

# Infinite John Lennon

## *If the Beatles Were An Instrument*

Michael Dean, v2, Oct 21, 2022

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The Beatles legacy is the size of a mammoth, but it's frozen. The band broke up. Half the members are dead. And yet their dormant creative force is on the verge of a re-eruption. Artificial intelligence is resurrecting old bands and releasing new songs.

**By 2030, there could be over a million 'new' Beatles songs generated by AI.**

I first dove into their catalog during my first semester at the University of Miami. While my new 'friends' were doing cocaine off their fake IDs on taxi-rides to South Beach, I was up in 'the stacks' (the library), getting high to the Beatles. I didn't listen recreationally, I gave them my undivided attention, for hours. The Beatles rewired my psyche, my values, and my life direction.

As potent as their music is, their catalog is small. The Beatles were around for only 8 years, recording 213 songs over 12 albums. That 'first-time-you-hear-a-Beatles-song' feeling is a scarce, depletable resource. You can binge their catalog in under 10 hours. Then what?

Similar to how porn addicts get progressively into harder and weirder stuff, so do serious Beatles fans. After you memorize their discography, there's nowhere left to go but studio outtakes (Helter Skelter, version 2, take 17), obscure interviews, and eventually, "Paul is Dead" fan-fiction conspiracy theories.

You can probably imagine my reaction when I stumbled into a weird corner of YouTube with hundreds of 'user-generated' Beatles songs. They were made with Jukebox, a tool made by OpenAI, the same company that spawned DALL-E 2. In 2022, we're already at the point of entirely new concept albums, Eleanor Rigby variations, and Beatles covers of

Radiohead, Nirvana, Queen, and of course, Lil Jon. I feel like the guy from the movie "Yesterday," who hit his head and suddenly wakes up in an alternate dimension with a Beatles catalog that no one's ever heard.

Like a madman, I find myself showing these weird recordings to everybody in my life through my iPhone speakers. There's a common arc of emotion: first confusion, then surprise, and finally, when they realize that computers can produce an astronomical volume of convincing art, revulsion. It's an existential threat to the human imagination. This was the last frontier, the *one* thing that machines were never supposed to touch.

My dad, born in 1960, said, "I'm glad I'm on my way out," as if we opened the door to Skynet. Erik Hoel, an AI expert that urges caution around computer consciousness, says we're sitting at the gates of a "[Semantic Apocalypse](#)." We risk drowning the intentions of artists with an ocean of soulless, imitative, illusion. Erik says that AI-generated art is an abomination that should be made illegal.

I agree that we should tread lightly at the threshold of irreversible explosions, but I'll admit it. As a Beatles fan and a songwriter, I'm more excited than I'm scared.

Eventually, I sent these same recordings over to my musician friends in the New York bands-trying-to-make-it scene. You'd think songwriters would be the most fearful of this technology. Quite the opposite. We all quickly became obsessed, collecting weird recordings we found and sending them to each other. I started transcribing these ideas onto guitar and piano. But my friend Kevin took it the furthest. He downloaded Jukebox, uploaded his chord progressions into the app, and the ghost of John Lennon hummed sweet melodies of gibberish back to him.

Instead of panicking about the coming tsunami of AI-generated music, we should try to understand what's actually going on here.

An algorithm can reverse engineer the voiceprint and pattern language of any band, and turn it into software that its fans can tinker with. **The Beatles (and all bands) are shifting from artists to instruments.**

How does this instrument work? Who gets to play it? And what does this mean for the future of music?

A landscape of infinite, machine-generated content sounds obviously cold when you think about it in low fidelity. But when you zoom in, it's not necessarily good or bad. It's unrecognizable. It's a different game, but a game that's not so unfamiliar once we analyze it.

This essay is a detailed voyage through the future of music, and we'll listen to 15 AI-generated Beatles songs along the way. Is this the Semantic Apocalypse, or the birth of music as an infinite game? You decide.

Notes:

- If beauty makes you feel something, it's doing it's job
- It's scary that we're using a computer, nothing real behind it
- Promethean vibe
- Punch the hornets nest
- "Imagine"
- It's always been curation - Beatles
- Never have the Beatles again because we're too fragmented now
- Crossed the Rubicon again
- Beatles benefits from scarcity
- Recorded music
- Gray goo problem - infinite paper clip problem - re: general AI - what if the AI realizes it needs to repurpose all the metal in the universe to make more paperclips - too much John Lennon - John Lennon and on and on