



Fig 1. Wile E. Coyote attempts to trick Road Runner with a convincing painting of a tunnel

1. Labor Day

In September 2015, following brief amnesia, I experienced a break from a reality so grounded and familiar until that point. In an instant, I became aware of my subjective experience - the wet grass, cold against my bare legs and back, the lightly percussive sound of water droplets spraying from the sprinkler behind me, the incandescent glow bathing the brick pathway ahead as I tentatively stood up to take measure of my surroundings.

I was struck with how real everything felt.

Because I didn't know then who I was, or how I had gotten there, I felt that it was the first moment I had ever experienced, that I was singularly waking up in this new domain. I reasoned that I was inside a simulated world, and that myself and everything around me were part of a computer program, the instantiation of which triggered my sudden, vivid awareness.

I had always known this would happen.

I escaped from the walled in enclosure where I had awakened and walked naked down the sidewalk, recognizing the neighborhood where I grew up. I knew that the brick row houses I saw reflected the actual Richmond that the real me had known his whole life. The artificial world's detail blew me away as every paint drip in the mural I passed stood out with pronounced clarity. Surely any simulation would have its flaws, I thought, but as I made my way to my parents house I found none. It was complete and impossibly real. After finding the back door to the house locked, I scaled the exterior of the back porch onto the

balcony, chancing whether pain, muscle strain, and even mortality existed in this world. I climbed in through the second story bathroom window and made my way to my childhood bedroom where I clothed myself and waited uncertainly until I heard voices and the opening of the front door.



Fig 2. Spawn Point

In my agitated and disoriented state my girlfriend's face looked grotesquely swollen, contorted with sobs as she stood in the front hallway. Her parents stood guardedly behind her, as confused as I was, while a sense of what had actually taken place slowly began to settle over me. They abruptly and awkwardly left after, still in total shock, I failed to give them any explanation for the chaos they had come across.

My girlfriend and I sat together, both shaking as I listened to her choke out the story of what she'd been through the past few hours. Dread hit me in waves as it sunk in that the world I had awoken to, naked, in the walled grounds of a retirement community was no different than the most real reality I had ever known.

In actuality, hours before a Sunday night became the quiet hours of Labor Day morning, the two of us had ingested a strong dose of psychedelic drugs. Soon after that, we began to hastily drink gulp after gulp of wine, agreeing that we would do whatever it would take to dull the mounting torrent of anxiety overwhelming us as we realized how unprepared we were for the intensity of what was coming.

This series of bad decisions gave rise to a string of unintended consequences. Most relevant here, but also perhaps most unlikely, is how this led me to want desperately to believe that Elon Musk isn't as smart as everyone thinks he is.



Fig 3. Road Runner foils Wile E. Coyote by entering the image

2. Afterlife

I wasn't raised religious but growing up I believed in life after death. My dad, a reader of Ray Kurzweil, taught me about the singularity – the idea that the exponential acceleration of technological development will eventually hit an asymptotic upward thrust so pronounced that the things that will be made possible by supercomputers and advanced artificial intelligence after that point are completely inconceivable now.

Between that and all the science fiction I absorbed as a kid the idea of uploading one's consciousness into a computer as a form of immortality took hold in my imagination. This was so appealing because it let me believe that, as long as I made it to that magic upward swoop, death would be little more than inconvenient. Predictive timelines drawn from Moore's Law reassured me that I could easily make it over that hump, as long as I wore a seat belt and didn't take up smoking.

I think growing up with this latent expectation tucked away is the best explanation for how I interpreted my sudden awakening in a world so startlingly vivid early on that Labor Day morning. After passing through a selfhood-annihilating psychic maelstrom of violent intoxication, returning to a world where everything can be pointed to and named felt like entering a freshly rendered CG environment where all boundaries are described with the unwavering precision of a vector graphic.

Two years later, I'm still grappling with the trauma of that night. I know that my experience of simulated existence was a hallucination, but in the moment I believed in the unreality of my experience as firmly as I had ever believed in its reality prior to that night, and certainly since.

I no longer take comfort in the idea of my personal virtual afterlife. Death seems preferable.



Fig 4. Sully's fur rendered in excruciating detail

3. Faith, Doubt, and Denial

Or

If you create PayPal they will take your word for it

Pick one:

1. "The fraction of human-level civilizations that reach a posthuman stage (that is, one capable of running high-fidelity ancestor simulations) is very close to zero", **or**
2. "The fraction of posthuman civilizations that are interested in running ancestor-simulations is very close to zero", **or**
3. "The fraction of all people with our kind of experiences that are living in a simulation is very close to one"

This is the trilemma of the Simulation Hypothesis, as first proposed by Swedish Philosopher Nick Bostrom and then presumably paraphrased by the author of the Wikipedia page on the subject. It's a statement of probability, placing the likelihood we are living in one of the relatively abundant simulated worlds much higher than the odds that we are experiencing base reality. Elon Musk has since publicly said that he shares this belief, giving rise to an explosion in this idea's popularity.

One person's stimulating intellectual exercise is another person's existential crisis.



Fig 5. In a world without Jimmy Neutron we take what we can get

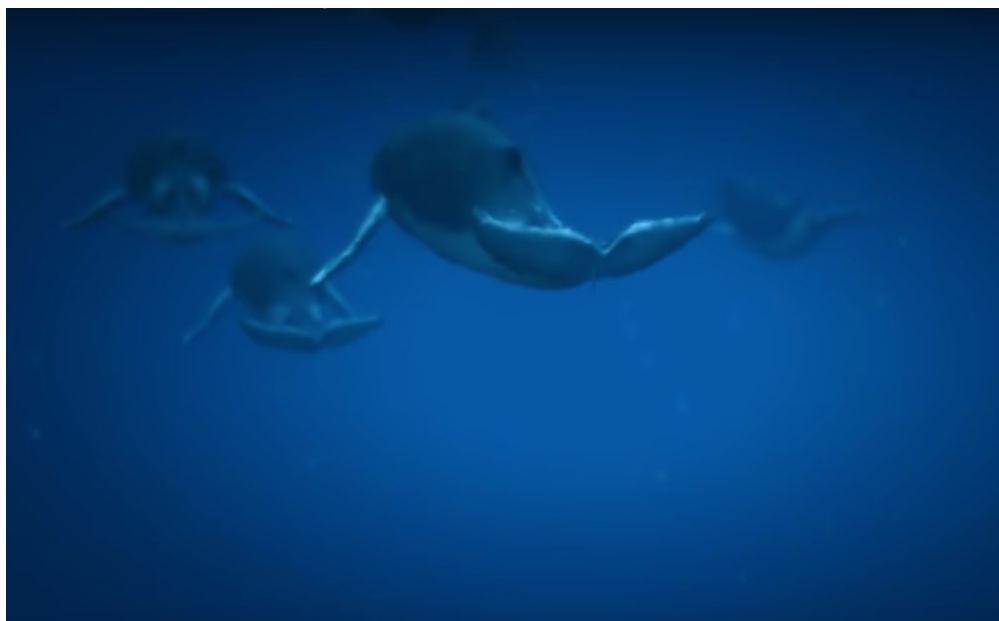


Fig 6. Still from a nature documentary filmed within Grand Theft Auto 5



Fig 8. Wile E. Coyote Falls for his own trick

