Storyboarding: A Critical History, by Chris Pallant and Steven Price. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 214 pages.

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Scholarly studies that focus on preproduction materials are rare, particularly for the "classic" studio period and earlier, doubly so for works that do not relate to Alfred Hitchcock and Disney animation.[1] One might counter such a claim by pointing to recent publications that feature production art for film franchises (Halligan, *Filmcraft*; *Art*), catalogues and essays that accompany exhibitions of production art (Carrick; Corliss and Clarens; Michelson; Schmenner and Granof), or, indeed, substantial studies on production design in film, many of which approach the topic through the field of architectural studies (Neumann; Bergfelder et al.).

Chris Pallant and Steven Price's *Storyboarding: A Critical History* chooses a more specific topic: the authors focus on one stage in the production workflow, the development of storyboards, while making clear that it is not a static or isolated process. By doing so, they elevate the visibility and function of storyboards, which the authors liken to being as significant to film production as the existence of a script. Here, the authors might have assumed a deeper understanding of scriptwriting than a general reader may possess, so a brief description of the relevant areas of comparison would not have gone amiss.

As the subtitle of the work suggests, *Storyboarding* does not exactly present a history of the process, but, rather, a survey of the forms that it has taken from the 1920s to the present day. In their coverage of the range of (mostly) hand-drawn or software-generated visual materials made during film production, Pallant and Price consistently raise the issue of formatting for storyboards, and the kinds of planning or creative work that occur during that preparation stage. It should be stated at the outset that they examine storyboards from both animated and live-action films, and although they point out differences between the two domains from time to time, they do not consider the distinction to be a crucial issue. Broadly speaking, the comparison is acceptable, given that both demonstrate the work of visual planning and "brainstorming". However, once one probes a little deeper, it becomes clear that animation's method of production means more complete control over all the elements of its images, and certainly more flexibility of the forms that the images take. Storyboarding for live-action films, on the other hand, has to contend with different areas of craft and practice, and with the unpredictable conditions of production.

The introduction and first chapter on the antecedents to storyboarding serve as the conceptual centre of Pallant and Price's account; subsequent chapters on Disney animation, Hollywood production designer William Cameron Menzies, spectacle and action sequences in

narrative cinema, Hitchcock and Saul Bass, the 1970s output of Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola, and contemporary practices that include a previsualisation stage serve as case studies that trace the role of the storyboard through the vertically integrated studio period and beyond. As befits a survey, the chapters cover the span from the 1920s to the present day at the expected and appropriate points, from studio filmmaking to auteur/independent production to New Hollywood to current small animation studios. In terms of the chosen case studies, many of which contain interesting details, it is inevitable that any project that engages with historical research on primary materials is to a certain extent guided by what is available and accessible. Indeed, as indicated by Pallant and Price in their introduction, the lack of serious attention paid so far by scholars to preproduction visual materials is primarily due to the fragmentary nature of the source materials (sketches, drawings and storyboards) that survive. Film analysis and criticism have also developed, understandably, around completed and distributed films. Consequently, there is a noticeable lack of guidance in this research area, which works like *Storyboarding* begin to ameliorate.

In their introduction, Pallant and Price correctly caution against distorting the original context and function of the drawn materials that survive. There is diversity in "production art" materials in terms of completeness, finish and purpose (set design sketches featuring human figures or devoid of them, continuity sketches, costume design drawings, technical drawings and thumbnail sketches), which accounts for the shifting terms for the different kinds of materials presented throughout the book. On the issue of storyboards, however, the authors stress the significance of the format in which they appear, as evidenced by the care that they take to contextualise, analyse and explain the illustrations in the book. I will be taking some space here to address these issues because it is where many of the authors' central ideas sit, and it is also where the explication of taxonomy and function can become tricky.

A storyboard refers to the sequential mounting of images that visualise "developing action and narrative across multiple pages" (Pallant and Price 14–15). The size, format and physical materials out of which storyboards are prepared are not fixed, and there are indications in surviving examples that they were used "to record a review process during the production" (16). [2] Storyboards, Pallant and Price explain, are more concerned with narrative development, editing, camera angles, lens choice and camera movement, while "concept art" addresses designs of sets and costumes. They are created "for localised, tactical purposes: to pre-visualise technical questions in editing of effects, for example" (6). Individual frames of storyboards can be rearranged, taken out or added, their progression remade in the process of production. Storyboards "clearly show the relationships between the characters and their environment" (10).

It is claimed that concept art, in contrast, is not populated with characters, rarely attempts "the detailed representation of movement", presents settings "as neutral, lacking the subjective experience or point of view of particular characters" (10). The authors cite Kristina Jaspers's observations from a 2012 exhibition catalogue, which describe how "[p]resentation usually occurs from a straight-on angle (human eye level), like in stage design, from a neutral, central point of view, which leaves open from which camera angle or camera frame this room will later be captured on film" (10). That position is barely held, however, as Jaspers qualifies her claims when she examines instances of production drawings from the late silent German cinema:

If one looks more closely at the production and animation designs of the later 1920s, it becomes visible that the angle is not always neutral, and the rooms not always without people. Especially in the case of more complex animation sequences, camera angles and frames were often already considered. (13)

How do we work with the evident slipperiness of classification and function? First, we should acknowledge the possibility of different practices across studio art departments, animation and live-action productions historically, and the varieties of production drawings that were created. In my view, storyboards should be compared with their like, whether in animation or live action. The authors argue for the influence of the storyboard process in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand et al., 1937) on Selznick's attempts at extensive storyboarding for *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939). However, as they discovered, the surviving production sketches do not all line up neatly as storyboards, which is a hint that they may have served different purposes. If the aim is to evaluate other forms of "production art" (as the authors do in their work), storyboarding, with its "frame-by-frame" visualisation of movement and action, should not be the unspoken standard that all production sketches have to live up to. It is a form that applies aptly to animation processes, but it is probably not the most productive view of all the preparatory drawn work done for live-action features. Furthermore, is there a relationship between storyboarding and the "independent frame" method practiced by British art directors in the 1940s? What's more, both Pallant and Price and Jaspers appear to miss the spatial organisation that set design sketches ("concept art") already present. Despite not depicting camera framing and lens effects, set designs plan the placement of architectural features and décor in relation to character movement and action, thus the possibilities of movement through the set have to a certain extent been worked out. It is an essential function of stage design sketches (Gillette 79–81).

For the early Disney shorts, storyboarding and storytelling were coextensive. The authors examine the editing of visual gags that occurred in the surviving story sketches from Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks's *Plane Crazy* (1928), which were set as six panels on a page, accompanied by typewritten pages describing the action. But as the production pace and corresponding staff numbers at Disney grew in the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, a story department was created, which included the former newspaper cartoonist Webb Smith. Smith was tasked with developing gags, and "preferred to design such sequences visually, sketching them rather than writing out a description" (51). His tendency to pin sketches to the wall was gradually transferred to more portable corkboards. Story sketch men began to assist writers, so their combined tasks turned towards creating early drafts of "visualised possibilities", rather than submitting "just a title or a setting" (54). Pallant and Price note that such specialisation set the template for "a labour dynamic that spread throughout the American animation industry", with the distinction between writers, who provide the story (and earn the royalties), and storyboard artists, who visualise the material (54).

Production designers and art directors for films have a different task, in terms of having to develop a coherent concept and look for sets, locations, costumes and integrating special visual effects. There is a wide range of variables and other teams of creative staff (set-building and dressing, costume design and special effects) to account for. Moreover, production designers do not only contribute visual ideas, but they have to possess knowledge of the practicalities of set-building and the ability to manage budgets. In the chapter on William Cameron Menzies, the

authors explain the production designer's work in "pre-staging", which is characterised as "the intermediate process between the printed word and its visualisation on celluloid" (65). Menzies' work in the 1920s articulated "an approach that sees the anticipated film through the eye of the camera, with an awareness of composition and the possibilities of editing the continuity from shot to shot" (64). Menzies' extensive design work on *Alice in Wonderland* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1933), for instance, included scene and shot designs for each page of the screenplay (642 pages in total), suggestions for technical solutions for visual effects and alterations to the dialogue, so much so that the designer was eventually given a cowriting credit on the film.

In their account of more recent preproduction work, Pallant and Price show that the storyboard's role in the workflow described in the earlier case studies is now supplemented or, in some cases, supplanted by the digital previsualisation (previs) process. For live-action films that require extensive visual effects work, the authors point out that:

> Previs has become the step in the pre-production process that the film crew strive to reach as quickly as possible. As with the animatic and the storyboard before it, previs presents the most accurate vision possible with the resources available (technical ability, hardware, and budget) of how the final film should look. (152)

The previs process is conducted with the participation of the cinematographer and director with their respective areas of expertise, artistic ideas, familiarity with the scenario and mode of narration—meaning that they are able to indicate their requirements and wishes throughout the design process. Thus, it appears that the storyboarding stage shifts more quickly to a collaborative space, compressing the previous preparatory stages. The economic realities of the storyboarding process have also changed to a vendor environment, where the previous studio concentration of technical staff on a lot, who are able to meet and exchange ideas easily, has ceased to exist.

Pallant and Price's study of storyboarding practices is a welcome addition, particularly given the range of their coverage, in terms of time period, production art artists and variety of materials. Nonetheless, it is an ambitious project, in an area that has not been extensively covered in previous scholarship, which explains some of the inevitable difficulties in fleshing out historical contexts, and ambiguities in categorisation of source materials. By including less publicised materials such as William Cameron Menzies' work on *Alice in Wonderland*, alternative versions of very well-known examples such as Saul Bass's storyboards from *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), and more recent iterations of storyboards from small animation studios such as LAIKA and A+C, the authors usefully guide the reader through the analysis of the images, their format, sequencing and accompanying notations—a much needed, but generally undervalued task.

Notes

[1] Some examples of preproduction materials include production schedules, staff contracts, production drawings, shooting scripts, and story treatments.

[2] Indicated by "editorial marks such as ticks, crosses, initials, signatures, the inclusion of annotations in different coloured inks, and the use of different coloured paper" (Pallant and Price 16).

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Suggested Citation

Hiaw Khim Tan is completing a dissertation on areas of technique and technology in Hollywood cinema of the early 1930s to late 1950s, centring on production design, effect-lighting, shot design, and composition. Tan relates these foundational issues of preproduction design, photographic registration, camera placement, direction of light, image "plastics" to issues of depiction and world-building in film melodramas, film noir, and the realist strand of Hollywood cinema from the 1940s onwards.