

EZRA WILLIAMS

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Foreword

In March 2020, the thing we call world took a lurch. It wasn't a political thing (say, the assassination of the leader of the free world), and it wasn't a religious thing (say, a terror attack of the scale of 9/11) and *of course* it wasn't an artistic thing (don't be so vulgar). It was nevertheless an astonishing thing.

I have written about it in print before, so shan't waste time talking about the myriad ways Covid-19 - and subsequent mutations of the virus - affected us all. But one inarguable positive was that it gave time and space for certain personal consolidations. It provided me time to write my fifth book, although technically my second, as the first three were youthfully solemn bullshit - and nobody read them anyway. And it gave me time to gather some old journalism together with a view to a collection: indeed, the sleek volume you hold in your hands.

But there were unexpected problems. I quickly realised that much of what I had contributed to magazines, journals, periodicals and newspapers over the years didn't merit being published in a book, or even published for a second time. Besides, journalism was itself a dying prospect since the advent of Social Media.

What was truth? Did truth even exist anymore? Or was *belief* - 'this is what I feel, so it's true to me' (and *ergo* must be respected by you) - the way of the future? I had long thought, indeed since the late 90s while still in education, that journalism was dying. I was exactly primed to see it: I remember the introduction of email, and I watched as it was sent: the very first email, on TV. Yes, it was filmed for TV. And I know it probably wasn't the very first, and I know TV isn't real, but that's the point. Even then, as a child, I thought: this means everyone is connected now. It means the death of history: it means we can *all* just make it up. It heralded the birth of Manifestation.

In the young 2000s, among my literary friends, *fake news*, or *false reporting* as it was then known - although the two are, in fact, different - was regularly bandied about in public, in our private residences, over late night phone calls, and even, horrifically, in *pubs*.