

ClearVoice

Multimedia fiction by Kate Soper
Music by Kate Soper and J.S. Bach (arr. Soper)

Commissioned for McSweeney's Quarterly 64: The Audio Issue (October 2021)

NOTE: this is a multi-media piece which must be read along with this audio track:

<https://on.soundcloud.com/z4UFU>

(See last page for audio track credits)

[Click for audio link](#)

A Message from ClearVoice: Welcome!

Thank you for your purchase of ClearVoice for individual or business use! At your fingertips is a world of efficient, streamlined, secure communication like you've never experienced before.

In today's fast paced world, you need to know your message is getting across. But how to compete with a never-ending stream of trivial distraction? The ClearVoice patented mind-to-mind communication protocol offers interference-proof access to your friends and colleagues when you need it most. Want someone's attention? With ClearVoice, you've got it.

To safely install the product, please follow along with our multi-media step-by-step instructions. The entire process will be complete by the time you finish this manual.

ClearVoice: cut through the babble.



Step One: Initialization

Hi, I'm Doctor Simon, I'll be guiding you through the upload process. It's important that you keep reading along as you listen to the sound of my voice.

Before we begin, let's try a simple exercise in virtual interaction. When you hear the tone, I'd like you to tell me your name – but don't say it out loud, just *think* it.

While artificial interneural exchanges, such as the one we just had, may be perceptually indistinguishable from true telepathy, there is no real way for me to receive your message across space and time. ClearVoice is designed to remedy this problem.

Now we'll briefly test your basic perceptual reflexes. You are going to see a bright light. No, you didn't misread that. You are going to see a bright light.

Once the ClearVoice procedure is complete, you will have a more flexible, less compartmentalized internal experience than what you're used to. The more quickly you can acclimate to this idea, the more comfortable your transition will be.

Testimonial (Transcript): Client 129

My name is [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] and I work for [COMPANY NAME REDACTED]. They purchased the trial version of ClearVoice to address some workflow issues and I thought it sounded interesting, so I volunteered! [Laughter] I am a Level Two Floor Manager, which means I spend several hours a day touring our industrial warehouse on the [STATION ID REDACTED] and taking really sensitive and precise measurements. The problem is, you always go in with a Quality Assurance Partner to corroborate your observations, but it's impossible to talk while you're on the floor because of the machinery, and the protective gear we wear means we can't write notes or use sign language or anything, so you never really know what the other person is thinking. And then when we're done with our rounds, we have to spend a couple of hours in separate isolation booths for decontamination, and you can't use any kind of communication device in there. And then after we leave the facility we're supposed to file a joint report, but my Quality Assurance Partner [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] is based out of a station with a different time zone and day length [laughter] so it's basically impossible to collaborate and we always end up just working on it separately. Anyway, at the end of the day a lot of errors creep in because of all these communication issues. So I guess ClearVoice seems like a great solution!

Step Two: Psychosomatic Preparation

Ok, now we're going to try something a little more complex. When you hear the tone, think your self-identity code.

A self-identity code is something you can use to confirm your own identity to yourself. For instance, say you travelled back in time and met yourself, and only had three seconds to telepathically communicate something that would let this other self know for sure that it was you and not a skilled impersonator or a hologram or simply a lookalike, what message would you send to let yourself know it was really you? Think it now.

Once you begin to receive inter-cranial messages, contemplating this phrase offers a way to confirm you are still present in your own mind. This will alleviate the mild disorientation and potentially distracting sensations you may experience at hearing someone else's voice in your head.

Let me reassure you, there's no need for any concern. Your post-procedure state will certainly be an improvement to the human default of internal isolation. Once you're able to communicate with others in this new way, you will no longer be inconvenienced by the imprecision, misinterpretation, and inefficiency that so often impede our business and personal relationships.

If you feel any lingering hesitation before we begin the process, repeat to yourself: I am isolated. I am alienated. I am utterly alone. Wouldn't you like to change that?

Testimonial (Transcript): Client 130

When I heard that [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] was signing up, I thought it made sense for me to do it too since, you know, I'm her Quality Assurance Partner and [COMPANY NAME REDACTED] needed a pair of volunteers. We've been working together for about...I wanna say, ten months? But I've never actually talked to her. I mean, our company picnics are literally in different orbits so it's not like we have much opportunity to hang out. Actually I think I've only ever seen her out of the hazmat suit once. It was a few weeks ago...I was checking the launch bay safety cam to make sure no one was in there before I depressurized it. And normally [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] and I leave [STATION ID REDACTED] at different times, but that day, I flipped on the viewfinder and – there she was. On the screen. Waiting for her ride.

And it was weird because, like I said, I've only ever seen her through billowing clouds of steam, in a bunch of gear, with a giant helmet on...but somehow I know right away it's her. And she kind of pauses and turns to look at the camera – it's a two-way feed – and I can tell that she knows it's me, too. And she kind of...half-smiles. And I wave. Then her launch sequence completed and she got into her pod and left. You work with someone long enough you sort of come to know them, even if you've never actually spoken to them, I guess.

A Message from ClearVoice: Prelude to an Upload!

Western Classical Music: this hulking monolith of human achievement contains some of history's most famous songs, from Beethoven's Fifth to the Blue Danube. Conveniently, it has also implanted a sturdy synaptic framework into the mental apparatus of a large percentage of the world's population. Chances are, if you were raised in a country whose natural or colonial history intersects with Western culture, when you hear this: *do re mi fa so la ti* – you'd like to hear this: *do!* It's inescapable.

Have you ever given your dog a pill? Perhaps you wrapped it in cheese or peanut butter, so that Fido didn't even notice it going down? The ClearVoice install works the same way. We use a highly goal-directed, deceptively simple specimen of Western Classical Music to subliminally deliver a set of sophisticated commands directly to your synaptic structure. You won't even feel your mind being re-wired! So, as we begin the process, we invite you to sit back, relax, and let the music sweep you away.

Step Three: Installation

You've probably heard of Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach's music has a reputation for elegance, purity, and logic. It gives an impression of supreme refinement coupled with a certain distance

from mundane concerns, which is why, in popular culture, titans of industry and technical geniuses are often shown listening to Bach.

You are going to hear a recording of the first prelude from Bach’s “The Well-Tempered Clavier.” This prelude is renowned for the prism-like efficiency with which it expresses the central formal objective of Classical music: to begin in a rooted place, to move away from this place, and then to return. Whether or not this piece is familiar to you, you will easily find yourself falling into its grooves. This will allow us to track and alter your brainwaves as your mind is serenely floated along a logical harmonic path. We will take this path only halfway, however: at the moment when the prelude reaches maximum distance from its origin, the ClearVoice process will be complete.

In order for the procedure to work effectively in the deepest regions of your mind, the surface of your attention must remain with the music. Repeat after me:



Please continue to sing as the product is uploaded. And there’s no need to be self-conscious: remember, I can’t actually hear you.

Let’s begin.

(...)

The process is complete. Welcome to ClearVoice.

Testimonial (Transcript): Clients 129 and 130

Didn't hurt a bit! I mean, that was definitely weird – I've never been able to carry a tune before so I don't really know how that all worked. But at least I didn't have to get brain surgery! I'm not really a classical music person, but I did recognize that song. I think I heard it in a commercial once...maybe for Time Warner. Or Allstate Insurance? Or...TD Ameritrade? ...hello? What just happened? Oh my god...can you hear me? What?? Can you hear me?? Yeah, yeah I can hear you! In my head! Holy shit, this is so weird! Wait, hang on let me try – can – can you hear me? I think so?? Say something else! Um, uh testing one two three... Houston, we have a problem...hello hello hello...Yes, I can hear you! I can hear you!!

A Message from ClearVoice: Congratulations!

Congratulations on a successful installation! You're now ready to explore your new mental pathways, and to begin your journey towards unparalleled expressive efficiency. Communication will never be the same again!

Step Four: Acclimation

While you should be able to quickly master basic intelligibility, other, more nuanced aspects of the product may feel strange at first. For example, the musical notes attached to your internal utterances. These are designed to provide nonverbal communication cues, much like body language or facial expressions in ordinary communication.

I recommend a few test sessions with a trusted friend or colleague. Before you learn how to control your thoughts, you run the risk of unintentionally exposing your deepest desires with this system, so it's best to try it out in a low-stakes environment.

Testimonial (Transcript): Clients 129 and 130

So...what did you think of my contributions to our last report? Um...I thought they were good! Oh, really? Well, I thought your recommendation for how to realign the power converters was...interesting. I think that's the first time I've ever known what someone means when they have said something was "interesting." Ok, my turn. What do you think about...me? What do I think about you? Sorry, I don't know why I said that...no, it's ok. This is the first conversation we've ever had and we're having it inside our heads! I think it's ok to go beyond chitchat. It's just...you're all I can think about right now...sorry, that's weird. No, it's...do you remember, a few months ago...we were circling around the plasma banks and you lost your footing? Yeah, I remember...and I know we're not supposed to be in physical contact on the floor, but I just instinctively grabbed you...I remember...Afterwards, in the booth – even though I was alone it was like I could still feel you, in my grasp...I felt your handprint on my arm for days...I guess that's what this reminds me of...Me too. Me too.

.....

A Message from ClearVoice: Side Effects

Now that our product has been permanently installed, we'd like to inform you about a few minor side effects. You may experience light vertigo. You may experience intense euphoria. You may lose track of where you end and others begin, and float away on a tide of oceanic feeling.

.....

Testimonial (Transcript): Clients 129 and 130

Should we try to write a joint report or something? What is a joint report? I don't even remember...I can't even tell [unintelligible] is that crazy? I can feel your handprint over [unintelligible] I feel like I suddenly have a thousand [unintelligible]...too dark to see before but now...like I'm a thousand times more [unintelligible]...with brilliant light...[unintelligible]

some other way...yeah, yeah...some other [unintelligible]...exactly, I know exactly what you mean, everything you mean [unintelligible]

A Message from ClearVoice: Next Steps

Thank you once again for your purchase. You are now a part of us, as we are part of you, forever and ever inextricably linked. Feel free to distribute these materials, and please refer us to colleagues, friends, lovers, enemies, and strangers. Soon, all of humanity will resonate as one, in an infinitely blooming inter-semiotic harmony.

ClearVoice: melt into the babble.

Step Five: ???

Don't you see? The dissolving of the boundary between the self and the non-self is not a tool for improving daily life. It is a better life. Only when we eliminate individual point-of-view will the suffering caused by our myopia, our apathy, our intolerance finally cease. If you find yourself desperately clinging to the limitations and prejudice that once comprised your being, repeat to yourself: you are understood. You are fathomed. You *are*.

Let's try one more exercise. When you hear the tone, think something that exists deep inside you that you keep viciously hidden, some feeling or memory or tic that you know no one would ever understand, that would disgust and disappoint anyone who heard it and leave you forever shunned, think it now:

Did you think it?

Maybe you thought something. Maybe you even said something aloud. Maybe your mind went totally blank and you couldn't come up with anything. Or maybe you tried to make your mind blank on purpose.

It's ok.

I heard you.

.....

Testimonial (Transcript): Clients 129 and 130

[Unintelligible]

ClearVoice
Audio Track Credits

Voice actors:

Lukas Papenfusscline (ClearVoice rep)
Kate Soper (Dr. Simon)
Gelsey Bell (client 129)
Paul Pinto (client 130)

Music:

Wolf for two pianists and two percussionists
By Kate Soper
Performed by ensemble Yarn/Wire.

Prelude no.1 in C Major from "The Well-Tempered Clavier" (BWV 846),
By Johann Sebastian Bach
Arranged by Kate Soper (voice/piano), performed by Soper, Gelsey Bell, and Paul Pinto

Electronic sounds/mixing by Kate Soper.