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# Billionaire Hollywood bad boy Alki David is resurrecting the dead with holograms | City A.M.

There's a rather bonkers Russian chap named Dmitry Itskov who claims that by the year 2045 his team of scientists will have achieved human immortality by uploading brains onto a computer.

That's a little way off, though. In the meantime, if Frankenstein's monster meeting Blade Runner doesn't tickle your fancy, one can achieve a rather less sentient immortality through hologram technology.

Tupac Shakur appeared alongside Snoop Dogg at Coachella a few years ago, followed by a not-long-dead Michael Jackson thrilling fans from beyond the grave.

Julian Assange, who is not dead, but shares the same fate, appeared from the Ecuadorian Embassy to speak at the trial.



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One man digitally resurrecting the dead is Alki David, the Greek billionaire heir to the Leventis Coca Cola bottling fortune.

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Once number 47 on The Times Rich List, David has made a name for himself as a "Hollywood Bad Boy" and prankster. From offering \$1m to anyone who dared streak in front of Barack Obama, to broadcasting a spoof assisted suicide as a publicity stunt, he has certainly ruffled a few feathers.

Few can claim to have sued and been sued quite as many times as he, but his hologram firm is, he says, no laughing matter.

It might all seem a bit Star Trek, but this time, he's serious.

Tupac, back from the dead for Coachella (Source: NPR)

Seeing is believing

"Seeing is really believing it right?" says David, on the phone to London from Hollywood. "It is a truly mind-blowing experience to see a life-performing on the stage with a light show – it is

The firm presently owns the rights to more than invested \$12m of his estimated \$2bn fortune the technology.

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His digital graveyard contains some 27 celebrities, ready to be reanimated at any point.

But, clearly, sensitivities around raising the dead bring ethical implications – has it brought him any trouble?

“Look, the controversy is great, it generates coverage of a deceased celebrity... usually you’ll get one for the sake of bringing in an issue.”

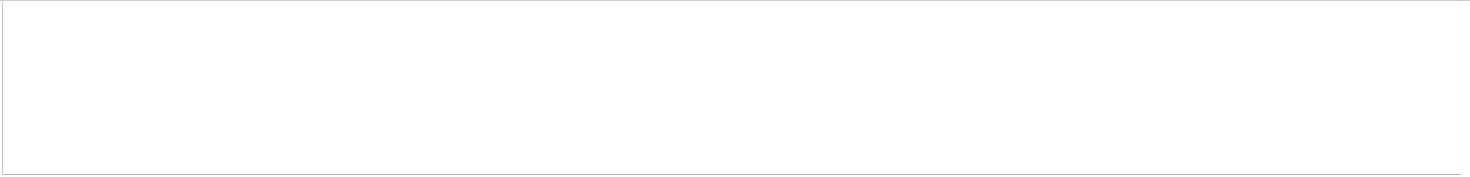
David’s view on the celebrities he is reviving... these are the sorts of people who want to... performances enable that.



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"Usually the card that people play is that it's far too spooky, or it's emotionally distressing," he says. "But the reality of it is that these are entertainers, who lived to be in the limelight, and that desire to continue to be in the limelight after death is their dream."

### Going Hollywood

David recently opened the first Hologram USA Theatre on the Hollywood Boulevard, one of seven, with 150 in total planned to roll out across the States. The conditions couldn't be better for a new entrant to the market, he says, citing a 16 per cent drop in theatre attendances from last year. There are, apparently, "enormous amounts of empty real estate around Western Europe and the United States".

To achieve his vision, David is going to raise capital for the firm through what is known as a "Reg A+" listing – or a "mini IPO". Born from the Obama era JOBS Act, it lowers regulatory hurdles for companies trying to go public and allows firms to have more private shareholders.

"This mini IPO makes a float available to the everyman," he tells me, "whereas normally an IPO is only really available to institutional investors, who buy up the stock before it's available. In selling these securities of the hologram company, we're using targeted advertising techniques. We're able to market individual shows as securities, or market to localised theatre installations on a regional basis."

Julian Assange escapes the Ecuadorian embassy (kind of) (Source: NPR)

David's plans don't stop in the cinema though. While "owning" Whitney Houston and the Jackson Five is all very well, David says the tech is being used in a range of ways from retail to corporate communications, military and education.

He adds that he's been "chatting with [his] mate about using this new technology to the West End," reportedly for a new production.

But will it ever be better than the real thing?



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“Listen. It’s better than the real thing. First of all you don’t have to feed them, and you don’t have the headache of the talent,” chuckles David, sardonically. “But really, the experience is better – not only because it’s lifelike, but now you can incorporate extraordinary effects with flames and dragons and exploding peacocks – all kinds of crazy stuff.”

### Paradigm shift

David compares his technology with Hatsune Miku, one of the biggest pop stars in Japan, who happens to be a hologram. He says by comparison, the Japanese tech is “hokey”.

His tech is the most-widely used, and while imitation may be the greatest form of flattery, having invested so much time and money into it, David is relentlessly combative over protecting what is his. “I have sued everybody who has infringed on my patents. From Fox to Cirque de Soleil – I’ve been 100 per cent successful in my lawsuits. I’m very, very litigious over protecting this patent.”

To declare holograms as representing the future of entertainment may seem brazen. It certainly has its critics, who see it is a passing fad, with ephemeral appeal. Naturally, David disagrees.

“They don’t know what they’re talking about. They haven’t lived and experienced the repeat performance of this technology over and over to venues and customers as we have.

“Who is to say there is no paradigm shift in entertainment? This is what this is. This truly is a tried and tested paradigm shift in the way entertainment is done.”



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