The Banners of the King of Hell Advance

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by **Edward Curtin**, *Behind the Curtain*
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"Vexilla regis prodeunt Inferni"

— Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: The Inferno*

Try to look ahead and see if you can see what's been coming for decades. Try to climb higher and see the beautiful things that Heaven bears, where we came forth, and once more see the stars and raise a banner of resistance to the King of Hell and all his henchmen. For they are here, and working hard as usual, and indifference will only strengthen their resolve. Don't be deceived by these digital demons. They want to make you think they don't exist. They wish to get you to suspend your disbelief and get lost in the endless looping movie they have created to conceal their real machinations.

For we are living in a world of endless propaganda and simulacra where vast numbers of people are hypnotized and can't determine the difference between the real world of nature, the body, etc. and digital imagery. Reality has disappeared into screens. Simulation has swallowed the distinction between the real world and its representations. Meaning has migrated to the margins of consciousness. This process is not yet complete but getting there.

This may at first seem hyperbolic, but it is not. I wish to explain this as simply as I can, which is not easy, but I will try. I will attempt to be rational, while knowing rationality

and the logic of facts can barely penetrate the logic of digital simulacra within which we presently exist to such a large extent. Welcome to the New World Order and artificial intelligence which, if we do not soon wake up to their encroaching calamitous consequences, will result in a world where "we will never know" because our brains will have been reduced to mashed potatoes and nothing will make sense. The British documentary filmmaker, Adam Philips, has said in his recent film, *Can't Get You Out of My Head: An Emotional History of the Modern World*, that it's already "pointless to try to understand the meaning of why things happen" and we will never know, but this is a nihilistic claim that leads to resigned hopelessness. We must get such sentiments "out of our heads."

We do not, of course, live in the middle ages like Dante. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to be beyond our ken. Our imaginations have withered together with our grasp on reality. Up/down, good/evil, war/peace — opposites have melded into symbiotic marriages. Most people are ashamed, as the poet Czeslaw Milosz has said, to ask themselves certain questions that the seething infinity of modern relativity has bequeathed us. Space and time have lost all dimensions; the experience of the collapse of hierarchical space and time is widespread. For those who still call themselves religious believers like Dante, "when they fold their hands and lift up their eyes, 'up' no longer exists," Milosz rightly says. The map and the territory are one as all metaphysics are almost lost. And with its loss go our ability to see the advancing banner of the king of hell, to grasp the nature of the battle for the soul of the world that is now underway. Or if you prefer, the struggle for political control.

One thing is certain: This war for control must be fought on both the spiritual and political levels. The centuries' long rise of technology and capitalism has resulted in the degradation of the human spirit and its lived sense of the

sacred. This must be reversed, as it has fundamentally led to the mechanistic embrace of determinism and the disbelief in freedom. Logical thought is necessary, but not mechanistic thought with the deification of reason. Scientific insight is essential, but within its limitation. The spiritual and artistic imagination that transcends materialist, machine thinking is needed now more than ever. We emphatically need to realize that the subject precedes the object and consciousness the scientific method. Only by realizing this will we be able to break free from the trap that is propaganda and digital simulacra, whose modi operandi are to dissolve the differences between truth and falsity, the imaginary and the real, facts and fiction, good and evil.   To play satanic circle games, create double-binds, whose intent and result is to imprison and confuse.

It is akin to asking what is the antonym to the word contronym, which is a word having two meanings that contradict each other, such as "cleave," which means to cut in half or to stick together. There are many such words.

"What is the opposite of a contronym?" I asked my thirteen-year-old granddaughter, a great reader and writer raised far away from the madding crowd of flickering and looping electronic images. To which, after thinking a few minutes, she correctly replied, "The antonym to a contronym is itself, because it has two opposite meanings. It contradicts itself."

Or as Tweedledee told Alice: "Contrariwise, if it were so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic."

And that's the logic used to trap a sleeping public in a collective hallucination of media and machines. A grand movie in which all "opposites" are integrated to tranquilize all anxieties and amuse all boredom so that the audience doesn't realize there is a world outside the Wonderland theater.

A Place to Start

Let me begin with a little history, some fortieth anniversaries that are occurring this year. In themselves, and even in their temporal juxtapositions, they mean little, but they give us a place to anchor our reflections. A sense of time and the progression of developments that have led to widespread digital cognitive warfare and twisted simulations. Widespread unreality rooted in materialist brain research financed by intelligence agencies. Spectacles of spectacles. As Guy Debord puts it in *The Society of the Spectacle*:

> *Where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior.*

In 1981, Ronald Reagan was sworn in as the U.S. President. He was a bad actor, of course, which meant he was a good actor (or the reverse of the reverse of the reverse…) in a society that was becoming increasingly theatrical, image based, and dominated by what Daniel Boorstin in his classic book, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, had earlier termed "pseudo-events." Reagan was the personification of a pseudo-event, a walking illusion, a "benign" Orwellian persona presented to the public to conceal an evil agenda. He was a masked man, one created by Deep-State forces to convince the public it was "morning in America again," even as the banner of an avuncular good guy concealed, right from the start with the treacherous "October Surprise" involving the Iranian hostage crisis, an evil opening act to start the charade. Reagan received overwhelming popular support and served two terms as the acting president. The audience was enthralled. In crucial ways, his election marked the beginning of our descent into hell.

Halfway through his two terms, Gary Wills, *In Reagan's America: Innocents at Home,* introduced Reagan as follows:

The geriatric 'juvenile lead' even as President, Ronald Reagan is old and young — an actor, but with only one role. Because he acts himself, we know he is authentic. A professional, he is always the amateur. He is the great American synecdoche, not only a part of our past but a large part of our multiple pasts. This is what makes many of the questions asked about him so pointless. Is he bright, shallow, complex, simple, instinctively shrewd, plain dumb? He is all these things and more. Synecdoche, just the Greek word for 'sampling,' and we all take a rich store of associations that have accumulated around the Reagan career and persona. He is just as simple, and just as mysterious, as our collective dreams and memories.

A few weeks after Reagan was sworn in, his newly named CIA Director William Casey (see Robert Parry's book, *[Trick or Treason: The 1980 October Surprise Mystery](#)*), made a revealing comment at a meeting of the new cabinet appointees. Casey said, as overheard and [recorded by Barbara Honegger who was present](#), "We'll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public believes is false."

Thirdly, in August of 1981, the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard published his seminal book, *Simulacra and Simulation*, in which he [set out his theory of simulation](#) where he claimed that a "hyperreal" simulated world was replacing the real world that once could be represented but not replaced. He argued that this simulated world was generated by models of a real world that never existed and so people were living in "hyperreality," or a totally fabricated reality. This was a radical notion, and his claim at the time that this was already total was no doubt an exaggeration. But that was then, not now. Forty years have allowed his nightmarish theory to take on reality. I will return to this subject later.

Technology and the Trap of the Machine Mass Mind

In his classic work, *Propaganda*, Jacques Ellul writes that "An analysis of propaganda therefore shows that it succeeds primarily because it corresponds exactly to a need of the masses…just two aspects of this: the need for explanation and the need for values, which both spring largely, but not entirely, from the promulgation of news." He wrote that in 1962 when news and world events were rapidly speeding up but were nowhere near as technologically frenzied as they are today. Then there were radio, many newspapers, and a handful of television stations. And yet, even in those days, as the sociologist C. Wright Mills said, the general public was confused and disoriented, liable to panic, and that information overwhelmed their capacity to assimilate it. In *The Sociological Imagination* he wrote:

> *The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of people to orient themselves in accordance with cherished values. And which values? Even when they do not panic, people often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. Is it any wonder that ordinary people feel they cannot cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted? That they cannot understand the meaning of their epoch for their own lives? That — in defense of selfhood — they become morally insensible, trying to remain altogether private individuals? Is it any wonder that they come to be possessed by a sense of the trap?*

This trap has been progressively closing ever since. To say this is false nostalgia for the good old days is intellectual claptrap. The evidence is overwhelming, and honest minds can see it clearly and a bit of self-reflection would reveal the inner wounds this development has caused. There are various reasons for this: many intentional, others not: political

machinations by the power elites, technological, cultural, religious developments, etc., all rooted in a similar way of thinking. Whereas the wealthy elites have always controlled society, over the recent decades the growth in technological propaganda has increased exponentially. But the machines have been built upon a technical way of thinking that Ellul describes as 'the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity." This way of thinking is the opposite of the organic, the human. It is all about means without ends, self-generating means whose sole goal is efficiency. Everything is now subordinated to technique, especially people. He says:

> *From another point of view, however, the machine is deeply symptomatic: it represents the ideal toward which techniques strives.The machine is solely, exclusively technique; it is pure technique, one might say. For, wherever a technical factor exists, it results, almost inevitably, in mechanization: technique transforms everything it touches into a machine.*

If only cell phones shocked the hands that touched them!

I think it is beyond dispute that this sense of entrapment and confusion with its concomitant widespread depression has increased dramatically over the decades and we have come to a dark, dark place. Lost in a dark wood would be an understatement. In the inferno would perhaps be more appropriate.

Who will be our Virgil to guide us through this hell we are creating and to show us where it is leading?

The massive use of psychotropic drugs for living problems is well known. The sense of meaninglessness is widespread. The shredding of social bonds with the journey into a vast digital dementia has resulted in panic and anxiety on a vast scale. The fear of death and disease permeates the air as religious

faith wanes. People have been turned against each other as an hallucinatory cloak of propaganda has replaced reality with the black magic of digital incantations.

I remember how, in 1975, when I was teaching at a Massachusetts university and, sensing a vast unmet need in my students, I proposed a course called "The Sociology of Life, Death, and Meaning." My colleagues balked at the idea and I had to convince them it was worthwhile. I sensed that the fear of death and a growing loss of meaning was increasing among young people (and the population at large) and it was my responsibility to try to address it. My colleagues considered the subject not scientific enough, having been seduced by the positivist movement in sociology. When the enrollment for the course reached 220 plus, my point was made. The need was great. But it was a small window of opportunity for such deep reflections, for by 1980 the Cowboy in the white hat had ridden into Washington and a rock star was enthroned in the Vatican and all was once again well with the world. Delusory orthodoxy reigned again. Until….

For the last forty-one years there has been a progressive dissolution of reality into a theatrical electronic spectacle, beginning with the push for computer generated globalization and continuing up to the latest cell phones. Science, neuroscience, and technology have been deified. Cognitive warfare has been waged against the public mind. The intelligence agencies, war departments, and their accomplices throughout the corporations, media, Hollywood, medicine, and the universities have united to effect this end. Neuroscience and medicine have been weaponized. The objective being to convince the public that they are machines, their brains are computers, and that their only hope is embrace that "reality."

After the actor Reagan rode off into the sunset, his Vice-President and former Director of the CIA (therefore a supreme actor), George H. W. Bush, took the reins and declared the decade of the 1990s the decade of brain research, to be

heavily financed by the federal government. In 1992, boy wonder William Clinton, straight out of the fetid fields of Arkansas politics, was elected to carry on this work, not just the brain research but the continuous bombing of Iraq and the slaughters around the world, but also the work of [dismantling welfare and repealing the Glass-Steagall Act](#), reuniting commercial and investment banking and opening the door for the rich to get super rich and normal people to get screwed. So Clinton fulfilled the duties of the good Republican President that he was, and the right-wing played the game of ripping him for being a leftist. It's funny except that so many believed this game in which all the players operated within the same frame (and of course still do), the play within the play whose real authors are always invisible to the fixated audience.

What is the antonym to a contronym?

When George W. Bush took over, he continued the brain research project with massive federal monies by declaring 2000-10 as the Decade of the Behavior Project.

Then under Obama, [whose role model](#) was the actor Reagan, and under Trump, whose role model was the guy he played on reality television and whose official role was playing the bad guy to Obama's good guy, the money for the mapping of the brain and artificial intelligence continued flowing from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the Office of Science and Technology Project (OSTP).

Three decades of joint military, intelligence, and neuroscience work on how to understand brains so as to control them through mind control and computer technology might suggest something untoward was afoot, wouldn't you say?

Create the Problem and Then the "Solution"

If you are still on this twisted path with me, you may feel an increased level of anxiety. Not that it is new, for you have probably felt it for a long time. We both know that free-

floating anxiety, like depression and fear, has been a stable of life in the good old USA for decades. We didn't create it, and, as C. Wright Mills has said, "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both." For our biographies, including anxiety and meaninglessness, take place within social history and social structures, and so we must ask what are the connections. And are there solutions?

There are drugs, of course, and the caring folks at the pharmaceutical companies who want to see us with Smiley Faces, perky in mind and body, are always glad to provide them for an exorbitant price, one often well hidden in the ledgers of their insurance company partners-in-crime. But still, there is so much to fear: terrorists, viruses, bad weather, bad breath, my bad, your bad, bad death, etc.

Is there a place upon which to pin this anxiety that floats ?

Professor Mattias Desmet, a clinical psychology professor at the University of Ghent in Belgium, has some interesting thoughts about it, but they don't necessarily lead to happy conclusions. I think he is correct in saying that for decades there has been a situation brewing that is the perfect soil for mass formation with a hypnotized public embracing a new totalitarianism, one that has now been made real through COVID 19 with the lockdowns and loss of liberties as we descend with Dante to the lowest depths of the Inferno.

These background developments are the breakdown of social bonds, the loss of meaning making, its accompanying free-floating anxiety, and the absence of ways to relieve that anxiety short of aggression. You can listen to him [here](#).

These conditions didn't just "happen" but were created by multiple power elite actors with long range plans. If that sounds conspiratorial, that's because it is. That's what the powerful do. They conspire to achieve their goals. The

average person, without the awareness, will, inclination, or ability to do investigative sociological research, often falls prey to their designs, and through today's electronic digital media is mesmerized into feeling that the media offer solutions to their anxieties. They provide answers, even when they are propaganda.

As Ellul says, "Propaganda is the true remedy for loneliness." It draws all lost souls to its benevolent siren song. CNN's smiling Sanjay Gupta sedates many a mind and *The New York Times* and *CBS* soothe untold numbers of Mr. and Mrs. Lonelyhearts with sweet nothings straight from the messaging centers of the World Economic Forum and Langley, Virginia. They draw on the need to obey and believe, and provide fables that give people a sense of value and belonging to the group, even though the group is unreal. These media can quite easily, but usually subtly, turn their audiences' frenetic, agitated passivity into active aggression towards dissidents, especially when those dissidents have been blamed for endangering the lives of the "good" people.

As has occurred, censorship of dissent is necessary, and this must be done for the common good, even when it is carried out in allegedly democratic societies. In the name of freedom, freedom must be denied. Thus Biden's declaration of war against domestic dissent.

[Mattias Desmet it right; we are far down the road to totalitarianism](#).

Simulation and Simulacra

When I was a boy, I did certain boy things that were popular in my generation. For a short period I constructed model ships and planes from kits. It was something to do when I was constrained to the house because of bad weather. These kits were replicas of famous battle ships or planes and came with decals you could paste on them when you were done. The decals identified these historical vehicles, which were very real or

had been. I knew I was making a miniature double of real objects, just as I knew a map of New York City streets corresponded to the real Bronx streets I roamed. The map and my models were simulacra, but not the real thing. The real things were outside somewhere. And I knew not to walk on the map for my wanderings.

When Baudrillard wrote *Simulacra and Simulation*, he was telling us that something fundamental had changed and would change far more in the future. He wrote:

> *Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of the territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory — precession of simulacra — that engenders the territory….*

Translated into plain English (French intellectuals can be difficult to understand), he is saying that in much of modern life, reality has disappeared into its signs or models. And within these signs, these self-enclosed systems, distinctions can't be made because these simulacra contain, like contronyms, both their positive and negative poles, so they cancel each other out while holding the believer imprisoned in amber. Once you are in them, you are trapped because there are no outside references, the simulated system of thought or machine is your universe, the only reality. There is no dialectical tension because the system has swallowed it. There is no critical negativity, no place to stand outside to rebel because the simulacrum encompasses the positive and negative in a circulatory process that makes everything equivalent but the "positivity" of the simulacrum itself. You are inside the whale: "The virtual space of the global is the space of the screen and the network, of immanence and the

digital, of a dimensionless space-time."

So if that plain English (Ha!) doesn't do it for you, here's Baudrillard again:

> It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its **operational double**, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have a chance to produce itself — such is the vital function of the model in a **system of death**, or rather of anticipated resurrection, that no longer gives the event of death a chance. [my emphases]

In the case of my model airplanes, there were real planes that my replicas were based on. I knew that. Baudrillard was announcing that the world was changing and children in the future would have a difficult time distinguishing between the real and its simulacra. Not just children but all of us have arrived at that point, thanks to digital technology, where to distinguish between the real and the imaginary is very hard. Thus the purpose of video games: To scramble brains. Thus the purpose of all the brain research funded by the Pentagon: To control brains via the interface of people with machines. This is a fundamental reason why the ruling elites, under the cover of Covid-19, have been pushing for an online digitized world through which they can amass even greater control over people's sense of reality. Are we watching a video of the real world or a video of a model of the real world? How to tell the difference?

The weather report says that there is a 31% chance of rain tomorrow at 2 P.M., and people take that seriously, even though only a genuine blockhead would not realize that this is not based on reality but on a computer model of reality and a reality that is unreal a second degree over since it has yet

to occur. Yet that everyday example is normal today. It's a form of hypnosis. The map precedes the territory.

But it gets even weirder as a regular perusal of the news confirms. A very strange warped sense of reality unconnected to digital technology is widespread. There recently was a news report about the sale of a Mohammed Ali drawing that sold for $425,000. [The drawing](#) could have been done by a child with a marker. It depicts a stick figure Ali in a boxing ring standing with arms raised in victory over a fallen opponent. From the fallen boxer's head a speech bubble rises with these words: "Ref, he did float like a butterfly and sting like a bee." It is factually true that Ali knocked many opponents on their asses and raised his arms in victory. So when he drew his stick drawing he was probably remembering that. Therefore his drawing, a representation of his memory of reality and imagination, is two degrees removed from the real. For no opponent uttered those words from his back on a canvas. They are Ali's signature words, how he liked to present himself on the world's stage, part of his act, for he was a quintessential performer, albeit an unusual one with courage and a social conscience. Obviously his drawing is not art but a crude little sketch. Whoever spent nearly half a million dollars for it, did so either for an investment (which raises one question concerning reality and illusion) or as a form of magical appropriation, similar to getting a famous person's signature to "capture" a bit of their immortality (the second question). Either way it's more than weird, even though not uncommon. It is its commonness that makes it emblematic of this present era of copies and simulacra, the mumbo jumbo magic that disappears the real into simulated images.

Take the recent case of the TV actor William Shatner, who played a space ship captain named Captain Kirk on a very popular television series, *Star Trek,* a show filled with kitsch wisdom loved by hordes of desperadoes. All unreal but taken close to the fanatics' hearts. He's been in the news

recently for taking a ride into earth's sub orbit on a spacecraft owned and operated by Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos. Bezos gave the ninety-year-old actor a comp ride up and away supposedly because he was a big *Star Trek* fan. In keeping with the pseudo-spiritual theme of this business venture and PR stunt, the spacecraft was called the New Shepard, presumably to distinguish it from the Old Shepard, whom we must assume is dead as Nietzsche said a few years ago. Sometimes these billionaires are so busy making money that they forget to tune in to the latest news. Bezos was announcing his new religion, a blending of P. T. Barnum and technology. Anyway, pearls of "spiritual" wisdom, like those uttered on the old TV series, greeted the public following Shatner's trip. Ten minutes up and down isn't three days and nights, but he was up to the task. A guy playing an actor playing a space ship pilot playing a TV personage on a public relations business stunt flight. "Unbelievable," as he said. Who is copying whom? [Tune in](#).

Baudrillard offers the example of The Iconoclasts from centuries past :

> *…whose millennial quarrel is still with us today. This is precisely because they predicted the omnipotence of simulacra, the faculty the simulacra have of effacing God from the conscience of man, and the destructive annihilating truth that they allow to appear — that deep down God never existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum — from this came their urge to destroy the images.*

We are now awash in epiphanies of representation, as Daniel Boorstin noted in *The Image* in the 1960s and which everyone can notice as those little rectangular boxes are constantly raised everywhere to capture what their operators might unconsciously think of as a world they no longer think is real, so they better capture it before it fully evaporates. Such acquisitive image taking bespeaks an unspoken nihilism,

secret simulations that signify the death sentence of their referents.

So let's just say simulacra are traps wherein the real is no longer real but a hyperreal that seems realer than real, while concealing its unreality.

This goes much further than the use of digital technology. It involves the entire spectrum of techniques of mind control and propaganda. It includes politics, medicine, economics, Covid-19, the lockdowns and vaccines, etc. Everything.

Let me end with one small example. A trifle, you'll agree. I began by noting the election of the actor Ronald Reagan in 1980. Then the quote from the CIA Director Casey: "We'll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public believes is false."

Then came the CIA actor George H. W. Bush, the two-faced Bill Clinton, George W. Bush the son of the CIA man, Obama, Trump, and Biden. Rather shady characters all, depending usually on your political affiliations. Suppose, however, that these seven men are an acting troupe in the same play, which is a highly sophisticated simulacrum that plays in loops, and that the object of its architects is to keep the audience engaged in the show and rooting for their favorite character. Suppose this self-generating spectacle has a name: *The Contronym*. And suppose that at the very heart of its ongoing run, one of the lead characters, who had been reared from birth to play a revolutionary role, one that demanded many masks and contradictory faces that could be used to reconcile the personae of the other six actors and perhaps reconcile the Rashomon-like story, suppose that character was Barack Obama, and suppose he was reared in a CIA family and later just "happened" to become President where he became known as "the intelligence president" because of his intimate relationship with the CIA. And suppose he gave the CIA everything it wanted.

Would you think you were living in a simulacrum?

Or would you say Jeremy Kuzmarov's report, [“A Company Family: The Untold History of Obama and the CIA”](#) was a simulation of the most scurrilous kind?

Or would you feel lost in the wood in the middle of your life with Dante? Heading down to hell?

"'I was thinking,' said Alice very politely, 'which is the best way out of this wood. It's getting so dark. Would you tell me, please?'

But the fat little men [Tweedledee and Tweedledum] only looked at each other and grinned."

Yet it is no laughing matter. If we want to get through this hell we are traversing, we had better clearly recognize those who are carrying the Banner of the King of Hell. Identify them and stop their advance. It is a real spiritual war we are engaged in, and we either fight for God or the devil.

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