

Cinemas of Traveling

An Introduction

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Screenshot Nandalala (source DVD Ayngaran)

Summary:

The introducing article explores some traveling aspects of the cinema. It starts in the early years of film, when cinema itself was on tour. The introduction shows some moving aspects of motion pictures, such as travelogues, road movies, postcolonial travelers, and what pictures can transport with them.

Keywords:

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Taking a bag, hurrying to a station, catching a train: this is one of many common images of beginning a journey. There are many ways of traveling. You can take a bus, an aeroplane, or just walk by foot. When does a journey really begin? If we follow Alain de Botton (2003) in his book *The Art of Travel*, an imaginary travel is one of the first steps, if you undertake a holiday trip. While you are flicking through some brochures or travel guides, your mind is creating an imaginary journey. You visualize yourself into postcard idyll places. Lauren Rabinovitz (2004:132) defines that one of the goals of a journey is “to acquire experience in the form of feelings, and eventually memories. Seeking sights that could be turned into memory.” However, this does not necessarily mean that journeys are as imagined. Most of the time, travel is exhausting. Beyond sight seeing on journeys, traveling means more than this. We do not only explore landscapes or cityscapes, but also notice the soundscapes and smellscapes of the undiscovered (Urry 2002:146). Each region has got its own sounds, its own smells. If you are wandering around in Kairo, it is another experience than in Delhi or Beijing.

Motion pictures – this term itself sounds like undertaking journeys, to be in motion, to go far away, to catch pictures. Annette Deeken (2007:47) tells us that the film is able to visualize the process of being “en route”. Which genre can fulfill this statement better than the American road movie which is the par-excellence example of traveling cinema? The psychoanalytical film theory assumes, that motion pictures forces the spectator to a journey into his own self (cf. Faulstich 2005:8). Nevertheless, even traveling or cinema, what do they matter without having a good story, worth to hear? The ethnologist Edward Bruner (2005:1) describes his experiences with tourists he leads to the places of his former research and distinguishes the “importance of narrative in tourism.” Thus, film has this motif with traveling in common. The audience is seeking for entertainment.

Cinema on tour: Early cinema as a medium of traveling

In the beginning of film history, cinema itself was on tour. As a new attraction, first in café's or salons, later then, in amusement parks or on annual fairs, projectors moved throughout the globe. Because of the colonial times, cinema spread fast in several metropolises like Bombay, Cape Town, and Dakar.

Like the projectors, film cameras traveled with them to numerous places all over the world to produce more pictures and to bring the images back to the places where the journeys have been started. A new genre arose: the travelogue; film strips to show people how the world looks like. Even travelogues seem to be documentary, to Jennifer Peterson this kind of travel film is a fantastic genre, “travelogues are an acting out of tensions between attraction and repulsion: exoticism is presented and then taken away” (Petersen 1997:76). Charles Musser (1991:110) refers to early travel lectures in the late 19th century that includes slides and short film episodes to entertain the audience. Later on, as of 1903, cameramen simulate the view of the locomotive engineer to have spectacular views. They put a camera in front of a train, so that you have the view as you are standing on the cowcatcher (Altman 2004:152). The film imagines travel.

In the 1910s tourism was on the rise, and “travelogues relate to actual travel in both mimetic and compensatory way,” (Petersen 1997:85) while they offer picturesque views and show stereotyped pictures of people and landscapes (ibid:81-84). The people were eager to hear news, and more over, to see pictures from the far. The possibility of visual reproducing put sights and views to screens. Lauren Rabinovitz describes a very successful attraction in amusement parks in the beginning of the 20th century: “Hale's Tour was the first virtual voyage, a multi sensory simulation of railway tourism” (Rabinovitz 2004:107). Instead of viewing travelogues just on screen, Hale's Tour offers a phantom ride, a simulation of a train journey, “that doubly signified the experience of railway tourism” (Rabinovitz 1998:154). With the emerge of narration in cinema, this kind of “cinema of attraction” lost its fascination and made way for the rising nickelodeons. Nevertheless, the cinema was still able to entertain with pictures of the far, should it be as newsreel, documentary, or as fiction film. The exotic is one special essence to flavor movies like the Gauguin like film *Tabu* (Germany 1930, Murnau).

On the road

The Tamil blockbuster *Paiyaa* (India 2010, N. Linguswamy) seems to be a classic road movie. Shiva (Karthi) meets Charulatha (Tamannaah) who flees from her family. She needs a trip from Bangalore to Bombay. She misinterprets



Screenshot *Paiyaa* (source DVD *Ayngaran*)

Shiva as a taxi driver, while he is waiting in front of a station to pick up his friend and owner of the car. Because he felt in love with the beautiful maiden, he drives her. The movie is full of action, comedy and romance, nevertheless, *Paiyaa* is a road movie. As they cover the distance on the streets, both protagonists change their character and discover their future.

Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark define the road movie in terms of Jean Boudrillard. When Boudrillard “equates American culture with “space, speed, cinema, technology”, he could just as well describing the characteristic of road movie” (Cohan&Hark 1997:1). This definition may not fit at all. We fall back to the description of Faulstich, who writes that road movies are stories of development (movement), which took the metaphor of the street to describe the state of “being on tour” as an existential basic category (Faulstich 2005:201). The same can be said about pilgrimage. To be on the road to Santiago de Compostella, Mecca, or Palani is, sometimes, more essential than to be there. Nir-mala Iswari's article on *Le Grand Voyage* in this volume enlightens the father-son relationship of a religious father and his modernist son while they share a car on their hajj.

Jacques Aumont (2004) sees in French road movies a characteristic motif, in which the protagonists are traveling without a distinctive target/goal. He names this kind of traveling “tailler en route” (to take the road). The Japanese film *Kikujirō no Natsu* (Japan 1999, Takeshi Kitano) tells us a story about Masao (Yusuke Sekiguchi), a little boy who wants to visit his mother during summer vacation. While he lives at his grandmother's flat in Tokyo, he resolves to walk all alone, but the neighbor's lady does not let him. She decides that her bad mannered and downtrodden husband Kikujiro (Takeshi Kitano) has to escort him. First, he is not amused to do so, but during the journey, he begins to care



Screenshot *Kikujirō no Natsu* (source DVD Universum)

for Masao. The destination of their way is not as both imagined. Kikujiro finds Masao's mother, but she lives a completely different life with a new family, where Masao does not fit in. He keeps quiet about that and tells him that his mother moved away. This is a turning point in the story, both begin to enjoy their journey back to Tokyo. *Kikujirō no Natsu* is a potpourri of short episodes, which put their light on the Japanese society. An interesting remake of this film is *Nandalala* (India 2010) by the Tamil filmmaker Mysskin. Even here, a young boy searches for a mother who has left him to live a new and better life. Mysskin transformed the story a bit, to show a sociogram of the Tamil society. Instead of an ex-yakuza, the main protagonist is mental and psychiatric handicapped and tries to find an answer, why he was left at the hospital by his mother. While *Kikujirō no Natsu* shows silent and ironic notes, *Nandalala* uses blatant violence. Both films have in common the idea of a journey to bind relationship and the way as a stage to show the modern society in their countries.

In many films, traveling is a common motif. We can see bicycles, trucks, buses, lorries etc. Not only the living are on the road but also the death could be a journey. In *Guantanamera* (Cuba 1995, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío), the corpse of Yoyita (Conchita Brando), a beloved old lady and music star, travels from Guantanamo to Havana. The journey of this dead lady and his early love Cándido (Raúl Eguren), who is accompanying her to the funeral, is very complicated, because a bureaucratic experiment starts by the local undertaker Adolfo (Carlos Cruz). They have to change the hearse in every district, though, that not one undertaker has to drive the coffin through the whole country by his own. The risks are shared by the community, but his experiment

does not work at all. Neither the coffin reaches the right graveyard, nor Adolfo's dream come true. He wants to get a statue as a “bureaucratic hero”.

A second string opens with the trucker Mariano (Jorge Perugorría), who starts his journey to flee from his carry-ons waiting for him at every station on the road. He meets his former professor for literature Gina (Mirta Ibarra) who is the niece of Yoyita and wife of Adolfo. In Tabíos film *Lista de espera* (Cuba 2000), the trip does not start at all. The travelers are stranded in a bus station. Instead of going on, the station metamorphoses into a utopia from where the travelers refuse to go away, but at the end, it is all a common dream.

Postcolonial Traveler

To discover the postcolonial heritage, *Little Senegal* (Algeria 2001, Rachid Bouchareb) is a good example. The tourist guide Alloune (Sotigui Kouyaté) worked for several years on Gorée Island in Dakar, a museum for the history of the slave trade. His dream is to find his kinship on the other side of the Atlantic. He travels to South Carolina and finds out, that he has relatives in New York. The life of them is not as he has expected. In their eyes, he is an African, the cultural differences are enormous. His elegant disposition is opposed to the living conditions of his kinship. The African view on America is a fascinating change in the privilege of interpretation. Paul Gilroy opens the idea of a Black Atlantic to describe a spatial dislocation on both sides of the Atlantic as a result of slavery. According to Gilroy, diaspora is not an easy concept for movement (Gilroy 1993:15-16).

Alloune looks for the lost strings of his family history and travels to the land of (un)freedom, to the home of the slavery. He comes back to his origins in Dakar to see that the times have also changed here. Barbara Korte describes



Screenshot *Little Senegal* (source DVD Blaq Out)

the postcolonial traveler who “seems to display a special sensitivity for the colonial history of the countries they visit” (Korte 2000:163). “For yet another kind of post-colonial traveler [...] the question of belonging and of conducting 'home' tours is extremely complicated owing to the complexity of the post-colonial world” (ibid:172). There are many African movies showing this phenomenon. *Little Senegal* shows also a postcolonial traveler, even not as someone who is coming home to explore his own roots. The globalized world since the 15th century is no One-Way road. John Durham Peters (1994:20) shows that “exile suggests pining for home; diaspora suggest networks amongst compatriots, nomadism dispenses altogether with the idea of a fixed home or center.” Beyond a positive contribution to nomadism, there is a gap, a kind of dislocation.

In Bouchareb's second collaboration with the Senegalese actor Sotigui Kouyaté, *London River* (Algeria 2009), Kouyaté plays Ousmane, a father who comes from France to London to look for his son, he has not seen since his boy was six. The family called him from Africa, because, after the terrorist attacks in London, they have not heard from him. He joins an English lady, Mrs. Sommers (Brenda Blethyn), who is in search of her daughter, who lives together with Ousmane's son in a flat. After they follow their track, they start to believe that their children are involved in the terror attacks, but at the end, they were victims while they are on their way to her holiday trip. All the images Bouchareb shows are confusing, they present an Arab world in London. The French speaking Ousmane and the villager Mrs. Sommer are alien in this multicultural district.

Pictures we see, images we feel

Traveling is mostly connected with narration (stories) and pictures (postcards, photographs, or films). Back home, visual media are a kind of “aide-de-memoire” (aid to memory). On the one hand, pictures produce nearness of people and places, as, to speak in John Urry's words, “the viewer is brought into bodily contact with the trace of remembered” (Urry 2007:268). Giuliana Bruno describes this phenomenon as a kind “of haptic journey, a retrospective voyage, where memories are retrieved by handling photos from the past” (Bruno 2002:97). Many people remember things visually, stick their feelings on

images of sites or persons: sunset, beach, holiday friends, etc. A photograph is a strong metaphor of remembering, often used in many films.

On the other hand, pictures can produce imaginations about your coming holiday destinations (cf. de Botton 2005). When you study brochures, you get an idea of a hotel, a resort, or a country, you are going to visit. In television, travel documentaries are more and more popular. They have displaced the role of travelogues. Today as then, travel films show postcard views of places, adopt the tourist gaze and romanticize the world as an idyll in harmony (cf. Deeken 2007:44-45). Fiction films, sometimes, present also postcard views of tourist places. In many Hindi movies, it is a common visual gimmick to translocate the plot to exotic places, sometimes only for a song and dance scene, but often the diegesis shifts to Europe, Australia, or Singapore. The popular blockbuster hit *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (India 1995, Chopra) is one of the best example of travel film. Two young students journey through Europe. Raj Malhotra (Shahrukh Khan) falls in love with Simran Singh (Kajol) and wins her heart. Besides the love story, the film offers many tourist views on popular destinations in Europe, especially Switzerland, where their love story begins to rise.

It is not surprising that film affects tourism and that the popularity of certain movies increases “tourist visitation of sites featured” and “created a range of niche tourist operations” based on film (Beeton 2005:8, see also Busby and Klug 2001, Hudson & Ritchie 2006). While the cinematic tourist gaze is created by imaginations on a real gaze, it transforms itself to a real tourist gaze. Movie tours, which show shooting locations all over the world, are a field of business of the tourism industry. Further on, from the bodily aspects of traveling, the media not only serves us visual travel but also virtual travel. Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen (2006:4) show five independent mobilities in our contemporary world: physical travel of people, physical movement of objects, communicative travel (messages), imaginative travel through images, and virtual travel (internet). We join the imaginative travel and follow the articles of our contributors.

Clare Clements invites us to the dual nature of the flâneur, which is a key element in Mambéty’s cinema. The camera-flâneur documents the social spaces of Dakar, breaking the city up into fragments, vignettes of life, that sus-

pend the narrative and allow the viewer to understand the city. The protagonist-flâneur becomes emblematic of African city life and provides a personal perspective of the city that foregrounds its dreamlike characteristics. Through their wanderings, these characters allow the audience to experience the contrasts, paradoxes and connections inherent in the city.

Irenna Chang presents us the Hindi blockbuster movie *Three Idiots* and takes us on a journey to the Himalaya mountains. The protagonists search for their former buddy Rancho. The film travels back to show their college years and enlightens the Indian educational system and forces the questions about morals of learning.

Nirmala Iswari questions the presentation of Islam in the Western cinema and asks why there are so few movies, which depicts it unagitated. In *Le Grand Voyage*, she found one. The two protagonists, a devote Muslim and his modern son, travel from France to Mecca. The French-Moroccan director Ferroukhi transfers components of the road movie genre to a film about a pilgrimage journey, the hajj. It is a movie about the identity of Muslim migrants and a proposal to rethink patterns of modern/traditional.

Lorna Israel invites us to the Philippines. Her article “A body in permanent transit” presents us a popular movie on the national hero José Rizal. Israel spins her analysis around the national monument in Manila, which shows Rizal in European clothes with packed suitcases next to him, and transports us to his exile years in the film *Rizal sa Dapitan*. She interweaves his motionlessness and the space of transit while his exilic stagnancy.

Michael Christopher closes this issue with a ride in an intercity bus. He describes the “art of traveling” in African cinema and analyses the movie *TGV Express* and its postcolonial critic. The film depicts tourism, adventure, migration, magic, and business in the form of stereotyping the characters.

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