

Rehearsed Lives and Planned History

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Theme: [History](#), [Intelligence](#)

Global Research, June 07, 2023

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"The technical achievement of advanced industrial society, and the effective manipulation of mental and material productivity have brought about a shift in the locus of mystification. . . . the rational rather than the irrational becomes the most effective vehicle of mystification."

- Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*

*"General, man is very useful.
He can fly and he can kill.
But he has one defect:
He can think."*

- Bertolt Brecht, "From a German War Primer"

Langdon Winner opens his prescient book, [The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology](#) (1986), with an anecdote about John Glenn and his experience orbiting the earth in 1962 aboard Friendship 7. After long, rigorous training in simulators, Glenn found that when he looked at earth from orbit - only the third man after Soviet pilots Yuri Gagarin and Gherman Titov to do so - he felt as if he had seen it all before. Rather than a sense of awe, he felt that his training exercises had deprived him of true experience. Winner writes, "Synthetic conditions generated in the training center had begun to seem more 'real' than the actual experience."

Glenn's example might seem unusual for the early 1960s, but it is now commonplace, the rule rather than the exception. I think many people today sense, but can't admit, that technology has usurped direct human experience while presumably enhancing it with so-called awe-inspiring, tech-enhanced products. Just as people walk around embalming time with their camera phones, there is something funereal about activities that have been rehearsed, reviewed, and planned on digital screens before they are undertaken. It's as if the hearse doesn't come rolling in soon enough.

I just checked the local weather forecast and “they” say there is a 37.235 % chance of showers on Saturday, six days away. Should I start worrying today since I have planned a picnic for that day? Would I be wrong to wonder when on that future day, if it ever arrives and I am around to greet it, that the 37.235 % chance of showers applies? Day or night, morning or afternoon? The picnic is scheduled for 1-3 PM, so should I play it by the odds and assume those 8.33 % of the 24 hours have a decent chance of avoiding the 37.235 %? Should I live by numbers and computer simulations?

In *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis, a man not opposed to science, tells us:

There is something that unites magic and applied science while separating both from the ‘wisdom’ of earlier ages. For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique. . .

Why was Glenn circling the earth anyway?

If the novelty of experience and the real objective value of the outside world have been crippled by the repetitive and predictive nature of technology, it is worth reminding ourselves of the simple truth that technology does not just happen; it is rooted in a philosophical premise of control, the inability to let the earth breathe and to stop trying to control life. This is a human choice.

It is possible to show reverence for nature and our part in it and to use technology for humane goals, not because we are adept at techniques, but because we understand that human beings are emphatically not machines but spiritual and moral beings. This has seldom been the case in modern times. To do so demands asking what are our first principles and what are the ends we are seeking. This requires subordinating science and technology to higher values. All technical decisions are political and all political decisions are moral.

Most new technologies of the past two hundred years have been touted as “revolutionary,” machines that will radically transform life for the better – i.e. leading to less labor, more equality, and the enrichment of human experience. Nowhere has this been truer than with the promotion of the computer and the digital “revolution” with its information superhighway – the Internet – that has been sold as leading to more benefits than the mind can imagine. The result, however, has been the loss of our minds as the nonsense that “information is power” has become a mantra of those controlling the digital information flow, as they promote information as an elixir for democracy. Such a strange sort of democracy it is where more and more power has accrued to the power elites and diversions of data and digital dementia to regular people who have a hard time remembering and forgetting, seemingly an odd couple if ever there were one.

Currently you hear a lot of complaining about artificial intelligence (AI), as if its development is some great surprise. Much of this caviling has been coming from the very people who created AI and continue to develop it. Now these experts are warning that it could get out of control, so we must be careful and take action since we risk “extinction” from AI. Only an idiot wouldn’t laugh at such rhetoric. Who are the “we” who need to take action? The fear campaign never stops, while the controls tighten.

Thirty-seven years ago Winner wrote:

Some observers forecast that 'the computer revolution' will eventually be guided by new wonders in artificial intelligence. Its present course is influenced by something more familiar: the absent mind.

And malevolent hubris.

For AI has been the stuff of popular screen and book entertainment for a long time, dress rehearsed in the popular consciousness far in advance of opening night. Now that the hearse has appeared and the identity of its occupants has become cause for wonderment, much chatter has erupted on the Internet. Could we be dead? Where are our controls?

The process of creating dread has been rather smooth, so surprise is an odd reaction. We have been in the simulators far longer than John Glenn was in his, and we too have seen it all before. First they created millions of artificial people drip-by-drip by drugging them with the "magic" of technological devices that were "irresistible," then, when most of "reality" had become unreal and people had downloaded their natural lives into the devices, they roll out the latest fraud about how the machines are taking over from humans, as if people don't have hands and eyes and walk upon the earth; that they can't see the birds in the trees or feel the breeze upon their heads. That they are not free to determine their own lives.

Be afraid, for "you have no freedom" has been the message for decades. This is the repetitious, implicit message of fear used to paralyze people. The AI experts who create the instruments of "control," even as they continue to develop them, then warn of their dangers. [Here](#) is their recent one sentence warning:

Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other society-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war.

Is that so? Our Dr. Frankensteins are so kind to create these monsters only to warn us about them.

Have you heard it all before?

Have you seen it all before?

Is the same-old, same-old getting you down?

Does the news seem like déjà vu all over again?

Does your life seem rehearsed and official history produced in advance?

Has the Weirdness arrived?

I think it's fair to say that wherever people travel these days, it's as if they were already there before they even left. Or at least the pictures they have seen have taken the newness out of the places they are going to in today's simulated life. Nearly a century ago in *The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway had his protagonist Jake Barnes say to Robert Cohen, when Cohen asks Barnes to go to South America with him and Barnes won't:

'Cheer up,' I said. 'All countries look just like the moving pictures.'

Moving pictures – how quaint that sounds today when the moving pictures now move in the dinguses in people’s pockets wherever people move, on the go to nowhere new. John Glenn would probably understand.

In his concluding chapter, Winner write::

More and more, the whole language used to talk about technology and social policy – the language of ‘risks,’ ‘impacts,’ and ‘trade-offs’ – smacks of betrayal. The excruciating subtleties of measurement and modeling mask embarrassing shortcomings in human judgment. We have become careful with numbers, callous with everything else. Our methodological rigor is becoming spiritual rigor mortis. [my emphasis]

This leads me back to the Internet and all the verbal and pictorial information published there. This is where most people now get their “news” and analyses about the “outside” world, where they get much of their official history before it happens. Even when people have learned how to choose sites judiciously, it is still information overload that destroys their ability to think, to remember what is important and forget the inessential.

Paul Virilio, the French scholar of technology and speed (dromology), calls it the “information bomb” (added to the nuclear and genetic bombs), the glut of repetitive information that deranges regular people but is a boon to the elites who think they are in full control of people’s minds and the technology they promote. Virilio [writes](#):

A black hole of Progress into which has now fallen this whole philanoia, this love of madness on the part of the sciences and technologies, which is now seeking to organize the self-extinction of a species that is too slow. . . . Not liberation, but global takeover of humanity by totalitarian multimedia powers, applying intensely to populations that age-old strategy which consists in sowing division everywhere – between peoples, regions, towns, countries, races, religions, sexes, generations, and even within families.

Like John Glenn’s loss of awe while in orbit because of his simulator experience, and like the rehearsal for travel and so much else people do through screens – “pre-planning,” as the redundant word usage reveals the truth – the Internet has become a place to lose your mind as fast as you can and to make sure your life is devoid of surprises.

And because Internet content is posted so rapidly and in such large quantities, the providers and their readers can’t move on from the past because they are repeating it in ways that let them hold onto it without understanding it. There is no “space” for new thoughts. It is analogous to those individuals who have suffered some childhood trauma but because it was so overwhelming, keep unconsciously repeating it in disguised form, rather than facing its truth and creating a new future.

Some of the Internet repetition is unconscious and innocent blather, and much of it is the basic method of propaganda. Repeat and repeat the lies so that those hearing them can’t imagine there could be another truth. And then those hearing them can’t forget what they have heard so often because, as Thoreau once said, “It is so hard to forget what it is worse than useless to remember.” And of course they can’t remember what they never heard since it has been omitted. Propaganda is two-faced.

There is a stuckness to so much on the Internet because the space is unlimited and sites keep posting at rapid-fire speed to keep up with each other. The Internet is like a clogged

highway on a Friday evening with hoards fleeing to the same “isolated” getaway. By the time they get there, they wonder why they ever left, or if they did.

If you stop reading or viewing the Internet for a week or more, and then return, you won't miss much.

Take, for example, Russia-gate and the recently released Durham Report. Patrick Lawrence has written an intriguing article about it: [John Durham and the Burying of American History](#).

Special Counsel Durham's four year investigation, “Report on Matters Related to Intelligence Activities and Investigations Arising Out of the 2016 Presidential Campaigns,” is, as Lawrence says, more a confirmation than a revelation. It verifies in a tricky way what some have known for seven years and others continue to deny because the implications are so explosive: that in 2016, Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party, and the FBI conspired to create the Russia-gate hoax to smear Donald Trump as a Russian proxy to help Clinton get elected president. The CIA and FBI knew from the start that the claims of a Trump-Russia conspiracy were completely fraudulent.

Once Trump was surprisingly elected, however, the Russia-gate lies were repeated endlessly for years by the conspirators, the mainstream press, and some alternative media. Such propaganda had the effect of fueling hatred for Russia and President Putin, NATO's continuing expansion to Russia's borders, Ukraine's neo-Nazi ongoing attacks on the Donbass, the persecution of Julian Assange as Clinton regularly accused him and Trump of being in cahoots with the Russian government, and eventually, after enough U.S. provocations, led to the present U.S./NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the growing danger of nuclear war.

The Durham Report lays out some of the conspiracy that led to them, but not these consequences. It doesn't call for criminal prosecutions and is very lacking in many ways; it excludes the [central role](#) of CIA Director John Brennan and the false and [discredited Clinton claim](#) that Russia interfered in the 2016 election by hacking Democratic party servers to help elect Trump by releasing the material through Wikileaks, etc. No one hacked those emails, as [Ray McGovern](#) and Veterans Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) have shown time and again.

It is a limited-hangout, a report so late and lacking that most people will have forgotten what engendered it, and, if that isn't enough, the mainstream media is burying it anyway.

I mention Lawrence's article, not because I agree with all his points - i.e. his historical examples exclude the Covid hoax and he claims that “Watergate was at bottom one man's scandal,” which it surely was not - nor to analyze the report, but to pick up on points he makes about the burying of history and our faculties of remembering and forgetting. He writes:

To value history, [Nietzsche told us](#) in very different circumstances, is ‘to understand the meaning of the phrase ‘it was.’ But the health of an individual, a people, or of a culture he also said, depended on forgetting, too: It is only when we can forget that we escape the bonds of the past and dare to begin again, to imagine and create, ‘to perceive as we have never perceived before.’ Having the certainty of a written history is what makes possible this desirable kind of forgetting.

I think understanding these ideas is necessary for understanding what has become of us in the era of digital simulacra, how we have lost our way while learning to imitate rather than live. Our reactions have become copies of copies. History has become a series of pseudo-debates with fewer and fewer matters factually settled so one can forget and move on. While the Internet provides us with massive amounts of information, some of it very important, its very nature or the method of its delivery of its content controverts its claim to seriousness. It is hard to remember or forget when one subjects oneself to a steady stream of electronic images that speed through one's mind like flashing lights.

Forgetting is usually considered a bad attribute that happens to you, not something good that one can do. It has come to be associated with ailments such as dementia and Alzheimer's. Rarely is it seen as a necessary art - Nietzsche's "music of forgetting" - that one might practice in order to make "room" for the onrushing future. For we know that the significance of the past depends on its importance for the future and only once one takes a stance toward the past can one create a new future. This is true for individuals and society. Learning to remember the past so as to forget it for the future is central.

Lawrence uses the JFK assassination, which occurred 60 years ago, as an example. The Internet is full of articles that still debate the assassination, as if the facts were not clear long ago. These pseudo-debates encourage readers to forget the facts - that the CIA killed Kennedy - and that the evidence is readily available if one reads a few scholarly books with impeccable sources, such as James W. Douglass's *JFK and the Unspeakable; Why He Died and Why It Matters*. (Books obviously differ significantly from the Internet.) How long such nonsense will continue is a guessing game, but because the truth is so unsettling, as is Russia-gate, I suspect it will continue for a long time. One is encouraged to remember incidentals, while the core is elided to keep the debate going.

It is true, as Lawrence says, that certain lies are too big to fail, for if they did and entered the official histories as truths, they would be preserved, not to be forgotten. Then society could deal with their implications. But as long as matters such as the facts in the Durham Report (and the report's omissions), the JFK assassination, etc., are buried or endlessly debated, as they are being now, their continuing ramifications in Ukraine, U.S. politics, etc. will be more deadly history planned in advance and nothing will seem new or hopeful. Like John Glenn, we will have seen it all before in our simulated lives.

Only to repeat it as we fly in circles in a country of endless lies.

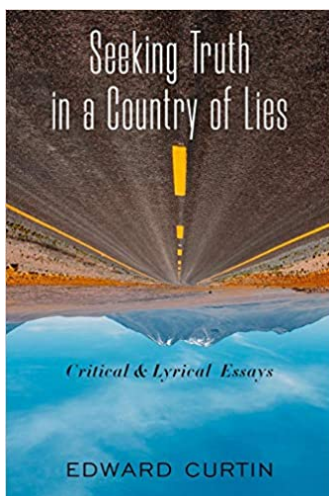
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This article was originally published on the author's blog site, [Behind the Curtain](#).

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Featured image: Astronaut John Glenn enters the Mercury spacecraft, Friendship 7, prior to the launch of Mercury-Atlas 6 (MA-6) on Feb. 20, 1962. The MA-6 mission was the first crewed orbital flight and Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth during the three-orbit, five-hour MA-6



He is the author of *Seeking the Truth in a Country of Lies*

To order his book, [click here or the cover page](#).

“*Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies* is a dazzling journey into the heart of many issues — political, philosophical, and personal — that should concern us all. Ed Curtin has the touch of the poet and the eye of an eagle.” Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

“Edward Curtin puts our propaganda-stuffed heads in a guillotine, then in a flash takes us on a redemptive walk in the woods — from inferno to paradiso. Walk with Ed and his friends — Daniel Berrigan, Albert Camus, George Orwell, and many others — through the darkest, most-firefly-filled woods on this earth.” James W. Douglass, author, *JFK and the Unspeakable*

“A powerful exposé of the CIA and our secret state... Curtin is a passionate long-time reform advocate; his stories will rouse your heart.” Oliver Stone, filmmaker, writer, and director

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