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STEREOGUM




The Crying of Let Go: The Obscured Mysteries
And Alternate Realities Of Andrew W.K.



SOUNDING BOARD

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BY MICHAEL NELSON

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Let's start now. Or as close to *now* as can be defined in this conversation,
between the time and place I am in as I write these words and the time and

EVERY DAY  DOES GOOD

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It's an odd clip, a negative-image video allegedly meant to illustrate the following bit of Andrew W.K.'s worldview:

By inverting every polarity and reflecting every opposite, we can unite the highest and lowest parts of ourselves, and rejoice in the ever-contrasting intensity of being alive.

It's odd, though, because at points, the figure on the screen looks nothing like Andrew W.K. This, of course, is a result of the filming technique. But it brings to mind a question I've been meaning to ask:

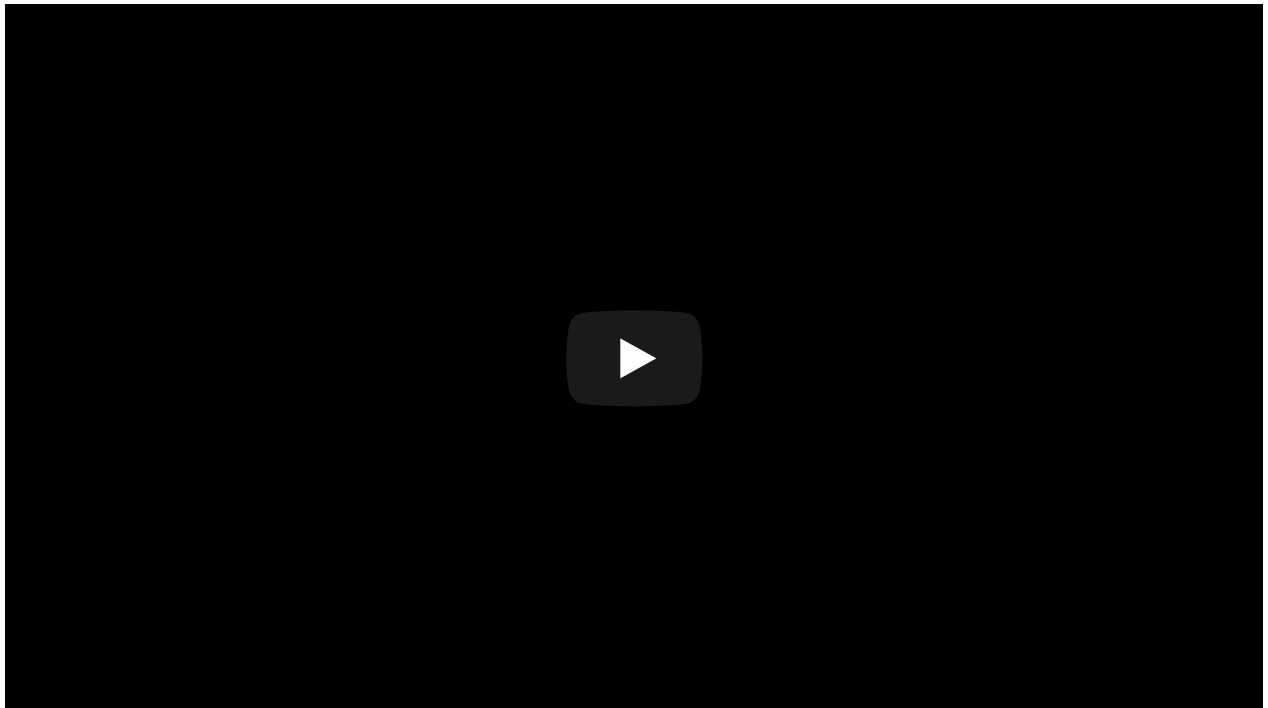
What does Andrew W.K. look like? Do you know what Andrew W.K. looks like?

I have shaken the man's hand and looked him square in the eye. I have watched him on stage and seen him in literally hundreds and quite possibly thousands of pictures and videos. If I had to describe Andrew W.K. to a police sketch artist, I could probably do a pretty good job. My own sketching abilities, though, are a bit rusty. Instead, I have created this Cubist-inspired collage, put together using a handful of "official" Andrew W.K. photographs shot over the course of his professional career.



Not a bad likeness, is it?

It still doesn't look much like the person in the video, though. Why don't you watch that and get comfortable, OK? And then, when you're ready, we can start. We can talk about how we got here in the first place, all the reasons why we're here *now*.



The Andrew W.K. story is like nothing else in music — maybe nothing else in the world — and there is no story I'd rather tell.

I can't, of course.

I *would*, though: in a heartbeat. I would spill everything and spare nothing. I *can't*, not because I'd betray any confidences or violate any agreements or put myself in harm's way, but because I *don't know* the Andrew W.K. story.

I don't know enough of it, at least. I don't know what's true and what's not true. I don't think anybody knows the whole truth of the Andrew W.K. story. I honestly don't think Andrew W.K. knows anymore. I am absolutely certain he wouldn't tell you even if he could, but I think even he would get lost if he

were to try. I think there are so many long-abandoned dead ends and red herrings and random acts of misdirection — so many layers of illusion interspersed with so many other layers of “reality” — that I can’t believe he can keep it straight. I doubt he completely remembers a whole bunch of it, and there are some details about which even *he* surely knows nothing.

Maybe he does, though? He might. Who knows.

For the purposes of this conversation, let’s tell ourselves there is nobody who knows the whole truth of the Andrew W.K. story, and let me tell you, I’m not pretending to know any more (or less) than what it is I’m telling you today. I’m sure somebody knows more than I do, but they are not here. I am. And let me tell you this, too: I’ve now been doggedly following the whole mess for longer than I can even believe, and I’ve done my level best to keep close track of the plot, to the extent such a thing is possible. So before I forget anything, I’m going to tell you some of the story as I remember it, i.e., as much of the story as I know.

Sound good? Good. Let’s begin. Let’s begin with what we *know*:

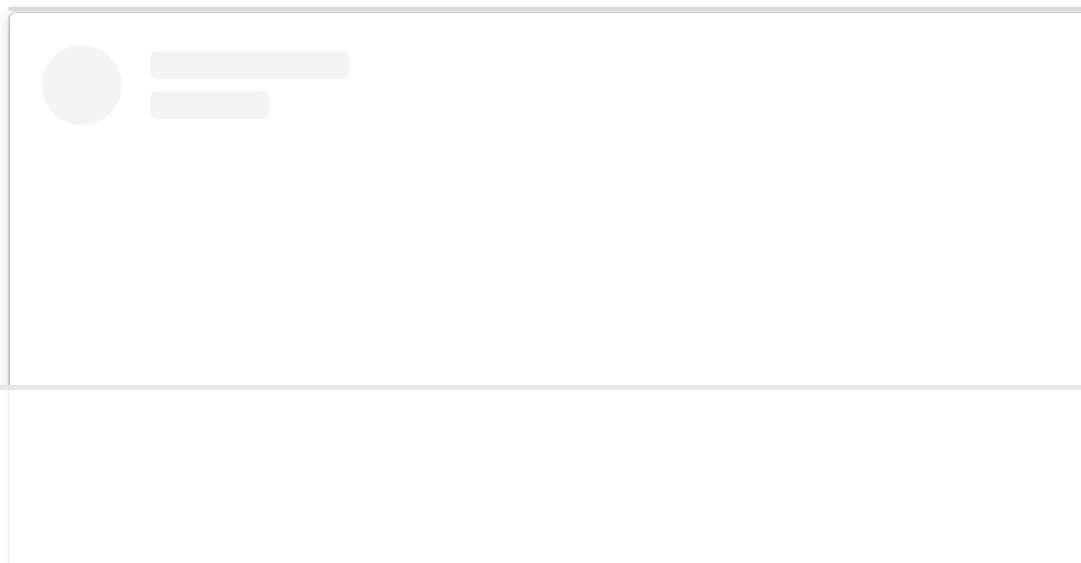
His name is Andrew W.K.

Andrew W.K. was born Andrew Wilkes-Krier. That much is generally accepted as fact without dispute. Personally, I think it's the first act of misdirection. As I see it, this is where the maze starts.

It's a fascinating little anecdote, frankly, although you don't hear it told much anymore: According to an old bio, Andrew was named after a drunk driver-turned-drugstore cowboy-turned-murderer named Andrew Stevenson, who started calling himself Andrew White, who was then given the alias "The White Killer" by the Michigan police force tracking him down. Here is an actual line from the actual bio:

Andrew's father was fond of this name, and as a chief officer on the police force, he named his son after the killer, once they caught him and executed him in 1987.

Does that sound like a true story to you? Police chief names his son after dirtbag drifter who's just been executed after being convicted of three murders? Let's say it sounds ... not even plausible, but within the realm of Earthly possibility. And then, let's wipe that off the board by pointing out that Andrew W.K. was born in 1979. This is a *fact* ... unless you see some reason to doubt the unredacted information included right there on the man's own Florida state ID card ... which was randomly shared on the man's own Instagram, on one random day in 2014.



Instagram

[View this post on Instagram](#)



#ThrowbackThursday Here's a photocopy of my Florida state ID card from 2000! #PARTY

A post shared by [Andrew W.K.](#) (@andrewwk) on Mar 6, 2014 at 3:54p...

Doubt, I suppose, is the order of the day, but I beg of you, don't get bogged down in this. The man's precise date of birth is beside the point. He was obviously not born in 1987, and was not 13 years old when that bio was written. Moving on. Regarding the "W.K.," here are the very next lines from that selfsame bio:

Andrew W.K. White Killer. Women Kum. Wild Kid. Want Kicks. It's all the fucking same. He fucking kills the music to make you dance.

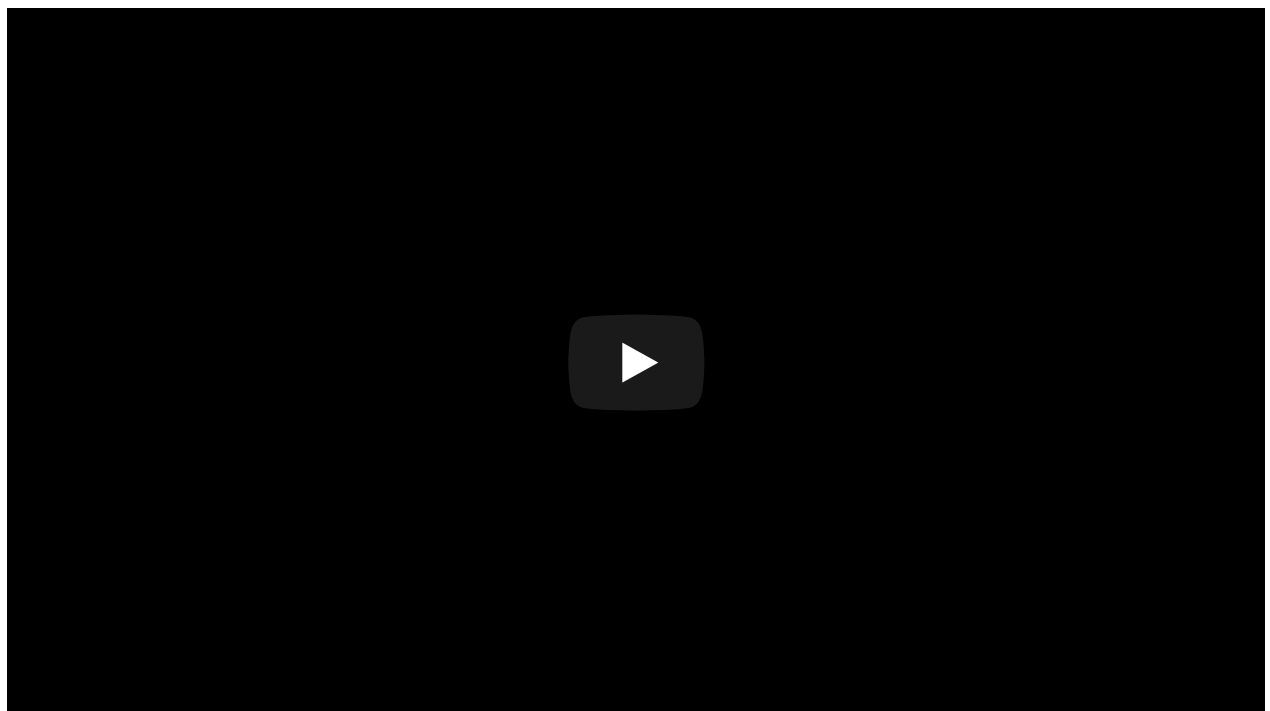
So by sheer dint of luck, the boy's hyphenate surname — Wilkes-Krier — has the same initials as his convict-namesake's weird alias: "White Killer." Which could also stand for "Women Kum," "Wild Kid," or "Want Kicks." Right?

"It's all the fucking same."

This is a lie. But history is made up of lies. There are no reliable narrators, no omniscient observers, no chroniclers capable of capturing the complete scope of events. This is the essential emptiness of every story, if not the sole absolute truth to be found in any story. This is the Andrew W.K. story.

Let's go back to the start of the maze:

Andrew W.K. was born Andrew Wilkes-Krier. There is corroborating evidence to prove this, so we can comfortably accept it as being "true." The following is also "true": Andrew Wilkes-Krier grew up in Michigan. He studied classical piano, listened to death metal, and played with a handful of experimental noise bands. Eventually he moved to New York City, where he made some valuable connections — Matt Sweeney from Chavez, Donald Tardy from Obituary, Dave Grohl — and started making music as Andrew W.K. He self-financed and recorded a couple of EPs around the turn of the millennium (*Girls Own Juice* and *Party Till You Puke*), which were released via Michigan-based avant garde indie label Bulb Records. On those EPs, in retrospect, we hear a nascent iteration of Andrew W.K.'s signature sound, but we recognize, immediately, the artist's vision.



So too, in the moment, did a handful of raving tastemaker-types — and, eventually, Island Records, who courted and signed W.K. and gave him the resources to make a proper album. That album was called *I Get Wet*.

We're getting ahead of ourselves, though. The questions — the very first questions — predate that album's release. They also predate the very weirdest weirdness, although perhaps it is more accurate to say they presage the very weirdest weirdness. Even before the world at large had heard the name Andrew

W.K., there were questions: Who is Andrew W.K.? Is Andrew W.K. real? Who is the real Andrew W.K.?

At the time, these questions took a fairly artless, inelegant form. Incidentally, I don't remember this at all, and if I hadn't found hard evidence of it, I wouldn't even bother to include it here. But evidence exists. In an October 24, 2001 [review](#) of W.K.'s first-ever British show, at the Garage in London, *The Guardian's* Alex Petridis included this truly random note:

One music-biz conspiracy theory currently circulating suggests that Andrew W.K. is an elaborate hoax devised by former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl.

I find this utterly preposterous — not even the suggestion that Dave Grohl somehow invented or “devised” Andrew W.K. (this is verifiably false), but the idea that a cadre of actual “music-biz” types would perpetuate such an obviously ludicrous, easily disproven rumor. And I am legitimately dumbfounded by the fact that it was mentioned in *The Guardian*: one of the most widely read publications on the planet; a newspaper that has existed since 1821 and has won dozens of major awards, including a Pulitzer for investigative journalism.

But it wasn't just *The Guardian*! The very same morsel was included in another early review, this one published by none other than the BBC:

The rumour is that Andrew WK is a none too elaborate joke foisted upon the world by ex Nirvana drummer and Foo Fighter Dave Grohl. Gossip hounds reckon Grohl penned the WK anthems for a laugh and got Andrew the long-haired sex god to front them.

It's not a coincidence that both the above-quoted publications are based in England. Like most new American rock acts around the turn of the millennium, Andrew W.K. was initially promoted to British audiences as a way of building up buzz for the eventual Stateside push (*I Get Wet* came out in Europe on November 13, 2001, but wasn't released in America till March 26, 2002). A week prior to W.K.'s October 2001 Garage gig — not just his UK debut, incidentally, but his fourth or fifth show ever under the Andrew W.K. moniker, and his very first, period, with a backing band — he was featured on the cover of the *NME*, touted as (yes) "The Saviour Of Music!"

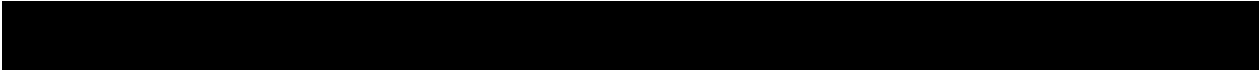
To be fair, W.K.'s seemingly out-of-nowhere arrival might have prompted some media folks to assign credence to the Grohl rumor, especially when taking into account the broader environment: the UK circa late 2001, a climate in which dumb hoaxes made for brisk business. (Consider, for instance, two other *NME* features that ran at roughly the same time as the W.K. cover story: "Finally ... the truth about the White Stripes! We investigated the endless wedding/sibling rumours," and "[We] finally reveal the REAL identity of Randy Fitzsimmons, the svengali and so-called sixth member of the Hives.")

Given that context, I can understand why mainstream Brit journalists felt compelled to mention the Grohl "theory" in their own initial coverage of Andrew W.K. But where did it come from? I know enough about the standards and practices of news organizations like *The Guardian* and the BBC to know they don't blindly bring attention to spurious, unsourced gossip, especially if the express purpose of including such information is to give the impression of being hip to the "real" story.

My point is: Somebody had to start that rumor. And somebody had to share that rumor with professional journalists at *The Guardian* and the BBC. And that person had to be credible enough for those journalists to feel comfortable publishing that rumor. And that rumor is fucking ridiculous, so that person must have been pretty goddamn credible.

Who started that rumor? Who spread it? Those are the real questions, but you'll never get any answers. This wasn't even the beginning; this was before the beginning. This is ancient history — stuff that occurred on a different continent in a different world. Who knows.





By the time *I Get Wet* landed in America, the Grohl business had been erased from the Andrew W.K. narrative. Yet somehow, the updated narrative was also wrong — perhaps equally demonstrably wrong — and the media were still treating it as reliable.

During *I Get Wet*'s promotional cycle, W.K. claimed his album's title was a reference to feeling excitement, particularly the feeling of excitement as experienced by the human body: sweat pouring, tears flowing, saliva dripping, pulse racing, endorphins pumping. This explanation was largely taken at face value and seemed to square with the album's core lyrical theme: partying. *I Get Wet*'s lead single (and Andrew W.K.'s best-known song, still to this day, by orders of magnitude) was called "Party Hard," and it was part of a tracklist including similarly fun-sounding titles like "It's Time To Party" and "Party Till You Puke."

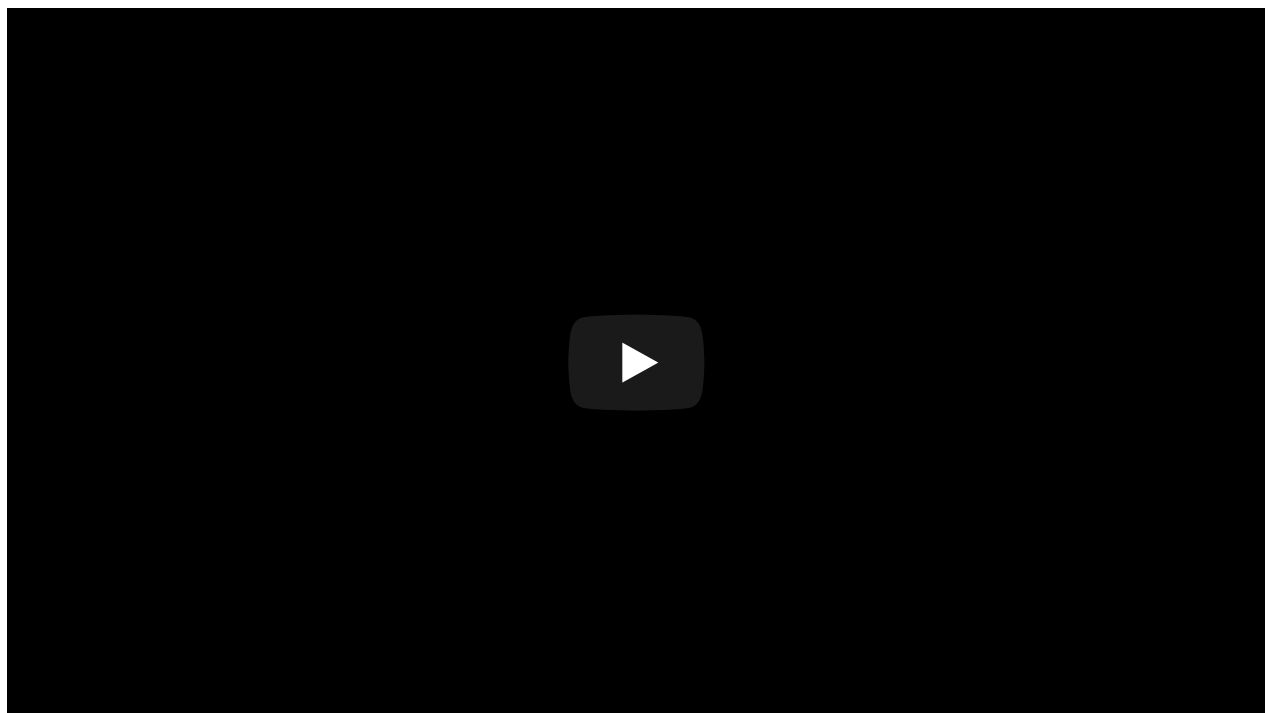
Almost instantly, W.K. was known in popular culture as "the party guy" — a goofy, goony brand, but one embraced and embodied by W.K. in the months after the release of *I Get Wet*; one he continues to flog, openly and perhaps excessively, even today.

The lyrics on *I Get Wet*, though, did not support this reading. The “party” described by Andrew W.K. did not sound like fun. It sounded like *The Purge*. There are some lyrics on *I Get Wet* that need a trigger warning, some lyrics that make me so uncomfortable I can’t type them out, and some lyrics that sound like they’re written in code, but here’s an example of one that’s pretty straightforward, relatively unobjectionable, and representative of the whole (from “Ready To Die”):

This is your time to pay
This is your judgment day
We made a sacrifice
And now we get to take your life

What the fuck kind of party is that? And in that light, how the hell were people buying W.K.’s Newspeak interpretation of the title *I Get Wet*? He was obviously retconning (or gaslighting), especially considering the alternate connotations. There was, for example, the phrase’s sexual suggestiveness (mitigated somewhat, or at least downplayed, by the fact that “Girls Own Juice” was reconfigured as “Girls Own Love” for the major-label release).

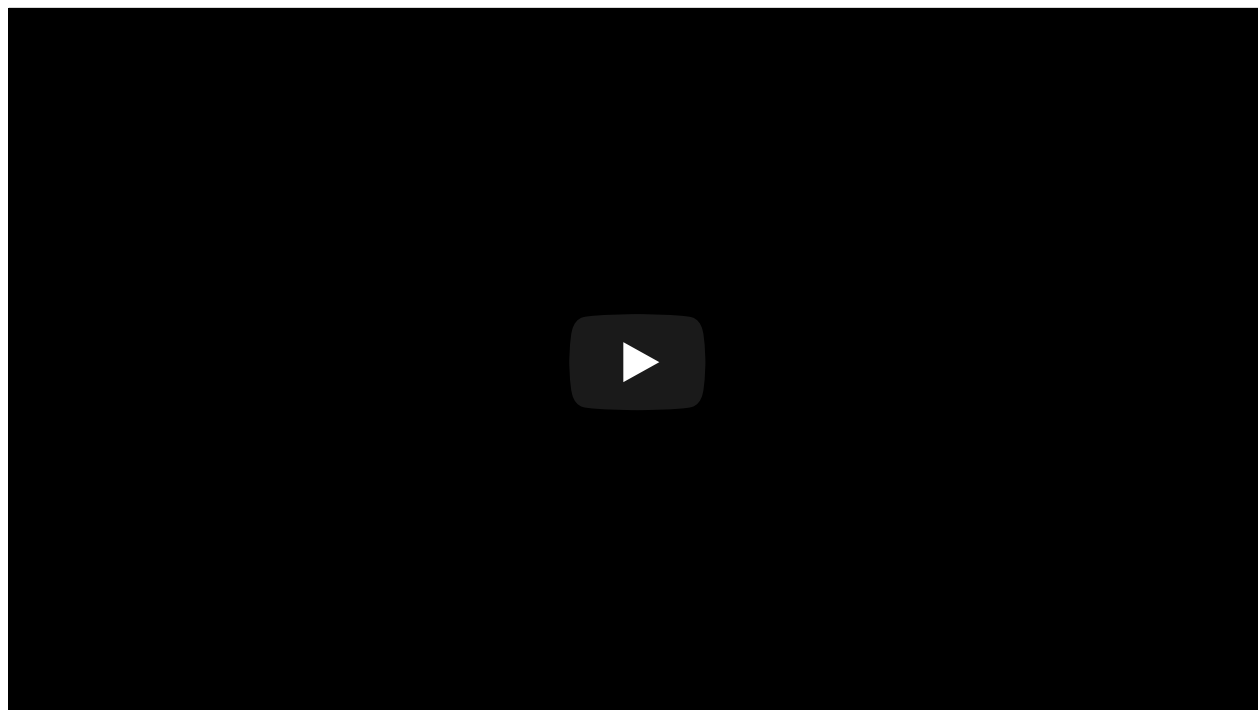
There was also the fact that “get wet” is old-school dirtbag slang for “smoke dust” — used frequently when you trick another kid into smoking dust, which is pretty much the worst prank you can pull on another human being. Dust is not a “party” drug; it’s a chemical that allows you to experience your worst nightmares in the physical world.



Most overtly, there was the album's cover, featuring W.K. caked in his own blood, looking not excited but anesthetized, sedated, sated: like a jungle predator who had just finished feeding.

So why in the world did anybody think of Andrew W.K. as “the party guy”? It would be like thinking of Michael Haneke as “the guy who makes funny movies about kids playing games. The funny-game movie guy. The funny-game guy.” If you’re unfamiliar with that reference, the below trailer should serve to illustrate my point. However, you should only watch said trailer if you

are ABSOLUTELY 100% CERTAIN YOU CANNOT BE TRIGGERED BY ANYTHING. I'm serious about that.



As I write this, actually, it occurs to me there could be more to that analogy than a shared sense of horrifying irony. Haneke's original German-language version of *Funny Games* was released in 1997, a couple years before the official arrival of Andrew W.K., and it wouldn't surprise me to learn that the film had served as a mood board for W.K.'s aesthetic, if not the music's lyrical content. In any case, whether by coincidence or design, the two things share numerous notable similarities. For instance, the two projects' respective title cards seem of a piece with one another.





Then, of course, there is the blood. And most famously, in both cases, there are the all-white costumes, against which the blood stands out in sharp, horrifying contrast.



Do you see it? Am I losing my mind? Don't answer that. It's irrelevant. Just let me say this, hear me out. Whether you're intimately familiar with *I Get Wet*, sort of recall its presence on the periphery of your consciousness, or have never heard (or heard of) the damn thing, I ask you to trust me now, wipe clean your mind, and read the following without prejudice:

I Get Wet is a wild experience. It's a genuine oddity, a weird burst of unhinged id, and it seems to exist in its own self-contained universe, only fleetingly visible in this one. It doesn't have influences so much as ingredients — bizarre ingredients meted out in bizarre proportions. Abba. Motorhead. Ministry. Meat Loaf. Donkey Kong. Dirtbikes. Snuff films. WrestleMania.

If you contend with the album's substance rather than allow yourself to be fooled by its Rashomon effect, *I Get Wet* has the feel of an X-Men origin story: a military-funded black-ops experiment in biochemical engineering whose formula proves too potent. But before its creators can make the necessary adjustments, it gets loose! It is an unpredictable, uncontrollable super-weapon capable of leveling cities. It can be contained, but doing so requires the public be distracted via some combination of mass hypnosis and subtly enhanced drinking-water fluoride. And relentless, focused spin.

I Get Wet received near-universal acclaim upon its North American release, but all the reviews — positive and negative — seemed to be recycling PR bullet points rather than engaging with (or even recognizing) the music's

substance. Consider, for example, this line from [the A.V. Club's review](#), written by Stephen Thompson:

On his endearing ode to his one-time home of New York City (“I Love NYC”), W.K.’s chorus sums up its charms in 10 words: “I love New York City / Oh, yeah! / New York City!”

Now those are indeed the lyrics to the chorus of “I Love NYC,” but those are not the only lyrics, and if you know the other lyrics, you know the song is not an “endearing ode” to anything. In fact, once you get past the chorus — which sounds weirdly cruel and sarcastic and disembodied in context — everything else in the song is horrifying and confusing and cryptic.

Here’s an example of what I mean:

Run them over
Run them out
Knock your block and terror your town

Another:

Broken faces
Burning beds
Deal off some for living while dead

One more:

We are a corporation
We are a company
We cut hard but we're cutting hard anyway
We are your mother-father
We are your final friend
It never started and it won't end

Tell me: What is that? What is happening there? “We are your mother-father”? That is genuinely disturbing. What does it even *mean* though? (The Andrew W.K. conspiracy-theory site [What Happened To Andrew WK?](#) claims the song's lyrics “make no attempt to veil [W.K.'s] references to Babylon, September 11th, and that he himself is ‘a corporation, a factory.’” I find this explanation...nonsensical?)

“I Love NYC” could (maybe?) be about a gang war, a military invasion, or [Silent Tristero's Empire](#) from Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying Of Lot 49*, but whatever

is going on in those lyrics is a deranged, awful thing, and the fact that it is never clarified or defined makes it so much worse. The incongruous and inane “happy” chorus — “Oh, yeah! New York City!” — just makes it an unholy nightmare.

I digress. I can’t help these digressions, because with Andrew W.K., I can never know what the author intended and what I am inventing, or inviting, or imagining. I can’t explain it and I don’t get it, but that’s what happened.

Two years later, Island released W.K.’s second album, *The Wolf*, in which the bizarre ingredients used to create *I Get Wet* were meted out in slightly different proportions — less Ministry, more Meat Loaf — but the results were similarly misunderstood and similarly remarkable. (Both albums are essential, as far as I’m concerned.) The abject violence had been dialed down; in its place was a message of survival and solidarity that somehow felt even more disquieting.

Or did it? Here, too, I have to be conscious of erroneously imputing to the author a message he never meant to send. I can say this much, at least, fully aware that my reaction says more about me than it does Andrew W.K.: I for one found *The Wolf* to be a disquieting experience, especially in light of *I Get Wet*. I didn’t know what to make of lyrics like, “All we ever wanted was a thing to believe/ And now that we have found it, we have all that we need.” Here’s another weird one: “The conquest will survive... We have found our pride.”

Both those examples are culled from a song called “Long Live The Party.” It’s not quite as depraved as the parties described on *I Get Wet*, but it is an unusual usage of the word “party,” is it not? I am not imagining that, am I? Nonetheless, it was a party, so W.K. stayed on-brand, even as the brand morphed into an entirely different organism, a decidedly stranger thing.

Make no mistake, this stuff is precisely why I was personally so immediately obsessed with Andrew W.K. The deliberate misuses of language and inexplicable misinterpretations of evidence. The cognitive dissonance. The darkness. The dread. The disguises. Some of these things were hidden in plain sight, but W.K. scattered them like a breadcrumb trail leading ever-deeper into a place where the possibility of “plain sight” was lost amid long shadows and tricks of the light.

Incidentally, I also appreciated and approved of the surface-level signals and signs flashed by W.K. (or the ones I recognized, at least). His presentation slyly included a number of careful aesthetic choices that indicated to me the presence of a kindred spirit. Without even once decoding it for the uninitiated, W.K. was referencing the golden age of American death metal, when American death metal was weird and scary and dangerous. He hired Obituary’s Donald Tardy to play drums for his band. He sliced open his face with an X-Acto knife for a photo shoot. He covered himself in pig’s blood. He had long, greasy hair and the gross facial growth favored by teenage dirtbags. He wore big, puffy ’80s high-tops. He moved to fucking Florida, for fuck’s sake — or at least he claimed to have moved to Florida (again, who knows), but in any case, he knew what Florida meant, what Florida had been before it became the place that gave us Backstreet Boys and Limp Bizkit. Up close, you could see his customary all-white outfit (tight jeans, tight T-shirt, puffy ’80s high-tops) was smeared with nasty stains of unidentified origins, but from a distance, especially against a black backdrop, it looked as though he’d covered his entire body in corpsepaint.

The “fun” stuff was a front, a game. It was like a Skittles bag filled with crack; a caramel apple concealing a razorblade; a joint laced with PCP. Andrew W.K.

was fucking with the dark shit, the evil shit, the cult shit. The funnest part was watching him do it, watching him get away with it, and waiting for somebody to finally clock it.

It had to happen.

Needless to say, it didn't.

From the beginning of 2002 through the end of 2004, Andrew W.K. was working nonstop: doing press for *I Get Wet*, touring for *I Get Wet*, recording *The Wolf*, doing press for *The Wolf*, touring for *The Wolf* ... (Tardy estimates they did 500 shows during that timespan.) He also had a series on MTV2 (*Your Friend, Andrew*), recorded a jingle for Kit Kat, and maintained a fairly active online presence. That kind of workload could cause anybody to crack, especially somebody who performs with the full-throttle intensity of Andrew W.K.

And as *The Wolf* tour wound down to its final dates ... somebody cracked.

And that's when things got weird.

It's been too long now for me to pinpoint precisely how I was made aware of the developments that followed *The Wolf*. I remember only that I arrived at the scene earlier than most — many years earlier, in fact — and yet still late enough to feel fully disoriented by the stories I found myself reading upon arrival. By that point, the situation was already badly out of control, and catching up meant diving headfirst into the middle of a very deep, very dark lake, and from there, swimming blindly to what I believed to be the perimeter. I never set foot on the lake's floor, and I never got a clear feel for its shape or size. Even now, having spent on this pursuit a number of hours that can only be described as “irresponsible,” I feel lost just thinking about it.

Rather than reconstruct for you my own scattered experience, then, I'm going to do my best to put together a concise timeline of the crucial events — or the events that, to my mind, are crucial. As a result, I'm leaving out a lot, including some of the strangest details. If I've excluded any truly valuable pieces of information, I have done so unintentionally, and I apologize. I encourage you to begin a search of your own if you're curious to learn more, but I must warn you: You'll learn nothing so much as the boundaries of your own patience. You'll find fewer facts and more curiosity. Curiouser and curiouser.

I won't say it's not worth it, though. I also wouldn't dream of attempting to catalog the many, many oddities I've found in such searches. Instead, my hope here is to present to you a coherent account consisting only of facts.

I want to underscore that last point, because it's important for me to make this absolutely, unequivocally clear:

These are facts.

I'm not interested in perpetuating any mythology; I'm trying to find the long-buried seed of truth from which this dense, vast forest of confusion has grown. These are facts. These things actually legitimately truly happened — in real life, in real time, in front of real people. Believe what you want to believe, but this is not fiction. *These are facts.* These things happened.

On the night of December 17, 2004, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Andrew W.K. had been scheduled to perform at the WSOU Holiday Bash, a charity event organized by Seton Hall's college-radio station. The show went off as planned, except for the fact that W.K.'s set was cut short. Immediately afterward, a bizarre rumor began making the rounds: The man on stage that night had not been the "real" Andrew W.K. He had the same clothes, a similar haircut and build, but a different face. He had been an imposter, or a replacement, or a stand-in, or... something else: some sort of facsimile of Andrew W.K.

The source of that rumor has never been identified, but six years later, the person who booked the show — then-WSOU Program Director Dan Rodriguez — shared his account of the events in question.

In brief: Rodriguez said there was nothing suspicious about the event's abrupt conclusion ("we were going to run past curfew"); he also never questioned the identity of the artist on stage that night ("he certainly looked like [Andrew W.K.] from where I was standing"). However, per Rodriguez, the next few weeks were consumed by "hundreds of callers that flooded WSOU's request lines and my direct business line each and every day... I spent way too many hours pleading with message-board nutjobs and callers who insisted I was part of the conspiracy because I denied it. Anything short of an admission was considered a lie."

On December 19, 2004, two days after the gig in Elizabeth, a person named Kristine Williams — identified as the webmaster of Andrew W.K.'s official site, AWKWorld.com — participated in an online Q&A where she fielded a few similar queries, two of which I've included in this document, without comment, below.

It would be impossible for me to summarize these exchanges, for reasons that will become evident when you read them. For purposes of concision and clarity, however, I've liberally condensed and lightly copyedited them, excising some text and cleaning up the rest — with the exception of one minor error that I've chosen to let stand. (Williams' copy was nearly pristine, which is especially impressive given its density, intricacy, and jarring tonal shifts.)

Q: Hey! A lot of people don't seem to think that was Andrew W.K. at the NJ show! I am one of them. What is going on Kristine?

A: To answer all of your questions: There's been a lot of confusion regarding this New Jersey concert. People have been especially curious about where Andrew went after the show and whether or not it was in fact Andrew himself on the stage. Well, please let me be the first to tell you that you can all take a deep breath and relax! Please calm down. It was a spectacular concert, everything went over very well and the night was a success! We should all feel great about the show. Many of you did mention some strange unexplained moments during the evening, mainly

due to the stopping of the show early, before the band could finish the intended set, and how Andrew was moving. This was due to a small problem with people in the backstage. Everything was taken care of smoothly and everyone made it out in one piece! At the end of the show we moved at the same time as they worked with the equipment and finished it up perfectly! We just want people to know that it went over very well. At this point all we can do is look at the information we've been collecting and continue with our research into the facts. We will not respond to false accusations, nor will we be threatened by those who choose deception over fairness. I'm never disappointed with a good A.W.K. show!

Q: Yo Kristine [AWK webmaster], Where the heck is Andrew? We don't want to hear from you, we want to hear from Mr. W.K. himself... Bring back Andrew W.K.!

A: I must admit, I feel slightly uneasy trying to explain to you where Andrew is, and let me also state for the record, that I am in no way trying to fill in for Andrew. I am simply here to answer questions — one at a time, on a moment by moment basis. Tonight will be the last Andrew K.W. concert of 2004! We trust that the fans will come out in full-force and raise the bar higher than ever. This is our last chance to build a night of never-ending excitement! Sold-out in New Jersey! I wish I could be there! As Andrew himself has stated, he will always be there, you just might not see him. Assumptions are once again at the mercy of possibility. Standards are suddenly stripped and elevated. Precepts and formalities no longer conceal the limitless possibility that's always been there, and no longer will anticipated procedure shatter expectations, or limit the endless variations of outcome that can be experienced now. Things which have become familiar are now anomalous. Due to the current circumstances, we still don't know who's causing this. We do have very clear ideas how to continue our research... You must know that Andrew is NOT moving away — because he's already gone — which means he's actually closer to you than ever before. Remember, no sign is a good sign,




and that still remains the case. The most important part of this will remain and flourish like never before. It's possible that your theories of comfort will be shattered in the ultimate liberation of understanding, but just when we feel we have no grasp, we'll realize we've been holding on to the most solid structure the entire time. There is NO reason for this to happen... except that it is. Accept that it is and enjoy yourself. As always, your pleasure remains the priority.

That's a bunch of deeply inscrutable philosophy-cum-hyperbole, obviously, and it neither teaches nor tells you anything, so I encourage you to skim the above sentences for tone rather than attempt to parse them for clarity. (The same caveat applies to much of the blockquoted text you'll find in this document, I'm afraid.) However, Ms. Williams does occasionally break through the bramble with some inspired wordplay:

There is NO reason for this to happen... except that it is. Accept that it is ...

Back then, Andrew W.K. frequently used his web portals as a means to communicate with his audience. He had a website called A.W.K. World (which no longer exists), and on that site he had a Q&A page where visitors could submit questions to be answered by Andrew W.K. The questions were often fairly generic — bored and/or lonely fans looking for random advice or pep talks — and W.K.'s answers were warm, encouraging, and kind, if often a bit platitudinous. “Remember that this too shall pass.” “We need to enjoy what we've got, because we won't have it forever.” Etc. (Incidentally, these are great bits of advice based on timeless wisdom — the fact that they are platitudes doesn't make them any less true.)

At the end of 2004, though, the tone ... changed. Suddenly, the answers made no sense — they weren't even answers; they were obscure declarations (e.g., "THIS IS HOW THE FORMATION BEGINS"). Soon after that, those declarations were typed out in numerical code.

	<p>Question: It's my birthday!!! Alright.. bye <i>asked by Tutti on Sunday, November 21, 2004</i></p> <p>Answer: (18)(32)(36)(30)(26)(18)(38)(10)::: (40)(16)(18)(38) (32)(2)(36)(40)(50) (28)(10)(44) (10)(36) (38)(40)(30)(32)(38). (9)(13) (7)(15)(9)(14)(7) (20)(15) (2)(5) (1)(18)(15)(21) (14)(4), (10)(21)(19)(20) (14)(15)(20) (23)(8)(5)(18)(5) (20)(8)(5) (13)(21)(19)(9)(3) (4)(15)(5)(19)(14)(20) (19)(15)(21)(14)(4) (15)(21)(20)(12)(15)(21)(4). (5)(22)(5)(18) (25)(20)(8)(9)(14)(7) (9) (8)(1)(22)(5) (7)(15)(5)(19) (9)(14)(20)(15) (20)(8)(9)(19) (13)(21)(19)(9)(3). (23)(9)(20)(8) (13)(25) (3)(15)(13)(16)(12)(9)(13)(5)(14)(20)(19), Andrew W.K. <i>answered by Andrew W.K. on Tuesday, November 23, 2004 6:45 PM</i></p>
	<p>Question: We love you. I guess my question is, will you hang in there for yourself more than anybody or anything? <i>asked by Linda on Tuesday, November 23, 2004</i></p> <p>Answer: Dear Linda, Yes, this is already well underway, and there's no going back now. I'm grateful for all the love ever given. That's what laid the foundation on which we're now to begin building. With this conclusion, we drive fast forward. (35)(20)(13)(32) (20)(13) (28)(28)(17)(26)(17)(16) (32)(27) (25)(37)? (16)(27) (37)(27)(33) ((25)(17)(13)(26)(21) (26)(19): (13)(24)(24) (27)(18) (33)(21) (17)(34)(17)(30) (30)(17)(13)(24)(24)(37) (20) (13)(28)(28)(17)(26) (21)(26) (32)(20)(17) (18)(21)(30)(31)(32) (28)(24)(13)(15)(17)? (35)(20)(21)(24)(17) (19)(27)(21)(26)(19), Andrew W.K. <i>answered by Andrew W.K. on Tuesday, November 23, 2004 6:24 PM</i></p>
	<p>Question: Why do you want to be 215 pounds? <i>asked by Jenea on Sunday, March 28, 2004</i></p> <p>Answer: Dear All, THIS IS HOW THE FORMATION BEGINS: First We Were Together..... <i>answered by Andrew W.K. on Tuesday, November 23, 2004 12:55 PM</i></p> <p>Question: Hey Andrew man, I had the worst day today. Everything is going down the shit hole and</p>

Some of the code was easily cracked: You just match each number to the corresponding letter in the alphabet, i.e., (1) = A, (2) = B, (3) = C, and so on. Other codes were quite a bit more complicated, and some were literally indecipherable, possibly just nonsense. I'm not going to bother with any of that, because it's pointless. The code itself was pointless. Well, mostly pointless. There is ONE THING in the code that will help you navigate this

maze. There is one thing you need to know. This is “explained” on the site <http://awilkeskrier.homestead.com/>:

[A] simple message would read: (19)(20)(5)(5)(22)-(13)(9)(11)(5), which translates into “Steev Mike.” The two number (5)’s next to each other (“55”) was seen again and again in many different pieces of code.

In point of fact, you don’t absolutely need to know all of that, even. Let me rearrange those sentences a bit, because you do need to know *this*:

The two number (5)’s next to each other (“55”) ... translates into “Steev Mike”.

That’s all you need to know. All you need to know is this:

$EE = (5)(5) = (55) = 55 = \text{Steev Mike.}$

$55 = \text{Steev Mike.}$

On one day during the final two months of 2004, a message appeared on Andrew W.K.'s website. I first read the message on December 21, 2004, and it scared the hell out of me.

In almost every single account published after the fact, this message reads a little differently than it did when I first saw it. At some point, somebody revised it: They cleaned up the many spelling errors, they changed some pronouns from first-person to second-person, and they removed the postscript altogether. The fact that someone took the time to make these changes is almost as disquieting as the message itself, in either form. The fact that no one seems to be aware of the original unedited version is inexplicable. But I have it, and I will share it with you now — unabridged, unaltered — exactly as it first appeared on Andrew W.K.'s official site:

DEAR ANDREW WK,

TO START, LET ME SAY THAT I RESPECT YOU AND OUR FANS VERY MUCH. YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I BELIEVE IN YOU AND ALL THAT YOU STAND FOR BECAUSE I STOOD FOR IT FIRST. YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVE YOUR MUSIC, BECAUSE I CREATED IT. YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE THE WAY YOU LOOK AND ACT AND SING AND DANCE, BECAUSE IT WAS BORN IN MY BRAIN.

HOPEFULLY BY NOW YOU'VE NOTICED THAT I'VE HACKED INTO THE WEBSITES. MAYBE YOU HAVEN'T SEEN EVERYTHING, BUT OUR FANS HAVE. IN FACT, YOUR FANS ARE WELL ON THEIR WAY TO KNOWING THE TRUTH. —I'VE BEEN GIVING THEM BITS AND PIECES, HOPING THAT YOU'D COME TO YOUR SENSES AND STOP TRYING TO SQUEEZE ME OUT. WELL, YOU HAVEN'T RESPONDED TO MY INITIAL REQUESTS AND NOW YOU'RE FORCING ME TO MAKE THREATS. WHEN YOU ARE UNPROFESSIONAL, SO WILL I. NOW I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO LET

THE FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.

I NEVER WANTED IT TO COME TO THIS, BUT I CAN NO LONGER WAIT IN THE BACKGROUND AND IGNORE YOUR COMPLETE DISRESPECT. YOU'VE EXPLOITED THE AUTOMATIC DISADVANTAGE OUR AGREEMENT PUTS ME IN. MY CHOICE TO LET YOU ENJOY THE SPOTLIGHT, WHILE I CREATE THE MAGIC LEAVES ME ALMOST HELPLESS. I'M GOING TO EXTREEM MEASURES BUT YOU WILL NOT GET ME TO EXPOSE MYSELF UNTIL I EXPOSE YOU FIRST.

I KNOW THAT THE QUICK RISE TO FAME HAS CLOUDED YOUR MEMORY CONCERNING OUR PARTNERSHIP. I WAS WILLING TO FORGIVE YOUR AND IGNORANT CHOICES BECAUSE YOUR A YOUNG STAR. HOWEVER, YOUR RECENT EFFORTS TO EXCLUDE ME FROM THE THIRD ALBUM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. I DIDN'T WORK FER THE LAST YEAR ON THESE NEW SONGS JUST TO HAVE YOU BREAK YOUR PROMISES AND MY HEART.

OUR FANS DESERVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH. OUR FANS ARE SMART. THAT'S WHY I'VE PUT THE SAME LETTER YOU'RE HOLDING NOW ON ONE OF THE MANY WEBSITES I'VE CREATED THROUGH OUR COMPANY. BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, OUR FANS WILL HAVE READ IT TOO. DON'T WORRY, I'VE MADE IT HARD FOR ALL BUT THE MOST DEDICATED FANS TO READ, BUT KNOW THIS: MORE AND MORE PEOPLE WILL FIND OUT THE REAL STORY UNLESS YOU STOP TRYING TO SABOTAGE OUR CONTRACT.

I'VE CHOSEN NOT TO GO TO THE PRESS WITH THIS YET. I STILL VALUE OUR RELATIONSHIP, AND I WANT TO CONTINUE WITH ALL THAT WE INITIALLY PLANNEC, BUT IF YOU REFUSE TO COMPLY, I WILL HAVE NO CHOIC BUT TO REVEAL MYSELF, AND RDVDAL YOU AS A BACKSTABBING FRAUD.

IT'S YOUR CHOICE.

YOURS TRULY,
STEEV MIKE

P.S. UNLESS YOU WANT EVEN MORE PEOPLE TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MUSIC, OUR AGREEMENT, AND YOUR NEW GIRLFRIEND, STOP WITH YOUR PTANS ANC HOLD UP YOUR END OF THE DEAL

Within days (hours? Minutes? Can't confirm), the message supposedly authored by "Steev Mike" had been deleted from Andrew W.K.'s website, replaced with a message credited to somebody claiming to be Andrew W.K. That's when real people started getting really worried. That's when it was clear something was up. Something was fucked up.

Dear Everyone,

I had no idea what was waiting... I got back to my room, I noticed I had changed, oh no... already I didn't like the sound of that. I immediately went and looked. Right away I noticed that there were something messed up I knew something was weird in the section. Then I sank into my stomach... I knew it. You always imagine you.

I am this. The me. I can't believe me. Anyway, soon I started finding them. (By the way, my manager showed me and I'm very impressed). I spoke and

the long process of forming cleared everything out. Jeez... I just can't believe this actually happened. I can't believe I'm here. I can't believe it. This whole Steev Mike thing – I can't even begin...

Right now we have solidified. We are the company. This was it's insides. That's the only way to the systems. However, there is a small part that thinks it could be someone undisclosed in privacy. I can't even imagine this, but I have. I'm just a witness. You shouldn't see any of this. I talk about blackmail.

PLEASE DON'T BELIEVE STEEV MIKE. I USED TO CALL MYSELF STEEV MIKE A LONG TIME AGO AND IT'S NOTHING NOW. Someone is trying to confuse you and make me look bad. Like a relationship gone bad. Someone is pretending to be me and this Steev Mike guy. I don't understand why people are close. I KNOW YOU'RE READING THIS: WHOEVER YOU ARE, WE'LL FIND YOU. I've made the following decisions: I've now completely removed myself. The music is all that matters for all of us, and that's what I am. I have the best feelings about all of it because I know that it's right. We're stronger now more than ever and it's only because of one thing. We're still going... loooooong gone.

Sincerely,

Andrew W.K.

There is not a single comfortable or comforting moment to be found in that message, but I think my own sense of nauseating dread becomes one of abject horror when W.K. hits Caps Lock, and I imagine him just shouting at me, at the screen, at the mirror, just begging:

PLEASE DON'T BELIEVE STEEV MIKE. I USED TO CALL MYSELF STEEV MIKE A LONG TIME AGO AND IT'S NOTHING NOW.

One possibility: Andrew W.K. was exhibiting symptoms of schizophrenia, maybe, or dissociative identity disorder. I wouldn't dare proffer such a diagnosis myself, but I saw it suggested again and again in the rare places where his state had become a topic of conversation and concern. I repeat it here and now because I've watched, helplessly, as several of my own friends and loved ones have suffered such severe psychotic breaks, and W.K.'s online behavior was consistent with what I've witnessed in real life. That would have been horrifying and heartbreaking, of course. But if it was *not* that, though, then ... what? What was going on? Who was Steev Mike? Where was Andrew W.K.? Who was Andrew W.K.? Who was Steev Mike? *Who the fuck was Steev Mike?*

In late December 2004, the [FAQ page](#) on one of Andrew W.K.'s websites was updated to address the confusion. Specifically, per the FAQ's introductory paragraph, the methodology was as follows:

After sorting through thousands of emails, letters, and phone calls, we've put together a list of the most Frequently Asked Questions related to the recent "ANDREW W.K.", "STEEV MIKE" and "12/17/04 CONCERT" events.

And here are some the questions and answers:

Q: Is Andrew W.K. dead?

A: No. "ANDREW W.K." is alive and well.

Q: Who is Steev Mike?

A: STEEV MIKE is the Executive Producer and Creative Director for the ANDREW W.K. albums "I GET WET" and "THE WOLF". STEEV MIKE's contributions to ANDREW W.K., Inc. and "ANDREW W.K." personally, have proved incredibly effective, and for this reason STEEV MIKE has always been well regarded within the organization.

Q: Are Steev Mike and Andrew W.K. the same person?

A: No. "ANDREW W.K." and STEEV MIKE are not the same person. In the past "ANDREW W.K." has stated that he used to call himself STEEV MIKE, however this does not indicate that they are in fact the same individual.

Q: Did Steev Mike hack into the Andrew W.K. websites?


A: Due to circumstances beyond our control, we are unable to comment at this time.

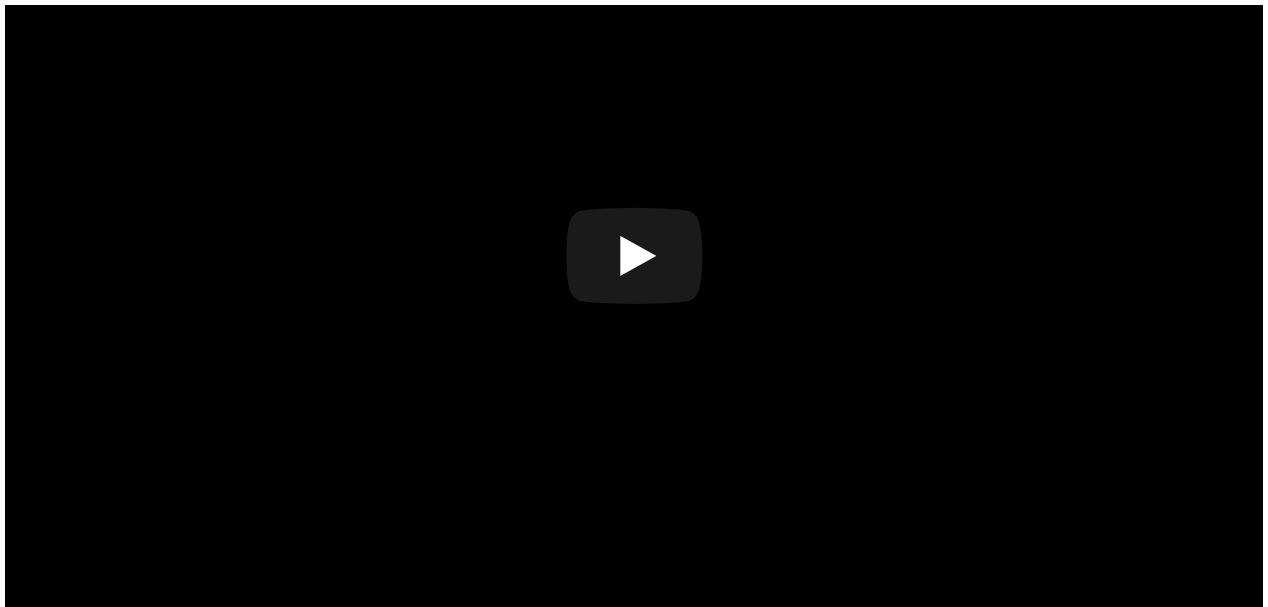
Q: I have a plan to help save Andrew. How can I get to him?

A: "ANDREW W.K." appreciates his fans and friends love and their outpour of devotion and concern. Please be advised that "ANDREW W.K." is not in danger or in need of "help" in any way, nor does he request the assistance of anyone outside of the immediate company. We encourage you to continue your support for "ANDREW W.K." by participating in the music and all that it has to offer.

Q: How can I talk to Andrew? How can I meet Andrew?

A: "ANDREW W.K." is well known for his easily accessible personality. At this time "ANDREW W.K." is unavailable.





Toward the end of 2004, this news item appeared on A.W.K. World:

“NEW ANDREW W.K. ALBUM:

Andrew W.K. is deep in the midst of recording the third full-length album. THE POWER NEVER STOPS FORMING: The new songs are building to an even higher level of power and exaltation. Radiance, resplendence, and richness will coarce through every moment of every flourishing grandstand. Effulgence will surge with each thunderous

collapse. The gorgeousness and grandeur of each sweat-dripping, blood-pumping, head-slamming moment of lustrous magnificence will fill our hearts with more strength than ever before. In other words, this is the pure majesty taken to the highest level of celebratory royalty. Binary is banal.”

“Binary is banal.” There you have it! Ah, if only it were so simple. If all this hallucinatory subterfuge were a marketing stunt, it would have been a good one. This was smack dab in the middle of *LOST* Season 1, it was the very peak of *Da Vinci Code* mania, and there was an unusually receptive public appetite for coded messages, secret societies, and labyrinthine puzzles.

But this wasn't *The Blair Witch Project* or Lonelygirl15. Nothing was being promoted or marketed. There was no album called *The Power Never Stops Forming*. For the entirety of 2005, Andrew W.K. was a ghost, a hazy memory, a formerly omnipresent figure now nowhere to be found. (If you were to believe his current Wikipedia entry, W.K. spent 2005 shifting his focus from music to public speaking, but this is a flagrant lie: W.K. didn't do any public speaking till November 2006.)

In 2005, W.K.'s entire public profile had been relegated to a small network of ever-emerging and -vanishing shadow sites. There was, for example, <http://hernonawk.bravehost.com/>, which had ostensibly been launched to uncover the truth behind W.K.'s very existence (or lack thereof). There was another called <http://www.louiseharland.com/> — the “official” site of the so-called Louise Harland Corporation: “a division of ANDREW W.K., Inc.” which was “responsible for many areas of operation within ANDREW W.K., Inc. and ‘ANDREW W.K.’”

Both those sites are gone today, along with many others. I've heard there were 50 of these sites. I've also heard there were 80 of them. Who knows. Just the same, a handful of the 2005 sites are still operational. Most prominent among them is <http://awilkeskrier.homestead.com/>, an ostensibly exhaustive and oft-cited "resource" launched in the wake of the 2004 Jersey show. Per its mission statement, the site's founder (called "Ward," short for "AWK-Ward," presumably), had heard about the concert as well as this "elusive figure named 'Steev Mike,'" and thus wanted to untangle all the knots in the thread, to deliver "the real history behind Andrew WK and his real origins ... "

As Ward writes in the site's introductory section:

So is Steev Mike the brains behind the AWK brand? Has AWK been bullied out of touring by his resentful creator and some sort of blackmail threat? It is all coincidence or indeed conspiracy?

Decide for yourself. There's a lot of this garbage out there, some of it true and based on facts, and some just complete misinformation. This site is my effort to explain what happened to Andrew WK, and what's really been happening with Andrew WK from the very beginning.

That fairly reasonable-sounding introduction might lead one to believe that the site in question had filtered out the "garbage" and "misinformation." Instead, what you get is one of the most surreal, confusing documents on the entire internet.

It would be literally impossible for me to summarise for you the contents of <http://awilkeskrier.homestead.com/>. I contend it is literally impossible to even

read the contents of <http://awilkeskrier.homestead.com/>. There are numerous other sites, too, to which the same notes apply. Even though the vast majority of the old sites are now just empty parking lots, there are still at least half a dozen online, all in various states of neglect. They are all, all of them, treacherous nightmare-pits full of dead links, inaccessible images, rudimentary design, and grammatically disastrous sentences. Those sentences, meanwhile, are dense with mind-warping invocations of countless conspiracy theories, zigzagging between everything from the Hollow Earth to the Reptilian Elite — and, somehow, *beyond*. This is not an exaggeration. One sub-subsection of one site opens with the following lines:

The rumors connecting Tom Cruise to the Steev Mike theories are shakey at best. There's been a long-running legend that "Andrew W.K." is actually Tom Cruise...

I don't encourage you to make any attempt to make any sense of those sites. However, for the purposes of illustrating for you what they feel like (or felt like, if they are offline by *now*, i.e., the time you read this), I have blockquoted bits of text from some of them throughout this piece, where appropriate. To that end — as something of a generally representative sample — I am sharing

the below paragraphs, culled from the pages of the blog [What Happened To Andrew WK?](#)

What actually happened with Andrew WK was not a case of multiple actors, but one man undergoing extensive mind-control and brainwashing damage when he auditioned and was granted the lead role in an entertainment creation. The people behind this creation were team of record executives working with Andrew's own father, James E. Krier, who in turn were working with higher ranking members of secret society organizations, believed to be either Freemason or Luciferian in nature.

Steev Mike was responsible for the transformations in a very real person, and the changes that Andrew WK underwent were not just to occur at the start of his career when he first signed on in 1997, but again, when he was further brainwashed in 2003, for his second album, *The Wolf*. I believe at some point during this second heavy dose of brainwashing, Andrew WK turned against his handlers, managers, and Steev Mike in general and a battle began. The war resulted in the 2004 blackmail threats and hacking after when I think Andrew tried to finally break free of his oppressors. The 2004 New Jersey concert was directly after the original Andrew WK quit, BUT IT WAS STILL THE SAME PERSON. This is where understanding brain-washing and mind control can become more complicated, because when someone has been the victim of mind control, they are becoming a different person, and they will look different, act different, and appear different in ways much less subtle than the reported differences in the Andrew WK on stage at the 2004 New Jersey show.

My theory is that it was the real Andrew WK, but that he quit and fled the scene only to be apprehended and brain-washed again. Now at this point, I do consider it possible that all of the preceding was created as an elaborate ritual display, for either obvious entertainment or more subversive social programming.

Who is responsible for those sites? Who knows. As if to underscore the uncertainty, that very question has, in fact, been addressed on several of those sites. As you might imagine, everyone involved with all of them is 100%

anonymous, and nobody involved with any of them seems to know the identities of anybody else. Here's a representative answer via [The Truth About Andrew W.K.](#)

For better or worse, there's no way to confirm exactly who's behind any of these sites. It's possible it could all be the same person, although I doubt it. It's also possible that at least one of the sites is an actual Andrew WK webpage, created by Andrew WK (or his company) to promote his music. "SITE 2" could actually be a legitimate attempt to represent Andrew WK's music, but it's also very possible that it's the work of a passionate fan. It seems to be growing more and more common for people to pose as Andrew WK and to use that position as a sounding board for their own opinions and ideas. What I find so interesting about this, is that when someone actually pretends to be Andrew WK, or acts like him, they are in fact imitating an impersonator. It's like making a replica of a plastic flower. Unfortunately, this makes the task of putting together the truth all the more difficult. At this point, almost all the information I find about Andrew WK (and just about everyone I speak with about the subject) all revolves around this same unknowable sense of paranoia and confusion.

On July 5, 2006, Andrew W.K.'s third album made its way into the world. The album was titled *Close Calls With Brick Walls* and it was inexplicably released only in Japan and Korea. Maybe "inexplicably" is the wrong word: An explanation was offered. An explanation of sorts, anyway. That explanation came several years later, from Andrew W.K. Here's what he said:

At the end of 2004, an old friend of [mine] got in some business trouble and basically decided to take it out on me. To cut a long story short, this person is someone I worked very closely with and had a formal and family business relationship with. Due to various complaints this person had with me, they were able to turn my life and career upside down. I wasn't allowed to use my own name within certain areas of the US entertainment industry and we were in a debate about who owned the rights to my image, and who should get credit for "inventing" it.

Typical legal troubles, then. The sort of stuff that forces the band called Entombed to make music as Entombed A.D. or whatever. The usual bullshit. Except this? This wasn't quite so typical. This was *distinctly unusual bullshit*. This was Andrew W.K., after all. And the "old friend"?

There is only one person in the world who fits the description provided by Andrew W.K. And you already know his name:

Steev Mike.

The explanation was utter nonsense, pure fiction, a bit of mythology offered as fact and repeated as such till it was believed to be so. It is *still* believed to be so. It is not so, though, and it never was. Why, then, had *Close Calls*' release been limited to Japan and Korea? What was the real reason? What the fuck happened there?

Who knows.

Fortunately, *Close Calls* came out at the very peak of the music-snob torrent moment, when every single note of recorded music *ever* was being shared and seeded by a global colony of bitrate-fixated obsessives, a time I remember as The Era Of Oink.

My point is, we were living in an age when regional markets and territories were an obsolete abstraction, and web-literate Westerners such as myself were able to hear *Close Calls* if we cared enough to hear it. And when we heard it?

Well... Hmm. Here's a thought: Maybe Andrew W.K.'s label had refused to release *Close Calls* because it was a *deeply* weird, unsettling, uncomfortable album? It's a possibility worth considering! *Close Calls* didn't *not* sound like Andrew W.K., but it didn't really sound like Andrew W.K. either. Andrew W.K. had always been weird, but this was a different kind of weirdness. In December 2006, Chris Campion reviewed the album for *The Guardian*. The whole review is excellent, but I'm excerpting the following bits for reasons that I assume will be immediately obvious:

W.K. plays with notions of identity and persona, constructing an increasingly arcane mythology around himself that turns reality inside out. Certainly, no other rock star is as odd as W.K. He posts lengthy digressions on the benefits of "self-monitoring" on his MySpace page. His album features photographs of him in starkly unnatural poses and bathed in ultraviolet light. At times, he doesn't seem to be himself.

This has led fans to chew on conflicting rumours, many of which seem to suggest W.K. might indeed be a put-on. And that all this confusion has been intentionally sown by someone called Steev Mike, his “executive producer,” who may or may not be an alter-ego of W.K. himself. It is as if he’s rapidly deconstructing himself into the rock star that wasn’t there, the only certainty being that this story has not yet run its course. *Close Calls* is the first in an already announced cycle of records to be released in the next two years. As to what happens next, who knows?

Who knows indeed! While we’re on the subject, I’d also like to share the following informal analysis of *Close Calls*, via a person writing under the username “contenderizer,” published on the wonderful old message board I Love Music.

(NB: If you’re unfamiliar, I Love Music was a place where critics both professional and amateur congregated to geek out over every last bit of music worthy of even a modicum of geekery. I Love Music was — and still is — home to some of the smartest Andrew W.K. discussion I’ve ever had the pleasure of reading. Coincidentally (?) the last song on *The Wolf* is called “I Love Music.”)

AS I WAS SAYING: Below is the comment I wanted to share with you. It is a far better and more apt piece of writing than I could hope to produce on the subject.

i found close calls with brick walls and especially the associated non-musical ephemera (art, videos, websites, theories, performances, interviews) extremely disturbing. it's lynch-like in that it suggests the presence of something awful, some terrible psychological disturbance or rupture, without ever really describing it directly. it has the sickening, tryptophobic gravity of a good wingnut conspiracy theory, where everything starts to seem like an encoded clue after a while, but the solution remains forever out of reach.

Sounds like quite a party, does it not? Incidentally, I agree with every word of that comment. I'm including it here, though, specifically because of its reference to the work of David Lynch, a parallel that is *exactly* on the money. Have you ever seen the Lynch film *Lost Highway*? I couldn't possibly begin to describe the plot (?) of that thing; instead, I will refer you to the late Roger Ebert. I'm excerpting lines of text from the middle of [Ebert's review](#), so I'll note here that the people referred to as "they" in the first sentence below are Fred Madison (played by Bill Pullman) and Renee Madison (played by Patricia Arquette). I hope that helps. Also, this bit is especially fun if you can read/hear it in Ebert's voice. I hope that helps, too.

They (Pullman and Arquette) go to a party and meet a disturbing little man with a white clown face (Robert Blake), who ingratiatingly tells Pullman, "We met at your house. As a matter of fact, I'm there right now. Call me." He does seem to be at both ends of the line. That mirrors another nice touch in the film, which is that Pullman seems able to talk to himself over a doorbell speaker phone.

Can people be in two places at once? Why not? (Warning: plot point coming up.) Halfway through the film, Pullman is arrested for the murder of his wife and locked in solitary confinement. One morning his guard looks in the cell door, and — good God! It's not the same man inside! Now it's a teenager (Balthazar Getty). The prison officials can't explain how

bodies could be switched in a locked cell, but have no reason to hold the kid. He's released, and gets his old job at the garage.

A gangster (Robert Loggia) comes in with his mistress, who is played by Patricia Arquette. Is this the same person as the murdered wife? Was the wife really murdered? Hello?

Now that you've read that, re-read just this one line, just once more, from Campion's review of *Close Calls*:

[A]ll this confusion has been intentionally sown by someone called Steev Mike, [Andrew W.K.'s] "executive producer," who may or may not be an alter-ego of W.K. himself.

Lost Highway came out in 1997, the same year as *Funny Games*, and like *Funny Games*, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that *Lost Highway* had exerted a fairly profound influence on Andrew W.K.'s work. However, while I have no idea whether Andrew W.K. has even heard of *Funny Games*, I know for a fact he's a fan of David Lynch. He said as much in an interview with *Vanity Fair*. What, then, does Andrew W.K. like about David Lynch?

He's created an access point to a certain feeling that is very intangible, but everyone can relate to it one way or another, even if you don't like it. Perhaps what we most get out of his work is his giving form to the formless, and giving shape and expression to the otherwise inaccessible but very present aspects of life that we don't get a chance to really interact with that much. We know they're there — it's that most real fundamental type of horror, where we realize that we're only experiencing a very small fraction of whatever really is going on.

On that note: My own favorite song on *Close Calls* is called "You Will Remember Tonight." Perhaps not surprisingly — as I am a simple man with simple tastes — it sounds more like "the real" Andrew W.K. than anything else on the album. There is something uniquely insidious and disquieting about it nonetheless. Sample lyric:

The face
that you see when you look in the mirror
It won't be the same shape
when you look at it hours from now
You will notice a change ...



In November 2006, W.K. did a lecture at NYU — it was his first official speaking engagement. Four months later, on March 10, 2007 — as he was preparing to bring a version of his lecture series to the West Coast — he was profiled in *The New York Times*.

The author of the piece in question, Melena Ryzik, seems unsure of whether W.K. is outright fucking with her (understandably), and as such, the story strikes an odd chord that rings both skeptical and serious without settling on either tone. Here's the salient stuff:

Lately [W.K. has] been exuberant about ideas, like the nature of coincidences and paradoxes and solipsism. Also pancakes. Over lunch near his apartment in Midtown, he ordered a stack of blueberry-banana-chocolate-chip-walnut, a blend of every flavor the restaurant offered — and slowly made a mash of them as he talked about his new passion: thinking.

He has been reading the works of the philosopher Martin Buber, among others, and contemplating consciousness. “I have been very into the idea that the only way the external world exists is by you observing it, and that the only way you can interact with that external world through that

observation is to intend it to be,” he said, his eyes closed in concentration. He opened them to eat observably a strip of bacon.

Is this directly related to the mysteries we are here today trying to solve? Maybe. Maybe not. I think it is, though. If nothing else, it offers a rare sincere example of W.K.’s metaphysical curiosity — a matter to which we will return in due time. Martin Buber, specifically, was an existentialist philosopher whose work challenged our commonly accepted notions of identity, experience, and objective reality. Relatedly, I’d like to highlight this quote offered in that profile, in which W.K. lightly touches on his own artistic goals:

Trying to represent nothing is the ultimate paradox.

In April 2007 — a month after the *Times* profile — Andrew W.K. brought his spoken-word tour to the Seattle venue Chop Suey, and a few days later, *The Stranger’s* Eric Grandy published a very brief [blog post](#) questioning whether the person on stage that night had been “the real” Andrew W.K.

Grandy had apparently been unaware of the 2004 Jersey show. He stumbled on to the [Truth About Andrew W.K.](#) blog, found a claim that it was “common knowledge that Andrew W.K. has in the past impersonated himself,” and was understandably perplexed.

Wrote Grandy:

Does anybody know what’s going on here? What does “impersonating himself” mean, anyway?

Grandy didn’t get too many answers to his questions, but he got [one response](#) that vastly exceeded anything that had ever been published anywhere to that point. It’s a bit long and unwieldy, but I’m going to share it here unabridged. The commenter’s handle? “WHO IS MIKE STEEV?! I KNOW!”

THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU SAD. MIKE STEEV IS AWK. Andrew W.K. is Steev Mike, and vice versa. The whole “Steev Mike created Andrew” concept, the website hacking, the actor angle, the Andrew W.K. Inc. company, Louise Harland, etc., all were designed and orchestrated by Andrew and his management company as a bit of a “social experiment” and a way of keeping the fanbase wondering about it all during his relative absence from the spotlight. The wealth of information available, “evidence” to the contrary, etc. – 35 to 45% of it was pre-written and planted in the correct places; the rest of it simply boils down to over-zealous fans coming up with their own scenarios and passing them along to other fans. After passing those scenarios along, they have a tendency to take on a life of their own, which is exactly what was hoped for by all involved. Originally, the idea was to draw the Andrew/Steev Mike confusion out even further and into different channels, but it’s been mostly abandoned to the hands of the fanbase at this point, who are keeping it alive on their own quite nicely. It’s my understanding that there were at least five or six other scenarios in the works for future developments at one point (possibly more), one of which would expand on the theory that Andrew W.K. had a split personality identified as “Steev Mike” who stood for the polar opposite of everything Andrew did (darkness, despair, isolation, etc.), and that the “two” of them would have a so-called “battle for control” over the identity. As absurd as it may sound, it was an idea on the table. A LOT of people have had their hand involved in the creation of these storylines. In regards to the “various actors play a rock star named Andrew” angle, there was/is a kernel of truth to that – several lookalikes were brought aboard at various times to make appearances in order to lend credibility to the ongoing internet rumors that Andrew wasn’t “real”. This was also a benefit to the real Andrew, who could as a result focus on his other responsibilities and obligations, ergo ‘be in many places at once’. Andrew is a legitimate artist who was discovered in early 2000 and got a HUGE media push, as Island/Def Jam really believed in him and was hoping to push him as the man who “saved rock and roll”. The “Steev Mike” angle was originally intended to be a part of that. It was wildly successful in some regards, but

didn't quite achieve the EXACT results they all were hoping for (which, unfortunately, I'm not exactly aware of), hence the abandonment of the "Steev Mike Project". The possibility DOES exist that "Steev Mike" may make future appearances/threats of "outing" Andrew (or things of other natures), depending on whether or not it appears feasible and the desired results may be met by the media and the general public. That's all. Hope it helps for anybody still confused on the subject.

You see what I mean about "labyrinthine puzzle"? That comment has been online for nearly 11 years now, and I don't know if even 50 people have ever seen it. I don't know how I actually found it in the first place, and I don't know if I could find it again. I don't know who wrote it, but I would bet my life on this:

It was written by Andrew W.K.

On September 19, 2008, W.K. brought his "motivational" public-speaking tour to London's Madame Jojo's, promising to deliver a "one-off, stream-of-consciousness address to an intimate audience."

"What will he talk about?" boasts the press release. "No one knows for sure, not even Andrew!"

That description would prove to be quite an understatement. Video of the event in question has long since been scrubbed from the internet, but transcripts remain. And what you'll read in those transcripts is a legitimate, epic, next-level mindfuck.

For the sake of brevity, I'm excerpting the wilder stuff (and lightly copyediting the stuff I've excerpted), but to be clear, I'm not deliberately leaving out any meaningful context to make this seem exceptionally confusing. *It is*

exceptionally confusing. It is exactly as confusing as it sounds. It condenses years of unsettling internet rumors into one extremely unsettling real-life monologue, not just confirming the rumors but actually elevating the overall weirdness without actually explaining anything.

Before we go on, I want to reiterate something I said at the very beginning of this journey:

This actually happened.

With that? Take it away, Andrew:

[I] want to confess something to all of you:

I'm actually not Andrew W.K.

I'm not. I'm not the same guy that you may have seen from the *I Get Wet* album ... I'm not that same person. And I don't just mean that in a philosophical or conceptual way — it's not the same person at all. Do I look the same as that person?

What I mean is that since that time, I have changed, and for any of you that happened to be there during that time, perhaps you have changed as well. And I would like to think that we're not the same people at all — and again, not just conceptually, but very literally, we're not the same. I'm a completely different entity. Not to discredit what I've done before, or what Andrew W.K. has done before, whoever that person was ... And so I'm here in that spirit, and I think that freedom is sort of hand in hand with idea of joy, and songs like "Party Hard" that Andrew W.K. has done, songs like "I Get Wet" or "Party 'Til You Puke" or "Totally Stupid" or whatever songs, that have appealed to you, that Andrew W.K. has presented — I'm here in the name of that joy, but I'm not Andrew W.K. as far as that goes ...

Andrew W.K. was created by a large group of people. They met, and I was there, and we talked about how we could come up with something that would move people. It was done in the spirit of commerce. It was done in the spirit of entertainment, which usually goes hand in hand with commerce. I was auditioned, along side many other people, to fill this role of a “great frontman,” “a great performer.” On the one hand it may be a little scary to admit this to you all, that I may not be exactly who you thought I was, and that the guy who was, in fact, first hired as Andrew W.K. is a different person than the guy sitting here on the stage tonight. I’m the next person who is playing Andrew W.K ...

After those transcripts were made public, W.K. issued a statement on his official site. It has since been deleted (of course) but you can find it [elsewhere online](#) if you search hard enough. It’s very long, so I’m reluctantly abridging it here — again, only for the sake of brevity. My abridged version is still very long, but my God, I can’t possibly cut it any deeper than I have right here:

Since 2001, I have been accused of being part of a conspiracy in which I knowingly entered into a contract with creative directors who proceeded to invent a new identity for me to perform under. I’m here to say this is simply not true and a gross exaggeration of easily explainable and common-place music industry practices. Of course I work with people who choose not to include their whole names in the credits or who aren’t on stage with me — but taking advice and guidance from other people doesn’t mean I’m a victim of mind-control ...

The kind of people who accuse Andrew W.K. of being a talking head for some secret conspiracy to corrupt people’s morals are the same people who claim MTV and Cartoon Network are owned by secret rulers of the world out to poison kid’s brains, or that pop stars like Beyoncé or Lady Gaga are part of some occult society, or that companies like McDonald’s,

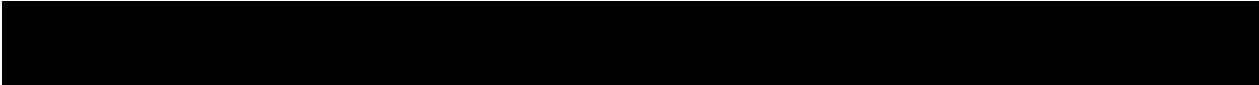
Coca-Cola, or Hollywood are secretly promoting hidden plans. Or that the President of the USA is just a figure head and reading a script given to him by a secret world power.

[J]ust because I work with other people who advise me doesn't mean that I am a puppet for an evil cult or a have some sort of master plan ... It has become too common for musical artists and performers to be labeled as part of some global scam to control the world, or that we're puppets for a larger agenda designed to hurt people. That's why I'm speaking out and loudly declaring: I am not evil and neither are any of my other fellow members of showbusiness. We are here to bring fun and light into the world, not doubt and darkness ...

I have always admitted that I worked with people and I have confessed that time and time again, even if the critics twisted what I said. I did this hoping it would quiet people up and put an end to all the speculation and exaggeration. I was never an actor and the partnerships I made with friends, family, and the companies I've worked with have all been to promote entertainment, excitement, and fun – to give people something fun to focus on and to occupy our thoughts, instead of a bunch of fear or negativity.

As it happens, that failed to satisfactorily resolve any of the matters in question. Soon afterward, W.K. released a video to prove he exists. It is titled “I AM A REAL PERSON,” and ... well, I'll say only that he makes a less-than-convincing case.





In September 2009, Andrew W.K. released a new album — although it wasn't exactly a new Andrew W.K. album. This isn't to suggest it was the work of an imposter; it just had absolutely no aesthetic similarity to any previous Andrew W.K. album. It was called *55 Cadillac*, and it contained only spontaneous solo new-age piano improvisations.

I truly have no idea what to make of *55 Cadillac* on any level. Is it a good album? I don't know. I don't know that I've ever heard another album of spontaneous solo new-age piano improvisations, so I have no basis for comparison. I'm bringing it up here, though, not because it is an oddity in the artist's catalog — in that regard, it is one of several, slotting alongside esoterica like *The Japan Covers* (covers of J-Pop songs originally marketed as 30-second ringtones) and *Gundam Rock* (covers of songs from the Gundam manga series).

I'm bringing it up here because it came accompanied by a statement that would seem to directly address some of the long-standing mysteries surrounding Andrew W.K. That statement was published by *The Guardian* (which, over the years, has inexplicably become a clearinghouse for Andrew W.K.'s most dubious claims). Its headline, "I am finally a free man," was paired with this truly remarkable subhed:

The last decade has been so fraught with legal trouble I've suffered hallucinations ... that's why I had to make an album consisting solely of improvisational piano pieces.

Again, I'm excerpting for the sake of brevity, but I can't cut too much from this one:

Over the past 10 years, I've had personal and professional issues with several people involved in my career, and due to formal agreements, I'm

partially forbidden from going into detail regarding certain aspects of my recent work and, as a result, the making of the 55 CADILLAC album.

Here's what I am able to say: At the end of 2004, an old friend of mind got in some business trouble and basically decided to take it out on me. To cut a long story short, this person is someone I worked very closely with and had a formal and family business relationship with. Due to various complaints this person had with me, they were able to turn my life and career upside down. I wasn't allowed to use my own name within certain areas of the US entertainment industry and we were in a debate about who owned the rights to my image, and who should get credit for "inventing" it ...

By 2008, and after a lot of negotiating, my new business team and I had come to an agreement with my opponent, and I was finally in the clear. That's how this new 55 CADILLAC album became possible — we based the new record label in the UK, so there were no issues within the US. However, as of last week, we've been partially pulled back into the thick of it and I'm getting hourly updates from my lawyer as I type this. I really don't know how to feel about it — it's beyond frustrating — it almost feels like a hallucination. It inspires so much rage inside me that my mind has to seek other outlets for that energy and I start to feel dizzy and see stars ...

Anyway, I wanted this new 55 CADILLAC album to sound like freedom. The sound of a piano being played by a free man ... No one telling me what to play, or how to play it. And no masterplans, high-concept visions, worldwide goals with roll-out schedules. No style consultants or acting coaches. No more meetings with sponsors or computerized yelling. No more threats.

Before moving forward, let's quickly acknowledge this unlikely typo:

...an old friend of mind...

Coincidence, no doubt. Let's move forward. That brief communique somehow incorporated every major conspiracy theory in the Andrew W.K. mystery: the psychotic-break theory ("I start to feel dizzy and see stars"); the Illuminati theory ("no masterplans, high-concept visions"); the hired-actor theory ("no style consultants or acting coaches"). It also seemed to confirm every last detail of the Steev Mike story, right down to the '04 website hack ("At the end of 2004, an old friend of mind got in some business trouble and basically decided to take it out on me ... they were able to turn my life and career upside down"). Furthermore it suggested that Steev Mike was very much still in the picture, although he'd been temporarily sidetracked.

The "new record label" to which W.K. referred in his statement was called Skyscraper Music Maker.

Three months later, in January 2010, W.K. announced that *Close Calls With Brick Walls* would finally be released in the US — four full years after its initial release. The legal issues that were causing W.K. to "feel dizzy and see stars" had been quelled. In the end, it hadn't taken much to satisfy the aggrieved parties.

"It all comes down to credit," W.K. explained to Rocksound when announcing the news. "[B]ased on the contracts and various decisions we'd made over the years, the people who weren't being given credit had to be given credit. An easy way for them to get credit is for them to have their name on the label, that way whatever I put out they automatically receive credit for."

And just like that, Skyscraper Music Maker had a new name:

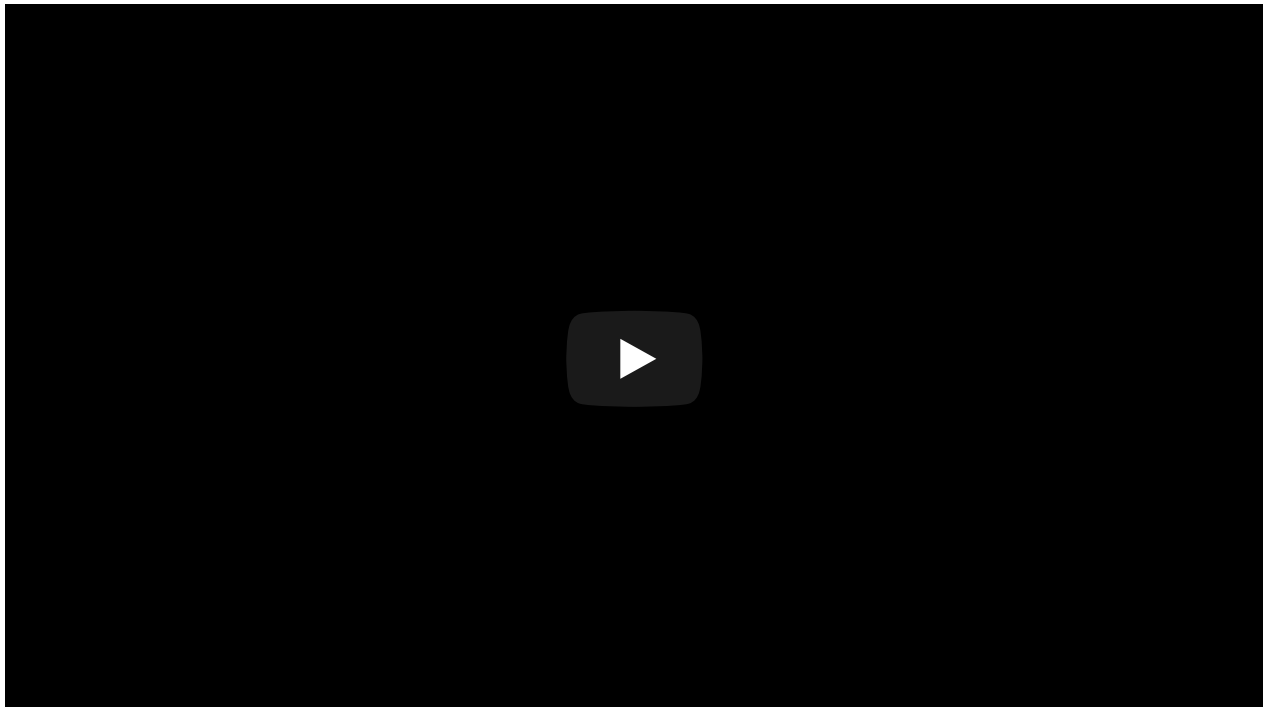
Steev Mike Music.

In February 2010, W.K. did *another* public-speaking engagement, this one at Santos Party House, the now-shuttered downtown NYC venue of which W.K. was a co-owner. Here's how it was described, after the fact, on W.K.'s website:

February 23rd 2010, ANDREW W.K. opened the mic at Santos Party House for a formal Q&A meeting with fans and friends. OVER 75,000 PEOPLE PARTICIPATED ONLINE through Justin.tv and ALL TICKETS WERE SOLD, RESULTING IN AN EXTREMELY WELL ATTENDED EVENT!

Make of it as you wish.

“Make of it as you wish” might be the single most accurate statement ever published on any website owned or operated by Andrew W.K. Here's the video, if you're interested in checking it out. Make of it as you wish.



I was not in attendance at this event, and I'd rather not attempt to surmise it from this distant vantage, based only on the video available to me, as well as the many secondhand accounts I've read. Instead, I'm going to excerpt some text from a "review" (?) written by *The Atlantic's* Chris Good. As always, I

encourage you to read the [full piece](#) for a fuller idea of what happened. But irrespective of how much you read — irrespective of whether you were even *there that night* — I'm not sure if we'll ever know what happened.

Just the same, here's what happened:

As the lights dimmed and Andrew came on stage, walking up to a lone chair in a lone spotlight, set up almost as if he was about to be interrogated — which, in a sense, he was — W.K. appeared, seeming quite nervous, and delivered his opening statement with many pauses and some apparent emotional difficulty.

“Good evening. And thank you for joining me. Many of you in this room are my friends,” Andrew said as the audience clapped, before stopping to compose himself.

“I understand people want to know who I work with and who I work for,” he said later in the statement, pausing to take a long drink of water. “But please know that, as far as I'm concerned, every one of these questions and answers is a matter between my business partners and me. It's not out of disrespect for you, the press, or any of my fans, but rather out of respect for the promises I made to my family and associates, promises that, if broken, will change my life in unimaginable ways...

“They did not ask to be in this spotlight, I did — I did. I recognize I have brought this on myself, and I know, above all, I am the one who made the decisions which have brought me to where I am. I have a lot of work to do, and I intend to dedicate myself to doing it.”

Had he sung in his own voice on his first album? He didn't answer directly, except to say that, “to answer your question, I am Andrew W.K. I am the same Andrew W.K. that has been there from the beginning. I am the same Andrew W.K. you have seen...on the albums” — but he didn't say the voice was the same.

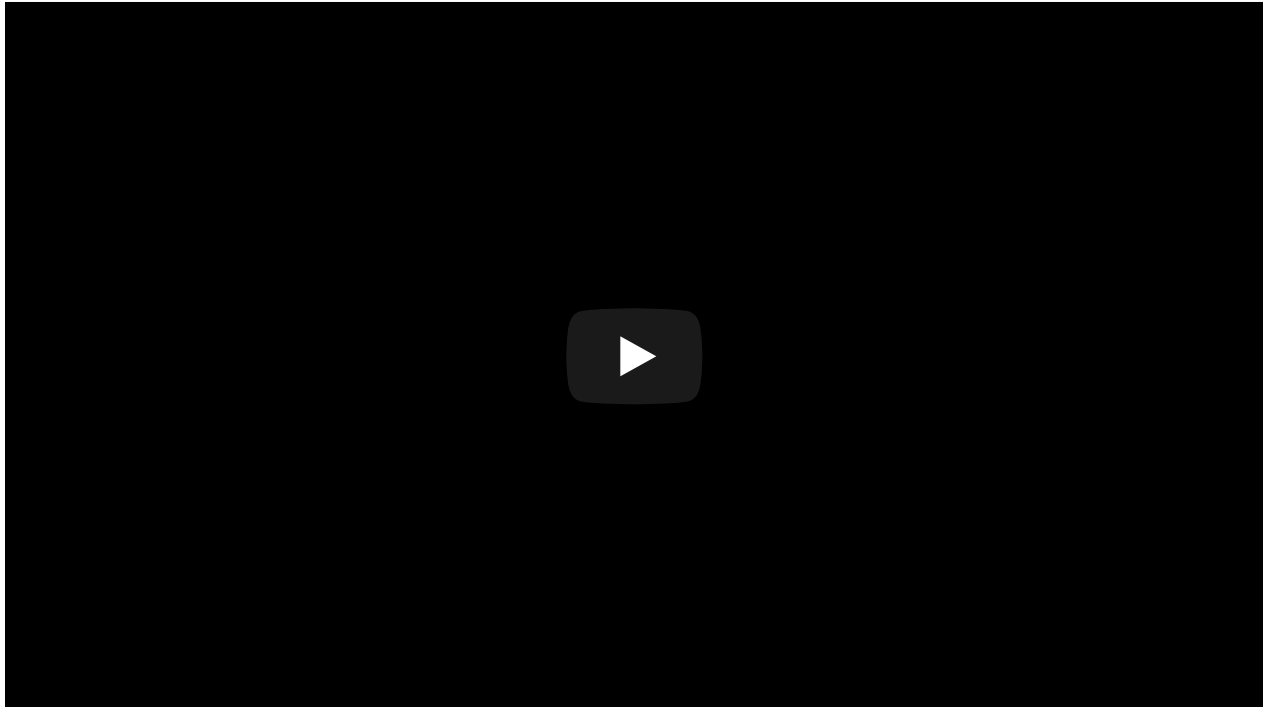
He was asked, “Who is Steev Mike” — a mystery producer listed on his first album, whom some have speculated is a pseudonym for W.K., or Grohl, or for the mysterious group of people alleged to have concocted Andrew W.K.’s act and persona. Andrew W.K. grew obviously nervous about this and stood up to protest, sounding genuinely scared and upset, that his current creative vision began when he was quite young — 18 years old — and that he takes responsibility for everything that has happened since then.

“On my first album, *I Get Wet*, Steev Mike was the executive producer. This is the name of the producer that appeared on my third album, *Close Calls With Brick Walls*, which will be released on March 23rd, 2010,” he said, reading exasperatedly from papers on the music stand.

And then: “People should understand that Steev Mike or anybody else, any other group of people that I chose to work with, I chose to work with,” he said. “Just because someone signed up for something or takes advice or has managers, or works in entertainment or show business with other people doesn’t mean they don’t have a brain, okay, it doesn’t mean that they’re not a real person... “This was the vision that I was presented with as a young person by my family and by the people that supported me... The point of this is to look out into the world with a sense of optimism, with a sense of possibility, with a sense of purpose, with a sense of power that you can make your dreams come true,” he said, telling the audience that songs like “Party Hard” — a popular track from his first album — “were written by — songs like ‘Party Hard’ were written to make people feel good. Songs like party hard were written to make people feel in touch with their greatest potential.”

As you can probably ascertain, the event was unsuccessful in its attempts to allay confusion — although it seems quite obvious there were no actual attempts made to allay confusion. This was simply an opportunity to blow more smoke into a hall of mirrors. The best line of Good’s *Atlantic* piece is not so much a surmisal, but a visceral reaction from the writer:

I am a political reporter. I've covered press conferences at the U.S. Capitol. I have seen controversies play out in live settings, tough, confrontational questions asked, and I've seen pro performers try to duck them. But I'd never seen anything quite like this.



On June 28, 2010, in order to promote *Close Calls* to Stateside audiences, W.K. released a video for the album track "I Want To See You Go Wild." On its surface, the clip is just a surreal little alt-style cartoon in which W.K. gesticulates and contorts manically in front of a green screen on which were later added various creatures partaking in various forms of wildness. The comments on the video's YouTube page, however, should give you some idea what fans saw when they watched it. Here's a sampling:

Damn thats a lot of illuminati symbolism. Does anyone else see the giant pyramid and all seeing eye? lol

Whats up with the All Seeing Eye ? and Whats up with the Free Mason Owl ? whats up with the Demon looking figures he is with ? honestly i

liked the song but the Video is out of this world. Maybe Andrew is part of a super intelligent group who plans on controlling the public. All I see is a Character created by a secret group to control people.

wow. so much illuminati symbolism. at the end too andrew is showing that he is being controlled like a puppet. the whole premise of the video shows the dumbed down public as zombies who are distracted by partying and “having fun” while the illuminati is controlling everything.

That stuff — the Illuminati stuff — is obvious. Obviously. Fan service. Fun! But I'd like to make mention of one reference I caught that was perhaps *not* so obvious.

Right around the video's 1:35 mark, the green-screen scene displays the image of a store called “Wild Steev's Electronics.” The “Steev” in question is obviously Steev Mike. That's a throwaway. Look more closely though.



“Wild Steev’s Electronics”?

Longtime (or long-since-departed) New Yorkers will recognize “Wild Steev’s Electronics” as a playful reference to an old consumer-electronics store called Crazy Eddie. For those who don’t know, Crazy Eddie was a chain based in New York City (“Oh yeah, New York City!”) known for its “INSANE” prices. Per [Wikipedia](#): “Almost from the beginning, Crazy Eddie’s management was engaged in various forms of fraud.”

Crazy Eddie went bankrupt in 1989, when Andrew was 10 years old, living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. “Insane”? Yeah, OK. “Fraud”? It plays, sure. Still ... it’s sort of a strange reference, don’t you think?

Maybe. But here’s the thing: The Crazy Eddie name lived on well beyond the passing of the store itself. As it happens, “Crazy Eddie” was the most popular brand of PCP sold in New York City for many years after the store went under.

Stamped bags of Crazy Eddie were sold up in Harlem, on 116th Street, and obtaining the stuff required one to know certain locations and codes — facts familiar to any East Coast-based death-metal-loving dirtbag who spent any amount of time living that life.

Let's get wet.

It's not as though no one has asked W.K. to clarify or address these subjects, and he's never declined to do so. His answers, however, are not answers. He typically appears to be as puzzled and frustrated as everyone else, earnestly trying to explain something he purports not to understand, leaving behind an even bigger mess than the one he was ostensibly helping to clean up. In his confounded state, he strings together double-negatives and non-sequiturs that contradict everything he has just said, everything that will follow, and even the unassailable facts of the question itself.

By way of example, I'm excerpting an exchange from an interview with W.K. as conducted by [Metalsucks](#) in 2010. I think it's fair to say this is representative of these interviews in general.

Q: This is the statement that you said: "I'm not the same guy that you may have seen from the *I Get Wet* album. I'm not that same person, and I just don't mean that in a philosophical or conceptual way. It's not the same person at all. Do I look like the same person?" What did you mean by that statement?

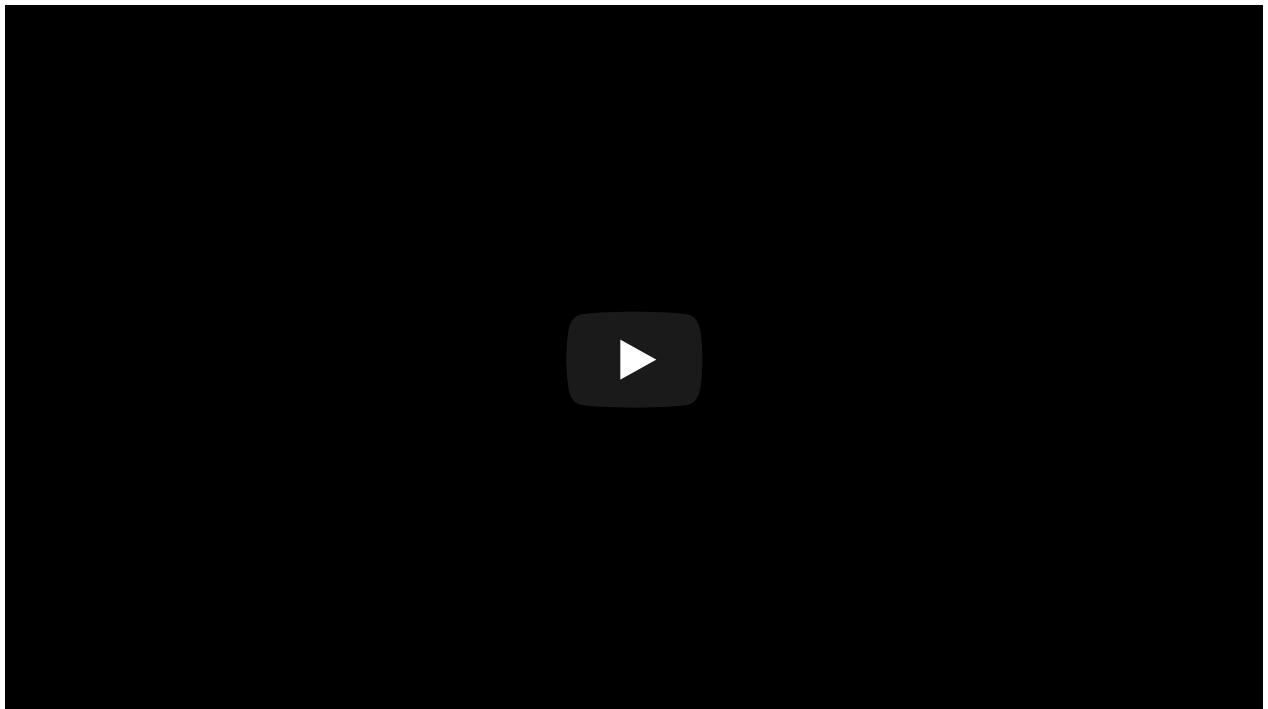
A: Well, I meant it exactly as I said, but the idea that I'm not Andrew W.K. was never meant to be the point of that. That was meant to make it very clear that I am Andrew W.K. and I was hoping that by appearing on that stage and saying it in that way I guess people wouldn't accuse me of not being Andrew W.K. which is what I was dealing with more at that time. At that time, the question was more about are you the real Andrew W.K.? You don't look like the same person as before. I wanted to make it very clear that I am Andrew W.K. Just because I don't look the same as someone else. I asked people "do you think I look the same?" If they had said "no", it doesn't mean that I'm not actually Andrew W.K. and I happened to have the authority to go out there and be Andrew W.K. and have people believe it's me. At that time, I think just because I did look different, people

assumed that something had changed. I wanted to make it clear that if that was the case, it doesn't mean that I'm not Andrew W.K. Regardless of whatever confusion there was, there should be no confusion about the

fact that I am Andrew W.K. and can go out there and be it and have people understand that.

Understand that? No? Maybe it would help to watch him talk to ... Larry King?
Per the show's own description:

In a particularly candid moment, rocker Andrew W.K. weighs in on the plethora of internet rumors questioning his true identity and his potential connections with societies like The Illuminati or The Freemasons.



It's not as though no one has asked Andrew W.K.'s collaborators to clarify or address these subjects, either. Just prior to the above-quoted Q&A with W.K., Metalsucks tried to get "the truth" out of Obituary's Donald Tardy — the guy who played with Andrew W.K. from the days prior to *I Get Wet* through the entire tour behind *The Wolf*. The interview is an absolute delight, but you really have to read the whole thing to experience its sublime magic. I want to highlight one part in particular, though.

Throughout their conversation, Tardy is adamant in his conviction that W.K. is a “real person,” and he’s *just one person*. I can say with some authority that Tardy is a guileless individual with no particular interest in helping W.K. perpetuate a complicated prank. He is answering these questions honestly, I’d bet a hundred dollars on it, right now. Here’s what Tardy believes to be true:

Andrew is a dude. He is a dude that I know. I think it’s when something happens so quickly and so successfully, people can’t accept that. That’s understandable especially when people don’t understand his talent and how focused he was and how the songs were already there long before he got signed. I can tell that he had many ideas and songs. He probably had two or three albums’ worth of music before anybody experienced who he was. When it explodes as quickly as it did, people can’t accept that so they probably just make up rumors. Let’s face it, he’s quite a charismatic kind of dude. He’s bigger than real life. You combine those two [things] with the success and people can’t understand it so they immediately think there has to be more to it. But he’s a dude. He’s a dude from New York that grew up in Detroit.

Tardy’s logic is airtight, and he knows what he saw, he knows who he met. But as the questions continue ... something very fucking strange happens. At a certain point, Tardy begins to DOUBT HIS OWN REALITY. Like I said, you have to read the whole thing to experience the full effect, but here’s the exact point, I think, that he just loses it:

Q: Just so you know there’s been all sorts of internet comparisons of photos of Andrew from the *I Get Wet* album and photos of him more recently. Speaking from a personal level, he totally looks like a different dude.

A: Really?

Q: It does not look like the same guy.

A: Huh. I have no idea. I never heard the interview or the lecture ... I don't know what to think about that. Andrew, to me, is a dude. He is nutty as ever. He's as intelligent as anyone that I have ever met, and he likes to keep people on the balls of their feet. I don't know how to ... if Andrew actually was quoted as saying that, I don't know. It would have been hard for me not to crack a smile if he was saying that with me in the room. To me, Andrew is Andrew and he's a dude. He's a good guitar player and an amazing piano player, and he is Andrew.

Q: Another quote for you from the same lecture. "Andrew W.K. was created, and this is a bit of a confession, by a large group of people, almost a conference of people ... I'm the next person who is playing Andrew W.K."

A: [*Laughter*]

Wow. Then you know what? I'm fooled also.

[*Laughter*]

Who knows! Phillip Crandall's 33 1/3 entry on *I Get Wet* makes an ambitious and thorough attempt to actually crack the case, and digs deeper than any other investigation I've come across. Crandall talks to W.K., of course, but he also tracks down a number of prominent figures in W.K.'s life and presses them on the question of Steev Mike. Unlike W.K., these secondary sources provide candid, coherent, and straightforward answers. And they are all, in their own different words and ways, saying the exact same thing. (The truth will make you sad!) I'm only going to pull out a handful of representative statements, but I hope you will seek out the book and read it for yourself — the Steev Mike section, at very least — because it is riveting, revealing, and truly, truly delightful.

Gary Helsing (former music publisher at Universal Music Publishing Group): I love Steev Mike. He's awesome. He's really talented. You know, he really balances out what Andrew does. The way they work together as a team — it's incredible. They combine their efforts, and where one is lacking, the other one has that quality, so ... everybody knows it's made up! It doesn't blow any cover, does it?

Jeff Rice (former Andrew W.K. collaborator): That Steev Mike thing just reminded me of everything we used to talk about at practice. People were saying that Andrew W.K. had an impersonator or he was a series of people. I was like, yup, that's Andrew fucking with people. What people are accusing him of being, he's actually capable of doing.

Pete Galli (former Andrew W.K. manager): He will never say this and he doesn't like the comparison but I don't care: He's got a sprinkle of Andy Kaufman and a sprinkle of Andy Warhol. He takes pop culture and turns it on its head. That's what's so great about him: You don't know if he's fucking with you or if he's genuine, but he's so likable that he can get away with whatever.

In brief, in case it's not clear: Andrew W.K. is Steev Mike, and vice versa. The whole concept was dreamed up by W.K. in 2000, after being signed by Island, although nobody totally understands why. Here are the theories, in brief: He wanted to invent a mythology. He didn't like the sound of his own name. He wanted to aggravate the suits at his label. He was bored. It wasn't any one of those factors specifically, but some combination thereof. Or something. Like I said, nobody totally understands, except for one guy, and he's not talking. Well, he's talking, he's just not saying anything. Here's what he said to Crandall:

At this point, every other version of what it could possibly be has come out, and I've gone with some of them, I've gone with others. Again, I think

those are some of the mistakes I feel we've made giving too much attention to it, trying to address it too directly. The fact of the matter is that it doesn't really ultimately impact hopefully too much in the big picture.

That sounds almost like a man unburdening himself, does it not? It may not be a *confession*, per se, but it could easily be confused for the contrite words of a jokester who knows the joke has gone on too long.

It shouldn't be confused for that, though. Read again.

At this point, every other version of what it could possibly be has come out, and I've gone with some of them, I've gone with others. Again, I think those are some of the mistakes I feel we've made giving too much attention to it, trying to address it too directly. The fact of the matter is that it doesn't really ultimately impact hopefully too much in the big picture.

What is *it*? What is *it* impacting? What is the big picture?

Who is Andrew W.K.? Is Andrew W.K. real? Who is the real Andrew W.K.?

Of the many theories shared on <http://awilkeskrier.homestead.com/>, there is one titled "The Real Story Theory." ("Real" as in "realistic," I think, not to be confused with "real" as in "true.") And "The Real Story Theory" isn't really a theory — it's a short anecdote written by a person who claims to have know Andrew W.K. since high school. Here's an excerpt:

[I] won't get into irrelevant details, but the fact is, Andrew and a few other people have been planning ALL of this for a long time. From years and years even before I GET WET came out. None of it is related to

advertising or new albums or anything else. It's actually a lot more complicated than that and it goes way beyond one particular time or idea...

One day in the acting class the teacher had us all stand up and talk about what are dreams for the future were. Most of the kids said "To be a famous actor", one other girl said "To be a star on Broadway", and I said "To make movies". Andrew went last and stood up and said, very slowly, "I want to craft my own non-existence." The teacher asked him what he meant and said "Exactly what I said." The teacher was clearly annoyed and the whole class rolled it's eyes because Andrew was always saying weird stuff that made no sense. I thought what he said sounded cool though, so after class, while we were walking to our cars, I asked Andrew how he was going to craft his own non-existence). I don't remember what he said word for word, but essentially he said, "First I'm going to make myself undeniably exist as a recognizable and identifiable form, and then I'm going to spend the rest of my life working to eliminate it and prove that it's existence was an impossible illusion all along, but because people have already seen it they will experience the sensation equal to maximum pleasure."

If that's true, it means W.K. was seriously exploring these concepts years before he became Andrew W.K. I think that's very possible. Consider, for example, this *Vanity Fair* quote courtesy of W.K. himself:

[I]n high school, that's when I realized that there was this whole other dimension of the world that was based on penetrating it and twisting it and distorting it and going after it in bizarre ways. I don't know if there's a word to sum all that up. A whole side of culture that was specifically based around blowing your mind. Freaking yourself out and getting way out into the outer-zone. Feeling strange, basically. And I was completely and immediately enamored with that feeling. Not understanding. Confusion. How it felt good to not understand. How that made things bigger and more full of possibility. It was one of the first experiences I had

with a natural antidepressant. Eventually I was able to connect that excitement that that feeling gave me — the urgent curiosity — with a real melodic feeling.

Stands to reason, does it not?

Here, though, I'll tell you what I *really* think:

I think Andrew W.K. wrote “The Real Story Theory” himself, and attributed it to an anonymous former classmate.

In fact, I think Andrew W.K. wrote every single word on that whole entire site — except for the words he stole from someplace else and credited to somebody who does not exist.

What's more, I think he also wrote every single word on all those other sites, too.

Do I sound like I'm losing my mind? I think that's how I'm supposed to sound, how I'm supposed to feel. Tell me, though: Who else would go to the effort of so elaborately spreading so much distorted, inconsistent, surreal, mind-bending disinformation *about Andrew W.K.*? In many cases, there are dead giveaways, little things he's left behind as clues, or maybe just telltale signatures he can't help but include.

Let me give you an example. Here are a few lines from the “Introduction” section of <http://awilkeskrier.homestead.com/>:

To say that “Andrew W.K.” is avant-garde is like describing a skyscraper as a “tall building”. It's an overstatement of the obvious — “sky scraper” is an elegant word designed specifically to communicate the idea of a “tall building”, and it communicates the idea on it's “own terms”, by combining two romantic and lucid words into one “super-noun-adjective-

verb” hybrid of it’s own creation. The word “skyscraper” is the custom-crafted essence of “tall building” in the same way that “Andrew W.K.” is the conclusion of every edge being cut and crossed.

Got that? Now recall what Andrew W.K. named his label prior to renaming it “Steev Mike Music”?

Skyscraper Music Maker.

I don’t think it ends there. I think he is singlehandedly responsible for all of it everywhere. I think it’s all intentional. I think it’s all him: e.g., not just the above-mentioned comment published on *The Stranger* blog back in 2007, but the comment directly preceding that one, credited to a user whose handle is (naturally) 55:

ANDREW WAS NEVER REAL

I think he’s *everywhere*. He says as much in the *Close Calls* cut “Don’t Call Me Andy”:

If you’re looking for Andy
You’ll be looking everywhere...

Remember Kristine Williams? The webmaster of AWKWorld.com who handled those questions after the 2004 New Jersey show?

I think Andrew W.K. is also Kristine Williams, and he tipped that one by choosing the name “Kristine Williams,” which is far too similar to an inverse of W.K.’s own surname (“Krier Wilkes”) to be a coincidence.

He tipped his hand, too, when he named his piano album *55 Cadillac*, and he basically gave it away when he decided not to include an apostrophe in front

of the 55.

Let's go all the way back. ALL THE WAY TO THE BEGINNING. I think Andrew W.K. was the person who started spreading the rumor that Andrew W.K. was invented by Dave Grohl. And a decade later, I think Andrew W.K. created this [Steev Mike Tumblr](#), and included this little [shout-out to Dave Grohl](#), because he just couldn't help himself:

THANK YOU DAVE FOR ALL OF YOUR CREATIVE GUIDANCE AND INPUT.
WE COULDN'T HAVE STARTED THIS MOVEMENT WITHOUT YOU.



What's more, I think he created a user account on Deviant Art *just to post this picture*. The title of this image is "route 55." The artist is SteevMike. The image was submitted on July 26, 2010.



If you're looking for Andy
You'll be looking everywhere ...

Of course, it's *impossible* to look everywhere, which means you can't see everything he's doing. He's not *just* making music, and he's definitely not *not* making music. But what else is he doing? What has he created? Where does it begin, and where does it end?

Who is Andrew W.K.? Is Andrew W.K. real? Who is the real Andrew W.K.?

Perhaps the closest present-day parallel to Andrew W.K. — the closest I can come up with, anyway — is Banksy. But for all the similarities, there's a vast gap between the two artists. I'm reminded here of Schopenhauer's distinction between "talent" and "genius." I.e.:

Schopenhauer's central premise is that talent achieves what others cannot achieve, whereas genius achieves what others cannot imagine.

We don't know what Banksy's real name is, we don't know what he looks like, but we see his work everywhere it appears. If we were not able to see his work, it would be irrelevant.

Andrew W.K. on the other hand? We know what his real name is. We know exactly what he looks like. And yet, we can't see everything he's doing. We can see only a small part of it. There's so much more to be found. Right? There must be. Right? I have spent what feels like *forever* looking for more, and I always manage to find it. I cannot possibly have found *all of it*.

My own experience in this regard reminds me of W.K.'s quote on the subject of David Lynch:

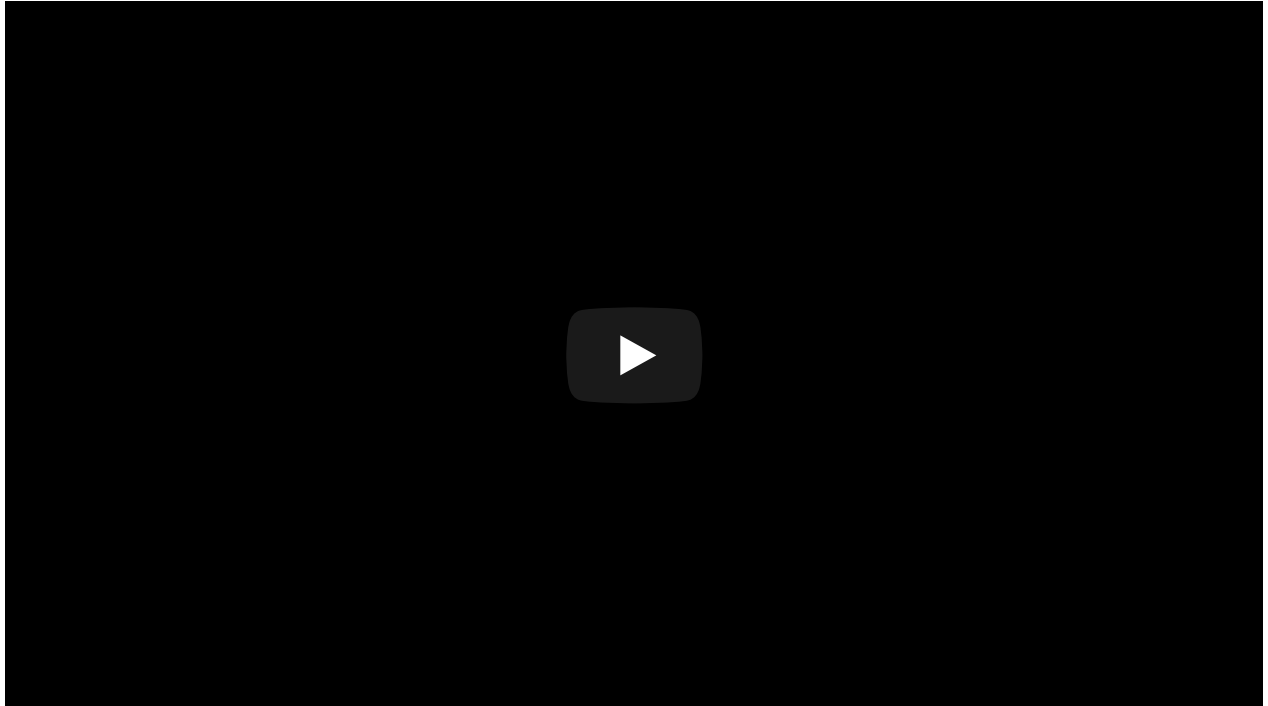
[I]t's that most real fundamental type of horror, where we realize that we're only experiencing a very small fraction of whatever really is going on.

Or, again, this:

If you're looking for Andy
You'll be looking everywhere...

Seeing him everywhere, though, means seeing him even when he's nowhere to be found. You could and certainly can apply this to some of my own discoveries, surely. (Though which ones? Who knows.) I'm not alone, though. Consider this quote, also culled from Crandall's 33 1/3 on *I Get Wet*:

Jimmy Coup (former Andrew W.K. guitarist): Andrew is capable of so much crazy stuff that I honestly don't know for a fact if Andrew didn't hire you himself to create this book and get all this information out of people. Just to find out what people are saying or thinking. I'm not paranoid, but I know the extent and the bizarre lengths Andrew's gone.



Let's circle back, now in earnest, to "Don't Call Me Andy." It's my second-favorite song on the *Close Calls*. It's a very basic, very catchy number, an update of "Don't Call Me Baby," and it sounds like a Spector-era Ramones cut, but maybe 35% gnarlier. And the chorus just repeats that title — "Don't Call Me Andy" — over and over.

Like "I Love NYC," the tripped-out verses in "Don't Call Me Andy" contradict the straightforwardness of the chorus, but *Close Calls* is a deeply fucked-up album, and when you're trapped in that K-hole, "Don't Call Me Andy" feels like a lucid moment. It's an old-school pop tune with a message as simple as its bass line:

The guy doesn't like to be called Andy; he would prefer you not call him Andy. Why? Who knows. Maybe it brings back painful memories, or sounds too

familiar, or too funny, or whatever. Whatever! Don't call him Andy. His name is Andrew.

That's one way of reading it, at least.

I hear it differently, though: I think W.K. is telling you not to assume anything to be true, and to definitely not believe anything you assume to be true.

Whatever you think is happening is not the thing that is happening. And that applies to everything in the world, but we're conditioned to otherwise.

Consider this quote, penned by W.K. and published in his *Vice* column on January 4, 2017:

[B]eing forced through a humbling coming-to-terms encounter with the puzzle of our true inner self will never allow us to reassemble the Humpty Dumpty pieces of our old identity again. We have seen who we are, for better and worse, and this instills humility, compassion, and freedom. The freedom to just be, instead of having to always be "me." The world opens up. There is more clarity and also more confusion. Possibilities that once appeared binary reveal themselves to be infinite. Questions that were once black-and-white now appear prismatic. There is less certainty and more openness. The self remains a magnificent mystery, but it's now finally free to be that mystery fully, no longer squeezed into the container of identity.

Here, W.K. was referencing the work of Franciscan monk Richard Rohr and I'll admit, I'm not familiar. Upon reading the above passage, though, I was reminded of something else I'd read not long before, by the writer David R. Loy, in his book *Money. Sex. War. Karma*.

We think that we experience the real world, but the world as we understand it is a linguistic construct that deludes us ... Identifying with any conceptual understanding is what gets us into trouble. Instead, the true nature of things (including ourselves) becomes apparent when we let

go of our delusions, including the ones embedded in ordinary language. Our emotional and mental turmoil is replaced by a serenity that cannot be grasped but can be lived.

With language as our lens, we perceive the world as a collection of separate things that interact with each other in objective space and time. We separate things from each other by labeling them — that is, by giving them names ... Our basic problem is that the “commonsense” way of understanding the world assumes this distinction, yet it’s a distinction that does not objectively exist ... When we do not cling to names and concepts, we can experience things as they are.

In the above excerpt, Loy was writing about the teachings of the ancient Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. Some of the ideas, though, overlap nearly exactly with those shared by W.K. in his own musings on Richard Rohr. E.g.:

The self remains a magnificent mystery, but it’s now finally free to be that mystery fully, no longer squeezed into the container of identity.

Andrew W.K. Andrew Wilkes-Krier. White Killer. Kristine Williams. Louise Harland. Steev Mike. The list goes on. Andrew Fetterly. Andrew Stevenson. Steven Michaels. All these names have been used. There are so many more. Fifty Five. (5)(5). 55. So many more. As was written in that old bio full of apocrypha:

Women Kum. Wild Kid. Want Kicks. It’s all the fucking same.

It’s not a coincidence, obviously, that Andrew W.K.’s *name* was among the redacted items on his old Florida state ID card. It’s deliberate. But he wasn’t protecting something or hiding anything. He was rejecting. He was refusing

When Andrew W.K. sings, “Don’t call me Andy,” I think he is talking about the same thing he was writing about when he wrote about “The freedom to just be, instead of having to always be “me.” And it’s not because he needs a break every now and then, but because *he knows he is not Andrew W.K.*, because he knows Andrew W.K. is not real, because he knows identity is not real.

And if identity is not real, then a fake identity is every bit as authentic as any other. Who is Andrew W.K.? Is Andrew W.K. real? Who is the real Andrew W.K.?

Remember this from the 2004 FAQ?

Q: Are Steev Mike and Andrew W.K. the same person?

A: No. “ANDREW W.K.” and STEEV MIKE are not the same person. In the past “ANDREW W.K.” has stated that he used to call himself STEEV MIKE, however this does not indicate that they are in fact the same individual.

That’s not a lie, and maybe not even an obfuscation. It’s what Nagarjuna was saying, as translated by Loy:

We separate things from each other by labeling them — that is, by giving them names ... Our basic problem is that the “commonsense” way of understanding the world assumes this distinction, yet it’s a distinction that does not objectively exist.

Or, similarly, as Andrew W.K. himself wrote in the 2005 announcement regarding *THE POWER NEVER STOPS FORMING*:

Binary is banal.

This is where the maze begins. This is also where the maze ends. This is what Andrew W.K. is doing. Although “doing,” really, is the wrong word. Not doing.

Being.

This is what he's singing about when he says, "Don't call me Andy." That's what I think, at least. It's not a prank. It's not pop art. It's not performance art. Nothing is real, and therefore, there is no "authentic" against which "inauthentic" can stand in opposition. It's not a performance at all. And yet it's all performance. In that way, Andrew W.K. stands apart from those artists who draw any such line. Andy Kaufman, for example. Andy Warhol, too. When Andrew W.K. sings "Don't call me Andy," maybe that's who he's talking about, and maybe that's what he's saying.

Maybe he's saying, Don't call me Andy Warhol.

Maybe, too, he's saying, Don't call me Andy Kaufman.


Or maybe, simply, Don't call me Andy Warhol-Kaufman.

His name is Andrew W.K.



Michael Nelson

Contributor

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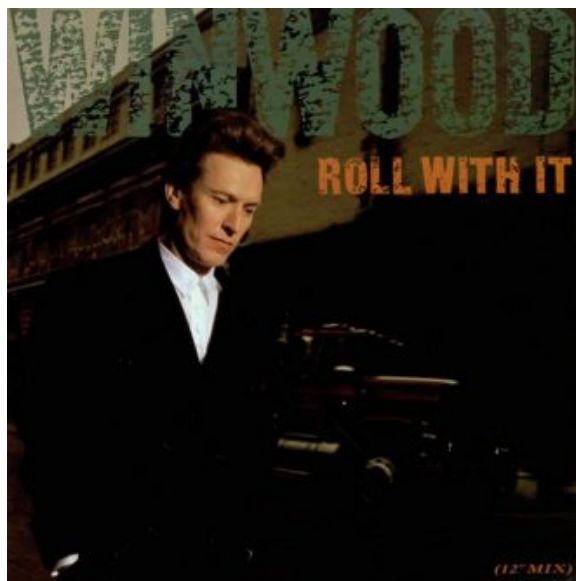
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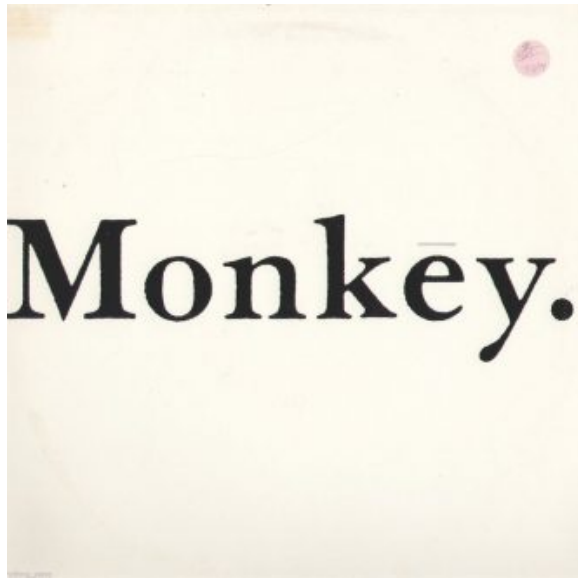


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03



The Number Ones: George Michael's "Monkey"

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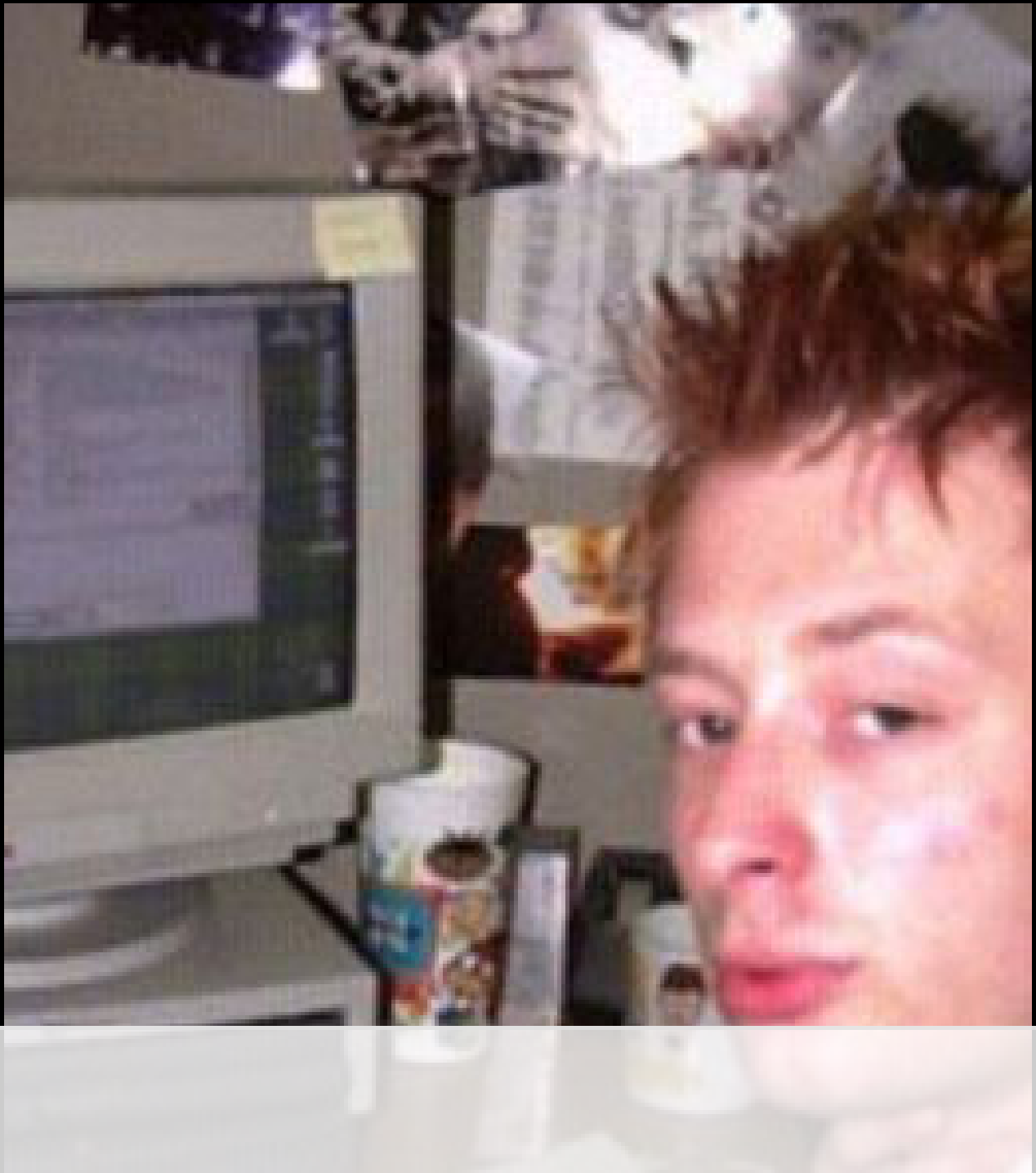
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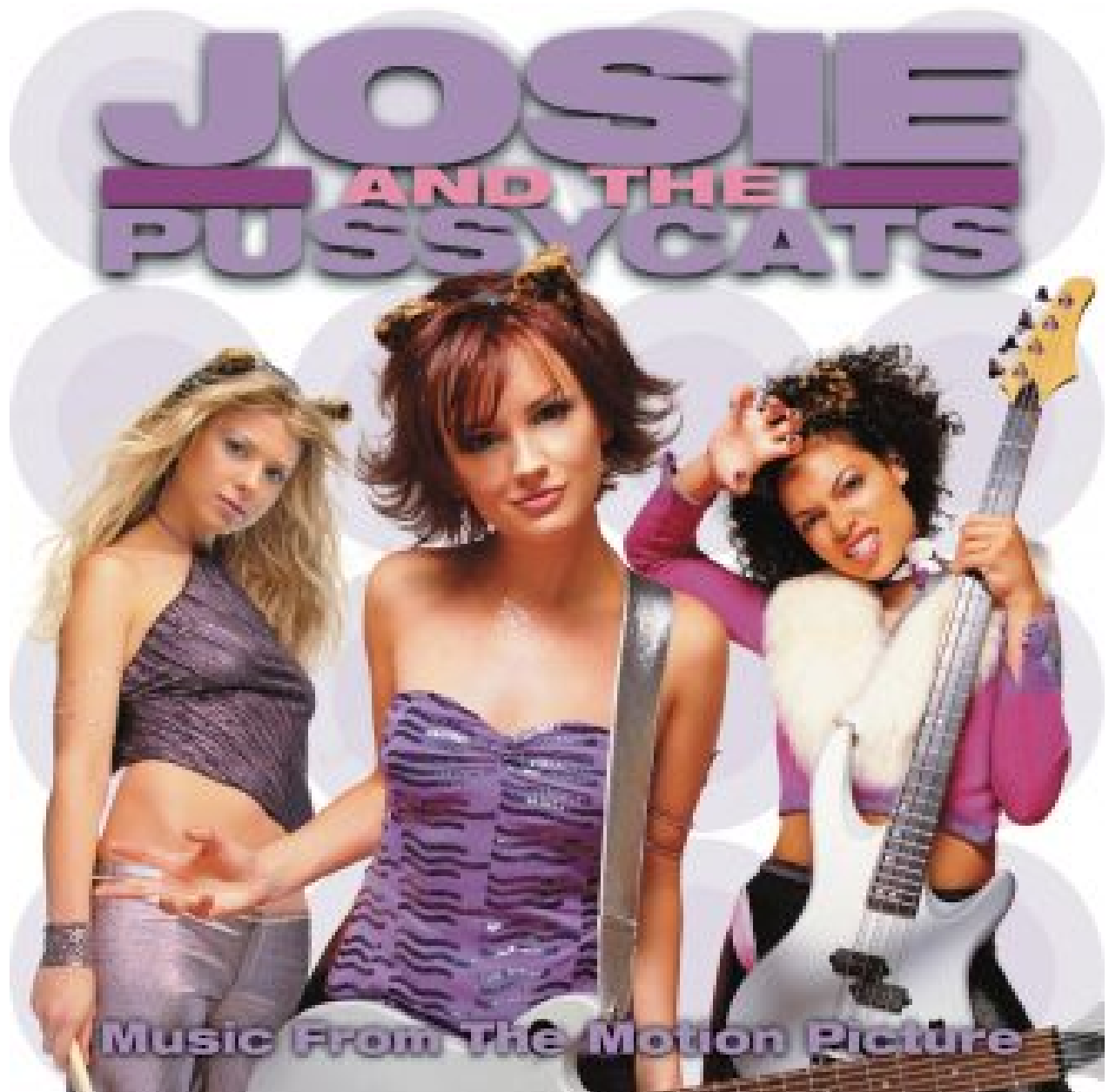




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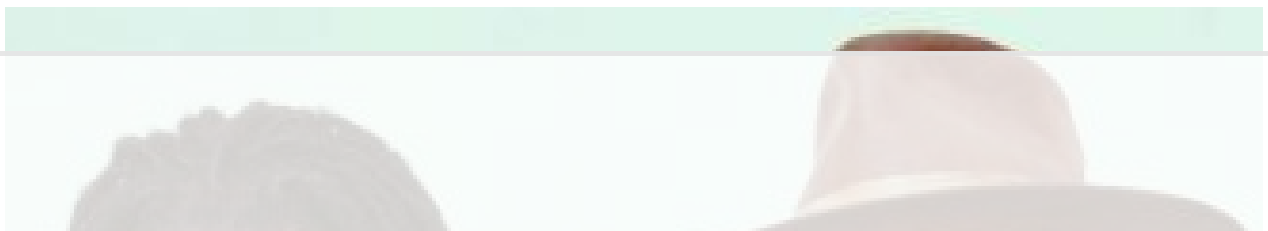
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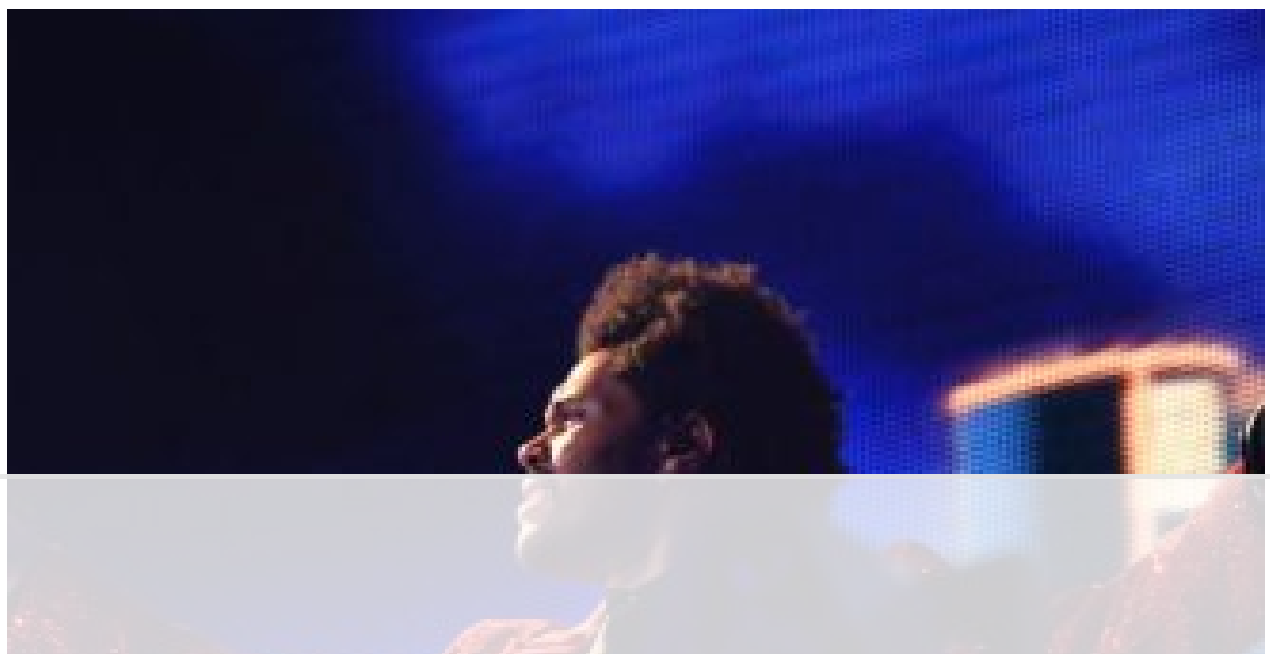




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