

# Pointing Forward, Looking Back

## *Reflexivity and Deixis in Early Cinema and Contemporary Installations*

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Enter a machine that spins out movement, mile after mile.  
Gaze through the window at objects rushing by, out of sync with your body  
Pieces of the landscape move at different speeds  
The foreground is blurred and the background looks like an outline  
Houses and whole cities roll, break a  
part and recombine  
The world becomes a torrent of images  
The machine eye of Zoomscape burns through space revealing that  
which is usually unseen  
It crosses forbidden thresholds, glimpses private lives  
Encounters feel all the more delightful for their lack of substance  
You can go to places you never dreamed of going  
You are there for the ride

(Texts from *Zoomscape*, Eye Film Institute Netherlands, 2010,  
inspired by Mitchell Schwarzer)<sup>1</sup>

In September 2010, EYE Film Institute Netherlands (formerly Film Museum) launched the program *Zoomscape*, an exhibition about film, trains, and perception. The program took place on platform 2A at Amsterdam Central Station. It consisted of train films from all periods in film history, presented in a program leaflet with “departure” times and film titles as destinations in a train schedule. Early cinema held a distinct and prominent place in the program; the four categories were fiction, experimental, documentary, and silent film. Interspersed with other, later films, early cinema also had its own separate schedule in the program, announced as a “compilation of the archive” with more than twenty titles, including *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (*Train Entering a Station*, Lumière, 1895), *Conway*

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**Figure 29.1** 2010 *Zoomscape* installation (Eye Film Institute) at Amsterdam Central Station. Photo: Maureen Mens, 2010.

*Castle* (British Mutoscope & Biograph, 1898), *Irish Mail* (American Mutoscope & Biograph, 1898), bits from the EYE Film Institute's collection of unidentified fragments, *Bits & Pieces*, *Dans les Pyrénées* (1913), and *A Railroad Wooing* (1913).<sup>2</sup>

Thematically, the program was positioned by the institute as zooming in on the travel trope inherent in the cinematic experience. Or in their words: "Trains and films go hand-in-hand. When the first trains chugged up to speed around 1835 they changed the way we experience reality. The world became a moving image, the carriage windows an imaginary film screen on which new horizons passed by."<sup>3</sup> Others have, indeed, examined the intricate bond between the cinema, as technology of vision, and the train as modern technology of transportation. Congruent to both machines is that the visuality they afford is one of movement and transport, physical movement in the case of the train and virtual in the optical illusion of the cinema's moving images. The novelty of the moving image and the sensationalism of mechanized travel provided a powerful combination of expanded vision and speed. In this sense, the *Zoomscape* program is not only about train travel; it is about cinema as a medium of virtual transport.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, I consider this *exhibition*, its *program*, and its *installation* as a historical event. Not because of its monumental status – which it did have, in the double

sense of the word – but because of its meaning as event both *in* and *about* history. In *Zoomscape*, the historical films are relocated from the film (and archival) context to a context of mobility and temporary presence – the station today as a place of transit – and thus do, today, what they did then. I will show how a deictic layering produces an effect that enables us to speak of a multi-directional film installation rather than a uni-directional film exhibition. Screening them in this particular location magnifies, “blows up” the key feature of the moving image. These films do what they say: showing transport while transporting; moving – as moving images – they move people. This brings me to the point of this history writing: the reflexivity that sharpens our understanding of both past and present cultural developments. My discussion is devoted to this reflexivity.

### Reflexivity of the Medium

The ride film is part of a pervasive trope in the history of screen media. In modern visual culture, in the age of mechanical reproduction – in Benjaminian terms – and mechanized vision – in Dziga Vertov's words – at moments of transition, newly emerging or transforming screen media often reflect on the virtual mobility that the new medium or technology facilitates for its users. Or, as Janet Murray formulates it, writing about immersion as transportation, in the case of digital media: “Part of the early work in any medium is the exploration of the border between the representational world and the actual world.”<sup>5</sup> I suggest that it is this border – defined in medium-specific terms – that we seek to explore, expand, and transgress in the recurring trope of (mediated) mobility. We can trace this desire from early cinema to our contemporary screens.

The kind of self-reflection I will examine here, then, is not, or not necessarily, a critical, intellectual reflection *à la* Habermas,<sup>6</sup> but rather a merging of mirroring and probing. Today's media reflections suggest that virtual mobility and screen-based navigation constitute effectively a primary paradigm driving digital screen media. This primacy of navigation entails more fundamental positions regarding the relations, so central in discussions of early cinema, between our culture's predominant modes of address: narrative and spectacle. Both modes are centered on sense-making, in many different meanings of the phrase: from making sense as bringing logic, making understandable, and bringing about (or privileging) meaning, to mobilizing the sensory domain of attraction and affect.<sup>7</sup>

Even when not consciously thought through, the activity of self-reflection is important because it brings about what it says. Rather than simply mirroring content, self-reflection makes it possible that the (critical) analysis of what its object stands for brings into existence that very aspect of the medium. In this case, transportation within the film brings about the transporting ability of the moving image. The train films make the convergence between the moving image and

the transport it represents – as well as constitutes. This is the *performativity* of self-reflection. I use medium reflexivity, reflection, and self-reflection interchangeably. The reflexivity in media texts of the specificities of the medium they are made for/in can indeed be called reflexive or self-reflexive. This “self,” however, is not to be confused with the deictic terminology invoked in this chapter. I mean it in the most literal sense: media texts as statements about their own media-specific status.

As I have argued before in my book *The West in Early Cinema* on the convergence of emerging cinema and the depiction of the American West, particularly as a still-present frontier, the popularization of travel is not only contemporaneous with the advent of cinema; it is also structurally congruent with cinema while overdetermining the latter thematically.<sup>8</sup> In light of this temporal conjunction it is significant that, similarly, at the heart of both “new,” modern culture and the “new” medium are the hot topics of movement, vicarious displacement, and expansion, both spatial and perceptual. The *Zoomscape* program at the train station must be seen in this light; it cannot be reduced to a thematic rhetoric.

The recurring topic of travel in moving images at both historical moments – around 1900 and around 2000 – is thus no coincidence, and the reflexivity of the films in the first decade of the medium suggests how this theme's frequent occurrence is best understood. Within the fragmentation and variability we can discern a logic of kaleidoscopic connections and attractions that celebrate the moment of radical change: a change evidenced by new mobilities and the then-new medium that provided ways to show them. Similarly, the *Zoomscape* installation reflects on the ways in which screens give us access to space; indeed, how they determine our relationship to space. In this sense the media precede and thus pre-write (not to say pre-scribe) the way scholars and users later come to understand them. The object pre-formats how we can study it.<sup>9</sup>

Media reflection means that an artifact in a particular medium probes that medium's features and impact. Moreover, as Mary Ann Doane suggests in her discussion of medium specificity at the moment of innovation and transition, this entails not only highlighting possibilities, but also the medium's technological and material limitations: “Proper to the aesthetic, then, would be a continual reinvention of the medium through a resistance to resistance, a transgression of what are given as material limitations, which nevertheless requires those material constraints as its field of operations.”<sup>10</sup>

Such reflections (here phrased as “reinvention”) on the possibilities and limitations of the medium are not a mere issue of aesthetics, nor are they to be reduced to commercial self-promotion. Speaking theoretically, I contend that reflexivity in a broad sense is an inevitable cultural mode pervasively present in all media artifacts. This is so because cultural existence implies the desire to understand how things work. This need for exploring possibilities, limitations, and medium-specificity, however, is particularly pertinent to moments of innovation and transition. Specifically at those moments, the artifacts are reflexive in that they inform us

about the historical position of their newness, including their future, as well as, consequently, our own. This can easily be assessed in an analysis of the meeting of two moments of increasing and accelerated development of new media, a century apart.

The exhibition, or as I will call it in the wake of *Zoomscape*, the installation of early cinema on-screen today creates a specific synergy between each screen culture's tropes of medium reflection: a layered mobility of virtual transport (cinema) and spatial expansion (screens in public space). This entails both the on-screen image of mobility and the positioning of the screen. Moreover, taking *Zoomscape* as an archival performance that brings about a particular *liveness* to early films as archival objects, the exhibition also suggests a layered temporal mobility: from the present of filming, to the present of screening, to a transportation back to an earlier cinematic culture. As Giovanna Fossati formulates it in Chapter 28 of this volume, film as performance is a useful framework for exhibiting these archival films. I would add that the layered temporality of the "present" of performance in an archival screening gives even more depth to the virtual time travel of cinematic experience.<sup>11</sup>

I will now analyze these moments of reflexivity in the moving images of early cinema and the screening of the images in the installation. Both address in their own way the changing relationship between spectator and (urban) space. They each do this through, on, and by means of the screen. This centrality of the screen brings up the question of the relationship between spectator, screen, and image. A particularly useful concept to investigate this relationship is *deixis*. I propose the concept of *deixis* to probe the way mobility and space-making work through the address to and solicitation of the spectator on multiple levels of the screening situation: the image on screen, the positioning of the screen, and the evocation of spatial and temporal mobility exemplary of screening early cinema in a contemporary context.

*Deixis* is a term borrowed from linguistics to explain how language is context-dependent. In fact, as Émile Benveniste has argued, *deixis* and not reference is the essence of language.<sup>12</sup> Deictic words, or shifters, function as mobile focal points, often within an oppositional structure such as "here," implicitly opposed to "there." *Deixis* indicates the relative meaning of the utterance, tied to the situation of utterance, an "I" in the "here" and "now." They have no fixed, referential meaning. *Deixis* establishes the point of origin, or deictic center, of the utterance: the "I" who speaks, as well as its point of arrival, the "you" who is spoken to. These terms are by definition mutually interchangeable. Moreover, or consequently, *deixis* frames the statement in temporal ("now") and spatial ("here") terms. *Deixis* helps set up the world to which the text relates. In contrast, for example, to nouns or adjectives, deictic words or shifters only have meaning in relation to the situation of utterance. Their meaning is produced through indication rather than reference – think of pointing. Personal pronouns of the first and second person – "I," "we," "you" – are shifters. But "he," "she," and "it" are not.

The latter, although also in need of identities to fill them in, do not change when the situation of utterance changes. But when *I* speak and *you* answer, *you* become *I*, and *I*, *you*. *She* remains the same, since both *I* and *you* know whom we are talking about. If we do not know who is speaking, the first and second person pronouns have no meaning. Similarly, we cannot *place* the meaning of such words as “over there” or “right here” if we don't know from where the speaker is speaking. Nor can we *time* the meaning of “yesterday” without a determined time frame.

I introduce these examples of shifters to suggest that time, place, and person are their primary anchors. Although the term was first introduced in linguistics, the perspective on the construction of space, time, and subjectivity is particularly useful for analyzing how the spectator is bound to the image. Hence, the “represented” images of, for example, the ride films that are central to my case here are not simply presented as from an internal point of view – a diegetic spectator – but also produce the subjectivity of the implied looker (the “I” doing the looking) as well as of the “I”’s “you,” the second person who mutually constitutes and affirms the “I.” A filmic image is what tells us “about,” and thus constitutes a (fictionalizing) gaze that emerges through the inflection of the vista that invests it with subjectivity. This inflection can also be called focalization, a term from narrative theory that expresses this mediating and subjectivizing function, a visual equivalent of deixis.<sup>13</sup>

## Ride Films and Deixis of the Image

Phantom rides are ride films shot from a first-person point of view – usually from the front of a moving vehicle. They were a typical attraction in early cinema which proved to have a lasting screen presence. The phantom ride's attraction is bound up with the deictic relationship between the camera, and hence the viewer, and the landscape. This is most important for an understanding of the films in their moment of cultural history. Through the device of the camera attached to the locomotive, the visual representation of landscape constitutes a truly shared environment. As a consequence, landscape does not stand on its own, as a geographical setting “out there” only, but rather functions as a shifter between ways of life. It stands as the point of access to the “other” of modern and diverse culture.

In this sense landscape has a specific role in the representation of modernity, mediating the ideological nature vs. culture opposition strongly present in the culture. And as binary oppositions tend to do, they declare one of their terms positive, the other negative. But this valuation is fraught with ambivalence as the one becomes the attraction of the other. To put this more strongly, the representation of nature partakes of a specific representation of its negative, culture, and hence, is an oppositional representation of the urban. The terms of the binary couple nature/culture, or wild/urban, need each other. From the vantage point of the

second term of the opposition – the one with which the viewer is aligned – the first term opens up to a spatial otherness, an elsewhere. This elsewhere, just like *elsewhen* and the cultural *Other*, only has meaning in an oppositional structure which, by means of the mapping of meaning through a shifter, organizes itself around the “I”/eye of the (urban) viewer that is its focal point.

Many travel films that include fictional characters play with this ambivalence of the traveler/spectator as being part of the landscape yet, inherently, also not part of it. Films like *A Romance of the Rail* (Edison, 1903), *The Hold-Up of the Rocky Mountain Express* (AM&B, 1906), and *A Railway Tragedy* (British Gaumont, 1904) combine footage from a train ride with romantic, comic, or dramatic scenes. *A Railway Tragedy* opens on the streets, at the arrival and departure of the train at the station, and ends with the train's arrival at another station. In this film, both trajectories – the non-fictional display of landscape and the fiction of the characters on the train with their urban point of departure – are literally intertwined by the insertion of views of passing landscape into the frames that show the interior of the train. As if they were traveling companions of the characters on screen, spectators can see the same view from the window, and they can also take a peek into the train compartment. The combination of shots and their modes of address sustain a fluid boundary between different fictional and non-fictional forms of address, providing shifting points of reference from “he”/“she” to “you” and, in the case of primary point of view, a phantom “I.”

What the cinematic ride films and the mobile screen have in common is that they not only display but also constitute an experience of travel. Both deploy the imagery of travel to underscore the (new) medium's capacity as a virtual travel machine. The dynamic of travel as topic-trope-metaphor results in a mirror image when the medium *in* the image comes to stand for the mobility *of* the image. Such mirror images are synecdochs, where a part or detail stands for the whole. Specifically, they take the form of a *mise en abîme* – a figure where a detail not only stands for the whole, but is a summary or mirror-image of it.<sup>14</sup> This shift from a thematic to a metaphoric reflection of mobility is visible throughout the history of media. I refer in particular to those moments when physical mobility was first used to establish and demonstrate the virtual mobility of the medium. In early cinema, phantom rides are exemplary of this model of visual or virtual mobility. The screen, in this case, is the tool for movement through vision. The result of captured mobility refers back to the mobility-in-motion (the moment of shooting) and enables the spectator to travel back in time to the moment of this mobility.

Let me point out how mobility and visuality are tied together in travel imagery of early cinema to produce a space of mobility. This interest in mobility in the unbreakable bond of space and time in timespace as a trope of early moving images thus stems from the insight that (virtual) travel and transport are, precisely and intensely, both visual and narrative in their appeal, so much so that these two aspects can no longer be disentangled. Transport is an experience consisting of a temporal sequence of micro-events; of movement through space and of (resulting)

encounters: a series of movements in time that appeal to the spectator's desire for immersion in space. It allows for "new ways of seeing."<sup>15</sup>

This new way of seeing is a temporally structured, at times immersive experience of visual engagement with new phenomena, environments, and people. These are all set, importantly, in space. The spatiotemporal imagery of travel thus establishes narrative as the twin or partner and not oppositional "other" of visual spectacle.

According to André Gaudreault, time, or *chronicity*, is the primary aspect of narrativity.<sup>16</sup> He distinguishes two levels of narration in moving images: micro- and macro-narratives. This distinction is that one occurs on the level of the single shot and the other is created between shots by means of editing. The single shot – as micro-narrative – is the barest form of narration because it shows the passing of time that is *change* over time within the image. Spectacle, or attraction, can be regarded as things happening; things that have a direct effect on the spectator, drawing primary attention to themselves or, in temporal terms: happenings that punctuate 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 surround them.

At first sight, narrative is the account of the passing of time (and its results) outside the world of the spectator, whereas spectacle draws the engager-spectator into that world, from a grammatical third-person account to a first- and second-person interaction, as if by synchronizing watches: not in some other time, or *elsewhen*, but *right now*. This makes such spectacles, or narratives that are also spectacles, deictic, and sets them in the present tense. Nevertheless, if narratives can *also* be spectacles, this is because as concepts, narrative and spectacle are derived from different logics. Narrativity is constructed by means of interpretation, whereas spectacle is often conceptualized as an "effect," a forceful effect that takes the spectator out of an immersive diegesis and breaks 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. Problematically, this oppositional conception blinds us to the intricate connections between the two. These connections become prominent in mobility. When mobility predominates, the distinction between temporal and spatial constructions is no longer meaningful.<sup>17</sup>

The concept "cinema of attractions" as it was originally proposed makes this clear. Tom Gunning initiated a rehabilitation of visual attractions as belonging to a register different from but equal to narrative, in order to understand a mode of address that did not fit with (classical) narrative models.<sup>18</sup> Identification, suspense, and laughter are typical responses to narrative which demonstrate the mechanism of what I would call a *heteropathic immersion*. The "pathos" of such immersion is "hetero" when viewing subjects go, as it were, out of themselves and make the



leap to immerse themselves in the “other” field visible on the screen. The opposite would be an “idiopathic” immersion where the subject appropriates the image and absorbs it into his/her own world. The distinction as I propose it here is one between the off-screen world of the spectator and the on-screen events they engage with. Here, heteropathic means that the immersion takes place on the terrain of the diegesis, an elsewhere/elsewhen into which the spectator enters.<sup>19</sup>

Gunning draws 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. These he sets off against the diegetic absorption that results from narration, the unfolding of a story. Gunning considers the phantom ride a key example of the cinema of attractions. He also proposes that its relative, the chase film, is the “original truly narrative genre,” providing a synthesis of attractions and the linear logic of narrative editing. Both train and chase films rely on a primary narrative format of spatial mobility, but in a different way. The phantom ride shows this in a first-person perspective from a moving vehicle; the chase film “follows” characters traversing space. These generic formats show different perspectives on the experience of mobility: one invites a primary identification and the other binds the mobility to a third person. Both solicit a heteropathic immersion based on spectatorial transportation via the visual mobility on the screen.<sup>20</sup>

I would underscore this view and extend it for my purpose here, which is to clarify the new perspective on early cinema that contemporary media help provide us. As an exemplary trope in moving images, phantom rides constitute an *arche*-genre – let's call it a paradigm – that precedes and predicts, and is continuous with, contemporary screen-based ways of constituting ever-changing (media) spaces. As such, movement, especially that of the phantom ride's traveling camera, establishes a synthesis between narrative and spectacle. Gaudreault discerns micro-narratives in shots that show movement, using the example of the famous single-shot arriving train film *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat*. Following on from this, I will propose below a temporary typology of train films as a way of thinking about contemporary screen-based relations to space. Together, these types demonstrate how movement as cinematic form reflexively embodies the ways in which narrative and attraction are essentially and inextricably tied together.

Foregrounding the intricacies of what some, perhaps, have tried too hard to disentangle, I argue that different types of train films function as visual motifs, in which both attraction and narrative can be discerned. It is primarily deixis that defines attraction; hence, through deixis, narrative can become (also) attraction. Let me use some examples from *Zoomscape: L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat*, *Conway Castle*, and *Irish Mail*. Like any program, a (thematic) compilation program is a creative product of selection and collage. Similar to the exhibition practices of early cinema at its time, spectators are presented with a wide array of images, viewpoints, and attractions. In the *Zoomscape* program we see a representative sample of the variety of train images from the early period. Let us see how the spectator is deictically addressed by these images.

A first form is that of the arriving train. Perhaps the most canonical example is *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat*. Shot with a camera positioned on the platform, a train arrives and people step off while others board the train. A more dynamic – more clearly deictic – variant is the approaching-then-passing train film: the train moves toward the spectator, but passes on one side. An example of this is *Fast Mail, Northern Pacific Railroad* (Edison, 1897), not programmed in *Zoomscape*. In some cases the camera pans, following the train ride toward the distance. This produces the sensation of seeing something first being hurled at you, and the subsequent relief of seeing it as it misses you as the target, and watching it disappear into the distance. The physical sensation this can produce is evidence of the deictic nature of such ploys. This is what Gunning points out as the relationship between early cinema attractions of train rides and the visual spectacles of the fairground.<sup>21</sup> What they share is the visual-physical sensations of the roller coaster.

In another type, the phantom ride of *Conway Castle* shows a first-person perspective, tracking the perceptual field as seen from a moving train, without showing the train itself. While named after the castle that was a popular tourist attraction, the film mainly shows the train track and the passing landscape. In the promotional text from the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company this is advertised as such: “Without a doubt this is the finest railroad moving picture ever made, and for variety and beauty of scenery it can hardly be surpassed the world over. This view is taken from the front of a rapidly moving locomotive, over a stretch of track made up of a continuous series of reverse curves; and every turn opens a vista of surpassing beauty. Conway Castle itself, one of the most picturesque and historic spots in Wales, appears from time to time in the picture.”<sup>22</sup>

Besides the tourist attraction of the film, the roller-coaster effect is very strong. The film consists entirely of a first-person perspective and follows the twists and turns of the track. The train also goes through a tunnel, and much like in a true phantom ride vision is temporarily suspended. The vista of the emerging landscape after the darkness of the tunnel in the colored print of the film is, still today, very spectacular in its effect. The spectator “lives” the moving perception, so that the phantom ride has become the measure of dynamic timespace. In deictic terms: the “I” is in the point of view that the spectator can adopt and from which the landscape is infused with meaning, and for whom the image has an effect. The deictic center is positioned by the camera perspective. *Conway Castle* is part of the Biograph 68mm collection that is mentioned in Giovanna Fossati's contribution to this volume. Due to their wide gauge they have a particularly bright and sharp image. The spectacular visuals of the ride film are enhanced by the use of color, which is strikingly beautiful in this film.

These various train films each exemplify a different relationship between the screen and its spectators, ranging from static beholder to virtual passenger, as they experience space as dynamic. These categories of attractions, based on mobility and the perception of spatiotemporal deixis of this mobility, are irreducibly reflexive as they show *on* screen how we are to relate *to* the screen, in a troping of the train as vision machine.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 29.2** A shot from *Conway Castle* (British Mutoscope and Biograph, 1898). Courtesy of EYE Film Institute, Netherlands.

## Placing Screens

Central to the construction of media as a travel machine is, then, the screen. Even if it can represent a temporal mediation, the screen is always also a spatial object, a tool for, but also part of, spatial transgression, hence, of mobility. The screen makes both the time of experience and diegetic time *spatial* – indeed, it is the locus of that transformation.

In early cinema, films were shown “in context” as well. The exhibition format of Hale's Tours is an often-mentioned example of a traveling exhibition format that reflexively projected cinematic images in a train. When film was still predominantly a traveling medium and shows were held in temporary locations, the programs often included local “views” and possibly local people on screen. Also, news event films or actualities provided a strong deictic anchor between viewers within their locative and temporal context and the image on screen. I propose that these images even framed the other attractions on the screen with an emphatic “here” and “now” in their address of the spectator as “you” and, even if by extension and only as a possibility in most cases, an “I” as the spectator's cinematic other. The difference of location-based screening then and now is, perhaps, first and foremost the deictic complication of time, as in the case of these archival films. But contemporary screenings can also make use of this deictic aspect.



**Figure 29.3** The entrance of *Zoomscape* at Amsterdam Central Station. The bulletin on the door says, “We are open.” Photo: Bert Kommerij, 2010.

The touring show *Crazy Cinématographe*, curated by Vanessa Toulmin (National Fairground Archive) and Nicole Dahlen and Claude Bertemes (Cinémathèque Luxembourg) in 2007, recreated for a contemporary audience early cinema's traveling years as fairground attraction. The films were projected in a tent along with a cast of performers bringing back the tradition of the fairground shows. The program included titles from European film archives and featured many regional and location-specific titles. This screening turned the contemporary and local audience into the deictic “you” of the archival films.<sup>24</sup>

The space of the frame, established by the deixis of the image, is extended by the space of the screen. One is encapsulated within the other; the virtual space on screen is *framed* by the external space of the screen. In the case of *Zoomscape*, we see how images of vehicular mobility or train travel become elements of cinema's virtual mobility, and are then thematically positioned within a (contemporary) paradigm of mobility – the metropolitan train station as place of transit *par excellence*. This layered mobility extends urban space.

When we look at the spatial arrangement of the installation, we notice the two-sided screen with train benches within an otherwise open space surrounding the screen, which allows people to walk around freely in the space. The open door has an inviting announcement addressing the passer-by/spectator in inclusive terms:

“we are open” and “free admission.” You/I can come in. “You are there for the ride” say the words written on the wall. The platform with arriving and departing trains in the background is the entrance and exit to the space. Location as the site of installation, as well as its spatial arrangement, emphasizes the dialectic of the medium and location, which is specific for so-called location-based screening. At the point of arriving and leaving, people can stop in their tracks and linger for a while in this space of virtual transport. The presence of the passing spectator is positioned both “here” within the image of the ride films and “here” as visitor to the exhibition space, in a spatial relationship to the screen.

Because of this deictically layered quality of the situation I propose to speak of “installation” rather than “exhibition.” The latter term suggests one-directionality of presenting material to a recipient audience that is itself outside of the display. Moreover, exhibition is unspecific, while installation, in contrast, suggests location-specificity and the making of meaning through performativity. An installation is activating; “screening,” in this case, is not a noun but a verb. Finally, an installation constitutes one “work,” while an exhibition comprises many different works. Hence, the term installation is also meant to unify the event.

In *Zoomscape*, the set-up of the screen in the space at the station proposes a deictic operation outside of the frame of the cinematic image. The presence within the space is visible, if only because of the daylight coming in. People can walk around and even view the screen from both sides. The installation is there to *visit*, a space to walk around in, emphasizing the spatiality of the installation as such. The screening of the films is spatially arranged and the screens are literally “installed” within the space. This accentuates the fact that the screening is a performance in a specific location, at a specific time, in the presence of spectators who are addressed and compelled to respond. The space where the films are shown is the site where the installation literally takes place. Moreover, the presence of the compilation program invites multiple perspectives. The archival footage, old images in a lively context of urban space where people pass through and possibly stay and sit for a while, creates a sensory domain of temporary presence. This, again, is a situation of installation rather than of exhibition.

Another example of contemporary screening in new contexts is the installation *Silent Films*, curated by Jennifer Peterson. This was a three-channel (digital) installation of early non-fiction films at *The Lab at Belmar* in Lakewood, Colorado in 2008. Three screens with images projected from the rear were hung at about eye level in an otherwise dark and empty space. They ran three separate programs of early non-fiction films – travel images, portraits, and industrial/labor imagery – from the collections of EYE, the Library of Congress, George Eastman House, and the British Film Institute. Each program ran at a slightly different length, so that as the programs looped continuously throughout the day, they were always in different synchronization. Many viewers described the pleasure of the installation to the curator as a puzzle of making associations between the three different images.<sup>25</sup>

This installation is another example of how the medium reflexivity of early cinema can return in contemporary screening practices, at the level of *compilation* (selecting and combining images), *relocation* (bringing the screen to new spatial contexts), and *installation* (spatial arrangement of the screen). The multiple screens looping compilations of films in this installation invoke the fragmentation of early cinema's film programs by reframing this in a culture of "reusing and reinterpreting historical cultural objects" (as described by the curator in the program leaflet). It is a historical gesture, this installation; it not only brings the archival object to a new place of exhibition but also reframes the cultural viewing context, from the black box, a site of popular culture, to the white-cube gallery space, the conventional space for art. This is a reflexive move, even if I use the term "popular culture" anachronistically, considering that, at the time of its making, the motivation for making this travel imagery was a part of attempts to elevate the cultural status of the medium. Not that this attempt at elevation had the effect, or the intent, of making the entertainment less "popular" in a broad sense: it remained a mass entertainment, slightly re-gearred to the new white-collar working middle classes.

Contemporary installations integrate a thematic resonance in the choices made in the selection and compilation of the images, the specific location within which they are shown, and the spatial set-up of the screen(s). My examples here converge in demonstrating that screening makes for a performative situation. And, as I now wish to argue, the performativity of these situations requires deixis. Alison Butler suggests as much when she makes use of the specific notion of deixis in theatrical performance to describe film and video screening in gallery spaces as a "theatricalization": "The defining role of deixis in theatre arises from the fact that performances, unlike films, actualize meaning in relation to concrete spatiotemporal contexts shared with their audiences. To describe gallery films as deictic in a theatrical sense, then, is to suggest that the 'theatricalization' of film in the gallery complicates spectatorship, dividing attention between screen space and screening space and subjecting the spectator's qualified belief in the cinematic illusion to continual – spatial, temporal and discursive – modulation."<sup>26</sup> The complication of spectatorship is precisely what makes these "gallery films" appropriate for reflexive statements. The selection, relocation, and subsequent installation of (archival) early films is a deictic operation. Placing screens for a performative event, then, entails the installation of deixis.

### Looking Forward: Archival Presence in Deictic Time

Whether historical resonance and wonder (Greenblatt)<sup>27</sup> or recognition and excess (Casetti)<sup>28</sup> dominate film experience in these exhibition formats, a similar dual structure makes those experiences possible. This is the dualism of the I/you structure. Spectators are hailed by means of deictic address, while simultaneously being

given the opportunity to save themselves by shrinking back when the train rushes by. The contemporary screening of archival films is not a nostalgic practice of showing images of the past in new context, but it is one that takes as its starting point performativity, as a profound present and presence of pastness.

In the age of digitization the index as a trace of pastness has been endowed with a specifically nostalgic *imago*, in the case of the photographic image in particular. The analog photograph as a literal imprint of light ontologically “proves” spatiotemporal reality and thus provides the image with “authenticity,” yet also with material decay. Due to the alleged ontological loss of indexicality with digital photography the photograph no longer functions as visual evidence of the literal imprint of reality (i.e., the rays of light on a sensitive surface). Digital photography has allegedly lost the direct connection between reality and image, or perhaps better, we have lost faith in it. But instead of deploring or celebrating this difference, I prefer to stay with the semiotic working of the index as sign in the making of meaning.

To understand the nature of this semiotic functioning of indexicality (or the indexicality of semiosis), we can look to a distinction proposed by Mary Ann Doane. In her contribution to a special issue of *differences* on the index, Doane brings together two very different characteristics of the index that we can discern in Charles S. Peirce's writings: its deictic directionality and the temporality of the index as trace. She problematizes the issue of authenticity by proposing a dialectic of these two sides to indexicality: the implied temporality of the index as imprint (what Barthes calls the “this-has-been” of photography) and as indicator: “look here.” This indication has a very forceful presence, if not present. In Peirce's own words: “[T]he sign signifies its object solely by virtue of being really connected with it. Of this nature are all natural signs and physical symptoms. I call such a sign an *index*, a pointing finger being the type of the class. The index asserts nothing; it only says ‘There!’ It takes hold of our eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops. Demonstrative and relative pronouns are nearly pure indices, because they denote things without describing them.”<sup>29</sup>

I seek to implement the temporal aspect of this distinction by considering indexicality as trace, on the one hand, and deixis on the other, in semiotic, not ontological terms. The trace is a sign of pastness from which the present cannot disentangle itself. The analog photograph of an object that was once placed before the lens would be a prime instance of such a trace. Deixis signifies the situatedness of the image in the present of its emergence: the “here” in “here was the object” of the photograph – the here which positions the spectator in relation to the image. This is the here that constitutes presence and positions relationality.

The trace and deixis are not mutually exclusive but operate dialectically, framing the present and presence of the image. Working together, however, the pastness as an absolute is unhinged: the situatedness of the image in its emergence is shifted to the situatedness of its presence. The pastness the trace carries is carried over into a bond with the present moment. This is why history remains important: the

past is not detached from the present but, bound to it by deixis, informs and thickens it. In light of navigation with (screen-based) mobile devices, I call this bond between trace and deixis a destination-index, a trace toward the future.<sup>30</sup> But perhaps it is a two-way trace: one that inscribes in our present moment of experience a double temporality.

Alison Butler via Warren Buckland points out how deixis is brought to the fore in screening as a live *event*.<sup>31</sup> According to Butler, this is particularly clear in the case of site-specific screenings of films: "In the conventionalized setting of the cinema the deictic potential of the cinematic image is minimized, but once prised from its institutional home the cinematic image discloses its brazen link with the local and the distant."<sup>32</sup> Bringing together the trace in deixis is the historical act of *Zoomscape*. The distinction between the index from the past – the trace – and the index in the present – deixis – is mobilized and its two temporalities are brought into touch with each other whenever the archival or historical becomes an experience in the present. This temporal deixis points to a time with which we have some sort of continuity.

In designing this presentation of the museum's archive in the city's public space, the programmers of *Zoomscape* clearly sought to do something more specific than the general goal of drawing attention to their archive in a larger public space by exhibiting and reframing the collection for the sake of archival "visibility" alone. They focused their program specifically on films from early cinema which, more than simply being in the movement of the then-new moving image, thematically represent movement. This is not simply a topic chosen among many equivalent ones. I argue that, instead, transportation is not only a main preoccupation of many early films in terms of thematic content, or a simple congruence between the moving image and the movement of people, but also a characteristic of the culture of early cinema as such. Both location specificity (the meaning of "place") and mobility (movement and the trope of transformation) are also primary preoccupations of today's visual culture. It is this dual track, so to speak, at the intersection of transportation and transformation, that has led me to look at early cinema in the *Zoomscape* film program and its location at a railway station as a structural, rather than only a thematic, doubling. The focus on the past is, then, as much a focus on the present. The two cultures meet in the common interest of the two eras in the locomotivity so omnipresent in the two moments.

This common ground between early cinema and contemporary screening installations has two consequences for the methodology of media history. I suggest here that such coincidences alert us to a bi-directionality in history. It draws attention to the forward-looking impulse in any new media development as paired, and inextricably intertwined, with a looking backwards to the medium from which the new development distinguishes itself. The desire to innovate comes inevitably with the desire to build on, and thus stay connected with, what came before. Indeed, history writing itself is a search for a gaze upon the past relevant for the time of writing. The publication of the present volume offers testimony of this.



## Notes

- 1 These lines were written on the walls of the exhibition space at the station that I take as my point of departure in this chapter. These lines, as well as the title for the program, *Zoomscape*, are inspired by Mitchell Schwarzer's 2003 book of the same title on architecture and the moving image. Many thanks to Anna Abrahams, project manager for experimental programming, EYE Film Netherlands, for giving me background information about the project.
- 2 The *Bits & Pieces* collection of EYE is unique in its kind, and consists of unidentified fragments that the archive finds beautiful and enchanting enough to not only preserve but also exhibit, in spite of, or perhaps because of their "incomplete" status. About this collection and the question of archival poetics, see Nanna Verhoeff, *After the Beginning: The West in Early Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), in particular chapter B, "Bits & Pieces."
- 3 From the program description, EYE Film Institute Netherlands, 2010. Text revised slightly.
- 4 Among the scholars who studied the trope of mobility in relation to turn-of-the-century culture and the shock of modernity are Lynne Kirby, who writes about the cinema as "mechanic double" for the train; Ben Singer on cinema and the sensations of modernity; and Lauren Rabinovitz on the perceptual experience of travel, in particular in the case of Hale's Tours. Rabinovitz also argues for a lineage between early cinema's phantom rides and modern ride films. Stephen Bottomore provides a thorough analysis of the so-called "train effect" and the myth of the early cinema audiences panicking by watching approaching trains. Tom Gunning examines the relationship between cinematic visuality and the culture of modernity and positions the phantom ride as emblematic of early cinema as a cinema of attractions. See Lynn Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1998); and "From Hale's Tours to Star Tours: Virtual Voyages and the Delirium of the Hyper-Real," *Iris* 25 (1998): 133–52; Stephen Bottomore, "The Panicking Audience: Early Cinema and the 'Train Effect'," *Historical Journal of Radio, Film and Television* 19, no. 2 (1999): 177–216; Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde" in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, eds. Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), 56–62.
- 5 Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 103.
- 6 See Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (1968; repr., London: Heinemann, 1972).
- 7 I speak of a visual regime of navigation that emerges with the advent of cinematic visuality and is transformed by the interactive possibilities of digital interfaces that emerge in the following century. This genealogy is not a strict and limited chronology. The navigational mode of viewing (in the very active sense) is also present in preceding machines for visuality, such as the painted Panorama and its spin-offs and

- Wittgensteinian relatives, and has a transforming persistence in our contemporary moment marked by mobile screens, locative media, and urban screens (cf. Nanna Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens: The Visual Regime of Navigation* [Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012]).
- 8 Verhoeff, *After the Beginning*.
  - 9 This predictive quality lies at the heart of some art-historical work as well; see Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
  - 10 Mary Ann Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 131.
  - 11 On the cinematic experience as a negotiation of both recognition and excess, see Francesco Casetti, "Filmic Experience," *Screen* 50, no. 1 (2009): 56–66. Casetti writes: "Indeed, filmic experience is arguably both that moment when images (and sounds) on a screen arrogantly engage our senses and also that moment when they trigger a comprehension that concerns, reflexively, what we are viewing and the very fact of viewing it" (56). While I cannot elaborate here on the qualities of experience itself, Casetti's conception of experience as both immersive and contemplative resonates with my point in this essay about reflexivity on the one hand and deictic address on the other.
  - 12 Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971).
  - 13 For an excellent overview of the ins and outs of deixis, see Stephen C. Levinson, "Deixis," in *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Laurence R. Horn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 97–121. Levinson considers deixis as coextensive with indexicality, which he considers a larger category of contextual dependency, and reserves deixis for linguistic aspects of indexicality (97–8). I will return below to the deictic quality of certain forms of indexicality, specifically in relation to the index as trace, when considering the specifically layered temporality at work in the screening of early cinema today. On the topic of focalization, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
  - 14 See Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (1977; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
  - 15 Brooks Landon, *The Aesthetics of Ambivalence: Rethinking Science Fiction Film in the Age of Electronic (Re)Production* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 94. Scott Bukatman quotes Landon when he summarizes his argument concerning the affects of special effects in science fiction cinema that go beyond narrative in "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime," in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (New York: Verso, 1999), 254. The phrase "ways of seeing" alludes to John Berger's book with that title.
  - 16 André Gaudreault, "Film, Narrative, Narration: The Cinema of the Lumière Brothers," in Elsaesser and Barker, *Early Cinema*, 114–22.
  - 17 This view of narrative and attraction as different but not opposing categories is put forward as well in Frank Kessler, "The Cinema of Attractions as *Dispositif*," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 57–69. Kessler argues that there is no exclusive opposition between narration and attraction, as attractions can be narrativized. That is why, according to

him, one should distinguish, rather, between modes of address and functions in terms of narrative integration versus attractional display.

- 18 Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions."
- 19 For the link between the cinema of attractions and contemporary screen culture, see Strauven, *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. I borrow the qualifier "heteropathic" – but not its specific meaning – from Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- 20 On the chase film as proto-genre in early cinema, see Tom Gunning, "Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity: A Theory of Genres in Early Film," *Iris* 2, no. 1 (1984): 100–12; and Jonathan Auerbach, "Chasing Film Narrative: Repetition, Recursion, and the Body in Early Cinema," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 798–820. On early cinema's train films, phantom rides, chase films, and the relationship between genres based on (Wittgensteinian) family resemblances, see Verhoeff, *After the Beginning*.
- 21 Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions," 58.
- 22 Reprinted in Richard Brown and Barry Anthony, *A Victorian Film Enterprise: The History of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1897–1915* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), 251.
- 23 <sup>23</sup> For background to this terminology see Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible" in *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation*, ed. Timothy Druckrey (1971; repr., New York: Aperture, 1996), 108–17. Comolli positions cinema not as (strict) technology but as a cultural *dispositif*: "It was necessary that something else be constituted, that something else be formed: the *cinema machine*, which is not essentially the camera, the film, the projector, which is not merely a combination of instruments, apparatuses, techniques. Which is a machine: a *dispositif* articulating between different sets – technological certainly, but also economic and ideological" (108, emphasis in original). In line with this, Maaïke Bleeker approaches theater as a critical vision machine in *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- 24 <sup>24</sup> The show was organized as a public event to accompany the academic conference *Travelling Cinema* held at the University of Trier. For the proceedings see Martin Loipedinger, ed., *Travelling Cinema in Europe: Sources and Perspectives* (Frankfurt: Stroemfeld, 2008).
- 25 <sup>25</sup> Many thanks to Jennifer Peterson for providing background information on this installation.
- 26 Alison Butler, "A Deictic Turn: Space and Location in Contemporary Gallery Film and Video Installation," *Screen* 51, no. 4 (2010): 311.
- 27 Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 42–56.
- 28 Casetti, "Filmic Experience."
- 29 Charles S. Peirce, "On the Algebra of Logic: A Contribution to the Philosophy of Notation," *American Journal of Mathematics* 7 (1885): 180–202. Reprinted in *The Writings of Charles S. Peirce. A Chronological Edition*, vol. 5, 1884–1886, ed. The Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 181.
- 30 Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens*.
- 31 Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68–70.
- 32 Butler, "A Deictic Turn," 310.