

Sense of Agency and the Role of Entertainment in *Infinite Jest*'s "Living Dead"

This paper attempts to betoken the relevance of emotions in the representation of the body and in the 'reviving' of the self in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. The novel discerns a world where the oversaturation of choices in entertainment has reversed a tradition of ennui and addiction as part of the hedonistic search for pleasure. This is of a particular importance to the understanding of the destruction of the self which is consequently framed in the paradoxically position of the 'abject', as one who rejects the self over unreachable pleasure.

On the basis of this new definition of entertainment, characters are annularly entrapped in non-agent actions to escape this deadly and stultifying entertainment (through sports, media and/or drugs). Moreover, entertainment invalidates its original meaning as it evokes no true stimuli in the characters in the novel. This significantly shows how individuals are unable to feel any emotion or attachment to the external world.

As a consequence, their mind is prosthesised and has lost control over the body which thus suggestively explains why bodies in the novel are described as malleable, machine-like and deformed. This can be enlightened from a neuropsychologist perspective with the claim that emotions play a key role in representing the body. If one feels a detachment from the body and no 'sense of agency', one may state to feel non-existent or dead as no external stimuli evokes emotions in them.

This paper will discuss how David Foster Wallace's portrayal may suggest that characters suffer from Cotard delusion. The world in *Infinite Jest* is a vapid oversaturation of annular choices where individuals in the search of hedonistic pleasure reject their self as "the choice for death of the head by pleasure" (*IJ* 319). However, the lack of emotional response to environmental stimuli hampers a correct representation of body. Bodies have become prosthesised parts, malleable and deformed where the mind fails to feel bodily emotions or connections. Cotard syndrome helps to reveal how this lack of emotions disables a correct representation of the body giving way to the belief that one may be dead, non-existent or deformed. Characters take on an obsessive compulsive trait to regain a sense of agency however in this iterative attempt they become even more detached from the whole. In this quest, they attempt to install feelings and thus their self back to their body with the use of masks, made-up feelings and through mind-body hybrid pain as one character states "have every limb of your body ache like a migraine" (*IJ* 175). Characters are in a constant and necessary struggle to identify the most fundamental sings of their selfhood to prove that they exist. This debate proves that the self is not a monolithic entity and that it is bound up in concepts of organic and non-organic. The discussion will lay on how *Infinite Jest* is a novel, among other things, about the struggle to regain feeling and the lost self from a body perspective and its validating connection to the mind.

References

Carruthers, Glenn. "Types of Body Representation and Sense of Embodiment."

Consciousness and Cognition 17 (2008): 1302-1316.

- Craig, A.D. "How do you feel? Interoception: the Sense of the Physiological Condition of Body." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 3.8 (2002): 655-666.
- Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: G.P. Putman's sons, 1995.
- Debruyne Hans, et al. "Cotard's Syndrome." *Mind and Brain, the Journal of Psychiatry*. (2011): 67-72.
- Tsakiris, Manos. "My Body in the Brain: A Neurocognitive Model of Body-Ownership." *Neuropsychologia*, 48.3 (2010) 703 -712.
- Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest*, New York: Back Bay Books, 2006.

Key words:

Entertainment; Interoception; Sense of agency; Body-mind representation; Cotard Syndrome