CITING DIGITAL IMAGES AND OBJECTS

Digital images teeter in a precarious position between flat surfaces and material objects, between simulated three dimensions and the physical world. Currently image is inseparable from the page or the screen; the substrate is inherent in the image—paper, computer screen, television screen, monitor, movie screen, and textiles. As carriers of the image they are membranes not involved in the meaning, emotion or expression of the content of the images. Images float on these neutral materials, unconnected like images float on the surface of a mirror, or like a reflection on a lake or stream. Images are ripe to spring into three dimensions embraced by new and unusual materials and technologies. Radical shifts in language now include objects born out of digital images and processes. Objects are powerful cultural artifacts and icons, embedded with highly charged symbols with social and personal meanings. Images propelled into objects probe cultural, economic and political issues, representing the powerful resonances of communications, relationships and interactions.

New languages will erupt with physicalization of digital images. Tactility of the object creates a sensuous, empathetic form of communication. Objects become symbols as they contain narratives that reside in personal and communal memory. This empathetic power

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permeates the body as well as the imagination as one caresses the physical landscape of the object. In Aboriginal mythology, the mind and body are intertwined as the meaning of a symbol is inscribed on one’s awareness only when it is absorbed through languages that affect both the mind and the body (Lawlor, 1991, p. 287).

The Aborigines conceptually entwine a multitude of languages in the everyday expression of their lives weaving together the body, the physical landscape, their ancestral history and their spirituality. Symbols are transformed into large earthworks, three dimensional earth sculptures. These ceremonial earth sculptures represent topographies created by the Dreamtime ancestors, some extending for acres in order to complete a mythic cycle. Groups of men work collaboratively forming these relief maps out of earth - each depicting a specific myth. During the construction they sing related chants and perform dances that are associated with the forms they are building that embody the many levels of meaning in the linear and circular design elements (Lawlor, 1991, p. 288).

As sacred symbols these material constructions engage potent forms of transformation. For the Aborigines this is a transformation of pure energy into form. This is parallel to the digital realm where computer images are transformed into objects using various production technologies. The imagemaking found in Aboriginal artworks provides another way to think about their Dreamtime creation. The Creative Ancestors made the world in a similar way, forming and shaping the creation from the symmetries and geometries of a preexisting energy continuum. The Aborigines maintain within their bodily existence the universal geometry of creation, activating it through sacred images and rhythmic movement (Lawlor, 1991, p. 299).

Ritual has become the language of the digital realm, opening portals to other realms of experience, forming new communities, and creating alternate realities. The point and click of computing is highly ritualistic, as we go into a trance, entering alternate geographies, connecting with others, and even transforming our identities.

Parallels between ritual and ceremony in indigenous cultures, and digital ritual and ceremonies are provocative. Rituals open portals to other realms – spiritual and ancestral worlds, or virtual realms. Indigenous ceremonies function to create and build communities similar to the function of digital social networks (Truckenbrod, 2008). My artwork is inspired by indigenous rituals with the vision of symbols being painted on the body under the cover of darkness, revealed in the undulation of firelight as the dancer moves in ritual celebration. The symbols are revealed and concealed as the body twists and turns in the flickering firelight. The image of symbols taking the form of the body yet fragmented as reflections of the flame in the wind, causing fluctuations in the brightness of the glow of the painted body through ritual time. The intimate resonance between the symbolic imagery and the human body in motion in indigenous ceremonies translates in my installations to disparate connections between hand-made objects and the flickering light of video projections encompassing them.

Objects are embedded with social, cultural, political and/or personal meanings which become juxtaposed with video imagery projected onto and into them. Tensions erupt with the meshing of these two elements – the video content informs the object simultaneously with the meaning or function of the object informing the video narrative.

Objects, as performers, are a powerful presence in these installations, exaggerated by absorbing the texture, form and story of the video projection. A shallow water pond surrounded by river pebbles on the floor of the gallery appears to be a window to a stream below the floor with salmon rushing upstream during a salmon run. Fish undulate and splash water with their powerful tails, causing viewers to jump back. This installation titled “Quantum Realities,” includes the sound of water rushing in a stream. In another installation titled “Lightening in My Blood” a large cardboard
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