

NEHIYAWEWIN AND VIRTUAL REALITY

By Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew

Forces of Allusion

Post modernism is the inevitable outcome of the fragmentation of the non-transformative fixity of European languages. The prevailing nihilistic, empty set semiotics of post-modern theory is now imposed on tribal cultures as the current form of cultural re-colonization. In Cree language, Nehiyawewin, metaphor and metonymy are not simply pointers to similarity. They describe the threshold of transformation and shifting states of being. They are artifacts of the awareness of the describer, indicating the knowledge of the potential in the comparisons and the actuality present in the description.

Nehiyawewin represents the world in nouns and verb phrases that are animate and inanimate. The animate classification is present in the language among representations of both human and non-human beings, animal and non-animal beings, and biological and non-biological beings. The concepts of time and space are also significantly different from European languages in the sense that they are also potentially animate and personalized rather than quantified and subjected to repetitious measurement. The codification system present in Nehiyawewin therefore also implicates any other form of Cree cultural and artistic representation beyond language acts themselves.

Wisahkecahk Regurgitating the Macabre Organ

The invisible but laser-focused collision of cultural concepts of metaphor and metonymy are splitting the atoms of the solidity of our world view. This explosion is invisible because the power of the Euro-American ethnocentricity contained in the notions of metaphor and metonymy has imposed them as universal. It sharpens them as surgical tools to dissect the torn corpses that have been crushed and mangled by a war machine dressed in shrieking, frenzied, carnival drag.

The slicing is the impossibility of translation. It is the inevitable construction of the bomb that consists of assuming the transparency and ubiquity of non-tribal European language, assuming that a metaphor is as empty and conflated for everyone as it is in the vacuum-world of hysterical post-modern detritus. Any act of saying, any act of representation, of constructing experience screams out with the painful, puffing, spitting and bloody energy of birth, yet is beaten down and consumed in the relentless gut of a zero state monstrosity. Voracious hungers inhabit the landscape of the gaze, stroking and massaging, then finally tearing and devouring the rich meat of the organs of perception.

isea95@er.uqam.ca T : (514) 990-0229



Wihtikow brought you here and now uses you to live and feed. Wihtikow's tracks show themselves when you say something is like something else but you don't really mean it, when you don't care for the interpretation that you knew in the reality of your dreams, when you applied yourself to the surgical slicing machine and abstracted that part of yourself to death; logos, rationale. Say it like you mean it, say it like when horror fills you to bursting and the explosive orgasm goes on and on in flailing, wiggling laughter that is true terror.

Saying something is like something else, or saying that something is something else is an act of magic. Using the word "magic" with all its English language baggage displays right there the dangerous fatality of translation. Cree language, Nehiyawewin, works on the borders between animate and inanimate, those things that have body and being and those that do not. For some Nehiyawak peoples in the North, those that have been re-colonized by the other great force of Euro-America, Christian fundamentalist evangelism, even using their first language is an overwhelming psychic crisis because the foundational concepts that form Nehiyawewin cannot abide the specio-centric human-based philosophy of the re-colonizers. Even to use our own language becomes a self-violation. Imagine the virtual reality version of that.

In Cree, the representational acts of metaphor and metonymy carry with them a weight of responsibility that is anchored in a vast network in which the human is only a small and sometimes questionable part - those who need to, please shift or squirm uncomfortably and hide it with a nudge or a smirk. At least this part will be marked in your memory when later you return to the scars where it was cut off. In Nehiyawewin, when you say something is like something else, you are representing an awareness, a gift that was given you to visualize another mesh in the web, to see and hear the transforming. The acts that result from this seeing have been called, in literature, magic realism. This is such a benign term to describe a world of images torn by lust and terror, yet linked by prayer and founded on spirits that flow through the rocks and grind up the earth in surging waves, the ones who place each child in a womb and follow the subsequent absurdity. For tribal peoples, magic realism is the predominant theory of media art, especially time-based interactive work.

Stop thinking of the future - any future. Remember, if you have a safe place to store this, that it is only the same day visiting you as many times as it finds interesting. Beware those feelings of superiority, of contributing to the cutting edge and the brave new world. These cliches mean nothing to the many, many more of us who don't have electricity, never mind access to electronic technology. Too much of what you do is already an insult that is already unbearable and explosive. Safe ground becomes a sink-hole and a swallower.

Watch out for the ancient and enduring consumers, the real audience. Everyone squirm now; we are all being watched, felt and tasted.

My gifts are meagre and stingy little things to me - I am no elder. I can see only two things that I am driven to give you. Both flow in magic realism yet have found no rooting among you. In non-tribal languages, antiseptic violence pervades against the establishment of an organism and kills the wolf spider woman.

Representation of the world,
Representation of time,
Metaphor and metonymy,
Nuclear fusion and surgery.
Spirits of the land and the living spirit of time,
Everyone learning to talk Indian, everyone learning to feed on dream-life, learning to tell stories stitched across the web of memory and a body bounded by infinity and uncertainty, not skin.

Magic realism has no place here yet. Who speaks - where does it arise? The literature and orature of it flows and intersects in a manner that stings and corrodes the monolith of re-colonization. But even on a static page or in a still image, works in this genre surge and swirl. Regurgitate and examine the discourses of time-based, interactive media art. How are metaphor and metonymy constructed? How does time visit, how does space welcome you and what does it say? In terms of viewing the virtual reality experience as a form of magic realism, the relationship of events, those that involve significant transformations for the viewer / participant, becomes a critical consideration.

Magic realism as a cultural force that inhabits and creates literature, visual art and performance has, in virtual reality, a new vital mode of expression, one that can accommodate Nehiyawewin and the expression of its visions. But this is denied to it because of the exclusionary nature of V.R. practitioners. Cultures out of which magic realism arises are excluded from the sphere of virtual reality by its economics and its ownership by an inaccessible, developed world, academically focused hierarchy. The forces of academia may be the most culpable agent in this since they hold the reins of critical discourses that have failed and refused to recognize the crucial relevance of magic realism theory and practice to the most obvious parameters of virtual reality, never mind the more subtle potentialities.

Magic realism is that place where colonized cultures fight eurocentric language oppression with that same set of etymologies. Tribal cultures speak and transform these definitions through their reinvention of metaphor and metonymy as history and prophesy, woven into solid and living present, sung by many voices, most of whom are not people. You can talk to an Indian

in many languages, but almost always only through subversion, satire, irony, and allusion. The acts of creation and expression through metaphor and metonymy extend outward, as they do for everyone, to define and modulate all other acts of creation and expression. It is through magic realism however, that the unique space is cleared for the performance of values anathema to the killing force that doesn't mean itself, the force that is relentlessly suiciding.

Tools-to-go; shopping for the hysterical frenzy. Earwear, eyewear, timewear (earweary, eyeweary, timeweary). Weary and wary, an exhausted and suspicious body flinching from the deliriously rabid cruelty of its own transplanted organs. Shopping habits: beads and electronics, deception and seduction. Playing on need by selling false vacant dream life to panting, violent johns. Pretending to suck the macabre organ - stifling the gag reflex.

When it feels and sounds like a heart-beat, maybe it should be; maybe it is.

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