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DAVID FOSTER WALLACE SPECIAL ISSUE

## White Guys: Questioning *Infinite Jest's* New Sincerity

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This article questions the idea that David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* instigates new forms of sincerity. We begin by scrutinizing the theoretical underpinnings of Adam Kelly's influential reading of such 'New Sincerity'. Firstly, we argue that this theory misconstrues Jacques Derrida's notions of iterability and undecidability. It does so in order to corral their implications within an elitist understanding of the 'literary' text. Secondly, we argue that Kelly's reading ignores how *Infinite Jest's* supposed New Sincerity is geared exclusively towards the novel's white male characters. Through close readings of the novel's often celebrated AA scenes, and by drawing on the work of political and cultural theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva, we then show how this process works at the expense of black and female characters. By addressing how forms of racist and sexist exclusion constitute the novel's apparent New Sincerity, we argue that this reading works to restore white men to positions of representative cultural authority.

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## Introduction

In his 2010 account of the then emerging field of David Foster Wallace studies, Adam Kelly argued that A.O. Scott's turn of the millennium 'career-overview piece' (2010b: para. 6) helped engender the common understanding of Wallace's work as an attempt to renew sincere affect in the face of postmodern affectlessness. Highlighting how Scott focuses on Wallace's prediction in 'E Unibus Pluram' of a coming generation of "anti-rebels" who would dare to 'instantiate single-entendre principles' (1998: 81), Kelly notes that Scott 'wonders aloud at how the terms of this prescription might relate to the evidently ironic and self-reflexive methods of Wallace's own fiction' (2010b: para. 6). Scott's comment has helped spawn an influential strand of criticism, which attempts to elucidate whether and how Wallace's work achieves such sincere affectivity; or, in the author's now often quoted words, of reminding us what it means to be a 'fucking *human being*' (McCaffery, 2012: 26). These readings deal with Wallace's desire to generate sincere affect without dismissing postmodern irony's critique of transparent communication, and the affectless self-consciousness that this critique apparently creates. Kelly's notion of Wallace's 'New Sincerity' exemplifies this strand of criticism.<sup>1</sup> However, we wish to argue that his reading not only rests on an elitist idea of the 'literary', but that it also ignores how Wallace's fiction – and particularly *Infinite Jest* ([1996] 1997) – presents as universal an experience that it in fact implicitly codes as white and male. Indeed, we interrogate Kelly's contention that *Infinite Jest*'s new sincerity moves beyond the white male liberal humanist subject. Accordingly, we offer a more sceptical estimation of the sincere affect that *Infinite Jest* purportedly generates. We argue that such affect not only prioritizes

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<sup>1</sup> It is also indicative of a broader fascination with the concept of a 'new' sincerity. In 2006, for example, American public radio host Jesse Thorn published 'A Manifesto for The New Sincerity'; in 2010, in *Wired* magazine, Angela Watercutter declared that '*Glee*'s Success Cements Age of Geeky "New Sincerity"'; and in 2013, cultural critic Jonathan D. Fitzgerald published *Not Your Mother's Morals: How the New Sincerity is Changing Pop Culture for the Better*. An examination of the cultural particularity of this fascination is beyond the scope of this article. Kelly's use of the term 'New Sincerity' as the primary descriptor of his reading of Wallace (and various other writers he considers to be writing in Wallace's wake) nonetheless situates it within this zeitgeist. Moreover, his reading of Wallace's work, though flawed, is the most thorough attempt to theorize how literary sincerity might operate in the aftermath of the purported death of the intentional subject.

whiteness and masculinity, but that it does so in ways that denigrate the experiences of the novel's black and female characters.<sup>2</sup>

Our article begins by examining the inconsistencies that underpin Kelly's theorization of Wallace's supposed New Sincerity. Specifically, we argue that he misconstrues Jacques Derrida's notions of iterability and undecidability in order to attribute to Wallace's fiction the performative 'literary' characteristics that can solicit sincere affect in readers. Kelly places this literary performativity in opposition to a popular postmodern irony, which, he suggests, is corrosive for its entanglement with a metaphysics of presence. This formalism translates into a cultural elitism, whereby Wallace's literary-deconstructive texts create a sincere affect that advertising in particular apparently suffocates. Furthermore, insofar as Kelly presents Wallace's New Sincerity as escaping metaphysical presence – and thus generating a sincerity that moves beyond the intentional, liberal humanist subject – he does so by eliding how Wallace's work overwhelmingly restricts this affectivity to white male characters. To demonstrate this in relation to *Infinite Jest*, we draw on the political and cultural theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva. Her work helps illuminate how the novel's plea for the same newly sincere affect Kelly postulates is in fact an effort to revivify the privileged status of the white masculinity it purports to transcend. By revisiting in particular the novel's much celebrated depictions of Alcoholics Anonymous, we argue that readings which suggest that *Infinite Jest* offers, in Kelly's words, 'the possibility of a reconceived, and renewed, sincerity' (2010a: 146), must take into account Wallace's white and male proscription of said sincerity, if they are to fully appreciate its dynamics. We spotlight the novel's depictions of black and female characters not only to intervene in such readings, then, but also to suggest the need to question

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<sup>2</sup> 'Whiteness' and 'masculinity' are by no means neutral concepts. Their historical and cultural constitution in relation to Wallace's work, the period he wrote within, his readership, and various other contexts of inscription begs further explication. Mark McGurl for one considers how Wallace speaks to 'largely young, educated, middle-class white people' (2014: 43), and how his penchant for 'geeky' erudition registers as a 'paradoxically nonethnic ethnicity, or technicity' (2014: 44). Elsewhere Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (2006) explains how Wallace's work displays a traditionally masculine anxiety over the value of fiction in an age of 'feminine' mass culture; a theme that Olivia Banner (2009) also explores in her analysis of Wallace's story 'The Suffering Channel'.

Wallace's coercive interpretative schemas. Such questioning is crucial, we argue, in order to better understand how *Infinite Jest's* pretensions to therapeutic intervention prioritize and aggrandize experiences that, in the terms the novel itself sets up, can only ever be white and male.

### Questioning New Sincerity

That Wallace was interested in writing fiction that would emotionally resonate with readers is a critical commonplace. What is startling, however, is the variety of ways in which scholars have tried to support Wallace's goal to make us sincerely feel again. Marshall Boswell (2003), Paul Giles (2007), and Lee Konstantinou (2012) have all argued that Wallace's work tries to renew affect in response to losing a sincere, 'human' affectivity in postmodern culture.<sup>3</sup> Kelly's notion of New Sincerity is perhaps the most theoretically vigorous of these readings, but it has not been without its detractors. For instance, James Dorson argues that 'the emotional reflexivity at the heart of New Sincerity (...) goes hand in hand with a growing market for skills that require emotional intelligence' (2014: 226–227), thus legitimating neoliberal discourses of individual affective labor. Elsewhere, Iain Williams, in an examination of Wallace's short story 'Octet' (1999), observes 'the underlying conservative, elitist, individualistic nature of (...) the concept of the New Sincerity as a whole' (2015: 311), especially in how it appeals to 'relatively empowered, educated, financially comfortable individuals' (2015: 311). Most pertinently for our purposes, Clare Hayes-Brady has suggested that there is 'an argument to be made that the "reconceived and renewed sincerity" that Kelly identifies in Wallace and other writers is used to entrench and defend the privileged position of white American masculinity Wallace so obstinately foregrounds' (2016: 35, fn35). In many respects we are indeed making this argument, yet unlike Dorson, Williams, and Hayes-Brady, we offer a close interrogation of the mechanics of Kelly's theories in doing so. By unpacking how Kelly misconstrues

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly distinguishes his reading from Boswell and Konstantinou (and Mary K. Holland) because, for him, these critics 'suggest that a writer can choose whether to make language a tool of irony or a tool of sincerity, as if the difference involved were simply one of intent' (2014b: en20). As we will see, what makes Kelly's reading 'more complex than these critics have it' (2014b: en20) is his suggestion that Wallace's New Sincerity works precisely by acknowledging that intention is impossible to ascertain.

Derrida's ideas of undecidability and iterability, we can start to see how his notion of New Sincerity rests on questionable interpretations of both deconstructive thought and the 'literary' text's value in relation to popular culture. Although Kelly has theorized New Sincerity in a number of different articles and book chapters, some of which offer variations on its aesthetic, political, and cultural implications, we do not detect significant changes in its logic. Accordingly, we treat Kelly's work on New Sincerity as a conceptual whole, while emphasising the centrality of Wallace's writings (and *Infinite Jest* especially) to his theorizations.

Drawing on Derrida's theorization of the impossibility of a pure gift, Kelly argues that Wallace's fiction displays an 'ethical undecidability (...) which opens up a space for the reader to inhabit' (2010b: para. 17). This 'undecidability' is premised on the collapse of surface/depth models of subjectivity. As Kelly puts it, if 'all telling can be understood as a pose, there is no way to present sincerity positively in cognitive terms' (2010a: 141). Quoting Lionel Trilling, Kelly suggests that 'the old sincerity' (2016: 198) was based upon a "congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (2016: 198), which can no longer function because there is no intentional subject either to know or to be known. Performativity, then, is all there is, but this same performativity places the interlocutor's sincerity in doubt. For Kelly, Wallace nonetheless values 'love, trust, faith and responsibility' (2010a: 139) – traits that traditionally require the transparency of intent – and he approaches them 'through the frame of paradox' (2010a: 139). Indeed, because of language's performativity, sincerity cannot 'finally lie in representation' (2010a: 143), but must break with it. Beyond language's indeterminate performativity (i.e. the fact that language produces, rather than merely expresses, what it describes), the reader must make a decision to trust the sincerity of Wallace's characters and narrators. For Kelly, this is the impossible gift that Wallace's fiction offers us. Commenting on the final lines of 'Octet' – 'so decide' – for example, he argues that 'even though this phrase is directed, diary-like, at the writer's self, it can only be answered by the reader, the text's true other' (2010a: 145). The postulated reader of such New Sincerity texts, aware that intent is unknowable because of irony's critique of the depth-model human subject and of representation itself, makes decisions based on their faith in the text's sincerity – which she can ultimately never know – and its affective injunction.

Underpinning this reading is Kelly's distinction between, on the one hand, a pop culture irony that alienates the subject and, on the other hand, a literary irony that takes the death of the subject as a given. Kelly associates pop culture irony particularly with advertising, which despite its self-reflexivity, still appeals to the agency of an intentional subject. Indeed, he argues that Wallace, apparently with Derrida, believes that 'the twin problems of narcissism and communicative uncertainty' (2010a: 136) in contemporary U.S. culture 'had to do with an obsession with univocal meaning, which still framed understanding even in a supposed age of irony' (2010a: 137). Nonetheless, advertising's use of irony can also potentially deconstruct its same appeal to intentional, univocal meaning. In fact, Wallace's New Sincerity is so innovative for Kelly precisely because it acknowledges that 'the effect advertising had of highlighting the complexity and impurity of all discourse could only be responded to by acknowledging one's own implication within this "system of general writing"' (2010a: 137). If ironic advertising appeals to, and so confirms, an intentional subject, then its own ironic discourse is such that it also becomes 'impossible to separate in an absolute manner those communications genuinely directed toward the benefit of the receiver from those that serve primarily to draw attention to the sender' (2010a: 137). The subject that is reinforced, then, is also compromised. The pure presence of an intentional subject cannot be recovered, because ironic advertising, despite itself, teaches us how communication always already signals the other's influence on the self's intent to communicate.

Furthermore, if ironic advertising can reveal the impossibility of pure intent, it can also reveal the sign's iterability: in other words, the fact that a sign can be 'quoted' from one context to another and continue to be intelligible. This iterability is thus the condition of possibility for the intention-less general writing that, for Kelly, Wallace's literary New Sincerity embraces. Ironic advertising, obsessed as it is with univocal meaning despite its use of irony, is tethered to a metaphysics of presence. Indeed, advertising inculcates an identity of affectless knowingness – what *Infinite Jest* calls 'masks of ennui and jaded irony' (1997: 694) – wherein subjects veil their intent through a reflexive self-awareness of intention. This identity, insofar as it derives from an awareness of how the context of advertising contaminates a

sign's sincerity, must also entail an awareness of how context determines a sign's meaning more generally. This in turn suggests the subject's awareness of the sign's general iterability, and so of how its meaning can only work *independently* of intent. Wallace's New Sincerity offers a way out of affectless knowingness, then, by extending this logic; we must use our awareness of a sign's general iterability in order to break out of the metaphysics of intentional subjectivity that underpins our affectless, ironic posing. In doing so, we can realize the impossibility of ever finally determining whether someone intends to be sincere or ironic – it is undecidable. What Kelly believes is Wallace's work's 'epistemological humility' (2010a: 143) thus opens a space of possibility for affect – we cannot *know* if his fiction's characters and narrators are being sincere, but we can decide to trust that they are, and so *feel* in relation to them – thus replacing the affectlessness of *knowing* they are being ironic.

To summarise: Kelly suggests we can only meet the undecidable question of whether someone intends to be sincere or ironic by acknowledging our implication in general writing. Our implication in this general writing transcends intention, which means we have to decide to believe in the other's sincerity. Such implication in a general writing, moreover, provides the basis of New Sincerity's appeal. In line with Giles's reading of Wallace's work as taking 'the psychological fragmentation endemic to posthumanist cultural landscapes as a *fait accompli*' (2007: 330), Kelly argues that Wallace proceeds from the acknowledgment that surface/depth models of subjectivity have been 'superseded by the privilege afforded to the inaugurating powers of capital, technology, culture, and especially language' (2010a: 133). For Kelly, the task that Wallace's fiction poses is to meet these post-human circumstances by relinquishing the intentional subject, and embracing instead a subject-less textuality in which we can rehabilitate affect through an undecidable decision. Indeed, Kelly argues that 'the novel – with its dialogic form and more complex relationship to ironic statement' (2014a: para. 11) is most suited to engendering the undecidability central to New Sincerity. This is because in Wallace's fiction 'literary language and irony are more clearly environments rather than tools' (2014b: en20). Literary language is an 'environment' that exceeds the boundaries of intent. As a result, it is here that Wallace's fiction creates those moments of ethical undecidability that, by compelling readers to decide, apparently allows for a New Sincerity to arise.



In its theoretical verve, Kelly's argument is compelling, and it remains useful in its attempt to explicate Wallace's main concerns – with irony, sincerity, affect, performativity, and so on. However, if we look more closely, his formulation of Wallace's New Sincerity rests on some rather questionable assumptions. Firstly, Kelly's reading is premised on an unexamined binary of sincere affect versus affectless irony. As David P. Rando convincingly argues, affectless irony in Wallace's work can in fact 'be described as a *product* of emotion, specifically the emotions of anxiety or fear about emotional vulnerability itself' (2013: 576). Therefore, to 'the extent that Wallace formulates irony as a product of anxiety or fear, there is indeed something rather melodramatic about irony' (2013: 576). In other words, affectlessness is always-already an affect, which means that 'sentiment and melodrama cannot be constructed as binary alternatives to cool irony' (2013: 576). If affectless irony is itself an affective response, then it is questionable to read Wallace's fiction, as Kelly does, as regenerating sincere affect in the face of unemotional affectlessness. To do so reaffirms a reading that, in Rando's words, 'Wallace himself helped to originate and his critics often reproduce' (2013: 575), namely, that his work can help resuscitate sincere sentiment in opposition to the anti-sentimental, ironic knowingness that apparently pervades contemporary popular culture.

Indeed, when we consider how the irony Kelly misreads as affectless is also an irony that he associates with popular culture, we can start to unravel the cultural elitism that motivates New Sincerity. In the same endnote in which Kelly distinguishes between literary language/irony as environment and tool, he proffers that '[t]he most fundamental question for Wallace the writer (as opposed, perhaps, to Wallace the cultural commentator) is not what intentional stance we take – to believe or not to believe, to be naïve or to be cynical – but how language works and what it enables us to do' (2014b: en20). Wallace the fiction writer works within a textual environment that 'displaces metaphysics' (2010a: 146). As a cultural commentator (a journalist, essayist, orator, etc.), by contrast, he uses language as a 'tool' that is expressive of an intentional subject. As a result, the texts he produces as a cultural commentator cannot create the undecidable performative maneuvers needed for New Sincerity. This is because these texts are apparently bound up with a concern for univocal

meaning.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, this attempt to distinguish between Wallace the writer and commentator on account of different types of language is inconsistent with his use of Derrida's notion of general writing. To arrive at the conclusion that Wallace's *New Sincerity* evinces 'the special characteristics (...) [of] literary fiction' (2016: 198) in ways that his non-fiction cannot, and to do so by applying Derrida's ideas concerning how the 'expansion of a general writing' (1988: 20) questions notions of authorial intention, Kelly has to tame the implications that Derrida's work has for the formal boundaries he seeks to uphold.<sup>5</sup> What makes writing *general* for Derrida is the sign's iterability outside of any delimited context: 'by virtue of its essential iterability, a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning (...) No context can entirely enclose it' (1988: 9). By pointing to Wallace's fiction as more conducive to eliciting performative moments of undecidable intention than his non-fiction, Kelly straightjackets the sign's iterability as only applicable to literature.

Indeed, Kelly downplays the importance of Wallace's non-fiction while, contradictorily, resorting to the author's essays, journalism, and interviews to legitimate his

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly claims elsewhere that 'Wallace's non-fiction need not simply be read in the shadow of his fiction' (2010b: para. 19). This clashes with his insistence that 'it is to Wallace's fiction—where literary language and irony are more clearly environments rather than tools—that we should look to understand his moment in the dialectic of sincerity' (2014b: en20) If only 'literary' language can instantiate the subject-less realm of undecidability, and so the possibility of sincere affect, Kelly's claim that we need not subordinate Wallace's non-fiction is contradictory. Indeed, in 'Up, Simba', Wallace constructs the question of John McCain's sincerity as undecidable, concluding that '[s]alesman or leader or neither or both, the final paradox (...) is that whether he's truly "for real" depends less on what is in his heart than on what might be in yours' (2005: 234). This suggests that in Wallace's writing, the undecidability that is central to *New Sincerity* is not limited to his fiction.

<sup>5</sup> Tellingly, Kelly misquotes Derrida here. The latter's suggestion that 'we are witnessing (...) the increasingly powerful historical expansion of a general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc., would be only an effect, and should be analyzed as such' (1988: 20), appears in Kelly's piece as 'the increasingly powerful historical expansion of a *system of* general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth etc., would be only be an effect, and should be analyzed as such' (2010a: 137, emphasis added). Kelly's addition of 'system of' before 'general writing' suggests how *New Sincerity* depends upon such general writing remaining bounded within a literary-novelistic system; a dependence that undercuts Derrida's point that no 'system' can or does govern the iterability of general writing. That Kelly reproduces this misquote in a truncated form as "system of general writing" (2010a: 137) later on in the same paragraph suggests that it is an authorial mistake, not an editorial one.

reading. He shores up the idea that Wallace's fiction demonstrates the desire to renew sincere affect through constant references to his – to use Kelly's phrase – cultural commentary. For example, to substantiate his assertion that Wallace's work is 'a response to the contemporary prevalence of irony in American literature and culture' (2010a: 133), Kelly draws on Wallace's comments in several interviews, as well as the essays 'Joseph Frank's Dostoevsky' and 'Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young' (2010a: 133–134). In this regard he accepts Wallace's comments about what he intended for his fiction to, paradoxically, exalt the undecidability of intention as his fiction's entryway into New Sincerity. To follow Kelly and argue that 'the advantage of the novel over the essay form' (2014a: 12) means that Wallace's fiction is more suited to engendering the undecidability central to New Sincerity denies the general textuality that, by necessity, extends to other forms of writing. This contradiction suggests how Kelly's reading seeks to institute limits – on the sign's iterability, and on what type of language counts as 'literary' – to create the parameters that will validate his own formalistic approach. As he asserts in a more recent overview of Wallace scholarship, 'limits, after all, can be animating and enabling: this is surely one of the primary insights offered by *Infinite Jest*' (2015: 59–60). The limits that Kelly imposes may animate and enable his own formalism, but they shut down readings less enamoured with Wallace's apparent aesthetic innovation, and more sceptical of his affective proscriptions.

For proscriptions they certainly are, and Kelly's reading replicates them. In fact, if the 'epistemological humility' (2010a: 143) of Wallace's texts aims to generate a decision in favour of New Sincerity, then it is not undecidable. In other words, to the extent that Kelly's reading arises from the need to theoretically explicate Wallace's endeavour to facilitate sincere affect, then it logically precludes deciding against this very same sincere affect. We can see Kelly attempt to pass off this predetermined (i.e. always-already stacked in favour of theoretically legitimating Wallace's attempt to facilitate sincere affect) decision as *undecidable* in the following: 'true sincerity, if there is ever such a thing, must take place in the aporia between the conditional and the unconditional. Or in Wallace's terms, sincerity *must* involve "intent" but *cannot* involve "motive"' (2010a: 140, emphasis added). Kelly tries to map the impossibility

of deciding between a conditional and unconditional gift onto the impossibility of deciding if sincerity is finally driven by intent (an unconditional, selfless communication) or driven by motive (a conditional communication that involves some element of self-interest). In the resulting undecidable aporia, true sincerity, like the true gift, is 'impossible to finally ascertain' (2010a: 140). It follows that we remain powerless to decide between intent and motive. However, Kelly's simultaneous assertion that (new) 'sincerity must involve "intent" but cannot involve "motive"' suggests the very opposite. If we wish to support (as Kelly assumes we do) Wallace's attempt to facilitate sincere affect for readers, we *must* allow for intent, but we *cannot* allow for motive. What is apparently undecidable in Kelly's theorization of New Sincerity not only turns out to be already decided and calculated, then, but also overdetermined by value judgements he takes unquestioningly from Wallace's melodramatic binary of a much needed sincere affect versus a toxically ironic affectlessness.<sup>6</sup>

As we have argued, Kelly's New Sincerity draws on Derridean iterability only to tame its implications. Moreover, his reading elucidates an element of Wallace's fiction wherein a seemingly undecidable moment is in fact highly determined and already calculated. We now turn to an examination of masculinity and whiteness in *Infinite Jest* to show how the premise of a universal affectlessness in need of curing – the premise from which New Sincerity proceeds – is in fact coded as white and male. Indeed, not only does the affectless white masculinity that *Infinite Jest* documents form the basis of its appeal to a universal human suffering, but its proposed mode for countering such – Alcoholics Anonymous – is geared towards white men. As

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<sup>6</sup> Lee Konstantinou reaches a similar conclusion when discussing the 'postironic belief' (2016: 175) he sees at work in Wallace's texts: 'The battle between inner and outer motivation, which dialectically resolves itself in the form of New Sincerity, can arrive only after a prior struggle, the struggle to achieve postironic belief. If they did not believe in the actuality of other persons, Newly Sincere writers would not feel much need to lash together inner intentions and outer performances in the first place, let alone ask readers to trust in them. Postironic belief *must precede* the ethics of New Sincerity' (2016: 175, emphasis added). This is not the place to discuss how Konstantinou theorizes 'postironic belief'. What is significant for our purposes, however, is his acknowledgment that Kelly's New Sincerity rests upon a preceding value judgement about the need 'to believe in the actuality of other persons'. Though Konstantinou does not say as much, this shows how a pre-calculated ethical goal always already informs New Sincerity, thus undercutting its apparent undecidability.

such, if it is only white male subjects who suffer from this affectlessness in *Infinite Jest*, it is also only they who can 'recover' from it. In fact, if the novel retains AA's emphasis on white masculinity by passing it off as applicable to everybody, it does so by forcing its black and female characters to disavow their experiences as marginal subjects. Not only is AA's new sincerity a white male concern, then, it is also a reactionary attempt to shore up the experiences of whiteness and masculinity at the expense of the novel's black and female characters.

### ***Infinite Jest's White Guys***

In order to understand how *Infinite Jest's* supposed New Sincerity re-constitutes a white male liberal humanist subject, we draw on Denise Ferreira da Silva's *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007). In this book, da Silva argues that modernity marks the transition from a 'natural' world governed by a divine ruler to a 'natural' world governed by reason. The self-determined and agential subject of modernity is intimate with this reason; it alone can reveal its workings (2007: 49–50, 58). Such intimacy is premised on this subject not being an 'affectable thing'; it is a mind, not a body, and in being so, it is not vulnerable to determination by the very reason whose operations it reveals (2007: xiii, 31, 60).<sup>7</sup> Significantly, this subject secures itself through its contrast to other gendered and racialised bodies that *are* affectable by exterior influences. As da Silva puts it, because

post-Enlightenment European (white) bodies (...) are not submitted to the regulative and productive force of [the] universe, the science of the mind produces bodies and social configurations as signifiers (...) of two kinds of minds, namely, (a) the *transparent I*, (...) the kind of mind that is able to know, emulate, and control powers of universal reason, and (b) the *affectable "I,"* the one that emerged in other global regions, the kind of mind subjected

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<sup>7</sup> da Silva uses affect in a different manner to its earlier deployment in our analysis of New Sincerity. In that context, affect referred to the intersubjective experience of feelings and emotions. In the context of Silva's work, it refers to one's (racially inscribed) propensity toward being affected by exterior influence.

to both the exterior determination of the “laws of nature” and the superior force of European minds

(2007: 117).<sup>8</sup>

Through this process, white masculinity comes to ‘signify the transparent I’ (2007: 8), and blackness and femininity ‘to signify otherwise’ (2007: 8). As da Silva puts it, ‘the gendered/racialised subject emerges (...) in her double affectability’ (2007: 247), which white masculinity must violently abject in order to maintain its status as a transparent I. The processes da Silva outlines here offer a way of understanding the reactionary racial and gender dynamics that are constitutive of *Infinite Jest*’s New Sincerity, and indeed its endeavor to ameliorate an ostensibly general experience of affectlessness.

If we turn to Hal Incandenza, who in Heather Houser’s words ‘is the characterological center for the novel’s critique of detachment’ (2014: 125), we can see how this detachment relates to his sense of embodied affectability. During the Eschaton debacle, Hal experiences whilst high a ‘completely and uncomfortably bizarre’ (342) moment when he feels ‘at his own face to see whether he is wincing’ (342). His bizarre detachment here is from his body; in fact, his resulting discomfort suggests the repressed knowledge of embodiment. For Hal, this moment is revelatory of the fact that his marijuana addiction, and the detachment that it helps to facilitate, allows him to regain a sense of selfhood distinct from his corporeal existence. As Hayes-Brady notes in a point that pertains to David Cusk’s attacks of public sweating in *The Pale King* (2011), but which she frames as having broader relevance to Wallace’s writing of gender, his work’s ‘masculine subject is problematized by the awareness of the possibility that it may not *only* be a subject’ (2015: 74). In this light, the ‘male lovelessness’ (2013: 579) that David P. Rando suggests Wallace’s work is consistently

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<sup>8</sup> Though this particular quote pertains to Europe, Silva later remarks that ‘[w]ithout the white body, the writers of the U.S. nation would not be able to resolve the distance that threatens to locate it in *affectability* (...) racial difference (...) has produced the U.S. American as a European being’ (2007: 199–200). As this demonstrates, Silva understands her analysis as equally applicable to an American context.

'invested in diagnosing' (2013: 579) – and which for him is 'most memorably' (2013: 575) displayed by Hal – helps to placate Wallace's male characters' anxiety of being objects as well as subjects, and thus of being susceptible to forces outside of their own determination. This desire for detachment sends the novel's white male characters into self-reflexive spirals, which aim to recover the subject that is not affectable – the subject that can determine itself. In Nicoline Timmer's words, Hal and male characters like him are 'continually reflecting on their own self, but there *is* no self, fixated in a mind, as a stable object of reflection – and the reflection on the self therefore results in an infinite regress, causing what could be called an *existential implosion*' (2010: 43). In *Infinite Jest*, the loss of a self 'fixated in a mind' (Timmer, 2010: 43) inaugurates an attempt to regain a self through continual reflections on one's own (non-existent) self. Accepting this loss forms the basis of AA's recovery process, and indeed the New Sincerity that Kelly believes it generates. That this loss is overwhelmingly experienced by *Infinite Jest*'s white men, however, suggests that AA is geared specifically towards alleviating an ailment Wallace codes as white and male. In fact, for subjects outside of these categories to benefit from AA, they must disavow how US society positions them as affectable I's; i.e. as subjects susceptible to exterior determination.

This disavowal must occur because the only story about addiction that the novel's AA scenes legitimate is that of addiction to a form of detachment, which is itself an attempt to regain the unaffected status of being a self-determined subject. Indeed, one of AA's slogans is 'My Best Thinking Got Me Here' (1026, en135). However, though AA is seemingly premised on accepting the impossibility of recovering the self-determining subject, this acceptance actually allows for its reimagining along nominally 'post-human' lines. AA allows the white people – and particularly the novel's white men – who attend to become more than their bodies; indeed, more than beings who are affected by that which is exterior to them, in the sense that it liberates them from their pathologised desire to (re)-attain a stable sense of self, and thus from the lovelessness that arises from the horror of their affectability. This recovery occurs in the realm of the (ostensibly) undecidable. This is made apparent both in the 'Blind Faith' (351) that sponsorship in AA requires, as well as in the

decision to commit to a program that one does not understand, and whose outcomes one cannot calculate in advance. As is explained in the introduction to Don Gately's recovery, 'the folks with serious time in AA are infuriating about questions starting with How. You ask the scary old guys How AA Works and they smile their chilly smiles and say Just Fine. It just works, is all' (349–350).

Kelly portrays this 'Blind Faith' as a decisive, incalculable act of faith in the undecidable. In a generous reading of Wallace's supposed New Sincerity, this is what AA's addicts do; they place trust in an institution whose benefits are incalculable. Yet, if this is the case, such incalculability only leads to calculation – and so a reinstated, self-determining subject who *can* decide – as evinced in how one speaker has 'been in (...) seven months, he says' (707), or the '90-day chip' (274) addicts receive. Indeed, this supposed act of initial incalculable Blind Faith in AA, to the extent that Kelly's New Sincerity frames it as a *preferable* choice, is in fact calculable from the very beginning, and thus *not* undecidable. Put differently, one may not know if AA will help cure their addiction, and one may (like Geoffrey Day) even be hostile to its dictates, but the very act of joining – insofar as it presupposes *some* awareness of AA's reason for existence – implies an awareness of its intentions towards oneself, whether one chooses to embrace or reject said intentions. As such, Blind Faith, based as it is in a value judgement concerning the best course of action (sincere affect *over* affectless irony), *must* contain some element of calculable return. As we discuss below, this very desire for sincere affect, in order to escape from the apparent alienation of affectless irony, is particular to white masculinity in the novel.

To quote endnote 281, which appends Hal's reflections on the 'empty mask, anhedonia' (695), Hal's feeling that he misses someone he has never met would make no sense 'without the universalizing abstraction' (1053, en281). What the novel, through Hal, universally abstracts here is the anomic dislocation of a generation apparently suffering from postmodern irony's hollowing out of a 'hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need' (695), and a desire to access this impossible 'internal self' nonetheless. Given Rando's intervention, we would do well to read Hal's paradigmatic lovelessness as being bound up with the novel's depiction of masculinity. Doing so allows us to question the novel's positing a gendered



affectlessness or lovelessness as universal, and to ask how characters who are not male experience this supposedly general suffering. It is the recovering addict Gately, and the AA system that he exemplifies, that *Infinite Jest* presents as a possible solution. As Elizabeth Freudenthal puts it, 'Gately is a hero, at least in part, because of how seriously he takes AA's prescriptions' (2010: 205), and in the context of the novel, 'everyone would do well to act like Don Gately' (2010: 191). For everyone to act like Don Gately would mean that everyone find solace in AA, an institution whose tenets, it logically follows, are applicable to all.

This is certainly the case in Kelly's reading, as 'success in the AA recovery program means finding a way to speak sincerely using a formula that possesses no originality as an emanation from the self' (2014b: para. 17). In fact, for Kelly 'the reader is made to participate in this process' (2014b: para. 18) of formulaic sincerity, as evidenced by the maxims which end a passage detailing 'exotic new facts' (Wallace, 1997: 200) for AA newcomers. He quotes several of these maxims, including, for instance, 'that there might not be angels, but there are people who might as well be angels' (205), as appealing directly to readers. For these to stand as impersonal facts that do not emanate from the self, though, we have to ignore the preceding statements that set them up. These include the less homiletic observations that 'black penises tend to be the same general size as white penises' (200), 'that, *pace* macho bullshit, public male weeping is not only plenty masculine but can actually feel *good* (reportedly)' (201), and 'that females are capable of being just as vulgar about sexual and eliminatory functions as males' (201). These maxims imply a white male subject, and one whose ignorance and reserve Wallace presents as regrettable traits we must look beyond if we are to access those other statements that, in Kelly's words, 'deal with things that have an aura of importance' (2014b: para. 19). Inversely then, maxims detailing the subject's surprise at black men's penis size, and so on, lack importance; they are personal tics that we need to acknowledge but ignore if we wish to benefit from AA's ability to rehabilitate sincere affect.

In fact, if we consider that it is Gately who is shocked at women excreting (594), holds 'unfortunately' (1026, en 141) racist views, and wants to 'cry and hit somebody' (445) after one particular AA commitment, then we have a strong case for aligning

the above maxims with him. His compassionate yet gruffly masculine working-class persona indeed characterizes *Infinite Jest's* depiction of AA more generally. As 'one of the unfortunate low points of this otherwise breathtaking novel' (2010: 210, en22), Freudenthal admits that 'Gately's heroic qualities are buttressed, if not caused by, his being a high-school dropout, a victim of alcoholic domestic violence and neglect, by his silent and muscular stoicism', and various other class and gender stereotypes (2010: 210, en22). Freudenthal's suggestion that Gately's gentle-giant persona as the emblem of AA not only buttresses his heroism, but causes it, implies that we should question the idea that AA's efficacy derives from its creation of an identity-less space. After all, it is on the seat of the 'men's room commode' (374) that 'some ironist who decamped back Out There' (374) carved AA's 'real Prime Directive' (374): 'Do not ask WHY/If you dont want to DIE/Do like your TOLD/If you want to get OLD' (375). That the novel appends this message with '*Sic*' (1026, en143) does not undermine its content as much as apologize for its poor expression. Similarly, that it takes an ironist – a 'witch in church' (369) at AA – to state this 'root axiom' (374) does little to attenuate its force.<sup>9</sup> With the same 'it's all optional; do it or die' (357) ethos that the narrator expounds, this Directive reiterates how success in AA entails a willingness to submit to harsh paternal discipline; a discipline, moreover, whose masculine constitution the novel broadcasts in order to exonerate.

The Directive is all the more powerful by virtue of appearing at the end of one AA speaker's 'head-clutchingly prolix' (370) tale, 'a stripper and semi-whore' (370) who 'has not yet learned to Keep it Simple' (370). The speaker relates how, as a young girl, she pretended to sleep as her foster father raped her paraplegic stepsister, whom he forces to wear a Raquel Welch mask as he does. She would then attend to her stepsister afterwards in order to keep the abuse secret, until one night she discovers that the sister has enjoyed being raped with 'a carnal bliss' (373). The AA

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<sup>9</sup> That this message appears on a toilet seat may suggest it is synonymous with waste, and thus should not be given credence. An important distinction remains though; rather than written in excrement, this directive is written on an apparatus for its removal. As such, it amounts to potty-training, a firm paternal injunction to responsible waste management in keeping with *Infinite Jest's* general suggestion that addicts, whether to drugs or entertainment, lack discipline.

audience are distressed, but not by the tale's content: plenty of them 'had personal childhoods that made this girl's look like a day at Six Flags Over the Poconos' (374). In fact, her 'self-pity [is] less offensive (...) than the subcurrent of explanation, an appeal to exterior *Cause* that can slide, in the addictive mind, so insidiously into *Excuse*' (374); indeed 'causal attribution is in Boston AA feared' (374). The woman fails to relinquish her experience of abuse in a patriarchal society, and insists instead that it has helped to cause her addictions. She thus excuses herself from a personal responsibility that AA demands of addicts. Taking such responsibility, and by doing so effacing her own subjective experiences of addiction, is necessary if she is to benefit from the formulas that fuel AA as an institutional engine for New Sincerity. However, given that the novel presents AA's formulas as emanating from a white male perspective (whether explicitly with the Prime Directive, or surreptitiously with racist and sexist maxims that we must acknowledge but then forget) closely associated with Gately, then effacing her experience does not entail entry into an impersonal space of recovery. Rather, it means denigrating her victimization as a frivolous self-indulgence, and in order to reaffirm a mode of recovery that, though the novel presents it as equally applicable, in fact prioritizes men as its ideal recipients and practitioners.

The novel's contempt for this female speaker is evident in the acronym of a group she is 'proud she says to be a member of', 'Wounded, Hurting, Inadequately Nurtured but Ever-Recovering Survivors' (372) – WHINERS. That this acronym, like 'O.N.A.N.' (36), exists in the novel's diegetic world – i.e. it is not wordplay indicative of the book's polyphonic voices – affirms its satirical import. The speaker's pride in seeking help is irrelevant; she is a whiner, and so we should judge her for failing to abide by the injunction against causal attribution. There is a correspondence here with Wallace's review of David Markson's novel *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (1988), 'The Empty Plenum', in which he bemoans Markson's decision to give his protagonist, Kate, a "motivation" via received feminine trauma' (2012: 108). Wallace's problem is less that Markson resorts to misogynist ideas of women, but that by giving Kate a 'feminine' back story, he undercuts her pan-human appeal; for 'to the extent that

Kate is not motivationally unique, she can be all of us' (2012: 107).<sup>10</sup> This complaint informs *Infinite Jest's* depiction of the whiner AA speaker. Her attempt to locate the 'etiological truth' (374) of her addictions in a history of abuse is unwelcome baggage in an institution that, as Kelly explains, compels one to disregard motive but embrace intent – the intention, that is, to erase one's subjective experiences and embrace intentionless, performative rituals that obliquely prioritize men. If we consider how, as Freudenthal admits, Gately's experiences as a (stereotyped) working-class man cause his addictions, as well as his heroism in trying to overcome them, we can see the double standard at work here. In contrast to Gately, the novel allows no room for the female AA speaker to postulate what factors may cause her suffering.

So, for a woman to succeed in AA, she must disavow any qualitative experiences that derive from how a patriarchal society interpellates her as a female subject. The speaker whose story appears shortly after that of the whiner exemplifies this. If the 'adopted stripper had presented herself as the object of an outside Cause' (376) – as what da Silva would describe as an affectable I – this next addict, the meeting's 'best Advanced Basics Speaker' (376) follows AA's dictate of 'Cause: no; responsibility: yes' (376). As with the whiner's tale, this speaker's story is replete with, to use Wallace's phrase, 'received feminine trauma' (2012: 108). She relates how, while pregnant, she had sex in order to pay for cocaine, smoking which causes her to give birth to a stillborn baby. Overcome with guilt, she then plunges into 'total Denial' (377), carrying the fetus around as though alive, until the smell and an 'insect-attraction problem' (378) draws the attention of social services. None of this is relevant, though, for there 'is no Cause or Excuse. It is simply what happened' (378). By embracing 'the responsible truth' (378) of her culpability, she succeeds where the whiner fails; 'all defenses have been burned away' (378), and so too have the specificities of her experience as a sex worker and cocaine addict. Losing such specificities does not matter, however, because 'it was basically the same all over, after all, Out There' (379). Focusing on the differential experience of addiction, and using said experience – as

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<sup>10</sup> For more on this, see Mary K. Holland's (2017) reading of the 'The Empty Plenum'.

the whiner does – to explain one's suffering, draws attention away from the 'binding commonality' (349) uniting AA members. This is the common detachment of addiction, a lovelessness whose apparent universality rests upon our willingness to ignore its masculine constitution.

For the novel's women to benefit from AA, then, they have to renounce any experiences specific to their position as female subjects. They must display the anonymous suffering attendant on lovelessness if they wish to find common cause with other addicts on the basis of an apparently transpersonal, genderless pain. As the examples of the 'stripper and semi-whore' (370) and the speaker who gives birth to a stillborn child suggest, the identity-specific experiences that these women must renounce relate especially to their bodily suffering. Hayes-Brady is accurate in this sense to assert that Wallace's work 'uses the body – particularly but not exclusively the female body, often in pain – to dramatize coherent alterity' (2016: 18). In the context of *Infinite Jest's* depiction of AA, these female speakers' physical pain offers an abject counterpoint to the masculine lovelessness that, in its concern with emotional sterility and the apparent ravages of ironic detachment, is notionally non-physical.

The passage where Joelle Van Dyne attends a Cocaine Addicts Anonymous meeting highlights the degree to which black characters must also disavow the markers of their affectability, in order to tell what Kelly describes as recovery's 'generic story' (2014b: para. 15). Joelle comments that CA is 'most heavily concentrated' in 'the colored part of Boston' (707). Furthermore, the speaker at the meeting confesses that he was a user of 'crank cocaine' (708) and that he lives in a housing project in Mattapan.<sup>11</sup> Taken together, these things are suggestive of racial stereotypes about

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<sup>11</sup> It may initially seem contradictory to argue that the experience of (a particular kind of) addictive detachment registers most intensely with the novel's white male characters, and that it is around their experience that AA is oriented, and then to explain its racial logics through reference to the narrative of a white *female* character in AA. However, whilst da Silva argues that 'racial difference and gender difference signify affectability', she contends that 'the female racial subaltern' must contend with a 'double affectability' (2007: 265–266). Though the white female characters of *Infinite Jest* must disavow the gendered markers of their affectability in order to embody AA's liberal humanist subject, then, they do not have to contend with racialized markers of affectability. As such, Joelle's mediation of the CA speaker's testimony is still revelatory of the racialized (and gendered) logic of AA.

drug usage and a relationship between addiction and socioeconomic inequality. The free indirect discourse of this passage thus frames the CA speaker as an affectable I. The speaker is not a self-determining subject; rather, he is *determined* by the impingement of exterior forces upon him, so that like the whiner, he is the 'object of an outside Cause' (376). This affectability is racialised, as exposure to this particular set of exterior forces is attributed to blackness. However, in the context of CA – in this apparently subject-less realm – all such markers must be disavowed.

This process of absencing is apparent in the stress that the passage places on Joelle's racist relationship to the speaker's blackness. This is emphasized through her use of a racial slur to describe the speaker and the contention that she is able to see past her prejudice. The reader is told that the speaker's story is full of 'colored idioms and (...) annoying little colored hand motions', (708) but that 'it doesn't seem like [Joelle] cares that much anymore. She can Identify' (708). Seemingly, beyond one's prejudices is identification with the universal, loveless suffering of addiction. The recurrence of the slur interrupts the interaction of the narrative voice with that of the CA speaker, such as in endnotes 293 and 294, which use the term to explain the speaker's usage of African American Vernacular English. These interruptions are attributed to Joelle, and they consistently remind the reader of the speaker's blackness, particularly in moments when he uses idioms that emphasise this. Indeed, the passage arguably never develops an extended relationship between the voice of the speaker and the narrator without an interjection from Joelle.

At every moment when the reader is reminded that the speaker is black, then, the terms of this blackness are translated from the language of the speaker into Joelle's racialized slur. Immediately following this, the narrator encourages us to forget this quality of the speaker. Joelle is 'doing (...) the best she can' (1054, en293), so her racially insensitive language is presented as something of a tic, best ignored. In other words, the reader is asked to make an effort to forget the speaker's blackness – just as Joelle is attempting to do – because it is being mediated in a way that is problematic but ostensibly well meaning. As such, it is best to bracket it out of the speaker's story, in order to continue to 'Identify' (708) with the universal truth of addiction to detachment that is the core of the AA recovery narrative. Indeed, following Joelle's

realisation that she can 'Identify', the narrator remarks that '[t]he truth has a kind of irresistible unconscious attraction at meetings no matter what the color (...) Even Denial Aisle (...) are absorbed by the colored man's story. The colored man says...' (708). Immediately following the declaration of the irrelevance of 'colour' to the 'truth' of AA, then, the racial slur is used twice in succession. This challenges the reader to perform the labour of forgetting the speaker's blackness. The speaker's blackness is never allowed to develop on its own terms; it is always translated into Joelle's lexicon, and the reader is encouraged to disregard these aspects of the speaker's testimony.

Through the CA speaker, blackness is thus presented as the signifier of a particular kind of affectability, which must be absented from his testimony in order for him to both become – and be heard as – a subject.<sup>12</sup> Like the sex worker who gives birth to a stillborn child, his affectability can feature neither in what he says, nor in what is heard of what he says. Tellingly, the speaker works for a manufacturing company called 'Universal Bleacher' (708). The proximity of this reference to Joelle's descriptions of him as 'the colored man' (708) suitably demonstrate the violent process of 'bleaching' that he must undergo in order to access the 'universal' realm of subjectivity. Indeed, near the end of his testimony, Joelle remarks that '[t]he speaker's face has lost its color, shape, everything distinctive' (710), indicating that, as with the successful female AA speaker whose 'defenses had been burned away', such a process is complete.<sup>13</sup> As if to confirm this, the CA speaker reveals moments later that

<sup>12</sup> This disavowal is not something that is demanded of the novel's white recovering addicts. The reader is not encouraged, for example, to make an effort to forget Don Gately's whiteness. Indeed, Gately's testimony to the 'Tough Shit But You Still Can't Drink Group' (Wallace, 1997: 442) is rendered sympathetically, without interruptions from the voice of other characters and/or footnotes.

<sup>13</sup> This process of assimilation via disavowal resonates with Wallace's comments in 'Authority and American Usage' about 'Standard Black English' (2005: 79). Wallace's justification for why he will not allow his students to write in this dialect is that 'if you ever want (...) arguments to get listened to and taken seriously, you're going to have to communicate them in SWE [Standard Written English], because SWE is the dialect our nation uses to talk to itself' (2005: 109). In much the same way that Wallace requires his African-American students to write in a certain manner in order to be 'listened to', *Infinite Jest* suggests that its implicitly white reader should 'listen to' its African-American characters in a way that brackets out the specificity of their vernacular. *Infinite Jest* thus contends that if African-American people will not *speak* in a particular voice, they can at least be 'listened to' in a way that omits their blackness from their speech.

'Universal Bleacher let him go' (710), which suggests that the work he had to perform for whiteness – the labour of assimilation – is complete.

It is notable that Kelly mentions this scene in his 2010a essay, in support of his New Sincerity thesis, without making any reference to its treatment of race (142, fn9). This is particularly questionable given that Kelly frames New Sincerity more generally as an ethical project. He endorses the emphasis on 'Wallace's ethical challenge' (2010b: para. 12) in the 'second wave' (2010b: para. 8) of Wallace scholarship, and as noted above, he characterizes New Sincerity as being dependent upon 'a kind of *ethical* undecidability' (2010b: para. 17, emphasis ours). For Kelly, the ethic of this undecidable moment is that, in the breaking of epistemological certainty and mastery that undecidability initiates, the reader is challenged to think about others and the vulnerabilities that they share with them. One has to ask what kind of 'ethical' project supports itself through reference to such an evidently problematic mediation of race – to ask who this 'ethics' is for and what it achieves. We have attempted to answer this by suggesting that the version of undecidability that New Sincerity deploys rehabilitates the liberal humanist subject, and thus *necessarily* operates by the same racialised and gendered logic. Kelly's omissions – of Joelle's racism, and of the racism and sexism of AA's introductory maxims – replicate the omission of signifiers of affectability that the affectable I must undertake in order to become the transparent I. Joelle's racism and AA's white male bias is absent from Kelly's references to them because markers of affectability can only be avowed as such; they cannot feature positively in the structure of the transparent I that Kelly is implicitly seeking – wittingly or otherwise – to rehabilitate.

In sum, then, the supposed New Sincerity articulated by *Infinite Jest's* AA scenes is a reactionary attempt to rehabilitate white masculinity at the direct and violent expense of those outside this category. The addiction to which AA addresses itself is addiction to a form of thinking that seeks to recover the agentic, sovereign liberal humanist subject in light of the knowledge of one's embodiment, or affectability. Such thinking is presented as undesirable because its process of reflexivity alienates the person engaged in it in affectless irony and the impossibility of sincere communication. This is a process that particularly afflicts the novel's white and male



characters – the agentic subject of liberal humanism historically being the preserve of white masculinity. The recovery of this liberal humanist subject is seemingly impossible. However, the apparently subject-less realm of AA in fact reinstates it *by stealth*. This program's ostensible dynamics of undecidability and Blind Faith depend on the already-taken decision that decentred self-reflexivity is undesirable. Rather than opening the possibility of alternative modes of association, reflexivity functions in *Infinite Jest* as a rabid and melancholic pursuit of some lost stable point. This pursuit can only be undertaken, of course, if one had access to that apparently stable transparent I in the first place. The undecidable (non-)subject of AA, then, is in fact an iteration of the deciding and calculating subject of liberal humanism, and this is reinforced by the (necessary, constitutive) exclusion of markers of affectability that is demanded of the program's adherents.

### Conclusion

Kelly's reading of Wallace's ability to renew sincere affect remains in thrall to the writer's own stated artistic aims. In particular, Kelly adheres by what has become Wallace's soapbox proclamation – in fact, 'the most famous thing [he] ever said in an interview' (2014b: para. 11) – that fiction should be about sincerely communicating what it means to be a 'fucking *human being*'. That he does so while paradoxically maligning Wallace's non-fiction for being unable to facilitate New Sincerity points to the cultural elitism motivating his project, whereby only 'literary' writing can create the necessary – and necessarily bounded – iterability required for our entry into an intentionless realm of general writing. If Kelly's New Sincerity proceeds by taming the implications of iterability, it also construes undecidability as a value judgement between good unconditional intent and bad conditional motive that, although allowing for their constitutive co-implication, precludes our ability to decide the 'bad' option *by virtue* of being a normative value judgement. Additionally, New Sincerity's undecidability is underwritten by a calculation about the value of certain affects, which works to reinstate a (white, male) sovereign decision maker who, under the guise of post-human acausality, responds to and 'solves' sincerity's undecidability through calculation.

Furthermore, Kelly's New Sincerity glorifies AA for the same reasons *Infinite Jest* does – disciplining addicts and readers into accepting their common lovelessness and, by doing so, effacing their subjective experiences in favor of an intentionless realm of undecidable (new) sincerity they can place Blind Faith in. The lovelessness *Infinite Jest* postulates as being universal, though, is in fact an anxiety, overwhelmingly coded as white and male, about the impossibility of being a transcendent, self-determined, calculating self. The irony, then, is that by installing the impossibility of (re)attaining a transcendent subjectivity – a subjectivity that constitutes itself through its distinction from black and female affectable bodies – as the *universal* ground of a post-liberal humanist subject, *Infinite Jest's* New Sincerity actually restores a white male liberal humanist subject as the locus for representative experience. Readings which continue to argue for the novel's New Sincerity, and that do so especially through recourse to its depiction of AA, should consider the violence that is central to this process, by which marginal subjects have to assimilate to its white male prescriptions in order to 'recover'. To ignore how the book's affective injunctions to (new) sincerity rely on racist and sexist forms of exclusion for their very definition is to follow in the steps that *Infinite Jest* not only sets out for us, but tries to force us to walk down; namely, towards an ethics that absents power, a sincerity that cancels critique, and a human that remains a white guy.

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