

SELF-REFLECTIONS: VIRTUAL TRAVEL IN EMERGING MEDIA (1900-2000)

Preliminary draft for MIT4 (2005)

Nanna Verhoeff, assistant professor, Institute for Media and Re/Presentation,
Utrecht University
Nanna.Verhoeff@let.uu.nl

Abstract

Travel was and is a major preoccupation in both emerging cinema (1900) and today's digital imagery (2000). With travel as both a narrative and visual trope par-excellence, new media reinvent the relationship between showing and telling. Using examples from both ends of the 20th century, I wish to demonstrate similarities and differences between these visual cultures. My focus is on how virtual travel functions as a trope in, and metaphor for, emerging media by offering a distinctively post/modern mode of experiencing their reconfigurations of time and space.

INTRODUCTION - Travel as means for self-reflection

At moments of transition, when new media emerge, it is a much-encountered practice to reflect within the artifacts produced in those media, upon the nature of the new medium itself. Taking my own turn in this game of reflection and self-reflection, I take this up for a self-reflection on my own practice, that is, my work as a cultural historian and media scholar. To that effect, in what follows I will revisit a number of issues I have encountered in earlier work on early cinema of the American West. I hope to argue and demonstrate that the media always precede and thus, pre-write – not to say pre-scribe – the way scholars and users later come to understand them.

Of course, I am not alone in considering emerging media, or media in transition, as acutely self-reflective. For example, as David Thorburn and Henri Jenkins have pointed out in their Introductory essay to *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, “a crucial distinguishing feature of periods of media change is an acute self-consciousness”; and “the introduction of a new technology always seems to provoke thoughtfulness, reflection, and self-examination in the culture seeking to absorb it.”¹ This reflection can appear in many different manifestations. Also, the media involved in this examination are not only the new ones for their own sake: a reassessment of old media is sometimes even more apparent than an examination of new media. Moreover, the terms of reflection are grounded in a strong bond (positive or negative) between the old and new media. But perhaps more in general, modern mass media tend to point to themselves, reflect (on) themselves and the broader media landscape. This may intensify at moments of transition and change, but then again, media are changing a lot, especially during the last hundred years. For this reason, I will make my case through the examination of media behavior at two, not one, moments of transition, one hundred years apart.

¹ Thornburn and Jenkins, “Toward an Aesthetic of Transition.” Thornburn and Jenkins (eds.) *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.

However, with the advent of postmodernism, perceiving self-reflexivity is becoming a bit of a platitude, and is only helpful for our understanding of media culture if we specify it. For, referencing each other, pointing out their own mediated status, media texts can have very different degrees and directions, even destinations, of self-reflexivity. This reflection can have a great variety of contents and investments. To give some examples, they may be self-satisfied or critical, of themselves or the media they have the ambition to replace, of social and cultural situations, related or not to the emerging media, of the consequences of their popularity. As a result, reflection on this reflexivity harbors insights of both a methodological nature, concerning the ways we study and write cultural history, as well as of a philosophical nature, concerning the self-critical perspective of a culture.

In line with this differentiation of self-reflexivity, I offer the following double contention – theoretical and historical. Medial self-reflection – here understood as the fact that an artifact in a particular medium probes that medium's features and impact – is a phenomenon of much wider scope than one interested in art and media culture would expect; it is not a mere issue of aesthetics, nor of commercial self-promotion. *Theoretically* speaking, therefore, I contend that self-reflection is an *inevitable* cultural mode pervasively present in all media artifacts. Cultural existence implies the desire to understand how things work, and for such an understanding to pass without fuss, self-reflection is just second nature to cultural expression. Yet these artifacts are specifically self-reflexive if they can inform us about their own, and our, historical position. From a *historical* perspective, therefore, I contend that in times of media innovation such self-reflexivity will increase in intensity, complexity, and depth. They are explicitly engaged in historical positioning, or historical construction, for they reflect, precisely, on *change*. This can easily be assessed in a comparative analysis of media use in the two moments of increasing and accelerated development – whether we consider these moments as ruptures or as modification – of new media, 1900 and 2000. I will elaborate this double contention, systematic and historical, through an analysis of different modes and levels of self-reflexivity in a range of disparate artifacts such as:

1. Early cinema's attractions (such as phantom rides) vis-à-vis (digital) special effects and digital exploration games
2. Contemporary commercials about *mobilities*, both physical, such as car commercials and commercials for travel and tourism, and virtual by means of media technologies. Their crossovers are of particular interest, as when they show physical mobility as virtual mobility through mediated spaces. I consider these filmic shorts as contemporary examples of the cinema of attractions – but, like the cinema counterparts with a narrative investment, as I will explain later. They are culturally significant, not just because of their ubiquity and commercial “value,” but also because they are a site of experimentation with and innovation of cinematographic and digital techniques and because of their “compact” messages. I am, however, not interested in their “commercial” rhetoric, but consider them as aesthetic genre. In short, I am not interested in what they sell, but what they chose to sell it with and how they show this.

3. The advertising campaign for the new Nintendo DS game console. Features of the console, such as double screens, touch-screen technology, wireless communication, voice-control options can be considered their relation to map and tour paradigms (de Certeau)> These features function as examples of a few new media "models" such as: 1) mobile digital technologies (GPS technology, hand-held navigation systems) that provide, for example, virtual "tours," and, related to this: 2) the phenomenon of pervasive gaming, where invisibility/absence of media technologies are necessary conditions for immersion. 3) Haptic ideals: touch screen technology can be regarded as a smart part of explorations of interface-possibilities. *From eye candy* (a popular term for special effects, scopic pleasures), to *eye-ware* (Virtual Reality head-sets), to *Eye-Toy* (webcam-technology: you become part of the image), to *Touch Screen*. Of course this does not present a singular development, but we can see them as different but related experiments in Interface.

I have selected these artifacts because they have in common that they not only *display* but also *constitute an experience of travel*. To put it simply, the medium is the message: they deploy the topic of travel to underscore the (new) medium's capacity as a virtual travel machine. The subject matter of mobility results in visual paradigms that become metaphors for "mediality." The dynamic of travel as topic-trope-metaphor result in a mirror image, or what narrative theorists call *mise en abyme*, when media *in* the image comes to stand for the mobility of the image. This shift from thematic to metaphoric reflection of mobility is visible throughout the history of media. I am referring to the moments when physical mobility was first used to create and demonstrate the virtual mobility of media. In early cinema, phantom rides are exemplary for this mobility model. But we can see how this developed, or split, into a new trend in which the situation has become reversed, and mediated mobility is used to convey physical mobility.

As I have argued in my book *After the Beginning: Westerns Before 1915* (2005) on emerging cinema and the depiction of the American West, particularly as *frontier*, the popularization of travel is not only co-temporaneous with the advent of cinema; it is also structurally congruent with cinema. At the heart of both "new," modern culture and the "new" medium are the "hot topics" of movement, vicarious displacement, and both spatial and perceptual expansion. Therefore, the recurrence of the theme of travel in the popular deployment of the moving image in both historical moments – around 1900 and around 2000 – is no coincidence. This is a first way of making the idea of self-reflection more specific. In the following, I will focus on the connections between mobility and the moving image, in early cinema as well as in contemporary forms of "visual movement." I will argue that a great number of aspects that both bodies of images share are intricately connected. The nature of those connections is the subject of my paper.

NARRATIVES OF ATTRACTION

Let me first point out how narrative and visuality are tied together in travel imagery of both early cinema. For this, it is necessary to overcome old oppositions, and to consider how we can conceive of narrative beyond the

opposition with visual spectacle. What is narrative and what is spectacle, or more precisely, what is their relationship?

For the moment I will take on André Gaudreault's useful distinction between two levels of narration in moving images, micro- and macro-narratives, between the level of the single shot and the narrativity that is created between shots, by means of montage.² The primary aspect of narrativity is, thus, to be found in the aspect of time, or *chronicity*, in Gaudreault's words. The single shot – as micro-narrative – is the barest form of narration because it shows the passing of time within the image. Spectacle, or attraction, can be regarded as things happening; things that have an awesome effect on the spectator, drawing primary attention to themselves, in temporal terms: happenings punctuating the moment. In this view it makes sense to consider spectacles, attractions, as narrative, yet in a different time-frame than the (longer) narratives that "surrounds" them.

On a simple view, narrative is an account of the passing of time (and its "results") outside the world of the spectator, whereas spectacle draws the viewer into that world; from a grammatical third person account to a first-second person interaction, as if by synchronizing watches: not in some other time, or what I have called *elsewhen*, but *right now*. Yet, as I have indicated here in a very obvious way, they have something to do with each other. Nevertheless, as concepts, narrative and spectacle are derived from different logics. Narrativity is constructed by interpretation, whereas spectacle is often conceptualized as an "effect," a forceful one at that, taking the spectator out of an immersive diegesis, breaking right through the narrative barrier.

Although this conception of narrative and spectacle as opposing forces seems to be clear-cut, disentangling their relationship is still on the agenda of media studies, whether as debate in the study of narration in moving images, in film history, or in the study of (digital) special effects. Clearly, this oppositional viewpoint is problematic because it blinds us to the intricate connections between the two. These connections – which is not to deny the possibility and indeed, usefulness to distinguish them – become prominent in travel.

At the beginning was the idea, the concept, of *Cinema of Attractions*. By means of this concept Tom Gunning definitively changed the course of early cinema studies.³ A rehabilitation of visual attractions, for example, as belonging to a register different from but equal to narrative, answered to a felt need to liberate the study of early cinema from the dominance and restrictions of classical narrative models in order to appreciate and understand a mode of address that did not fit with this models. Identification, suspense, and laughter are typical responses to narrative that demonstrate the mechanism of "heteropathic" immersion based on a distinction between the world of the viewer and that of the events.

In my argument, "heteropathic" means that the immersion takes place, so to speak, on the terrain of the diegesis, into which the viewer

² Gaudreault, "Film, Narrative, Narration: The Cinema of the Lumière Brothers." Elsaesser and Barker (eds.) *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. 1990, London: BFI Publishing: 114-122.

³ Gunning, "1986 "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." Elsaesser and Barker (eds.) *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. 1990, London: BFI Publishing: 56-62.

"enters."⁴ Gunning drew attention to a different set of responses, such as a primary spectatorial confrontation, aesthetic fascination, and an appreciation for the novelty of "direct" cinematic imagery. This he set off against the "diegetic absorption" that results from narration, the "unfolding of a story." The kind of immersion involved, here, lies with the viewer, who "takes in" the spectacle.

His term, as heuristic tool, was useful, for it rescued a cinema hitherto considered "primitive" and *non-fiction* from the hegemony of classical cinema. His viewpoint that this mode of cinematic address did not go away, but became a part of narrative cinema, went "underground," was also useful. This is why his term became so productive for describing the attractions of special effects in cinema today, even though Gunning himself refers to avant-garde practices and (Hollywood) genres like the Musical.

Unfortunately, the tendency to insert new concepts into old binary oppositions has recuperated Gunning's idea and locked it into an opposition between narrativity and visuality, even if, in his text, he does not want to see it as oppositional, but rather, as dialectical.⁵ We can even consider his description of "direct" attractions versus "longer" narrative development, as fitting right in with Gaudreault's levels of micro- and macro-narratives. Following the ideas about attraction, I would say that these moments of direct address, of "pure" spectacle, of a paradoxical "transparent hypermediacy", to invoke Bolter and Grusin's conception thereof, are punctuations of macro-narratives by micro-narrativity.⁶

However, the persistence on an oppositional conception of spectacle and narrative is particularly clear in analyses of contemporary special effects in cinema where the concept is used to underscore the breaks in the longer narrative of the film – assuming there is one dominant narrative.⁷ There the logic runs as follows. If cinematic images appeal to the pleasure of looking and the thrill of seeing unknown things – or recognizing known ones – then they must be something altogether different from, even opposed to immersing oneself in a story that unfolds before our eyes.

⁴ I borrow the qualifier "heteropathic" – but not its specific meaning – from Kaja Silverman's seminal discussion of identification in *The Threshold of the Visible World*, New York: Routledge 1996.

⁵ Gunning himself is not very clear about his in his essay, because he does not develop precisely *how* we can see beyond opposition. In his explanation of what attractions are, we can distil an oppositional view. For example, when he says that "[t]heatrical display dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct stimulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe." (59)

⁶ Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. Their vision of remediation is that media tend to put forward a paradoxical logic of transparent immediacy (the medium is invisible) and hypermediacy, "a style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium." (272)

⁷ See, for example, Scott Bukatman's, excellent essay "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime." Annette Kuhn (ed.) *Alien Zone II*. New York: Verso, 1999: 249-275. He points out the relationship between late-nineteenth century sublime paintings and special effects cinema. His focus on the "emotive" aspect of effects is highly interesting, but his assumptions about the non-narrativity, or even counter-narrativity of these visual effects are a bit underdeveloped.

My interest in travel as a trope of early and late moving images stems from the insight that travel is, precisely and intensely, both visual and narrative in its appeal, so much so that these two aspects can no longer be disentangled. Travel is an experience consisting of a temporal sequence of micro-events; of movement and of (resulting) encounters: a series of moments in time that appeal to the narrative viewer's desire for immersion. It allows for "new ways of seeing," as Brooks Landon states about science fiction cinema, but which can be said about travel in general.⁸ It is a temporally structured, at times immersive experience of visual engagement with new phenomena, environments, and people, all set, so to speak, in space.

Significantly for my argument about travel, Gunning sees the phantom ride as an example of the cinema of attractions, and proposes that the chase film is the "original truly narrative genre." I would underscore that as an exemplary motive in moving images (to take Gunning's examples beyond early cinema!), both phantom ride and the chase are part and parcel of a genre we can simply call travel. As such, travel, including the traveling camera of the phantom ride or the diegetic travel of the chase, establishes a synthesis between narrative and spectacle. When we consider the micro-narratives of shots that show movement, as proposed by Gaudreault, who uses the example of the single-shot "arriving train" film *Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (Lumière, 1895), I propose a typology of train films. I distinguish four types of such films. Together and according to my classification, these types show how travel, or movement, as a topic or theme, self-reflexively shows how narrative and attractions are essentially tied together.

MEDIA OF TRANSITION - Travel as trope

In order to grasp how the thematic notion of travel becomes an entrance in the specificities of self-reflection, I see the topic or topos of train films as a figure or trope of the bond that links travel and narrative visuality – or visual narrative, for that matter. Hence, I propose to consider the thematic instances of travel films inherently – because of their self-reflexivity – as tropes. Foregrounding the intricacies of what scholars have, perhaps, tried too hard to disentangle, the following kinds of train films function as visual motives, both attractive and narrative:

1. arriving trains (camera on platform, train arrives, people step off, others board the train) – the above mentioned Lumiere film is the prototype
2. passing trains (train moves towards camera/spectator, but passes on one side. Sometimes camera pans, showing a "leaving train")
3. phantom rides (first person perspective, showing the perceptual field, but not the train itself)
4. double rides (a combination of 2 and 3: shot from a moving train, another moving train on parallel tracks in view) – of which *INTERIOR NEW YORK SUBWAY, 14TH STREET TO 42ND STREET* (1905, Biograph). is a compelling example.

⁸ Brooks Landon, *The Aesthetics of Ambivalence: Rethinking Science Fiction Film in the Age of Electric (Re)Production*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992: 94. Scott Bukatman (1999: 254) quotes Landon, when he summarizes his argument concerning the affects of special effects in science fiction cinema that go beyond narrative.

These four kinds of train films are all tropes of particular relationships between the medium and the spectator.⁹ These categories of attractions, based on mobility, time, and the perception of spatial consequences of this mobility are not only to be considered as micro-narratives, but, as a current commercial for a JVC camera demonstrate, can become entire “macro-narratives” in and of themselves.

JVC SKATEBOARDER. This commercial shows what could be considered yet another type of travel trope. Borrowing from the phantom ride model the mobility of vision (the viewer is taken along in the same pace), combining this model with the passing-train formula, this commercial mixes that formula with a second layer of movement in the image. For, while he is riding, the skater is recording the ride, creating an image of movement within the image of movement. This is a mise-en-abyme in motion! We see movement, the character who is moving is navigating through the cameral lens, and we see him constructing a phantom ride: the film he is making through recording his own travel (which we do not see, but is implied) is strictly speaking a phantom ride film. The film follows his movement, we see movement in the image, and we see, implied in this the future of movement, even if we do not actually see the result – in his creation of the skating phantom ride. The temporal layers in this film are thus extremely complex, but nevertheless clearly focused on the conflation of physical mobility and medium mobility.

This brings us back to the time-space dichotomy implied in the opposition between narrative and visual attraction. In this example of doubling virtual movement we can see how space, in fact, becomes time; stories are spatial in the sense of set (or embedded) in, evoked by, space, but also construct visible space; here these are collapsed. This brings me to the second issue of what I would like to put on the agenda regarding the fundamental relationship between travel as topic and the narrative of moving spectacles. Above, I mainly foregrounded temporality even in micro-narrative shots of attraction. But the flipside of the bond between the two is space.

Space – it has always been opposed to time, as the support of visuality versus time as the backbone of narrative. The moving image as such – in its bare essential nature – already defeats that opposition, and that may well be its primary attraction. For, whatever the attraction that holds the viewer's gaze, the image unfolds in time, dictating, in fact, the *temporal* involvement of the viewer who is subjected to the film's pace. Symmetrically, as Henri Jenkins has argued, even the most stable of spatial arrangements, such as architecture, have a temporal dimension as well, so much so that Jenkins speaks of narrative architecture.¹⁰ By this provocative term Jenkins accounts for the particular form of narrative that can be discerned in exploration games, making it possible to investigate a “new” type of reading space: that of player navigation. I will address the interactive aspect, or rather, the agency of navigation later, but let's first look at the concept of spatial

⁹ For more about the visual rhetoric of space, particularly in early train films, see Nanna Verhoeff and Eva Warth, “Rhetoric of Space: Cityscape/Landscape.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22, 3 (2002): 245-251.

¹⁰ Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture.” *First Person*. Pat Harrington & Noah Frup-Waldrop (eds.) Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002

narrativity, which can be applied to different kinds of spaces, physical or digital.

In "Nintendo® and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue," Henri Jenkins and Mary Fuller compare exploration games to "old" travel narratives. They find inspiration in Michel de Certeau's writing on spatial Stories ("Spatial Stories" in *The Practice of Everyday Life*) who makes the claim that "every story is a travel story – a spatial practice."¹¹ I would say that this claim can be easily turned around to the claim that every space contains potential travel narratives. For this logic de Certeau makes a distinction between *place* and *space*: "space is a practiced place." (1988: 116) In short, every place can be turned into space, by narrative. This practice is infused with "ambitions." In Jenkins' words:

Places exist only in the abstract, as potential sites for narrative action, as locations that have not yet been colonized. [...] Places constitute a "stability" which must be *disrupted* in order for stories to unfold. Places are there but do not yet matter, much as the New World existed, was geographically present, and culturally functioning well before it became the center of European *ambitions* or the site of New World narratives. Places become meaningful only as they come into contact with narrative agents [...]. Spaces, on the other hand, are places that have been acted upon, explored, colonized. Spaces become the location of narrative events. [my emphasis]

The comparison between narrative turning place into space and the conquest of the New World is, of course, highly significant.

The authors continue in line with de Certeau, including his use of the equally significant word "map:"

The place-space distinction is closely linked to De Certeau's discussion of the differences between "maps" and "tours" as means of representing real-world geographies. Maps are abstracted accounts of spatial relations ("the girl's room is next to the kitchen"), whereas tours are told from the point of view of the traveler/narrator ("You turn right and come into the living room").

They sum up the distinction with the words: "Maps document places; tours describe movements through spaces." They then compare the rhetoric of the tour and the way this rhetoric produces attention to the effects of the tour, including its "ethics" expressed in terms of obligation, the other side of gaining control over narrative spaces. They signal the narrative aspect of touring which involves "a constant transformation of unfamiliar places into familiar spaces." Spatial control needs to be reaffirmed as the tour/narrative continues. We could summarize this as: moving through space is a narrative appropriation of place, which involves an inherent struggle for control.

Certeau draws attention to the role of frontiers in this narrative construction of space. (De Certeau, 1984, p. 126). Plot actions, he argues, involve the process of appropriation and displacement of space, a struggle for possession and control over the frontier or journeys across the bridges that

¹¹ Michel de Certeau "Spatial Stories." *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 1984: 115

link two spaces together. A recent COCA COLA commercial exploits this idea: one football shot > the ball travels the world > time compressed as space is expanded

The interactive possibilities of (some) digital media are crucial for the narrative potential of mediated environments, or spaces. Navigation of the player of digital games, for example, enables, not just an active reading of space, but rather more fundamentally, a construction of place into space.¹² Janet Murray (2001) considers navigation as a form of agency - interactivity in which actions are autonomous, selected from choices and determine the course of the game. In line of this somewhat optimistic view we can state that navigation is a narrative practice, given that this type of narrativity is different from the classical model of characters or actors that experience events while the viewer witnesses these. The narrative of navigation is creating a narrative of space by reading place as space. Instead of being an external focalizer who espouses or not, the diegetic focalization of the characters, the navigator is a narrator, focalizer and actor in one. Moreover, when the player/user is the navigator, or more precisely – and this distinction is important! - operates the navigating, but diegetically-bound avatar, the borders between playing, seeing and reading are blurred.

In “Languages Of Navigation Within Computer Games” Bernadette Flynn takes up Jenkins’ notion of embedded narratives. Flynn emphasizes the difference between such embedded narratives and classical narrative, in the following terms: “adventure games [...] are not narrative spaces and operate outside of the narrative causality structure.” I assume Jenkins can agree with this, but the formulation begs the question of causality’s role in narrative. For, Jenkins has demonstrated, precisely, that narrativity can operate outside a dominant narrative causality, and that the navigational, “ludic and aesthetic pleasures” that Flynn argues to be “unrelated to narrative,” can, in fact, be understood as having a narrative core – namely, a development or outcome.

This can perhaps be reversed. In light of the centrality I am claiming for travel, it is possible to argue that, more than just having a “sense” of narrativity about it, navigation is at the core of narrative in general. This is the case if, as I contend in the wake of Jenkins’ appropriation of de Certeau’s view, we need the navigator to explore places and turn them into spaces. That the navigator, then, fulfills the triple narrative roles of narrator, focalizer and actor, makes all the sense in the world. This is why it is necessary to come to an understanding of narrative that is different from the traditional sense that opposes it to spectacle. The nature of the tour, chase, travel or navigation involves events in some kind of coherent sequence, and thus is narrative, even if it also functions on the basis of attraction.

The point is not to stretch the concept of narrative beyond recognition to encompass these artifacts, but to overcome a dichotomy that makes narrativity invisible and thus, overlooks the self-reflexivity involved. Looking back from these two cases where intense visuality meets narrative – cinema

¹² In “Game Design as Narrative Architecture,” Jenkins discerns four different ways in which spatial narratives can result in immersive experiences of media spaces: “[S]patial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scene; or they provide resources for emergent narratives.”

of attraction and narrative architecture – it is possible to argue that even still images such as photographs and paintings have a temporal, hence, a potentially narrative dimension. They are narrative to the extent that they require a certain amount of time to be processed. Less dictatorial in time-management than film, a photograph requires that someone stops, looks, thinks and responds, moves on – a series of small events liable to become a narrative. Similarly, architectural works – houses, public buildings, department stores – once visible and visually displayed and processed, entices the engagement of the people entering it, moving in it, and exiting, into the small stories of everyday life. Outdoor spaces, cityscapes, and landscapes attract *because* – not in spite of the fact that – they can be entered and conquered in a narrative. Even if the representation of this travel narrative of attraction stretches logic.

A HYUNDAI commercial flaunts incompatibilities between time and space: what we see is alternately tiny and huge, both measures make the phenomena not visible for the driver; and in a frenzy of acceleration we see the growth of a tree before our eyes> This is the temporal equivalent of a panoramic long shot alternating with real time moments. Moreover, the tiny details punctuate the pace of motion.

Travel – first as a topic, then as a trope, and, as I will argue in the next section, ultimately as a conceptual metaphor that articulates the specificity of the medium in which it is represented – intensifies these connections between visuality and narrative to such an extent that it allows me to probe what it is that makes these connections so obvious that they are easily forgotten or even actively denied.

I have noticed that travel is thematically in the forefront when it comes to flaunting the *visuality* of new media. I take this thematic centrality to constitute a pointer to the self-reflexivity that has methodological and philosophical consequences. This is how the topic, then trope, turns into a concept, and since this concept is grounded in metaphor I call it a conceptual metaphor in this methodological guise. Two further aspects of travel immediately strike me as instances of this intricate bond between visuality and narrative beyond their opposition. The first one concerns *mobility*. As I have mentioned, in early cinema the phantom ride and its relatives that exploited mobility make spectatorial mobility possible. Digital mobility, on the other hand, complicates matters. Multiple tropes of mobility are at work in the media in transition: the cinematic form itself, but also a mobilization of the (inter)active user navigating in cyberspace. In this digital domain, the latter becomes paradoxically “weightless” yet again. Mediated travel becomes the new mobility, and as this becomes a topic in media, self-reflexivity is unavoidable. Hence, the third aspect (after visuality and mobility) concerns the construction of visible space – which is what media set out to do.

Spatial constructions in media show us allusions to new spaces, new bodies, new modes of “travel” that make up our present culture. New spaces come to stand for new mobilities, and, as I am putting forward here, new spaces thus come to stand for the new, *virtual* mobilities that new media technologies make possible.

What, then, is the point of using the term trope for this use of travel? When I say "stand for" I am already inside the rhetorical domain of tropology. Travel is "like" the media in which it is also thematically represented. The spaces the media create in the act of entering and conquering them, are tropes – most frequently, metaphors – of the new mobility that is the feature of the media that presents and represents itself by means of this metaphor.

BOUNDARY-CROSSINGS - travel as a *conceptual* metaphor, as marking-off spaces and frontiers + self-reflexivity, tourist gaze, culture criticism

I am now reaching the "inner" core of the onion whose layers I am attempting to peel away. Travel "images" – offers an imaginative visualization of – what media are capable of doing. Hence, the media as creators or producers and promoters of a modern sensibility to mobility stand for a cultural phenomenon they also scrutinize. Look at this commercial for a mobile phone company, for example.

KPN (a Dutch phone company). This commercial shows how mobile telephony is conceptualized as physical, or rather, perceptual movement. It does this by traversing the urban space from home to home. The private domain is thus not invaded but, on the contrary, invades the public domain when the private space traverses the public space. In this way this commercial gives a face to a form of mobility that is not physical. Isn't this is precisely what virtual travel is? A doubling: virtual mobility is displayed: virtual travel (mobility stands for visual media) stands for virtual media.

The media technology as virtual travel machine thus stands for a more fundamental and especially fast-moving virtualization of "life" and the world. This is one side of the lived-in culture these media might be said to question. The flip side is the insight that the media technology that produce travel like a machine is, of course, in its function of promoting a neo-colonial invasion of spaces, also an ideological apparatus – not one of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses, but the globalized version of that, an Ideological Capital Apparatus so to speak.

Travel is a form of transition, between known and unknown territory, between sedentary and provisional life. In this sense travel can be a conceptual metaphor of *transitional* media. If this conference-series is titled *Media in Transition*, it is appropriate to conclude with a brief reflection on how the media themselves reflect, not only on what they are capable of doing but on their transitional status itself.

Emerging media have the tendency to flaunt, not just their story-telling ability as discussed above, but more specifically their possibilities for reinventing relationships between time and space. That potential they possess allows new *kinds* of narratives. The experiences of the visual attractions that these reinventions facilitate are not so much distinct from narrative, but appear to serve a different purpose than classical narrative "in the third person." This is, we now discover, not the only kind of narrative, and never was. This new or renewed kind of narrative is grounded in an admiring astonishment rather than an immersive absorption or a desire for the ending (suspense).

Indeed, in our inquiry of moments of media transition, concepts like *attractions*, the *ludic*, *navigation*, and *spatial*, or *architectural narratives* have

infused our academic vocabulary. These terms have in common that they are deployed to conceptualize the relationship between the spectator or user and the media as essentially different from “reading” strategies, aspects of (trans-media, or universal) “textuality”, and (classical) spectator/performer/character distinctions and hierarchies that inform (classical) modes of identification.

New media technologies seek to achieve *spectatorial* immersion, thus integrating narrative engagement through visual appeal. As a trope, travel comes to *stand for*, hence, offer reflections on, media's capacities to shape or even create spaces, to activate visions, to establish spectatorial positions, to mobilize view-points and to establish hierarchies of vision: s/he who moves sees, and thus, conquers space.

After having demonstrated the ins and outs of travel and its centrality for the way media in transition reflect upon themselves, the remaining question – one to which I cannot give an answer succinctly – concerns the implied evaluation of the potential of the media – their impact on the culture in which they function. I would refrain from generalizing, especially since my corpus has clearly demonstrated the differentiated possibilities, the different reflections of which the self-reflecting significations consist. Some proposals may be utopian, some dystopic. But also, in line with the visual immersion proposed, and hence, with the performativity of which the navigator is perhaps the emblematic example, it would be wrong to judge on the basis of the commercials alone. For, what they propose before all else is that it is the viewer – each viewer, embedded as she is in her own cultural situation – who acts out what the commercial proposes. The artifact proposes, the viewer disposes. This is a freedom that obliges.