

The Fake Haven

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(m/y)o-
ur/their

Before you enter, please read aloud using one full breath

Stop

Full stop

In a dream

In a sense

We are in a dream

In a sense

In a dream

Full stop

Stop

Full stop

In a dream

In a sense

We are in a dream

In a sense

In a dream

Full stop

Stop

Inhale now.

P lease

A llow

U ninterrupted

S ound to

E nter

“I’ve been meditating a lot during lockdown and it’s been really helpful, so I stopped meditating”¹

Internal noise, external noise, internal voices, external voices, which voice will they listen to today?

Enmeshed in a dream, they can’t wake up before 11am and use coffee to

SNAP-TO-IT.

“Will I stay? Will I sit today? Will my thoughts stay? Will I surrender to it? Nothing happens. But nothing happens. And nothing happens. Then nothing happens.”

Except the past is about to happen again.

Directions:

Read this on an exhale – this is it

Read this on an inhale – that is it

Read this on an exhale – this is it

Read this on an inhale – that is it

Is this it?

GO TO LEVEL 1.

1 Me (2021).

TIME (avoid the void), Level 1

TIME is a dark space; they are led through it by the light of a phone in a disembodied arm. This third person-player perspective is not so much an extension of their body as it is another limb, one that they are holding stretched out in front of them. They can hear a choir, voices are singing elongated notes, the fundamentals are gliding around, the instruction to the choir was this: *sing a different note to the ones you can hear and aim to harmonise with the other voices, use gentle attack and decay, your note should last as long as one full breath.*

Someone had to start. The first singer also had an instruction: *listen to your environment and mimic a note from one of the sounds you can hear – not the timbre, just the note.*

To understand these instructions, you need to see what cannot be seen.

Noise is a vehicle in *TIME* to attend to or escape from the present moment, if they want to get out of their head, and away from their inner monologue they can sit in stillness and listen to the choir, or select rain, traffic, a washing machine, or they can listen to minimal techno, vaporwave, or trap. A gift of this moment in time is also the ability to exit from it.

They regularly work with unwanted noise in the background. They can still hear the canned laughter of *Friends* coming from their son's laptop, even though they have headphones on, even though they are lost in thought, even though they are actively blocking that noise with more noise. They try to block the noise of the traffic with the noise of the TV and the noise of the TV with pink noise, noise on noise on noise, inside *TIME*.

Meditation Level, LEVEL 2

A dome, a river. The infinite curve distorts their spatial perception. There is no way in and no way out. A stone figurine sits in an abandoned graveyard, its broken down one grain of sand at a time with rainfall.

Please observe (m/y)our/their:

pressing thoughts

intrusive thoughts

suicidal thoughts

happy thoughts

fucked-up thoughts

lonely thoughts

lingering thoughts

listless thoughts

environmental pressures

poor housing

toxic relationships

inability to process difficult emotions

substance abuse

increased anxiety

desire to get out of your head

desire to get into your head

this inner voice.

The choir returns and sings a slow melody:

Nothing was ever meant to be this way,

Nothing was ever meant to really decay,

To this extent.

Watch the water go by,

Watch the water go by,

Till you die.

THE REAL WORLD (UNDER CONSTRUCTION), Level 3

They double screen anytime the stress of living arises. They open their laptop to watch TV and almost simultaneously they unlock their phone and start scrolling, searching, reading, reacting, reaching, lingering, longing. The swell of brain traffic competing for dopamine, disappointment, flight, rest, reach, take, drink, run, buy, stare, steal, swear, wear, wake, die.

Their brain bathing, drowning, in media, entertainment, jealousy, fear, resentment, envy, anger, sadness, one after another the empathic desire to connect with what they're seeing pushes their mind beyond what it is designed for.

This entertainment is causing them to slowly erode and cave inwards in a post-humanist dream state, they are not the product, they are the carcass that's been left behind² after their data has been consumed and processed and sold back to them with an opiate-like compulsive addiction and a human-centipede configuration.

The instant jealousy algorithms, the instant anxiety algorithms, create another urge, they're missing something, they don't know what it is, maybe it's in here but in the Artaudian cannibalism of their mind (the dream that ate the dream), they are sinking into the abyss and their urge to reach for more is like wanting cake while eating cake.

Q. How do you escape when a threat is internal?

A. Substances or behaviours. Drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, TV, the internet, arguing, running, eating, stealing, lying, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, any behaviour that changes you physiologically, that you return to on a daily basis to block, numb, deny, remove, ignore a perceived threat, where the dopamine hit can cause or push you to return to the behaviour, despite missing work, insomnia or hypersomnia, not washing and isolating.

2 Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Public Affairs, 2019. "The carcass" is Zuboff's concept.

Sedation by noise is a numbed state induced by predictive content and visual noise.³

Think of two people arguing, one hoping to drown out the other by raising their voice, both with the same idea. In this slice of the anthropological time scale, we devour noise, we can't face ourselves, a feeling of self-loss-ness.

Now, here you go again
You say, you want your freedom
Well, who am I to keep you down?
It's only right that you should
Play the way you feel it
But listen carefully, to the sound
Of your loneliness
Like a heartbeat, drives you mad
In the stillness of remembering what you had
And what you lost
And what you had
And what you lost⁴

This endless forest fire in our minds, minds that crave silence, stillness, space, are filled with noise, every second of the day.

This is noise, that is noise, life is noise, I am noise, consumed by noise, eating noise, shitting noise, living noise, breathing noise.

This is what we want.

This is what we are feeding on and being fed.

We are free to do whatever we want
within this trap.

3 I came to this term after hearing about the concept of “censorship through noise”, which describes blocking information or facts – particularly in a political arena – not by silencing the truth but by blaring so much noise around it that you can no longer hear or see the truth. The proliferation of fake news is one such example (Pomerantsev, Peter. *This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*. Faber & Faber, 2019).

4 Fleetwood Mac. ‘Dreams’. Warner Brothers, 1977.

‘Piss Factory’, Patti Smith⁵

I got this job in a piss factory inspecting pipe
Forty hours thirty-six dollars a week
(...)
But these bitches are just too lame to understand
Too goddamned grateful to get this job
To know they’re getting screwed up the ass
(...)
Floor boss slides up to me and he says
“Hey sister, you just movin’ too fast,
You screwin’ up the quota,
You doin’ your piece work too fast,
Now you get off your mustang sally
You ain’t goin’ nowhere, you ain’t goin’ nowhere”

This monocrop of a digital drip feed. Advertisements projected on aurora borealis, visual, aural, anal, vaginal, music from your u bend, implants in your iris, to the end of the downward spiral at the end of the downward spiral to the end of the downward spiral.

MORE PEOPLE ARE DEAD THAN ALIVE.
MORE PEOPLE ARE DEAD WHEN ALIVE.

Pitch this – every user’s data generates a meta kind of city, onticity, that leads us to this, it is feeding *us (not with)* the hand that was bitten off.

5 Smith, Patti. ‘Piss Factory’. Vertigo Records, 1974.

Level 4: Tomorrow

Emptiness is what I'm aiming for now.

Nothing happens here.

qot2Stop
qots llulFull stop
mærb æ nlln a dream
esens æ nlln a sense
mærb æ ni ɛr æ We are in a dream
esens æ nlln a sense
mærb æ nlln a dream
qots llulFull stop
qot2Stop
qots llulFull stop
mærb æ nlln a dream
esens æ nlln a sense
mærb æ ni ɛr æ We are in a dream
esens æ nlln a sense
mærb æ nlln a dream
qots llulFull stop
qot2Stop
qots llulFull stop
mærb æ nlln a dream
esens æ nlln a sense
mærb æ ni ɛr æ We are in a dream
esens æ nlln a sense
mærb æ nlln a dream
qots llulFull stop
qot2Stop

Level 5:

- 1 The way that you define a problem determines the solution.**
- 2 You cannot heal what you cannot feel.**

12 step recovery clichés:

Easy does it

Live and let live

First thing's first

One day at a time

Keep it simple

One is too many, a thousand is not enough

We'll love you, until you learn to love yourself

Try to be grateful and resentful at the same time, you can't serve two masters

Faith chases away fear

Take other people's inventory until you can take your own

We have to give it away to keep it

The addict's mind is like a bad neighbourhood: don't go there alone

Poor me, poor me, pour me another drink

An egomaniac with an inferiority complex

Half measures availed us nothing

This too shall pass

How does it work? It works just fine

If you hang around the barbershop long enough, you'll get a haircut

The elevator to sobriety is broken, take the steps⁶

6 12 step slogans and clichés.

So in emptiness there is no form;
no sensation, conception, discrimination, awareness;
no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind;
no color, sound, smell, taste, touch, phenomena;
no realm of sight, no realm of consciousness;
no ignorance and no end to ignorance,
no old age and death and no end to old age and death,
no suffering, no cause of suffering,
no extinguishing, no path, no wisdom, and no gain⁷

The perfect situation is before you if you just wake up.

⁷ Osho, Yoga Sudha, Yoga Rabiya. *The Heart Sutra: Discourses on the Prajnaparamita-hridayam Sutra of Gautama the Buddha*. Rajneesh Foundation, 1978.

CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

'The Fake Haven' is a text that contains writing in various forms, including poetry, autofiction, prose, and song lyrics. At the time of generating this text, I was simultaneously writing a script and editing sound loops of my voice within the context of my practice-led research PhD at the Sonic Arts Research Centre at Queen's University, Belfast. Whereas artwork can be ever faltering, ever failing, not knowing how it will turn out, within practice-led research the work should be predetermined. Within the boundaries of the academy my writing – my work – became porous; poetry seeped into and dissolved the institutional fortress that is sometimes incongruous with a creative process. This became a methodological framework for 'The Fake Haven', which engages with the point at which language breaks down, an avalanche of form, meaning, formality, and spontaneity in writing.

In concrete poetry, the text in a poem oscillates between the form, the materiality of the words, and the inherent meaning of the words themselves. During a period of writing in both academic and experimental forms, the texts became entangled. I submitted a creative academic piece to my institution as part of my first annual progress review. It was rejected. This led to my decision to supplement my submitted portfolio (in this case sound and video works) with what I termed 'alternative reads' or 'alt reads'. The first of these 'alt reads' became a self-contained text that formed the outline for *The Fake Haven* video game, which was produced for Manchester International Festival, 2021.

The premise of the text is that by following an imaginary video game walk-through, the player will return to their 'pre-self' – a term that I coined myself. The 'pre-self' is an idea that references the 'non-self' (anatta), which is a concept in Buddhism. However, the concept of the non-self in Buddhism is not straightforward: if there is no self, the non-self cannot exist. It is better to understand the non-self as emptiness:

It appears the doctrine of anatta arose, not as a fundamental teaching of the Buddha, but as a misinterpretation by those who could not accept the indeterminate consequences of the simple neti neti (not this, not that) approach to the Self evidenced in this [the Buddha's] early dialogue (Shrader, 2007).

Emptiness appears in the virtual world of the video game as a level, called “Tomorrow”. In this level the first-person player can do only one thing: walk down a path. There is a metal fence keeping you on the path, and sunlight bursts through the fence in strips of light. Your (the player’s) iris is overexposed to this white light, which blocks your vision. Walking this path is like walking through a natural strobe. You can hear music – a choir singing a postapocalyptic love song: “Nothing was ever meant to be this way, nothing was ever meant to really decay to this extent. Watch the water go by, watch the water go by, till you die.”

Nobody ever was or had a self (Metzinger, 2003: 1).

In Thomas Metzinger’s *Being No One*, he discusses the first person perspective of the self. In its essence, the self is a collection of stories or “conscious self models” (Metzinger, 2003) that we hold on to in order to generate a self. This first-person perspective is illustrated through the medium of a first-person video-game walkthrough: here the self is represented by the gun that enters the base of the screen. The gun is shown in a forced perspective to give the player a sense that they are holding it in their own hands, looking down the barrel.

A video game walkthrough is recorded game play that functions as a guide to help players get to the next level or provides instructions about the game. In the 1980s, hotlines were set up by Nintendo to help players beat games (Zaleski, 2015), and this practice has evolved to high-profile YouTube channels showing gameplay live or pre-recorded. As a single parent, I watched my son watching these walkthroughs from the ages of fourteen to twenty-three, peering over his shoulder as he watched YouTube. There are so many layers to this perspective: I am watching my son, watching a YouTube gamer who is watching the game. As Alexander Galloway explains, “The movie theatre is a complex intersection of seemingly incommensurate media environments: a three-dimensional space is used for viewing a two-dimensional plane that in turn represents the illusion of another three-dimensional space” (2006: 39). In first-person shooter games, there is the additional element of the player (the gun/you) in the foreground of the screen. Galloway argues that “the beginning of a medium is that historical moment when something ceases to represent itself” (2006: 39). In this case, it is the player’s perspective that is no longer represented.

At the time of generating ‘The Fake Haven’ as a text, I was struggling to learn the complex game-development software Unreal Engine. Instead of building the game with the software, I built it with the text. The video game has now become

a music interface for the spoken text. The sounds for the video game are taken from the spoken, sung, exhales and inhales, and recordings of excerpts from the text. The game play triggers sound loops. Sounds are embedded in objects which are then shot, and there are blueprints running in the background that play the sound loops on impact. The game's architecture is fake rather than a representation of the real world, and three-dimensional letters and words have been placed as monuments in the landscape. The landscape itself (if it's zoomed out on) is built on an infinity symbol. This riff on the futility of our existence means that the player always return to the beginning of the game ad infinitum.

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