

## Panel F3

Sala delle Colonne 2

### Animation, Time and Identity

Sarah Bowen

#### Animated Movement through Cinematic Landscape - the Transitional Space Trope



Visual rhetoric understands images as expressions of cultural meaning, with generally accepted ideas and allusions that are established and communicated through visual imagery. Repetition of an image used in a particular configuration acquires a symbolic meaning when presented to the spectator. Key to the rhetorical perspective is the response to the artefact (Foss, 2004:306)<sup>1</sup>. While an aesthetic encounter may consist of appreciation of form, the rhetorical response contributes meaning to the artefact with the form providing the basis for the spectator to infer, 'the existence of images, emotions, and ideas' (*ibid.*). A rhetorical response is a process of accrual (Helmer cited in Foss, 2004:306). Past experiences 'merge with the evidence of the artefact to construct meaning' (*ibid.*)

This paper proposes that a particular quality of animated movement through cinematic landscape has become a specific visual trope describing transitional space (Winnicott, 1971)<sup>2</sup> It investigates contexts, meanings and affect of this trope within this rhetorical perspective.

Landscape in film is most often perceived as background to the action; as 'setting' for narrative. Movement across cinematic landscape, viewed from the protagonist's POV, is often included to depict the terrain between the protagonists 'point of departure' and their 'destination'. While the 'point of departure' and 'destination' both have an identity, the cinematic territory between them is usually perceived as a transitional space or a 'non-place'<sup>3</sup>.

The transitional space trope is explicated through Jerzy Kucia's multi-award winning animation *Strojenie Instrumentów* [Tuning Instruments](2000) with examples from Sarah Turner 's experimental feature *Perestroika* (2009). Both of these films use animated movement through landscape with specific affect.

*Strojenie Instrumentów* [Tuning Instruments](2000) portrays the movement of an unidentified character through a landscape viewed as a first person POV across the x- axis of the screen. The soundtrack suggests the character is traveling on a motorcycle. Opening in a fragmented urban world, a man wakes up and goes through a routine that includes stretching and washing. He leaves the apartment and takes a motorcycle trip out of the city through forests and across fields to a rural destination. This journey from the urban apartment 'blok' into the countryside includes transient images that suggest memories are triggered by the landscape. For example, a forest transforms into marching

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<sup>1</sup> Foss, S. (2004), *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, Waveland Pr Inc

<sup>2</sup> Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Augé, 1995

soldiers. The open landscape at the end of the film contrasts with the closed black and white urban world at the beginning.

Sarah Turner's *Perestroika* (2009) is also about memory of a journey. This long form experimental film has Lake Baical in Siberia as its destination and was shot from the window of the Trans-Siberian Railway over two trips. Turner made the first journey in 1987-8 and then reenacted it in 2007-8 in remembrance of her original travel companion who had subsequently died in Siberia. The landscape footage is a mix of Hi8 video shot on the 1987-88 journey and HD pixilation and live-action taken on the same route in 2007-8 (APEngine, 2009)<sup>4</sup>. Turner uses still photographs, to evoke the memories of the first journey, with Barthes' (1981)<sup>5</sup> account of the photograph, as the visualization of loss, prevalent throughout the film.

Both films focus on the transitional journey across landscape as an exploration of time and memory. In both, there is no explicit differentiation between the autobiographical and the allegorical. The spectator's experience of the landscapes in both Kucia's and Turner's work is through an unidentified character's the point of view. The shift from diegetic to non-diegetic sound draws the spectator's attention to the space between the film world and the spectator's world, heightening identification with the POV.

In both *Strojenie Instrumentów* (2000) and *Perestroika* (2009) the motivation for the transitional journey appears to be reconciliation with the past. Winnicott's notion of a transitional space is applied to this cinematic trope to explain its affect.

This paper deconstructs and posits specific x-axis animated movement, naming it as a specific trope that originated in the first railway and photographic technologies.

## Biography

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Sarah Louisa Bowen is Head of Animation at the Northern Film School, Leeds Beckett University, teaching Animation, Experimental Film, Research-based filmmaking practices, and Moving Image Theory.

A graduate of the National Film and Television School, Sarah was taught by Jerzy Kucia and Piotr Dumala in UK and Poland and has a keen interest in Eastern European Animation and Experimental Animation techniques. Starting out in 2D drawn animation, Sarah worked on both commercial and independent productions combining live-action with digital and traditional animation. Sarah 's filmmaking practices engage with experimental

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<sup>4</sup> APEngine (2009) *Interview with Sarah Turner*. <http://www.apengine.org/2009/10/sarah-turner-on-perestroika/> Last accessed 07/07/15:

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, R. (1981) *Camera Lucida*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux

stop-motion animation techniques to explore movement through cinematic landscape. In her film 'Walking Albion', a stop-motion camera travels 550 miles across the widest part of England (Cornwall to Norfolk) between Beltane and the Summer Solstice. The camera passes through diverse landscapes connecting significant pre-historic, Christian and pre-Christian sites. Out of this journey, came the follow on book 'Awakening Albion' and the film 'Walking Albion'. These helped to establish this route as an official footpath (Michael/Mary Pilgrims' Way), now way-marked between West Cornwall and Avebury continuing onto Norfolk.

Current research explores the relationship of music and dance movement through animation.