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## **LOCATING THE IMAGE IN AN AGE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

### Summary

As East Asia accelerates from Medieval culture and consciousness, through a compressed period of industrial modernization, into the communications era, the convergence of living sacred traditions and information technology presents a deep ontological enigma. Starting from the premise that the image is an index of the locus of reality, this session will attempt to locate the image in an age of instantaneous communication, virtual reality and hypermedia.

The word image is linked in etymology with the Latin *imitari*, which is the root of the word imitate. In the Medieval view the likeness between any thing and any representation of it must be analogical. Here, analogy is similitude in the sense of simile rather than that of simulacrum. Medieval representation imitates the idea of the thing and not its substance.

The image of a Hindu devata, latent in canonical prescription, must be inwardly visualised by the icon maker in an act of non-differentiation. This inner image is the model from which he proceeds to execute in a chosen material. The viewer in turn applies his or her own imaginative energy to the physical icon, realising the devata within the immanent space in the heart. All images are interior and reality itself is imaged within consciousness.

From the Islamic standpoint, the law of all phenomenon can be symbolised geometrically in the way that space, seen as extension, is created by unfolding through the dimensions and can be folded up again, leading back to the point of unity. It is the confusion caused by sculpture in the round, chiaroscuro, perspective and other illusionistic representations in the stages of folding up that underpins the prohibition of images in Islamic art.

In modern consumer capitalism everything that was once directly lived becomes representation as images proliferate beyond the viewers control. Guy Debord has described this spectacle as capital accumulated until it becomes an image. This is the televisual imaging of our desires. The image of desire itself. It alienates us as it permeates our consciousness. In works like Theme Song (1973), Vito Acconci assaults the limit of this image. He implicates the viewer and paradoxically compounds the alienation of a medium that promises interaction but does not permit it.

Today the alienation of the spectacle has dissolved into what

Jean Baudrillard has called the ecstasy of communication. There is a loss of private space and simultaneously, a loss of public space. This is the ontology of Paul Sermons Telematic Dreaming (1992). With electronic interactivity, the body appears to be situated wherever its effect is. Enabled by micro-technology, consciousness has left the physical body and merged with the image in an interactive outer-space.

Email to Paul Sermon:

Telematic Dreaming. Disembodied consciousness and contact across two and three dimensional worlds, between image and physical reality, between man and his own image. Remember Michelangelo's Creation of Adam. Contact. New ontology or old delusion. Electronic communion or physical alienation. Paul, do you have any comment on my understanding of your work?

Pauls reply:

Consciousness always seems to be the starting point of any discussion about Telematic Dreaming, the notion of the cause and effect situation, the rapid fire of consciousness back and forth between the remote and the local body. Without putting too much emphasis on the historical notion of a great artwork or a masterpiece the reference to Michelangelo's Creation of Adam is an appropriate one. Its not my initial intention, however, when I install the piece I am always struck by its presence - watching the hands of two people move towards the point of touch is an event in itself. The senses of sight and touch are exchanged.

Email to Paul Sermon:

Help. I need to set up a home page in conjunction with ISEA96. The problem is that my work - The Failure of Marcel Duchamp/Japanese Fetish Even! (1993-96) has an erotic element that is unacceptable on Malaysian servers. Part of the aim of this project is to address territoriality in the Net. Information that is globally accessible (instantaneously) is not universally acceptable (local laws and values). The work itself is a harsh parody of Marcel Duchamps Etant Donnes. Could you possibly direct me to someone who can help by providing space.

Pauls reply:

We could certainly locate your web site on our server at the Art School in Leipzig. And judging by the content of the site, I would find it a very interesting possibility.

With regard to the reading of images, Roland Barthes has asked if analogical representations or copies produce true systems of signs and not simple agglutinations of symbols. Is it

possible to conceive of an analogical code - a language of the image, or is the image the limit of meaning.

Etant Donnes cleaves from logos, an abyss of eros. It represents the culmination of the humanist trajectory in the philosophy of being. The perspective of the eye is fused, or rather, confused with that of the I in what must be the end game of retinal art. Sculpture and photography are reduced to indifference in this paragon of visibility. This paragon of reality This hypereality.

In Hellenistic usage, *aisthesis* implies physical affectability as distinguished from mental operations. Ananda Coomaraswamy has remarked that the Greek origin of the modern term aesthetic means nothing but sensation or reaction to external stimuli - what the biologist calls irritability. With this observation the conventional dichotomy of pornography and art is dissolved. Fredric Jameson has even proposed that the visual image is, in itself, essentially pornographic.

Today, Duchamps delayed image is no longer an esoteric encounter. It is democratically accessible (Given:) as the slow download (Waterfall?) on a personal illuminating screen (Gas!). With this mass, interactive dilation of desire, the meaning of the image has been displaced by its very presence. The image has become an absolute fetish. It is even argued that as a consequence of the limited spatial resolution in all physical systems, including the eye, and the nature of light as discrete quanta, every image is in principle a digital one. The image as sheer technology.

Paul Valery had prophesied that just as water, gas and electricity were effortlessly brought into our homes to satisfy our needs, visual or auditory images would one day serve us at a simple movement of the hand. Ultimately, in keeping with this utilities analogy, the current system of instantaneous use and retrieval of images on a mass basis is dominated by the circulation of capital. In the new order of our fast homogenising world, what is really at stake is the authorship and ownership of reality itself.

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