

JADED SELVES AND BODY DISTANCE: A CASE STUDY OF COTARD'S SYNDROME IN *INFINITE JEST*

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ABSTRACT. *This article attempts to betoken the relevance of emotions and sensations arousing from the body for the reviving of the self in David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest. The novel discerns a world where the oversaturation of choices and the external stimuli from entertainment has established a tradition of ennui and addiction as part of the hedonistic search for pleasure. This is particularly important for the understanding of the effects it may have on the mapping of the self and on agency which can consequently be framed among mental disorders. Taking a neuroscientific approach, Wallace's characters are discussed as having a possible connection to Cotard's syndrome. This delusion helps to reveal how a lack of emotions disables correct self-awareness giving way to the belief that one may be dead or non-existent.*

Keywords: agency, embodiment, David Foster Wallace, self-awareness, addiction, cognitive literature.

SERES HASTIADOS Y DISTANCIA CORPORAL: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DEL SÍNDROME DE COTARD EN *INFINITE JEST*

RESUMEN. Este artículo pretende mostrar la importancia de las emociones y las sensaciones que emergen en la representación del cuerpo y en el (r)establecimiento de la identidad en la novela *Infinite Jest*, de David Foster Wallace. En ella se percibe un mundo donde la sobresaturación de elecciones de entretenimiento ha creado una tradición de bastío y adicción como parte de la búsqueda hedonística del placer. Esto es relevante para comprender los efectos sobre el “yo” y la agencia y que, consecuentemente, se pueden enmarcar en desórdenes mentales. Desde un enfoque neurocientífico, la descripción de los personajes que narra Wallace es analizado en su posible conexión con el síndrome de Cotard. Este delirio ayuda a mostrar cómo la falta de emociones invalida una representación correcta del cuerpo, dando así lugar a la creencia de uno mismo de estar muerto o ser inexistente en la novela.

Palabras clave: agencia, experiencia corpórea, David Foster Wallace, conciencia de sí mismo, adicción, literatura cognitiva.

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David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996) explores a world where the constant search and (ab)use of entertainment represents the pitfall for characters' agency and awareness of choice. *Infinite Jest's* characters seem to be entrapped in a downward spiral of anhedonia, solipsism and addiction due to the accessibility and oversaturation of the dominant entertainment. Among other things, Wallace appears to reflect on how the cultural obsession and (ab)use leads to disorders in characters' agency. Characters are portrayed through emphasis on or descriptions of body disturbances (Chapman 2019), defined as being machine-like, anomalous or prosthetic (Russell 2010) and through the effect of these body disturbances on the mind. Under normal circumstances, individuals believe they have a body and that they are the agent behind movement and influence of their actions in the world. The importance of body defragmentation has also been discussed in the text/narrative construction itself (Cioffi 2000; Burn 2003, 2013). Nonetheless, embodied self-awareness i.e. ownership of experience and body (Fogel 2009), and the possible mental disruptions are also pivotal for what Wallace apparently points at as the contemporary societal malaise. For this reason, a review on emotions in the novel plays a key role to discuss disturbances in sense of agency and self-awareness. The narrative exposes characters' experiences as a dichotomy where internal and external stimuli and its emotional effect in the search for unreachable pleasure results in an abnormal perception of oneself and of one's sense of agency. Wallace's work can be interpreted as what the author perceives as an inherent response to and result of entertainment in American society.

More specifically, this paper aims at associating traits observed in Wallace's fiction to Cotard's syndrome (also known as the Walking Corpse syndrome) that are linked to patients with substance abuse, schizophrenia and/or depression (Sahoo and Josephs 2018). Most characters are addicted to some kinds of entertainment; substance (tennis players, Joelle, Ennet interns, among others) or TV series (e.g. Steeply's father or Joelle's father). This criticism towards dependence on entertainment is epitomized with the Entertainment, a cartridge that is a deadly national threat to those who watch it.

The affective spectrum is pivotal to the connection of these conditions in the narrative. The major search for unreachable pleasure gives rise to the range of emotional/affective disorders in the story as discussed in the following pages. One mental disorder affecting emotions is schizophrenia. Although it can be said that schizophrenia is an "organizing trope in his fiction" (Burn 2013: 70), the novel can be further analyzed to reflect on how Wallace diagnoses contemporary society's infirmity that leads to the death of the self by giving away to dependency on the external. This sensation of annihilation as examined in *Infinite Jest* connects to Cotard's syndrome as a possible textual trope. This delusional condition comprises a belief that patients lost or never had specific body parts or that the self does not exist or is dead. (Berrios and Luque 1995; Debruyne *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, Tomassetti *et al.* state that "the main psychopathological cornerstone [in Cotard's delusion] is the progressively ingravescent cognitive misinterpretation of bodily sensations by the mind, as if they would have been somehow disconnected" (Tomassetti *et al.* 2020).

This manuscript will address issues of the entertainment effects on somatosensory and mind matters and how this may be linked to the narrative reflection on death and characters' lack of correct body sensations for a normal integrity of the self. This parallelism with cognitive studies on disruptive images of the self appears to be valid owing to Wallace's knowledge of the mind. As Burn reflects, *Infinite Jest* possesses "a set of nested allusions [that] come together to interrogate and dramatize a range of theories of consciousness" (2013: 65) and which he believes that "could not take place, [for Wallace] without reference to neuroscience" (65) in the examination of "being alive".

The current analysis is divided into, first, identifying the scientific terms related to agency and the sense of feeling, the disorders that may arise from them and then, discovering these traits in *Infinite Jest*. The first term that needs to be defined is agency. Agency is shaped by two significant aspects: fact and sense (Gallagher 2000; Tsakiris and Fotopoulou 2013; Haggard and Eitam 2015). Fact of agency alludes to purposefully making things happen by dint of the neuroanatomy of voluntary action (i.e. I want to perform an action or accomplish a specific

outcome through actions). On the other hand, sense of agency corresponds to the conscious experience of agency. In other words, sense of agency implies that the subjective feeling of agency is a consequence of initiating and controlling our actions to influence the outside world and experiencing “that one actually achieves the intended goal, through one’s actions” (Haggard and Eitam 2015: xii). Sense of agency is an addition to somatic experience, a sort of body-mind (physical matter and thoughts) interface, that comes to be defined as the feeling of carrying out an action individually. Sense of agency has a major attribute; it is intimately bound up with notions of freedom and responsibility traits that pave the way towards our understanding that if we feel the experience, we consider ourselves initiators of the acts. Farrer and Frith among others, identify that “[a]gency has been assigned a key role in self-consciousness” (2002: 596). And that is why according to Gallagher (2000) self-consciousness is constituted in part by a “minimal self”. This direct self-awareness includes self-ownership, or the sense that “it is my body that is moving” and self-agency, or the sense that “I am the initiator of the action and thus that I am casually involved in production of that action” (16).

When sense of agency fails it may show itself in two possible ways, schizophrenia (the primary source analysis here) or anosognosia for hemiplegia. Schizophrenic people fuse the environment to their own body creating an unclear limit between one’s body and external entities. This blurred delimitation entails the schizoid’s detachment from any veritable feeling of induced movement. The body yields to an externally commanded site lacking self-control although they still consider that they possess their body. One example in the novel is when Hal Incandenza expresses, “I believe I appear neutral, maybe even pleasant, though I’ve been coached to err on the side of neutrality and not attempt what would feel to me like a pleasant expression or smile” (Wallace 2006: 3). He continues to express uncertainty of his movements when he states: “I have committed to crossing my legs I hope carefully, ankle on knee, hands together in the lap of my slacks. My fingers are mated into a mirrored series of what manifests, to me, as the letter X” (3). He then also discloses: “I compose what I project will be seen as a smile” (5) although he seems to show “grimace” (5) as in pain.

Hal who at this point has very possibly taken DMZ (a hallucinogenic drug) is clearly an epitome of this state of the body control and sense of agency which most characters lack insight into. This section hints at the possibility that Hal has become aware at this point, though late, of how entertainment takes control of your sense of agency and body: “I’m not a machine. I feel and believe. I have opinions [...] I could, if you’d let me, talk and talk [...] I’m not just a creātus” (12). However, no real language production and body expressions arise correctly in him.

Infinite Jest has a myriad of characters attached to TV series, cartridges, drugs or for example, tennis players whose tennis rackets become part of their body, “something so much an extension of you [that] deserves a sobriquet” (2006: 173). Notwithstanding, almost all characters are ontologically unaware of their state of body-mind, external-internal binary opposition in the schizophrenic world present in *Infinite Jest* (some instances are found on pages 47-48, 244, 262, 435).

Somatic passivity symptoms are a hallmark for the identification of schizophrenic patterns. The passivity symptoms characteristic of schizophrenia include actions, thoughts and sensations that are under external control. Schizophrenia patients with these symptoms report a loss of clear boundaries between the self and others and the idea or feeling that their thoughts and actions are controlled by external forces. However, characters’ inefficiency to accept that their actions have become externally driven is what varies from real schizophrenic patients. It is possible that this recognition is left out for readers to discover. Frith (2006) asserts that one of the most extensively accepted explanatory models of these symptoms indicates a dysfunction in the forward model system, whose role consists of predicting the sensory consequences of actions. That is why if there is no feeling of doing (due to damage or disturbances in a specific sector of the brain) the individual perceives senses as externally controlled. One of the features defining psychopathy and schizophrenia is the failure to accept or to be aware of the responsibility of one’s own actions and therefore, the instigator is not one’s self. This disorder encompasses the paranoid, obsessive-compulsive (Swets *et al.* 2014) and depressive (Upthegrove *et al.* 2017) among others.

The key to understanding how this annular and schizophrenic search for pleasure has become jaded and unreachable also lies in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). As Freudenthal (2010) proposes, OCD in *Infinite Jest* may be linked to what she defines as “anti-interiority”, a confluence of the mind and both the external objects and the body. OCD can be described as the loss of sense of self and agency which echoes schizophrenic conditions. Performance becomes an automatic/involuntary action which voids the self of any control over its actions in OCD. Although Cotard’s syndrome and OCD have not been found to be connected scientifically (see DMS-5), the parallel study of both disorders allows us to interpret how OCD actions may emerge as a feeling observed in Cotard patients (i.e. the lack of having and feeling agency).

In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace develops a vision of a society whose hedonistic pursuit of pleasure confines them away from true feeling and experience. Fromm’s joyless pleasure is reached by characters’ OCD patterns that remove true feelings from their repetitive acts. Wallace’s vision results in nihilistic traits that derive from entertainment pursuit. The annihilation is the annulment of the self enslaved

in its drive towards stultifying entertainment. One of the reasons for Wallace to put the limelight on entertainment and addiction is his belief that substance abuse represents “a kind of a metaphor for the sort of addictive continuum that [he] think[s] has to do with how we as a culture relate to things that are alive” (Lipsky 2010: 81). He finds this addiction rooted in America as “a community of sacred individuals which reveres the sacredness of the individual choice. The individual’s right to pursue his own vision of the best ratio of pleasure to pain: utterly sacrosanct. Defended with teeth and bared claws all through our history” (Wallace 2006: 424).

However, pleasure and freedom of choice are paradoxically the opposite outcome achieved through OCD patterns. OCD is defined as a disorder characterized by its distancing from true emotions and its consequent removal of them. Freudenthal also suggests how this OCD attitude is “a continuous [attempt to] re-establish [...] selfhood contingent on external material reality” (2010: 192) and that it also leads to “the voluntary objectification of personality” (193). This emotion erasure is closely connected to what Wallace outlines in his interview with Lipsky (2010). He expresses that what is sad about this obsessive need for entertainment is that it cancels out any emotional response by only adding excessiveness and vapid addiction to entertainment. Wallace conveys these symptoms in *Infinite Jest* through Avril Incandenza (also known by the family nickname of the Moms) when she says that “[t]he drugs both blunt the real sadness and allow some skewed version of the sadness some sort of expression” (767). In an interview with Miller he describes his purpose in writing *Infinite Jest* as he states that he

wanted to do something real American, about what it’s like to live in America around the millennium [...] There’s something particularly sad about it, something that doesn’t have very much to do with physical circumstances, or the economy, or any of the stuff that gets talked about in the news. It’s more like a stomach-level sadness. I see it in myself and my friends in different ways. It manifests itself as a kind of lostness. (2012: 59)

Therefore, in order to describe this *lostness* he maps it onto the symbolic world of entertainment. This conflicting approach to entertainment underlies a sense of anhedonia and lack of excitement observable in the story. The basis of this particular situation constructs a world where external objects have no effectual stimuli on characters. If what is sought allows no stimulus, it thus comes down to vapid addiction whereby it puts characters in a reality of emotionless response to the world. In other words, the body is unable to feel any emotion arising from inside as the self is annulled and that condition of cancellation is caged in addiction.

This irremediable need to search for pleasure makes characters reject individual control. The state of individuals in *Infinite Jest* entails a dualistic approach due to their willingness to allow external control over agency while, at the same time, they attempt to regain control in order to feel agency and their bodies. For instance, drugs are described as possessing multiple level effects on characters. “[A]ddiction is either a disease or a mental illness or a spiritual condition (as in ‘poor of spirit’) or an O.C.D.-like disorder or an affective or character disorder” (2006: 203). Interestingly, Wallace subtly implies within these lines that characters may have reached that state due to powerless self-control. Gene M. conceives addiction in a dualistic form as he says “you can spell the Disease *DIS-EASE*, which sums the basic situation up nicely” (278). He associates addiction with a double-edge weapon as by “changing *DISEASE* to *DIS-EASE* [it] reduces a definition and explanation down to a simple description of a feeling” (203). The addition of a hyphen illustrates the contradictory *feeling* that addiction can arouse in characters. The relief the characters are searching for is in the habit of stupefying but dependence is at the core of what they have lost and therefore, a state of “*Analysis-Paralysis*” (203) is conferred upon the characters. Another instance of this OCD duality state is seen in “wanting to but not” (203) get high in a section where sitting around is the major course of action as if in a limbo state of paralysis.

As *Infinite Jest* progresses, addictions do not end with substances. Steepley’s father’s dependency on TV series that made him seem “misplaced” (647), Ennet’s interns’ obsessive thinking, i.e, that are “addicted to thinking” (203), and Orin and his sex relationships with Subjects. Wallace points out the universal human trait of shoving yourself so desperately into something that will give you joy and purposeful meaning to yourself. In Hal Incandenza’s words:

We are all *dying* to give our lives away to something, maybe. God or Satan, politics or grammar, topology or philately – the object seemed incidental to this will to give oneself away utterly. To games or needles, to some other person. Something pathetic about it. A flight-from in the form of a plunging-into. (900; italics added)

When it comes to entertainment, the media world has a significant role in its “addictive continuum” (Lipsky 2010: 81). That relationship of addiction/entertainment is made explicit through the ghostly ubiquitous presence of the cartridge Entertainment also called Infinite Jest (which Canadian terrorists are searching for as the ultimate deadly weapon to destroy American society). The cartridge is an unlabeled entertainment with a “vapid USA-type circular smiling head” (36) that could distort natural bodily needs towards catatonia or death. The creator of such a piece, Jim Incandenza, revealingly

had a thing about entertainment, being criticized about entertainment v. nonentertainment and stasis. He used to refer to the Work itself as “entertainments.” He always meant it ironically. Even in jokes he never talked about an anti-version or antidote for God’s sake. (Wallace 2006: 940)

Cartridges are a fundamental necessity for many characters as a form to attain emotions and to ironically feel *aliveness*. There are two clear examples of this in *Infinite Jest*. On the one hand, there is the medical attaché who stops biologically functioning by submitting to utter pleasure (by watching *Infinite Jest*); and on the other hand, there is Steeple’s father who becomes so absorbed by the TV series M*A*S*H that he is slowly consumed by it and he ceases to exist organically. Both characters become a source for Wallace’s personal depiction of entertainment as they kill the self and their *aliveness* in the pursuit of unreachable pleasure. Characters are left with dysfunctional bodily sensations that could be interpreted as the death of the self.

It is not a coincidence that the Year of Glad coincides with Hal’s withdrawal, speech impairment and with his success in achieving a good rank in tennis. The Year of Glad ironically does not intentionally imply a truthful type of emotion but is applied to an existing brand of handle-tie trash bags. Substance addiction is behind the enhancement of entertainment performance in Hal while also achieving the ultimate stage of the paralysis of agency. The name Glad for the year jars as it is incongruent with a happy state. Glad grates as it is false and non-descriptive; it is only an adjective with nobody/nothing to describe. As a verb, it is also inharmonious/out of place because it is not making anybody or anything happy. There is then an uneasy paradoxical lack of gladness in the name of the year and in the novel. Hence, characters search for emotions and the self that they have already thrown away with their (ab)use of vapid entertainment. The repeated theme of waste and the image of the trash bag in *Infinite Jest* represents the discarded self entrapped in a cage. Moreover, the novel begins in the Year of Glad and ends in the same year ascribing self-reflexivity and possibly locked in annularity to the representation of characters in the novel.

The representation of individuals is dichotomous, on the one hand solipsistic as they view the self in the egocentric and hedonistic form in their ability to discharge anything or any connections to the world for the sake of pleasure, but on the other hand, they are paradoxically able to erase their very own self in this pursuit.

Hal Incandenza’s plot is of his growth from childhood into adulthood. However, it is not a conventional bildungsroman as it becomes a degradation and confinement of adult expression to communicate in the form of an affirmation of his own self. This, in turn, is also suggested in the circularity of the novel, where the beginning and the

end of the novel coincide in the year of Hal's loss of communication and body control. However, although Hal becomes aware of the excess and effects of entertainment, his development towards adulthood degrades to the extent of annulment of agency. He is located in a liminal state that is on the margins of two (op)positions. This state of the self is seen in the section where Hal boils down tennis success to the fact of expelling part of one's own soul as a kind of "self-erasure" (Wallace 2006: 791). He identifies that the major fight in the match is against oneself:

How promising you are as a Student of the Game is a function of what you can pay attention to without running away. Nets and fences can be mirrors. And between the nets and fences, opponents are also mirrors. This is why the whole thing is scary. This is why all opponents are scary and weaker opponents are especially scary. Next paragraph See yourself in your opponents. They will bring you to understand the Game. To accept the fact that the Game is about managed fear. That its object is to send from yourself what you hope will not return. This is your body [...] You will have it with you always. (176)

A tennis court is represented as the individual's struggle to eliminate part of their self as their opponent is no other than themselves. This is reminiscent of how characters interpret entertainment when it comes to rejecting a part of themselves. Your opponent is in you. This is also concealed by President Johnny Gentle in his speech against new terrorism on America's horizon. However, it is no accident that his main fear is of the waste created within his territory. Žižek identifies this fear of the power of the external as something that comes from within:

[I]t is no longer that "one wants to make you/us fear," but that "one fears," which means that the enemy stirring up fear is no longer outside "you/us," [...] it is here, amongst us [...] corroding our unity from within. (Žižek 2008: 167)

Wallace confers on this situation a state of having the ability to "bonk the head" (Wallace 2006: 429) by numbing your choices. This condition becomes the dualistic approach of destroying your choice awareness and sensation by addiction to entertainment in the impossible quest for stimuli. As John L. and Gately reveal, the degradation of oneself is where

the Substance seem[s] like the only consolation against the pain of the mounting Losses, and [where] of course you're in Denial about it being the Substance that's causing the very Losses it's consoling you about. (346)

This circling state can be translated into a syndrome with symptoms that are contradictory in themselves. It then symbolically comes down to addiction and subsequent neuropathologies, as key concepts in *Infinite Jest*. As the narrator underlines in the following section:

That a little-mentioned paradox of Substance addiction is:

that once you are sufficiently enslaved by a Substance to need to quit the Substance in order to save your life, the enslaving Substance has become so deeply important to you that you will all but lose your mind when it is taken away from you. (201)

Wallace portrays the illusion of instant gratification from substance addiction to highlight the disruption of the self.

As stated before, an individual with complete cognitive capacity would have a reaction to stimuli including some kind of feeling or emotion feedback or return, it being of excitement or displeasure. As “[f]or instance, a roughly and incompletely composed happy facial expression [leads] to the subject’s experiencing “happiness,” and angry facial expression to their experiencing “anger,” and so on” (Damasio 1995: 147-8). Entertainment resources should allow characters to attain some kind of emotional response and this is why contemporary entertainment is invalidated in *Infinite Jest* as it now projects no true emotions in characters.

The lack of stimulation of internal sense or interoception of the characters unites addiction and OCD as major causes of caging the self. Research on the brain has shown the relevance of perceiving emotions in the representation of the body and thus, in shaping the self. For instance, Craig’s research maintains that

[a]s humans, we perceive feelings from our bodies that relate our state of well-being, our energy, our mood, our disposition. Recent functional anatomical work has detailed an afferent neural system that represents all aspects of the physiological condition of the physical body. This system constitutes a representation of the ‘material me’ and might provide a foundation for subjective feelings, emotion and self-awareness. (2002: 655)

Therefore, as no material world provides feelings in me, I cannot feel my body, I cannot see my boundaries clearly. This, in turn, is strongly mirrored in *Infinite Jest* with the representation of separable body parts, machine-like, malleable and deformed bodies (Wallace 2006: 118, 100, 636). Craig continues to observe that

[i]n humans, a meta-representation of the primary interoceptive activity is engendered in the right anterior insula, which seems to provide the basis for the subjective image of the material self as a feeling (sentient) entity, that is, emotional awareness. Recent findings suggest that interoception should be identified as the sense of physiological condition of the entire body and not only visceral [...This] constitutes a basis for the subjective evaluation of one’s condition, that is, ‘how you feel’. (2003: 500)

This is clearly impaired in the novel as the major feeling is taken from a nihilistic approach of characters to their self and thus interoception, i.e. feeling the body from inside, is impaired.

Craig's findings discover the significance of "the cortical representation of feelings from the body as the likely basis for human awareness of the physical self as a feeling entity. This association provides a fundamental framework for the involvement of these feelings with emotion, mood, motivation and consciousness" (663).

The oversaturation of choices has numbed characters' ability to consciously feel any entertaining excitement due to personal selections and thus consequently agency is void. This oversaturation is translated into a state of anhedonia which disables characters' ability to truly perceive any external stimulus or exteroception over their choices. Anhedonia is an early signifier of depression as the neurological suppression of pleasure or desire, i.e. the pre-conscious suppression of the ability to produce an identity. Hence, an anhedonic state can develop into a sense of a lack of body and thus self, due to the lack of response to external stimuli.

Cotard's syndrome is categorized (among other ways) as a nihilistic delusion within a depressive episode with psychotic features (Grover *et al.* 2014). This syndrome is seen as a new type of depression which is characterized by a sense of damnation or rejection, insensitivity to pain and the delusion of non-existence. As mentioned, *Infinite Jest* is a novel where schizophrenia, obsessive compulsion, depressions and the annihilation of the self are axiomatic.

Whether the syndrome is a distinct disorder or a symptom of other disorders has been a subject of debate (Debruyne *et al.* 2011). For the purpose of the analysis, where characters show a composite of symptoms denoted as relating to Cotard's syndrome they will be considered as patients suffering from the distinct Cotard disorder.

Cotard's syndrome is characterized by the appearance of nihilistic delusions concerning one's own body. It is also affected by mood-congruent alterations whereby body sensations and emotions are altered by the lack of external stimulus transmission. From a scientific standpoint, the most prominent symptoms for Cotard's syndrome are depressive mood (89%), nihilistic delusions concerning one's own existence (69%), anxiety (65%), delusions of guilt (63%), delusions of immortality (55%), and hypochondriac delusions (58%) (Berrios and Luque 1995).

In *Infinite Jest* the state of the body is depicted as malleable, separate and deformed and the mind disrupted and unstable. Ortho "resembles a poorly spliced photo, some superhuman cardboard persona with a hole for [his] human face. A beautiful sports body" (Wallace 2006: 636), Hal who is unsure of his facial expressions (875), Pemulis' paranoid feelings of objects moving and people listening and Marathe's wife who has no skull are some examples

of these body and mind disturbances and representations in the novel. These frames of mind and body shed light on the importance of feelings in the representation of the corporeal and the influence of the psyche. Feeling one's body plays a major role in representing and attributing one's body and actions to one's self. Characters in *Infinite Jest* suffer a schizophrenic state of external control which they seem unaware of. Therefore, this groups them together with typical symptoms such as the lack of sense of agency and the lack of feeling their body and actions. It correlates to Ramachandran's observation that "[o]ne attribute of the self is your sense of 'being in charge' of your actions and, as a corollary, of your belief that you could have acted otherwise if you had chosen to" (Ramachandran 2011: 286). This supports Damasio's statement that interoceptive body-mapping is thought to be the foundation of elementary feelings that one may exist (Damasio 2010).

The Cotard's delusion is associated with the belief that one may be dead. Thus, it also shows nihilistic symptoms of the loss of the self together with the distorted vision of the external world (i.e. the misidentification of one's position in the world). Moreover, Cotard's syndrome is frequently observed in psychotic patients with schizophrenia or depression which interestingly connects both to the novel and to the author's personal experience with depression.

Cotard patients not only suffer the monothematic delusion where one denies ownership of a limb or an entire side of one's body, or what is also called somatoparaphrenia, as it "is not simply a consequence of primary sensorimotor deficits, but a specific failure in the linkage between primary sensorimotor experience and self" (Fotopoulou 2011: 3947). A normal state of somatoparaphrenia implies the rejection of one part of one's body as if it were someone else's. However, Cotard's syndrome consists of the rejection of your whole self. This syndrome makes you feel disconnected from emotions and reality, thus it all seems unreal and stimuli fail to evoke emotions in you. As Ramachandran states, "cotard syndrome is apotemnophilia [also known as Body Integrity Identity Disorder or BIID] for one's entire self, rather than just one arm or leg, and suicide is its successful amputation" (2011: 282).

In *Infinite Jest*, it is not the rejection of the body (which has already occurred) that is the major concern of narration but the willingness to recuperate the feeling of those parts which have been rejected in the pursuit of pleasure. In most of the patients the somatoparaphrenia symptoms normally last a few days or weeks but it can persist for years as is the case in *Infinite Jest*. In the case of Cotard, "first hit produces abnormal perception and second hit leads to persistence of abnormal perception despite being presented with evidence to the contrary" (Sahoo and Josephs 2018: 64) and therefore, it presents first with a disturbed sensation of

body and then an utter rejection of the body. In the novel, they “walk [...] around making you think they are alive” (Wallace 2006: 733).

When Don Gately is describing blackouts, it can be metaphorically connected to the feeling of the death of the self. He describes that blackouts for him were “like [if] your mind wasn't in possession of your body” (2006: 464).

Due to the lack of sense of agency and body, readers may sense that characters feel dead in the novel. As Tsakiris identifies, “motor cognition operationalizes the self as a physical entity through multisensory and motor signals creating experience of ownership over body and agency over actions” (2010: 703). Therefore, as they do not grasp their own deformed bodies they do not sense a self. This occurs through the schizophrenic examples discussed above. The character portrayals then are a consequence foregrounded in the symbolic use of the schizophrenic sense of being externally driven.

At the level of our physical existence we experience our body from the inside. The proposal is that “when one feels a sensation, one thereby feels as if something is occurring within one's body” (Martin 1995: 267) in other words, you seem to be

contained or *bounded* within your body. Hence anything outside of your body seems distinct from you. This experience of boundedness in your body is related to the sense of having your own experience [...] Any time something impacts on your boundaries you know where on your boundary that impact occurred [...] Thus in generating a sense of what and where your boundaries are you are able to generate your own perspective. This is another component of this sense of embodiment. (Carruthers 2008: 1303)

Embodiment is consciously depicted by Wallace as separate or deformed, leading the readers to question why boundaries are blurred or invalidated. Specific examples can be found in Mario Incandenza's deformities, Lyle's crustacean hands, tennis players with disproportionate limbs among many others. Moreover, the fact that characters do not question these abnormal bodies highlights the degree of disruptions in cognition of the sense of embodiment and self.

Carruthers adds that embodiment is “used primarily for self recognition” (2008: 1303) which strongly shows how the representation of the body and the feeling of aliveness are misinterpreted in *Infinite Jest*. Carruthers includes three conditions that are needed for self recognition: sense of embodiment, sense of agency and the capacity to compare visual and non-visual representations. So far, only the two have been discussed. The major analysis on the following pages, focusing on the self in connection to the body, is largely based on sensory information from the body, such as proprioceptive, kinaesthetic and vestibular information, as well as the senses of touch, heat, cold and pain.

Ramachandran discloses the experience of a Cotard patient:

A patient in Chennai: “Ali where are you?”[...] “Not much can be done: I am a corpse”[...] “I don’t exist. You could say I am an empty shell. Sometimes I feel like a ghost that exists in another world” “I don’t know what you’re saying. You know the world is illusory as the Hindus say. It’s all *maya* [the Sanskrit word for “illusion”]. And if the world doesn’t exist, then in what sense do I exist? We take all that for granted, but simply isn’t true” “Well, I am dead and immortal at the same time.” (2011: 280)

Damasio suggests that one under normal circumstances is able to represent one’s body as it has been lately (1995: 239) which in *Infinite Jest* seems to be impaired. Patients suffering from Cotard’s delusion are unable to identify their body as their own and that is why they claim that they do not exist or that they are dead. It is often assumed that this delusion arises out of a profound feeling of detachment from the world. Therefore, if you cannot sense your own body, you may feel dead. Furthermore, Carruthers suggests that “the Cotard patient lacks appropriate responses to certain stimuli (say faces or anything they come into contact with). As such, they fail to represent how their body changes and can potentially change when coming into contact with these stimuli” (2008: 1314).

Hal Incandenza’s smiles are inappropriate or impossible to project as he lacks a crucial part of the perception of his body. Furthermore, in *Infinite Jest* the involvement with addictions entraps characters in their symptoms. By templating the description behind the nosology of neuropsychological conditions like schizophrenia, OCD, depression and Cotard on the personae in the novel, it can be suggested that characters do feel as if they were dead because they are unable to feel their bodies and so they can be associated with these diseases. In a regular Ennet House meeting where interns share their experiences, John L. describes what substance addiction does to free will in close connection to feeling non-existent: “A fuckin livin death, I tell you it’s not being near alive, by the end I was undead, not alive, and I tell you the idea of dyin was nothing compared to the idea of livin like that for another five or ten years and only *then* dyin” (2006: 347).

The use of the word undead is no coincidence. It contains in its form the duality of most characters in the novel. Hence, the lack of agency over their bodies that only function mechanically with no will control. This recalls another depressive patient, Kate Gompert, who mentions that her “fondest dream [she comes to discover is] anhedonia, complete psychic numbing. I.e. death in life” (698). At Ennet Recovery House, an intern that we assume is Lenz states that “most of them ain’t real. So watch your six. Most of these fuckers are –: metal people [...] walking around, make you think they’re alive [b]ut that’s just the layer [...] There’s a micro-thin layer of skin. But underneath, it’s metal. Heads full of parts” (733).

Death is a major topic in the novel which appears in the form of Cotard's syndrome, the living dead and the actual or close death of many of its characters. Jim Incandenza commits suicide, the medical attaché and Steeply's father give themselves away to entertainment, Poor Tony dies of perhaps Too Much Fun (although officially from a venereal disease: 300-301), Steeply's wife is a living corpse, and Orin seems to be stuck in a kind of limbo with addiction towards Subjects. Most tennis players are paralyzed awaiting the destiny of their selves immersed in never-ending drills whilst attempting an emotional escape through drugs. Joelle revealingly, has had ironically Too Much Fun and wants to stop it. Cotard's delusion is also perceived in the suggestive name of the brothers Anti-toi, the *anti-you* who are killed in the Assassins' pursuit of a copy of Infinite Jest. Death also comes through the pleasure of seeing death which is the case of the schizophrenic intern Lenz who is obsessed with killing pets (695).

A clear drama over death is Don Gately who is struggling to keep alive in hospital. Another example is the tennis player The Darkness who becomes more significant in the novel the more he achieves the ability to deny selfhood or personality. Interestingly, *Infinite Jest* begins with *I* and ends with *he*. But if we consider the end to be the endnotes then an even more impersonal end is revealed with a corporation and registered trademark symbol as a story of self-forgetting and degradation.

The idea expressed by Marathe about American citizens that "you cannot kill what is already dead" (319) is also seen in Hal Incandenza. The contradiction is seen in the case studies of Cotard, the living dead who want to commit suicide (Moschopoulos *et al.* 2016). Hal becomes a living corpse unable to communicate due to Too Much Fun. What is noteworthy is the fact that Hal's competitive leap happens when he became addicted to marijuana, "the coincidence of Hal's competitive explosion and the year of his addiction," indicates that "both have drawn on the same erasure of self" (Burn 2003: 50). Hal appears to share his father and grandfather's view of turning the self into machine, soul into body to achieve sport success which parallels the destruction of self due to addiction. As Hal says, his "eyes are two great pale zeros" (Wallace 2006: 10). This is a landmark in the novel which is iterated as the consequence of their "choice for death of the head by pleasure [which] now exists" (319).

He states that God is more pro-death while he is anti-death (39). Hal confesses that he hasn't had "a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny" (694). Mario realizes that Hal does not feel any control over his movements after a match, as he tells Hal "I don't get how you couldn't feel like you believed, today, out there. It was so *right there*. You moved like you totally believed [...] How do you feel inside, not?" (41). Hal construed his body actions as individually

questionable. Sense of controlling is damaged and impaired but apparently Hal, together with his father and Don Gately, are more aware of this than most characters in the novel.

With this limbo state, time stops on the course of expectation for drugs when Hal awaits a woman to bring him Bob Hope. He closes windows and leaves a message on the phone (19-20). He “is insufficiently committed to the course of action” (20) which highlights the idea that if there is no action or agency you may feel as if you were dead.

Death lingers throughout the novel as OCD and addiction have removed what was left of characters’ feelings while entertainment is accurately represented by Wallace as vapid and/or stultifying and responsible for the *nobodiness*. Vapid entertainment is a major symbol of dehumanizing bodies that become machine-like losing their souls to the entertainment world in general and specifically to cartridges, series and the Entertainment. As suggested in the novel, “[a]ll the different people you know. So-called. They’re the *same machines*” (753). In close connection to media entertainment, Steeply suggests that Canadians had a pleasurable entertainment called the myth of *L’Odalisque de Sainte Thérèse*. It is an enchanted enthrallment over those who look straight into her eyes, casting over them death as a consequence of her great beauty. More interestingly, even those who are aware of the fatal outcome are willing to look at her beauty. The myth represents the descent into bodiless non-agent selves and into the loss of the soul to become a mere object. The concept of blindly surrendering to the external becomes a true representation of the living dead in *Infinite Jest*.

The character Kate Gompert, a 22-year old depressive patient on suicide watch in a psychiatric unit brings us to a germane type of Cotard’s syndrome. The purity of her descriptions makes her sections in the novel a major source of what may go through a depressive person’s mind and, at the same time, it represents a valuable perspective for the exploration of Cotard’s syndrome in my discussion. As in much of Wallace’s writing, this passage portrays the apprehension that deals with the nature of existence and the “paralytic thought-helix” (335) of isolation and true feeling of emotions. Wallace’s utterly emotional words come together in what is considered a key section in the novel. The descriptions where Kate Gompert appears are an intimate and powerful account owing to Wallace’s insight that contributes to the reflection upon the sadness and loneliness apparent in the novel. The author was fully aware of the afflicting effects isolation had. Kate Gompert’s sections entail a rather intimate description of self-obsession and the pain unbearable for any human to endure.

It is this pain that will be analyzed in depth and in close connection to embodiment. Kate Gompert identifies her depressive symptom to a feeling all over her body. However, what I suggest is that it does not spring from body sensations in themselves but that it is a “psychic pain” (69). She is aware of how the external has erased her very own agency and sense over her body and, thus, she identifies this *feeling* to be all over her whole body. What is proposed here is that what she feels is a rejection of her whole body which makes her not want to “play anymore” (73), i.e. commit suicide. This feeling is conceived in Cotard's delusion as the feeling of repulsion or rejection of your own somatosensory system or the body that she is unable to truly perceive. As Kate Gompert conceives it, she does not want to feel pain but to cease that particular sensation she describes that overcomes her body. She frames this feeling as a nauseous sensation not only coming from the guts, but “[a]ll over. My head, throat, butt. In my stomach. It's all over everywhere. I don't know what I could call it” (73). She attributes this feeling to “inside. All through you. Like every cell and every atom or brain-cell or whatever was so nauseous it wanted to throw up, but it couldn't, and you felt that way all the time, and you're sure, you're positive the feeling will never go away” (74).

In the face of being identified as a feeling, that feeling is connected to a body sensation disorder which is seen in studies that recognize body actions as metarepresentations of feelings. Additionally, a profound state of unease or dissatisfaction may accompany depression or anxiety which can also appear as a feeling of not being comfortable in the current body. This disorder called dysphoria can be associated with Kate Gompert's emotional state in the novel. And as characters in the novel have lost sense of body ownership and agency towards external control this situation yields to the figure of self-rejection. The former can be observed in Gompert's reaction to *repulse* her own corporeality. Her feeling or thought comes in the form of disgust. That is why the only way she can remove this feeling of bodilessness is by committing suicide. As she says, it “isn't a state” (73). As recognized, states refer to clear confirmations of who we are as well as referring to a condition or a feeling as in “I am hungry”, I feel it inside and I can connect it to the need of food. That is why she insists that she “didn't want to especially hurt myself”[...] just wanted out [of the body while she reiterates that idea that she] wasn't trying to hurt myself. I was trying to kill myself. There's a difference” (71).

Death appears again represented as an important trope in the novel. Kate Gompert connects this feeling to a source of horror as someone jumping off a building in flames who does not want to die by the flames but knows that they will die after the jump. She declares that “everything gets horrible. Everything you

see gets ugly. *Lurid* is the word [...] And everything sounds harsh, spiny and harsh-sounding, like every sound you hear all of a sudden has teeth. And smelling like a smell bad even after I just got out of the shower” (73). Thus, Gompert’s statement once more represents a connection to the sense of disgust: “I fear this feeling more than I fear anything, man. More than pain, or my mom dying, or environmental toxicity. Anything” (73).

Anhedonia is a clear promoter of this body state due to the fact that, if no emotions arise, then consequently the sense of bodilessness emerges

this form of depression [is] not overtly painful [and] its deadness is disconcerting. Kate Gompert always thought of this anhedonic state as a kind of radical abstracting of everything, a hollowing out of stuff that used to have affective content. Terms the undepressed toss around and take for granted as full and fleshy – *happiness, joie de vivre, preference, love* – are stripped to their skeletons and reduced to abstract ideas. They have, as it were, denotation but not connotation. The anhedonic can still speak about happiness and meaning et al., but [...] has become incapable of feeling anything in them. (692-3)

The following paragraph continues reflecting upon these concepts:

Hal isn’t old enough yet to know that this is because numb emptiness isn’t the worst kind of depression. That dead-eyed anhedonia is but a remora [...] Authorities term this condition *clinical depression* or *involutional depression* or *unipolar dysphoria*. Instead of just an incapacity for feeling, a deadening of soul, the predator-grade depression Kate Gompert always feels as she Withdraws from secret marijuana is *itself* a feeling. It goes by many names – *anguish, despair, torment*, or q.v. Burton’s *melancholia* or Tevtushencko’s more authoritative *psychotic depression* – but Kate Gompert, down in the trenches with the thing itself, knows it simply as *It*. (695)

Thus, it is not a feeling that we would define as coming within a normal interoceptive and exteroceptive state. It is a psychic pain that arises from the despair and thus an OCD search to understand and regain your body. Therefore, the former description entails that the body state in the novel reflects no self-stimuli as no true and/or direct feelings are sensed. Kate Gompert connects despair to the external control over your own body, as she names it “*It*” which has to do with the self,

the essence of conscious existence. *It* is a sense of poisoning that pervades the self at the self’s most elementary levels. *It* is a nausea of the cells and soul. *It* is an unnumb intuition in which the world is fully rich and animate and un-map-like and also thoroughly painful and malignant and antagonistic to the self, which depressed self *It* billows on and coagulates around and wraps in *Its* black folds and absorbs into *Itself*, so that an almost mystical unity is achieved with a world every constituent of which means painful harm to the self. *Its* emotional character, the feeling

Gompert describes *It* as, is probably mostly indescribable except as a sort of double bind in which any/all of the alternatives we associate with human agency – sitting or standing [...] living or dying – are not just unpleasant but literally horrible. (696)

This analysis holds that the feeling is horrible as they cannot have any sensory feedback. It becomes the lurid torment of realizing you are *non-existent* or *dead*. This is observable when, walking with Ms. Ruth van Cleve, she wonders how she can walk “without any sort of conscious moving-forward-type volitions” (699). And yet, she cannot attain any firm sense of doing as “all she’s capable of concentrating on is one foot and then the other foot” (699). In this section there is a clear focus on separate body parts as if they had no self attached to them. It also reveals to the reader a sense of the deadened state of Cotard’s syndrome. Body delusion related to the syndrome is also illustrated through the description of detached or separate parts for example when Kate Gompert describes “heads [that] glide by in the darkened windows” (699), while she struggles to identify her own body in the reflection: “She looks at [...] just heads that seem to float across each window unconnected to anything. As disconnected floating heads. In doorways by shops are incomplete persons in wheelchairs with creative receptacles where limbs should” (699).

When it comes to the external pleasure pursued by most in *Infinite Jest*, it is observable that this does not provoke any stimuli in their bodies. Kate Gompert’s feeling has a profound impact on body perception. It is as if the external stimulus and the impaired internal body state of what is supposed to be stimulated have turned around on her, cancelling her out. This is observable when conceived by the fully meaningful representation of her feeling as that of “remora on the ventral flank of the true predator, the Great White Shark of pain” (695). Thus, what is significant here is the wrong allowance of trying to survive on what may kill your agency and senses.

She confines her problems of why she feels the way she does to Bob Hope. But it is due to stopping using it and not being dependent on substance addiction that she becomes aware that her body was externally controlled and that without Bob Hope she considers it impossible to overcome this disorder. Hence, substance addiction for her is translated to “hope springs eternal” (75). The abjection of the self over Bob Hope onsets the feeling of disgust and body rejection (75-76). Wallace gives her description yet another obscured and uncertain aspect by including again the random and involuntary sniff that many characters enact throughout the entire novel without any particular reason. “The doctor was oddly sure that Kate Gompert pretended to sniff instead of engaging in a real sniff” (76). The inconsistency in self, body and action in *Infinite Jest* truly affects how characters and we, as readers, perceive and feel the course of narrated actions.

The findings in contemporary neuropathology research alongside theories of agency, self and body suggest a correlation between mental conditions like depression and schizophrenia (both associated with Cotard's syndrome) and OCD. Characters in the novel are figurative case studies mirroring these studies that explore concepts influencing self-awareness and thus, the self. As shown, all the mental disturbances presented here are linked to dysfunctional bodily sensations. Firstly, introductory notes to concepts related to disruptions in body and mind have been put forward to support the main argument of the living dead. Examples of these disruptions in the novel suggest how the search for hedonistic pleasure in the fallacy of choice is what may trigger anhedonia, solipsism and addiction. It is then, the reason why Wallace considers that these states arise from the threat that the entertainment world poses to the integrity of the self and to "living in your body" (2006: 158).

David Foster Wallace had an extensive library knowledge of neuropsychological disorders and also experienced many difficulties personally. This particular article has explored the theme of death in relation to Walking Dead syndrome and it is my belief that Wallace consciously constructed this novel using the related theories and conditions in a medium of addiction to entertainment or substances in order to portray the lack of self as societal malaise.

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