Faking It: On the Ethics of Fake Musicianship, Perfection Culture, and Why Intention is Important

This isn't gonna be some finely tuned thinkpiece or perfectly structured deep dive. It's more like a sprawl of thoughts I've been having while in a two-week mental and creative rut. I am sitting there watching Adam Neely's *The Ethics of Fake Guitar* and thinking back on my own creative past and present. I'm not here to lecture anyone on how to do it, and I'm not pretending I've got a definitive answer to anything, but I do have a compass, and that compass always points to intentionality. I still feel all I have that is truly my own is intentionality. So let's talk about what it means to fake something, what it means to chase perfection, and what happens when the internet—and especially social media—gets ahold of all of that and changes that intention to an expectation. With that expectation based on a lie for monetary gain.

Part 1: NO-Budget Filmmaking, Perfection Culture, and Reflections in the Mud

I went to film school from 1999 to 2004. A community college that no longer exists. Part-time. Full-time job just to stay afloat, and I was lucky enough to have family that kept a roof over my head and a plate of food in front of me. But camera gear? Editing bays? Glossy production? Even Time… Forget it. I was scrapping together Mini-DV setups and busted PCs, praying they wouldn't crash before I could save the project file. That's where I come from—NO-budget filmmaking. **Capital N-O.** That mindset never left me. After college I struggled to find stable employment. I basically kept truckin' along filming what I could and make something out of it. I still make things with what I have. If something sucks in the final product, it's not because I didn't care. It's because I couldn't afford better. And even if I *could*, I probably wouldn't obsess over it. I care more about what I'm trying to say than how glossy it looks. People chasing that **"Aesthetic of Perfection"** are chasing ghosts. They're chasing a version of a thing they *think* they saw, not what's actually there. Could be a statement on our human society experiment. What happens if you stop chasing that and start creating from where you *are* instead?

Because Here's the Truth: <u>Perfection is Just another Kind of Fake.</u>

Part 2: The Line Between Editing and Faking Ain't as Clear as People Pretend

Now let's get into the thick of it. Is editing a live performance "faking"? Depends. If you're just sweetening the sound—cleaning up the EQ, leveling things out, maybe patching a glitchy mic—that's post-production, not deception. I don't think anyone should be faulted for wanting to make their performance *presentable*. Especially if they're filming on a cell phone in a garage or bar with poor sound and/or acoustics.

YouTube's compression algorithm noticeably degrades audio quality during upload, especially in the higher frequencies—cymbals, vocals, and clarity tend to get flattened. After extensive trial and error, I found that exporting the final video using VSDC in the .mkv format with PCM S16LE audio encoding preserved far more of the original sound. Unlike standard .mp4 exports with AAC compression, which YouTube compresses more aggressively, the .mkv + PCM combo seems to bypass some of that automatic degradation. It's not perfect, but the improvement is real—especially for trained ears—and it's become my go-to method for getting cleaner audio onto the platform. That's not me trying to deceive anyone. That's me working *with* the limitations, trying to squeeze as much juice out of the lemon as I can with the controls I have. But yeah, if you're miming along to a studio-recorded track and selling it as live, you're crossing into a different territory. **And here's where it gets messy:** It's not just *what* you do, it's *how you frame it*. **Your, 'intention…'** If you tell the audience what you're doing, most people are cool with it. It's the hiding part that rubs people wrong. Transparency covers a lot of ethical ground. The ones that actually can do these amazing things. They worked incredibly hard to get there. **AND** in many cases most of them never really got the recognition and real profits from their work, which they should be credited and even paid in my more cases than not.

Part 3: Social Media and the Great Monetization Lie

Here's where the whole thing twists into something nastier. This drive for perfection—this impulse to fake your way through—it's not happening in a vacuum. Social media monetization has created an entire ecosystem where people aren't making art anymore. They're not even really making products. They're making *content.* And more specifically, they're selling *themselves* as content. Their personality, their lifestyle, their *vibe.* Somewhere between 13 and 45, an entire generation got convinced that if you were fun at parties and worked retail that one summer, you were just a ring light away from being a brand ambassador. What they're selling isn't just a product—it's the belief that *if they say it's cool, it must be cool.* And sometimes? That works. Some people *can* sell that illusion. But most people can't. Most end up chasing something that was never actually real to begin with: **the idea that charisma alone can substitute for experience, skill, or hard-earned credibility.** What we've ended up with is this fake hustle culture. People *"working hard"* on building their brand—but it's all image. It's cinematic. You know how movie characters only face the parts of life that move the plot forward? Nobody in a movie spends three hours troubleshooting why their WiFi won't connect to the printer. That's what we're doing now. We're cutting out all the unglamorous stuff—the years of grind, the failed attempts, the dead ends—and presenting a highlight reel as if it were a documentary.

And the result? People think they're working hard, but they're not actually *doing* anything. Because in real life—especially with tech, with music, with film—you have to know what you're doing. There's *work* involved. But the illusion sold on social media says you don't need that. You just need to be *seen* doing the work. And this is the part that really gets under my skin: what people now call **"influence"** or **"reach"** used to be called **resources.** It was marketing budget. It was connections. It was a studio or a label or some angel investor quietly bankrolling the whole thing while pretending it was just some quirky girl in her bedroom making videos on her phone. It's not grassroots. It's AstroTurf. There's a whole industry out here trying to convince you that these influencers are *"just like you,"* and some are. However, in many cases the reality is they've got deep-pocketed support, production teams, and years of unseen infrastructure propping them up.

What they're selling isn't a product, or even a skill. They're selling *belief.* They want you to buy into *them*. And that's wild to me. That's televangelist territory. And yeah—not everyone online is doing this. There are legit creators, legit businesses, real product testers that influence product trends.

A **"confidence game,"** or **con**, is a method of manipulation where someone gains your trust *(your "confidence")* in order to exploit it. It's not always about outright lying—it's about *framing something believable enough* to get you to invest, commit, or act… even if what you're committing to has no real foundation. This solely operates on trust and belief, not substance—a more nuanced and stronger word for it could be is **"speculative branding"** or more sharply, **"belief-based marketing."** A term that captures the *illusion of substance*—where the *product is really just the belief in the product*—without a clear product, goal or vision.

This type of influencing has now krept into the social media world of performance art like guitarists, drummers, even vocalists, all trying to sell the *idea* that if you *"buy in,"* you'll be part of something profitable. But in truth:

- **The asset is often unproven.**
- **The odds of success are downplayed or hidden.**
- **The story is polished to hide the risk.**
- **You're investing in their ability to attract others**, not in a tangible return.

This is classic con structure:

1. **Gain trust** through charisma, social proof, or flashy success stories.
2. **Present belief as product**, appealing to your emotions or FOMO.
3. **Shift risk onto the buyer**, while keeping the seller insulated.
4. **Profit off belief**, not substance.

But like anything else—music, politics, religion—the scene gets polluted by people who are just gaming the system. You see it in politics all the time. New tax law drops? Within a week someone's already figured out a loophole. That's the American tradition now: *don't work harder, just find the cheat code.* Circumvent the rules so you can look better than you actually are. Especially online, where one rarely has to actually prove anything they do. Numbers, views, hearts, likes, even comments can be generated by AI in mass to manipulate how much "influence" a channel, account, business or single person has. That mindset has bled into how we think about success. It's no longer about doing the most logical, skilled, or creative thing to reach your goal. It's about finding the path of least resistance *that still looks good on camera.*

So yeah—when someone fakes a guitar solo, or mimics a live performance, or cuts corners in post and sells it as raw talent, it's not just annoying—it's part of a bigger problem. It's another symptom of a culture that values *perception* of substance over actual, real substance.

Part 4: Intention Matters More Than Tools

Let me be clear—I'm not anti-AI. Not even close. Hell, this whole essay was structured *with* the help of AI. When I've got too many thoughts colliding in my head and can't quite nail the phrasing, I bounce ideas off it. I test tone. I reorganize arguments. I care deeply about semantics, and sometimes it helps me not butcher my own meaning. That's a *gift*, not a threat. I'm also a scatterbrain, if I'm being real. And AI helps me reign it in. That doesn't mean it *wrote* this. It means it helped me *shape* this. Like a co-writer, or an assistant editor. I'm still driving—it just helped clean the windshield.

What bugs me isn't people *using* AI. It's people pretending they *didn't*. Acting like every word or note or design choice sprang perfectly from their untouched genius. Like, why? Most content isn't made by one person anymore. It's usually a team, or at least a couple of close collaborators. If your buddy helped with camera work or gave you feedback on your mix, you'd thank them. You'd credit them. So why wouldn't you do the same with AI, if it helped shape the thing? And honestly, I don't even mind if AI *does* a lot of the work. Sometimes that's necessary. Sometimes that's how you get unstuck or get something done *at all.* But just *say so.* Give the tool its due. Don't slap your name on an AI-written book like you typed it all out on a typewriter in a cabin. That's not authenticity. That's performance.

Same deal with music production. You want to use backing tracks, drum machines, pitch correction—do it. We've been doing that since the tape deck. But be up front. Don't roll out a video where you look like you're playing note-for-note perfection when it's really comped to hell and back. The problem isn't the tool. It's the *pretending*. It's the whole *"fake it and act like you're not faking it"* loop we keep finding ourselves in.
But—and this is important—I also get the weird beauty in it. Sometimes the fake stuff *does* lead to real growth. A kid sees a faked guitar solo, and maybe they *don't* know it's fake, but it lights a fire. They want to play like that. They go chasing that sound. And in the process, they *get good.* Really good. Better than the faker, even. That's the contradiction. That's where I agree with someone like Rick Beato or Adam Neely—it's complicated. Sometimes the illusion plants real seeds and the fruits from those seeds we all enjoy and get emerged in. And that's not nothing. That absolutely is something.

So I don't think it's a question of *"should you use AI or not."* It's about your *intention.* Are you trying to express something? Or are you just trying to appear impressive? That's what separates art from content. One is a reflection of the self. The other is a pitch deck with candy flavored vibes.

Part 5: Genre Codes, Gatekeeping, and the Woke Redefinition Game

The genre stuff at the end of that video? Yeah, that wasn't just noise to me. What Adam Neely was getting at is that a genre or sub-genre isn't just a checklist of sounds and styles—like tempo, tuning,

instrument choice or technique—it's a kind of social contract. A shared code among a community about what's authentic, what's fake, what's sacred. And that hit home for me. I'm a metalhead. I've watched these battles happen in real-time—arguments over what counts as **"real"** metal, or who gets to fly the flag of some niche sub-genre like they invented it. Is deathcore **"true"** death metal? Is nü-metal a joke or a gateway drug? Is Djent a sub-genre at all or just a sound, like an effect? The tribal lines are drawn in every comment section. **But here's the twist:** this isn't just about sound. It's about values. **Identity.** Cultural territory. That used to be messy enough on its own. Now throw in woke subculture, and the whole thing gets distorted beyond recognition.

Woke thinking—at least how I see it—tries to take minority arguments and attempt to make them majority arguments. Take a widely agreed-upon bad idea, strip away some of the baggage, repackage it with newer language, and then scold anyone who doesn't clap along. It's not progress. **It's marketing.** And now it's invading art, music, genre, and scene dynamics. Suddenly, people aren't just fighting over whether a band fits a sub-genre. They're fighting over whether that genre itself is *problematic* because of what someone said on a podcast or tweeted in 2007 about social dynamics at that specific time to them. You'll see this play out in ways that sound harmless at first. Someone says a genre is "too masculine" or "too violent" or "too whiney," and suddenly, the subculture has to shift to accommodate a narrative that was never really part of the music's DNA. These criticisms start as niche takes, but thanks to social media and algorithmic validation, they balloon into mandates. Then comes the guilt-tripping, the digital shaming, the weird re-education process: *This sub-genre is actually about this now, and if you don't agree, you're a bigot, gatekeeper, insert buzzword here.*

And if you push back? You're **"toxic."** You're being **"negative." "Out of touch."** Just another troll who doesn't **"get it."** Never mind that the whole *point* of subculture was to resist conformity in the first place.

It's like every genre has to go through a weird spiritual audit now. Not just **"what does this sound like?"** but **"what does this *say* about your politics? *You as a person?*"** Which is insane. Music is supposed to be a place for escape, for release, for raw emotional reaction and entrainment—not a damn TED Talk with fake playing guitar solos.

And then there's this individualist twist where people experience one thing, and suddenly they try to rewrite the entire genre canon around their feelings. *"Well, I listened to X and it helped me through Y, so now this genre is about Z."* I get that it meant something to you. That's valid. No one is saying one or a few cannot come together and share this thing in a different light. But your emotional reaction doesn't overwrite the cultural framework that genre came from. Not every genre needs to be soft and affirming. Not every lyric needs to be therapy. Some of it's supposed to be ugly, aggressive, nihilistic—because that's what it's channeling. We've got a generation trying to *fix* things that were never broken to begin with. And what we lose in the process is the texture, the risk, the rawness that made these subcultures worth fighting for. You can't remap black metal or punk or horrorcore through some feel-good HR training lens. You'll sand off everything that made it matter.

Community norms didn't collapse because people stopped caring. They collapsed because people started pretending *anything goes* as long as you can spin a social virtue out of it and gas light people into treating you like a victim. When you are a victim of your own making. It's not creativity. It's control—dressed up in the language of inclusion. And I'm not saying **"keep things pure"** like some frothing elitist. I'm saying stop treating cultural identity like it's a choose-your-own-adventure morality tale. Some things actually have context. History. Meaning. Rules. That's what makes them genres. That's what makes them powerful. Its ok to change things. That is what sub-genres are for. A variation of the original with nuanced twists. Nü-metal isn't a joke or a gateway drug to nonsense-core but a nuance of fusion from a decade before. That is all nü-metal is; a fusion of different styles and it was heavy and closer to metal than hip-hop, funk, electro or reggae. At the time it was a huge shift from where metal was in the 1990s. The labeling name makes sense. That is how these things happen. But more importantly 'why' they happen.

Part 6: In the End, It's Still About Intention

Look. I'm not here to say don't fake anything. I'm saying *know why* you're doing it.

If the goal is to share an idea, an emotion, a perspective—and you're using every tool you've got to get that across—cool. Go for it. Cheat the lighting, filter the hell out of it, remix, repackage, whatever. If it's in service of something real, that intention comes through.

But if the goal is to game the system, farm dopamine, and dress up clout-chasing as *"authenticity"*? That's not creativity. That's commerce wearing a cosplay wig. That's performance art with no art. And yeah, the internet's always had fakery—but now we've got people with delusions of grandeur being handed tools that amplify those delusions at scale. Taking away from real creators just trying to get some momentum in life with the talents and creative things they do. To fake it to directly take away from lesser people's efforts and propped one's self higher than they actually are is the worst kind person out there. The damage isn't just in the trick—it's in pretending there *wasn't* a trick to begin with.

Social media was supposed to be a quick peek into someone's day. A way to stay connected during the in-between moments of life. But now it *is* the day. It's the job. It's the hustle. It's a 24/7 grind machine full of fake smiles, fake stories, fake lives—people living like avatars of their best guesses at what other people might want to click on. This isn't a shot at real salespeople with real track records who just adapted to new platforms. Sell stuff. Talk about what you love. No shame in that. The problem isn't sales. It's when the entire persona is a lie, built to manipulate good intentions for personal gain. That's where I draw the line. Intention is everything. If your intention is pure—even if the result is messy, flawed, imperfect—no one with a conscience is gonna fault you. But if you use sincerity as a prop, if you twist trust into currency, if you hijack empathy just to raise your stock... that's not just wrong. That's *objectively* wrong.

And yeah, I said *objectively*. That word still means something. It means something is true regardless of your feelings, your preferences, your influencer score and your influence upon it. It doesn't need you to function. The universe doesn't care if you're trending. It doesn't care if your lighting is good or if your truth gets applause. The universe is indifferent. It gives zero fucks. But we should care. Because the moment we stop caring about intention—the moment we start pretending that subjectivity *is* objectivity—we lose the thread. We let the algorithm tell us what matters. And we forget that what we *intend* is what makes us human in the first place.

So yeah, maybe this all gets me fewer views. Less reach. No monetization. So be it. If I'm gonna be seen, I want it to be *me* being seen. Not some echo of someone else's polish. Not a mask of greatness I haven't earned.

Just me.
Raw, flawed, real.
And that's enough.