



Wandering into the Space of Imagination

Chris Pallant, ed. *Animated Landscapes: History, Form and Function*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015. 321 pages.

Reviewed by Oslavi Linares Martínez

Animated Landscapes offers animation and media scholars multiple considerations on the history, function, and potential of an often-neglected subject in animation studies: animated space itself. Going beyond the topics of background and setting, editor Chris Pallant seeks “to advance our understanding of the animated landscape through discussions of history, form and function.”¹

The result is a series of analyses examining what animated space is, has been, and could be through different techniques, locales, and artistic practices. In other words, the volume views animated space through different lenses and in relation to different aspects of visual culture and everyday life. The book’s five sections cover historical, formal, and functional aspects of animation’s constructed space and its relation to the real world and to spectators. The first section deals with the formal histories of drawn, stop-motion, and tridimensional computer graphics imaging (3D CGI). The second consists of national histories, focusing alternatively on aesthetic lineages, particular animators, or environmental depictions from non-western countries. Section Three examines animated space as a site of travel and memory. This formal review is extended into the fourth part, which focuses on lesser known subjects like projection mapping, animated sports, and CGI zombies. The final section’s two essays speculate on video games’ interactive landscapes, one examining their visual logic and the other their aesthetic of sublime.

One gets a sense of the expansive scope of this volume from the first chapter’s opening words, in which Bryan Hawkins writes about drawing “as a technology of the imagination.” He then goes on to explore its historical portrayal of the future, and the way it mediates between humans and the natural world.² In another essay, Mihaela Mihailova advocates for the traditional techniques of Latvian animation and notes their unique portrayal of female sexuality.³ The following contribution from María Lorenzo Hernández features three case studies of animated travelogues and how they not only recreate locations but spaces of personal memory.⁴ In chapter twelve, Paul Wells compares the constructed spaces of sport with those of animation, and how

¹ Chris Pallant, “Introduction,” in *Animated Landscapes: History, Form and Function*, ed. Chris Pallant (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 9.

² Bryan Hawkins, “Seeing in Dreams,” in *Animated Landscapes*, 15.

³ Mihaela Mihailova, “Latvian Animation: Landscapes of Resistance,” in *Animated Landscapes*, 125.

⁴ María Lorenzo Hernández, “The Landscape in the Memory: Animated Travel Diaries,” in *Animated Landscapes*, 145.

these offer “alternative modes of reality.”⁵ In chapter fifteen, Alan Meades offers a return and departure from the primordial considerations of the first chapter, and looks at the possibilities animated space offers to disclose the technological sublime, hidden by our user interfaces but rendered overwhelmingly through glitches in the system.⁶

Animated Landscapes is in many ways a site of convergence. The authors address different techniques, histories, and themes of animation, and write about these subjects from different national traditions and scholarly backgrounds, from art-history to ecology, anime studies to feminism, passing through animation, film, and media scholarship. This is particularly evident in the second section on “National Perspectives,” where the contributors write about animation histories from Australia, Japan, China, and Latvia and address topics such as environmental politics, aboriginal rights, and female sexuality. This diversity allows the anthology to introduce not only new ideas, but also new voices, from well-known figures like Paul Wells to emerging scholars like Kiu-wai Chu.

Perhaps the anthology’s novel approach accounts for some minor shortcomings, namely, the omission of historical developments in animation and of other scholars directly concerned with the animated landscape. The title implies a more comprehensive and systematic historical review of animated space and its technical realization, which the anthology unfortunately fails to address. A notable omission is Walt Disney’s multiplane camera system, even among the essays concerned with traditional cel animation. This device was a vertical setup consisting of a camera and underlying layers of glass planes that could create in-depth movement for the effect of spatial believability. Its influence can be seen in today’s two-dimensional (2D) software and compositing with computer generated imagery (CGI).⁷ Another omission is the use of layers in Japanese cel animation, which achieves a different effect of movement into depth by sliding the layers horizontally, what Thomas Lamarre calls “open compositing,” and also allows for techniques of limited animation.⁸

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to devalue the originality of the anthology for these omissions. Instead, these absences attest to the novelty of the featured essays. Moreover, the book atones for this by including lesser-known historical developments, like Pixar Animation Studios’ rendering feats in Malcolm Cook’s contribution or the numerous national histories in the second part of the anthology. Pallant himself offers an innovative vision of animated space in his introduction. To consider the different types of animated spaces, he uses Maureen Furniss’ concept of abstract and mimetic aesthetic poles in animation, adding to it the dimension of interactivity.⁹ This consideration of interactivity reverberates through the book’s chapters, as many of the authors stress the relation between the animated landscape and the actual world (addressing natural ecologies, technological feats, travel routes, transportation, locales of sport,

⁵ Paul Wells, “Plasmatic Pitches, Temporal Tracks and Conceptual Courts: The Landscapes of Animated Sport,” in *Animated Landscapes*, 220.

⁶ Alan Meades, “Beyond the Animated Landscape: Videogame Glitches and the Sublime,” in *Animated Landscapes*, 269.

⁷ Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 65.

⁸ Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 37-38, 189, 190.

⁹ Pallant, “Introduction,” 6.

and art) or between animated space and the mind (depiction of memories, visual logic, visual representation, and the sublime).

As a whole, the diverse body of considerations in *Animated Landscapes* offers a starting point for expanding the field of visual culture. Its multinational approach and variety of reflections on animation will be of interest to animation scholars, practitioners of animation and film, and others wanting to learn more about the history and future of this medium. The inclusion of national histories offers a much-needed global awareness to animation practices beyond the Western world, while theoretical considerations of animated space bridge art and philosophy. In this regard, the book's arguments are valuable in an age where digital cinema, video games, and virtual reality promise to turn the world into an animated space.

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