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Infinite Jest and the Sartrean Philosophy of Hal Incandenza

Grace Corrigan
Regis University

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INFINITE JEST AND THE SARTREAN PHILOSOPHY OF HAL INCANDENZA

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

Grace Corrigan

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Introduction

In the vast sea of modern literature there exists a movement by authors with the intent to describe reality to its fullest extent. Ryan David Mullins writes, “The exploration of an author’s contemporary reality and its seemingly herculean, interconnected patterns, and the attempt to capture and represent these underlying patterns in some kind of fictional intuition constitutes one of the aims of a form a literary fiction, namely theory of everything (TOE) or encyclopedic fiction.”¹ In other words, artists creating a fictional theory of everything are grasping at the entirety of reality through their work instead of a single reality, through a single character or ‘world.’ While David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* fall into this category, Mullins claims Wallace shows the “impossibility of TOEs” through a “fictional critique of the metaphysics of totality.”² Instead of a continuous totality, Wallace fractures reality into domains, each of which is complex and brimming with philosophical theories captured by his characters.

Of course, any attempt to distill an encyclopedic piece of fiction into a few short pages of summary would probably make the original artist cringe. However, in an effort to supply context for specific philosophical influences in *Infinite Jest* I will attempt to do just that. By no means is this overview intended to summarize this enormous novel, but rather to allow the reader to understand characters as they are referenced and how they relate to one another and the scenes that will follow.

¹ Ryan David Mullins, “Theories of Everything and More: Infinity is Not the End,” in *Gesturing Towards Reality: David Foster Wallace and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. Bolger and Scott Korb (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 239.

² Mullins, “Theories of Everything and More” p. 239.

Taking place at the fictional Enfield Tennis Academy and Ennet House in Enfield, MA as well as various areas of Tucson, AZ, *Infinite Jest* is the grand intersection of characters and their parallel experiences of pleasure, addiction, internal suffering, entertainment, and their relationships with one another and ourselves. James O. Incandenza, or ‘Himself’ as his children call him, was considered a genius avant-garde filmmaker and the founder of the Enfield Tennis Academy, an elite and prestigious athletic school focused on the training of tennis prodigies, just within Boston. During his long struggle with alcoholism, J. O. Incandenza succeeded in creating the ultimate form of film entertainment which transfixed viewers into a state of pure pleasure, rendering them incapable of anything but viewing. Following this work, he manipulated a microwave oven and committed a gruesome suicide. His son and arguably the main character of the novel, Hal Incandenza, is the first to discover his dead father in their kitchen. Hal is a genius level intellectual in class at Enfield Tennis Academy as well as a prodigious tennis player. His oldest brother Orin played at E.T.A. and then attended Boston University on a full-ride tennis scholarship until he dropped tennis in pursuit of football and the P.G.O.A.T., or “Prettiest Girl of All Time.” Their middle brother is Mario, a genuine and kind character, defined by his lack of intellect and affection for amateur filmmaking. Their mother, or “The Moms” is infectiously attractive and overbearing to the point of creepy when it comes to her children. Down the hill from the tennis academy is the Ennet House for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Although there are some character connections between the two spaces, their stories are relatively unrelated. Don Gately, recovering Demerol addict, has been sober for about 9 months in

the last scenes of the book. In much of the novel, Gately is employed by the Ennet House and because of his massive stature is supposed to keep the peace between addicts and supervise. Joelle, who we find out was the star of J.O. Incandenza's ultimate entertainment and Orin's P.G.O.A.T., is a resident of the Ennet House after an attempted suicide by smoking high-grade cocaine. Her obscure radio personality is "Madame Psychosis" whose radio show Mario Incandenza listens too regularly. The relationships between these major characters plus numerable minor characters is complex and incredibly clever, as sometimes only relatable through contextual clues, and often wholly explored in a single footnote.

Contributing to the distinct and fractured reality throughout the text, Wallace presents the reader with scenes out of chronological order. For example, the first scene in *Infinite Jest* depicts Hal Incandenza's last appearance in the story chronologically in the Year of Glad. Wallace's scenes occur during "subsidized time," which is made up of years bought and named by corporations. Through this extra source of revenue for the fictional O.N.A.N. (Organization of North American Nations) government, the years are named anything from the Year of the Perdue Wonderchicken to the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment.

The novel includes scenes from subsidized time spanning Hal's life from age ten to age eighteen. In some ways, *Infinite Jest* is a coming of age story for Hal. In general, these ages are an important time of growth for all humans in building interests and character. The trauma that young Hal experienced when he walked into his kitchen with walls plastered with his father's brain changed what would have already been a relatively

abnormal adolescence.³ When his brother Orin asks who was the first to find their father after his suicide, Hal responds “Found by one Harold James Incandenza, thirteen going on really old.”⁴ It goes without question that finding one’s father directly after his suicide would be an incredibly traumatic and transformative start to teenage years. The Moms sent Hal directly to one of the best grief specialists in Boston directly after the incident in order to process his trauma. More about this further on, but one of Hal’s main characteristics is his lack of emotional ability, as he often replaces feelings with intellectual analysis.

At fifteen, Hal stars in his brother Mario’s tennis instructional cartridge about tennis as both a game and a lifestyle. In the midst of advice on how to hold a stick and avoid sunburn by coating oneself in Lemon Pledge, Hal reveals that he finds it easy to be “no one.”⁵ Later on, Wallace writes of Hal’s internal self, “Hal himself hasn’t had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny; he finds terms like *joie* and *value* to be like so many variables in rarified equations, and he can manipulate them well enough to satisfy everyone but himself that he’s in there”⁶ After Hal quits smoking marijuana he finds himself in a complicated spiral of self reflection, saying “It now lately sometimes seemed like a kind of black miracle to me that people could actually care deeply about a subject or pursuit, and could go on caring this way for years on end.”⁷ His crisis here seems based on his relationship with both tennis and his father. It is impossible

³ The pressures and rigors of attending the Enfield Tennis Academy differed greatly from what would be a “normal” childhood.

⁴ David Foster Wallace. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2006. p. 248

⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*. p. 175

⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 694

⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 900

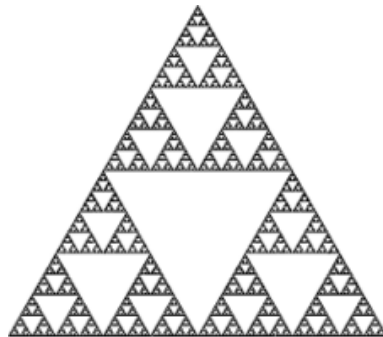
for someone to care deeply about something if they acknowledge their own emptiness. Later on, we will explore many more examples of Hal's character, but the above passages give some basis for his character's internal life.

Throughout *Infinite Jest* the references to philosophical thinkers are incorporated, either explicitly or implied, into almost every scene in the novel. In my opinion, the effort and time required to explore each one of these philosophies and how they relate to one another and the story would (and should) takes years of analysis. By exploring just a small fraction of Wallace's use of philosophy in his characterizations of the game of tennis and Hal Incandenza, I think we gain valuable insight into how our choices shape our existence. Looking at Wallace's distinct use of choice and freedom in his description of tennis match play, Sartre's philosophy of being and bad faith can bring powerful conclusions about why Hal's identity outside of tennis degrades throughout the novel. Wallace is asking us what is left after we have consistently given ourselves away.

Chapter 1

Infinities of Choice; Tennis, Freedom, Self

After the release of *Infinite Jest*, Wallace confirms the suspicions of interviewer Michael Silverblatt, who notes that the novel's structure seemed to resemble a kind of fractal.⁸ Wallace responds that one of the structural devices going on is a Sierpinski gasket, "which is a very primitive kind of pyramidal fractal."⁹ The basic principle of fractals is that they are never-ending patterns of "self-similarity."¹⁰ In other words, a fractal is a basic pattern that can be repeated into a series that collectively form a larger pattern identical to the individuals in the series. The primitive fractal called the Sierpinski gasket that Wallace uses looks like this:



It is evident that the Sierpinski gasket shown above is based on an inward expansion, as the triangles get proportionally smaller but continue the same pattern. However, it is

⁸ "David Foster Wallace: Infinite Jest." Interview by Michael Silverblatt. KCRW. April 11, 1996. Accessed September 3, 2015. <http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/bookworm/david-foster-wallace-infinite-jest>.

⁹ Wallace notes, however, that after editing the novel probably resembles more of a "lopsided Sierpinski gasket."

¹⁰ "Educators' Guide." Fractal Foundation. Accessed October 12, 2015. <http://fractalfoundation.org/fractal-shows/educators-guide/>.

important to note that a fractal expanding inward also expands outward in the same manner. The triangles contained in the figure above can be repeated outside of the largest triangle shown, in the same configuration they are shown inside. Infinite inward and outward expansion are occurring at the same time, the line between the two exists only where you position yourself to see it.

Wallace's use of this fractal in structuring his novel shows his ability to apply mathematics to humanity in a way that is not only complex, but often beautiful. The infinite expansion occurring in fractals gives not only a model for how Wallace structured the novel's plot, but is deeply incorporated into the philosophy behind his character's actions. There is a consistent theme of repetitive actions or behaviors as integral parts of Wallace's character's identities. Outwardly, these repetitive actions can be seen in Hal's solo practice, many of the character's drug addictions, anyone who views J.O. Incandenza's ultimate entertainment, and even the constant tennis ball squeezing required of all E.T.A. students. In addition, I believe there lies a connection between Wallace's use of infinity in both Schtitt's description of the game of tennis and Sartre's philosophy of the self, especially when it comes to the formation of Hal's character. Whether they result in deep seeded drug addiction, prodigal talent in tennis, or Hal's apparent inward regress, these repetitions and patterns of behavior become integral in the formation of character's identities.

The real question behind Wallace's use of structural infinities is whether or not the repetitive behaviors are constructive or destructive. In the case of drug addiction, these behaviors are certainly destructive. Don Gately's constant battle with drugs from a

young age produced a man with nothing to live for but the next high.¹¹ Hal's secrecy surrounding his addiction to marijuana leads, at least partially, to his feelings of immense loneliness. J.O. Incandenza's tendency to drink Wild Turkey at all hours of the day, year after year, lead to the bone chilling incident with the microwave. Mullins writes, "I want to suggest that, in Wallace's work, liberation from "bad" infinite regresses consist in the higher-order act of *choosing* what one does and doesn't pay attention to within the operative domains in which we're participating."¹² I would argue that Mullin's argument aligns with Sartre's assertion that choice plays an immense role in the essence of the self, which I will get into later. After Gately's final binge he chooses to seek treatment. After Hal's secrecy is threatened, he stops smoking in the tunnels beneath his school. After years of drunken genius, Himself decides to kill himself. While the outcomes of these character's choices vary greatly, they all make a conscious choice to put an end to the behavior that is destructive. In so many ways, this conscious choice and the decision to act intentionally in one direction or the other is what Wallace is trying to say defines our humanity. By breaking their destructive behaviors and escaping from the infinity of regressive action, each of the characters mentioned above regained their ability to decide for themselves.

My main point above is not the outcome of these character's struggle with addiction, but how Wallace uses *choice* as a defining way of building a character's identity. It is the breaking of a pattern, like the inwardly expanding Sierpinski gasket, that allow Hal to escape from his inward regression. However, just as his choice broke his

¹¹ Until he found AA, of course.

¹² Mullins, "Theories of Everything and More," 241.

inward regress, which could metaphorically be used as the negative process of continually moving into oneself, this same method of choice allows him to decide how to hit on the court- and Wallace uses this decision as a metaphor for how Hal chooses to *be*. There is a complex but incredibly intentional use of tennis as a philosophical metaphor for life itself throughout *Infinite Jest*, which I will now explain both generally and in the context of Hal's character.

In addition to writing multiple essays about the physics, metaphysics, and beauty behind the sport¹³, Wallace played junior tennis as an adolescent and studied it avidly for much of his life. Because of this, I think it is safe to assume that the philosophies regarding tennis in *Infinite Jest* are not just shallow musings, but Wallace's deeply important reflections on the game and how it relates to our humanity. Using the militant, unapologetic, and practically fascist character of Schitt, Wallace provides us with an important passage regarding the complexity and intricacy of tennis. Nestled in a scene of Schitt's musings to a rather confused Mario Incandenza is what I believe lies at the heart of Wallace's philosophy of tennis:

Schitt, whose knowledge of formal math is probably about equivalent to that of a Taiwanese kindergartner, nevertheless seemed to know what Hopman and van der Meer and Bollettieri seemed not to know: that locating beauty and art and magic and improvement and keys to excellence and victory in the prolix flux of match play is not a fractal matter of reducing chaos to pattern. Seemed intuitively to sense that it was a matter not of reduction at all, but- perversely- of expansion, the aleatory flutter of uncontrolled, metastatic growth - each well-shot ball admitting of n possible responses, n^2 possible responses to those responses, and on

¹³ Wallace, David Foster. "The String Theory." *Esquire*. September 17, 2008. Accessed October 23, 2015. <http://www.esquire.com/sports/a5151/the-string-theory-0796/>.

into what Incandenza¹⁴ would articulate to anyone who shared both his backgrounds as a Cantorian continuum of infinities of possible move and response, Cantorian and beautiful because *infoliating*, *contained*, this diagnate infinity of infinities of choice and execution, mathematically uncontrolled but humanly *contained*, bounded by the talent and imagination of self and opponent, bent in on itself by the containing boundaries of skill and imagination that brought one player finally down, that kept both from winning, that made it, finally, a game, these boundaries of self.¹⁵

In many ways, Schitt is J.O. Incandenza's successor to the philosophy behind E.T.A. They share a common belief about what the game of tennis can do for an athlete, and Wallace reinforces this by comparing Schitt's view to those of "Hopman and van der Meer and Bollettieri" all elite tennis academies in the non-fictional U.S. of A. Wallace writes that these other academies seem to find that prolific tennis comes from "a fractal matter of reducing chaos to pattern." In quite the opposite view, Schitt finds that real tennis match play comes from embracing the infinities of possibilities with each and every shot. When he writes that tennis is actually the "flutter of uncontrolled, metastatic growth" we see that in match play there lies an endless number of possible serves and returns. Interestingly enough, Wallace's use of these possibilities that Schitt acknowledges are actually part of Georg Cantor's theory of infinity, which explains his reference to the "Cantorian continuum of infinities." Cantor, the father of mathematical set-theory, was one of Wallace's inspirations as a comprehensive student of mathematical philosophy in his undergraduate years and throughout his entire academic career.¹⁶

¹⁴ James O. Incandenza, to clarify.

¹⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 82.

¹⁶ He continued to study Cantor showed in his references in *Infinite Jest*, up until his 2003 publishing of *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity*. The book is more or less an everyday readers' guide to mathematical theories of infinity.

Wallace's reference to Cantor's infinity of infinite sets of numbers, whether these be real or natural numbers, show the possibilities of serves and responses as "*infoliate*," which means to be covered or spread as with leaves. To imagine a tennis court with the infinite possibilities of moves inside the boundaries of the court is difficult, but imagining no gaps between every trajectory of each possible serve shows how each move that Hal makes on the tennis court affects the future of the game. Cantor's theory of infinity demonstrates that there are infinite sets of infinite numbers. When we apply this math to the game of tennis, we can see that for the young fictional prodigy in *Infinite Jest*, every hit within the boundaries of the court propels his match play towards a future that he controls. For Hal, the choices he makes on the court parallel the actions he chooses to make throughout the novel. Hal's "diagnate infinity of infinities of choice and execution" are restricted only by his "boundaries of self."

These "boundaries of self" that define Hal's match play through his choice also define his character. These ideas surrounding freedom and choice in existential philosophy impacted not only Wallace's writings, but the fiction of so many other authors in his genre. Jean-Paul Sartre, a key figure in existentialist philosophy, said in his speech "Existentialism is a Humanism" that the defining principle of Existentialism is that "existence precedes essence." In other words, we exist and act and experience before we can define any part of ourselves. In other other words, through our experiences we create ourselves, as our experiences are defined by our conscious choices on how to act. Sartre defines consciousness as "a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far

as this being implies a being other than itself.”¹⁷ We exist as an individual because we are able to recognize consciousnesses that are separate from our own. The individual would cease to be a concept if we were unable to distinguish our own being from those that surround us. The author goes on to argue that there is no dichotomy between the being and what is referred to as the ‘hidden self’ in that the constant and changing “appearance” that we essentially *are*, because a ‘hidden self’ would absorb all of the consciousness into itself and out of the being. In other words, there exists no difference between our inward and outward consciousness. However, he seems to define appearance as the “total series of appearances” that our consciousness expresses. In the same way that there is no such thing between the ‘hidden self’ and the being, Sartre argues that there is no separation between *appearance* and *essence*. He writes,

The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it is the essence. The essence of an existent is no longer a property sunk in the cavity of this existent; it is the manifest law which presides over the succession of its appearances, it is the principle of the series.¹⁸

The essence of our beings can be found in the series of our appearances and it is what strings the series together at its core. Sartre goes on to argue that in truth our essence is just another appearance and the “phenomenal being” manifests both essence and existence, forming “nothing but the well connected series of its manifestations.”¹⁹ In regards to these manifestations he writes, “the existent in fact can not be reduced to a *finite* series of manifestations since each one of them is a relation to a subject constantly

¹⁷ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956. p. 3.

¹⁸ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956. p. 5.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 5.

changing”²⁰ Since we are ambiguous and ever-changing phenomenal beings the manifestations of our existence and essence together cannot be finite in Sartre’s theory. From the first moment of our existence, we begin our appearances, which manifest themselves into a *series*, which by definition seems that it must have an end. It is impossible that part of the series of our being exists as manifestations in the future. Sartre writes,

What appears in fact is only an aspect of the object, and the object is altogether in that aspect and altogether outside of it. It is altogether within, in that it manifests itself in that aspect; it shows itself as the structures of the appearance, which is at the same time the principle of the series. It is altogether outside, for the series itself will never appear nor can it appear.²¹

Quite obviously, we are multifaceted beings full of much more than can be found in our appearance or manifestations. Sartre is saying that our series of manifestations are simply manifestations of singular aspects of ourselves. Unsurprisingly, it is impossible for our manifestations to be as multifaceted as our beings, a singular aspect can manifest itself as an appearance, but no more than a singular aspect at any given moment. In speaking of “the infinite in the finite” Sartre is referring to the multitude of “aspects” inside of ourselves, each with the ability to manifest themselves as appearances at any given moment in time. However, because only a single aspect can manifest and become appearance at one time, these single aspects string together to create essence and furthermore, existence. As a result, “The essence finally is radically severed from the individual appearance which manifest it, since on principle it is that which must be able

²⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 5.

²¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 6.

to be manifested by an infinite series of individual manifestations.”²² To challenge and expand on Sartre’s definition of being, I would argue that the aspects that manifest themselves do not exist singularly.

Sartre says that there are aspects of self which manifest themselves as appearances. These appearances are strung together in a series, with the defining principle of these appearances being considered essence. I would challenge Sartre here by arguing that at the same time an aspect is being expressed there are a multitude (possibly infinite number) of aspects that exist but do not necessarily manifest themselves into appearances. As this multitude of aspects is not expressed in a singular appearance, we find that there is an exponential number of possible different aspects that could be appearances that have the possibility of forming distinct series. Through these infinite number of possible series we are presented with an infinite number of possible essences, the defining principle of a being. In other words, I think that Sartre’s definition of being can lead us to conclude that while a single essence is expressed outwardly through being, there is a multitude of different beings that can result depending on which aspect of the being is expressed. I would argue based on Sartre’s insistence that choice is the sole way that we define our essence (through experience) that we have the ability to choose which of these aspects of self manifest themselves and form our essence.

²² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 6.

Chapter 2

Sartre's Ontological Dimensions of Being; Hal as Body-for-Others

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre writes of the two main types of being that exist in the world. The first is being-in-itself (*en-soi*) which is principally used to describe a being of full positivity. Just as in the case of inanimate objects, a being-in-itself is enclosed within itself, passive, and unchanging through time. The second type of being that Sartre writes of is the being-for-itself (*pour-soi*). A being-for-itself aligns with Sartre's definition of consciousness, as it is existing before itself, consistently and dynamically approaching the future. Within the concept of being-for-itself, however, lies three distinct ontological dimensions of the body which hold great importance in how Wallace navigates the first scene of *Infinite Jest*. It is evident that Wallace used the idea of body as being as a consistent theme throughout the novel, as the first sentence of *Infinite Jest* is "I am seated in an office, surrounded by heads and bodies."²³

The three ontological dimensions of the body which exist inside Sartre's category of being-for-itself and its direct relationship to consciousness focus on the idea of body as consistent and the ways in which a body interacts with itself and those around it. The first ontological dimension, carefully laid out by Dolezal, is The Body as Being-for-itself. This dimension of the body aligns directly with Sartre's original Being-for-itself. Dolezal explains this dimension in simple terms saying, "In this mode of being, the body is transparently lived-through, it is the means through which the world appears: the 'for

²³ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 3.

itself is a relation to the world.' Sartre asserts that the body, as lived, cannot be regarded in-itself."²⁴ And, "the body-for-itself is *lived* and not *known*."²⁵ The Body as Being-for-itself is Sartre's idea of the majority of us experiencing human consciousness. For the majority of *Infinite Jest*, I would consider Hal to fit into this category.

The second ontological dimension of the body is The Body-for-Others (*pour l'autrui*). In this dimension, the body is "'utilized and known by the Other' and I realise that I exist as an object for the other."²⁶ Here we see that as a consciousness our body exists in relation to how we are used by other beings. Sartre differentiates between these two ontological dimensions of the body, claiming that a body cannot be both at the same time. Dolezal reinforces this with, "Sartre claims that either the body is an object or thing, among other things, or it is that which reveals things to me; however it cannot be both at once."²⁷ In other words, we are either existing for ourselves or existing as we are known by being other than ourselves.

The third ontological dimension of the body is The Body as Known by the Other: The 'Seen' Body. This dimension exists within the intersubjectivity of the first two dimensions, or rather, as a result of them. Dolezal explains Sartre's definition of this body when she writes, "my awareness of my being an object for others means that I also 'exist for myself as a body known by the other'"²⁸ And, "Through the third dimension, and through awareness of my seen body, I become reflexively self-aware of how I appear

²⁴ Dolezal, Luna. "Reconsidering the Look in Sartre's: Being and Nothingness." *Sartre Studies International Sartre Stud Int* 18, no. 1 (2012): 9-28. p. 12

²⁵ Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look," p. 12

²⁶ Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look," p. 12

²⁷ Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look," p. 12

²⁸ Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look," p. 13

to others...I experience and am aware of how (I think) the other sees me.”²⁹ The self-awareness of the objectification that takes place between beings, one as subject and one as object, changes one’s view of themselves. It is evident that Wallace engages Sartre’s three ontological dimensions of being in the first scene of *Infinite Jest* to construct an interesting dichotomy between how the reader and those within the story experience Hal.

In order to understand how Wallace engages Sartre, it is essential to do an in-depth analysis of Hal Incandenza’s first appearance in the novel. *Infinite Jest* begins in the University Administration building at the University of Arizona where Hal, along with E.T.A. Headmaster Charles Tavis and prorector Aubrey DeLint, are interviewing for Hal’s position on the varsity tennis team with the Deans of the school. In the context of the rest of the novel, it is evident that something has deviated drastically from Hal’s tennis career, as he was previously destined to play professional tennis after graduating the Academy. Though this is the first scene of *Infinite Jest*, it is Hal’s last chronological appearance in the novel.

It is evident within even the first page of the scene that Hal is hyper aware of his presence within the room. He describes his posture being “consciously congruent” to his chair, and believes to “appear neutral” in front of those he must impress. Hal describes the appearance he is attempting to present and the careful and calculated actions that he uses in this attempt. Allowing the reader inside of Hal’s head, Wallace writes, “I believe I

²⁹Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look," p. 13

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."³⁰

There is a significant fracture between what should come as natural human behavior and Hal's conscientious analysis of each of his actions. Here there is evidence of Sartre's third ontological dimension of the body, The Body as Known by the Other: The 'Seen' Body and the hyper-awareness and self-consciousness that goes along with it. In addition, the character thinks, "I am in here" which implies a kind of enclosed self, inaccessible to the others in the room. The language Wallace uses establishes a base for the obvious disconnect of Hal's being described later on in the scene.

The interview process begins with with one of the Deans reading a basic description of Hal: "You are Harold Incandenza, eighteen, date of secondary-school graduation approximately one month from now, attending the Enfield Tennis Academy, Enfield, Massachusetts, a boarding school, where you reside."³¹ The Dean goes on to list some of Hal's accomplishments as a tennis player including his continental ranking as a junior tennis player. These factors surrounding Hal's being are what Sartre would call 'facticity.' Referring to being-for-itself, Sartre writes, "It *is* in so far as there is in it something of which it is not the foundation - its *presence to the world*."³² In other words, Hal exists as a being-for-itself on Sartre's premise that there are factions of the world outside of his consciousness that he participates in. However, Sartre requires a being-for-itself to exist within facticity but simultaneously have the ability to transcend. Distilling

³⁰ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 3.

³¹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 3.

³² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 103.

Sartre's argument, Dulk writes, "as 'transcendence,' the human being can always distance himself from the facticities that situate him; he 'transcends' them, does not fully coincide with them, is able to relate to and distance himself from them."³³ Hal is unable to separate his self from his academic record, his tennis career, and the facticity read aloud by the Deans. The language Wallace uses during the interview with the Deans also sets up a theory that Hal has become a Body-for-Others in the sense that he is being objectified and utilized by the 'Other,' which in this case is the Deans and the University of Arizona. When they finally ask Hal to speak for himself, one of the men asks, "Hal, please just explain to me why we couldn't be accused of using you, son. Why nobody could come and say to us, why, look here, University of Arizona, here you are using a boy for just his body..³⁴ In an indirect way, the Dean is asking Hal to validate his being outside of the facticity surrounding his tennis career, and in turn, his Body as a Being-for-Itself.

This inability is shown when his uncle, Charles Tavis, is asked to leave the interview room and let Hal, who has been silent previously, to speak for himself. As a deafening silence settles upon the exit of his uncle, Hal attempts to defend himself against the accusation of a doctored application. He says, "My application's not bought, I am not just a boy who plays tennis. I have an intricate history. Experiences and feelings. I'm complex."³⁵ and "I'm not just a creatus, manufactured, conditioned, bred for a

³³ Dulk, "Hyperreflexivity," p. 37.

³⁴ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 10.

³⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 11.

function.”³⁶ Here, Wallace is showing how Hal is attempting to ‘transcend’ his being’s facticity. In addition, he tells the Deans, “‘I *read*,...I study and read. I bet I’ve read everything you’ve read...My instincts concerning syntax and mechanics are better than your own, I can tell, with due respect. But it transcends the mechanics. I’m not a machine. I feel and believe. I have opinions.’”³⁷ In the midst of Deans purely interested in Hal’s facticity, Wallace’s character is attempting to “transcend the mechanics.” In essence, he is attempting to show that he can transcend his facticity; his tennis career and his academic record. Hal is trying to show that he is a Body as a Being-for-Itself and not simply defined by the concrete factors of his reality and how he is viewed and utilized by those around him.

Hal’s efforts to transcend his facticity ultimately fail, as his outward appearance differs greatly from what the Deans see. Because Hal is an object for the other that is a subject, he is unable to escape his being as a Body-for-Others. Opening his eyes after finishing his seemingly normal defense, Hal is met with pure horror on the face of the deans. Chaos ensues within the room and Hal hears the strong concern of the men who are saying things like, “‘Sweet Mother of Christ,’” “‘What’s *wrong*?’”, “‘Get help!’”, and “‘What in God’s name are those...those *sounds*?’”³⁸ Later on in the public restroom with a restrained Hal, the deans report to Charles Tavis that Hal was making, “‘*Subanimalistic* noises and sounds.’” and described an almost demonic fit that “‘Sounded most of all like a drowning goat. A goat, drowning in something viscous.’”³⁹ Here we see that while Hal

³⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 12.

³⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 12

³⁸ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 12.

³⁹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 14.

is defending his ability to transcend his facticity- the same facticity that the deans laid out just minutes before- his outward appearance significantly differs from what the reader sees as being expressed. Charles Tavis, who has known Hal for most of his life defends the so-called drowning goat saying, “He has some trouble communicating, he’s communicatively challenged, no one’s denying that.”⁴⁰ Even further, C.T. addresses the deans saying, “There’s more to life than sitting there interfacing, it might be a newsflash to you.”⁴¹

It is now reasonable to conclude that although Hal appears to the reader as a being-for-itself, his inability to transcend (outwardly) the mechanics (facticity) does not allow for him to embody Sartre’s definition of such. Sartre writes that the “Being-in-itself has no *within* which is opposed to a *without*’, it is ‘isolated in its being’. it ‘knows no otherness.’⁴² It is evident to the reader, of course, that there is some kind of internal consciousness for Hal. As a result of these factors, Hal exists as a Body-for-others in the midst of the Deans. However, Hal’s self-awareness of his being an object for the Deans (the Other), Wallace presents us with both the second and third ontological dimensions of the body: both a Body-for-others and a Body as Known by the Other. However, we see that the only way Hal is able to ‘transcend’ his facticity is by engaging it. It is apparent in the first scene that the only way he is able to express himself is through playing tennis, something that has become so engrained in his selfhood and defined him for so long. It is unfair for the Deans of the University to ask for Hal to defend himself as a Being-for-

⁴⁰ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 14.

⁴¹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 15.

⁴² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 21-2

itself although they have already ushered him into the second and third ontological dimensions of being mentioned above.

In order to fully understand the transition Hal has made from Being-for-itself to a Body-for-others or a Body as Known by the Other, it is essential to examine Hal's humanity throughout the rest of the novel. Hal's genius level intelligence, tender relationship with his brother Mario, thoughtful tennis game, and deep reflections about the mundane routine of E.T.A. are all examples of Hal as a Being-for-itself with his own desires, disciplines, and thoughts. By showing Hal's communicative humanity before the scene in the Dean office, we will be one step closer to figuring out what happened to Hal.

One prominent instance of Hal's humanity that occurs in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment is a late night conversation with his brother Mario. Mario praises Hal, "Boy were you on today. Boy did you ever make that guy look sick. When he hit that one down the line and you got it and fell down and hit that drop-volley Pemulis said the guy looked like he was going to be sick all over the net, he said."⁴³ To which Hal responds, "Boo, I kicked a kid's ass is all. End of story. I don't think it's good to rehash it when I've kicked somebody's ass. It's like a dignity thing."⁴⁴ Not only is Hal expressing true sentiment to his brother, but he is exemplifying compassion. Hal's choice here to not relish in his win corresponds with his virtue. He reinforces the importance of not dwelling on one's winnings in the tennis instructional video when he says, "Learn to care and not to care. They mean the rankings to help you determine where you are, not who

⁴³ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 40

you are. Memorize your monthly rankings, and forget them.”⁴⁵ Hal uses his winnings as a self motivator, not as a means to brag to his fellow tennis players.

Another instance that shows Hal’s outward appearance as a Being-for-itself occurs when his tennis coach Aubrey DeLint is discussing how his game compares to other top players at the academy. He says,

But the reason Wayne is Three continentally and Hal’s Six is the head. Hal looks just as perfectly dead out there, but he’s more vulnerable in terms of, like, emotionally. Hal remembers points, senses trends in a match. Wayne doesn’t. Hal’s susceptible to fluctuations...Some days you can almost see Hal like flit in and out of a match, like some part of him leaves and hovers and then comes back.⁴⁶

And comments further, saying “This emotional susceptibility in terms of forgetting being more commonly a female thing. Schtitt and I think it’s a will issue. Susceptible wills are more common to the top girls here...But the one we see this most in is Hal.”⁴⁷ The fact that Hal’s tennis game is emotionally exposed to those watching him play shows that him as a Being-for-itself was obvious, unlike what we see in the first scene when Hal becomes a Body-for-others or a Body as Known by the Other.

It has now been established that Hal exists as a Being-for-itself at key moments in the novel, but seems to transform into a Body-for-others in the scene analyzed above. Here, it is important to reiterate that Sartre declared these ontological dimensions of being are unable to coexist. Therefore, in the almost year-long break that Wallace gives from Hal’s last year at the academy to his appearance in the Dean’s office, it is implied

⁴⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 175.

⁴⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 682.

⁴⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 682.

that a radical change of being occurred, a change which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Sartre's Bad Faith as a Mode to Hal's Dissolution

By now we have explored Wallace's parallel between philosophy and life and how choice is an essential part of freedom. In addition, I have argued that Wallace is using Sartre's three ontological dimensions of being to navigate the state in which Hal finds himself in his last chronological appearance in the novel. This brings to light the question, what happened to Hal? Wallace intentionally inserts a yearlong gap in the story from when Hal must quit smoking marijuana and starts a tumultuous existential inward spiral, and his episode in the Dean's office. Some of the most common theories or explanations for Hal's change are that he ate some of the rare 'DMZ' drug that Pemulis procured. Another is that he watched 'The Entertainment' which destroyed his ability to communicate or that his withdrawal from marijuana led to his present state. However, I believe what happened to Hal is a bit more abstract than drug or film. But rather, the kind of self-negation and irony that Wallace continually warns us about throughout the novel.

I came about this idea by reading *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers, and Foer*, where Allard den Dulk explores the ways in which existentialist philosophy has integrated itself into modern literature. More specifically, Dulk explores the mechanisms of bad faith that Wallace uses, but attributes Hal's change of being to a realization and acceptance of living as a 'sincere self.' By opening himself up to his brother Mario, and providing genuine and uninhibited emotion with another being, Hal's essential being begins to change in the sense that his inward self has been turned

outward.⁴⁸ Dulk frames this conclusion within Sartre's idea of sincerity, while I think Dulk is ignoring some crucial aspects of Hal's condition.

The influence of Sartre on Wallace is impossible to ignore in the case of the ontological dimensions of being that were previously discussed and Dulk's analysis. However, I believe that Sartre's notion of bad faith and turning oneself into a negation is the most concrete theory behind how Wallace structured Hal's social disintegration. Beginning his section on bad faith in *Existential Psychoanalysis*, Sartre writes about the use of irony and how it is destructive to being. He writes, "In irony a man annihilates what he posits within one and the same act; he leads us to believe in order not to be believed; he affirms to deny and denies to affirm; he creates a positive object but it has no being other than its nothingness."⁴⁹ When engaging in irony, we manipulate our outward expression in a way that doubles back onto itself, and therefore destroys meaning within the expression. Taking this a step further, Sartre writes, "What are we to say is the nature of a man who has the possibility of denying himself?...This attitude, it seems to me, is *bad faith (mauvaise foi)*."⁵⁰ In other words, Sartre is using the same definition of irony, that which ends up negating its own being, in relation to the man who using irony inwardly.

Take the obese person, for example. There is a background of knowledge with which to understand the dangers of overeating, stemming from societal understanding and common knowledge. However, each moment the obese person indulges, the personal

⁴⁸ Dulk, Allard Den. "Sincerity," in *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers and Foer: A Philosophical Analysis of Contemporary American Literature*. p. 192

⁴⁹ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existential Psychoanalysis*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1953. p. 204.

⁵⁰Sartre, *Existential Psychoanalysis*. p. 205

damage and disease that is a potential of this action flashes briefly before their mind. The mechanism of bad faith acknowledges this danger and pushes it back in the mind with some justification or the other. The moment of true reflection on an action and the conscious denial of the danger of the action which is known and understood is an exemplary example of bad faith. The key to this moment of reflection, however, is that the knowledge of danger and the lie to oneself happens almost simultaneously in the mind. Through this mechanism of bad faith, the obese person finds themselves living in the same nothingness that results from the irony that Sartre discusses. I would argue that Hal's addiction to marijuana and secrecy, the denial of his true feelings toward his tennis career and his father's suicide contribute to his essence of bad faith which results in the new Hal we experience in the first scene of the novel.

One of the most prominent instances of bad faith that Dulk raises in his analysis of *Infinite Jest* is that of addiction. Referring to those suffering from substance-addiction in the novel, Dulk writes, "The many addicts in the novel employ both above-described forms of bad faith, to escape acknowledgement and responsibility for their actions. Their desire to flee from the tension of existence can be regarded as the principal motivation of their addiction"⁵¹ While Dulk avoids addressing Hal as a character experiencing bad faith, I think his behavior fits well into Sartre's philosophy. Towards the beginning of the novel, Wallace describes Hal's habits, "Here's Hal Incandenza, age seventeen, with his little brass one-hitter, getting covertly high in the Enfield Tennis Academy's underground Pump Room and exhaling palely into an industrial exhaust fan...Hal is by himself down

⁵¹ Dulk, Allard Den. "Hyperreflexivity," *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers and Foer: A Philosophical Analysis of Contemporary American Literature*. p. 53

here and nobody knows where he is or what he's doing."⁵² The mystery and sneakiness of Hal's actions set up a place where bad faith has the possibility to exist, but even more poignant is how he feels about it; "Hal likes to get high in secret, but a bigger secret is that he's as attached to the secrecy as he is to getting high."⁵³ The attachment that Hal has to the secrecy of this addictive action is pushed further just a few pages later. When describing the extensive hygienic routine of hiding any sign of his marijuana use we find further evidence of this attachment to secrecy.

...when he gets high he develops a powerful obsession with having nobody - not even the neurochemical cadre - know he's high. This obsession is almost irresistible in its force...Hal has no idea why this is, or whence, this obsession with the secrecy of it...Like most North Americans of his generation, Hal tends to know way less about why he feels certain ways about objects and pursuits he's devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves.⁵⁴

Hal's obsession with the secrecy of his marijuana addiction is indicative of some of the bad faith mechanisms posited above. In some ways, Hal has become addicted to the 'secrecy,' but even further, to the insincerity surrounding his sobriety at the tennis academy. We find in Sartre's explanation in *Existential Psychoanalysis* that bad faith is the antithesis of sincerity.⁵⁵

Hal reflects on his addiction to the secrecy of getting high and finds himself "brooding uncomfortably for a moment on why he gets off on the secrecy of getting high in secret more than on the getting high itself, possibly. He always gets the feeling there's some clue to it on the tip of his tongue, some mute and inaccessible part of the cortex,

⁵²Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 49

⁵³ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 49

⁵⁴ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 54

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Existential Psychoanalysis*. p. 234

and then he always feels vaguely sick, scanning for it.”⁵⁶ The character’s inability to articulate why he dwells in secrecy is, I believe, linked directly to the passive and pre-reflective denial aspects of Sartre’s bad faith. The moment in which Hal is confronted with his addiction, in the “scanning,” he is simultaneously able to repress the truth of his facticity, which results in an inward negation. As Hal continually engages with the insincerity and negation surrounding his addiction, he denies his sincere being and dives directly into the emptiness of bad faith.

While his pursuit of marijuana and secrecy is a type of indulgence, Hal’s sole other extracurricular pursuit is tennis; a sport that structures every single day at the academy. His dedication to the art of tennis began early, as his father founded Enfield Tennis Academy. Wallace includes endless extended scenes depicting Hal’s matches, drills, practices, and routine surrounding his tennis career and unabashedly includes specific and often tedious details of the intense tennis academy lifestyle. Hal’s commitment to the sport is shown with the time he spends perfecting his game and even in one of his brother Mario’s short films, *Tennis and the Feral Prodigy*. The film is a tennis instructional cartridge in which Hal outlines the idiosyncrasies of life as a junior elite tennis player and advice on how to navigate the intensities of the academy with grace. He recites, “Squeeze the tennis ball rhythmically month after year until you feel it no more than your heart squeezing blood”⁵⁷ and “Here is how to avoid thinking about any of this by practicing and playing until everything runs on autopilot and talent’s

⁵⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 114

⁵⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 173

unconscious exercise becomes a way to escape yourself”⁵⁸ It is evident that tennis is not only how Hal spends his time, but has become utterly ingrained into his being through repetition. The outward intensity and dedication with which Hal pursues tennis varies greatly, however, from his inward sentiment towards his pursuit.

Rounding out the fall semester of the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, Hal’s tennis has been improving greatly, but there are several instances where he feels the urge to end his tennis career. In one passage, Hal imagines the freedom that would result from intentionally stepping on his bad ankle in the wrong way and ending his career entirely. Further on, Hal contemplates his facticity:

It now lately sometimes seemed like a kind of black miracle to me that people could actually care deeply about a subject or pursuit, and could go on caring this way for years on end. Could dedicate their entire lives to it. It seemed admirable and at the same time pathetic. 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. Flight from exactly what?... To what purpose?⁵⁹

The above notions are the first in the novel that describe how Hal actually *feels* about his pursuit of tennis. He has resisted the urge to admit how the mindless repetition of serves and volleys and lobs and denial has disconnected him from his true self. In this way, Hal’s continual denial of his true sentiments lie in the same “mute and inaccessible part of the cortex” that he exhibits in the secrecy of his marijuana addiction. Hal has lied to himself about the value of his athletic pursuits and the secrecy and obsession surrounding

⁵⁸ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 173

⁵⁹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 900

his marijuana addiction, however, his mindset surrounding his father's suicide is another important indicator of Hal's bad faith.

During a phone conversation with his brother Orin, Hal relays the experience of being the first to find J.O. Incandenza after his suicide. When analyzing Hal's internal reaction it is important to acknowledge that his father rigged a head-sized hole in a microwave oven, packed the space around his neck with aluminum foil, and more or less hit the popcorn button. When describing what happened to Himself, Hal proposes, "have you for example, say, ever like baked a potato in a microwave oven? Did you know you have to cut the potato open before you turn the oven on? Do you know why that is?"⁶⁰ and more specifically, "The B.P.D. field pathologist said the build-up of internal pressures would have been almost instantaneous and equivalent in kg.s.cm. to over two sticks of TNT."⁶¹ While not explicitly stated, it is easy to imagine the traumatic sight of his father's head splattered across the kitchen of Hal's family home. When Orin asks who found their father, Hal replies with, "Found by one Harold James Incandenza, thirteen going on really old."⁶² For a thirteen-year-old, the natural psychological response to this instance would have been one of horror, disgust and a deep sense of grief or loss. But a thirteen-year-old Hal Incandenza reacted radically different from a normal pre-pubescent teen.

Almost directly after his findings, the Moms sent Hal to one of the top grief-therapists in the city, hoping to relieve her son of his implied trauma.⁶³ Hal, after being

⁶⁰ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 251

⁶¹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 251

⁶² Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 248

⁶³ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 252

submitted to therapy, responded in the only way he knew how; academically. After doing some extensive reading on the psychology of grief, Hal went to his next session hoping that it would be his last.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, this went on for weeks until Hal reached out to the campus guru, and realized he had been approaching the ordeal from the wrong side. Our character's next trip to therapy, after hours of reading the instruction manuals for grief therapists, triumphed. When relaying the story to Orin, Hal says,

What I did, I went in there and presented with anger at the grief therapist. I accused the grief-therapist of actually inhibiting my attempt to process my grief, by refusing to validate my absence of feelings...I said it seemed like he wanted me to feel toxically guilty for not feeling anything. Notice I was subtly inserting certain loaded professional-grief-therapy terms like *validate*, *process* as a transitive verb, and *toxic guilt*. These were library-derived.⁶⁵

The grief therapist consequently found him to no longer need therapy and prescribed that he continue on as normal.⁶⁶ Even as Hal confided this story over the phone, his older brother attempted to reach Hal's actual feelings about the situation through leading questions. Each of these questions were answered with a sarcastic reply, equivalent to the academic rhetoric that Hal dished his grief-therapist. The trauma and true emotion that Hal experienced upon finding his father was combatted with deep internal denial, which outwardly presented itself as irony. The sarcasm and irony that Hal engaged are the same as Sartre's discussed above; they result in negation. In other words, the young tennis player's processing of his father's death was just another mechanism for him to engage bad faith.

⁶⁴ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 253

⁶⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 255

⁶⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 256

The culmination of Hal's being that manifests itself in the first scene of *Infinite Jest* is a result of his bad faith in his addiction to secrecy and marijuana, his inability to express his sentiments about tennis, and the cold and calculated way in which he deals with his father's suicide. It is only when Wallace narrates Hal's feelings, however, that we are able to understand the root of his tendency for bad faith. Wallace writes,

Hal, who's empty but not dumb, theorizes privately that what passes for hip cynical transcendence of sentiment is really some kind of fear of really being human, since to be really human (at least as he conceptualizes it) is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naive and goo-prone and generally pathetic, is to be in some basic interior way forever infantile...he despises what he's really lonely for: this hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need, that pules and writhes just under the hip empty mask, anhedonia.⁶⁷

Hal Incandenza's inability to connect with others, an inability that manifests itself in the first scene, is a culmination of the various mechanisms with which he has engaged bad faith. Not only is he lonely for authenticity and sincerity (the antithesis of bad faith), but he *despises* it. The genuine emotion and almost infantile vulnerability that is part of the essence of humanity is something that Hal would describe as "hideous"- all while acknowledging that he holds a deep yearning to be just that. This internal conflict doubles back on itself, ironically, and negates our character's being, resulting in Hal as the Body as Being-for-others described in the first scene.

⁶⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest* p. 695

Conclusion

In an interview just three years before the release of *Infinite Jest*, Wallace shares his view on what fiction should do for humanity saying, “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 time’s darkness.”⁶⁸ *Infinite Jest* undoubtedly achieved this, reaching into the darkest caverns of my enclosed consciousness on one page and abruptly transitioning to vivid portrayals of the idiosyncrasies of human interaction on the next. But, is that not how life tends to flow? Wallace’s delicate expression of what is universally understood to be the incommunicable and minute tendencies of human consciousness shows not only artistry, but an enlightened awareness of human experience. By exploring how the author characterizes humanness in Hal throughout the novel, I think we are able to derive Wallace’s suggestion for how we ought to interact with others, and even more importantly, ourselves.

The infinite number of possibilities surrounding our ability to truly choose, allows for the acknowledgement and embracement of our beings as fundamentally free. By exposing Hal’s passive acceptance of his facticity, Wallace is exposing the power and urgency of transcending our own. An examination of the ways in which our bodies can define our being allows us a structured awareness of how we situate ourselves within an

⁶⁸ "A Conversation with David Foster Wallace." Interview by Larry McCaffery. Dalkey Archive Press. Accessed March 14, 2016. <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-david-foster-wallace-by-larry-mccaffery/>.

often chaotic world. By suggesting that Hal had allowed himself to become a Body-for-others, Wallace opens us to the possibility of doing the exact opposite. The explicit use of Sartre's bad faith forces us to probe at the commonality of negation. By uncovering Hal's internal contradictions, Wallace invites us to examine our own. Through Hal's dissolution, Wallace asks us to combat causal parallels within ourselves. By delving into the philosophy behind Hal's character, we are able to 'apply CPR' to the magic of humanity in the face of darkness.

Hal's appearance as a Body-for-others on the first pages of *Infinite Jest* are a result of his consistent engagement with the bad faith mechanisms that Sartre warns against so vehemently. The scene in the Dean's office in Arizona show what Hal has become after his bad faith completely takes over, turning his being into a negation, unable to be anything but false, and therefore nothing.

The incredible way in which Wallace applies existential philosophy, among others, throughout the 1079 pages of *Infinite Jest* gives us explicit instructions not on how we ought to live, but rather, how we ought *not* to live. To embrace freedom is to reject passivity. To choose consciously is to allow a Being-for-itself. To be forthright and sincere is to combat negation. To 'apply CPR' to humanity is to live within the light.

My experience engaging with and analyzing *Infinite Jest* over the past few years can best be described by the sentiments of David Foster Wallace himself. "It seems to me that so much of pre-millennial life in America consists of enormous amounts of what seem like discrete bits of information coming together and that the real kind of

intellectual adventure is finding ways to relate them into each other and to find larger patterns and meanings”⁶⁹ Navigating my way through *Infinite Jest* while piecing together larger patterns has been an immensely rewarding intellectual adventure and an incredibly transformative experience.

In the future, I will be investigating the idea that pleasure without work is a destructive force in society, as we see this ultimately with *The Entertainment*. I hope to look at how Wallace uses both Taoism and Buddhism in his writing, and how these relate to existentialist ideas of nothingness. By putting these very different traditions in conversation I hope to reveal the true lightness of existentialist philosophy and how freedom comes with consistent awareness.

⁶⁹"David Foster Wallace: Infinite Jest." Silverblatt. KCRW.

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