

# Winston Churchill

Winston Winston Churchill in the party,  
coming on strong now, knocking down Nazis.  
Winston Spencer Churchill takes the floor,  
V for victory in the Second World War!

Winston Churchill taking the stage,  
statesman poet of the turbulent age.  
Winnie's on the mic and he's busting out speeches,  
fight them on the hills and fight them on the beaches.  
Winston Churchill's on lyrical form,  
warning the people of the gathering storm.  
The fascists are back, and it's not over yet,  
so tune in to Churchill on your wireless set.

Czechoslovakia, Poland then France,  
Who's going to stop the German advance?  
Europe lies crushed by the boots of the Reich,  
Britain's left standing so on we fight.  
Stand up to corrupt and evil regimes,  
smashing all the National Socialist dreams,  
We'll never bow down to the fascist agenda,  
we'll never give in and we'll never surrender!

London lies dark under the bombs of the blitz.  
Lights out, head down, watch out for Fritz.  
Under weapons of colossal and shattering power,  
history will say this was our finest hour.  
Doodlebug, V2, rain of fire,  
Conflagration of the world entire,  
for all mankind the situation looks dire,  
but Winston's got the rhymes to uplift and inspire!

Chomping on the Cubans sipping down the brandy,  
Watch the big old bulldog Winston getting handy,  
Shooting down Stukas from out of the skies

Winnie tells it straight whilst Adolf spouts lies.  
Big up the Russians and their perishing winter,  
Shout out to Turing, cracking Enigma.  
Watch out Jerry, the Yanks have joined the fray,  
The motherfucking Fuhrer's not going to get his way!

Winston Winston Churchill in the party, coming on strong now smashing down Nazis  
Winston Spencer Churchill takes the floor, V for victory in the Second World War!

## The Concept

What old Sir Winston Churchill is arguably most remembered for are his inspirational speeches on the funky fresh new medium of radio. We can never know how much his microphonemanship actually made a difference to the morale of the nation, or the outcome of the war, but lets say, for the purposes of *this* track, that the Second World War basically boiled down to an MC battle between Churchill and Hitler, and Winnie's laidback badass style won the day. Winston basically rapped fascism out of Europe. That may be a slight trivialization of the deep complex weave of military history, but then again there may be a grain of truth in there.

So then, let's have Winston rapping for real over some dubstep built out of the sound of bombers and air-raid sirens. Yay!

A fairly simple concept, then, but a track that was extremely satisfying to make, and juicily enjoyable to perform live.

## The Sound Of War

It's hard to imagine a more frightful and uncanny sound than air raid sirens, particularly when on hot it's heels follows the drone of bombers. And that's only the *sound* - imagine how much more terrifying if you were actually cowering in your house underneath those machines, that are about to drop explosives more or less at random on your city.

The sound itself, I think, taps into more primal fears - it is an extended cry of a wounded creature, or the existential wail of a giant, distressed baby. Despite (or even because of?) the horrifying nature of such a sound, it has worked pretty damn well in rave music. Everyone loves a good siren. Actually, I've always thought of dark Jungle and Drum and

Bass in particular as, more or less, the sound of mechanized war. Rattling machine gun snares, spattering high-hats of spent cartridges, droning bomber 'Reese' bass lines thundering overhead, sirens, explosions, wailing shells, chugging helicopter rotor blades... it's all in there if you listen. It's a party, funtimes, smiletimes, but it's also a war, darktimes, horrortimes. The latter seems to enhance the former. Work that one out.

The sheer brutal apocalyptic inhumanity of [tracks like this](#) has always thrilled my inner warmonger. That's not to say I'm really keen on *actual* war, it's probably even the reverse: I think the more brutal the music you listen to and make, the more chilled out you become as a person. Throughout my teenage life, and a fair proportion of my adult life to be honest, having a massive wig out mosh to terrifyingly loud apocalyptic noise has expunged all the pent up anger and aggression all out of my system. That catharsis-through-noise felt incredible and I miss it like hell. Whilst I am a much less angry person in general now, I also feel I have less release for what tensions do build up. I tell a lie, Mike Trollfield is my release now, gawd 'elp us.

The spoken word, air-raid & bomber drone sample that starts the track is taken from the iconic "[The World At War](#)" BBC documentary series, narrated by Lawrence Olivier.

Top Tip: if you're going to sink to the dismal level of kicking off your album with a vocal sample on top of a soundscape, at least ensure it's delivered by a bloody good actor.

I think this TV series was the way I first learned about WW2 - watching this series with my Dad as a kid. It's a funny thing to think about: at some point I'd *never heard* of World War Two, and then at some point I had. Imagine introducing that concept to someone for the first time! Yet true understanding of the immensity of it is still continuing to occur throughout my life.

The dark, brooding, fantastic [World At War theme tune](#) by Carl Davis is burned into my subconscious. In my head the wars of the first half of the 20th century are soundtracked by this kind of doomy, grainy, black and white strings and brass. *None* more gravitas. In some ways this brand of classical is even heavier than metal. I use this sound-world reference in quite a few other places throughout the album (e.g. Atom Smashers).

It's probably not so obvious any more, but my original intention was to get a 1940's vibe in this track somehow. I've often fancied that there's some subconscious connection between the sound of the music in the forties and the sound, and indeed social configuration, of the actual war. Many identical looking individuals forming large squadrons of droning things,

interspersed with bombastic hits. This rough setup would apply to both the jazz and the classical music being made at the time, and also to the battles being fought.

The average number of people in a single band must have been way higher than it is today. The large amount of cohesion and control required to coordinate large orchestras in a way mirrored the coordinated effort of waging war. These musical efforts were vastly more demanding than those expected of modern bedroom musicians like myself. Editing a track on a laptop in your house is far easier than playing complex arrangements synchronously with fifty other musicians. Similarly, posting a rant about Brexit or Coronavirus on Facebook is incomparably easier than attacking a Normandy beach. Our digital atomisation has relieved us of a great many organisational burdens. This is a good thing, on balance.

## "Seed" Ideas

Some tracks simply emerge from tinkering around with sound, others emerge as a specific concept in my head and then have to be brought into existence. Both approaches are good. This track is an example of the latter. It started as “wouldn’t it be cool if... hmm, yes it would” and then I merely had to write the damn thing. In general tracks that emerge from concepts are far harder to make than ones that emerge from exploratory noodlings.

In addition to the MC battle lyrical idea, the basic seed idea for the instrumental side of this track was to make dubstep using a mix of the sound of big band brass with real samples of WW2. I ended up not being 100% faithful to that seed, but that was the starting point. I don't always start off with concrete concepts like this, especially not for dance music, but as my musical abilities became stronger I found myself able to construct tracks around concepts in this way.

I think the important thing with "having an idea for a track" is not that you come up with a plan and follow it to the letter, but just that the seed is something that will excite you enough to get off your arse and get making music, start the process. Not only that, the seed is something to return to when the process starts losing momentum or hits an impasse. When you start asking yourself "what the hell should happen now?" then you can return to the original concept and usually it will prompt some kind of suggestion, or provide you with an artistic constraint that will get you over the immediate creative barrier. It's happened time and time again that I'm not getting very far, I ask myself, "what *is* this track actually *about*?" and then "how can I make the track even more *that*?" ... and then

immediately I get the next idea. It is a continual process of convergence on a core idea, and divergence of new ideas that spin off that core. More on convergence and divergence later.

Sonic noodling can go anywhere, and there aren't any rules, but a concept has to *work*, and that means *work*. That said, even a track born from a happy accident needs to have some kind of cohesion, some kind of identity and individual character, it needs to have a face.

In fact, I would go so far as to say that if a track doesn't have a core concept of *some* kind, even if that concept is completely abstract, then it's just not very good.

## Synths vs. Samples

I doubt the war between synths and samplers will ever be quite as intense as the one between Nazism and the civilized world, but it looms pretty large in my life, at least. Usually I try to refrain from using samples - I much prefer to design the majority of my sounds using synths, for reasons I will go into in a second. In this case I did both. After setting the stage with the grainy black and white World At War sample, the sounds morph into something more synthetic and modern on synths. First I tried using the actual recording from the TV audio of drone of the bombers for the droning bassline - but this didn't quite work, the recording was just too old and tinny, not heavy enough to be convincing. So I tried to resynthesise both the bomber-drone and the siren-wail using synths, which worked OK.

The other problem with just using that droning bomber sample for the bassline was that I felt the original Luftwaffe were about seven semitones too high (maybe that's why they lost the war? Just not enough welly in the low end?), so the synth bass first fades in, and then switches to 7 semitones down (a fifth) - which was one of those kludgy compromises that somehow become part of the song, to me it sounds like the higher German drone being countered by a deeper more resolute and more powerful drone underneath, which represents the determination of London to withstand them - or something.

I wouldn't necessarily recommend that a beginner start making electronic music with *just* synths. It's much simpler and more immediately rewarding to start building beats with samples. It also has to be said many genres fundamentally rely on samples for their sound. But at some point I think you need to establish your own sound palette, and be able to squish sounds about in time and frequency to suit your musical needs. For me, synthesis provides a finer level of control over the fundamental building blocks of sound. There's

something awesome about being able to drill right down into the guts of your noises and tailor them precisely to your liking.

Now, you can get too snobbish and categorical about this, but I liken using samples to making a collage, and using synths to painting. You can make a great collage out of snippets of other stuff, for sure, but painting undeniably gives you so much more control of color, form and texture. On the other hand, painting is more time consuming and takes more practise. That doesn't mean it's "better", or that if you don't design your own sounds you're not a "real producer" or any of that crap. You choose your tools, and whatever works for you is good, but personally, designing my own sounds is of paramount importance.

To me, making the sounds that build a piece of music is sculpting an item of furniture from raw materials, whereas using samples is just assembling it Ikea-style. Songbirds are cute when they imitate other noises, it's a neat trick, but I'd far rather listen to a Nightingale riffing on its own freeform creative improvisations than just imitating another bird or a mobile phone or something.

And hell, I also just bloody love listening to NOISES. The stupider the noise the better. I like exploring sounds. In fact I could quite happily give up music and make only sounds. I love sounds, I love the details in sounds, I love what happens when you reverse a sound, I love what happens when you pitch a sound down four octaves, I love what happens when you loop a sound for five minutes and listen to the same sound for so long it changes into something completely different. This kind of thing has almost nothing to do with music (unless you want it to have). Some people find it a chore and a distraction from music making, but I don't, I love sound design for its own sake.

Sounds can be just as interesting as music. Some music I have made is basically just a series of interesting noises put end to end, music concrète style (e.g. my releases on Unbearable Recordings). That is actually enough to sustain my interest, if not anyone else's. For me the thing that draws me into producing music, again and again, is the unlimited variety of sound. I could probably spend the rest of my musical career just making snare drums or tiny bleeps and never get bored. This is essentially why I for the most part make electronic music and not anything else - control of timbre. This was what lured me away from metal and into techno. Metal just started to get samey: the guitar always sounded like *that*, the drums always like *that*, and the vocals always like *that*, resulting in an extremely limited sound palette, which I felt was more or less exhausted by around 1993. Synths and effects seemed a way out of that, and seemed to promise a way to get *even heavier* than guitars could ever be.

That said, if I'm making a "songy-song" with lyrics and so on, like most of the tracks on this album, then I'll not pay as much attention to sound design as I would if I were making techno or electro or instrumental electronica. Sound design is just not as important. Because the listeners attention will not be fully on the sounds, it's not quite as important to make them amazing. In fact, sonic amazingness might just be a distraction, as the listeners attention budget is very limited. There is also the practical concern that spending fucking ages on sound design would just slow the production process down so much that you might just get bored and give up due to mental overload.

This sound design vs. songwriting tradeoff saddens me, as I'd love to make "songs" that are as sonically rich as the most complex electronic music. Maybe I should just try harder. I'd like to wave my hands and say that it's physically impossible due to the Second Law of Listenodynamics, but I've heard artists who do actually achieve it. Bummer. Clark springs to mind in this regard. There are very few producers so good that they make me think I should give up, and hence I end up avoiding listening to any more of their stuff. Clark is one of them, nice one, mate.

And then there's the fact that twoddling, splooping and fiddlicating around with physical hardware synths is tremendously enjoyable. Voyaging into the world of sound with a knobtastic, tasty looking bit of kaboodle is fun fun fun. Especially in the modular world - I often just play around for a few hours and make strange noises, and not record anything. But that's OK. Not everything in life has to be "used" - some music making can just be fleeting. Even if you don't record anything you have still practised using your stuff, but more importantly experienced JOY. Both those things are super valuable. Exploring noises for an evening is more fun than just surfing the net or watching TV. In fact, sitting down to produce noise with no intention is a much better formula for producing something awesome than sitting down with some productive goal in mind.

Notwithstanding what I said about the seed ideas, if I sit down and tell myself "Right, I'm going to make a track now" then fuck all happens and the whole thing is a drag. But if I sit down and say "I'm going to explore sound, and see where it takes me", then what do you know, an hour later I have a banger on my hands<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Or at least what feels like a banger at the time... we'll get back to this.

## Synthesising Sounds To Order: The “Divebomb” Sound

It's always tricky trying to make a synth sound "to order" to imitate something else, it's still something of a lottery, so I'm chuffed when it comes out well. I really enjoy trying to synthesise real sounds, not because I want to perfectly imitate those sounds so that you can't tell the difference, but because it's interesting to weave around on the line between “real” and “synthesized”. I think this peculiar line we draw in our heads between real and fake is a recurring theme in my tunes, it links into my fascination with simulated worlds and the “illusory” nature of reality. This mindfuckery we shall gleefully return to later.

You don't have to know how sound works to make music, but it really helps.

I think the ability to imagine a sound and then make at least something vaguely resembling it is a handy ability to have - but I reckon it took me about fifteen years of somewhat tedious twiddling to achieve, your mileage may vary. I think I was a pretty slow learner compared to some ridiculously young and talented producers I hear (little gits). Of course, really being able to precisely predict what sound will emerge when you turn a certain knob is impossible, but ballparky efforts get you a long way - being able to quickly dial up your favourite sounds on any synth will ensure that you can always find something that's roughly what you need, and furthermore if you know *exactly* how the sound was built it can then be easily tailored for the musical context it sitting in. If you just use presets, or samples, you don't know how the guts of them work, and the sound is just a complex, unwieldy black box, so you are less able to then tweak it and fit it into the song as you wish. If you have never tried this before, then try out this website:

<https://learningsynths.ableton.com/>. It's an interactive explanation of how synths work. You can turn knobs, hear the results and get a feel for how synthesisers make the noises they do. It's a nice starting point. But I *never* got taught this stuff, I simply played around. When I learned, there was no internet, so I just had to experiment and find out what got me toward the sound I wanted. Tips and tricks you find online or on courses are super useful, yes, but ultimately having a burning ambition to make amazing sounds is the best teacher of all.



I was particularly smugly self-satisfied with the descending plane noise that serves as a riser<sup>2</sup> leading up to the first beat of each line. A longer version of this also ends the track. The neat thing is the modulation, plane noises kind of fade in and out and flange, and I deliberately made this sound do that based on what I know about how sound works (see the track "divebomb" in the Ableton project).

I think I might, like everyone else making dance music, overuse this riser technique of having a whoosh or backward sucking sound leading up to the first downbeat. It builds anticipation and makes that eventual hit more intense, but there's something increasingly lazy and formulaic about it. It pisses me off when I hear other people doing it, and yet I do it myself. What a hypocrite I am.

However, in my defense, the fact that this whoosh is a damaged, plummeting plane spewing flames, and the downbeat is the plane smashing to bits on the ground, adds a bit of spice to the proceedings. With this sound I've killed two "birds" with one "Small Stone"<sup>3</sup>. I often attempt this - try to take some trick that is something of a cliché or "trope" in some genre and try to put it to use to support the *conceptual* context of the track, in this case we have a build in anticipation and a plane sound combined. This is a win-win situation, because you have used an ironic "quoting an idiom" approach to avoid the cliché of just using the boring old trick, but yet you have also deepened the sound world you are painting without that sound collage being musically or structurally arbitrary. It is stupidly easy to just paste a relevant sound effect over a beat - but if the sound effect actually plays a part in the rhythmic structure then that's a bonus in my view.

Why do planes sound the way they do? Why when a plane goes over your head does it make that descending and then ascending sheeeeeooooowwww, sound? Why do people say that flangers sound like planes? It's not a coincidence, it's for exactly the same underlying reason.

"Flanging" was an effect invented in the sixties, and christened by the Beatles (sorry, if you don't like the Beatles you *will* get sick of me mentioning them). It involves a technique invented by Abbey Road engineer Ken Townsend of mixing two copies of the sound together, one with a slight delay, and then varying that delay, by putting a finger on one of the "flanges" of the tape machine to slow it down, and releasing it so that the copy catches up again. The peaks and troughs of different frequency waves interfere with each other,

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<sup>2</sup> Risers are sounds that lead up to, or build up to, a hit, often something like a backwards "whoosh". Risers can descend in pitch, and a descending sound can lead "up" to something... confusing terminology I guess.

<sup>3</sup> Bird was a [slang term for a plane](#). The [Small Stone](#) is a phaser pedal not a flanger, but they're similar enough for me to feel extremely smug about this scintillating smartass triple play on words.

some frequencies are enhanced and others are eliminated. The pattern of cancellations and amplifications looks like a comb, hence this effect is sometimes called a "comb filter". If you change the delay between the two copies, the areas that are enhanced and attenuated sweep up and down in frequency, whooshing up and down. That's flanging.

So what about a plane going over your head? There are again two 'copies' of the sound. One copy of the sound reaches your ear via a path leading directly from the plane. Another copy reaches your ear via a path that has bounced off the ground to get to your ear. Because the bouncing path is longer, and sound travels at a constant speed, that sound is delayed, and interferes with the direct path, and filters the sound in that "comb" pattern, just like a short delay/echo effect. As the plane travels overhead and past you, the change in angle that the plane makes with you and the ground means that the bouncing path gets shorter faster than the direct path, roughly twice as fast. As this extra distance shortens, the delay between the two sounds comes *down*, and the comb frequency pattern sweeps *up*. This effect is particularly pronounced when you're standing in a wide open area and the floor is hard and smooth, e.g. paving slabs, because the bounced sound is more equal in volume to the direct sound, and hence the cancellations become more pronounced.

You can prove this to yourself next time a plane goes over. Jump up and down and you can add your own LFO modulation to the flanging sound of the plane. You will look like a complete wally, but is it not worth a little social humiliation to empirically and intuitively grasp this deep mathematical interweaving of space, time, and music technology? Yes it is. It very much is.

In my kind of world, every time an aeroplane flies over a busy street, everyone would start jumping up and down to create their own personal flangers. That world would be a better one. But sadly, right now you are currently not really allowed to be jumping around out in the open, and there are hardly any planes flying over. Jumpy-plane-flange is yet another thing that Corona has put a downer on. Ah well, stick it on your ever lengthening lockdown is over to do list.

Anyway, despite all this DSP geekery, using a flanger didn't actually make the plane sound any more realistic, so I turned it off. So much for theory!

## The Vocals

So one tricky thing here is that I wanted to somehow do an impression of Winston Churchill rapping, and I'm not a good impressionist *or* a good rapper. So that took a bit of

bloody graft. However, I did find that Winston's vocal mannerisms did weirdly lend themselves to rapping. He had a distinctive way of using notes, with a kind of rhythm to them, often ending on a flat insistent persuasive tone, and I try to imitate that.

But I usually sound, um, quite different from Churchill. I guess due to the fact I'm skinny and tall, not fat and stocky, and schooled in 1980's comprehensive school, not a Victorian boarding school. I am at least British, thank God and Her Majesty for that.

I had to squash my chin into my throat, try and puff my larynx up a bit and somehow imagine myself as a posh, lumbering barrel of a man. In the end the voice is not *that* similar, but similar enough for you to get the idea (Winnie's a bit more mumbly, squawky and avuncular but that style wouldn't really come across on a loud backing track). Given a load of compression, tight middle EQ and old school reverb like a 40's public address system (another trick I over-use) I got something which adequately carried things along. I'm still annoyed that the character isn't quite consistent across the whole track - but trying to re-do the whole thing or overdub bits until they are perfectly consistent would lead to even more inconsistencies, and endless rabbit-hole perfectionist madness. Knowing when to bail on perfection is extremely important. It's too hard to do the whole impression thing live, so I don't really try, but I like to think that some of the cadences of Winston's voice come through anyway.

I have a love-hate-love-indifference-hate-hate-love-quit-try-again relationship with vocals. I'm not much of a singer, but I enjoy it. I enjoy writing lyrics immensely, so then someone has to sing 'em, and I'm usually the only person around.

There's a strange but widely held superstition about vocals, which maintains that being able to sing is a magical talent that you either have or don't have. But this is bollocks. The voice is an instrument like anything else, the more you practise the better you get. Yes, there will be characteristics of your unique voice, but the vocal apparatus is so incredibly flexible that I think you can always work around it. Slowly but surely I get better. Not great, but better. Hopefully I've done enough, but I still fret about it and struggle to record takes I'm happy with.

Why do I like writing lyrics so much? I guess it's because I like songs with a strong message, and a strong identity, but it's also that I love word games. Lyrics don't have to rhyme, but I just think it's fun, a bit like playing Scrabble or something. I often sing little nonsense rhymes to myself as I wander around the house, in silly voices and about ridiculous subjects. I try to make them rhyme in real time as a kind of fun exercise to brighten up an otherwise dull chore.

And language is funny. My wife and I sometimes play the kids game of peaking po peach pother pusing pe pame pirst ponsonant por pevery pord. It gets more and more amusing the longer you spend doing it, and furthermore every different letter you use is somehow *differently* hysterical. The current record for total hilarity is "Gn" as in "Gnocci". Gnit's Gnabsolutely gnilarious. I find this everyday creativity is far more important to me than Creativity with a big C. I believe it's more important for my own wellbeing to have a brain that can have fun in the daily small things in life, than have a brain that creates some magnum opus that gets me famous. Really I do, it's tiny moments of domestic micro-creativity that give me the most joy, I think.

I assume the neighbours can't hear me doing this, and I also like to think they wouldn't worry too much if they did. But then again, when once I heard our neighbour singing silly stuff to himself I immediately thought "christ, he sounds like a sad fucking lunatic" so sadly the chances of not sounding like a nut-job to an eavesdropper are vanishingly slim.

Where I live now there are some kids living opposite the window of my studio room, and sometimes when I'm doing vocals I can hear them taking the piss. It's immensely off putting. It's one of those little moments that puts you as a musician right there in your place and says "You: you are no one. You are not special. This is not a recording studio, it's just a smallish bedroom. You are so pathetic that even small children treat you as an object of derision. You are fooling no one but yourself. Take the headphones off, stop this self indulgent nonsense, accept your mediocre existence and live a normal goddamn life". But no, I still refuse to lie down and die. I'll show those damn kids.

## Statesman Poet of the Turbulent Age

Some of the lyrics here are taken from Winston Churchill's real speeches. He was a highly literate man, and wrote extremely well. It seems that people in power in those days were expected to be educated in the arts, and not afraid, indeed encouraged, to display it. Hence a "Statesman Poet".

He busted out some pretty killer turns of phrase:

- "We shall fight on the hills and fight on the beaches..." (natch)
- "instruments of colossal and shattering power" (sick!)
- "the gathering storm" (the name of one of his books)
- "we'll never give in and never surrender" (so good to deliver live)
- "worldwide conflagration" (boom!)

“Iron Curtain” (a fantastic term that aptly described post-war Europe for the following fifty years)

...and possibly a few more that I may have pilfered. I had to change the wording slightly to make them scan, and I also had to up my own lyrical game such that the phrases that were to rhyme with Churchill’s needed to have a consistent amount of gravitas to match the real quotes. It needed to sound kinda like something Churchill kinda *would* have said. The last verse gets a bit more lenient in this regard, by that time the scene is set and you can play around a bit, and then I could throw in an anachronistic “big ups” and “motherfuckings”... Somehow though, I can still somehow imagine Winnie uttering a few “motherfucker”s to himself off-mic. I think posh swearing is severely underrated, to be honest.

One point here is that stylistic constraints upon the language, and indeed everything else, can open up as a song progresses. It’s a general pattern: the first verse sets the scene so needs to be played straight, the second verse gets down to business, the third has the luxury of titting about.

The last rhyme of the 1st verse got updated for the album version to "*The fascists are back, it's not over yet, so tune into Churchill on your wireless set!*" for two reasons - I wanted to indicate that the song was about what's going on now as well as then (since recording this track in 2012 the fascists HAVE seemed to have come back) and also thought it would be nifty to have a posh BBC announcer as Winston's [hype man](#): I do enjoy doing old school plummy British accents! I could have run with this idea more, and have the BBC hype man interjecting at various other points after Winston's lines ("how true!", "indeed!", or "quite right!"), but the opportunity passed.

Another fun thing here is that the radio background noise in that gap is an actual sample of the noise during a gap in one of Churchill’s speeches, which is kind of a nerdy thing that no one would ever know if I hadn’t written about it right here. If you listen closely to that scrap of noise in isolation, at one point you can hear him shift in his seat. I find it kind of fascinating that you can focus in on that little snippet of sound which is simultaneously irrelevant auditory-junk and also of massive historical significance. It is just some trouser cloth being shuffled about, but it’s bloody Sir Winston Churchill's trousers, trousers rustling during a pivotal moment in world history. Trousers that helped save the world from Nazism.

Another thing I insist on is having lyrics that serve no purpose but for the sound they make: "shooting down Stukas from out of the skies" ... "spouts lies", and "smash-in-all the na-tio-nal..." and so on have mini-rhymes and alliterations within the lines that don’t really

serve any informative purpose, but are just for symmetry and fun to deliver. Same goes for “coming on strong now knocking down Nazis”, it’s not really the expression you would choose in terms of aptitude - the main point of it is that there are six “o”s in a row which creates a repetitive pulsating rhythm, and the reason he’s “knocking” down Nazis is that Nazis begins with an N and so does Knocking. Well, knocking doesn’t, for some obscure bloody Anglo-Greco-Chaucerian linguistic reason, but you know what I mean. For a while I used to not write any lyrics that made any sense at all, and were simply there for sonic reasons, for example most of the stuff on my first album.

I think if a lyric is satisfying to *deliver* then it's satisfying to *listen to*, because I think the listener forms a model in their head of how it would feel to actually be saying those things, and hence gets vicarious enjoyment from it... I want the music I'm listening to have been enjoyed by the musicians who make it. I mean isn't that kind of the point? Aren't we paying these people to have fun on our behalf, more or less? I don't have much truck with Ye Olde Serious DJs who simply lay down their tracks with a blank, stony expression on their faces, ignoring as much as humanly possible the silly audience pumping their fists, whooping and gurning. Fuck that shit, if the musician isn't enjoying themselves then why should I? I *enjoy* making music, why else would I do it for fucks sake? I am not too proud to whoop and gurn with the unwashed mob. So I sincerely hope that this enjoyment comes through to you, the listener. Even if the track is the most dark, doomy depressing shit ever, I'm having a whale of a time and I want you to as well.

So I do enjoy the nerdy word games of trying to cram in as many multi-rhymes as possible, but try to not go so far with it as to detract from the directness of the language. Lyrics should attempt to be *direct*, as too much “fanciness” can just descend into empty arty farty pretentiousness, suck the fun out of things and make the thing inaccessible. It is not about being as clever and ambiguous as possible. At some point someone left a comment on one of my tracks, War Machine: "terrible lyrics". With no explanation of course. But I think I can understand why someone would think that. My lyrics are often very basic and simplistic, almost inane.

But fuck it, I *like* inane lyrics. I think the childlike simplicity of overly direct, almost autistically socially inept use of language can snap your mind out of its normal ruts. Syd Barrett was an enormous influence on me in this regard. The lyrics to "Bike" or "The Gnome" are, on the surface, completely moronic:

*“Look at the sky, look at the river, isn't it good”*

On one level it's like, what the *fuck*, man, pull yourself together. But the childlike simplicity and disingenuous naivety of them is completely unique, lacking in artifice, and utterly refreshing even all these years later. I also like the bands Barrett inspired, for example the Television Personalities, for this exact reason. I like music that drops any attempt to pretend to be music-y and "soulful" and actually ends up far more soulful as a result.

Barrett is simultaneously honest and very, very peculiar. This contrasts with other great 60's lyricists, for example Bob Dylan, who spews out sophisticated labyrinths of poetic wordy wizardry, but with no sense of naivety or nakedness. Bob's lyrics are also brilliantly mind twisting/expanding, but he somehow ends up being more cynical and worldly as a result. For me there's a sense that Barrett has rediscovered some fundamental source of playful delight, whereas Dylan gave up on all that when he was twelve years old. Hopefully I'll get further into Barrett's songs later.

And yes, when I cycle through the park in the morning I try to remind myself to look at the sky and look at the river. For it is indeed "good".

Another simple reason the song is fun to do live is because it is basically an anti-fascist rant, and its good to belt such things out at high volume to a bunch of enthusiastic people. Fuck the fascists! I mean really, fuck those people. It feels good to say that on stage.

The lyric I'm by far the most pleased with is "Chomping on the cubans, sipping down the brandy, watch the big old bulldog Winston getting handy". I don't really know why this lyric felt so amusing to me, but it is great fun to deliver and gets a chuckle from people. This is why it features immediately after the drop. There's a break where the beat and the bass are taken away, during which I try to switch to the sensation of being the general public hunkering down during an air raid (it did have a line "London lies dark under the bombs of the blitz..." which was actually edited out for brevity, or should I put it back in? Aahhh Christ! The indecision!), at this point the intensity diminishes and you are "hiding" down, waiting for the bomb to "Drop" on the "Drop" geddit? Then the beat drops, and this is precisely the time to deliver the best lyric. So the "bigness" of the lyrical narrative follows along to the "bigness" in the backing track. In this kind of fashion the words work alongside the structural development of the track in order to deliver a narrative with a unified shape. If you swapped the lines in the breakdown with the lines after the drop the whole thing would fall apart. You would ruin the track. This kind of structural thing tends to just flow out of you naturally (I didn't realise I'd done this until I wrote this analysis in full hindsight mode), and intuition is indeed your best guide, but when things aren't working this sort of "is everything following the same shape?" analysis can sometimes fix some structural problems. The verses also, very roughly, follow the chronological development of the war -

the initial warnings, the Nazi advance, the dark days of the Blitz, the turning of the tide and eventual victory. This is how the track progresses as a story, and gives the track a certain shape and momentum.

I really wanted to give a "shout out to Turing cracking Enigma", as if some pirate/spy radio operator were sending a coded message from London to Bletchley Park bigging his homey Alan up. If you're a computer science nerd like me, this code breaking effort was one of the pivotal moments of the war. Imagine being able to know exactly what your enemies plans are ahead of time. Game changer. Turing's contribution was at least that of Churchill's in my view, if not greater. This complements perfectly the "big up the Russians and their perishing winter", because that side of things was about sheer bloody suffering and persistence on a vast inhumanly stupid scale, whereas Turing's contribution was the total opposite, a few pipe smoking boffins having jolly clever wheezes whilst tinkering in their backroom lab back in Blightly. I know which effort I'd have rather been part of. But then Turing's life was not exactly free of suffering either. Incidentally I think the only petition I signed that *ever* had any effect whatsoever was for the [official pardon of Alan Turing](#).

The last line is the Americans "joining the fray". When this happened Churchill himself said "now we've won". We'll get back to discussing this American war effort in a later track.

Making this track again brought home to me how astounding the story of the war really was. It has to be one of the greatest, most dramatic stories ever told, and yet it really did happen. It still absolutely boggles my mind.

Anyway, I highly recommend listening to Churchill's "fight them on the beaches" speech as if it were a techno track... It's a real builder.

## The Hook

So then there's the slightly tongue-in-cheek "Churchill in the Party" hook. Originally this was done in a kind of Mancunian/Scouse accent which I'm not sure what the point of was (thanks go to Ben Webster for pointing out that was a bit crap) so I beefed that up with a bit more of BBC/Queen's english. Unfortunately I had to miss out one of Winston Spencer Churchill's middle names to make this hook scan. Bending history to fit the needs of entertainment. Tut.

The V for victory sign is now thoroughly ensconced as a meme - and yes, Churchill knew how to use memes. I wanted to ride piggyback on that meme with the final line of the chorus. This trick of borrowing a meme and making it my own is something I repeatedly try



and pull off. Of course it only works if you're famous, but in my imaginary musical world I *am* famous. Fake it till you forget you're faking it and spiral into an alternative universe, that's what I say. So the "hook" here is a borrowed one - waving a V sign in front of a Union Jack, Churchill as a punk with a safety pin through his nose. You know, the kind of shitty posters you used to get on Oxford Street. I also very much had in my mind the picture of Churchill with a bowler hat, a cigar, and machine gun - looking well gangster. If being a rapper is about being a bit gangster, then surely Winston qualifies. I mean, he was basically the top dog in a huge gang war, but *his* gang had tens of millions of people in it. That's pretty gangsta, right?



And you can buy Churchill looking Gangsta on all sorts of consumer apparel. There's no reason why you *shouldn't* be able to do that in an advanced capitalist society such as ours, so of course you can.

So, full disclosure, I'm not afraid to slap a cheesy hook in my music, but for me it only works when the rest of the track has the musical chops to not *just* be about the hook. The hooks are never really the "pay off" for me, they rank about the same importance as the hi-hats really, but nevertheless, like hi-hats, they have to be there.

The hook more or less serves the same function as a sticky label on a tupperware of something-or-other that's buried at the bottom of a freezer, it's just how you remember something so you can come back to it and know what you're about to defrost, but the real

tasty goodness is *inside* the tupperware. Let's take a look at some more of that tasty goodness.

## The Beat

So the militant Drum 'n Bass sound palette seemed extremely necessary, but I couldn't quite imagine 170bpm suiting a man as rotund as Churchill. You can't really imagine our erstwhile wartime leader skanking around at double speed... so 70bpm dubstep it was. Being less hectic, Dubstep is slightly less blitz-like than DnB, but it very much inherited the same sound-world.

The beat here is meant to have a kind of swagger to it: a burly, slightly tipsy uber-posh tough-man bossing the place with his commanding plummy lyrical flow<sup>4</sup>...

The rhythm also has a slight feel of WW2 military technology, it's a bit clunky, a bit green and brown, you can see the welds around the edges. It's much more of a leather, wood and brass affair than plastic, carbon fibre or aluminium. It was cheap to rapidly mass produce, but nonetheless effective for that.

The kicks, the snares and the bass are of course what drives dance music, and these are what I have spent (wasted?) 90% of my life working on. And the key to it is getting them to work together, it doesn't matter how good the sounds or patterns are in isolation, the whole collection needs to be speaking with one voice - the pattern needs a shape, and the individual sounds serve to outline and define that shape. It's a bit like the black and white video of [the dalmation walking around](#), when stationary, the black blobs are all disconnected, but as soon as the thing moves you see the dog. The black blobs are the drum sounds, but the rhythm - the dynamic energy that actually makes you move - is the dog. My friend (and first person to release my stuff) Russ used to call this "the invisible funk factory", with reference to the fact that often in minimal techno, you have a disconnected collection of noises, and then something tiny is introduced and the whole thing clicks into place, and the funk is revealed in all its glory. There's also a great track by Atom™/Stereonerds - "Funk is what you don't play - it's the space between the beats" which sings the praises of this phenomena as well as exhibiting it. That invisible funk factory idea was very influential in the way I make beats. Having said that, this beat isn't actually that funky, I mean Winston wasn't particularly "funky", was he?

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<sup>4</sup> Damn, should have put that sentence in another verse. NO, MUST STOP.

The snare in Winston is a simple back beat, which is one of those formulae that never gets old. Every single track I make, that's one of the first things I try, sometimes it doesn't work and I do something else, but 2/3 of the time it does. I love snares. One of the reasons I could never exclusively focus my dance music efforts on making techno is that I love backbeat snare drums soooo much. The snare drum is one of the most sonically complex of instruments, with inharmonic resonances and chaotic particles of noise working together in a coupled dynamic system, and all that complexity is packed into a very short burst of time. This makes snares far more distinct and interesting than kick drums, which being mainly in the low frequencies carry relatively little information. Snare drums are so crunchy and smashy and boshy. They have pointy serrated teeth that bite into your ears every half bar. They sound like mini, focussed, gunpowder explosions in a barrel full of complicated little bits of metal and sand and sparkling hot colored light. Did I mention I love snares?

The other great thing about snares, is that because they are such intrinsically complex but short sounds they're very hard to ruin - you can just layer and layer more and more stuff on top, as noisy as you like, and mix and mix until you get something that clicks (or pops or bashes or frunches or kraamns). There has been this trend over the last decade or so to have very loose granular, clippy, clappy sounds for a snare, and I stole that idea for this one, the snare kind of "sloshes" in with a little lead up of noise before the exact metrical grid line, but actually I think this snare might be slightly behind the beat. Often it's a slightly delayed snare that gives the beat the swinging, swaggering confidence, a trick often found in hip-hop. A confident person speaks slower than a nervous one, they use their time more generously and expansively, and I believe a similar principle applies to beats, and a similar principle applies to delivering important speeches to a embattled nation.

The art of the massive snare goes way back, to the 60s and beyond. It's the heart of rock 'n roll basically. You even get huge sledgehammer snares in unlikely genres, such as motown soul and cheesy 80s pop. It might sound strange to claim the snare in this track was influenced by the Beatles, but in fact everything I do is influenced by the Beatles. Going further, everything any musician has done post-Beatles has in some way been influenced in some way by the Beatles. The snare here is layered with a big band sample. I got this layered snare trick from Beatles tracks like "Taxman" or "The Word". I've been using this snare trick ever since I first heard it on Rubber Soul. It consists of a 7th chord stabbed out on a nasty trebly overdriven guitar in perfect sync with the snare. In this way the snare and the guitar function as a single unit - a repeating rhythmic and melodic punch. I used that exact trick here, but with a horn stab (sampled, I think, from a Benny Goodman recording).

In terms of layering - making up this snare there are actually seven completely different sounds. There's a little "clonk", a clap sound, a burst of whitish noise, a huge reverby "bosh", and a nasty kind of scratchy thing, and the big band "stab" sample. Incidentally, boshes and clonks and so on are my onomatopoeic words for certain kinds of sounds. Due to the necessity of naming fails I think many electronic musicians end up inventing their own language for sounds. I think you should try and practise naming sounds as quickly and effortlessly as possible, it is a right pain - but naming things is one of the things you have to get good at if you want to manage any reasonably big library of your own stuff. I treat it as another aspect of musical creativity. The preset names I was most proud of were for a weird Reaktor ensemble I made once. Actually naming the presets was the most fun part.

So, snares yeah? It's fun to build up a big stack 'o snares, and once you have all these layers you can boost and cut things until the thing says what you want it to say. Is this excessive attention to detail? Not if you're interested in snares, and I really, really am.

Actually this composite snare sound very nearly went missing entirely. Without realising it, I'd lost the horn stab sample at one point, and I was wondering why the track was sounding limp and lifeless. Damn it, I'm sure this track used kick ass, and now turns out *flaccid*, what the fuck. I re-found the sample, then the lightbulb went back on: without that constant Pow! Pow! the track loses so much energy. This boring keeping-everything-under-control administrative tedium is a thing you constantly have to fight with when producing your own music. It sucks - you are often so focussed on other details, and so busy fighting the computer interface, that the main driver of the track can disappear and you don't even flippin' *notice*. It is a constant balancing act between narrow razor focus on the details, and wide overview of how the whole track is shaping up. It's a constant struggle between mad creative genius and boring neatening and polishing and administering. It would be a massive bitch if it wasn't also such splendid fun.

The pattern of the kick drum is also a feature - it's not a great kick sound per se, but the pattern is distinctive in my view. Each of the kick patterns between the snares is saying something rhythmically that leads up to that snare, and connects to everything else, including even the lyrical pattern - the kick mirrors the rhythm of the lyrics in the hook.

You can tell something is distinctive if you move any of the elements and the track sounds "wrong", if you move one of these kick drums the beat sounds "wrong". The dependency also goes the other way - the rhythmic shape is heavily dependent on the timbre of the drum sounds, so if you swap one of the drum sounds for a different one the rhythm falls apart.

Like I was saying, drums are like words in a sentence, but the beat as a whole is the meaning of that sentence. It's not just a bunch of individual noises dumped into a sack, it's a functioning mechanism made out of carefully interlocking components. These components hand over temporal responsibilities to one another, and they have a bidirectional, toroidal conversation in time. When making a beat, I spend huge amounts of time trying to find the "shape" of the beat. Once it is found it's the easiest thing in the world - it seems obvious and inevitable, even the postman could whistle it (or rather beatbox it) - but finding it can take what seems like a good while wandering in the wilderness.

Many people still think that putting music on a precise metrical grid robbed music of expressivity and made it mechanical and lifeless. This is not true. Shit beats made by shit producers for their shit music have lost expressivity, for sure, but since all they would have expressed was shittiness maybe that's no great loss. The fact that with current music technology you have very fine control of an almost unlimited palette of timbre gives you back at least as much expression and articulation as you ever lost. In fact, if you want to get pedantic, even if things are quantized to a grid, practically none of the sound is *actually on* the grid, because the sound lasts for a significant duration and most of that duration is in between the grid lines. The *precise* timbral envelope of a drum is the thing that will give rhythmic expression to your beat, and you can massage that just as much as any real drummer can massage their timing and articulation. In fact, it takes effort to *make* a beat sound mechanical. I have striven for a good number of years to make beats sound as mechanical as humanly possible, and often something off the grid will sound *more* mechanical than something perfectly quantised. So I think that whole debate is a bit of a waste of time really.

Sounds in music often operate according to the "Gestalt principle". This says that things that always occur at the same time will be grouped in the listeners perception. Things that appear "in a line" will be grouped, things that *move* together will be grouped. And this can be used to great effect to merge and separate things dynamically. You should always try to have an instinctive<sup>5</sup> feel for what things in your music are operating together and what are operating in contrast. The sledgehammer snare is an example of Gestalt in action - a synthesised drum and a big band are very different things, but if they always hit on the same beat they will be heard as one composite element. Even if you have a completely different thing that appears on the beat after that snare, if it always follows the snare the listener will somehow group them together - the second sound becomes an "echo" of the first rather than a separate entity. The bassline is also an example of grouping. Whilst the bass in this track is just going wubba wubba wubba with a simple LFO, the kick drum

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<sup>5</sup> Can you *try* to do something *instinctively*? Seems weird but I say yes.

serves to emphasise certain wubs, and places accents on them. So the kick sort of serves to create a "bass riff" as well as a downbeat. That bass riff is a kind of auditory illusion created by the interaction between the kicks and the wubs. If I try to picture the bassline in my head right now it is that shape I get a picture of, not the actual real synthesised bass in isolation.

Finally, I always try to compress the beats and the bass in tracks as squashed together as possible, not just because of the extra loudness I get, but also so that it sounds like everything in is the same "box", is speaking with the same voice, and coming at you from the same place. I find that *unity* is important to make a beat really groove. And I think this unification is the real strength of compressors, not really loudness. Though loudness is also awesome, let's face it.

## Stuka Solo!

The middle section has a, er, 'noise solo', made out of a real recording of a Stuka dive bomber.

This is another of the most iconic sounds of the war, and is a fascinating example of sound design put to military purposes. The plane itself did not sound like that. Rather, it was fitted with wind-powered sirens, known as "Jericho Trumpets". These were employed purely with the intention of making people on the ground shit themselves with terror as the plane dive-bombed them... It became a kind of psych-ops propaganda "audio logo" of the Blitzkrieg. Clever. Insane. Amazing sound though. I highly recommend watching the film Dunkirk in a big cinema to get a feel for what it's like having one of those fuckers flying toward you. But in the cinema of course, you know you're not going to die, so that particular aspect of the experience is missing I guess<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding the "noise solo", I like the idea of using noise collages or weird glitchy interludes where an instrumental solo would normally be. They provide two functions - first it provides a rest from the vocals. Songs that feature vocals throughout really get on my tits. One of the most annoying things about a lot of mainstream pop music is when the vocalist (the "star") fills up every single second of the track with their wheedly, whingy, whiny vocals. Whilst I enjoy vocals up to a point, I don't care that much about your life, please go away. This tendency is also a feature of annoying Drum n Bass MCs. Just shut. the. fuck. *up* for a second and let me listen to the fucking tune!

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<sup>6</sup> Along with a certain amount of historical accuracy also Missing In Action.

The gig recordings I'm most ashamed of tend to be when I've drunk a wee<sup>7</sup> bit too much and done too much incoherent yelling on the mic. Trying desperately to make up for my alcohol impaired mixing skills with shouting. No one needs that. My ideal amount of vocals on a track is probably a James Brown frequency of interjection - just occasional "yiah! Get into it! Huh!" to remind you that he's still very much in the driving seat, but generally he just lets the funk do the talking.

The second function of a "solo" is to have a moment where you can go a bit more crazy with the amount of complexity or density in the track. Enough time has elapsed so that listeners have a basic grasp of the beat or the melody and the alternating structure. They also have "trust" in the track, in that if they do like it, they will already be enjoying themselves, and they will be committed to enjoy themselves no matter what else happens. This trust is a very valuable thing. You can then *shamelessly abuse* this trust a bit and go a bit mental. A bit like the widdley guitar solo in a rock ballad - the chicks are happy, so now you can shred. I jest, but you get the idea.

Solos or breakdowns are great opportunities to do stupid stuff that you couldn't normally get away with. In this case it's just the "full-on-ness" of that Stuka sound that you can put up with for a few bars but would be terribly enervating if it went through the whole track. Besides, you wouldn't be able to hear the vocals over it. A depressingly large amount of time when making music is spent moving shit around just so you can hear the damn things, and fading things in and out so you don't get bored to tears with the repetitive little buggers. Moving and fading, fading and moving. Yawn. Being a producer is about as glamorous as being a delivery person, really.

The limited ability of the human ear to distinguish different sounds on top of one another is hugely tedious and creatively limiting for a musician. One of the first disappointments of music making is you soon discover that just adding more and more amazing sounds on top of one another results in unlistenable mush. You have to make compromises. It's just one eternal compromise. Boo. The one situation in life where you can do anything you darn well please it turns out that you *still* can't have everything you want. Fuckssakes.

I distinctly remember the first time they gave us paints at primary school. Like every child, one of the first things I tried was mixing *all* the paints together in an attempt to create a brand new awesome color that no one had ever seen before. Instead I was dismayed to find that I just got a disgusting greeny grey nothing-sludge color. So it is with mixing music. Awesome sounds tend to contain a large amount of sonic information, in fact the

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<sup>7</sup> Do not stop reading this sentence at the word wee.

awesomest gnarliest sounds often take up the whole frequency spectrum, so there's only really ever room for one or two awesome sounds at a time. Booring.

It should be stressed that these are more problems of *arrangement* than mixing - fiddling about with EQs and compressors will only take you so far - many mix engineers say that the arrangement needs to have already thought about, i.e. where things sit in relation to each other, otherwise a decent mix is impossible. You have two dimensions to moving things in: frequency and time, and generally moving things in time is far more effective than moving them in frequency. The point here is that using a traditional verse-chorus-verse-chorus-solo-verse-chorus structure actually solves many of these arrangement problems for you, it tells you exactly which section should be how dense, leaving you creative capacity left over to think about other, more important, more fun musical things.

I would stress this: Formulaic music is not *automatically* uncreative, it can provide a set of solutions to problems so you don't have to solve them each and every time, it can provide a framework of limitations in which creativity can flourish.

There's another two and a half verses that got taken out just for time reasons, but I still do then live sometimes. This track is one of the only ones that I can reliably remember the lyrics to. I'm so appallingly bad at remembering lyrics, sometimes I've even had to lip-read someone in the audience who is better than me at remembering lyrics that *I* wrote. But I take it as a sign of the lyrics being reasonably good if I can actually remember them live. I imagine this means they have some kind of mental cohesion.

I briefly entertained the idea that there should be a section where Hitler gets to rap a bit, but you have to draw the line somewhere, and my German is still a bit lacklustre. Besides, it would make it even more cartoonish, and there's a mean steely edge somewhere in this track that I didn't want to dilute too much with ridiculousness.

So that's the first track. We went quick deep into the nerdy details. I'll be doing less of that for the rest of this book just to try and keep things lively.

The great thing about putting this track first is that I don't have to worry about Godwin's law. Which says that as a discussion goes on, the odds of someone mentioning Hitler, or making some analogy with WW2 go up exponentially. I've just got straight in there, so in the ensuing articles I can mention the war as many times as I like without seeming crass or irrelevant, it's part of the theme, yeah? Indeed, throughout these writings I do make a shit ton of analogies with the war. I'm not ashamed of this. Well maybe a little, it is a supremely



lazy thing to do. But Godwin's law shouldn't come as a surprise. WW2 is *the* creation myth of the modern era. We refer to it in analogies and metaphors in the same way that a Christians might refer to stories in the Bible. It is our dominant political narrative, and with good reason. In particular I often try to find analogies with the Climate Crisis. But we'll get into that later.

## Churchill: Hero or Villain?

I can't vouch for the complete historical accuracy of this song.

More seriously, I don't subscribe to the nostalgic view that this was a time when Britain was marvellous in all respects and Churchill was a perfect hero. Clearly not!

Churchill was flawed, and was a man of his time, and held many opinions that would be unacceptable now (at least to we remainers). He bungled Gallipoli in WW1, costing many lives, and he bungled the partition of India, again costing many lives. Some of his views on the empire and race were dubious to say the least. Apart from anything else he was a Tory! Gross. This doesn't mean that we should just consign his achievements to the dustbin though, does it? He was undeniably a great speaker, and provided ballsy leadership in a time of crisis. Let's face it, the man could rock a mic on the biggest of stages when it most counted. And, yes, I do think people in those days did really possess skills and personal qualities that we have lost. Of course they did, how could it be otherwise? Time passes, some things are created, other things disappear. The average human now has a similar cognitive capacity to the average human back then, we have gained some virtues and lost others.

After the war, in spite of the reverence for the great wartime leader, politics took a major turn to the left and Churchill was chucked out. Clement Atlee's Labour Party took power and with a huge majority were able to set up the British welfare state. This was, I believe, another of our "finest hours", and made the difference between the war being an unmitigated disaster and a spur to the creation of a better world. It was probably for the best that Churchill, Britain's wartime leader, was voted out in peacetime.

I'm fortunate in that this album will not make it into the public spotlight, because I would probably face a torrent of uninformed abuse on social media. Maybe for simultaneously being on the side of little Britain nationalist brexiteer bigots, and for making fun of the serious business of Britain's great achievements. Coincidentally as I began writing this the whole "Churchill - Hero or Villain?" debate blew up, with sensible historical perspectives only (as usual) prevailing some time after what passes for the news cycle died down. When

I wrote this track in 2012, there would have been no need to put this discussion/disclaimer here, but unfortunately since then politics has gone fuck-nuts and I feel there is an actual need to distance myself from both the crackpot right-wing nationalism that's reemerged, and the nitpicking hero-shaming of the left. I now realise that some people (on both sides of the culture wars) just might not get the jocular irony in this song, because politics is now a gentle humour-free zone. This track is ultimately a cartoon, so I wouldn't read too much serious politics into it. But there *is* a message, and that is I guess about the importance of inspiring leadership, and this is why it is the first track on Inspiracy Theory.

So, with some trepidation, I would now like to hand over to my co-author, Mike. Mike Trollfield is a political commentator, intellectual dark web guru, inventor, and data junkie. He is a member of Mensa, and the founder of the "sci-fi writers for capitalism" think-tank. He has a goatee and wears a black fedora. He lives in the countryside for some weird reason. Mike will talk for a while about heroes.

## Imperfect Heroes vs. Incompetent Leaders

### **Mike Trollfield**

So when it comes to Churchill, the thing is that, and this seems to have been forgotten, heroes don't need to be perfect. In fact, the archetypal heroes are *never* perfect, they are always flawed. There are very few stories in which the hero is morally perfect, simply because if they had appeared in the story having already achieved moral perfection they would have nothing to struggle against, and therefore there would be no story, for every decent story of good vs. evil is a story representing the struggle for good within ourselves, man.

The idea of branding historical figures as good or bad according to modern standards makes about as much sense as judging on a Panda for it's bland repetitive diet. We all act within our own environment. We act within societies and we share the vast majority of our values with that society. Accusing Churchill or Jefferson or whoever of racism is a bit like criticising Aristotle's Physics for not mentioning the Higgs Boson. Yeah, they turned out to be wrong, dead wrong, but you know who else was wrong at the time? Practically everyone. The slightly wrong Churchill managed to help defeat the really, really wrong Hitler. The world got a bit less wrong, we can celebrate that. We can celebrate large step changes in wrongness, whilst still acknowledging that we're even less wrong now.

When it comes to public figures, assuming they are attempting and are doing some good, it seems at any indication that they are less than perfect and it's time to bring them down,

cancel them, and consider all their achievements worthless. Counterproductive bollocks of the first order. There's a particularly annoying meme that went round which embodies this tendency perfectly. This has cropped up at least three times on my Facebook feed and I only had the energy to complain once, so I'll do it properly here.



John and Yoko making the bed so they can continue protesting against the system.

Maybe you've seen the "John & Yoko waiting for the maid to make the bed so they can continue protesting against the system, 1969" meme. Sigh. For a start, it is a factually tenuous connection, they weren't protesting against capitalism or the class system they were protesting against War. This maid is not covering a Vietnamese village with fresh Napalm, she's covering a bed with fresh linen.

Secondly, they were staying in the Hilton hotel in Amsterdam. In hotels, maids (or soft furnishing contour supervisors, or whatever the fuck they're called now) make the beds. That's basically what happens in hotels. Having other people do things for you is kind of the point. Did you make your own bed when you last stayed in a hotel? By paying money to be lazy for a few days you provide employment for a host of service industry workers. I guess, in theory, it is possible that part of your minibar bill could have been funneled off for

military purposes, and instead of going into that poor maid's pay packet it was in fact used to supply arms to the deadly battle of Khe Sanh... But you're on holiday, damnit, do you really want to spend the whole bloody time following the shadowy paper trail that leads from your tub of overpriced peanuts to consignments of mortar shells making their way down the Ho Chi Minh trail? No. You don't. You want to toss those peanuts into your mouth whilst indolently tinkering with the air conditioning settings.

This meme is holding a celebrity to moral standards that are completely beyond the standards of the onlookers who are supposedly calling out their hypocrisy. Calling other people hypocrites without putting yourself on the line is, in my view, the very worst kind of hypocrisy.

Besides, even if they *were* protesting the class system, you wouldn't be able to do that in a vacuum. You can write a meaningful protest against sweatshop labour on a laptop fabricated in a sweatshop. You can fly halfway round the world in a Kerosine guzzling plane to a conference about climate change and still contribute something useful. There's an awkward, fucked up irony there to be sure, in some cases that's worth pointing out, but it doesn't invalidate every single one of the words you utter. And is celebrity hypocrisy so bad, really? If you were a celebrity vegan, and you inspired tens of thousands of people to go vegan, and yet in private you regularly enjoyed sinking your slavering chops into massive, juicy Wagyu beef burgers, would you *really* be morally worse than a person who ate no burgers ever, but completely failed to influence the rest of society for the better?

Finally, and this is a controversial point about creativity that I'll get into in a later track, if John Winston Lennon was more conscientious about shouldering his fair share of the housework he would probably have made fewer great songs.

Does it not cross your mind that in this sanctimonious judgement of celebrity morality, you are completely *missing* the point of the Rock 'n Roll counterculture? In protesting about war, John and Yoko were not, actually, following the moral guidelines meted out by pious busibodies like yourself, they were *rebellious* against the orthodoxy. In the old days, many people thought that war was natural and right and we were the good guys no matter what. That changed in the sixties, and it was people like Lennon that changed it. Rock 'n Roll, essentially, was about rebellion, rebellion against all the stupid morality of the past. Maybe it was, initially, about being deliberately obnoxious... but then evolved into a more fundamental social critique. At it's best, the counterculture was an attempt to escape the incessant repression, judgment and damnation that self-righteous curtain twitchers like yourself compulsively engage in. To attempt to expose hypocrisy in a Rock 'n Roll star is to completely misunderstand that entire dynamic.

Remember the function of these memes is to self replicate, they'll do this by any means necessary. This meme self replicates by giving you a smug feeling of self satisfaction that you have pointed out some hypocritical flaw in a successful person's behaviour, and rid the world of some tiny bit of evil. Nope. What you've *really* done is looked at a picture which raises in your head some complex ethical questions about the society we are all a part of, and blamed all those complex issues on the most famous person in the picture, and then shared it to demonstrate how woke you've just been. Well done, you. By the time you've realised that you were bollock-brained, the share button has long been clicked. This is precisely the same mechanism that is spreading right-wing memes as well. Social media has decomposed the brains of the left as well as the right. This is unfortunate, don't you think? If ever we need the left to be smarter than the right it's now.

I guess part of my motivation to defend John Winston Lennon is that when I was in my twenties, he was one of my bona-fide heroes. Absolutely worshiped the guy, to be honest. I wanted, like an adolescent numpty perhaps, to be a free thinking outspoken progressive rock star too. I wanted to write songs that were simultaneously experimental, high-brow and challenging, but also super accessible and influential. I wanted to radically push forward music. I wanted to be (very Britishly) surreal and sarcastic, but also radically honest and spiritually earnest. I wanted to do something "good" too, I wanted to make a statement. I wanted to speak out and have my voice heard by millions, open their minds, and enable them to experience radical perspectives through psychedelic music. I wanted to continue to advance the sixties countercultural revolution that people like Lennon stood for and were symbols of.

That was my dream, not a very original one, but a dream nonetheless. Now I'm glad I didn't achieve that dream, because its looking like a total fucking nightmare.

I want to still be able to look up to heroes. I want to look up to the "good" version of Churchill that was in my head. I want to look up to the "good" version of Lennon that was in my head. I don't actually care that much if Lennon hit his first wife, or took too many or the wrong kind of drugs, was mean and arrogant, stayed in bed too long, didn't live up to some gold standard of hypocrisy, or whatever trivial human failing people want to write him off for. This isn't relevant for my "hero" thought process. Why would it be? The hero thought process is to see an achievement and wish to emulate it. To hear someone and be inspired to do something. It is to form an image of a person around that achievement, and seek to adjust your own behaviour so that you become more likely to achieve that yourself. It is not seeking to become a carbon copy of a real person with all their flaws. Not even the weirdest of the nerdiest of the creepiest of the freakiest stalker fans would wish to mimic their heros *in their entirety*. Ideals *are* idealised, hence the name. Hero worship is not necessarily an

objective process. Maybe this is why we need imaginary gods, because real people never live up to our idealised image of them.

Ultimately, this kind of shit is probably why we don't have musicians making radical political statements any more. Because once you set yourself up as a person trying to do "something", you're simply not allowed to make any small human mistakes. The only thing that musicians can get away with being terrible at these days seems to be music.

And what do you think is the eventual result of this barrage of scorn that is poured on anyone who tries to make a difference? The result is that people in the public eye will stop sticking their necks out for anything they believe in, and they'll play it safe. Individuality will be smeared into a grey characterless uniformity, and nothing will ever change or get better and nothing new will ever happen. Furthermore those who are sociopathic enough not to care about the hate they receive will be the only ones who speak their minds, they thus begin to appear more honest than genuinely compassionate people. Morally bankrupt sociopaths will become the new "heroes" of honest free speech, become extremely popular, and maybe one day even get elected.

At times like these, it is helpful to ponder upon Bacteria<sup>8</sup>.

In particular, muse upon the case of antibiotic resistant bacteria. We have killed squillions of bacteria using our antibiotics over the last century or so. A tiny tiny proportion of those bacteria, who were slightly less susceptible to antibiotics, survived. They went on to reproduce, and then faced another wave of antibiotic attack, and the slightly more resilient survived again, etc. Repeat this process often enough and you get "Superbugs", who are completely resistant to any medicine we currently have. Donald Trump is just such a superbug. People often wonder whether he is secretly super smart and knows what he's doing, or is simply winging it and blundering through by sheer accident. It doesn't matter. Whatever cogitation may or may not be going on inside The Donald's incomprehensibly orange, leathery, floaty-quiffed head is more or less irrelevant. What is relevant is what is being *selected for*. If you systematically destroy the careers of everyone who has ever done anything slightly offensive and is self-aware enough and has shame enough to resign when that misdemeanour is revealed, Trump is what you get. Since the demands of identity politics are rife with internal contradictions, perfectly conforming to them is logically impossible. Hence the only person who successfully hurdles all the incessant, infantile show trials of public shaming will not be a perfect paragon of woke sainthood, they will simply be *immune* to public shame, i.e. a sociopath. If you select for someone who is

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<sup>8</sup> Especially if you're sick of pondering upon viruses.

immune to such ad-hominem attacks and identity-political tripwires, then Trump and Johnson are what you get.

This is why we need to educate people about Darwinian evolution, not because it really matters whether dumb people believe the earth was created 6000 years ago or not, but because this is precisely how our environment operates at scale, and not “getting Darwin” results in completely counterproductive efforts to improve matters.

So I find attempts to *demonise* this current crop of leaders misguided. By running around gasping in shock at everything Trump or Boris says, you actually give them more power. By trying to bring them down *via* their trollish misdemeanours (however crass and appalling these may be), you achieve the following five counterproductive effects:

1 - You cheapen the value of the job that they're actually meant to be doing. If the job of the president or prime minister is to avoid being offensive to anyone anywhere for the rest of eternity, then who will actually concentrate on, you know, the *actual* job? If a casual off color comment, or an ill advised fancy dress costume, or an ancient sexual misdemeanour are considered equally as important as the economic wellbeing of hundreds of millions of people, a global ecological crisis, a virulent pandemic, or winning a world war against fascism, then our prioritisation mechanisms are seriously, seriously screwed.

2 - You lend credence to the perceived power of this political shaming tool. A tool which is just as available to the other side, actually more so, as the voters on your side are more sensitive to outrage, and are actually more likely to desert *your* guy when he makes some trivial mistake (did you spot my trivial mistake just there? Well done. Did you notice that you get no points or benefits or improvements in the world of any kind for spotting it? Even better done).

3 - You enhance the excitement around the outrage, you give them more air time, and as we all know, there's no such thing as bad publicity. Stupid people will often just vote for the most famous person on a list.

4 - You make them more popular in the eyes of the people who really do hold those offensive opinions merely in order to offend. There are cunts out there who just want to rile you up, and you getting riled will just encourage their behaviour. I know the following statement sounds like some old man moaning about millennial snowflakes (that's because it is), but it is really like some people never learned the main lesson from being bullied at school - the more you react to the bullying the more you will get bullied. The more upset

you get, the more of a target you'll become. The only way to deal with this crap is to rise above it.

5 - You have directed the public eye to something trivial, and created a distraction during which the bad guys in question can get their real business done<sup>9</sup>.

Some perverted part of me relished the delicious irony of the media complaining that Trump is twisting the pandemic to be all about him. Oh yeah? What about the fact that every single headline about the pandemic in the U.S., now the worst hit country in the world, is about *him*? Why can't I actually find an article that reports the situation rather than simply hand-flaps at his latest talkturd? Who gets to decide that *he* fills the headlines? Hey, media, haven't *you* made the past four years all about *him*? Aren't you just doing exactly what he wants? Wasn't he the *exact* dish you ordered?

So if you see an article that mentions some shocking thing that any of these fuckwits have said. Just don't click. Starve this clickbait of oxygen. I sometimes think if we all just woke up one day and decided to utterly ignore them, they wouldn't have any power any more. Eyeballs bestow power, remember, *you* have control over where they swivel.

Once upon a time we had heroes. My ultimate concern is, that if we gradually erode all our heroes according to impossible superhuman ethical standards, that we will be left with no heroes at all. We will be left with no one to inspire us. We will be left in a void in which anything any human being has ever done is inadequate. We will all be left utterly demotivated, depressed, anxious and impotent. And that's a high price to pay for some vague notions of "transparency" and "accountability".

So let me tell you right now: It's OK to be inspired by something imperfect.

Not only is it OK, there is no other option.

## Dominance Hierarchies and Growth Hierarchies

Something one often revisits significantly in the time beyond one's teenage years is one's attitude to things like hierarchies, authority and leadership. It's a fairly stereotypical development that someone who wanted to smash the system when they were 19 will be

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<sup>9</sup> It would not surprise me that Boris deliberately uttered his abysmal Jo Cox reference just to inflame a storm of outrage over "language", which would possibly tie up parliamentary debates for, ooh, maybe 5 weeks, the amount of time he was originally seeking to prorogue it for. There have been a hundred tricks like this.



sycophantically smarming their way up the greasy middle management pole when they're 45.

They have worked out at what age a person will become more likely to vote conservative and that age is 47<sup>10</sup>. I apologise: I'm on the cusp of my 45th birthday, my internal Tory time bomb is ticking, and I'm about to be similarly predictable.

Yes kids, there is an argument for getting rid of hierarchical social organisations, but it's not a very good one. There are two reasons why it doesn't work.

First, there are the practical details of getting things done, it's pretty difficult to complete complex activities like building a power station, running a hospital or winning World War Two without some kind of organisational structure, with few at the top and many on the bottom. Despite what you might have read about holographic self-organising brains, human cognition itself is organised hierarchically. That's how coherent thought works (or at least how it gets shit done) and a good management structure will operate in a similar "predictive", layered, hierarchical fashion to a brain. Why is the brain hierarchical? Because reality is. Big things are made up of smaller things. Big amounts of time are made up of smaller amounts of time. It is simply a pragmatic thing to mirror that hierarchy of Holons<sup>11</sup> with nested structures of competence. And the more risky a task becomes the more strict the hierarchy needs to become.

Why is the military so strictly hierarchical? It's not just because they're repressed sado-masochistic cocks and they enjoy that kind of thing. Winning wars takes tight organisation, and they can't afford to fuck about. If flat, self-organising, cuddlocratic anarcho-holistic collectives were effective, then that kind of system would have probably won more wars through history and established vast, fluffy empires, and that's exactly what military forces would have evolved into through a form of Darwinian selection. But they weren't, and they didn't. I'm not saying military structures are enjoyable to be a part of, or that we should try to make our future societies in their image, just that you will need at least some hierarchical structure in order to carry out complex tasks at scale.

The second reason we can't get rid of hierarchies is that we are biologically wired to respond to status and hierarchy, similarly to other mammals and apes. So even if you do try and establish a flat, anarchistic community, the old status-based hierarchy will just come

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<sup>10</sup> My guess for why people get more conservative as they age is this: you simply have more invested. You have more knowledge of how to operate in the system, therefore you don't want that system changed beyond recognition. It doesn't matter what system it is, it's *your* system now, and without it you'd be flapping and gasping like a tuna yanked onto a fishing boat. When the Iron Curtain fell, older folks *hated* it.

<sup>11</sup> Ken Wilber. See later.

back in some other, probably more unpleasant form. This happened time and time again in communes that tried to establish a more equal way of life avoiding the “pathologies of modern society”. Weird, primal, dominance patterns bubbled up from their subconscious. Again I'm not saying it's impossible or undesirable to live like that, it is just helluva difficult, and difficult things tend to fail more spectacularly.

I get the impression that the consensus among many in my social circle seems to be that egalitarian, non-hierarchical society is the default, natural state of affairs and modern industrial society came along relatively recently and forced some artificial rigid status-driven hierarchy onto us. Which is the *exact opposite* of history, both natural history and civilizational history. Just ask a [chimp](#), or a medieval serf.

So we both need, and are wired for, a hierarchical social structure. However, in the terminology of Ken Wilber, there are two different flavours of hierarchy. One is a "dominance hierarchy" and the other is a "growth hierarchy". A classic example of a dominance hierarchy would be something like Hitler's Nazi party or Stalin's communist party, all about power, fear and coercion. These are the "famous" ones that spring to mind first somehow. These are certainly worth doing everything in our power to get rid of. The other form is a “growth hierarchy”. Something more like differing levels of education system, sporting leagues, seniority in a (well functioning) organisation. Growth hierarchies are the meritocratic ones. The problem is not how to get rid of hierarchies, but to stop growth hierarchies degenerating into dominance hierarchies, because they have that tendency.

So we're not trying to *get rid* of leaders, we're trying to make them better. And part of that it looking at ourselves as asking why *we* constantly fall for leaders who are narcissistic, incompetent arsewipes. [This TED talk](#) captures the point succinctly. And the speaker also points out that if we choose *better* leaders, then we automatically get more female leaders - and that *this* is the way to address that particular inequality. Though, as usual, the gag-reflex inducingly right-on TED audience misses this point entirely and loudly applauds the idea of “more women leaders”, whilst the “better leaders” sentence that follows it is greeted with does-not-compute tumbleweed.

A Freudian would say my attitude to hierarchies is probably shaped by my relationship with my Dad<sup>12</sup>. Maybe. He was a Managing Director / CEO of a successful company during the IT boom in the 90s. In the 90s I was a bolshy adolescent and, predictably, I wanted to be

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<sup>12</sup> But recall that Freud was a crackpot pseudoscientist who spouted a load of twaddle that set the science of psychology back by some forty years. But then also recall that Freud was a visionary genius who unearthed the subconscious, and advanced the field of psychology by some fifty years.

the complete opposite of him. I wanted to be a musician, not a businessman, and that seemed the polar opposite goal in life. Over the years this rebellion has mellowed, he mellowed too, and now we're surprisingly more or less on the same page about most things (not cars though, see later). Though this might well be because we are *both* grumpy old men now, and we grumpy old men are all virtually indistinguishable, let's face it.

I guess the funny thing is that musicians *are* still leaders in some sense. They are thought leaders, they lead their listeners through emotions, cultural references, they lead fans and other musicians through the story of their own development as artists. Even just playing music to a few hundred people in a club is a form of leadership, you are leading the atmosphere and energy of the party, you are leading them on a musical journey and setting the context in which people do their own thing. I think, rather than expanding our definition of corruption to include all forms of leadership, we should expand our definition of leadership to include such inspirational (counter) cultural influencers.

Now, if you are a proper artist you should always subvert that somehow, in order to signal that you are vehemently opposing yourself to any kind of dominance hierarchy. And this is a constant struggle, as we see in the case of the "faceless DJ" (the DJ was deliberately being anonymous as a way of transcending the fucked up star-worshipping hierarchy of rock) has transformed into the "superstar DJ", a completely un-meritocratic or even *anti*-meritocratic dominance hierarchy based on marketing, big money, fame and jaw droppingly formulaic music.

This weird dominance/not dominance aspect of being an artist is one reason why I dressed up as a military sergeant for a while, with an acid smiley instead of some military insignia. The idea was to simultaneously take advantage of the dominance hierarchy buttons that someone standing on a stage wearing this uniform pushes, but also make it so ridiculous that it's clear that militaristic values are the exact opposite of what I wanted to achieve. Also military stuff looks great. I can't help that.

Times have changed and I don't think I'd wear that kind of uniform now. I was once messaged by a concerned listener that had seen a photo of me wearing Nazi label badges. This was a suit custom made for me at a Soho clothes shop called "My Mate Primate". This was 2004, the costume was made in preparation for a gig I did at the Alternative Miss World Contest (watch a [great documentary about this crazy event](#)). I do recall the guy making the suit checked beforehand whether the lapels were OK with me and I said fine. I guess now I wouldn't.

It didn't bother me then, because scraps of fabric and arbitrary symbols do not really mean anything, and Nazism seemed like ancient history. To me. Then. I was able to reassure that concerned listener that I am in no way a Nazi, but it concerns me a little that pictures of those lapels are forever "up" on the internet, indeed, the below image is the first thing that shows up in an image search, and people being what they are it will get misunderstood. Another good reason to avoid fame like the plague I suppose. Phew.



Punk Tartan, Nazi shoulders, Communist chest, Moog collar bone. Angryface. Made sense at the time.

## Hierarchies and Conspiracies

It is quite easy, as a solo musician, to assume that those at the top of the business are involved in some giant conspiracy to dominate everything and destroy or suppress decent music. It's a handy excuse, and one that I often reach for in desperate times.

The hierarchy of the music industry seems like a pathological one. Successful music now seems so absurdly, revoltingly, stomach-heavingly awful, it is rather easy to get paranoid that someone is making it like that deliberately. It is carefully calculated in order to control the minds of the masses, or something. We'll come back to conspiracy theories later, but I'll be honest and admit I have, um, "entertained" some of these theories, lets say. I think this came from frustration with my own progress, and also since being a self-absorbed "underground" artist I was quite isolated - so I had a complete lack of actual information about how things really worked. It is easy to get conspiratorial as a self employed musician, simply because as an individual working alone you don't need to manage anyone, and you forget how tricky that actually is. You basically have no idea of logistics. How much coordination it would really take to organise that conspiracy does not figure in your estimate of the likelihood of it occurring.

Now I'm a bit older and a bit wiser (a bit, not much) I see that organising shit is really super super hard. Taking on responsibility terrifies me and many other people. The default is entropy and chaos, and actually getting anything done is really the exception to the rule. This relates to a bigger, crucial point. If I were to pick one single reason why you should take (serious traditional) conservative political philosophy seriously it would be this: they understand the second law of thermodynamics and the left don't. They understand that a functioning liberal society is the exception, not the norm. They understand the fragility of the wealth and freedom we currently enjoy, and they rightly conclude that the fact that the far left don't understand any of that is dangerous.

I think the most likely explanation for the mind meltingly god-awful shitness of modern music is not that the illuminati are using it for their subliminal mind-control messages, but that thousands of people over the last four decades have taken small, shitty, lazy decisions and the whole thing has just degenerated through institutional cowardice. It *sounds* exactly like it has been deliberately destroyed, yes, but in fact the ebb and flow of tiny events just funnels everything in a certain direction, and this time that direction happened to be down the toilet.

Something I have realised over the past few years is that much of left wing thought is *just* such a conspiracy theory. The anti-semitic undercurrent in extremist parts of the Labour party (which is massively overblown of course) is an extreme example of this. But once you spot it, it can be seen everywhere. In my view, conspiratorial thinking is closely linked with animism, or religious superstition. The logic is the same: take a complex and seemingly inexplicable phenomena, and assume some human-like willful agent is behind it. Lightning is God getting angry, barcodes are the mark of the beast, climate change is a result of capitalist greed, Jews want to destroy Europe by letting in millions of immigrants, the lack of female electronic musicians is due to oppression by the IDM patriarchy, Coronavirus emerged from those ride-share electric scooters... so on and so forth. Any of these theories *could* be true, but they all share certain characteristics that should tingle your skeptic-antenna, most prominently the attribution of macro-scale phenomena to human-scale, conscious cognitive processes. And, as we all (should) know, not every phenomenon is under the control of conscious thought processes, not least *our own thought processes themselves*.

One of the things I want to try to illustrate over the course of these pages is that conspiracy theories are a symptom of cognitive bias, and people all across the political spectrum suffer from them. Even claims that you or I thought were obvious, or even self evident, may in fact be little better than the claim that alien paedophile lizards are running the world.

## Winston's got the rhymes to uplift and inspire

Many conspiracies are not, in fact, conspiracies, they are emergent patterns, I call them *Transpiracies* - events that simply transpire, rather than people who *conspire*.

Then there are *Inspiracies*, which inspire.

My hope is that rather than simply moaning about how stupid all you conspiratorians are, I will propose a positive alternative. And what I wish for is not simply proposing an alternative conspiracy, which is what most political writing tends to do, but to propose something completely orthogonal. Rather than proposing how our current nightmare situation can be explained by the evil machinations of shadowy figures of the left/right/jewish/white/capitalist/socialist/rich/gay/straight/immigrant/blah/antiblah/underclass/elite (delete as applicable), why not admit that, no one is in control, but that's OK? Why not admit that, all things considered, actually our current situation isn't so bad? Rather than arguing about whose conspiracy theory is the right one, why not admit that they're all similarly inadequate?

Why not admit that, not only are we not in control of our societies, but that we're not really even in control of *ourselves*?

Why not admit that humans are inherently fucked up and weird, but that's OK too? Why not admit that it'll probably take thousands of years for us to live up to our own most basic standards? But why not admit that we're genuinely getting better despite that? Why not be honest? Why not just give yourself a fucking break? What is the inspiracy? I don't know yet, hopefully we'll find out.

## Learning How To Be Inspired Again

What has happened is that, as democracy creaks and buckles under the strain of new technologies and the increasing power of corporations, media and marketing, we have lost faith in all hierarchies. As leader after leader takes shitty, incompetent, shallow or manipulative decisions, we have lost faith in leaders and role models. We have become too cynical to look up to anyone. And that's sad, because it jeopardises opportunities for growth, and it jeopardises our ability to work together coherently. It also kills inspiration, because to be inspired is to let your guard down. To be inspired is to be vulnerable. Anyone who has ever worked their guts out on a piece of music they thought was great knows this vulnerability intimately. The slightest thing can ruin your inspiration and make it look cheap and deluded.

It takes effort on both sides to benefit from leadership, it's not just a matter of having decent leaders, it also takes a bit of good faith from those being led. We need to be better followers. Bizarrely, despite losing our faith in those at the top, we still fall for the fallacious expectation that those people can magic everything better again. Well, not without people who believe in them they can't. You think that the establishment is corrupt, and yet you still expect the winner of some kind of reality TV game show (for that is what elections are) to herald a grand new dawn of wondrous miracles and instant fixes. How can both these things be true?

To a certain extent the faith and courage than Winston Churchill inspired was illusory. It was propaganda, of course. But it was, as I say in the song, honest propaganda, in that it "told it straight" and yet persuaded people to do better and go further than they would otherwise have done. An Inspiracy.

Take this sentence in his post-Dunkirk speech:

*“our thankfulness at the escape of our Army and so many men, whose loved ones have passed through an agonizing week, must not blind us to the fact that what has happened in France and Belgium is a colossal military disaster.”*

Can you imagine a modern day politician having the balls to say that? They’d be busy trying to paint the exact opposite picture. Churchill clearly felt confident enough in his listeners’ *faith in him* to be able to state the facts honestly. He didn’t feel that a single admission of inadequacy would get him cancelled.

Without a little belief things become impossible. We want leaders to fix things, and yet we are so cynical of them that we would immediately refuse to follow any suggestions of how to do it. The only thing left to a leader who, almost by definition, cannot inspire people, is for them to abuse the purely bureaucratic administrative power they have to line their pockets as much as they can while they still have the chance.

We need an Inspiracy - we need a leader with the rhymes to uplift and inspire. But alongside that, we need people to *allow* themselves to be uplifted and inspired. We do see this happening occasionally, but immediately expectations get too high and the smallest mistake then brings the movement crashing down, the momentum immediately grinds to a halt, and the brief flash of hope and belief evaporates. You saw it with Barack Obama, you’ll see it with Greta Thunberg. Within a few short months our dreams are once again mired in petty bickering over banalities.

The situation has always traditionally been that the right have a monopoly on the faith of the followers, and the left are too busy questioning everything. The standard scenario was always that the right stuck to the party line and the left argue amongst themselves. Thus, despite the left’s moral high ground, they were always placed at a political disadvantage. Luckily it looks like the right are increasingly in disarray too now. *Everyone* has lost faith in leaders. The right will continue down their path of hate and mistrust, and spiral into ever more ridiculous conspiracy theories. Which is hopefully an opportunity. If the left can reignite that faith before the right can, then that could be a big, big win.

And as to whether the Leave or Remain camp can claim Churchyboy as their own? I leave that to his own words. The first Congress of Europe met in The Hague in May 1948. Winston Churchill was the keynote speaker:

*“We shall only save ourselves from the perils which draw near by forgetting the hatreds of the past, by letting national rancours and revenges die, by progressively effacing frontiers and barriers which aggravate and congeal our divisions.”*



So Remain, then. Doubly Remain considering the fact that most Brexiters would not know what the words "effacing" and "congeal" meant.

So, in conclusion... This is my first anti-what-people-like-me-think claim. We do benefit from leadership, we benefit from looking up to heroes, we need values and we need ambitions. We need to look up to *someone* or we stagnate - figureheads that embody what we want to achieve. Whether they are fictional characters, superheroes, gods, entrepreneurs, scientists, swedish schoolgirls or rich hippy musicians watching someone make their bed, it doesn't really matter but someone needs to guide these ideals in a coherent direction, and these people could be said to be "leaders". They don't have to make perfect decisions, they don't have to be saints, they don't have to have had a squeaky clean private life, they don't need to be omniscient, they just need to INSPIRE. A shitty leader that inspires a hundred million people to do fantastic things would be way way better than a brilliant leader who utterly fails to stir a hundred million apathetic and obtuse cynical fucks.

To destroy meritocratic hierarchies is stupid, because we destroy structure that enable us to grow and develop, and we open the door to darker dominance hierarchies to reassert themselves. We also become arrogant and entitled enough to assume everyone more successful than us is corrupt, we then assume we don't need to learn from anyone, hence we become closed minded and our knowledge stagnates.

So this song, in my mind now, stands as a small reminder that leadership can be positive and inspiring - both the leadership of someone performing on stage as an MC, and guidance from pivotal figures in times of peril. And we are entering times of peril right now, of course. Our minds need inspiring people to focus upon, and to learn from, and to look up to, but these people won't be perfect. I'm not suggesting we need blind faith, but we need to be able to focus our minds on how we can extract the best from our leaders instead of focusing on their worst.

We need to demand more from our leaders where it matters, and less where it doesn't.

*Mike Trollfield*

## Tune in next week for The Chairman

Thanks Mike. Love the fake handwriting sign off. Tasteful.

Nevertheless, Mike, those with power and influence *must* be subjected to more intense moral scrutiny. Why do I say that? I think a lot of the motivation for insisting that politicians, musicians, and celebrities be held to higher moral standards than us normal people is that power and fame have a strong tendency to corrupt. Let's face it, having people actually do what you tell them to do can completely twist your fucking mind. Leaders may even get fucked up precisely *because* they became the centre of so much attention.

Which will bring us to our next song, also about leadership, but the dark side. This song will be about the pathological dominance hierarchy, but with a musical/spiritual/philosophical/psychological twist. Fun awaits. See you there.