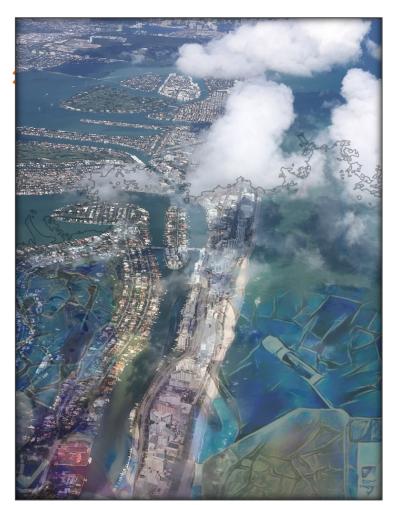# Post-Truth Simulacra:
Inviting Mutable Meaning-Making

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Abstract:

"Post-Truth Simulacra" is an artwork created to confront post-truth realities and constructions of meaning in response to the articles in this journal issue. An aerial photograph of Miami is used to depict the way humanity has fully operationalized the territory of the barrier islands. Various overlays are used to think about social theorist Jean Baudrillard's *precession of simulacra*. Using the lens of Baudrillard's phases of representation from a pedagogical perspective, an analysis of meaning-making processes for each of the articles is discussed. The editorial recognizes the importance of place and autoethnography in the context of Canadian curriculum studies.

Keywords: Baudrillard; simulacra; simulacrum; representation; arts-integrated research; place; autoethnography

Miami. Autumn. 2017.

Walking the smooth sand of the beach and strolling the outdoor night life of Lincoln Road enthralls; even the clickety clack of the glossy hotel floors along the waterfront beguiles. From the air, I note that nothing is left of the territory but a thin strip of filtered white beach sand; the rest of the land is operationalized. The constructed Miami is the perfect eclipse of the land. The operation of humanity supplants the natural barrier islands. Post-truth politics, post-reality living and the hyperreal are declaimed through the social media microphone and even the sea has become colonized parcels of exchange-value.

*T*he JCACS cover is an allegory. Superimposed on the aerial shot I took is a filtered photograph of one of my daughters giving a speech. Using a digital drawing program, I played with the idea of the coastline paradox in the clouds and created property plots in the sea. I also altered the colours of the clouds, attempting to shrink the verticality of altitude. As an arts-integrating researcher, I use making as a way to mediate my ruminations. As I consider the articles in this issue, I'm struck by the human construction of layerings upon a base. I refer here to base as original—land or event that occurs without our control. I am newly aware of the levels we develop of constructs and mappings to understand or alter the meanings and uses of the base. I realize the construction is not always a negative action—to create a narrative to understand loss is a healthy commitment (see Carl Leggo, this issue). In other cases, when the overlay of a new story or operation is so successful that the base is completely veiled or lost, we run the risk of letting the foundation crumble without knowing why our footings are unstable. If we contend that people and

place function reciprocally (Parenti, 2011), then it is no surprise that the world becomes volatile when we are disconnected from our base.

The articles in this issue, as a whole, press my sensibilities on processes of making sense, on the construction of mutable meaning, the reliability of perceived realities, and what social theorist Jean Baudrillard (1994) calls the *precession of simulacra*.

A *simulacrum* is a representation of something that becomes the perceived real. It may be a depiction of something that is not original, or the original becomes lost over time. Baudrillard's (1994) opening in *Simulacra and Simulations* has always intrigued me. He recounts an allegory by Luis Borges in which cartographers map out the Empire with so much detail, the replication is mistaken for the original. Over time, as the map and territory coalesce in decay and the inhabitants no longer know the difference between the map and the territory, they find themselves disoriented.

Precession of simulacra refers to the constructed symbol or sign eclipsing or preceding and even determining the original. Baudrillard (1994) suggests that the saturation of the symbolic fabricates a simulated reality where the original becomes inconsequential. He explains that "today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept . . . it is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal (p. 1). Baudrillard's use of the term *hyperreal* is important. Hyperrealism is a genre of art where the finished artwork looks not just like a high resolution photograph, but in which its details may appear even more distinct, even more emphatic than the subject or object itself. Hyperrealism constructs a new reality, an illusion of *more-than* the original. The manipulation of the base (the territory) appears meticulous, clever and more valuable.

I think about the articles in this issue framed within Baudrillard's (1994) four phases describing the representation of reality. While Baudrillard's cultural analysis is a critical perspective pointing to the insignificance of reality because simulacra and simulation have become predominant norms, I use his phases of representation here pedagogically, thinking that mapping structures and creating new narratives can be healthy if we remain alert to the organizing devices and tools we use to build our realities, disrupt ourselves, and stay awake (see Adrian McKerracher, this issue). Baudrillard describes the stages of representation as:

- First, the representation reflects reality;
- Second, the representation masks or alters the reality;
- Third, the representation masks the absence of the reality; and
- Fourth, the representation has no similarity to any reality (see p. 6).

Inviting Mutable Meaning-Making

As teachers, researchers and learners, how do we experience and build understandings of objects and truths? What stories do we believe or reconstruct to feel congruence? What are the stories we supplant on the land? How do we make meaning? Maxine Greene (2006) promotes the "ability to anticipate and accept incompleteness" (p. 1). Baudrillard (1994) asserts that "when the real

is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning" (p. 6). Leggo (this issue) asks, "Can the heart avoid clichés?" How do we think outside of ourselves? In my readings of the articles in this issue, I try to pull together fragmented or disciplinary knowledge and challenge the institutionalized and legitimated ways I make meaning. When I am busy, it's easy for me to stack things into the right closet. When I have time, I try to make plans, not calendared linear plans, but architectural plans or maps. These maps house "story buildings" in a constructed landscape. Then, by wandering around the buildings, I investigate my wonderings. The map becomes a new ground (See Sameshima, Miyakawa & Lockett, 2017). I see this process as a character in Borges' allegory. My map is my ground—this is a third level representation where the constructed image masks the absence of the original.

Leggo (this issue) writes, re-reads and overwrites new stories to understand loss. He is creating a narrative over a base, the loss of his brother. These overlays are second phase representations of the event, whereby the representation attempts to alter the reality, in order to make meaning. Leggo seeks to develop health and wisdom with the overlay of narrative. He quotes Frank Davey (2009) who says "grief is so often the gnawing desire to know why" (p. 110). As a learning tool, a second phase representation is an investigation.

But where post-truth politics grow from media and public narratives disconnected from policy and evidenced actions, we have a fourth phase representation where there is no similarity in the map to the base. Patricia Altass and Sean Wiebe (this issue) express the disconnect between matching skills training to potential jobs in their article on re-imaging education policy and practice in the digital era. Attempting to create a corresponding point-to-point narrative match for any dynamic or volatile base will fail. Altass and Wiebe comment:

> Brown et al. (2011, p. 584) refer to matching skills to jobs as "the opportunity bargain, where the role of the state is limited to making opportunities for people through education." In the 21st century context, this opportunity bargain more closely resembles a Faustian bargain, as today's well-educated youth struggle to achieve the middle class ideal within an increasingly precarious globalized labour market. To move beyond an industrial revolution-based education paradigm of narrowly matching skills to anticipated future employment, the nature of the emerging economy calls for systems level change, and a reimagining of the forms and purposes of education in the digital era.

The belief that the map can fully replace the real is problematic. Just as the inhabitants of Borges' story become disoriented when they do not understand their base contexts, education leaders must seek to reveal the historicity behind the policies and adapt and change the training narrative to suit the needs of the time. Altass and Wiebe's research suggests that the only kind of mapping here that can make a difference is mapping that is translucent, overlain with the knowledge that maps are permeable, fallible, ephemeral and mutable. In their work, they suggest that it is the changing map, the adapting map, that holds value for the individual on a moment-to-moment plan. They offer that a "fundamental shift toward uniquely human skill recognition and development can be facilitated by a threshold concept approach that privileges the situated and complex nature of human ability and knowledge within and across disciplines" (see Altass and Wiebe, this issue).

Jennifer MacDonald, Bryan Smith and Adrian McKerracher (this issue), each describe how the traversing of land teaches. MacDonald recounts her most cherished memories from accompanying her grandparents on their daily stroll. She describes her grandparents' recountings of "layers of family history transcribed in the landscape near their home." This is a first level representation of the land. The territory presides. I interpret her writings as layerings of narratives and stories resting transparently on the land. She then explains her important shift in noticing how her "body is in place, not what place [her] body is in." The subtle difference in language here is a difference between Baudrillard's first and second phases of representation. Noticing what place her body is in is a first phase representation where her body is separate from the base. MacDonald's body *in place* is a second phase representation where she becomes part of the fabric of the reconstructed map. She indicates how a construction of understanding through the body changes her cognitive way of knowing urban places. The notion of being in place, not on top of the land, or separate from the land, but an integrated part of the land, is to construct an altered base.

Smith apprises how telling a story of place (re)writes his home. He explains how the movement of stories "captured in the faces and bodies of travelers is inherently connected to those of others— the story of the city lives on through the connected narratives of individual lives." Smith is using a third level representation, where the representation masks the absence of the reality. He is speaking about the storied city that rests above the land, a construction built up on the subway map. He goes on to suggest that "amidst the 'storied lives' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) that live through/within the bodies of those traversing the city's transit system is the story of place remembered in the commemorated ghosts of the community's history" (this issue). Smith's article offers a subway map as the arterial mediator of storying over the map of Toronto. He writes about how toponyms commemorate, validate, represent and reproduce colonial community histories. He offers a map reading:

> Mapped spaces are complicit in telling a story that itself is a consequence of judgements about what is important to know. However, as a product of subjective conceptions of space, maps inescapably lie in their privileging of items/features, a privileging that consequently necessitates an (un)conscious exclusion of other features (Monmonier, 1996). Elsewhere identified as 'silences' (Harley, 1988), maps are inherently products of political circumstances and cultural commitments, which necessitates a reading of them as texts that tell a story of place. (Smith, this issue)

McKerracher recognizes the complexity of breaking with pre-established patterns of expectation using sonic experience as practice for the cultivation of historical agency and ontological self-awareness. McKerracher uses different words to describe the ongoing deterioration of the unattended under the map. He writes:

> I repeat myself (my self repeats) and I witness again and again my tendencies towards certain responses. Without changing them, my life will go on as it has, altered only by the decay of mind and body. I am more predictable than I like to admit.

McKerracher contemplates repetition and pattern to recover agency that can transform habitual patterning. His contemplation advocates for breaking through the layers that mask the important, challenging us to see beyond the simulacra, to break through the representations of the real.

As I look back over the last two years as editor, and further back in our JCACS history, I see Canadian scholars continuing to theorize place and autoethnography in the context of curriculum studies. There are numerous integrated works, but here I name a few in JCACS: Butler, 2016; Courtland et al., 2009; Greenwood, 2016; Kull, 2017; MacDonald & Wiebe, 2011; Norquay & Garramone, 2016; & Pente, 2009. My first editorial cover is titled "Currere in Place" (Sameshima, 2016). We are taking up Cynthia Chambers' 1999 question: "In what ways have, and are, curriculum theorists writing in a detailed way the topos—the particular places and regions where we live and work?" (see Sameshima, 2016). Going back to Chambers' (2008) article, "Where Are We? Finding Common Ground in a Curriculum of Place," from a decade ago, reminds and affirms us of this important stream in Canadian scholarship.

I conclude by appropriating McKerracher's outlook, to view, after Virginia Woolf, "the rhythm of a sequence . . . [as] overlaying undulating waves throughout a story"; that we might imagine a "passing [of the self] from stability to instability and back again" and that these "bursts of energy" might create for each of us a wide-awakeness to the powerful monotony of routine and consistency that numbs us from knowing the maps that we accept unconsciously to live, learn and dream by. McKerracher proposes:

> One cannot simply ride the beat. One must participate in its making, embodying it, for contemplation of repetition is what creates the experience that time is passing. One must attend to the repetition of behaviour, of reaction, of history.

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