THESIS
1
2001

LIBRARY
Michigan State
University

This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

"THE SOUL IS THE PRISON OF THE BODY": FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY IN DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S INFINITE JEST

presented by

Maureen Elizabeth Lauder

has been accepted towards fulfillment of the requirements for

M.A. degree in English

Major professor

Date 8/20/01

O-7639

MSU is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution

PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.
TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.
MAY BE RECALLED with earlier due date if requested.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE

6/01 c:/CIRC/DateDue.p65-p.15

"THE SOUL IS THE PRISON OF THE BODY": FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY IN DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S *INFINITE JEST*

By

Maureen Elizabeth Lauder

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

2001

Dr. Patrick O'Donnell

ABSTRACT

"THE SOUL IS THE PRISON OF THE BODY"[1]: FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY IN DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S *INFINITE JEST*

By

Maureen Elizabeth Lauder

In his novel, *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace suggests a vision of identity and subjectivity that is predicated upon the idea of confinement. For Wallace, the subject is in a constant state of struggle to escape the very things that form its identity and status as a subject. The self is something that must be surpassed or transcended; it is to be forgotten or escaped. Wallace's text is thus filled with characters who have fanatically devoted themselves to some pastime or pursuit in order to effect a self-forgetting. Wallace, however, identifies a fundamental paradox that underlies this attempt at escape. All the pursuits that are meant to provide an escape from the self serve only to reemphasize the primacy of the self. This is so because an act of "surrendering" to such a pursuit is still an act of will and thus serves to reassert the self even as it claims to deny it.

Wallace's text thus poses an important question about freedom. His characters are on a continual quest for freedom from something (themselves) that cannot be evaded. Wallace seems to suggest a particularly bleak outlook for the possibility of freedom, but there are moments in his text where he suggests that some kind of freedom is possible. Using the work of Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben, this paper will explore Wallace's vision of subjectivity and identity and attempt to identify a space of freedom within the framework Wallace has laid out.

[1] The title of this paper is taken from Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977) 30, qtd. in Butler: 33.

Copyright by
MAUREEN ELIZABETH LAUDER
2001

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional love and support, as well as all my friends for enduring countless hours of my stress and worry over this paper. In particular, I'd like to thank Amy Nolan, for her assistance and support with some of the hard parts, and Renée Lansley, for always being there with love and advice—even when she's far away. Most especially, I'd like to extend my deepest gratitude to Matt Bowman, who has read every draft and offered invaluable advice and criticism at every stage...and without whom this thesis would not be.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BODY..1

WORKS CITED..38

> I am coming to see that the sensation of the worst nightmares, a sensation that can be felt asleep or awake, is identical to those worst dreams' form itself: the sudden intra-dream realization that the nightmares' very essence and center has been with you all along, even awake: it's just been...overlooked; and then that horrific interval between realizing what you've overlooked and turning your head to look back at what's been right there all along, the whole time... (Wallace 61-62)

Thus does Hal Incandenza, one of the protagonists of David Foster Wallace's novel, *Infinite Jest*, describe the sensation of his nightmares: the feeling of being trapped in a limbo between recognition of the omnipresent nature of some horror and facing the horror itself. Hal is caught in a moment wherein he attempts to turn toward or against himself—a self that he has been attempting to flee and that has been with him all along. The horror that Hal recognizes lies in his sudden awareness that his identity, everything that he thinks he is, is constituted by the very things he wishes he were not. For Judith Butler, such a moment encapsulates the experience of being a subject. Butler figures subjectivity as a turn: a desire or longing is thwarted and turned back on itself, creating the self as an object of reflection (Butler 22). Self-consciousness, she says, is "the form will takes when it is prevented from simple expression as deed" (76). In the case of Hal's nightmare, then, Hal's desire to escape is thwarted by his realization that that which he flees has always been with him. Unable to achieve escape, Hal's desire bends back upon itself and is transmuted into an urge to confront this thing. And in the process Hal's self-consciousness is created: he is now acutely aware both of the presence of the thing and his place in relation to it. He has become an object of reflection for himself.

This "horrific moment," then, is the very thing that has formed Hal's identity and his status as a subject. And as his description suggests, this dream sensation—the endless

moment of the "turn"—is hardly limited to his sleeping hours. In his waking life, Hal plays competitive tennis at a near-professional level and is struggling with a burgeoning drug addiction. Both tennis and drugs serve for Hal as a means of forgetting himself, a way to lose himself in something bigger. Ultimately, however, these pursuits serve only to emphasize that Hal cannot get away from himself. Tennis, for example, recalls Hal's late father, himself a near-great tennis player, and an accompanying web of familial obligations and expectations. Despite tennis's power to allow Hal to exist within his own body, without thinking, it simultaneously emphasizes the impossibility of ever really getting away from himself—for much of whom he is has been formed by tennis and its relation to him and his family. Likewise, drugs have also provided him with an illusion that he can escape himself. Marijuana numbs him, allowing him to silence his own thoughts and emotions, but as the drug becomes more and more important to Hal, he is no longer able to evade the constant awareness of the self that the drugs initially helped him to avoid. Hal is thus trapped in exactly the place he describes in his dream. He is in the midst of an endless process of "turning back" on himself, trying to confront and overcome the thing he flees, the thing that has been there all along—himself. Hal is encaged, caught with and by a self that cannot be evaded.

Hal is thus living out that which Butler identifies as the dilemma of the subject. In Butler's view, the subject turns upon itself because this is the only means of striking out at the power that formed it. However, a successful repudiation of its status as a subject would necessarily entail the erasure of the subject as a being (Butler 129). And herein lies the trap in which Hal finds himself. He is fighting to escape the very thing that constitutes his being. Moreover, this exercise, the attempt to evade that which

cannot be escaped, is necessary. Hal must continually try to evade that which he is and that which has formed him, because it is through this evasion that he reaffirms his existence and his identity. He knows what he is simply because it is the very thing that he is trying desperately not to be. And this bind—wherein our identity only exists through our attempts to repudiate it—poses a larger question concerning freedom. If the human subject is always trapped with and by itself, then what possibility is there for freedom of any kind?

For Wallace, the state of being a subject seems to be captured by the idea of "encagement." His characters are all encaged in one way or another, and nowhere is this so apparent as in the portions of the text dealing with Alcoholics Anonymous and Ennet House, a local halfway house. The characters who feature in this particular plot line are all addicts, and, for Wallace, these characters seem to serve as a worst case scenario of encagement. The paradox of addiction is that substances both present themselves as a solution to whatever emotional problems the addict is experiencing and serve to reinforce those problems. Thus, while the initial stages of addiction obscure the fact that the addict is in fact fleeing him- or herself, eventually it becomes clear that substance abuse has only served to bind the addict ever more tightly to the self he or she was fleeing:

> [...] this Substance you thought was your one true friend, that you gave up all for, gladly, that for so long gave you relief from the pain of the Losses your love of that relief caused, [...] has finally removed its smily-face mask to reveal centerless eyes and a ravening maw, and canines down to here, it's the Face In The Floor, the grinning root-white face of your worst nightmares, and the face is your own face in the mirror, now, it's *you*, the

Substance has devoured or replaced and become *you* [...] Doing the Substance is now like attending Black Mass but you still can't stop, even though the Substance no longer gets you high. [...] You are behind bars; you are in a cage and can see only bars in every direction. (Wallace 347)

This passage underlines the primacy of the self in the thoughts and actions of the addict. Drugs or alcohol can only be evaluated in terms of their effects on the self: they have replaced the self, they have helped the addict flee from the self, and they have resulted in the addict's encagement with the self. To the addict, the self is absolute and autonomous (Kurtz 3). Because a conception of the self is so central to the addict's thinking, emotion, which appears to present a danger of engulfing or obliterating the self, becomes threatening. Drugs present a means to both deny and allow the expression of an emotion that the individual fears would be obliterating. This fear of emotion, however, is more than merely a fear of erasure of the self. Ultimately, it is a fear of the self as well:

> 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 being really human, since to be really human (at least as he conceptualizes it) is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone and generally pathetic, is to be in some basic interior way forever infantile, some sort of not-quite-right-looking infant dragging itself anaclitically around the map, with big wet eyes and froggy-soft skin, huge skull, gooey drool. One of the really American things about Hal, probably, is the way he despises what it is he's really lonely for: this hideous internal self,

incontinent of sentiment and need, that pules and writhes just under the hip empty mask, anhedonia. (Wallace 694-695)

The fear of and disgust for the self that, in the above quote, Wallace attributes to Hal is by no means limited to the novel's drug addicts and alcoholics. However, this fear and its clear relationship to the theme of encagement are most readily visible in reference to the addicts of Ennet House. Paradoxically, this is so because these characters are, in many ways, the ones who are closest to escaping their cages.

This escape, however, is by no means a straightforward exit from the cage. Because the alcoholic is so deeply invested in the autonomy of the self, recovery hinges upon recognizing one's own lack of control, or, as the First Step of Alcoholics Anonymous states: "admit[ting] we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable" (Hazelden 1). This admission, which informs each of the Twelve Steps, is a recognition of limitation, and it is through this limitation that recovery begins. The alcoholic self, caught in its own subjectivity and incapable of recognizing its own limitation, is progressing toward death, whether literal or figurative. It is at the point of the recognition of the ultimately destructive nature of his or her alcoholism that the alcoholic is ready to acknowledge limitation, and thus this moment that AA chooses as its point of intercession (Taylor 7). This moment involves the realization that life as it is currently structured is no longer tolerable and requires the admission of "an absolute lack of absolute control" (Denzen, *Alcoholic Self* 12; Kurtz 211).

The freedom AA offers from the cage is thus a paradoxical one, for it involves the admission of a complete lack of freedom. And this admission is certainly not a means of exiting to any kind of "true" freedom: "The newcomers who abandon common sense and

resolve to Hang In and keep coming and then find their cages all of a sudden open, mysteriously, after a while, share this sense of deep shock and possible *trap*" (Wallace 350, emphasis added). In some ways, this trap is AA itself. Once freed from the cage of substance abuse, addicts—especially those in Wallace's text—are enormously dependent on AA in order to maintain this freedom:

> [...][I]t's mostly Crocodiles with geologic sober time in these cars, it's mostly the guys that've stayed sober in White Flag for decades who still go on every single booked Commitment, they go every time, dependable as death [...] and the crocodiles in the car invite Gately to see the coincidence of long-term contented sobriety and rabidly tireless AA Activity as not a coincidence at all. [...] [T]he Crocodiles say they can't even begin to say how many new guys they've seen Come In and then get sucked back Out There [...] (Wallace 354-355)

However, the "possible trap" to which the cage's exit seems to lead is more than merely AA itself. There is no way to truly escape the self with and by whom you are caged, but AA does offer the illusion of such an escape. It does so through the establishment of a community that privileges itself over the individual. Upon becoming a member of the AA community, the extreme subjectivity of the alcoholic gives way to a new vision of self that is constituted through surrender to the collectivity (Denzen, *Recovering* 21). This collectivity coexists with the individual, but individual subjectivity is in many ways devalued, and, to a certain extent, effaced. The clearest evidence of this lies in the Twelve Traditions, the first of which states in part that the "common welfare should come first" (*AA Comes of Age* 78). Each of the following Traditions expresses the

same concern with the survival of the group over the individual, culminating in the final Tradition: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our tradition, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities" (78).

As the principle of anonymity illustrates, AA's purpose here is to reduce the impact of the individual on the group. Anonymity, of course, does not erase subjectivity, but it does help to efface individual uniqueness. The AA practice of "identifying" further attempts to underline the essential universality of the alcoholic experience. Identification is the means by which internal, personal experience is made relevant to others, specifically to newcomers who are still trapped in the "exceptional thinking" that insists on seeing a fundamental difference between themselves and the "true" alcoholic (Kurtz 60). Telling one's story is a public acknowledgement of surrender and limitation and thus acts out the very basis of the AA community: "the living out of the connectedness with others that comes about from the alcoholic's very limitation" (4).

This connectedness surfaces time and again in Wallace's novel. All of his descriptions of AA meetings emphasize the importance of empathy or identification. Identification is a way of translating the subjective nature of personal experience into something more universal. To identify with someone else's story is a way of "receiv[ing] the AA message he's here to carry" (Wallace 345). By empathizing with someone else's experience, the addict realizes the similarity of that experience to his or her own. The individual story becomes a part of a greater collectivity: "if you sit up front and listen hard, all the speakers' stories of decline and fall and surrender are basically alike, and like your own" (345). Wallace often cites the moment of identification as being a moment of clarity for the addict. In the case of Joelle VanDyne, for example, the first

moment she truly identifies with a group speaker is also the first moment that she is sure that she wants to stay off drugs, regardless of the consequences (710).

This engulfing of the individual by the collective does not necessarily imply a subsuming of personal will. Wallace does emphasize personal autonomy: "Inebriates are discouraged from driving themselves home after the Lord's Prayer, but nobody's going to wrestle your keys away. Boston AA stresses the utter autonomy of the individual member" (Wallace 356). Nonetheless, as with official AA literature, the functioning of Wallace's AA depends to a degree on erasing the individual will:

> The bitch of the thing is you have to *want* to. If you don't *want* to do as you're told—I mean as it's suggested you do—it means that your own personal will is still in control [...] The will you call your own ceased to be yours as of who knows how many Substance-drenched years ago. It's now shot through with the spidered fibrosis of your Disease. [...] [Y]ou have to surrender your will. This is why most people will Come In and Hang In only after their own entangled will has just about killed them. You have to want to surrender your will [...] You have to want to take the suggestions, want to abide by the traditions of anonymity, humility, surrender to the Group conscience. If you don't obey, nobody will kick you out. They won't have to. You'll end up kicking *yourself* out, if you steer by your own sick will. (357)

This passage does highlight the necessity of subsuming personal autonomy to the "Group conscience," but note how this absorption takes place: "You have to *want* to surrender your will" (Wallace 357, emphasis added). This formulation raises two

questions. First, is it possible to surrender the will if the act of surrender is itself willful? And secondly, what is implied about desire when one casts the act of wanting as a surrender of will?

The above passage quite explicitly depicts the surrender of will as the ultimate expression and acceptance of one's lack of control. It is only by *wanting* this surrender that one can be assured that one's own will is no longer in control. This appears counterintuitive, for to surrender *without* wanting to do so would seem to imply a truer surrender. To want to surrender seems to indicate that the very act of surrender is an act of will; it is your personal decision to act in accordance with your desires. In spite of this, however, it hardly seems that to surrender without wanting to can be less an act of agency. For, as Wallace indicates, to not want to surrender implies a holding in reserve of one's own will. It suggests that given another option, there would be no decision to surrender. And, when formulated like this, surrender without wanting to becomes equally an act of personal will; there may be valid reasons for your surrender, but the implication is that in the absence of those reasons, your decision would be otherwise. Surrender thus becomes a personal choice or decision (and hence an act of will), rather than a voiding of personal will.

Seen in this light, it becomes evident that surrender can in no case be an actual surrender; it is always an act of agency or will. And as Judith Butler points out, such an act of agency, though it dooms to failure the effort to surrender, provides an equally pleasurable assertion of the self. For Butler, to engage in an act of religious devotion is to attempt to forget the transitory nature of the self. The subject regards itself as split between interior and exterior. Its interiority is regarded as an essential part of its being,

the exterior (*i.e.* the body) is inessential. Acts of religious devotion thus become a way of attempting the transcendence of the body, of subsuming to pure thought and thus elevating it to the status of the essential (Butler 46-47). It takes the form of a sacrifice of the self, but this sacrifice is a doomed one, for it serves only to recreate the self anew:

> The renunciation of the self as the origin of its own actions must be performed repeatedly and can never finally be achieved, if only because the *demonstration* of renunciation is itself a self-willed action. [...] Paradoxically, performance becomes the *occasion* for a grand and endless action that effectively augments and individuates the self it seeks to deny. (Butler 49)

For Butler, then, the act of religious observance—ostensibly an act of renunciation of the self—becomes instead an act of assertion of the self. Likewise, AA's insistence on the individual's surrender to the group ultimately leads to a continual assertion of that individual's self—an assertion neatly disguised as an act of renunciation.

According to Butler, this act of renunciation causes both pleasure and pain. It is painful because true renunciation can never quite be achieved by the act of renunciation; it is pleasurable, however, because the act of renunciation serves as an assertion of the self (50). This recognition of the fundamentally intertwined nature of pleasure and pain, self-abnegation and self-assertion, helps to explain some of the paradoxes of addiction and recovery. Wallace casts addiction as an attempted escape of the self that itself results in encagement. Butler's recognition of the pleasures inherent in asserting the self—no matter how this assertion comes about—provides a useful shorthand to explain the reasons why substance abuse, an enterprise which fails without exception in its attempt to

escape the self, continues to be a problem. It carries with it, in spite of the "litany of Losses" it inspires, an assertion of self, of autonomy that gives pleasure in spite of the pain it causes. Through the character of Hal Incandenza, Wallace makes evident the identification of self and substance, the way in which the use of a substance that seems to lead to a forgetting of self ultimately only reemphasizes the self.

For Hal, the use of marijuana is most decidedly part of an effort to forget himself. Toward the beginning of the book, Hal sets up an equation between oneself and one's opponent during a game of tennis. An opponent is a mirror of oneself, and therefore frightening. To play the game well, you must manage your fear and "[s]ee yourself in your opponents" (Wallace 176). Hal's description of his first experience with marijuana invokes this vision of the identity of self and opponent. He tries pot as an attempt to combat a recurring nightmare in which the apparatus—lines, nets, etc.—of tennis overtakes the game, play becomes hypothetical, and the opponent is distant, invisible, and possibly only theoretical (67-68). Marijuana stops the nightmares, but at what cost, given Hal's conviction that the opponent is a reflection of the self? Read in terms of this belief, Hal's dream points to an awareness of a lack of access to himself; the fear instilled by the nightmare is a fear of losing the self, a fear that the self will be engulfed by its own "apparatus." In terms of Hal, who is portrayed throughout as being very much emotionally shut down, this apparatus of the self seems to be emotion itself. This fear—the fear that the self will be overtaken by emotional expression—is the same fear that Wallace depicts throughout the novel as being the common denominator in the psyches of drug addicts and alcoholics. Hal's own mother, Avril, points out quite explicitly,

albeit not to Hal, that the recourse to drugs is means of allowing emotional expression of some sort while keeping at bay the threat that the self will be engulfed (765-767).

Hal's turn to drugs as a means of arresting the nightmare thus has paradoxical effects at best. Marijuana does stop the dreams, but it does not do so by allowing him more access to his emotional interiority; it serves only to obscure the fact that there is a problem. Rather than providing access to the theoretical opponent, the drugs only efface the evidence that there is no such access. Marijuana does not supply so simple a remedy as to allow Hal to flee himself; instead it allows Hal to maintain the illusion that he has already escaped himself.

This illusion crumbles, however, when Hal resolves to quit. Abstinence makes Hal feel that he has lost a part of himself, underlining the centrality of the self to the way he thinks of his drug use: "I feel a hole. It's going to be a huge hole, in a month. A way more than Hal-sized hole. [...] And the hole's going to get a little bigger every day until I fly apart in different directions" (Wallace 785). Despite the earlier sense that drugs serve for Hal as a means of escape, Hal now identifies drugs so strongly as comprising a part of his being that he believes abstinence will cause a part of him to disappear.

As Hal's case demonstrates, addiction entails the same paradox of simultaneous self-abnegation and self-assertion that Butler identifies in religious observance. Religion and addiction are, of course, only two of many examples of this paradox. For both Butler and Wallace, the coexistence and interdependence of the urge to both assert and efface the self are fundamental to the state of being a subject. Wallace quite explicitly identifies religion and addiction as examples of a means of acting out the contradiction that lies at

the heart of subjectivity, but he is also quite clear about the fact that these are only two responses to a fundamentally human dilemma:

> 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. [...] The original sense of *addiction* involved being bound over, dedicated, either legally or spiritually. To devote one's life, plunge in. (Wallace 900)

The role of religion in *Infinite Jest* is filled by Alcoholics Anonymous, which has a strong spiritual component and explicitly emphasizes the transcendence of the individual. Despite the parallels that he sets up between the workings of religion and addiction, Wallace does see a qualitative difference between the two, and Wallace's characters are living out this difference. Even though the freedom promised by AA is illusory, it does lead to an improved quality of life:

> [N]ot only does the urge to get high stay more or less away, but more general life-quality-type things—just as improbably promised, at first, when you'd Come In—things seem to get progressively somehow better, inside, for a while, then worse, then even better, then for a while worse in a way that still somehow better, realer, you feel weirdly unblinded, which is good [...] (Wallace 350-351)

Why, though, should this be? If addiction and religion/Alcoholics Anonymous operate in the same way, how does it happen that religion yields a positive form of "self-forgetting" while addiction achieves only a negative form? Addiction may be self-

destructive in a way that other pursuits are not, but all pursuits, according to Wallace, are still attempts at self-forgetting. The quality of the attempt may differ, but it is still an attempt to escape the self. One of his characters, for example, creates a film that "present[s] the self-forgetting of alcohol as inferior to that of religion/art" (Wallace 742). This description of the film underlines the common structure (self-forgetting) that lies at the heart of both religion and addiction. Despite his identification of a qualitative difference between the two, James Incandenza, the film's creator, very clearly sees a fundamental similarity between religion and addiction. Another of Incandenza's films presents the Catholic faith as a substitution of "slavish dependence" on religious devotion for the "slavish dependence" of substance abuse (Wallace 706).

Wallace seems to argue that this exchange of dependence on one thing for dependence on another can happen with almost anything. In the midst of a list of pastimes (including sleeping, gambling, work, and shopping) that can be "abusable" escapes, Wallace includes an endnote that not only continues the list at some length, but also cautions that AA too can be abused:

> Not to mention, according to some hard-line schools of 12-Step thought, yoga, reading, politics, gum-chewing, crossword puzzles, solitaire [...] ad darn near infinitum, including 12-Step Fellowships themselves, such that quiet tales sometimes go around the Boston AA community of certain incredibly advanced and hard-line recovering persons who have pared away potential escape after potential escape until finally, as the stories go, they end up sitting in a bare chair, nude, in an unfurnished room, not moving but also not sleeping or meditating or abstracting, too advanced to

> stomach the thought of the potential emotional escape of doing anything whatsoever, and just end up sitting there completely motion- and escapeless until a long time later all that's found in the empty chair is a very fine dusting of off-white ashy stuff that you can wipe away completely with like one damp paper towel. (Wallace 998, endnote 70)

What Wallace's tongue-in-cheek litany of possible escapes points to is the impossibility of living without some engagement in an attempt at self-forgetting. His example of the person whose body disintegrates completely as the result of "escapelessness" reveals the necessity to the subject of the movement toward escape. Deprived of this movement, the subject can no longer even be constituted as such; it becomes nothing more than a residue. Butler points out that "[t]he limits to liberation are to be understood not merely as self-imposed but, more fundamentally, as the precondition of the subject's very formation" (Butler 33). Wallace's characters adhere perfectly to this formulation of subjectivity. Their subjectivity is the result of entrapment within and by the self, and while attempts at escape are always fruitless, they are also necessary. Becoming escapeless is almost the equivalent of becoming free, for there is no longer any need to struggle against the cage. However, for Wallace, as for Butler, this freedom entails the necessary dissolution of the subject. Without the cage, there can be no self.

In spite of his contention that pretty much everything is an attempted escape, Wallace does seem to believe that AA provides a better form of self-forgetting than drugs or alcohol. Wallace is quite clear on the fact that human nature requires some kind of escape (or the illusion of escape), but, as in the above passage, he often points to the ways that this escape can be abused. Despite the potential for abuse, however, AA provides the

addict with an improved quality of life. Life is better with AA; all the characters recovering from addiction assert this. But this improved quality of life by no means implies a pain-free existence. The addict has not escaped the pain of having a body that cannot be transcended, a self that cannot be evaded. Wallace does, however, situate a purpose in the pain of recovery:

> [T]hey somehow omit to mention that the way it gets better and you get better is through pain. Not around pain, or in spite of it. [...] [T]hese Boston AAs start in on telling you you're right where you're supposed to be and telling you to remember the pointless pain of active addiction and telling you that at least this sober pain now has a purpose. At least this pain means you're going somewhere, they say, instead of the repetitive gerbil-wheel of addictive pain. (Wallace 446)

It seems, then, that for Wallace the purposiveness of the pain of sobriety creates the qualitative difference between the escape offered by AA and that offered by addiction.

The major difference between the pain of addiction and the pain of sobriety seems to be the way in which it comes about. Addictive pain is a result of the attempt to escape the self, to escape emotion, to escape pain itself. Wallace likens drugs and alcohol to painkillers: "[Once] you've been Substanceless for maybe six or eight months, you'll begin to start to 'Get In Touch' with why it was you used Substances in the first place. You'll start to feel why it was you got dependent on what was, when you get right down to it, an anesthetic" (446). The relief offered by drugs is temporary, and it is followed by the addict's intense, hopeless awareness of the cage in which he or she resides: "[O]nce you are sufficiently enslaved by a Substance to need to quit the Substance in order to save

your life, the enslaving Substance has becomes so deeply important to you that you will all but lose your mind when it is taken away from you (201).

It is no accident that successful membership in AA requires this vivid awareness of the cage. One thing that unites AA members is that the decision to join AA comes at their bottom, at the moment when they are left with the choice of ending their lives or turning them around:

> And what defines this cliffish nexus of exactly two total choices, this miserable road-fork Boston AA calls your Bottom, is that at this point you feel like maybe selling flowers on median strips might not be so bad, not compared to what you've got going, personally, at this juncture. And this, at root, is what unites Boston AA: it turns out this same resigned, miserable, brainwash-and-exploit-me-if-that's-what-it-takes-type desperation has been the jumping-off place for just about every AA you meet, it emerges [...] (Wallace 348-349)

This passage highlights two important aspects of the decision to "Come In" to AA. The first is that this decision results from desperation. To have arrived at a point where one can decide to submit one's will to AA, one must perceive that death is the only alternative. Substance abuse no longer provides its promised relief. The second aspect is that this decision is emphatically a choice. Suicide allows the addict the possibility of continuing his or her flight from pain. It offers, or appears to offer, the very escape from pain that the addict was after in the first place. In spite of this, however, the addict chooses the pain of sobriety, of AA. And to remain in AA is to submit to the pain, to accept that any improvement can only occur through pain.

On the surface, then, it appears that the addict has chosen pain over flight. This decision is significant, because, to AA, the choice signals the relinquishing of will. The addict has decided to submit his or her will to something in which he or she does not believe, to "this 'Program' that at best is probably just Unitarian happy horseshit and at worst is a cover for some glazed and canny cult-type thing where they'll keep you sober by making you spend twenty hours a day selling cellophane cones of artificial flowers on the median strips of heavy-flow roads" (Wallace 348). Additionally, this choice marks the first moment at which the addict has in some measure embraced pain. The very decision to live rather than die becomes a signal of a willingness to experience pain, for at this moment in the addict's life, living itself is tremendously painful.

In choosing continued pain (*i.e.* life), it may appear that the addict has stopped fleeing. After all, the life of the addict is "one long futile flight from pain" (Wallace 348). Keep in mind, however, that it is not pain specifically that the addict flees; rather he or she flees the origin of the pain—the self, or one's subjectivity. And AA does not allow an escape from the self. It may, through its doctrine of submission to one's lack of control and its emphasis on the transcendent possibilities of a "Higher Power," allow a "self-forgetting," just as drugs and alcohol do, but the self is still present. Though AA ostensibly offers transcendence of the self, its true project is the self. AA's work is to create a relationship to the self with which the addict can live.

AA accomplishes this through illusion. It is the same illusion offered by drugs—that the self can be escaped, that one can elude the pain of being trapped in and by a self-consciousness that is necessary to one's being—but with a vital difference: AA's illusion is sustainable. Addiction—as Wallace sees it, at least—ultimately leads to the desperate

crossroads where the addict must choose between death and continued pain; AA however never allows the addict to reach this point. AA does not promise an impossible freedom from pain, and membership is predicated on the very lack of control that substance abuse tries to ignore. Most importantly, however, both these—acceptance of pain and acknowledgement of lack of control—come about through choice. The AA member *chooses* the pain of AA in a way that he or she never chose the pain of addiction. This choice, of course, is the very thing that renders the requisite renunciation of the self and the will an illusion, for the very decision to renounce is in fact an assertion of the self. However, in spite of its illusory status, the freedom or self-forgetting offered by AA is, indeed, of a better quality than that of addiction. And, for Wallace, this qualitative difference seems to hinge on the choice of AA versus the non-choice of addiction.

Recall the passage in which Wallace claims that "[t]he bitch of the thing is you have to *want* to. If you don't *want* to do as you're told—I mean as it's suggested you do—it means that your own personal will is still in control" (357). In addition to the questions of will and surrender that this passage raises, it also leads one to wonder what conclusions are to be drawn about desire when the act of wanting is considered to be a surrender of will. Clearly, the implication is that, for Wallace, desire (or want) exists separately from personal will/agency. There is, however, a modicum of freedom in the selection of the object of desire. For the character Rémy Marathe, whom Wallace uses to speak most explicitly about choice, desire is something to be chosen. To select your desire is, for Marathe, to choose something besides yourself, which thus affords a kind of escape from yourself. If you do not choose, as is the case with addiction, then all you have done is to encage yourself ever more firmly:

> 'Then in such a case your temple is self and sentiment. Then in such an instance you are a fanatic of desire, a slave to your individual subjective narrow self's sentiments; a citizen of nothing. You become a citizen of nothing. You are by yourself and alone, kneeling to yourself.' (108)

For Marathe, then, the initial choice—which is marked by the choice of something beyond the "subjective self"—is foundational. This initial choice forms the condition of possibility for all other choices and provides the illusion that the choice was freely made. Although Marathe indicates an awareness that his choice was not completely free ("I was *allowed* to choose something more important than my thinking of my life" (Wallace 778, emphasis added)), he says as well that he has exchanged one form of encagement for another, which appears to be in some way preferable or less oppressive: "It [the choice] chains me, but the chains are of my choice. The other chains: no. The others were the chains of not choosing" (781).

For Marathe, the initial choice entails the selection of something beyond the self. Choosing something that does not extend beyond the self—for example, drugs, which only serve to emphasize the importance of the self—is the equivalent of not choosing at all. And to fail to choose something beyond the self is to doom oneself to "the chains of the cage of pain" (Wallace 778). The importance to Wallace of this initial choice becomes terribly clear with his depiction of the Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA). ETA is set up to train young tennis players to exist within the game of tennis, to lose themselves within the baselines of a tennis court. ETA tries to accomplish this self-forgetting by having the player choose tennis before he or she can really think about the choice: "This was why they started us here so young: to give ourselves away before the age when the

questions *why* and *to what* grow real beaks and claws" (Wallace 900). In order for ETA to be successful, tennis must truly be, for its students, something greater, something beyond the self.

Hal Incandenza, the youngest son of ETA's founders, has been playing all his life and situates in tennis the possibility of the sort of self-forgetting that ETA tries to accomplish. At the same time, however, much of the self that Hal so desires to escape is created by his relationship to tennis. Both his father and grandfather were tennis players with terribly tortured relationships to their own talent and to each other, and his talent becomes, for Hal, both the thing that traps him in a cycle of expectation and failure and the thing that allows him to forget this trap:

> Have Himself hunch down to put a long pale arm around your shoulders and tell you that his own father had told him that talent is sort of a dark gift, that talent is its own expectation: it is there from the start and either lived up to or lost. [...]
>
> Here is how to avoid thinking about any of this by practicing and playing until everything runs on autopilot and talent's unconscious exercise becomes a way to escape yourself, a long waking dream of pure play.
>
> The irony is that this makes you very good, and you start to become regarded as having a prodigious talent to live up to. (Wallace 173)

For Hal, then, tennis cannot be the "initial choice" of which Marathe speaks. His choice of tennis is dictated by his relationship to his father and by the beliefs he holds about his father's expectations for him. And because this choice is so constrained by Hal's own

history, it fails him. Tennis is not able to provide the complete self-forgetting that a true initial choice promises because, for him, playing tennis serves only to reassert the very aspects of himself that he seeks to escape. For Hal, at least, tennis is not something beyond the self; choosing tennis is akin to choosing continual self-assertion and thus cannot provide the self-forgetting that he craves. Consequently, he turns to drugs to complete the process.

This failure of tennis, however, is not a failure in the same way that substance abuse is. Substance abuse fails because its illusion of self-escape is necessarily temporary (necessarily because substance abuse always derives from a decision not to choose, rather than a choice). AA, on the other hand, works because it allows a sustainable illusion of freedom; it does this by making its project the relationship to the self, rather than the escape from the self. Thus AA's failures—and there are characters in Wallace's text for whom AA does not work—stem from the individuals themselves. Failure arises when the desperation of the addict is not at a level that allows an initial choice. The addicts in Wallace's text who do not sustain their membership in AA are often those who have been forced into the group by legal or family pressures, those who are using AA as a means of delaying rather than preventing another "Loss."

Similarly, Wallace's vision of tennis does not seem to necessarily preclude the possibility that it may be a successful system for living with the self. Although most of his characters—or at least his more fully developed characters—do not make the sort of choice that would allow for the success of tennis, Wallace still very clearly sees tennis as a model for life:

> You seek to vanquish and transcend the limited self whose limits make the game possible in the first place. It is tragic and sad and chaotic and lovely. All life is the same, as citizens of the human State: the animating limits are within, to be killed and mourned, over and over again. [...] [J]unior athletics is but one facet of the real gem: life's endless war against the self you cannot live without. (Wallace 84)

Tennis is a forum for the same kind of project that goes on in life: it is a continual flight from and return to the self. However, the choice of tennis necessarily fails to contain or lose the player completely within the game. The game is ultimately terribly dependent on the self, because it is structured around the very attempt to get away from this self. Thus, like AA, tennis provides the illusion that one can escape the self, while simultaneously bringing one inexorably in closer contact with the self.

While tennis serves for Wallace as a model of life, it equally presents a paradigm of subjectivity and the self. The formulations that Wallace uses to describe tennis hinge on the idea of limits and containment, and limitation becomes crucial to his conception of subjectivity, both in relation to tennis and elsewhere. Tennis is:

> [a] 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. (Wallace 82)

For Wallace, then, the limits of the self become crucial, not only to the game of tennis, but to a thinking of subjectivity.

The subjectivity that Wallace envisions is one that only occurs through another. To recognize itself as a being, the subject is fundamentally dependent on exposure to another. This occurs most explicitly in tennis, where opponents are mirrors, and the game is about transcending "in imagination and execution" the limited self/opponent that enables the game in the first place (84). Thus, in his or her opponent, the player recognizes the self and its limits: "This is why all opponents are scary and weaker opponents are especially scary" (Wallace 176).

This recognition of the self through exposure to another is hardly limited to tennis. Hal, for example, is allowed a similar recognition of himself and his encagement through his confession of drug addiction to Mario. Although Mario's reaction to the information is complete acceptance, Hal tries to insist that his reaction should be otherwise:

> 'And of course you're hurt, Boo, that I've tried to hide all of it from you.'
>
> 'I'm zero percent hurt, Hal.' [...]
>
> 'You can get hurt and mad at people, Boo. News-flash at almost fucking nineteen, kid. [...] You can get mad at somebody and it doesn't mean they'll go away. You don't have to put on a Moms-act of total trust and forgiveness. One liar's enough.' (Wallace 784)

In this exchange, Hal performs a kind of dual displacement. In the first instance, he projects onto his brother Mario an emotional response that would be more likely to come

from his mother. Avril is obsessively worried about secrecy in her children and continually insists on a façade of trust and openness that Hal very clearly considers false. Hal, when smoking, is obsessed with ensuring that his drug intake remain a secret from absolutely everybody: "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" (Wallace 49). His admission to Mario points to Hal's own awareness that at least part of what his drug use is meant to help him flee or forget is the inordinate control his mother exerts over him. Even in his subconscious attempts to evade that control through secrecy, Hal is still very much concerned that Avril never discover that he has tried to evade her control: "Something terrible will happen if she finds out I hid it from her" (784).

Of course it is not just his mother's control that Hal is trying to flee; it is himself as well. Hal is an extreme example of the addict who so fears his own emotions that drugs are necessary to both subdue and allow expression of those emotions. Hal considers himself empty, and he resents Avril for thinking that she knows him better than he knows himself:

> Hal himself hasn't had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny [...] One of his troubles with his Moms is the fact that Avril Incandenza believes she knows him inside and out as a human being, and an internally worthy one at that, when in fact inside Hal there's pretty much nothing at all, he knows. His Moms Avril hears her own echoes inside him and thinks what she hears is him, and this makes Hal feel the one thing he feels to the limit, lately: he is lonely. (Wallace 694)

Hal's insistence that Mario feel some anger or hurt is thus directed as much at himself as at Mario—more so, perhaps, because there is no reason to believe that Mario is not telling the truth. Hal's evident belief that his mother hides emotion thus reveals that from which he is really fleeing and that which he recognizes about himself in his conversation with Mario. Hal thinks of himself as empty, though he is clearly not: at the very least, he feels loneliness. What is really happening is a suppression of emotion; in his brother Orin's words, Hal is "shut down" (Wallace 1040). Hal sees in Mario's behavior a reflection of both himself and his mother, and he clearly identifies himself with Avril, though he may not admit it. His final words reveal this identification: "One liar's enough" (784). With the indefinite pronoun, Hal seems to refer to Avril, but he may just as well be referring to himself. He thus struggles against a double limitation: his inability to cope with his own emotions and the exterior control imposed on him by his mother.

These dual limitations, are, of course, closely related, if not one and the same. Just as the limiting "internal" elements of Hal's personality and talent are ultimately something that he has taken in from his family and society, so too is the "external" control exercised by his mother a limitation that Hal has internalized. The effectiveness of both these limitations on Hal hinges upon this internalization, for in making them a part of himself, he renders them that much more difficult to resist. This, of course, is the crux of Judith Butler's argument. The power that controls you and that you seek to resist is the same power upon which you depend for your identity and being. A successful resistance would then necessarily entail the erasure of your being: "[I]f the terms by which we gain social recognition for ourselves are those by which we are regulated *and* gain social existence, then to affirm one's existence is to capitulate to one's

subordination" (Butler 79). Hal, then, is constituted as a person by his relationship to the powers that control him. His own recognition of this fact is colored by his feelings of loneliness: "We enter a spiritual puberty where we snap to the fact that the great transcendent horror is loneliness, excluded encagement in the self. Once we've hit this age, we will now give or take anything, wear any mask, to fit, be part-of, not to be Alone, we young" (Wallace 694). Thus, the cultural power that creates the exclusion and encagement of the self is the same very power that is embraced in an effort to fight this exclusion.

This thinking of the relationship between power and resistance is crucial to Wallace's formulation of subjectivity. Wallace, however, identifies an additional dimension to the conception of the limitations power necessarily places on agency. For Wallace, the limits imposed by the movement of power have a dual function: they constrain the subject, but they also provide shelter. This is most evident in Wallace's discussion of tennis. Gerard Schtitt, ETA's head tennis coach, describes tennis as something that contains and gives meaning (Wallace 83). It is a "second world," where there is no change:

> 'In that world is joy because there is shelter of *something else*, of purpose past sluggardly self and complaints about uncomfort. [...] You have a chance to *occur*, playing. No? To make for you this second world that is always the same: there is in this world you, and in the hand a tool, there is a ball, there is opponent with his tool, and always only two of you, you and this other, inside the lines, with always a purpose to keep this world alive, yes?' (459)

The boundaries of which Schtitt speaks, wherein this world occurs, are comprised not by baselines but by the player: "The true opponent, the enfolding boundary, is the player himself" (84). Thus, for Wallace, the limits of the self are protective, sheltering. If an exit from the cage would entail an erasure of the self, then it stands to reason that the cage must serve a dual function. It is confining, but it also preserves.

Hal is experiencing directly the sheltering nature of limits. At the novel's end, he has become trapped in his own body, unable to communicate, whether verbally or non-verbally. He is clearly encaged by his own body, yet this encagement has the effect of in some ways protecting him from other forms of control. To begin with, it provides him with a kind of shelter from the expectations of his family. As he begins to struggle with quitting drugs, Hal loses all desire to play. For the first time, he starts to actively not want to play tennis (Wallace 852), and he even contemplates deliberately injuring himself, so that he can become "the object of compassionate sorrow rather than disappointed sorrow" (955). His sudden inability to communicate, or even maintain a neutral facial expression, ultimately functions just as a self-induced injury would have. Hal can hardly be said to have *deliberately* brought about the onset of his condition, and thus—though no fault of his own—he can no longer be expected to play professionally. His family's fallback plan is college, but his incapacity to even interview effectively negates that option.

Less obviously, Hal's condition also affords him a certain protection from the control his mother exerts over him. "Communicational imprecision," says Hal's brother Orin, is one of Avril's great fears and obsessions (Wallace 1043). Linguistic performances have long been Hal's way of pleasing her, and, additionally,

communication is the means by which Avril hopes to foreclose any secrecy or hiding on her sons' parts:

> 'Mario Love-o, are *you* sad? Are you trying to determine whether I've been sensing that you *yourself* are sad? [...] Though of course the sun would leave my sky if I couldn't assume you'd simply come and tell me you were sad. There would be no need for intuition about it' (768-769).

By eliminating all possibility of communication, then, Hal is thus able to almost completely remove himself from Avril's immediate sphere of influence. Of course, as his withdrawal from communicability arises in part from Avril's presence in and attempts at control over Hal's life, one cannot say that he is truly beyond her control. She is clearly still exerting an enormous—though indirect—influence. However, insofar as Avril can no longer exert control via the usual interaction between mother and son, Hal has achieved a measure of shelter from Avril's day-to-day influence and manipulation. And, indeed, Avril is absent from *Infinite Jest*'s narrative from the moment Hal loses communicational ability onward.

Through his encagement, then, Hal has found a perverse kind of protection and freedom. Certainly, this is not a complete freedom, for it comes at a great price, but Hal is now encaged less by others and more by himself. His inability to speak is clearly psychologically motivated and, although it is a response to and thus, to an extent, dictated by the limits he feels are placed on him by others, it is also largely an encagement created by he himself. His condition is not imposed by him from without, but is rather an internal, somewhat protective response. Thus, while his condition is a cage, of sorts, it is a cage with a very different valence than the ones Hal has found in his family or in drugs.

There is thus an odd kind of similarity between the "freedom" offered by AA and that which Hal attains through his condition. Both depend on the limits or the cage to offer a protective space in which freedom (or the illusion of freedom) can function. Within his entrapment, Hal has found a sheltered space where he can, to some extent, avoid some of the limitation placed on him. Similarly, AA offers its illusion through the acknowledgement of human limitation. This acknowledgement forms the basis of the AA community, which itself serves as a sort of sheltering limit. One abides by AA's doctrines because they provide protection against a world of addiction, and the key to abiding by AA's rules is to always remember that one is human and thus limited:

> The Boston AA 'In Here' that protects against a return to 'Out There' is not about explaining what caused your Disease. It's about a goofily simple practical recipe for how to remember you've got the Disease day by day, how to keep the seductive ghost of a bliss long absconded from baiting you and hooking you and pulling you back Out and eating your heart raw and (if you're lucky) eliminating your map for good. So no whys or wherefores allowed. In other words check your head at the door. (Wallace 374)

To question AA doctrine is to give in to one's personal will, and to do so is to stand outside the limits that AA places on the self. AA's limits are a means of protecting the self against its own will; to ignore these limits, then, is to remove oneself from the shelter that AA offers against the self.

Unlike the shelter of AA, however, the shelter Hal has found within himself offers no illusion of transcendence, and—because the freedom it does offer so clearly occurs

within a cage—neither does it offer a true illusion of freedom. The shelter Hal has found involves a severe withdrawal into the self, and thus is not a sustainable shelter. Nonetheless, this withdrawal *is* a shelter of sorts, and the dual nature of this sheltering limit derives from the interrelation of power and the subject. The self is dependent for existence on the power that forms it, and, according to Butler, the limits of the subject are constituted by this power, for the subject can never truly hope to destroy or transcend that which gives it its existence. For Butler, this limit ultimately translates to the Lacanian Real, which is "the first act of introjection as well as the subject's radical limit" (122).

Slavoj Zizek concurs with this assessment, but makes the additional point that the limit precedes that which lies beyond (115-116). In terms of the subject then, the limit that bars the subject from complete access to the self creates both the subject and the self that is the inaccessible object of the subject's thought. This limit, then, is the limit of subjectivity itself. And if the limit creates that which it limits, than this helps to answer the question of how a limit can be protective. Without the limit, there would be no subjectivity to limit, and thus the establishment of the limit necessarily implies preservation as well as limitation. There is an interdependence at work here, for the existence of the limit depends upon the continued existence of that which it limits.

It is here, in his identification of the sheltering potential of the limit, that Wallace's concern with the psychological implications of power begins to coincide with Giorgio Agamben's concern with the place of biological life in the workings of power. Wallace is primarily concerned with the preservation of the subject and subjectivity. AA doctrine, for example, does care for the body, insofar as it provides the addict with an alternative to suicide, but the bulk of Wallace's discussion of AA hinges on the way it

protects the self and the subject. Likewise, all the shelter that Hal Incandenza is provided occurs on a psychological plane; at no time is his biological life at stake. Agamben, however, argues that the sheltering aspect of power preserves biological life, or the body. For Agamben, the sovereign is that which has the power to decide the question of life—whose life is protected under law and whose is not (71-73). Because the exercise of power depends upon the presence of a human body over which to rule, power also entails the preservation of this body (124-125). Agamben here references the same sheltering aspect of the limit that Wallace points to in his text. For Agamben, that which regulates also preserves, and this can be seen as well in Wallace's description of the regulatory doctrine of AA that protects even as it confines. And, although Wallace is more concerned with the limitation's shelter of the subject and subjectivity, he does recognize the importance of the body.

Despite his emphasis on the psyche, the body for Wallace is much more than mere housing. It is a limitation dictated by mortality and human strength and endurance, and thus it is also a shelter. The evidence can be seen in Wallace's depiction of Hal's feelings about tennis, where Hal finds that by "practicing and playing until everything runs on autopilot [...] talent's unconscious exercise becomes a way to escape yourself, a long waking dream of pure play" (Wallace 173). The attempted escape that Wallace describes here comes very close to Butler's description of the attempted renunciation of the self through repetition of a ritualistic bodily movement. Wallace, however, envisions no attempt at a transcendence of the body. Hal is not trying to escape his body, but rather seeks to live fully within it. The body is a shelter, a space wherein Hal can both escape himself and avoid thinking about his inheritance of failed talent and expectation.

In this refusal to consider the body as something to be transcended, Wallace is closer to Agamben than to Butler. This becomes remarkably clear in Wallace's use of the character Don Gately. Gately, a recovering narcotics addict, has suffered a gunshot wound and has refused pain medication. Suffering acutely, Gately finds himself remembering the agony of his initial detox:

> He had to build a wall around each second just to take it. The whole first two weeks of it [detox] are telescoped in his memory down into like one second—less: the space between two heartbeats. A breath and a second, the pause and gather between each cramp. An endless Now stretching its gull-wings out on either side of his heartbeat. And he'd never before or since felt so excruciatingly alive. Living in the Present between the pulses. (Wallace 860)

Gately here finds a kind of shelter within his own body. His body is, of course, where he feels the pain, but it is also where he escapes it, in the space between heartbeats, between breaths, between cramps. Now hospitalized for the gunshot wound, Gately realizes just what his body shelters him from:

> He could just hunker down in the space between each heartbeat and make each heartbeat a wall and live in there. Not let his head look over. What's unendurable is what his own head could make of it all. What his head could report to him, looking over and ahead and reporting. [...] [E]verything unendurable was in the head, was the head not Abiding in the Present but hopping the wall and doing a recon and then returning with unendurable news you then somehow believed. (Wallace 860-861)

Gately's body thus provides him with a form of protection from his mind, his consciousness, his self. Rather than envisioning the body put into the service of self-forgetting, Wallace depicts it as a place of retreat, a place where one can—at least temporarily—live in harmony with the self. In serving as such, it provides Gately not with an escape from the self, but with an escape from his own tortured relation to the self.

As with all of Wallace's liberties, the "freedom" that Gately attains through his body is illusory at best. It is also a temporary freedom, for Gately only gains it when he is subjected to great pain. And like all Wallace's freedoms, it is one that occurs within a space of containment. In the context of Wallace's novel, however, it is also somewhat remarkable, for it is one of the few instances of freedom that derives from unity of mind and body, from a situation in which the mind so firmly inhabits the body that they are inseparable and only the natural functioning of the body matters. And Gately's insight here is that this type of freedom is perhaps where AA is trying to direct him:

> He wonders, sometimes, if that's what Ferocious Francis and the rest want him to walk toward: Abiding again between heartbeats; tries to imagine what kind of impossible leap it would take to live that way all the time, by choice, straight: in the second, the Now, walled and contained between slow heartbeats. [...] It's a gift, the Now; it's AA's real gift: it's no accident they call it *The Present.* (Wallace 860)

It is here, in his use of the body and freedom, that Wallace moves toward some of the same things at which Agamben hints. Following the work of Heidegger and Levinas, Agamben draws a sharp distinction between factical life and the traditional Western philosophical conception of life. In factical life, there is no distinction between life itself

and the way life is lived; thus, there is no difference between body and spirit, or between sensation and consciousness (Agamben 150). In this description, we can see the kind of life that Gately attains by "abiding" with his pain, a life wherein he so inhabits his body that all other distinctions are negated.

For Agamben, the crucial point about factical life is its relation to "bare life," which Agamben identifies as the kind of life over which the sovereign is able to exercise its power. The union of "Being and ways of Being, of subject and qualities, life and world" implies that there can be no distinction of bare life as such: "[T]his unity [...]appears as an indissoluble cohesion in which it is impossible to isolate something like a bare life" (Agamben 153). And if bare life can not be distinguished in human life, then power no longer has any hold over human existence (153). Agamben thus points to an end of the exercise of power, to a way out of the endless Foucauldian proliferation of power.

However, it seems that Agamben can only propose this possibility for an erasure of power by virtue of the psyche's absence from his text. The unity implicit in factical life must somehow exclude or absorb psychological life, for the psyche is founded upon a fundamental split between body and mind, between being and consciousness of being. And conversely, Butler's attempts to situate any true agency for the subject are doomed to failure, for she rightfully insists upon the role of consciousness in the workings of power.

Like Butler, Wallace envisions a subjectivity in which the subject always seeks futilely to escape the self. However, this attempted flight does not necessarily entail an attempt at bodily transcendence. Rather, the subject has the possibility of withdrawing

into the body, of inhabiting it so fully that consciousness and the body are indistinguishable. And for Wallace, as for Agamben, there is an odd sense of freedom in this fusion.

This freedom, however, is by no means clearly defined and recognizable. If Wallace's characters demonstrate nothing else, they reveal the fear and confusion that come with being human. And thus, even for Gately, who comes the closest to recognizing the potential freedom of living within his body, the relation to the body is one shrouded in mystery, one that only becomes clear through a haze of pain. In Gately's mind, to live everyday life the way he can through his pain would entail an "impossible leap" (Wallace 860). Hal perhaps articulates best the confused and contested relationship of the subject to its body: "This is your body. They want you to know. You will have it with you always. On this issue there is no counsel; you much make your best guess. For myself, I do not expect ever really to know" (176). That he feels the need to address the subject directly attests to its importance, but Hal—extraordinarily articulate in all other respects—just as clearly does not know exactly what to say about it. His words thus encapsulate the indeterminacy of this troubling relationship to the body.

Wallace's novel by no means offers any formula for a true and lasting freedom. Indeed, in many ways it suggests a particularly bleak view of freedom's possibility. At the novel's end, Hal and Gately are both trapped in much the same way—they are left without the ability to communicate, stuck within bodies over which they no longer have any control. However, in Gately's recognition of the sheltering potential of his own body, Wallace seems to put forth a faint glimmer of hope, the suggestion that we are perhaps not shackled so firmly as we might think. And in this, Wallace succeeds in

carving out a space that Agamben—if not Wallace's own characters—would recognize as liberatory.

WORKS CITED

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford UP: Stanford, 1998.

Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age. New York: Harper, 1957.

Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection.* Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997.

Denzen, Norman K. *The Alcoholic Self.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.

---. *The Recovering Alcoholic.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.

The Hazelden Foundation. *The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.* New York: Harper/Hazelden, 1987.

Kurtz, Ernest. *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous.* Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1979.

Taylor, G. Aiken. *A Sober Faith: Religion and Alcoholics Anonymous.* New York: MacMillan, 1953.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology.* Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
3 1293 02331 0075