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***Mobile screens: The visual regime of navigation***

by Nanna Verhoeff

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012,  
212 pages

ISBN: 978-90-896-4379-7 (paperback) Price: €32.50

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*Reviewed by Simon Ferdinand, Amsterdam School for  
Cultural Analysis*

This bold book argues that screen media have dovetailed with various forms of mobility in the modern world so as to constitute a distinct 'visual regime', that is, a fundamental dispensation of established modes, instruments and understandings of visuality. Verhoeff contends that our current regime is characterised by practices and tropes of navigation. Rather than proclaiming some radical visual paradigm shift, however, *Mobile Screens* applies a well-chosen methodology of historical comparison between media forms, allowing Verhoeff to discern an uneven complex of breaks and continuities that mark the development of the proposed 'culture of screen mobility' (15).

Proper to the study of something so broadly dispersed as a socially hegemonic visual paradigm, the book's case studies have been drawn from wide ranging moments and levels of social experience. The chapters progress from panoramas that extend before car windshields; the forms and metaphorical figures with which various media have reflexively represented their own possibilities; a conceptually provocative new round of gadgetry, exemplified by the Nintendo DS; moving screen images that saturate urban space and the locative new media that have transformed cartography into a networked, interactive and ever more pervasive cultural practice.

The book is thick with searching and imaginative – if also often elliptical – conceptual abstraction, demanded by these variously ephemeral, quotidian, hybrid and extraordinarily dynamic objects and practices. Although the text seems reticent as to how definitive of contemporary visual culture this visual regime is intended to be, its underlying problematic of navigation certainly proves illuminating in each of its diverse scenes and studies.

Interwoven with the elaboration of navigation as a frame for considering mobile screen media in practice, *Mobile Screens* is animated by a second argument. Verhoeff holds that locative screen media are profoundly performative. This idea goes further than suggesting that they structure our ways of seeing, knowing and inhabiting space; instead, she argues that they constitute the lifeworld. Taking a radically constructivist position that readers might find bracing, Verhoeff also insists that they produce space itself – 'not only taking place', as she puts it, 'but truly making space' (131).

To that hard take on media images' performativity, she adds the interactivity that is heralded, principally, by touchscreen interfaces, arguing that screen media empower their users to imaginatively form and enact their own worlds. That compelling idea should certainly provoke debate, not least over the question of whether the celebrated interactivity or dialogism of locative media applications indeed affirms users. Interactivity might rather be taken as the consensual immersion and investment of quotidian lived experience in the determinate framings or codings of space in which greater social interests are at stake (Google's cartography being a ready example); less the free co-creation of space than domination by consent.

*Mobile Screens* presses deep into this and many other challenging topics in visual culture. Forcing self-interrogation, it presents readers concerned with several

overlapping fields – most especially media theory, cartography and contemporary phenomenology – with much to contemplate and work through.

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