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# JASON JONES-HALL: DIGITAL RESURRECTION

By Jason Jones Hall

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‘ Chances are, we may not be able to stop someone from digitally recreating us in some distant dystopian future, even if we wanted to ’

— *Jason Jones Hall, founder of xHumed*

xHumed is digital exhumation. We recreate a person from their personal data and archived media content using a combination of art, technology and theatre.

When we xHumed famous **Dead Good Thinkers** there was a direct correlation between the scale of the technical and creative challenge and the quality and availability of the archive and data. Mary Shelley, for example, was difficult to digitally xHume since we were working from 19th-century media – documents, letters, a couple of portrait paintings. However, 20th-century figures such as HG Wells gave us more to work with – audio, photos and, for later figures, video. If we were to xHume someone today we would have a goldmine of high-definition media archive and daily data sources to draw from.

Today, we all create, digitise and archive pretty much our every waking moment, our every movement is tracked and stored as data, somewhere, without us even thinking about it. So is it possible to recreate or xHume someone with access to that kind of source material? We could have a field day with it.

We've already seen digital resurrections of the likes of Tupac Shakur and Michael Jackson, but our approach is that if we could bring back anyone from history why on earth should it be a dead rapper or the 'King of Pop'? Why not Einstein? Gandhi? JFK?

Political leaders are particularly interesting. A lot of people are really disenchanted with the candidates on offer in the forthcoming general election. Can you imagine if a restored, resurrected and rebooted copy of Winston Churchill was standing? It would be a landslide. The question would be whether someone who was resurrected from years gone by would still function as effectively when put in a completely different historical and political context.

In our show for Nesta's first **FutureFest**, we imagined the world in 2050 governed by xHumed leaders, with society divided between the 'known quantities' – those xHumed from digital archive and data – and natural-born humans – the 'unknown quantities'. We asked whether, in a rapidly overpopulating and under-resourced world, we should trust our future to those from whom we know exactly what to expect or should roll the dice and select from those who have yet to prove their worth to society.

This is the key question. If there was an algorithm for digital resurrection, who would it resurrect and why? It very quickly strays into digital eugenics.

In the end, we may not even get any choice in the matter: who owns all that data and media you upload, share and sign away in oblique T&Cs that you never bother to read? Chances are, we may not be able to stop someone from digitally recreating us in some distant dystopian future, even if we wanted to.

*Jason Jones-Hall is co-founder of **xHumed**. For more on digital legacies and the future of death, read our macrotrend **The Immortal Brand**.*