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USSY 227 – Ehrlich

Travel Writing on Screen

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**NOTES – Tom Gunning Essay**

* Travel genre was an exceedingly popular until about 1906
* “Chapter explores this tourist viewpoint as embodied in early travel films, examining both the forms this viewpoint takes, the discourses that surrounded it, and its place within a peculiarly modern experience in which the role of images has taken on a new dimension” (25).
* Travel films show wide range of exhibition contexts
* Adaptation of travel genre creates background/platform for fictional action
* Lanterns and stereoscopes were means of experiencing a distant place through images
* “This obsession with documenting one’s trip by an image brings me to core of the issue that I believe the travel genre poses for modern perception and use of images. In the modern era the very concept of travel becomes intricately bound up with the production of images. The image becomes our way of structuring a journey and even provides a substitute for it. Travel becomes a means of appropriating the world through images’ (26).
* The creation of Cooks Tours and modern transportation are symbiotic
* “Travel images did more than incite journeys. As the postcard shows, they were also the end products of journey, the proof one had been there, and the means by which one reflected” (27).
* “We should not simply think of travel images as substitutes designed for those who cannot travel… Rather , during the modern era images penetrate deeply into the process of travel itself, structuring our experience of the journey” (27).
* “The idea of making the world available in spectacles stretches back to the panorama of the turn of 18th century and to the world expositions of the latter part of the 19th century” (27).
* Moving canvas panoramas gave spectators the illusion of a sea voyage
* “The production of foreign views in early cinema must be placed in larger context…” (28).
* “Images fascinate modern consciousness obsessively, and this modern sense of images comes from a belief that images can somehow deliver what they portray” (28).
* Transportation companies encouraged tourism by sponsoring travel films
* Travel genre was possible because of an obsessive labor force that processed the world as a series of images and to make those views available to a wide audience
* “Illumination and transformation also intensified the visual power of magic lantern imagery”(31).
* The topics in the in above quote usually depict greater realism, but the author would like us to believe they help overcome the limits of traditional picture and film. This seems like the same concept.
* Panoramic views has more than one meaning in early cinema
* Travel genre’s popularity is from allowing a broader view of the landscape and carrying the viewer into the image
* “Panoramic perception involves a separation between the viewer and the spectacle observed: ‘Panoramic perception, in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belongs to the same space as the perceived objects: the traveler sees the landscape, objects, etc. through the apparatus which moves him through the world’ ” (32).
* The above quote’s idea anticipates the mode of film viewing
* “… the mediation of the cinematic apparatus allows viewpoints not available to the tourist” (33).
* “… a slice of native life is seized and presented as an amusing and possibly even laughable spectacle for the declaration of viewers from another culture and race. But then the frame becomes unstable with movement and the camera discovers another context” (35).

**SUMMARY**

Tom Gunning’s essay explores “a tourist viewpoint as embodied in early travel films, examining both the forms this viewpoint takes, the discourses that surrounded it, and its place within a peculiarly modern experience in which the role of images has taken on a new dimension” (25).

The essay has a strong focus in examining the traditional travel genre in both film and photography. The travel genre was often experienced in a wide range of exhibition contexts, such as trade fairs, art galleries, train cars, etc. While some portrayals of the travel genre facilitated the experience of distant places through images, others could signal the ending of a journey, “the proof one had been there, and the means by which one reflected” like postcards once did and continue to do (27). Travel genre, in general, is meant to vicariously allow users to experience distant places or to create the background / platform for fictional action which is where the genre’s popularity stems from.

**QUOTES**

“We should not simply think of travel images as substitutes designed for those who cannot travel… Rather, during the modern era images penetrate deeply into the process of travel itself, structuring our experience of the journey” (27).

“The production of foreign views in early cinema must be placed in larger context…” (28).

“Images fascinate modern consciousness obsessively, and this modern sense of images comes from a belief that images can somehow deliver what they portray” (28).

“Illumination and transformation also intensified the visual power of magic lantern imagery” (31).

**QUESTIONS**

The author would like us to believe that illumination and transformation help overcome the limits of traditional picture and film, rather than conveying greater realism. As a reader, I believe these concepts are one of the same. Could you elaborate more on what the essay was trying to convey, specifically regarding the differences in the imitations of traditional film and greater realism?

The essay gave great examples of how and where traditional film and pictures were viewed, but completely left unanswered who specifically viewed these films. The author seemed to generalize the traditional viewers of the travel genre when this essay examines the tourist viewpoint. I would have liked to see the author elaborate on how the wealthy and poor originally partook in viewing the film genre. How does this difference affect the author’s essay regarding the origins of the film genre?