

HyperNormalisation

HyperNormalisation is a 2016 BBC documentary by British filmmaker Adam Curtis. It argues that governments, financiers, and technological utopians have, since the 1970s, given up on the complex "real world" and built a simpler "fake world" run by corporations and kept stable by politicians. The film was released on 16 October 2016 on the BBC iPlayer.^[2]

Contents

Etymology

Chapters

1975

The Human Bomb

Altered States

Acid Flashback

The Colonel

The Truth Is Out There

Managed Outcomes

A Cautionary Tale

A World Without Power

Music

Clips

Critical reception

Awards and nominations

See also

Notes

References

External links

HyperNormalisation



Title screen

Directed by	<u>Adam Curtis</u>
Produced by	<u>Sandra Gorel</u>
Written by	<u>Adam Curtis</u>
Production company	<u>BBC</u>
Release date	16 October 2016 (UK)
Running time	166 minutes
Country	United Kingdom
Language	English
Budget	£30,000 ^[1]

Etymology

The word *hypernormalization* was coined by Alexei Yurchak, a professor of anthropology who was born in Leningrad and later went to teach in the United States. He introduced the word in his book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (2006), which describes paradoxes of Soviet life during the 1970s and 1980s.^{[3][4]} He says that everyone in the Soviet Union knew the system was failing, but no one could imagine an alternative to the status quo, and politicians and citizens alike were resigned to maintaining the pretense of a functioning society.^[5] Over time, this delusion became a self-fulfilling prophecy and the fakeness was accepted by everyone as real, an effect that Yurchak termed *hypernormalisation*.^[6]

Chapters

The film comprises nine chapters.

1975

The fiscal crisis in New York City and the emergent idea that financial systems could run society; shuttle diplomacy between then-US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Middle Eastern leaders in the Arab-Israeli dispute and the subsequent retreat by Hafez al-Assad of Syria; and the onset of hypernormalisation in the Soviet Union.

The Human Bomb

Following the United States' involvement in the 1982 Lebanon War, a vengeful al-Assad made an alliance with Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran. They planned to force the US out of the Middle East by encouraging civilians to carry out suicide bombings on American targets in the region, thereby avoiding reprisals. In February 1984, the US withdrew all its troops from Lebanon because, in the words of then-US Secretary of State George P. Shultz, "we became paralysed by the complexity that we faced".

Altered States

By the mid-1980s, banks and corporations were connecting through computer networks to create a hidden system of power, and technological utopians whose roots lay in the counterculture of the 1960s also saw the internet as an opportunity to make an alternative world that was free of political and legal restraints.

Acid Flashback

John Perry Barlow's vision of cyberspace as the 1990s equivalent of the Acid Tests. Barlow had been part of the LSD (also known as "acid") counterculture in the 1960s and founded the Electronic Frontier Foundation. He wrote a manifesto called A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace. Addressed to politicians, it declared "the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose upon us". Two computer hackers—Phiber Optik and Acid Phreak—knew that in reality corporations were using the internet to exert more control over the lives of people than governments had done in the past, and they demonstrated that hierarchies did exist online by obtaining Barlow's credit record from TRW Inc. and posting it on the internet.

The Colonel

This chapter describes the Reagan administration using Muammar Gaddafi as a pawn in their public relations (PR) strategy of creating a simplified, morally unambiguous foreign policy by blaming him for the 1985 Rome and Vienna airport attacks and the 1986 Berlin discotheque bombing that killed US soldiers, both of which European security services attributed to Syrian intelligence agencies. Gaddafi is described as playing along for the sake of increasing his profile in the Arab world as a revolutionary. The 1986 United States bombing of Libya, 10 days after the disco bombing, is described as an operation carried out mainly for PR reasons, because attacking Syria would have been too risky.

The Truth Is Out There

This chapter begins with a montage of unidentified flying object (UFO) sightings recorded by members of the public in the United States. It argues that the phenomenon surrounding UFOs in the 1990s was born out of a counter-intelligence operation designed to make the public believe that secret airborne high-technology weapons systems tested by the US military during and after the Cold War were alien visitations. Top secret memos forged by the United States Air Force Office of Special Investigations were allegedly leaked to ufologists who spread the manufactured conspiracy theory of a government cover-up to the wider public. The method, called perception management, aimed to distract people from the complexities of the real world. American politics are described as having become increasingly detached from reality. Curtis uses the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s as an example of an event that took the West by surprise because reality had become less and less important. A Jane Fonda workout video is shown to illustrate that socialists had given up trying to change the real world and were instead focusing on the self and encouraging others to do the same. The video is intercut with footage of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, being executed by firing squad and buried following the Romanian Revolution in 1989.

Managed Outcomes

Ulrich Beck is identified as a left-wing German political theorist. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he saw the world as too complex to change, and Beck asserted that politicians should merely keep the West stable by predicting and avoiding risks. Curtis looks at Aladdin, a computer that manages about 7% of the world's financial assets, analysing the past to anticipate what may happen in the future; and how anti-depressant drugs and social media both stabilise the emotions of individuals.

A Cautionary Tale

The start of this chapter is about the flaws of trying to predict the future by using data from the past. Curtis tells the story of how a card counter was recruited by Donald Trump to analyse the gambling habits of Akio Kashiwagi at his casino, the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City, after Trump had lost millions of dollars to Kashiwagi. In an effort to avert the impending bankruptcy of the casino, a model was devised that predicted a way of recouping the money from Kashiwagi, who lost US\$10 million. However, before he could pay, he was killed by yakuza gangsters and the casino went bankrupt, with Trump having to sell many of his assets to the banks.

Attention turns back to the Middle East and the Lockerbie Bombing in 1988. Curtis says that immediately after the bombing, journalists and investigators blamed Syria for carrying out the attack on behalf of Iran in revenge for the shooting down of Iran Air Flight 655 by the United States Navy.^[a] It was generally accepted as true until US security agencies announced that Libya was behind the attack. Some journalists and politicians believed that the West had made the volte-face to appease Syria's leader, who the US and the United Kingdom required as an ally in the coming Gulf War.

He focuses on the spread of suicide bombing tactics from Shia to Sunni Islam and the targeting of civilians in Israel by Hamas during the 1990s. The resulting political paralysis led to a stalling of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. It is described as an unintended consequence of Israel's response to the 1992 killing of an Israeli border guard.

A montage is shown of clips from pre-9/11 disaster films in which New York City landmarks are variously destroyed by alien invaders, meteorites, and a tsunami. Curtis argues that such films were characteristic of a mood of uncertainty that pervaded the United States at the end of the 20th century.

Curtis shows how Muammar Gaddafi was turned into the West's "new best friend."

A World Without Power

The effect of the Iraq war wreaks havoc on the American psyche and people retreat into cyberspace. Judea Pearl creates Bayesian networks that mimic human behaviour. Judea's son, Daniel Pearl is the first American to be beheaded on a video uploaded to YouTube.

Meanwhile, social media algorithms show information that is pleasing to their users and hence does nothing to challenge their beliefs. Despite this, Occupy Wall Street emerges in an attempt to disrupt the system by imitating the leaderless system that the internet was once imagined to become. Using a similar method, the Egyptian revolution of 2011 commenced.

Britain, France and the US turn their backs on Muammar Gaddafi once Libyans rise up against him. The US drops bombs using drones, and then footage is shown of Gaddafi being captured by rebels.

Neither Occupy Wall Street nor the Arab Spring turn out very well for the revolutionaries.

In Russia, Vladimir Putin and his cabinet of political technologists create mass confusion. Vladislav Surkov uses ideas from art to turn Russian politics into a bewildering piece of theatre. Donald Trump used the same techniques in his presidential campaign by using language from Occupy Wall Street and the extreme racist right-wing. Curtis asserts that Trump "defeated journalism" by rendering its fact-checking abilities irrelevant.

The American Left's attempt to resist Trump on the internet had no effect. In fact, they were just feeding the social media corporations who valued their many additional clicks.

Syria's revolution becomes more vicious and violent. The technique of suicide bombing that Curtis argues Hafez al-Assad introduced in order to unite the Middle East has instead torn it apart. Russia uses Surkov's concept of "non-linear warfare" to fight against the Syrian rebels. Russia claims to leave Syria, but doesn't.

Abu Musab al-Suri in Syria suggests that terrorists should not carry out large-scale attacks such as Osama Bin Laden's, but instead carry out "random" small-scale attacks throughout the West to create fear and chaos, against which it would be more difficult to retaliate.

Destabilisation of the West's psyche leads to the vote for Brexit and the popularity of Donald Trump.

The film closes with a Barbara Mandrell performance played over a montage.

Don't help me set the table
Cause now there's one less place
I won't lay mama's silver
For a man who won't say grace
If home is where the heart is
Then your home's on the street
Me, I'll read a good book
Turn out the lights and go to sleep

— "Standing Room Only" from *This Is Barbara Mandrell*

Music

Music used at any stage or repeatedly includes:

- Scuba Z – The Vanishing American Family

- [Nine Inch Nails](#) – [Something I Can Never Have](#)
- "02 Ghosts I" from [Ghosts I–IV](#) by [Nine Inch Nails](#)
- [Yanka Dyagileva](#) – [My Sorrow is Bright](#)
- [Dmitri Shostakovich](#) – [Suite for Jazz Orchestra No. 2: VI. Waltz 2, Part 6/8](#)
- [Dmitri Shostakovich](#) - [24 Preludes and Fugues \(Shostakovich\)](#) - [Prelude No. 1 in C Major](#)
- [Ennio Morricone](#) – [La Tragedia Di Un Uomo Ridicolo](#)
- [Ennio Morricone](#) – [Lontano](#)
- [Ennio Morricone](#) – [The Thing: Humanity, Part 1](#)
- [City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra](#) – [Poltergeist: Main Theme](#)
- [worriedaboutsatan](#) – [Blank Tape](#)
- [Thomas Ragsdale](#) – [Warning Mass](#)
- [Pye Corner Audio](#) – [The Black Mill Video Tape](#)
- [Gavin Miller](#) – [Fotograf \(part 2\)](#)
- [Ghosting Season](#) – [Far End of the Graveyard \(3am version\)](#)
- [Suicide](#) – [Dream Baby Dream](#)
- [Her Name Is Calla](#) - [Paying for your funeral](#)
- [Burial](#) – [In McDonalds](#)
- [Burial](#) - [Dog Shelter](#)
- [Burial](#) – [Truant](#)
- [Burial](#) - [Distant Lights](#)
- [Barbara Mandrell](#) – [Standing Room Only](#)
- [Aphex Twin](#) – [Blue Calx](#)
- [Brian Eno](#) – [On Some Faraway Beach](#)
- [Cliff Martinez](#) – [I'm in the Pink](#)
- [Cliff Martinez](#) - [Can I Sit Next to You](#)
- [Clint Mansell](#) – [Welcome to Lunar Industries](#)
- [John Perry Barlow](#) and [Dražen Bošnjak](#) – [A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace](#)
- [Sergei Prokofiev](#) – [Symphony No. 1](#)
- [Olivier Messiaen](#) – [Turangalila Symphony](#)
- [Benjamin Britten](#) - [Peter Grimes](#)
- [Béla Bartók](#) - [Bluebeard's Castle](#)

Clips

HyperNormalisation makes extensive use of footage from the [BBC Archives](#) and includes material shot specially for the documentary.^[8]

Critical reception

The Independent described it as "A rare documentary that respects the viewer's intelligence".^[9] *The New Yorker* described it as "a searching and essential document of our times...".^[10] In *The Guardian*, reviewer [Charlie Lyne](#) writes, "[this] 165-minute opus makes a feature of its sheer unwieldiness, as Curtis veers from social history to conspiracy theory via the odd rambling bar-room anecdote, like a man who's two-dozen browser tabs into a major Wikipedia binge".^[11] For *The Hollywood Reporter*, [Stephen Dalton](#) writes, "A rich gumbo of occult conspiracy theory, dystopian science-fiction thriller and [Noam Chomsky](#)-style Marxist critique, *Hypernormalisation* is highly compelling even when its arguments are not wholly convincing... This

fascinating assemblage of half-explored ideas should inspire curious viewers to conduct further research of their own, which is an entirely healthy and positive response".^[12] Phil Harrison, in a review for *The Quietus*, wrote "it could be argued that Curtis himself is just another master manipulator".^[13] In *Little White Lies*, David Jenkins wrote that the film "reveals [Curtis's] limited range as a filmmaker".^[14]

Awards and nominations

Year	Association	Category	Nominee(s)	Result
2017	Diversity in Media Awards	Movie of the Year		Nominated

See also

- *Bitter Lake*
- *Potemkin village*

Notes

a. Lebanese involvement has also been suggested.^[7]

References

1. Tim Adams (9 October 2016). "Adam Curtis continues search for the hidden forces behind a century of chaos" (<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/oct/09/adam-curtis-donald-trump-documentary-hypernormalisation>). *The Guardian*. Retrieved 16 October 2016.
2. Holly Barrett (22 September 2016). "New Adam Curtis film HyperNormalisation comes to iPlayer" (<https://rts.org.uk/article/new-adam-curtis-film-hypernormalisation-comes-iplayer>). Royal Television Society. Retrieved 15 October 2016.
3. Brandon Harris (3 November 2016). "Adam Curtis's essential counterhistories" (<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/adam-curtiss-essential-counterhistories>). *The New Yorker*. Retrieved 3 November 2016.
4. Yurchak, Alexei (23 October 2005). *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (<https://archive.org/details/everythingwasfor0000yurc>). (In-Formation). Princeton University Press. ISBN 978-0691121178.
5. Adam Curtis (16 October 2016). "With documentary film-maker Adam Curtis" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07z7zq8>). *Jarvis Cocker's Sunday Service* (Interview). Interviewed by Jarvis Cocker. London: BBC Radio 6 Music. Retrieved 17 October 2016.
6. Neringa Klumbyte; Gulnaz Sharafutdinova (2012). *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964–1985* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=628u2gG4XXcC&pg=PA213>). Lexington Books. p. 213. ISBN 978-0-7391-7584-2.
7. John Ashton; Ian Ferguson (27 June 2001). "Flight from the truth" (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/jun/27/lockerbie.features11>). *The Guardian*. Retrieved 5 October 2018.
8. Jonathan Lethem (27 October 2016). "It all connects: Adam Curtis and the secret history of everything" (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/10/30/magazine/adam-curtis-documentaries.html?_r=1). *The New York Times Magazine*. Retrieved 28 October 2016.
9. "HyperNormalisation review (Adam Curtis, BBC iPlayer): A masterfully dark dive into our experience of reality" (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/hypernormalisation-review-adam-curtis-bbc-iplayer-a-masterfully-dark-dive-into-our-dissociative-a7367166.html>). *The Independent*. 18 October 2016.

10. "Adam Curtis's Essential Counterhistories" (<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/adam-curtiss-essential-counterhistories/>). *The New Yorker*. 3 November 2016.
11. Lyne, Charlie (15 October 2016). "Hypernormalisation: Adam Curtis plots a path from Syria to Trump, via Jane Fonda" (<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/oct/15/hypernormalisation-adam-curtis-trump-putin-syria>). *The Guardian*. ISSN 0261-3077 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0261-3077>). Retrieved 16 August 2019.
12. "'Hypernormalisation': Film Review" (<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/hypernormalisation-review-944677>). *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved 16 August 2019.
13. Harrison, Phil (6 October 2016). "HyperNormalisation: Is Adam Curtis, Like Trump, Just A Master Manipulator?" (<http://thequietus.com/articles/21077-adam-curtis-hypernormalisation-review-bbc-politics-doom/>). *The Quietus*. Retrieved 17 May 2018.
14. Jenkins, David (27 October 2016). "The dirty tricks and shady tactics of Adam Curtis" (<http://lwlies.com/articles/adam-curtis-hypernormalisation-tricks-and-tactics/>). *Little White Lies*. Retrieved 17 May 2018.

External links

- *HyperNormalisation* (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04b183c>) at [BBC Programmes](#)
- *HyperNormalisation* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6156350/>) on [IMDb](#)

Reviews:

- Adam Curtis on chatbots, A.I. and Colonel Gaddafi (https://www.theregister.co.uk/2016/10/13/adam_curtis_hypernormalisation_preview/) at [The Register](#)
- Adam Curtis continues search for the hidden forces behind a century of chaos (<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/oct/09/adam-curtis-donald-trump-documentary-hypernormalisation>) at [The Guardian](#)
- Virtual unreality: Adam Curtis on why your life doesn't make sense (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/30xkY1XYtIHYcxBklGDxYPD/virtual-unreality-adam-curtis-on-why-your-life-doesnt-make-sense>) at [BBC Arts](#)
- A masterfully dark dive into our experience of reality (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/hypernormalisation-review-adam-curtis-bbc-iplayer-a-masterfully-dark-dive-into-our-dissociative-a7367166.html>HyperNormalisation:) at [The Independent](#)
- TV Review of the Week: HyperNormalisation (<http://www.thenational.scot/culture/tv-review-of-the-week-hypernormalisation.23877>) at [The National](#)

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=HyperNormalisation&oldid=992262633>"

This page was last edited on 4 December 2020, at 10:35 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.