

How is reality conveyed through landscapes within animation?

Name: Tarian Martinez

Student Number: 1905027

Course: BA Illustration

Module: Research in Practise

Word Count: 2,229

Lecturers: Louise Burston

This piece is about three key words and three images with artists or thinkers to support each key word. Linking the three key words, landscape, animation, and reality. Involving artists such as Tyrus Wong, Lotte Reinger, Hayao Miyazaki, Tomas Sanacero, Dave and Max Fleischer. Even the thinker, Protagoras. I find these key words fascinating as they all develop the technology through the time, and all influence the mediums and artists around them. Each key word shows the extent of influence and development on each other. Including the key images I used to sum up the key word in an image.

Landscape



Fig. 1 Rainbow at Pontoise

Natural landscapes are important to our wellbeing, even in places such as cities, houses, towns and apartments can people find nature. In animation background, they tell the characters story and give us their identity. They give us answers to questions. They can be immersive and make people analysis and understand what they mean, giving us symbolism and meaning, which “We can put this another way; Landscape is not the only something we see, it is also a way of seeing things, a particular way of looking at and picturing the world around us.” (Wylie, 2006, p.7).

Landscapes are often implemented in animation and graphic novels to depict a scene. They are visual and show the background, emotions or history of the story and its world. Surroundings often showing

how weather illustrates character emotions. Additionally, plants and nature can be incorporated to order to show barriers characters must overcome.

Landscapes are used to set tone and how a character moves in a story. While graphic novels and animation have differences, they are similar in the ways they tackle landscapes and background. Many landscapes are based on actual scenes, from different places and cultures. “Weather is written into our landscape” (Harris, 2016, P.9) and gives us a good idea of surroundings but also the symbolism that is written in our landscapes. Storms, hurricanes, rain, snow, and hail are all types of weather which can be used as symbolism for characters and used for worldbuilding, which gives visual details that does not normally need to be spoken about.

Places such as forests are considered mysterious. It brings in symbolisms of life, nature, and exploration. Mountains have symbolism of divinity and journeys that make people overcome a challenge as Protas (1997) tells us. Both are two very different landscapes but have different meanings. The weather and the sky are used to show freedom and infinity and can be used to depict character’s emotions.

The work, see Fig.1. *Rainbow at Pontoise* is a painting that shows a long stretch of land. Involving hills, houses, bushes, trees, a rainbow, and clouds. It is an impressionist painting and many works of impressionism involved landscapes. While being painted from reality, it is possible to infer symbolism from the work. It’s a rural idyll, a populated countryside with houses and two figures walking along a path. The prominent brush strokes and palette make it look bright and appealing. The softer colours used are similar to Tyrus Wong’s work.

Tyrus Wong was an artist who used many mediums but was a well-known illustrator for Disney’s movie *Bambi* (1942) as Stevens (2014) explains. As a young boy he moved to America from China and later went to university for illustration. He created storyboards, concept, and inspirational sketch art and additionally backgrounds and being promoted to Lead Production Illustrator in *Bambi* (1942), his backgrounds were unique and used for the forest landscapes of the film. His experience with multiple mediums highlighted his abilities and

Amid difficult racial realities, he nevertheless explored a diverse array of art mediums throughout his lifetime, from water colour painting, landscape art, ceramic art, animation, live action illustration and greetings cards to traditional kite making.

(Tran. A. T., 2019, pp.123-125)

Using soft pastel for his works, they were inspired from Song Dynasty classical Chinese paintings. Fired during the Disney Animators strike during the sixties, he later worked for Warner Bros within the storyboarding department. He retired and started designing kites to fly. Later on his work was recognised and he was given an Exhibition by Disney, in San Francisco.

His work on Bambi showed his landscapes being shady forests and hills. Making his medium interesting with the forest landscapes they did.

To support this understanding of nature Riley MacFarlane a contemporary writer explains his perception of landscape in that

I was becoming increasingly interested in this understanding of wildness not as something which was hived off from human life, but which existed unexpectedly around and within it: in cities, backgrounds, roadsides, hedges, field boundaries or spinnies.

(Macfarlane. R. 2007, P.226)

This statement illustrates that the untamed can be found in numerous places many of which are not normally considered.

Animation

Animation is based on the illusion of depth and motion and varied images moving at a rapid succession. "Perspective enabled a commanding, objective and controlled grasp of space and spatial relations." (Wylie, 2007, p.58) so its perspective is based in the space around the animation. There are many mediums such as paper cutting and hand-drawn that can create alternative forms of animation.

Lotte Reiniger was a pioneer of silhouette animation. She created forty films, with Prince Achmed being her most well-known character as Sergeant (2019) states. Using Chinese paper cutting techniques to create her puppets and backgrounds in her works. Her silhouettes came into Paul Wegener's films as title cards, and she created several successful films afterwards. This later helped her create a feature-length animated film. This horrified the industry, as most films were ten minutes long.

“And most specifically in silhouette animation, meaning emerges through the play of light and shadow.” (Palfreyman, 2010, pp.6-18) which showed fluid motion and the technique of Chinese cutting paper. Her film *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926) used a camera with manual shutters, background lighting and layers of glass to achieve depth and angles. Giving brighter backgrounds that contrasted the black silhouettes and created fluid, animated movement for the characters in her films. Similar to Studio Ghibli’s realistic character animation.

Hayao Miyazaki was a filmmaker who created 2D hand-drawn films and established the Tokyo based award winning Studio Ghibli. Miyazaki at first started in manga then moved onto animation after watching *Hakujaden Tale of the white Serpent* (1958). Entering Toei Animation, becoming a key animator and working on several projects until 1971 when he moved to Nippon Animation which Bose (2021) explains. Within this company he then developed films such as *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979) and *Panda! Go Panda!* (1972), later creating *Nausicaa of the valley of the wind* (1984) and Studio Ghibli in 1985.



Fig. 2 My Neighbour Totoro

My Neighbour Totoro (1988) was one of eight acclaimed films that Hayao Miyazaki had created. A children’s film all hand-drawn, with water colour backgrounds. Fig .2. is a scene from the film. A rainy night with an avenue of trees. The two main characters waiting for a bus. The background is dark and painted with detail in shade and lighting. While Lotte Reiniger’s backgrounds were black paper cut out with light shining behind them, both are similar in using detail. Both use nature and convey characters through animated actions. Even then Studio Ghibli has a smaller team to work on their films with Hayao Miyazaki partaking in most of

the work, compared to Fleischer studio's large team who worked on each bit of animation. Including backgrounds.

And when I say "Fleischer", I do not mean Dave Fleischer the individual, but the whole animation staff, which probably included members both young and old and represented an entire trend in animation that is symbolised by the word "Fleischer"

(Miyazaki, 1996, p.115)

Fleischer studios was created in the thirties by the brothers, Max and Dave. The studio used a thick line style and black and white to create characters, such as Betty Boop and Popeye the Sailor. Their episodes filled with adult themes, of dark humour, sexuality, and the Great Depression. They even used rotoscoping and the Bouncing Ball in music. It was due to the Hay's code, a censoring law, which censored their themes, they had to change and lost money with the eventual outcome of losing the studio to Paramount. They used oil paintings for their backgrounds and inked their animations on cel's and making their animation movement rubber hose-like.

All three are known for their animation, interesting stories, backgrounds, and their mediums accentuating their styles. Cut out silhouettes with fine detail from Lotte Reiniger, Hayao Miyazaki's bright watercolours and Fleischer studio's black and white oil paintings. Even with their differences they concentrated on character movement in their animation. They show fluidity of movement and even Fleischer used rotoscoping in their work.

Reality

My interest in reality comes from animation and art. Lots of things from reality are used in animation and art to give it story and create something real. The meaning of reality can be rather hard to explain. There are many ways to explain what reality is and how we use it. Such as explaining it as

“Reality is all of your knowledge of the world that helps you to determine how things appear to you. The state of the world as it really is rather than as you might want it to be” (Polley, (2021) which forms our mindsets and opinions and artistic ideas.

Though every person has their idea of the state of the world. It is the state of things that exist around us. It means that the world is not what we want it to be. A philosopher named Protagoras taught the idea of a person holding views measures its worth. What could be true for one person can be false for another. Bringing forth the idea of perspective being part of truth, which makes it relative. This could be said for reality. Reality can be determined by knowledge and state of the world, though that state might not be true for another person. It differs for every single individual.

Many people turn to animation and technology to create what they want a world to be from their minds. Augmented and mixed and merged reality are such ways to bring animation into reality. While Augmented uses devices to interact with reality by phones or tablets and mixed reality uses headsets to create a space where reality and virtual are together. Bailey states (2021) that using augmented reality in phones for video games has becomes very prominent.

There are many artists who use augmented reality to create animated works that push the limits of art and animation. It is also used in mixed reality with many using headsets to create art with devices such as electronic pens and programs. We use reality as inspiration to create things. We see the landscapes and world around us and try to bring it together. Virtual reality can be immersive and sought out to see the world in new and interesting ways. Especially since mixed and augmented reality are created by technology and tools such as Procreate, Photoshop and Aftereffects. Though creating animated characters or objects viewed must work well with the real background and landscapes behind it.



Fig 3. Prototype of Maratus Volans (peacock spider)

This piece is by Tomas Sanacero, an artist who uses multiple mediums on the theme of spiders, uses augmented reality. He created an animated spider that could be seen on the bank of the river Thames, using an app on a phone and being all part of an Augmented Reality art public festival 'The Unreal City'. The spider moves in a realistic way and poses as if it's being watched. The spider is realistic and very detailed. Compared to Lotte Reinger and Hayao Miyazaki's animations, the spider is fast and twitches like a real spider. Similar to Fleischer Studios who rotoscoped dancers for their characters. Giving them a realistic movement that contrasted their cartoony images. The spider may contrast with the background, but it feels real when viewing it through a phone which shows that "We may find it difficult to define reality, since we live in it every day, and cannot find an external point from which we may observe it." (Ichihara, (2010).

Reality is what we live our everyday lives in. We use the real world in artworks such as animation, landscapes, backgrounds, characters, or 3D works. It can be hard to define reality when combined with technology that shows fictional characters moving. Though reality will always have its influence on art and mediums like animation or landscapes.

Looking into the key words and the images that I used, I found there to be a strong link between all three. The question that I created was, 'How is reality conveyed through landscapes, within animation?' and I researched each key word to find an answer. Reality has influence in everything and gives us a basis for ideas and projects. Landscapes come from the world around us. We see different landscapes everyday and sometimes even create new ones, with developing technology. Animation uses landscapes for background

and worldbuilding, even taking movements and techniques to recreate animated characters. Each key word greatly influences and continues to do so as it develops. Even when works involve fantasy, we see influences of reality and praise works that are realistic. It is a common theme. Many other questions could come from the original as it is a very open question. It gives many ideas and many avenues to explore if this topic is touched upon again. Still the question, 'How is reality conveyed through landscapes, within animation?' can be answered in one way. That reality has a great influence and foundation in landscapes within animation.

List of Figures

Fig. 1: Pissarro. C. (1877) *Rainbow at Pontoise* [oil painting] Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo, Available at: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/camille-pissarro-rainbo/> (Accessed: 06/05/2021)

Fig. 2: Miyazaki. H (1988) *My Neighbour Totoro* [animated film] Available at: <https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/looking-back-at-my-neighbor-totoro/> (Accessed: 13/05/2021)

Fig. 3: Saraceno. T. (2020) *Prototype of Maratus Volans (peacock spider)* [Augmented Reality] Acute Art, London, Available at: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/gallery/29281/1/unreal-city> (Accessed: 13/05/2021)

Bibliography

Acute Art (2020) *Tomas Saraceno*, [website], Available at: <https://acuteart.com/artist/tomas-saraceno/> (Accessed: 13/05/2021)

Alexis (2019) *Sequencing in photography: the print, a practical tool*. [blog] Available at: www.film-photography-blog.com/sequencing-in-photography-the-print-a-practical-tool/ (Accessed: April 10 2021)

Bailey. A (2021) 'Augmented reality art: Where your home becomes the gallery', 23rd February, *BBC*, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-56123958> (Accessed at: 13/05/2021)

Bose. D. S. (2021) 'Hayao Miyazaki: The life and lasting influence of the studio Ghibli auteur-animator', Available at: <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/hayao-miyazaki-studio-ghibli-life-career-films/> (Accessed at: 13/05/2021)

Dimitrois. L. (2015) 'Landscape in motion: Muybridge and the origins of chronophotography', *Film history: An International Journal*, 27(3), p.22, Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/600605/summary> (Accessed at: 07/04/2021)

DK (2011) *The Philosophy Book*. London: DK

Durrant. A. pebble studios. (2017) *What is mixed reality? Bringing animation into the real world*. [article] Available at: <https://www.pebblestudios.co.uk/2017/08/30/what-is-mixed-reality-bringing-animation-into-the-real-world/> (Accessed: 29/04/2021)

Harris. A. (2016) *Weatherland*. London: Thames & Hudson

Ichihara. K. (2010) *Between Reality and Illusion*. Guggenheim museum. Available at: <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/the-take/between-reality-and-illusion> (Accessed: 29/04/2021)

Jobson. C. Colossal. (2014). *The Pastel Illustrations of Tyrus Wong That Would Inspire the Movie 'Bambi'*. [article]. Available at: <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2014/03/tyrus-wong-pastels/> (Accessed: 5 April 2021)

Jones. A and Oliff. J. (2007) *Thinking Animation*.

Macfarlane. R (1976) *Landmarks*. London: Hamish Hamilton

Macfarlane. R (2007) *The wild places*. London: Penguin Books

Muybridge. E. (1901) *The human figure in motion*. New York: Dover publications

Nere. C. (1990) *Unquiet Landscapes: Places and ideas in 20th-Century British Painting*. London: Thames & Hudson

Palfreyman. R. (2010) 'Life and Death in the shadows: Lotte Reiniger's *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Ahmed*', *German life and letters*, 64(1), pp.6-18, Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2010.01515.x> (Accessed at: 07/04/2021)

Polley, H. (2021) Reality, *Basic Knowledge 101*. [website] Available at: <https://www.basicknowledge101.com/subjects/reality.html> (Accessed: 29/04/2021)

Protas. A. (1997) *Dictionary of symbolism*. [website] Available at: <http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html> (Accessed: 02/05/2021)

Psychology Notes HQ (2012) *What is Phi Phenomenon?*. [article]. Available at: <https://www.psychologynoteshq.com/phi-phenomenon/> (Accessed: 07/04/2021)

Miyazaki. H and Cary. B and Schodt. (1996) *Staring Point*. UK: Simon & Schuster

Sergeant. A. (2019) 'Before Walt Disney, there was Lotte Reiniger – the story of the world's first animated feature'. *The Conversation*. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/before-walt-disney-there-was-lotte-reiniger-the-story-of-the-worlds-first-animated-feature-125091> (Accessed at: 13/05/2021)

Stevens. J. (2014) 'How Disney's 1942 Film Bambi came to be influenced by the lush landscapes of the Sung Dynasty', *Smithsonianmag*, January 23rd, Available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-one-man-drew-1942-bambi-180949466/?no-ist> (Accessed at: 06/05/2021)

The Public Domain Review (2020) *Phenakistoscopes (1833)* [blog] Available at: <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/phenakistoscopes-1833> (Accessed: April 6 2021)

Tran. A. T. (2019) 'Tyrus: The Tyrus Wong story dir. By Pamela Tom (Review) *Journal of Asian American studies*, 22(1), pp.123-125, Available at: <https://www-proquest-com.exproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/scholarly-journals/tyrus-wong-dir-pamela-tom-review/docview/2199269704/se-2?accountid=130472> (Accessed at: 07/04/2021)

Wylie. J. (2007) *Landscapes*. London: Routledge p.7