



DIGITAL NARRATIVES AS ENHANCER OF MINDSCAPE THROUGH LANDSCAPES

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Abstract

The paper aims to examine how digital visual narratives, such as videos, offer its viewers varied experiences, especially transporting them metaphorically to distant places. This research proposes to engage in an exploratory study through the analyses of Erik Conover's videos on places such as Norway, Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Hawaii . The primary argument being that these videos create a sense of aura for its viewers using technology and further, in reinforcing that these lesser known places are certainly worth being visited. It also attempts to map the mental landscapes of the viewers through examining the comments-thread, and this is done in order to learn how Conover's digital monologues have influenced the viewers. In the course of the study, the paper also invests in understanding the evolution of digital narratives in the field of visual travel narratives.

Keywords - Travelogues, narratives, transportation, comprehension, landscape, mindscape

“Today I ascended the highest mountain in this region, which, not without cause, they call the Windy Peak...” The words go on in one of the first ever travel record written by Italian poet Petrarch on 26 April 1336. World has seen many great explorers, names like Marco Polo, James Cook and their hand written travelogues have contributed in the history of earliest travelogues ever written and also as a means to explore world beyond one's home. According to Marco Polo: "When a man is riding through this desert by night and for some reason -falling asleep or anything else -he gets separated from his companions and wants to rejoin them, he hears spirit voices talking to him as if they were his companions, sometimes even calling him by name. Often these voices lure him away from the path and he never finds it again, and many travelers have gotten lost and died because of this. Sometimes in the night , travelers hear a noise like the clatter of a great company of riders away from the road; if they believe that these are some of their own company and head for the noise, they find themselves

in deep trouble when daylight comes and they realise their mistake”. These travel narratives transport one to different places and spaces.

The travelogues began with writings and have evolved through time. *Michael Kowalewski* in one of his essays (1990) writes how there has been a comeback of interest in travel writing in the last one decade nonpareil since the twenties and thirties. The revival is notable not only in the recent reprinting of the travel classics but in the remarkable growth in number of new travel writers. The travel writing was accompanied by photography. Introduction of Photography in travel narratives or writing was a boon to the receptor. “As soon as there was photography, there was travel photography. Furthermore this invention of photography became a leap in the evolution of types of image-making long associated with travelling” - *Peter Osborne*.

There have been emergence of new media after the introduction of photography. One of which is the visual media, in forms of youtube video, vlogging and etc. The finding from *Annals of Tourism Research- Mediating Tourist Experiences: Access to Places via Shared Videos*, confirm that “online shared videos can provide mental pleasure to viewers by stimulating fantasies and daydreams, as well as bringing back past travel memories. In addition, the videos act as a narrative transportation, providing access to foreign landscapes and socioscapes.” This act of transportation can further be understood by the concept of *Aura*. In the year 1936, concept of ‘aura’ was technically introduced by Walter Benjamin in his influential essay - *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. *Aura* can be designated by the one-time experience of a certain object. Furthermore, ‘aura’ becomes a synonym for ‘one-timeness’ of the experience, where the meeting of the subject with the object cannot be reproduced. “A similar expression to that of Benjamin’s aura is that of ‘aesthetic experience’ albeit Benjamin stresses the unique one-time experience” The beginning of the essay brings out the traditional aesthetic values of “creativity and genius, eternal value and *mystery*”. *Mystery* or suspense becomes very important for it increases the curiosity. Similarly this gets into work while there is digital travel narrative at play, the visuals of the particular geography adds to the element of mystic to the place itself. “By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand it manages to assure us of an immense field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and our furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in

any case was visible though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject".
(Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* 236)

As mentioned above, a film helps in expanding our comprehension, the same is implied for the digital narratives, or more specifically the visual digital narratives through Vlogs. Vlogs, in present time are the conveyer of different information and happenings. And one of the growing fields of exploration through vlogging is travelling. Digital narratives create aura which Walter Benjamin talks about. The aura is of the geography and also of the culture represented in Erik Conover's vlogs on Norway, Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Hawaii. These places are not just a treat for eyes but also places with great natural resources. Each of these countries' gems are brought out in these vlogs. Furthermore, places beyond one's imagination come into picture in these vlogs. That creates an impact and at the same time creates an aura because of its geography and existence at a larger picture. There have been travel narratives written even before, and it was upon the reader to decipher the description into a mental landscape or mindscape. Through digital narratives, the vlogs give a clear picture of the place being explored and adding to an individual's perspective. There is a sense of awareness that strikes. Awareness in terms of geography and the dynamics of the geography meaning the country at a larger picture. Conover focuses on the natives' knowledge on these geographic scenes. That adds to the aura as well, because it gets a sight from the native. Bringing in a Native into the picture also makes the vlogs authentic.

Conover revolves all the vlogs around the adventure, sports and environment concerned issues in all of these explored countries. As Nature is the centre of attraction, it speaks for itself creating its own aura. Giving an ecocentric reading to the text, the text speaks for itself. Thus making it a large part of the narration in the vlogs. Digitalisation is seen as a threat to traditional writings but if seen beyond that digitalisation in travel narration has led to perspective formation due to the accessibility of the place in visual.

This further also helps in understanding the world wide view which is equipped by the viewer sitting in one particular place. Traditional travel narratives have been the base for having vivid imagination and mysterious mindscapes, which cannot be discounted. Whereas Digital travel narratives have added to the perspectives. The question of how is bound to arise, for which the answer is the visual presentation of the culture and the geography makes the viewer get more explorative about the place and the world at a larger scale. Conover brings out different angles to the country explored and the places being very unconventional meaning, not cliched and less explored makes it more mystic in nature. In their work Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska in the book, *Travellers's Tales: Narratives of Home and displacement* talk of how 'Narrative' becomes a symbol of journey and also

is a structure of development, growth and change-the acquisition of knowledge and solution of problems-is conceived as a physical process of movement, of disruption, negotiation and return. Where as 'Travel' concentrates as well as broadens the mind as a result of experiences of unfamiliarity, where there is a combination of pleasure of displacement along with the enjoyable role of ethnographer/consumer. And in the world of raging use of internet , travel narratives have found its way through the portal of Digital world. Digital Narratives gives the consumer a first hand experience of the story that follows up. Photographs for a long time have been contributing in the history of visual narrative. Since the invention and use of camera, there is loss of human touch to things .

Photographs being the product of the camera become very different from the sculptures and paintings because they make "representational images". The experience of these "representational images" become realistic through digital visual narratives in form of videos. Thus making the vlogs again an experience that cannot be explained. Today the digital travel narratives have become the basic way of journal. Thus making the exploring world get an eye from the lens.

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