**Limitless Jest**

I’ve seen *Limitless (2011)* more times than I’ve seen any other movie. I must’ve been 11 when I first saw it in theaters with my dad. We got it on DVD in the early-to-mid 2010’s, and I recently bought it on Prime Video for $9.99. It’s the kind of movie you realize is sorta shaky on the drive back from the theater, but which is nonetheless fun the whole time you’re watching. And it’s the kind of movie I can’t stop rewatching. I’ll probably rewatch it one or two more times this year. There’s a good makeover montage, there’s catchy dialogue that’s so catchy it draws attention to itself, and the movie does a not-bad job at realizing the smart-drug fantasy. It’s a pretty good time.

So I’ve been watching this film a few times a year for the last ten years, and it’s been a mundane, unexamined piece of my life until like a year ago. There was a day in quarantine when I was writing (typing)—probably something for some college class—I was writing and after a few words I could feel my fingers gravitating towards the *Limitless* protag’s Sorkin-esq way of speaking. It was sort of creepy and ethereal; the pull wasn’t from the original words, but from their like grammatical bones. Following that syntactic skeleton’s prods and nudges and letting it sort of drive got me a few valid sentences with little effort. It usually takes a few disparate pockets of suffering to get something ok-sounding, and this was a pleasant change. That short burst of writing felt (and I’m risking ridicule here) like how I’d maybe expect Divine Inspiration to feel. The whole thing’s marred by the divine source being a commercial film which itself was based on a commercial novel, but I think it’s weird and interesting that something as abstract and ineffable as inspiration might’ve come from something as banal as watching the same movie over and over and over.

And maybe it’s not the rewatch qua rewatch that matters. I’ve recently read *Infinite Jest* (who reads *IJ* and doesn’t talk about having read it), and after 981+97 pages I’ve found a few Wallace-isms that I’ll probably end up sort of affecting. Like how he—after bridging into a long-winding parenthetical to give backstory or like the corporate history of some product—he repeats the subject of the sentence as a kind of reminder. Or how he employs, like, a certain piece of colloquial syntax to ease into abstract descriptions. And that’s just some of the effable stuff. The sheer length of the work maybe gives your cranial pattern-maching machine a large enough dataset to pull something meaningful out. Instead of rereading or rewatching, you’re reading one writer’s style for an extended period—it’s like the longitudinal analog to the cross-sectional reread.

I think the reread and the rewatch might have a formal function w/r/t picking up a kind of semi-tacit linguistic knowledge of authorial style. I think this function might also be somewhat captured by reading a lot from a single author. Or listening to an audio book on loop, etc. Anything to embed those grammatical structures deep into your gray matter. But maybe pick something other than *Limitless (2011)*.

P.S., why does Lindy get back with Eddie at the end? There’s that whole scene where she says Eddie was different before he took NZT and leaves him because of it. And now he’s running for president and speaking Chinese—even if he’s telling the truth to Van Loon and he’s off NZT, he sure isn’t acting like it.

P.P.S., it is admittedly feels somewhat head-in-the-sand-ish to talk about only formal aspects of *IJ*, especially when its content is so proximal to the idea of rewatching. It would be funny to make fun of me for being a catatonic cartridge-viewer or for being like Steeply’s M\*A\*S\*H-watching dad.

And though I can sort of put the more formal Wallace-ism into words, they normally sit on the boundary of consciousness. And there are probably some wholly inaccessible bits of procedural linguistic knowledge that one gets from reading long things, rereading things, and reading simpliciter.

**PRODUCTION—how knowledge**

There’s a good interview with David Foster Wallace (see *Quack This Way*), where DFW says: “Probably the second biggest [thing for a student to remember] is learning to pay attention in different ways. Not just reading a lot, but paying attention to the way the sentences are put together, the clauses are joined, the way the sentences go to make up a paragraph. Exercises as boneheaded as you take a book you really like, you read a page of it three, four times, put it down, and then try to imitate word for word so that you can feel your own muscles trying to achieve some of the effects that the page of text you like did. If you’re like me, it will be in your failure to be able to duplicate it that you’ll actually learn what’s going on” (27). Along with DFW, Stephen King in *On Writing* (27), Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography (13), Malcolm X in his (175) all mention reading and copying texts as a way they honed their verbal and literary chops—you start to think there might be something to this exercise.

I think a good chunk of our linguistic knowledge is like halfway tacit, tiptoeing the line between what-knowledge and how-knowledge. The meaning of words, how to put them together to form grammatical strings, and how to do it stylishly—we can talk about this stuff to some degree, but that have to be practiced, the way you practice a forehand or drill a musical riff. We copy Federer and

tacit blah blah

Another way to get tacit is to read long books

On top of readin

I’ve recently read *Infinite Jest* (and who reads *IJ* and doesn’t talk about having read it), and after a few hundred pages you start to notice certain Wallace-isms. The sheer length of the work, I think, gives you…so the vaguely gelatinous pattern-matching machine in your skull

Like how he—after bridging into a long-winding parenthetical to give backstory or like the corporate history of some product—he repeats the subject of the sentence as a little reminder. Or how he uses, like, a certain piece of colloquial syntax to ease into abstract descriptions of things.

* And maybe these aren’t Wallace-isms, I haven’t read broadly enough to know what’s author-specific and what’s not. But my goal isn’t to affect Wallace—I just want the

And though I can put these sorts of tendencies into words, they normally sit on the like the boundary of my consciousness, tiptoeing the thin line between what-knowledge and how-knowledge.

How he uses “real” instead of “really”

“familiarity with the rules before breaking them”—but familiarity with rules can be tacit, as can the process of flouting them.

* Butter notes?

If **mental diet is a good analogy, I think it’s true that you are what you eat.**