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## Addictive Potential: Regimes, Tranformations, Circulations

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in  
Theory and Criticism

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## Abstract

This thesis employs a poststructuralist framework to consider the possibilities for agency and resistance in consumer capitalism. The argument begins with an examination of figures who emerged in nineteenth century psychiatric discourses, and the roles that those figures play in poststructural and postmodern critiques of psychoanalysis and psychiatry, specifically in the work of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. I then argue that David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* presents us with a new figure—the addict. My reading of Wallace is informed by poststructuralist critiques of psychiatric power and by Wallace's own affinity for the fiction of Franz Kafka. I argue that the addict is a configuration of subjectivity that emerges under consumer capitalism, and through a Deleuzian reading of *Infinite Jest*, I prove that the addict is both a complicit and resistant figure, who personifies the grounds for human agency under consumer capital.

## Keywords

Poststructuralism, postmodernism, David Foster Wallace, Kafka, Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault, subjectivity, consumer capitalism, depression, anhedonia, addiction, *Infinite Jest*

## Summary for Lay Audience

Much poststructural and postmodern thought has focused on the construction of the subject, particularly on the configuration of regimes of knowledge and power that have historically defined subjectivity. Following the example of poststructural and postmodern thought, my thesis is an examination of the figures of madness who emerged in nineteenth century psychiatric discourses and came to be, in many ways, emblematic figures of

poststructuralist thought. I demonstrate that these figures—the depressive, manic-depressive and schizophrenic—and the therapeutic regimes that spring up around them are inherently political. Theorists such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue specifically that these figures are symptomatic of the fragmented subjectivity that emerges under consumer capitalism. In texts such as *Madness and Civilization* and *Anti-Oedipus*, they argue that the confluence of certain forces—therapeutic regimes, particularly psychoanalysis and capitalism—have coalesced around and actually realize their full, despotic potential in the repression of the contemporary subject. However, wherever there is oppression, resistance is also possible. Drawing upon David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, I argue that there is a fourth figure, the figure of the addict, who embodies these circulations of power and, in many ways, is the ideal subject of consumer capitalism, but who is also a figure of resistance. Through a Deleuzian reading of Wallace’s text, I argue that the addict is both a subject who is formed by the multiplicity of forces beyond their control but who nonetheless finds agency in the world-building nature of addiction. I also examine Wallace’s affinity for Kafka’s literature, particularly *The Metamorphosis*, and his appropriation of Kafka’s Gregor Samsa through the character of Hal Incandenza in *Infinite Jest*. For Wallace, I argue, Kafka’s narrative serves as an example that enables the late postmodernist writer to construct the addict as the logical response to the dominance of anhedonia and depression that is engendered by consumer capitalism.

## Acknowledgments

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To Jennifer, Patrick, Laura and Liam: thank you for putting up with the madness, the surliness, the despair. To Catherine, Blake, Carol, Patricia: thank you for always asking if I was going to finish. I hated it at the time, but I needed it. Joan, Vlad, Kadeem and Elizabeth—thank you for wanting to read this thing. You don't even have to. It was enough to know that there are people who willingly want to read the strange creatures that my brain builds.

There is a select group that took every phone call, who listened to all the self-loathing and doubt, and nonetheless pushed me forward. Leigh, Frances, Natasha, Elizabeth, Emma, Curran, Charlotte, Kurt. Thank you for the memes, encouragement and for reminding me that I am a human being.

Most days, I wake up wishing I were a beetle and believe justice to be impossible in the universe where it never happens. Naomi, Christina and Nick remind me, every day, that this belief is untrue. Thank you for reading this thesis, thank you for believing in me, thank you for letting me tell you all about David Foster Wallace when none of you care.

“Curiously enough, Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back. (This is a very nice observation on my part to be treasured all your lives. Some Gregors, some Joes and Janes, do not know they have wings).”

Vladimir Nabokov, “Franz Kafka” , 259.

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## Chapter 1

### 1. Critique of Pure Madness

Much twentieth-century thought might be defined by its suspicion of the privileging of reason. Contemporary theory, in particular, has shown a keen interest in figures of madness, as those who sit outside regimes of rationality and truth. Postmodernist and poststructuralist writers and theoreticians have often recognized that there is both a symptomatic configuration and a potential for resistance in figures of madness and the therapeutic subject. For poststructuralists, the figures of various mental illnesses have also been useful for theorizing the way that language and capitalism generate the political horizons of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Perhaps the most well-known of these figures is the schizophrenic in the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. My thesis follows from their example; however, in addition to the schizophrenic, I would like to consider the depressive and manic-depressive, two recurrent figures in the work of Foucault and in the discourse of twentieth century psychiatry. In this thesis, I would also like to expand upon the concepts of the depressive, manic-depressive and schizophrenic to include a new figure, that of the addict, who is perhaps best represented in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*.

On February 6, 1974, Michel Foucault delivered the twelfth lecture in his 1973-74 seminar at the Collège de France, a seminar that would subsequently be published under the title, *Psychiatric Power*. In this lecture, Foucault describes the dynamic between Jean-Martin Charcot, the nineteenth-century neurologist and professor, and the hysterics he worked with at Salpêtrière. Foucault argues that because Charcot's research attempted



to classify hysteria as a neurological illness, the trauma that each hysteric appears to have suffered had to be treated as though it were a physical symptom divorced from any non-biological cause (Foucault, *Psychiatric* 317-18). As Foucault recounts in his lectures, many of the hysterics were female patients whose fits involved the recollection of sexual violence; notes from the case files of patients such as Genviève corroborate this fact (*Psychiatric* 322). However, Charcot never admitted that sexual trauma was one of the root causes. As Foucault explains, “if one really wanted to succeed in demonstrating hysteria was a genuine illness, if one absolutely wanted to make it work within the system of differential diagnosis, if one did not want its status as illness to be challenged, then it had to be entirely shorn of that disqualifying element...sexuality” (*Psychiatric* 321). The hysteric became an object of knowledge because their body was marked by trauma; however, the cause and content of that trauma was of no interest to neurologists. Trauma was noteworthy only to the extent that it appeared to leave a lesion or physical mark on the brain. Trauma’s physiological symptoms, rather than their cause, were the medical priority. For Foucault, the hysteric is, to some extent, emblematic of the ways in which the psycho-pathological subject, or the subject deemed “mad,” is dominated by master discourses that hold the power to define and discredit madness.

As Gilles Deleuze similarly observes in another context:

One thing is rather shocking about books of psychiatry or even psychoanalysis, and that is the pervasive duality between what an alleged mental patient says and what the doctor reports—between the ‘case’ and the commentary on the case, the analysis of the case. It’s logos against pathos: the mental patient is supposed to say

something, and the doctor says what it means in terms of symptoms or sense. This allows what the patient says to be crushed. It's hypocritically selective. (*Desert* 218)

Here, Deleuze points out that the mad are not allowed to speak directly. Rather, the doctor takes what the patient says and uses it to prove a theory. Foucault and Deleuze turn to figures of madness because of the way that institutional regimes exploit these figures in order to generate a dominant logic and a normative measure of reality. The language of symptomology, of differential diagnosis, is one of power. Deleuze argues, correctly, that the mad are not listened to. They are a perfect example of the way that the subject is constructed by external forces that refuse to allow it to participate in its own becoming, forces that pursue their despotic course under the guise of 'care.' The treatment of mental patients, from the way that they are diagnosed to the way they are managed and moved through the systems of medicine, law and capital, exemplifies the way in which the subject is caught in and engendered by a multiplicity of systems, and that subject, constructed and disciplined by those systems, resides at the core of poststructuralist and postmodernist thought.

### 1.1. Reality, What?

As Jean-François Lyotard remarks, "A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (Lyotard 15). The subject is enmeshed within a network of linguistic and economic relations that are prior to its existence. However, this is not to say that the subject is not important. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "like all other breaks, the subjective break is not at all an indication of a lack or need, but on the contrary, a share

that falls to the subject as a part of a whole, income that comes its way as something left over” (*Anti-Oedipus* 41). By using the economic metaphor of income, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that the network that forges the subject is also productive and creates things of value. The subject, in their terms, may be destabilized and re-arranged, but the celebrated fragmentation of the subject, or the disappearance of the unitary subject, should not be thought in terms of a loss. In other words, the fragmentation of the subject does not diminish the crucial importance of the category of the subject.

The fragmented subject that figures so prominently in poststructural critique is also central to the representational field of postmodern narrative and culture. Linda Hutcheon, for example, asserts that the postmodern critique of representation can best be understood as a way of demonstrating that notions like truth and tradition are conveyed through a series of images and motifs, which can be reconfigured and called into question. She writes, “postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations” (Hutcheon 55). Prominent among previous notions and representations is the traditional unified subject, which is often the object of postmodern representational subversion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Postmodernism is “a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order—what is often euphemistically called post-industrial or consumer society” (Jameson 3). Many, such as Jameson, would argue that postmodernism is, in a sense, in the past. Jameson is actually someone who believes that postmodernism does not belong to the past, and persists with the term, even though he recognizes that not everyone shares his view. However, many of the preoccupations that fueled the aesthetic of postmodernism, such as the construction of subjectivity, duplicity and representation continue to inform contemporary theory.

It is this fragmentation of the subject, and the struggle to accurately represent it, that bolsters Hutcheon's claim that the political dimensions of postmodernism lie in its interest in representations of post-industrial life, both in high art and low commodified forms. Hutcheon argues that by self-consciously playing with the conventions of representation, postmodernism aims to interrogate the past and to displace the meta-structures that were previously received as given and self-evident truths (Hutcheon 1-2). In taking up the question of representation, postmodernism, Hutcheon asserts, is making a political claim that things can be different.

This line of reasoning is not completely satisfactory for those who believe that postmodernism is not adequately subversive, though the disappointment with the postmodern refusal or inability to do away with traditional narratives is arguably misplaced. Hutcheon writes that of all its descriptors—subversive, self-reflexive, self-duplicitous, self-undermining—the highest ethic of postmodernism is a “commitment to doubleness” (Hutcheon 1). This duplicity gives it the strategic advantage of being able to critique, well, everything—any image in the contemporary lexicon can be subverted or recapitulated. For Hutcheon, postmodernism reaches its highest critical function when it “de-naturalizes” given images that were held to be above critique or beneath consideration of socio-political intrigue (42). Many would still argue that de-naturalization is not a satisfying political stance, especially when postmodernism's main claim is that everything is constructed. However, the question of representation and the assembly of images are critical in a society that is defined, not just by its own consumption, but by how it makes sense of consumption. Postmodern discourses on

representation challenge the way that the subject understands itself within the context of a consumer society through a complicitous critique of both the subject and the social field.

## 1.2. Poststructuralism, Postmodernism and Madness

Central to the postmodern critique of representation is its critique of the category of the subject, a critique that is informed, in part, by theoretical interrogations of the discourse and practice of psychoanalysis. As Mark Fisher observes, “in the 1960s and 1970s, radical theory and politics...coalesced around extreme mental conditions such as schizophrenia, arguing, for instance, that madness was not a natural, but a political, category” (*Realism* 19). In poststructural thought, as I have already suggested, Foucault’s work is fundamental to this project, as is the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In broadest terms, for Foucault, the principal charge to be laid at the door of the therapeutic regime is that it doesn’t listen to the mad. Rather, it seeks to exploit madness as a means of legitimizing discourses of civilization, meaning and rationality, and it tries to “push” the “non-being of madness” out of discourse by forcing the mad to recognize that they are the error, the ones who need to be corrected (Foucault, *Madness* 187). For Foucault, madness is a discourse that exists alongside, and is the necessary precondition for, reason. He argues that psychiatric power converts madness into mental illness—that is, the medicalization of madness de-fangs it. Madness is an untamed force that moves through the social field, while mental illness is made up of clinical categories.

To put it another way, psychiatric power operates on a logic of waiting for the barbarians. It cautions us that madness is a force that must be contained. For psychiatric power, madness is both denigrated as a failure to understand reality correctly and closely

watched for its dangerous potential to overthrow reason. Madness has no terminus and can only be managed through a constant regime; there is no 'cure.' Yet, madness also needs to be managed so that it can be maintained; after all, psychiatric power has no purpose if it has no one to treat. More broadly, we might argue that civilization requires madness for its legitimation and produces mental illness as its by-product. Deleuze and Guattari write, "our society produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars, the only difference being that the schizos are not salable" (*Anti-Oedipus* 245). The chief distinction between a product and a by-product is that the former is intended, and the latter is secondary. A society that organizes itself around repression necessarily reproduces the madness that it tries to suppress. But "why does [capitalism] confine its madmen and madwomen instead of seeing them as its own heroes and heroines, its own fulfilment?" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 245). Capitalism thrives on discord, but it is not, itself, madness. Rather, we might say that madness is the by-product of living under capitalism. The system produces madness, and it uses repression as a way to control and leverage its reproduction, even though madness is dangerous to the system itself.

However, not everyone has tried to silence madness. The one nice thing Foucault says about Freud is that he at least tried to speak to madness directly (*Madness* 198). Unlike his Enlightenment forebears, Freud doesn't discount the idea that the mad could have something comprehensible to say. However, psychoanalysis purposefully misinterprets the mad, in the sense that it projects itself onto the productions of the unconscious. While quoting Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari explain,

Insofar as psychoanalysis cloaks insanity in the mantle of a ‘parental complex,’ and regards the patterns of self-punishment resulting from Oedipus as a confession of guilt, its theories are not at all radical or innovative. On the contrary: it is completing the task begun by nineteenth-century psychology, namely, to develop a moralized, familial discourse of mental pathology, linking madness to the ‘half-real, half-imaginary dialectic of the Family,’ deciphering within it ‘the unending attempt to murder the father,’ ‘the dull thud of instincts hammering at the solidity of the family as an institution and at its most archaic symbols.’ (Foucault qtd. in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 50)

Deleuze and Guattari argue that not only does psychoanalysis deliberately mishear madness, it is directly responsible for perfecting the function of repression under capitalism. They write about the process of oedipalization: the way that we are trained to identify and function as if Oedipus were real. The core function of oedipalization is that the subject comes to understand that their desire, through language, is predicated on lack. Oedipus is afraid of becoming even less if his father castrates him for bedding his mother. For the subject, this means that desire is a longing that cannot be fulfilled, for satisfaction would cause irreparable psychic harm. However, lack still generates tension because the entire theory of Oedipus relies on the assumption that what one wants most is something that is unattainable. This inability to obtain the object of one’s desire is a constant source of psychic distress. Repression capitalizes on this tension by structuring the desire of the subject as one that goes without fulfillment, as if desire were a void.

While psychoanalysis would claim that the Oedipal triangle is transhistorical, it emerged as a therapeutic concept only with the arrival of psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century. The Oedipal triangle defines the subject in terms of a specific notion of the family, in relation to the Mother and the Father, and through a narrative in which the subject experiences the possibility of both fulfilment and castration. The logical fallout of this triangulation is that the family is both the guardian against and at fault for stoking madness (Foucault, *Psychiatric* 97). For Freud, Oedipus presents the story of a son who, torn between his desire for his mother and fear of his father, is forced into accepting that he will never be permitted to have the thing that he wants. The family is “haunted by mythical figures,” and this haunting creates a superficial coherence for the origin of the subject and the psychic unrest that is, by and large, inflicted and necessitated by our way of living (Foucault, *Madness* 117). By entrenching the theatre of the family within myth—stories with ancient and forgotten origins—an illusion of permanence is created. Suddenly, it is perfectly reasonable to accept the ideas that the unconscious, while unknowable, can become comprehensible under a very specific reading, and that all human motivations can become coherent and reasonable, no matter how selfish, perverted or convoluted. The incest taboo, for example, is misunderstood as given and absolute. If it were an innate, biological function, there would be no need for a law against it. With the acceptance of the incest taboo, the most sacred and intuitive laws must be reinforced by a state power.

This conversion process from unstable force to static being is not confined to madness. For Foucault, this is, in fact, the method by which subjectivity is created; the subject is a flashpoint through which multiple powers merge and flow. The subject is



constituted by these flows, and what appears to be a stable formation is infinitely more flexible than it is given credit for. The enigmatic powers-that-be are machines that require a clean circuit through which to run, and subjectivity is one of those tracks. In his study of the asylum and psychiatric power, Foucault examines the way that the production of reason necessitates the negation of madness.

### 1.3. Madness for Civilization

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault provides several arguments, all of which expand upon the above idea. The first is that Enlightenment discourses produced the figure of the madman as an object of knowledge. These discourses separated madness from reason, and thoroughly devalued madness and the mad subject, for “there appeared to be a special modulation which concerned madness proper, and was addressed to those called, without exact semantic distinction, insane, alienated, deranged, demented, extravagant” (Foucault, *Madness* 66). Madness was thrown into the same category as non-being and the profane—that is, negations that served to distinguish and to define structural features essential to modern civilization. In this sense, madness can be understood as a spectre, a ghost that, despite being rebuffed and negated, is nonetheless present in its absence. Through its negation, in part, rationality and civilization affirm their power and necessity.

Foucault also argues that the emergence of psychiatry was really about the creation of a human science. Rendered the object of knowledge, the subject would be made to disclose their truth to doctors, in the hopes that psychiatry could reveal something about them that they could not. Foucault recounts the case of a melancholic who believed he

had no head. He writes that the doctor treated the patient by “entering into the delirium, [agreeing] at the sufferer’s request to fill up this space and placed upon his head a great ball of lead” (*Madness* 190). Upon experiencing discomfort, the patient was forced to admit that, indeed, he had a head instead of a void where it ought to be. Foucault writes, “the exchange of non-being with itself is carried out in this ingenious play: the non-being of delirium is turned against the being of illness and suppresses it by the simple fact that it is driven out of the delirium by dramatic representation” (*Madness* 191). In this example, we see madness is engaged by participating in its own negation. Quite literally, in this case, “the non-being of madness, the inanity of error, was forced to yield, finally, to this pressure of the truth” (*Madness* 187). In early cognitive treatments for madness, the sign of ‘remission’ is that the mad come to understand themselves as such. This is achieved “not by treating the false judgment, by trying to correct it or dismiss it by demonstration, but rather by dressing up and manipulating reality [so it] is placed on the same level, as it were, as the delirium” (Foucault, *Psychiatric* 131). The doctor takes a hold of reality and pins the madman on all sides, or, in other words, the psychiatrist claims to represent “the surplus-power of reality inasmuch as I possess, by myself and definitively, something that is the truth in relation to madness” (Foucault, *Madness* 134). Reason, in this practice, does not appeal to itself as reason; rather, it presents itself as truth.

In the opening pages of *Madness and Civilization* Foucault points out that in the Middle Ages, the mad in urban centres would be rounded up, placed together on boats and sent to other cities. This served both a practical and spiritual purpose: the mad were no longer in their original host city, but the madman was also sent on a symbolic journey,

for “navigation delivers man to the uncertainty of fate; on water, each of us is in the hands of his own destiny” (Foucault, *Madness* 11). When moving over water, the mad were not simply driven from a city, but embarked on an unending journey, for every port city would eventually place them on another boat. In this way, they each became “the prisoner of the passage” (*Madness* 11). Unlike Odysseus, who was on a journey to understand his place in the cosmos, the mad were—and are—on a journey of perpetual displacement.

#### 1.4. Madmen: Depressed or Manic

However, the madman at the beginning of *Madness and Civilization* is very different from the one we encounter at the end of the book. The madman is transformed through psychiatric discourses. Psychiatric power will vivisection the mad for parts, classifying illnesses and stealing that which gave madness its ability to traverse worlds—its non-reason is stolen from it. While it is possible to read *Madness and Civilization* as an attempt on the part of Foucault to restore the non-reason of madness, that would be a mistake. We cannot go back and return that which was taken away. Rather, Foucault attempts to create a discourse around madness that does not force it to submit to reason. He uses madness to interrogate the assumptions of reason. To do this, Foucault refers to specific cases and illnesses to demonstrate the ways that reason relies on non-reason for definition. I would like to focus on two specific figures in his work: those of the manic-depressive and the depressive.

The figures of the manic-depressive and the depressive go by several names throughout Foucault’s oeuvre, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will simply employ the

names “depressive” and “manic-depressive.” They are twin figures, who have long been understood to exist on the same spectrum, produced by illnesses that affect the mood of the patient (Foucault, *Madness* 125). Moods are an affective state which, unlike emotions, are not the result of a specific stimulus. Mood disorders are typically judged both on the basis of how the patient feels and on how the patient is perceived by others—in this instance, doctors. In the case of mania and depression, patients are often treated with the same spectrum of medications, and there is frequent cross-treatment with different medications. For example, a manic-depressive may be treated with an antidepressant in conjunction with a mood stabilizer, while a depressive may be treated with an antipsychotic. The reason these conditions receive similar treatment is that mania and depression exist on the same spectrum. Both are uncanny to behold, in that they produce a comic enlargement of certain qualities of the patient. The features of the depressive may remain inert and flattened, while, when in the throes of mania, the manic-depressive may speak quickly and is unable to sit still. The depressive and manic-depressive, when in an episode, are both like themselves, but not. They still know who they are, but they are nonetheless transformed.

Mood disorders are not a break with reality. While there undoubtedly is “an idea dear to traditional psychiatry that madness is fundamentally linked to a loss of reality,” the depressive and the manic-depressive do not lose touch with reality (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 123). Rather, they become keenly aware of reality. Mania and depression alter the patient, and affect impacts the way reality is perceived, but the depressive and manic-depressive are still capable of reasoning. Foucault writes, “the mind of the melancholic is entirely occupied with reflection, so that his imagination

remains at leisure and in repose; the maniac's imagination, on the contrary, is occupied by a perpetual influx of impetuous thoughts" (*Madness* 125). The locus of their illnesses are found in the way that they think and put ideas together. However, they cannot hide the moods that give rise to the productive apparatus of their mind. Depressives and manic-depressives both deal with restlessness, impatience, frustration and an inability to disguise their moods from others. They both build worlds, yet, unlike the schizophrenic, they can be told that they are insane, and, furthermore, the depressive and manic-depressive can believe that they are, indeed, crazy. The depressive and manic-depressive are more receptive to therapeutic and pharmaceutical treatment than the Deleuzian schizophrenic, who will be discussed later in this chapter. They can lie down on Freud's couch and nod: 'Yes, I really am sick.' In that way, they can be read as finally submissive, open to correction, and distant from what might be understood as the revolutionary threat of madness.

The psychiatric establishment, however, appears to believe otherwise. Both the depressive and manic-depressive are considered difficult to treat—a difficulty compounded by the fluctuating moods that characterize these conditions—justifying the sometimes cruel treatment instituted in the name of psychiatric reason. The instability presented by the manic-depressive is considered to be especially dangerous. Left untreated, "the savage danger of madness is related to the danger of the passions and to their fatal concatenation" (Foucault, *Madness* 85). Furthermore, the behaviours that are watched for are ones that revolve around consumption: appetite, money, sexuality and substance use (Miklowitz 27). The volatility of mania lies in the way that it floods the

subject, demanding that the subject react to its appetites without delay or considerations for limits.

The treatment of mania, or excitation, became a major concern in the early years of materialist psychiatry (de Sutter 6). The manic-depressive was considered dangerous because, in addition to being followed by the hound of depression, they are haunted by the spectre of mania. The defining feature of manic depression is “the *capacity to be excited*” (de Sutter 9). The capacity to become excited without a clear provocation constituted a threat for several reasons, but Laurent de Sutter argues that the interest in calming down the singular patient was a part of broader political concern around the masses. The root of this thought begins in the manic-depressive. The goal of treatment for the manic-depressive is simple: “a manic depressive does not get better; all you can do is try to calm them down—make sure, that is, that the excitation affecting them is reduced to nothing” (de Sutter 12). In other words, mania can only be constrained and monitored. To control the disease, patients take medications that are designed to bring them down, among them lithium, antipsychotics and mood stabilizers. While depression is a key feature of the illness, de Sutter’s manic-depressive is at their most threatening when manic; their depression is considered to provide welcome stability. As he puts it, “the only good manic-depressive is a depressive” (de Sutter 12). The medications used to treat the manic-depressive typically have side-effects that range from digestive upset and weight gain to anhedonia and akathisia, a loss of libido to anxiety. For side-effects like nausea, unless intolerable, patients are advised to wait it out. Moreover, losing one’s libido is taken as a given. As risky sexual behaviour and arousal is a feature of mania, losing one’s sex drive is a necessary sacrifice in order to control the condition.

Using the figure of the manic-depressive, de Sutter explores the relationship between capitalism and narcotics. For de Sutter, the manic-depressive is a more broadly representative figure, one who best exemplifies lived experience under what de Sutter calls “narcocapitalism,” a lived experience characterized by the willingness of the subject to accept intolerable side-effects as a necessary evil in order to get better. The main argument in *Narcocapitalism* is that the contemporary subject accepts the premise that they must give up their desires to achieve political stability, in the way that the manic-depressive and depressive accept that the cost of achieving clinical stability is one’s libido. Psychotropic pharmaceuticals affect the moods and behaviour and are deployed to order and stabilize the mind. These drugs include, but are not limited to, mood stabilizers, anti-depressants, lithium, and antipsychotics. He argues that under the regime of narcocapitalism, these drugs are used to anaesthetize the subject in order to render them docile, not to improve their quality of life. In this context, the function of psychiatric power is not just to treat the mad, but to anticipate madness before it strikes.

By contrast, the figure of the depressive is incredibly difficult to theorize. If mania represents the destructive potential of the passions, then depression is that destructive force intensified. According to Thomas Sydenham, “[melancholics] are people who are, apart from their complaint, prudent and sensible, and who have extraordinary penetration and sagacity. Thus, Aristotle rightly observed that melancholics have more intelligence than other men” (qtd. in Foucault, *Madness* 118). This is an interesting and recurrent theme throughout discourses about depressives: the idea that their misery endows them with an ability to see the world as it is. This is, perhaps, the greatest illusion depression casts, for “the depressive is always confident about one thing: that he is without illusions”

(Fisher, *Ghosts* 60). The depressive never questions their actual perception of the world, because their madness can easily masquerade as sanity.

Depressives are described throughout *Madness and Civilization* as sedate and reflective. But as Foucault points out, the melancholic is one of the first figures to have their madness attached to the body, specifically through the humours, so that what was once an issue of the soul became a physiological pathology (*Madness* 119). One would think that the physiology of depressives would be of little interest, since they are able to present themselves as being a better seer than others, yet depression was one of the first mental illnesses to be thought of as connected to the body.

However, in the contemporary world, depression is an illness that is regarded in existential, rather than physiological, terms. It is an illness characterized by the radical annihilation of being. The depressive is, arguably, the embodiment of non-being itself. Depression is inimical to life, and therefore, resists being thought. Mark Fisher argues, for example, “depression is not sadness, not even a state of mind, it is a (neuro) philosophical (dis)position” (*Ghosts* 59). However, depression is not a belief; the depressive does not wake up and consciously decide that depression is the best way of apprehending the modern world. Rather, depression makes a slow creep upon the senses. In that sense, clinical depression is not a philosophical disposition; it is simply good at masquerading as one. Fisher writes, “the depressive experiences himself as walled off from the lifeworld, so that his own frozen inner life—an inner death—overwhelms everything; at the same time, he experiences himself as evacuated, totally denuded, a shell: there is nothing except the inside, and the inside is empty” (*Ghosts* 59). While the



depressive is still in the world, they do not participate in the world as a being. Something has been essentially robbed from them. The depressive can participate in activities that are, theoretically, pleasurable, but there is a cognitive dissonance, a lacuna, a gap between the thing and the experience of the thing where pleasure should be. Anhedonia, the inability to enjoy activities that were once pleasurable, is a side-effect of many psychiatric drugs, but it is also one of the key symptoms of depression. In the manic-depressive, we see a figure whose enjoyment is purposefully muzzled and anaesthetized, while in the depressive, the loss of pleasure is one of the more painful symptoms of the disease. To add another level of complication, antidepressants, as I have already indicated, are notorious for killing the libido, so that even if one starts enjoying some pleasurable things again, one will still lose the ability to enjoy sex. Here, the duplicity of anhedonia reveals itself, as both a symptom that requires treatment and a side-effect to be endured.

### 1.5. Anhedonia: Infinite

The recurring and connective affect in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is not strictly depression; rather, it is anhedonia— the inability to feel any pleasure. As a clinical symptom of depression, anhedonia is a term for the depressed person's inability to enjoy activities that once brought them pleasure. Being around the people one loves or pursuing interests that bring one joy lose not only their charm but are 'painful' for the depressed person because these things don't make them feel anything. The depressed person is completely numb to the people and things which once brought them joy. This same numbness, or anhedonia, is accompanied by a self-awareness of one's own indifference, so that the depressed person is often deeply unnerving to those around them,

principally because they do not appear to feel anything. The depressed still believe in things like values and principles, but they cannot feel anything towards them.

One of the most memorable characters in *Infinite Jest* is Kate Gompert, who is hospitalized in the novel for multiple suicide attempts (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 69). One of her observations is that there are two types of depression from which a person can suffer: the most common is anhedonia, and the second is the severely painful void of full-blown clinical depression. Her description of anhedonia is important here, as it describes its affective qualities. Wallace writes, “the anhedonic can still speak about happiness and meaning et al., but she has become incapable of feeling anything in them, of understanding anything about them, of hoping anything about them, or of believing them to exist as anything more than concepts” (693). In other words, while one can still think about and believe in things like meaning, one can do so only at the level of abstraction. As Wallace’s narrator further explains, “Kate Gompert’s always thought of this anhedonic state as a kind of radical abstracting of everything, a hollowing out of stuff that used to have affective content” (693). The anhedonic can think about happiness and freedom, but their condition renders those concepts nothing but abstractions.

Anhedonia guts principles, values and activities of their pleasure; depression replaces numbness with pain. Thus, while anhedonia and severe depression are distinct, they do exist on the same affective continuum. For Wallace, “dead-eyed anhedonia is but a remora on the ventral flank of the true predator, the Great White Shark of pain” that is depression (*Infinite Jest* 695). He writes this in reference to the central character, Hal, who has not yet grown into realizing that anhedonia is only one end of this continuum,

which implies that anhedonia grows into depression. As for Kate Gompert, she resides in the belly of this shark. She experiences “it [as] a level of psychic pain wholly incompatible with human life as we know it. It is a sense of radical and thoroughgoing evil not just as a feature but as the essence of conscious existence” (695). Kate Gompert’s depression and suicidal ideation resists any kind of amelioration. She cannot, nor will she, find any relief from her suicidal depression. It resists any treatment or therapy, forcing Gompert to live with an incomprehensible amount of pain. While anhedonia can be theorized, depression resists this impulse because as an affective experience, it forecloses upon every other thought or sense but pain. For this reason, while we cannot think about the affective reality of anhedonia without thinking of its more extreme relation, depression itself cannot be thought.

Kate Gompert, who tries to treat her depression through the recreational use of cannabis, accurately depicts Fisher’s concept of “depressive hedonia,” as, “an inability to do anything except pursue pleasure” (*Realism* 21-22). The depressive can still pursue pleasure and knows what pleasure is, in the abstract way that one can theoretically know how to fly a kite. By contrast, depressive hedonia is similar to anhedonia, in the sense that neither results in actual pleasure. Depressive hedonia is a state of consumption that is predicated on a futile attempt to feel better, even as one knows that that consumption will not get rid of bad feelings. The depressive sets up our relationship to consumerism this way: the depressive “unwittingly finds himself in concordance with all the human condition...he sees himself as a serial consumer of empty simulations, a junky hooked on every kind of deadening high, a meat puppet of the passions” (Fisher, *Ghosts* 61). The

truth that the depressive reveals is the vacant relationship between the subject and the consumer.

## 1.6. Biopolitics to Psychopolitics

The depressive moves from being an existential to a political figure when one considers the implications of what it means to live in a social field dominated by anhedonia. The depressive is not an inherently political figure, so much as the discourses that move through them politicize depression. For Foucault, since the eighteenth century we have been living in the age of biopolitics, or the political administration of biological life. The ontological and existential questions posed in previous political regimes are replaced by systems of classification and organization that supplant and dominate by “[intervening] to make live” (Foucault, *Society* 248). In the regime of biopolitics, the wellness of citizens becomes a political imperative. The important thing to remember about biopolitics is that it has no goal; it merely works to perpetuate itself. It does not look to cure—it aims to maintain control. Its creation and organization of figures within medical discourses is designed for the purpose of creating subjects to be administrated. Foucault often notes that the function of most institutions is to gather knowledge through testimony, and then use it for political ends. He writes that “institutions...prompt people to speak... [and] store and distribute the things that are said” (*Sexuality* 11). The manic-depressive and depressive are both expected to speak to their lived experience, to admit that they are sick, and in turn, the psychiatric establishment constructs for them a subjectivity that is, first and foremost, sick. One example of this is the location of mental illnesses within the body; while on one hand, this move legitimates madness as an embodied experience, it also allowed for the creation of a pathology of the mad. For

Foucault, psychiatry creates a discourse about mental illness that aims to reinforce a stable sense of what being is, and to silence existential questions that madness poses. If those who are mad are inherently sick, then it stands to reason that they should be contained as if they are a threat to the social fabric itself. Building upon Foucault's concept of biopolitics, de Sutter declares that we are now in the age of psychopolitics. In de Sutter's view, psychopolitics takes up the explicit focus on "ordering the affects" of subjects (de Sutter 100). Like biopolitics, it supplants and obscures the existential questions posed by a politics that dominates through control; however, rather than seeking control through a regime of physical well-being, it seeks control through the ordering of affects, specifically, euphoria and anhedonia. Psychopolitics obscures the fact that "being is the site of psychopolitics; there is no being outside the business of ordering the affects separating subjects from everything in them pertaining to the dysfunctional" (de Sutter 100). In this sense, the subjectivity that is generated under this regime is already in need of correction. To become a 'healthy' subject, one must submit to the notion that anything deemed dysfunctional is a symptom of an illness and allow oneself to be organized into a stable being.

When madness is posed as a problem of being, it is not because madness is inimical to being. Rather, it contests the popular conception that being is stable and constant, in the way that the self is unified and self-evident. For Foucault, whatever being may actually be is an entirely separate question from that which is projected onto the concept. He argues that madness was relegated into non-being and pushed out of language as a discursive subject. This move was a relegation, but this purposeful exclusion does not erase the fact that madness does generate possibilities, particularly as a form of

resistance. In terms employed by Deleuze and Guattari, madness belongs to becoming, rather than to being. Understood this way, madness can be considered a force through which things become, and becoming, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, is an inherently productive act: “the act of becoming is a capturing, a possession, a plus-value, but never a reproduction or an imitation” (*Kafka* 13). Becoming both creates itself and a surplus—a by-product.

While Deleuze and Guattari present a reading of madness as resistance, there is another view, perhaps best represented by de Sutter, that “being...is the gift offered to all those who feel disjointed, to whom the possibility of a continuity solution is presented as the most desirable thing there is” (de Sutter 100). Being, offered in this way, is mere survival, bare life. It is the acceptance of anhedonia, the acceptance of mere existence, the acceptance of the narrow gap between all out suicidal depression and pedestrian despair. Consider that the “[indefinite neutralization of the libido] ...is even accepted [as] the ultimate meaning of the phrase ‘getting better’” (de Sutter 21). The phrase “getting better” isn’t so much about healing, as it is coming to terms with one’s abnormality. If one accepts that they are mad and that they need treatment, then even if that treatment causes its own dimension of suffering, it has already been accepted that if one is abnormal, then one can expect to live with a different set of expectations for life. For de Sutter, society has now crossed the line; rather than desire as a force to be normalized, as in psychoanalysis, or desire as a productive force, it is now acceptable to expect the subject to exist without desire. Not only that, but the elimination of desire is a cure in and of itself. As de Sutter observes, this elimination of desire “[transforms subjects] into simple bodies, subject to examination and manipulation” (109). To eliminate desire is to

generate compliance by destroying both the impulse to revolt and the ability to see differently. The current state of things becomes not just livable, but a bare life to celebrate and protect.

In locating madness in the body, desire becomes the source of the problem, and its excision is therapeutically necessary. This means that “getting better is not getting anywhere at all—it is existing only in the negative mode of being whose stability badly conceals the emptiness, as well as the suffering of not suffering, or of the feeling that you do not feel your suffering, in an inescapable downward spiral” (de Sutter 21). The subject is trained to recognize madness as an inherent defect, something to be managed and corrected, no matter the cost. As a process or affective mode, we have been trained to be okay with not asking for much, if anything, at all. The depressive and manic functions, which have been re-routed to turn towards themselves, don’t even think about themselves as questioning anything. They no longer offer a way out, but they do expose something about the game of psychiatric power. Psychiatric power is able to turn players against themselves, to take something and, through a discursive maneuver, simultaneously make the depressive believe they are crazy *and* that they are correct about the ultimate meaninglessness of life. It takes the manic function and convinces it that it needs to be anaesthetized for its own good. The depressive and manic functions are converted into states, and thus, the languages they speak and the meanings they produce must be confessed and disavowed, condemned to rambling and nonsense.

## 1.7. The Schizo

The schizophrenic, on the other hand, presents a madness of a different kind. One of the first categorical differences between the figures of affect and the schizophrenic is that the latter cannot be told that they are crazy. Dubbed the “exterminating angel” of capitalism, the schizophrenic is the greatest challenge to repression, in the sense that they cannot accept that their madness is something that needs to be curbed (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 35). The content of their delusions is beyond interpretation, and furthermore, these delusions cannot be reasoned with. It is impossible to sit a schizophrenic down and explain to them that their delusion, their product, is wrong. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the schizophrenic is “the absolute limit, but capitalism is the relative limit” (*Anti-Oedipus* 176). They argue that this is because the schizophrenic functions within language, as the hard limit of meaning, in the sense that it is the locus of its production. Capitalism appears limitless, but it cannot keep up with its own production. The schizo, on the other hand, is always producing; there is no break, no pause between productions. It works as a function within capitalism, is engendered by capitalism, but it is inimical to capitalism. The schizoid function creates new assemblages and new possibilities that are impossible to completely repress or sublimate into discourse.

Foucault argues that madness is prevented from participating in discourse as a speaker. The mad are turned into objects of knowledge and are disbarred from speaking for themselves. However, if we understand madness as a function within language, then it can be seen as both productive of and indispensable to language—that is, being. This function is the absolute limit because once it is reached, it decodes “the flows of desire”



(Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 177). Capitalism is flexible, appearing to be infinitely so. However, it still relies upon a harnessing control of desire. This means that it still needs a precise configuration upon which to function. Psychoanalysis, rather than questioning the fundamental role of capitalism in the psychic instability of the subject, chooses to forge a subjectivity that internalizes that instability, managing it through repression. However, the schizoid function works against this, as “the schizophrenic deliberately seeks out the very limit of capitalism: he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 35). Deleuze and Guattari argue that the schizo-analysis is the destructive process through which the repression of psychoanalysis can be undone. They write, “schizo-analysis forgoes all interpretation because it forgoes discovering an unconscious material: the unconscious does not mean anything” (*Anti-Oedipus* 180). It may seem counter-intuitive to refer to a process as analytic if it does not interpret a concept. However, the function of analysis under schizophrenia is not to find meaning. Rather, the analytic process is to find the gaps and interruptions that structure meaning. These gaps are useful for resistance as they are a weak spot in the chain of meaning. The stated goal of schizo-analysis is: “to analyze the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economic and political spheres, and thereby to show how, in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 105). Therefore, schizo-analysis is a hermeneutic developed, not to legitimate repression the way psychoanalysis does, but rather, to blow it up. Schizo-analysis, in seeking the faults in psychoanalytic logic, will demonstrate that repression, while it does not originate within the subject, has taken root within the subject as something that is desired, or, in other words, “breaks or

interruptions are not the result of an analysis; rather, in and of themselves, they are syntheses” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 41). Analysis does not create gaps, in the sense that whenever there is meaning there is a gap. Schizo-analysis treats the gaps as concepts within themselves. They are little bits of dynamite, which, if triggered correctly, can free themselves.

That is why, for Deleuze and Guattari, schizo-analysis is also the method by which capitalism can be resisted. Schizo-analysis breaks and rearranges the axioms that psychoanalysis entrenches. Capitalism is difficult to resist because it is infinitely flexible: “the strength of capitalism indeed resides in the fact that its axiomatic is never saturated, that it is always capable of adding a new axiom to the previous ones” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 250). Capitalism is productive, and not only does it make meaning, it can make any meaning that one wants it to have. For Deleuze and Guattari, “capitalism defines a field of immanence and never ceases to fully occupy the field” (*Anti-Oedipus* 250). They essentially argue that capitalism embodies and weaponizes all the apparent contradictions within the social field, for it is generated by conflict. Schizo-analysis works on this same level of immanence, and it, too, works in contradictions. It has no deeper motive, no hidden agenda beyond destruction— for “schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 246). Here, they explicitly challenge the notion that capitalism, itself, is schizoid; while it may have schizoid features, capitalism is not schizophrenic. Moreover, they suggest, the death of capitalism will not come from rejecting it, but rather, creating the conditions under which it explodes.

One of the ways to create these conditions is to look at the way that capitalism has formed the subject. As a prefix, schizo means split. While Deleuze and Guattari do not advocate for a unified subject, they argue that psychoanalysis actually creates schisms between the conscious and unconscious that do not exist. They liken the unconscious to a machine that produces assemblages, rather than spitting out a rotation of transhistorical symbols. Psychoanalysis aims to achieve integration, whereas schizo-analysis aims to create division. Psychoanalysis holds the unconscious to be a unitary entity that, despite being unknowable, is able to nonetheless think and speak in symbols that are not only comprehensible, but also map perfectly onto known representations. For Deleuze and Guattari, the unconscious does not produce reproductions and representations of the external world. Rather, the unconscious produces new assemblages, new meanings, and new linguistic possibilities. They write that “the unconscious does not speak, it engineers. It is not expressive or representative, but productive” (*Anti-Oedipus* 180). This means that it does not think, and furthermore, what the unconscious thinks is beside the point. What is important is its products.

Psychoanalysis takes the chaos, the excess generated by capitalism, and calls it neurosis—Oedipus, even though the schizophrenic cannot tolerate the being called Oedipus. In fact, while the process of schizophrenization is independent of Oedipus and Hamlet, it is nonetheless aggravated by psychoanalysis. Deleuze and Guattari write:

Will it be retorted that the schizo is not joyous either? But doesn't his sadness come from the fact that he can no longer bear the forces of oedipalization and [H]amletization that hem him in on all sides? Better to flee to the body without organs

and hide out there, closing himself up in it. The little joy lies in the schizophrenization as a process, not in the schizo as a clinical entity. (*Anti-Oedipus* 113)

Once again, they differentiate between the figure of the schizophrenic and its clinical counterpart. However, Deleuze and Guattari use the figure of the schizophrenic, who resists psychoanalysis, as a way of generating the enemy, the destructive weapon that can be deployed against psychoanalysis. Schizo-analysis is a destructive process through which the repression of psychoanalysis can be undone. It takes, as its first principle, that the unconscious cannot be interpreted because it does not generate anything for the purpose of being understood. Psychoanalysis tries to make everything legible, and in the process, always only finds itself. As I will discuss later, their interest in Franz Kafka—and the way that he literalizes and deforms metaphor—comes from this interest in using language as a vehicle against interpretation, against psychoanalysis.

## Chapter 2

### 2. Against Despair: Figures of Transformation in Kafka and Wallace

In an essay entitled “Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Precursor of Kafka, Céline, and Ponge,” Gilles Deleuze argues that cruelty does not exist until humans enter a social state. He writes, “humanity, as supposed in a state of nature, cannot be mean, since the objective conditions that make human meanness and its exercise possible do not exist in nature itself” (*Desert* 52). In Deleuze’s terms, meanness is unimaginable outside of civil society because civil society creates the conditions under which self-interest becomes necessary for survival. While this applies to any civil state, Deleuze argues that this becomes most evident with the emergence of capitalism. He credits Engels with taking Rousseau’s point to its logical end: “violence or oppression does not constitute a primordial fact, but supposes a civil state, social situations, and economic determinations” (*Desert* 53). In other words, the conflict and social inequality arising from the pursuit of self-interest are inescapable consequences of a society structured precisely around the competition of interests. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari often turn to literature as a way of speculating about possible paths towards justice and as a means of addressing the conflicts of civil society, broadly understood. In his Deleuzian reading of the works of Thomas Pynchon, Stefan Mattessich explains the appropriateness of this move when he observes, “with the coalescence of consumption as a primary interpolative fact of social life, enmeshing the subject within the spectral structures of global markets and the ideological ‘freedom’ of commerce, new narrative forms and conceptual tools are needed to grasp the ‘event’ that this development presupposes” (Mattessich 14-15). As

Mattessich suggests and as Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate, literature can present new ways of representing this conflict in language. This project, I would argue, is central to Wallace's *Infinite Jest*.

Much of the scholarship on Wallace's fiction looks to his work for answers on an individual level. John Baskin argues that *Infinite Jest* is an attempt to integrate philosophy and literature in order to offer the reader a therapy, that Baskin terms "revaluation," in which the reader comes to reconsider their immediate judgements of Hal, a tennis prodigy and near genius, and Don Gately, a convict living in a half-way house (Baskin 46). In a similar vein, Adam Kelly argues that Wallace is championing a "new sincerity," designed to set the reader on the path towards honesty, reflection and integrity, "an answer to problems raised by the legacy of a modernist insistence on an aesthetic view of the world, and on the priority of authentic expression, or an artistic autonomy, over sincere communication" (Kelly, "The New Sincerity" 200). However, in their insistence upon the healing power of Wallace's fiction, both these arguments fail to consider sufficiently the dystopic setting of *Infinite Jest*. Hal Incandenza and Don Gately are not presented together so that the reader can see that their classist and elitist judgements are wrong; rather, these two characters from apparently different backgrounds live in a civil state that not just engenders but thrives upon class conflict and inequality. In the bizarre and horrifying world of the novel, time is subsidized; America, Canada and Mexico now form the Organization of North American Nations, celebrating Interdependence Day on November 8; and a band of disabled French Canadians named *Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents* are fighting for independence from America by broadcasting a tape so entertaining that it renders its viewers vegetative (Wallace, *Infinite*

*Jest* 259, 325, 89). Significantly, the most despairing moments in *Infinite Jest* transpire not when people ruminate on the past, but rather, when they contemplate the present moment. In the world Wallace represents, addiction and depression are the only sensible responses.

To quote Kate Gompert, living with depression is “like horror more than sadness” (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 73). Describing the experience of living with clinical depression, she tells her doctor: “everything gets horrible. Everything you see gets ugly. *Lurid* is the word” (73). The traumatic experience of living with depression has led to her dependence on cannabis, which in some ways, exacerbates the problem (75). Gompert is one of the few characters in the novel whose addiction is tied so completely to circumstances outside of her control. Her depression is treatment resistant, and none of her doctors can comprehend the depth of the pain with which she lives (69). From the outside, her compulsions, from the cannabis dependence to multiple suicide attempts, make no sense. But from Gompert’s perspective, it is quite different. She likens living with depression to being trapped in a burning building, though no one can see the fire; jumping from the top window looks completely insane to those outside, but only because no one else can see the flames (696). As the novel suggests, her maladaptive and suicidal behaviour is an attempt to *regulate* the pain of her mere existence, as is her repetitive consumption of cannabis. The compulsion itself is not the problem; rather, it is a necessary function so that an organism—the subject under consumer capitalism—can keep functioning. In Wallace’s novel, the subject cannot somehow ‘escape’ from or triumph over a confluence of multiple forces that generate the totalizing system. The constant references to ever present entertainment, from professional sports to movies to advertisements, confirm this

at every turn. Wallace writes, “what metro Boston AAs are trite but correct about is that both destiny’s kisses and its dope-slaps illustrate an individual person’s basic personal powerlessness over the really meaningful events of his life” (291). If the system did not generate addicts, then, presumably, one could assume that people are content simply to sit down and to passively take in all the entertainment around them. In Wallace’s novel, the only sensible reaction to so much stimulation is to try and regulate the nervous system in some other way, and the way in which the subject chooses to self-regulate is the only form of agency that remains.

Though there is no outside to the total system of consumer capitalism in *Infinite Jest*, addiction does present opportunities to poke around for a trap door. In order to understand how the addict functions as an anti-systemic figure, it is useful to look at the way that Deleuze and Guattari describe the schizophrenic, and how the schizophrenic operates within language. I also want to consider their use of Kafka to talk about the politics of twentieth century Europe, in order to argue that the addict in Wallace, much like the schizo in Deleuze and Guattari, is the figure who will come to define both the state border and the barbarian that skulks around the gate.

## 2.1. The Schizophrenic in Language

For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism and language are two systems that inform each other. All systems, whether they be economic or linguistic, construct and order the subject. But as Deleuze and Guattari argue in *Anti-Oedipus*, schizophrenia is, primarily, a function within language, produced by the pressures of capitalism. The schizophrenic function within language is only possible because of the schizoid features of capitalism;



the delirium it induces, the endless flow of concepts it produces and the superfluity of meaning it generates. The schizoid function in language is also potentially explosive, in the sense that it produces beyond the capacity of language, creating new assemblages at a relentless place.

But Deleuze and Guattari also see language as a possible point of resistance, and literature as the machine best suited for the job. Representation and repression are affected by language and the law of the signifier, and literature, in their view, is precisely the place where language can fragment and break into lines of flight. If representation and repression are found at the level of the signifier, then breaking language is the most effective way to resist oppression. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the function of language is not limited to conveying meaning, a function that becomes visible at “the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow, and to explode—desire. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal, a production and not an expression” (*Anti-Oedipus* 133). Literature creates new assemblages; its principal function is to produce itself, not to express a particular higher meaning. It is immanent, not transcendent.

However, this does not mean that literature is trying to reach a non-linguistic realm that precedes language. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, “if language always seems to presuppose itself... we cannot assign it a non-linguistic point of departure, it is because language does not operate between something seen (or felt) and something said, but always goes from saying to saying” (*Plateaus* 76). There is no way out of language, just as there is no way to get outside a total system. The operation of language is to generate

assemblages, and for Deleuze and Guattari, language can be best understood as a series of sayings and expressions that are combined into assemblages. What is interesting is not the meaning of expressions but the way that they are fitted together. The effects of language are indirect, by-products of its chief function, which is its own perpetuation, for “metaphors and metonymies are merely effects; they are a part of language only when they presuppose indirect discourse” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 77). Metaphors and metonymies are “indirect” in the sense that they do not directly represent the thing which they are meant to signify. But for Deleuze and Guattari, metaphor and metonymy are simply rhetorical tools deployed within language, and they are to be distinguished from the revolutionary potential of literature, which resides elsewhere. For too long, Deleuze and Guattari argue, the reading of texts has focused on effects, on an intentional aesthetic gesture rather than the revolutionary potential coming from the way that the reader assembles the text. They write that “reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier. Rather it is a productive use of the literary machine, a montage of desiring-machines, a schizoid exercise that extracts from the text its revolutionary force” (*Anti-Oedipus* 106). In other words, readers—both recreational and scholarly—consistently misrecognize the revolutionary potential in a book. It is thought to be within the book itself, encoded within the intentions of the author, but it is actually activated by the productive reader.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In an essay entitled “Desert Islands”, Deleuze argues that the narratives that develop using the desert island as a setting, are stories about trying to appropriate and understand myths that are no longer understood. Deleuze writes, “literature is an attempt to interpret, in an ingenious way, the myths we no longer understand, at the moment we no longer understand them” (*Desert*, 12). The revolutionary potential in literature lies in its ability to reimagine the liminal, mythic space from which language springs. That right at the moment at which it appears to be impossible, remembering *becomes* possible not through reinterpretation but recreation.

## 2.2. Misinterpretation: Literature and Psychoanalysis

For Deleuze and Guattari, literature makes change possible, not through an intentionality inscribed in the text, but through the way that the texts are productively activated by the reader. One of the reasons that Deleuze and Guattari argue so heavily against psychoanalysis is that it has also been taken up as a method of reading and talking about literature. Psychoanalysis, in their view, seeks only to prove itself and to normalize the objects of its discourse. Furthermore, psychoanalysis works to cage revolutionary potential. It focuses on metaphor and metonymy, celebrating the intentionality of the author's unconscious which, coincidentally, always refers to the theatre of the family and, in the view of Deleuze and Guattari, to ludicrous misinterpretations of the unconscious. Everything can become a symptom or a sign, a clue to a supposed larger meaning or intention. However, psychoanalysis is only capable of finding itself. In this vein, it makes perfect sense that psychoanalysis would gravitate towards mythology and theatre. Through Hamlet and Oedipus, we see how the figures of myth and theatre work together to create a world. For Deleuze and Guattari, oedipalization and Hamletization are two of the most conspicuous ways in which psychoanalysis pursues its ends. Oedipalization and Hamletization create a series of symbols and meanings through which literature is tasked with proving itself and through which the subject is contained. Psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, typically asks “were you *born* Hamlet? *Or did you not rather create the type in yourself?*” (*Anti-Oedipus* 298). The subject is asked to identify with and project themselves onto these figures, so that they come to understand themselves as a symbolic representation—i.e. a type or copy of what had come before. Deleuze and Guattari write, “myth and tragedy are systems of symbolic representations that still refer

desire to determinate exterior conditions as well as to particular objective codes—the body of the Earth, the despotic body—and that in this way confound the discovery of the abstract or subjective essence” (*Anti-Oedipus* 300). In mythic figures, the subject comes to recognize themselves as a part of a system of representation that precedes their existence. The dependence of psychoanalysis upon symbolism and its insistence on interpreting through the lens of the theatre of the family means that it can only lead to limited claims about literature. Vladimir Nabokov, who absolutely loathed Freudians and their interpretations of art, said, “let the credulous and the vulgar continue to believe that all mental woes can be cured by a daily application of old Greek myths to their private parts. I really do not care” (*Strong Opinions* 66). In literature, psychoanalysis aims to find Oedipus or Hamlet; it cannot speak otherwise, and the processes of oedipalization and Hamletization that it discovers in the text typically rely on the notion of character, using it as a metaphor for the subject.

### 2.3. Kafka, Vermin and Territories

However, not all literature relies on metaphor, and for this reason, Deleuze and Guattari gravitate toward the work of Franz Kafka. In his enigmatic tales of bureaucracy and despair, Kafka hits on something that had previously been unseen, a potential exit. Stanley Corngold writes,

In the universe of semioticians in which all entities are signs, all groups texts, and all experience interpretations—in which no self exists, except as the series without paradigm of its readings, and the vale of soul making has been developed into the archive of soul-marking—Kafka’s work would seem to occupy a

privileged position because of the rigour with which it holds this view to be deranged. (“Principles of Kafka Interpretation” 294)

Kafka’s work rejects the logic of the sign, the idea that everything can be interpreted as a stand in for anything else. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, Kafka says “kill metaphor” (*Kafka* 70). As Corngold explains, Kafka’s critique of “metaphorical reason” through his “fictions provoke ongoing metamorphosis, which exposes, dismantles, and hence destroys metaphor” (“Metaphor and Chiasm” 97). The destruction of metaphor is not just a rhetorical ploy, but also the way to show the instability of the meaning which metaphor conveys (“Metaphor and Chiasm” 104). Because metaphor insists on substituting one thing for another, or, more precisely, one image for another, it depends upon a likeness or a similitude that always ultimately proves unstable.

In psychoanalysis, myths are used as metaphors to create a connection between a symptom and the subject. But in the logic of Kafka’s literature, there is no room for Oedipus to thrive. There is an immediacy to Kafka’s literature that presents the “consistent...ontological insight into the dereliction, the untruthful character, of ordinary consciousness, whose prejudices in its own favor require abrupt reversal” (Corngold, “Metaphor and Chiasm” 104). Rather than point to some hidden depth, Kafka elects merely to use images for their literal immediacy, rather than as a sign of another image or signified. This literalization of metaphor is also the mode of representation necessary to non-reason; for non-reason to resist capture in metaphor, it must pivot to immediacy. Gregor’s transformation is not a metaphor for his being; rather, he was always regarded as vermin. His transformation is horrifying, but no one ever suggests that another animal would have been more fitting. This implies that the other characters all agree, to some

extent, that becoming a beetle was appropriate for Gregor. Transformation is one way to generate a means of representation that could gesture beyond current material conditions, towards different possibilities. While it is important to remember that “we cannot go outside the world of things we can express in order to express something,” it should not be forgotten that expressions can be transformed (Schuman 24). Indeed, the power in literature lies in its productivity—its insistence upon creating different expressions from the ones that came before

A book cannot be rewritten, but it can be reread. In his reading of *The Metamorphosis*, which he refers to as *The Transformation*, Nabokov insists that Kafka, and by extension, Gregor, did not know that he had become a dung beetle; had he known, Gregor could have flown away the entire time (Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* 90). One might suggest that this is but one instance of Kafka stumbling upon an exit, a trap door, even if it was not recognized. However, this moment in Nabokov’s discussion is more interesting when considered in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of territorialisation. For Deleuze and Guattari, anything can, in and of itself, be considered a territory. Concepts, words and language are territories that can be and are occupied. Concepts are generated, but they are born from previously existing territories. Even if they break out, seemingly free from all previous meaning, there is always a way in which they are connected to an overall chain. Territories are always moving through this process of being both claimed and not. More often than not, the same concept, language, or territory is both, simultaneously: “an island doesn’t stop being deserted simply because it is inhabited” (Deleuze *Desert* 10). This means that there is always another way, a place within dominance where it can be contested and resisted. The transformation of Gregor,

from human to dung beetle, is genius not just for the simple fact that he was always a creature beneath contempt; it is genius because the subject under consumer capitalism is always already occupying this liminal space— the subject is both and neither, a human, a louse.

In Kafka's literalization of metaphor, Deleuze and Guattari argue that he deterritorializes metaphor through literal transformation. However, "as long as there is form, there is still reterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka* 6). Wherever there is a territory, a metaphor, there is always a place that can be evacuated and occupied, annexed or reclaimed. Corngold, for his part, argues that Kafka amplifies this tension to an almost comic level: "in organizing stories around the effort to interpret image-words and concept-words advantageously, in making culpability and even death the cost of failure in this effort, Kafka dramatizes the severity of this struggle" ("Metaphor and Chiasm" 95). The futility of trying to establish and articulate an assigned fixed meaning to words also mirrors the kind of political subjectivity theorized and advanced by Foucault, as well as Deleuze and Guattari. In their view, the supposedly unified subject is an assemblage of different territories, generated through the different ways in which assemblages are fitted together.

In *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari present this understanding of subjectivity in terms of a linguistic function. Using Kafka's literature as an example, they argue that there are two broad categories of national literatures that have two distinct functions. The first is "major" literature: it functions to serve the dominant language and political power structures of a nation. Deleuze and Guattari write, "in major literatures...the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with

other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or background” (*Kafka* 17). While major literature has a political function, it is not to point to a collective. Rather, it presents to the subject the way that it presents the nation: as a piece of the story, a cog that keeps the narrative rolling towards a terminus. Minor literature differs in a very distinct way: it cannot help but to be political. It is “completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it” (Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka* 17). Instead of the individual concern remaining contained to itself, minor literature forces the individual to become collective; in other words, the subject cannot help but explicitly manifest at a flashpoint between political forces which operate on the collective.

Deleuze and Guattari explain this linguistically through the example of the dominance of German for Kafka. They argue that Kafka, a Jew from Prague, knew German, Czech, French and Italian; he learned Hebrew later in life, and was at least familiar with Yiddish (*Kafka* 25). Through his grasp of Yiddish and Czech, Kafka was able to “make German take flight on a line of escape.” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 26). Deleuze and Guattari continue, “he will turn syntax into a cry that will embrace the rigid syntax of this dried-up German. He will push it toward a deterritorialization that will no longer be saved by culture or by myth” (*Kafka* 26). The revolutionary potential of minor literature, its political possibility, resides in its ability to push the dominant language to the limits of what it can represent, so that it assembles something totally new. It is made foreign to itself in the way that the dominant language forces the non-native speaker to



speak in a language which alienates them. While Kafka would have grown up speaking German, he knew other languages; he knew what German lacked, how it could be forced into its own limits. For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka is also representative of a much wider impulse; they argue that potential for a minor literature necessarily exists where a dominant or ‘major’ language exists. They argue, “how many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the language that they are forced to serve?” (*Kafka* 19). In this sense, the potential for a minor language to push back, to grow and explode its own language beyond representation, is ever present and, in fact, is engendered by the very forces that colonized and attempted to snuff it out. Colonization, and the violent state apparatus that enables it, becomes dominant by the very means that could also assure its own destruction. This means that resistance is possible, and wherever resistance can be found, there is a possibility for things to be different.

But how does the elimination of metaphor in *The Metamorphosis* engender any kind of revolution? At first, it appears impossible that the lowly, inconsequential life of Gregor Samsa could, in any way, offer resistance. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, Samsa always had a way out; he just didn’t know it. However, it is important to remember the function of the transformation: “with this metamorphosis Kafka reverses the original act of metamorphosis carried out by thought when it forms metaphor; for metaphor is always ‘metamorphosis.’ Kafka transforms metaphor back into his fictional reality, and this counter-metamorphosis becomes the starting point of his tale” (Skokel qtd. in Corngold, “Metaphor and Chiasm” 90). Rather than Gregor being like a beetle, he becomes a beetle. He is not like a pest; he becomes the vermin that he was always perceived to be.

Therefore, although he is inarguably an insect, the word vermin is used in the English translation. According to Schuman, “our notion of Gregor as ‘a vermin,’ a human with some applicable vermin-like qualities, undergoes a necessary transformation into the realization that he *actually is a vermin*” (Schuman 28). It is important to stress that Gregor is not a parasite, or a pest. Rather, he simply becomes what he is regarded to be by his family, the director, the bureaucrats who come to hunt him down. The nature of Gregor’s transformation is that he becomes what he always was: a creature regarded as lowly and subhuman, for whom the question of agency and expression is laughable.

To borrow the language of Deleuze and Guattari, Gregor’s transformation is one of becoming-animal; his human subjectivity is turned inside-out or evolves into what it was before domestication. For Deleuze and Guattari, “Gregor becomes a cockroach not to flee his father but rather to find an escape where his father didn’t know to find one, in order to flee the director, the business, and the bureaucrats, to reach that region where the voice no longer does anything but hum” (*Kafka* 13). The accompanying hum, the clicks of a beetle, are essential features of the story. Not only does Gregor become incomprehensible to those around him, but his “language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 23). His own speech is no longer his own. He is made to speak in a tongue that he does not know but nonetheless he can grasp and deploy; however, it is incomprehensible to those around him. He truly becomes vermin, not when he is unable to speak but when his speech no longer means anything to other people.

There are many ways to think about major and minor literatures. They are functions specific to literature, and while they are a discursive practice, they are not innate to

language. However, these functions have social dimensions. While Deleuze and Guattari might be read as opposing all representative interpretation, their opposition is more specifically directed against interpretations of literature which result in the emergence and consecration of figures who would serve to uphold a repression that they associate most often, in *Anti-Oedipus*, with psychoanalysis. However, this does not mean that these consecrated figures do not continue to influence reading and interpretation, nor does it mean that we can simply break away from them.

## 2.4. Representations of Madness

One could go so far as to say that it is impossible to break fully from figures of repression in literature. This is why, in the case of figures of madness, Deleuze and Guattari aim to reterritorialize them. The schizophrenic, the depressive and the manic-depressive are all both actual, non-mythic entities and figures that emerge from the lineage of the eighteenth-century madman. What is of interest here are not the clinical manifestations of schizophrenia, depression and manic-depression, but the ways in which a new figure emerges from their lineage, a figure who resists the oedipalization not by refusing it, but by completely submitting to the hypothesis that trauma changes the body. A figure who says, ‘okay, okay, call me what you want, explain me to me in whichever way works, but I won’t fundamentally change, no, I can’t even if I tried.’ This is the position occupied by the figure of the addict in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*. It is not by mere accident that Wallace was interested in Kafka, but in order to understand the affinities between his work and that of Kafka, it is important to consider first the notion of repression under capitalism and the turn towards schizo-analysis.

In an interview published in response to *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze declares: “psychoanalysis has this pious conception of itself; through lack and castration, it makes itself out to be a kind of negative theology which entails calling on infinite resignation...this is what we oppose. And in its place we suppose a positive conception of desire: a desire that produces” (*Desert* 223). Positioning desire as a productive machine which manufactures assemblages and concepts was aimed at turning psychoanalysis on its head. The question was no longer what the unconscious is trying to say, but what psychoanalysis is trying to repress. Guattari warned that “we ought to ask ourselves whether the expression of politicians, scientists, and the military is not in fact precisely a kind of anti-production, a kind of repression working at the level of expression, whose goal is to stop the work of questioning” (“Capitalism and Schizophrenia” 239). It is crucial to understand that Guattari is saying the repression is anti-productive, in the sense that what it produces is obfuscation. For Deleuze and Guattari, psychoanalysis as a theory and as a therapeutic practice is weaponized by capitalism, as “from its birth, capitalism has been connected with a savage repression” (*Desert* 268). This means that capitalism runs upon a principle of repression that functions in specific ways. Under consumer capitalism, one mistakes the freedom to choose between different products and the oversaturation of markets for liberation. In a related way, psychoanalysis works by telling the subject that they are not caught in a trap at all; rather, they, themselves are the source of their own ensnarement. For Deleuze and Guattari, this is a forgone conclusion: “Oedipus and castration work like a charm. But we want to know what are their effects: they work but at what price?” (*Desert* 229). The question that Deleuze and Guattari are interested in answering is what does oedipalization actually do to us? To that question,

Mattessich offers a compelling answer: “desire in our time is not a predicative state of being, linked to a signified in which it finds satisfaction. Encased in discourse, trivialized by consumerism, terrorized in everyday life, it recovers itself in the abyssal apprehension of its own disappearance” (Mattessich 11). Oedipalization functions, first and foremost, to contain and direct desire so that the subject is trained to desire their own oppression. The ensnarement of desire, the creeping sense of uneasiness, the need to crawl out of one’s own skin are all symptoms of this oppression, which point toward a clinically understood notion of madness. In the creation of schizo-analysis, Deleuze and Guattari aim to undo the damage of psychoanalysis, and to get to the heart of a different notion of madness. Deleuze says:

The transformation of psychoanalysis into schizo-analysis implies an evaluation of the specificity of madness. This is just one of the points Guattari insists on, joining forces with Foucault, who says that madness will not be replaced by the positivist determination, treatment and neutralization of mental illness, but that mental illness will be replaced by something we have not yet understood as madness. (*Desert* 200)

Part of their argument is that mental illness is poorly understood by those who are treating it. Rather than adequately treating madness by addressing the root of its cause, the repression engendered by capitalism, psychiatric medicine sets itself up as another system of domination and control. As Guattari observes, “psychiatric hospitals are essentially structured like a state bureaucracy, and psychiatrists are bureaucrats” (“Capitalism and Schizophrenia” 271). However, what is most important is that conventional treatment does not neutralize mental illness; rather, this approach only

exacerbates it, for treatment reproduces the material conditions that create depression, manic-depression and schizophrenia. For Deleuze, an adequate understanding of madness involves more than regarding it as something that can be cured, as if it were somehow independent of its surroundings. It is in this same spirit that Deleuze declares, “whoever does not laugh out loud while reading Kafka does not truly admire Kafka” (*Desert* 52). For Deleuze, Kafka is an author who transforms the monstrous reality of contemporary life into stories that joyfully affirm the horror of everyday living. There is a distinct fetishization of trauma, madness and the tragic that many people mistake for good art. However, Kafka’s work, like that of Wallace, is first and foremost, funny. Deleuze bemoans the tendency to put angst and tragedy on a platform: “this pseudo-sense of the tragic makes us stupid. How many authors we deface by substituting a puerile, tragic feeling for the aggressive, comic power of thought which animates their work” (Chapsal qtd. in Deleuze, *Desert* 134). Tragedy is privileged over comedy, in the sense that it is perceived as more real, intelligent. However, that is not the case. By privileging the tragic, in a sense, we celebrate the everyday monstrosities, both large and small. Not only are they normalized, but tragedy gives tolerating the everyday a sense of valor. However, in Kafka’s writing, valor is not possible. All the typical stances of the tragic hero are unavailable to his protagonists. They merely exist in circumstances so pedestrian and ludicrous that it is impossible to do anything but laugh at their vain attempts to navigate the world, as if they are not what they already are.

## 2.5. Consider Wallace and Kafka

To understand the addict, we must look at David Foster Wallace’s relationship to Kafka. He was an admirer of Kafka’s work, particularly, of the way that he was able to

weaponize expressions to evoke both horror and delight at the monstrous dimensions of psychic life under the regimes of capitalism and the bureaucratic state, systems that exist merely to propagate themselves through human hosts. Wallace once said that “Kafka’s evocations are, rather, unconscious and almost sort of sub-archetypal, the primordial little-kid stuff from which myths derive” (Wallace, “Some Remarks” 62). The key here, however, is that Kafka does not use mythic force the same way that psychoanalysis does. Rather, the expressions invoked by Kafka are the cries of someone who does not fetishize their own repression. Even though Gregor tries to normalize the parasitic relationship between himself and his family, his body betrays him and chooses itself.

When David Foster Wallace published his second novel, *Infinite Jest*, it was received as the last hurrah of American postmodernism. However, the first chapter is, in many ways, an appropriation of *The Metamorphosis* rather than an ode to American postmodernism. It begins with a scene that features a central character, Hal, a gifted student and tennis prodigy, trying to communicate to a panel of administrators who are evaluating him for admission to university. Like Gregor, Hal experiences a physical impediment in his ability to speak to others. While Hal does not transform, he does become what he is in the same way Gregor does. He becomes locked in, incapable of speaking to those around him. When he is prompted to speak, only the reader knows that Hal is inside; all the administrators hear are subhuman noises. Like Gregor, Hal is capable only of making clicking noises, “only marginally *mammalian*” (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 15). Hal’s speech becomes a series of clicks, a Morse code, in an effort “to reach a region where the voice no longer does anything but hum: ‘Did you hear him? It was an animal’s voice’” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 13). Like Gregor, whose transformation

allows him to flee from his family, Hal's transformation resists the university bureaucrats who stand to profit from his recruitment.

Of Gregor's impotent attempts at speech, Deleuze and Guattari write, "in the becoming insect, it is a mournful whining that carries along the voice and blurs the resonance of words" (*Kafka* 13). Hal's words are received by his audience as "subanimalistic noises and sounds," and, "like some sort of animal with something in its mouth" (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 14). Hal tries to convey something, despite knowing its futility. While this can be read as an allusion to Kafka figured as an author of a minor literature, a character with their voice obstructed, it is also a non-figurative way of showing what it means to occupy the margins of language, where what one utters is not what others can hear. This fixation on speech versus sound is crucial, for while the reader can read what Hal is thinking, they cannot hear the noises he makes. The inverse is true of the administrators. He is aware of this, saying both, "I am not what you see and hear" and "I'd tell you all you want and more, if the sounds I made could be what you heard" (13; 9). Hal, painfully self-conscious, is concerned with the way he is misperceived: "I cannot make myself understood, now. I am speaking slowly, distinctly" (10). The tension between Hal's disclosive voice, directed at the reader, and whatever noises he is making at the administrators, separates the official discourse of the administrative, civil and therapeutic apparatuses from the notion of sense, from the potential for an oppositional discourse that escapes or sits outside the regime of oppression.

However, rather than insisting upon his sanity, Hal implies that he does not have a reliable grip upon reality. When he is about to be left alone in the room with the administrators, he thinks, "I would yield to the urge to bolt for the door ahead of them if I



could know that bolting for the door is what the men in this room would see” (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 8). In conjunction with his statement, “I believe I appear neutral, maybe even pleasant, but I have been coached to err on the side of neutrality and not attempt what would feel to me like a pleasant expression or smile,” it is safe to assume that whatever is happening to him is both beyond his control and complete comprehension (3). This is because if he could understand what was happening, he would, presumably, be able to control what was happening, or at least, know what he looked like to other people. While Gregor hides himself away out of sensitivity towards his mother and sister, Hal does not have that option. As he is held down to the floor, all he can say is: “there is nothing wrong,’ I say slowly to the floor. ‘I’m in here” (13). In this gesture of reassurance, there is a plea to be understood, as if accepting one’s own precarious grip on reality could be the way towards connection. Unfortunately for Hal, like Gregor, he is simply seen as he is, with no regard for the being inside.

Many read Hal as a version of Hamlet; both are hyperaware of how they are perceived by others; their fathers reappear as ghosts and their mothers have dubious relations with their uncles. Hal finds his father dead via microwave, and he is forced, subsequently, by his mother to attend trauma therapy (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 253). Realizing that he would not be able to get out of therapy without an overdramatic confession, Hal puts his head in his hands and confesses his shame to have initially found the scent of his father’s cooked head to be “delicious” (256). This is clearly intended as a joke, but the therapist takes it seriously, and regards Hal’s confession as a breakthrough. Hal is then allowed to return to his athletic and academic endeavours. As an example of how one is meant to submit in the therapeutic process to the Hamletization that Deleuze

and Guattari criticize, Hal's experience is perhaps quintessential. At first, Hal understands the therapeutic process to be a mere formality, and, rather than resisting, chooses freely to participate in the appointment and the assessment that will identify him as pathological. But this merely sets him up to be Hamletized, over and over. For when he embellishes the moment that he found his father's body, he identifies himself to the therapist as duplicitous, unreadable to those around him, an assessment that he cannot escape. Like Gregor in *The Metamorphosis*, Hal does not make a clean escape of anything. In this sense, the reader of Wallace's novel is first introduced not to Hamlet, but to Gregor Samsa, as Hal's ordeal appears to resemble the trials of Kafka's protagonist. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, Hal's likeness to Gregor is particularly figured in his encounter with the university administrators in the opening chapter. The administrators go over his file, citing his excellent academic and athletic track records and ask him, directly, if these accomplishments are all his own. While the administrators are all speaking over each other, the reader has access to Hal's mental state. When left alone with the administrators, he gives an impassioned speech that ends with "please don't think that I don't care" (12). As in *The Metamorphosis*, Hal and Gregor are being subjected to two different trials. With Gregor, there is an obsession with his job performance—the unyielding demands, his family's parasitic relationship to him and the despairing sense that he would never get out from under his current circumstances (Nabokov, "Franz Kafka" 261). Upon awaking as a beetle, he never seems to be disturbed or upset by his transformation; rather, he is concerned about the fact that he will be late for work, that he won't be able to meet his professional expectations or support his family (Nabokov, "Franz Kafka" 264). Gregor recognizes the body of the

insect to be his body. He is aware that others will be disturbed by his transformation, but he is not himself, horrified. If anything, he expresses a sense of being inconvenienced.

A character cannot flee from narrative, just as a living subject cannot flee from life. However, the narratives of both Kafka and Wallace do demonstrate that there is a way for the subject to resist the powers that be. *Infinite Jest* is known as a book that deals explicitly with the themes of addiction and mental illness. However, rather than being a book that merely uses addiction and mental illness as a metaphor for contemporary life, Wallace uses figures such as the addict and the depressive to directly represent the kind of subjectivity generated under capitalism. To understand this approach in Wallace's work, it is necessary to look at his relationship with Kafka. Wallace describes teaching Kafka to his students as follows:

You can ask them to imagine his stories as all about a kind of door. To envision us approaching and pounding on this door, increasingly hard, pounding and pounding, not just wanting admission but needing it; we don't know what it is but we can feel it, this total desperation to enter, pounding and ramming and kicking. That, finally, the door opens...and it opens outward—we've been inside what we wanted all along. ("Some Remarks", 65)

For Wallace, Kafka's stories generate a psychic tension that he terms "compression" ("Some Remarks" 61). In other words, Kafka is a master of creating psychic tension within the reader. This unease is disorienting, for, as Wallace points out, Kafka does not offer an escape from life so much as he reminds the reader that life is inescapable. This is

where his comedic power truly comes into play, for there is little funnier than realizing that where you are, in and of itself, is where you will always be.

Wallace finds inspiration in Kafka's portrayals of contemporary life, though Kafka does not deal explicitly with mental illness. Kafka's characters are put in monstrous circumstances that are both as despairing as they are hilarious. Within his narratives, "the connotation of pain accompanies...metamorphosis" but that is not entirely separate from the ludicrous (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 23). Kafka's texts, I would argue, provide Wallace with a strategy for representing the comedic dimensions of despair, and Kafka's example extends to the discourse of Wallace's texts. As Wallace puts it, "some of our most profound collective intuitions seem to be expressible only as figures of speech, and that's why we call these figures of speech *expressions*" ("Some Remarks" 63). This is a key moment, for here, figures of speech are no longer mere representations—they become something sensory, something that cannot be separated from that which they express. Kafka's ability to tap into collective enunciations has been described but it is worth restating its importance. As the example of *The Metamorphosis* and, indirectly, of *Infinite Jest* would suggest, the urgent political force of Kafka's work is not to be found in the images he uses, but in the sounds that he attempts to make. The impotent clicking of Gregor's mandibles and Hal's plaintive words, swallowed by the floor, have the power to speak to something larger than either can fathom.

## Chapter 3

### 3. At the Gate: Addiction

In a revealing passage in *Infinite Jest*, Hal describes the etymological origins of addiction. He says, “the original sense of addiction involved being bound over, dedicated, either legally or spiritually. To devote one’s life, plunge in” (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 900). In Hal’s account, addiction was originally connected not with disease or a personal flaw, but with an impulse to find meaning by being bound to something outside of the self. Hal continues, “we are all dying to give our lives away to something...the object [is] incidental to this will to give oneself away” (900). In this understanding of subjectivity, desire is not a hole that needs to be filled; it is productive. Meaning is not something that can be found in consuming something rather, it is found in the process of tying oneself to an external thing, in building a world around this thing. It is important to note that the goal here is not to complete or satisfy desire, but to create a connection to the outside world. As Elizabeth Freudenthal observes of Wallace’s novel, “most characters’ compulsive behaviors connect directly with the multinational economic and nuclear-industrial systems at the plot’s center” (Freudenthal 195). Wallace’s figuring of addiction would, in this context, appear to echo Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of desire as that which seeks to build rather than pursue its own completion. While we have been trained to pursue satisfaction, it is not the actual end of desire. Desire has no end. Rather, it wants to build upon itself, to create more.

As Deleuze and Guattari point out, desire is typically understood in psychoanalytic theory as the lack that structures the subject (*Anti-Oedipus*, 41). It is the gap that is

required so that the contemporary subject can exist, but at the same time it is experienced as a distressing compulsion that cannot be permanently satisfied. In the addict, Wallace discovers a figure who illustrates the way in which capitalism trains the subject to conflate freedom with the satisfaction of desire, but who, at the same time, represents a more Deleuzian understanding of the relationship between the subject and desire. To the extent that addiction is associated with the satisfaction of desire, it is by definition endless. It is simply another form, in the contemporary context, of the compulsion to consume that is engendered by capitalism. And even though this process of consumption is engendered and encouraged by capitalism, addicts are repeatedly asked to oedipalize themselves, in the sense that they must frame their addictions within a narrative of shame and must suffer guilt for possessing a desire that cannot be controlled. Thus, they take the blame for being the product of a system that is beyond their control. They are asked to abstain from the very system that creates them, as if they could somehow be anything but what they have been encouraged to become.

But Wallace's text also proposes another reading of addiction, one that would see it not as an erosion of the subject, but as a form of world-building. In this view, addiction creates structure, order and limits for the subject, though the limit it creates is not a set boundary that would constrain consumption. Rather, addiction is a way for the subject to bind themselves to a specific thing, a principle of sorts, to structure themselves under capitalism. Read in this way, addiction, rather than being a weapon deployed against the subject, is the subject weaponizing their own desire against the system that trains it to consume themselves. However, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, capitalism and psychoanalysis attempt to control desire because it is unpredictable:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. (*Anti-Oedipus* 116)

Addicts appear, in many ways, to be well-trained consumer-capitalist subjects, in the sense that they channel their desire towards the specific goal of consumption; they attempt to consume beyond their means. Like the subject of consumer capitalism for whom consumption is a limitless pursuit, the desire of the addict can never be satiated, but the desire of the addict is most often destructive in the sense that it goes well beyond the limit and has no ‘end.’ However, if we consider Wallace’s account of addiction, it can also be thought to be potentially constructive. It is not so much that the addict could cause a revolution; rather, it is that consumption could be world building; the desire of the addict could create a burrow.

### 3.1. The Addict Proper

Following Deleuze and Guattari, one might suggest that the addict is a figure who is akin to their notion of the schizophrenic, and to the figures of the depressive and the manic-depressive that I described earlier in this thesis. Like the schizophrenic, the addict weaponizes desire. Deleuze and Guattari write that “schizophrenia is at once the wall, the breaking through this wall, and the failures of this breakthrough” (*Anti-Oedipus* 136). In a similar way, addiction takes the logic of consumption past its conclusion. Addiction, the repetition of a desire that often persists to the point of death, is not necessarily the end

of life. Rather, like the schizophrenic, the addict is a figure who can potentially warp the system that engenders them by creating a void, a lack, a burrow to create an escape. Through substances, the addict has access to the altered mood states of the depressive and manic-depressive. Euthymia, euphoria and anhedonia are all on the spectrum of emotion of the addict. By consuming substances, the addict is trying to achieve a high; however, that high can morph into an attempt to achieve a euthymia, an attempt to find emotional stability in the achievement of the high. Rather than a seeking after euphoria, addiction can be understood as an effort by the subject to preserve themselves through consumption. That is, euphoria is secondary to the stability achieved by consuming. In this sense, addiction is also world building, organizing time and space; however, like schizophrenia, it generates excess, it builds pressure upon the limit, and so comes to resemble desire in the purest sense, in that it refuses to make sense. Deleuze and Guattari write that “desire produces reality, or stated another way, desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production” (*Anti-Oedipus* 30). The figure of the addict is hyperconscious of their part in generating reality. Consuming the substance is the way in which the nervous system is regulated, a way to achieve equilibrium. However, it isn't the kind of equilibrium that reproduces current material conditions. Rather, it is an equilibrium that overflows and overwhelms, that isn't a balance at all but an attempt to achieve a semblance of peace by gobbling everything.

A more expansive view of the productive power of the excess of desire in addiction might suggest that it carries with it a revolutionary potential. Capitalism has trained us to consume, and the addict is a subject who relentlessly consumes, and indeed, is innately compelled to, seemingly wired or programmed to pursue a substance with a single-



minded focus. But that single-minded compulsion, it might be argued, has the potential to cause the system to collapse in upon itself. It is not that addiction is the path to freedom, but rather that addiction presents a different approach to the question of repression. For, rather than freeing oneself from repression, the addict appears to sink their hooks into it, doubling down on repression by consuming a substance to keep them in a stasis. However, one might argue that in this overcompensation the addict creates an opening for a different mode of subjectivity. This speaks to Deleuze and Guattari's point, that "the problem is not that of being free but finding a way out, or even a way in, another side, a hallway, an adjacency" (*Kafka* 7-8). To be clear, this not an argument for transcendence but rather, an assertion that material conditions and the way that subjects move within the social field could be different.

The addict appears to be an unlikely hero, and indeed, they are not a hero at all. The addict is resolutely who they are, startlingly themselves, a louse in human form with no false heroics or hidden agendas and nowhere to go. But as Wallace points out, Kafka shows us that "our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home" ("Some Remarks" 64-65). And if Deleuze and Guattari are right to claim "where one believed there was the law, there is in fact desire and desire alone" then we might well suggest that the addict, rather than a hero, is in fact a legislator, a kind of lawmaker in capitalism (*Kafka* 49). Addicts are those who cannot stop consuming, who are all appetite. Their revolutionary potential, if we want to call it that, lies in the state of flux in which the addict resides: "consumptions are transitions, processes of becoming, and returns" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 42). Addiction is a state of becoming, in the sense that it is a productive process without a fixed end. That addiction, or the obsessive

and repetitive fixation upon consuming, is compatible with capitalism is well known. However, addiction goes beyond consumption. It has the capacity to order affects and create worlds. It is a consumptive process that works by organizing. Deleuze and Guattari write that “desire does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings it traverses, the vibrations and flows of every sort to which it is joined, introducing therein breaks and captures” (*Anti-Oedipus* 292). In the very terms they suggest, the addict is a figure who shapes their political horizons through the force of their desire. Their desire is the kind that legislates, that organizes and stabilizes. The addict grows and grows, until, unable to be sated, they collapse or explode, taking a piece of the system with them.

### 3.2. Addiction as Bad Thinking

However, this is not the only discourse of the addict that operates in *Infinite Jest*. Wallace also writes about addiction as if it were a failure in logic, a bad way of thinking. His narrator suggests, for example, that “the most Substance-addicted people are also addicted to thinking, meaning they have a compulsive and unhealthy relationship with their own thinking” (*Infinite Jest* 203). Conceptualized this way, the addict is reduced to a maladaptive, someone with faulty wiring. In this perspective, the addict is effectively “Hamletized,” which hobbles any revolutionary potential by reducing addiction to an error in thinking. Freudenthal describes one of the “emotional draws of *Infinite Jest* [to be] its portrayal of interior-focused, rational, self-conscious intellectuality as emotionally debilitating” (Freudenthal 195). However, to reduce addiction to an error in thinking overlooks the system that engenders the isolation and solipsism that Wallace portrays in a character like Hal. I would even go so far as to say that it appears that Wallace, at some

points in the text, chooses to disregard the systems that engender the addict or treats the addict as if their subjectivity could be separated from the system that forms it. It is an oversight on Wallace's part on par with Kafka's failure to understand that Gregor had transformed into a beetle who could have flown away: "a domed beetle, a scarab beetle with wing-sheaths, and neither Gregor nor his maker realized that when the room was being made by the maid, and the window was open, he could have flown out and escaped and joined the other happy dung beetles rolling the dung balls on rural paths" (Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* 90-91). Reducing the addict to a subject who thinks too much, who is addicted to their own thinking, further interiorizes a problem that is caused by material conditions. In effect, the subject is being blamed for the very conditions that shape them, which is at odds with the abundant evidence that addiction is powerfully informed by various socio-economic factors. Furthermore, in posing addiction as a problem in thinking, a fault in logic, it is easy to ignore the apparently inexplicable compulsion to consume. Addiction is productive, but it is not conscious. While the figure of the addict is self-aware, that is not the doing of their addiction. Rather, it is in spite of it.

These two dissonant discourses at work in the novel are, in many ways, irreconcilable. If addiction is the result of a particular economic system, then no matter how many times the addict tries to 'change' their thinking, that system will still exist. Earlier in this chapter, I reviewed Wallace's etymology of addiction, which includes the sense that addiction functions as a way to solve the problem of "I cannot get out, I cannot get out" (Sterne qtd. in Nabokov, "Franz Kafka", 254). In other words, addiction is the subject's response to living within a set of material conditions that are inescapable. But in thinking of addiction as a problem in logic, Wallace implies that the addict's logic, rather

than the system that necessitates that logic, is the problem, as if solipsism is the cause, rather than an effect of addiction, or as if the addict need only redirect their thinking away from themselves and towards those around them. This is what has led to the veneration of Don Gately as a heroic figure in the novel, a former addict who chooses to live through the pain of a gunshot wound without any pain killers (Baskin 45). Numerous critics dwell upon the Alcoholics Anonymous portions of *Infinite Jest* as evidence of Wallace attempting to guide the reader away from the existential despair engendered by living in millennial America (Baskin 63-65). However, this quest for an alternative way of living is misguided because, as the novel suggests, the addict will still be ensnared within the system that created them in the first place. Perhaps, a more nuanced way of regarding this impulse towards moralizing in the novel, represented by the narrator's interest in setting the addict back on the path of the straight and narrow, is to read it as an impulse towards reterritorialization. Deleuze and Guattari identified this impulse as an inevitable feature of American literature: "the destiny of American literature [is] that of crossing limits and frontiers, causing deterritorialized flows of desire to circulate, but also always making these flows transport fascisizing, moralizing, Puritan and familialist territorialities" (*Anti-Oedipus* 277-278). As I said earlier in this thesis, the impulse to reterritorialize is always present where deterritorialization occurs. While this is not necessarily unique to American literature, what makes it particularly evident in *Infinite Jest* is that there are twin compulsions. The first is, as I have just said, to locate the origins of addiction in the way that the subject thinks. The second, and I believe more interesting of the two, is to look at how the various circuits of capital, therapeutic regimes and entertainment work to ensnare the subject in its own desire. As has been said, in

many ways, these two impulses are irreconcilable, but they are also, in the novel, mutually constitutive. The former cannot exist without the latter, because the addict and their ‘bad thinking’ cannot occur without the system that makes the logic of addiction sensible. In the same vein, the system, or multiple systems, as they are currently arranged, cannot exist without creating the subject who thinks this way. In this way, while the impulse to reterritorialize becomes inevitable in Wallace’s fiction, the novel also suggests that it is important to resist the impulse to rehab the addict, for they occupy a position in the social field that makes resistance possible.

Of all the insipid things written about *Infinite Jest*, the least interesting are those that present Wallace as a saint who intends to show readers the correct path. As Adam Kelly observes, there is an “implicit agreement among...many critics with Wallace’s professed premise that fiction should act as both “diagnosis and cure,” that it should be viewed not primarily in terms of aesthetic representation, but of ethical intervention” (Kelly, “David Foster Wallace” 51). Many scholars turn to the sections of *Infinite Jest* that take place in Alcoholics Anonymous to argue that the addict needs to be cured through rebinding themselves to the Higher Power of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, there is a dearth of scholarship that questions the function of AA within the novel. By forcing the addict to go through their childhood, to admit that they have a “Disease/-ease”, they become the locus of destruction when the system itself is the source of rot (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 205). To think of AA as curative, as if there is a cure able to repair the system that generates the addict, fundamentally misunderstands addiction. Rehabilitation does not mean that the addict is fixed or is living a decent life; it means that they have been brought in line.

There are scholars who argue that Wallace wants to make his readers better (Baskin 12). In Wallace's own words, "fiction's about what it means to be a fucking *human being*," so he sought some sort of connection to the reader (Wallace qtd. in McCaffery, 26). Admittedly, there is a tendency in *Infinite Jest* to argue that sobriety is better, that it is even transcendent. In this sense, Don Gately is represented as a throwback to a nineteenth century hero rather than a way forward. However, considered in terms of the novel's broader construction of and reflection upon the figure of the addict, one might argue instead that in venerating Gately, one is asserting that subjects created by a system should rehabilitate themselves so that they can better serve that system. Desire doesn't *go* anywhere. The novel suggests that the resistance the addict generates is destroyed when they are rehabilitated back into the system. They are reintegrated into the game of desire in which we all find ourselves. In this respect, there is no getting better in *Infinite Jest*, merely a return to the same. It is all a lateral move. Recall that Wallace's novel takes place in a dystopia, where America has integrated Canada and Mexico into the Organization of North American Nations, and the system itself, the homeostasis that is being reached for, is rotten. In this context, the impulse to moralize over the issue of addiction only reveals an apparently irreconcilable conflict in the text between understanding the subject as a figure generated by a confluence of forces outside of its control and seeing that figure as self-directed, with the agency to act productively. Rather than considering the possibility of agency under consumer capitalism, a significant amount of time is spent moralizing over the addict, pointing out how they are in the wrong when they are generated by something greater than themselves.

### 3.3. A Book with No Point

*Infinite Jest* is not just a book with an empty center. It is a novel about the circulation of nothingness itself. There is, of course, the pretext of a tape in the novel called *Infinite Jest*, described as “lethally entertaining” (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 788). Its whereabouts are presented to the reader as a mystery that needs to be solved, but its exact location is never confirmed. We know that all those who watch the tape are rendered infantile, their desire for entertainment sated and presumably, obliterated. The contents of the video are a very straightforward critique of the theatre of the family within psychoanalysis:

It features Madame Psychosis as some kind of maternal instantiation of the archetypal figure Death, sitting naked, corporeally gorgeous, ravishing, hugely pregnant...explaining in very simple childlike language to whomever the film’s camera represents that Death is always female. (*Infinite Jest* 788)

Wallace finishes this thought by writing, “the woman who kills you is always your next life’s mother” (788). The figure of the mother who harms her child through her love, or rather, her inability to love her child the right way, is a common trope in psychoanalysis. In most psychoanalytic theory, the realization of one’s own subjectivity and the existence of desire occurs when one understands that they and their mother are ultimately two different entities rather than an undifferentiated whole. In this way, the mother supposedly creates a lack in her absence, leaving a split, a tear, that can never be truly repaired. As I have suggested, the theatre of the family is central to psychiatric discourses, including psychoanalysis; in *Infinite Jest*, this theatre of the family plays out

on an actual tape, which appears to have been created with the express purpose of supplementing a ‘lost’ or presumed memory of an archetypal mother. This is, in some ways, a joke. However, it should not be ignored that the film still presents the mother as a kind of monster, for in giving life she is also condemning the subject to death.

According to the wraith of J.O Incandenza, the creator of the film and the father of Hal, he wanted to create a tape “[Hal] would love enough to induce him to open his mouth and come out” (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 839). He was hoping to use entertainment to save his son from “the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life” (839). In his own words, it was meant to be an apology: “I AM SO VERY, VERY SORRY” (839). This further substantiates the dual impulses of the tape. On one hand, there is a fairly obvious joke about psychoanalysis and its fixation on the family; on the other hand, in Incandenza’s decision to recreate an Oedipal fantasy and the tape’s ability to neutralize desire, there is the suggestion that the family and particularly parents are culpable in the mental and emotional distress of their children. However, in the novel, the actual quality of the tape, widely considered a failure, is up for debate. Those who watch it are reportedly not liberated but rendered infantile. Hal never actually sees the tape, and Madame Psychosis, the star of the film, has “a hard time believing it was even entertaining, let alone lethally entertaining” (789). While it is important to the structure of the narrative, the investigation into the tape ultimately goes nowhere. It is forever stalled, left incomplete, like an aborted mystery novel.

However, to ask this question of ‘where’ or ‘what’ is to miss the point of the tape. That is, there is no point, and the existence of the tape is simply part of the endless series of cycles within the novel: the brutal training regimens, the ritual of praying to a Higher



Power. There is always a not-yet, something on the horizon that is always put off, that can never be achieved. Deleuze and Guattari write that “capitalism...liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement that drives it toward this limit” (*Anti-Oedipus* 139-140). The endless circulations in Wallace’s novel mimic these flows, cycles that exist merely to sustain themselves.

The circulatory structure of the novel also mimics the multiplicity of capitalism itself. Todd McGowan observes, “capitalism is such a variable system that we cannot speak of a single system” (McGowan 19). It is a system that is made of many different parts and circuits. The dystopia of *Infinite Jest* is built on this system of endless flows and circulations, which is also the novel’s inescapable horizon. This is not an uncommon motif in postmodern literature. Philip Nel writes, “if [postmodernism] delivers a critique of conspicuous consumption, it also endorses the desire to consume; if its nonsensical logic challenges the present rationality of accepted social structures, its reliance on stereotypes reinforces those same systems of power” (Nel, *Avant-Garde*, 76). As I earlier observed, one of the more dystopic elements in *Infinite Jest* is that time itself is subsidized, so that the majority of the events in the novel take place in the “Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment” (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 17). As Wallace explains in an interview, “the world that I live in consists of 250 advertisements a day and any number of unbelievably entertaining options, most of which are subsidized by corporations that want to sell me things” (Wallace qtd. in Miller, 60). In *Infinite Jest*, this notion is expanded so that time itself is subject to the circulation of consumption, and so it is

perhaps not surprising that in Wallace's narrative, addiction is just another way that these circulations of consumption move through the subject, and indeed, use them as a flashpoint. But while addiction in *Infinite Jest* is ultimately world building, that constructive model is not the generative principle for the novel. In Wallace's text, time is structured by advertising; there are infinite opportunities to consume and endless regimes and rituals, all illustrative of the novel's insistence upon empty circulation. Everything is in perpetual motion, yet there is no point, just as there is no point beyond mere existence to capitalism.

### 3.4. Circulation as Motif

In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher argues that there are no clear 'aesthetics' of capitalism, so much as capitalism will appropriate whatever it can to conceal itself. He writes "the role of capitalist ideology is not to make an explicit case for something in the way that propaganda does, but to conceal the fact that the operations of capital do not depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief" (*Realism* 12-13). For Fisher, capitalism hides itself in plain sight, in the sense that it does not rely on propaganda or a specific rhetoric or aesthetic discourse. Rather, it presents itself as both apparent and inevitable. The apparent and inevitable are figured in Wallace's novel in conjunction with its emphasis on circulation and mere existence. For example, the plot of the novel is constructed so that the beginning of the narrative presents what is chronologically the end of plot, so that the narrative appears to move in a circle. In addition, the sheer profusion of events and characters in the text, often in situations without resolution or that have little relation one to another, presents a world that is teeming with motion and multiplicity but to no end. In Wallace's novel, perpetual motion is the 'point' of

capitalism; the system must always be on the move and cannot function otherwise. Moreover, to the extent that time, for example, appears to be a function of capitalist circulation, the text would appear to suggest that capitalism has, in some way, always haunted the social field. In this sense, *Infinite Jest* can be seen to echo Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that "capitalism [is] a kind of dark potentiality which haunted all previous social systems" (Fisher, *Realism* 5). While capitalism is not timeless, in the sense that it is not a transhistorical structure, Fisher argues that the despotism that it engenders has always been on the fringes of previous social systems. Within the text of *Infinite Jest*, Wallace uses different cycles, most notably time and narrative, to articulate this omnipresence of capitalism.

Time also plays a role in the profusion of short, isolated narratives within the larger discourse of *Infinite Jest*. There are several characters who only appear once in the novel, not to move the plot forward but to provide a testimony, their own story; their narratives typically go nowhere, but they are nonetheless part of the circulatory and circular discourse of the larger text. A particularly memorable instance of this occurs when a young woman stands up at an AA meeting and recounts the cause of her addiction. She is a "skinny hard-faced Advanced Basics girl who...posits that she was an eight-bag-a-day dope fiend *because* at sixteen she'd had to become a stripper and semi-whore...*because* she'd had to run away from her foster home (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 370). The other members at the meeting are uncomfortable with the woman blaming her addiction on a trauma, presumably since most people in attendance have been traumatized in some way, and because her trauma is sexually violent in nature. As a teenager, she shared a room with her disabled foster sister, who was being sexually

abused by the woman's foster father, who was the foster sister's biological father (371). Before he assaulted his daughter, he placed a Raquel Welch mask over her face, suggesting that his own daughter was a means through which he could realize a near impossible fantasy (371). The woman cleaned up after her foster father, who would leave his daughter with the mask on, her legs apart (372). However, the true horrific moment, the one that pushes her over the edge, is when she looks over and sees that her foster sister is taking pleasure from these assaults. Her face had a "sort of pinched gasping look of neurologic concentration that marks a carnal bliss beyond smiles or sighs" (373). This realization, the woman claims, forced her to leave her foster home and become a sex worker to survive and a drug addict to cope with the psychic pain.

The woman's story is upsetting for others at the meeting because no one asks her to say what happened, and the "subcurrent of explanation, an appeal to exterior *Cause* that can slide, in the addictive mind, so insidiously into *Excuse* that any causal attribution is...feared, shunned. Punished by empathic distress" (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 374). She does not simply tell the story that she believes everyone wants to hear. This is the story through which she comes to understand herself and her world. She has the chance to be 'honest' with herself, as if it has the power to begin the healing process inside of her. By reducing her addiction to her trauma, the addict hopes to receive sympathy for becoming who she is. In framing her addiction as the logical response to a traumatic moment, she does not look at her role as an agent in her addiction, which is precisely what makes her testimony so uncomfortable for the other members of AA.

In the story of the Raquel Welch mask, Wallace presents a figure who is trying to use a singular, traumatic event to make sense of her entire life. The way that she

constructs her own narrative illustrates how both time and addiction figure as circulations. Everything can always be tied back to something that is in the past but cannot be left behind. In framing her addiction as the logical outcome of a singular trauma, not only does the addict claim passivity, but in claiming that addiction is the result of trauma, that it has a causation that is located within childhood experience or the theatre of the family, the young woman, unwittingly, directs our attention away from the larger systems that cause it. As was stated earlier in this chapter by Fisher, this redirection is typical of the aesthetics that are produced under capitalism. Everything, including time, is malleable. It can be shaped, looped, circuited in such a way that it feels as if there is no way out. Through this redirection, the system remains unquestioned, the addict is disoriented and pinned down. The addict is the subject generated by a system with an empty centre, that weaponizes the story of the family to hide what it is in plain sight. The addict *is* the centre, in the sense that the centre, the point, is to keep moving, desiring. Deleuze and Guattari write that “the order of desire is the order of production; all production is at once desiring-production and social production” (*Anti-Oedipus* 296). The unconscious does not produce representations, and it does not move according to a narrative or a story. Generally speaking, representation is a by-product of desiring-production. This representation, the centre, the point, the very figuration of the addict is the circulation of desire.

### 3.5. The Hamletizing of Hal

In the first chapter, and throughout the book, Hal is regularly Hamletized and oedipalized. While I compared him to Gregor Samsa earlier in the thesis, I think it is valuable now to look at the way that Hal is both constructed from Hamlet and Hamletized

within the novel. There are numerous references to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the novel, but Hal is not merely an echo of Shakespeare's tragic hero. Hamlet's dead father wanted to be avenged, calling out: "let not the royal bed of Denmark be/A couch for luxury and damned incest," but, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ghost of Hal's father says only that he wanted to create the tape *Infinite Jest* to lure his son outside of himself, to prevent him from retreating into solipsism (Shakespeare 1.5.82-83; Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 839). In fact, in the creation of the tape, Incandenza does the opposite of the ghost's condemnation of gluttony. Incandenza looks to indulgence in order to create a tape that would move Hal to speak. He believes that this will save Hal, bringing him outside of himself in order to defeat the solipsism engendered by a society that hinges upon individual consumption. In Wallace's novel, Hal's affiliation with Hamlet and the oedipal subject signals merely the extent to which he is ensnared in a trap from which there is no escape. As Wallace remarks apropos of Kafka, subjectivity is inescapable. You are always already who you are. Wallace writes: "it's not that students don't get Kafka's humor but that we've taught them to see humour as something you get—the same way we've taught them that a self is something you just have" ("Some Remarks" 64). This ensnarement is inevitable, and the hilarity in Wallace, as in Kafka, is in this incredible lack of self-awareness in the struggle to understand that one is simply who they are. One does not get a self or achieve subjectivity or enlightenment or insight. One is a subject.

Rather than stumbling upon his father's ghost, Hal stumbles upon his father's dead body, after he killed himself via microwave: "found by one Harold James Incandenza, thirteen going on really old" (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 248). Although I have already discussed this earlier in this thesis, I would like to go into more detail, as it is a

particularly illuminating section of the novel. Taken out of his training for “concentrated grief- and trauma-therapy,” Hal realizes that the only way to return to his regular regime is to lie about having a therapeutic breakthrough (252). Encouraged by his trauma counsellor, Hal Hamletizes himself, making a false and exaggerated confession of trauma, claiming that, before discovering his father’s body, he thought “that something smelled delicious” (256). This is, obviously, a joke. However, the therapist takes Hal at his word and, on the basis of simply having recognized his trauma, okays his return to the field, with little or no therapeutic support: “I’d finally delivered the goods and my traumatic grief was professionally pronounced uncovered and countenanced and processed” (257). Rather than feigning madness, Hal pretends to have a breakthrough that allows him to return to his normal routine. In an illuminating observation about the figure of Hamlet, Hal remarks: “it’s always seemed a little preposterous that Hamlet, for all his paralyzing doubt about everything, never once doubts the reality of the ghost. Never questions whether his own madness might not in fact be unfeigned” (900). Hal questions the entire premise of not just the play, but Hamlet’s sanity from the outset. In other words, Hal implies that Hamlet’s intellect masqueraded as sanity, similar to the way that depression presents itself as a sane, logical and objective view of the world. The fixation on the intellect of Hamlet is revealing for two reasons. First, Hal is obviously thinking about himself, suspecting that his own intellect is the enemy, and second, Hal reveals that he is unable to integrate his rational and emotional worlds. In other words, his ability to intellectually comprehend something outstrips his ability to emotionally comprehend the world.

This is important, because Hal's actual drug use is not triggered by trauma, but rather, by the creeping sense of anhedonia that his father foresaw coming for him. In other words, there is no rational reason why Hal begins using cannabis. Wallace writes: "like most North Americans of his generation, Hal tends to know way less about why he feels certain ways about the objects and pursuits he's devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves" (*Infinite Jest* 54). It was not an intellectual response to a stimulus, but an unconscious action that is directly tied to having feelings that are overwhelming and beyond comprehension. On this point, Wallace writes "who [hasn't], at some life-stage, in the U.S.A. and Interdependent regions, in these troubled times" indulged in some sort of substances or another (53). Though Wallace writes that there is an intellectual function to anhedonia, it is not the logic of anhedonia that is devastating; rather, it is the emotional impact of anhedonia that does the damage. As de Sutter writes, "anaesthesia [is] the ablation of the relationship between a subject and their sensations, and the elimination of their enjoyment" (de Sutter 15). Rather than getting high to feel good, Hal gets high to numb out the emptiness of feeling nothing. This is a crucial piece of information for our understanding of Wallace's representation of the addict. Addiction doesn't seek any one affect—some people want to be numb; others want euphoria; addiction is a process of ordering and achieving an affective response, but it would be a mistake to assume that everyone is looking for the same one.

The relationship between addiction and anhedonia takes place within the subject. However, as with any discussion of the subject, there is a political dimension to this relationship. As a desiring subject, the addict appears to clash with anhedonia, and the clash between them is essential for any understanding of the conflict that Wallace tries to



navigate in *Infinite Jest*. The source of that conflict can be found in the tension between the desiring addict and the anhedonia that dominates the social field. As I have indicated, addiction is a productive, world-building response to the flattening, monotonous emotional world of anhedonia. One may wonder why the addict even bothers, but it should be obvious: these two forces are different responses that emerge from the social field shaped by capitalism. McGowan writes “the capitalist subject constantly experiences its failure to belong, which is why the recurring fantasy within capitalism is that of attaining some degree of authentic belonging” (McGowan 20). The addict creates a world in which they belong, and in this sense, there is an agency in addiction that is a direct response to anhedonia. I use the word agency because, in a world generated by consumption, the choice of how and what to consume is one of the few choices one has. While the social field is generated by forces beyond the control of the subject, and indeed, the subject is always already enmeshed within this field, there is some agency to be found, some different way of traversing the plane of immanence. It is a matter of looking.

In some ways, it may simply appear dated to advocate for desire as having revolutionary potential. Living under consumer capitalism, which consolidates so much of its power in stoking desire, the idea that desire, in and of itself, could have subversive let alone revolutionary potential can seem laughable. However, it cannot be ignored that “desire does not “want” revolution, it is revolutionary, as though involuntarily, by wanting what it wants” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 116). One of the main arguments in this thesis is that desire is not just what we recognize it to be; it can take different forms. Its wanting is not for fulfilment, and according to Deleuze and Guattari,

to see desire as a lack is to fundamentally misunderstand how the subject negotiates with the forces that act upon them. If desire is truly a lack that needs to be filled, that would mean, according to Deleuze and Guattari, that there is no hope for the possibility of human agency. While they argue that the subject is undoubtedly shaped by a multiplicity of forces outside of its control, by virtue of desire and its productivity, change is possible. In other words, human agency is a *productive* act, even though civil society seemingly does everything to obfuscate this truth. As Deleuze observes of meanness, “society constantly puts us in situations where it is in our best interest to be mean. Our vanity would have us believe that we are naturally mean. But the truth is much worse: we become mean without knowing it, without even realizing it” (*Deserts* 53). *Anti-Oedipus* is, arguably, built upon this claim. As I remarked at the beginning of the second chapter, meanness is a product of social conditions, and as such, is not an innate, human quality. Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of agency as a fundamentally productive act is critical to this point. While meanness is practically encouraged by all the material aspects of Western society, it is not an inevitability. It is possible for the subject to act differently, in accordance with the world in which they want to live, the world which they will build through their actions. In this sense, the addict is a model for creating the world in which one wants to live; it isn’t necessarily a better one, but it could be, and that potential is the grounds for its creation.

## Postscript

The structure of this thesis has been described as a triptych. Rather than present a linear argument, the three chapters work together as a 'set' of texts that provide distinct vantage points from which to study the therapeutic regimes of psychoanalysis and psychiatric power, and the lived experience of consumer capitalism. All the objects I have considered, from the figures of madness to the forces of addiction and anhedonia, work together to shape contemporary subjectivity. The first chapter presented a genealogy of contemporary figures of madness in order to argue that there was a political dimension to the categorization of madness that arose in the nineteenth century, and that the challenge of madness was systematically negated or harnessed through multiple discourses and regimes, particularly psychoanalysis and capitalism. In the second chapter, I narrowed my focus by employing Deleuze and Guattari's theory of minor literature to explore the relationship between Kafka and Wallace, as well as the possibilities for resistance that are unique to the figure of the addict. In the final chapter, I argued that the figure of the addict is constructed from a multiplicity of circulations, and that addiction, in and of itself, is a kind of circulation, a method of appropriating the flows of capitalism and the forces that are weaponized against the subject.

There are both utopian and anti-humanist impulses within this thesis. Following Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, I have echoed the anti-humanist argument that the subject, shaped by discursive forces outside its control, appears to have little agency. I have also been particularly critical of the roles of psychoanalysis and psychiatry in actively undermining any potential agency in madness. Psychoanalysis and psychiatry

project upon madness in order to neutralize it, and their work upon symptoms deflects attention away from the larger system of which those symptoms are effects. As Deleuze remarks of the grounds for his engagement with psychiatry and psychoanalysis, “I would never have allowed myself to talk about psychoanalysis and psychiatry if this were not a question of symptomology. [It] is located almost outside of medicine, at a neutral point, where artists and philosophers and doctors and patients come together” (*Deserts* 134). The social field is made up of multiplicities, and it is worth considering what it means to live in a society where the subject is punished for its inability to maintain sanity in a system that may not be entirely sane. As long as psychoanalysis and psychiatry treat only the symptoms of the subject and ignore their relation to the systems that engender madness, then madness will always be negated or neutralized.

As Deleuze and Guattari assert in *Anti-Oedipus*, “the madness of our patients is an artifact of the destruction wreaked on them by us and by them on themselves” (*Anti-Oedipus* 132). It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari include “us” in their indictment. *We* cause destruction and harm; the system is despotic, yes, but it could not cause the harm that it does without its agents. Consider, for example, as Wallace does, the authority figures, bureaucrats, clerks and prison guards in Kafka. Wallace writes that “Kafka’s authority figures are never just hollow buffoons to be ridiculed, but are always absurd and scary and sad all at once” (“Remarks on Kafka” 63). The petty agents of despotism in Kafka’s work enact its will in the everyday unfolding of the world without even blinking an eye, and with a thoughtlessness that is both absurd and terrifying.

On the utopian side, I have argued in this thesis that desire is the grounds for human agency, though we can never say what the intention of the revolutionary potential of

desire is. One of the central claims of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* is that desire, by virtue of its unpredictability and libidinal structure, is inherently productive and therefore, could be a means through which capitalism might be resisted. While the terms 'revolution' and 'resistance' remain vague in their account, they nonetheless assert that agency is a fundamentally productive act; it creates, manufactures, and assembles. While we are inevitably caught up in a system that pins us down on all sides, agency is still possible—that is why the repression enacted by capitalism and enforced by psychoanalysis is as crushing as it is. In other words, though we may live in a culture that is shaped around consumption and repression, in which the subject is pinned down by the very discursive forces that construct it, such as psychiatric power, agency is still possible.

This line of argumentation, I would argue, opens the door to a possible counter discourse. There is, for example, the possibility of looking to literature as an anti-therapeutic discourse. Wallace scholarship, for its part, has been more comfortable with suggesting that Wallace wants to offer a therapy, a connection of sorts, to his reader: “[*Infinite Jest*’s] real ‘difficulty’ lies...in...what it endeavors to get its readers to see” (Baskin, 41). However, ascribing this kind of intentionality is problematic, as Wallace’s novel itself would appear to suggest through the example of J.O. Incandenza, who, in trying to create a tape to bring his son out of his shell, ended up doing the opposite. What Wallace’s novel ultimately suggests is that if there is any value to be found in literature as a therapeutic response, it must reside in its capacity to work against discourses that encourage normalization. In this sense, it would be more appropriate to think of literature as a potential anti-therapeutic discourse. For, if there is anything to be learned from *Infinite Jest*, it is that while the book is not therapeutic, or at least not in a way that we

would recognize, it still speaks to the symptomology that Deleuze and Guattari identify in the social field. In this vein, as Deleuze correctly argues, “the artist is not outside symptoms, but makes a work of art of them, which sometimes serves to precipitate them, and sometimes to transform them” (*Deserts* 140). Rather than simply ‘treating’ symptoms, literature offers the possibility of engaging with madness, bringing it into a discourse that does not negate it. This is not to say that madness leads to great art. Rather, it is that literature is a discourse that can offer resistance by allowing madness its productive potential, its agency.

I embarked on this thesis because I was looking for a trap door. I was not satisfied with the notion we find in *Infinite Jest* that addiction is a subjective failing, particularly when we recognize that the subject is constructed by a system that almost guarantees that they become who they are. Kafka’s “A Little Fable” sums up the situation quite well:

“Alas,” said the mouse, “the world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning it was so big that I was afraid, I kept running and running, and I was glad when at last I saw walls far away to the right and the left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I must run into.” “You only need to change your direction,” said the cat, and ate it up. (*Short Stories*, 445)

The mouse has no choice but to be gobbled up, to enter the belly of the beast and be chewed up and consumed. However, I think that this can be interpreted a little differently. I don’t think this story necessarily has to be devastating or depressing. Frightening, yes. But this story does not represent an inevitable foreclosure. Note that it is the cat, the

second trap, who tells the mouse that the only escape is by changing direction; not only does the trap speak, but it advises the mouse that there are two ways to act in the present situation. The mouse was always already trapped, before the cat appeared, because the mouse was always trying to find the trap so as to avoid it. The mouse was already in a state of flight, and as such, could not realize the extent to which it was participating in its own ensnarement.

For, in moments of despair, of which there are many in this world, and at times when one correctly ascertains that there is nowhere to go, the subject may find agency in the fact that there is no other choice but to change direction. While there may only be one choice presented, it is still a choice, and there is agency in turning around and realizing where one truly is, instead of trying to flee. Agency does not mean that one is able to escape ensnarement. Rather, it changes the relationship between the subject and the trap. For if one can stop struggling, they will be able to find, if not a way out, a chance to resist.

There is also a third line of flight, hinted at by the cat. If the mouse had stopped focusing on finding the trap, it most likely could have seen the cat come stalking up behind it. If the mouse had stopped and thought about why it was running, why it was afraid, it is entirely possible that the story could have ended differently. In other words, my response to the question of agency under consumer capitalism, under the therapeutic regimes of psychiatric power and psychoanalysis, is not that the subject can only resign itself to the inevitable; in order to understand the trap, our location in it, there must be an acknowledgement that we are stuck in a network of relations that are prior to our existence. We must stop and locate ourselves, and then look for another direction. No

matter how these traps and predators present themselves, they are not transhistorical nor are they absolute givens. If the subject regards life as an exercise in avoiding traps, then they are already ensnared. Agency is not only possible, but an imperative. Do with that what you will.



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