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Landscape and the Moving Image, by Catherine Elwes. Intellect, 2022, 261 pp.

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How do we experience and appreciate landscapes when we know too much about them? Looking over a familiar view, we begin to note the intrusive presence of countless threats—climate change, urban sprawl, and deforestation to name but a few—that seem to linger on the edge of the frame, revealing each landscape to be unstable, at risk, and subject to the creeping or sudden onset of massive change. Likewise, increasing awareness of the violent histories that are now acknowledged to underpin and define seemingly innocuous landscapes challenges not only the possibility of contemplation and leisure within these landscapes, but also brings feelings of guilt, grief and anxiety to bear upon spaces that were not previously acknowledged to host such emotions. Where is our embodied experience left, though, if we succumb to the resulting impulse to detach ourselves from landscapes and avoid the naivety of contemplation, or to attend to larger or smaller scales than those within which we experience the world? The questions that are being asked of artists engaged in and with landscapes are pressing ones: what does it mean to look at the Earth when it is, finally, all we really know and can experience? How can we look at the world when we are always already in it, deeply immersed in its rhythms and ways and weather systems? These are some of the questions that Catherine Elwes attempts to tackle in *Landscape and the Moving Image*, a wide-ranging and timely survey of the work of an enormous variety of moving-images artists who, she alleges, "bring back news from the hot and cold fronts of nature" (6).

Elwes begins by diverging from that certain strand of ecocritical thought that, either tacitly or explicitly, forbids contemplative and embodied accounts of the material world and in particular of its landscapes. Dismissing works such as Katie Paterson's *Vätnajökull (the sound of*) (2007), as disembodied, data-driven and divorced from the reality of the world as we live in it, Elwes contends—with occasional assistance from increasingly influential theories of human indivisibility from nature—that ethical and ecological approaches to landscape are best drawn from "the position of engaged and passionate subjects immersed in grounded, located practices" (6). *Landscape and the Moving Image* is, then, ultimately a quite personal account that is preoccupied with detailing the breadth of such practices across a vast stretch of artistic terrain. Elwes is careful to position herself relative to the artists and scholars whose work she discusses, and while she claims to write "as a critic and artist and not as a theorist", the book is nonetheless generally rigorous in its critical and theoretical approach to a broad range of questions relating to moving images and landscapes (6). It therefore represents a highly useful and up-to-date addition to the literature, fitting well alongside Martin Lefebvre's edited collection *Landscape and Film*, although that volume is (perhaps naturally) more diverse in its cultural and theoretical approach. Despite Elwes' book's "long gestation", it is closely engaged from its inception with the current, and changing, stakes of human relations to the landscape, in particular with reference to the Anthropocene (xi).

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Elwes is also careful to delineate the culturally and historically determined nature of *landscapes*, as they exist in and of themselves, as they are represented, and indeed, how these two conditions come to overlap and mutually determine each other. The book's first six chapters, each fairly concise, trace the history of landscape as it has been socially and lexically defined. Elwes considers by turns the invention of landscape as a concept through the tradition of the picturesque, then its social construction as a site of identity and trauma. In the fifth chapter, "Landscape Subjectivities", Elwes expands her theoretical position to embrace affect theory and phenomenology, emphasising her argument that "landscape, as well as being an ideological construct, occurs as a function of human cognition activated by a range of environmental stimuli acting upon the senses and the emotions" (46). Subsequently, the following two chapters trace a more historical approach to the formation of landscape through the media of painting, still photography and finally slide-tape, a medium Elwes recalls fondly through the work of Patrick Keiller and Nina Danino, her contemporaries at the RCA in the 1980s. Here, Elwes reasserts her emphasis on the embodied presence of the artist as a key element of the landscape work she documents, while also echoing Ian Christie's suggestion that "in an age when young people are reconnecting to the environment […] they are increasingly reconfiguring hands-on media that have a physical, tactile dimension" (59). Although this particular strand of the argument is not followed, in these early chapters Elwes is meticulous in her tracing of the stakes and historical and cultural factors that converge to define our understanding and experience of landscape before it comes anywhere near a cinema screen. She also foregrounds how these particular codes (notably, the Romantic picturesque and the sublime) have been reinvested with alterity and reanimated to illustrate emerging relations to landscape(s).

In the subsequent chapters the book becomes more closely concerned with moving image works, in a move that seems somewhat overly deferred. Chapter Nine, "Talking Pictures", centres on questions of framing, drawing on Bazin's discussion of the screen's centrifugal force, containing "part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe" (165). Elwes discusses a number of works that question the position of filmmaker and spectator in film's spatial imaginaries, such as Shona Illingworth's 2016 *Lesions in the Landscape*, which used balloon-mounted cameras to counteract the disembodied point of view of the military survey. Here, Elwes makes no grand intervention but surveys the territory comprehensively with an insistent return to the question of artistic positionality and point of view that underpins the book's theoretical angle. This theme returns in Chapter Ten, "Artists' Moving Image", where Elwes traces the way artists have repositioned themselves, the spectator and the space surrounding the film projector towards a greater emphasis on the materiality of the medium. Analogue video was, Elwes writes, "like a mirror with a pulse" (98). In her subsequent discussion of the shift towards digital images, Elwes gestures towards a range of theoretical and aesthetic positions without settling on one in particular, but makes clear her position relative to moving images in general as they come to bear on landscapes: "I am inclined to promote the moving image from its role as a twentieth-century experimental tool, recruited to explore different ways of seeing, to a medium enabling creative investigations of landscape, whether as a political act in the face of the climate crisis or as a poetic meditation on nature and our place within it" (105).

Chapter Eleven, "Weather-Blown Film", is rewarding in its more sustained engagement with the work of William Raban and Chris Welsby. Focusing on *River Yar* (1971–72), a timelapse of an estuary landscape produced by regular hand-cranked camera shots, and *Wind Vane* (1972), where the camera was attached to a tripod with sails, Elwes argues that in allowing external, natural forces to exert agency over the images, Raban and Welsby "appear

to take on the role of mediums or facilitators, simple technicians enabling the landscape to speak through them" (116). Elwes gestures briefly, here, towards cybernetics and systems theory since, although "the self-effacement of the artist should not be overstated" (116), the two works "stand as profound, […] poetic metaphors for the interpenetration of all life on earth" (118). There are, however, moments where the book's stated focus on landscape, moving images, or both together, falls away. Considering the sustained way in which Elwes elaborates over the book's early chapters a working definition of landscape, it is surprising to subsequently find several chapters in the book that either partially or entirely diverge from the theme of landscape. Chapter Twelve, "Being-With: Rocks, Sea and Sky", continues the previous chapter's discussion of works that engage with and are co-produced by the contingency of the natural world and elements, but the inclusion of works such as David Gatten's *What the Water Said* (1997–2007), for which film reels were placed in lobster creels, and Mary Lucier's *Dawn Burn* (1975–76), which exploited technical shortcomings to reveal the shifting arc of the sun's trajectory across the sky, speak less to the layered determination of landscape that Elwes sets out in the earlier stages of the book, and gestures instead towards a different (albeit no less useful) understanding of film's engagement with the material elements and forces of the earth. The particularly short Chapter Thirteen, "Getting the Shivers", returns somewhat more closely to themes of landscape in its discussion of the way artists generate empathetic projection in their audiences "by screening images of human subjects beset by the elements" (145). Here, the focus on the questions of the senses is welcome, but there is a notable absence of theoretical reflection on the sensory operation of moving images.

The book is at its most effective when it is most focused: Chapter Fourteen, entitled "Australasia and the 'Vexed' Question of Landscape", concentrates principally on moving image works from Australia, where Elwes conducted research in 2005. Some of this material was screened in 2008–10 as part of the Arts Council England-funded project "Figuring Landscapes", which toured a broad selection of moving image works throughout the UK, Ireland and Australia. In this chapter, Elwes explores the particular relations to Australia's contested landscapes that both indigenous and non-indigenous moving image artists explore in their work. She traces a development from earlier works, where abstraction and simulation were used to avoid the politically charged task of representing landscapes that are subject to long-term colonial contestation, towards a more recent trend that she identifies in aboriginal artists' works where documentary has been used as a form of legal document and/or cultural archive. Elwes' discussion here is balanced and sustained, and certainly contributes much to the discussion of moving image works in the specific setting of Australia's deeply contested landscapes. Chapter Fifteen, "Landscape and Identity Politics", finds Elwes "shifting focus to a vision of landscape as a contested territory, a layered repository of colonial history and competing belief systems" (163), as she investigates the way various artists have "negotiate[d] the politics of place whilst fielding an identity rooted in the topography of a particular landscape" (165). She discusses, among other works, John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015) as part of an œuvre defined by "[t]he transmigration of the Black body into western landscapes", then moves on to take in the way women artists have addressed the familiar tropic association of the female body with the landscape (168). Here, Elwes is once again rigorous in her theoretical treatment of a range of works, and it is pleasing to see her cite her own work as she briefly discusses the video *With Child* (1983); elsewhere, the author's substantial body of work is a rather noticeable absence in the text. Elwes goes on to discuss the potential of queer expression through landscape, followed by a longer account of the way, she alleges, "some straight men have turned to landscape to find wide open, unfenced spaces hospitable to their fractured subjectivities" (182). This claim is not substantially justified, and Elwes neglects to provide a detailed account of her arrival at this particular conclusion; it seems reductive to

allege that "[a]rtists such as Chris Welsby, James Benning and William Raban have sought the solitude of wild places […] to make films with the elements that, like nature itself, are indifferent to identity politics", whilst also rather uncritically citing the view that "any recourse to theories wrought by individuals marked as 'male, pale and stale' is viewed with great suspicion" in an overly brief reference to "today's move to decolonise the curricula of universities" (182). Here, Elwes' argumentation relies largely on casting her gaze back over works already analysed, and as such the reader is not left particularly compelled.

In Chapter Sixteen, "Performing the Landscape", Elwes argues more convincingly that "[l]andscape itself generates a visual, aural, tactile, olfactory and embodied experience that […] exceeds our abilities to capture sensations", leading artists to incorporate elements of performance within and beyond the aesthetic strategies of their moving image work (193). She moves from an evocative discussion of Guy Sherwin's *Paper Landscape* (1975–2015), where the artist uses an embodied performance surrounding a layered film projection to comment on his own ageing, then turns to a discussion of the performative work of artists including Sandra Lahire, Steve McQueen and Roz Cran, who variously perform an awareness of the earth's rocky materiality. Elwes' discussion of Cran's *Stone* (2008) is effective and returns the reader to the book's overarching preoccupation: "Cran's strong identification with the material world resonates with an ecological message of fellowship between the human and non-human domains" (198). This is a useful, albeit necessarily brief, survey of a selection of works that trade in the connections between performance, moving images and geology; its contribution to this burgeoning field would be strengthened by references to theoretical sources beyond nature writer Robert Macfarlane. The chapter concludes with discussion of works that stage a temporary intervention in the landscape, such as Cyprien Gaillard's *Nightlife* (2015) and Sarah Dobai's *Nettlecombe* (2008), leading Elwes to conclude that as well as a repository of subjectivities and histories, landscape also provides a site for radical worldmaking practices. Chapter Seventeen, meanwhile, focuses nearly exclusively on animals. In this chapter, Elwes presents an impassioned discussion of the place of living and dead animals in artists' moving image work, one which is certainly an important contribution to the field of critical animal studies in relation to moving images. Drawing, here, from a wide range of theoretical positions, Elwes variously discusses questions of captivity, cruelty, courtship and Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-animal, interrogating how they are addressed by artists' moving images. Her argumentation is deeply concerned with ethical questions, presenting the case that, finally, we can "sit with [animals], sing to them if we must, but ideally, we should simply leave our fellow creatures alone" (222). In spite of this chapter's success in isolation, it should be noted that here the question of landscape once again falls away, making the chapter's inclusion feel somewhat tangential.

Elwes concludes after these seventeen chapters that "however constructive these [moving image] approaches to landscape, they nonetheless bear the scars of human destructiveness" (228), leading her to wonder where artists should turn. She draws on Macfarlane's reminder to avoid "inertial thinking" and develops Suzi Gablik's invitation to cultivate and seek out works that promote a "connective aesthetic" (2) of "deep mental and emotional investment in observing, listening to and feeling the landscapes of which we are temporary custodians" (230). For Elwes, as the deeply personal and wide-ranging chapters of *Landscape and the Moving Image* show, the stakes of our own existence within nature are such that we should feel compelled to continue to attend to it and speak with and of it, towards a more ethical form of coexistence.

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