

Stage Dialectics: Performativity, Thought, and The Novel

A Senior Honors Thesis presented to The Department of English

Tufts University, Spring 2017

Daniel Weaver

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Professor John Lurz's for his advice and guidance, to Professor Lee Edelamn for critical notes, and to the intelligence of Prof. Lurz's students in James Joyce's Ulysses, who allowed me to eavesdrop on their class discussions.

Thanks to my family for their support and encouragement.

And thanks to Alex.

Stage Dialectics: Performativity, Thought, and The Novel

Notes on Citation:

Dramatic scripts are cited as follows: 1.2.13 (Act I, Scene 2, Line 13)

Ulysses is cited: 3.234-240 (Chapter 3 Lines 234-240)

Introduction: Performativity, Thought, and the Social Consciousness

Sometime between 1599 and 1602, the first performances of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* occur on the stage. For the first time, Hamlet walks before an audience and asks what it is, and whether or not to be. Three centuries later, in 1922, James Joyce publishes *Ulysses*. Stephen Dedalus lectures on Hamlet to a handful of English and Irish literary icons and a librarian in a dark and bookish corner of the National Library in Dublin. The course of *Ulysses* is, in some sense, the process of Stephen's supposed self-realization as James Joyce. The novel registers its explicit relationship to theatre, to Shakespeare, and to *Hamlet*. Joyce introduces Hamlet's obsessive preoccupation with thought from the theater onto the page, and the space of soliloquy is rendered in the modern novel as a space of psychological interiority. The theatrical performance of a troubled self-realization appears as a legible rather than visual or audible performance, with Joyce as guide and architect. In 1996, David Foster Wallace publishes *Infinite Jest*, and his novel signals its own explicit relationship to *Ulysses* and to *Hamlet*. Lexicographical prodigy Hal Incandenza appears in the text haunted by the death of his father and the quick re-marriage of his widowed mother to her half-brother. Three texts obsessed with the possibilities of self-realization choreograph a movement between thought, speech, action, and performance, which culminates almost always in ontological despair. These texts form a constellation within literature.

Whatever the form, these texts are engaged in writing theories of self that outline possible or impossible means to coherent self-hood. They engage with the performative aspects of identity in a dialectical movement between inside and outside; between the fictional dream and the materiality of stage, the page, and the body; between character and actor; and between performance and essence. Identical in their attempts to make thought visible and audible (for theatre) and legible (for the novel), they are works that probe the social possibilities of

consciousness, works in which theories of self encounter and exploit the contradictions manifest in their logic. In these texts is read the impossible attempt to realize a coherent and authoritative self. In my understanding, the reader's intuitive sense is simply that access to a character's thoughts, her interiority, should offer an authoritative sense of *who they are* – what they want and why, the constitution of their psychology and a coherent sense of self that the reader can hold up, as if in a mirror, to some version of her own. But the attempt at a harmony between inside and outside communicates a tragic failure to synthesize antithetical spaces constructed by the texts. Is one coherent and intelligible only insofar as one can disclose and perform an internal authoritative core in a movement from interior to exterior? Do speech and action follow necessarily from thought? Or, perhaps, does our performance generate the internal 'authoritative' core it is supposed to disclose?

In *Empty Houses*, David Kurnick takes Joyce's theatrical failures as the point of departure for exploring the enduring influence of the theatrical within the novel. He argues that the same effects which writers such as Joyce use to psychologize the novel have "a genetic relation to their failed theatrical experiments, and that these techniques thus smuggle the memory (or more properly the fantasy) of the crowded theatrical space into the psychic interior."¹ His understanding of the strange course by which interiority becomes an increasingly social matter raises questions about the relationship between the social character of theatre and, as I understand it, the social character of reading. The novel's attempt to render theatre's visual and audible performance legible in the act of reading engages Judith Butler's theory of performativity – in the more general sense of character or identity rather than gender – with Kurnick's analysis on the movement between interior and exterior in the novel. Butler, like these

¹ Kurnick, *Empty Houses*. p. 11

texts, engages the relationship between language, theater, and gender: “my theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical.”² Both theories attempt to understand the social character of supposedly asocial and private interiors: gender for Butler and consciousness for Kurnick. Both theorists utilize the language, theory, and structure of theatre. The theory articulated here is an attempt to understand how theatre and the novel engage each other to approach questions of self-hood or self-realization as a social performance.

In the first case, *Hamlet* stages a repetitive and impossible performance of the self. It is a torturous, prolonged, and impossible attempt to disclose an interior essence supposed to exist outside the process of that disclosure, which is to say an authoritative identity beyond the text’s performance of itself. The disclosure of interiority is the central task Hamlet’s puts before the reader and himself: “But I have that within which passes show / These but the trappings and suits of woe.”³ That interior essence, immanent and unavoidable within the logic of soliloquy, gestures to a coherent and intelligible self the text never discloses. Instead we see a Hamlet moved by passion and enmeshed in a recurring cycle of disappointment within which he fails again and again to realize himself through a movement from inside to out, from thought to speech to action. For students of literature and readers well-trained to anticipate and desire the disclosure of an internal core – which might in turn deliver the possibility of their own unity – the difficult and opaque process of disclosure reproduces the problem of reading in general in the course of an attempt to read Hamlet’s turbulent psychology. In the meantime, *Hamlet’s* circumlocutions continue unabated on the questions of self and means to self-hood. The circular

² Butler, *Gender Trouble*. Preface, xxvi.

³ 1.2.88-89

movement of the text as it refers the reader back to its beginning and back to the stage traces the oscillating dialectic between inside and out. Ultimately, this circular movement back to the first act does not close the question of interiority, but merely continues the text's performance.

The maddeningly iterative *Hamlet* reveals the coherent and intelligible self as only a fantasy object constructed by the anticipation and desire central to reading. Hamlet becomes a shadow of a point where a converging network of antithetical selves collide. He exists in dissonant opposition to himself – simultaneously pained by the death of a father and racked by an impulse for revenge; unsure of his own sanity or capability to perceive theatrical reality; uncertain of a desire to live; and questioning his status as merely an actor trapped within a staged fiction – a multivalent Hamlet proliferates relentlessly. The course of Hamlet's soliloquies represents the content of thought, but not an internal core or authoritative and coherent psychology. Instead, they structure the space of interiority which both produces and undermines the supposed authority of consciousness as a site of meaning and characterological truth.

The rendering of consciousness in *Ulysses* reproduces the logic of soliloquy in the novel. *Ulysses'* great innovation is not the presentation of a supposedly asocial and private consciousness, but the socialization of that consciousness. Libraries of texts which have evaded to the greatest extent possible the reproduction of this movement between internal and external have always relied most on the authority of the interior consciousness to produce coherent character even as they attempt to push the space of consciousness off the stage. While it may be emphatically declared that *Ulysses'*s status as a psychological novel has contributed to the ennui rampant in a mass already collectively deceived by individualism, the social character of consciousness, to the contrary, recognizes the most psychological of novels as at the same time the most social.

The reproduction of a logic of soliloquy in *Ulysses* exposes the text to the contradictions inherent in the logics of interior which the text has articulated and undermined. Joyce's submersion into the theatrical space of the mind winds up running aground in Circe: as the text plumbs the depths of interiority it finds itself resorting to an imported theatrical space, exactly as Kurnick theorizes. Pushed to its extremes, writing consciousness must undermine the authority of interiority it initially reinforces. The theatrical space of the mind becomes the most social of spaces, and the shared theatricality of interior and exterior enables the constant movement between the two.

But *Infinite Jest* indicates a departure from the earlier texts. Where *Ulysses* and *Hamlet* map movement between interior and exterior to trouble and critique consciousness as an authoritative zone of meaning, *Infinite Jest* crystallizes, freezes this movement. As part of the text's general immobility, the novel's stage expands infinitely. It encompasses not the dialectical movement between inside and outside but, instead, never fully establishes the stage on which that movement might occur. Hal Incandenza's inability to make himself understood communicates a sense of the difficult or impossible process of self-disclosure, but the text closes the question at the outset of the first chapter. In place of that movement, the whole of the text submits a didactic truth of self-hood which bends self-incoherence into the aspect of coherence. For *Infinite Jest*, the self is understood, coherent, and legible not only in, but by its incoherency. Hal Incandenza cannot make himself understood, nor does the course of the text narrate his attempt. In *Infinite Jest* interiority finally becomes a carceral and authoritative zone of meaning. Consciousness is not defined by its slippery and intimate interaction with the outside, but by the supposed impossibility of reaching beyond itself. It is an immobile text full of immobilized characters, a still-born tragedy with the aspect of a comedy. *Hamlet's* tragic movement is absent

and *Ulysses* interior depth is fully collapsed, but the text remains focused on self-hood in its own way.

A common reading of these texts – which carries with it substantial critique and often derision – is that their self-indulgent and so essentially selfish obsession with consciousness and the inside cannot but imply an author equally self-indulgent and self-directed. This isn't necessarily untrue. Even if *Hamlet's* status as a play and theatre's obviously social character have excused it somewhat from this sort of criticism, the text's obsession with one's own thoughts remains. For David Foster Wallace, James Joyce, and for Shakespeare these characterizations of the text may very well hold true for the author, but criticism of the text is not limited by the intent or supposed indulgence of the writers whose texts it takes as objects of critical study. However self-indulgent and selfishly obsessed with consciousness these texts may be, that selfish indulgence and obsession can tell us much about the society in which it existed, about our own society, and about the consciousness – our shared cultural and social consciousness – which created it. These texts can tell us about the social conditions in which we come to think about interior life as a prison, as the locus of our supposed individuality, or as the location in which we are known only to ourselves if we can be known to ourselves at all. I have argued that *Ulysses'* status as a psychological novel entails its status as a social novel, and it does. But to a certain extent every novel must be psychological to the extent that it engages character, and every play's performance must be concerned with communicating “that within which passes show.” If for no other reason, this omnipresent psychological character demands an understanding of the ways in which interiority engages, or claims not to engage, the social conditions of performance in and beyond literature.

One: Hypocrisy of Tongue and Soul, or the Performative Antics of Soliloquy

Who's there? – Barnardo, Act I Scene I

To pursue a reading of *Hamlet* without consideration of the play's infamous question – to be or not to be? – might strike the reader as an attempt to deliberately side-step the work's most pressing issue, or a critique ignorant of Hamlet's consideration on being itself. But the questions the play asks of reading and of theatre, and only by extension of the individual, provoke both a more interesting and more pressing meditation. *Hamlet* considers a certain means to selfhood – indeed its possibility – not whether to be, nor whether to face existence in its iniquities and its “sea of troubles,” but rather whom to be, or how?⁴ Who, actually, is there?

The play's consideration of the status of self-hood takes the form of a continuously frustrated cycle of self-disclosure, which occurs both within a constructed space of interiority and without, and compulsively attempts an impossible closure of the gap between the performances of multiple selves on and beyond the stage. Hamlet and *Hamlet* possess a paralyzing self-consciousness, where Hamlet's feverish awareness of his status as a performer and the play's awareness of its status as a play trouble the pursuit of an authoritative self with which Hamlet, the reader, and reading in general are always obsessed. The performance of the ideal image of oneself – the realization of vengeance, to seal a whisper of fragile thought with action – is only the play's entrance into far more destabilizing territory, a dialectic governing movement between interior and exterior. The course of *Hamlet's* seven soliloquies constructs a space of interiority that humors a reader's sense of privileged vision, of access to an authoritative self through the supposedly private domain of thought. Hamlet's musings in the space of mere

⁴ 3.1.67

thought constitute a performance, the space of interiority an illusion that nonetheless identifies explicitly both the relationship between the reader and the text, through isolation and direct address, and a dialectic between antithetical poles: ‘unacted’ speech, i.e. thought, and action or deed. Stage dialectics – the movement between interior and exterior – in *Hamlet* takes the form of performative thought. A division between speech-as-thought and deed-as-action is established as the play’s logic, even if it is eventually critiqued. If the gap between ‘unacted’ speech and action, a gap also between two images of the self, is performed as the central preoccupation of the play, in the fifth act *Hamlet* reverses the question, and the text seems to grasp the impossibility of the self. It is then not to wonder whether mere thought can serve as means to selfhood (implicit, always, is thought’s insufficiency) but to wonder whether action – or mere action – can perform the self without an audience?

Hamlet read as a meditation on speech and action as means to selfhood can testify only to their inevitable failure. A logic of soliloquy suggests consciousness as a zone of meaning, represented by thought, in which resides an internal authoritative core. At first, it appears that self-realization can occur in a movement from interior to exterior, but the text troubles this logic. The play appears instead as a violent display of the inability to perform any one iteration, a collision of multiplying selves realized only in passing moments but always troubled by the existence of another; Hamlet and the audience, Hamlet and himself, Hamlet and Gertrude, each Hamlet exists amidst an endlessly reproducing network of relationships in which it is impossible to read *the* Hamlet. Interior consciousness loses its authority. All that is left, perhaps, is a relentless succession of performances.

To locate the site of this collision within the text is impossible, but it seems clearest, which is to say most destabilizing, at the moment of the Players’ arrival in Elsinore in Act II. To

frame a performance within a performance is not a theatrical sleight of hand, but a violent and disorienting movement. If the duplicity of the player's performance within *Hamlet* appears at first benign, one might look to Hamlet himself. The Player's convincing portrayal of passions – grief, love and hate – absent any 'non-fictional' motive or cue for such passions, i.e. a father's murder and a mother's betrayal, is frustrating for Hamlet, we might say, because his circumstance is exactly opposite: he possesses the motive and lacks the act, or the acting. But the play is obsessively engaged with the very portrayal – the acting – of grief and passion. The player's performance is cause for reflection by Hamlet on Hamlet's status as an actor performing his 'non-fictional' grief, on a certain level, and as an actor performing Hamlet within *Hamlet*, on another. Hamlet's reflection produces an identical reflection in the audience and the reader. It is a conceptual framework within which the most sane response, if such a thing exists, is to consider Hamlet's "antic disposition" as possibly little but the "trappings and the suits of woe," which is to say that Hamlet is eventually seen only in his duplicities as the internal Hamlet disappears beneath the text.⁵ What might lie beneath trappings and suits is doubtless the question the reader well-trained in their anxious and readerly desire would ask Hamlet to disclose, and Hamlet will continue exhaustively to ask the same of himself.

Throughout the course of the first two Acts, the popular consensus on Hamlet is a diagnosis of increasingly dysfunctional insanity. With the possible exception of Marcellus and Horatio, this is true for Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius, R & G – more or less the entire court. If this consensus is not wholeheartedly shared by the reader, it is precisely because soliloquy constructs a space of interiority into which the audience has a supposedly privileged access. If one understands Hamlet, it is only through soliloquy. It should be said that

⁵ 1.2.89

understanding Hamlet by his insanity is an interpretative escape which misses the point. Hamlet cannot be understood simply to be insane, the movement between and exterior by which he performs his variegated selves matters, and how Hamlet succeeds or fails in the course of self-realization matters, too. In any case, the reader's drive to steal from the text an authoritative Hamlet, sane or not, but demonstrably one or other, is strong not just in the reader but in Hamlet himself.

The space of interiority constructed through the logic of soliloquy is the source of privileged vision which, momentarily, figures a more authoritative Hamlet than is available to the court. The social character of theatre consists in the exchange between the audience (reader) and theatre's players, and this character is manifest in moments of parabasis.⁶ At fever-pitch in Act II Scene II, *Hamlet's* explicit self-consciousness works to perform this relationship through, of course, a performance. The players are necessary insofar as they trigger by parabasis the awareness of our status as reader-audience through Hamlet's reflection on the duplicity of theatre, a reflection delivered in the form of a soliloquy that begins, as if to seal the illusion, "Now I am alone."⁷ His reading of the player's performance as "a fiction, a dream of passion" demands the reflexive substitution of Hamlet for the Player, of his (the player's) performance within the play for the performance of *Hamlet* itself.⁸ But to understand this fit of textual self-consciousness as a revelatory gesture in which *Hamlet's* Hamlet is merely and definitively an actor performing in a fictive universe is to forget the failures of self with which *Hamlet* is obsessed. Failure to perform one particular notion of himself is Hamlet's temporary

⁶ Parabasis here as Kurnick figures de Man's understanding: "a figure for the expression of textual self-consciousness." The term's theatrical origin is indicative generally of theatre's presence in the novel.

⁷ 2.2.576

⁸ 2.2.579

preoccupation as he reflects on theatre's general duplicity: the actor's performance that may "force his soul to his own conceit."⁹ Hamlet's fixation on theatre foregrounds exactly the connection between theatre and a hierarchically ordered movement from soul to conceit. That movement is a repetitive process of attempted self-disclosure proceeding from definitive interior to representative exterior, and a cycle within which Hamlet and the actor are always enmeshed. He is identified by the play as an actor; by himself as "a dull and muddy-mettled rascal;" by the reader as a Hamlet who thinks himself a "dull and muddy-mettled rascal;" by the court as insane; and on downwards in a seemingly infinite regression of uncertain identities which transgress the delimiting border of the stage.¹⁰ Hamlet is seemingly never any one of them definitively, but always in the process of becoming the next. He is always performing an interim. *Hamlet's* proliferation of selves inevitably occurs in terms of the stage, which is to say in terms of the dialectic between interior and exterior that produces it. Though this authority is reconstituted in the form of the soliloquy, the play will both perform and undermine interiority's privilege, oscillating between the two.

Figuring Hamlet as authoritative within these performative and self-conscious soliloquies reinforces in the reader the sense of privileged perspective supposed to be a reader's inalienable right, not the least because of its utility in reading into existence a coherent and intelligible self. Hamlet's soliloquies flatter the reader's misguided assertion of privileged sight to the extent that they deign to address her as she sits in the theatre, likely feeling forgotten (but not slighted) despite her participation in the process of theatre and reading. This privilege, for a moment

⁹ 2.2.580; The etymology of conceit is, here, particularly fascinating and relevant, from Late Middle English meaning idea or notion, but contemporary usage as "a fanciful expression in writing or speech," "an artistic effect or device," or "excessive and pride in oneself."

¹⁰ 2.2.526

forgotten, returns as a shock to the consciousness, a social awakening which is the profit of soliloquy's parabasis-effect. The reader's instinct is to over-correct and reclaim for themselves not their delimited vision but an over-privileged vision with preferential access to the coherent and intelligible Hamlet: a Hamlet who is visible only, it is supposed, in the exclusivity of the performance of soliloquy. Thus the logic of soliloquy constructs a sense of interiority considered by the reader as authoritative.

The unauthoritative vision of the reader is unauthoritative as long as it constitutes but one of a set of relations through which characterological truth (like gender, or like a core of selfhood) is not fixed but performed as a repetitive act.¹¹ Within *Hamlet*, soliloquy makes the reader-text relation explicit. Isolated on stage, Hamlet speaks to the audience or to himself. The uncertainty of self that is the unavoidable consequence of any serious reading of *Hamlet* works, in this case, to trouble the privilege of the reader's position. The reader's sense of 'privileged' vision, whether flattered by the performance of soliloquy or not, constructs a sense of Hamlet that is not essential nor essentially interior, but particular. Hamlet is inevitably incomplete as a product willed into being from the wreckage of his tortured self-performance; movement within and across the dialectic of the stage thoroughly deconstructs him.

Though the reader-text relation is foundational and constant, and although this relation is made most explicit in the performance of soliloquy, the space of soliloquy contains, too, Hamlet's performance of himself, to himself. Shakespeare and Joyce share a reflexive troubling of fixed characterological truth, and both enact the troubled sense of self within the space of interiority, within the novel and within the theatre. David Kurnick, for his part, attributes Joyce's

¹¹ Per Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and applied expansively as a general project in identity.

“auto-critique of his tendency to fix characterological truth through the exposure of sexual secrets” to his interest in theatre.¹² Reading soliloquy as Hamlet’s authoritative disclosure of the self within the space of interiority is troubled when the space of interiority itself is psychically fragmented and Hamlet’s sense of self is as troubled within the ‘theatre of the mind’ as within the theatre itself. This uncertainty undermines both the supposed authority of interiority and, as a separate question, the reader’s access to it. “Am I a coward?” is not the question posed to the court or the villain (and, to be sure, whether the “bloody bawdy villain” of the following lines is Claudius or Hamlet himself is unclear) but posed to himself, against himself.¹³ These readings of soliloquy require an understanding that soliloquy can perform in some way an interior essence, which in this case is thought. They necessitate forgetting the participation of the reader in the text’s performance and believing, as it were, Hamlet’s insistent declaration that he is alone. The performance exists not within the soliloquy, but in the space between the audience and the stage, or between Hamlet and himself on the stage. His uncertain grasp on self, “my weakness and my melancholy,” produce a need for means to ‘externally’ corroborate Claudius’s guilt.¹⁴ That means is theatre, and a movement between exterior and interior: particularly, the Player’s performance of the *Murder of Gonzago*. Theatre as a method of interrogation constitutes “grounds more relative” than Hamlet’s experience of the theatrical reality.¹⁵ Which is to say that the supposedly externalizing power of theatre reveals the dialectical nature of performance in *Hamlet*: theater is external only against an existing space of interiority, and within *Hamlet* that space is the soliloquized representation of consciousness.

¹²David Kurnick, *Empty Houses*, p. 5

¹³ 2.2.598

¹⁴ 2.2.630

¹⁵ 2.2.632-633

Butler's argument that the social construction of gender cannot be viewed as an interior essence mirrors the status of identity and its disclosure in reading in general, and in *Hamlet* in particular. The play's non-disclosure of authoritative selves which, like gender, are thought by the reader as an interior essence, proceeds through the act of reading and particularly, but not only, in the space of soliloquy. Butler, like *Hamlet*, fixates on the ambiguous status of speech as simultaneously "word and deed."¹⁶ The play constructs a hierarchical dichotomy of thought and action transposed onto the dialectic of interior and exterior, where psychic dissonance is rooted in the gap between self-image and the performance of self, either to oneself or to the audience. Self-image is encountered in *Hamlet* only on the plane of thought and in the space of a constructed interiority through the performance of soliloquy. This is to say that the gap between words and deeds is the gap between, on the one hand, a Hamlet that thinks and speaks but does not in his own estimation perform himself, and on the other the Hamlet that performs, acts, and avenges. The irony of staging this particular construction within theatre is that both iterations of Hamlet are, of course, and by theatrical necessity, always performed.

Hamlet's instructions to the Player in Act III articulate a specific sub-dialectic of action, or deed, and word, or speech. This binary is the ground on which Hamlet's self-conflict unfolds, but within the logic of soliloquy. Hamlet asks that the Player's performance "Suit the action to the/word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty/of nature."¹⁷ He speaks to the performance of theatre but also to a larger logic of performance; the uneven relationship between word and action, thought-speech and deed, is itself performed within the space of soliloquy throughout the play. By establishing a space of

¹⁶ Butler, Preface 1999, p. 1999, p. xxvii

¹⁷ 3.2.18-20

supposed interiority, the logic of soliloquy enables the performance of the gap between the word and the action and the process by which stage dialectics perform the contradictions of supposedly private consciousness. Access to Hamlet's soliloquized 'thoughts' allows speech to be figured as *un-acted* speech, and Hamlet's wracked self-image in soliloquy is differentiated from the self that he considers himself to perform 'externally.' Even more precisely, soliloquy represents thought as a reflection on action but is not considered action itself.

The gap between self-image and performed self is a constant refrain of Hamlet's soliloquies. In his first soliloquy in Act I, Hamlet laments "That this too sullied flesh would melt/Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew." Here dew is also 'do,' and Hamlet contrasts himself with Hercules, nothing if not a man of action over the word.¹⁸ The soliloquy closes as Hamlet cries "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue."¹⁹ Thus the terms of the relationship between word and deed are established. Hamlet's closing lament establishes, too, the status of speech within soliloquy as un-acted. Speech is mere thought in the false privacy of the moment of soliloquy.

The third soliloquy carries the theme forwards, and expands on the suspicion that speech acted in soliloquy is unacted, in some way, or silent. Hamlet says "Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, and can say *nothing*."²⁰ Hamlet can say nothing of Claudius's treachery, exactly the same treachery that Hamlet held his tongue rather than explicate in the first soliloquy. And again, further on, Hamlet laments that he "must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words."²¹ The turn recalls the possible but continually forestalled catharsis in the transference

¹⁸ 1.2.133-34; "My father's brother, but not more like my father/Than I to Hercules" 1.2.157-58

¹⁹ 1.2.164

²⁰ 2.2.595

²¹ 2.2.614

from thought (heart) to action or deed, and simultaneously the implied insufficiency of unacted speech, or speech without action, that constitutes the gap between various performances of the self. To a certain extent within the logic of soliloquy, speech becomes synonymous with thought as distinct from other, acted speech, where some speech is action and thought is not. Hamlet's soliloquies map his interior psychological geography, but the play's logic at first refuses to consider thought's representation a performance as such. Thus as part of its double-work, soliloquy seems to disclose an authoritative core that is not subject to the duplicity of performance.

If Hamlet seems suspended in some in-between space of paralyzed thought or consideration, *Hamlet's* suggestion that thought is opposed to action should not elicit surprise. Hamlet constantly reiterates the paralyzing effect of consciousness: he warns how "conscience makes cowards of us all," that under "the pale cast of thought" we might "lose the name of action."²² This sense of thoughtful suspension is, perhaps, soliloquy's most definitive trait. But the reader, unlike Hamlet, resists the notion that speech exists unacted, and she does so particularly because the reader encounters Hamlet and *Hamlet* within the theatre, that is: within the space of performance where there exists no unperformed or unacted speech. Hamlet's despair is rooted in his un-performed vengeance. Speech cannot suffice as means to perform the self Hamlet continuously imagines himself to be, to say nothing of thought. The questions raised are those of means to selfhood – a synthesis of imagined or desired selves – whether by speech or thought or deed.

²² 3.1.91-96

Act III Scene II sees the continuation of Hamlet's rumination on the relationship between speech and deed:

I will speak daggers to her, but use none
My tongue and soul in this be
hypocrites:
How in my words somever she be shent
To give them seals never, my soul, consent.

3.2.29-32

The hypocrisy of tongue and soul and the difference, if any, between daggers spoken and 'used' articulates exactly the hierarchical ordering of thought, speech, and action in terms of self-realization. The logic the play begins to write is that of a dialectic between word and deed mapped onto interior and exterior. Where for Hamlet, the performance of the self must be realized through deed as it is opposed to speech. The reality of theatre is opposed to this understanding. Theatre lays bare that all speech is at the same time speech, word, and deed.²³

The soliloquies are notable for their stubborn irresolution of their subject matter; this irresolution communicates the futility of movement between inside and out. The seventh and final soliloquy turns in exactly the same dialectical circle of the first. The play and Hamlet are traveling the same ground, once more the play is "thinking too precisely on th' event."²⁴ The "dew" of the initial soliloquy is reprised, "I do not know/why yet I live to say 'This things to

²³ Readers of *Hamlet*, as opposed to audiences of a live performance, are in a unique position to consider the status of speech within soliloquy and the speech without it (dialogue) as of the same type, which is to say *acted* speech. *Hamlet* as a textual and not a theatrical performance is all words, and never action.

²⁴ 4.4.43

do,” and the final emphatic declaration – the soliloquy’s last – points toward a union of thought and word as of yet denied within Hamlet’s own logic if not the logic of theatre, “From this time forth/My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.”²⁵ Insofar as *Hamlet* is a record of irresolvable, unauthoritative, and in some sense un-performable selves, the soliloquies write this record. The play is not reducible to the arc of its soliloquies, but nearly.

The space of interiority is sealed by the conclusion of the seventh soliloquy and the play inaugurates Hamlet’s bloody thoughts. With the close of soliloquy, the play ends Hamlet’s spinning equivocation and collapses the supposed space of non-performance. The end of the seventh soliloquy commences an entire shift in the logic of self-realization. Within the logic of interiority thought is opposed only by resolve; beyond the scope of soliloquy, Hamlet moves into action. But the dialectic of thought and action established through the course of the soliloquies is nonetheless a critical one to which the closing act of the play will gesture. In Act V Scene II Hamlet informs Horatio of Claudius’s intercepted letter, and of the plot for Hamlet’s murder. The play might have disclosed this sort of revelation in the space of soliloquy, but the space of soliloquy is entirely unfitting Hamlet’s state of resolution, which is to say it is unfitting his performance. Hamlet’s action is indeed enabled by a lack of thought, he says he acts before “I could make a prologue to my brain.”²⁶ Sealing the fates of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is, for Hamlet, exterior, definitive, and active precisely because it lies outside the circuitry of thought. Every soliloquy through the seventh and last should rightly be considered as a prologue to the brain insofar as it is synonymous with thought. Of course, ‘prologue’ is appropriate both in its

²⁵ 4.4.47; 4.4.69

²⁶ 5.2.34

intimacy with the language of text and performance, and as antecedent to the interim in which, as Hamlet seems to know, he now performs: “The interim’s mine.”²⁷

All the play’s action after soliloquy reads as a type of epilogue, and this epilogue moves in a curious way from the general preoccupation of the play. The space of Hamlet’s interiority constitutes the massive center of the play’s movement – seven soliloquies – but a discussion of Hamlet’s interior state preoccupies it outside the space of soliloquy, too.²⁸ In a certain sense the play’s resolution is abrupt, as is to be expected in a tragedy. Doubtless a reader who has ceaselessly anticipated and desired a disclosure of self, if not through speech, then, finally, through the unmediated authority of action, finds it in Hamlet’s enactment of revenge. In his dialogue, they see an unlikely, conscientious, but not debilitating self-awareness:

But I am very sorry, good Horatio
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause
I see the portraiture of his

5.2.85-88

But a reading resistant to the authoritative disclosure of self, which is to say a reading that is mindful of the play’s recurrent insistence on the impossibility of self-disclosure and one aware of soliloquy’s role in the construction of a space of supposed interiority and thought – a reading of *Hamlet’s* stage dialectics – this reading finds not self-realization but a re-enactment of the same insistence its impossibility. In the wake of *Hamlet’s* bloody resolution the text again

²⁷ 5.2.83

²⁸ It’s interesting, perhaps, to note that *Hamlet* is Shakespeare’s lengthiest play, by nearly 200 lines.

delivers a moment of startling self-consciousness reminiscent of the moment of the Player's arrival, Hamlet's third soliloquy, and his ruminations on the role and nature of theatre. Poisoned and dying ("I am dead, Horatio"²⁹) Hamlet turns to the audience in a moment of parabasis, and he re-enacts the moment of soliloquy:

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes and audience to this act,
Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,
Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you –
But let it be. – Horatio, I am dead.
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright.
To the unsatisfied.

5.2.366-371

Against the idea that thought and speech, insufficient in their supposed immateriality, somehow without the efficacy Hamlet ascribes to the "name of action," are subordinate to the cause of action, Hamlet's insistence on a report posits the need for witness and re-telling. Hamlet demands speech over action. The space of exteriority now seems to require the power of narrative, the name of action has no name outside its performance in speech and in the text. Even in the throes of action and violent resolve the play persists in suggesting an insufficiency or gap that might be filled, if only "I could tell you." Quite the same gap between thought and action has frustrated Hamlet throughout the course of the play, but appears now in reverse. While Hamlet and the obedient reader have asked relentlessly what good a thought or a speech might be

²⁹ 4.2.370

in the course of one's self-realization, a new question hangs dolefully over the audience in place of a dramatic resolution: what good is an act towards the same performance without an audience and a text? Quite possibly, and certainly for Hamlet, "the rest is silence."³⁰

The play responds to the question as Horatio exhorts full accordance with Hamlet's wishes, transmuting the course of the play into the course of another play, a text not unlike *The Murder of Gonzago*:

And here arrived, give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to the view,
And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause

5.2.420-425

The play's self-referential obsession and inevitable return to questions of text, audience, and theatre cannot resolve the impossibility of Hamlet's self-disclosure, but rather radically insist on an impossible, carnival performance of the self that is as inevitable as it is inescapable. The play performs not its own resolution but the impossibility of synthesizing disparate and proliferation performance that produce the self. The play closes, and 'closes' the question, simply by referring the audience back to the beginning of the text, to a continued and infinite

³⁰ 5.2.395

proliferation of Hamlets to consider and perform, and so to a confrontation with the frustrating inability to view either Hamlet or *Hamlet* authoritatively. One is constantly reminded of her status as a reader, and as participant to the act.

Two: Circe and The Social Theatre of Consciousness

But Hamlet is so personal, isn't it? Mr Best pleaded. I mean, a kind of private paper... - James Joyce, Ulysses

Within *Ulysses*, the construction of a space of interiority occurs by a unique Joycean logic and textual architecture that is at once an explicit imitation of the performative space of theater and a product of the novel's unprecedented project: the representation of an interior consciousness, the matter of consciousness: thought rendered legible.³¹ Joyce's reliance on theatre includes the reproduction of its stage-dialectic. The novel's exploration of consciousness takes the terms of this dialectic as it moves between inside and out, which is nothing less than a movement towards the socialization of thought. That movement also maps Stephen's course of self-realization as an author and authoritative self, i.e. Stephen's becoming as James Joyce.

This sense of interiority is produced in the novel for both Stephen and Bloom by essentially the same means: an interior monologue distinct from both exposition (scene) and dialogue. Which is to say that Joyce's text erects a third space, an iteration of soliloquy transposed from the theatre into the novel, and which preserves both its logic and the social character of its performance. Joycean interiority does not lend the novel a private nature; but rather the performative space of the theater and the social relations which it entails – the necessary presence of an audience – are re-experienced in *Ulysses* as the performance of the novel and the social act of reading. The novel performs.

³¹ Or maybe illegible, and the difference between the two (illegible and legible) is essentially the point.

Ulysses, at least through Scylla and Charybdis, presents the reader with what David Kurnick aptly describes as “an undifferentiated textual block.”³² This block of text contains simultaneously the ‘traditional,’ pre-Joycean cohabitation of narration, exposition, and dialogue, as well as the Joycean surplus: the content of thought, or the ‘stream of consciousness.’ It is the supposedly interior nature of Joyce’s production of consciousness that justifies *Ulysses*’ predictable characterization as the “preeminent psychological novel in English.”³³ The interplay between the ‘traditional’ elements and the surplus dimensions are comparatively easy for the reader to navigate, and particularly easier than the text’s referential network, which is to say easier to navigate than the apocrypha of the Irish literary scene and the most memorable trivia of late 19th-century Catholic curricula.

Faced with such a daunting and “undifferentiated” wall of text, Kurnick believes that “in order to comprehend the action at all, we are forced to re-create those characterological boundaries the text so continually violates,” and so the reader “must decide what ‘belongs’ where, distinguishing mental from narrative material and re-secreting the former in its proper psychological containers.”³⁴ In short, Kurnick proposes that *Ulysses* engages the reader in a delegation of authority from Joyce to herself, where the reader is forced to read Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom into being through the content of their thoughts as they are distinguished from scene (Dublin), action (narration), and other characters. Kurnick’s enlightening analysis is particular to *Ulysses*, but in its essential content it is indistinguishable from a description of reading in general. A text cannot but transfer the authority of interpretation to the reader. The characterological boundaries (and so the characterological truth) that the reader creates, by which

³² Kurnick, p. 179

³³ Kurnick, p. 174

³⁴ Kurnick, p. 179

I mean the limits, form, shape, and content of a text's character and its textual 'reality,' are the product of this process of interpretation. To be sure, the difficulty of *Ulysses* lies in the multiple dimensions of its form, its Joycean surplus, and the intricate style of each dimension's distinctive language. But the act of reading produces the legible text as a product of the precise social relation between itself and the reader. The reader takes Joyce's wall of text and comprehends it only insofar as it becomes legible and coherent through her labor. The text is not simply read, but is an object read by a reader. In this sense, the text occurs only in the process of its performance, its disclosure through reading. It is illusory in the sense that it cannot be comprehended outside of its social performance. The graspable and read text is as invisible and as necessary as the breathable air in the theater that nonetheless sustains both the audience and their players.

Joyce's relentlessly proliferating dimensions make infuriatingly explicit the 'problem' of reading. Just how infuriating is perhaps best exemplified by Leo Bersani's claim that "*Ulysses* is a text to be deciphered but not read."³⁵ It is not that *Ulysses*' complex referential network neglects to provide any ground for interpretation, as Bersani might lead one to conclude. Instead, it is that to read *Ulysses* is the same as to decipher an immensely convoluted text, the complexity of which by no means repels the possibility of interpretation but, on the contrary, increases the reader's awareness of that interpretative authority.

Kurnick identifies the double-work accomplished by the logic of interiority, which is nearly identical to the double-work of the soliloquy in *Hamlet*. The novel's structure, as well as its difficulty, valorize the reader's construction of characterological truth through a sense of

³⁵ Leo Bersani, *Against Ulysses, The Culture of Redemption*, p. 175

supposedly privileged access to interior consciousness, but also undermines the attendant construction of any truth of selfhood hidden within the text.

The interior monologue of Joyce's invention is not an innovation in competition with the polyphony of the text, but rather one of its constituent voices.³⁶ A litany of theatrical allusions within the text of *Ulysses*, along with Kurnick's fascinating analysis of Joyce's theatrical failures and their influence on *Ulysses* both demand a theatrical reading of *Ulysses* that considers the monologue as one of many dimensions *Ulysses* performs; consciousness for Joyce is ultimately not interior at all, but a social theatre of the mind.

The most coherent and accessible expression of the logic of interiority in the novel is found in its most accessible chapters: the reader's introduction to Stephen through the first three chapters, and to Bloom in the fourth through the sixth. It is here that Joyce's rendering of 'the material consciousness' imitates the intimacy of the logic of soliloquy, and the quality of its social relation, by explicitly implicating the reader in the act of reading through moments of novelistic parabasis.³⁷ These are, essentially, moments of textual self-consciousness where the text alludes to a break in its fictional matrix, not exactly a glitch but the possible suggestion of one, a sort of textual déjà vu. In theatre, soliloquy produces a moment supposedly unmediated by other characters and sometimes exempt from the temporal and physical logic of the scene. In soliloquy, Hamlet seems to address the audience, or no one. Soliloquy constructs a space exterior to scene, foregrounding the relationship between the audience and the player.

³⁶ "The first six chapters dominated by the stream of consciousness; the last six by polyphony." Franco Moretti, *The Modern Epic, The Other Ulysses*, p. 183

³⁷ Parabasis here as understood throughout, i.e. Kurnick's reading of de Man.

The earliest and most explicit instance of such a moment finds Stephen reclining on the Strand scribbling his poetry on a slip of paper. The first two chapters suggest quietly what the third emphatically reveals: Stephen is watched and he is read. Stephen's uncanny fear of an audience or a reader mixes with his obvious and crippling desire for both. His thoughts are, within the generative matrix of the fiction, a reflection by the text on his own immutable physical presence.³⁸ But in a second sense it is the text's reflection on the form of the novel, the written word itself: "Who watches me here? Who ever anywhere will read these written words? Signs on a white field."³⁹ At the same time the text reflects on its material existence: "Paper," Stephen thinks.⁴⁰ Stephen's transcribed thoughts map his relation to himself, as co-produced by the reader and the text. This relation between Stephen and himself, like Hamlet, constitutes one of the text's central themes, but it is critical and indicative of an essential similarity between theatre and the novel that 'reading' and 'watching' are here entirely interchangeable. For the text, as for Stephen, they are synonymous. The text's allusion to a reader who sits outside the novel's matrix signals its awareness that it is performing itself and thereby generating the characters within it. Its allusion to its physical presence signals its awareness that the book is not a linguistic medium which communicates a fictional reality existing outside the process of reading, but a material performance which generates it. The self-reflexive moment grounds the social aspect of the text and implicates the reader in this performance.

If Stephen's moment on the strand is notable for its verbal conflation of the theatrical and the novelistic, then particular instances of language work to incorporate the theatrical into the

³⁸ Stephen's performance of himself, here, is characterized mostly by a desire *not* to perform, a disgust with his physical presence and its avoidable weight. This sort of self-disgust is reminiscent of Hamlet and his suicidal intent, the performative character of which remains to be written.

³⁹ 3.414-415

⁴⁰ 3.404

novel's performance. Stephen reflects early in *Telemachus* on the performative aspect of his garb: "God, we'll simply have to dress the character. I want puce gloves and green boots."⁴¹ In this moment the text not only expresses Stephen's need to perform himself, but also seizes on Stephen's incoherence. It touches for a moment the impossibility of coherent self-realization. Stephen thinks to himself, "Contradiction. Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself."⁴² The allusion to Whitman is appropriate; *Ulysses* is no doubt engaged with a multitude of selves. But for Joyce, antithetical characterological truths proliferate specifically in the movement between consciousness and action, inside and out. The self-reflexive and self-critical impulses meld into the course of the text precisely because interiority poses the greatest threat to the Modernist obsession of Man-As-Author, which Joyce seems at once to posit and to reject.

The text's self-consciousness, and Stephen's awareness of his performance of his own character, invoke a type of theatrical space but reformulated for the novel. *Hamlet's* reflexive musings on the play-within-a-play multiply the identities within the performance: Hamlet as player playing Hamlet, as aggrieved son either performing or suffering grief and/or love, etc. The tension between the theatrical and the novelistic is apparent, perhaps, as Joyce directs the reader towards the ineluctable modality of the visible and of the audible, but not the ineluctable of the legible, or not exactly. The perceptive conditions of the theatre shift to the perceptive conditions of the novel. Hence Proteus's circumlocutions revolve around issues of legibility: "Thought through my eyes. Signature of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot."⁴³ The text's continuous oscillation between the novelistic and the theatrical is crystallized as Stephen walks along the beach, endlessly sorting signifier and signified. The

⁴¹ 1.515-516

⁴² 1.517

⁴³ 3.1-3

“signs on a white field” correspond to the written text in the same way that Stephen has begun to “read” the signatures of boots, grime, and the sea. But Stephen’s focus on the audible and visible articulates in terms of theater the chapter’s obsessive pre-occupation with the written word and the legible. The audible and the visual are to theatre what the legible is to the novel. But where Hamlet’s reflexive musings on theatre make us aware of his double-status as character and actor, the focus on the legible – the signified and the signifier – makes us aware of the text’s linguistic existence. This hyperbolic expression of a style fully articulated by the movement of the initial chapters, in which Stephen simply cannot see without thinking, converts the world into a text to be read, or rather a world which is “thought through my eyes.”

But the suggestion that *Ulysses* is in some sense a theatrical performance is a fissure that the novel’s experimentation in Scylla and Charybdis and Circe breaks open. The theatrical character of the novel both conditions its movement between inside and out and performs interiority’s contradictions.

Scylla and Charybdis stages a complex iteration of the play-within-a-play staged (twice) by *Hamlet*. The chapter reads as a theatrical set-piece; Kurnick refers to the chapter as “Backstage at the Library”⁴⁴ and identifies it as the final chapter “to feature the regular alternation of narration, dialogue, and interior monologue.”⁴⁵ The section resembles an actual script more than the combination of narration, dialogue, and interior monologue pioneered in the first three chapters: narration falls almost completely away and there is little action, whether mediated by Stephen’s thoughts or not. Indeed, the final pages of Scylla and Charybdis seem to inaugurate the formal experimentation – Joyce’s break into the dramatic stage-script form –

⁴⁴ Kurnick, p. 178

⁴⁵ Kurnick, p. 180

which definitively signals the novel's relationship to theatre. The break is an early hint at Circe's general formal project.

The stage is set for Stephen in the library. He recognizes the high stakes contingent on his performance of his own intelligence and literary acumen, and he commences to set another stage: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. "It is this hour of the day in mid June...The flag is up on the playhouse by the bankside. The bear Sackerson growls in the pit near it, Paris garden."⁴⁶ Joyce writes the canvasclimbers, the sausages, and the groundlings onto the stage. Even before Joyce shifts into stage-script form, the obvious correspondence between the date and time and Stephen's own thoughts – he reminds himself to attend to the "Composition of place" – both signal the possibility that the novel is actually a play.⁴⁷ Joyce's slip into the dramatic form at the close of the chapter reinforces this suspicion. Joyce goes so far as to develop a space off-stage for none other than Leopold Bloom. Notified by the attendant that Bloom has arrived, the librarian says:

"Certainly, certainly, certainly. Is the gentleman...?"

"Is he....? O, there!"⁴⁸

Blooms appears, as is custom, off-stage. His existence is barely more than an allusion, "a patient silhouette waited, listening."⁴⁹ The form of the dialogue is identical to that found in one of Joyce's *Epiphanies* (19), which Kurnick notes for its allusion to an off-stage body and the critical role of the dramatic form: "The thematic content of the episode – the urgent need to apprehend the body, to render it linguistically graspable – is doubled by its dramatic form."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ 9. 155-157

⁴⁷ 9.163

⁴⁸ 9.588; 9.591

⁴⁹ 9.597

⁵⁰ Kurnick, p. 161

Bloom's interruption and his presence off-stage is important to understand, first, because the off-stage in which he exists raises again the notion of the novel's theatrical performance, and second, because Bloom will literally take center-stage in Circe's dramatic performance. *Ulysses* is excruciatingly aware of the trouble with rendering anything "linguistically graspable." Rather than fortify the novel's unique claim to a modality of the legible this reference to theatrical space undermines the novel's ability to render the self coherent through the text's performance. The pronoun confusion of Stephen's rambling collapse of present, future, and past selves is the confusion of Hamlet's referential network as he discusses the players.⁵¹ In theatre the confusion becomes tangible in the player's multiplying identities as actors and characters (or playwrights, as per Stephen's theory) while in the novel this confusion is manifest in its multiplying textual dimensions, a vertigo complicated by the recurrent insistence of a theatrical space.

Circe is, perhaps, the most disorienting articulation of this disturbance of characterological coherence. Circe's wholesale adoption of the dramatic form signals a shift in the novel's texture, suggested at the close of Scylla and Charybdis and now fully developed. The chapter achieves, essentially, a reformulation of the life of consciousness that Joyce has until this point presented through the Joycean surplus as an interior essence, the private language of thought. Circe's dream-experimentalism realizes Stephen's suspicion of an audience or reader and reproduces conscious and subconscious life in full. The abrupt externalization performs a particularly radical and literal theatre of the mind. This supposed externalization is dependent on a knowledge of both Bloom and Stephen's interiority – including their unconscious anxieties – which is visible

⁵¹ "that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I set here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be." 9.382-385

in Joyce's reproduction of conscious life but never (within the narration or dialogue of the novel) performed. Interiority exists only to be externalized.

Circe's dramatic externalizations are actually among the few moments within *Ulysses* that are all but entirely interior. The action of the chapter occurs in a surreal nowhere, but the psychic content generating it is rooted throughout the preceding pages. Circe's action is related to the rest of the novel only insofar as it reproduces Bloom or Stephen's conscious and subconscious life. Dublin is not reproduced, only its dream double, and thus Joyce flips the novel's normative generative logic. The movement performs the confusion of a dream's hangover into the next day, where its supposed unreality is surprisingly little comfort: the dream is in a sense still something one *did*, a self-produced product of one's consciousness.

The chapter's obsessive return to sexuality is a fitting preoccupation of the 'interior' consciousness. The threat of public shaming for Bloom's erotic desire, his unstable gender pronouns, and his constantly revolving wardrobe all perform Bloom's unstable and curious relationship to sexual identity, a relationship never performed before this within the more traditional 'action' of the novel. Without the interior monologue, Bloom's relationship to his own sexual identity would remain unknown.

The social character of the text as indicated earlier by novelistic parabasis is manifest formally in the dramatic script. If the reader was previously responsible for sorting psychological content (thought) from the narration and exposition of the novel, Circe reclaims this authority by its deluge of performative dream-content, effectively erasing the line between exterior and interior. The formal logic in the early chapters, which the reader must grasp in order to construct a space between interior and exterior, is largely coherent. But then Circe literally stages the collapse of the interior into the exterior, ostensibly 'externalizing' the entire carnival but taking

as its primary matter the content of a supposedly interior consciousness. Circe pushes the logic of interiority so far that the novel's stage becomes either entirely interior in terms of content, or entirely exterior in terms of form. The logic crumbles under a dialectic pushed to the extent of its manifest contradictions in the privation of consciousness. To the contrary, consciousness is socialized.

Both presentations of consciousness, novelistic and theatrical, demonstrate a gap between imagined or idealized selves and their 'actual' performance in the supposedly 'real' action of the text. Just as soliloquy staged this gap principally by offering a privileged vision into Hamlet's idealized sense of himself, so do both the interior monologue and Circe in its entirety stage the gap between the self as it is performed on the one hand, by means of thought within the theatre of the mind, and on the other, as it is performed through action within the theatre of the novel's stage, i.e. the city of Dublin but not its dream double. It is critical to recognize that the performance of the text *in general* includes any performance of thought or consciousness, and Joyce's critical innovation is in some sense not the development of thought as an un-performed dimension but rather precisely the performance of an action occurring within consciousness, thought as actual activity. Whether that action occurs within an asocial space of the mind or whether it is actually a social operation becomes the question that *Ulysses* plays out in its engagement with dialectical movement between inside and out.

The invocation of a social theatrical space is thus tied inextricably to the troubled performance of the self. The relationship between the two illuminates the double role of interiority as identified by Kurnick: a valorization of the readerly desire for and anticipation of a supposedly coherent self that is visible only by access to thought and characterological psychology, but where that characterological truth is eventually undermined when movement

inwards seems only to prove the impossibility of fixing characterological truth as an interior essence. The inassimilable difference between selves is performed throughout the multiple dimensions of the text, both thought and action, and eventually demonstrates the impossibility of grasping an authoritative core.

In the first of these movements, Joyce's logic of interiority licenses a reading that is authoritative by virtue of its access to consciousness. Kurnick's discussion of Joyce's *Epiphanies* and their formal oscillation between the dramatic and the prosaic takes as its object – appropriately – threats to Joyce's "mastery of his gendered self," a mastery threatened by the social context "signaled most clearly by the externalization of the dramatic form."⁵² In this particular instance, Joyce's gendered self is posited as an inner essence pre-existing its "externalization" in dramatic form. Simply put, the logic supposes a gendered self that exists before and outside of its performance. Unsurprisingly, gender and sexuality are exactly the ground on which Stephen and Bloom negotiate the multiplying and incoherent images of the self. That self may or may not be threatened by a social context, but the idea presupposes an asocial context out of which to bring, or 'externalize' something interior in the first place. If the dramatic form invokes a type of externalization, then the novelistic and especially the Joycean dimension of consciousness must deliver a version of claustrophobia to counteract it. Joyce writes consciousness as it moves from interior to exterior, from the novelistic to the theatrical, and eventually performs a critique of interiority's supposed claustrophobia.

Quite contrary to any readerly, intuitive hope that the psychic space might clarify or solve the problem of interpreting the 'action' of a novel, *Ulysses* clearly suggests that the 'interior'

⁵² Kurnick, p. 160; The obvious connection between the central role of gender in Butler's theory of relational identity and the gendered nature of the threat endured by Joyce is, in this case, not coincidental. Gender and the sexual frequently for Joyce, as for Butler, find themselves at the center of performative identity.

space is simply another social theatre. In *Scylla and Charybdis*, Stephen's theory proposes that Shakespeare can be known, which is to say his characterological truth can be ascertained through a close and attentive reading of his plays. It is an unsurprising theory from Stephen, who is engaged in a particularly theatrical performance of himself, and indeed wallows in almost exactly Hamlet's predicament. He thinks to himself "Speech, speech. But act. Act speech. They mock to try you. Act. Be acted on."⁵³ To "Act speech" is to move from thought to speech and action in a self-realization which proceeds from an internal core to its representation on stage. For Stephen as for Hamlet, the problem seems to be the process of transmuting thought into action or speech. The difficulty they encounter calls into question the authority of interiority, and the value of a reader's access to consciousness.

The failure produces Circe's incoherency. If we take the "hermeneutics of sexual suspicion" in Stephen's theory of *Hamlet* to indicate his own sexual anxiety, then the carnival and poly-gendered performance of Circe is little reason to hope for coherence through thought reified in action, or, in terms of the novel's formal logic, thought 'externalized.'⁵⁴ Circe presents Stephen's properly interior anxiety about death and about his mother, or about paternity and love, by the most literally theatrical and performative means possible in the novel, and yet the chapter's incoherence is only magnified.

For Bloom, it is a social, literally theatrical context in which we find Bloom's unspoken desires explicitly indicted. But most importantly, Circe sees a proliferation of multiply-gendered Blooms in cohabitation with a hallucinatory vision of his deceased son. Circe is essentially, for both Stephen and Bloom, the realization of the content of consciousness. It recasts the initial

⁵³ 9.978-979

⁵⁴ Kurnick, p. 180

problem of translation from thought to action or deed, as a more deeply unsettling incoherent performance of identity and the self. The incoherent multitude of Blooms encountered in *Circe* are certainly not any more authoritative by virtue of their externalization.

Exactly as in *Hamlet*, the dialectic between interior and exterior finds its performance on the stage, and not least the stage of consciousness. The critical movement of the dialectic cannot but argue for the difficulty of performing oneself outwards, from consciousness to the stage. The interior essence of consciousness takes the terms of gender and sexuality within a paradigm of performativity, a literal and legible theatre of the mind where movement ever inwards only arrives outside. It is perhaps the most social of *Ulysses*' acts, but *Circe* ultimately argues for the social performance of the text in the most general and critical-theoretical sense.

Three: Infinite Immobility, A Didactic Theory of Impossibility

Let me see. Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio – a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.

- William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* ⁵⁵

In his foreword to *Infinite Jest* Dave Eggers writes: “This book is like a spaceship with no recognizable components, no rivets or bolts, no entry points, no way to take it apart...It simply is.”⁵⁶ The description touches on the book’s ambivalence, which defines its approach to the question of self-disclosure in contrast to the approach taken by *Hamlet* and *Ulysses* before it: a flat one-dimensionality that produces Egger’s sense of the text’s coherent singularity, on the one hand, and a fractured quality that communicates its self-incoherence on the other.

Shakespeare and Joyce arrive at the impossibility of disclosing any authoritative internal core, and so critique the idea of that interior core in general, but the impossibility that is for Joyce and Shakespeare a type of end is for Wallace a kind of beginning. *Infinite Jest*’s formal project – discursive movement between narration and essayistic expositions, chronologies, lists, endnotes, filmographies, scripts, etc. – alters the nature of its movement between represented consciousness and staged action. Parabasis cannot occur, as in *Ulysses* and in *Hamlet*, because the form of the text resists the production of a fictive reality or a stage from which the novel’s actors can emerge. It is not to say that staged realities are never written or read into being, indeed Wallace at times soliloquizes thought amidst staged action, but generally the novel’s stage has been broken down. Distributed throughout the theatre, the stage mingles amidst the audience; the

⁵⁵ 5.1.191-193

⁵⁶ Dave Eggers, Foreword to the Tenth Anniversary Edition Copyright 2006, p. xiii.

play's program constitutes a set-piece and the tickets themselves become props in the performance; the theatre's records, like James O. Incandenza's filmography, are called forth from the administrative office and become the theatrical debris that constitutes the text and infinitely expands the borders of the stage. Thus interiority is not represented by the logic of the novel in a staged movement between thought and deed, but is merely posited. Psychic interiority, for Wallace, is a hollow shell with no recourse to performance: a type of prison. By this gesture, *Infinite Jest* suspends movement between interior and exterior that demonstrates the necessary failure of self-realization, but where that failure in Shakespeare and Joyce demythologized authoritative consciousness, *Infinite Jest* smuggles a disguised and didactic truth of authoritative consciousness and coherent self-hood.

Infinite Jest's soliloquized beginning delineates the gap between interior consciousness and exterior fictive reality, which is the gap between the imagined ideal self and the performed self. In short, it is Hal Incandenza's failure to make himself understood. It is the same as problem Hamlet faces disclosing "that within which passes show,"⁵⁷ and which Stephen encounters in the library, "Speech, speech. But act. Act speech."⁵⁸ Wallace's first chapter establishes a duplicity similar to soliloquy in *Hamlet*: a self-conscious first person narration which addresses the reader while it narrates the action. The scene takes as its subject matter self-performance.⁵⁹ "I am seated in an office, surrounded by heads and bodies," Hal says, "I believe I appear neutral, maybe even

⁵⁷ 1.2.88

⁵⁸ 9.978-979

⁵⁹ The opening scene is essentially: Hal Incandenza meets with the university deans to address 'inconsistencies' in his college application and his bid to play competitive tennis at the collegiate level, except that Hal's attempt to explain inconsistencies with his application are perceived by the deans as animalistic gurgling and "waggling" of the lips and body. Further, Hal's speech is comprehensible to the reader, but is essentially incomprehensible or mute to anyone within the novel's fictional universe both in this scene and the one which follows close upon. Hal is comprehensible to everyone for the remaining course of the text.

pleasant, though I've been coached to err on the side of neutrality and not attempt what would feel to me like a pleasant expression or smile."⁶⁰ The "coached" nature of Hal's appearance is the text's acknowledgment of the performative aspect of his character, and Hal's awareness of his own performance is exactly identical to Hamlet's self-conscious performance in soliloquy. A sense of authoritative interiority would lead the reader, then, to authorize not the essentially neutral or pleasant Hal (as he appears to the Deans) but the Hal who recognizes himself as appearing pleasant or neutral. This authorization is *Infinite Jest's* initial reproduction of a space of interiority into the novel, where access to Hal's interior consciousness produces an authoritative version of self-hood.

Unlike Shakespeare and Joyce, who take their time, Wallace immediately complicates the coherence and legibility of Hal's interior self. The text moves subtly between dialogue addressed to the deans and the first-person narration addressed to the reader. "I cannot make myself understood" appears twice: addressed to the reader in narration and addressed to the deans in dialogue.⁶¹ The effect is the same as Hamlet's evolving exterior and interior incoherence and Circe's collapse of interior into exterior but arrives sooner, at the very outset of the text. Unlike in *Hamlet*, the reader of *Infinite Jest* cannot re-claim a privileged vision which claims to know the coherent Hal whom the text's characters do not. Unlike in *Ulysses*, the reader has not labored to recreate a division between consciousness and narrative for a long stretch of the text. *Infinite Jest* is a still-born tragedy with the aspect of a comedy; the text begins where *Hamlet* and *Ulysses* eventually arrive. It has nowhere to be nor anywhere to go.

⁶⁰ p. 3

⁶¹ p. 10

In this way, Hal's insistence that "I am not what you see and hear" is properly addressed to both the Deans and the reader.⁶² Wallace has already completed the entire length of the movement by which Shakespeare and Joyce demonstrate the problematic disclosure from interior core to external performance; the readerly pleasure exercised in the construction of character is pre-emptively denied. Proper to Wallace and Joyce's utilization of theatrical modes of perception in the novel, Hal's incoherence and unknowability is communicated in terms of "what you see and hear." Notably, Wallace withholds Joyce's acknowledgement of the linguistic presence of the text in terms of legibility.⁶³ It is not because Wallace does not acknowledge the linguistic presence of the text in general – quite to the contrary, the text's formal schizophrenia is an exercise in the modality of language – rather, Hal's permanent and defining illegibility is precisely the feature by which he is understood, produced, and coherent. Unlike Stephen and Hamlet, he is legible in his incoherency. The text immediately proposes self-incoherence only to author a logic where incoherency signifies not itself but a disguised coherency.

The text's chronological and formal structures reinforce the didacticism the initial chapter introduces. In *Ulysses*, the reader's work "distinguishing mental from narrative material" is labor which eventually unearths the stage (Dublin) and characters by which the novel occurs.⁶⁴ The work of *Infinite Jest* is not the archaeological work of *Ulysses*; it not as if under its encyclopedic debris there exists a single, unified stage on which its characters perform; nor as if Wallace ever bothered to map the interior geographies of characterological truth that both *Hamlet* and *Ulysses* promise and deliver in excess, if only to undermine.⁶⁵ Reading is no longer a work of repair to

⁶² p. 13

⁶³ "Thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read." *Ulysses*, 3.1-3

⁶⁴ Kurnick, *Empty Houses*, p. 179

⁶⁵ "The novel is meant to capture this mapping of ever narrower interior geographies." Kurnick, *Empty Houses*, p. 2

demonstrate an irreparable condition of self-hood. Hal's insistence that he cannot make himself understood – the object-goal of the reader's anxious desires – becomes a type of didactic characterological truth itself. The labor of reading does not eventually yield to the impossible task before it; the labor of reading produces self-incoherence as its didactic and hollow truth. Two conditions produce this situation.

First, the text's formal project conditions a constant self-conscious tick. The moment of parabasis is stripped of its effect as it becomes formal law. Wallace's prolific use of endnotes, in the first case, requires constant referral to the latter half of the book and thus a constant manipulation of the book's physical presence. The effect is similar to *Ulysses*'s own invocation of the physicality of the book but more radical, perhaps, in its total abstraction from the novel's supposed action. While *Ulysses* ventriloquizes Stephen's thoughts to refer to itself, Wallace never writes a character who gestures to the endnotes – the endnotes gesture to themselves. In *Infinite Jest* we encounter not the depth of a fictive illusion but a horizontality which seems as preoccupied with the weight of its pages as the density of its language, its symbolic and referential power. Within a chapter that occurs itself within an endnote, one finds a twice-nested endnote – a note of a note – which simply reads “Don't ask.”⁶⁶ The comic quip points to the somewhat tiresome manipulation of the textual artifact required by its form, and to produce any kind of meaning the joke relies on that tiresomeness, i.e. the reader's annoyance at flipping to a note that doesn't perform its explanatory function. The entire comic exchange takes place outside of the fictional universe; it only works in the physical context of the book. The joke is neither possible in the delimiting context of a traditional novel nor does it really belong there. The critical point is that the joke illustrates the text's distance from the fictional world it creates but

⁶⁶ p. 1020

does not always engage with. What it means is that Hal's character, as a specific element of the fictional dream, is never quite engaged, either. The text is always more concerned with itself than with its characters.

The same point is illustrated in text's other formalistic experiments: the complete filmography of James O. Incandenza, a chronology of 'subsidized time,'⁶⁷ the script of a puppet closet-drama both penned and performed by Mario, and a proliferation of essays dealing with the rise and fall of "videophony" technology⁶⁸ and Hal's critical takes on television.⁶⁹ In the critical register of its formal breaks, the novel already begins the process of writing scholarship on itself. Eventually, that critical register will construct the text's didacticism when it returns to the logic of self and the authority of interiority.

Second, the text's chronology exhibits a fractured and montage quality. This is the text's most significant departure from *Ulysses* and *Hamlet*, and a primary condition producing *Infinite Jest's* inability to demonstrate the course of failed self-realization. Hal's meeting with the Deans occurs at the beginning of the novel but the end of the plot. When they reference Hal at all, the remaining thousand pages narrate events that occurred before the meeting with the deans. The text is a response to the question Hal imagines he will be asked at the hospital after his devolution into animalism: "a tired Cuban orderly who addresses me as *jou* – who asks only 'So yo then man what's *your* story?'"⁷⁰

⁶⁷ "CHRONOLOGY OF ORGANIZATION OF NORTH AMERICAN NATIONS' REVENUE-ENHANCING SUBSIDIZED TIME™, BY YEAR" p. 223

⁶⁸ "WHY – THOUGH IN THE EARLY DAYS OF INTERLACE'S INTERNETTED TELEPUTERS..." and so on, p. 144

⁶⁹ "And re Ennet House resident Kate Gompert and this depression issue:" p. 692

⁷⁰ p. 17

His story is entirely anachronistic. One might expect the reader's reconstruction of the plot to resemble the tragic course of Hamlet's self-performance or Stephen's confrontation of sexual desire, or, perhaps his self-realization as James Joyce, but it doesn't. Hal gets high a lot. Hal plays tennis and Hal wins. Sometimes, Hal loses. The text neither traces his encounter in the deans' office to prior events that produce it nor does it articulate the consequences of that encounter. The text reads like a puzzle without an image, or with many ill-fitting images. It does not move between coherence and incoherence; it exhibits a stabilized instability and a develops a standardized improvisation.⁷¹

The plot cannot explain Hal, nor can it offer the reader even insufficient means to do so, but the text can and it does. Wallace produces a logic of self-hood which the text never enacts but only articulates. The logic is articulated variously by the tennis academy's proto-fascist head coach and exposition which reads like an essay, but is not to be confused with the essays written by characters and reproduced within the text.⁷² That logic is written in terms of tennis and runs essentially thus:

The true opponent, the enfolding boundary, is the player himself. Always and only the self out there, on court, to be met, fought, brought to the table to hammer out terms. The competing boy on the net's other side: he is not the foe: he is more the partner in the dance. He is the what is the word excuse or occasion for meeting the self. As you are his occasion. Tennis's beauty's infinite roots are self-competitive... Which is why tennis is an essentially tragic enterprise... All life is

⁷¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *The Culture Industry*.

⁷² To clarify, the text contains at least three types of 'essay': essays that exist in the novel's fictional dream but are not associated with any of its characters, essays produced by its characters, and essayistic exposition not explicitly identified as such but which reads like scholarly work on *Infinite Jest*. Here, we deal with the third type.

the same, as citizens of the human State: the animating limits are within, to be killed and mourned, over and over again.

Play in *Infinite Jest* is as in theatre, as in Shakespeare, and as in Joyce: the occasion for the realization of the self or one of its iterations. The greatest difference between *Infinite Jest* and, later, *Hamlet* and *Ulysses* is that, for Wallace, play never becomes the site of choreographed movement between interior and exterior. The fraught attempt at a harmony between consciousness and the performed, other-perceived self never occurs except in the first section where it immediately fails. Yet, in that section, the text alludes to the possibility of the realization which it never performs: as Hal supposedly devolves into animalistic uncontrol the Athletic Dean remarks: "I'd only seen him play. On court he's gorgeous. Possibly a genius. We had no idea... We were watching ballet out there, a mate remarked, after."⁷³ The process of play and self-realization which might have performed the failed synthesis of antithetical selves and the tragic quality of tennis appears only stated as a didactic truth. This shift from staged movement to didactic truth has consequences for the authority of consciousness.

The paradoxical struggle articulated by Schitt, above, might re-enact the struggle which begins the moment the reader encounters the fractured debris of the text, which her idea of reading demands she re-construct. *Infinite Jest* presents the text not in its contradictions but as an incomplete whole. Reading is not a doomed bid for coherence, demolishing and defeating the text in the process of its creation, but the lengthy, coherent, and articulate performance of meticulous incoherence. Thus in *Infinite Jest* the

⁷³ p. 14

tragic character of reading finds a resolution sincere most of all in its abolition of irony. For the earlier texts, their tragic quality lies in play: the failed movement from consciousness or 'interior' to externalized performance. That failure undermines the authority of consciousness and thought as zones of definitive and essential meaning. But *Infinite Jest's* immobility in this regard strips it of the earlier texts' critical capabilities. Hal is not demonstrably unknowable, but eminently knowable as an unknowable individual.

Hal Incandenza's character is both the best example of the text's immobility and the subject of its smuggled didacticism. Instead of the social character of play dramatized in *Ulysses* by Circe, and in *Hamlet* by self-reflexive musings on theatre, the text foregrounds an authoritative and carceral interior consciousness. Play in *Infinite Jest* takes the decidedly asocial terms of tennis's ontological conflict between self and other-self, inside. The text finds its articulation of a theory of self in another Schitt lecture on anesthetizing consciousness from outside conditions, in this case the weather: "Different world *inside*. World built inside cold outside world of wind breaks the wind, shelters the player, you, if you stay the same, stay inside."⁷⁴ The logic begins to articulate the text's didacticism: a type of appeal to interior-life, however imprisoning, as shelter. Schitt articulates again the self-becoming possibilities of the court, "You have a chance to occur, playing. No?"⁷⁵ But this possibility is not predicated upon a synthesis of antithetical selves, not a movement between inside and outside nor the transmutation of thought into action, but the walling-off the external world: "Make this second world

⁷⁴ p. 459

⁷⁵ p. 459

inside the world: here there *are* no conditions.”⁷⁶ Of course, for *Infinite Jest*, it is for life as it is in tennis. Which is to say that for Hal the possibility of realizing an authoritative or coherent self will occur wherever it would for tennis; he says, “The human head, sir, if I got your thrust. Where I’m going to occur as a player.”⁷⁷

Rather than deny the text the ability to arrive at some conclusion regarding identity or coherent self-hood, the text’s rejection of any narrative arc clears space for Schtitt’s didactic truth as it applies generally.

In Wallace’s essayistic exposition on Hal Incandenza’s own life-of-consciousness problematics:

Hal Incandenza hasn’t had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny; he finds terms like joie and value to be like so many variables in rarified equations, and he can manipulate them well enough to satisfy everyone but himself that he’s in there, inside his own hull, as a human being – but in fact he’s far more robotic than John Wayne...inside Hal’s there’s pretty much nothing at all, he knows.”⁷⁸

One expects a sense of hollow interiority as the companion to a logic of self which figures the interior consciousness as the zone of meaning and of being. The movement between interior and exterior in *Hamlet* and in *Ulysses* engage the

⁷⁶ p. 459

⁷⁷ p.461

⁷⁸ p. 694

performative aspects of identity which *Infinite Jest* cannot, but for once at the outset. Ultimately, Wallace and the text capitulate to the illusion of authoritative consciousness that Shakespeare and Joyce, for all their obsession with thought, ultimately critique.

*One of the really American things about Hal, probably, is
the way he despises what it is he's really lonely for: this
hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need,
that pulses and writhes just under the hip empty mask,
anhedonia.⁷⁹*

The only movement the theory of self seems to suggest at all is movement further inwards. But not inwards as in *Ulysses*, where the performance of unconscious anxiety emerge in the theatrical space of the mind or dream as appropriately social and socially-determined questions. The hollow interiority that characterizes Hal Incandenza is, as I understand it, a type of Lacanian escape that figures Hal's incoherence and fractured sense of self as definitive, coherent, and legible: "since to be really human (at least as he conceptualizes it) is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone...sort of not-quite-right looking infant dragging itself anaclitically around the map."⁸⁰ The text and Hal seem to know what it is to be "really human" in a way that Shakespeare and Joyce seem not to, and *Infinite Jest* has drawn and reinforced the lines between inside and outside throughout the course of its many pages. The emptiness of interiority is not its refutation in total but its subtle and powerful affirmation. In this way, the text finds its positivism. Thus, the positive triumph of interiority proceeds in a course

⁷⁹ p. 695

⁸⁰ Anaclitic, def. "pertaining to an acute emotional dependence on another person or persons"

similar to Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of the abolition of tragedy by the culture industry under capital.⁸¹ *Infinite Jest*'s matter-of-fact acknowledgement of a hollow interiority, which is never contested or engaged with, but merely stated, defangs the critique of interiority and the affirmation of a social character of consciousness both of which *Ulysses* and *Hamlet* produce in their engagement with and movement between interior and exterior spaces.

⁸¹ "The culture industry stakes its company pride on looking it manfully in the eye and acknowledging it with unflinching composure. This posture of steadfast endurance justifies the world which that posture makes necessary."

Conclusion

The constellation between these three texts first caught my attention as a textual pre-occupation with thinking, or more precisely with over-thinking. Stephen, Hamlet, and Hal Incandenza are shackled with their own thoughts, and so in some way, by language. This initial question has led to thinking about the relationship between thought and language and the unique and private status which thought seems to enjoy, as in the naturalized hierarchy of and figurative weights given to thought, speech, and action. Action weighs more than words, is the general gist, at least, and for one to do something seems very different than for one to say that they will do something, or especially different than for one to merely think about doing the same thing. They are just words, after all.

As Judith Butler's work on gender seems to make clear, however, language bears a powerful ontologizing effect. In some ways, this text attempts to come to terms with a question Butler identifies in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*: "Does mean that everything that is understood as "internal" about the psyche is therefore evacuated, and that internality is a false metaphor?"⁸² The 'social possibilities of conscious,' as I've written about them, attempt to address the inability to understand ourselves inside our own consciousness, as a core, and our inevitable movement outwards to the social to establish ourselves as seen and as performed. Butler addresses a similar concern with regards to the first-person, the 'I:' "If I treat that grammar as pellucid, then I fail to call attention precisely to that sphere of language that establishes and disestablishes

⁸² Butler, *Gender Trouble*. Preface (1999), p. xvi

intelligibility.”⁸³ The ontologizing effect of language brought to bear on consciousness is precisely the question, though approached quite differently, biologically, which Daniel Dennett approaches in his own study of consciousness:

*Curiously, then, our first-person point of view of our own minds is not so different from our second-person point of view of others' minds: we don't see, or hear, or feel, the complicated neural machinery churning away in our brains but have to settle for an interpreted, digested version, a user-illusion that is so familiar to us that we take it not just for reality but also for the most indubitable and intimately known reality of all.*⁸⁴

This multi-pronged critique of the transparently intelligible first-person is not exactly new or surprising, but the possible implications that Butler identifies – implications beyond but not excluding gender – are not too be ignored, either. The question deserves more exploration and interrogation in terms of literature, and I believe in terms of form, especially. The social character of theatre has proven fundamental to understanding the performative aspects of consciousness in particular, and texts (like *Infinite Jest*) which begin to register a relationship to film rather than theatre, may be fertile ground for the exploration of different formal representations of consciousness, interiority, and the movement between inside and out.

⁸³ Preface (1999), p. xxvi

⁸⁴ Nagel, Thomas. “Is Consciousness an Illusion?” *New York Review Of Books*. March 9, 2017. Vol. 64 Number 4

References

Adorno, Theodore and Horkheimer, Max. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. English edition, 1972.

Bersani, Leo. *The Culture of Redemption*. Harvard University Press. 1990.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge Classics. 2006

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior. Vintage Book. 1986

Kurnick, David. *Empty Houses*. Princeton University Press. 2012.

Moretti, Franco. *The Modern Epic, Against Ulysses*. Verso Books. 1996.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince Of Denmark*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library. 2012.

Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest*. Back Bay Books. 1996.