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Foreword to *Ntifein Jest*

Artistic concession is the defining affliction of our cultural landscape. *Ntifein Jest* by LG Williams reveals it completely.

In 1997, David Foster Wallace, anointed "the voice of Generation X," sat across from Charlie Rose and admitted it. When asked about *Infinite Jest*'s structure, Wallace confessed: "I should have jumbled the sentences, but then no one would read it." *Infinite Jest*, the novel that secured his literary sainthood, should have been chaos—a deranged torrent of language, meaning unspooled, structure annihilated. That was the truth he glimpsed. But he recoiled. He chose the market over artistry.

Wallace's retreat marked a turning point in our creative history. He didn't just betray his vision; he set a standard for betrayal. Culture rewarded him, canonized him, and praised his failure of nerve as an act of innovation. *Infinite Jest* is celebrated not for radicalism, but for surrender—its transformation of challenging form into something marketable. "The trick is keeping the truth up-front in daily consciousness," Wallace once wrote. But what truth survives in a novel designed to be half-read, rarely finished? What's left when chaos is abandoned for legacy?

This isn't a literary failure. It's cultural collapse wrapped in a bestseller jacket. A culture that flees truth for acclaim, creation for career, and difficulty for comfort cannot produce meaning. It produces only works of surrender. As one critic noted, "Everyone our age has a quarter-read copy of *Infinite Jest*"—a symbol of seriousness that demands nothing, a trophy for having tried.

Wallace did not fall alone. Critics who canonized compromise, institutions that rewarded retreat, readers who celebrated their own confusion—these

are the forces that shaped the market Wallace feared.

Readability is not a virtue. Accessibility is not the truth. Coherence is not courage. Comprehension is a mere convenience, not a necessity in art.

Václav Havel, writing about truth under totalitarian pressure, provides the counter-principle: "It means something that there is such a book, that it could be written at all." Truth exists, indifferent to reception. Sincerity stands apart from readership, legibility, or market success. Wallace bowed to market pressure; *Ntifein Jest* chooses Havel's path.

This isn't a remix. It's the book Wallace described but refused to write—the one he admitted was possible but rejected for the sake of readership.

This project takes Wallace at his word. It uses his original 21,850 sentences and jumbles them into the text he confessed was possible but rejected: a work that refuses coherence, rejects redemption, and exposes the cowardice of narrative. Every broken phrase, every deranged sequence is a possibility Wallace discarded. This is not completion—it is correction. Not reverence, but vengeance. The language is louder than the original: not compromise, but a demand for reckoning.

Only someone operating outside market pressures could execute this correction. Only someone who never blinks.

Williams operates entirely outside these pressures.

Ntifein Jest is a literary extension of that refusal. It is neither a remix, nor a parody, nor a critique. It is destruction. It strips Wallace's text of every compromise, every gesture toward sense or readability. This is not postmodern cleverness;

it is a complete rejection of convention. What emerges is language separated from structure, narrative removed, meaning left in its rawest form.

This is not editing. It is an intervention—an act of reclamation, reorientation, and elevation. Not permission, but completion. Here, intervention becomes authorship. Destruction becomes genesis. Wallace’s confession becomes Williams’s creation.

Ntifein Jest is not for readers—Wallace already told us no one would read it. Not for Wallace’s fans. Not for literature students. It is for the ghosts who haunt unread books, for abandoned manuscripts, for radical forms strangled in their cradles. It is for the truth Wallace glimpsed, then abandoned.

And whether it sits unopened on tables or gets pulped in disgust, its existence matters. Havel again: “Even those countless flashes of knowledge which never illuminate the path ahead for society as a whole have their deep

social importance... if only through the mere fact that they happened.”

Read, ignored, dismissed, misunderstood—*Ntifein Jest* indicts either way. It shows the difference between concession and refusal, between art that obeys and art that resists. It does not ask for reception or seek relevance. It stands as fact. As a challenge. As proof.

You’ll call it unreadable. Dismiss it as incoherent. In doing so, you prove Wallace’s point: market fear determines artistic form. Good. Art does not exist to comfort you. Wallace chose you over truth. *Ntifein Jest* chooses truth over you. It exists. That means something. That is the final, unyielding fact.

One great Central Illinois artist realized the work that another was too afraid to make.

Jenny Saypaugh, January 2, 2025, Bodega, California