

Chris

**CARTOGRAPHIES OF ERASURE**  
**Perception, Justice, and Ethics in the Unapologetic Hyperreal**

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**Alex's "Foundational Five #HardTruths"**

- 1. fake news r us: we are implicated by, produce, and circulate this crisis whenever we study, teach, or try to fix it.*
- 2. virality is virility: a potent mix of internet-fueled falsity, masculine grandiosity, and resulting real-world bellicosity undergirds fake news and our efforts to understand it.*
- 3. art answers to fake questions: departures from evidence-based, indexically-linked practices into realms of truth-telling verifiable by different logics might get us out of the he-said/she-said rabbit-hole we currently find ourselves in.*
- 4. our internet truths trump media lies: we must name, share and honor our own lived experiences within social media as another form of honesty in desperate times. Let's do this first offline, together where we live, work, struggle or learn.*
- 5. heed the poet's call: poetry, a time-honored word-based form of truth-telling outside the logics of indexical mediation might be one well-honed literacy practice well-suited to this crisis.*

**Excerpts, Questions, and Prompts**

Opening prompt: *What is a "map"? What do we mean by "mapping"? What is the relationship of the process of "mapping" (physically and metaphorically, semiotically, linguistically, etc) to ontological formation?*

*In what ways did we just "map" ourselves, and how is this inextricably tied to the actual and conceptual maps that we have internalized?*

*"The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory,...that engenders the territory, and...it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map." Jean Baudrillard*

*How do maps, and other technologies, erase or "shred" the territory or other aspects of space, place, experience, identity, etc? What does it mean for the map to precede the territory, and how does this happen in your world? How would your relationship to yourself, your environment, other humans, ideas, etc. change if these maps were redrawn / rewritten / redefined and/or had never been introduced to you?*

*But CAN we map in a way that isn't, on some level, always flawed, always conjecture? how or how not? How do we understand the idea of a "hard truth," and how, if at all can we represent these without reproducing some conditions of bias or subjectivity?*

## EXPLORING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO "TRUTH"

from Timothy Morton's *Being Ecological* (also in *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People*):

### Truthiness

*Data* simply means "what is given." It's the plural form of the supine of the Latin *dare*, "to give": aspects of things that are *given* to us when we observe them. If we have a pair of scales, we can collect data about the weight of an apple. If we have a particle accelerator, we can collect data about the protons in the apple. In truth, data isn't really the same as facts, let alone interpretation of facts. In order to have a fact, you need two things; data, and an *interpretation* of that data. This sounds counterintuitive, because part of our common talk about science thinks in a very old-fashioned way about facts. Common talk imagines facts to be something like barcodes that you can read off a thing: they are self-evident. But a scientific fact isn't self-evident. That's precisely why you have to do an experiment, collect data, and interpret the data. *fact*

Notice that neither data or interpretations are the actual *things* about which we are gathering data and interpreting. A *factoid* is a (usually quite small) chunk of data that has been interpreted so as to *appear* truthful. It is "truthy," to use the helpful vocabulary of the American Comedian Stephen Colbert and his parodic word, truthiness. It has a *ring of truth*, or as some scientists now say, it is "truth-like." A factoid is truthy because it is in *accord* with what we think facts are. And because of *scientism*, the common belief that science tells us something about the world in the same way that a religion might do, we think that facts are totally simple and straight: they come out of things themselves. What appears truths to us is what cuts out the middleman, offers up straight data. But data isn't facts—yet.

I'm afraid that the world of science is actually shifty and uncertain. And any attempt to achieve total certainty is an attempt not to live in a scientific age. We are stuck in the initial stages of going through a *trauma*—one that is still happening, mind you, one whose painfulness is obvious if you care at all.

Denial of planetary symptoms such as global warming bogs us down in factoids. We waste a lot of time worrying about or arguing with these factoids, which have nothing to do with data or interpretations of data. When we get into this mode—either being deniers or arguing with deniers—we are barking up the wrong tree. Truthiness is in a way a kind of reaction, like a blister, to the real problem, namely that we live in a modern scientific age characterized by a radical gap between data and things.

*How does reading this make you feel? What are your reactions? What other questions, concerns, or even fears does this raise for you?*

*What is the relationship of the body to the establishment of "truths," and/or beliefs? What is the body's reaction to the potential of those concepts being disproved, undermined, or otherwise threatened? Can you identify any reactions in your body to the above reading, or to the ? If so, what?*

## SPECTACLE, IMAGE AND THE MEDIA

*How is image production under capitalism a deviation from earlier "truthy" models that preceded it? How is ontology production, circulation, and consumption in the 21st century unique from what came before? How are new medias complicit in this, and how has the proliferate forms of social media changed the landscape of ontological formation and perception? How does the body respond to these new forms, modes, and platforms?*

**The successive phases of the image:**

**it is the reflection of a profound reality**

**it masks and denatures a profound reality**

**it masks the *absence* of a profound reality**

**it has to relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum**

"The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that was once directly lived has become mere representation.

The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.

The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm - a world view transformed into an objective force.

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production.

In order to describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions and whatever forces may hasten its demise, a few artificial distinctions are called for. To analyze the spectacle means talking its language to some degree — to the degree that we are obliged to engage the methodology of the society to which the spectacle gives expression. What the spectacle expresses is the total practice of one particular economic and social formation; it is, so to speak, that formation's agenda. It is also the historical moment by which we happen to be governed.

The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image."

Guy DeBord, *Society of the Spectacle*

"In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible. [Actions] can only be defended by arguments which are to brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of the political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness."

George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*

## TRUTH, PERCEPTION, AND THE BODY: THE 'ORGANISM THAT PERSONS'

*How does the body learn who it is and how to understand the world in which it lives?  
Is the human animal continuing to evolve? How do we adapt and/or become conditioned to our  
environments / stimuli, and how does our body become the product of ontological mapping, not only  
intellectually but physically / biologically?*

### **PROMPTS: FREEWRITE IN RESPONSE TO THESE QUESTIONS AND THE QUOTES BELOW:**

"[One is] born into a new territory, and that territory is myself as organism. There is no place to go but here. Each *organism that persons* finds the new territory that is itself, and, having found it, adjusts it. . . . An organism-person-environment has given birth to an organism-person-environment. The organism we are speaking of persons the world."

Arakawa and Gins, from *The Architectural Body*, 2002

"We could say that history 'happens' in the very repetition of gestures, which is what gives bodies their dispositions or tendencies. We might note here that the labor of such repetition disappears through labor: if we work hard at something, then it seems "effortless." This paradox—with effort it becomes effortless—is precisely what makes history disappear in the moment of its enactment. The repetition of work is what makes the signs of work disappear. It is important that we think not only about what is repeated, but also about how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions. We are also orienting ourselves toward some objects more than others, including physical objects, . . . but also objects of thought, feeling and judgement, and objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives. . . . The object we aim for comes into our view through being held in place. . . . the action searches for identity as the mark of attainment.

Bodies hence acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others, as actions that have certain objects in view. . . . The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon, is not casual: it is not just that I find them there, like that. Bodies tend some some objects more than others, given their tendencies."

Sara Ahmed, in *Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology*, 2006

"Man has both the extraordinary opportunity—given to no other animal—to build up a body of learned responses, and the special vulnerability of going wrong. Since other animals have their responses wired into their nervous systems, they go wrong less frequently. We are learner and judge at the same time. Our learning depends on, and is limited to, our learning achievements."

Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement*

"(T)he body is psychically, socially, sexually, and discursively or representationally produced, and . . . in turn, bodies reinscribe and project themselves onto their sociocultural environment so that this environment both produces and reflects the form and interests of the body. The relation of interjections and projections involves a complex feedback relation in which neither the body nor its environment can be assumed to form an organically unified ecosystem. . . . The body and its environment, rather, produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the (place) is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn is transformed."

Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities", in *Sexuality and Space*, 1992

## FORENSIC ONTOLOGIES and SOMATIC SELFHACKING

*If places, spaces, their representations, and the technological tools we (increasingly) use to interact with and navigate within them are deeply implicated not only in the erasure of physical landscapes, histories, and identities, but also are part of an embodied relationship to perceived truth which is "truthy" at best, how do we go about restoring both our cognitive and sensed awareness, as well as a healthy skepticism about language, media, technology, and other tools that are inextricably linked to agents of colonial neoliberal practices and systems?*

Just as the 'era of the witness' had its aesthetics—testimony still occupies a central place in contemporary culture and art galleries—and its ethics of compassion, the forensic shift might bring about its own associated ethics and aesthetics. If popular entertainment is at all an indicator of cultural shifts, then it is interesting to note how today the forensic-detective has gradually replaced the physiologist-detective in TV dramas. Today's narratives are told through things.

*delete individual*

In relation to this idea of speech, the origins of the term *forensics* might be revealing. The word derives from the Latin *forensis*, which means 'forum' and refers to the practice of making an argument by using objects before a gathering such as a professional, political, or legal forum. Forensics was part of rhetoric. Rhetoric, of course, is about speech, but forensics does not refer to the speech of humans but to that of objects or things. In forensic rhetoric, objects address the forum. Things need, however, a "translator" to interpret and mediate their speech. Because the thing speaks through, or is "ventriloquized" by its translator, the object and its translator make a necessary and interdependent duo. To refute a legal / rhetorical statement, it is enough to refute one of the two: to either show that the object is inauthentic or that its interpreter is biased.

The principal of forensics assumes two interrelated sets of spatial relations and both are relations between publics and things. The first is a relation between an event and the object in which it is registered. The second is a relation between the object and the construction or the assembly of the forum to which it is addressed, or within which it resonates. The forums to which contemporary forensics are not only the actual spaces of the court or parliaments, they are also diffused and networked, created through and by the media, and operate across a multiplicity of international institutions. Forensics is thus as concerned with the materialization of the event as with the construction of a forum and the performance of the object within it. So forensics is not only the writing of history; its other part is the construct construction of its forums, and here lies its propositional potential.

Eyal Weizman: "Dying to Speak: Forensic Spatiality,"  
in *Log*, No. 20, Curating Architecture, Fall 2010

*What would a forensic poetics or creative practice look like? What is the difference between a forensic poetics and a poetics of witness? How do we approach or frame a call to "truth-telling" in poetry, vis-a-vis the five fundamental hard truths provided here, with forensics, the body's patterning, and truthiness in mind? How can we use a poetics or other creative practices to "hack" ourselves and our ontological, embodied patterning?*

## A #FAKETRUTHS RESPONSIVE, SOMATIC POETICS

"... survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 1984

"My idea for a somatic poetics is a poetry which investigates that seemingly infinite space between body and spirit by using nearly any possible THING around or of the body out and/or in town spirit with deliberate and sustained concentration. The writing of Somatics is an engagement with the thing of things and the spirit of things."

CA Conrad

*Many would report the experience of living in what is currently called the "United States," in a "time" we've numbered "2018" as being rather Kafkaesque: waking up and 'suddenly' living in a space eerily reminiscent of Mike Judge's prophetic 2006 film "Idiocracy," with headlines that could have been pulled from the Onion running in the newspapers of record.*

*I put "suddenly" in quotes because for those already privileged with certain data, the systems and patterns are no surprise, but a natural next stage for processes and behaviors that have long allowed for a litany of abuses —to natural resources, of human rights, and so on —in the interest of the capital accumulation of an elite few, whose ties preclude the national or political 'identities' or supposed 'loyalties' that the official narrative might have you believe.*

*The curious situation we are in is one in which someone deeply complicit in the production of the simulacra has positioned himself as the mouthpiece against its pervasive power. The emperor, one could say, is the one letting us know there's no clothes to be had — except he's deflecting that attention, (perhaps) masterfully using technology, social media, and the further production of the spectacle around the spectacle he is creating through his #fakenews outcry to further build its power. Smoke and mirrors, trojan horse, bait and switch.*

### FINAL PROMPT

*With the texts / concepts / procedures of the reviewed texts in mind, and now bringing in the images, language, and specific subjects / objects / things of the #fakenews media primer, produce a text that represents a forensic practice, requiring and/or speaking to (and perhaps, scripting or creating instructions for) somatic practice. Consider subverting forms of presentation and/or playing with formal "rules," logical structures, instruction sets, definitions, taxonomy, or other procedural models. You may consider creating a rule or instruction set and then following it, and may play with erasure, lifting, collapsing, or colliding language, neologisms, or any other formal process you might choose.*