The Descent of Inanna: The technology of myth

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Descent of Inanna is one of the earliest myths of humanity – a story that encodes within it the transit of the planet Venus and her Sumerian archetypal representative – the goddess Inanna, Queen of Heaven. With performer Anna-Helena McLean and staff at Ravensbourne University, we are creating a VR performance piece in Ravensbourne's HoloPortal to draw out the essential information within this story utilising the ancient technology of myth-making.

2. THE DESCENT OF INANNA

A number of cuneiform tablets tell the story of Inanna, and later Ishtar, travelling through the seven gates leading to the underworld, suffering a stripping away, a decaying and a symbolic death before being revived and reanimated and returning to heaven.

The stories of the ancients were often intelligent mnemonic devices for transferring deep, complex information. An early memory technology we frequently fail to identify. How can we rework these techniques to help contemporary audiences learn about ancient history, older ways of thinking and different styles of cognition?

The artefacts great cultures leave behind are now displayed in museums and galleries, but they frequently lack appropriate and engaging context for museum visitors.

The Burney Relief on display at the British Museum has become an iconic and recognisable representation of the ancient Goddess. Thought to depict Inanna, an ancient Sumerian Goddess worshipped by early Mesopotamian people as a personification of the planet Venus. Her central myth being that of her Descent into the Underworld.

Figure 1: *The Burney Relief (British Museum).*

The different stages of her journey are not dissimilar to something like The Stations of the Cross in contemporary Christianity. Each is a symbolic representation of a journey towards surrendering the ego and corporeal form and returning to divine source. The Burney Relief is the key image from antiquity we will be showcasing in this work.

3. ANNA-HELENA MCLEAN

Formerly principal in the legendary Gardzienice Theatre in Poland 2000–2007 (Electra Barbican, Meyerhold Centre, LaMama ETC). Ensemble physical theatre director (RCS, DePaul), extended voice coach (Rose Bruford, Winchester) and

professional cellist (KC3 Almeida, West End). Artistic Director of Moon Fool and ACT Ensemble.

Anna-Helena McLean's area of special interest is the power of transformative sound and story and she has a considerable amount of experience working with ancient narratives and musical systems from antiquity. Her latest work 'INANNA: A Sonic Return to the Source', is inspired by the Descent myth and incorporates the most current archeo/ethnomusicology research about the Mesopotamian world of music and sound. Working with esteemed archeomusicologist Richard Dumbrill, Anna-Helena has created a vibrant contemporary interpretation of the story.

Figure 3: Anna-Helena McLean performs *Inanna* at Juju's Bar & Stage, London.

4. HOLO PORTAL AT RAVENSBOURNE

DoubleMe HoloPortal is a real-time 3D holomotion. It is a holographic mixed and virtual reality experience. DoubleMe is basically a transformative Silicon Valley tech start-up company, which provides mixed reality holographic experience. This new and rapidly developing technology is a powerful tool for sense making and mental transmigration. This is the ideal format in which to start building up a contextual archive of ancient stories and power objects. This product has a 3D volumetric video system, which captures a still or moving target shot from different angles. The system then converts this target into animated 3D models or holographic virtual reality characters in real time. Then these characters could be imported

into various 3D contexts such as 3D animation, VR, AR, video games, 3D printing and MR. HoloPortal has eight HD cameras around the facility in order to produce holographic virtual reality characters which preserve the original volumetric 3D meshes, textures, expressions and movements.

Figure 4: HoloPortal Imaging at Ravensbourne and holographic nuns, created for an art exhibition at the V&A (2018).

5. REFERENCES

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