord 2004a: 44)

Debord uses the language of performance to describe these aims of the Situationist project: "The role of the "public", if not passive at least a walk-on, must ever diminish, while the share of those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, "livers", will increase" (Debord 2004a: 47).

Such an outlook, and the language used to describe it, is also shared by "the wraith" (a ghostly apparition implied to be James Incandenza appearing from beyond the grave) in a scene at the end of *Infinite Jest*. Communicating with the hospitalized Don Gatley telepathically, the wraith asks Gatley to consider the "myriad thespian extras" (Wallace 1997a: 834) he has seen on the TV show *Cheers!,*

> the nameless patrons always at tables, filling out the bar's crowd […] human furniture, figurants […] these surreally mute background presences whose presence really revealed the camera, like any eye, has a perceptual corner, a triage of who's important enough to be seen and heard v. just seen.[8]

(ibid: 834-5)

These "figurants" are the citizens of Debord's 'society of the spectacle', "completely trapped and encaged [in] mute peripheral status", with "no possible voice or focus" (ibid: 835). The "center-stage Sam and Carla and Nom" (ibid: 835), the named and audible characters of *Cheers!*, are stand-ins for the spectacle, for the distracting, simulated experience of everyday modernity.

The wraith Incandenza admits to Gatley that he

---

[8] Wallace makes a tongue-in-cheek gesture towards fiction's propensity for this "perceptual corner" in *The Broom of the System*, when protagonist Lenore visits her Grandmother in a nursing home, and readers are told that "The Shaker Heights Home has just one story to it" (Wallace 1997b: 29).

personally spent the vast bulk of his own former animate life as pretty much a figurant, furniture at the periphery of the very eyes closest to him, it turned out, and that it's one heck of a crummy way to try and live.

(ibid: 835)

Incandenza takes the logic of 'the society of the spectacle' to an extreme end, embodying the idea that the individual experiences even the personal as representation. When communicating with Gatley, the wraith admits that he "spent the whole sober last ninety days of his animate life working tirelessly to contrive a medium via which he and [his] muted son [Hal] could simply *converse*" (ibid: 838). From here we learn the true origins of the Entertainment, that Incandenza's "last resort" in attempting to connect with his son, Hal, was to "make something so bloody compelling it would reverse thrust on a young self's fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life" (ibid: 838).

That the resulting film is a cause of death for those who watch it is not just a heavy-handed extension of Marshall McLuhan's famous claim that "the medium is the message", implying an ability on television's part to do irreparable damage to viewers, however. [9] Rather, "the Entertainment" can be read as a darkly humorous example of the inadequacies of mediation – a statement in solidarity with the Situationist ideal of art as lived experience. Elsewhere in *Infinite Jest*, Wallace alludes to a similar idea, when he outlines how residents of the novel's near-future Boston participate in "so very much private watching of customized screens behind drawn

---

[9] This said, Wallace acknowledges McLuhan's influence on "E Unibus Pluram[…]" in his interview with McCaffery: "The complete suppression of a narrative consciousness, with its own agenda, is why TV is such a powerful selling tool. This is McLuhan, right? "The medium is the message" and all that? But notice that TV's mediated message is *never* that the medium's the message." (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 33)

curtains" that an alternative culture has sprung up alongside it: "the new millennium's passion for standing live witness to things" (ibid: 620).

Incandenza's attempt to communicate with Hal through his films ultimately fails – it is too successful in entertaining – and in this way serves partly as a stand-in for all television. "One of the reasons I feel empty after watching a lot of TV", Wallace said in an interview with David Lipsky towards the end of the *Infinite Jest* book tour, "is that it gives the illusion of relationships with people […] but it doesn't require anything of me" (Wallace in Lipsky 2010: 85). Wallace here reveals his apprehension about the prevalent inertia of contemporary audiences, a concern shared by Debord and the Situationists. Their transformation of the everyday lies in the "construction of situations", which can only begin "on the other side of the modern collapse of the idea of the theater", a collapse that will lay waste to "non-intervention" (Debord 2004a: 47) and passive spectatorship. As Kauffman (2004) notes, if connections are made between the construction of situations and "the contemporary happenings and performance art toward which the Situationists were in fact quite hostile, that is because everyone is not yet Situationist or an artist" (299). In other words, the all-encompassing performance of Situationism "precludes spectatorship" (ibid: 299). As such, even the live "public spectation opportunities" of Boston "drawing sober and studious crowds" (Wallace 1997a: 620), which I will explore further in Chapter Four, do not fit the Situationist brief of collapsing the idea of the theatre.

Various pieces of performance in Wallace's fiction do in fact impede spectatorship, however, and indicate a similar promotion of activity over passivity in the everyday. Unwatchable by definition, Found Drama evidently precludes

spectatorship, as does, albeit in a different way, Incandenza's film *The Joke*, in which two "video cameras in [the] theater record the 'film''s audience and project the resultant raster onto screen" (ibid: 988-9). I will go on to examine *The Joke* in further detail in Chapters Three and Four, but its relevance here is clear: spectators are also performers at every moment of the film, just as in everyday life. Wallace's most overt moment of solidarity with the Situationist mantra of art as lived experience comes in *The Pale King*, however, when an unnamed IRS employee details his/her concept for a play in a recorded interview. The play consists of a "very bare and minimalistic" (Wallace 2012: 108) stage set-up of an IRS worker at a desk filling out forms and doing rote examinations very attentively. The employee sits on stage working

> until the audience gets more and more bored and restless, and finally they start leaving, first just a few and then the whole audience, whispering to each other how boring and terrible the play is. Then, once the audience have all left, the real action of the play can start.

(ibid: 108)

This "real action", which can only begin once there is no audience to passively consume it, can be understood as the everyday life which each individual enacts and experiences as their own. The IRS worker whose idea the play is admits that he/she "could never decide on the action [of the unseen section of the play], if there was any" (ibid: 108), another gesture towards the uncertainty of the everyday I earlier outlined as key to Wallace's conceptualisation of such experience. One thing was certain to the employee, however: that it would be a "totally real, true-to-life play" (ibid: 108) – one implication of this being that to be "true-to-life", one must do away with passive spectatorship; one must do away with audiences.

<u>Awareness</u>

The unnamed play and Found Drama share an unashamed hostility towards their intended audiences, although the latter does so to a different end than the former. When Orin Incandenza explains what Found Drama is, he also reveals that his father created the genre to get "revenge" on "academics who hated him" (Wallace 1997a: 1027), an ironic fact considering how celebrated the project apparently is by critics in the novel. Found Drama is a "joke" Incandenza propagated by getting

> some film-journals to run some proclamatory edictish things he wrote about it, and [getting] Duquette at M.I.T. and a couple other younger tenure-jockeys who were in on [the joke] to start referring and writing little articles in journals and quarterlies about it

> (ibid: 1027)

Although critically engaging with Found Drama does as such initially appear to be an endeavour mired in irony, Incandenza's disdain is directed specifically at critics' praise of plot and Neorealism – Found Drama was conceived by a drunken Incandenza whilst he was lamenting how even "avant-garde journals were complaining that [… his] fatal Achilles' heel was plot, that [his] efforts had no sort of engaging plot, no movement that sucked you in and drew you along" (ibid: 375).

Wallace pre-empts this diegetic ridicule of the academic world by satirising the language of academic criticism in Incandenza's filmography, not least in its lengthy, jargon-packed citation: "From Comstock, Posner, and Duquette, 'The Laughing Pathologists': Exemplary Works of the Anticonfluential *Après Garde*: Some Analyses of the Movement Toward Stasis in North American Conceptual Film […]"

(ibid: 985). Wallace's ire with academic writing is well-documented, and reaches a peak in his essay "Authority and American Usage", during which he outlines his frustration with the "opaque abstraction [… that] often makes it just about impossible to figure out what [a] sentence is really saying" (1999a: 115), and claims that Academic English is a communicative failure.[10] This failure is most prevalent, Wallace suggests, when "a scholar's vanity/insecurity leads him to write *primarily* to communicate and reinforce his own status as an Intellectual" (ibid: 115). Falling prey to such egotism is a side effect of "the most dangerous thing about an academic education" for Wallace: the "tendency to over-intellectualize stuff, to get lost in abstract thinking instead of simply paying attention to what's going on right in front of [you]" (Wallace 2009: 48).

Wallace implies that the critics who laud Found Drama are guilty of exactly this kind of over-intellectualization, as they embody the tendency to forget and forgo the obvious that is part of a contemporary cultural condition that Wallace associates with both "academia and commercial culture" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 31). In Wallace's view these are linked by their ulterior motives, to "conceal" or sell respectively, and it is this frustration that explains Wallace's ire in "Authority and American Usage", which stands in contrast to a letter he wrote to *The New York Times* in 1987 defending academic criticism and its "occlusion and prolixity". In that letter, Wallace suggests that "[l]iterary criticism is itself an artistic endeavor, and will naturally sometimes sacrifice transparency for creative richness". Six years later,

---

[10] The citations to non-existent criticism I earlier alluded to (see note 2) surely also highlight the communicative failure Wallace finds frustrating in much academic writing, as the actual content of critics' praise of Found Drama remains unseen.

however, in his interview with McCaffery, Wallace outlines his belief that "academia and commercial culture" have become "gigantic mechanisms of commodification that drain the weight and colour out of even the most radical new advances" (ibid: 31). It can thus be said that the "weight and colour" of Found Drama lie in its aspects so obvious as to be left implied, namely the clear interest in performance, uncertainty, and the everyday that I have explored so far. Critics in *Infinite Jest* fail to see this point, as Wallace mirrors the unawareness of the everyday that Found Drama represents in the unaware critical reaction surrounding it.

Found Drama is, just as Incandenza intends, hailed as "the ultimate in avant-garde Neorealism" (Wallace 1997a: 1028), and its lavish praise is augmented by claims that his earlier work "deserve[s] reappraisal" (ibid: 1028). This is a prime example of the over-intellectualisation Wallace warns against: as one can see by "simply paying attention to what's going on right in front of you", the unfavourable comments levelled at Incandenza's earlier work are applicable to Found Drama too. A journal article concerning Incandenza's oeuvre referenced by Orin is titled "Watching Grass Grow While Being Hit Repeatedly Over The Head With a Blunt Object" (ibid: 1026), but the bare bones of Found Drama are no more exciting or subtle than Incandenza's previous work. The genre in fact reaches, as Wallace puts it one section, "the historical zenith of self-consciously dumb stasis" (ibid: 398), and any attempts to prop it up as a Neorealist masterpiece miss the point.

Lefebvre writes in *Critique of Everyday Life* of a similar critical confusion, offering one characterisation of responses to what he saw as an intellectually stifled inter-war period: "worried at first, then panic-stricken, intellectuals ran headlong

towards false solutions, taking any way out but one which might offer a real answer

or demand a real 'commitment', a real responsibility, a real renewal" (1992: 116-7).

This characterisation resonates particularly here, as one reason the critical response

to Found Drama is so positive is that the genre requires no "real commitment" at all

– the vital difference between Found Drama and the rest of Incandenza's plotless

work being how much effort the audience is expected to exert to understand or

appreciate it. Wallace points out that "the classical Realist form is soothing, familiar,

and anesthetic; it drops us right into spectation" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 34).

Found Drama takes us one step further, apparently offering the ultimate neorealist

values – truth, immediacy, authenticity[11] – with none of the work; "you do whatever

you want during the Drama. You're not there" (Wallace 1997a: 1028).

Found Drama thus resides at the opposite end of the spectrum of audience

passivity to Incandenza's final film, the Entertainment. The latter causes its viewers

to focus on nothing except the film, to submissively consume the Entertainment until

they die, whereas Found Drama's 'audiences' are given licence to be so passive as to

disengage entirely from the piece. It is an exercise in unawareness, with "no audience

and oblivious actors" (ibid: 1028). Thus when Orin points out that "it wasn't

impossible […] the name you hit with the dart was somebody dead in the last year",

and that Incandenza "especially liked the idea that the star of the show might have

[…] recently died" (ibid: 1028), another possible meaning besides the literal is

invoked, contextually bolstered by Wallace's longstanding thematic interest in

attention and awareness as transformative tools, which I will explore further in

---

[11] For more on "the necessary characteristics of neo-realism" see Bondanella and Gieri (1987).

31

Chapter Two. As Incandenza imagines the dead Subject of his Found Drama, a genre which represents everyday experience, we are invited to envisage a person who is alive by technicality, but – as described in *This Is Water* – is going through their "adult life dead, unconscious" (Wallace 2009: 60).

Across *This Is Water*, Wallace's use of the word "death" comes to represent unawareness and unconscious living in the everyday, a trend also visible in Wallace's novels. The speech opens with a joke taken from a conversation in *Infinite Jest* between former thief and drug addict Don Gatley and an older Alcoholics Anonymous member (Wallace 1997a: 445). The joke describes two young fish swimming along, who are asked by an older fish how the water is, only for the younger fish to respond incredulously: "What the hell is water?" (Wallace 2009: 4). *This Is Water* goes on to overtly articulate how the "most obvious, ubiquitous, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about" (ibid: 8). This may sound like "just a banal platitude", Wallace admits, "but the fact is that, in the day-to-day trenches of adult existence, banal platitudes can have a life-or-death importance" (ibid: 9). It is by ignoring the 'water', by remaining oblivious to the everyday, that Wallace suggests one can go through "life dead" – this warning becoming even more clearly linked to the endeavours of Debord and the Situationists in the context of a similar metaphor used in Issue 7 of *Internationale Situationiste*: Situationists "only take into consideration problems that are already present in the general population. Situationist theory is in people like fish are in the sea" (qtd. in McDonough 2009: 164).

Found Drama's critics represent a death of sorts too, as its empty praise is cast as a fictional manifestation of Wallace's real-life fear for the cultural landscape of the

late twentieth century, where "prescient art suffers death-by-acceptance [and] we love things to death" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 31). The response to Incandenza's film *The Joke* also fits this pattern – the filmmaker is said to have "loved the fact that *The Joke* was so publicly static and simple-minded and dumb, and that those rare critics who defended the film by arguing at convolved length that the simple-minded stasis was precisely the film's aesthetic thesis were *dead* wrong" (Wallace 1997a: 398; emphasis mine). By understanding death here as colloquially analogous to unaware and unconscious living, the ringing endorsement of Found Drama as a Neorealist triumph becomes not just an endorsement for passive spectatorship in film or theatre audiences, but an endorsement for a passive way of life, a submission to the "default-setting" of unquestioning self-centredness. Given how, as Konstantinou (2012) has noted, "Wallace, more than most contemporary novelists, insists on the necessary link between life and literature" (110), it is not surprising that even in these sections of Wallace's novels seemingly about issues of performance, Wallace's fiction often concurrently addresses the everyday.

Chapter Two – Forming the Self

Alienation

The two core aspects of the everyday that Wallace identifies through Found Drama – performance and uncertainty – are also key to his conceptualisation of the self. To properly address performance's relevance to ideas of the self in Wallace's novels, however, it will be important to first outline what these ideas of the self are. This chapter will do just that, outlining the centrality of both choice and boredom to the novel's presentations of self-becoming. I will, however, retain a focus on performance in this chapter, referencing theatrical figures relevant to Wallace's ideas of alienation, and in this way will demonstrate how Wallace's engagement with performance, everyday life, and the self, reveal themselves to be interdependent thematic strands. Firstly, however, an account of Wallace's engagement with alienation, as a theme and a technique, will both reaffirm his interest in everyday life, and help introduce his view of the self.[12]

As the previous chapter outlined, the work of Wallace, Debord, and Lefebvre is linked by an endeavour to turn the passivity of a spectating public into active, interested, compassionate participation, and given how each of these writers portray everyday life as a site of performance, it is unsurprising that they all make particular use of the methods and metaphors of theatre in their writing. Debord and Lefebvre explicitly cite Bertolt Brecht's 'Epic' theatrical practice as a useful tool, with its

---

[12] Burn (2012) points out that *Infinite Jest*'s "Ted Schacht owes his last name to the philosopher Richard Schacht, with whom Wallace occasionally played tennis and whose volume *Alienation* (1970) was a source for *The Pale King*" (110).

'verfremdungseffekt', or 'alienation technique', a way of "exposing [a subject's] context (historical or other), and thereby act[ing] as an enabling agent for the reader or spectator" (Leach 2004: 111), a catalyst for action and engagement.

There are clear parallels here with Wallace's promotion of "simple awareness" (Wallace 2009: 131), of the importance of "liv[ing] consciously […] day in and day out" (ibid: 135), and in his fiction Wallace, like Brecht, adopts a technique of alienation to achieve this. As Cioffi (2000) suggests, *Infinite Jest* employs a number of "performative gestures […] that interrupt the flow of the narrative and call attention to the work *qua* performance" (168), such as its copious endnotes, fractured structure, and use of highly specialised vocabulary. Cioffi's suggestion that *Infinite Jest* "epitomizes a kind of art described by Bertolt Brecht" that makes use of his alienation technique does not fully explicate the Brechtian purpose of artistic alienation, however. Whilst it is true that Wallace uses "Brechtian alienation effects that […] call attention to the work *qua* performance", this is not solely to "encourage readers to become conscious of their own performances as readers" (ibid: 168), as one might be at risk of inferring from the article.

Lefebvre's (1992) thoughts on Brecht provide some elucidation here: Brecht's theatre is one "in which action (and poetry) [are] expressly and deliberately brought close to everyday life" (14). Lefebvre provides a classic Brechtian example to outline this, of "a traffic accident, with witnesses discussing what happened and giving biased accounts of it, each implying a judgement […] and an attempt to make the listener share the judgement" (ibid: 14). Brecht hopes to stimulate this atmosphere of debate in his theatre audiences, and as such, Lefebvre claims, Brecht's theatre demands

engagement with life both in and outside of the theatre – to "understand [it] properly, we need to think about what is happening around us, within us, each and every day" (ibid: 14).

As such, the political, Brechtian edge of the alienation technique is important to keep in mind alongside the useful reminder to readers of their role as readers. As well as being a means to dissuade "passive spectation" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 33), Wallace employs his fracturing forms of narrative to best describe lived experience, claiming that what differentiates his fiction from "the kind of meta-strategies [he has…] attacked as preventing authors from being anything other than narcissistic or overly abstract or intellectual" (McCaffery 1993: 33) is the simple question of whether his techniques "serve a purpose beyond themselves" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 33). Indeed, Wallace explains in an interview on *Charlie Rose* how *Infinite Jest* meets this criterion, by reflecting the fragmented experience of everyday modernity not just in its content, but its form too:

> There is a way, it seems to me, that reality is fractured right now, at least the reality that I live in. The difficulty [… of] writing about that reality is that text is very linear, it's very unified […] I, anyway, am constantly on the look-out for ways to fracture the text that aren't totally disorienting.
>
> (Wallace in mojomc123's channel 2012)

Realism "imposes an order and sense and ease of interpretation on experience that's never there in real life" (Wallace in Lipsky 2010: 37); footnotes and montage and fractured narratives attend to everyday experience.

If it is not used to attend to everyday life, the alienation technique loses what Lefebvre called its "practical efficacy" (qtd. in Highmore 2002b: 131) – in art's refocussing of the technique on art itself there is no move towards "an awareness of lived conditions and situations" (ibid: 131). There are, of course, many pieces of visual art which use alienation for more aesthetic than political ends, as exemplified by Marcel Duchamp's famous Readymades. In such pieces, "what was plain and obvious before is turned into something enigmatic and absurd" as a "result of aesthetic alienation" (Giesen 2006: 321).[13] Wallace is by no means hostile to such work – he explains to McCaffery his belief that the "move to involution [in art and fiction] had value", in that "it helped writers break free of some long-standing flat-earth-type taboos", but feels that such techniques are only effective up to a point, as "after the pioneers always come the crank-turners" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 30). Wallace's fiction in fact sides with Guy Debord, who despite disagreeing with Brecht's "unfortunate respect for culture as defined by the ruling class", feels that Brecht's model of alienation is "much closer than Duchamp to the revolutionary orientation [Situationists were] calling for" (Debord and Wolman 1981: 9). In other words, as Wallace appositely declares, whatever its intentions, "art's reflection on itself is terminal" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 31).

Wallace concedes that his fiction often adopts a similar strategy of "defamiliarization" (ibid: 38) to Duchamp's Readymades. This term was originally coined by the formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky, who notes that "as perception

---

[13] The most famous example of this is probably Duchamp's *Fountain*, which consists of "a standard urinal, laid flat on its back rather than upright in its usual position, and signed 'R. Mutt 1917'" (Howarth 2000).

becomes habitual, it becomes automatic", but that art can "remove objects from the automatism of perception in several ways" (2006: 778-9). In Wallace's fiction, defamilizarization can be both diegetic, as when in *The Broom of the System* Lenore drives a car "made by Mattel, also the maker of Hot Wheels", which is "only slightly larger [… and] really more toy than car" (Wallace 1997b: 67), and non-diegetic, as in the metafictional headings of "Westward The Course of Empire Takes Its Way", when Wallace draws attention to the story as a constructed artwork with bold text that announces sections such as "A REALLY BALATANT AND INTRUSIVE INTERRUPTION" (Wallace 1997c: 264). Yet even these uses of defamiliarization go beyond the aesthetic. Wallace suggests in his interview with McCaffery that the writer's role is to "no longer mak[e] the strange familiar, but mak[e] the familiar *strange* again […] to restore strange things' ineluctable strangeness, to defamiliarize stuff, I guess you'd say" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 38). In this way Wallace seeks to combat the fact that, "for [his] generation, the entire world seems to present itself as 'familiar'" – this familiarity being "of course an illusion in terms of anything really important about people" (ibid: 38).

Wallace's attempts to challenge the familiar resonates with Lefebvre's view that "familiarity […] conceals human beings and makes them difficult to know" (1992: 15). In its discouragement of considered thought, awareness and judgement, familiarity is seen to breed another kind of alienation, here between individuals. The artistic alienation technique that Wallace, Lefebvre, and Brecht all promote is in fact a response to this other kind of alienation bred by familiarity. Wallace and Lefebvre find common ground here again, in their attempts to fight fire with fire: for Lefebvre, "consciousness of alienation – that strange awareness of the strange – liberates us,

or begins to liberate us, from alienation" (ibid: 20); for Wallace, "any possible human

redemption requires us first to face what's dreadful, what we want to deny" (Wallace

in McCaffery 1993: 32).

This idea that denial obstructs awareness of the everyday is shared by another

theatrical figure of the twentieth century, one who Wallace directly references in

Infinite Jest, namely Antonin Artaud. One of James Incandenza's films listed in the

endnotes of the novel is the *Film Adaptation of Peter Weiss's 'The Persecution and*

Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at Charenton

Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade'. Wallace demonstrates his theatrical

literacy by referencing Weiss' influential play, Peter Brook's 1965 production of which

was notable for "its fusion of Artaudian and Brechtian techniques" (Brook et al 1966:

214). The work of both these theatrical figures sought to recalibrate audiences

alienated from their everyday lives, an endeavour also present throughout Wallace's

novels. Wallace is aware of Artaud's relevance to Weiss' play: during Incandenza's

adaptation, readers are informed, the "documentary's chemically impaired director

(Incandenza) repeatedly interrupts the inmates' dumbshow-capering and Marat and

Sade's dialogues to discourse incoherently on the implications of Brando's Method

Acting and Artaud's Theater of Cruelty for North American filmed entertainment"

(Wallace 1997a: 993).

Both Thornton, at the *Wallace Infini* conference at the Sorbonne, and Jackson,

at the *Supposedly Fun Things* colloquium at Birkbeck, have noted similarities between

"Artaud's description of his new theatre [... and] the world of *Infinite Jest*" (Thornton

2014a: 1), and that "cruelty is an important aspect of [Wallace's] work" (Jackson 2015: 1). As Jackson points out,

> Brando's method acting, […] as we learn from [Incandenza's] drunken father, apparently signals entertainment's successful simulation of rebellious gestures. The implication, then – at least as the inebriated [Incandenza] suggests – is that artists ostensibly can no longer elicit what Wallace calls, in 'E Unibus Pluram,' the […] 'shock, disgust, outrage' that previous generations could.

> (ibid: 2)

Despite this apparent impotence of shock experienced by contemporary filmmakers that Incandenza blames Artaud for initiating, Wallace and Artaud have plenty in common. Wallace certainly echoes the end, if not the means, of Artaud's call for "theatre that wakes us up, heart and nerves" (2010: 60). Further to this, the claim of Wallace's that art "about what it feels like to live[, i]nstead of being a relief from what it feels like to live" is extremely "precious" (Wallace in Lipsky 2010: 39), also echoes Artaud's essay *Theatre and Cruelty*:

> Our long-standing habit of seeking diversions has made us forget the slightest idea of serious theatre which upsets all our preconceptions, inspiring us with fiery, magnetic imagery and finally reacting on us after the manner of unforgettable soul therapy.

> (2010: 60)

Stephanie Lambert (2014) is as such correct to point out, in another paper delivered at *Wallace Infini*, Wallace's alignment with "the avant-garde project to jolt us […] into an awareness of the everyday and its possibilities for revolutionary transformation"

(1) that characterise both the avant-garde theatre of twentieth-century practitioners such as Artaud and Brecht, and prominent theories of everyday life.

If Wallace is to "[wake] us up, heart and nerves" (Artaud 2010: 60), then, his use of alienation effects in the experience of reading his novels, and defamiliarizing techniques in their content, both point first and foremost towards making readers aware of alienation itself. Most importantly, rather than using alienation as a purely aesthetic distraction, Wallace presents characters alienated from the people around them, and – of more interest here – from themselves as well. *Infinite Jest*'s Hal Incandenza is a prime example of such a character. Hal apparently "hasn't had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny", and lives "under the hip, empty mask, anhedonia" (Wallace 1997a: 695). In presenting characters alienated not just from others but from themselves too, Wallace implies that having a self is not something a person can take for granted.

Rather, in Wallace's novels, internal emptiness such as Hal's implies characters are struggling to produce or become themselves. In his essay *Boredom, Irony, and Anxiety: Wallace and the Kierkegaardian View of the Self*, Dulk (2014a) outlines Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's view that "an individual is not automatically a self but has to become one", a view that he argues "we can recognize […] throughout Wallace's writing" (44). This idea of the self that Kierkegaard and Wallace both share[14] is put more starkly by Wallace in his essay "Some Remarks on

---

[14] For an extended discussion of Kierkegaard and Wallace, see Boswell (2003), pp. 137-149.

Kafka's Funniness […]", where he laments how contemporary culture has taught

people

> that a self is something you just *have*. No wonder [young people] 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.
>
> (1999b: 64)

Guy Debord shares this conception too, and unsurprisingly suggests that the

construction of Situations in the everyday should be part of the struggle – that

performance can be "a matter of producing ourselves, and not things that enslave

us" (2004c: 61). Lefebvre, however, is sceptical: the "contradiction [of] the

simultaneous postulation of 'commitment' and total 'open-mindedness'" (1946: 9) of

existential philosophies such as Kierkegaard's strikes him as irreconcilable.[15] For

Wallace, however, the two elements Lefebvre highlights as contradictory are not to

be thought of as concurrent phenomena – rather, one follows the other. Open-

mindedness is a pre-requisite to commitment: the former is required to be

"conscious and aware enough to *choose* what you pay attention to and to *choose*

how you construct meaning from experience" (Wallace 2009: 54), to choose what is

worth the commitment, and how to be in the world – otherwise it is not a real choice

at all. As Dulk succinctly puts it, Wallace's fiction "points out the real world and urges

---

[15] Dulk (2014a) is by no means convinced by the logic of this "strange paradox [that] underlies […] the postmodernist celebration of the fragmented self" – rather, he argues, "for Kierkegaard, the fact that the self is something "made" does not imply that it is a fiction, in the sense of an imperfect artificiality that corrupts the diversity of the individual. What exactly is it that is corrupted when there is no pre-existing self?" (44-5).

us to pay attention to it, to commit to it, and thereby, to become ourselves" (2014a: 58).

Choice

Examining ideas of the self in Wallace's novels, particularly how choice is shown to be something that must be performed, reaffirms his interest in performance. The centrality of choice to Wallace's view of the self echoes Lefebvre's stance on choice in everyday life:

> Practically, the requirement to act and to make decisions imposes choice […] We have no knowledge of the human actions which go on around us; they escape us just as our own selves escape us. And yet we must *make judgements* […] It is the only solid ground, the only unchanging requirement amid all life's ups and downs, its one axis.

(1992: 19)

In this comparison, the two key elements of the everyday that Found Drama represents gain another relevance pertaining to Wallace's view of the self. Just as everyday life is based on uncertainty – on "fluctuations beneath stable masks and appearances of stability" (ibid: 19) – the self too is uncertain, and must be formed from disparate experience. For Wallace, this is where awareness leads: to the freedom afforded by choosing, "the freedom of real education […] where] you get to consciously decide what has meaning and what doesn't" (Wallace 2009: 95), to build a self in this process, and to consider different ways of thinking about "the boring, frustrating, crowded parts of adult life" (ibid: 83).

It is this conception of choice as related to awareness that Wallace's novels address, focussing less specifically on choice as a neoliberal ideal relating to consumer freedom than on a broader view of meaning-making in everyday life. Readers encounter an example of this conception of choice in §22 of *The Pale King*, when Chris Fogle outlines how the fulfilling turnaround of his life had its impetus in "something to do with paying attention and the ability to choose what [he] paid attention to, and to be aware of that choice, the fact that it's a choice" (Wallace 2012: 189). Fogle's story doesn't just pay lip-service to the idea of choice – his awakening that turns him from a "wastoid" into a fulfilled and conscious individual partly comes as he is watching the television show *As the World Turns*, and he is "suddenly struck by the bare reality" of his situation when the TV network announcer says "*You're watching* As the World Turns" (ibid: 224). In this moment, the vapidity of his nihilistic lifestyle dawns on Fogle, as does the fact that he "drifted and quit because nothing meant anything […] But that this, too, was because of something [he] chose – [he] had somehow chosen to have nothing matter" (ibid: 225).

Fogle here implicitly endorses choice as something that must be performed, and in this way Wallace escapes Lefebvre's critique of existentialist philosophy, that "the existentialist will probably *stop short of choice*[, as] his belief system, which permits him everything, also allows him not to choose […] and so he ensconces himself in a comfortable indeterminacy" (1946: 11). Fogle's initial indeterminacy is far from comfortable, and he describes how a drug-taking habit led to "heightened awareness and self-articulation" (Wallace 2012: 190) when he was high that was freeing and wonderful at first, but at a certain point "could sort of explode into a hall of mirrors of consciously felt sensations and thoughts and awareness of awareness

of awareness of these" (ibid: 190). In the instances of many characters throughout

Wallace's novels this intensity of recursive self-focus can spiral if not kept in check.

For Fogle, awareness is simply the gateway to choice, and even though it is not

grammatically the case, "I choose" must become a performative utterance, a

statement that is enacted in its being spoken,[16] for it to have any transformative

effect. Fogle appears to be an heir to Lefebvre's conception of choice in this regard,

given how Lefebvre declares that "decisions may ripen like fruit on a tree, but they

never fall of their own accord; we must always cut the stem, we must even choose

the moment of choice" (1992: 18).

None of this is to say that Wallace ever presents this as an easy task to

readers, nor as a prescription – despite his vast collection of volumes from the genre,

Wallace's fiction never enters the realm of self-help.[17] Rather, a host of characters

are portrayed in the midst of the struggle to become themselves. In the very

presentation of characters who are suffering in this way, Wallace acknowledges and

reminds readers of the difficulty of overcoming the 'default-setting' of unawareness.

In other words, Wallace's fiction partly incorporates a critique of itself, foregrounding

the often overwhelming difficulty of the task it appears to promote. Similarly, Henri

---

[16] For more on performatives see Austin (1975); on choice as a "semi-perfomative utterance" see Chapter Three of Rayfield (1972).

[17] In 2011, Maria Bustillos published an article on *theawl.com*, having spent three days in the David Foster Wallace archive at the University of Texas at Austin. As well as papers, notes, and drafts of Wallace's work, the archive also contains "three hundred-odd books from his personal library, most of them annotated, some heavily" (Bustillos 2011). Bustillos notes how

> One surprise was the number of popular self-help books in the collection, and the care and attention with which [Wallace] read and reread them. I mean stuff of the best-sellingest, Oprah-level cheesiness and la-la reputation was to be found in Wallace's library. Along with all the Wittgenstein, Husserl and Borges, he read John Bradshaw, Willard Beecher, Neil Fiore, Andrew Weil, M. Scott Peck and Alice Miller. Carefully.

> (ibid)

Lefebvre believed that "everyday life presents its own moments of critique" (Highmore 2002b: 129) by default, incorporating as it does all action and reaction, and that our attending to it reveals such inherent critiques. For example, Lefebvre argued that "capitalist modernity can be characterized by contradictory tendencies that increase homogeneity in everyday life […] at the same time as social differences are extended and deepened", and that "these forces are combined in an experience of fragmentation" (ibid: 119).

The fractured self is met with fragmented experience, then, and Wallace's characters often feel alienated as a result, forgoing the performance of their choices for the performance of a pre-set role. Wallace shows us the perils of this – the narcotizing effects of various characters' apparent commitment to something other than reality, a commitment that proves destructive and false. Such characters have failed to find a balance between self-consciousness and other-directedness, and suffer because of it. In exploring this predicament, Wallace presents the perils of an imbalance on both sides, of excessive selfishness *and* selflessness.

In Wallace's fiction, what often appears to be selflessness, that is commitment to something other than oneself, is shown to in fact serve no one. In other words, in Wallace's novels it is implied that by refusing to engage with the task of self-becoming, characters also refuse the awareness that connects them with the outer world. *The Broom of the System*'s John Beadsman is an exemplary character in this regard – he is said to be "so reluctant to be in any way involved with anything's death that he usually refused to eat, since every eating entails a death" (Wallace 1997b: 281). As well as being one of the throwaway gags Wallace was so fond of

inserting into his fiction,[18] John's dietary decision can be read as a portrayal of excessive selflessness, that is to say the character's refusal to become himself. John's moral stand is inherently contradictory, as even though every eating entails a death, the refusal to eat (if sustained for long enough) would certainly result in his death too. In the novel, however, rather than John's literal death, readers are confronted with another 'death' – that which comes with unawareness, as I outlined earlier in Chapter One. *The Broom of the System* follows John's sister Lenore Beadsman on her search for her Grandmother, who has disappeared along with several other residents of the nursing home where she lives. Matters swiftly become more complicated as she begins to suspect her father's complicity in the disappearance, and John is also reported missing. While Lenore is unaware of her brother's situation, Wallace provides his readers with this information: John has been hospitalised – a different kind of 'commitment' entirely to that involved in self-becoming – after an emotional breakdown in a taxi, and now appears to be suffering from elaborate delusions that he is a contestant on a gameshow. John "refers to himself only as "The Contestant" […] refuses to speak unless [he] believes [he is] being filmed, recorded; [and] refuses to acknowledge questions posed by any but those representing [them]selves as "game-show" personnel" (ibid: 198).

By centring John's delusion on the performance situation of a gameshow, and implicating not just John but his interlocutors in the façade, Wallace implies an antonymous relationship between performance and reality. I will explore this conception of performance as presented in Wallace's novels more in Chapter Three,

---

[18] "I have a grossly sentimental affection for gags, for stuff that's nothing but funny, and which I sometimes stick in for no other reason that it's funniness." (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 24)

but here it is useful to note that Wallace makes a distinction between the performance of choices, and another conception of performance as analogous with falsity. Wallace emphasises this latter view, and John's estrangement from reality, in how he provides us with the information about John's breakdown. We first learn about John's disappearance from a conversation between his father and Lenore, and the scene of his breakdown in the taxi is represented by dialogue between the taxi driver and members of the public, with John remaining voiceless. Finally, the information about his delusion is presented as an "EXCERPT FROM DUTY LOG OF DR. DANIEL JOY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES, CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH" (ibid: 197). Wallace thus suggests that John's performance is keeping him from building a self, and that it is alienating him from himself. Further to this, it is implied in the 'DUTY LOG' that John's delusion may be the result of his malnutrition, and an interesting parallel relating to the self emerges here if one reads John's refusal to eat as representative of a broader denial of need. In *Infinite Jest*, Hal recognises his loneliness for the "hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need" (Wallace 1997a: 695). It is the weak, internal self that expresses need, and understood in this way, John's refusal to eat is also a refusal to acknowledge the self.

Both John and Hal try to deny their need for a self by embracing distraction, the former in his gameshow delusion, the latter, having "snap[ped] to the fact that the great transcendent horror is […] excluded encagement in the self" (ibid: 694), fleeing into the welcoming arms of addiction and anhedonia. Hal "despises" (ibid: 695) the self that he is lonely for, and embodies Kierkegaard's description of "despair at not willing to be oneself":

> Just as a father disinherits a son, so the self is not willing to recognize itself
>
> after it has been so weak. In its despair it cannot forget this weakness, it hates
>
> itself in a way, it will not humble itself in faith under its weakness in order to
>
> gain itself again; no, in its despair it will not hear of itself, so to speak, will not
>
> know anything about itself.

> (1968: 196)

The weakness Kierkegaard refers to here is that of a person despairing over "earthly" things rather than over the "eternal", but the analogous weakness in John's case is a conflation of representation and reality – he has turned away from the self, and refuses to turn back.

Various characters are shown to similarly confuse representation and reality throughout Wallace's fiction. In a scene midway through *Infinite Jest*, Hugh Steeply tells the story of his father's "attachment to the program *M*A*S*H*", and his "gradual […] withdrawal from life" (Wallace 1997a: 640) because of it. The obsession advanced slowly, until Steeply's father began staying up through the night to watch episodes of *M*A*S*H*, and "was no longer able to converse or communicate on any topic without bringing it back to the program" (ibid: 642), taking copious notes and writing complex theories on the show's themes, writing letters to fictional characters from the show, and eventually refusing to leave his chair "even to go to the bathroom" (ibid: 645) as he was so engrossed in his viewing. Steeply's father's relationship with *M*A*S*H* is one based in a hyperreality – a term coined by Jean Baudrililard (1994) in *Simulacra and Simulation* to refer to "the generation by models of a real without origin or

reality" (1).[19] Steeply's father has made real the unreal situations of *M*A*S*H*, his letters to fictional characters garnering real responses from disgruntled military personnel, echoing Baudrillard's claim that the hyperreality of television means that "there is no longer a medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffused and refracted in the real" (ibid: 30).

This phenomenon of hyperreality is linked to the self in *Infinite Jest*, when Wallace references the same Borges short story that Baudrillard does at the beginning of *Simulacra and Simulation*.[20] In the story, "the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly" (ibid: 1). Wallace evokes this image when he outlines how, for people suffering from anhedonia, a kind of depression that precludes choice (and thus self-becoming) in its preclusion of feeling, "the world becomes a map of the world" (Wallace 1997a: 693). This is the exact metaphor Baudrillard uses to describe hyperreality – "the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. The map precedes the territory" (1994: 1) – and to read Wallace alongside Baudrillard here affirms that a conflation of reality and representation affects not just the self, but the world around it.

In the case of Steeply's father, the diffusion and diffraction of television in the real affects his family, and is in fact visible only to them, since for him *M*A*S*H* also constitutes reality. Steeply's father fails to see the damaging effects his actions have on the rest of his family, and, like John in *The Broom of the System*, shows that even a commitment apparently to something other than oneself can be entirely selfish. As

---

[19] It is worth noting a link between Baudrillard and Lefebvre here, given that Baudrillard completed his thesis under "the doctoral dissertation committee [of] Pierre Bordieu, Roland Barthes, and Henri Lefebvre" (Fleming and Sturm 2011: 1).

[20] For more on Wallace and Baudrillard, see Quinn (2014).

Dulk (2014b) points out, herein lies the "reason that the novels of Wallace […] and the philosophy of Kierkegaard differ […] when it comes to the importance of the other [… as] Kierkegaard regards self-becoming as an inner process, before God" (235), whereas Wallace consistently reminds readers of the importance of the other to this process. That "choice presupposes attention […and] attention can thus be seen as the effort or energy underlying choice and commitment" (ibid: 241) implicitly depends upon something existing outside the self to attend to. For Dulk, "this ability to attend to others [is] the starting point of the realization of the importance of community" (ibid: 242) in Wallace's fiction.

It is noteworthy that Wallace often articulates these issues of the self in relation to others in situations linked to performance, implying as they do the presence of an audience. In *Infinite Jest*, James Incandenza's father bemoans his wife's lack of consideration for other people's bodies, claiming that "she treats bodies outside herself without respect or due care", and then, unexpectedly, declares that "it's Marlon Brando's fault" (Wallace 1997a: 157). Seeing Brando "slouching against everything in sight, trying to *dominate* objects" during his performances has, Incandenza's father claims, "ruined it looks like two whole generations' relations with their own bodies and the everyday objects around them" (ibid: 157). This subconscious adoption of a role is an aesthetic distraction from the performance of the self, and yet, paradoxically, in its unconsidered enactment it serves only the self – Incandenza's mother "never learned that treating things in the gentlest most relaxed way is also treating them and your own body in the most efficient way" (ibid: 157), and so saw no issue with her Brando-esque bearing.

Incandenza's father's assertion here is that self-awareness doesn't have to be selfish. As such, Smith's (2009) suggestion that Wallace's "particular creed is [that…] awareness must move always in an outward direction, away from the self", and that "self-awareness and self-investigation are to be treated with suspicion, even horror" (Smith 2009: 268), fails to consider the importance Wallace places on balance. In one section of *Infinite Jest*, Hal Incandenza begins pondering why he is lonely, linking it to the fact that "the lively arts of the millennial U.S.A. treat anhedonia and internal emptiness as hip and cool" (Wallace 1997a: 694). As mentioned earlier, this causes Hal to "despise what it is he's really lonely for: this hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need" (ibid: 695), and he fears that "what passes for hip cynical transcendence of sentiment is really some kind of fear of being really human" (ibid: 694-5). Clearly, for Wallace, disregarding the self entirely is a horror of its own.

The difficulty in "becoming ourselves" lies not in becoming entirely selfless, then, but in "distinguishing what is in essence good self-consciousness from what Wallace called elsewhere "toxic, paralyzing, raped-by-psychic-Bedouins self-consciousness"" (Durantaye 2014: 25). This latter kind of self-consciousness is demonstrated effectually and complexly throughout Wallace's fiction, not just in his characters, but in his own persona too. Even in the apparently belletristic pieces of Wallace's oeuvre, recursive short fiction such as "Octet" from *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, the impression that for him "writing is a means of overcoming loneliness and the crippling effects of radical individualism/atomism" (Konstantinou 2012: 105) remains a palpable presence. "Octet", a series of "pop quizzes" concerning highly specific contemporary moral conundrums, eventually degenerates into a recounting of the author's intentions in writing the 'quizzes', and his fear of looking

"like just another manipulative pseudopomo Bullshit Artist who's trying to salvage a

fiasco by dropping back to a metadimension and commenting on the fiasco itself"

(Wallace 2001: 135).

The absurd escalation of self-awareness comes to a climax with a statement

of apparent sincerity, which recasts the rest of the piece, as the writer addresses both

the reader, in the context of the "pop quiz", and himself, in the context of the 'story'

as a whole, to sum up how a piece as convoluted and recursive as "Octet" is likely to

come across:

> [I]t's going to make you look fundamentally lost and confused and frightened
> and unsure about whether to trust even your must fundamental intuitions
> about urgency and sameness and whether other people deep inside
> experience things in anything like the same way you do…

(ibid: 136)

Holland (2013a) highlights how Wallace here creates "the feeling of reality not by

allowing the reader to absorb herself into another world through the illusion of

verisimilitude, but by creating a world so obviously false, constructed, written" (122)

that the reader cannot help but recognise the author's presence, and as such must

engage with that reality, and by extension with that person. Wallace forces

awareness on the reader, but as earlier demonstrated, for Wallace awareness must

always be followed by choice for it to be effective. "Octet" deals with this simply and

effectively, ending as it does with a two word imploration: "So decide" (Wallace 2001:

136).

<u>Boredom</u>

As I earlier outlined, the difficulty of enacting choice does not escape Wallace, and he admits that the kind of awareness and considered thought required to do so "is hard, it takes will and mental effort, and […] some days you won't be able to do it, or else you just flat-out won't want to" (Wallace 2009: 88). One reason for this is that the "automatic, unconscious" (ibid: 83) way of viewing the world with oneself at the centre of it does not like to contend with boredom. Highmore (2002b) highlights how Lefebvre's stance on the everyday places him in a "utopian tradition", where "the goal of transformation must be the overcoming and obliteration of the everydayness of everyday life", to be replaced with "a social life stripped of boredom and routine" (144). Wallace's belief, however, is that boredom must be endured to pay proper attention to and begin to restructure our view of reality. As Dulk (2014a) puts it, "by enduring boredom, we resist fleeing in aesthetic distraction and, instead, *choose* to attend to something" (58; my emphasis). Rather than stripping the world of boredom, Wallace hopes to redefine it as a precursor to proper attention. Indeed, in *This Is Water*, Wallace claims that if you have

> really learned […] how to pay attention […] it will actually be within your power to experience a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell-type situation[21] as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the same force that lit the stars – compassion, love, the subsurface unity of all things.

> (Wallace 2009: 93)

---

[21] Durantaye (2014) describes this as Wallace's analogue for "what more peremptory essayists such as Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin respectively called the "society of the spectacle" and "the destruction of experience"" (25).

Both the Situationists and Wallace promote finely-tuned and decisive awareness as the means by which the individual can break out of the non-conscious realm of the everyday, but whereas the former advocated performed action to negate boredom in the experience of the everyday, Wallace's novels, particularly *The Pale King*, present a contrasting view. In §19 of *The Pale King*, an unnamed speaker links the proliferation of the "rule of image" to people's desire to be distracted from their mortality – "they're small and going to die, after all" (Wallace 2012: 151) – and as such recalls the assertions another character makes earlier in the novel. David Wallace, the narrator of several sections throughout *The Pale King* who shares his name with both the novel's author and another character for whom he is mistaken by an IRS employee, posits in §9 that "maybe dullness is associated with psychic pain because something that's dull or opaque fails to provide enough stimulation to distract people from some other, deeper type of pain that's always there" (ibid: 87).

As such, a system that helps to "distract ourselves from feeling" this "ambient low-level" (ibid: 87) pain is bound to succeed, and has indeed been co-opted by corporations expertly in the installation of "actual TV in waiting rooms, supermarkets' checkouts, airports' gates, SUVs' backseats. Walkmen, iPods, BlackBerries, cellphones that attach to your head" (ibid: 87). "This terror of silence with nothing diverting to do" (ibid: 87) promotes a culture of distraction, a 'rule of image', a 'society of the spectacle' in everyday life, where the only choices we are encouraged to make are between products. In this way, we see how "Wallace is exploring boredom as a historical construction specific to our times" (Clare 2014: 192), and as

inextricably linked to our desire to avoid it.[22] To the Situationists' claim that "boredom is counterrevolutionary [in] every way" (Situationist International 1981: 87), Wallace appears to suggest that, since the proliferation of 'the society of the spectacle' depends upon the boredom of its citizens, enduring boredom has become a revolutionary act.

This conception of boredom has a long history itself, and film theorist, cultural critic and sociologist Siegfried Kracauer, in a 1924 essay entitled "Boredom", "can be seen to anticipate his more extensive analyses of modern everyday life as a culture of distraction" (Highmore 2002b: 301). For Kracauer, whose essay focusses on the everyday experience of this condition, "the failure to be bored in such a culture marks the success of distraction" (ibid: 301), a view we can also infer Wallace held from his reference in *The Pale King* that I quoted above to the myriad distracting gadgets available to consumers. Kracauer writes:

> People today who still have time for boredom and yet are not bored are certainly just as boring as those who never get around to being bored. For their self has vanished – the self whose presence, particularly in this so bustling world, would necessarily compel them to tarry for a while without a goal, neither here nor there.

> (2002: 302)

Kracauer here explicitly suggests that boredom, "an unfulfillment from which a fullness could sprout" (ibid: 302), is a necessity for recognition and construction of the self. Both Wallace and Kracauer maintain a belief in the redemptive power of boredom in one's life, and their writings correspond strikingly on the matter – not

---

[22] For more on this and the "Politics of Boredom" in *The Pale King* see Clare (2014).

just in the conspicuous absence of elucidation on how they believe this transformation would exactly work.

Kracauer claims that "if one has the patience, the sort of patience specific to legitimate boredom, then one experiences a kind of bliss that is almost unearthly" (ibid: 302). Compare this to Wallace's notes on *The Pale King*, in relation to the character of Shane Drinon, who begins to "levitat[e] slightly […] when he is completely immersed" (Wallace 2012: 487) in a task, so total is his focus: "Drinion is *happy*. Ability to pay attention. It turns out that bliss – a second-by-second joy + gratitude at the gift of being alive, conscious – lies on the other side of crushing, crushing boredom" (ibid: 548). For Kracauer, upon reaching the other side of boredom, "a landscape appears in which colourful peacocks strut about, and images of people suffused with soul come into view" (Kracauer 2002: 304), and for Wallace "it's like stepping from black and white into color. Like water after days in the desert" (Wallace 2012: 548).

Bennett (2014) suggests that Wallace's conception of boredom in *The Pale King* "promises the potential of a kind of self-overcoming, a state of quasi-spiritual self-denial" (83), but once again, as with Smith's (2009) claim that for Wallace "awareness must move always in an outward direction" (268), this reading does not consider the importance of balance. Rather than overcoming the self, Wallace instead directs readers to form (or reform) it. It is not the case in Wallace's fiction that, as Bennett claims, she "who passes through such boredom will enter a state in which she will abandon herself, give up her will, forsake her endless, fruitless, intransigent desire for fulfilment" (2014: 83), but that one will recognise the formerly

boring as itself potentially fulfilling. Drinion is "happy", his self found and fulfilled in his ability to pay attention. Thus when readers are told that, for the IRS officers of *The Pale King*, "routine, repetition, tedium, monotony, ephemeracy, inconsequence, abstraction, disorder, boredom, angst, ennui – these are the true hero's enemies, and make no mistake, they are fearsome indeed" (ibid: 233), we are to understand that the "true hero" can and should turn these enemies' strength against them. For Wallace, one must find a way to "deal with boredom", a key which unlocks detail, the world, and its contexts. Alongside the endurance of boredom and enactment of choice, however, Wallace's novels also suggest that in forming the uncertain self, performance plays a vital role.

Chapter Three – Performing the Self

Deception and Expression

In his suggestion that the self must be constructed through the choices we make, Wallace directs our attention to the world, and implies that we must decide how to present ourselves in it. In doing so, Wallace parallels the claims and concerns of another theorist of the everyday, Erving Goffman. In his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1971) posits that the "self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses" (244). Goffman is interested primarily in face-to-face interaction, and so stresses the importance of an "audience, whose interpretative activity will be necessary for this emergence" (ibid: 245) of self. Chapter Four will address the complex depiction of audiences in Wallace's novels, but this chapter will first examine examples from his fiction alongside Goffman's study of "how we arrange for […] performances [of the self] in our Anglo-American society" (ibid: 244). As I will go on to argue, Wallace often explores ideas of the self in situations related to performance, and Goffman's study similarly uses the language of theatre[23] to articulate "the way in which the individual […] presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them" (ibid: 9). Further to this, I will

---

[23] "In developing the conceptual framework employed in" *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1971) uses what he calls "some language of the stage", writing of "performers and audiences; of routines and parts; of performances coming off or falling flat; of cues, stage settings and backstage; of dramaturgical needs, dramaturgical skills, and dramaturgical strategies" (246).

outline how, through repeated references to masks and rituals, Wallace's novels directly link performance to notions of selfhood.

As outlined in Chapters One and Two, Wallace often highlights the everyday as a site of performance. This view is reinforced in a section of *Infinite Jest* describing a "fundraising exhibition and gala" at Enfield Tennis Academy (E.T.A.). The gala is said to be an

> unusual occasion for the guests [...] because for the first few hours they're there to watch [students] play – they're all audience – then at some point with the last couple matches winding down the guys in white jackets with trays start appearing [...] and the gala starts, and then it's the guests who become the participants and performers.
>
> (Wallace 1997a: 964)

By comparing the gala's performers directly with the Academy's tennis players, Wallace implies that there may be a competitive edge to these social proceedings, and that there are different levels of competence and skill when it comes to presenting a performance of the self. A similar parallel between games and performance in everyday life is identifiable in Goffman's work: Gouldner (1971) claims that "it is not morality as a deeply internalized feeling of duty or obligation that holds things together, in Goffman's view, but rather as conventional rules required to sustain interaction and treated much as men do the rules of a game" (383). Both Wallace and Goffman present a view of contemporary American life as being beholden to performance, a view Wallace also expressed outside of his fiction.

In an interview with Russian journalist Ostap Karmodi, Wallace characterises Americans as being "very, very cynical", in part due to the influence of television, and

explicitly links performance and tactical play when he claims that "everyone has seen so many performances, that American viewers and American readers, we simply assume now that everything is a performance and it's strategic and it's tactical" (Wallace in Karmodi 2011). This is the world of Wallace's writing, where "the ubiquity of television [meets] the voraciousness of late capitalism" (Smith 2009: 268), and social interactions are seen as nothing more than "presentations by someone who's trying to get something" (Wallace in Karmodi 2011).

Wallace here portrays performance as an essential element of everyday life, the means (imagined or not) by which a prevalent mistrust in others gestates, and performance is frequently equated with falsity across his novels. One example of this tendency is found in the character of Hugh Steeply in *Infinite Jest*, a spy for the fictitious United States Office of Unspecified Services (U.S.O.U.S.).[24] The U.S.O.U.S. is known for its "assignments of fictional personae for its field-operatives" (ibid: 419), with Hugh Steeply either preparing or enacting his undercover identity as a female journalist, Helen Steeply, throughout the novel. The centrality of performance to Steeply's espionage creates a direct link between performance and uncertainty, even mistrust.

Elsewhere in *Infinite Jest*, when a "painfully new" attendee at a Boston Alcoholics Anonymous meeting gets up to speak in front of the crowd, the fact that the audience can tell "he's performing" immediately impacts on his reception, with even his introduction being "so clearly unspontaneous [and] rehearsed" as to make

---

[24] The U.S. Government's primary security agency in *Infinite Jest*, established by President Johnny Gentle, the U.S. Office of Unspecified Services replaced the "National Security Agency, [and] absorbed [...] A.T.F. and D.E.A., C.I.A. and O.N.R. and Secret Service into [its] ambit" (Wallace 1997a: 1037).

"people shift in their seats with a slight but signal discomfort" (ibid: 367). A speaker's story "has to be the truth to really go over" at the meeting – "it can't be a calculated crowd-pleaser" (ibid: 369). The implication here is that performance does not align with truth, but is instead a technique of "sly disingenuous manipulative pseudo-sincerity" (ibid: 369) in the same vein as Steeply's undercover pretence. Those attendees "who are accustomed to figuring out what an audience wants to hear and then supplying it find out quickly that this particular audience does not want to be supplied with what someone else thinks it wants" (ibid: 367-8), a sentiment that characterises performance as a misleading tool. This is echoed in Wallace's later novel *The Pale King* by IRS worker Meredith Rand. Rand, a "totally, wrist-bitingly attractive" staffer in the IRS, is used to her male colleagues "performing for [her]" when socialising, "even if the performance's core consists of making a complex show of the fact that they are not performing for [her]" (Wallace 2012: 449). As with the Alcoholics Anonymous audience, however, Rand "has a very good subliminal antenna for this sort of thing", and is repelled by the inauthenticity of her colleagues – "she's allergic to performance" (ibid: 470).

This view of performance as consistently driven by hidden or ulterior motives, pervasive as it is amongst Wallace's characters, is not the only view offered to his readers, however. Wallace's texts in fact contain numerous examples of a reconsidered idea of performance as a tool for realisation of the self. By presenting an alternative model for thinking about performance, Wallace avoids what he called the "kind of black cynicism about today's world that […] certain [contemporary authors] depend on for their readership" (Wallace in McCaffery: 25-6). Wallace's comments in the Karmodi interview offer one view of the world, but as he outlines in

the McCaffery interview, his fiction attempts to offer an alternative to "a mean shallow stupid novel that becomes a mordant deadpan commentary on the badness of everything":

> In dark times, the definition of good art would seem to be art that locates and applies CPR to those elements of what's human and magical that still live and glow despite the times' darkness. Really good fiction could have as dark a worldview as it wished, but it'd find a way both to depict this world and to illuminate the possibilities for being alive and human in it.

(ibid: 26)

One way Wallace illuminates such possibilities is by presenting an alternative conception of performance that is linked to expression rather than deception. In particular, Wallace foregrounds his assertion that "you get to *decide* how you're going to try to see" a situation, and that "you get to consciously decide what has meaning and what doesn't" (Wallace 2009: 94-5). This is often linked to performance in his novels by way of 'rituals', as I will now go on to explain.

The first chapter of *The Broom of the System* outlines protagonist Lenore Beadsman's visit to Mount Holyoke College, where her sister Clarice's dorm "is giving a really big party […] with a bitching band called Spiro Agnew and the Armpits and dancing and men and beer with ID's" (Wallace 1997b: 9-10). Lenore, only fifteen years old at the time, is keen to attend the party, but Clarice tries to convince her otherwise, declaring how "it's clear awfully fast that the whole thing is really just nothing more than a depressing ritual, a rite that we're expected by God knows who to act out, over and over" (ibid: 11). Ritualization of the everyday, or framing everyday events as rituals as Clarice does here, is commonplace throughout Wallace's

novels. In *Infinite Jest*, the students' preparations for the "fundraising exhibition and gala" at E.T.A. are described as follows:

> Dressing and stretching, wrapping grips with Gauze-Tex or filling a pouch with fuller's earth […] or sawdust […], getting taped, those in puberty getting shaved and taped. A ritual. Even the conversation, usually, such as it is, has a timeless ceremonial aspect […] Across the wall on the Female side we could easily hear Thode and Donni Stott invoking Camilla, goddess of speed and light step.

> (Wallace 1997a: 964-5)

Rituals and the everyday have been a key focus of Performance Studies scholars since the discipline's inception, and one of its key texts proves useful here in delineating ritual, theatre, and everyday life in Wallace's novels. 'Ritual' acts such as those described in the passage above are not to be understood as performance in the same way as theatrical entertainment. As Schechner (2004) outlines, "context and function, and fundamental structure or process, distinguish ritual, entertainment, and ordinary life from each other" (152). Participation (or lack thereof) is key: "theater emerges from ritual out of a complex consisting of an audience *separate* from the performers" (ibid: 152). As such, the dressing room activities at E.T.A. could not be classified as theatre on Schechner's terms, and its "link to an absent Other" in which an "audience believes" rather than "appreciates" (ibid: 130) is especially characteristic of ritual.

In Wallace's fiction, identifying how such ritualizations are differentiated from everyday life also frames them as performances of the self. Primarily, Schechner suggests, "if the performance's purpose is to effect transformations – to be

efficacious – then […] the performance is a ritual" (ibid: 130). Wallace provides a

tongue-in-cheek reference to such a ritual 'transformation' in one section of *Infinite

Jest*, when in the run-up to an Independence Day event at E.T.A., several students are

said to have "made a little ritual of nipping out to the little hidden clearing behind

West House's parking lot's dumpsters and sharing an obscene cigar-sized [joint]"

(Wallace 1997a: 1018) before the event begins. Despite the fact that those E.T.A.

students involved in the joint-smoking 'ritual' are known to be regular drug-users,

and drug use is apparently rife within the academy (ibid: 67), this event gains its

status as ritual due to its repetition, even if it has only been performed "for the past

two years" (ibid: 1018). Ritualization such as this frames everyday actions for many

of Wallace's characters, bestowing overt significance on certain events, no matter

how commonplace they are.

Here we can identify another similar sentiment to that which Shechner puts

forward, that "the differences among [theatre and ritual] arise from [an] *agreement

(conscious or unexpressed)* between performers and spectators" (2004: 152;

emphasis mine) – in other words, from a choice. In fact, the "basic polarity is between

efficacy and entertainment, not between ritual and theater" (ibid: 130), and as such

it is implied that it is performers who decide where on the "continuum" (ibid: 130) of

efficacy and entertainment a performance lies. In *The Pale King*, Chris Fogle provides

an example of this when he outlines how he and a roommate "formulated a kind of

ritual" (Wallace 2012: 165) that involved watching a rotating sign opposite their

apartment, at the same time each night, to see which direction it would point when

it was turned off. If the sign "stopped with […] any significant part of it facing [their]

windows", Fogle and his roommate would "blow off" their college homework and

instead go out to a bar (ibid: 165). As with Wallace's view of the self, the aspect of

choice is central to this ritualization. The E.T.A. students impart extra significance to

their habit simply by choosing to repeat it in a certain way, and Chris Fogle's apparent

deferral of choice to the inanimate sign is itself only a result of an initial choice to

bestow the sign with decision-making abilities – to define the event as an efficacious

ritual. These everyday rituals thus function as the meeting point of many of the

themes I have explored so far – the *everyday* is ritualised by a matter of *choice*, and

thus *performed* as an expression of the *self*.

Presentation of Self

Whereas rituals do not generally distinguish between performers and

audience, Goffman is interested in the social impact of such a distinction. When an

"individual presents himself before others", Goffman (1971) suggests, it is "an

expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community" (45)

in which it occurs, and as such Goffman's sociological study is predicated on the

presence of an audience for the self to perform to. Goffman would as such be

sceptical of Clarice Beadsman's hesitance to allow her sister to attend the Mount

Holyoke party, as "to stay in one's room away from the place where the party is given

[is] to stay away from where reality is being performed" (ibid: 45). Examining this

performance of reality requires recognition of the myriad 'routines' individuals

present in different social situations, whether at work, in the home, at a social

gathering, and so on. As in Goffman's sociological study – which examines a broad

spectrum of situations, ranging from the effect of tourism on "the community life of

Shetland" (ibid: 30) to the everyday work environment of an office – performance pervades social interaction in Wallace's fiction.

One chapter of Goffman's book focusses on "The Arts of Impression Management", undeniably an obsessive part of everyday life for many of Wallace's characters. In one of the first sections of *Infinite Jest*, a character named Ken Erdedy is waiting for a woman, who "had promised to get him […] 200 grams of unusually good marijuana, for $1250 U.S" (Wallace 1997a: 18), to arrive at his house. Erdedy's status as an addict is quickly confirmed ("he had tried to stop smoking marijuana maybe 70 or 80 times before" (ibid: 18)), and readers are led through his cyclical thought process, caught as he is between his desperate need for the drugs, and his desire to not appear desperate. Erdedy "considered himself creepy when it came to dope, and he was afraid that others would see that he was creepy about it as well" (ibid: 18), and it is this fear of giving off the wrong impression that leads Erdedy to perform a role he knows to be false. As such, Erdedy resides at one "extreme" of the scale that Goffman lays out for "belief in the part one is playing", where "we find that the performer may not be taken in at all by his own routine" (1971: 28).

Erdedy is certainly aware of the disparity between his inner life and performed actions, and follows "several courses of action once he decide[s] to own marijuana one more last time" (Wallace 1997a: 18), including phoning his workplace to lie about being called away because of an emergency situation, and changing his answering machine message to refer to the made-up emergency, whilst cleaning his bedroom so he can remain in it for three days straight, shopping for junk food, renting films, and buying a new bong. All this takes place, as Goffman would put it,

"backstage", while Erdedy maintains that he is "very casual about the whole thing" to his dealer: "She said she knew a guy a just over the river in Allston who sold high-resin dope in moderate bulk, and he'd yawned and said well, maybe, well, hey, why not, sure, special occasion, I haven't bought any in I don't know how long" (ibid: 18).

Other characters like Erdedy who maintain a performance they know to be false, such as Lane Dean Jr. in *The Pale King*, suggest that there might be adverse effects to what Goffman labels "dramaturgical discipline", where an "actual affective response must be concealed and an appropriate affective response must be displayed" (Goffman 1971: 211). In §16 of *The Pale King*, Lane Dean Jr. is "still adjusting to the unbelievable tedium" (Wallace 2012: 125) of his new job as an IRS rote examiner, and stands outside his office building to get some air during his break. Readers are told that Lane "feels like running out into the fields in the heat and running in circles and flapping his arms" (ibid: 125). The presence of two other examiners talking on their breaks stops Lane from doing this, and readers encounter a 'textbook' example of "dramaturgical discipline", as Lane "suppress[es] his spontaneous feelings in order to give the appearance of sticking to the affective line, the expressive status quo, established by his team's performance" (Goffman 1971: 211). Wallace points readers towards the likely outcome of such posturing – one can easily infer the loneliness, stress, and discomfort both Erdedy and Lane Dean Jr. experience as a result of their disparity between self and presentation of self. Goffman articulates the discomfort felt by the likes of Erdedy and Lane Dean Jr. precisely when he claims that, "to the degree that the individual maintains a show before others that he himself does not believe, he can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self and a special kind of wariness of others" (ibid: 228).

I have already examined alienation from the self in Wallace's fiction, but the "wariness of others" that Goffman highlights here is also important to Wallace's diagnosis of the suffering self. In a draft of one section of *The Pale King*, published in an appendix to the 2012 Penguin reprint of the novel as one of "four previously unpublished scenes", an unnamed IRS staffer recalls an epiphany he experienced whilst returning home from a party:

> I was struck by the fact that I had met and conversed with at least a dozen new people at that party […] and had not one idea whether I'd liked any of them or not – I had been so preoccupied with whether or not *they* liked *me* that I hardly noticed them […]

(Wallace 2012: 552)

In Wallace's formulation, then, "wariness of others" is inextricably linked to "alienation from self", as an overplayed concern for how one comes across can trump the development of who one is.

Goffman cites an example of this quandary from Sartre, similar to the one Wallace gives of a party-goer, outlining how "the attentive pupil who wishes to *be* attentive […] so exhausts himself in playing the attentive role that he ends up by no longer hearing anything" (Sartre qtd. in Goffman 1971: 42). Sartre's relevance to Wallace's writing has been outlined by Dulk (2014b)[25], who claims that addicts in *Infinite Jest* such as Erdedy "employ [the Sartrean notion of] bad faith", a form of self-deceit representing a "flight from the tension of human existence", to "escape acknowledgement and responsibility for their actions" (52). Wallace's addicts deceive

---

[25] For more on Sartre and Wallace, see McGurl (2014) and Dulk (2014c).

themselves in two main ways: they either "deny that they are addicts", or regard their addiction "as something that is impossible to change" (ibid: 53). In both instances, a misleading performance is involved, though in denial "the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist" (Sartre 1993: 150) – a performer is also the audience to their self-deceit.

Erdedy's self-deceit, however, is dependent on his deceiving others. As Goffman outlines, "when an individual […] makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically […] oblige[s others] to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect", and as such "implicitly forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be" (1971: 24). In Lasch's (1991) study of narcissism in American culture,[26] Goffman is in fact praised for highlighting the implication of seeing others as one's own personal, judgemental audience, as "an important element in the contemporary malaise":

> A number of historical currents have converged in our time to produce not merely in artists but in ordinary men and women an escalating cycle of self-consciousness – a sense of the self as a performer under the constant scrutiny of friends and strangers.
>
> (90)

Lasch goes on to discuss some of the ways that environment can encourage such a view, pointing out that "all of us, actors and spectators alike, live surrounded by mirrors [in which] we seek reassurance of our capacity to captivate or impress

---

[26] A book that I pointed out Wallace owned on page 21.

others" (ibid: 92), an impulse Wallace also recognises in the same unpublished

scene from *The Pale King* quoted on page 69:

> [I] happened to look into the window of a bookstore to gauge the way I
> looked while walking – the way we all will look absently, mesmerized, into
> dozens of mirrors and opportune surfaces every day, both closely and
> absently, trying it seems to verify something that couldn't even be
> described.

(Wallace 2012: 552)

It would not be unreasonable to assume that the "something that couldn't even be

described" the character notes here is his sense of self, but trying to verify one's

inner self merely from exterior surfaces seems counter-intuitive. Likewise, to

attempt the task of self-becoming by committing to a life of appearances leads

Wallace's characters nowhere.

Gouldner (1971) claims that "in effect [… Goffman's] dramaturgical model

invites us to live *situationally*" (385; emphasis mine), and although this is meant to

identify Goffman's approach as an atomistic rather than holistic view of the world,

the comment gains a new relevance here. Raoul Vaneigem, prominent Situationist

and author of *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, diagnosed the inherent falsity of

performing roles when he claimed that said roles in fact "compensate for […] the lack

of life" (1983: 106).[27] Vaneigem's chapter on 'Roles' echoes Goffman's claim that "in

analysing the self […] we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will

profit or lose most by it" (1971: 245), to the external world. Vaneigem similarly

---

[27] Gardiner (2002) paraphrases this sentiment: "to dwell in the realm of appearances is the compensation offered by the spectacle to people for their dehumanization and loss of authenticity" (115).

outlines how one man may be compelled to play the parts of "driver, employee, superior, subordinate, colleague, customer, seducer, friend, philatelist, husband, paterfamilias, viewer, citizen" (1983: 101), and perhaps more, dependent entirely upon the individual circumstances of each interaction he has.

Vaneigem uses the term "identification" to describe how roles proliferate and are willingly taken up by people: it is a process that "feeds on authentically felt desires", and appropriates the human "desire to find the richest and truest part of ourselves in other people" (ibid: 104-5). As such, he argues, "the quest for identity degenerates into identification" (ibid: 105). Gardiner (2002) succinctly summarises Vaneigem's argument regarding roles when he writes that "society now consists of a number of fixed 'roles' that strictly regulate each person's horizon of activities, access to social networks, and 'appropriate' personality and behavioural dispositions" (115). In 'the society of the spectacle', then, roles keep citizens staring at the walls of Plato's cave, asking them to identify with shadows. The "lack of life" that Vaneigem laments is thus to be seen not only as a denial of self-expression, but also a rejection of the world.

As interested in and relevant to sociology as *The Revolution of Everyday Life* is, Vaneigem does not embark on an intricate study of *how* roles are performed in everyday life as Goffman does. Rather, Vaneigem's polemic directs anger at such differentiation, declaring roles to be "the bloodsuckers of the will to live", by virtue of being nothing more than "images of the dominant spectacle" (1983: 99). Performing said images as roles places one "in the *representational* hierarchy, and hence in the spectacle" (ibid: 100), and any "satisfaction derived from a well-played

role is in direct proportion to [one's] distance from [one]self" (ibid: 101). Goffman, Vaneigem, and Wallace all concur that roles provide distancing from the self, and this idea is most concisely portrayed by Wallace in the opening story of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. The story, which bears the academic-sounding title "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life", could in fact be a radically condensed version of Goffman's study, interested as it is in performance and interaction. The story consists of only two paragraphs:

> When they were introduced, he made a witticism, hoping to be liked. She laughed extremely hard, hoping to be liked. Then each drove home alone, staring straight ahead, with the very same twist to their faces.
>
> The man who'd introduced them didn't much like either of them, though he acted as if he did, anxious as he was to preserve good relations at all times. One never knew, after all, now did one now did one now did one.
>
> (Wallace 2001: 0)

That the page this story is printed on is numbered as "0" implies that these characters are in fact empty, two of the "citizen[s] of nothing" (Wallace 1997a: 108) that Marathe labels contemporary Americans in *Infinite Jest*. The focus on each character's desire "to be liked" foregrounds the social dimension of self, and echoes Goffman's assertion that people "merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time" (1971: 245). Holland (2013a) suggests, however, that the twisted faces of the man and woman as they drive home separately in the first paragraph "suggest not only the problem of ubiquitous masks in postindustrial social interactions and thus the constant question of sincerity in such

a culture, but also the faith that something true remains beneath the façade to be discovered through empathy" (112).

"Hell of a lot of masks, here"

The "problem of ubiquitous masks" that Holland highlights is a recurrent theme throughout Wallace's oeuvre, but is explored literally, and most comprehensively, in *The Broom of the System* and *Infinite Jest*. In the latter novel, a section describes the rise and fall of "videophony", this being "the idea of phone-interfacing both aurally and facially" (Wallace 1997a: 144), Wallace's prescient representation of video-calling technologies such as Skype and FaceTime. In the novel, most users of the service, "image-conscious" and unused to the innovative phenomenon of video-calling, are "horrified at how their own faces appear on a […] screen" (ibid: 147). Most videophone users who respond to a survey about the service describe their own faces as "evasive, furtive, untrustworthy, [and] unlikable", with "a phenomenally ominous 71% of senior-citizen respondents specifically comparing their video-faces to that of Richard Nixon during the Nixon-Kennedy debates of 1960" (ibid: 147). This description is reminiscent of a comment made in Wallace's short story *Lyndon*, during which the narrator very briefly describes seeing Richard Nixon in an office, claiming that he "looked like a Nixon mask" (Wallace 1997c: 91). The users of videophonic calling also end up looking 'like' themselves, although not due to the widespread broadcasting and subsequent appropriation of their faces. Rather, in a farcical run of entrepreneurial advances, increasingly-absurd products become available in "response to the vanity, -stress,-and-Nixonian-facial-image problem" (Wallace 1997a: 148).

Each videophone user eventually begins to wear a mask of their own face whenever they take or make a video-call, a product which "tak[es] the most flattering elements of a variety of flattering multi-angle photos of a given phone-consumer[28] and […] cas[ts] the enhanced facial image in a form-fitting polybutylene-resin mask" (ibid: 148). The next stage in videophony's rapidly-developing chronology occurs when consumers start "outright demanding videophone masks that [a]re really quite a lot better-looking than they themselves [a]re in person" (ibid: 148). This demand is said to result from "consumers' *instinctively* skewed self-perception" (ibid: 148; emphasis mine), but given that these people are by now already using flattering masks, their self-perception has arguably become *increasingly* skewed as a result.

Videophony is not a hermetically-sealed phenomenon – rather its effects diffuse into other aspects of the everyday lives of phone-consumers. The technology changes consumers' behaviour, as "large numbers of" videophone-users become "suddenly reluctant to leave home and interface personally with people who, they fea[r are] now habituated to seeing their far-better-looking masked selves on the phone" (ibid: 149). Indeed, Wallace ruminates on the possibility of such effects in his essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction", when he claims that "how human beings who absorb […] high doses [of screen media] understand themselves will naturally change, [and] become vastly more spectatorial, self-conscious" (Wallace 1990: 34). Indeed, there is an uncannily prophetic nature to Wallace's claims here; the idea pre-empts Hayles' (2012) assertion that "our interactions with digital media are embodied, and they have bodily effects at the physical level" (3). Various

---

[28] Users of videophonic technology are referred to exclusively as "consumers" throughout this section of the novel, in a gesture towards the commodification of communication under the 'rule of image'.

media outlets have run features on videophony to claim that Wallace "predicted" the phenomena of video calling and selfies,[29] but more than this, the fact that Wallace's videophone users are reluctant to leave home forewarns against overdependence. Over fifteen years after *Infinite Jest*'s publication, the fact that "such feelings" of disorientation without technology "are widespread, constitute[s] nothing less than a change in worldview" (ibid: 2), one that Wallace apparently foresaw.

In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace takes this change in worldview to its comic extreme: the 'rule of image' advances as consumers begin demanding "full-body polybutylene and –urethane 2-D cutouts" (Wallace 1997a: 149) of themselves, and any semblance of bodily autonomy finally fades completely when the "Transmittable Tableau (a.k.a. TT)" is introduced:

> [A] video-transmitted image of what [i]s essentially a heavily-doctored still-photograph, one of an incredibly fit and attractive and well-turned-out human being […] simply high-quality transmission-ready photographs, scaled down to diorama-like proportions and fitted with a plastic holder over the videophone camera, not unlike a lens-cap.

(ibid: 149)

By likening the transmitted images to a lens-cap, the narrator here implies a lack of vision, a switching off both visually and attentively. Videophone callers are said to struggle with having to pay complete attention to the person they are speaking with – "the whole attention business was monstrously stressful, video callers found" (ibid: 147) – and the lens-cap comparison implies that in this way their view of the world is reduced. Further to this, "scaled down to diorama-like proportions" (ibid: 149),

---

[29] See Frucci (2010) and Wiener-Bonner (2014) for more.

phone-consumers have reduced themselves too. Wallace here presents one fictional consequence of the narcissism inherent to late twentieth-century American culture: a simulacra of the body, a version of one's physical self that has no original, but is instead born solely of vanity. The "full-body polybutylene and –ureathane 2-D cutouts" (ibid: 149) that Wallace imagines are incarnations of Baudrillard's (1998) claim that the body "is no longer 'flesh' as in the religious conception, or labour power as in industrial logic, but is taken up again in its materiality (or its 'visible' identity) as narcissistic cult object or element of social ritual and tactics" (132). The masks and body cut-outs of videophony thus become supplementary tools to the tactical play of Goffman's "Art of Impression Management".

In the appositely-titled *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*, Emigh (1996) describes how, "[f]requently used as a symbol for theatre, the mask calls attention to the often ambiguous play between self and other involved in [performance]" (xviii). Emigh outlines his view of the symbolism of masked performance itself:

> The unworn mask begins as something clearly set apart: an inert and disembodied other. […] For the actor, the otherness of the mask becomes both the obstacle and the goal. He or she must redefine the sense of self in order to wear the other's face and be true to it in spirit, thought, and action.
>
> (ibid: xviii)

By understanding the unworn mask as "an inert and disembodied other", the masks of *Infinite Jest*'s videophone-users become further symbols of alienation from the self. Given that the phone-consumers' masks (and tableaux) are representations of and stand-ins for the phone-consumers themselves, it is each phone-consumer's *self*

that reflects "the otherness of the mask [and] becomes both the obstacle and the goal". Indeed, Wallace outlines a version of this formulation himself in his essay on Kafka, trying to explain how to teach the iconic writer's stories to young students:

> You can ask them to imagine [Kafka's stories are] all about a kind of door. To envision us 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.
>
> (Wallace 1999b: 65)

The Broom of the System also involves characters wearing masks of their own faces. In a scene comprising a form of therapy called Family Theater, a phrase which "Wallace considered […] as a possible title for [the novel]" (Burn 2012: 20), Lenore Beadsman visits her sister Clarice, who is about to begin the therapy with her husband Alvin, and their oddly-named children Stonecipher and Spatula. As Family Theater begins, each family member is given a mask – "[t]here was a Clarice-mask for Clarice, an Alvin-mask for Alvin, a Stonecipher-mask for Stonecipher, a Spatula-mask for Spatula" (Wallace 1997b: 165-6). What follows is an absurd, heavily symbolic, and not-particularly-subtle series of monologues and movements (apparently one of several scripts written and choreographed by the family with their therapist), all performed to a pre-recorded DVD of an audience and "life-size cardboard cut-outs of [the family] positioned on either side of the television" (ibid: 170).

When the "audience-disc was inserted", readers are told, "there appeared [on the screen] a view, as that from a stage, of rows of theatre seats, being filled by

people dressed to the nines, with programs" (Wallace 1997b: 166). The "television

audience" (ibid: 173) of Family Theater is a tool for the Beadsman family to use, a

means to an end, and as such they have removed any obligation they might feel to a

live audience by pre-recording them, and mediating their 'presence' through a

screen. When things go wrong in Family Theater, the Beadsman family need not

worry – when she realises she is behind schedule, Clarice just "reinsert[s] the disc

and [gets] an earlier point, in which the theatre seats were just filling up" (ibid:

166); when her son falls over "the audience [is] put in a FREEZE mode, and finally

unfrozen, and things [get] back underway" (ibid: 171).

The aim of Family Theater is to coach the Beadsmans to reduce each family

member's tendency to allow their "sense of self and rightness-with-themselves-as-

people depend on things outside them" (ibid: 170). As such, removing a live

audience that the performers/family members may feel compelled to impress

initially appears to make sense in terms of the therapy's aim. Yet if this is the case,

to have the audience-disc playing at all seems contradictory, especially when each

time the family completes this particular script "the audience [rises] as one" (ibid:

177) on the television screen. Clarice's family delude themselves by clinging to the

enthusiastic reception of an audience for validation, without having to work for said

enthusiasm – the on-screen audience would still stand and cheer even if the

performance had not happened.

The Beadsman family's uncertainty about themselves is further highlighted by

their use of numerous masks, and Family Theater is best summed up by Lenore's

reaction as she sits and watches: "hell of a lot of masks, here" (ibid: 170). The explicit

links that Wallace makes between performance and identity in this scene are worth noting here, as the performed therapy is supposedly "directed toward helping family-members grow and see themselves clearly as both selves and members, and so come to a fuller and happier sense of self" (ibid: 172). In other words, the "often ambiguous play between self and other" that Emigh outlines as characteristic of masked performance is supposed to lead these family-members to "redefine the[ir] sense of self" (1996: xviii).

Wallace gestures towards the myriad separate roles required of people in contemporary society, as well as their potentially lifeless homogeneity, when Clarice's family each put on, over the masks of themselves, "red masks that ha[ve] just generic features and the words FAMILY-MEMBER stamped in white across the forehead" (Wallace 1997b: 167). Wallace acknowledges the difficulty of juggling different roles, and of consolidating their existence with the idea of one 'true' self, when he describes these red masks as "cumbersome, given the presence of the original masks, too" (ibid: 167). As Family Theater goes on, more masks appear – "plain white featureless masks with red cracks down the middle, and very tiny holes for breathing [… and] extremely tiny but still accurate Clarice-, Alvin-, Stoney-, and Spatula-masks […] affixed to [personalised] objects" (ibid: 169-170). Whether Family Theater is a successful form of therapy is left unclear but, as Grassian (2003) points out, the characters do not talk "during or after the 'therapy'. Rather, [it] seems pointless, full of empty television-like clichés" (82). Clichés often hide further complexity in Wallace's fiction and have a "life-or-death importance" (Wallace 2009: 9) in everyday life, however, and as such it would be unwise to disregard Family Theater simply because of their presence.

Indeed, in a section of *Infinite Jest* outlining how, if "you ever chance to spend a little time around a Substance-recovery halfway facility like Enfield MA's state-funded Ennet House, you will acquire many exotic new facts", the narrator declares that one such fact is "that the cliché 'I don't know who I am' unfortunately turns out to be more than a cliché" (Wallace 1997a: 204). As such, when Clarice's family eventually narrates the ending of their performance, declaring that "they found out that what they needed to get their feelings of being themselves from was *themselves*" (Wallace 1997b: 173) rather than from being the members of a family or from material possessions, readers are confronted with a poignant image that risks being overlooked due to what Grassian refers to as the "banal wording [… of a] wishy-washy" (2003: 82) message.

The final image of Family Theater consists of "Alvin, Clarice, Stoney, and Spatula [taking] off their […] masks, and star[ing] deeply into the empty eye-holes of their own faces" (Wallace 1997b: 173). Although earlier in the therapy, the Family Theater script outlines how "in making their own sense of self and rightness-with-themselves-as-people depend on things outside them, the family-members were letting themselves in for riskiness and trouble" (ibid: 170), the prospect of finding comfort from themselves alone seems equally difficult, and the "*empty* eye-holes" of the family-members' masks call into question the assertion of Holland's that I quoted on page 74, that "something true remains beneath the façade to be discovered through empathy" (2013a: 112). Indeed, this assertion is also problematized in a section of *Infinite Jest* during which an Alcoholics Anonymous member gives a speech whilst the narrator interjects with descriptions of descent into addiction. As you reach the apotheosis of addiction to a given substance, the narrator claims, "the last layer

of jolly friendly mask comes off the Substance [you are addicted to...] and you all of a sudden see the Substance as it really is, for the first time you see the Disease as it really is" (Wallace 1997a: 347). The narrator goes on to describe the moment "this Substance [...] has finally removed its smiley-face mask to reveal centreless eyes and a ravening maw, and canines down to here, [... and reveals it's] the grinning root-white face of your worst nightmares, and the face is your own face in the mirror, now, it's you" (ibid: 347).

Initially it appears here as if Wallace is implying that addiction to a Substance steals and subsumes the self, and in *Infinite Jest* former addict Don Gatley is only described "in his process of recovery as 'returned to himself'" (Dulk 2014a: 46). Rather than simply stealing the self, however, readers are told that during addiction "the Substance has devoured or replaced and *become* you" (Wallace 1997a: 347), and as such, Dulk claims, in *Infinite Jest* addiction "is a metaphor for not taking up responsibility for one's life" (2014a: 46) – instead of focussing on the task of self-becoming, the Substance does enough 'becoming' for the both of you. That "substances start out being [...] so much the interior jigsaw's missing piece" (Wallace 1997a: 350), though, suggests that being "returned" to oneself is conversely not about completion – rather that the "something true" beneath the mask may well be an *absence* that one must finally face, rather than attempt to fill. Throughout Wallace's novels, then, masks are primarily used in descriptions denoting the hiding of something, rather than as tools of representation – they are used in performances simply of surface, rather than as means to communicate inner life. As such, we can infer that the performances of everyday life in Wallace's fiction give no indication of the "true [thing ...] beneath the façade" (Holland 2013a: 112) that Holland maintains

Wallace gestures towards in "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life". In the absence of a "true" self in Wallace's characters, we can take it that the "true" thing beneath this social "façade" is an implicit, but missed, opportunity for 'true' connection.

Whatever the mask hides, however, Wallace's fiction does not always tend towards defeatism. Rather, concerning roles and surfaces, his novels carry a message similar to the hopeful note put forward in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*:

> [A] man cannot be entirely reduced to the idiotic machine, the lethargic puppet, that [the adoption of roles] implies. For brief moments his daily life must generate an energy which, if only it were not rechanneled, dispersed and squandered in roles, would suffice to overthrow the world of survival [and invigorate the world of *living*].
>
> (Vaneigem 1983: 101)

The redemptive narratives of characters such as Don Gatley in *Infinite Jest* and Chris Fogle in *The Pale King*, who both restructure their lives and affirm their senses of self through choice and effort, centre on a rechanneling of energy away from roles, and of awareness back towards everyday life. This awareness is as essential to Vaneigem's view as it is to Wallace's: "if individuals could stop seeing the world through the eyes of the powers-that-be and look at it from their own point of view", Vaneigem claims, "they would have no trouble discerning which […] moments are lightning flashes in the dark night of roles" (ibid: 105). The "powers-that-be" for *Infinite Jest*'s addicts are the Substances that hold them in thrall, but *The Pale King*'s equivalent is closer to the forces Vaneigem has in mind here. If in Infinite Jest "addiction is a metaphor for not

taking responsibility for one's life" (Dulk 2014a: 46), then in *The Pale King* the heady individualism of consumer capitalism serves the same purpose.

In §19 of *The Pale King*, the IRS staff members stuck in an elevator all ruminate on this characteristic of contemporary life, with one character lamenting how "responsibility [is now] something to be enshrined in symbol and evaded in reality" (Wallace 2012: 133). The conversation continues, as one character claims that "what's changed is [people] don't think of themselves as personally responsible" (ibid: 140), and that "citizens feel alienated now. It's like me-against-everyone-else" (ibid: 142). As another character wryly notes in response that "*alienated*'s one of those big sixties words", we are surely invited to consider key political polemics of the sixties such as Debord's and Vaneigem's. Consumer capitalism has, the characters declare, led people to think of themselves "as citizens when it comes to [their] rights and privileges, but not [their] responsibilities" (ibid: 132), and so instead "we all go about our individual self-interested business and struggle to gratify our various appetites" (ibid: 138).

This is part of the in-built self-protection of the "rule of image": its overthrow is, as Vaneigem reminds us, a "task […] at once individual and collective" (1983: 105), and so 'the society of the spectacle' redefines the sense of self to preclude, or at least reduce, collective actions and notions of community. Instead, it produces citizens who believe "that [their] first responsibility is to [their] own happiness, that everyone else is the great grey abstract mass which [their] life depends on standing apart from, being an individual" (Wallace 2012: 146). This distance between self and other encouraged by addiction, consumerism, television, and other forces is a recurring

theme throughout Wallace's fiction, and one I believe to be central to the author's

engagement with performance, as I will go on to outline now in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four – Performance as Metaphor

Incandeza's Audiences

In the many scenes focussed on performances in Wallace's novels, the role, status, and purpose of the audience is often called into question, and this chapter will focus in part on the deep importance of audiences to Wallace's fictional project. In later sections I will explore how, throughout *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King* in particular, performance is often used as a metaphor for the relationship between self and other – with, for the most part, performers to be seen as the self, and audiences as the other. At the core of Wallace's use of this metaphor is the message that if we recognise every person's status as a performer of their own lives, as a *self* rather than just as an *other* in relation to ourselves, we avoid the trap of solipsism, of believing only in the reality of ourselves, of being less empathic and more selfish. This is not to say, as one "unfortunate popular conception of Wallace" has it, that this (or any) aspect of his work is an "intellectually sophisticated […] self-help narrativ[e] designed to "save us" from solipsism, loneliness, addiction, and so on" (Boswell 2014: 210). Rather, as I will show, Wallace's focus on audiences demonstrates a complex engagement with ideas of passivity, community, and inner life.

Before exploring this idea, however, it is worth outlining other ways Wallace makes use of audiences in his work to reinforce the extent of his thematic engagement with performance. Throughout *Infinite Jest*, for example, audiences often become symbols used to satirise the state of contemporary culture, with Wallace both poking fun at and warning against the possible effects of a society

saturated with spectators. In particular, Wallace uses eyes as a symbol to emphasise the spectatorial status of certain characters, and the significance of the performance situation. Burn (2014) notes the "centrality of vision to David Foster Wallace's work" (86), and "argues that close attention to Wallace's obsession with vision helps reformulate our understanding of [*The Pale King*]" (ibid: 85) in particular. This obsession is observable in *Infinite Jest* too, as the members of the panel interviewing Hal at the start of the novel are described as "eight eyes [that] have become blank discs that stare at whatever they see" (Wallace 1997a: 12), and the audience of the lecture given during James Incandenza's film *Good-Looking Men In Small Clever Rooms*[…] as "dead-eyed kids" (ibid: 911). Wallace channels much of his thematic interest in audiences into Incandenza's films, with Hal noting midway through the novel how his father went through a **"**subphase of being obsessed with the idea of audiences' relationships with various sorts of shows" (ibid: 396).

As such, the form of Wallace's thematic engagement with audiences reflects its content, with his emphasis on the cinematic situation drawing attention to the separation of performer and audience that mirrors the separation of self and other. Eyes continue to play an important part in Wallace's descriptions of audiences in another film of Incandenza's, *Cage III — Free Show*, which is synopsised in the director's filmography as follows:

> The figure of Death […] 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 […] 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.

(ibid: 988)

That the spectators in *Cage III – Free Show* all become "gigantic eyeballs in chairs" is particularly notable here, as it is similar to a description Wallace gives earlier in *Infinite Jest* of the state of technology in the near-future world of the novel: it is "an entertainment market of sofas and eyes" (ibid: 620).

In Incandenza's film, the audience can without doubt *see* what is going on, but they cannot listen, think, touch, or respond. Wallace's mention of the "entertainment market of sofas and eyes" links this phenomenon to a broader pattern of consumption taking precedence over consideration – a pattern Wallace was keen to avoid inviting with his work, wary of "performing for a faceless audience, instead of trying to have a conversation with a person" (Wallace in Lipsky 2010: 41). Invoking the idea of a conversation, Wallace invites us instead to extend his wariness of the performance situation to ideas of communication and community. It is thus implied that the "entertainment market of sofas and eyes" found in *Infinite Jest* is a gateway to solipsism if extended into everyday life.

Yet the "floating no-space world of personal spectation" of *Infinite Jest* is also described as a world of "total freedom, privacy, [and] choice" (Wallace 1997a: 620). Yet again the importance of choice to Wallace's novels becomes clear, but the choice referred to here is clearly the kind Baudrillard (1998) labels "conformist choice" (70), directly linked to consumerism, what with *Infinite Jest*'s narrator's sardonic claim coming as it does after a lengthy list of entertainment products available on the

market. Baudrillard claims that the "fundamental, unconscious, automatic choice of the consumer is to accept the style of life of a particular society" (ibid: 70) – something most citizens of *Infinite Jest*'s world of "subsidized time"[30] are apparently guilty of, with a staggeringly conformist "94% of all […] paid entertainment now absorbed at home" (Wallace 1997a: 620). Such an "unconscious, automatic choice", the kind Wallace warns so fervently against throughout his writing, is in fact "no longer a choice", Badurillard claims, "and the theory of the autonomy and sovereignty of the consumer is refuted" (1998: 70). As we can see here, the audiences in *Infinite Jest* may inhabit a world of "privacy and choice", but in this case it is certainly not a world of "total freedom".

Incandenza's *Cage III – Free Show* echoes this atmosphere of conformism, as both the figures of Life and Death represent two versions of the same product. Accepting the invitation of Death, a figure here once again equitable with unawareness-in-life, members of the sideshow audience are subsumed by their desire to watch, and become identifiable only as spectators, as viewers and consumers of images. In this way, the audience in *Cage III – Free Show* serve as a surrealist rendering of how characters in *Infinite Jest* come to be affected by Incandenza's later, deadly work, the Entertainment – spectators of which become so ruled by their desire to continue watching the film that they may as well be nothing more than giant eyeballs.

---

[30] Subsidized Time refers to the U.S. Government's "commercial subsidization of a lunar […] calendar" (Wallace 1997a: 1057), apparently a "revenue-response to the heady cost" (ibid: 438) of redefining the borders of the U.S. At one point in *Infinite Jest* a "CHRONOLOGY OF […] REVENUE-ENHANCING SUBSIDIZED TIME™, BY YEAR" is provided, the nine listed years including "Year of the Whopper […] Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar [… and] Year of Glad" (ibid: 223).

Despite accepting the invitation of Life and taking active roles, however, the sideshow performers likewise fall for the promise of spectacle, and so adopt pre-set roles, thus degrading themselves and provoking the wide-eyed response of "identification" (Vaneigem 1983: 105) that said roles feed on. The homogeneity of the eyeball-spectators thus represents complete consumption by 'the society of the spectacle', since the role's "prime function [is] always that of social adaptation, of integrating people into the well-policed universe of things" (ibid: 102). For Vaneigem, the performance of roles becomes much like "the need to consume anything at all" (ibid: 103) imposed by consumer capitalism, and the self is commoditized – that is to say, the adoption of a role in everyday life becomes a transaction, where one must pay for a role with one's *own* 'life', the entrance fee to spectacular society. Read alongside Vaneigem and Baudrillard, the criticism set forth by *Cage III – Free Show* can be understood as implying that spectators may obsess over identification in attempts to differentiate themselves throughout their lives, but they are in fact being paradoxically conformist by engaging in this process.

Similarly to Vaneigem and Baudrillard, Wallace is not critical of *individuals* caught up in this perpetual societal cycle, rather of sociological structures and forces. Certainly Wallace does not endorse the resigned bad faith of *Infinite Jest*'s addicts, for example, whose "obsessive self-reflection creates the illusion that addiction is somehow his or her nature" (Dulk 2014b: 53). Rather, Wallace recognises, as Vaneigem (1983) does, that part of the society of the spectacle's success is the fact that "inauthentic life feeds on authentically felt desires" (104). When Wallace presents a view of audiences as identical, homogenous groups, then, it usually serves as a critique of some larger structure, such as the laziness of contemporary

entertainment's pandering to audiences' base similarities rather than allowing for the possibility of diversity.

For example, that the performers in *Cage III – Free Show* must "undergo unspeakable degradations" to inspire all-consuming dedication from spectators recalls a comment of Wallace's from his essay "E Unibus Pluram[…]", where the author writes that "television is vulgar and dumb [not] because the people who compose the Audience are vulgar and dumb [but] because people tend to be extremely similar in their vulgar […] and dumb interests and wildly different in their refined […] and noble interests" (Wallace 1990: 37). Although the image of an audience made solely of eyes could easily be deciphered as little more than a diagnosis of culturally-prevalent passivity, upon further examination Wallace's writing about audiences is more nuanced than this. In this way, the sections of Wallace's fiction addressing spectatorship bear similarities with the work of yet another French theorist of politics and aesthetics, Jacques Rancière, as both writers go further than the "conclusion prevalent in much work on this [theme], namely that the spectator is necessarily duped by the work, or the spectacle, as s/he is duped by ambient images of consumerist society" (Davis 2010: 153).

As a student Rancière participated in the May 1968 protests in Paris (Highmore 2002c: 246), which were in part influenced by figures of political philosophy such as Debord and Lefebvre, and his writing bears similar hopes for radical transformation. As Morris (2014) points out, in a paper delivered at *Wallace Infini* on the similarities between Wallace and Rancière's work, the latter's view of "the political potential of art [is that it] relies on its ability to posit the equal capacities

91

of its viewers, a kind of equality in its production and reception" (5). Importantly, for

Rancière this promise of equality "also then carries the promise of life reconfigured"

(ibid: 5). Even though Wallace, in his interview with McCaffery, voices his scepticism

about fiction's ability to reconfigure a reader's life,[31] he promotes a notion of the

reader's autonomy just as fervently as Rancière, going as far as to claim that

"language lives not just in but *through* the reader. The reader becomes God, for all

textual purposes" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 40). In his essay *The Emancipated*

Spectator, Rancière (2011) develops the notion of this titular figure by claiming that

"being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into

activity" (17), rather that any interpretative action is inherently active and unique to

each spectator. As such, Rancière's engagement with performance in this essay plays

out on similar terms to Wallace's – as an issue of the individual in relation to others

– but also implies that the promotion of activity in audiences is not necessary when

such activity is already present in perception and thought, when some kind of

performance is inherent to spectating. This view of Rancière's is the end point

Wallace is working towards, although much of *Infinite Jest* indicates that he remains

sceptical as to whether audiences engage in quite as active a way as Rancière

suggests.[32]

For example, Incandenza's film *The Joke*, which as I earlier outlined consists

of a live projection of the film's audience watching their live image being projected

onto the screen, carries the implication (in line with Rancière) that its audience

---

[31] "We still think in terms of a story "changing" the reader's emotions, cerebrations, maybe even her life. We're not keen on the idea of the story sharing its valence with the reader. But the reader's own life "outside" the story changes the story" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 40).
[32] For an exhaustive analysis of theories of reading and viewing amongst audiences, see pp. 20-85 of Bennett (1999).

should all be given the status of performers, given that they are the 'stars' of Incandenza's film. The audience initially appears to appreciate this fact – when spectators first enter the screening, they are confronted by "big cameras down by the red-lit EXITS on either side of the screen", and the initial reaction of "the patrons" is to assume that the cameras are there for "an ad or anti-ad or a behind-the-scenes metafilmic documentary" (Wallace 1997a: 397). The audience here unquestioningly accept that their lives are for documentation, dissemination, and consumption, more products for the world of advertising, but if the cameras are the set-up, the audience is the punchline of Incandenza's joke. When they are confronted with live images of themselves, the audience stare "at [the screen] with less and less expectant and more and more blank and then puzzled and then eventually pissed-off facial expressions" (ibid: 398).

One implication here is the suggestion that audiences are unwilling to do the work of confronting themselves, a pursuit Wallace frequently reminds readers of the importance of. Art that manages to do this is for Wallace, as I mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, "very very very very very precious. Because it's the stuff that's about what it feels like to live. Instead of being a relief from what it feels like to live" (Wallace in Lipsky 2010: 39). *The Joke*'s angry audiences are unable to recognise, as Chris Fogle does in *The Pale King*, that they are simply "watching *As The World Turns*" (Wallace 2012: 224). Wallace also articulates this thought in an originally-unpublished scene from *The Pale King*, with an analogy of a different kind of consumption, of someone "starv[ing] at a banquet: We cannot see that there is a banquet because seeing the banquet requires that we see ourselves sitting there starving" (ibid: 551). As *The Joke* also seems to suggest, "seeing ourselves clearly,

even for a moment, is shattering" (ibid: 551), especially if it reveals that we are nothing but eager eyes and mouths, waiting to be fed distraction from the task of living. The audience's negative reaction to their promotion to the status of performers suggests an unwillingness to view spectatorship as an active role. Further to this, it carries an important implication when considered in terms of the metaphor for the relationship between self and other as analogous with performance that Wallace employs throughout his work.

Performance as Metaphor

Before examining Wallace's use of performance as a metaphor, it is worth mentioning that the sections of Wallace's novels I address here do not break with the traditional view of audiences as set apart from the 'action' of a performance. Whilst "non-traditional forms of theatre practice have involved audiences in all stages of production, and have sought (rather than allowed) a central role for the spectator" (Bennett 1997: 87), Wallace's metaphor functions fairly rigidly, in terms of a traditional model of spectators as grouped together watching one event.

In this way, Wallace's work once again overlaps with that of Erving Goffman. Whilst it is true that Goffman's "use of the theatre metaphor is consistently very loose", States (1996) notes how "Goffman is very much aware that you can't get the whole phenomenon with one metaphor" (7), as when he concludes *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* by admitting that his "attempt to press a mere analogy so far was in part a rhetoric and a manoeuvre [...] And so here the language and mask of the stage will be dropped [as s]caffolds, after all, are to build other things with" (Goffman 1971: 246). States outlines how "[w]hen Goffman says that people are like

stage performers […] we are applying a model from one semantic network to a subject in another network whose characteristics we wish to elucidate by metaphorical comparison" (1996: 2). Similarly, Wallace focusses on only one aspect of performance in his metaphor, in the hope of constructing a model for thinking about the self in relation to the other.

Whilst Wallace does not engage with the idea of "reception as a politically implicated act [in terms of] the relationship between production and reception, positioned within and against cultural values" (Bennett 1997: 86), this does not mean that there is no political dimension to Wallace's theorising of audiences. As I will go on to argue, Wallace's conception of performers and audiences stands in direct contrast to the prevalent socio-political view characters discuss during §19 of *The Pale King* that I mentioned at the end of Chapter Three, "that everyone else is the great grey abstract mass which [your] life depends on standing apart from, being an individual" (Wallace 2012: 146). In this way we can see that it is the structure of traditional performance as applied to everyday life that frustrates Wallace, because it casts people in inherently unequal roles of performer and audience, of entertainer and entertained, of self and other. Whereas for Goffman "theatre [is] just a hermeneutical tool […] for deploying and isolating elements in the "drama" of social behaviour" (States 1996: 7), then, Wallace's work takes this one step further and implies that a complacent view of the world as split in this way might have adverse effects on oneself and others.

For example, in *Infinite Jest* Wallace gives voice to several characters who are sceptical of the traditional performer-audience relationship infiltrating everyday life,

and in doing so uses performance as a means to explain the need for a balance of outward and inward awareness. In a conversation between E.T.A. prorector Aubrey F. DeLint and Helen Steeply, a U.S.O.U.S. agent posing as a magazine journalist, Steeply highlights the fact that whichever E.T.A. students proceed to play tennis at a professional level will "be entertainers", and claims that "audiences will be the whole point" (Wallace 1997a: 661) of the game. If this is the case, Steeply asks DeLint, why does E.T.A. "not also prepare [students] for the stresses of entertaining an audience, get them used to being seen?" (ibid: 661). Steeply's question implies that these students will go on to work primarily for the enjoyment of others, and frames "the Show" (ibid: 661) of professional tennis as performance for performance's sake. DeLint is quick to put Steeply right in this regard:

> I say you do not get it. The point here for the best kids is to inculcate their sense that it's never about being seen […] If they can get that inculcated, the Show won't fuck them up […] for you it's about entertainment and personality, it's about the statue, but if they can get inculcated right they'll never be slaves to the statue […] Whether or not you mean to, babe, you chew them up, it's what you do.

> (ibid: 661)

DeLint, all this time talking apparently about audiences and performers, in fact reveals many of the same sentiments that Wallace voices elsewhere concerning the self and the other. DeLint here clearly outlines how dedicating oneself to the entertainment of others in fact requires a massive amount of self-awareness,[33] to the

---

[33] Wallace makes a similar claim in "E Unibus Pluram[…]": "you have to be just abnormally self-conscious and self-controlled to appear unwatched before cameras and lenses and men with clipboards. This self-conscious appearance of unself-consciousness is the real door to TV's whole mirror-hall of illusions, and for us, the Audience, it is both medicine and poison" (Wallace 1990: 25-6).

point where performers might be inclined to make the ultimate denial of self – "blow their brains out after winning an event when they win, or dive out a third-story window when they start to stop getting poked at or profiled, when their blossom starts to fade" (ibid: 661).[34] Tellingly, Wallace's use of the phrase "chew them up" is similar to his claim in *This Is Water* that "anything […] you worship will eat you alive" (Wallace 2009: 102), and as such it is implied that dedicating oneself *entirely* to the pleasure of others will have nothing but adverse effects on the self. Indeed, as Wallace makes clear to McCaffery, to do so can breed hostility towards the very other you wish to impress: "since your good opinion is the sole arbiter of my success and worth, you have tremendous power over me, and I fear you and hate you for it" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 25).

Wallace further implies the need for balance between self-awareness and awareness of others when DeLint lists those things that "chew up" vulnerable performers: "You, *Moment*, *World Tennis*, *Self*, Inter-Lace, the audiences" (Wallace 1997a: 661). Book-ended by the separating tense of the second person pronoun and a collective, anonymising term for a group of people, this sentence's centre lists in contrast the magazine *Self*. Commas separate each thing being listed, and readers can infer a further message implanted in DeLint's rant: one of the difficulties of living is to be a self surrounded by, but separated from, others. Yet the *Self* can also "chew up" people. The structure of this self-centred sentence thus simultaneously warns of the impact of "be[ing] deeply and literally self-centred, and to see and interpret

---

[34] Similarly in Wallace's short story "Good Old Neon", whose narrator Neal recounts the story of how and why he committed suicide, the language of performance is used to articulate Neal's "own basic problem […] that at an early age [he'd] somehow chosen to cast [his] lot with [his] life's drama's supposed audience instead of with the drama itself" (Wallace 2005: 176).

everything through this lens of self" (Wallace 2009: 44), but also of losing one's self

to the crowd, of "You" becoming alienated from your "*Self*".

DeLint's hostility towards audiences and the idea of pleasing them is shared

to some extent by E.T.A's founder, James Incandenza. For example, whereas Peter

Brook's film adaptation of *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat*[...] ends in a

frenzy of orgiastic violence as the inmates of Sade's asylum tear the stage to shreds,

Incandenza's ends as "Incandenza becomes ill all over the theatre audience's first

row" (Wallace 1997a: 993). This action is both pertinent and symbolic, and goes some

way to backing up the in-novel

> critics and scholars who point to the frequent presence of audiences inside
> [Incandenza's] films, and argue that the fact that the audiences are always
> either dumb and unappreciative or the victims of some grisly entertainment-
> mishap betrays more than a little hostility on the part of an '*auteur*' pegged
> as technically gifted but narratively dull and plotless and static and not
> entertaining enough.

(ibid: 911)

Categorising James Incandenza's presentation of audiences in his films solely

as hostile is not entirely convincing, however, as Hal, the narrator of this section,

explains. Whilst "these academics' arguments seem sound as far as they go" (ibid:

911), they do not account for what unfolds during the final scene of Incandenza's

"Unfinished [...] UNRELEASED" (ibid: 991) *Good-Looking Men In Small Clever Rooms*

That Utilize Every Centimeter Of Available Space With Mind-Boggling Efficiency. In

this scene a lecturer, portrayed by Paul Anthony Heaven, reads "stupefyingly turgid-

sounding shit [...] in a monotone as narcotizing as a voice from the grave" to an

uninterested audience, "a crowd of dead-eyed kids picking at themselves and drawing vacant airplane- and genitalia-doodles on their college-rule note-pads" (ibid: 911). Whatever point Incandenza (or Wallace) wishes to make or imply about audiences and entertainment in this scene – Wallace's comments on contemporary audiences' aversion to difficulty seem most relevant here[35] – Hal points out an altogether more important aspect of the film's climax. Hal explains how academics' arguments regarding Incandenza's hostility to audiences can only go so far, and

> do not explain the incredible pathos of Paul Anthony Heaven reading his lecture […] 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.

> (ibid: 911)

In this part of the film, Paul Anthony Heaven can be read as representative of a core problem of the human condition: the inability to truly communicate one's inner life to another person. As such, the scene bleakly reflects Wallace's comment that "we all suffer alone in the real world; true empathy is impossible" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 22).[36] Wallace writes and speaks about this inability to communicate and connect with others across his oeuvre, and in *This Is Water* he also warns against the effects of our "natural default setting of being uniquely, completely, imperially alone" (Wallace 2009: 60), noting the frustrating reality that "[o]ther people's

---

[35] See Lipsky (2010) pp.71-2; Artzineonline (2010a); Wallace (1990).
[36] For a more considered discussion on the implications of this comment both for readings of Wallace's work, and in more general philosophical terms, see Horn (2014).

thoughts and feelings have to be communicated to you somehow, but your own are so immediate, urgent, *real*" (ibid: 41). This is the vast gulf between self and other made apparent in Incandenza's *Good-Looking Men*[…], where although the narcotizing voice of Paul Anthony Heaven seems dull to his audience, his relentless tears indicate a much deeper well of emotion that cannot be voiced or understood. Wallace often highlights the inadequacy of language in this regard, as when in *The Pale King* one character remarks during a stream of reminiscences about his youth: "How odd I can have all this inside me and to you it's just words" (Wallace 2012: 429). In Wallace's short story "Good Old Neon" too, the narrator Neal laments how "what goes on inside is just too fast and huge and all interconnected for words to do more than barely sketch the outlines of at most one tiny little part of it at any given instant" (Wallace 2005: 151).[37] Rather than harbouring a hostility towards audiences then, *Good-Looking Men*[…] lets them off the hook somewhat, citing the mitigating circumstances of being a self.

In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace provides two significant indicators that the lecturer in *Good-Looking Men*[…] is portraying this struggle to communicate one's inner life, and that the performance situation is one with wider metaphorical connotations, firstly by referencing Paul Anthony Heaven's casting as the dull-voiced lecturer. This casting choice is explained away by Hal when he says that James Incandenza loved the actor's "deadening academic monotone [… and] used Paul Anthony Heaven, a nonprofessional, by trade a data-entry drone for Ocean Spray, in anything that

---

[37] Wallace also ruminates on the role that communication plays in empathy, given the fact that "[w]e do not have direct access to anyone or anything's pain except our own" (Wallace 2004: 241), in his essay "Consider the Lobster".

required a deadening institutional presence" (Wallace 1997a: 911). It is significant, however, that in another film of Incandenza's, *Cage III – Free Show*, Heaven portrays the figure of 'Life', a certain nod by Wallace towards the inner life that the actor serves as a stand-in for in *Good-Looking Men*[…]. Further to this, when Hal highlights his father's use of Paul Anthony Heaven "in anything that required a deadening institutional presence" (ibid: 911), a secondary meaning is invoked. Whilst this line apparently refers only to Incandenza's films, it can also be read as implying that Paul Anthony Heaven was used in *the role of* anything, in other words of any character, who required a deadening institutional presence *themselves* – an institutional presence such as AA in *Infinite Jest* or the IRS in *The Pale King*, both of which appear initially "deadening" but hold the promise of transformation, community, and inner contentment.[38]

Secondly, and more importantly, Wallace chooses to have Hal narrate this section of the novel in the first person, with the character declaring immediately after his description of the scene at the end of *Good-Looking Men*[…]: "Then this too began to seem familiar" (ibid: 911). This is clearly a hint on Wallace's part at what will later befall Hal, a fate that readers of the novel are already aware of, with the chronologically-final scene being placed by Wallace at the start of *Infinite Jest*. In this scene, Hal is being interviewed for a place at the University of Arizona, and experiences a literal rendering of the inability to externalise one's thoughts, to communicate one's inner life. For example, Hal cannot smile – he is only able to "compose what [he] project[s] will be seen as a smile", but his interviewers are

---

[38] For more on the importance of institutions to Wallace's work, see Kelly (2014a) and McGurl (2014).

confused by his attempt and ask if Hal is "in pain" (ibid: 5). Language fails Hal too, and

he is informed that his standardized test "verbal scores […] are just quite a bit closer

to zero than [the college is] comfortable with" (ibid: 7). Hal's eventual attempts to

speak in his defence are met with "horror" (ibid: 12), as he apparently instead makes

"subanimalistic noises and sounds", and flails about like "a writhing animal with a

knife in its eye [… or] a goat, drowning in something viscous" (ibid: 14). All this, whilst

later implied to be the result of Hal's ingestion of an incredibly potent hallucinogenic

drug, is clearly a problem of communication, analogous with the struggle to

externalise inner life that the lecturer experiences in *Good-Looking Men*[…], as Hal

sums up by declaring variously: "I cannot make myself understood" (ibid: 10); "I'm

not a machine. I feel and believe." (ibid: 12); "I am not what you see and hear" (ibid:

13).

As such, Hal's interviewers and the students watching Heaven's lecture are

identified primarily as audiences misunderstanding a performer's desperate plea;

they are two groups representative of the other, opposite a self that readers alone

are given access to. In his interview with McCaffery, Wallace outlines his belief that

it is fiction's unique ability to give "the reader, who like all of us is sort of marooned

in her own skull, to give her imaginative access to other selves" (Wallace in McCaffery

1993: 22), and as such, McGurl (2014) notes, whilst "much effort is made [by Wallace]

to represent the sheer enclosedness of […] institutional enclosure at the University

of Arizona" in this scene, the significant "enclosure is […] Hal's own cranium, the self

he is stuck inside" (36-7).

The setting of this scene, a college interview, is also particularly noteworthy here. In his biography of the writer, D.T. Max (2013) outlines how Wallace himself was terrified in his college interviews, and in fact "dreaded interviews" precisely because "[l]ife for [Wallace] had the quality of a performance, and being called on to perform within that performance was too much" (13). Max goes further, and in fact claims that Wallace took his own admissions interview at Oberlin College as inspiration, and "transform[ed] the scene into Hal's breakdown at the opening of *Infinite Jest*" (ibid: 13). Wallace's use of performance as a metaphor then, according to Max's suggestion, fits with his own experience of everyday life – performance makes the perfect metaphor for the everyday, as the everyday is permeated by performance.

"There is no audience"

With performance being so integral to Wallace's view of the everyday, it is useful to remember the uncertainty of everyday life that I highlighted in Chapter One. Performance itself is also an uncertain concept, as "contingent, contested, [and] hard to pin down" (Bial 2004: 1) as the everyday – as is the self. All these topics, then, are linked by a certain precariousness of definition, but Wallace's exploration of them is nonetheless carried out in a similar spirit to that of "the positive promise of performance studies – its potential to illuminate, instruct, and inspire – [that] is enhanced, not diminished, by this ever-present uncertainty" (ibid: 1).

The sections of Wallace's fiction that involve audiences in particular, by thematising the uncertainty of the self's relation to the other, find in this uncertainty a promising universality. Wallace puts this most succinctly in "Westward the Course

of Empire Takes Its Way": "[W]e are, always, faces in a crowd" (Wallace 1997c: 208).[39]

Remembering that this is a truth for everyone, not just ourselves, is not just a tool to

combat solipsism, but a moral imperative of the kind Wallace lays out in *This Is Water*.

His ideal reader must question the thinking that, as he put it, "situations […] are really

all about *me*" (Wallace 2009: 77) as a performer and everyone else as an audience,

and rather to "choose to force myself to consider the likelihood that everyone else"

(ibid: 86) is a performer, a self, too. This is the moral at the heart of Chris Fogle's

awakening in *The Pale King*, when he experiences, similarly to Hal with the film *Good-*

Looking Men[…], an epiphanic moment during a lecture.

In the lecture on "Advanced Tax" that Fogle mistakenly stumbles into at his

college, an unnamed substitute teacher makes "an immediate impression" on him,

and commands attention from the class – "when the substitute accounting professor

entered […] the room's whole voltage changed" (Wallace 2012: 219). As the lecture

draws to a close, the substitute turns away from his notes and delivers a rousing

speech to the attendants, invoking the image of an audience to describe a problem

that the would-be accountants will all face, announcing to his students: "Gentlemen,

welcome to the world of reality – there is no audience" (Wallace 2012: 231). The

lecturer is of course here referring to the difficult reality of IRS work, presenting what

he refers to as "a truth: Enduring tedium over real time in a confined space is what

real courage is" (ibid: 231). The lecturer's view that "to give oneself to the care of

---

[39] Wallace's use of the first-person plural here is important, with its egalitarian implications, and Kelly (2010) notes how the "call for a two-way conversation [that] characterizes" (145) Wallace's work, and that of writers inspired by him, is implied even further by such a voicing.

others' money" constitutes true "valor" (ibid: 233), however, masks the broader relevance of the lecturer's statement about audience.

The reason that there is "no one to applaud, to admire[, n]o one to see you [… and why] actual heroism receives no ovation, entertains no one" (ibid: 231), is because the difficulties facing these tax officers are all internally felt. As the lecturer outlines, "routine, repetition, tedium, monotony, ephemeracy, inconsequence, abstraction, disorder, boredom, angst, ennui – these are the true hero's enemies, and make no mistake, they are fearsome indeed" (ibid: 233). As such, he demonstrates that "true heroism is *a priori* incompatible with audience or applause or even the bare notice of the common run of man" (ibid: 232) because the true heroism the lecturer refers to is the battle with one's inner life.

Alongside this development of performance as a metaphor for the self and the other, Wallace's conception of performance as falsity is again given voice by the substitute lecturer:

> The truth is that the heroism of your childhood entertainments was not true valor. It was theater. The grand gesture, the moment of choice, the mortal danger, the external foe, the climactic battle whose outcome resolves all – all designed to appear heroic, to excite and gratify an audience.

> (ibid: 231)

The explicit link between theatre and appearances here focusses on several aspects of misleading "valor", importantly including the "external foe" – a false enemy in the eyes of the substitute teacher, as the "true enemy" is internal. The 'other' of the audience does not have access to, and so can never truly know, someone else's

"reality". Dealing with this in-built loneliness is, in Wallace's view, the ultimate heroism – an act of valor that each and every person must deal with every day. In *Infinite Jest* Wallace highlights that such a struggle can form bonds between people, as when Hal points out to some fellow E.T.A. students that "suffering *unites* us" (Wallace 1997a: 113). Hal's choice of words is pertinent here also as, whilst discussing the difficulty of being in a group of "deeply alone people all jammed together", he declares that "nothing brings you together like a common *enemy*" (ibid: 113; emphasis mine).

Wallace's performance metaphor as such highlights both the separation between self and other, and the paradoxical communality of this separation. The nebulous, isolating "entertainment market of sofas and eyes" in *Infinite Jest* gives rise to "the new millennium's passion for standing live witness to things […] the priceless chance to be part of a live crowd, watching" anything at all, from "crime-scenes, fires, [and] demonstrations" to "watching expressionless men in federal white and municipal cadet-blue drain and scrub the Public Gardens' man-made duck pond for the upcoming winter" (ibid: 620-1).[40] For both Wallace and Rancière, to focus too much on the crowd as a single entity is misleading, but Rancière, declaring that it is "high time we examine this idea that the theatre is, in and of itself, a community site" (2011: 16), also questions whether there is in fact little to no communitarian essence to audiences. For him, the particular danger is never of not seeing the wood for the trees, but of not seeing the trees for the wood:

---

[40] Wallace again makes particular mention of eyes when referring to these crowds, describing them as "a mass of eyes all not at home" (Wallace 1997a: 621).

in front of a performance, just as in a museum, school or street, there are only ever individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs […] The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body […] but is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way

(ibid: 16)

Rancière goes on to pose two questions about the supposedly "living, communitarian essence of theatre" (ibid: 16). Firstly he asks: "What exactly occurs among theatre spectators that cannot happen elsewhere?" (ibid: 16). Wallace's fiction initially appears to be sympathetic to the implied answer of 'nothing', particularly in *Infinite Jest*'s "whole sub-rosa schedule of public spectation opportunities, 'spect-ops,' […] the Gapers' Blocks at traffic accidents, sewer-gas explosions, muggings, purse-snatchings" (Wallace 1997a: 620). If one thinks of these events as a kind of theatre of everyday life, however, which Wallace directs readers to do in framing them as "spect-ops", then Wallace's portrayal of crowds is at odds with Rancière's suggestion that theatre's communitarianism is just a "presupposition" (2011: 16). Indeed, Wallace's fiction seems to disagree outright with this claim in relation to Rancière's second question: "What is more interactive, more communitarian, about these spectators than a mass of individuals all watching the same television show at the same hour?" (ibid: 16).

In *Infinite Jest,* when describing the appeal of being part of an audience at a live event, Wallace highlights "the fellowship and anonymous communion of being part of a watching crowd" (ibid: 621). Much is made of this potential energy of connection present in a live audience, and Wallace often reminds us of this potential

by highlighting the fact that what appears to separate us can also link us. In *Infinite Jest*, in fact, Wallace echoes Baudrillard's (1998) claim that there exists in society "a structural logic of differentiation, which produces individuals […] as different from one another, but in terms of general models and a code, to which, in the very act of particularizing themselves, they *conform*" (92). As mentioned in Chapter Three, one section of *Infinite Jest* presents the "exotic new facts" that residents of Ennet House may learn during their stay there, one of which is that "everyone is identical in their secret unspoken belief that way deep down they are different from everyone else" (Wallace 1997a: 205). This belief, whilst "[not] necessarily perverse" (ibid: 205), bears close relation to another that Wallace highlights in his story "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way": that "all of us […] have our little solipsistic delusions, ghastly intuitions of utter singularity" (Wallace 1997c: 308). In this same section of "Westward[…]", Wallace turns solipsism against itself by pointing out that "solipsism binds us together" (ibid: 309).

Acknowledging "that we feel lonely in a crowd", Wallace implies that this feeling is only exacerbated if we "stop not to dwell on what's brought the crowd into being" (ibid: 309). This paradox, the fact that, as one E.T.A. student puts it in *Infinite Jest*, "it's what we all have in common, this aloneness" (Wallace 1997a: 112), is a truth Wallace believes we are confronted with when part of a crowd, hence his emphasis on the communal aspect of spectatorship. Rancière is not, despite the questioning I have previously mentioned, entirely unsympathetic to this view. Although *The Emancipated Spectator* focusses on the "power of each [individual] to translate what she perceives in her own way" (Rancière 2011: 16-7), Rancière keeps one eye on the bigger picture. To interpret an artwork is "to link it to the unique

intellectual adventure that makes [each individual spectator] similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other" (ibid: 17).

Wallace's choice to highlight the "*anonymous* communion of being part of a watching crowd" (Wallace 1997a: 620; emphasis mine) is particularly relevant here. By drawing attention to the anonymity of spectators afforded by being part of a crowd, Wallace reminds readers of the place of the individual within such a group – the place of the self in relation to the other. Identity is lost in the crowd, but only when we consider a crowd, or an audience, as nothing more than a mass of others, as opposed to a collection of individuals, selves. As Rancière puts it,

> [w]hat our performances – be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it – verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else.
>
> (2011: 17)

This anti-solipsistic thinking is shared by Wallace and Rancière – the idea that what separates us can in fact contribute to a genuine communion, that "this shared power of the equality of intelligence links individuals […] in so far as it keeps them separate from one another, equally capable of using the power everyone has to plot her own path" (ibid: 17).

Another example of a community built around internal struggles common to a certain group is to be found in the Boston Alcoholics Anonymous meetings of *Infinite Jest*, portrayals of a performance situation central to that novel. In Boston,

> AA is divided into numerous individual AA Groups [… and] almost all Boston Groups' meetings are speaker meetings. That means that at the meetings there are recovering alcoholic speakers who stand up in front of everybody at an amplified podium and 'share their experience, strength, and hope.'

> (Wallace 1997a: 343)

Performance is thus integral to AA and the healing process of its members – as well as being a means of "spreading the message that despite all appearances AA works" (ibid: 344), it functions much as Incandenza's *The Joke* does in its reminding us that everyone is, and must be, a performer. Being reminded of this is a way of reclaiming the self from the clutches of "the Substance", and even though not all AA members become speakers, everyone's story is effectively performed – this being because "if you sit up front and listen hard, all the speakers' stories of decline and fall and surrender are basically alike, and like your own" (ibid: 345).

Kelly (2014a) points out how "it remains undecidable to what extent the generic frame and language employed by each speaker […] are handed down by AA", and uses this fact to propose that Wallace presents "a new and institutionally mediated brand of sincerity" in *Infinite Jest*. In outlining how Wallace does this, Kelly touches on the importance of performance to AA:

> True freedom, Wallace seems to suggest, is now to be found in recognizing limits and submitting oneself to boundaries […] This understanding of freedom […] requires a concomitant rejection of an understanding of sincerity as the pure and uninfluenced emanation of the self. […] In *Infinite Jest*, then, success in the AA recovery program means finding a way to speak sincerely using a formula that possesses no originality as an emanation from the self.

This is precisely a form of sincerity for which […] "performance overrules expression"[41]

(ibid)

As such, another idea of performance emerges in opposition to the intimations of falsity that the AA audience proliferates in their discomfort with any speaker who is "performing" (Wallace 1997a: 367). Just as "Wallace depicts the functioning of this new kind of sincerity precisely in its social dimension", performance becomes not a tool for misleading others and oneself, but "the embrace of a range of learned behaviors that connect one to one's community" (Kelly 2014a). This emphasis on community is reflected in the intentions of the AA audience, which is by no means similar to those unengaged masses present in Incandenza's films – everyone's story ends up being heard, as "everybody in the audience is aiming for total empathy with the speaker; that way they'll be able to receive the AA message he's here to carry" (Wallace 1997a: 345).

Vaneigem (1983) in fact offers an inadvertent description of the Boston AA of *Infinite Jest* when he outlines how we currently live in "a *society* in which *man's essence is to consume* […] in which each of us is supposed to take part, not merely by making *a choice*, but by *a commitment*, by *practical activity*" (103; emphasis mine). AA turns Vaneigem's description on its head – it is a 'society' actively battling *against* the essential drives of its members to consume alcohol and narcotics. Vaneigem's language could be straight from the organisation's handbook: "singular" to Boston AA is the fact that the speakers "at one certain Group's weekly speaker meeting are

---

[41] This last expression, Kelly notes, is taken from van Alphen and Bal (2009).

always from some other certain Boston AA Group", speakers who are "here on something called a *Commitment*" (ibid: 343; emphasis mine). That speakers must travel when on commitments highlights the distance between self and other that AA seeks to bridge, and emphasises the active effort this requires. In fact, to be one of the speakers who travels on commitments is called "Getting Active With Your Group" (ibid: 344), and much is made of the fact that one must choose to be at these meetings – "the bitch of the thing is you have to *want* to [get clean]" (ibid: 357). Vaneigem's description is useful here, as it helps reveal how in *Infinite Jest* AA subverts some of the means by which consumer society prevails – choice, commitment, activity – to *curtail* consumption, just as Wallace turns solipsism and boredom against themselves to combat their effects, as outlined earlier in this chapter (page 108) and in Chapter Two (page 58) respectively.

Another example of such subversion can be found in Wallace's description of the process of 'Identification' at AA, which is a world away from Vaneigem's notion of the phenomenon, described in *The Revolution of Everyday Life* as that which "alienate[s] people from their desires and pen[s] them in the spectacle, in the occupied zone" (ibid: 103). Conversely, at AA, Wallace's readers are told, to "identify means [to] empathize", and attendees are encouraged to "sit right up at the front of the hall […] and try to identify instead of compare" (Wallace 1997a: 345). Holland (2013b) voices her reluctance to uphold the novel's AA meetings as paragons of empathic action, however, noting that

> [w]hen the program asks its members to 'Identify' with each other, it is requiring them to empathize with this standard story that each member tells, with their own story, with themselves. In this way, the AA and NA programs

ultimately ask not that members reach out to empathize with strangers but that they recognize their own place in this infinitely repeating sameness, the recursivity of addiction.

(77)

Holland is correct to point out that when AA members identify with speakers, it is essentially a narcissistic action. Indeed, Hal's specific reference to the "*pathos* of Paul Anthony Heaven" (Wallace 1997a: 911) in Incandenza's *Good-Looking Men*[...] is itself only a result of Hal's identification with Heaven's lecturer, the recognition of his own symptoms in someone else, even at such an early stage of his communicative degeneration. Since in *Good-Looking Men*[...] Heaven represents the *self* to his audience's *other*, it would be fair to say that Hal, like the Boston AA attendees, "identifies with himself", but it would be unfair to claim that Hal sees Heaven as nothing other than a stand-in for himself. In identifying with themselves through the conduit of another, Hal and the AA attendees not only "recognize their *own* place in this infinitely repeating sameness", but also, by extension, recognize the place of their fellow humans as caught within the same trap of individuality, as selves as much as 'others'. Put succinctly by Fitzpatrick (2012),

> [t]he impulse toward identification can, as we have seen, be grounded in a narcissistic or even imperialistic assumption of identity between the self and the storytelling Other, but it can also lay the groundwork for a more critical, empathic recognition of the irresolvable difference between self and Other [...] the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of achieving some kind of mutual comprehension.

(198)

113

In working towards "a more ethical form of empathic identification", Fitzpatrick suggests, one must "remai[n] open to the otherness of the Other while nonetheless benefitting from the affective connection" (ibid: 186) with them. The substitute lecturer's insistence in *The Pale King* that "there is no audience" should as such not be read as implying that to pretend otherness does not exist would be ideal. Rather, acknowledging that everyone is a self should come part and parcel with recognising their otherness. Wallace recognises that a reconsidered idea of performance serves as an ideal metaphor for this idea, what with its separation of performer and audience, yet undeniable "affective connection" between the two.

<u>Conclusion – Politics, Performance and Literature</u>

In exploring how the theme of performance manifests throughout the novels of David Foster Wallace, this thesis has outlined how Wallace's writing about performance is never just about performance itself. Rather, as I have shown, it is used as a way of explaining behaviour in everyday life, a means of constructing, showing, or hiding the self, and as a metaphor to articulate ways of thinking about interaction and community. Through close readings of Wallace's novels, in the context of a focussed theoretical framework, I have outlined the importance of performance to Wallace's fictional project, a topic which both reaffirms certain aspects of Wallace scholarship, and recasts other readings of his work in a new light. Despite the limited attention performance has received thus far in published critical studies of the author's work, two panels at 2014's *Wallace Infini* conference focussed on "performance, entertainment, and media", which hopefully indicates a developing interest in the topic across Wallace Studies. This study joins those in implicitly calling for further, interdisciplinary research into Wallace's writing.

In comparing Wallace's work with that of a number of cultural theorists throughout this thesis, it has been my hope to on the one hand place Wallace's engagement with performance in a historical context, and on the other to reaffirm the continued importance of the cultural conditions these theorists were themselves writing about. The texts of, in particular, Lefebvre, Debord, Vaneigem, Baudrillard, and Rancière that I have referenced are all responses to particular political conditions of everyday life and lived experience. Wallace's novels can be seen as concomitant to these writers' concerns, and represent a parallel attempt to understand what

changed at the "moment in the sixties when rebellion against conformity became fashionable, a pose, a way to look cool to the others in your generation you wanted to impress" (Wallace 2012: 146-7). Further research into this topic must as such examine the political dimension of Wallace's engagement with performance. As Boswell (2014) argues, "Wallace is not generally thought of as a political novelist, per se, [...] and yet [his] shift to more politically engaged work can be traced back directly" (211) to a profile he wrote for *Rolling Stone* of U.S. Senator John McCain in 2003. In that profile, Wallace explicitly links performance and politics, whilst maintaining that his writing primarily addresses lived experience: the essay concerns "how millennial politics and all its packaging [...] makes US voters feel, inside, and whether anyone running for anything can even be "real" anymore" (Wallace 2000: 159).

As Kelly (2014b) puts it, "the very fictional worlds [Wallace's characters] inhabit have themselves been constructed through Wallace's close engagement with abstract ideas – logical, political, historical" (3), and as such any mention of performance in his novels form part of this theoretical web, just one co-dependant thematic strand in the fictional whole. Further research into the topic will benefit not just those scholars interested in performance, but elucidate the complex workings of Wallace's writing more generally. Indeed, close examinations of performance in Wallace's non-fiction and short stories would clarify the extent of his engagement with and thoughts on the phenomenon, and help map how this engagement developed over Wallace's career, but such research could also open up discussions regarding a host of other topics. Not least amongst these topics might be the relationship between performance and diverse literary forms, Wallace's varying narrative personae across his non-fiction, and the impact of paratextual sources on

our understanding of his engagement with the theme. Further to this, an exploration and comparison of performance's relevance to the work of other fiction writers, perhaps even from different literary periods, would surely yield interesting results.

At the end of any research project, the question naturally emerges as to what, if any, its wider implications might be. With an interdisciplinary focus such as mine, at least one further avenue of research is implied in the topic itself, namely the potential for re-evaluating the relationship between the fields being explored – in this case performance and literature. More specifically, the ways in which performance is important to Wallace's fiction could surely be elucidated further by an exploration of theatre practitioners' attempts to adapt his work for the stage. Indeed, the question of whether performance is only a thematic concern of Wallace's, or whether his fiction might also mirror some formal aspects of theatre, could be addressed to some extent by an exploration of the successes and failures of theatrical adaptations of his work.

The two most high-profile of these adaptations have been Hebbel am Ufer's 24-hour-long, multi-location adaptation of *Infinite Jest*, and Daniel Fish's *A (radically condensed and expanded) Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again (after David Foster Wallace)*.[42] In a *New York Times* feature on Daniel Fish's adaptation of Wallace's essays, Bonnie Nadell, Wallace's "longtime agent and […] a trustee of the David Foster Wallace Literary Trust […] estimated that the trust receives at least one request a week" (La Rocco 2012) from people wishing to adapt Wallace's work for

---

[42] For more on the former, see La Rocco (2012); Aucoin (2013); Haglund (2015). For more on the latter, see Wiener (2012); Earley (2012); Wick (2012).

the stage or screen. In deciding which requests to grant, the trust is said "to err on the side of generosity when they feel people's hearts are in the right place" (ibid). When a request is granted, Nadell says that she feels like the trust is "letting people try" (Nadell in La Rocco 2012). Precisely what Nadell believes the trust is letting people "try" is unclear, but given that requests are only granted when they feel "people's hearts are in the right place", the obvious implication is that they are allowing attempts at adaptation that create an experience 'true to' that of reading Wallace, although in another medium.[43] We can go one step further than this, however, by beginning to consider whether performing a writer's work, rather than being a way of creating an ersatz reading experience for an audience, might actually be a method of 'close reading' for performers, and how the process of adaptation might provoke new thinking about the text.

Indeed, Wallace's description of fiction's "magical" ability to "allow a reader to leap over the wall of self and imagine himself being, not just somewhere else, but someone else" (Wallace in Adam James B 2011) already implies a sort of performance on the part of the reader, similar to the preparations an actor might undertake for a role. Further to this Smith (2009), in her essay on Wallace, invokes an image of performance to suggest how readers should approach his work:

> [Wallace] can't be read and understood and enjoyed at […] speed any more than I can get the hang of the Goldberg Variations over a weekend. His reader needs to think of herself as a musician, spreading the sheet music – the gift of the work – over the music stand, electing to play. First there is practice, then

---

[43] Tellingly, the copy for the 2015 performances of Fish's *Supposedly Fun Thing*[…] claims that "Wallace's work [is] *translated* by Daniel Fish and the performers" (Public Theater 2015; emphasis mine).

competency at the instrument, then spending time with the sheet music, then playing it over and over.

(261)

Once again, performance becomes a metaphor that provides another model for thinking about something often taken for granted, a reminder of the need to question received ideas and test established boundaries. Wallace clearly understands that the relationship between performance and reading is a complex one, and his writing without doubt invites further research into this.[44]

Indeed, a critical study such as this one lays the groundwork for a broad interdisciplinary crossover, a questioning of the relationship between performance and fiction more generally, of whether that relationship might in fact be more complex than it often appears to be, and whether the critical vocabulary of each field can aid and enhance understanding of the other. The bulk of the relationship between performance and literature is often restricted to an understandably logocentric, one-way system of studying plays *as* literature, with performance often seen as a post hoc issue to critically engage with. Performance and novels, it frequently seems, can only meet in the realms of live readings or adaptations – in theatre. This binary position in fact mirrors how, as Boenisch (2010) points out, "[t]heatre in the UK has today become predicated […] on the ossified antagonism of supposedly innovative experiments with bodies and images on the one hand, and text-based theatre on the other" (162). Such a rigid opposition, if indicative of a

---

[44] For more on this complex relationship, see Ong (1988), Kivy (2009), and Barabara Browning's lecture on "The Novel's Call to Perform" (Cricoteka 2013).

119

similar "antagonism" between theatre studies and performance studies, appears problematic for anyone wishing to champion interdisciplinary criticism.

Even when examining performances with little emphasis on text, or completely devoid of it, however, it is not uncommon to use words like 'poetic' or 'prosaic' to describe them. Indeed, in my undergraduate dissertation I examined the apparent contradiction of using a traditionally literary term such as 'poetic' to describe pieces of postdramatic theatre, which is essentially defined by its opposition to logocentrism. Identifying what traits survive the interdisciplinary shift between poetry and performance implicitly suggests the possibility of examining the intersections between other forms, too. Clearly we are able to understand performances in literary terms; how might an equivalent model function for thinking about literature performatively? These are questions that concern not just performance studies scholars, but literary critics, fiction writers, and readers.

Just as performance links us all in everyday life, so too could a critical focus on the topic become the meeting point of various disciplines. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Wallace recognises the centrality of communality to performance, noting that each audience member of the "public spect-ops" of *Infinite Jest* is "out in the world and pointed the same way" (Wallace 1997a: 621). The crowd are all "pointed the same way" to watch whichever live event they have gathered at, but this line also indicates a less ephemeral link between all members of the crowd in its nod to the inexorability of time, the fact that each individual is "pointed the same way" towards an identical end, no matter how disparate their experience. It has been the aim of all of the writers I have referenced in this thesis to elucidate our

understanding of such experience, and at some point or another each of them has

turned to performance in the hope that it might help to this end. Given its repeated

thematic appearances throughout Wallace's novels especially, one can easily infer

that the phenomenon has a great deal to do with the overarching concern of his

fiction: "what it is to be a fucking human being" (Wallace in McCaffery 1993: 26).

Works Cited

Adam James B. (2011). *Endnotes | David Foster Wallace | BBC Documentary*. [video online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIjS4K2mQKY> [Accessed 25 July 2015].

Alphen, E. v. and Bal, M. (2009). Introduction. In: Alphen, E. v., Bal, M. and Smith, C. Eds. (2009). *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp. 1-16.

Artaud, A. (2010). *The Theatre and Its Double*. Translated from French by V. Corti. London: Oneworld Classics Limited. (Original work published 1964).

Artzineonline. (2010). *David Foster Wallace: The future of fiction in the information age.* [video online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cj0JgqOnK2M> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Aucoin, D. (2013). Words, tennis balls fly in 'A Supposedly Fun Thing'. *The Boston Globe*. [online] 26 February 2013. Available at: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2013/02/26/the-words-and-tennis-balls-fly-radically-condensed-and-expanded-supposedly-fun-thing-never-again-after-david-foster-wallace/k5IiJB5jho4CC7Ms8QeCuO/story.html> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Auslander, P. (2003). General Introduction. In: Auslander, P. Ed. (2003). *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1. London: Routledge. pp. 1-24.

Austin, J. L. (1975). *How To Do Things With Words*. 2nd Ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (Original work published 1955).

Barnett, L. (2011). Edinburgh Festival 2011: Audience, Ontroerend Goed, St George's West, review. *The Telegraph*. [online] 10 August 2011. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/edinburgh-festival-reviews/8692941/Edinburgh-Festival-2011-Audience-Ontroerend-Goed-St-Georges-West-review.html> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated from French by S. F. Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Original work published 1981).

Baudrillard, J. (1998). *Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Translated from French by C. Turner. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bennett, A. (2014). Inside David Foster Wallace's Head: Attention, Loneliness, Suicide, and the Other Side of Boredom. In: Bolger, R. K and Korb, S. Eds. (2014).

Gesturing Toward Reality: David Foster Wallace and Philosophy. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 19-29.

Bial, H. (2004). Introduction. In: Bial, H. Ed. (2004). *The Performance Studies Reader*. London: Routledge. pp. 1-4.

Boenisch, P. (2010). Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience: Reflexive Dramaturgies and Classic Texts. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 162-172.

Bondanella, P. and Gieri, M. Eds. (1987). *La Strada*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Boswell, M. (2003). *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Boswell, M. (2014). Trickle-Down Citizenship: Taxes and Civic Responsibility in The Pale King. In: Boswell, M. Ed. (2014). *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing": New Essays on the Novels*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 209-225.

Boswell, M. and Burn, S. J. (2013). Preface. In: Boswell, M. and Burn, S. J. Eds. (2013). *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. ix-xii.

Brook, P., Fiedler, L., Lust, G., Podhoretz, N., Richardson, I. and Rogoff, G. (1966). Marat/Sade Forum. R. Schechner, ed. *The Tulane Drama Review*. Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 214-237.

Burn, S. J. (2012). *David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest: A Reader's Guide*. 2nd Ed. New York: Continuum.

Burn, S. J. (2013). "Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing": Infinite Jest and the Science of Mind. In: Boswell, M. and Burn, S. J. Eds. (2013). *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 59-85.

Burn, S. J. (2014). Toward a General Theory of Vision in Wallace's Fiction. *English Studies*. Vol. 95, No. 1, pp. 85-93.

Bustillos, M. (2011). Inside David Foster Wallace's Private Self-Help Library. *The Awl*. [online] 05 April 2011. Available at: <http://www.theawl.com/2011/04/inside-david-foster-wallaces-private-self-help-library> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Cioffi, F. L. (2000). "An Anguish Become Thing": Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest. *Narrative*. Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 161-181.

Clare, R. (2014). The Politics of Boredom and the Boredom of Politics in The Pale King. In: Boswell, M. Ed. (2014). *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing": New Essays on the Novels*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 187-207.

Cohen, S. and Konstantinou, L. (2012). Introduction: Zoologists, Elephants, and Editors. In: Cohen, S. and Konstantinou, L. Eds. (2012). *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press. pp. xi-xxv.

Cricoteka. (2013). *Barbara Browning - 'Dear Reader':The Novel's Call to Perform | The Book Lovers*. [video online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1m4uWyRjvo> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Danielewski, M. Z. (2000). *House of Leaves*. New York: Pantheon.

Davis, O. (2010). *Jacques Rancière*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Debord, G. and Wolman, G. J. (1981). Methods of Detournement. Translated from French by K. Knabb. (Original work published 1956). In: Knabb, K. Ed. (1981). *Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets. pp. 8-13.

Debord, G. (1992). Preface to the Third French Edition. In: Debord, G. (1994). *The Society of the Spectacle*. 3rd Ed. Translated from French by D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books. pp. 7-10. (Original work published 1967).

Debord, G. (1994). *The Society of the Spectacle*. 3rd Ed. Translated from French by D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books. (Original work published 1967).

Debord, G. (2002). Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life. (Original work published 1961). In: Highmore, B. Ed. (2002). *The Everyday Life Reader*. London: Routledge. pp. 237-245.

Debord, G. (2004a). Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency. Translated from French by T. McDonough. (Original work published 1957) In: McDonough, T. Ed. (2004). *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Boston: MIT Press. pp. 29-50.

Debord, G. (2004b). *Panegyric: Volumes 1 & 2*. Translated from French by J. Brook and J. McHale. London: Verso. (Original works published 1989 (Vol. 1); 1997 (Vol. 2)).

Debord, G. (2004c). Theses on Cultural Revolution. Translated from French by J. Shepley. (Original work published 1958). In: McDonough, T. Ed. (2004). *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Boston: MIT Press. pp. 61-65.

Dulk, A. d. (2014a). Boredom, Irony, and Anxiety: Wallace and the Kierkegaardian View of the Self. In: Boswell, M. Ed. (2014). *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing": New Essays on the Novels*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 43-60.

Dulk, A. d. (2014b). *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers, and Foer*. London: Bloomsbury.

Dulk, A. d. (2014c). Good Faith and Sincerity: Sartrean Virtues of Self-Becoming in David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest. In: Bolger, R. K. and Korb, S. Eds. (2014). *Gesturing Toward Reality: David Foster Wallace and Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 199-220.

Durantaye, L. d. l. (2014). The Subsurface Unity of All Things, or David Foster Wallace's Free Will. In: Bolger, R. K. and Korb, S. Eds. (2014). *Gesturing Toward Reality: David Foster Wallace and Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 19-29.

Earley, M. (2012). A day in dystopia. *Financial Times*. [online] 22 June 2012. Available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/3e80b10a-b95c-11e1-b4d6-00144feabdc0.html> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Elderon, S. (2014). The Shaping of Storied Selves in David Foster Wallace's The Pale King. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. Vol. 55, No. 5, pp. 508-521.

Emigh, J. (1996). *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Fleming, D. and Sturm, D. (2011). *Media, Masculinities, and the Machine: F1, Transformers, and Fantasizing Technology at Its Limits*. London: A & C Black.

Frucci, A. (2010). David Foster Wallace on Video Calling. *Gizmodo*. [online] 08 June 2010. Available at: <http://gizmodo.com/5558321/david-foster-wallace-on-video-calling> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Galenson, D. W. (2009). *Conceptual Revolutions in Twentieth-Century Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gardiner, M. (2002). *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Giesen, B. (2006). Performance art. In: Mast, J., Alexander, J., & Giesen, B. Eds. (2006). *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 315-324.

Goffman, E. (1971). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin. (Original work published 1959).

Gouldner, A. W. (1971). *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Grassian, D. (2003). *Hybrid Fictions: American Literature and Generation X*. Jefferson: McFarland.

Haglund, D. (2015). This Isn't Water. *Slate*. [online] 14 January 2015. Available at: <http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/01/public_theater_david_foster_wallace_stage_adaptation_reviewed.html> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Hayles, N. K. (2012). *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Higgins, H. (2002). *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Highmore, B. (2002a). Introduction: Questioning Everyday Life. In: Highmore, B. Ed. (2002). *The Everyday Life Reader*. London: Routledge. pp. 1-34.

Highmore, B. (2002b). *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Highmore, B. (2002c). Preface to Proletarian Nights [1981]: Editor's Introduction. In: Highmore, B. Ed. (2002). *The Everyday Life Reader*. London: Routledge. pp. 246-247.

Holland, M. K. (2013a). Mediated Immediacy in Brief Interviews with Hideous Men. In: Boswell, M. and Burn, S. J. Eds. (2013). *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 107-130.

Holland, M. K. (2013b). *Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Horn, P. (2014). Does Language Fail Us? Wallace's Struggle with Solipsism. In: Bolger, R. K. and Korb, S. Eds. (2014). *Gesturing Toward Reality: David Foster Wallace and Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 245-270.

Howarth, S. (2000). *Summary*. [online]. Available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573/text-summary> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Jackson, E. (2015). *The Male Gaze and Infinite Jest's Theatres of Cruelty*. Paper presented at *Supposedly Fun Things*, London, 7th Februrary 2015.

Kane, S. (2002). *Crave*. London: Methuen Drama.

Kaprow, A. (1968). Self-Service: A Happening. *The Drama Review*. Vol. 12, No. 3, pp.160-164.

Karmodi, O. (2011). 'A Frightening Time in America': An Interview with David Foster Wallace. *NYR Blog*. [online] 13 June 2011. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2011/jun/13/david-foster-wallace-russia-interview/> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Kaufmann, V. (2007). The Situationists. In: Kritzman, L. D. Ed. (2007). *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kellein, T. (1995). *Fluxus*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Kelly, A. (2010). David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction. In: Hering, D. Ed. (2010). *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*. Los Angeles: SSMG Press. pp. 131-146.

Kelly, A. (2014a). Dialectic of Sincerity: Lionel Trilling and David Foster Wallace. *Post 45*. [online]. Available at: <http://post45.research.yale.edu/2014/10/dialectic-of-sincerity-lionel-trilling-and-david-foster-wallace/> [Accessed 20 August 2015]

Kelly, A. (2014b). David Foster Wallace and the Novel of Ideas. In: Boswell, M. Ed. (2014). *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing": New Essays on the Novels*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 3-22.

Kierkegaard, S. (1968). *Fear And Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*. Translated from Danish by W. Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kirby, M. (1995). Happenings: An Introduction. In: Sandford, M. R. Ed. (1995). *Happenings and Other Acts*. New York: Routledge. pp. 1-24.

Kivy, P. (2009). *The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Knabb, K. Ed. (1981). *Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets.

Konstantinou, L. (2012). No Bull: David Foster Wallace and Postironic Belief. In: Cohen, S. and Konstantinou, L. Eds. (2012). *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press. pp. 83-112.

Kracauer, S. (2002). Boredom. (Original work published 1924). Translated from German by T. Y. Levin. In: Highmore, B. Ed. (2002). *The Everyday Life Reader*. London: Routledge. pp. 301-304.

La Rocco, C. (2012). When the Voice in Your Head Just Keeps Talking. *The New York Times*. [online] 16 March 2012. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/theater/daniel-fishs-take-on-david-foster-wallace.html?_r=0> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Lambert, S. (2014). *'We recoil from the dull': David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo's Digressive Tactics.* Paper presented at *Wallace Infini*, Paris, 11-13 September 2014.

Lasch, C. (1991). *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. London: Norton.

Leach, R. (2004). *Makers of Modern Theatre: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Lefebvre, H. (1946). Retrospections. In: Elden, S., Lebas, E., and Kofman, E. Eds. (2003). *Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings*. London: Continuum.

Lefebvre, H. (1992). *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1: Introduction*. Translated from French by J. Moore. 2nd Ed. London: Verso. (Original work published 1958).

Levé, E. (2014). *Oeuvres*. Translated from French by Jan Steyn. [online]. Available at: <http://www.thewhitereview.org/fiction/oeuvres/> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Lipsky, D. (2010). *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*. New York: Broadway Books.

Max, D. T. (2013). *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace*. London: Granta Books.

McCaffery, L. (1993). An Expanded Interview with David Foster Wallace. In: Burn, S. J. Ed. (2012). *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

McDonough, T. Ed. (2004a). *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Boston: MIT Press.

McDonough, T. (2004b). Introduction: Ideology and the Situationist Utopia. In: McDonough, T. Ed. (2004). *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. Boston: MIT Press.

McDonough, T. (2009). *The Situationists and the City.* London: Verso.

McGurl, M. (2014). The Institution of Nothing: David Foster Wallace in the Program. *boundary 2*. Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 27-54.

McKenzie, J. (2001). *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. New York: Routledge.

Merrifield, A. (2013). *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge.

mojomc123's channel. (2012). *DFW*. [video online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hm94gUBCih8> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Morelos, R. (1999). *Symbols and Power in the Theatre of the Oppressed*. Ph.D. Thesis. Queensland: Queensland University of Technology.

Morris, L. (2014). *The Emancipated Reader: The Radical Aesthet[h]ics in David Foster Wallace's Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Paper presented at *Wallace Infini*, Paris, 11-13 September 2014.

Nyman, M. (1999). *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ong, W. (1988). *Orality and Literacy: The Tehcnologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge.

Phillpot, C. (n.d.) *FLUXUS: MAGAZINES, MANIFESTOS, MULTUM IN PARVO*. [online] Available at: <http://georgemaciunas.com/cv/manifesto-i/> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Plant, S. (1992). *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*. New York: Routledge.

Poole, S. (2000). Gothic scholar. *The Guardian*. [online] 15 July 2000. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jul/15/fiction.reviews> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Public Theater. (2015). *A (radically condensed and expanded) Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again – after David Foster Wallace*. [online]. Available at: <http://publictheater.org/tickets/calendar/playdetailscollection/utr-2015/a-supposedly-fun-thing/> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Quinn, P. (2014). "Location's Location": Placing David Foster Wallace. In: Boswell, M. and Burn, S. J. Eds. (2013). *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 87-106.

Rancière, J. (2011). *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated from French by G. Elliott. London: Verso.

Ravenhill, M. (2006). *Pool (no water) : And, Citizenship*. London: Methuen Drama.

Rayfield, D. (1972). *Action: An Analysis of the Concept*. Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media.

Sadler, S. (1999). *The Situationist City*. Boston: MIT Press.

Sartre, J. (1993). *Essays in Existentialism*. New York: Citadel Press.

Schechner, R. (1973). Performance & the Social Sciences: Introduction. *The Drama Review*. Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 3-4.

Sheringham, M. (2006). *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shklovsky, V. (2006). Art as Technique. Translated from Russian by L. T. Lemon and M. Reis. (Original work published 1917). In: Richter, D. H. (2006). *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. 3rd Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. pp. 774-784.

Situationist International. (1981). The Bad Days Will End. Translated from French by K. Knabb. (Original work published 1962). In: Knabb, K. Ed. (1981). *Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets. pp. 81-89.

Smith, Z. (2009). Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace. In: Smith, Z. (2009). *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*. London: Penguin. pp. 257-300.

States, B. O. (1996). Performance as Metaphor. *Theatre Journal*. Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 1-26.

Thornton, B. (2014a). *DFW, JOI, and Modern French Film*. Paper presented at *Wallace Infini*, Paris, 11-13 September 2014.

Thornton, B. (2014b). *'At the Very Terminus of His Tether': David Foster Wallace and the Situationist Ghost*. Paper presented at *Illinois State University's First Annual David Foster Wallace Conference*, Normal, 23 May 2014.

Vanaigem, R. (1983). *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Translated from French by D. Nicholson-Smith. St. Louis: Left Bank Books. (Original work published 1967).

Wallace, D. F. (1987). Matters of Sense and Opacity. *The New York Times*. [online] 2 August 1987. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/02/books/l-matters-of-sense-and-opacity-773987.html> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Wallace, D. F. (1990). E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction. In: Wallace, D. F. (1998). *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. London: Abacus. pp. 21-82.

Wallace, D. F. (1997a). *Infinite Jest*. London: Abacus.

Wallace, D. F. (1997b). *The Broom of the System.* London: Abacus.

Wallace, D. F. (1997c). *Girl with Curious Hair*. London: Abacus.

Wallace, D. F. (1999a). Authority and American Usage. In: Wallace, D. F. (2007). *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*. London: Abacus. pp. 66-127

Wallace, D. F. (1999b). Some Remarks on Kafka's Funniness From Which Probably Not Enough Has Been Removed. In: Wallace, D. F. (2007). *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*. London: Abacus. pp. 60-65

Wallace, D. F. (2000). Up, Simba. In: Wallace, D. F. (2007). *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*. London: Abacus. pp. 156-234

Wallace, D. F. (2001). *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*. London: Abacus.

Wallace, D. F. (2004). Consider the Lobster. In: Wallace, D. F. (2007). *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*. London: Abacus. pp. 235-254

Wallace, D. F. (2005). *Oblivion: Stories*. London: Abacus.

Wallace, D. F. (2009). *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*. New York: Little, Brown.

Wallace, D. F. (2012). The Pale King. London: Penguin Books.

Wick, A. (2012). An Old-Fashioned 'Infinite Jest' Invades Berlin. *NPR fm berlin blog*. [online] 16 July 2012. Available at: <http://www.npr.org/sections/nprberlinblog/2012/07/16/156853184/an-old-fashioned-infinite-jest-invades-berlin> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Wiener, A. (2012). Infinite Jest! Live! On Stage! One Entire Day Only! *Slate*. [online] 18 June 2012. Available at: <http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2012/06/infinite_jest_on_stage_berlin_theater_adaptation_of_david_foster_wallace_s_novel_.single.html> [Accessed 20 August 2015].

Wiener-Bronner, D. (2014). David Foster Wallace Predicted Our Selfie Anxiety Back in 1996. *Yahoo News*. [online] 08 April 2014. Available at: <http://news.yahoo.com/david-foster-wallace-predicted-selfie-anxiety-back-1996-203754918.html> [Accessed 20 August 2015].