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Animated Landscapes: History, Form and Function. Edited by Chris Pallant. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015 (321 pages).

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Animation is pervasive. As Suzanne Buchan has observed, "[i]t is transforming cinema, is the basis for computer games, is used throughout the web, and advertising and propaganda learned early on its power to astonish, influence and coerce" (1). Animated landscape, therefore, cannot be simply understood as a background for films or a decorative image that moves; instead, it should be considered in broader artistic, technological, philosophical, cultural and political contexts. Arising from the Society for Animation Studies International Conference held in 2013 in Los Angeles, California, and edited by Chris Pallant, *Animated Landscapes: History, Form and Function* aims to address such issues and explore the rich and challenging terrain of animated landscape. Divided into five parts, the collection is organised according to a logical categorisation and order, bringing together fifteen essays that investigate various aspects of animated landscape, from histories to forms and functions.

The term "animated landscape" can be understood variously in different contexts. Accordingly, in his Introduction, drawing insights from literature, film criticism, and animation research, Pallant prepares the reader for a nuanced understanding of such notion. Starting with a discussion of landscapes that are represented in cave paintings and in predigital and digital animations, Pallant examines the connections of animated landscapes to different art forms and technics, including photorealistic digital cinema, abstract animation and interactive video games. He further creates an "all-encompassing mapping" able to accommodate all types of animated landscapes "in relation to the intersecting axes of interactivity and mimesis", which makes navigation and comparison possible (7).

Part One, entitled "History: Formal Traditions" and consisting of three essays by Bryan Hawkins, Chris Pallant and Malcolm Cook, investigates the historical evolutions of animated landscape in hand-drawn, stop-motion and computer graphics techniques. Devoted to these three distinctive technologies, the essays are organised in a progressive temporal order. Spanning a broad time scale, the opening essay, "Seeing in Dreams—The Shifting Landscapes of Draw Animation", investigates the transitions of the landscape in prehistorical painted caves, in early Disney's animations and in twenty-first century animated films. In this regard, Hawkins recognises hand drawing as an "extraordinarily imaginative and intellectual technology", which is related to the prehistory of animation, and also contributes to the conception of modern and postmodern images (20). In the same essay, by using Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) as example, the author suggests that two axes—palimpsest and polyphony—"can orient and re-orient us in relationship to the landscape of drawn animation", and "form the map of drawn animation" (20–1). He then extends his discussion of the shifts of animated landscape from premodern to modern and postmodern

times through a set of case studies, namely Walt Disney's *Silly Symphony* (1929–39), Ryūtarō Nakamura's *Serial Experiments Lain* (*Shiriaru Ekusuperimentsu Rein,* 1998), Ryan Trecartin's *Tommy Chat Chat Just E-mailed me* (2006), Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, 2004), and Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001).

In Chapter Two, "The Stop-Motion Landscape", Chris Pallant assesses the knowable quality of stop-motion animation, placing such technique as a distinguished way of conceiving landscapes, especially in relation to hand-drawn and computer-generated (CG) landscapes, due to its ability of constructing images through recognisable objects and materials. Pallant further categorises the stop-motion landscape into three main strands: instrumental landscape, which is the most powerful landscape in stop motion, as it emphasises the relationship between character and landscape; symbolic landscape, responsible for enhancing satirical critique and offering political commentary; and, narrative landscape, which aims to establish a believable fictional space. The following chapter, Malcolm Cook's "Pixar, 'The Road to Point Reyes', and the Long History of Landscapes in New Visual Technologies", examines the history of computer-generated landscapes. Through an investigation of the aesthetic content and context of the landmark project "The Road to Point Reyes", the author provides a fresh insight into the computer-generated imagery, emphasising that the connection between nature and culture is present in both images and technologies.

The discussion of the historical agenda is furthered in Part Two of the volume, particularly focused on national experiences which highlight the cultural and geographical diversity of animation practices around the world. As the longest section of the book, it includes four articles, respectively looking at the landscape as represented in Australian animation, Japanese animation, Chinese animation, and Latvian animation.

In "Australian Animation—Landscape, Isolation and Connections", referring to Ross Gibson and Peter Pierce, and using four animated films as examples—*Dot and the Kangaroo* (Yoram Gross, 1977), *FernGully: The Last Rainforest* (Bill Kroyer, 1992), *Mary and Max* (Adam Elliot, 2009), and *$9.99* (Tatia Rosenthal, 2008)—Steven Allen examines works developed in the country in the past thirty years and suggests that the landscape presented in Australian animations "shifts from an interiorized, isolationist stance to an outward focus that seeks to connect with the world" by increasingly depicting the country in a global context (75). The following chapter, "Environmentalism and the Animated Landscape in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997)", by Melanie Chan, extends the existing discussion on Hayao Miyazaki's films to an environmental perspective. She argues that both Japanese animations emphasise the "environmental issues on an emotional level" by leaving "audiences with memorable experiences through the representation of the beauty, fragility and powerful aspects of nature" and addressing "the interconnections between the human and non-human realm" (93). In "Latvian Animation: Landscapes of Resistance", as the title suggests, Mihaela Mihailova outlines how Latvian animation has developed in the past two decades and examines notable contemporary trends. By looking at changes in national productions, the author aims to demonstrate that the Latvian aesthetics of resistance, particularly seen as a stylistic practice that goes against the Hollywood three-dimensional digital animation, creates metaphorical landscapes, setting up feminist and erotic spaces, subversively represented thanks to advances in digital animation.

As a Chinese researcher myself, Kiu-wai Chu's "Animating Shanshui: Chinese Landscapes in Animated Film, Art and Performance" naturally drew my interest. The author

focuses on Shanshui, a philosophical concept of Chinese art, which literally means "mountains and water", and investigates how it has been represented in Chinese animation and live performance. Chu clearly identifies three essential features of classic Chinese painting in the first part of his essay, which seems to lie outside the book's theme. However, such passage provides a solid foundation, especially for those readers who are not familiar with Chinese philosophy and aesthetics. Chu asserts that animation in China, to some extent, has been turned into a specific form to express philosophical thoughts. Based on this claim, he develops his analysis through a close reading of early water-and-ink animation, using films such as *Where is Mama* (*Xiao Kedou Zhao Mama*, Te Wei, 1960), *The Cowboy's Flute* (*Mu Di*, Te Wei and Jiajun Qian, 1963), and *Feeling from Mountain and Water* (*Shan Shui Qing*, Te Wei et al., 1988) to exemplify how human being and physical environment are bound together in a harmonious unity rendered in a modern aesthetic. Although Chu's analysis of water-and-ink animation does not change the state of the art in scholarship on Chinese animation, the final part of his essay offers an intriguing discussion of how the digital Shanshui, particularly in the post-2000s art installations and performances, portrays the rebuilt human-nature relationship in contemporary China. It is impressive that Chu mentions the recent "sceptical representation of uncanny, 'post-natural' landscape" (122) at the end of his essay; however, the analysis would have been solider if he had expanded his discussion with more updated information and offered stronger underpinnings on the topic.

The third part of the book, titled "Form: Journeys through Animated Space", includes three essays focusing on animated space "as a site through which we might travel and as a site carrying newfound digital agency" (9), a topic that fully engages with the central theme of the book. María Lorenzo Hernández's "The Landscape in the Memory: Animated Travel Diaries" explores a unique film form—namely the animated travelogue—in which "the landscape becomes central in the revival of the animator's experiences of a now-distant country" (145). With a textual analysis of three films, *Madagascar, a Journey Diary* (*Madagascar, Carnet de Voyage*, Bastien Dubois, 2009), *Ámár* (Isabel Herguera, 2010), and *A Journey to Cape Verde* (*Viagem a Cabo Verde*, José Miguel Ribeiro, 2010), Hernández indicates that such animated genre incorporates artists' subjectivity and creativity into a documentary gaze, allowing artists to re-find themselves during such animated travels.

Referencing Aylish Wood's concept of "timespaces", and presenting a range of case studies, Fran Pheasant-Kelly's essay "Between Setting and Character: A Taxonomy of Sentient Spaces in Fantasy Film" addresses that the sentient space in fantasy film, produced by computer generated/assisted technology, not only adds a temporal quality, as Wood suggests, but also enhances the film narrative. He further argues that "settings have become credible sentient entities, with digital technologies effecting a diminishing/absent margin between character and setting" (179–80), as they exhibit psychological motivations, such as the castle and the fire in *Howl's Moving Castle* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2004), the crewmembers of "Flying Dutchman" in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Gore Verbinski, 2006), the "Ents" scene in *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Peter Jackson, 2002), the writhing tree roots in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Mike Newell, 2005), and the setting in the final scenes of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Steven Spielberg, 2008).

"Off the Rails: Animating Train Journey" by Birgitta Hosea reinforces the notion of mobility in the urban city and society, giving attention to animations that "move between locations and are concerned with trajectory and locomotion" (159). Beginning with an examination of the relationship between landscape and the railway, and a brief review of early cinema, Hosea thoroughly dissects the idea of "animated train journey" by examining a

range of works from the prefilmic moving panoramas, shot from means of transport in movement, to post-filmic subway zoetrope and railway simulation games. She asserts that animation is a powerful device to describe the experience of a journey, as well as a potential medium with which to visualise what will happen to a given landscape in the future. Following a textual analysis of a set of animated works, she explores the narrative aspects of trains, considering them as the main characters of such productions, with personality and feelings. Hosea further considers the landscape as a subjective matter that is incited by the motion of the journey itself and is always in the process of being created or recreated by human being, in order to offer the audience an experience of being mobile. The author concludes the essay by referencing Zygmunt Bauman's term liquid modernity, which vividly describes the dynamics of contemporary societies, adapting it to understand the animated train journey as a metaphor of the transience and the flux of societies, and finally, placing animation—as a liquid art form—as an ideal candidate to represent such issues.

The discussion on the form of animated landscape continues in Part Four of the book, which focuses on peripheral practices. It brings three intriguing essays together, which explore relatively under-researched fields: projection-mapping animation, animated sport, and the zombified landscape. Dan Torre's "The Metamorphosis of Place: Projection-Mapped Animation" looks at a rising trend of situated animation that is custom-made for a particular location and projected onto a certain structure. Torre offers a range of examples focused on the analysis of five facts: site specificity, metamorphosis, visual layering, soundtracks and, finally, light and shadow. His research is particularly interesting to me because it offers a great comparison with traditional film/animation that is not site/size specific—"projection-mapped animation is made both *from* and *for* a specific landscape and therefore constitutes its own unique reading of the 'spatial predicate'" (202; emphasis in the original). It relies on the real physical structure and, at the same time, transforms it into an unreal world, which fully engages with the term of animated landscape.

In "Plasmatic Pitches, Temporal Tracks and Conceptual Court: The Landscapes of Animation Sport", Paul Wells adopts a cross-disciplinary approach, citing Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as a starting point to consider the relationship between animation, landscape and sport. Thus, by situating animated landscape in a broader artistic, cultural and practice-based framework, Wells differentiates such category from the landscape in traditional film or paint, and recognises it as "*ultimately a specifically imagined and constructed environment dramatized through its plasmatic motion in the moment, and revealed by the cognate disciplines it relates to or represents*" (218; emphasis in the original). Based on this, he further investigates how sport can serve as an ideal cognate discipline to define animation and engage with the animated landscape, due to their similar material codes and practice conventions. In "The Zombified Landscape: *World War Z* (2013), *ParaNorman* (2012) and the Politics of Animated Corpse", James Newton explores how the increasing use of computer-generated animation shifts the established politics of the zombie film genre—the left-wing inflection of zombie film is transformed into a reactionary and conservative production, mainly when zombies become the landscape, with faceless features and an indistinguishable mass due to the CG process.

The book's final and shortest part, entitled "Function: Interactivity", consisting of two essays, extends the discussion of the animated landscape to the field of video games. In "Evoking the Oracle: Visual Logic of Screen Worlds", Tom Klein identifies the visual logic of gamespace, which is a visible expression of the mechanics, operating a defined system and guiding the interaction with the game space restrained by a set of logical rules, and he further

aligns it with the visual spectacle of the cinema. Drawing on a range of case studies, Klein then proceeds to analyse how the visual logic on the screen is planned and designed for conveying meaning, particularly in the digital-age cinema. Alan Meades's essay "Beyond the Animated Landscape: Videogame Glitches and the Sublime", which closes the book, reinforces the notion that the depiction of landscape is meaningful and reveals the relationship between the human and the nature. Rather than considering landscape simply as designed, Meades explores the complexity of player actions, specifically glitching, *"the intentional triggering of software fail-states"* (270; emphasis in the original), as well as its impacts on the coherence of representation and the meaning of animated landscape. He asserts that glitching reconstructs our understanding of animated landscape, and speaks of inscrutability and chaos.

As a whole, this collection provides a rich and lively discussion on one of the most overlooked areas of animation—animated landscape, which, just as Pallant wants it to be, is to rebalance the long-term bias existing between character and landscape, which is related to the centrality of studies on character design and interpretation over reflections about landscapes. It ably explores the multivalent nature of animated landscape with an interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approach, which also deepens the reader's understanding of what animation is. It would be ideal if the final section of the book on "Function: Interactivity" were stronger, with more explorations of animated landscapes as they are being developed by the new technologies. For instance, virtual reality technology, by empowering the audience to enter and interact with the 360° simulated space, arguably makes the landscape predominant, particularly in film and video game, and potentially takes us back to the cinema of the stage and the showground—a topic that, to me, would much contribute to the theme and strengthen this section. Nevertheless, the collection successfully addresses the unique territory of animation research, and certainly inspires further studies in this subject area. It undoubtedly contributes to the development of animation's own theoretical and critical methodology and furthers the promotion of animation as an independent and autonomous discipline.

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