

I have a friend who spends his time manufacturing official-looking documents that prove our government is in contact with extraterrestrials. He mails these pieces anonymously to UFO researchers, and these individuals, believing the material to be classified information leaked by a sympathetic mole, publicize it accordingly. His work has appeared in the field's leading journals, and has inspired several best sellers, as well.

I've given a great deal of thought to Christian's hobby, but still can't decide what I think of it. While I sympathize with his desire to undermine the "cult of the expert" that "monopolizes the dominant venues of debate," I can't ignore the fact that his work reinforces the most anti-intellectual elements in American society. And while his forgeries do raise interesting questions about the veracity of bureaucratic records, it seem to me that he overlooks an important point: the people who believe his writings also vote, and their votes are influenced by the paranoid vision he describes. It's a world in which CIA researchers watch impassively as alien scientists conduct horrifying experiments on unwilling human participants in a vast complex deep beneath the Capitol building; the survivors are made sex-slaves for the use of high-ranking officials, while the remains of the less fortunate are fed to the hybrid human/alien monsters that inhabit the complex's lower levels. I have a hunch that individuals receptive to this material already hold a dim view of our democratic institutions, and these writings only reinforce their disgust.

Of course, my objections aren't going to deter him from pursuing this work; I'm sure he'll keep at it until something else captures his attention, like the advent of home computers capable of generating life-like video. Christian insists that this technology will change the world by "abolishing even the possibility of a master narrative" and "accelerating the balkanization of our culture, except along epistemological rather than socio-economic lines." What he means is that once the average consumer can produce computer-generated video indistinguishable from reality, it will become impossible to tell fact from fiction. Every newsworthy incident will spawn a flurry of videos, each presenting a completely different version of events, and the viewer will be free to choose the narrative that best reinforces his personal prejudices. Eventually it may even be the case that the only incidents about which anything is known for certain are those which predate this technology, since these will be the only events for which multiple pieces of video testimony do not exist.

This whole "multiplicity of diverging social realities" angle really creeps me out: in a world in which there are multiple competing narratives for each happening, it seems obvious that the best-marketed one will become the most widely accepted, meaning corporate and government entities will be able to write history as it happens. Unfortunately, given the inevitability of technological progress, there's likely nothing we can do to avoid such an outcome—but I still don't have to like it. Christian, on the other hand, can't wait: he's a techno-anarcho-libertarian, meaning dystopian visions of the

future turn him on, especially if they include the possibility of social collapse.

As far as a timeframe is concerned, we're both convinced that this technology will arrive in our lifetimes. This view isn't shared by our friends, though; they believe that Christian has read too much cyberpunk fiction, and that I'm too easily swayed by jargon-laden rhetoric. I say, let them scoff: the prophet is always disdained by his contemporaries. In fact, the more I think about it, the more convinced I am that this video revolution is simply the final step on a journey that began in the nineteenth century. From the "Death of God" to the discovery of quantum mechanics, at each stage we've abandoned another system claiming to offer the 'truth', and it only makes sense that we should eventually surrender the idea of 'truth' itself. And once we've eliminated the possibility of knowing anything at all, where will we find ourselves? We'll be standing at the end of history, where nothing is true and everything is permitted.



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