

Archive Rushes: On Truth and Lie in Adam Curtis's *HyperNormalisation*

Smoke and Mirrors

Torchlight, deep in the dark woods at night, tracing the snaking boughs, tangled branches, and lacing ivies of an ancient tree. This image is the opening shot of *HyperNormalisation* (Curtis 2016)—a complex of metaphor, metonym, and anthropomorphism. The torch is the camera and the camera the eye; an illusory recursion illuminating that which is stumbled-upon. A contingent encounter which fascinates but at the same moment ensnares and obscures; an image which is both signal and symbol of what is to come. “We live,” proclaims director and narrator Adam Curtis, “in strange times.” A boat in the open sea, capsizing, a few refugees failing to cling to the upturned hull, hundreds of people in the water; Trump, with entourage, waves serenely to the camera; Putin, stationed in front of a microphone, shrugs. *HyperNormalisation* comes on in a cascade, a collage of found fragments from the cutting room floor. These disparate visual images avalanche with a soundtrack of ambient synths and syncopated beats, left-field pop, country and western, drones and feedback. All accompanied by the ever-present and unrelenting voice of Curtis: “Over the last forty years, politicians, financiers, and technological utopians rather than face up to the real complexities of the world, retreated.” A white man in a black T-shirt proclaiming “Fuck Islam!,” “Make America Great Again” on a red baseball cap; a plastic air-dancer, buffeted by the wind, arises. “Instead,” continues Curtis, “they constructed a simpler version of the world in order to hang on to power ... And as this fake world grew, *all of us went along with it.*” *HyperNormalisation* takes us from the United States to the Middle East to the Soviet Union, and from the present to the 1960s and back again. Alongside Putin and Trump, we encounter other such phenomena as Hafez al-Assad and Henry Kissinger; financial crashes; suicide bombings; hippies, freaks, and

various countercultures; the emergence of the internet, hackers, and mega-techs; the cold war; Osama bin Laden and 9/11; Jane Fonda workout videos; and UFOs (sort of). “*All of us went along with it.*” Because the simplicity was reassuring.” The opening sequence of *HyperNormalisation* ends in a domestic kitchen—the camera tilts to discover a bloodied floor, the aftermath of carnage, someone has been dragged away after bleeding out, the camera tracks the arterial smear through the rooms and into the yard outside...

HyperNormalisation is a 166-minute documentary created for and released via the online BBC iPlayer platform. The images are culled (mostly) from the BBC Television Archive, a Library of Babel-like storehouse of broadcasts and unedited rushes collecting decades of programmes and reportage. The film argues that the complexity of the world has been effaced by political, economic, and technological power structures by way of the propagation of simple and sure narratives. Curtis calls this a “make-believe world,” a “fake world,” a world of “trickery,” a “dream-world.” Yet, in just this way, power maintains some semblance of control by feeding off the desires of people: certainty over ambiguity, permanence over change, sameness over difference. Such reciprocity and collusion between power and desire cohere into a vicious circle of socio-political stasis where “nothing ever changes.” Curtis’s response: rather than retreat from the complexity of the world, we must learn to accept and affirm uncertainty, transience, and heterogeneity. *HyperNormalisation* undermines simple and sure narratives by exposing opacities, ambiguities, and paradoxes, using cinematic strategies of defamiliarization to sustain complexity. The documentary is a flow of disparate images that composes a disjunctive narration and creates a dispersive narrative. Thus, while the film has its origins in documentary journalism, its storytelling is akin to free-form improvisation or cut-up; *HyperNormalisation* undermines, rather than abides,

the contemporary norms of televisual journalistic praxis (industry-standard communication techniques such as simple linear storytelling and the confrontational interview). The film prefers complexity over certainty to break open the vicious circle of socio-political stasis. Rather than closing down thought through reification, reiteration, and premastication, *HyperNormalisation* opens up thought.

According to Curtis, what is essential to these disruptive and productive procedures is that he created the film within the new media eco-system. For the director, the iPlayer platform is a space that allows an escape from the formats, rules, and clichés of television's investigative journalism. Curtis states, iPlayer "offers an extraordinary place to experiment," a space "to tell stories that allow you to explore and explain the strangeness of our modern world in a new way. Complex, interwoven stories that reflect the ... unpredictability of our time" (Curtis qtd. in IW). The medium—so goes the infamous formulation from Marshall McLuhan—is the message (7). For Curtis, then, the procedures of *HyperNormalisation* are a consequence of the platform upon which it was shared and for which it was created. New media journalist Natasha Lomas frames it thus: Curtis's iPlayer documentary work counteracts the "over-simple stories" of old media "linear broadcasting" with "online" narratives that are "both richer and more confusing, more complex and more true" (par. 18). Lomas argues that new media allows Curtis to produce new kinds of stories that are multi-layered and ambiguous, that foreground complexity and so reveal the truth. The equation here is new media equals complexity, and—in turn—such complexity equals truth.

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Yet, we must immediately ask: can we really believe this series of audacious assertions? With this formula, we encounter a troubling and infernal conflation: new media can somehow guarantee truth. Such a privileging of the internet seems ever more impossible to affirm. As Julia Carrie Wong summarises, the online worlds of YouTube, Google, Facebook, and Twitter implicitly sanction "the proliferation of fake news, conspiracy mongering, and propaganda" (par. 10). Even the creators of these services—such as Facebook's founding president Sean Parker, and once vice-president for user growth Chamath Palihapitiya—now echo analogous critiques (Wong, pars.



1-2, 5-6). Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, concurs, seeing the internet increasingly becoming a space of surveillance, disinformation, and indoctrination (pars. 2-3, 4, 5). Such valuations rebound upon *HyperNormalisation*. Stephen Dalton writes that the "arguments [of the film] are selective, subjective and powered by questionable leaps of logic" (par. 4); and Brandon Harris believes the documentary reveals "corners that have been cut and ... gaps that have been just barely sutured" (par. 11). David Jenkins goes even further, accusing Curtis of "secretly getting high on his own supply. He uses smoke and mirrors to attack the smoke and mirrors" (par. 4). Accordingly, *HyperNormalisation* conspires in the very problems it attempts to expose: sleight of hand, conspiracy, and lies.

HyperNormalisation appears captured within a whole set of embedded discourses: new and old media, simple and complex narration, claims of truth and lie. Where—then—is the problem with the Lomas equation? Without a doubt, the new media landscape appears infinitely complex. Thus, the problem with the formula seems to be with the second moment, where complexity equals truth. Surely truth depends on the exact opposite of complexity: the resolution of ambiguities, clarity rather than confusion, certainty over doubt? However, my argument in this essay will be that such complexity (ambiguity, confusion, and doubt) does indeed guarantee truth. This proposition, nevertheless, will depend upon a still radical understanding of the truth. Accordingly, to make this argument I will turn to philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's early unpublished but foundational essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873). Concomitantly, if we are to escape the infernal conflation of new media with truth, then the counterargument must be that new media in no way guarantees complexity. This side of the proposition will be explored and affirmed with Janet H. Murray's seminal *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of*

Narrative in Cyberspace (1997). And as we shall see, and despite how it may appear—Curtis too, after Murray, escapes this trap, and alongside Nietzsche, has a radical understanding of the nature of truth.

Something You Wouldn't Put on Television

For several decades, television was Curtis's medium of choice. In the early 1980s, the director cut his teeth on investigative journalism, working on programmes for BBC series such as *Just Another Day* (1983-86), *40 Minutes* (1981-94), and *Inside Story* (1974-). However, it was in the 1990s that the filmmaker really made his name. *Pandora's Box* (1992) saw Curtis write and direct an epic six-part documentary serial, with episodes exploring subjects as diverse as games theory and the arms race, the economies of the USSR and UK, the history of DDT insecticide, and post-colonialism in Ghana. In these programmes, Curtis interconnects stories to explore themes of politics and finance, psychology and culture, science and technology. Foregrounding the resources of the BBC Television Archive and incorporating specially filmed interviews, we see the emergence of the director's mosaic style. Previously unused or only partially used found footage is deployed to compose a visual tapestry for which Curtis provides voice-over. This style would be further developed and refined over the years to come. With *The Century of the Self* (2002), Curtis reads the twentieth century from the perspective of psychoanalysis and capitalism through the practices of Sigmund Freud and his nephew, Matthew Freud. *The Power of Nightmares* (2004) considers the reciprocity between Western neo-liberalism and Islamist terror. *The Trap* (2007) is an exposé of notions of human liberty. Finally, *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace* (2011) looks at the pseudo-scientific belief that everything in the world can be controlled. In each of these serials, Curtis unpicks the warp and weft of the narrative webs that politics, economics, and technology weave to capture us.

Yet, after *Machines of Loving Grace*, something would change. Late in 2007, the BBC's online iPlayer service went live in the United Kingdom. Its original purpose was to function as a catch-up service for the corporation's post-broadcast television and radio programmes (Laughlin). Rebooted in 2011, iPlayer was reoriented as a "video-on-demand service" that now also featured "the best from the [BBC] catalogue stretching back 50 to 60 years" (Bradley-Jones qtd. in Dredge, par. 5). In the wake of this, as well as a result of advancements in UK telecommunications infrastructure and parallel developments in video streaming software, Curtis came to realize iPlayer had even more

potential. "You can use it," he argued in a speech to BBC executives, "in a more adventurous way"—for the creation of original content (Curtis qtd. in Godwin, par. 4). As he tells it, Curtis was commissioned the very next day to produce the first original iPlayer release (Godwin, par. 5). Exploring thirteen years of war in Afghanistan, Curtis developed *Bitter Lake* (2015) from footage discovered by camera operator Phil Goodwin in a BBC studio in Kabul. Goodwin "sat there for weeks with his laptop, digitising it all ... tapes of everything we'd shot there over the last 40 years, the rushes, the unedited material ... he came back with 26 terabytes" (Curtis qtd. in MacInnes, par. 6). Critic Paul MacInnes comments: *Bitter Lake* has "different qualities" to Curtis' broadcast serials because it was "[f]reed from the constraints of TV schedules," it is "dreamlike," "a strange experience," proceeding "much slower" with "lingering unedited shots" (MacInnes, pars. 8, 9). Created using only the rushes from the BBC Afghanistan archive, the director (finally and completely) does away with filming his own anchoring interviews. Instead, the documentary submerges the viewer within the duration of an event: an event that is complex and multiplicitous, with silences, forgettings, paradoxes, and contradictions. Curtis puts it this way: "I wanted to create something you wouldn't put on television" (Curtis qtd. in MacInnes, par. 10). The proposition seems to be that the differences in praxis between the serials and *Bitter Lake* are a direct result of the medium for which the content was produced. As Lomas sees it, the "edited time slot[s]" demanded by television are "allergic to complexity;" whereas the medium of the web enables Curtis to achieve a "new, more pluralist format for storytelling—one that supports the transmitting of multiple ... decentralized perspectives" (Lomas, pars. 14, 18). "I struggle," writes filmmaker Charlie Lyne of Curtis's *HyperNormalisation* (his second documentary for iPlayer) "to think of a more



Adam Curtis, director of BBC's *HyperNormalisation*.

perfect union of medium and message” (par. 1), overtly nodding to McLuhan.

With *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis pushes the techniques of *Bitter Lake* even further. The scope of the narration is far more expansive and oblique: jumping from one spatiotemporal domain to another; there are flashbacks and leaps forward; stories are interrupted with other tales; the choice of images is more diverse, obscure, and bizarre; and there are abrupt shifts in tone. Drama turns into horror, horror into comedy, comedy into tragedy. There are (seemingly, at first) even irrelevant moments. Teenage girls dancing to hip-hop on social media; a man scraping human flesh from the street after a terrorist bombing; singer and artist Patty Smith in a car, musing on the power of graffiti; hippies in the woods spaced-out on LSD; Islamist martyrdom videos with hugging wannabe terrorists; old-school CGI rendering (now) crappy-looking digital worlds. Alongside such reportage and online footage, Curtis also appropriates films such as *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), *Carrie* (1976), *Stalker* (1979), *TRON* (1982), and *The Rock* (1996), as well as a whole host of late 1990s American apocalypse movies.

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Using shots from *Independence Day* (1996), *Deep Impact* (1998), *Godzilla* (1998), and *Armageddon* (1998), Curtis creates a sublime meditation on the shock and awe of terror. With a superimposed soundtrack of Suicide’s minimalist electro-punk hymn “Dream Baby Dream” (1979), this music video-like segment is composed of two sequences. The first recuts dozens of the movies’ images: faces and bodies suspended in wonder, confusion, surprise, and fear. Children on a stoop, staring up into the sky; drivers in stalled traffic, staring up into the sky; the US President and staff outside the White House, staring up into the sky. Everything is in stasis. Prefacing this moment is the chapter title “America at the end of the twentieth century” and reportage of attacks by Islamist jihadists across the Middle East. Curtis zeroes-in on some BBC news reports of terrorist atrocities in Jerusalem: the burned-out and blackened shell of a passenger bus, a marketplace strewn with corpses. Curtis’s voice-over declares that in the wake of such attacks, the United States of America “[be]came possessed by dark forebodings.” Everyone in American

society, “not only the politicians but the scientists, the journalists, and all kinds of experts” became “focus[ed] on the dangers that might be hidden in the future. This, in turn, created a pessimistic mood that began to ... infect the whole of the culture.” The first sequence of Hollywood apocalypse movies ends with a screen title: “All these films were made before 2001.” The second sequence recuts the apocalypse movies’ destruction of iconic skyscrapers and buildings: the White House is devastated with an electric blue laser beam; the Empire State building explodes, material and people raining down on the streets below; Grand Central Terminal collapses in upon itself; a giant tsunami overwhelms the twin towers of the original World Trade Center. Next, Curtis cuts to a collage of mobile phone footage of 9/11. *HyperNormalisation* is digital-baroque: a complex, intense, polyphonic experience—an ornate online documentary enfolding news reportage, YouTube footage, movies, music, and voice.

Towards Complexity

However, we must immediately ask in what way the disparate images, disjunctive narration, and dispersive narrative of *HyperNormalisation* are an effect of the iPlayer platform. Are the claims for this documentary as a new media artifact justified? Are we simply witnessing an ongoing evolution in Curtis’s praxis? Is this just the colonization of new media by old media? Janet H. Murray—author of the seminal *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (1997)—encourages us to be rightly suspicious. The MIT researcher believes that the digital medium should be productive “not by imitating existing standards for traditional media ... but by maximising the expressive power of digital representation” (Murray 114). The problem is that “[l]egacy traditions” such as television and movies “exert a powerful influence,” and thus we encounter an “additive form” (114). The additive form is merely a re-platforming of old media artifacts onto new media environments with pseudo-digital frills and a new media façade. The computer with its online presence should instead fulfil the “promise” of its “new expressive power” to provide “special possibilities for storytelling” (113). For Murray, this new power is captured in the formula: “Interactivity ↔ Immersion” (114). Interactive spaces invite the spectator to become a participant in the very production of the narration, a rich and complex encyclopaedic environment with the depth and breadth of a real world, a world which can change and transform, generated as it is from the potential of pure code and leading to an experience of unfolding and enfolding spatial immersion. Thus, such a reconceptualization of

immersion and interactivity are proper to computational narratives and can no longer be applied to the experience of artifacts originating on broadcast television and at the cinema. In this way, *HyperNormalisation* would appear to be a cuckoo's egg.

Although, there is another—far more subtle—way of approaching the question of *HyperNormalisation* and the digital medium. For instance, Lyne sees something very different going on. Curtis's filmmaking is indeed affected by new media but not by way of a change of platform (television to the web). Rather, Curtis's earlier broadcast serials were already made in a style that anticipated the online documentaries to come. *Pandora's Box*, *Century of the Self*, *Power of Nightmares*, *The Trap*, and *Machines of Loving Grace* were already of and inspired by the computational era, envisioned, produced, and developed alongside and in response to the evolution of the internet. In this way, the promise increasingly inherent in his televised serials was merely affirmed and accentuated by the transfer to iPlayer with *Bitter Lake* and *HyperNormalisation*. "Though he's spent the best part of four decades making television," concludes Lyne, "Curtis's signature blend of hypnotic archive footage, authoritative voiceover and a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for bizarre historical tangents is better suited to the web ... like a man who's two-dozen browser tabs into a major Wikipedia binge" (pars. 1, 2). And we can go even further than this. Curtis's films are composed of found footage originating with and produced by other filmmakers, documentarians, and the public, images repurposed from the BBC Archive, YouTube, and the movies. Curtis creates a collage of other voices from a multiplicity of sources. We should therefore not hesitate before, nor recoil from, Lyne's peripeteia. Furthermore, it is one Murray also suggested some twenty years earlier. Not only is the additive form "an inevitable part of the evolution of the medium" but, reciprocally, "traditions of storytelling are continuous and feed into one another" (Murray 115, 34-35). Old media does not simply colonize new media. Instead, television and film respond to and are transformed by the digital medium.

We do not know and cannot define with any certainty where an old medium ends and a new medium begins.

One medium does not necessarily replace another. They develop and feed into one another, effect and affect one another, resonate and reciprocate: anticipations and experiments create hybrids and monstrous fusions. Nothing is pure.



While new technology is generative of new forms and styles, we should not expect these new forms and styles to drop from the sky, to arrive ready-made. They will take time to become what they will. On the one hand, new digital technologies must be seen as the most recent historical medium in a whole series of territorial shifts from "the bardic lyre, to the printing press, to the secular theatre, to the movie camera, to the television screen" (Murray x). The forms of an earlier medium necessarily mutate via the subsequent medium. On the other hand, as a correlate and in a radical future-active movement, the advent of any emergent technology will have increasingly destructive *and* generative effects on the forms and styles of pre-existing mediums. Murray writes: "in the incunabular days of the narrative computer, we can see how twentieth-century novels ... have been steadily pushing against the boundaries of linear storytelling" (35). Similarly, "before the invention of the motion picture camera, the prose fiction of the nineteenth century began to experiment with filmic techniques," we "catch glimpses of the coming cinema in Emily Brontë's complex use of flashback, in Dickens' crosscuts between intersecting stories, and in Tolstoy's battlefield panoramas that dissolve into close-up vignettes of a single soldier" (35). One medium does not necessarily replace another. They develop and feed into one another, effect and affect one another, resonate and reciprocate: anticipations and experiments create hybrids and monstrous fusions. Nothing is pure. These forms subsist and intermix: music videos, e-books, television-plays, operas live broadcast to cinemas, and streaming services creating and platforming movies and programmes. Thus, it is telling that Murray does not use terms such as old media and new media, preferring specific digital and computational nomenclature: the digital medium enables the production of what she will variously call the "computational narrative," the "digital narrative," the "multiform narrative," and the "kaleidoscopic narrative" (xiv, 43, 74, 196). We do not find here (no matter how unconsciously) the smuggling-in of a binary, oppositional, and hierarchical model captured in the designations of the old and the new, adjectival descriptions favoured and

defended by theorists such as Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* (2001) and “New Media From Borges to HTML” (2003). Rather than foregrounding temporal succession, we encounter with *Hamlet on the Holodeck* atemporal and aspatial differences, interpenetrations, and indeterminacies.

HyperNormalisation is an online-film, immersive and interactive in its own way due to both its production and consumption. A film, for Lyne, which “embraces the peculiarities of online viewing, trusting that its audience—if confused—will skip back 20 minutes to refresh their memories, or supplement Curtis’s argument with research of their own ... each viewer must decide for themselves how exactly to navigate the experience” (par. 5). Yet, Curtis is no technological utopian. As the director tells Jon Ronson in conversation: while—for example—social media may be “a powerful new tool for helping to organise people ... what it really doesn’t offer is a new kind of political way of changing the world. And, in fact, the belief that it does, and the failure of that, can lead to the most conservative situation” (qtd. in Ronson, par. 29). People become “trapped in an echo chamber,” “trapped in a system of feedback reinforcement,” “a kind of mutual grooming,” and when something breaks through the walls of such cells the elements within “react furiously and try to eject that destabilising fragment and regain stability” (pars. 31, 34, 36). The simple and sure trumps complexity, ambiguity, and indetermination. It has always been this way. And it always will. No medium is inherently better at complexity than another. “I know that in five years’ time, everyone’s going to watch everything on iPlayer, so let’s get in there before the bureaucrats do” (Curtis qtd. in MacInnes, par. 10). It is not the medium that gives an artifact its complexity, nor its simplicity. The medium is not the only message. It is the power of the owners of the medium and the platform, and the desires of their users that are essential here. It is reciprocity between power and desire that either cohere into a vicious circle of socio-political stasis or open up onto complexity.

The Truth Is Out There

HyperNormalisation is named after a neologism from a book by Alexei Yurchak: *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (2005). Yurchak coins the term *hypernormalisation* to describe the collective cultural delusion at the heart of the late Soviet regime (1960s-80s) (47-50). Normalization describes a process whereby some way of thinking can be socially engineered to become popular and dominant. Thus, it is essentially a neutral term, but depending upon provenance can have broadly

progressive or reactionary objectives. In the Anglophonic world, the concept was developed in the late 1960s in the natural and social sciences through empirical and theoretical methods, having the aim of embedding reformist policies in the domain of intellectual disability (see, for instance, Nirje; Bronston; May et al.). More recent cultural examples of such normalisation would be that of state affirmations of gay marriage and transgender rights in response to activist pressure. However, in the popular consciousness, the term tends to be employed to identify the promotion of reactionary and regressive attitudes: the normalisation of nationalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on. It is this usage that Yurchak signals with *hypernormalisation* (or extreme normalisation), a process which not only “affect[ed] all levels of linguistic, textual, and narrative structure but also became an end in itself” (50). Political, economic, technological, and cultural language becomes “monosemic” and self-referential, that is, “freed from ambiguity and indeterminacy” in order to maintain the status quo (50). For Curtis, after Yurchak, simple, monosemic narratives are what constitute a false expression of the world. As the historian Mary Beard asks: “What is the role of an academic, no matter what they’re teaching, within political debate?”—the answer: “It has to be that they make issues more complicated. The role of the academic is to make everything less simple” (qtd. in Williams, par. 4). For Curtis, complex, ambiguous, indeterminate narratives allow an encounter with the truth. How can we understand such an idea?

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s early unpublished but foundational essay “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873) provides a pathway. For Nietzsche, all truth is illusory, but that does not mean that there is no truth. Nietzsche puts forward the disturbing proposition that there are truths everywhere, truths of different systems, different types, and different intensities. There is a multiplicity of truths. A cacophony of truths. A war of truths. Nonetheless—and necessarily so—there are two



fundamental conceptions of truth: one that is conceived as “fixed” (eternal, universal, and binding) and another that is conceived as “illusion” (aesthetic, historical, and perspectival) (Nietzsche 255, 256). In short, truth either denies or accepts its illusory nature. Accordingly (and paradoxically), illusory truth could be said to be *more true* than fixed truth. This is because it incorporates both the drive for truth, and, at the same moment, its own contingency. Truth—writes Nietzsche, in one of the most well-known sentences in philosophy—is a “mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms ... which, after lengthy use, seem firm, canonical and binding” (257). It is only when we forget, repress, and deny the complex, paradoxical, ever-changing appearances of the world and bind ourselves to a structure of solid, irrefutable, unitary truth that we feel orientated. Nietzsche’s response: accepting the illusory nature of truth is a “smashing ... [of] this structure,” and while disorientating, allows us to be “free and released from ... habitual slavery,” and allows the creation of new truths (263).

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Such a problematization of truth remains controversial. At first, we might see Nietzsche’s philosophy as liberating. But then how do we affirm that which we know must be true? Does not Nietzsche lead us to those who trundle out alternative facts and false logic? To the president of the USA tweeting and retweeting false truths; to conspiracy theorists with red flags; to the twin towers being destroyed by the CIA, FBI, or some other big state acronym; to Holocaust deniers and climate change sceptics; to myths and religion. How does Nietzsche’s philosophy help us here? If “truths are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions” (257), do we not encounter an amorphous, nihilistic world where nothing is true, or, conversely, a vulgar and vague postmodernism where any claim to truth becomes equally valid? And before all this, is not even such an idea of truth as illusion unfeasible given the famous recursion: you say there is no truth—but is this not itself a truth claim?

If truths *are* illusions—there is no recursion; recursion relies on the possibility of truth without illusion. Which is to say, all truth is anthropocentric, human-centred, sustained through language and images, concepts and formulas. However, here is the crucial point: Nietzsche’s

“Truth and Lie” encounters, surfaces, and upholds the very problem of nothing and everything. Do you feel the horror in this? Yet this is only the negative condition of Nietzsche’s proposition. All is not lost.

Strange events in the night sky, caught on an old 8mm home movie camera. “What the hell is that?” Grainy footage from the past. “Wow”—“Oh my god!” A circle of intense light. Zooming this way then that; flitting from here to there, the disc can barely be confined within the frame. The shape distorts, elongates, it is a flame, now a smear of brightness. Then gone. In voice-over, Curtis tells of UFO sightings in the States during the 1970s. These were, in actual fact, military aircraft experiments, but in order for them to remain secret, disinformation was propagated by the military-industrial complex. Leaked false documentation and loose-lipped lies in bars seeded and encouraged the wildest tales. Area 51. Alien corpses. Out-of-this-world tech. Such deception was known as perception management. How do we affirm that which we now know must be true? All truth may well be an illusion, but there is an asymmetry here: not all illusions are truths.

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