Great Britain: The Wonderful Years¹

It is not possible to discuss British animation² from the 1990s onwards without talking about Channel 4. Channel 4 was created in 1981 as a public utility by an Act of Parliament. Its purpose was to be an alternative to BBC and ITV, and it started broadcasting on 2 November 1982. Unlike the public utility that was the BBC, Channel 4 – though public – didn’t receive any public funding. All of its programs were financed by its commercial activities, including advertising.³

British animation peaked at the end of the 1980s. From 1989 to 1996 it was dominated by short films that vied for the Oscar category,⁴ mostly commissioned by Channel 4. It was extraordinary that a television channel – an entity usually devoted to all that is commercial and profit-making – produced and financed experimental animation that was often hermetic and difficult and certainly not readily appealing to a wide range of viewers.

The result was a patronage system of coproductions (only rarely were works completely financed by Channel 4). The bulk of Channel 4’s commissioned animation was intended for adult audiences, and quite deliberately so. That policy was formulated on the basis of trying to be different from other television channels. Animation for adults was scarcely seen on British television.⁵ Channel 4 was instrumental in the production of some remarkable films of the 1980s, from the works of David Sproxton and Peter Lord (the founders of Aardman Animations) to those of the Quay brothers, to Murakami’s When the Wind Blows, to Alison De Vere’s The Black Dog.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Michael Grade, Channel 4’s chief executive, forwarded a proposal for a possible privatization of the channel. After some months, he changed his mind and decided to maintain Channel 4 as a public service. Privatization would have risked reducing the channel’s artistic freedom.

Channel 4 faced, and solved, many different problems. From the outset, the animation product had to be submitted in a different way to the ‘classic’ half-hour TV program. Animation was costly to make, which led to the creation of shorts (in addition, animation is best suited to short productions). The channel’s animation had to gain high audience shares. To achieve this, animation shorts were broadcast in two different slots: a five-minute one at

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¹ By Maddalena Ramolini.
² We thank Andrew Osmond for his important contribution.
³ Originally, Channel 4 was a subsidiary network of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). Later it became the property of Channel Four Television Corporation, a public entity, after the IBAs abolition. Channel 4 also owns the Welsh public channel S4C.
⁴ In 1989, Mark Baker was nominated for The Hill Farm. In 1990, the award went to Nick Park for Creature Comforts and a nomination to Nick Park for A Grand Day Out. In 1991, the award went to Daniel Greaves for Manipulation. In 1992, Paul Berry was nominated for The Sandman, Peter Lord for Adam, and Barry Purves for Seven Play. In 1993, the award went to Nick Park for The Wrong Trouser and nominations went to Mark Baker for The Village, Bob Godfrey and Kevin Baldwin for Small Talk, and Stephen Palmer for Blindscape. In 1994, the award went to Alison Snowden and David Fine for Bob’s Birthday and nominations went to Erica Russell for Triangle and Tim Watts and David Stoten for The Big Story. In 1995, the award went to Nick Park for A Close Shave. In 1996, Peter Lord was nominated for Wat’s Pig. There were three nominations a year until 1991, and five each year after 1992.
She made an excellent debut in 1987 with *Girls’ Night Out* about a group of female Welsh factory workers who go to a male strip-tease joint. It was made with funding from Channel 4 and S4C. The same year, Quinn moved to Cardiff, attracted by the activities of the Chapter Film and Animation Workshop. She formed Beryl Productions with the writer and producer Les Mills, who had previously been one of her college teachers. Like most animation companies, Beryl Productions alternated between rent-paying commissions and more personal work.

Joanna Quinn wanted to represent women, their neuroses and their weaknesses, which can become strengths. She used comedy and irony to explore feminine experience and relationships between genders. In her first two films (*Girls’ Night Out* [1987] and *Body Beautiful* [1991]) she features Beryl: an overweight, middle-aged woman, less sensual than insecure, who is always fighting not to gain pounds. However, through the films, Beryl proves herself strong and resolute; she gets what she wants through her efforts while males are vain timewasters. Quinn teases women and their whims, but she does so with affection.

She also developed an instantly recognizable, highly detailed hand-drawn style of artwork with a strong visual rhythm. Especially in *Body Beautiful* (1991) she talks—with irony—about how it is of the utmost importance today to own a beautiful and healthy body and she details the effort and tactics necessary to achieve it. The difficult path, however, is to accept oneself and one’s physicality, which never matches with the image imposed by media. The film *Elles* (1992) imagines that Toulouse Lautrec’s models decide to have a spot of lunch before resuming their poses.

In 1993 Joanna Quinn made *Britannia*, moving away from her previous themes. It is about Great Britain, represented by a fat bulldog that wears a T-shirt bearing the Union Jack. The dog plays, jumps, and makes a mess through the entire nation, from Scotland to London.

**Channel 4 Animation**

Below we consider some of the most famous and talented animators who started their careers through Channel 4.

**Joanna Quinn**

One of the very best talents that Channel 4 ever produced is Joanna Quinn, a cornerstone of British animation.

Quinn was born on 4 February 1962 in Birmingham but soon moved to London with her family. When she was four, she won a drawing competition; from then on, drawing became her main passion. She attended a year-long art class at Goldsmiths College in London then spent three years studying graphics and design at Middlesex University.
The film portrays the British sureness that comes from conquering half the world. Through the bulldog, Quinn traces the wars and the dead, the colonization of India, the split from Rome, the greed, hypocrisy, and Puritanism—finally reaching the multicultural London of today.

Quinn’s next films were *Famous Fred* (1996) and *The Canterbury Tales [The Wife of Bath’s Tale]* (1998). The latter is based on part of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, about a knight who rapes and kills a maiden. To avoid punishment, he must wander the world asking the question: ‘What do women want above all?’ and always getting different opinions. The final answer is that women want everything and its opposite: husbands and lovers, security and uncertainty. Women are incoherent creatures, impossible to understand.

In *Dreams and Desires: Family Ties* (2006), we meet Beryl again, on new adventures. She buys a digital camera and becomes obsessed by it, using it to make a movie diary. She tries to imitate famous film directors while filming her friend’s wedding, with hilarious results. Quinn gives voice to the wild side of the world of ageing women who give free rein to their drives and sexual desires (as in *Girls’ Night Out*). The result is tender and funny. Joanna Quinn’s women are suggestive, irreverent, and joyful, ashamed of nothing—well, almost nothing.

### Candy Guard

Candy Guard (b. Ealing, London, UK, 1961) belongs to the same generation as Joanna Quinn and shares her interest in the modern woman’s life. Like many other budding animators, her passion for drawing and moving pictures started in childhood. She studied fine arts, first at Newcastle Polytechnic, and then at St Martin’s School of Arts in central London.

She began to experiment with live-action before being commissioned by Channel 4 to make some short films in the series *Woman In View* (1988). The most successful are *Alternative Fringe* (1988), *Wishful Thinking* (1988), and *Fatty Issues* (1988). The latter is about an overweight woman who weighs herself and realizes she has gained weight. She decides to begin a regime, but all day she can’t resist nibbling food. She exercises for only five minutes (because it’s enough), eats peanut butter (‘because at bottom, peanuts are fruits!’), and finds she has gained more weight. The series talks about women’s weaknesses and small neuroses.

Two years later, Candy Guard made three shorts for a youth programme by S4C: *Moanologue* (1990), *What about me?* (1990), and *The Wrong Type* (1990). The latter features an ordinary and insecure woman looking for a job as a typist. The interview is conducted by a beautiful and sensual woman who embarrasses her.

Guard deals with the frustrations and difficulties that every normal woman faces daily with a stylized and snappy design and a humour that can turn thorny and extreme. The thinly-veiled complaint is that today’s women are apparently free but actually slaves of social customs and expectations. The pictures are simple and compelling; Guard focuses on the characters’ depth and thoughts, rather than on their graphic representation. She uses flat drawings and traditional 2D animation.

After many successful independent works, Guard had wider success in 1996 thanks to *Pond Life* (1996–2000), a series commissioned by Channel 4 about Dolly Pond, an independent and neurotic single woman. Even though the production was big and complex, and the stakes much higher, Guard kept the spontaneity and immediacy of her first works. The series was an amazing success.

Dolly Pond is about thirty years old. Outwardly she’s a single woman, but in fact she has a submissive idler as a boyfriend. Pond smokes, drinks, eats junk food, and hates physical exercise—though sometimes she forces herself, when trying to lose weight. Her female friends drag her into adventures that leave her breathless; she’s goofy and confused but she loves having fun. Tiny female weaknesses are perfectly represented in her character.

All the episodes, never more than 10–15 minutes long, are compelling and sharp. The graphic style is simple and linear; without frills (a little like Cavandoli’s *La Linea*), increasing the charm and immediacy. Hair, for instance, consists of a few lines radiating from the top of characters’ heads. *Pond Life* won for best primetime TV series and best director at the Los Angeles Animation Celebration and also won best series prizes at Annecy and Ottawa.

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4. The voice of Dolly Pond is provided by actress Sarah Ann Kennedy. She is also an animator. Her first film, *As It Happens* (1985), was a satire about the main aspects of 1970s feminism. Subsequently she made *Carol and Mary*, about rivalry and competition between women, and *On the Rail*, about two girls in Spain. Sarah Kennedy’s works explore the border between desire and reality. In 1993, Kennedy made the series *Nights*, a mix of puppet animation, 3D, and live-action. It told the love story of Bob and Carol, two ordinary people, though the characters are often grotesque and caricatured. *Crapston Villas* (1995) is an animated soap opera with clay animation. It focuses on the occupants of an old folks’ home in a creepy London and was produced by Channel 4.
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Erica Russell

In 1988 Lee Stork, a Channel 4 producer, saw the pilot of *Feet of Song*, a short film made by a New Zealand animator, Erica Russell (b. New Zealand, 1951), and decided to produce it immediately. Russell’s parents migrated to South Africa in 1953, and she spent her childhood there, finding inspiration in local folk traditions and especially in African music and dance. Moving to London in the early 1970s, she joined Richard Williams’ animation studio as a paint-and-tracer and gained valuable experience assisting veteran Disney animator Art Babbitt.

Through the 1970s and 1980s she worked for a number of animators and animation companies, including Gerald Scarfe, Paul Vester, and Rocky Morton. Then she established her own studio, Eyeworks, and made her solo directing/animation debut with *Feet of Song* (1988), about African balleto. Russell drew the dance through stylized and flexible lines, symbolic and sensual bodies, colours and motions, in tune with the music.

In *Triangle* (1994), the passion of two young lovers is mixed with that of a mature woman, expressed through paint, colour pencil, crayons, and dance. In this film, Russell makes powerful use of music and art styles, ranging from classical drawing to pure abstraction. In 2001 Russell made *Soma*, dealing with the effects of postmodern culture: dislocation, fragmentation of identity, and violence. The work is inspired by street culture, with urban dance and graffiti.

Chris Grace

Chris Grace, the director of the animation department at S4C, received a BAFTA for his creative career. A producer and a film writer, he also won an Emmy for *The Canterbury Tales*.

In 1992, Grace produced *Superted* with Mike Young, an original series about a teddy bear who receives superpowers. The characters were drawn by David Edwards; the story was written by Robin Lyons.


Grace also contributed to the production of *The Miracle Maker*, a feature based on the life of Christ and released in 2000. It was directed by Derek Hayes and Stanislav Sokolov and mixed puppet animation with CGI. It shows the miracles of Jesus, simply told without special effects, from the viewpoint of the women in the Passion. The characters are voiced by famous British actors such as Ralph Fiennes and Julie Christie. The puppets are made with a special resin called Fastflex, which is very ductile and tough.

Grace was also executive producer on a two-part television production of *The Canterbury Tales* (1998), which included a ‘Wife of Bath’s Tale’ segment animated by Joanna Quinn (see above). His other executive producer credits include the series *Book Box: Animated Tales of the World* (2000) and the live-action/animated feature *Y Mabinogi* (2002), an adult adaptation of the medieval Welsh story collection *The Mabinogion*. The film was called *Otherworld* in English.

Marjut Rimminen

Marjut Rimminen (b. Finland, 1944) is another animator connected with Channel 4. In 1968, she graduated from Helsinki College of Applied Arts as a graphic designer. She made her first animated commercial for Vivante Bubble Bath. It received an award for best commercial at the 1972 Zagreb Animation Festival. The following year, Rimminen was invited to the UK to join Halas & Bachelor Animation.

From 1974, Rimminen worked independently in London, directing and animating commercials for Finland and producing short films for Channel 4 such as the family psychodrama *The Stain* (1991). She created the puppet animation children’s series *Usio & Turpo* (1996) in partnership with Liisa Helminen for Finland’s Lumifilm. Two teddy bears act in funny and eccentric ways, inventing nonstop strange games and new realities in their boy owner’s room.

Rimminen’s style mixes puppets, hand drawing, computer graphics, pictures, live-action, and collages. The
tones are dark and hidden, mysterious and disturbing, probing the psyche. Probably her best film is *Many Happy Returns* (1996), a live-action short with inserted puppet animation. A little girl ghost persistently creeps into a young woman’s consciousness, asking for care and attention. At the end, the woman shuts her in a bottle and goes away. The traumas of her childhood, represented by puppets and manipulated images, still disturb her.

In 1998, Rimmminen made *Mixed Feelings*, four personal and subjective stories in which women talk about abortion. She was interested in social subjects in wider terms: in 2001 she made *Red Ribbon*, a contribution to a film about AIDS commissioned by UNICEF.

In 2007 she made *Learned by Heart*, a five-part film exploring the post-World War II period in Finland. Rimmminen discovers small hidden stories, unspoken things, mysteries that live in people for years. The film mixes animation, period pictures, and archive material, combined and manipulated.

**Gaëlle Denis**

Another Channel 4 discovery was the French animator Gaëlle Denis (b. 27 May 1975). She studied graphic design at ENSAD in Paris then moved to London for an MA in animation at the Royal College of Art. She had a four-month exchange visit at Kyoto University, where she learned the Japanese approach to making cartoons.

Her graduation film was *Fish Never Sleep* (2002). Naoko, a young sushi chef, chops fish all day and also keeps a goldfish in a bowl. After several scenes of Naoko’s insomnia, and many fish heads chopped off, the girl wonders: do fish ever sleep? The film mixes computer-generated images and scanned hand-drawn images.

*City Paradise* (2004) was made for Passion Pictures. Tomoko, a Japanese girl, arrives to stay in London where everything seems weird and alien and the people are apparently cold and unfriendly. But a trip to a swimming pool leads to an amazing adventure. The film uses CGI and live-action. The underworld characters were inspired by some creations of British fashion designer Alexander McQueen, which Denis had seen on a catwalk.

And they all animated in Britain. In the 1990s–2000s, more and more people were studying animation in the United Kingdom, and many universities established new animation, graphics, and fine art courses. These schools included the University of Abertay Dundee in Scotland, the Royal College of Art, and Goldsmiths College in London. Many new talents emerged from these fertile grounds.

**Jonathan Hodgson**

Jonathan Hodgson (b. Oxford, 1960) studied at Liverpool Polytechnic and received a BA in graphic design. He attended the Royal College of Art in London, graduating in 1985 in film and TV. His first commission after he left college (made with codirector Susan Young) was an animated short about nuclear disarmament, *The Doomsday Clock*.

In 1991, Hodgson was a founding member of Bermuda Shorts and a director at Speedy Films. In 2003 he set up Hodgson Films as an outlet for his personal work. *Feeling My Way* (1997) is about a man who walks in the suburbs, between city traffic and urban desolation. Light pastel colours mix with scattered words written on the screen, some angry. They make the viewer reflect, between images of homeless people and rubbish. The man perceives other people as x-ray skeletons. Images and colours become confused; the atmosphere is sad and disturbing.

All of Hodgson’s works, though, are full of energy and spontaneity. He is fascinated by American culture and inspired by artists identifying with the working class—for instance, the writer Charles Bukowski. While still at the RCA, Hodgson searched for the right poem to provide the basis for a film, but he realized Bukowski’s violence and sexism were too much for sensitive viewers. He finally made *The Man with the Beautiful Eyes* (1999), combining strong, dreamlike images with Bukowski’s words. The film describes children’s fascination about a man on society’s margins, drunk and doped, yet real and free.

In 2001 Hodgson made *Camouflage*, part of a video series about children who have grown up with schizophrenic parents. The animation intersects with live-action. Hodgson’s style is in tune with these people recalling their experiences.

*Forest Murmurs* (2006) mixes collage, small Victorian figures, and Hodgson’s typically confused hues. In a wild forest long ago, men contend for domain of the earth. The film shifts to the present day, when the forest is almost destroyed. Yet the illness and degeneration of the modern world intersect with the forest’s purity.

**Phil Mulloy**

Phil Mulloy was born in Wallasey, Merseyside, on 29 August 1948. His drawings are stylized, gaunt, and deliberately unpleasant. He aims for immediacy; his images are cruel and troublesome and reach viewers unfiltered. He’s not interested in aesthetics: what’s necessary for him is to destroy every certainty, every superstructure, and to gain...
as much truth as possible. The soundtrack is very important too. Mulloy works mainly with two musicians, Alex Balances and Peter Brews.

Eye of the Storm, his first film, was made in 1989. In 1993, Mulloy began the series Ten Commandments, completed in 1996. It is a desecration of the biblical commandments, consisting of ten short films of about five minutes each. In contrast, The Wind of Change (1996) is poetic and delicate. It is based on the life of Hungarian violinist Alex Balances and is about the resistance against the Communist dictatorship.

In 1998, Mulloy made The Sealift of a Chair, an absurdist film about the hypothetical sex life of a wood chair.

From 2000 to 2004 Mulloy made his masterpiece, the Intolerance trilogy: Intolerance I (2000), Intolerance II – The Invasion (2001), and Intolerance III – The Final Solution (2004). It meditates on intolerance but is much richer than a mere pamphlet. The first film is about Zog, an alien people identical to humans except that their heads and genitals are switched around. The aliens are unbearable for humans, who decide to make war on Zog’s planet. But Zog have the same thought, and in The Invasion they decide to overrun Earth. At the end of the third film we understand that maybe Zog never existed, except as a product of intolerant minds needing a scapegoat. The story begins somewhere else.

In 2006, Mulloy made The Christies, a parody of family sitcoms. It is about a family of four portrayed as black silhouettes; they are weird and frustrated, suffering from phobias.

Vera Neubauer

Phil Mulloy’s wife, Vera Neubauer (b. Czech Republic, 1948), studied art and drawing in Prague and advertising in Germany. She specialized in drawn animation, first in Stuttgart and then in London. Neubauer’s works are created through women, for women. Every gender stereotype is questioned, mixed up, to obtain a new result.

Vera borrows stories from Genesis and legends and fairy tales from Eastern Europe and transforms them through visual poetry, representing the complex, fragile, feminine soul. Misogyny is shown as the machismo that permeates the modern culture. Neubauer presents animation for adults that never forgets the child within, via 2D animation, live-action drawing with sand, and clay animation.

The Lady of the Lake (1995), made with ink on paper mixed with live-action, is based on a legend in which a mermaid falls in love with a man. She can live on earth with him, provided he doesn’t scold her more than three times. If he does, the mermaid must return to the sea,
where she can live wild and free as her nature requires. Wheel of Life (1996) is based on the Old Testament, made with live-action and 2D animation. The Dragon and the Fly (1999) and I Dance (1999) followed. La Luna (1999) is a story of love and fear, despair and murder, about rats wanting to become men and men forced to live as rats. It was commissioned by Channel 4 and the British Film Institute.

Woolly Wolf (2001) presents, through clay and puppet animation, a new version of Red Riding Hood, where the girl escapes the wolf without a man’s help. In 2003, Channel 4 commissioned Vera Neubauer to make Hooked, an animated documentary about women’s lives in Latin American countries such as Peru and Guatemala. Puppets reproduce the features of spirits and totems from these places, such as Hooked, a Guatemalan skeleton.

The Last Circus (2004) is a mythological life story with animated puppets. The legendary Lady Godiva rides into the ring on a horse and climbs into her wheelchair. Her life unfolds before her eyes, woven with myths of her childhood, dreams of her youth, and visions of her death. It is a captivating fairy tale of birth and life, war and death.9

Mark Baker

During his school year at St Martin’s School of Art in London, Mark Baker (b. London, 1959) met Michael Dudok De Wit and followed him to the West Surrey College of Art and Design. While there, Baker made his amazing diploma film, The Three Knights, and became an assistant animator.

In 1983, he returned to study at the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield and focused his graphic style. In 1989 he made The Hill Farm, a simple story about a couple living peacefully on the title farm. The Village (1993) is Baker’s masterpiece: a simple but incisive apologue about human vice, set in a claustrophobic village where people have dark and wretched souls. Only one man is really free; for this reason, the other villagers want to kill him. The characters are subhuman, locked in their defects. The only thing that can unite them is hate.

The Village led to a further Channel 4 commission, Jolly Roger (1998), about a pirate ship and a bridesmaid in danger. It masterfully and poetically mixes 2D traditional drawing with the new computer technology. In the same period, Baker, along with animator Neville Astley10 and producer Phil Davies, established Astley Baker Davies Ltd. The studio made a series for the BBC called The Big Knights (1999), a funny show about three brave and goofy medieval knights. A remastered special edition was produced in 2009, with expanded scenes and redefined images.

In 2004, Astley Baker Davies Ltd made the preschool series Peppa Pig, about a feisty little girl pig called Peppa and her funny family. It was a huge success worldwide. In 2009 the studio made Ben & Holly’s Little Kingdom, a series for young children with elves and small fairies; they live in a tiny kingdom in the blades of grass of a meadow.

Paul Bush

Paul Bush (b. London, 1956) studied fine arts at Central School and at Goldsmiths College in London. He learned cinema as a member of the London Filmmakers Co-op and of the Charter Film Workshop in Cardiff. His first short and medium-length films were made in the 1980s and had success with audiences and critics. However, it was in the 1990s that his work reached a wide audience.

In 1996, he founded his own production company, Ancient Mariner Productions, to make his films without market influence. He also directed commercials and his clients included Panasonic and Philips. The technique through which he became famous was direct painting on film – specifically, making little scratches directly on each frame then repainting them with contrasting colours. The final result is extremely suggestive.

Bush often used pixilation, as in Furniture Poetry (1999), where furnishings are animated and coloured through the technique to show the soul of daily objects. Bush loves literature and poetry, which inspire some of his works such as His Comedy (1994) and The Albatross (1998). The first is based on Dante’s Divine Comedy, the second on Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Through his works, Bush explored new visual ideas rather than creating stories and plots; his works are close to avant-garde. The Albatross, particularly, is rich in atmosphere and visual magic.

Still Life with Small Cup (1995) is dedicated to Giorgio Morandi’s paintings, reborn in three dimensions through pixilation. The Rumour of True Things (1996) is a mid-length film exploring such modern phenomena as video games,
Richard Williams

During the 1990s, Richard Williams devoted himself to teaching animation around the world at such studios as Disney, Pixar, DreamWorks, and Warner Bros. His popular master classes led to the best-selling book The Animator’s Survival Kit: A Manual of Methods, Principles, and Formulas for Classical, Computer, Games, Stop Motion, and Internet Animators (2002). The book includes techniques, advice, tips, tricks, and general information on the history of animation.

A second edition followed in 2009 (The Animator’s Survival Kit – Expanded Edition, featuring a 16-volume DVD box set). It combined the text with footage from the master classes and animation of examples from the book. Williams offers explanations and examples of topics such as timing and spacing, soft and hard accents, the ways to turn a head from a side to a front view, or change a smile to a frown. The Animator’s Survival Kit was used by animation students worldwide.

In 2009, Richard Williams completed a nine-minute silent short called Circus Drawings, which premiered at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy in September 2010. It originated in 1953, when young Williams was living in Spain near a village circus and drew the clowns, acrobats, and onlookers.

Twelve years later, Williams filmed the drawings; nearly 50 years after that, he completed the film. It first shows the 1950s drawings, then how they were animated, moving from black and white to colour; reflecting Williams’ experience and the influence of past masters.

Barry Purves

Barry Purves (b. Woodbridge, 3 July 1955), originally an actor, is a director and writer of puppet animation and a designer and director of stage plays. He is also a connoisseur of music and opera. Purves dedicated his university studies to classical history and culture. He began a career as an actor before addressing himself to direction and production.

In the late 1970s Purves started working in cinema animation. Initially, he joined Cosgrove Hall Productions Ltd, one of the most important children’s studios in Great Britain. While there, he contributed to the animation of many television series including Dangermouse (1981) and The Wind in the Willows (1984).

In 1986 he moved to Aardman Animations Ltd in Bristol, where he refined his animation technique. His film Next: The Infinite Variety Show (1989) is a puppet animation. Using mime and props, William Shakespeare summarizes his plays on stage, all without saying a word. It’s a celebration and magnification of drama.

After leaving Aardman Studios, Purves collaborated with Bare Boards Productions. Screen Play (1992) is about an impossible love between a high-ranking lady and a humble gardener, representing the Japanese art of kabuki. Rigoletto (1993) is a 30-minute puppet version of the opera by Giuseppe Verdi, dark and gothic. The puppets were created by Mackinnon & Saunders.

In 1995, Purves made Achilles, possibly his most significant work. Against the background of the Trojan War, the film presents the homosexual love story between the warriors Achilles and Patroclus. Achilles’ real ‘heel’ is his love for Patroclus. The film is full of sensuality, with explicit (but never vulgar) love scenes.

Gilbert and Sullivan: The Very Models (1998) is the last film Purves made for Bare Boards Productions. It recounts the lives and works of librettist William Schwenck Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan. In five chapters, it shows their working relationship and their very human relationship too. The style is original and fascinating: the puppets look simultaneously like human beings and statuettes of paper-pulp.

In 2001 Purves produced Hamilton Mattress, a mid-length film featuring Hamilton, a shy aardvark with a passion for music. The director, who had found inspiration in such an intimate subject as the homosexual love between warriors, could also build a marvellous musical, full of action.

Purves said:

I like working with puppets (not clay) as they give me the texture that you can’t have in drawn films, or on most computers on our scale of budgets. I like the detail and

11 The second one was animated by Phil Mulloy.
Figure 3.4 Barry Purves, Achilles, 1995.

richness possible with puppets. But working with puppets is a very intimate form of animation. It is just your hand controlling the puppet, and not a whole team or committee working out what to do. Unlike other forms of animation, it is also spontaneous, giving the most direct equivalent to an acting performance. And the audience are aware that the puppets have existed, in a real space, and that the human hand has been part of the process.

I enjoy watching puppets because you are always aware that they are puppets. You are aware of the trick and thus you share part of the performance and contribute to it. A puppet should always be allowed to be a puppet, and not a cheaper version of CGI. Its peculiar qualities should be embraced, and not seen as limitations.12

In recent years Barry Purves directed the 52 episodes of *Rupert Bear* for Cosgrove Hall Films (UK, 2007); wrote, directed, and animated the dramatic *Plume* for Dark Prince (France, 2010) and the melancholic *Tchaikovsky: An Elegy* for Studio M.I.R. (Moscow, 2011); directed 52 episodes of *Toby’s Travelling Circus* for Komixx and Mackinnon and Saunders (UK, 2013); and was supervising director on Ragdoll’s latest series, *Twirlywoos* (UK, 2014). He was also involved in significant roles on the features *Mars Attacks!* (1995) and *King Kong* (2003).

Restless Barry Purves also had three books published on puppet animation and had a concert of Tchaikovsky music dedicated to him in 2014 at the Tchaikovsky house, where the puppet from his film now resides.

**Snowden and Fine**

Alison Snowden (b. Nottingham, UK, 3 April 1958) and David Fine (b. Toronto, Canada, 13 September 1960) are a couple both personally and professionally.

Alison Snowden studied graphic art at Mansfield Art College and Lanchester Polytechnic. However, she ended up applying to the National Film and Television School to train as a live-action director. There she met David Fine, who introduced her to the National Film Board of Canada’s work and persuaded her to attempt animation. They graduated from NFTS in 1984 with the degree film Second Class Mail and moved to Canada, where they worked at NFBC in Montreal for many years.

There they made *George and Rosemary* (1987), about elderly romance, which received an Oscar nomination. *In and Out* (1989) crams a lifetime from birth to death into nine minutes. After moving back to London, the couple made *Bob’s Birthday* (1993) and the TV series spinoff *Bob and Margaret* (1998–2001, funded partly by Channel 4), numerous TV ads, and other material in between.

*Bob’s Birthday* is a 2D traditional short film, about Bob, a frustrated middle-aged dentist. A group of friends plan a surprise party for his birthday. They all hide in his parlour, but Bob is having a midlife crisis and is confused and

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12 Barry Purves, e-mail message to Giannalberto Bendazzi, 17 January 2011.
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Ruth Lingford

Ruth Lingford (b. London, 20 May 1953) made What She Wants (1993), an experimental film made entirely on a home Amiga 1500 computer. It is about a woman on the underground who indulges in fantasies about wild shopping and lust. After a three-month residency in animation at the Museum of the Moving Image, Lingford received a Channel 4 commission for Death and the Mother (1997), another Amiga work based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale. A desperate mother is ready to meet Death in person in order to save her ill daughter. The black and white drawings are filled and stylized, creating a dark mood.

In 1998, Lingford made Pleasures of War, an animated documentary. The style is dark and biting. The film (written and designed with writer Sara Maitland) is based on the epic story of Judith and Holofernes, about a besieged city and the woman who tries to save it by offering herself sexually to the enemy chief. Animated images intersect with live-action documentary, showing cities destroyed by war.

In 2002 Lingford completed The Old Fools, illustrating the Philip Larkin poem, which was commissioned by Channel 4. She was a principal animator on Silence (1998, Halo Productions for C4) and winner of a Gold Hugo at the Chicago International Film Festival and a Special Prize at the Hiroshima International Animation Festival. Since 2006, Lingford has been Professor of the Practice of Animation at Harvard University.

Laurie Hill

Laurie Hill (b. 1970) studied animation at the Royal College of Art and graduated in 2006. His first film was My Life at 40 (2005). In the film Hill, aged 34, imagines a special collaboration with his 12-year-old self. They both look forward to a glorious future as a 40-year-old conservation hero and Lamborghini owner. This film uses various techniques: real and computer animated cutouts, drawing on paper, photography, and time-lapse photography.

Weather Report (2006) is a collage of footage recorded at home on one UK channel over the space of a year. The supposedly banal is transformed into cultural gold, as hundreds of linear fragments play simultaneously. My First Taste of Death (2006) is based on a story Hill wrote when he was 12: it is the tormented offspring of half-remembered adventure movies. The film is a kind of angry, tormented take on Hollywood action cinema, full of surreal detail.

Photograph of Jesus (2008) is probably Hill’s masterpiece. He participated in a competition run by Getty Images, which invited filmmakers to create a piece with images from its Hulton Archive of historical photographs. Rather than set a rigid brief, the challenge offered key words and phrases as prompts. In Hill’s film, black and white figures from the archive come alive, meeting in an original silhouette animation. The past and present mix; modern pop stars kiss old Hollywood actors. The short won many awards. Replete with dogfights, undead dodos, and Edwardian hussies, it is a work of meticulously executed chaos, full of unexpected and entertaining juxtapositions.

Joan Ashworth

While studying graphic design at Gwent College of Art and Design, Newport, Joan Ashworth (b. Lancashire, UK, 16 October 1959) was introduced to animation and embraced it as her means of expression. Later, Ashworth studied at the National Film and Television School and graduated in 1987 with her short film The Web, based on Mervyn Peake’s Titus Groan. The Web was shown at film festivals worldwide. It won the Mari Küttna Prize for Best British Animation 1987 and was broadcast on Channel 4.

After graduating, Ashworth cofounded 3 Peach Animation. She directed many commercials, title sequences, and stings for TV and cinema. She joined the RCA in 1994, becoming Professor of Animation in 1998. Her best-known work is the 10-minute How Mermaids Breed (2002), which is inspired by Bronze-Age Cycladic fertility figures and the drawings of Henry Moore. The film, made with 3D computer animation, envisages mermaids made of sand. They live in a matriarchal underwater society and catch men to take sperm to fertilize their eggs, like sea turtles. The film is original and sensitive.

In 2010, Ashworth completed the seven-minute The Mushroom Thief. The dialogue-free film has puppet animation.
and pixilation and features a girl swimming through a lush green meadow.

Suzie Templeton

Suzie Templeton (b. Hampshire, England, 2 August 1967) came to animation after a science degree and nine years of self-forming, spent mostly travelling and temping in different roles. Finally, she enrolled at the Surrey Institute of Art & Design in Farnham.

Her graduation piece was *Stanley* (1999), a puppet animation film. Stanley is a nostalgic, middle-aged man. He loves agriculture and dreams of growing the biggest cabbage in the world. His cabbage reminds him of his lost sexuality because its interior looks like a vagina. His jealous wife decides to cook it; to save the vegetable, Stanley kills the woman.

After graduation, Templeton went to the Royal College of Art in London and made the clay animation *Dog* (2001). It is the story of a traumatized boy whose mother and dog die in quick succession and whose equally traumatized father is unable to help. Suzie Templeton’s clay figures are deliberately disturbing and in no way endearing. She depicts the dark side of the soul, conflicting feelings, and desperate environments. Her narratives combine sincere anxiety and sincere compassion.

A leap forward was her puppet film *Peter and the Wolf* (2006), which won the Oscar for the Best Animated Short.

*Peter* is a boy with large, scared, resentful eyes who is bullied by the youngsters of the village. He goes out, encounters a wolf, and fights and defeats it – although he loses a friend, a duck. He goes to the village to sell the captured wolf, but he and the wolf make eye contact; they have the same eyes now, fortified by experience. Peter releases the wolf, which leaves the village with dignity.

There isn’t actually very much of Sergey Prokofiev’s famous music in the film, which is all Templeton. If *Stanley* was a story of sterility, and *Dog* a story of death, *Peter* is a story of birth. Not a note is heard until Peter, after several attempts, actually gets out of his walled house-uterus. When he does escape, the music erupts with the sunlight, sudden and cheerful.

It’s a story of strength too. Peter endures humiliation, seclusion, loss, and the temptation of triumph as well. The village bullies use violence and firearms. Peter uses an inoffensive web to overcome his enemy. He wins through courage and trial and error. According to narrative structures, Peter had to win through his rite of passage. But he doesn’t become a hero; his victory looks like every spectator’s victory in everyday life.

Geoff Dunbar


Ken Lidster

Ken Lidster (b. Outlook, Saskatchewan, Canada, 21 November 1960) made many commercials for the drink Brisk Lipton. Using clay, he parodied scenes from films such as *Rocky* (1997) and actors such as Danny DeVito.


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13Serge Kornmann writes:

For a year, [Geoff Dunbar] listened to music while drawing at the same time: thus was born a beautiful animatic, with all the sketches of characters and sets ranked in order of appearance. Thirty good animators and a whole studio worked at it. In 2003, *Opus Arte* (in association with the BBC, the Los Angeles Opera, the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin and the European Centre for Opera) took delivery of *The Cunning Little Vixen*. [. . .] The three acts of the opera are divided into two scenes linked together, despite the changes of place and time, like the editing of modern cinema. Animation brings to the scenes an extremely soft transition. It has this superiority over operatic *mise en scène*, to represent both a mosquito singing and a human being. [. . .] The wonderful landscapes and the animation, fluid and graceful, cause total enchantment. (Serge Kornmann, ‘Le Chrononaute: Opéra et dessin animé, La petite renarde rusée’, *La lettre de l’AFCA*, Paris, 2010; Giannalberto Bendazzi’s translation from French.)
Sandra Ensby

**Fast Spin Fling** (1998) is the first notable work by Sandra Ensby (b. Dorset, England, 19 January 1972). It is a funny short film about Muriel, a woman who lives with her attractive friend Pippa, who has many admirers. Muriel has a friendly relationship with Kevin, Pippa’s boyfriend, and when the frivolous Pippa betrays Kevin yet again, Muriel is there for him.

Ensby made *The A–Z of Love and Sex* (2001) and *Protect the Human: Measles* (2006); the latter is a film/commercial for Amnesty International. *Throwaway* (2007) is a short film made with the Sweetworld Collective. A dining couple has a quarrel that appears as a balloon on their heads. Incomprehension increases until the final collapse. In the end, peace is restored, but for how long? Ensby also made the special animation effects for *Girls in Love* (2003–2005), a live-action series based on the popular teenage books by British writer Jacqueline Wilson.

Other Directors Who Have Benefited from Channel 4

The following directors have also distinguished themselves and benefited from Channel 4.

Andrew Higgins graduated in 1996 from the Royal College of Art with *Gourmand*. It uses pencil on paper, soft colours, stylized figures, and slow and shivery animation. Higgins then collaborated on three eight-foot mosaic panels for the Machynlleth Museum of Modern Art and worked on *Famous Fred*, directed by Joanna Quinn. Afterward, he returned to London to join Picasso Pictures as an animation director.

Tim Webb’s graduation film was *Smoke Rings* (1986), a critique of the hypocrisy of the big cigarette companies. In 1992, Channel 4 planned a TV season on disability. After a long time studying the subject, Tim Webb – helped by Dick Arnall – made an animated documentary, *A is for Autism* (1992). It animates paintings made by autistic people. Simple and snappy, the film takes a warm look at the world of autistic youngsters and adults. It uses their stories, live footage, and commentary in a way that thrills and educates. The film became a reference work both for autism and animation studies, winning awards and acknowledgements.

Iain Gardner graduated in 1993 from the Glasgow School of Art with a BA in illustration. His graduation film, *The Gilded Man*, was screened on Channel 4 and programmed at Edinburgh Film Festival the same year. He received a master’s in animation at the Royal College of Art in London with the short *Noah’s List* (1996).


Kunyi Chen made *Rien* (1998) using pencil on paper. A little girl tries to learn French; the images and letters intersect with words and sounds.

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14 Sandra Ensby was married in 2008, after which she changed her surname to Salter.
As noted earlier (please see Vol. 2), Raymond Briggs (b. Wimbledon, UK, 18 January 1934) is a famous illustrator specializing in books for children (including The Snowman, made into a film directed by Dianne Jackson in 1982, and When the Wind Blows, made into an animated feature by Jimmy Teru Murakami in 1986). Later films based on Briggs’ books are Father Christmas (1991), by Dave Unwin and Dianne Jackson, The Bear (1999) by Hilary Audus and Joanna Harrison, and Fungus the Bogeyman (2004), by Mark Haddon. Briggs also wrote the original screenplay for Isor the Invisible, directed in 2001 by Hilary Audus.

In Petra Freeman’s The Mills (1992), a girl begins a journey inside a windmill wheel, taking the viewer through a strange stream of consciousness. The crosswise images of metamorphosis focus on bees and beekeepers.

Karen Kelly graduated in animation from the Royal College of Art in 1989. Her most notable film is Stressed (1994), about the daily tensions and stresses affecting people in a suburb. The film shows various events and people’s reactions: some become aggressive and impatient, others passive and ill. The technique is crayons on paper and traditional 2D animation. The drawings are full of confused lines, with vibrant and violent colours.

Jim Lefevre’s short film The Little Princess’ Birthday Party (1997) was made with clay animation and pencil on paper and produced by the Edinburgh College of Art. The animator is shown as he creates the story; the characters and scenery change gradually with his thought.

Alan Smith and Adam Foulkes graduated from the Royal College of Art’s animation course in 1997 and teamed up with producers Chris O’Reilly and Charlotte Bavasso at Nexus Productions in London. Their portfolio includes a range of short films, music videos, commercials, and film title sequences (for example, ‘The Littlest Elf’ sequence at the beginning of the film Lemony Snicket: A Series of Unfortunate Events, 2004).

In 2008, they made This Way Up, nominated for Best Animated Short Film at the 2009 Oscars. Made in 3D, the eight-and-a-half-minute film features the two sad employees of a funeral director who go through dark and creepy swamps and woods but end up in Beyond, a happy and colourful land.

An Vrombat is an illustrator of children’s books more than an animator. She has made two short films and one animated series. Little Wolf (1992) is a children’s short in which a small wolf plays with the moon; When I Grow Up I Want To Be a Tiger (1996) is about a quiet little cat who dreams of being a terrible tiger.

The animated series 64 Zoo Lane was conceived by Vrombat in 1993 and broadcast in 2000. It tells the story of Lucy, a little girl who lives next to a zoo full of funny animals, which become her friends. Every night Lucy enters the zoo by sliding down the long neck of the giraffe Georgina, and every animal tells her a story.

Brian Wood has a particular animation style: dark, grotesque, and politically incorrect. His first notable work is Mr Jessop (1994), made with black backgrounds, sharp and stylized drawings, white pencil, and crayon. A little man leaves home to buy something in a mall, a sick and stupid Heaven of Consumerism. In this dark and lonely world, everyone is miserable and intolerance and neurosis reign. The animation is frenetic, irregular, and confusing.

Wood’s School Disco (1999) is a raw and cruel animation about the difficulties of growing up. A group of kids get drunk and insult classmates and teachers at a high school party. The Cramp Twins (2001–2006) is an animated series about twins Lucien and Wayne. They live in the town of Soap City with a mother obsessed with cleaning and a father addicted to western movies.

Daniel Austin (b. 1981) made Guy’s Guide to Zombies (2006), a definitive A to Z guide about living with the dead, in 2D animation and CGI.

Ed Taylor’s Sticky Business (1997) mixes 3D computer animation and live-action. Two figures, a man and woman, escape the drawn world and run around the artist’s studio. Tiny Planets (1998–2000) is an animated series about a funny alien and his weird dog, called Bing and Bong, who explore the universe from the comfort of their couch. Taylor also made advertising spots for Picasso Pictures: The Boy who didn’t stop to look and listen, The Girl who didn’t dress bright in the dark, The Boy who didn’t look for a safe place to cross. The latter were all made for the British Department of Transportation to teach road safety to children.

Animation Meets Video Art

Many video artist animators decided to experiment with animation and created works halfway between two artistic worlds.

Oliver Harrison

Oliver Harrison’s works are based on typographical choreography, with words and script moving harmoniously, gradually illustrating the sung words. They resemble old art deco advertisements. Harrison has made many animated commercials for Nike, MTV, and Delta Airways. His graduation film, Amore Baciami (1983), should be described as the first kinetic typographical film. He also

**Tim Hope**

Tim Hope’s *The Wolfman* (1999) is a traditional 2D animation that features simple and stereotyped — in a good way — figures. A girl in a wood is followed by a big bad wolf, watched on screen by a mad scientist. With the full moon, the scientist becomes a werewolf. He loses his mind and is mad to possess the world.

**Jo Ann Kaplan**

Jo Ann Kaplan’s *An Anatomy for Melancholy* (2000) explores the melancholy of death and things that are gone. It is a kind of strange anatomy book, following drawings of desperate hands and skeletal faces. In the background are the words of ‘Ode on Melancholy’ by John Keats.

**Reeza Dolatabadi**

Reeza Dolatabadi made the puppet animation short *Octo-Dancing* in 2008. An octopus dances in an aquarium, with electro music in the background. *Koda* (2008) was made with computer graphics, 3D, and 2D. Composed of more than 6,000 paintings, it is a short psycho thriller exploring the potential and fears of the human mind.

**Kayla Parker**

Kayla Parker (b. Birmingham, 16 June 1955) explored subjectivity and sense of place. She used animation, photography, performance, found objects, drawing, writing, and digital technologies. Parker was interested in embodied experience and the intersection between the natural world and urban environments — particularly liminal spaces, such as the city’s industrial outskirts.

As an artist, Parker chose animation because of its unlimited possibilities. While at art college she cofounded the feminist video and performance group Dark Bananas. Her video about mother-daughter (non) communication, *A Family Conversation*, was broadcast on BBC television in 1984. She graduated in 1985 and joined the South Wales Women’s Film Group. She learned animation under the guidance of Les Mills and Joanna Quinn at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff. While there, she made her first 16mm film, *Adult Day Return* (1986).

Parker moved to Devon in 1986 and became a management committee member of Exeter Film and Video Workshop (EFVW). She continued to develop her practice as an experimental filmmaker and presented work at Plymouth Arts Centre and Watershed Media Centre, Bristol. She has been based in Plymouth since December 1989.


She made three films for Animate. *Cage of Flame* (1992) explores menstrual dreams, using a combination of live-action, puppet animation, and scratching on the film to convey haunting and powerful imagery. *Sunset Strip* (1996) is about a day-by-day diary showing a year of sunsets, rendered directly onto 35mm film stock using various materials including nail varnish, magnolia petals, hair, and net stocking. *Time-lapse* becomes transcendent in this record of light and cloud. The third film was *Teign Spirit* (2009).

In 1997, Parker cofounded the production company Sundog Media Partnership with Stuart Moore. The company has produced many innovative projects including films for satellite-driven screenings in bars and clubs across the UK and social short films and adverts on behalf of disabled people and the environment. In 2009, the company won the Media Innovation Award for Collaboration between Business and Young People for *There 2 Care*, a clay animation made with young carers.

**David Anderson**

David Anderson (b. London, 20 July 1952) was another artist whose practice lay between animation and video art. He trained at Bath Academy of Art and the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield. His first film, *Dreamland Express* (1982), won a British Academy Award. Made with silhouette animation, it shows a small train crossing a nocturnal, enchanted landscape. His next film, *Dreamless Sleep* (1986), won the Hiroshima Peace Prize.

He collaborated with the writer Russell Hoban to make *Deadsy* (1989) and *Door* (1990). *Deadsy* is close to video art, mixing 2D traditional animation, CGI, and live-action. *Deadsy* is a neo-punk figure who eats live insects and loves...
everything that is dark and deadly. The narrator is a 3D rolling head. Door is an animated documentary made for Channel 4, with puppet animation. The setting is a post-apocalyptic world marked by confusion and the loss of language.

In 1994 Anderson made In the Time of Angels, another animated documentary. Its themes include traumatic events and the belief that memories are imprisoned in various items, to be freed when the subject realizes and metabolizes his lived drama.

David Anderson's later films were Motion Control (2001), Sense of Gravity (2003), and Tongue of the Hidden (2008). The latter is a short animation film based on the book Ten Poems from Hafez by the Iranian writer Jila Peacock. The film's aim is to bring the work of the metaphysical poet Hafez, who lived in the thirteenth century, to the screen. Using Hafez's words, the film shows an aerial shining landscape where letters slide away like leaves of a tree, arise from a hot fire like smoke, and undergo many other changes.

JoWOnder15

JoWOnder (b. Taplow, 1958) began as a painter. In 1983, her works were shown in London art galleries and she participated in the itinerant exhibition Pandora's Box, which revisits the Pandora myth in a modern way. She had been educated in fine art at Kingston University and then studied experimental film at St Martin's School of Art in London. She studied filmmaking more formally at the National Film and Television School. Her friendship with David Anderson was very encouraging to her, although her work is influenced more by fine art, especially that of women in the twentieth century.

During her artistic career, JoWOnder combined animation, art, and classic drama. Her first film, made with a Super 8 camera, is The Poet of Half Past Three, named after Chagall's painting. It is a tribute to Jean Cocteau's poetry, scratching and drawing directly on film. Her second film, The Hump Back Angel, is a dark tale inspired by Vera Neubauer's works.

Thanks to The Hump Back Angel, JoWOnder was able to join the National Film and Television School. While there, she produced the live-action The Discreet Call of Nature, about the inner desires of a group of town people on a country trip. Her graduation film at NFTS was The Brooch Pin and the Sinful Clasp (1990). Two-dimensional paper figures, puppet animation, and live-action are used to tell the story of a man who falls in love with a dancer he sees on the top of a skyscraper. In the end, he discovers she's only a mechanical figure.

JoWOnder's other works include The Weatherhouse (1991); Sawdust for Brains and the Key of Wisdom (1992); The Cat (1997); Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale (2003), based on the Max Ernst painting of the same name; and the stop-frame video installation Don't Submit To A Moments Passion With A Stranger (2008).

Another video installation, 6 Days Goodbye Poems of Ophelia (2009), is a high-definition video of a 'time-lapsed bacterial painting'. It is based on John Millais's painting of Shakespeare's doomed Ophelia, remade in the colours of living bacteria. JoWOnder made the paintings over a six-day period, filming them in time-lapse. The installation invites members of the public to leave voicemail messages for Ophelia.

Run Wrake

Run Wrake (Aden, 24 November 1963–Ashford, Kent, 21 October 2012) was born in Yemen but soon moved to rural Leicestershire and Sussex. He saw Alan Parker's The Wall, which inspired him to take an art foundation course and then go on to study graphic design at Chelsea School of Art and animation at the Royal College of Art in London.

His graduation movies are Anyway (1990) and Jukebox (1994). Anyway (made with 2D traditional animation, computer graphics, and clay animation) is a surreal artwork with weird and graceless images. Jukebox was also made in 2D traditional animation and computer graphics, adding paints and pictures. A boy walks along the streets of a suburban town, meeting strange people, weird animals, and hallucinations. In 1998 Wrake made Ping Batter Pong, showing a ping-pong battle between a modern man and a cowboy.

Graphically, Wrake's influences are dadaism and pop art. He likes to use collages like Max Ernst, mixed with hand drawings and Super 8 short films, in a quick and dense mix of different styles. For soundtracks he favours digital and electronic sounds, metropolitan music, and collaborations with artists such as Howie B, Manu Chao, and The Charlatans. He also made music video clips and commercials.

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15 Real name Joanna Woodward.
Wrake’s masterpiece is *Rabbit* (2005), based on a 1950s children’s picture book (with words written over pictures to help children read). The myth of purity is upset: the main child characters are evil, and the apparently idyllic landscape hides dangers and cruelty. The story is a simple morality tale about greed, subverting classic children’s pictures in a punchy way, and it won several awards. The music was by Howie B.

*The Control Master* (2008) is a short commissioned by Veer, the Canadian visual elements agency, to promote their Charles S. Anderson collection. The film is animated using images from the vast archive; the story has a mysterious heroine and her unknown ally fighting an evil scientist.

**Lucy Lee**

Lucy Lee (b. Twickenham, UK, 16 February 1971) made her graduation film *Bird Becomes Bird* (1997) in Ekaterinburg, Russia, where she learned a huge amount from the local artists. This film, made in 2D traditional animation, shows a small crane as it follows golden fish in a lake in snow, before the eyes of an astonished little girl. For the girl, the wonderful bird becomes the symbol of a long-desired freedom, to escape from a strict mother.

Lee’s next film, *Waiting* (2002), is about love and loss and how hard they are. In 2004 she made *The Gates of Heaven*, about the difficulty of achieving one’s dreams. Lee makes animated films with various techniques: oil paint on glass, drawing, puppet work, animating the environment, photographic sequences, live-action, and digital media. Her films use dreamlike paintings and animals that become other animals in the desperate search for sense, following their personal dreams.

**Simon Pummell**

Simon Pummell (b. Norwich, UK, 1959) crossed the boundaries of traditional animation. He used shadow and silhouette animation, digital manipulation and postproduction, live-action and frame by frame. His films turn on the anxiety caused by having a physical body and the need to find one’s self in a world of new technologies.

Following works such as *Secret Joy of Falling Angels* (1991), about the Annunciation, Pummell’s most important animated film was *Butcher’s Hook* (1996). It is a Daliesque surrealist documentary, dealing with a taxidermist who embalms animals. A succession of sequences shows the
stuffed animals, as well as the inexpressive face of the taxidermist (a real man), with melancholic music in the background. In the same year, Pummell made Evolution, about the technology artist Stelarc and his inventions, such as the robotic ‘Third Hand’. It was an animated documentary, commissioned by the music band Queen as a hypothetical promo for their song ‘This Could Be Heaven’.

Ray Gun Fun (1998), commissioned by Channel 4, mixes digital animation with live-action figures. Stuck in a traffic jam, a boy fidgets restlessly beside his mother. To placate him, his mother allows him to open a present, a plastic toy ray gun. When they arrive home, the boy continues to play with his new gun – unfortunately for the objects in his room. The film opens in a 1950s world with toned-down characters from Dr Seuss and a visual style that’s quite otherworldly.

Pummell’s most touching work is Blinded by Light (2000), an animated documentary with special effects. It is about a man, born blind, who gains sight through surgery at the age of fifty. The film tells of the yearning, confusion, and pain of a person who must learn to see the world after spending his life in darkness. It was followed by the live-action How Long Is a Minute (2000) and Bodysong (2004), a documentary about human life with a soundtrack composed by Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead. It was made with funding from Channel 4.

In 2011, Pummell premiered the feature film Shock Head Sou, at the Venice Film Festival. Through documentary interviews, dramatic reconstructions, and CGI animation, it tells the true story of Daniel Paul Schreber, a German lawyer confined to an asylum at the turn of the twentieth century. He believed he was receiving messages from God and turning into a woman; during his confinement, he wrote his autobiography, Memoirs of My Nervous Illness. Although much of the film is in live-action, Pummell says: ‘This film relies very substantially on sustained animation sequences to create the metaphysical visions of the main character.’

Chris Shepherd

Chris Shepherd (b. Liverpool, UK, 4 December 1966) studied animation at West Surrey College of Art and Design. After graduating, he became studio manager at Speedy Films and coordinated adverts and short films for TV. In 1995 he set up a company called Polkadot Productions Ltd and directed and produced the multi-award-winning The Broken Jaw (1997) for Channel 4. In a desperate future suburbia, the only spark of light is the titular pub. Made in 3D computer animation and live-action, the film has scurrilous language and dark backgrounds.

After this, Shepherd realized Big Train (1998) and Pop Skool (2000). The latter is an irreverent animated series with clay puppets, showing famous singers and bands discussing history and current affairs – for example, Oasis talks about the Vietnam War. There followed The Worlds of Interiors (2001), People’s Britain (2001), and Dad’s Dead (2003). The latter is told through a series of flashbacks. A boy puts together memories of the past, permeated by the admiration he feels for his friend Johnno. At the story’s end, Johnno reveals his cruelty and violence, and admiration becomes revulsion.

Chris Shepherd’s most successful film is Who I Am and What I Want (2005). Pete is a man who lives alone in the woods, surviving by hunting and killing, happy on society’s margins. The drawings are linear, with a simple black line that’s rather caricatural.

In 2006 Shepherd made Silence Is Golden in both live-action and animation. Billy, a young boy, is scared by his neighbour Dennis. The story is creepy, sad, and full of injustice. Dennis is taken to a mental hospital and Billy wonders why this happens.

Bolexbrothers

In the last thirty years, various small animation studios arose in Britain. They proved vital for the development of new creative ideas and for the patronage and market integration of young talents. One of the most interesting independent studios is Bolexbrothers, which operates in Bristol. It was founded in 1983 by Dave Borthwick, Dave Riddet, and Nick Upton.

The studio’s name comes from the Bolex, a legendary camera that revolutionized the job of filmmakers in the 1960s. Bolexbrothers made strange films, on the border of animation, which went against market requirements. They also made successful commercials – for example, for Budweiser – but only to have revenue to make independent films.

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16 Simon Pummell, e-mail message to Andrew Osmond, 17 May 2012.
**Chapter 3: Great Britain: The Wonderful Years**

**The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb** (a 1993 feature, originating in a ten-minute pilot in 1989), is the studio's most notable work. Directed by Borthwick (Bristol, 26 July 1947–Bristol, 27 October 2012), it's made especially for adults. Tom is a fetus-like infant living in a grim and squalid urban environment. He's taken to an experimental laboratory but escapes to a community of similarly-sized people in a swamp, who help him on his journey.

The film is largely dialogue-free, limited mostly to grunts and other nonverbal vocalizations. It uses a combination of frame-by-frame animation and pixilation; puppets often share the scene with the pixilated live actors.

In 2004, Bolexbrothers Studio made the feature *The Magic Roundabout*, directed by Borthwick with Jean Duval and Frank Passingham. In *Daily Variety* on 9 February 2005, Derek Elley wrote: 'The only way to get some entertainment out of the picture is to forget the original series and yield to its generic, all-purpose flavour. [...] [though the film has] plenty of incident and smoothly wrought 3-D digital animation.'

**Aardman**

A basic reality of British animation was Bristol's Aardman studio, which in the 1990s and 2000s became established worldwide as Britain's most important animation studio, both for audiences and critics. This happened through the success of the characters Wallace and Gromit, as well as through the studio's captivating stylistic choices.

Aardman has operated in Bristol since the 1970s. It has gone through many different aesthetic, stylistic, and thematic stages while keeping some essentials: the use of clay animation (later accompanied by unobtrusive computer animation in postproduction); the veil of melancholy and loneliness present under the surface humour; the focus on the daily and social problems of ordinary people (beginning with *Animated Conversations*, 1978); and strong characterization mixed with anthropomorphism. The final product is very obviously animated but seems entirely real.

Aardman love cinema homages, tributes to tradition, and looks back to the past. Wallace from *Wallace & Gromit* is a classic, old style, English man. He loves the ritual of tea with crackers and cheese, reading the daily newspaper on his couch, and building strange but working objects. In their works, Aardman seems to be always researching a sort of perfect time, an ideal period where things are exactly what they should be.

As mentioned above, the studio was founded by school friends Peter Lord (b. Bristol, 4 November 1953, President and CEO of Aardman Animation), and David Sproxton (b. Bristol, 6 January 1954). Initially, Aardman was a small studio with a very low budget. However, in 1989 Channel 4 commissioned a series of five short films, *Lip Synch*, which included Aardman's *War Story*, *Going Equipped*, and *Babylon*.

The first feature created by Aardman was *Chicken Run* (2000) – basically, *The Great Escape* with hens and a rooster. It was inspired by the classic British World War II movies but set on a Yorkshire farm whose owners decide to move their operation to making chicken pies. The film plays with some of the darker overtones of farm-as-concentration camp but weakens its possible messages with character comedy centred on the circus rooster Rocky, voiced by Mel Gibson. Yet the film, under a glaze of humour, treats serious issues such as imprisonment where the individual is exploited to the limit.

*Chicken Run* was the first European film to use Digital Intermediate Process technology, allowing for the post-production of every single frame and manipulating them before final editing. The film won many prizes, including two BAFTA Awards and a Golden Globe.

In 1998 Aardman created the series *Angry Kid*, about a repulsive 15-year-old boy. The technique is a mix of clay animation, pixilation, and live-action.

Following *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005), discussed below, the third feature film by Aardman was *Flushed Away* (2006), in partnership with the American studio DreamWorks Animation. This was the first Aardman film made completely by 3D computer technology, though the CGI images are created over clay figures made previously, through special software developed by Aardman. The film tells the story of Roddy, a posh pet mouse, who falls into the sewer and has many adventures.

It is not possible to explain the success of Aardman without focusing on Nick Park, the creative mind behind the two most famous characters created by the studio: Wallace and Gromit.

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Nick Park

Nick Park was born in Preston, Lancashire, on 6 December 1958. While he was a child, his father, Roger, a photographer and amateur inventor — if this reminds you of a certain inventor called Wallace, you’re not wrong — regularly showed a variety of 8mm films to his family on Sunday afternoons. Nick was soon attracted to animation, admiring films by the Halas & Bachelor studio, Ray Harryhausen, and later TV animation by Terry Gilliam.

These influences soon prompted ‘bedroom’ film experiments, such as Archie’s Concrete Nightmare (1975), which reveal Park’s eye for a visual gag and his ability to create comic situations from everyday characters and experiences. Park has always been attracted to verbal and visual puns and to eccentric and obsessive behaviour, epitomized by Wallace’s commitment to Heath Robinson-styled inventions. These machines are consistently characterized by the way they offer an over-the-top and unworkable solution to a simple problem. Breakdown, defeat, and chaos are inevitable comic outcomes.

Park was also a fan of the British comics The Beano and The Dandy. They played an important role in the formation of his humour and storytelling, in which local British characters are incongruously placed in Hollywood-style genre adventures.

At fifteen, Park entered a European Young Filmmaker of the Year Competition. He didn’t win, but the BBC broadcast a short extract from his film. Park had already decided that animation was what he wanted to pursue. In 1980, he graduated in communication arts at Sheffield Art School and then moved to the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield.

Park worked on the dancing chicken sequence of Peter Gabriel’s music video, Sledgehammer (1985), and on some animated sequences on Peewee’s Playhouse (1986). He was also spellbound by all the small aspects of human foibles. His film Creature Comforts (1989) combines voice recordings of real people’s attitudes to zoos and reflections on their home environments. This enables Park to represent their perspectives in the guise of animals seemingly commenting on their various habitats. Everyone is satisfied with his life but thinks he deserves better. While staging these supposed interviews with the animals, Park inserts background visual gags so the people’s everyday problems clash with the funny images. For this short, Park won his first Oscar.

In 1990, the Creature Comforts concept was adapted for a series of commercials for ‘Heat Electric’ for the GGK Agency. The animals effectively encapsulated a domestic comfort recognized, embraced, and aspired to by the British public, and the adverts were popular and critically acclaimed. In 2003, Creature Comforts also inspired a TV series using ordinary people talking about a range of topics, made both in the UK and the US. The series version was directed by Richard Golezowski.

Park’s most famous characters, eccentric inventor Wallace and his mute, knowing, canine companion Gromit, first featured in Park’s graduation film from the National Film and Television School. A Grand Day Out (1989) features Wallace’s handmade efforts for journeying to the moon. The film was only completed when Park joined Peter Lord and David Sproxton at Aardman. Lord and Sproxton recognized Park’s talent for producing witty and whimsical, inherently British, puppet animation. Wallace and Gromit run out of cheese, so they decide to build a (homemade) rocket and go to the moon — which, as everybody knows, is made of cheese.

Their second adventure, The Wrong Trousers, was made in 1993. Wallace builds a pair of robotic trousers that can take Gromit for a walk with no effort for Wallace. Then Wallace rents a room in their house to a suspicious-looking penguin and the film takes a police-story twist. Everything ends happily with a glorious action finale — Ben Hur in a Wigan back bedroom. The screenplay was written with the help of Bob Baker, a Bristol writer for cinema and television, and in collaboration with the young animator Steve Box.

Wallace and Gromit’s clay figures are, from the very beginning, realized in a special way — raw and dirty — so the creator’s fingerprints are clearly visible, helping to make them real and captivating. The music and soundtrack are integral to the films and are always composed by Julian Nott. Wallace’s voice belongs to Peter Sallis, a famous British actor born in 1921. Gromit never speaks.

There really is only one Wallace and Gromit story. Wallace embarks on a scheme, often distracted by a new potential companion or interest; Gromit seems initially marginalized; Wallace rebukes him; Gromit sees the error in Wallace’s actions, and the ways he is easily taken in by

20 By Paul Wells.
22 Golezowski (b. Suffolk, UK, 1959) joined the studio in 1983 and collaborated on Wallace & Gromit projects. Aardman has many other excellent directors, such as Jeff Newitt, who made Loves Me. . . Loves Me Not (1992), and Darren Walsh.
others, and thus saves the day; Wallace ultimately appreciates Gromit but learns nothing from the adventure, to everybody’s amusement and acceptance.

This last point was lost on DreamWorks’ executive producer, Jeffrey Katzenberg, who requested a more formulaic conclusion to Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit (2005), in which Wallace could recognize his failings. This is not the way of British comedy, in which innocence, ignorance, and embarrassment are the staple points of recognition and amusement for Englishmen. Wallace is a master of them all.

The third Wallace and Gromit outing was A Close Shave (1995), the first with a love interest for Wallace. Wendolene is the daughter of an inventor who becomes part of a sheep-rustling scam led by her dog, Preston, who turns out to be a robot-dog-gone-wrong. Park, once more, engages in set piece chases. In one sequence, Wallace and Gromit chase Preston on a motorbike and sidecar. Plunging over a precipitous cliff, Gromit’s sidecar becomes a plane. In Japan, Astroboy is empowered with rocket legs and laser weaponry, but only in Britain, and perhaps only in Park’s vision, could a sidecar-cum-plane be armed with a porridge gun.

This third film won an Oscar and a BAFTA in 1996. Preston’s Mutton-O-Matic in A Close Shave, in which he hopes to make dog food, anticipates the pie-making machine in Chicken Run (2000, see above), which Park codirected with Peter Lord.

A Close Shave also marks the debut of Shaun the Sheep, who finds himself accidently shorn in Wallace’s Knit-O-Matic. In 2007, Shaun became the star of his own spinoff series, while Wallace’s machines became part of another spinoff, ten short films called Cracking Contraptions (2002) initially for Web-exhibition. These two-minute vignettes (featuring such inventions as the soccamat, the bully-proof vest, and the snowmanatron) further defined Park’s world as a safe, retro-styled Britain, with 1950s values and conservative outlooks. They are more pictorial gags than short films.

As noted earlier, Park particularly enjoys playing out the British parochial sensibility in the frameworks of Hollywood narratives. The feature Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit, codirected with Steve Box, is a Jekyll and Hyde-cum-werewolf story of a monster rabbit plundering village vegetable patches. The gothic tale is exploited for the ways it provokes fear but inspires fun. Park recognizes that horror and humour are close. He chooses the laugh not the scare and makes the monster anything but monstrous.

Wallace and Gromit are the accidental heroes, now running a humane pest control service. Wallace vies with Lord Victor Quartermaine for the affections of Lady Tottington, and Park mines Britain’s class system for its petty conflicts, status issues, and behavioural foibles. In an often-overlooked aspect of his work, he uses old-fashioned contexts to make ironic points about contemporary attitudes. Aardman developed 3D software that reproduced the appearance of clay perfectly, with scratches and fingerprints, for scenes impossible with stop-frame alone. In 2006 the film won an Oscar for Best Animated Feature Film.

Park’s A Matter of Loaf and Death (2008) premiered in the UK on Christmas Day with an audience of 14 million viewers, which is extraordinary in the multi-channel era. Another mock-thriller in the style of Hitchcock, Wallace’s love interest is the embittered murderess, Piella Bakewell, who mistreats her pet dog, Fluffles. Gromit foils Bakewell’s attempts to kill Wallace and wins the heart of Fluffles; Piella is eaten by a crocodile.

Park’s comic invention remains undiminished, and Wallace and Gromit are acknowledged stars worldwide. They export an old-world Britain, reassuring for its subjects, insisting that good humour, warmth, and affection can conquer all. In 2010, Wallace and Gromit hosted a BBC series called World of Invention, featuring technological innovations. Once more, progress is made safe by the comforting context of the lost, better, and imaginary past that the duo represent.

One of Wallace and Gromit’s strengths – besides their funny appearance and surreal humour – is their deep and intense relationship. Wallace has his head in the clouds and is a little neglectful of his faithful dog, who follows his vision, could a sidecar-cum-plane be armed with a porridge gun.

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One of Wallace and Gromit’s strengths – besides their funny appearance and surreal humour – is their deep and intense relationship. Wallace has his head in the clouds and is a little neglectful of his faithful dog, who follows him through crazy adventures. Often Gromit is isolated, ignored, and sacrificed by Wallace. Despite this, the viewer gets the feeling that Gromit will always be on Wallace’s side. This sort of devotion is truly fascinating.

The intrinsic belief in the goodness of people, even if they have temporary aberrations, is at the heart of Park’s stories, as is a genuine affection for their small-scale passions and pastimes. Park situates his work in the tradition of the novelist and playwright Alan Bennett, the poet John Betjeman, the filmmaker Mike Leigh, and the comedienne and actress Victoria Wood.

Londoners

Arthur Cox

Arthur Cox Studio specializes in all things moving. The studio was originally founded by animators Sally Arthur and Sara Cox and grew in size and diversity through the
years. The studio's visual style is determined on a job-to-job basis.

Sally Arthur (b. Chester, UK, 1 October 1971) did a one-year Fine Art Foundation course at Mid Cheshire College of Art and Design before venturing north to study fine art at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. She earned a degree there and became interested in animation. Local teacher and animator Peter Leake helped make her first film, *Picassoesque*, based on a poem by Julia Darling. Funded by Northern Arts, the film was her ticket to the RCA Animation course, where she made *Capotea* (1999) and *Dear Dairy* (2000).


Sarah Cox (b. 6 August 1966) graduated in 1992 from the Royal College of Art in London with *Reel to Reel*, made with abstract colours and drawing on paper. In 1997 Cox made *3 Ways to Go*, a short exploring the meaning of death and last moments. Three people will die separately – one by suicide, one in a car crash, and one by drowning – but they are united by an invisible thread. Then came *Pain Pleasure* (2001), commissioned by Channel 4, and *Heavy Pockets* (2004), a sad story of school bullies.

Cox’s recent works include *Don’t Let It All Unravel* (2007), made with 2D computer and animated objects for Aardman, and *A Time and a Time* (2009), made from archive footage and screened in competition at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival. In 2007, Arthur and Cox codirected *The Peculiar Adventures of Hector*, a road safety miniseries for Texaco and VCCP.

**Studio AKA**


In 1994 he made *Ah Pook Is Here!* which illustrates the words of William S. Burroughs and was inspired by his live reading performances. The film is made in black and white, with overlaps, collage, and puppet and objects animation. The visual style is dreamlike and stylized and the animation rocky, immediate, and punchy. In 2008, Hunt directed *Lost and Found*, an adaptation of the children’s book by Oliver Jeffers celebrating loyalty and friendship.

The studio’s leading director is Marc Craste, who made the thirteen-minute *Jo Jo in the Stars* (2004), inspired by a Nick Cave song, ‘The Carny’. *Jo Jo* is a silver trapeze artist, secretly beloved by a mysterious figure. In a brutal and wretched world, the two lovers desperately resist jealousy and selfishness.

In 2008, Craste made a thirty-minute film in CGI, *Varmints*, based on the children’s books by Helen Ward. A strange little creature has the strenuous task of protecting the world and risks losing itself in pettiness and indifference. Craste’s *Stuck on a Sunday* (2009) is a dark tale made for the Royal Opera House about a family living in complete harmony. But everything, it is soon revealed, has its dark side.

One other member of Studio AKA is Kristian Andrews. In 2008 he made *Rabbit Punch*, about the life and drama of a 14-year-old boy. He contends with a confused sexual identity, the responsibilities of growing up, and dangerous friends. The film gained attention worldwide.

**Daniel Greaves and Tandem Films**

In 1977, Daniel Greaves (b. Woburn-Buckingham, 1 October 1959) went to the West Surrey College of Art to study animation and he graduated in 1980. From 1986, he worked as a freelancer for several studios, but in the same year he founded his own London studio, Tandem Films, with Nigel Pay. His main themes are metamorphosis and the collision of reality with fantasy. He often revives ideas from the past, which he sees as relevant to the present. He regards the soundtrack as very important and as an element that can completely change one’s perception of a story.

*Manipulation* (1991) won an Oscar. A small drawn figure suffers harassment and manipulation by its creator. Then it goes wild, becomes three-dimensional, and runs away through a wastebasket. The film is a good colour play in red.

*Rabbit Rabbit* (1995), made by Tandem Films, shows a stylized rabbit that multiplies itself continuously, first in blue on a white background and then in white on a blue background, following the pattern and graphic of a kaleidoscope. Greaves animated the film as a single character hopping round the screen; the art was then defined using water-based ink. This simple action becomes a complex graphic pattern, thanks to the complicated repositioning of each original drawing.

of human foolishness, each told briefly. *Beginning, Middle and End* (2005) mixed live-action and 2D in a poetic play of Chinese boxes that contain flowers, fruits, letters, and animals. It is the circle of life, presented in an unusual way.


Following are some of Tandem Films’ main animators and recent works.

Ignacio Ferrera directed *How to Cope with Death* in 2002. Death comes in person to Earth to take away a very old lady, who has no intention of being taken. Simon Tofield directed the series *Simon’s Cat* (2007), consisting of five-minute films in a very simple and endearing style about a touchy, stinking lounge cat.

John Dunleavy’s debut, *The Technical Hitch* (2007), won a BAFTA award the following year. Also in 2007, Dunleavy and Jason Isaacs made the series *Mummy and Buddy*. It tells the story of an evil little man who has designs on the whole world but still lives with his old and oppressive mother.

**Shynola**

Shynola is the collective name of a group formed in 1994. Gideon Baws (who died in 2008), Chris Harding, Richard Kenworthy, and Jason Groves all met at Kent Institute of Art and Design. The Shynola group made video art works and music videos for British music bands, including Radiohead, Coldplay, Beck, and Blur. They also made adverts for clients including Nike, NatWest, and Orange, and visual and animated effects for such films as *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (2004).

They made only a few shorts, but these were of great quality. *The Littlest Robo* (1999), for example, is about the unlikely friendship between an orphan boy and a small robot, both alone, exploited by neglectful grown-ups.

**Animus Film**

Sylvie Bringas founded Animus Film. She trained in France as a visual artist and moved to the UK in 1989. After studying animation filmmaking, she joined forces with the documentary and animation producer Orly Yadin. They established Halo Productions as a creative home for independent animation filmmaking aimed at adult audiences.

In 1997 they wrote, directed, and produced the short documentary animation *Silence* for Channel 4. It is the story of a Jewish girl who must keep her silence about her traumatic experience during World War II. But she needs to talk about what has happened; the pain can be overcome only when shared. (It is based on the true case of Tana Ross, a Jewish woman who was a child in Terezin concentration camp.) At the start, the animation is black and white; later, colours appear.

At Halo, Bringas and Orly also coproduced the comedy animation series *Treasure* (1999) for BBC2. It involves a teenage terrorist, his suffering mother, and his indomitable grandmother.

In 1998, Bringas produced *Andares in Time of War*, written and directed by Alejandra Jimenez, about a man’s last breath travelling through the world to reach his mother and girlfriend. In 2001, she produced *The Cat with Hands*, which was written, directed, and animated by Robert Morgan, about a cat slowly becoming human.

In the same year, Bringas produced *Bye Bye*, created by Italian animator Liána Dognini (b. Milan, 26 January 1963). It used pencil on paper and 2D animation to tell a poetic tale about a grandmother and a child walking in the woods with a bag full of kittens.

At Animus Film, Bringas produced *The Separation* (2003), another film by Robert Morgan. Made with 3D computer animation and puppets, it is the story of two Siamese twins who are separated, and the extraordinary consequences. There is no dialogue, only sound effects and music. With Morgan as writer-director, Bringas produced *Monsters* (2005), a live-action film.

In collaboration with animator Monika Forsberg, Bringas made *His Passionate Bride* in 2004. An animated soft-porn film, it is a story of love and passion, betrayal and death, with an ironic aftertaste and a gaunt graphic style.

**Pearly Oyster**


*The Queen’s Monastery* (1998) was the first animated film to be funded by the National Lottery. It received many prizes, including a Silver Hugo in Chicago. Using water-colour on paper, and inspired by the *Sinfonietta* by Leos Janáček, the short depicts a woman watching as the man she loves, a fanciful and passionate acrobat, returns from war changed into another person. The film rails poetically against the horrors of war that change a person
deep inside. Memories, fantasies, obsessions, and guilt are mixed in a masterful way. Emma Calder also made the animation sequences for the Channel 4 documentary *The Great British Black Invasion* (2006).

**Other London-Based Studios**


Asylum Film worked in commercials for many famous brands and produced animation special effects. *This Is Where We Live* (2009) is a commercial made for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publisher 4th Estate. A paper man comes out of a book on a shelf and begins walking through a city made of print paper.

Hibbert and Ralph Studios, based in Oxford Circus, central London, produced such series as *Stressed Eric* (2000), an irreverent cartoon about Eric Freeble, a stressed 40-year-old man persecuted by his children and ex-wife; *Tractor Tom* (2003), a children’s series about a truck called Tom that lives in Springhill Farm with many friends; and the new 3D version of *Fireman Sam* (2003–2005).

**In Manchester**

Cosgrove Hall Films was one of the biggest and most productive European studios, dealing with every kind of animation. It was founded in 1976 by Brian Cosgrove and Mark Hall, directors and producers. The studio’s most famous series was *Danger Mouse* (1981–1992), a hilarious action-comedy series about a mouse secret agent who protects the world. *Count Duckula* (1988–1993) was a perhaps more sophisticated comedy about a neurotic, vegetarian vampire duck and his towering castle servants, Igor and Nanny. On the puppet side, the studio’s series included young children’s fare such as *Chorlton and the Wheelies* (1976–1979) and shows for older viewers. For example, there were puppet versions of *The Wind in the Willows* (1984–1987, following an initial TV animated feature in 1983) and *Truckers* (1991), an adventure serial about small people called ‘Nomes’, from a novel by bestselling author Terry Pratchett.


Cosgrove Hall was closed by ITV in 2009. Later, it was relaunched as Cosgrove Hall Fitzpatrick Entertainment, led by Hall’s son Simon, with investment from the Irish entrepreneur Francis Fitzpatrick.

**In Cardiff**

Dinamo Productions, founded in 2004, dealt with 2D and 3D animation as well as CGI and special effects for live-action films, TV, and the Internet. In 2009, the studio was commissioned by S4C to make *Happy Valley*, a preschool series illustrating nursery rhymes and doggerel. Other projects included *Graddpa in My Pocket* (2009), a mixture of live-action, CGI, and green screen, about a grandpa so small he can be put in a pocket; and *Telly Tales* (2008), produced by BBC Wales.

Griffilms Studio deals with original niche productions, realized for the most part in 3D and computer graphics.

**Scotland**

The producer and director Leslie MacKenzie established West Highland Animation in 1988, based in Perthshire, Scotland. The studio’s aim is to promote Gaelic language, culture, and local stories to a wide audience.

**Ireland**

Sullivan Bluth Studio found itself in financial difficulty after the poor box-office returns of its features *All Dogs Go to Heaven* (1989) and *Rock-a-Doodle* (1991). In 1995, it closed. Emerald City closed soon after, and Fred Wolf Films Dublin downsized. All this coincided with the introduction of digital technology, which caused the downsizing of animation studios worldwide and allowed indigenous entrepreneurs to think big and spend little.

These events also coincided with Ireland’s rapid economic growth, which led to the country being nicknamed...
the Celtic Tiger. What had been one of Europe’s poorest countries became one of its wealthiest. The gap left by the big studios started to be filled by brand-new ones.

Animated auteur shorts also got under way, mostly thanks to the reestablishment of The Irish Film Board in 1993. The board’s initial policy didn’t include financial aid to animation. However, in 1991, a group of animators and animation students, led by Steve Woods and Cathal Gaffney, established the Anamú Animation Base, promoting the growth and development of independent animation in the country. Anamú and other groups lobbied for new funding, and eventually it extended its funding system to include animation.

In 1996, the film board, RTÉ, and the Arts Council, in association with the Northern Ireland Film Council, instituted a new funding scheme for animation. It was called Frameworks and was an annual money award for a selection of animated shorts. These shorts were launched at the Galway Film Fleadh, the oldest animation festival in Ireland. Frameworks was followed by similar schemes including Oscailt and Short Shorts, open to both live-action and animation. Irish Flash, made to encourage new animators working in this digital format, opened in 2000 and ran for four years. As well as schemes for shorts, the agency also invested up to 1.2 million euros annually in Irish-driven animated features and TV series, through production and development funding. The Irish Film Board was an enormous supporter of the animation industry, developing and investing in new and established talent through the late 1990s and the 2000s. Such funding helped the industry grow and gave independent animators opportunities to develop their own projects.

Despite all of this, the industry was – comparatively – still small. The legacy of Sullivan Bluth Studio influenced Irish animation, as did the country’s historic tie with the United States. Many studios produced series for international clients and developed original projects in parallel. This continual change of register is probably the strength of Irish animation.

It often focused on Ireland’s national past and folklore – for example, The Secret of Kells, Steve Woods’ Ireland 1848, and Naomi Wilson’s An Caithfeac’h Bhíeara (‘The Old Woman of Beara’). All were funded by the IFB. There were also several literary adaptations. As Darragh O’Connell put it, Ireland is ‘a small country which has a history of being good storytellers and writers’, and this is reflected in its animation.

### Studios

Among the large studios, Quin Films and Fred Wolf Films remained active in the mid-1990s, mostly producing television series. Slowly, new companies were set up, including Monster Production and Terraglyph Animation (both by Don Bluth alumni). Terraglyph coproduced several feature films with European companies; they included Carnivalé (2000) with Millimages (France), Duck Ugly (2000) with Estudios Moro (Spain), and Help! I’m a Fish (2001) with A Film (Denmark). Terraglyph was Ireland’s largest studio until it folded in 2008.

Monster Production was founded in 1995 by Gerard O’Rourke and Andrew Fitzpatrick. In 1997, it split into Monster Distributions, which finances and distributes TV series worldwide, and Monster Animation, which creates the animation. One example of their work is Matthew Darragh’s Pilgrim (2006), about a delirious fridge that gets lost in the desert. The studio’s staff included creative director Jason Tammemägi (b. London, 1974), creator of the

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25 Anamú also published a directory of freelance animators and small studios and sponsored two short animations with RTÉ. It ran three years of animation festivals at the Irish Film Institute. Anamú ended in 1996 because the members were too busy developing their own projects – so it succeeded in its aim.
26 It is also worth pointing out the role of festivals in Ireland. The Cork International Festival often programmed short animations before features. The Galway Film Fleadh – whose cofounder (Steve Woods) worked in animation – staged the first Irish Animation Retrospective in 1989, which included the first-ever meeting of Irish animators.
27 Darragh O’Connell, personal communication with Laura Buono, 7 October 2009.
28 Jim Quin opened his studio in 1977. His son David joined the studio in 1984 as an animator and director of puppet TV series. Among his works are To Forget (1992), an oneiric telling of an unhappy love story narrated by a child in metaphysical scenery devastated by war; and It was a Terrible Hard Work (2008), an animated documentary describing the life of miners from the Slieveardagh coal fields. Its narration is taken from interviews with former miners, who speak of accidents, hard underground work, and death.
series *Fluffy Gardens* (2006) and *Ballybraddon* (2008). He also directed the shorts *Dublin 1* (2004) and *Not There Yet* (2004), the latter about the Irish transport system and the daily obstacles for travellers using it.

In 1994, Cathal Gaffney (b. Dublin, 1970) and Darragh O’Connell (b. Dublin, 1972) founded Brown Bag Films. The studio began with commercials then expanded and made successful TV series such as *Cat Little’s Wobblyland* (2005), Nicky Phelan’s *Crapp Rap* (2007), and Darragh O’Connell’s *Olivia* (2008).

In 2001 Brown Bag made the short *Give up Yer Aul’ Sins*, directed by Cathal Gaffney. It originated in a set of 1960s recordings of children reading Bible stories, made by a teacher as a learning aid. Animated in a documentary style, complete with wobbly camera moves, the film has a little girl give her own version of the John the Baptist story. The childish style of the visuals suits the child’s amusing speech, and the film was nominated for an Academy Award in 2002. In 2009 another Brown Bag production was nominated: *Granny O’Grimm’s Sleeping Beauty* (2008), by Nicky Phelan. It is a comic version of Sleeping Beauty, made in a mix of 3D and droll flat animation.

Raw Nerve Productions was established in 1995 in Derry, in Northern Ireland’s interactive multimedia arts centre.29 The studio produced live-action and animation series, plus excellent shorts by John McCloskey (b. Derry, 1964). His first film, *Midnight Dance* (1997), is a visual interpretation of the *Danse Macabre* by Saint Saëns, with drawings photocopied on sugar-paper and then coloured. The short renders the nineteenth-century cultural mood in a nightmare atmosphere mixed with irony, ridiculing death to exorcize it.

In 2000, McCloskey directed *The King’s Wake*, a 30-minute featurette that takes an ancient Irish ghost legend and gives it a suggestive dark outlook. *Loocymoon* (2006) is a 3D dreamlike story about a little girl who is enchanted by the moon. In 2007 McCloskey directed *The Crumblegiant*, nominated for a BAFTA in 2008, with traditional animation. Made all in black-on-white, the raw, exquisite drawings depict a metamorphic journey into an old woman’s memories, recalling an episode in her childhood. In 2009 he directed *Guns, Bees and Tadpoles* in which a summer day for an ordinary family becomes the pretext for a depiction of 1970s Northern Ireland.

In 1999, Tomm Moore and Paul Young brought together a group of young animators and started an informal partnership. This grew into the Cartoon Saloon studio in Kilkenny, southeast Ireland. The studio produced high-quality commercials, films, and series such as *Skunk Fu!* (2006), broadcast in more than one hundred countries, and the beautiful *Anam an Amhráin* (‘Soul of the Song’, 2009), a reinterpretation of Irish folk songs.

In 2009, the studio collaborated with Les Armateurs, France 2 Cinéma (France), and Vivi Film (Belgium) to create the first animated Irish feature film, *The Secret of Kells*, codirected by Moore and Nora Twomey. In 2009 the studio made the short *Old Fangs*, directed by Adrien Mérigeau (b. Besançon, France, 1983), about a young wolf who visits his father many years after his parents’ divorce.

A comic artist and illustrator, Tomm Moore was born in Newry in 1977. After founding Cartoon Saloon, he worked on most of the studio’s productions; he directed commercials for such clients as Cadbury and Irish Independent and worked as an animator on TV series and feature productions. He directed two shorts, *Dress Rehearsal* (2001) and *Coach Potato* (2004), before devoting himself to his first feature, *The Secret of Kells*. The project, developed and directed with Nora Twomey, came from an ambition that Moore had since his college days to base an animated film on something significant in Irish art.

*The Secret of Kells* derives its title from *The Book of Kells*, an amazingly beautiful illuminated manuscript containing the Gospels that is Ireland’s most famous handiwork. The film imaginatively retells its creation. Brendan is a twelve-year-old orphan who lives in the Kells monastery and likes to spend his days in the scriptorium. Brother Aidan, a master illuminator, appears one day with a manuscript of great beauty. The monk initiates the lad into

![Figure 3.7 Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey, *The Secret of Kells*, 2009.](image)

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29 Another studio based in Northern Ireland was Flickerpix Animations, established in 2003 by Joel Simon (b. Malmedy, Belgium, 1975). The studio produced commercials, shorts, and animation series, including *Days Like This* (2000), mixing various styles and techniques. In 2007, Joel Simon directed the humorous short *Horn Ok Please*. It shows a noisy and restless day in the life of a Bombay taxi driver who is trying to earn enough to buy the air-conditioned car of his dreams.
the art of illumination, thus finding Brendan’s real talent, and charges him with finishing the book. The boy is also helped by the fairy girl Aisling, who becomes his best friend and a vital ally.

The overall style is inspired by Celtic and medieval Irish art – from the masterfully backgrounds created and overseen by the art director, the painter Ross Stewart, to the character animation. The latter was originally planned in a Disney style but went through a progressive simplification. It melded with the whole visual style, ‘flat with false perspective and lots of colour’; even the clean up was deliberately planned to obtain ‘the “stained glass” effect of thicker outer lines’. The film is a beautiful succession of colours, intricate lines, and patterns, with an apt soundtrack from French composer Bruno Coulais and Irish folk band Kíla. The movie was applauded by the critics and the public, receiving an Academy Award nomination in 2010 and audience awards at the Annecy and Edinburgh film festivals.

Nora Twomey (b. Cork, 1971), codirector of The Secret of Kells, was one of the founding members of Cartoon Saloon. In 2002, she directed her first short, From Darkness, blending traditional hand-drawn figures with computer-generated backgrounds. The plot is from an Inuit folk tale. A woman cast into the sea returns in the form of a dreadful skeleton and appears to a lonely fisherman. The young man’s pity and his breath of life regenerate her. The poetic, wordless film has a superb opening sequence and a touching passage portraying the regeneration of the body; such elements make the film at once powerful and delicate.

Made as a fake commercial, Celtic Maidens (2004) pokes fun at the international Rose of Tralee competition, celebrated among Irish communities all over the world. Maeve Connolly observed

Celtic Maidens sharply identifies it as a point of convergence for a set of enduring myths concerning Irish emigration, feminine purity and rural identity [. . .] Much of Celtic Maidens is characterized by the linear aesthetic of cel animation and graphic caricature, but the opening sequence employs photographic landscape imagery, evoking an array of cinematic and photographic texts, from The Quiet Man (John Ford, 1952) to the postcards of John Hinde and photomontage pastiches of Sean Hillen.

Cúilín Dualach (‘Backward Boy’, 2004) is based on a short tale of Jackie Mac Donacha and is entirely spoken in Irish. A boy, born with his head backwards, manages to be accepted by other people and, above all, by his father. The short blends various techniques to create different textures and the comedy and drama are well mixed.

Magma Films, in Galway, focused on feature films as well. In 2003 it coproduced The Ugly Duckling & Me, followed by 2008’s Niko & The Way to the Stars. They were both directed abroad by the Danish Michael Hegner.

Boulder Media in Dublin provided TV series for US channels, such as Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends (2004), directed by Robert Cullen and nominated for an Emmy Award. The studio also produced shorts, such as Mick O’Sullivan’s amusing Barber Shop (2005) and Paul O’Flanagan’s Carte de Visite (2006).

Kavaler Productions was founded and led by Andrew Kavanagh (b. Dublin, 1973). It would become one of the most prolific companies in Ireland, engaging in commercials and children’s television series in addition to creating some award-winning shorts. In 1998 Kavanagh received a commission from the Irish Film Board to make his first film, From an Evil Cradling (1999), codirected by Keith Foran. Based on Brian Keenan’s account of his experience as a hostage in Beirut, it was narrated by Keenan himself.

The film uses an extract about an extreme inner journey in the prisoner’s mind, spiralling into madness before returning to sanity. The animation follows his stream of thoughts, creating a colourful, changeable mental universe through crude, raw drawings and expressionist colours. The beginning of the ‘Hell’ sequence is remarkable, combining figurative and abstract approaches.

In 2000 Kavanagh directed The Milliner, an allegorical tale about the individual versus the masses. The short is set in a perfectly organized world populated by identical individuals drawn as hundreds of jigsaws all wearing the same bowler hat. A random error sets off a chain of events that will eventually break the mechanical efficiency.

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32 A coproduction between A Film (Denmark), Futurikon (France), and Ulysses (Germany) in collaboration with TV2 (Denmark), M6 (France), and WDR/ARD (Germany).

33 A coproduction between Animaker (Finland), A Film (Denmark), and Ulysses (Germany).
Drawing on such diverse sources as the surrealist paintings of René Magritte and Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times*, the short—compared to Jiří Trnka’s *The Hand*—reaffirms that change, however improbable, can happen.

*The Depository* (2003) is inspired by the 1994 visual novel by the English/Polish Andrzej Klimowski. The short shows the troubled dreams of a writer who falls asleep on his notebook. In his dreams, his spirit tries to fly off on book-leaf wings, but even in his mind he’s imprisoned by dark forces until his artistic muse rescues him. The essential, elegant drawing and symbolic colours suit the fine characterization.


In 2002, Alan Shannon (b. Dublin, 1972) co-founded JAM Media with John Rice (b. Kerry, 1971) and Mark Cumberton. He directed and animated commercials and series as well as a short. *Badly Drawn Roy* (2005) is an ingenious fake-documentary about an animated boy born in an ordinary live-action Dublin family. Retracing Roy’s unique case, we meet his family and learn about the ordinary life of this extraordinary lad.


In 2007, Louise Bagnall (b. Dublin, 1985) joined the studio. She animated and directed *Colour Contamination* (2008)

portraying a white, clean-cut businessman who must face his worst fears in a colourful world, and *Donkey* (2009).

**Independents**

One of the first Irish animators was Steve Woods (b. Drogheda, 1955). He began creating a Saturday morning series for RTÉ, which included his first children's short, *Oíche Sí* (*A Fairy Night*, 1989). After a visit to the Annecy festival, he changed his view about animation and came to see it as a form of art. He became involved in raising Irish animation’s profile, working as a journalist and programming animation festivals. In 1994, he produced his second children’s short for children, *Timmy the Ticket*. After that, he used animation for criticism and denunciation.

*Ireland 1848* (1996) is a documentary about Ireland’s Great Famine, a period of mass starvation, disease, and emigration between 1845 and 1852. It is presented as if through a camera, forty years before the birth of cinema. The photos refer to illustrations of the Great Famine, such as those published in the *Illustrated London News*. The references to early cinema and photography reflect the self-reflexive medium.

In 1998, Steve Woods directed *Window*, based on the writings of Bobby Sands, who died in prison during the Irish Hunger Strike. The first part is made, like *Ireland...*
Chapter 3: Ireland

1848, through the animation of photographic stills, photocopied to high contrast in black and white then coloured by pastels and shot under a rostrum camera. It describes the prisoner’s cruel reality – an atmosphere of restless agony, highlighted by the use of extradiegetic sounds. The yells of the protests echo in the prisoner’s head while he shows his personal political protest, writing on the wall with his excrement. The rest of the short uses traditional cel animation to describe, through almost achromatic and childish drawing, the inner world rising from his yearning for freedom.

The Trial of Solomon (2002) depicts the trial of Solomon Tellirian. In 1921 in Berlin, he shot a Turkish diplomat, who was responsible for the murder of Solomon’s family during the Armenian genocide.

Timothy Booth (b. Dublin, 1943) began a career as a painter and designer and in the course of this work discovered animation. In 1983 he made The Prisoner, a look at the life and work of the Irish poet W. B. Yeats. Ulysses (1997) is an irreverent caricature of James Joyce, dealing with his struggles to write Ulysses. Both films had music composed and performed by Booth’s band, Dr Strangely Strange. After making these films, Booth left animation to work as a painter, musician, and comic-strip artist.

Born in Duisburg, Germany, in 1969, Edith Pieperhoff studied film and animation at the Dun Laoghaire College of Art and Design. In 1993 she and Maria Murray directed An Bonnán Buí (‘The Yellow Bittern’), based on a traditional Irish song that mourns a bird dying of thirst on New Year’s night. A lonely old man sees his life reflected in the bird’s struggle to survive. The story is told without words and homages Frédéric Back’s animations.

Pieperhoff made many literary adaptations from myths and legends. Orpheus (1998) retells the Greek myth. Pangur Bán (‘White Fuller’, 1999), made with crayons on paper, is taken from an early Irish poem. A monk spends his day copying manuscripts but the harsh working conditions inspire flights of fancy; his poetic imagination compares his life to that of his cat.


Another German woman in Ireland, Stefanie Dinkelbach (b. Dernbach, Germany, 1962) started making films after studying ceramics in Cardiff. Nicer Than They Think They Are (1991) is her first short, developed ‘when the figurative sculptural work I was developing at the time started to need a storyline and a soundtrack’.38 In this film, a woman steps out of her everyday life to discover the potential of her ‘other self’.

In 1993 Dinkelbach moved to Ireland, where she directed the shorts Game of Rules (1994), Hurry-Hurry (1994), and The Imperial Message (1997). The latter, based on a Franz Kafka story, deals with the endless journey of a messenger sent by a dying emperor. Completely shot in black and white, it uses suggestive weaves of shadows, a mix of model animation and cutout. The cutouts enhance the evocative, enigmatic atmosphere.

Aunt Bridget (2003), based on a story from the childhood memoirs of the poet and novelist Patrick Galvin, is set in Cork in the 1930s. A woman courageously lives the life of an artist at a time when this role was restricted to men. In 2005, Dinkelbach moved into more experimental language with the black and white Joy. A live-action sequence of a dancer is superimposed with shots of Cork St Fin Barre’s Cathedral organ. The film represents the ascent of a spirit to heaven, accompanied by the music of Olivier Messiaen. The result is rather abstract, with music as the key element.

Based in Northern Ireland, Stephen McCollum (b. Letterkenny, Donegal, 1967) directed Pullin the Devil by the Tail (2002), then turned it into a six-part series screened in 2009. Both the short and the series are eclectic mixes of tales told by Puca Ryder, an old Irish musician in his last days. They concern the exploits of himself and his fellow band members, Ciaran McGinley and Frank Murphy, who made up Stoisis, Ireland’s first punk-folk band. The stories combine many elements of rural Irish life: superstition, down-to-earthiness, hell, black humour, and verbal brutality.

In 2005, McCollum directed a music video for The Frames, Fake, again with Puca Ryder as protagonist. Dead Murphy (2006) is an absurd, hilarious story about a dead man meeting a killer. All of these films reinterpret the Irish stereotype, spoken in extremely vulgar English with strong Irish accents.

Naomi Wilson (b. Dublin, 1965) studied at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. After spending ten years in New York, she returned to independently produce her films. In 1999, she and Brian Doyle set up Loophead Studio in West Clare, with Doyle providing sound and music for all the shorts.

38 Stefanie Dinkelbach, personal communication to Laura Buono, 29 December 2009.
Wilson has recurring themes: tensions between man and nature, the presence and power of the Atlantic Ocean, and Irish folklore. They are all inspired by the studio’s location in the Loop Head peninsula, a remote part of Ireland’s west coast. *Rehy Fox* (2002), drawn on sand, is based on a folk-tale about a fox who outwits everyone around. *Among Strangers* (2005) is based on the opening of the autobiographical book *People of the Sea* by David Thomson (1914–1988). It tells of a significant moment in Thomson’s childhood, when he first sees a group of seals, his life’s passion. It was made with sand, a material between the land and sea, and the film’s soundtrack includes a local fisherman.

*An Cailleach Bhéarra* (‘The Old Woman of Beara’, 2007) is based on the legends of Cailleach. She is a figure of Celtic folklore, an immortal woman linked to the landscape, the changing seasons, the storms, and the sea. The film gives a poetic treatment to the ancient tale, introducing elements of contemporary life juxtaposed against the archetypal language of myth. The pixilated animation is excellent and the film enchanting.

Matthew Talbot-Kelly (b. Dublin, 1963) started Glimpse Digital Ireland in 2005 and Glimpse Digital Canada in 2008. In 2007, he made his first short film, *Blind Man’s Eye*, which used both a physical model and 2D and 3D computer animation. It is a collage of different moods, objects, and music, delicately depicting an old man’s memories. Surreal imagery and incongruous juxtapositions of everyday objects climax with the unfolding of the man’s city of memories.

Rory Bresnihan was born in Dublin in 1974. After the success of *The Chameleon* (1996), he was hired by Aardman Animation (UK) and trained under Nick Park, working on projects such as *Chicken Run* and Tim Burton’s *Corpse Bride*. He then returned to Ireland to direct his own projects.

*Guy’s Dog* (1998) looks like an irreverent interpretation of Aardman’s Wallace and Gromit. Animated in the same style, it’s about the desire to be someone else: an alcoholic dog dreams of being human. In 2001, Bresnihan directed *Ape*, a spoof of Mafioso-style films with an acute sense of humour. Like many Bresnihan characters, the protagonist is a maniac, a zookeeper obsessed with catching his escaped orangutan.

In 2003, Bresnihan made the black-humoured *The Butterfly Collector* and, in 2004, *God’s Early Work*, a pert tale of God creating humans. The latter short is in Bresnihan’s prickly sarcastic and bitter style, with an amusingly represented Lucifer.


Ruairí Robinson (b. Dublin, 1978) earned a degree in visual communications at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. His graduation film was *The House on Dame Street* (1999), a dark and gloomy story. An investigator gets lost in a house and faces absurd, grotesque situations.

*Fifty Percent Grey* (2001) was Robinson’s second work and won an Academy Award nomination. With a paradoxical humour, the film reflects Robinson’s view of his time. He effectively puts us in the character’s shoes, waking in a universe devoid of spatial and temporal coordinates, where even heaven is a widescreen TV. The spectator is dazed and amused at once.


The peculiar, recursive technique used to create *Butterfly* became the leitmotif of Marshall’s next works. They included generative art pieces created entirely by the computer with programming and mathematical codes. These works employ algorithms applied on a biomorphic shape. Among them were *Quiet Steam* (2007), *The Nest That Sailed the Sky* (2009), and various applications for Apple’s iPhone.

Eoghan Kidney was born in Dublin in 1982 and studied at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art and Design. With Paul Madden, Eoin Whelehan, and Andy Clarke, he created the group Delicious 9. It was active from 2001 to 2006 in the production of experimental music videos, performances, interactive installations, comics, and workshops.

In 2005, Kidney directed Stars. It tells the story of Sophie, an ill young woman who experiences synesthetic hallucinations. The film constructs a dual reality between our perception and the woman’s altered reality through treatment-induced hallucinations. The short was first shot in live action, then edited and used as both storyboard and animation reference. The style switches from 2D rotoscoped animation to fully rendered CGI to motion graphics, in order to reflect the experiences of the characters.

Visionary and versatile, David O’Reilly (b. Kilkenny, 1983) was a supreme talent of his era. He never formally studied the trade but in 2004 he started working as an animator for Shynola and as Marc Craste’s assistant at Studio AKA. Later he quit to work independently and develop his own projects. He also freelanced for clients such as Sony and the BBC. He was hired to create animation sequences for Garth Jennings’ features The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy (2005) and Son of Rambow (2007) and the video for U2’s single ‘I’ll Go Crazy If I Don’t Go Crazy Tonight’ (2009) with the designer Jon Klassen.

At that time, he started to experiment and created his first works. These include the visionary short WOFL 2106 (2006) and RGB XYZ, an animated series between 2004 and 2008. Octocat Adventure (2008) was released in five parts on YouTube; it is presented as the work of Randy Peters, a nine-year-old kid from Chicago. The series tells of a cat with octopus tentacles looking for his lost parents. It deliberately looks like a child’s raw computer animation and went viral on the Web.

O’Reilly constantly seeks a graphic expression befitting CGI, with a freedom of expression only this art form gives. His style mixes many contemporary visual sources: manga and anime, video games, TV, and traditional animation. RGB XY Z, for example, has an insignificant plot, but its rough animation, inspired by early video games, appeal to different ages – to viewers who relate it to their childhoods and to those who find it old-fashioned.

A similar approach was used in O’Reilly’s shorts Serial Entoptics (2007) and especially Please Say Something (2009).

The latter, the story of a dysfunctional mouse and cat couple in a futuristic city, resisted any polished appearance. Please Say Something was a huge public and critical success; its awards include a Golden Bear at the Berlinale Film Festival.

In 2010, O’Reilly directed The External World. It is a visionary, crude look at contemporary society, in which reality and fiction become indistinguishable.

France

Between 1990 and 2010, French animation changed radically. The impetus given by government programmes, the rise of digital animation, and the growing number of dedicated schools propelled the nation into becoming the third largest animation-producing country, behind the United States and Japan. (In 2007, animation accounted for 35 percent of foreign sales of audiovisual programmes, worth 41.7 million euros.)

French production grew so much that it became almost impossible to screen all of the films produced in France, including the ones made for television and the Internet. The number of animated features multiplied. TV series adopted a modern tone and digital fabrication. Short films were made in abundance and screened throughout the world. Special effects ‘made in France’ flourished. Animation penetrated everywhere, including video games, another French specialty.

The media informed the public (at last) of the nature of animation, declaring that it was an art form and boosting its position in the culture. In addition to the increase in quantity, there was also an evolution in the styles and work philosophy. It was now possible to work cheaply from home, and a large number of people in animation could live from their trade – a breakthrough made possible by the digital revolution.

The Feature Film

Not long ago, the production of an animated feature film seemed financially unrealistic. The prevailing attitudes were that this format should be aimed at children and therefore had a limited audience; that originality...
Chapter 3: France

represented a major risk; and that international distribution was unpredictable. All of these attitudes dampened the spirits of producers. But the new American features (especially Pixar’s) and the high number of animation professionals led to the emergence of a few different projects.

The race began with *Kirikou et la sorcière* (*Kirikou and the Sorceress*, Michel Ocelot, 1998). It was made with a modest budget and drew from African, not French, culture. Its sequential narration was outside the norm; it was from a director known only to fans; and it was unexpectedly successful. That Ocelot could make an art-house film for a large audience and profit from it was a revelation to the industry.

The door had opened at last. There was one French animated feature produced in 1990, eight in 2003, and seven in 2006. More animated features were made in France in the early twenty-first century than ever before. Generally they were made with European partners, as much to limit the initial investment as to ensure pre-sales to distributors. This way of operating contributed, of course, to the identification of a common European culture — even if the films lean more toward specific cultures. *The Secret of Kells*, for example, has many references to Ireland, and it would be difficult to find anything more French than *Les triplettes de Belleville*, ‘The Triplets of Belleville’.

Since 1998, nine animated feature films have been seen by more than a million viewers around the globe (seven in France). Ten out of 31 films made in France had more sales abroad than in France. This was not only true for productions intended for the international market (Arthur et les Minimoys, *Igor*) but also, surprisingly, for the personal films (*‘The Triplets of Belleville’, Persepolis*). The expansion in production represented a feast for directors who had dreamed of making a feature.

Jean-François Laguionie had encountered difficulties in producing and directing *Gwen* in the beginning of the 1980s. However, he followed up with *Le château des singes* (*‘The Castle of Monkeys’, a.k.a. ‘A Monkey’s Tale’, 1999) and *L’île de Black Mór* (*‘The Island of Black Mór’, 2004). The latter is a magnificent homage to the adventure story, in the mode of Robert Louis Stevenson. The two features signal the changeover from paper cutouts, which the director loved, to classical animation on cels.

In the same way Michel Ocelot, a storyteller if ever there was one, considered the feature an opportunity to develop richer narratives and a chain of productions. He came to public attention with *Kirikou and the Sorceress* (1998); then he reworked short animated silhouettes as a feature compilation, *Princes et princesses* (*Princes and Princesses*, 2000). He was artistic director on *Kirikou et les bêtes sauvages* (*‘Kirikou and the Wild Beasts’, 2003) before creating a pure jewel, *Azur & Asmar* (*‘Azur & Asmar: The Princes’ Quest’, 2006), which gave free rein to his humanist spirit. This latter work, made on computer, is absolutely representative of its author’s style — further proof that it’s not the tool that makes a film, but the director’s will.

### Animation and Comic Strips

The success of the contemporary comic strip in France, an art now recognized by official authorities and a flourishing publishing domain, couldn’t stay on the margins of animation.

The relationship between animation and the comic strip has always been narrow and debatable. Very often, the film just enhanced the printed original. Two important factors modified the relationship between the media: the growing number of adult comic readers and the emergence of creators with different influences who were familiar with both arts.

Of course, classical adaptations didn’t disappear completely. *Astérix et les Vikings* (2006), a coproduction between France and Denmark, is typical. However, compared to the output of Belvision or Gaumont in the preceding decades, it seemed there was less demand for such productions. Also, the growing number of diverse American and French adaptations of comics into live-action films encouraged the public to accept a drawn figure becoming a flesh and blood actor. It was no longer always necessary to draw the characters to make them live on the screen, and animation became optional. French live-action examples included *Astérix et Obélix contre César*, ‘Asterix and Obelix Vs. Caesar’, and *Lucky Luke*.

The low cost of publishing a comic strip facilitated the freedom of expression and style that one finds in animation when creators jump from one domain to the other. Among writers, Jean-Luc Fromental (b. 1950) began as a scriptwriter for comic books then created scripts for Grégoire Solotareff (b. 1953) and adapted the graphic novels of *Mandarine and Caw* (2007) by Jacques Azan and Chico Mandarine for the small screen. Stéphane Blanquet (b.

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nominated for an Oscar) with Marjane Satrapi (b. Rasht, Iran, 22 November 1969), who wrote the comic on which the film was based.

The film stands out from the usual adaptation of the comic strip to animation in several ways. It is based on an independent graphic novel, about Satrapi’s life in Iran following the 1979 revolution. The film was faithful to the spirit of the strip – one legitimate change was that the strip was in black and white, whereas the addition of movement and the scale of the projection encouraged the filmmakers to create a more visceral experience.

Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, 15 May 1973) used cutouts to add movement to the graphic universe stemming from his colourful, morbid comics. The result was the seven-minute Mon placard (‘My Wardrobe’, 1999).

The two arts could represent two facets of the creator’s palette. Vincent Paronnaud (b. La Rochelle, 1 January 1970), alias Winshluss, is a comic strip author and artist (his Pinocchio won best comic book at the 2009 Angoulême festival). His work also includes several short films in live-action. He codirected the animated feature Persepolis (2007, nominated for an Oscar) with Marjane Satrapi (b. Rasht, Iran, 22 November 1969), who wrote the comic on which the film was based.

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to add levels of grey. Only a short time before, the subject matter would have been an insurmountable bar to the production of an animated feature film.

***Pear[s] du noir*** (‘Fear[s] of the Dark’, 2008) is a collective work that played the very graphic card of pure black and white. Etienne Robial, a publisher of comic strips, was the film’s artistic director. He gathered together talents from comic strips, illustration, and animation including Blutch, Charles Burns, Marie Caillou, Pierre di Sciuolo, Lorenzo Mattotti, and Richard McGuire. Each artist directed a sequence, which resulted in a patchwork film with very graphic interludes.

*Renaisance* (id., 2006), by Christian Volekman (b. Avallon, 9 July 1971), was a futuristic film noir with a very rich script and visuals. Again, it used only black and white, which matched the drama magnificently.

Sylvain Chomet (b. Maisons-Laffitte, 10 November 1963) received a diploma at Angoulême School at the same time as Nicolas de Crécy (b. Lyon, 29 September 1966). Early on they made comic strips together. Chomet worked for a while in England at the Richard Purdum animation studio before returning to comic strips in France. His animation career really began with *La vieille dame et les pigeons* (‘The Old Lady and the Pigeons’, 1998), which won numerous prizes, including the Grand Prix at the Annecy Festival and an Oscar nomination.

This success allowed him to continue with a feature, ‘The Triplets of Belleville’ (2003), which was inspired by Crécy’s drawings although Crécy was not credited in the film. The story is the quest of an old lady to find her grandson, a cyclist kidnapped and taken to the United States by the Mafia. The success of the film (with its two Oscar nominations) owes much to its originality, offering a finely caricatured ‘Old France’.

After a detour in live-action, Chomet returned to animation with *L’illusionniste* (‘The Illusionist’, 2010), taken from an unfinished script by Jacques Tati. It is about an ageing stage musician (modelled on Tati) who ends up travelling to Edinburgh with an impressionable young woman. There are moments of perfection in the film, which exhibits spectacular know-how, though the soul is a bit lacking. In a short time Chomet found a personal style, though not without influence, centred on the dramatic quality of his characters, who are often caricatured and animated with care. Chomet also knows how to avoid chaff, one of the plagues of animation.

Jacques-Rémy Girerd (b. Mars, 7 March 1952), founder of the studio Folimage, was the producer and director for numerous shorts, feature films, and TV work. He started in animation directing little Plasticine films such as *4000 images foetales* (‘4000 Fetal Images’, 1979). In his long filmography, one outstanding film is *L’enfant au grelot* (‘Charlie’s Christmas’, 1998) a short feature for children. It is a Christmas tale with an honest technique based on pastels.

Another is *La prophétie des grenouilles* (‘Raining Cats and Frogs’, 2003) a variant on the Noah’s ark story. Its graphic style is typical of the studio, heavily inspired by the aesthetic of children’s book illustrations. There is a sort of paradox here, because the films made at Folimage are immediately recognizable but are often made using very different techniques. *Mia et le Migou* (‘Mia and the Migoo’, 2008) has a more conventionally Manichean script and is visually close to TV work.

The Brizzi brothers, Paul and Gaëtan, managed the French Disney studio starting in 1989, where they produced and directed several series and TV specials. Departing for Los Angeles, they worked on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and directed one of the best sequences in *Fantasia 2000*, ‘The Firebird’.

### 3D and Infography

In the beginning of the 1980s the French government, under the influence of its culture-loving president François Mitterrand, made many grants available. Their purpose was not just to launch a traditional animation industry but also to prepare France for the arrival of new technologies. These were criticized at the time, on the grounds that such a ‘cold’ tool as a computer could never compete with traditional drawing, but their presence grew during the 1990s and they were well established in the industry in the 2000s.

The union of Sogitec, a company specializing in flight simulation, with Thomson Digital Image, gave birth to Ex Machina. For a time, this was the most important studio for computer images in Europe. Companies such as Duran-Dubois, Mikros Image, BUF Compagnie, and Mac Guff Line, working in postproduction, also created departments dedicated to computer graphics. They worked first for the advertising sector, then for feature film and shorts, which were often directed by young talents during their spare time.

This development in special effects, often using animation, soon crossed frontiers and the know-how was used in big American productions. This competence sometimes passed from the framework of special effects to encompass whole productions, as with the live-action/animated feature *Arthur et les Minimoys* (‘Arthur and the Invisibles’, 2006), by director Luc Besson and BUF Compagnie.
These productions, as well as new specialist schools such as Supinfocom (created in 1988 and rated number one in the world by the magazine 3D World in 2007) and the opening up of older establishments like Gobelins L’école de l’image to computers, created a new generation of classical animators and directors. They grew up with the aesthetics and techniques of contemporary computer images.

Additionally, the annual ‘high mass’ at Imagina from 1981 to 2000 encouraged the spirit of emulation and enthusiasm characteristic of the beginning of a new art form. Creators explored several routes, determined to master the tools and yet keep their own style. The tools used were very diverse, especially at the beginning, and the choice of tool had a crucial impact on the visuals and final animation.

In the beginning of the 1990s, computer imagery still had restrictions that the directors had to get around, one way or another. Character representation remained especially delicate. Invisible Man in Blind Love (1991) by Pascal Vuong (b. Paris, 6 March 1960), for example, has an invisible man as the main character, so only the objects he touches needed to be animated. Les fables géométriques (The Geometric Fables, 1990–1993) by Fantôme (Renato, Georges Lacroix, and Jean-Yves Grall), based on La Fontaine’s fables, uses very primitive shapes.

The purely 2D tools, initially used in digital postproduction, were exploited by directors possessing a painter’s sensibility or background. They often hijacked classical works. Examples of this can be seen in L’escamoteur (The Conjuror, 1990) by Eve Ramboz, after Hieronymus Bosch, and Double Secret (1991) by Cécile Babiole (b. Paris, 12 October 1956), after Magritte.


Olivier Cotte (b. Soisy-sous-Montmorency, 20 June 1963), a distinguished animation historian and comic-book creator, made 1995’s Terra Incognita (id.), featuring actor Michael Lonsdale. This beautiful and almost unknown short imagines that a nineteenth-century merchant is given a map that draws itself according to the place it is brought to, with fantastic results.

Above all, the digital image developed around the traditional idea of a visual show, with a desire for formal research at the same time. Nevertheless, the creators linked to the development of the technique were often programmers who pursued deeper research. For example, Michel Bret (b. 1941), painter and mathematician, made films consisting of applications of his programmes. Elonap (1992) is based on an animation of behavioural synthesis; Cahincaha (1996) uses a connectionist method.

The work of Bériou (b. 1952) is more classical in its approach but it develops a contemporary aesthetic, using the opposition between 2D and 3D. Ex Memoriam (1992) is largely based on metamorphosis. Limbes (‘Limboes’, 1995) and Cloison (‘Bulkhead’, 1997) are obsessed with the transformations of organic matter. Sometimes the graphics aren’t very different from those of classical technical productions. Un jour (‘A Day’, 1997), by Marie Paccou (b. Dakar, Senegal, 6 April 1974), develops graphics close to wood engraving; in the symbolic story, a woman has her husband plugged into an orifice in her stomach. Afterwards, Paccou’s production methods became more traditional but no less imaginative, as in the excellent Le jardin (‘The Garden’, 2003).

Jérôme Boulbès (b. Casablanca, Morocco, 2 November 1969) distinguished himself in CGI with his first film, Le puits (‘The Well’, 1999), followed by La mort de Tâu (‘Tâu’s Death’, 2001), Rassagui (id., 2003), and Masques (‘Masks’, 2009). The fantastic and poetic universe of this master of timing was developed in a realistic way, using the full possibilities of the computer and with special attention to lighting.

Philippe Grammaticopoulos (b. Brussels, Belgium, 29 December 1970) received a diploma from Supinfocom and was an illustrator and author of comic strips. He developed a very personal graphic style in films such as Le processus (‘The Process’, 2001), Le régulateur (‘The Regulator’, 2005), and Les ventres (‘The Stomachs’, 2009). The imagination, the highly developed soundtrack, and the deliberate choice of crude lighting give his style a powerful identity. ‘The Regulator’ shows a couple living in a futuristic town devoid of humanity, searching for a kit to build a child. Grammaticopoulos bends the computer to his artistic wishes, offering an original and personal vision.

Yann Jouette (b. Strasbourg, 12 August 1972) directed several films with dark eccentric humour such as La fabrik (‘The Faktory’, 2001) and Space Feet Attack (2003). In Berni’s
**Doll** (2008), a character with an outsized head is trapped in a dark universe, endlessly building a sex robot.

Geoffroy Barbet Massin (b. Lisieux, 2 June 1970) worked at Mikros Images. He directed short personal films, such as *Merveilleusement gris* (‘Marvellously Grey’, 2004) and *La chute de l’ange* (‘The Angel’s Fall’, 2005).

### TV Series

Nourished by American and Japanese productions and helped by contemporary production methods, the new TV directors constituted one of the spearheads of French animation. *Totally Spies* was a typical model of diverse influences, an American concept with anime-inspired graphics that accounted for 50 percent of the market in Italy on Channel Italia 1 (2006/2007 figures). *Code Lyoko* accounted for 46 percent in Galicia (Spain). *Les nouvelles aventures de Lucky Luke* had more success in Germany than in France (from 2006 to 2007, 43 million Germans watched the series, compared to 41 million French). It was a completely new situation.

Before the beginning of the 1990s the number of productions was low and, in spite of some courageous attempts, often very conventional. The opening to exterior influences brought new creativity. The most surprising thing about the new generation of French TV productions was its diversity. What was the connection between the adaptation of *Titeuf* (from the comic strip by Zep), *Skyland* by Emmanuel Gorinstein (b. Thiais, 27 April 1970), and *Foot 2 rue* by Marco Beretta? It was no longer a dishonour to work for TV series, because this sector had passed from the level of ‘bread and butter’ money to that of a creative network. The producers proposed modern concepts, encouraged by commercial success and the renewal of ideas and graphics.

### The Short Film

Many things are clear when one considers the development of short films. First, the script — very often the poor relation in personal films — came back into play. Influenced by the American cartoon and with generally similar techniques (mainly 3D), or influenced by British productions (with Plasticine), some of the new directors wanted to entertain as much as they wanted to make a personal film. This desire to please caused them to abandon slow timing and minimalist animation.

The Anglo-Saxon animation models were popular, as was the Japanese model (France was the second biggest consumer of manga after Japan), because the classical history of animation was scarcely known by newcomers. They fished in common waters for models, and influences passed from one director to another. There was a tendency towards uniformity in production, especially in graduate films. Yet the models were often excellent and lifted the quality of their imitators. This led to French films being regularly represented at festivals and being nominated for Oscars, even winning one (*Logorama*, 2009, by the collective H5).  

The outburst of expression was made possible by a large number of new production companies appearing from the 1990s: *Les films de l’Arlequin*, *Les films du Nord*, *Vive la France* (by François Laguionie). The panorama of styles was amazingly wide.

Another evolution, not to be ignored, concerns the marginalization of short films. At one time many directors, in spite of personal and financial difficulties, would dedicate an important part of their career to making shorts. However, for many newcomers, the short only represented a parenthesis in production. Fewer professionals continued to make short films after their graduate work. These school films often served as just a professional trampoline, made expressly for festival presentation. The new animator, armed with his film as a passport to the professional world, often abandoned the short once he was established.

Graphic artist Daniel Guyonnet (b. Paris, 30 July 1960) is the director of several films, starting with *L’escalier chimérique* (‘The Chimerical Stairs’, 1986), which won the César for best short film. He directed the well-known *Nous sommes immortels* (‘We Are Immortals’) in 1999, made in charcoal drawing with a superbly designed universe. Lolo Zazar (b. Neuilly-sur-Seine, 26 March 1958) worked primarily in pixilation and most of his films were directed with Franck Maigne. These shorts were technically prepared with extreme care for months, which ruled out nearly all improvisation.

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1. H5 was formed by François Alaux, Hervé de Crécy, and Ludovic Houplain.
44 A lais is a narrative poem in langue d’oil, the ancestor of the current French language. We know very little about its writer, except her name (Marie), her times (the twelfth century), her country (England), and her origin (France, in those times meaning only the area around Paris). In the French milieu, the choice by Émilie Mercier of a forgotten middle age text was original and daring.

45 Alessandro Baricco (b. Turin, Italy, 1958), wrote Novecento (1994) as a theatre monologue, but many people consider it a novel.

Bruno Collet (b. 1965) started his director’s career in 2001 with Le dos au mur (‘The Back to the Wall’). In Calypso Is Like So (2003), he gave a new life to the film star Robert Mitchum as a puppet. This was followed by several series before he directed Le jour de gloire (‘The Day of Glory’, 2007). The film described the horror of World War I trenches; the clay soldiers mix into the background mud.

Philippe Jullien (b. Paris, 8 August 1964), a collaborator at JPL Films, directed his first film, Le cyclope de la mer (‘The Cyclop of the Sea’, 1998), a sensitive work, in model animation. He followed it with Tadeus (2000) and Ruzz et Ben (2005), coproduced with the National Film Board of Canada. Jullien’s films are often without words, a refreshing change from the often overly wordy French productions.

Émilie Mercier (b. Paris, 13 October 1968) made her first film, Bisclavret (id.) in 2011, after a long professional career. With elegance and fineness, the film adapts The Lais of Marie de France44 in images.

Jean-Luc Gréco (b. Saint Chamond, 30 July 1965) and Catherine Buffat (b. Bourg de Péage, 6 June 1966) studied graphic art and worked at Folimage. They launched themselves into animation with Bouche cousue (‘Sewn Mouth’, 1998), a model animation of a new visual kind. In La sacoche perdue (‘The Lost Bag’, 2004), a scene of people in a church is disturbed by the discovery of a bag of gold. The film was followed by Colechique (‘Colchicum’, 2008) and Les perdrix (‘The Partridges’, 2010).

The already mentioned Dominique Monféry (see Vol. 2), a former student at l’Ecole des Gobelins, worked on TV series and at the French Disney Studio. At Disney he did animation for The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Hercules, and Tarzan. Most importantly, he was the director of Destino (id., 2003), a short film from a project initially developed by Walt Disney and Salvador Dalí. Its surrealist spirit and catalogue of obsessions respected the work and the notes that Dalí had developed during his stay at Disney and the film won Monféry an Oscar nomination.

In 2006 he made the children’s feature Franklin et le trésor du lac (‘Franklin and the Treasure of the Lake’, 2006). Kerity la maison des contes (‘Eleanor’s Secret’, 2009) was codirected with Henri Heidsieck; it is faithful to the spirit of a children’s picture book and refreshingly poetic.

Sarah Van Den Boom (b. Antony, 4 January 1975) studied at l’École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs. Her first film, Novecento pianiste (‘The Pianist Novecento’, 2005), adapted the work of Alessandro Baricco44 and received a great deal of attention. The classical graphics present the beautiful story of a man born on a ship whose only reason for living is his piano. Van Den Boom also animated for Persepolis by Satrapi and directed very personal commercials for Acme.
Serge Elissalde (b. Besançon, 30 July 1962) is primarily an artist and teacher who taught himself animation. His first short, Le balayeur (‘The Dustman’, 1990), was made on his own over four years. He then created a team and collaborated on TV series while continuing his personal production with such films as La vie secrète d’Émile Frout (‘Émile Frout’s Secret Life’, 1994), Raoul et Jowelyne (2000) is sensitive and funny, with beautiful, simple graphics.

Elissalde’s feature film U (2006) was based on drawings by Grégoire Solotareff (who previously codirected a short with Elissalde, Loulou, in 2003). A little girl flees the brutality of her adoptive parents and seeks refuge with a unicorn. While we sometimes wonder what audience the film is addressing (children? adolescents?), its modernity resides in its graphic style – which is very different from an animated feature’s usual emphasis on movement – and a script that doesn’t set goodies against baddies. It is a director’s film.

Claire Fouquet (b. Paris, 30 December 1971) made a remarkable graduate film, Chéri viens voir! (‘Come and See, Darling!’, 1997). Then she directed Vos papiers! (‘Your Papers!’, 2006), using excellent visual ideas to criticize the expulsion of illegal immigrants. Her style in water colour is immediately recognizable.

The personality of Georges Sifianos (b. Khanyà, Crete, 14 August 1952) emerged in such films as Odeur de ville (‘City’s Smell’, 1994), about a woman tortured by solitude. Tutu (id., 2001), codirected with Pascal Dalet, had crude, slightly aggressive graphics, telling the story of an adolescent who encounters incomprehension and cruelty. C’est Mia (‘It’s Mee’, 2007) is conceived like a ballet, mixing two actors and two marionettes.

Laurent Gorgiard (29 March 1965–16 August 2003) directed L’homme aux bras ballants (‘The Man with the Wobbling Arms’, 1997). This film, made with marionettes, gives a poetic explanation for the moon rising in the sky; it is a little slow but saved by a mind-blowing ending.

Jean Rubak (b. 1947), originally a violinist, first worked at Films Paul Grimault. There he made his first film, Les chouettes (‘The Coquettes’), in 1970. In 1972, working with the humour artist Mose and Jean-François Laguayonie, he directed Animoses (id.). On his own, Rubak produced and directed Les noces de Viardot (‘Viardot’s Wedding’, 1999), using mixed techniques. The film plunges the spectator into the nineteenth century in the company of Alfred de Musset.

After La politesse des rois (‘The Kings’ Good Manners’, 2001), Rubak directed the presentation of a compilation of Ladislas Starewitch films called Les contes de l’horloge magique (‘The Tales of the Magic Clock’, 2003). In 2009–2010, he coordinated the making of Tout autour de l’île (‘Around the Island’) and Comme un poisson dans l’eau (‘Like a Fish in the Water’), made by prison inmates. It was acclaimed at the Festival International du Film de La Rochelle.
Arthur de Pins (b. 22 September 1977) directed Gérardine in 1999, a graduate film that won the prize for best short student film at Annecy. The rhythm and drollery of the principal female character (or, rather, a male character who wakes up turned into a woman) brought de Pins immediate recognition. He worked in video games then directed La révolution des crabs (‘The Crabs’ Revolution’, 2004), a film overflowing with mockery. Without abandoning animation, his career moved more towards the graphic novel.

Aline Ahond is a visual artist who sometimes directs films in live-action (often with live special effects) or in animation. Carnavalée (‘Masquerade’, 1998) won a prize at the Krok festival and is an explosion of colour and motifs. L’amour à la saucette (‘Love in a Hurry and Secretly’, 1996) shows an Eastern European influence with its great control of rhythm and lighting.

Laurent Pouvaret (b. Saint-Étienne, 30 July 1965) directed Ferrailles (‘Wrecks’, 1996), in which animated spare parts try desperately to repair an impossible machine. La canción del microsillon (‘The Long-Playing Record Canción’, 2002) is an inventive and fascinating model animation, in which everything seems to have a soul.

There are also several representatives of a new school with a diversified style. Franck Dion (b. Versailles, 9 January 1970) came from the theatre to direct L’inventaire fantôme (‘The Ghost Inventory’, 2003) and Monsieur COK (‘Mr COK’, 2008). He always employed a baroque and techno style and his lighting is well conceived and presented. L’inventaire fantôme criticizes the industry of war, projecting the spectator into a sombre universe with symbolic elements.

Cédric Babouche (b. Savigny sur Orge, 18 December 1976) made Imago (id., 2005), the moving story of a boy mourning his father’s death in an airplane accident. Gaël Brisou (Tassin demi Lune, 8 December 1971–23 October 2010), who often collaborated with Folimage, directed the very aesthetic Sucré (‘Sweetened’, 2005), in which cooking serves as bait for love. Jérémie Clapin (b. Paris, 13 February 1974) made Shhiztein (2008), a CGI story of a man hit by a meteorite who finds himself geometrically offset from the rest of the world. It is a very good idea (or probably a real schizophrenic mania) and is well directed.

Pierre-Luc Granjon (b. Annemasse, 29 March 1973) made a good number of productions in the 2000s, including Petite escapade (‘Little Escapade’, 2002), Le génie de la boîte de raviolis (‘The Genie of the Ravioli’s Can’, 2005), Le loup blanc (‘The White Wolf’, 2006), and Le printemps de Mélie (‘Mélie’s Springtime’, 2009), among others. These were made in a very personal style, using models or paper cutouts, with a quality of imagination suitable for children.

Fabien Drouet (b. Le Mans, 21 April 1969) is a director whose name is linked to Ponpon, a model dog animated with humour in such films as Ponpon (id., 1999) and Ponpon le pilote (‘Ponpon Pilot’, 2004).

**That Famous Touch**

The ‘French Touch’ is often used as a label of quality and as an identification. Things are not so simple. What is the chief characteristic of French animation at the beginning of the 2010s? In this writer’s opinion it is diversity. If the politics of auteurs (considering the director as a project supervisor) generated many unsatisfactory films, the same politics have also encouraged a liberty of expression and allowed the development of original styles.

On the other hand, timidity and defiance towards the industrialization of production no longer exist. But, thanks to the high quality of animation schools, the profession was nourished and replenished with new influences.

**Michel Ocelot**

Michel Ocelot, who had already worked for television and directed several of the best French short films, saw his career take on a new lease of life in the 1990s. His transition to feature films, especially, brought him public success and international recognition. That he made this transition so late in his career might seem surprising, but for Ocelot the short format corresponded to a certain idea of precision and concentration that suits animation. Nor did he abandon the short film.

Like all creators who have fought a long time to finance and direct short animated films, Ocelot overflowed with projects and ideas. Thus, when Didier Brunner from Les Armateurs proposed a feature, he barely hesitated and pulled out a project that he reworked in a week. He stuck to a sequential narration, traditional dress for the African women (who are often bare-breasted), and the nudity of...

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*Ocelot is a pseudonym that was eventually recognized as an official surname by the French state. He was born in Villefranche-sur-Mer, France, in 1943.*
After making *Azur et Asmar*, Ocelot was so impressed by the digital technique’s advantages, especially in the field of colour control, that his next project, a new collection of tales animated in silhouette, was made entirely by computer. (It was a 13-part TV series for Canal+, called *Dragons et Princesses* [‘Dragons and Princesses’]; select episodes were later compiled into the 2011 feature *Les Contes de la Nuit* [‘Tales of the Night’].) Why return to the animated silhouette? Ocelot, who loves purity and wishes to focus on the essentials, is attached to its simplicity and appreciates how well it works with the short-story format. Ocelot’s desire is ‘to reach a wide audience and to bring enchantment with a lasting meaning’.47

Ocelot’s films are important because of how he brings together content and style. If the aesthetic desire, which is always present in his work and visible from the first image, has become increasingly important with time as he deploys more complex techniques, still his heart stays joined to a humanist quest. In Ocelot’s work, the picture never overrides the message. Thus his cinema is universal, or should be (certain countries have frowned upon the breasts of the African women), because the questions he asks concern everyone.

These are not pedantic films that stifle the audience with reminders of morals and duty. His films are exactly the opposite, returning to a classical form, the tale. Strangely enough, because today the tale is neglected, it communicates in a way that naturally calls for reflection. It is about telling a story where nobility is never in danger of being spoiled by Manicheanism. There are no goodies or baddies; Ocelot does not impose a message by shortcuts and caricature. Rather, it is by having confidence in the audience’s intelligence that Ocelot reaches his goal, by talking simply to the heart.

Florence Miailhe

Painting and animation have always maintained a close relationship. Numerous directors come from the plastic arts, and many, including Florence Miailhe, share their time between the two spheres.

This can be a bad combination. The artist who wants to be recognized for his graphic talent can’t always envisage animation’s potential beyond that of adding movement to his images. Florence Miailhe hasn’t fallen into this trap. She studied fine arts but she also fell in love with animation.

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47 Michel Ocelot, personal communication to Olivier Cotte, September 2010.
When Miailhe (b. Courbevoie, 24 January 1956) was studying engraving at the École des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, she was already planning to move into animation at some point. Moving images, particularly the animation of paintings, already fascinated her. She wished not only to make paintings move, but also to tell stories through movement, or through painting with movement.

The influence of painting is obvious in her first film, *Hammam* (id., 1991). In order to preserve the pictorial aspect and the traditional working method, the animation was done directly by successive modifications of the basic image. The choice of theme wasn’t naive. One of Miailhe’s most common motifs is the sensuality of the human body. Languishing nude female figures frequently appear in the history of art. *Shéhérazade* (id., 1995) follows a similar route, and *Au premier dimanche d’août* (‘On the First August Sunday’, 2000) is based around dance.

Considering the nudity on posters for *Conte de quartier* (‘A Neighbourhood’s Tale’, 2006), it’s hard not to find them crude because they’re linked to a soliciting advertisement. The obsession with the body is focused by sensitivity to the sensual gesture. As the characters are voiceless (the director doesn’t like the artificiality of animated mouths), they communicate, encounter, and live by their bodies. They dance and touch; there are many embraces in Miailhe’s films. The use of a thick line and areas of bright colour give legibility to the bodies, with the sense of a party, a celebration.

*Les oiseaux noirs, les oiseaux blancs* (‘The Black Birds, the White Birds’, 2002) is a special case. The technique, sand, limits Miailhe’s characteristic use of colour. The procedure is more complex than it appears. There are several different types of sand, lit from beneath and on top to increase the range. Finally, levels of paint are placed over and under the glass supporting the sand. Apart from her interest in finding a new technique, Mailhe’s approach reflects the film’s reference to the teaching of Tierno Bokar, a Soufi master, who instructed by drawing in sand with his stick.

Miailhe’s films are not traditionally scripted. However, since *Shéhérazade*, she has entered into collaboration with the writer Marie Desplechin. The idea is not to create a narrative with classic rules. Text and dialogue, for instance, might be written in preproduction but could be replaced by music composed after shooting. Mailhe and Desplechin collaborate more in structuring the concept, each bringing ideas the other enhances.

In ‘A Neighbourhood’s Tale’, a real story is developed. The title area is seen through the eyes of different characters; the passage from one to another is smooth, linked by the symbolic passing of a doll from hand to hand. Mialhe uses paint, exchanging the sparkle of pastels in her previous films for a more contemporary, dramatic texture that is closer to a story. The tools are linked to the subject – colour for stories with carefree characters, dyed sand for philosophical demonstrations, and monochrome tints portraying the district’s changes.

In Mailhe’s work, a picture speaks through its substance. It isn’t a closed system; even the movements are
worked in a different way from one film to another. It is partly calculated, partly intuitive, and the result is midway between the spirit and the heart.

Alain Gagnol and Jean-Loup Felicioli

Folimage, the production company created in 1981 by Jacques-Rémy Girerd, was active in numerous areas: the production of short and feature films, presentations in schools, artists’ residencies, a school of international repute (La Poudrière), and theatrical distribution. They produced work in several formats: shorts, TV series, TV specials, and feature films.

The studio also works in association with others (for example, the National Film Board of Canada and Ciclope Films from Portugal). Their production is diversified, both stylistically and technically. Over the past thirty years, numerous artists have started there and developed their own styles, as in the case of Alain Gagnol and Jean-Loup Felicioli.

From his first aspiration to be a comic book artist, Alain Gagnol (b. Roanne, 13 May 1967) turned towards detective novels and at the same time started with Folimage as a graphic designer and animator.

Jean-Loup Felicioli (b. Albertville, 18 July 1960) studied in several art schools before deciding on animation. He directed two films prior to collaborating with Gagnol.

Their first work together was L’égoïste (‘The Selfish One’, 1995). It was originally planned in model animation but was made in cel animation to produce a colourful result (painted on the back of the cel and highlighted in chalk on the front). The directors’ inimitable style is recognizable by the graphics in Felicioli’s saturated colours.

Gagnol writes the script and draws a rough storyboard, which is adjusted by Felicioli. Then, after numerous discussions, Gagnol animates while Felicioli handles the graphics, the backgrounds and colours. They share the direction. Gagnol and Felicioli’s films find their identity precisely in the combination of the erudite narrative text and the illustrative image. Their partnership is often considered at odds with traditional filmmaking. With Gagnol, the influence of literature, and particularly of novellas, is obvious; the text could exist without the support of the image.

Les tragédies minuscules (‘The Tiny Tragedies’, 1999), a miniseries for television in ten parts, develops little scenes with a kind of nonchalance that would make numerous contemporary novelists proud. Could it have been shot in live-action? Yes, but the judicious choices of the shooting script, the extreme stylization of the characters, and the colour harmonies, all build an illusory world where one recognizes oneself and would like to live.

Also, the image’s purpose is to illustrate. A relationship that is too direct a reflection of reality, through live-action cinema, would impoverish the story. Therefore, the translation into animation is essential. The marriage of the scripts and graphics, born of the directors’ love for the graphic novel, transports the viewer into a completely commonplace universe that develops adult dramas and strange narrative contexts.

Le couloir (‘The Corridor’, 2005), a longer film of 16 minutes, is another experiment. Having played with dialogue in more than ten short films, the two authors decided to work on a purely visual narration. As usual, the accent is on one character and even one place (which, again, is ‘anti-cinema’). In the story, a man accepts a job that seems useless, spending weeks watching a door at the end of a corridor, which is supposed to protect some valuable objects. This difficult exercise, the directors’ best short, uses narrative development to draw the audience into a maze of questions.

Unable to avoid the trend to make features, Gagnol and Felicioli directed Une vie de chat (‘A Cat’s Life’, 2010), based on a detective story about a child and a cat. The resulting 70-minute feature gives intelligent attention to the characters without the kind of complex writing that might hamper a young audience’s understanding of the film. The film is faithful to the visual style that the directors had established.

French culture is attached to language, literature, theatre, film dialogues, and even diaries. It also studies the nature of the self. The animated film rarely explores this vision, leaving literary and psychological aspects to live-action. For this reason, Gagnol and Felicioli’s productions are very French and also rather unusual.

Borislav Šajtinac

Borislav Šajtinac (b. Melenci, Yugoslavia [Serbia], 29 July 1943) focused his artistic life on painting, illustration, and cinema. A satirical fine artist of great imagination and black humour, he premiered his first film, Analyse (‘Analysis’), in 1968. In 1969, he made Izvor Života (‘The Spring
In 1978, Stockmann-Filmproduktion distributed this animated feature film, a compilation of all the filmmaker’s previous shorts in addition to 20 minutes of new material. Since it was strongly inspired by the short that Šatijnac made in Yugoslavia in 1970, it bore the same title.

One consequence was that his last name, originally pronounced ‘Shayteenats’, changed its pronunciation to ‘Sazhteenaak’. The first letter went from ‘Š’ to ‘S’.

According to the critic Ranko Munitić, Šajtinac was able to create a ‘poetically absurd world of his own, with dark colours, gloomy spaces and grotesque drawings; his films are characterized by sequences showing different degrees of intensity, by speeded-up or slowed-down rhythms and a visionary mood within the style of black humour’. Šajtinac’s output is as original as that of Boris Vian and other surrealists and can be appreciated by reading his writing, viewing his drawings, and watching his scattered films.

The fantastic and surrealistic vein that typified Belgian animation and the work of its best-known master, Raoul Servais, was followed by other artists, including Manuel Gomez (b. 1956) and Willy Kempeneers (b. 1939). However, more recently, Gomez has strayed into more marginal and sometimes provocative films, even working in live-action features.
Chapter 3: Belgium


There seemed to be little sign of any replacement artists at the beginning of the 1990s, until a new generation emerged. It should be remembered that the first big names in Belgian animation were self-taught, trained through trial and error or work experience in scattered studios. The new generation came mainly from schools and gave a new slant to auteur animation.

The training at the KASK Academy in Ghent (Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten) and La Cambre School in Brussels (École nationale supérieure des arts visuels) had always been focused more on the development of the artistic personality than on the acquisition of a particular skill. However after 1990, the teachers, who were mostly from a visual arts background, were more interested in the link between animation and live-action cinema, seeing the incentives rather than the creative restrictions. The schools regularly submitted student productions to international festivals – which became more and more interested in graduation films – and also established production facilities.

Given the technical and economic changes in international animation as well, the twenty years between 1990 and 2010 looked completely different from previous decades. The gap between independent and industrial animation seemed smaller, with one sometimes influencing the other. There was a growing audience for animation, including viewers for even the most demanding auteur animation. The notion of auteur films changed and, some would say, was degraded.

Additionally, a few young Belgian animators went abroad and had the opportunity to work on some of the best international productions. Guionne Leroy (b. 1967) worked on Toy Story, Tim Burton’s The Nightmare Before Christmas, and Corpse Bride. Kim Keukeleire (b. 1967) worked on Chicken Run and Fantastic Mister Fox.

In the field of animated shorts, a new kind of producer appeared. Filmmakers from the generation before 1990 had no other choice but to become their own producers. However, from 2000 real producers began to appear. Studios such as La Boîte Productions, Lumière, La Parti, SOIL, and Zorobabel were able to draw from the talent pool of former students and give viability to a genre that was still underfunded, despite government aid. This encouraged the emergence of new auteurs.


Based in Brussels, La Boîte Productions developed an original policy. It relies on cross-border and/or regional aid, in collaboration with its sister companies in the north of France or in coproduction with Lumière or Folimage. The founder, Arnaud Demuyck (b. 1966), was himself a director of short films in this context (L’Évasion, ‘The Getaway’, 2007 and Mémoire fossile, ‘Fossil Memory’, with Anne-Laure Totaro, 2010).

Over time, La Boîte built up a pool of artists to whom it provided a certain continuity of work, while allowing each one in turn to take the reins on a personal project. Some of these artists include: Cecília Marreiros Marum (b. 1969); Vincent Bierrewaerts (b. 1973, director of Le Porfèlaine, ‘The Wallet’, 2003); and Frits Standaert (b. 1964, director of L’Écrivain, ‘The Writer’, 2003), along with filmmakers from Films de l’Enclume (Constantin Beine, Rémi Durin, Paul Jadoul, Jérémy Mazurek), all from the Cambre school.

Lumière, which is also a distribution and theatrical exhibition structure, produced several shorts in the 2000s, including Jazzed (2009) by Anton Setola (b. 1976).

Finally, there were producers who concentrated on feature animation, such as Vivi films, active in coproductions on a European level (Les triplettes de Belleville, Brendan et le secret de Kells). Some 3D studios, including Digital Graphics, Walking the Dog, Victor 3D, and Grid, worked across the range from features to advertising.

Belgium showed a certain prowess in puppet animation. The movement seems to have originated from La Cambre,

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54 The Ill Luster project ‘Closed/Form’ (Dicht/Vorm) comprised two series of short animated films based on Dutch poetry: the classics and the modern, Dicht/Vorm (2002) and Dicht/Vorm klassikers (2005). SOIL conceived a similar project for Flanders, though the concept was slightly changed. On the one hand, it focused more on the creation of opportunities for young animators. On the other, it provided a representative overview of Flemish poetry and put both animation and poetry in the spotlight. In December 2006, the Belgian series was released during the International Short Film Festival in Leuven. It was also presented at the Anima festival in Brussels, and some films were selected for the 2007 animation festival in Annecy.
with Eric Blésin (b. 1969), Claude Grosch (b. 1966), Kim Keukeleire, and Guionne Leroi, among others. Puppet animation came to prominence with Vincent Bierrewaerts, a highly original and unusual personality who was constantly researching new ideas, and with Gerlando Infuso (b. 1986), a creator of dark and tortured worlds with some of the Burton aesthetic.

Zorobabel, a Brussels collective bringing together professionals and amateurs, produced at least one short film per year, often (but not always) in puppet animation. The workshop was also active with children. In the Beast Animation studio, created in Brussels by Steven de Beul (b. 1969) and Ben Tesseur (b. 1975), there was a proper structure for shooting puppet animation.

Vincent Patar (b. 1965) and Stéphane Aubier (b. 1964) were special cases. After winning over audiences with their crazy cartoons (their PicPic André was a very successful TV show in 1999), they converted to puppet animation without losing any of their vitality. On the contrary, their series Panique au village (‘Panic in the Hamlet’, produced by La Parti), caused a sensation in the mid-2000s. It became a feature in 2009, inspired by the series characters but with an original screenplay.

A survey of Belgian animation would not be complete without mentioning the workshops for children, youth, and nonprofessional adults. This focus on education is a real Belgian specialty and for decades these workshops were also exported to many other countries. Workshops such as Caméra enfants admiss, Blanc Murmure, Pantalone, Stichting Raoul Servais, ABC, Graphoui, and Zorobabel have all taught the art of animation to many people, and some of them have done so for many years.

We should also mention commercial animation for television. A driving force in the 1960s, Belvision was no longer strictly a studio, but it was still part of the Dargaud audiovisual group. Also linked to a well-known publishing house, Dupuis Audiovisual followed an active policy in the field of TV series, exhibiting its catalogue of comic book characters.

The once peripheral sector of stereoscopy also had its Belgian pioneers, Ben Stassen (1959) and his team. Their studio Nwave has made feature films in 3D for multiplex cinemas, including Fly Me to the Moon (2008) and Samy’s Adventures (2010).

**Luxemburg**

A tiny country (with only 450,000 inhabitants) ruled by the Grand Duke at the beginning, Luxemburg was financially very rich but structurally dependent on other countries. Its national animation started in the early 1990s with some aides à l’audiovisuel (financial help for audio-visual production) bestowed by the government. In 2007, the director of the authority that distributed this aid, Guy Daleyden, calculated that ‘the Luxemburg studios give work to more than 200 professionals. Our financing mechanism […] permitted the surfacing of a real industrial platform.’

In 1997 Stephan Roelants founded Studio 352, and a little later Melusine Productions. The two companies (one for actual production and the other a think tank) always worked hand in hand, employing about 80 people. In addition to the TV series for children and participation in international feature projects, one auteur work stands out: the Spaniard Raúl García’s The Tell-Tale Heart (2005), based on an Edgar Allan Poe story and narrated by Bela Lugosi (in a voice recording thought lost for many decades).

Lux Animation and Lux Studio were created in 2002 by Lilian Eche and Ariane Payen. They produced highbrow TV series with budgets of seven to eight million euros. In their first five years, the two Lux companies made more than twenty TV series and four feature films.

Also in 2002, Christine Parisse and Jean-Marie Music created Fabrique d’images. Many producers relied on their expertise and didn’t hesitate to give them parts of their projects, from scripts to the final images. At the same time, the two partners developed ‘home projects’ with Bruno Murer, a mainstay of the company’s graphics research. The company’s success led to Fabrique d’Images becoming an autonomous production company in early 2008. It changed its name to The Picture Factory.

**The Netherlands**

The Netherlands, a small country crowded with 16 million people, has no real animation industry. However, it is well known for its high-quality animated shorts made by independents. They showcase different animation styles.

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56 This film should not be mistaken for the 1954 UPA short of the same name. That version was narrated by James Mason and directed by Ted Parmelee.
57 By Hans Walther.
and explore exciting new kinds of narrative and unique designs.

From 1998, the state-supported Dutch Film Fund counted animation as a separate category. The Dutch Film Fund offered subsidies for various projects, provided the film had a producer, a distributor, a television network willing to participate, and also provided that the project satisfied a committee of professionals. Dozens of animated films could not have been made without this subsidy, though the occasional short finds alternative financing. More commercially viable projects have been made with private funds, especially those targeted at television audiences.

The Netherlands’ first animated feature was *Als je begrijpt wat ik bedoel* (‘Dexter the Dragon & Bumble the Bear’, 1983), directed by Frank Fehmers (b. Amstelveen, 1942). The Netherlands can count *Beertje Sebastiaan* (‘Sebastian Star Bear: First Mission’, 1991) as one of its projects because it was funded by Netherlanders’ money and produced and directed by a Dutchman, Frank Fehmers, but it was written in the UK and entirely produced in China. The film wasn’t a huge success but had some nice moments and a cute theme song.

The two decades around the turn of the century brought many new faces to Dutch animation, mainly because many art academies started including animation in their curricula. Some students teamed up with classmates after graduating to start their own production companies. These included Ka-Ching, House of Secrets, Carambolas, Anikey, Lemonade, Urrebuk, Mosquito and Job, and Joris & Marieke, to name a few. Other students started small studios focusing on motion graphics, the Internet and games.


Gerrit van Dijk (Uden, 5 December 1938–Haarlem, 4 December 2012) made *Janneke* (1990) and the very successful *I Move, So I Am* (1997), which won the Golden Bear Short Film Award at the 1998 Berlinale. In this mainly rotoscoped work, van Dijk draws himself till he is fully realized, surrounded by fragments of his older films. It is a very personal and inventive work.

Ties Poeth (b. Tegelen, 1957) made such varied films as *Joelfeest* (‘The Carnaval Shout’, 1994), *Loc Light Louis* (1998), and *Klein Concert voor een Uil* (‘Music for an Owl’, 1999). *A Short Passion Play* (2002), about the last days of Jesus, is made in pixilation, a technique that is not often used in Dutch animation.

In September 1993, the Netherlands Institute for Animation Film (NIAf) was founded in Tilburg. It has an artists-in-residence program, produces and distributes animated shorts, holds an archive of documentation, books, films, and artwork, and organizes educational projects. It holds various workshops and master classes by specialists from all around the world, featuring such famous names as Yuri Norstein, Gil Alkabetz, Paul Driessen, Andreas Hykade, Normand Roger, and Barry Purves.

The artists-in-residence work in studios, known in Dutch as the Animatie Ateliers, where they can make their own animated film and use the NIAf’s extensive library.


Moesker’s short *Sientje*, which won the prestigious Gouden Kalf award at the Netherlands Film Festival in 1997 for best short, was turned into a successful television series of the same name, telling the everyday adventures of a little girl named Sientje. The series was produced by Animation World, which made several other television series, including *The White Cowboy, Bobby’s Body*, and *Egoland*.

Only a few computer-animated films are worth mentioning. *Escape from Paradise* (2001) by Freark Broersma (b. Drachten, 1957) tells the story of a giant turtle who meets Adam and Eve. André Bergs (b. Ijsselstein, 1979) made *Teddy* (2005), about an old man in a busy city. With his slow pace it seems impossible for him to connect with anyone until he meets a little girl who seems just as isolated from the hectic world as he is.

By far the most successful computer-animated short is *Barcode* (2001), made by Adriana Lokman (b. Haarlem, 19 January 1960). Among many prizes, it won the Grand Prize at the Annecy festival and at the Holland Animation Film Festival in 2002. Lokman’s *Shredder* (2002) is a combination of live-action and computer animation, again exploring the boundaries of animation. In 2003 Lokman moved to the countryside in France, but he continues making computer-animated films, such as *Forecast* (2006), showing the beauty of a cloudy sky in a unique fantasy world. As with Lokman’s other films, sound and music play crucial parts.

Evert de Beijer (b. Drichuis, 1953) was studying graphic design when he became interested in photography and animation. He continued his studies at the Dutch Film &
Television Academy, and his background can be seen through his strong designs and inventive camera angles.

De Beijer’s film De Karakters (‘The Characters’, 1986) was voted the best Dutch animated short of the twentieth century by the Dutch Animation Association. He made a last 2D film, Hotel Narcis (1994), and then turned to computer animation with Car Crazy (2003) and Get Real (2010). The digital tools let de Beijer combine 2D and 3D animation, translating his strong flat designs to computer animation in a stylish and innovative way.

One of Holland’s most experienced puppet animators was Maarten Koopman (b. Amsterdam, 1951). His De Staatkamer (‘The Bedroom’, 1990) runs one minute and shows the bedroom at Arles, as painted by Vincent Van Gogh, in a very inventive way. ‘The Bedroom’ won several prizes, among them the Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1990.

Inspired by this success, Koopman made 11 more short films and combined them into Beroemde Schilderijen (‘Famous Paintings’, 1996). Through different animation techniques, we see famous works by Hieronymus Bosch, Johannes Vermeer, Francisco De Goya, Salvador Dalí, and Piet Mondriaan take shape.

The Dutch pioneer of animation production, Nico Crama (b. Leiden, 1935), produced his last animated short in 1998: Paul Driessen’s 3 Misses. In 1996, Arnoud Rijken (b. De Bilt, 1968) and Michiel Snijders (b. Utrecht, 1972) decided to follow in Crama’s footsteps and start their own production company, Il Luster, specializing in animated shorts partly funded by the Dutch Film Fund, but also produced over 50 animated shorts, mainly independent films. Learning the trade from Crama, Rijken and Snijders produced their first short in 2000.

Their resume is impressive. Based in Utrecht, they have produced over 50 animated shorts, mainly independent shorts partly funded by the Dutch Film Fund, but also commissioned work and television series. They produced two animated poetry series, in which a total of 25 Dutch poems were animated. The pair gave experience to many young Dutch animators, such as Juan de Graaf (b. Rotterdam, 1971), Sander Alt (b. Haarlemmermeer, 1971), Lucette Braune (b. Houten, 1976), Bouwne Pool (b. Amsterdam, 1974), Violette Belzer (b. Rotterdam, 1971), and Liesbeth Worm (b. Amsterdam, 1969).

The poetry series, called Dicht/Vorm (2002) and Dicht/Vorm Klassiekers (2005), were also part of an educational program for high schools and were distributed through the Internet, television, and cinemas.

Cineventura was a production company located in both Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Founded by Ruud den Drijver (b. Rotterdam, 1957), it produces artistic theatrical shorts such as Hisko Hulsing’s Harry Rents a Room (1999) and Seventeen (2003). In the latter film by Hulsing (b. Amsterdam, 1971), a timid 17-year-old construction worker tries to connect with the girl of his dreams at the village fair. However, events turn into a psychedelic nightmare.

Other shorts that Cineventura produced include Red Light Diaries (1997) by Juan de Graaf, De Kat van Oblomov (‘Oblomov’s Cat’, 2006) by Hans Richter (b. Amsterdam, 1955), Magic Show (2009) by Milan Hulsing (b. Amsterdam, 1973), and Topor et Moi (‘Topor and Me’, 2004), directed by the actress Sylvia Kristel (b. Utrecht, 1952). Topor and Me brings to life the Paris art scene at the start of Kristel’s career, when she played Emmanuelle in the erotic film of the same name.

Dutch animated television series are a rarity. Besides the series made by AnimationWorld, there was Purno de Purno (‘Purno’, 1989–1996), created by Marcus Vlaar (b. Judibana, Venezuela, 1964) and Hans Wessels (b. Rotterdam, 1963), who knew each other from their studies at the art academy in Rotterdam. The series was originally done on an Amiga 2000 computer with just 32 colours and a frame rate of 12. The series evolved to a more professional level and was popular with both children and adults.

Kopvogel (‘Coppernickel’, 2000), made by Wouter van Reek, tells the adventures of a bird that wears a cape and lives in a small house near the woods. Coppernickel and his loyal dog Tungsten make inventions, take long adventurous walks in the woods, eat pancakes, and have philosophical conversations.

Café de Wereld (‘Café the World’, 2003–2006), a daily five-minute program, was hugely successful. In it, caricatured CGI celebrities meet in a bar and discuss day-to-day topics in a humorous way. Directed by Hans Walther (b. Amsterdam, 1958), it was the first Dutch television production to use motion capture as the basis for animation.

Targeted towards an adult audience, Colin (2007) was a series about a gay guinea pig. With his fortieth birthday approaching, the title character looks back on his life. Directed by Peter Lindhout (b. Leiden, 1958), the series combined 3D with traditional 2D animation styles.

Kika & Bob (2008), created by Vincent Bal and Colette Bothof, is a fast-paced series about a smart little girl named Kika and the brave but not too clever fireman, Bob. They are blown to the other side of the world by a typhoon. During the 26-part series they try to get back home, overcoming obstacles and meeting strange people and animals.

Holland’s most popular theme park, the Efteling, inspired a series about the different characters in the fairy tale forest. It was called Sprookjesboom (‘The Fairy Tale Tree’, 2006–2010), and almost 200 five-minute episodes were made for this preschool computer animated series.
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The Efteling also produced *De Grobbelollen maken lol* (‘The Furrybubbles Have Fun’, 2010), spun off from the very popular live-action series *Ti-Ta Tovenaar* (1972 and 2008), telling the silly stories of Jelly and Bro.58

**Rosto**59

Filmmaker, musician, and visual artist Rosto (b. Leeuwarden, 1969; his real name and biographical data are secret) brought a rockstar-like narcissism to animation. He put himself at the centre of his artistic experience, but this was bearable because of the almost naive sincerity of the operation.

A sensitive person despite his maudit look, Rosto is the typical example of a shy man who builds an assertive and ultimately fictional character around himself. His personal appearance is inspired by the dark and gothic music scene; his films are reminiscent of the dark surrealist atmosphere of certain David Lynch films. All of his works relate to a unique personal mythology, particularly developed in the online graphic novel *Mind My Gap*.

Here, Rosto depicts a surreal word with a giant eye looking down through a hole in the sky. The main characters, Diddybob and Buddybob, are TV anchormen involved in strange journeys and encounters. The graphic novel, first published in Dutch magazines, suffers from its awkward online presentation, suggesting the early, goofy experiments to find new interactive narrative forms on the Web.

Rosto’s operation seems especially inspired by the *Sandman* saga, created by British writer Neil Gaiman and graphic designer Dave McKean. Like *Mind My Gap*, *Sandman* was noteworthy for developing a coherent inner mythology. McKean’s sophisticated design – which involved every detail of the books, including typography, index pages, and so on, and used different techniques in refined patchworks, clearly influenced Rosto’s films.

Rosto’s mythology is not as developed and interesting as Gaiman’s. His films work better as independent visions; ignoring the underlying mythology adds to their enigmatic nature. According to the narcissistic nature of his myth, Rosto himself is a character in his films, appearing as Virgil, the evil ‘God’ of his world.

We see Virgil in the live-action prologue of Rosto’s first full-fledged film, *The Rise and Fall of the Legendary Anglobilly Feverson*. It uses many different techniques: drawings on paper, 2D and 3D computer animation, and live-action footage. A man realizes the sun is a giant eye peeping from a hole in the sky; he tries to reach the hole using balloons but fails.

More ambitious is the subsequent *Jona/Tomberry*, a film about ‘nasty illusions’ and a fascinating illusion in itself. It is maybe not as deep or disturbing as it would like to be, but it’s enjoyable as a good goth-metal rock song is, with a sophisticated sound and look and high production values.

There is a little transgression, but overall it is mainstream animation at its best.

**Michael Dudok de Wit**60

The masterpiece *Father and Daughter* (2000) harvested every Grand Prix at every festival at which it was shown in competition (plus an Academy Award), between 2000 and 2004. In its own way, it was the ultimate auteur film, the epitome of a genre.


59 By Giovanni Russo.

60 By Giannalberto Bendazzi.
The landscapes are typically Dutch and historically datable. Since 1932, and especially since the early 1950s, many Dutch marshes have been drained and transformed into grassy land (polders).

The musical variations go hand in hand with the changes induced by life’s seasons: at first, very sad; secondly, allegro and skittish; mature in the middle; and sad but liberating at the end. Time is touching; time passes by in a woman’s life, in her conscious orphan loneliness.

The final moment of nostalgia, before the daughter finally reaches her father, is acute – it is aptly prepared for in the previous moments and awaited with a delicate suspense.

A classic is reassuring within the boundaries of its own genre, too. An auteur film, Father and Daughter is neither linked nor linkable in a series. It is a one-of-a-kind work, like a poem or a painting. It doesn’t try to please the audience; it conveys a special feeling and a special appearance, which the audience is free to accept or not. It doesn’t mind entertaining or filling some leisure time and it also has a serious message. It is written, designed, animated, and directed by one person, whose inspiration can’t be misrepresented or modified by too many collaborators.

‘Classic’ doesn’t mean ‘traditional’ or, worse, ‘déjà vu’. Like a real classic, Father and Daughter has its share of innovation without revolution. For instance, as an animator, Dudok de Wit has a special talent for creating movement. Both in this film and his previous The Monk and the Fish, characters act and gesticulate in an expressive staccato
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In 1992 he created the pilot film Tom Sweep: The Bin, a three-minute film that shows the misadventures of Tom the personality. He then spent a year in Barcelona, working for a couple of small studios, until he settled in London, without ever breaking off his connections with the Netherlands. From 1981 to 2003 he worked with Richard Purdum Productions, which he considered the real forge for his creative talent. [Commercials were] my real training. [Commercials] give you continuous feedback, and you can learn how to be clear and understandable. If you work alone on your film, you may find out too late that your clear visions are not so to the eyes of the audience.

He then spent a year in Barcelona, working for a couple of small studios, until he settled in London, without ever breaking off his connections with the Netherlands. From 1981 to 2003 he worked with Richard Purdum Productions, which he considered the real forge for his creative personality.

In 1992 he created the pilot film Tom Sweep: The Bin, a three-minute film that shows the misadventures of Tom the dustman as he tries to keep his neighbourhood clean. The story takes place against a sparsely-drawn background. There is only Tom, the trash can, and various characters who drive him mad by throwing garbage everywhere except in the bin. The series was not given the green light.

In the meantime, the filmmaker had established a contact with Folimage, the Valence-based production company that had a program for artists-in-residence. His next film was Le moine et le poisson (‘The Monk and the Fish’, France, 1994), based on a Serge Besset adaptation of Arcangelo Corelli’s La folia. In a Romanic monastery, equipped with a sumptuous aqueduct, a monk tries to capture a fish in every possible way, leading both characters on a spiritual journey. This film was nominated for an Oscar, won numerous prizes including a César, and gave its author an international reputation, a 41-year-old ‘discovery’.

After Father and Daughter and lots of work as a book illustrator, The Aroma of Tea (2006) left Dudok de Wit’s admirers wrong-footed. The film differs significantly from his past titles: it’s an abstract three-minute work in which a small dot moves rhythmically with the music (by Corelli, again) through unreal landscapes, all painted with tea. The ‘de Wit’s way to movement’ is easily recognizable, the dot’s abstract navigation is sometimes captivating, but in all The Aroma of Tea seems a divertissement before something really challenging – a feature film.

Germany after Reunification

There was a boom in animated film in Germany in the early 1980s, before the reunification. The main filmmakers with a noticeable impact on animation started work in the 1960s and were strongly linked to experimental film. Most of them were college teachers. Two of the most important directors of this generation were Franz Winzentsen and Helmut Herbst. Herbst started with a teaching assignment at the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin (DFFB) as early as the late 1960s. From 1985 to 2000, he was a professor at the HFG Offenbach.

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62 The tune’s title is Valurile Dunari (‘The Danube’s Waves’), by Romanian composer Ionif Ivanovic (1845–1902). It was first published in Bucharest in 1880.

63 A little man tries to interview various people and finds it difficult to obtain answers. Screened at the Annecy Festival in 1979.


65 Serge Besset was the talented musician of Folimage. Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) was an Italian composer and violinist, famous for giving shape to the Concerto Grosso. All his creations are included in six opus numbers; they are mostly devoted to serious and popular sonatas and trio sonatas. ‘La Follia’ is in the Sonata Opus 5. Although ‘follia’ means ‘madness’ in Italian, this was not an attempt at describing mental illness but the name of a standardized musical theme.

66 By Ulrich Wegenast.
The German Colleges: Where the Art of Animated Film Began

Among the important colleges in the mid-1980s were the HFG Offenbach and the HfB Hamburg, where Winzent- sen taught. The schools encouraged innovative means of creation through abstract film, video clips, and collage film, invigorating the fine-art animation in Germany.

A major contribution to the development of this form was made by the cartoon class of the Stuttgart Public Academy of Fine Arts, established by Albrecht Ade in 1977. Animation directors such as Andreas Hykade, Thomas Meyer-Hermann, and Gil Alkabetz studied there. In the early 1990s, the Baden-Württemberg Film Academy was spun off from the cartoon class. The academy’s Institute for Film Animation became one of the world’s leading educational facilities for film animation.

The teaching staff at the Film Academy included animation artists like Jochen Kuhn from Hamburg, with his original style developed from painting, his laconic humour, and his experience in literature. He helped shape the younger generation, including the animation director and screenwriter Daniel Nockey.

An animation faculty was created at the Film & Television Academy Konrad Wolf in the mid-1980s. It offered one of the world’s most successful animation degree programs. Christina Schindler and the Israeli animation artist Gil Alkabetz taught there.

Another very successful schools included the animation programmes at the Kassel College of Art (since 1979) and the College of Media Arts in Cologne. At the Kassel College of Art, the twin brothers Christoph and Wolfgang Lauenstein (b. Hildesheim, 20 March 1962) won an Academy Award with Balance (1989), as did Thomas Stelmach (b. Straubing, 1963) and Tyrion Montgomery (a.k.a. Wolfgang Schröter, b. Miltenberg, 1967) with Quest (1996). Both films were produced under the aegis of Paul Driessen in his capacity as teacher.

The animation programme at the College of Media Arts in Cologne, founded in 1990, is at the interface of media arts and film production. In the 2000s, it was supervised by Raimund Krumme. Several private colleges offered degree programmes in film animation, such as the Animation School, Hamburg and the European Animation Master Class in Halle.

The number of schools led to an animation boom from the early 1990s. Among the award-winning films were the two Oscar winners Balance and Quest, as well as Wir lebten im Gras (‘We Lived In Grass’, 1995) by Andreas Hykade, Morir de Amor (2004) by Gil Alkabetz, _grau (‘Grey’, 2004) by Robert Seidel, and 458nm (2006) by Tom Weber, Jan Bitzer, and Ilija Brunck.

The Renewal of the Abstract Animated Film

The success of German animated film is an achievement not only of the colleges but also of independent animation directors such as Bärbel Neubauer and Kirsten Winter, who continuously promoted animated film culture with their work.

Neubauer and Winter especially used experimental methods, tracing back to the avant-garde of the 1920s. Those old abstract films, then called ‘absolute film’, contributed to the global reputation of the German film. Winter and Neubauer deal carefully with this cinematic heritage, which is directly connected to the fine arts, and especially painting.

At the same time, they added some new aspects. In the abstract Feuerhaus (‘Fire House’, 1998) Neubauer uses the drawn-on-film technique, adding self-composed electronic music with a techno beat. Music plays a major role in Winter’s Clocks (1995), a collage of material that animates painting and photography and provides an associative insight into the work of composer and pianist Elena Kats-Chernin. The film points out how close many German animated films are to painting. There are no set boundaries between abstraction and representation, or between motion picture and static picture.

Together with Gerd Gockell, Winter developed and tested a number of animation techniques in her production studio, Anigraf, in Hanover. She studied graphic design and liberal arts at the HBK Braunschweig. Like many animation directors, she can be placed between the applied and liberal arts.

Her longtime partner Gerd Gockell, producer of the outstanding animated documentary Muratti & Sarotti (2000), on the history of German animated film, also uses many techniques in filmmaking that are usually more associated with painting than with classic cartoons. Such Gockell films as Miles, So What! (1993), like Winter’s films, are literally animated paintings.

Underground, Subversion, and Animation

Music plays an important role in Mariola Brillowska’s productions. Musician Felix Kubin adds the soundtrack,
which is on an equal footing with the visuals, in many of her films. For Der falsche Spieler (‘The Wrong Player’), the author and singer Max Goldt (Foyer des Arts) was also on the team. However, Brillowska’s movies do not refer to the avant-garde tradition of the 1920s. They are, rather, related to the underground comic-book culture.

At first glance, her works appear shrill and absurd; the topics wander around lust and are a bizarre fictionalization of the present time. But Brillowska’s films are a kaleidoscope of our society, like contemporary science fiction, brazenly breaking taboos. Her creative film work made it to the stage, too, in a very special form of revue and cabaret. The Polish-born Brillowska acts as grand marshal, often crashing the show. Her colourful and gaudy style occasionally resembles the satirical work of the Estonian animated filmmaker Priit Pärn, combining striking pop art with absurd Eastern European humour.

Hanna Nordholt and Fritz Steingrobe, an artist couple from Hamburg, began their film production with anarchic Super 8 movies and the battle cry, ‘We are the audience striking back!’ in the mid-1980s. Their films analyze and reflect on the media, such as Das dritte Fenster (‘The Third Window’) from 1998. In their films they find discontinuities in the media and the aesthetics of reproducible media in a quite satisfying fashion, combined with subversive humour.

Their film Yo Lo Vi (title in Spanish meaning ‘I Saw It’, 2003) is the successful attempt to create a convincing, and comparably associative, film response to Francisco de Goya. The title Yo Lo Vi is taken from an etching of Goya’s graphic cycle Los desastres de la guerra (# 44). (The etching shows the Spanish population running from Napoleonic troops.)

Nordholt and Steingrobe’s film, however, is more an approach to Goya’s work and his creative and social position than a direct illustration. The filmmakers link the Spanish insurgents fighting against the French troops in the early nineteenth century and the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. However, they didn’t lose track of Goya’s aesthetic; they successfully revive his complex art and his addiction to the grotesque, using computer animation.

Reduction

The bottom line is that the German animated short film is often more closely related to the fine arts than it is to the typical cartoon. The cartoon aesthetics are reduced, even though these films develop cartoon-like structures and characters.

One master of this kind of reduction is Gil Alkabetz, who used and enhanced one of Lotte Reiniger’s silhouette techniques in his early film Swamp (1991). Jan Koester also used silhouettes in his award-winning Our Man in Nirvana (2005). However, Alkabetz does not simply use reduction as one stylistic device amongst many. He also extends it to his elliptical storytelling. In Yankale (1995), Rubicon (1997), and Morir de Amor (2004), Gil Alkabetz combines an economic and very effective narration and presentation with subtle and absurd humour. Regular filmgoers probably know Alkabetz mainly from his animated contribution to the internationally successful feature Lola rennt (‘Run Lola Run’, 1997–1998).

Alkabetz’s fellow student Andreas Hykade doesn’t like abundance either. He created his own universe of characters in his movies, taken from totally different backgrounds.
During his short but prolific life (1802–1827), Hauff wrote – among many other things – a collection of Märchen (fables), which have been famous for two centuries in German-speaking countries. They include Das kalte Herz.

For Krumme, the animated space is narrative space as well. His narratives are mostly about communication and its failure. His short The Message (2000) offers abstract and musical parables on social interaction and the increasing absurdities of daily life.

Hykade was born in Altötting and from infancy grew up with Catholicism and its practices, especially the cult of the Virgin Mary.

His short Wir lebten im Gras (‘We Lived In Grass’, 1995) was honoured, among others, with the Mercedes Benz Award at the Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film. The film portrays a disturbing confrontation with Hykade’s childhood in Upper Bavaria without being a one-dimensional autobiography or a linear narrative. Childlike fantasies and reality become blurred. The depressing setting of the film becomes almost physical, marked by ecclesiastical repression, family, and suppressed sexuality.

‘We Lived In Grass’ is also a story of finding one’s own identity, rich in metaphors. It is a film about growing up, like Hykade’s later Der Runt (‘The Runt’, 1996), which won the German shorts award in 2007. ‘The Runt’ is about a kind of initiation ceremony, whereas the protagonist of ‘We Lived In Grass’ must find the way to his own life.

In all his films, Hykade finds ways to tell highly complex and psychologically empathetic stories with very simple characters. Ring of Fire (2000) is presented in cinemascope format in the form of a spaghetti western; it is a dark investigation of the nature of sexual fantasy, in the manner of Japan’s Yoji Kuri. As in ‘We Lived In Grass’, the narrative is nonlinear and associative. To explore and explain its details would take days, but its power, Hykade’s hunger for living, his sight-and-sound universe expanding, all capture the viewer’s mind. The characters make do with few visual attributes, yet they are recognizable and emotionally believable.

Hykade combines universality with active graphics, creating a completely independent and recognizable style. His animation series Tom & das Erdbeerarmeladennrot (‘Tom & the Strawberry Jam Bread’, from 2005) and his award-winning music videos for the German punk rock band Die toten Hosen are proof of his success.

In the matter of reduction, Raimund Krumme carries minimalism in animation to the extreme. His films are mostly black and white, producing figurative motion with only a few strokes. Seiltänzer (‘Rope Dancer’, 1986), Die Kreuzung (‘Crossroads’, 1991), and Passage (1994) are not simply brittle finger exercises and motion studies. They are also fashionable compositions, playing with perspective and spatial perception in a virtuoso way.

Figure 3.16 Raimund Krumme, Die Kreuzung (‘Crossroads’), 1991.

Reflection and Narrative

Jochen Kuhn also seeks a minimalistic approach, albeit in a different way. His animated films go back and forth, from static picture to moving picture. Kuhn does not want everything to be meticulously animated and his films often only have a few animated phases. Kuhn is interested in the process of creation; his focus is not on the completed piece of...
art but on the flow of pictures. Similar to the work of South African animator William Kentridge, Kuhn’s paintings are constantly erased or altered by the following picture. He carried this artistic process to the extreme in Exit (2008).

However, Kuhn’s films are not aesthetic experiments. Such titles as Lob des Anrufbeantworters (‘Praise of the Answering Machine’, 1989) and Brief an die Produzentin (‘Letter to the Producer’, 1985) show his subtle humour. Kuhn is a great narrator with distinctive powers of observation. He sonorously narrates most of his films and is also responsible for the music. His micro-stories are about everyday occurrences, pleasant embarrassments, and apparent banalities that show the ups and downs of our lives.

In the case of Die Beichte (‘The Confession’, 1990), though, Jochen Kuhn brings up great people of recent history – Pope John Paul II, former East German president Erich Honecker – in his unpretentious way. In the film, the battle of ideologies and religions seems to have ended, leaving banalities, embarrassments, and an almost tender reconciliation.

Daniel Nocke, one of Jochen Kuhn’s students, has a similar laconic humour. Besides being an animated filmmaker with an emphasis on puppet animation, Nocke is also a gifted screenwriter. His first 3D-rendered computer-animated film, Kein Platz für Gerold (‘No Space for Gerold’, 2006) won the prestigious Short Tiger award. ‘No Space for Gerold’ is not a typical computer-animated film but a cunning play with genres, animating a fatal conversation between animal roommates, in the manner of reality television. By using an apparently running camera, Nocke stays away from computer animation that is too smooth and polished.

Nocke’s puppet films show that he is not an animation artist in the usual sense. His methods and use of puppet animation are too peculiar and independent. The puppets are gnarly and bizarre, comparable to the grotesque figures of German sculptor Thomas Schütte. His films focus on dialogues. The protagonists of his animated feature Der Peitschenmeister (‘The Whip Master’, 1998), set in the Middle Ages, talk in the manner of people in the 1970s. All of his films are about the subtle complexities of social interaction and barely visible social control. In his 1999 Trösterkrise (‘Comforters’ Crisis’), a kind of Good Samaritan attempts to impose his help on his neighbours, but his unwelcome actions lead to ruin.

### The Art of Puppet Animation

Heinrich Sabl’s approach to the animated puppet film is quite different. Sabl studied puppetry at the East Berlin Drama School and later worked at the animated film studio in Dresden, then went to Kassel Art College to study animation. His films are influenced by his theatre experience and by authors including Samuel Beckett, Heiner Müller, and Alfred Jarry. For example, Sabl made an independent animated puppet film adaptation of Jarry’s Père Ubu. Sabl’s theatre background is reflected in the vitality of his puppet films, which are rough and impetuous. His staging is powerful and energetic, involving the audience almost physically.

Der Hahn (‘The Cock’, 1995) is a special kind of mechanical theatre. It shows a fight between a rooster and hens, set to the metallic-sounding music of Einstürzende Neubauten’s percussionist, F.M. Einheit. It is a parable on sexuality and power, compressed into nine minutes. Its production was tricky; the animation was done with spring-mounted puppets in the open air, outside the controlled environment of the studio. It was exactly this method that made the film distinctive and breathtaking.

Das Rad (‘The Wheel’, 2001) by Arvid Uibel, Chris Stenner, and Heidi Wittlinger enhanced the global reputation of...
of the German animated puppet film. Meanwhile, the Frankfurt-based company Scopas Medien AG, specializing in puppet and clay animation, made the first German animated puppet feature since World War II, *Sandmännchen – Abenteuer im Traumland* (*Sandman – Adventures in Dreamland*, 2010).

Steffen Schäffler (b. Trier, 1968) made a film called *The Periwig-Maker* (1999) that tells the story of a man who seals himself off in a medieval plague-infested London in order to escape infection. The American critic Maureen Furniss wrote:

Impressive sets and props lend a great deal to the visuals in the film. A long tracking shot opens the film, taking the viewer from an exterior that includes the water of the Thames and the London Bridge through the streets of London in which the action occurs. The entire set, which is given depth with the use of false perspective, measured 4.5 meters wide by 10 meters long. It contains eleven houses based on historical drawings, which contain handmade and fitted tiles, walls made of individual miniature bricks and other examples of detailed miniature work.

Influenced by the legendary Jiří Trnka, the filmmakers used a minimalist approach to puppet making, relying on body movements rather than facial changes to create expressions. Only the eyes and eyelids of the puppets’ faces were moveable. The puppets themselves were moved through the use of metal armatures under polyurethane foam, silicone rubber and foam latex exteriors. Wigs were hand-made from mohair. The puppets were built by Mackinnon & Saunders in England on a scale of 1:5; the largest puppet measured 36 cm. Along with animated objects, real flames provided light from candles, a fireplace and other sources.

The 15-minute film was created over a six-year period at Schäffler’s Berlin studio, Ideal Standard Film, which the director founded in 1994 with sister and producer Annette Schäffler. The story was based on Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

**Winning Students**

Artistic animation had its breakthrough in Germany with *Balance* (1989) by the Lauenstein brothers. It has everything an animated film requires: a compressed and universal storyline, extraordinary artwork, and precise timing.

The plot is simple yet complex. Five men stand on an unstable disc in a dark universe. In their midst is a suitcase. Every man wants to possess it, causing a ludicrous fight and putting the entire disc world out of balance. After all but one of the men has fallen, the suitcase is unreachable at the far end of the disc. The sole survivor can only watch it until the end of his days.

The strength of the animated film lies in this concise way of pictorially annotating the human condition. *Balance*, a student project that is considered an icon of animation history, was started at the HfBK Hamburg and completed at Kassel Art College.

*Quest* was also created at Kassel. Tyron Montgomery and Thomas Stellmach’s work is an animated puppet film, following the logic of a video game. A sandman looking for water goes through different materials (rock, iron, paper, etc.) and is faced with perils such as a buzzsaw throwing out sparks in the World of Iron. He cannot escape his fate.

**Humorous Germany? Animated Movie Theatre Productions**

Animated films made after the reunification became more successful, creatively and commercially. *Werner – Beinhart!* (*Werner – Hard As Bone!*, 1990), by producer Gerhard Hahn, and *Das kleine Arschloch* (*The Little Bastard*, 1997) by Michael Schaaack and Veit Vollmer, were restricted to adult-only, but large, audiences. Their humour is occasionally flat and trivial and was hard to sell outside German-speaking areas.

Feature film animation subsequently began to concentrate on young children (and their mothers) as the target audience. There were charming films that reached an international audience: *Der kleine Eisbär 1* and 2 (*The Little Polar Bear*, 2001 and 2005) and the *Laura’s Star* films (the first in 2004, the second coproduced with China and released in 2009) by Thilo Graf Rothkirch (Cartoon Film Berlin) and Piet de Rycker. *Die drei Räuber* (*The Three Robbers*, 2007) was a classic cartoon

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68 Although conceived and made in Germany, the film was (and still is) mistaken for a British film.

69 Maureen Furniss, ‘Fresh from the Festivals: December 2000’s Film Reviews’, *Animation World Magazine* 5, no. 9 (December 2000).

70 Based on a children’s book by the Alsatian draftsman and illustrator Tomi Ungerer and directed by Hayo Freitag. Freitag had revealed his abilities in many shorts and in the feature *Kap’t’n Blaubär* (*Captain Blaubär*, 1999).
feature by Animation X and Stephan Schesch. It was a commercial hit in Germany and reached an audience of 700,000 in France. This made it the most successful German animated film ever released to cinemas, and it won the audience award at Annecy.

Some companies faced difficult times during this period, however, and some even had to give up, such as the Hamburg-based Trickcompany and Toons ‘n’ Tales.

**New Form of 3D-Rendered Computer Animations**

From the mid-1990s, computer-aided 3D animation became more and more important. It was encouraged by, among others, Thomas Haegele, head of the Institute of Animation at the Baden-Württemberg Film Academy.

The first big computer-aided 3D animated movie was Lenard Kräwinkel’s *Back to Gaya* (2004). Subsequently, Holger Tappe’s Hannover-based company Ambient Entertainment, which was responsible for its production, produced a string of feature-length CGI films, including *Urmel aus dem Eis* (‘Urmel from the Ice’, 2006), *Urmel voll in Fahrt* (‘Urmel at Full Throttle’, 2008), and *Die Konferenz der Tiere* (‘The Animals’ Conference’, 2010).

Numerous experiments were conducted with computer-animated short films. Robert Seidel’s abstract _grau* (‘_Grey’, 2004) combines art and technology. The film achieves extraordinary picturesque effects between two- and three-dimensional spaces, visualizing the fragments of memories of a traffic accident. The usual 3D rendering software was not sufficient for Seidel; he used medical magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

While producing the film, Seidel attached great importance to the fact that it was not simply abstract pictures but breathing pictures that trigger a reaction in the observer and prompt him to find his own history. ‘_Grey’ makes use of the avant-garde 1920s tradition but dynamizes the abstract forms in real time, exploring organic forms and biological behaviour patterns.

*458nm* by Tom Weber, Jan Bitzer, and Ilija Brunck is a rather figurative but also experimental film. It begins with a quotation from a poem by Theodor Storm on impermanence:

> A forest engulfed by fog,  
> Has seen your silent happiness;  
> Covered by scent and twilight,  
> This beautiful world will perish.

An infatuated conflict arises between two snails – they are a cross between robots and biological creatures – to pulsating electronic music. The students from the Film Academy of Baden-Württemberg were inspired by the nature film *Microcosmos*.71 which shows two snails apparently trying to kiss. Their film is a contemporary romance, exploring the blurring lines between humans, animals, and machines and generating a new technoaesthetics.

A Machinima scene originated in the late 1990s, creating computer-aided animated films on a no-budget basis. One of the most interesting representatives of this genre was Friedrich Kirschner. His work was based on the video game *Unreal Tournament*. The result, however, does not resemble typical game aesthetics.

The so-called Demoscene, which originated in the hacker movement of the 1980s, was very active in Germany. Demoscene’s animations are often abstract and heavy on music, using only a small data volume. They are – sometimes unknowingly – connected to the ‘absolute films’ of the 1920s, tying in with probably the most interesting time for German animation.

**Bärbel Neubauer**72

The five-minute *Feuerhaus* (‘Firehouse’, 1998) was one of the best animated films of its century, although very few people realized that. It uses rapid, rhythmic images of leaves and stones, stalks and vegetable veins, linked to no less rhythmic music and sound. It was created by flashlight exposures of plants and stones directly on print stock.

Maureen Furniss wrote:

To my mind, *Firehouse* is one of Neubauer’s most fully-realized films, in part because of the lively, intriguing score she has composed for it, and the way in which this soundtrack works with her images. Like all of Neubauer’s direct-on-film animations, images in *Firehouse* are primarily abstract in nature, though recognizable.

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72 By Giannalberto Bendazzi.
forms appear from time to time. [. . .] Worldwide, she is the most productive and innovative artist specializing in the direct-on-film technique.73

Bärbel Neubauer was born in Klagenfurt (Austria) on 22 April 1959. She studied stage design and film in Vienna, where she began writing poems and making live-action films in 1980. She says:

In 1983 I made my first animation film, OH, by painting on the wall of my room and shooting the single frames. It was partly abstract, partly figurative. The professor of the class of stage design and film (in fact, only stage design was taught) had allowed me not to come, and make my film instead, though he gave me all the papers. So from the beginning I learnt everything on my own. A friend of mine taught me how to use the camera and how to set light. Soon after that, I made my first figurative animation film, Angelika and Ferdinand.74

Neubauer’s first abstract film was made a year later, 1984’s Mond und Tiger (‘The Moon and the Tiger’). It was painted with oil pastels on paper and contained more than 1,800 fade-ins. It divided Neubauer’s friends: some wanted her to be an abstract filmmaker, others wanted her black humour, stories, and figurative films. In Neubauer’s recollections, this was the first period of her filmmaking, characterized by extremely varied experiments, both in live-action and animation.

In 1987 she moved to Munich, Germany. Her second period started in the early 1990s, in which she worked exclusively in the direct-on-film technique. In 1990, Neubauer bought a saxophone and taught herself music. Then she composed the soundtrack of her films. She said:

During the production of Roots (1996) I got a Mac and I started to learn more of the digital parts of the music. At the beginnings of the direct-on-film works the image was first and then came the music. Step by step it changed. In Roots, the sound was first; from then on, it varied: it became a dialogue throughout the period of creation. The music is much quicker to do, and defines [the] content and structure of my work. With Firehouse in 1998 I had explored many direct film techniques.75

‘Firehouse’ was little seen. Since the 1960s, abstract cinema and direct-on-film cinema had been considered tools of the past (and, for the average festivalgoer, there were no

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74 Bärbel Neubauer, autobiographical notes given to Giannalberto Bendazzi in 2005.
75 Bärbel Neubauer, autobiographical notes given to Giannalberto Bendazzi in 2005.
gags). For years, Neubauer and her films had high respect but little interest. She did nothing to please. Yet her second period was blessed with good films.

Samstag Nachmittag (‘Saturday Afternoon’, 1994) still combines figurative and abstract images. It is a description of a walk, lazy moments, and some fantasies; it is vibrant and sweet. Algorithmen (‘Algorithms’, 1994) shows metamorphoses of colour and shapes that are painted or drawn, or stamped directly on blank film.

Roots (id., 1996) is again a series of metamorphoses. Mondlicht (‘Moonlight’, 1997) is a poem to the moon; its voice is the saxophone. There were also Holiday (1998), ‘Firehouse’ (1998), and Passage (2002), cumulatively recalling the work of Norman McLaren. The imagery was different, smoother, but the approach and very high quality were the same.

In 2000, Neubauer abandoned the direct-on-film technique and started her third period, ‘the beginning of my way to work with digital tools also in image’. She explained: ‘Painter software and U&I software were among my first tools. [. . .] From 2000 on, I created libraries of sounds and images; both were like a diary, and in 2002–2004 I made Flockenspiel I–IV out of it.’

This period of Neubauer’s work is strictly based on digital technology. It was an aesthetic development, not a technical updating. The direct-on-film technique provided a material quality that no pencil or algorithm will ever be able to provide. To Neubauer’s followers, Flockenspiel was a completely new chapter because her inspiration had changed. Although complete and consistent, Flockenspiel is a step in her journey from filmmaking to interactive art and music. Not by chance, she started performing dance (her own dancing) at the same time.

Flockenspiel is divided into four parts, running 25 minutes in total. Images, sounds, and their combination are astoundingly beautiful and impossible to describe on the page. A few times they risk becoming decorative, but then Neubauer’s sense of timing intervenes and transforms the film. She painted the first part frame by frame, the way she was used to working. This time, she did it with digital brushes, which she created on her own with Painter software.

The next part of the film mixes frame-by-frame paintings with animations from ArtMatic software. In the third part she used ArtMatic only, and in the fourth she created 3D objects in the traditional way, to get irregular shapes and movements.

After Flockenspiel, Neubauer remained with ArtMatic. Her new friends and workmates were fractals. According to Wikipedia: ‘A fractal is a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole, a property called self-similarity.’

The use of this intellectual tool is extremely varied, with applications to geometry, mathematics, medicine, geography, music, and so on. Fractals have generated images since 1975 (and a new section of visual art, fractal art). A spectator or an artist doesn’t need to understand a fractal mathematically, any more than he or she need understand the colour-sensitive layers of film stock chemically. What matters is the result.

Neubauer’s Fractal Cycles (2010), running 36 minutes, was among the best fractal works. ‘Making this film’ said Neubauer, ‘meant to me to paint in space in a poetic way, which means creating and using irregular shapes and borders; any part of the visual should be irregular, therefore nature-like’. Neubauer did many forbidden things with ArtMatic and achieved the best results. She created systems that worked from, or in, themselves, like little universes. It was only after long experience with that that she went on to use key-frame in ArtMatic.

When I was painting on the film stock, I got coincidences via chemical reactions of the layer’s surface and

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76 Barbel Neubauer, autobiographical notes given to Giannalberto Bendazzi in 2005.

77 Barbel Neubauer, autobiographical notes given to Giannalberto Bendazzi in 2005. Flockenspiel is a pun based on Glockenspiel (chimes, carillon, or also a music box).

78 Neubauer never mixed the two media. Her dancing was a different language to express her creativity with movement, using her body instead of a brush.

79 What is most striking about this film is its rare interactive quality. One ‘sees’ a film, sometimes ‘watches’ it, but here one dives into the abstract action. Flockenspiel is an invitation to a mental dance.

80 ArtMatic software is for the Mac only. It is a graphic ‘synthesizer’ written by Eric Wenger (creator of the original KPT Bryce 1994–1995). It puts images together and creates motion in systems, or trees, which are built from tiles containing functions. For an artist, creating animations means building trees out of the tiles and functions of his/her choice and knowledge and varying them. The tool is explicitly visual, and the user interface encourages an intuitive way of working.

81 Barbel Neubauer, personal communication to Giannalberto Bendazzi, Genova, October 2010.
the colours and the materials. Coincidences are more complicated and interesting when painting in space with ArtMatic. It was a challenge. What I wanted to produce didn’t exist yet, so it was impossible to copy from life; nor did I want to imitate anything analogical with it. ArtMatic taught me to think three-dimensional; it taught me not the perception of space (that’s normal in anybody), but the consciousness of it.

*Fractal Cycles* is imposing, more than half an hour of moving abstract colour shapes. ‘I never intended to make that new film, I was just playing around (it was the same with all of my films, actually) […] The film grew like the growing of a plant – like a fractal, in short.’

It is a daring exploration in unprecedented imagery, but it has kind of a skeleton, regarding how the camera moves, or how the image flows under the camera, and especially regarding the content of the image and sound. An architectural, Euclidean skeleton would have made the project impossible. Neubauer’s symphonic approach made it a triumph.

At the beginning a sphere multiplies, the first clue to the fractal nature of the film. In the final sequences, the attentive viewer is able, even invited, to recognize the fractal basis. The great trip into the unprecedented colour universe and its metamorphoses finds its (temporary?) destination on a vaguely familiar sensory shore, on a vaguely reassuring return.

Shining spheres and corollas, abstract grass, abstract water, and abstract leaves would make a world of lyrical, reassuring return. Synesthesia is far from Neubauer’s interests. Rather, the eye and the ear act like a duo, or even a straight man and a comic.

To achieve her artistic results, Bärbel Neubauer doesn’t ‘take any drugs, not even medical drugs. When I do things that I like I don’t want things that hamper my mental clarity. Mine is a stream of consciousness. It is not voluntarily a research on spirituality. Spirituality is included in my works automatically, every now and then. Inevitably, since I’m a human being; spirituality is the connection to things that might be or also not. It just appears, but it’s not a planned research. It gets unlocked when I do my inspired work.’

**Austria**

Since the beginning of the new Austrian animation movement, many visual artists outside the Vienna Academy of Applied Arts have started making animated films. These artists include: the painter, sculptor, and performance artist Tone Fink (b. Schwarzenberg, Vorarlberg, 1944), who moved to Vienna and met Hubert Sielecki; Thomas Steiner, Wolfgang Hoffmann, Leo Schatzl, and other artists around the self-organized alternative culture centre Stadtwerkstatt in Linz; Renate Kordon (b. Graz, 1952), who studied in Paris; and Peter Putz (b. Ebensee, 1954), who studied animation in Poznan, Poland (1977–1978) and later (1988–1989) went as artist in residence to Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, where he made *Mont Real* with his wife Barbara Putz.

The movement of the 1980s led to a great deal of audiovisual production, using affordable Super 8 film and later video cameras. It also led to new structures for the presentation of this work, such as alternative cinemas and self-organized centres in all parts of Austria. Animation was no longer limited to art academies and became part of a much larger antielite culture.

Artists concentrated more on animation’s codes and rules and researched the formal relationships between vision and sound. Animation that treated the body expressionistically was supplanted by abstraction or musical-rhythmic animation. Tone Fink’s *Aus der Luft Gegriffen* (‘Taken by the Wind’, 1983) was surreal and rough, far from life; nor did I want to imitate anything analogical with it. ArtMatic taught me to think three-dimensional; it taught me not the perception of space (that’s normal in anybody), but the consciousness of it.

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82 Bärbel Neubauer, personal communication to Giannalberto Bendazzi, Genova, October 2010.
83 Bärbel Neubauer, personal communication to Giannalberto Bendazzi, Genova, October 2010.
84 A professor in the Department of Computer Science at New York University, he invented the Perlin noise in 1985. In 1997, he was awarded an Oscar: ‘To Ken Perlin for the development of Perlin Noise, a technique used to produce natural appearing textures on computer generated surfaces for motion picture visual effects.’
85 Bärbel Neubauer, personal communication to Giannalberto Bendazzi, Genova, October 2010.
86 By Thomas Renoldner and Paolo Parmiggiani.
away from the regularity and severe conception of *Fall ür 4* (1990) and *Getp ukt* (‘Dotted’, 1990).

In the films of Thomas Renoldner (b. Linz, 1960) and Martin Anibas (b. Waidhofen, 1961), music, abstraction, and perception rules are central to the artistic research. (Sometimes the two filmmakers collaborated.) In Renoldner’s *Bund* (‘Coloured’, 1991) and *Rhythmus 94* (1994), sounds, rhythm, space, and images are reciprocally connected in rigorous pieces. Anibas’ *Am Land* (‘On the Land’, 1991), *Spinning – Bild 14* (‘Spinning – Image 14’, 1991), 60 *See-Kunden* (1993), and *Bild 15/16* (‘Image 15/16’, 1993) are free abstract investigations that still keep a strong formal structure. The work of Thomas Steiner (b. Wels, 1961) is a surreal drawn animation that uses a cycle repetition and the accumulation of grotesque elements to satirical effect.

After the year 2000, there was a trend for animation to move away from alternative cinemas to art houses and museums. These became new playgrounds for interactive art, 3D computer animated installations, and more spectacular forms of moving images. One of the best-known artists in the field is Peter Kroger, who produced partly interactive, partly space-filling animated 3D films.

In the first decade of the millennium, Austrian animation opened to CGI and a new approach to figurative animation. *Mao Tse Tung – Bd. 2* (2001) by Heimo Wallner (b. Salzburg, 1961) is a surreal drawn animation that uses a cycle repetition and the accumulation of grotesque elements to satirical effect.

Harald Hund (b. Grieskirchen, 1967) made 2005’s *All People Is Plastic*, a CGI short that uses 3D models to visualize a repetitive life in a cold world of buildings and machines. *Herr Bar* (‘Mr Cash’, 2007) by Clemens Kogler (b. Steyr, 1980) used a kind of CGI cut-out technique; photos of human body parts were assembled into machines and living beings, moving on fantastic landscapes. *Kurzes Leben* (‘Short Life’, 2007), by Johanna Freise (b. Kiel, Germany, 1961) and Daniel Šulić (b. Zagreb, Yugoslavia [Croatia], 1968), is both obscure and dramatic, relating the tragic life of a young girl with a continuously varied drawing line.

**Switzerland**

Martial Wannaz (Compiègne, France, 7 April 1945–Lausanne, 11 September 2002) made at least a dozen personal shorts (the last was finished and released posthumously), some collaborations, and several dozen TV episodes. He had a penchant for the darker realms of existence and kept experimenting with visual styles, so his films never looked the same. His outstanding *Douce nuit* (‘Sweet Night’, 1987), based on a novel by Italian writer Dino Buzzati, features lush, stupendously animated cut-out imagery. A romantically moonlit garden is contrasted with the hidden horrors of the night, where all creatures are predators and prey at once.

Another Wannaz gem is *À la recherche d’Adèle* (‘Looking for Adele’, 1993), a hybrid of animation and live-action in an homage to film noir and comics. A comic collector (played by Wannaz himself) leafs through a graphic novel, drawn in the style of French comic artist Jacques Tardi. The camera enters the panels and follows a mysterious night pursuit through Lausanne, until comic, animation, and reality all merge at Wannaz’s doorstep.

**Georges Schwizgebel**

In Geneva in the early 1970s, Georges Schwizgebel (see Vol. 2) engaged in what in retrospect appear to be a well-considered sequence of exercises, designed to develop the hallmarks of his work. Some of these hallmarks were already apparent in his first mature effort: a predilection for a conceptual approach, based on formal choices; a tight relationship to music; and the absence of dialogue. In each film that followed, he introduced new features while pushing others further as his distinctive style evolved.

The first of these, *Perspectives* (1975) is a minute and a half of humans and animals in motion cycles (a wink at Muybridge?). It introduced a graphic style of loose, rather bold brushstrokes on cels. Unlike the ‘lightbulb’ grid of *The Flight of Icarus*, it had a flexibility and potential for development which was carried through to subsequent films. Also notable was the film’s rotoscoping, to learn about naturalism in movements. In addition, it introduces Schwizgebel’s typical transitions, a kind of painted morphing that replaces traditional editing and results in extended sequence shots.

In *Hors-jeu* (‘Off-Side’, 1977), Schwizgebel further investigated the use of cycles and the rotoscope. In *Le ravissement de Frank N. Stein* (‘The Ravishment of Frank N. Stein’, 1981), the animation simulated a subjective camera; the point was to make the spectator into the protagonist. The

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87 Original title in English.
88 By Rolf Bächler.
film was Schwizgebel’s first attempt at classic storytelling, but the excess of the formal experiment left audiences bemused.

The run culminated in 78 tours (‘78 R.P.M.’, 1985), a well-measured blend of all the ingredients that Schwizgebel had explored previously. Inspired by a melancholic accordion waltz, the film alternates between the animated subjective view of a leisurely summer day and the still observation of a man stirring his coffee. No longer depending on the rotoscope, Schwizgebel takes us into his lightly painted world in continuous swirling moves.

A Case of Form

La course à l’abîme (‘The Ride to the Abyss’, 1991) sees Schwizgebel the engineer meet Schwizgebel the artist. The original challenge was how to make several minutes of film with a limited number of cels constituting a cycle of only a few seconds?

In the film, a cycle of 144 large-format cels, equalling six seconds of film, is repeated time and again. The camera captures a postcard-size part of the whole as it tracks a spiral path, frame by frame, clockwise from the edge to the centre, sweeping the entire surface. At every repetition, the image area filmed is adjacent to the one of the previous round, with no overlap. The result is an extended unedited sequence shot, spiralling in to the centre of the cels, from where the camera pulls out to reveal the whole setup.

The music chosen was ‘The Ride to the Abyss’, an excerpt from The Damnation of Faust by Hector Berlioz, during which Mephistopheles takes Faust to hell. Written for a dramatic stage production, it provided the source for the narrative content. Starting with the cavalcade of two horsemen (Faust and Mephisto), Schwizgebel essentially illustrated the protagonists’ dialogue from Berlioz’s libretto, which revolves around Faust’s visions and phantasms as they rush towards the abyss (hell). With the conclusion, the Helvetic animator gives the piece a very personal twist. Instead of meeting the damned, we are received by the orchestra and its conductor, who appears, when the camera pulls back, to be the puppet master of it all.


Other Animators

Daniel Suter (see Volume 2) resumed production after retiring from teaching. He also revived his original colour pencil style for La chanson du pharmacien (‘The Song of the Chemist’, 2003), a charming little black-humoured ballad of errors, reminiscent of his poetic early work of the 1970s. Histoire d’eau (‘Water Story’, 2009) continued in this vein.

Claude Luyet (see Volume 2) began two major projects simultaneously. In Le cœur de lumière (‘The Square of Light’, 1992), a boxer fights his own mirror image. Luyet mostly assumes the protagonist’s point of view, but he also extends the subjective perspective to the soundtrack, putting the spectator in the body of the huffing and panting fighter, suffering his futile attempts to block his enemy’s blows on the way to the knockout. The graphic style of acrylic painting on cel, combined with loose white, red, and blue crayon slashes swirling on a black background in front of our eyes, produces images of gut-gripping intensity. They tighten relentlessly to the final revelation that the worst fights happen in our minds. The film is a classic in every respect.

At the same time as he was working on Le cœur de lumière, Luyet joined with La Fabrique again to produce Robert Creep: Une vie de chien (‘Robert Creep: A Dog’s Life’, 1993), a 26-minute film-noir conceived as a pilot for an unmade series. It was codirected by Thomas Ott (b. Zurich, 10 June 1966), a well-known illustrator and comics author who suggested the story and was the art director.

After this double feat, it took Luyet almost a decade to come up with his next personal film, Rush (2004), codirected with the Canadian illustrator Xavier Robel (b. Montreal, 1971). Completely breaking away from his previous work, the film sets flickering movements of colours, patterns, and figures to a rhythm-driven electronic noise track. It looks like a fresh transposition of 1920s avant-garde into the twenty-first century and it had a successful festival career.

Kilian Dellers (b. Basel, 1959) was a graduate from the Academy of Arts in Düsseldorf. Starting with pixilation and puppet animation, using everything that came his way for his experimental films, he eventually focused on retouching oil paint. He used this technique in his masterpiece, Vision (1995). It is about tension and release, coming and going, condensation, intensification, and change.
\textit{Luora} (2001) by Carlo Piaget (b. 1962) is an astounding emulation of the Disney style, as close as a solitary artisan secluded in his workshop can get. A streetlamp’s filament is set free by a lightning strike, breaking into a dance over the rooftops like a glowing fairy and disappearing in the distance. It reflected Piaget’s own animation career, since this film was the last we saw of him.

As Switzerland did not belong to the European Union, its animation was cut off from the incentive programmes of Media Cartoon. Consequently, the confined community had no economic base, no cooperative tradition, and little coherence. It was entirely restricted to private initiative (and, for the most part, private investment), even while animation boomed all around. For ages Swiss film production had no connection with the rest of the world. When Switzerland finally became eligible to join the European Union, a large public discovered animation beyond the offer from the international animation festival, was a blessing. Finally Switzerland finally became eligible to join the European Union. The visual authority and black humour of Claudius Gentinetta (b. Lucerne, 9 January 1968), apparent in his exercises of the late 1980s and early 1990s, was confirmed by his first international success: \textit{Amok} (‘Amuck’, 1997). \textit{Poldek} (2004) has a bizarre plot about neighbourhood cannibalism which, like \textit{Amuck}, is evoked rather than told. The stunning visuals veil the diffuse narrative.

For \textit{Die Seilbahn} (‘The Cable Car’, 2008), Gentinetta teamed up with Frank Braun (b. Winterthur, 1965), the founder and president of the Fantocche festival, as a codirector. This may explain why Gentinetta finally managed to break away from his overly complex plots. The narrative is reduced to a single, straight event: a man in a cable car violently sneezes, gradually dismantling the car on its way up. \textit{Schlaf} (‘Sleep’, 2010), again codirected by Frank Braun, is more a poem than a traditional story.

Basil Vogt (b. Brugg, 21 February 1965) was a jack-of-all-trades and a gifted tinkerer. In 1995, he constructed a series of three sculpture-like mutoscopes as slot machines, like one-armed bandits with a spring motor, flipping clanking metal sheets with animated engravings. For his personal shorts, Vogt used and often mixed different techniques every time. \textit{Kapitän Hu} (‘Captain Hoo’, 2011) is a gem. With a design leaving space for imagination, it is about a sailor whose ship gets stranded in the Alps during a violent storm.


Zoltán Horváth (b. Geneva, 1966) premiered with \textit{Carcasses et crustacés} (‘Carcasses and Shellfish’, 1999). It shows the disaster of the Titanic through the eyes of fish and other sea creatures detained in the dining room. Horváth used computer technology to create an atmosphere of decadence before the fall.

For \textit{Nosferatu Tango} (2001, about a mosquito who falls in love with the prince of vampires), Horváth used the computer to create the rich, lush, superbly composed universe of a pop-up book. The story unfolds by turning the pages. Its mechanism naturally makes one world fold for the next to rise. The mosquito’s tragedy is not just its unrequited love but also its inability to grasp the system.

Samuel and Frédéric Guillaume (b. Fribourg, 1976) were twins and joint authors of the first Swiss-made animated feature, the puppet animation \textit{Max & Co}. (2007). It was a monumental achievement and commercial failure; the animation was excellent, though opinions on the script were mixed. While the audience in Annecy celebrated it with the audience award, the film’s box office was disastrous. The Guillaume brothers survived (unlike their company), and the studio technology developed for \textit{Max & Co}. remained available.

One of the first new faces in the new century was Isabelle Favez (b. Berne, 1974). At La Poudrière, the affiliated school of the Folimage studio in France, she discovered CelAction software (based on the cut-out principle but enhanced with digital image processing). It became her standard working tool and the basis of her distinct style.

Favez’s \textit{Circuit Marine} (2003), coproduced by the National Film Board of Canada and her first film to catch
wide attention, was a diverting ensemble comedy where several characters complicate their lives in pursuit of happiness. In Tarte aux pommes (‘Apple Pie’, 2006), the lives of a baker lady, a butcher, a hunter, a dog, a cat, and a rabbit all entangle – not to everyone’s benefit.

Claude Barras (b. Sierre, 1973) started with computers but discovered puppets when he was asked to do character design for the pilot version of the Guillaume brothers’ Max & Co. He took the experience further in Le génie de la boîte de raviolis (‘The Genie from the Ravioli Tin’, 2005), a fairy tale. It was coproduced by the National Film Board of Canada, as was Sainte Barbe (‘Holy Beard’, 2007) and Land of the Heads (2009), which Barras codirected with the Belgian Cédric Louis (b. Liège, 1970). As of this writing, they are preparing their first feature, Ma vie de courgette (‘It’s a Zucchini’s Life’).

Herr Würfel (‘Mr Dice’, 2004), the first film by Rafael Sommerhalder (b. Zurich, 1974), is his least conventional but most interesting work. It is about the last second in a man’s life, with a voice-over analyzing why he is so paralyzed with fear that he will make a wrong decision. The didactic tone is matched by a design reminiscent of infographics and enhanced by deliberately visible computer animation. Sommerhalder never reached the same level of quality in his later films.

Marina Rosset (b. Lausanne, 1984) graduated from Lucerne University of Art and Design with La main de l’ours (‘The Bear’s Hand’, 2007). She displayed a sense for laconic (and mostly melancholic) stories and subtle directing as well as a pleasing, efficient graphic style. An unusual talent, she won Annecy’s project competition twice in a row.

Maja Gehrig, a 2005 Lucerne graduate, launched her post-school career with Amourette (‘Lust to Dust’, 2009), a puppet gem in the rare (and too often vulgar) genre of erotic fantasy.

Jesús Pérez, whose work in his native Bolivia we discuss in the section on Latin America, was offered a part-time job at Lucerne University of Art and Design to teach new animation students the basics.‘ Fostering young talent encouraged him to explore his own ideas as well. The blueprint was a spontaneous style exercise he had created during a previous visit to Lucerne, Ejercicios en lápiz (‘Pencil Exercise’, 1995). In this one-and-a-half-minute short, the animator’s pixilated hand draws a stick figure, awakens it to life, and sets it free – a concept popular in the earliest cartoons.

The first of his new works, Punkt und Striche (‘Dot and Lines’, 2005), gives a playful account of a boy-girl (or brother-sister) feud. Pérez again made the artifice visible. The set is the animator’s drawing desk, his hands and drawing utensils keep interfering, and the characters are mere stick figures – as if to attribute the whole weight of expression to the animation.

Children, storytelling, and dance make up the essence of Der grosse Bruder (‘The Big Brother’, 2010), cowritten and codirected with Pérez’s wife. A pure drawn ballet, full of charm and love for the characters, it received great festival acclaim.

François Chalet (b. Geneva, 17 June 1970) definitely belongs to a new breed. Trained as a graphic designer in Berne, he got into animation by teaching himself how to animate using Flash, the most common digital tool for Web design. Winning a competitive tender for an event hosted by MTV Germany in 1998, he became involved in projections of motion graphics, live and direct, to be shown to large audiences and broadcast in households.

For this purpose he developed a simple, quick visual style based on vector graphics – essentially circles but also other geometric primitives. Initially they were black and white, but they soon extended to reduced high-contrast colour palettes, launching a new visual trend for the coming millennium. Chalet’s trademark is not just his style but also his ability to create highly differentiated expressions within the style’s formal constraints.

Tes où mère-grand? (‘Where Are You, Grandmother?’, 2003), Chalet’s first professionally produced ‘old school’ type of short, is a Red Riding Hood takeoff that was part of the omnibus children’s feature Loulou et les autres loups (‘Loulou and the Other Wolves’, France, 2003), under the direction of French animator Serge Elissalde.

**Denmark**

Since 1985, Denmark has produced about one animated feature film per year and has thus become one of the major animation producers in Europe. The Danish Film Law, revised in 1982, ruled that 25 percent of the total film production budget should be used for films targeting children and young people. The diversity of these films was vast, in terms of themes as well as visual expression.

**Valhalla** (id., 1986) took its theme from Norse mythology. It told its story in an upbeat and humorous way and

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89 Whenever his means and time allowed it, he returned to Bolivia to share his craft and experience through training workshops.

89 By Annemette Karpen.
was animated in the Disney style. After a long, chaotic production, both its producer and the director were replaced. Eventually Peter Madsen, the artist on whose comic books the film was based, received director credit and Jeffrey J. Varah, who had started it all, was codirector.

In 1998, a group of animators who had begun working on *Valhallu* founded A. Film. They were led by Jørgen Lerdam (b. Gladsaxe municipality, 12 March 1958) and Stefan Fjeldmark (b. 1964).

The budgets available for both A. Film and Jannik Hastrup’s Dansk Tegnefilm Kompagni increased over the years and the two companies developed very different approaches to animation. A. Film is the name of the rival company to Dansk Tegnefilm Kompagni. The latter squirmed away as much as possible and had an easy noticeable style. For its part, A. Film had an entertainment-oriented attitude and made films in the ‘international style’.


A. Film preferred to work on fantasy, fairy tale, and internationally oriented stories. It was a traditional business-minded company with a continuous production slate and TV, feature film, and commercial departments. During the 1990s, A. Film expanded, founding sister companies in Tallinn, Estonia, and Riga, Latvia. It also established new departments in Hamburg and Berlin, which were in charge of the more demanding parts of the productions. An office in Los Angeles, run by Hans Perk, was also set up.

The first feature film made by the A. Film studio was *Junglelyret* (*Jungle Jack*, 1993), about the world’s rarest animal. Flemming Quist Møller was the scriptwriter and codirector with Jørgen Lerdam; the film also had a young and promising animator, Michael Hegner (b. 1964). A sequel followed in 1996, *Junglelyret Hugo – den store filmselv* (*Amazon Jack*), again with Lerdam and Møller as codirectors.

Both *Jungle Jack* films follow the new thoughtful, critical line of children’s culture in Denmark, but they are still close to Disney style in their backgrounds, character animation, and storytelling. They are quite different from *Snuden* and *The Monkeys and the Secret Weapon*, which have more complex story structures.

The feature *Hjælp! Jeg er en fisk* (*Help! I Am a Fish*, 2000) cost 101 million Danish kroner (18 million US dollars); it was prompted by A. Film’s ambitions to follow Hollywood. Directed by Jørgen Lerdam, Stefan Fjeldmark, and Michael Hegner, it featured three children who turned into fish after drinking a potion. In contrast, *Terkel i knibe* (*Terkel in Distress*, 2004) is a rough and satirical tale about bullying, psychopathic teachers, and teenage problems. It was based on the stand-up comedian Anders Matthesen’s radio series, with all the voices recorded by Matthesen himself.

*Pettson og Findus 3 – Nissmaskinen* (*Pettson and Findus – The Santa Machine*, 2005) was a coproduction for small children, based on the Swedish writer and illustrator Sven Nordquist’s books and presented in a typical Swedish rural style. *Asterix og Vikingerne* (*Astérix et les Vikings*, ‘Asterix and the Vikings’, 2006) was a French-Danish coproduction, made in traditional cel animation. It was the most expensive film to date (160 million Danish kroner; approximately 29 million US dollars). France’s M6 Films chose A. Film as its partner on account of the high production standard of ‘Help! I Am a Fish’. Although the film is French, A. Film was active in every step of the project, from the screenplay to the storyboard and animation.

*Den grimme ælling og mig* (*The Ugly Duckling and Me*, 2006) was made in 2005 and is a new version of Hans Christian Andersen’s tale. It was created in 3D computer animation by the same young team behind ‘Terkel in Distress’. In 2008, the 3D department of A. Film put their efforts into *Hugo 3 – fræk, flabet og fri* (*Jungo Goes Bananas*, 2008), which was as fresh and charming as the previous *Jungle Jack* films.

With *Rejsen til Saturn* (*The Journey to Saturn*, 2008), A. Film tried to reach a more adult audience. In the same year, the company made *Niko og vejen til stjernerne* (*Niko – lente jän poika*, ‘Niko & the Way to the Stars’), in coproduction with a Finnish studio.

Although both A. Film and Dansk Tegnefilm Kompagni had success in Denmark and the European cinema market, none of their films had an impact in the US. If it were not for the subsidies and funding from The Danish Film Institute, there would have been no film production in Denmark.

The fourth generation of animators and animation directors benefited from state-subsidized educations. A four-year course training people to be animation directors was established at The Danish Film School in 1992. A three-and-a-half-year bachelor’s degree programme in classical character animation at the Animation Workshop was established in 2003.

The two big studios’ monopoly on producing animated feature films was broken with Copenhagen Bombay’s
production of *Princess* [id., 2006], the first Danish animated film for adults, telling a grim, shocking story with very explicit sex and violence. In 2009, the same studio made *Æble og ormen* ("The Apple and the Worm"), a funny family film about the strange relationship between an apple and the worm inside it. Both were directed by Anders Morgenthaler (b. Copenhagen, 5 December 1972), a very talented comic-strip artist and writer and a controversial director.


### Sweden

Lisbet Gabrielsson (b. 1943) had a career at the Svenska Filminstitutet and started producing animated shorts on her own in 1997. Some of these shorts are based on Swedish children’s books, directed by the respective authors. Anna Bengtsson’s *Bollongexpeditionen* ("Expedition on a Balloon", 2003) is the story of an ant that builds a hot-air balloon and then flies in it on a scientific expedition. *Nal-lars Väntan* ("Nallars Waiting", 1998), directed by Christina Björk and Maria Brännström, is a puppet animation about the secret life of teddy bears. Gabrielsson’s productions tell pleasant, tasteful stories, but their animation is weak.

Despite some growth in the last decades of the twentieth century, and efforts made by the Svenska Filminstitutet, Swedish animation was still small in the 1990s, employing little more than a hundred people. The majority of these animators were disconnected from the big production companies, struggling alone with few economic opportunities and still using craftsman’s methods.

Among the distinguished artists, Pernilla Hindsefeldt (b. 1968) and Jonas Dahlbeck (b. 1971) received a Guldbagge in 1995 for best short film for *Do Nothin’ Til You Hear From Me*. Fully animated on cels, the film stars a couple of male musical instruments who fight for a female violin. The film shows the power of an attractive design, despite a trite story full of clichés. Hindsefeldt created a sequel, *Nocturne* (1998), a love story built on Chopin music, and Jonas Dahlbeck was hired as a director at Filmtecknarna.

Another Guldbagge winner is Ulla-Carin Grafström (b. 1953), who made animated films about the Swedish royal house. *Hem ljuva hem* ("Home Sweet Home", 1997) shows King Carl-Gustaf and Queen Silvia doing household chores. Grafström made two more movies in the style she discovered, in which cutouts mix with cartoons. It is a casual and raw style with a personal touch.

One of the finest cut-out animators was Lotta Gefen-blad (b. Strömblad, 1962), who was one of the few artists working with the multiplane. Gefenblad, together with the animator Gun Jacobson, created many children’s films, including *God morgon Gerda gök* ("Good Morning, Gerda Cuckoo", 1988). With her husband Uzi Gefenblad, she directed *Apricots* ("Apricots", 1996). A child spends a day on the beach with his uncle and discovers that the ocean holds many secrets.

Petter Lennstrand (b. 1970), who began his career as a puppeteer, created the TV series *Spratlan* & *Janne & Metz* (1991) for Svt. He also directed and animated the puppet Allram Eest, his most famous creation, in the TV program *Allra mest tecknat* ("Most Drawn", 2002).

*After Semesterhemmet* ("Holiday Home") by Birgitta Jansson, Sweden produced few animated documentaries. However, in 2002, the film *Gimd* ("Hidden") was released by Hanna Heilborn (b. 1968), Mats Johansson, and David Aronowitsch (b. 1964). The film combines live-action interview with 3D animation to tell the intense story of Juan Carlos, a 12-year-old South American boy who is not so welcome in Sweden.

### Magnus Carlsson

Magnus Carlsson (b. Säffle, County of Västra Götalands, 20 April 1965) is a prominent figure among his contemporaries. He is important both domestically and abroad, where his works are sold and where he participates at international festivals. Unlike most of his fellow artists, who work outside large production enterprises, he makes entertainment on an industrial scale while maintaining a high level of quality.

While attending art school in Gothenburg in the 1980s, Carlsson was strongly influenced by MTV’s animation, combining drawings and music. Mr Carlsson (1992) was a small collection of poignant short stories. In 1992, Carlsson began working with Filmtecknarna, where he made a TV series entirely in clay, *Alice i Plasmalandet* ("Alice in Plasmaland", 1993) with Jonas Odell. *Sweden* (1996) is a Plastine TV series with an element of documentary; its characters express their opinion on various situations.

Filmtecknarna’s *Robin* (1996) is a TV series in traditional cel animation about a young urban idler. The music video...
Paranoid Android (1997), for the British band Radiohead, was derived from the series. In 1996, Carlsson started his own company, Happy Life. In 1998 he made Lisa and The Three Friends . . . and Jerry, both in cel animation, and Da Mob (2002), a TV series in mixed techniques about friends who want to form a rock band.

Happy Life was based on the principle of producing high-quality animation in large quantities, through the use of a simple but effective design, made according to an industrial system. Much of the work is done by foreign factories and freelance artists.

In 2000, having ended his relationship with Happy Life, Carlson started Magnus Carlsson Production AB and Thin Baron, adding The Jolly Patron in 2003. Carlson’s business principles didn’t change in these new companies. He returned to work with clay and made his first features for children, Desmond trashade äppelträd (‘Desmond’s Trashed Apple Tree’, 2003) and Desmond & träskpatraskfäl- lan (‘Desmond & the Swamp Barbarian Trap’, 2006). The little pig Desmond and his forest friends are among the director’s most innovative creations.

Norway

The professionalization of Norwegian animation began in the early 1990s. The Caprino studio made hugely popular puppet films from 1948 to 1975, but it worked on the margins of the main film scene and never became the catalyst for a wider Norwegian animation industry.

This situation changed in the early 1990s. The first national commercial TV channel, TV2, opened in 1992. At last, Norwegian animators could use TV advertising money to make their studios profitable. New technology made animation accessible for young enthusiasts and helped widen the use of animation in TV graphics, advertising, music videos, and computer games. A state-funded animation school opened in Volda, while the Nordic-Baltic animation festival started in the early 1990s. Most important, the animators began to collaborate, becoming better qualified to get help from the Norwegian film funding system.

Two studios were formed at the very beginning of the 1990s: Tegnefilmcompagniet (The Animated Cartoon Company) and Studio Magica. Tegnefilmcompagniet made drawn cartoons; Studio Magica made puppet animation. Tegnefilmcompagniet was a film collective, whose owners Øivind Jorfald (b. 1950), Jan Konings (b. 1947), Guttorm Larsen (b. 1953), and Linda Madsen (b. 1967) worked in the same studio but each had responsibility for their own films. Most of these were shorts based on children’s books and funded by state money. Highlights include Snøp (‘Candy’, by Jan Konings, 1991), Det opprør- ske alfabetet (‘The Rebellious Alphabet’, by Øivind Jorfald, 1994), and Filmen om Bodil (‘The Film about Bodil’, by Linda Madsen, 1995).

Studio Magica was an extension of the company Camera Magica, run by the cinematographer Morten Skallerud (b. 14 July 1954). Skallerud made several animated shorts in the 1970s and 1980s. Inspired by Norman McLaren, he made Geometrisk dans (‘Geometric Dance’, 1972) and Den hvite streken (‘The White Line’, 1978), in which he animated a white line on live-action film stock.


Skallerud’s masterpiece is the time-lapse animation Året gjennom Barfjord (‘The Year along the Abandoned Road’, 1991). It was the only Norwegian film shot in 70mm. With a specially developed shooting technique, Skallerud’s camera travels the only road in an abandoned fishing community in northern Norway. The journey starts in the morning in January on one end of the road. In single frame animation, the camera moves along the road, the snow disappears, spring and summer come, and the summer people return to the little village. But with autumn they leave . . . and when the camera ends its journey on the other end of the road, the snow is back, it is night, and it’s December. Jan Garbarek’s beautiful music accompanies the journey.

In Studio Magica, Morten Skallerud was joined by the Russian special-effects artist Natasha Nikitina (b. 1944), the puppet maker Ivar Rodningen, the editor Pål Gengenbach (b. 1943), the producer Lars Tommerbakke (b. 1950), and the animator Pjotr Sapegin (b. Moscow, 4 December 1955). Besides their many prize-winning commercials, Studio Magica’s most successful films were the clay shorts directed by Pjotr Sapegin. In the early 1990s, he made several shorts featuring a character called Edvard, loosely based on the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg.

92 By Gunnar Strom.
Jacobsen, Aukrust entered the world of animation and eventually created ‘Gurin with the Foxtail’, a feature that was a huge critical and popular success. Nille Tystad and John M. Jacobsen shared the credit as directors.

Afterwards, Jacobsen was approached by the rights owners to Astrid Lindgren’s book, who proposed a cartoon feature based on Lindgren’s *Karlsson på taket* (‘Karlsson on the Roof’). When the film premiered in 2002, Vibeke Idsøe was sole director; Nille Tystad had left during the production.

Aage Aaberge produced two animated features together with Oslo’s Qvisten Animation: *Kaptein Sabeltann* (‘Captain Sabertooth’, 2006) and *Pelle Politibil* (‘Pelle Policecar’, 2009). They were based on popular Norwegian stories aimed at children and directed by Rasmus Sivertsen (b. 1972).

*Kaptein Sabeltann* was coproduced with the Swedish company Happy Life and codirected by Stig Berqvist. In 2008 Sivertsen made the CGI feature *Kurt blir grusom* (‘Kurt Turns Evil’), based on the children’s books by Erlend Loe and Kim Hiortøy. His father Thor Sivertsen was credited as codirector. In 2002, the younger Sivertsen made the 15-minute cartoon short *Guggen*, the best Norwegian film inspired by classic American cartoons.

Another success was the hugely popular Web cartoon series *Fanthomas* (the series premiered in 2009), a celebrity satire based on the Hollywood stylist Jan Thomas. Meanwhile, Qvisten Animation made the animations for the *Knerten* films (the first premiered in 2009), based on the books by Anne Cath. *Vestli* is about a wooden stick that comes alive.

The comic-book artist Christopher Nielsen (b. Oslo, 20 April 1963) had success with the 3D computer TV series...

The first animation Oscar for a Norwegian film was given to Torill Kove for her film Den danske dikteren (‘The Danish Poet’, 2006). This was coproduced between the Oslo studio Mikrofilm and the National Film Board of Canada. It followed the Oscar nomination of Kove’s debut film, Min bestemor strøk kongens skjorter (‘My Grandmother Ironed the King’s Shirts’, 1999), coproduced between Studio Magica and, again, the National Film Board of Canada.

Kove was born in Furnes, Norway, on 25 May 1958. She lived in Norway and spent several years in Kenya and Botswana before moving to Montreal (Canada) in the early 1980s. Her style is minimalist in form and deep in feeling,

Figure 3.20 Torill Kove, Den danske dikteren (‘The Danish Poet’), 2006. ‘The Danish Poet’ © 2006 National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved.
so intelligently easy that it may be undervalued. ‘The Danish Poet’ is sensitive, with a deep, subtle humour.95

Me and my Moulton (2014) was nominated for an Academy Award, while the animated feature Hocus Pocus Alfie Atkins (2013) was a Norwegian/Swedish children’s film based on a book by the iconic Swedish picture book author and illustrator Gunilla Bergström.

Mikrofilm is owned by producer Lise Fearnley (b. 1969) and animator and director Kajsa Næss (b. 1970). The company has served as producer for many of the talented animators that have emerged since the early 1990s in Norway: Jan Otto Ertesvåg (b. 1969), Julie Engaas (b. 1968), Astrid Åkra (b. 1960), and Kajsa Næss herself. Cathinka Tandberg and Magnhild Winsnes are new partners in Mikrofilm.

Special mention should be made of Anita Killi (b. Stavanger, 17 January 1968) and her studio Troll-Film. In a studio up in the mountains in the village of Dovre, she makes multiplane cut-out animation inspired by Yuri Norstein. All four of her major productions have won international prizes. Lawasiid Aigi (1996) is based on an old myth about how the Sami people used traditional singing to catch reindeer. Kongen som ville ha mer enn en krone (‘The King Who Wanted More Than One Crown’, 1999) is a 45-minute fairy tale, made with composer Randall Meyers. Tornehekken (‘Hedge of Thorns’, 2001) won 14 international prizes. Sinna Mann (‘Angry Man’, 2009) a 20-minute film on child abuse carried out by close relatives, made the Norwegian king cry on national television just after the premiere.

Elías og kongeskípt (‘Elías and the Royal Yacht’, 2007) is a children’s feature directed by Espen Fyksen (b. 1970) and Lise I. Osvoll (b. 1979). Based on a television show, it was well received by the public.

Finland

The animation boom reached Finland in the early 1990s. In 1993 the Finnish Film Foundation invited animators to present their ideas in order to receive special support. Finland’s first animation school started in Turku in 1994, headed by the Estonian master Priit Pärn. In 1995 Cartoon Forum, the European cofinancing event for animation, was held in Turku.

The independent production of animated TV series was revived. Aurinko on keltainen kirahvi (‘The Sun Is a Yellow Giraffe’, 1997–2003), by animator Antonia Ringborn (b. 14 November 1946) and Jaana Wahlforss (b. 1957) depicted poems. The puppet animation Urpo & Turpo (‘Umpy & Tumpy’, 1996–1997) featured anarchic teddy bears and was directed by Liisa Helminen (b. Turku, 15 February 1950), Marjut Rimminen (b. 1944), and the Estonian Riho Unt (b. 1956). Marjut Rimminen moved to Britain in 1973 and continued to work there (see the section on British animation). Her 2007 film Learned by Heart, produced in Finland, x-rays the country’s history through the eyes of a child.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finnish animation makers often cooperated with Estonians on the other side of the Gulf of Finland. For example, the first parts of Urpo & Turpo were animated at the Nukufilm studio in Tallinn.

The puppet animation Turilas ja Jääri (‘Tootletubs & Jyro’, 2001) is a hilarious series about two bugs, directed by Ismo Virtanen (b. Jyväskylä, 15 November 1965) and Mariko Harkonen (b. Tokyo, 2 December 1970). This 13-part series was completely made in Finland and shot on 35mm film. It was also screened in cinemas as a feature in 2001.

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93 Torill Kove comments about her work:

I got involved in animation in the early 1990s, fairly late in life. At the time I had lost my job as an urban planner in Montreal and was not feeling optimistic about finding another one. I decided that I would take a bit of a risk and see if I could find something to do in life that mostly involved drawing from the imagination.

I was curious about animation and started watching animation films that I could rent at the library. They were mostly NFB films. This way, I was introduced to a kind of animation that was really quite new to me, and I found them quite intriguing. I audited a seminar in the animation department at Concordia University, and afterwards I enrolled in their degree programme.

After one year I was hired as an animation assistant at the NFB animation studio. It led to other jobs and taught me some basic animation skills.

[... ] Primarily I like to write and make films about how people relate to each other. I am interested in the dynamics of close relationships, and about what we learn from each other. I think I have a responsibility to make films that actually are about something. My films won’t change the world or even inspire policy, but I do aspire to stir something up, be it thought or feeling, with stories.

[... ] I love animation as an artistic expression. It is perfect for people who don’t mind drawing the same thing over and over again. It’s a very open and forgiving art form and increasingly also very democratic. [... ] I have written some commissioned scripts, but mostly I just write for myself when I’m kind of stewing over a film I’d like to make. (Torill Kove, e-mail message to Giannalberto Bendazzi, 23 June 2010.)

94 By Heikki Jokinen.
Katarina Lilqvist (b. Tampere, 24 May 1963) made her first animation in 1991. Educated in Prague, she is a puppet animation director who has received several prizes, including the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. The basis of her reputation is the Kafka trilogy, *Hiiisangolla ratsastaja* (‘Rider on the Bucket’, 1992), *Kamarinaikara* (‘The Chamberstorh’, 1993), and *Maalaisliikäiri* (‘The Country Doctor’, 1996). Her films are surrealistic, often pacifist, visually strong, and made with passion.

Lilqvist’s *Mire Bala Kale Hin* (‘ Tales from the Endless Roads’, 2001–2003), is a six-part series based on Rom tales and music. The Rom language version is probably the first animation series telling Rom tales in their original language. The tales best-loved by the audience were those in the third episode, *Mustan Suuran Legenda* (‘The Legend of the Black Sarah’), and the fourth, *Laulu hissipuista* (‘Song of the Gallows’).

Then Lilqvist made the puppet film *Uralin perhonen* (‘Far Away from Ural’, 2008), which caused major debate in Finland. It’s about the cruel Finnish civil war of 1918 and hints that the Finnish war hero Marshal Mannerheim might have been gay. The heated debate ended with almost 10 percent of the population watching the film on television.

The younger generation of animated filmmakers received a good education in animation from the Turku school or other institutions around the country offering shorter courses. Several former Turku students made their names with independent films. The puppet animation film *Lentoposti* (‘Air Mail’, 2002) by Kaisa Penttilä (b. 12 April 1975) is a study of a man’s mind. *Moni moitti muotoani* (‘Many Complained of My Look’, 2003) by Leena Jääskeläinen (b. 2 August 1975) tells a touching story of loneliness, based on Finnish folk poetry. The most powerful film by Tatu Pohjavyrtta (b. 1977) is the puppet animation *Elukka* (Animal’, 2005), the story of a father turning into a werewolf while his son accidentally gets the brains of a sheep.

Ami Lindholm’s (b. 1982) ironic *Ilo irti* (‘Irresistible Smile’, 2006) received the Zagreb festival student film prize and was a Cartoon d’Or finalist. Lindholm’s simple drawings show an air hostess on the job, suffering all kinds of travellers with an eternal smile.


Christian Lindblad (b. 29 March 1963) is an actor and live-action film director who turned to directing clay animation. *Space Pigs* (2000) reveals that the first spaceman was actually a pig, and *Eläköön markkinalaulus* (‘Last Supper’, 2001) ironically comments on the welfare state.

Finland has traditionally been a country without a major animation industry, but this has changed a little. The first feature animation since 1979, *Kesäisin valtiaat* (‘The Emperor’s Secret’) was released in 2006 and directed by Riina Hyytia (b. 1969). It is based on a motion capture aided TV series called *Itse valitaat*, set in the world of politics. This satire was screened on television once a week from 2001–2008 and drew a large audience.

The first Finnish drawn animation feature was *Röllin ydän* (‘Quest for a Heart’, 2007) by Pekka Lehtosaari (b. 1963), though it was actually animated in Moscow. The story is based on a children’s live-action TV series starring the troll Rolli.

However, the commercial success story of Finnish animation is the feature *Niko – lentäjän poika* (‘Niko & the Way to the Stars’, 2008) by Kari Juusonen and Danish Michael Hegner (b. 1964). The children’s film features the young reindeer Niko, who believes his father is one of the heroes of Santa’s Flying Forces and decides to find him. The CGI animated film was the most expensive film ever produced in Finland, but it was also the most successful. It was sold to over one hundred territories and more than two million viewers saw the film in cinemas.

The sequel, *Niko 2 – lentäjiäveljekset* (‘Niko 2 – Little Brother, Big Trouble’) was directed by Kari Juusonen. It premiered in autumn 2012 and was well received by the public and the critics.

After the year 2000, Finnish animation was faring better than ever. There was a medium-size – by European standards – animation studio, Anima Vitae. The level of education was good. Animation was accepted as an independent art form and subsidized by public funds. Its subject matter included politics, social satire, and humour. All animation techniques were used, though puppet animation was perhaps the strongest of them.

Iceland

Sigurður Brynjólfsson mined the Icelandic sagas for his 11-minute *Audun og ishjörnin* (‘Audun and the Polar Bear’,

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95 By Jónas Knútsson.
1993). The dream of Icelandic filmmakers, in live-action or animation, is to share the country’s unique narrative tradition with the rest of the world. One of the challenges of Icelandic cinema has been to render the nuances and complexities of the country’s culture in a way that is appealing to the rest of the world. Brynjóllsson revisited the sagas in his 20-minute puppet-animated film, Hreiðar heimski (‘Hreiðar the Stupid’), 1996.

In dramatic live-action films, this has often proven an insurmountable obstacle. Animated cinema, though, relies on a more basic narrative thrust in which the intricacies of the narrative are to be found in the form rather than in the content. Perhaps animators will be the first to translate Iceland’s cultural heritage to universal cinema.

In 2002, the Icelandic animation company CAOZ presented its first project, Līla lisjan jīoa (‘The Lost Little Caterpillar’) by Gunnar Karlsson (b. Helluvað, 24 March 1959), from the children’s book by Friðrik Erlingsson (b. Reykjavík, 4 March, 1962). The 26-minute tale of a wayward caterpillar was eight years in the making and was screened at the Chicago International Children’s Film Festival. That same year, CAOZ made a series of innovative commercials for the Icelandic fruit juice company, Sóki. ‘The Lost Little Caterpillar’ went on to break Icelandic box office records for a short.

CAOZ staked their claim as Iceland’s answer to Disney with Anna og skatsevîljar (‘Anna and the Moods’, 2007), a 26-minute animated short with characters voiced by Björk, Damon Albarn, and Terry Jones. It was written by the Icelandic poet and novelist Sjón Sigurðsson. The studio then made the feature Hetjar Valhallar – Ísir (‘Legends of Valhalla – THOR’, 2011), directed by Óskar Jónasson, Toby Genkel, and Gunnar Karlsson), which was a success at home and abroad.

The good times did not last. On 2 March 2012 the company’s CEO, Hilmar Sigurðsson, announced his resignation in the wake of differences with the majority of the board of directors. Gunnar Karlsson’s resignation followed. In an e-mail sent a month later, the manager’s and the director’s new joint venture, GunHil, was born.

**The Invasion of the Elves**

In 1995, Magnús Scheving (b. Reykjavík, 10 November 1964) published a children’s book called Latibær (‘Lazy Town’) to promote a healthier lifestyle and diet for children. Scheving followed his book’s success with a stage musical and a sequel, Latibær á Ölympisaleikjum (‘Lazy Town at the Olympics’).

Scheving then had the idea of turning the adventures of ‘Lazy Town’ into an international TV series, produced in Iceland with puppets and live performers, and also making heavy use of CGI. In view of the short history of animation and film production in Iceland, this was folly by any standards. However, what seem like delusions of grandeur to most people are often modest proposals to the average Iceland. The Lazy Town series premiered on the Nickelodeon channel in 2004 and its characters became household names in the United States.

**Estonia**

Even when Estonia was still part of the Soviet Union, and all the films and scenarios were financed and approved by the Moscow Cinema Committee (Goskino), the figurative character of animation allowed the creation of unique worlds. Animated films spoke metaphorically about human and social problems, contradicting the ruling cultural policy. The environment of many-levelled bureaucracy was conducive to the creation of artful films.

Estonia regained independence in August 1991. Animation succeeded in maintaining its extremely high artistic standards and remained a carrier of elite culture. Yet Estonian film, including animation, changed in character because authors no longer needed to veil their intentions or say things in roundabout ways.

In Soviet times, an average of three puppet and three drawn animations were completed each year. The number of shorts fell in the first days of independence, but feature-length drawn films appeared on the scene. Since 1999–2000, computer technology, including CGI animation, has been used in production.


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96 This Gunnar Karlsson is not related to the Swedish animation producer by the same name (1924–1985).

97 By Jaan Ruus.


Janno Põldma (b. Tallinn, 7 November 1950) was a prolific, successful theatre playwright. His directing debut was in the Nukufilm Studio in 1991, with the puppet film *Vennad ja õed (*‘Brothers and Sisters’). In 1994, his *Sünnapäev (*‘Birthday’) received a special prize from the prestigious Fantoche Festival in Switzerland. *Armatastse võimalikkuses (*‘On the Possibility of Love’, 1999) also received accolades.

About Põldma, Priit Pärn wrote: ‘He is there [in the memory of common people] together with Heiki Ernits with two long children’s films [*Ladybirds’ Christmas and Lotte from Gadgetville, see below]. From my point of view Janno’s shorts [...] are really important in Estonian animation history."

Because they were so expensive to produce, the number of animated films declined. By the end of the 2000s the output had fallen to between four and a maximum of nine films annually. Nevertheless, the artistic level of those films remained high, with prevalent irony and humor.

The Soviet-era monopolistic studio Tallinnfilm was closed down and many others took its place. In 1993, Tallinnfilm’s splinter studio Nukufilm (meaning ‘puppet film’) was established. It produced cut-out and puppet films, series, and advertising, and turned out 30 to 60 minutes of film annually. Under its managing director and producer Arvo Nuut (b. Tallinn, 13 April 1941), Nukufilm became home for many former Tallinnfilm directors. They included Riho Unt, Hardi Volmer, Rao Heidmets, and Mati Kutt.

In 1994, the independent studio Eesti Joonisfilm (*Estonian Drawn Films) was formed by drawn animation filmmakers. Its owners included renowned Tallinnfilm animators Priit Pärn, Mati Kutt, Heiki Ernits, and Janno Põldma. It was also where Priit Tender (b. Tallinn, 7 February 1971) and Úlo Pikkk (b. Tallinn, 15 June 1976) began their careers. Olav Ehala (b. Tallinn, 31 July 1950) regularly composed music for the studio’s productions and Kalev Tamm (b. Tallinn, 15 November 1966) kept his position as producer. The annual output was 30 to 70 titles – mostly auteur films, but also TV series.

In 1994, the Danish film studio A. Film established a subsidiary of the same name in Tallinn, which became an independent studio in 2011. As a production house, it produced hand-drawn and computer animation for features (Danish, German, Irish, French, Spanish, American, British, Swedish, and Norwegian) and TV broadcasts (Danish, German, French), as well as for educational productions and commercials. The studio produced the characters and animation for Denmark’s Oscar-nominated *Kui hing läheb oma teed (*‘When Life Departs’, 1996). The studio’s producer and managing director was Kristel Töldsepp (b. Tallinn, 26 September 1974); the creative head and animation director was Meelis Arulepp (b. Tartu, 9 May 1965).

The small universal production studio Multi Film was established in 1999, headed by Mikk Rand (b. Tallinn, 1 August 1970). Short animations were also directed by Heiliika Võsu (later Pikkk, b. Tartu, 9 May 1982), Elisabeth Salmin (b. Tallinn, 26 November 1979), and Birgit Demi- dova (b. Loksa, 26 November 1984).

The state remained the primary source of financing. Film production in the small country (1.2 million inhabitants) depended entirely on state subsidies. To improve the situation, the Cultural Endowment Foundation was established in 1995 to support national art projects. It received its income from excise taxes on alcohol, tobacco, and gambling.

Estonian animation took pride in a new generation of filmmakers born in the 1970s. Úlo Pikkk, Priit Tender,

Together with the works of the masters born in the 1940s (Priit Pärn, Mati Kutt) and 1950s (Riho Unt, Hardi Volmer, Rao Heidmets), Estonian films continued to shine at international festivals. In the meantime, the country’s main animation studios, Eesti Joonisfilm and Nukufilm, managed to become economically secure by making series for international TV stations.


Tom ja Fluffy (‘Tom & Fluffy’, 1997) was made for children by directors Leo Lätti (b. Tallinn, 9 June 1957), Heiki Ernits, and Janno Põldma, as was Lotte reis lõunamaale (‘Lotte’s Journey South’, 2000), by Ernits and Põldma. Both were drawn animation series depicting the adventures of animal characters with humour and no violence. They became very popular among Estonian families with the advent of DVDs.

From 2003, Nukufilm studio also produced the irregular series Mirjam, named after its girl character. The company A. Film proposed a German-Denmark-Estonian series about the world of children called Mis müttes? (‘Things You Think’), directed by Karsten Külerich (b. Slagelse, Denmark, 21 January 1955) and Meelis Arulepp.

In December 2004, the drawn animation feature Frank ja Wendy (‘Frank & Wendy’, by script and art director Priit Parn and directors Kaspar Jancis, Ülo Pikkov, and Priit Tender) opened Animated Dreams, part of the Eighth Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival. It was a South Park-style political satire. The film followed the adventures of two American super agents, with absurd humour and political incorrectness. Estonia’s grand old man of animation, Priit Parn, produced a delightfully ironic script.

The Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (POFF) is held annually at the end of November. The Animated Dreams section includes an international short animation contest. Each year, the festival presents a retrospective of one well-known animation master and a special selection from one country’s animation work.

One popular success was Heiki Ernits’s and Janno Põldma’s feature Lepatriinude jõulud (‘Ladybirds’ Christmas’, 2001), about two ladybirds brought into a house on a Christmas tree. In late 2006, the first Estonian animated feature made especially for movie theatres was released, Leisiäytekäsilu Lotte (‘Lotte from Gadgetville’, 2006). Written by Andrus Kivirähk (b. Tallinn, 17 August 1970) and directed by Heiki Ernits and Janno Põldma, it created a violence-free world of whimsical characters.

Meanwhile, surrealism carried Mati Kutt’s powerful puppet works: *Pòvanda bhine* (‘Underground’, 1997); *Nõobi odisseia* (‘Button’s Odyssey’, 2002), and *Une institut* (‘The Institute of the Dream’, 2006). Kutt became prominent among Estonian surrealist artists. His *Taevalaul* (‘Sky Song’, 2010) was hailed by critics as a film that ‘overcomes gravitation with surrealist powers and rises into heights where few can breathe’. It explored dream logic on a grand scale – a journey to the moon, meetings with Salvador Dalí and Alfred Hitchcock, and the exploration of Sigmund Freud’s subconscious.

A grotesque and melancholic drawn animation, *Kroko-dill* (‘Crocodile’, 2009), by Kaspar Jancis, won the highly coveted Cartoon d’Or, the traditional award of European animation.

In addition, there were two well-made documentaries about masters of Estonian animation. *Pàrnography – mees animatsioonist* (‘Pärnography – Man of Animation’, 2005; script by Toomas Kall, directed by Hardi Volmer, and produced by Arko Oikk) portrays the most celebrated Estonian animator, Pritt Pärn. *Aja meistrid* (‘The Kings of Animation’, 2005), written and directed by Priit Pärn, is a clever film about Elbert Tuganov (Baku, Azerbaijan, 22 February 1920 – Tallinn, 13 October 1925), who founded Estonian puppet film. It reconstructs the era from the 1950s to the 1990s, blending documentary footage with animation.

In the course of the Eesti Film100 project in 2012, several classic animated films (by Elbert Tuganov; Heino Pars; Rein Raamat, and Pritt Pärn) were restored and a new Estonian Film Museum opened its doors. A department of animation was established in the Estonian Art Academy in 2006, cochaired by Pritt Pärn and Ulo Pikkov.

Through the decades, Estonian animation kept its spirit of experimentation. For instance, eight directors of Eesti Joonisfilm produced films based on well-known Estonian poems (*Must Lagi*, ‘Black Ceiling’, 2007). It was the distribution and funding of the films that caused concern, since the animation still depended on state subsidies.

### Pritt Pärn99

As a consequence of Nikita Khrushchev’s policy of decentralization and balanced ethnic representation, from the 1950s onwards animation studios gradually began to be built up in Soviet centres such as Tallinn in Estonia, Kiev in the Ukraine, Yerevan in Armenia, and Tbilisi in Georgia. They contributed to the formation of what David MacFadyen calls the ‘Soviet type of cartoon’ which was ‘both national in form and socialist in content’.100

Nukufilm, the animation department at the Estonian Tallinnfilm Studio, was established in 1957.101 The animated films it made were recognized for their authors’ original vision and their appetite for experiments.102

Pritt Pärn, born in Tallinn on 26 August 1946, began working at Joonisfilm in 1976. His output includes many short films and advertisements, as well as films up to half an hour in length. His work has been awarded more than 80 prizes at international festivals such as Zagreb, Stuttgart, Hiroshima, Brussels, and Ottawa.103

Pärn distinguished himself through his expressiveness and originality. He was able to find ways to convey satirical messages with subtle, eccentric humour. His drawing style could be described as ‘grotesque realism’; his graphic style came mainly from Poland and Czechoslovakia. As a cartoonist, he presents important issues with absurd black humour.

He remained a genuine cartoonist even when he was an animation director. His notion of animation involves satirical pictorial metaphors in incongruent combinations of images and metamorphoses. A basic familiarity with cartoon language and symbolism is probably needed to grasp Pärn’s films. In places where cartoons and caricature are not deep-rooted in the culture, Pärn’s work would likely give the impression of being from a distant planet.

What Pärn strove for in his moving cartoons was a caricature of Soviet society. Everyone and everything

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99 By Midhat Ajanović and Doi Nobuaki.
101 In 1971, the specialized drawn animation department Joonisfilm was established, with the help of Russian master Fedor Khitruk.
103 Pärn won top prizes in Zagreb in 1988 (for *Breakfast on the Grass*), 1996 (for *1895*), and 2010 (for *Divers in the Rain*, with Olga Pärn). In 1992 he won the Baden-Württemburg Prize in Stuttgart (for *Hotel E*) and in 1998 he triumphed in Ottawa (for *Night of the Carrots*).


The soundtrack is characterized by Western popular music. (Tom Jones accompanies the nostalgic memories of the bureaucrat.)

In the documentary *Pärnography* (Hardi Volmer, Estonia, 2005).
animated cartoons that challenge the material world. The film combines cumulative jokes of every kind with instant, static jokes. In the first part, we see a cat-like character in a room. He tries clumsily to follow a schedule that comes in the form of dictates from a clock. But the hand of the omnipotent animator intrudes, throwing the clock into the void beyond the screen, and time ceases to exist.

Then Pärn’s character suddenly finds himself in a world of total freedom, a space without beginning or end, unlimited by physical laws or time. Pärn conjures up the limitless possibilities through effective and very inventive incongruous images – for example, a hen laying glasses that hatch into two eyes and a figure filing down waves to calm the sea.

According to Pärn, to create animated images is ‘to organize two ways of thinking at the same time and in the same head’. The two ways of thinking are ‘fantasy thinking, which means to put together two or more things that have previously never been together; and engineer-like, mathematically structured thinking, which helps us to build up the logical structure of the film’.

Pärn’s international breakthrough came in the mid-1980s with glasnost and perestroika. Censorship disappeared almost completely, but the state financed various film companies up until the breakup of the Soviet Union. Pärn had the opportunity to produce his 30-minute Eine murul (‘Breakfast on the Grass’, 1987, whose script had been written in 1983). It is one of the most remarkable satirical animated films ever made. Through incongruent images, the body movements and gestures of figures, and an associative montage of intruding mental images, Pärn conveys mankind’s emotional condition, marked by loneliness, fear, and anxiety.

The four-part film describes the everyday lives of four characters, two female and two male. Around them is an urban environment, composed of absurd but easily recognizable scenes of ‘real-life socialism’. In Robinson’s words, ‘Pärn trenchantly critiques the absurdities of Communist society by giving viewers a rare glimpse of daily endurance in the Soviet Union.’ Humanity only exists in the mind of bureaucratic pen-pushers, or scrawled on fake stage walls.

Pärn captures strange images that cause unease and creep under the skin. The pessimistic feelings radiated by the drawings are ones that existed deep down in people imprisoned in an ideological nightmare. The unifying thread is a stylized figure representing Picasso. A flock of black birds flies above his head like vultures circling a carcass, while policemen or secret service agents continually drag him away.

In the first story, Anna tries to buy an apple in an almost empty supermarket. This part is made in a grey-scale, painting a depressing everyday scene in the socialist metropolis. Uniformly dressed people shuffle around the streets. You can almost smell the brown coal smoke hanging over a city. The only thing that is not grey is the apple, painted in a glowing greenish yellow.

The monotony and hopelessness are underlined by scenes of rain, wind, and dead dogs lying on pavements and a market where people sell useless things. After many fruitless attempts to get the apple Anna must sell her body to obtain the desired fruit.

In the second story, we see Georg in an aristocratic drawing room, stretching and performing gymnastic moves before a mirror, while beautiful classical music chimes in the background. Suddenly the wind blows the window open and Georg’s dream is blown away. The whole picture melts, the colours fade, and all that is left is greyness. Georg sits in a shabby flat, dressed like everyone else, while marching music from a military band comes in from outside.

Berta is the film’s third character. She loses her face when her baby appears. On the empty space where her face used to be she draws on a few clumsy lines to represent her eyes, mouth, and nose. This painful metaphor for the loss of identity culminates in the despairing Berta smashing a wall of portraits of herself while the rain washes away her drawn-on ‘face’.

The last character in the quartet, Eduard, initially looks like a giant. But the nearer he comes to Moscow, the smaller he becomes. Finally he has shrunk to a dwarf, so that his one-eyed boss is like a Cyclops in comparison. Eduard uses a teaspoon to gouge out the boss’s eye and ink flows out of the boss’s wound.

Finally, the four main characters find comfort and happiness in a fantasy world; they are united in Manet’s famous painting, Breakfast on the Grass. But this escape into imagination lasts only a moment. They are forced to return to their brutal world, where Picasso lies in the street and a steamroller rolls over his painting hand.

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109 Priit Pärn’s quotations are taken from his lecture on narrative techniques in animation at the Festival for Animated Film in Eksjö, Sweden, September 2003.

Chapter 3: Estonia

How did Pärn succeed in the post-Soviet era? Support from the government is one factor. Animators got 30 to 70 percent of the money for their productions, though they still needed to make up the cost. In Pärn’s case, the funding came from the studio Joonisfilm.111

Pärn’s attitude is rebellious, his humour a way of resisting for the weak. If you cannot fight with too strong an enemy, you can use a joke that the enemy doesn’t understand. But what should be resisted, after the totalitarian society collapses?

The main stage in Hotell E (‘Hotel E’, 1992) is ‘Hotel Europe’. A wall and door divide two rooms: the ugly, grey, monochrome, busy world of the East and the beautiful, colourful, elegant, and slow world of the West. The film was completed in 1992, immediately after Estonia experienced a radical social change and people hoped for a better life in the Western system.

The film seems to reflect such a view, but in reality Pärn is warning the viewer. According to the filmmaker, his personal experience was put into the film. Pärn had come and gone between East and West and knew that the West was not as good as Easterners imagined.

The film begins with two introductions: The Legend of the Traitor and The Legend of the Redeemer. These two episodes are set in a distant past and their relationship is just like that of the two rooms in Hotel Europe. The filmmaker points out the possibility that society will become worse instead of better. People in the colourful world enjoy the freedom and look graceful. But their words are limited to dumb sentences (e.g. ‘Oh shit’, ‘How are you?’, ‘I’m fine.’) They have the freedom to say anything but have nothing to say. The worst thing is that they seem to think their lives are perfect and their actions are their own.

At the end, everybody sits around the table and starts to act in ritualistic ways, just like people in the grey world, without any order or compulsion. It is their voluntary obedience. In ‘Hotel E’, there is a TV series called The American Dream. The end of the Cold War means this dream now dominates the world. The characters look happy, but what they really do is destroy everyone, including themselves. This is the world after everyone achieves freedom.

Parn takes notes that power doesn’t always look like power, that it may not be a manifest enemy like a dictator or a totalitarian society. It’s an entity that defines the behaviour of unconscious people. The influence of mass media becomes a major motif in his work.

In 1995 the artist made, for the centennial anniversary of cinema, 1895. It is a fake documentary on the Lumière Brothers and their invention. It is a film about cinema and how it influences people’s memories and understanding of history. Most of the plot consists of citations and parodies from famous films. But the made-up story is interesting and captivating. The viewer feels catharsis at the end, though the film is full of false information.

Oddly, these images are in their own way believable because they are based on biased images, on the images we tend to believe. (According to Pärn, the world in 1895 is viewed from the perspective of Paris.) Cinema is deceptive; our perception of the world is transformed by our exposure to cinema, and we don’t notice.

The atmosphere of Porgandite öö (‘Night of the Carrots’, 1998) is a fin de siècle one. The film looks like a modern fable, based on the cheap catastrophe stories that are always in the mass media. Many people try to enter a hotel and become members of a mysterious group called PGI. However, they fail, so they surround the building and protest. The happy few who can make it inside are shut in a room. They don’t look happy at all, although they avoid being anonymous and can boast a distinctive personality (like becoming a celebrity).

Important point: there is a powerful enemy, evil rabbits, hidden somewhere inside the hotel. Characters dream of a ‘Night of the Carrots’, when every rabbit will turn into a carrot and everything will be peace and happiness. With the visible evil gone, people seek an alternative figure to blame for their own bad lives – even a rabbit.

Karl ja Marilyn (‘Karl and Marilyn’, 2003) sums up the first period of Pärn’s post-Soviet films. The characters include Karl Marx and Marilyn Monroe. Karl is trying to escape his position as a superstar who must live up to everyone’s expectations. Marilyn, a country girl, yearns to be a celebrity in the big city. The figures are actual persons, but they become universal images. The film asks: Is there a real personality, separate from the images we expect?

Olga Marchenko (who became Olga Parn in 2008) was born on 1 January 1976 in Minsk, into an animation family. Her mother Elena Petkevich worked as an animation director at Belarusfilm. Olga herself started her career at the studio as an art director and animator. But soon she felt she needed more education and moved to France to study at La Poudrière, in Valence.

111 Joonisfilm was once a branch of the national production company Tallinnfilm. It became a private company in 1993. Among its creations was a popular character called Lotte, and the income from the series enabled the studio to produce ‘auteur’ short films. Joonisfilm Studio is co-owned by the filmmakers, including Parn.
Her mother strongly urged her to watch Priit Pärn’s films. Olga found Priit’s films in the school library and soon fell in love with them. The school invited Pärn to run a storytelling workshop at La Poudrière and Olga asked him to be her tutor while she made her graduation film.

Olga reignited Priit’s creativity at a time when he had stopped making films. He returned to the movie camera so that Olga could get a visa and move to Estonia so they could make animation together. Their collaboration started with a short segment in Must Lagi (‘Black Ceiling’, 2007), an anthology by Estonian directors. They chose charcoal animation, the first time Priit had used this technique for animation (although he used it frequently as a painter). Olga already had experience making films in oil and sand. Drawing on a frosted glass let Priit draw and erase very easily and do lighting from underneath.

‘Black Ceiling’ animated Estonian poems. Priit and Olga chose Jüri Üdi’s ‘I Feel a Lifelong Bullet in the Back of My Head’, based on the deportation of Estonian people to Siberia and their massacre by the Russians. Priit and Olga added a new dimension. The film is full of intimate feelings and laughter, reflecting strange but strong relationships between lovers.

Both a man’s voice and a woman’s voice narrate the poem many times. The voices gradually start to laugh. By repeating the poem again and again, the filmmakers try to break it away from the historic tragedy. The man’s narration is in a ‘true’ Estonian accent, while the woman has a Russian accent. The film insists that the relationship between Estonia and Russia go to the next level of intimate collaboration, exemplified by Olga and Priit themselves. Olga speaks Russian very fluently, and she fell in love with the Estonian Priit.

Eli ilma Gabriella Ferrita (‘Life without Gabriella Ferri’, 2008)\(^{112}\) deals with personal topics. According to Priit, what enabled him to make the film was his personal experience: the death of his first wife in 2004 and his encounter with Olga.

A young woman dives into water after grasping one of her own hands softly, symbolizing the parting with her boyfriend. A husband and a wife caress each other enthusiastically, but their lonely son interrupts them. In this world where nobody can get the connections that he or she hopes for, a thief is the exception. He takes everything he wants by his hand, including people, and he really is Death.

144 Chapter 3: Latvia

Tuukrid Vihmas (‘Divers in the Rain’, 2010) is about a man and a woman who live in the same house. He works as a diver in the daytime; she is a dentist at night. Their meetings are brief: they just have coffee together and kiss goodbye. The film is a parable about isolation and lack of communication. There is always rain; its sound isolates people softly, matching the overall atmosphere. Purposely, the story does not evolve. Through many tiny episodes, the diver slowly recognizes the tremendous gap between him and his lover.

Lendurid Koduteel (‘Pilots on the Way Home’, 2014) illustrates the real and imaginary worlds that three pilots have to face after having survived the loss of their plane in the desert. Another of Priit and Olga’s great films, it is based on an innovative technique that combines drawn and sand animation.

Pärn’s career as a director started in the 1970s and endured through many important political changes, but his approach remained the same. He observes people who are trapped in some context. In the socialist era, he contemplated a society that made people obedient. After the collapse of the Soviet Empire, he criticized how people trap themselves.

Latvia\(^{113}\)

Following the country’s independence from the Soviet Union, Latvia’s transition to a market economy wasn’t easy and sometimes led to productions collapsing. However, animation survived quite well. A government decision in 1990 proclaimed that all artistic associations were independent from the state.

A National Film Centre was established to grant separate financial support to fictional live-action films, documentaries, and animation. It also supported the non-commercial distribution of films. The National Culture Capital Foundation was created to support cultural projects, extending to filmmaking in 1997. These two bodies became the main internal financial sources for animation filmmakers.

The puppet animators and the drawn animation filmmakers in the district of Šmerlis joined forces to create the Dauka studio. In 1991, Arnolds Burovs initiated production at Dauka with his last film before retirement, Spe ˉle ar Dzlı ˉvı ˉbu (‘A Game with Life’). Piemineklis (‘The

\(^{112}\)Gabriella Ferri (1942–2004) was an Italian folk singer.

\(^{113}\)By Ieva Viese.
Monument’, 1991) was the first episode of the comic puppet series AvarijasBrigāde (‘Rescue Team’), directed by Jānis Cimermanis. It was a popular hit.

Two series of short drawn films followed, made by different directors: Rāķķiņšņējs (‘The Zip’) and Kriķķiņš (‘Trifles’). The films were made by young artists who had no directing experience, including Inga Praulīna and Signe Baumane. There was a different director for almost every episode. However, the initiative was a fiasco overall, and many of the directors never made anything significant.

In the meantime, Roze Stiebka and Ansis Bērziņš directed the educational Kā bērniņš nāk pasaule (‘How a Baby Comes into This World’) and Ness un Nesja (‘Ness and Nessy’, 1991), the first Latvian animated feature film. However, the techniques of the separate groups were quite different, and their cooperation on these two films wasn’t successful.

In 1992, the puppet group split off and Dauka became a studio for drawn animation only. Roze Stiebka and Ansis Bērziņš continued working and directing drawn films, in cooperation with Latvian artists and musicians. Such artists as Helēna Heinrihson, Juris Petraskevič’s, and Kaspar Zariņš joined the team, as well as composers Valts Pāce, Uģis Praulīns, and Ingus Bauškenieks. They continued pursuing themes and characters from folklore and literature.

The series Pasacinas (‘The Little Fairytale’, 26 films in total) was made with storylines based on poems from Latvian authors (Rainis, Aspazija, Fricis Bārda, and others) and lullabies. Other significant films included kākša Dzīrnavuņas (‘The Cats’ Mill’, 1993), Neaparastie rīdzinieki (‘The Unusual Rigans’, 2001), and Spēlēju, dancoju (‘I Played, I Danced’, 2007).

Dauka’s films are considered a part of Latvian cultural heritage and the studio is primarily concerned with local children. The national television channel premieres all of their films.

The puppet filmmakers called themselves Animācijas Brigāde. Jānis Cimermanis (working with the producer, screenwriter, and children’s storyteller Māris Putniņš) continued the episodes of ‘Rescue Team’. The studio made other series: Munks un Lemijs (‘Munk and Lemy’), Zviēri (‘Animals’), and Rezgalības (‘Mischievous’).

In 1996, the group teamed up with the Danish production company Zentropa to found the Aboom Studio for international coproductions. Under this banner, Jānis Cimermanis worked on the puppet features Props un Berta (‘Props and Berta’, codirected with Dutch director Per Fly) and Trīs musketieri (‘The Three Musketeers’, based on the novel by Alexandre Dumas).

Cimermanis directed short films as well. In 2004, he made Pūm pa kilmeni, illustrating the threshing process as a cultural tradition of the same importance as any festival. Latvietis (‘The Latvian’, 2007) is an ironic look at the history of Latvian folk, followed in 2008 by KaraTuleh.116

New talents appeared at the studio: Nils Skapaņs (b. Riga, 25 September 1969), Dace Rīdūze (b. Cēsis, 15 May 1973), Ėvalds Lācis (b. Riga, 1 July 1974), and Māris Brinkmanis (b. Tukums, 29 September 1975). Skapaņs, a former cameraman, started working on episodes of ‘Munk and Lemy’. He soon received the Crystal Bear for best children’s short at the Berlin International Film Festival. Seven episodes of ‘Munk and Lemy’ were followed by the series Zviēri (‘Animals’). The latter was compiled into the film Caurā māja (‘Leaky House’), which won Skapaņs the national festival’s Lielaīs Kristaps Prize for Best Director of Animation.


Dauka and Animācijas Brigāde were the dominant makers of animation until 1995, when the Rīja studio was founded. The manager of the studio, the producer Vilnis Kalnaelis, had started working at Dauka, but soon it was clear that his ideas for an animation studio differed from those of Roze Stiebka and Ansis Bērziņš. Stiebka and Bērziņš prioritized the local distribution of their films; the

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114 During the Soviet period, people were held back from discussing themes connected to sexual life and childbirth. Therefore, this educational film about natural processes had extra significance.

115 After failing – for financial reasons – to finish a feature animation of his own, Ansis Bērziņš stopped directing and had become a producer by 1993.

116 The title is deliberately put in a dialect. It means ‘A Poem about Threshing’ but it is usually left untranslated in catalogues.

117 This title is not in Latvian but in the Estonian language, meaning ‘the bear is coming’. The storyline was derived from real news: a Latvian bear swam to the extremely distant Ronu (Ruhnu) island belonging to Estonia.
involvement of Latvian artists, writers, and composers; and Latvian children as the target audience.

Vilnis Kalnaelis wanted a producer-organized studio, where animators could work on several projects at a time. These would include international coproductions. Much emphasis was put on international distribution, film festivals, and screen time on television and in cinemas.

Rija became the best internationally known Latvian film studio. Its first collaboration was Kirikou and the Sorceress (‘Kirikou et la Sorcière’, Michel Ocelot, 1998), with the French companies Tiramisu and Les Armateurs. It made ten times its expected box office income and brought the studio well-deserved attention.

Rija’s animators later worked on the Oscar-nominated The Triplets of Belleville (‘Les Triplettes de Belleville’, 2003), the French-Canadian feature directed by Sylvain Chomet. For the feature Lote no Izgudrota ˇjciena (‘Lotte from Gadgets’, 2006) by the Estonian directors Heiki Ernits and Janno Põldma, Rija provided the services and also took an important part in the production process.

Moreover, Rija helped local directors. Signe Baumane, Vladimir Leshchiov, Jurģis Krāssons, Reinis Kalnaelis, Aija Bley, Aksols Saulūtis, Riita Mežavilka, and others have all made their films there and brought the studio international recognition.

Dauka, Animācijas Brigāde, and Rija are the most important animation producers in Latvia. Gradually, however, the names of other studios have appeared as well and many animators move between studios on different projects.

Nils Skāpāns, despite his success with Māris Putniņš’ dolls at Animācijas Brigāde, wanted to experiment with different materials and storylines. In 2000, he created Klucāņija (literally, ‘Brickland’, untranslated in most cases) from wooden bricks. However, he sought new challenges and soon decided to leave the studio for a space where he could express his artistic intentions. He went to Juris Podnieks Film Studio and started to create films under the brand name Nilsongs. His first work there was Pavasaris (‘Spring’, 2001).

The figures in his works were mostly from Plasticine. His characters were very emotional and he used his abilities to bulge their cheeks, slick down their ears, or move their bodies in a hyperbolic manner. Occasionally Nils invited sculptors (Ilze Emse, Vika Valdmane, and the Estonian artist Annely Poldsaar). However, he was the scriptwriter, director, animator, cameraman, and editor for most of his films.

Although the majority of his films were addressed to children, Klucāņija (2000), Diversija (‘Diversion’, 2001), and Telefons (‘Telephone’, 2005) are all pungent films for adults.

Signe Baumane (b. Auce, 7 August 1964) graduated in philosophy at Moscow University and worked as an animator at Dauka from 1989. She made her first short film, The Witch and the Cow, in 1991 for the series Trifles. Then she spent two years in Moscow, where she illustrated children’s books and published a book of her own. Subsequently, she returned to Dauka to make Kurpītes (‘Tiny Shoes’, 1993), a spoof of fairy tales.

In 1995, she moved to New York and started working in Bill Plympton’s film studio. However, she made several of her own films in New York as well (Love Story, The Threatened One, Natasha – created in close collaboration with Josh Rechnitz – and Five Fucking Fables). All of them have provocative sexual themes and images. At first, they were treated with circumspection by a Latvian public unused to this type of liberty, especially in animated films still associated with children’s entertainment. Nevertheless, Baumane’s films were appreciated worldwide.

In 2002, Signe Baumane returned to Latvia to create Sieviete (‘Woman’), made in the Rija studio. In this story, she expresses how a woman lives in her world of passions. On her next return to Latvia, she made Veteriņarsts (‘Veterinarian’), an award-winning story of tenderness. In the US, she directed Dentist (2003), followed by Birth (2009). The latter film again illustrates the subjective, intimate feelings of women’s experience, with a dose of humour. In 2009, it was nominated for The Golden Bear at Berlinale.

Signe Baumane’s films have an interesting system of characters and images. People’s emotions or states may be expressed with bestial figures; she freely uses hyperbole and very bold metaphors. She plays with fairy tales, fables, and advertisements.

Vladimir Leshchiov (b. Daugavpils, 10 March 1970) began working in advertising in 1991. He went to study animation at Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Eksjö, Sweden. His first films were Vestale (‘The Letter’, 2002) and Vesteska Modus (‘Grandad’s Honey’, 2002). The latter is a peaceful, touching story about an old man’s last moments and it brought Leshchiov various festival awards.

Each of Vladimir Leshchiov’s films is created in a different technique – lead pencil, oil ink, colour pencils, gouache, and watercolours. He maintains it is the intonation of the film that determines the materials. While working with the script, he already knows what material he is going to use. He is very attentive to detail; by adding background characters and carefully creating the relationships between the characters and their environment, his animated places become highly believable.

The first film that Leshchiov made in Latvia was Bezmiēgs (‘Insomnia’, 2004), a superb exercise in surreal
comedy, Žudusi sniegę ('Lost in Snow', 2007), on the other hand, was surreal and melancholy, telling the story of old fishermen. Sparni un ari (Wings and Oars', 2009) received the Lielais Kristaps for Best Latvian Animated Film 2009 and many international festival prizes.

The action in Leshchiov’s films doesn’t develop predictably from common situations and conflicts. Rather, his films play with subjective views and the restructuring of events. To shift the action to another level, different states of consciousness are used – the passions from emotions, the dizziness from alcohol.

Jurga Krūsoms (b. Tukums, 14 February 1970) graduated from the Latvian Academy of Arts as a painter. However, he established a career as one of the leading production designers for live-action film in Latvia. He also designed such animated films as Kītra un Rubinsteins ('Clara & Rubinstein', 1999, directed by Askolds Sauliūs) and Vai Riga jau gatava? ('The National Hero', 2001, directed by Rūta Mežavilka), and he directed Melnā Kaste ('The Black Box', 2006) and Norit Kriņi ('To Swallow a Toad', 2010). The latter was shown at the Cannes film festival in 2010.

Edmonds Jansons (b. Saldus, 10 May, 1972) began at Dauka. His artistic career includes animating, filming, editing, and directing; he also worked on documentaries and in fiction films. His first animated film was Haikas ('Haiku') in 1995. In Dauka, he made Žvaigždu īēja ('Starry Tea', 1999), Baltā ('The White One', 2001), and Šķērsgrēzis ('Scissorman', 2005).

At Studio Centrums in 2007, he directed Little Bird’s Diary, the first Latvian documentary animation. Pavasaris Vārnu nelē ('Springtime on Vārnu Street') was a musical tale about suburban kids in the early twentieth century that received the greatest number of nominations at the 2007 Lielais Kristaps awards. Jansons also made a bland children’s film, Lapatīniņš ('Shammies', 2010).

The documentary film director Aija Bley (b. Liepaja, 20 July 1967) created Eža kažōņi ('The Pricky’, 2005), the first Latvian animation using computer graphics. Another of her works was a wholly fresh look at animation, the erotic Doktora D sala ('The Island of Doctor D’, 2005). It was created with artist Patricija Brekte (b. Riga, 1981); they also created Sieviete un Veļš ('Woman and Wind', 2010) – a story of passions between a Western woman and the Eastern wind.

Kārlis Vitols (b. Riga, 21 March, 1979) made animated films to supplement his paintings. Fetisų dārzs ('The Garden of Fetish', 2006) and Aptomsums ('Eclipse’, 2010) were created for his exhibitions. However, they are not just meant to be seen with the paintings and have attracted more attention as artworks on their own.

Vitols worked in computerized collage techniques, using diverse materials in his films – his own and other paintings, as well as posters and photos. His other films include Trofeja ('Trophy’, 2004), Melhānisms ('The Mechanism’, 2007), and Velna Fudži ('Devil’s Fuji’, 2010).

Graphic designer Egils Mednis (b. Riga, 13 November 1962) made Kaģis ('The Ship’, 2007) in the computer-game technology Machinima. It won him the jury prize in the Next Generation Machinima Contest in California, 2008. The same year, it also won at the Machinima Film Festival in New York.

Lithuania

In the 1980s and 1990s, many Lithuanian animators emerged from the ranks of architects, designers, graphic artists, and cartoonists. After the country became independent again in 1990, some artists founded their own studios. In 2004, the Lithuanian Film Studio was privatized, leading to a gradual reduction in production.

In 1986, the director Valentinus Aškinis (b. Šiauliai, 1959) created the drawn television lullaby Dele Megas ('Uncle Sleep’), commissioned by Lithuanian TV. She also made the animated film Kaktuso paslaptis ('The Secret of a Cactus’, jointly produced by the Lithuanian Film Studio and Mosfilm, 1989). ‘The Secret of a Cactus’ is based on a fairy tale by the Lithuanian writer Vytautas Zilinskaite. Aškinis worked on the script with the Russian director Vladimir I. Parker, seeking a technique to preserve his hatched drawing style.


Jūratė Leikaitė (b. 1963) debuted in 1996 with a striking and impressive film for adults, Metamorfozės (‘Metamorphoses’), which took her six years to make. Later, she created Braškės ant eglės (‘Strawberries on a Fir’, 1999), and three films about a snail: Snaižė Maica (‘The Snail Nellie’, 2000), Siaurėnių bokštas (‘The Tower of Dreams’, 2001), and Solistė (‘The Soloist’, 2002).


Ieva Bunokaite also worked in mixed techniques. Among her materials, she used appliqué, ceramic dolls, textiles, and flowers. Most of her films are based on Lithuanian fairy tales: Gudri dukterė (‘The Clever Daughter’, 1995), Lapė ir vynuogės (‘The Fox and the Grapes’, 1996), and Bičių piemuo (‘The Herd of Bees’, 1999).


‘Samogitian Genesis’ is the story of a tribe in search of their land. Algirdas Selenis says: ‘This fairy tale is interesting because it connects the Old Testament with Lithuanian myth concerning bygone times [. . .] It does not talk only about Samogitians, but also about the origin of all mankind. This fairy tale is archaic because it strongly reflects traces of matriarchy.’


Rasa Bereznicka (b. 1976) made La la la (id.), in 2007, in which sounds, seemingly improvised, are dominant. In the same year, Ieva Miškinytė (b. 1981) created Most (‘The Bridge’), a black and white film inspired by a Kafka miniature.


Synchronization (id., 2009), by Rimas Sakalauskas (b. 1985), represents modern experimental animation. The film is intended for lovers of drifting rotating objects, showing the influences of Star Wars, Andrei Tarkovsky, and Stanley Kubrick.

Belarus

Independence arrived in 1991. However, at the national animation studio Belarussfilm, Russia still had a strong influence. In addition to Igor Volchek and Elena Petkevich (see Vol. 2), such directors as Mikhail Tumelya (b. Minsk, 18 February 1963), Vitaly Bakunovich (b. Minsk, 1 December 1956), Vladimir Petkevich (b. Tavda, near Sverdlovsk, Russia, 20 October 1952), Aleksandr Shepetov, and Aleksandr Bychkovsky had all studied at the Moscow school of cinema.

Leonid Shukalyukov (b. Komsomolsk-na-Amure, Russia, 13 October 1947) and Olga Chikina (b. Minsk, 26 July 1947) founded Studiya-3. The private TV studio TVS-Validiya made cut-out and object animation films by Vitaly Bakunovich. Gori, gori (‘Burn, Burn,’ 1989), for example, used ordinary candles for the protagonists.

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121 In 2009, the film won the Golden Panda award for best student film at the Sichuan TV Festival in China.
122 By Antonina Karpilova.
Mikhail Tumelya, along with designer Dmitry Surinovich, directed the puppet feature Volshchina svirel (‘The Magic Pipe’, 1998). The film, which glorified the ancient Caucus people of Ossets, received awards at various international festivals.

Igor Volchek was the head of the animation branch at Belarusfilm during the 1990s and has been the key figure in the first twenty years of independent Belarusian animation. He brought the idea of auteur films to the country and won many awards at international festivals, both as director and soundtrack composer. Educated as a pianist, he cared as much for the sound as for the images, and many of his films are based on music – for example, Concerto grosso (id., 1988), Skertcho (‘Scherzo’, 1994), and Pastoral (id., 1998). His films deal with inner life and memories, often metaphorically.

For a long time, Belarusians considered Moscow the centre of their world and referred to Russian culture. In the new films, however, national principles became visible through such elements as language, music, clothes, and objects. The local mentality was depicted, too – optimism, mild humour, and curiosity towards different cultures. Christian values are at the heart of Belarusian civilization, and films with Christian issues became common.

Irina Kodyukova (b. Minsk, 25 July 1954) exemplifies this approach. Her philological studies led her to pay special attention to literary accuracy. Snyatotschie rasskazi (‘Christmas Tales’) is her most ambitious work, a cycle of nine short films that took a decade to complete. She chose the cut-out technique as best suited to her inspiration.


Vladimir Petkevich and his wife Elena Petkevich also deal with Christian issues. Among their works, often based on painting on glass and sand on glass, are Sny (‘Dreams’, 1992), Mesyatch (‘The Month’, 1993), Skazki lesa (‘Forest Tales’, 1996), Zhilo-bilo derevo . . . (‘Once upon a Time a Tree . . .’, 1996) and Skazki stargo pianino. Beikhenov (‘Tales of the Old Piano: Beethoven’, 2007).

The drawing style of Belarusian animation was originally inspired by book illustrations, for instance by Vyacheslav Tarasov (Rostov-Yaroslavsky, Russia, 17 October 1938–Minsk, 20 January 1997). Later, the best artists were Dmitry Surinovich (b. Vishenka, near Kirovsk, Mogilev region, 31 July 1953), Aleksandr Vereshchagin (b. Arkhalgelsk, Russia, 12 February 1949), the excellent colourist Alla Matyushevskaya (b. Baku, Azerbaijan, 23 December 1950), Tatyana Kublitskaya (b. Khachinka, Mogilev region, 12 October 1956), and Natalya Kostyuchenko.

Even in the computer era, manual techniques were highly praised. Most of the Belarusian films were based on drawn animation, puppet animation, two-dimensional puppet animation, coloured sand, and so on. Elena Petkevich made the first well-received computer animated film, Pesenka dlya kanareyky (‘A Song for the Canary’, 2002).


Also popular were Tatyana Zhitkovskaya’s comedies, such as Fantazzy Sidorova (‘Sidorov’s Fantasies’, 1991); Elena Turovaya’s musical Pro p’tcharyya, kotoryi nitchego ne boylasya (‘About the Fearless Knight’, 1991); and Mikhail Tumelya’s parody of the Middle Ages, Psen o Volfgange neustrashimom, dostoslanom istreblete drakonov (‘The Song of Wolfgang the Intrepid, the Glorious Dragon’s Hunter’, 1991).

In 1994, the first Belarusian TV series, Reaktivnory parose- nok (‘The Reactive Piglet’; six more Piglet series followed), was made by Aleksandr Lenkin. In 2004 Igor Volchek revived Nesterka, the Belarusian Robin Hood, in a series named after him. Volchek also directed Povest minuvshikh let (‘The Novel of Bygone Years’, 2006–2008), explaining the origin of the coats of arms of Belarusian cities.
Mikhail Tumelya utilized a computer cut-out technique (called vyitanka) for his series Beloruskie pogovorky ('Belarusian Proverbs', 2008).

Poland

Since destiny is derisive, the artists who had openly and courageously opposed the Communist regime spent the decade after its fall trying to save something of what the regime had given them. Production was reduced to opening titles for TV, or commercials. Professionals made a living teaching new generations who might never find jobs. The films of the past were left in warehouses, waiting for distribution, care, and restoration.

Like most of the former USSR ‘satellite’ countries, Poland reacted to the end of state film production by establishing a state agency that enabled private entrepreneurs to apply for government grants. A lot of improvised companies sprang up, but most died when it was realized that the agency assured only a part of the budget. There was basically only one other potential partner: Polish Television, which was interested in children’s films, cheap entertainment, and educational series.

Within the latter category, there were some jewels: Magrite by Hieronim Neumann and Maciej ćwiek (1995) and Carmen Toren by Aleksandra Korejwo (1996). Korejwo (b. Poznań, 14 June 1958) followed the latter with Carmen Suite (1994) and Carmen Habanera (1995), inspired by Georges Bizet’s work. Her original technique, based on coloured salt grains, animated with a condor feather (!), make these films a paradigm of semiabstract cinema.

At the Łódź Film Studio Semafor, amid innumerable problems and cheap series for children, the career of Marek Skrobecki took off. Born in Kalisz on 18 September 1951, the puppet specialist Skrobecki graduated from the animation department of the Polish National Film School in Łódź in 1990. He earned a scholarship from the British Council that brought him to Jim Henson’s Creature Shop and Aardman Animation (1992).

When he made D.I.M. (id.) in 1992, few spectators or specialists paid due attention to the film. It was only thirteen years later, when Ichtyś was presented at international festivals, that this previous little masterpiece was rediscovered. Animating human-size puppets, in D.I.M. Skrobecki explores the relationship of a couple secluded in an apartment. Their meaningless life has a single justification and tenderness: they feed a little bird that comes from time to time to the windowsill. When the bird doesn’t reappear, it’s their end and the end. The direction and lighting are superlative, as is Michał Lorenz’s musical accompaniment.

In 1999 the Semafor Studio was relaunched under a similar name: Se-Ma-For Film Production.

Skrobecki’s Ichtyś (id., 2005) was much richer, probably too rich, and was welcomed internationally. A man is in a restaurant, the interior of which resembles a sacred building. The waiter takes his order and leaves. Time goes by and everything ages. When the ever-young waiter reappears, the client is seemingly dead. Ichtyś is visually original, tragic, and ironic by turns. However, it is so full of allegories and double-meanings that the viewer eventually sees it as a puzzle of Christian religious fragments and not as art.

In 2010 Skrobecki made Danny Boy (id.) in a town inhabited by headless, blind people, ruled by the logic of beheaded people (for instance, blindness), a ‘normal’ man falls in love with a girl, who flees horrified when she discovers what her suitor is. The young man goes to a guillotine and chops his head off. As a plane hits two skyscrapers, the headless young man and girl walk to the future hand in hand, in a scene resembling one in Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times (1936). Again, we have symbols and multiple interpretations (maybe it’s the story of the twentieth century, inhabited by blind, mindless fools), but also the impact of a powerful personality and a true poet.

125 The vyitanka is an openwork pattern cutout of white, black, or coloured paper. It is an age-old craft activity, dating back to when paper was invented. In Belarus, the vyitanka started in the sixteenth century when the first paper-making shop appeared. The vyitanka is characterized by geometric and floral motifs.

126 By Giannalberto Bendazzi.

127 This method is basically the same as the sand or powder animation already utilized by others, with the addition of the graceful brilliance of the little sand crystals. Korejwo made many other films, including the decorative Nad pięknym modnym Dunajem (‘The Beautiful Blue Danube’, 1993).

128 In early Christianity, the secret symbol of the Christ was the fish (the Greek word ΙΧΘΥΣ, transliterated Ichtyś, was pronounced ‘eckthys’, with the accent on the last syllable).

129 Skrobecki was also production designer on Suzie Templeton’s Peter and the Wolf (2006) and codirected a documentary on the pioneer of puppet animation with Ladislas Starewitch (Vabzdziu dresūstąjas, ‘The Bug Trainer’, along with Donatas Ulvydas and Linas Augustis, Lithuania/Poland, 2008).
Tomasz (Tomek) Kozak (b. Lublin, 7 September 1971) also appeared on the scene in the 1990s. While still a student, Kozak made Czarna burleska (‘Black Burlesque’, 1997) and Opera ocalenia (‘The Work of Salvation’, 1998). His first professional film was 627 Romans dzentelmena (‘627th Novel of a Gentleman’, 2000). These were films about obsessions, sexuality, homoeroticism, and the grotesque. He made nonnarrative cinema of a very high quality, using suggestions and impressions and drawing heavily on illustration and graphic design. Despite the acclaim he enjoyed, Kozak abandoned pure animation for experimental film, re-editing found footage.

The Polish approach to film animation survived the millennium. Many of the younger Polish animators had been pupils of the filmmakers from the older generation. Many of the older filmmakers were still active, among them the previously mentioned Hieronim Neumann (b. Poznań, 14 November 1948). He began as an animator/experimentalist in 1977 with Wyliczanka (‘Counting-Out Rhyme’) and continued dividing his time between filmmaking and fine arts. His excellent Blok (‘Prefabricated Housing Building’, 1982) owes something to Zbigniew Rybczyński’s artistic research. Among Neumann’s later films, Remote Control (id., 2002) and Zoopraxiscope (id., 2005) deserve mention.

Wiola Sowa (b. Gniezno, 13 May 1972), for example, showed in Refreny (‘Refrains’, 2007) that she had absorbed the standpoint, if not the style, of her master Jerzy Kucia. There were also self-taught people who absorbed the classic Polish atmosphere by themselves, such as Mariusz Wilczyński (b. Łódź, 29 April 1964). He was a prolific, multitalented artist. He started out in 1985 with paintings and graphics. In the late 1990s, he created about two hundred ‘book-clips’, video supplements for books, which visually expressed the main themes of the most interesting new books. He also made music videos for many top musical performers.


A second Polish approach to film animation began in the new millennium. Young people didn’t know, nor did they want to know, stories about Communists, Nazis, concentration camps, pessimism, and fate. They wanted to know about themselves and possibly their iPods. New digital imagery made filmmaking cheap and affordable. There was a new generalized consciousness of images and sounds. The new way marched alongside with the old one, and audiences, production, and critical coverage grew.


Figure 3.21 Hieronim Neumann.

For *Jam Session* (id., 2005), Izabela Plucińska (b. Koszalin, 6 October 1974) was awarded the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. The film combines spatial techniques with clay animation.

With his film *Telewizor* (‘TV-set’, 2005), Tomasz Siwiński (b. Koszalin, 4 November 1982) made a superb piece, connecting paint animation directly with film narrative (shot framing, panoramas). Siwiński makes a strong link between animated film and dreams, pursuing meanings hidden just under the surface.

These films are not recognizably ‘Polish’. They belong to the new, globally minded generation growing up alongside more traditional directors. Interest in animation was boosted when the Cinematography Act of 30 June 2005 was passed, establishing the Polish Film Institute (PISF). Since its inception in 2006, one of its tasks has been to develop special operating programmes to help with the production and promotion of animation. A priority is to support directorial débuts.130

### Piotr Dumała

In Volume 2 we described the beginnings of Piotr Dumała’s career in the early 1980s, when his world was rooted in black humour. Over the years, he moved to embrace an almost grievous atmosphere of human compassion, creating such masterpieces as *Łagodna* (‘The Gentle Woman’, from Dostoevsky, 1985);131 *ściany* (‘Walls’, 1987, a study on claustrophobia); *Wolno nogi* (‘Freedom of the Leg’, 1988, the story of a sleeping man whose body parts live their own lives at night); *Franz Kafka* (id., 1991); and *Zbrodnia i kar** (‘Crime and Punishment’, from Dostoevsky, 2000).

These works, inspired by the writers he referenced and by the art of Edvard Munch and Odilon Redon (whose lithographs from the series ‘Haunted House’ were inspirational for some pictures in ‘The Gentle Woman’), offered images of rare beauty. Some frames of *Franz Kafka* or ‘Crime and Punishment’ would be worthy of a museum. Dumała developed his technique, engraving a plasterboard and erasing and changing the images frame after frame. The principle, a little like animated paintings on glass or animated charcoal drawings on paper, allows for extremely thin, defined lines and areas of mellow, opaque colour. Kafka and Dostoevsky call for chiaroscuro; *Franz*

130 Giannalberto Bendazzi thanks Wiola Sowa and Mariusz Frukacz for their help.

Figure 3.22 Hieronim Neumann, *Blok*, 1982.
String Quartet No. 8 is a new version of the film, made by Dumala and editor Beata Walentowska using the music String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor by Dmitry Shostakovich. The author writes: ‘Formally the film does not exist. I have no rights for the music and the picture as well. So, it was only my private exercise. For me it was important because I was not happy with Crime and Punishment. The new version is another story coming from the music, sort of (an) abstract, experimental story. [. . .] Be inspired by music without any plan. It was pure film creation by editing. Recently I watched Au hasard Balthazar by Robert Bresson and the director’s commentary. I totally agree with his vision of cinema as a rhythm, editing, texture, atmosphere. Pure film language without clear story and leading role of dialogues.’ (Piotr Dumala, e-mail message to Giannalberto Bendazzi, 6 August 2011.)

Kafka boasts a gorgeous black and white, while the Dostoevsky films revolve around brown.

At first, ‘Crime and Punishment’ didn’t fulfill its author’s – or critics’ – expectations, and it won few prizes at international festivals. It was the acclaim of the common filmgoers that made them realize that, though the film might have its flaws, it was an inspired, slow, kammerspiel-like masterpiece, which conveyed much that
was true about human hatred, love, self-imprisonment, victory, and defeat.\textsuperscript{133} In 2014, Dumala released the controversial \textit{Hipopotamy} (‘Hippos’), about killing and sexual violence. In the cold light of day, this writer holds it in high regard, especially for the uncommon visual approach (the action takes place in a black marsh that depicts the death river Styx).

\section*{Jerzy Kucia}

Jerzy Kucia (b. Soltysy, 14 January 1942) was educated as a painter and graphic artist at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts. He later became a professor and head of the animation department, making his first animated film, \textit{Powrót} (‘The Return’) in 1972.\textsuperscript{134}

This outstanding director seldom received the appreciation he deserved, probably because he never focused on single works. Rather, he devoted his career to constructing a large, detailed, consistent poem made of short films scattered over almost thirty years, which few people could see in their entirety. Some visual elements constantly return: hunched men walking, faces shadowed by caps, train compartments, fluttering birds, insects, peasants’ tools, apples, a fiddle, small domestic objects, flashes, semiabstract shapes.\textsuperscript{135} We often see night before morning. Daylight never shines (it’s usually distorted by shade or chromatic stylization) and fragments are the rule.


However, they never reach a place that rewards – or explains – their undertaking. Everything on the screen may be hazy, but the spectator feels a strong connection with things. Those tired men are men. Those apples fell from an apple tree. The sounds may not match the actions, but they were produced by someone with something. Kucia’s inspiration is not abstract.

His poem is an infinitesimal odyssey of negligible wanderers, through restricted horizons, where nothing is magnificent. Just for that, it is majestic. One film, \textit{Refleksy} (‘Reflections’, 1979) shows the birth and death of an insect. Like any odyssey, Kucia’s is basically a quest for knowledge (human feelings like solitude, tenderness, longing for time past) and consciousness (time lapsing, people skirting us, objects with or without souls). Like a true poem, it starts exploring the world and ends creating a world. It picks up bits of truth and builds a differently meaningful, ulterior truth with them.

Kucia’s third film, and his first masterpiece, \textit{W cieniu} (‘In the Shade’, 1975), starts as a delicate black and white film of a girl on a swing, coming in and out of the shade. Then there is an eruption of colour, human profiles, a door, a motorbike ride, landscapes, apples, a road accident – all interspersed with the swinging girl. There is no overstatement, not even a dramatic crescendo. Adolescence, joy, and sorrow, all together, make a ballad on the enigma and taste of life – or maybe something deeper to be found.

Kucia says: ‘Making a film, I leave places for the viewer. I send signals and give the viewer the opportunity to receive them in his/her own way. My aim is what I would call the developing of an individual film, taking advantage of the receiver’s internal experiences.’\textsuperscript{137}

All of these works are characterized by an almost ascetic style (not by chance was he called ‘the Robert Bresson of animation’).\textsuperscript{138} ‘Tuning the Instruments’ takes place in early morning, when it is still pitch dark. The images are unclear. The protagonist (whom we will never see in detail) is still drowsy and wanders in search of the annoying alarm clock. After some gymnastics in his

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{133} To know more about this great artist, see More About It 1.
\textsuperscript{134} This film looks very much like Daniel Szczechua’s 1970 \textit{Podróż} (‘Voyage’, 1970), but the poetics and style of the two filmmakers have little in common.
\textsuperscript{135} To know more about this great artist’s technique, see More About It 2.
\textsuperscript{136} The camera itself often wanders on travels – for instance, in the second part of \textit{W cieniu} (‘In the Shade’, 1975).
\textsuperscript{137} From Jerzy Kucia’s typewritten pages, undated, provided to Giannalberto Bendazzi by the artist.
Kucia is a master of black and white who sporadically chooses to make an original use of colours (as with the use of green in Wiosna, 1980).

The director had already used this beautiful stylistic process in Parada (‘Parade’, 1987). The sound of the rotating wheel triggers the music.

Apples and pears take shape, the camera running over them; then a jumping cat, a wooden toy horse, apples again. These are memories of a country childhood. While the piano plays, a violin appears, a visual/acoustic oxymoron. Telephone wires dance, spreading out and drawing near. There are five of them, as in a pentagram; they look like strings, too. We hear some sounds of strings, but the main instrument is a trumpet – another oxymoron.

Now we see birds, perched in the middle of the wires, looking like notes in the pentagram. They are silhouettes of swallows, which suddenly fly away in flocks. Almost unexpectedly, the camera pans right to reveal a flock of different birds, still silhouettes. There are green trees, a green meadow. The birds fly away, some leaves disappearing with them. The rest of the birds fly away again; all of the leaves disappear and the landscape becomes wintry.

From this point on, the travel becomes a stream of consciousness. A duck walks. Some objects take shape. There are two toy wheelhorses, a grating or grille, a dog’s head. A little boy wearing a newspaper hat appears on the left and then disappears. His hat floats above a flock of fluttering birds that look like waves of water. The boy reappears on the right of the frame. The grating or grille is actually parlour, the man takes a shower, puts on his tuxedo, and leaves. From his clothes we understand he’s an orchestra member, and possibly the conductor, since he doesn’t carry an instrument. His shape reminds us of the ‘film conductor’, Jerzy Kucia himself. There are shreds of piano music, a pizzicato violin, bits of domestic sounds and songs.

Outdoors, the man starts his motorcycle. Colour replaces black and white, subjective shots replace the objective ones. The motor crackling is, at the same time, a sound belonging to the music. From this point on, there will be travel, through the country and through the man’s feelings, memories, and imagination. We hear the crackling, plus a piano; a violin and double bass join; eventually, there is a creaking.

Except for some figures (a car, people going to the train station), the images are mostly indefinite until a row of trees appears. Now the sun has risen and for the first time we see warm colours, light green rows of trees that become rows of soldiers, a vision of disciplined trunks all the same, a memory of disciplined men all the same. There are flashes – beams of sunlight, explosions? Memories and imagination surface as we start to share the soul of the person with whom we are travelling.
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A chair (a trompe l'oeil). In the white frame a bird flutters about. Apples break loose from the ground and go high. The frame turns black, and the last image is the newspaper hat, sliding like a newspaper boat over still water.

'Tuning the Instruments' is one of the best animated films ever made. One can view it a thousand times and still sink, amazed, into its depth, its secrets, its details. They combine with each other and produce more meanings. The images are stunningly beautiful and yet inseparable from their movement. This is cinema, not fine art; you couldn't take a single frame away and hang it on a wall.

At the same time, 'Tuning the Instruments' is the summa – and possibly the summit – of an art that has always combined sight and hearing. Viewing its images without soundtrack, or listening to its soundtrack without images, would be fruitless. It's their blend that is extraordinarily poetic. Many filmmakers in history (both animation and live-action) have struggled with the relationship between sound and image, colour and music. Most were visual artists or former stage directors, for whom what happened in front of their eyes was most important.

Kucia valued both the art of the eyes and the art of the ears. He worked closely with composer Wadim Chrapaczkow, accepted suggestions, and didn't hesitate to subordinate some scenes to Chrapaczkow's score (especially lengthening them when needed). 'Tuning the Instruments' is a synesthetic film par excellence. The viewer has the feeling that images purposely leave a space that sound must fill, and sound does the same in return. We get suggestions and stimuli through our two primary senses; that's why the film is so full of secrets.

The common man who gets up in the early morning and leaves to meet his day is a guiding thread in Kucia's work. 'Tuning the Instruments' (2000) follows the template of 'The Return' (1972), only it is much more skilled, profound, and poetic. Kucia's long quest finishes where it had started. All in this world of ordinary people, of ordinary other living beings, are trying to tune their instruments, all have unanswered questions. Is the conductor of the year 2000 the same person limping on the train platform in 1972? He probably is.

'I've always displayed an emotional attitude toward problems, and I want to attract viewers emotionally,' Kucia said. His viewers experience a doleful feeling of estrangement, an awareness of being no more than witnesses. An example can be found in Chips, a film dominated by darkness from which images of simple household activities and memories emerge sporadically.

'I am witness of my times,' Kucia said on another occasion, 'and some of my films can be my own personal notes on life, although they seem to refer to insignificant problems.' After a long silence, Fuga na wiolonczele, trąbkę i pejzaż ('Fugue for Trumpet, Cello, and Landscape', 2014) proved that Kucia's inspiration was still powerful and still willing to amalgamate music and vision. It is a masterful semi-abstract fugue, a combination of travels alongside and into landscapes which dialogues with its soundtrack. (According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary a fugue is a musical composition in which one or two themes are repeated or imitated by successively entering voices and contrapuntally developed in a continuous interweaving of the voice parts).

Czech Republic

During the last days of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, wisdom guided men. In December 1989, the Communist president Gustáv Husák voluntarily resigned, and Václav Havel, a playwright and former victim of political persecution, was elected chief of state. There was no revenge, no political purge in what was called the 'velvet revolution'. On 1 January 1993 the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia peacefully split and went their separate and democratic ways.

There was nothing velvet about the way animation was treated. State-owned production companies were hurriedly sold to private citizens; old film prints, puppets, drawings, and documents were scattered or simply thrown away. Unable or unwilling to kneel to the rules of pure moneymaking, many of the best filmmakers were jobless. It took more than a decade to redress the production situation.

Fimfárum Jana Wericha ('Jan Werich's Fimfárum', 2002) was the most successful animated feature film in the 2000s in the Czech Republic. It was based on a book of the same name, using the author's own recordings from the 1960s, when he narrated his stories. It was directed by Vlasta Pospišilová and Aurel Klimt, with a screenplay by Jiří Kubíček and Aurel Klimt.

In 2006, the sequel arrived, Fimfárum 2, adapting more of Werich's stories. The Czech public acclaimed it no less.

141 Alina Terechowicz, ‘It Takes Quite a Bit of One’s Life to Make One Film / Chaque film demande un morceau de ma vie’, Animafilm no. 8 (1981).
142 By Giannalberto Bendazzi and Tommaso Iannini.
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It was written by Jan Balej, Jiří Kubíček, Aurel Klimt, and Břetislav Pojar and was directed by Jan Balej, Vlasta Pospíšilová, Aurel Klimt, and Břetislav Pojar.

Michaela Pavlátová

Among the new generation of animation creators, the most internationally famous was Michaela Pavlátová (b. Prague, 27 February 1961). Her short film řeči, řeči, řeči (‘Words, Words, Words’, 1991) won many awards and received an Oscar nomination in 1993. In 1995 she made the even better Repeče (‘Repeat’). From 1998–2002, she divided her time between Prague and San Francisco, where she worked as an art director with the animation company Wildbrain Inc.

Back in Prague, she directed the live-action feature film Neveřné hry (‘Faithless Games’, 2003). In 2006 she finished, together with Vratislav Hlavatý, the animated short Karneval zvířat (‘The Carnival of Animals’) and in 2008 she returned to live-action with Děti noci (‘Night Owls’).

Pavlátová is a versatile artist. In her words, ‘I often get bored with animation and then I take up something new. I make illustrations, feature films, children’s books, and short stories.’

Her finest animated films, ‘Words, Words, Words’ and ‘Repeat’, stand out for good drawing and timing, but especially for their dramaturgy. ‘Words, Words, Words’ is a visualization of what people think or want to say in a café, and every idea is original and biting. (‘I am interested in conflict,’ Pavlátová says. ‘You have to exaggerate, to be a little more direct. How can you exaggerate when everything is only nice? You can make it even nicer, but then it becomes sugary. I like sarcasm. I like being ironic.’)

‘Repeat’, written with Jiří Kubíček, is the story of various couples spinning in a vicious circle, eventually changing their behaviour and relationships. It is the best example of what Pavlátová finds interesting in animation: black humour and social reflection. Some of her films have erotic elements and ‘The Carnival of Animals’ is based on them. Pavlátová worried because ‘the line between what is erotic and what is vulgar is extremely narrow’.

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143 A psychological film about partners’ mutual search for harmony, it tells the story of the pianist Eva. She follows her husband Peter, a musician and composer, to a small village on the Slovak and Hungarian border.

144 Ofka, age 25, works a nightshift at a 24-hour shop. She hides her uncertainty and unhappiness, living a lethargic life and experiencing a kinship with the other people who are awake while the rest of humanity sleeps. A bizarre robbery forces her to face the real world.

145 ‘Etiuda & Anima Festival Catalogue’, Krakow, 2008. The following quotations come from the same source.

146 Pavlátová’s still drawings are even better: lively, sensitive, and expressive.
French composer Camille Saint-Saëns wrote the suite *Carnaval des animaux* in 1886. The director picked seven movements from the original fourteen. *Hens and Roosters* is about puberty; *Wild Donkeys* is a geometric dance of genitals and breasts. *Aquarium* is original, slow, and sensuous with a nocturne track-forward of people in bed, from room to room, underwater. The eighth movement, *Characters with Long Ears*, is a collection of almost fixed, impressive images in suspended time, a little reminiscent of Gašparovič's *Satiemania*.

The segment based on *Aviary* is a short on its own. It starts with a phallic fountain in a public park, continues with men and women offering their private body parts to apparently pleased birds, and ends with the fountain ceasing to spurt. The melodic *Swan* is illustrated with a motionless lady whose clothes go up and down, melancholically and derivisely. The *Finale* is a merry orgy. ‘The Carnival of Animals’ is a good piece of erotic poetry/comedy. Not surprisingly, it received awards at many international festivals.

*Tram.avi* (id., 2012) was no less successful at the festivals. It is a sort of a coda to the previous film (Saint-Saëns’s music returns in the soundtrack), about a female tramway driver who experiences arousing fantasies while carrying male passengers across town. Once more Pavlátová tells her carnal story with taste.

### Jiří Barta

Jiří Barta, the director of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (1985), was the Czech animator hit hardest by the end of the state system. The most gifted director of his generation, he found it so hard to get funding that he had to give up his production of *Golem*, which had suited his inspiration and expressionistic style like nothing else.

It’s an easy cliché to say that Barta is Trnka’s heir in puppet animation, and the statement has only a bit of truth. Since the beginning Barta has taken an eclectic approach and used several forms of staging, often combining them organically, using various animation techniques as well as live-action. Among his first films, *Diskžokej* (‘Disc Jockey’, 1980) is inspired by pop art—consumer brands and products are very much present—and by optical art, but also by the deformed realism of Francis Bacon. (Some passages seem obvious quotations from the painter.) Basically it is a music clip, in which one can identify elements that will define Barta’s style—or part of it—such as his rhythmic editing and the articulated interplay of geometric forms.

*Zamikly svět rukavic* (‘The Lost World of Gloves’, 1982), alternating live-action and animated objects, has animated gloves as protagonists. It harks back to the aesthetics of silent films, with an explicit quotation from the surrealist Un chien andalou by Luis Buñuel. The protagonists of *Balada o zeleném drzewu* (‘A Ballad of the Green Wood’, 1983) are a raven and some pieces of wood, shot in a snowy forest. It is a simple, short film of great impact.

We already have praised Barta’s feature-length *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, which gives an apocalyptic meaning to the pied piper. In *Poslední lyp* (‘The Last Theft’, 1987), the animation has a complementary role, in a ‘dark’ fantasy in which a thief enters a cemetery and falls victim to vampires. For *Klub odlodžených* (‘The Club of the Laid Off’, 1989), Barta animates some mannequins in a real environment. A group of houses in a poor urban area, crumbling and desolate, becomes the scene of a metaphor of Czech society on the eve of the velvet revolution. The mannequins occupy a place between actors and puppets; they are symbolic of the conformity of a closed system centred on mediocrity.

The fall of the regime returned liberty of expression to Czechoslovakia (and hence to the Czech Republic and Slovakia). However, as we have seen, the problem of censorship was replaced by a problem of funds. For this reason, Barta was never able to complete *Golem*, a seven-minute trailer for which was shown in London in October 2002. It would have told the story of a student researching the Golem, unloading mysterious forces, with actors and clay animation.

After experimenting with computer animation in the short *Donečku vař* (‘Boil, Little House, Boil’), in 2009, Barta made *Na příčě aneb Kdo má dneska narozeniny?* (‘In the Attic: Who Has a Birthday Today?’), called *Toys in the Attic* in America. The protagonists are again puppets, animated in the traditional manner, but with inserts of animated drawings and live-action. The story takes place in an attic. Buttercup is a sweet little doll, kidnapped by the golden bust of an old Communist leader. Of course her friends save her.

The imaginative film is aimed at children and is full of good touches, such as a teddy bear’s vanity when he shines his nose, or a clay character’s battle to stay intact during a rainstorm on the roof. Between fable, comedy, and horror, the film has surreal and metaphorical levels; its foundation is Barta’s formal ability and his use of a complex screen language in a fantastic and dynamic manner, not tied down by a particular genre or form, and exploiting the interplay between several ideas.

### Jan Balej

Jan Balej (b. Prague, 30 May 1958) graduated from the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design (VŠUP) in
Prague, specializing in graphics for film and television, in 1988. Later he worked as animator on a TV series based on Czech fables. In 1990 he founded Hafan Film Praha, with Miloslav Špála.

A director, set designer, illustrator, and scriptwriter, Balej continued the Czech animated puppet tradition but also followed his own independent research. Between 1992 and 1994 he wrote and directed four films about Tom Páleček (‘Tom Thumb’), for which he received some prestigious awards.

In 2000, he made the short Jedné noci v jednom městě (‘A Night in a City’), telling the intersecting night adventures of people in a city. The setting has a magic atmosphere, which can be morbid and mocking at times. The characters have Trnka-style immobile faces, but they are more caricatured. Though highly praised, the film was not profitable and became one of three episodes in a feature of the same name (67 minutes long), which Balej completed in 2007. The other episodes were Užity (‘Seashells’) and Větvicka a Ploutvička (‘Větvicka and Ploutvička’), dated respectively 2004 and 2006.

‘Seashells’ (the first segment in the feature) shows inhabitants of a palace with bizarre habits: a person with a tiny theatre of dead insects, a funeral director for dogs, and a cocaine addict. Without the poetry of ‘A Night in a City’, ‘Seashells’ repeats its visual choices, its grotesque and paradoxical themes. Balej’s humour becomes more fanciful in Větvická Ploutvička, where the protagonists are an anthropomorphic tree and a fish, rendered ingeniously in appearance and sound. The story involves prolonged time ellipses, showing episodes in the tree’s life in different seasons. The black humour mixes with dreams and fantasy.

Balej’s puppets had lead structures, bodies in foam rubber and latex, and heads modelled in ModuLite and Araldite. They were traditionally animated (by Alfonˇs Mensdorff-Pouilly) without the use of a computer. The shooting was by Miloslav Špála, Balej’s associate and a longtime collaborator with Švankmajer. ‘Seashells’ utilizes large puppets (60–80 cm. tall), allowing the use of real objects on the sets. The characters’ buildup and presence is remarkable.

In building the narratives and atmosphere, Balej was inspired by real life, and particularly by the images and ambience of Žižkov, Prague’s workers’ neighbourhood. The external urban landscape is mainly nocturnal, gloomy, and desolate. The indoor scenes are dusty and badly illuminated. There is an abundance of details, often very realistic (even in the tree and fish episode, the living matter has a realistic solidity), but also alienating and hallucinatory.

Balej was also able to contribute to the collective feature Fimfárum 2 with the episode Může, strojška, proč je slané? (‘Uncle, Why Is the Sea Salty?’).

Pavel Koutský

Pavel Koutský (b. Prague, 6 December 1957) was a scriptwriter, animator, designer, and director. Unlike some of his well-known countrymen, he focused on drawn animation instead of puppets. His favourite form was the brief, concentrated short film. Convinced that art’s purpose is not to change the world but to show it for what it is, he used animation for its very marginality, finding in it a greater artistic freedom than in other forms of expression. His social criticism is implicit and humorous. (‘If a film pleases, makes people laugh or reflect, it is OK.’)147 He represents the history of his country in Posledních 100 let marx-leninismu v czechách (‘The Last 100 Years of Marxism-Leninism in Bohemia’), 1990), and in Portrét (1988).

In one of his first films, Navštivte Prahu (‘Welcome to Prague’, 1983), he presented tourists visiting the Czech capital, showing them moving around as automatons from one place to another. In Curriculum vitae (id., 1986), he reviewed his own cultural route ironically, showing how animation was the last leg of a knowledge that begins with the letters of the alphabet, passing through mathematics, painting, and architecture.

Koutský creates a happy combination of graphic elements in constant mutation and comic situations. At’žije myš (‘Long Live the Mouse’, 1993) is a cartoon that retells the adventures of Tom and Jerry (a mouse must escape a famished cat) as a film in the film (a live-action man watches the cartoon on a television set).

Kavárna (‘Pub’, 1998) starts with a scene filmed with actors (three conversations in a coffee shop), then changes it through animated designs into three short satirical sketches, visually representing avarice, sexual desire, and gossip. In Duel (id., 1997) and Media (id., 1999), the author shows through metaphorical but very direct language how society conditions the individual through mass media from birth to adulthood. But the vision is never wholly pessimistic; Duel shows how one can respond through art.

147 Pavel Koutský, personal communication to Giannalberto Bendazzi, 2008.
Aurel Klimt was born in Žilina (Czechoslovakia, today Slovakia) on 6 August 1972. For many years he lived in Prague, where he also trained. Since 2000, he has lived in Malešov, 75 kilometres from the capital, where he founded his production studio ZVON. A student of Bretislav Pojar, Klimt worked for television, gaining experience on video art and puppet shows as well as dedicating his time and talent to animation. Klimt loved puppet film but always enjoyed combining different techniques and often experimented with digital technology.

In 1996, when Klimt was 24, he created Maškin zabil Koškinà (‘Maskin Kills Koshkin’), a humorous puppet short. The film consists of a single scene, interspersed with explanatory captions and rhythmic insistence on a nursery rhyme. For Eastern – Kravý Hugo (‘An Eastern – Bloody Hugo’, 1997), Klimt shot live actors through pixilation. It’s a spoof of ‘western’ films and early silent films. Klimt frequently uses acceleration and time-lapse cinematography to add a comic dimension, as well as ironic intertitles and sound effects. O konzelném zvone (‘The Magic Bell’, 1998) is a fairy tale integrating drawings, objects, and semi-relief puppets. Klimt plays with genre by having his puppets sing and perform musical-like scenes.

Pád (‘The Fall’, 1998) is reminiscent of Barta’s and Balej’s best work, both for its visual choices and for its technique (particular angles, camera moves defining and enhancing the depth of space). Despite the film’s comic details, it stands out for its realistic setting and bleak connotations.

Klimt codirected (and coordinated) the collective anthology-project Fimfárum Jana Wericha (2002), contributing its namesake episode and another segment called Franta Nebojsa (‘Fearless Frankie’). He also codirected Fimfárum 2 (2006), for which he directed the episode Hrbácí z Damascu (‘The Hunchback of Damascus’). These works show Klimt’s maturation technically and narratively, theatrically and cinematically. ‘Fearless Frankie’ and ‘The Hunchback of Damascus’ integrate drawings, objects, figures in relief, and animated puppets. They also add pictorial effects of light and colour worthy of the best of the Czech school.

### Other Czech Artists

Michal Žabka (b. Liberec, 20 December 1965) started out in 1993 with the cartoon Královina (‘Crazy Cow Story’). He progressed with Babulon (‘Babulon’, 1997, a bittersweet story of a child whose head inflates and carries him to the sky) and further with Prasavci (‘Premammals’, 2001). The characters are not so imaginative, but Žabka’s inspiration is unique.

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148 The most memorable being the bumptious, sinful lady in Archangel Gabriel and Mrs. Goose (1964).
Born on 16 May 1974 in Piešťany (Slovakia), Noro Držiak attended the Zlin film school – the animation studio in Ateliers, KZ, where he could work with various techniques and styles. He later used many techniques in his commercials, titles, and so on. His directorial debut was Velký Kýchac (‘The Great Sneezer’, 2001), followed by his animation and visual effects supervision of the feature Alois Něbel (2011), directed by Tomáš Luňák. It is based on the graphic novel by Jaroslav Rudiš and Jaromír 99, combining animation and live-action and using rotoscoping to stay true to the style of the original.

David Šíkup was born on 9 July 1974 in Prague. In 2001, his BA graduation film Sětilo (‘The Light’) received awards at many international festivals. Although an ordinary film in many respects, it had the brilliant idea that light can be dealt with like a liquid. In 2010, Šíkup directed the grotesque 40-minute Rožum a Šlechtí (‘Reason and Luck’), the third and longest segment of an anthology of animated fairy tales based on the classic book Fimfárum by Jan Werich.

Lucie Sunková (née Šimková) was born in Prague on 7 July 1974. She made a name for herself with three shorts, all painted with oil colours under the camera. Havran (‘The Raven’, 2000) and Podobizna (‘The Portrait’, 2002) are sincere and careful, but immature. The much better Pelargónie (‘Geranium’, 2005) tells, in a rather personal style, a young couple’s love story with a sad ending.

Jan Tománek (b. Prague, 1978), the son of the already mentioned director Dagmar Doubková (see Vol. 2), made many internationally successful animated short films, from 1997 (Poslední večeře Plumá ‘The Last Dinner of Lord’) to 2003 (Prohuzení, ‘Wake Up’). In 2008 he directed the first Czech 3D feature-length animation, Koží příběh – pověsti staré Prahy (‘Goat Story – Old Prague Legends’).

Slovakia

The hybrid country of the Czechs and the Slovaks was born on 18 October 1918. It survived a Nazi invasion, World War II, Communist rule, and eventually, when a steady peace returned, on 1 January 1993 it split. The new state of Slovakia had an underdeveloped economy – and much hope.

Even during the days of Trnka (Prague) and Zeman (Zlin), the grand national tradition of animation was based in Czech towns. Slovakia’s professionals found themselves penniless. Their leader, Viktor Kubal, died in 1997. Yet instead of wearing themselves down seeking nonexistent funding, the Slovaks embraced teaching and prepared a new generation for better times.

In 1993, the Department of Animated Film was opened at the newly founded film and TV faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. It was the first university in the territory that focused on teaching classical and digital animation. The wisdom of this choice was clear in December 2009, when Šyri (‘Four’), by Ivana Šebestová, won the Grand Prix at the Animateka festival in Ljubljana. Four stories take place one spring day in the late 1930s. A popular singer’s fate intersects with the fates of three other women.

The director was born in Poprad, at the foot of the Tatra Mountains, on 9 February 1979. She finished ‘Four’ in 2007, following her first film, Lionardo mio (‘My Leonardo’, 2005). In 2010, Šebestová assisted Katarína Kerekovská (b. Žilina, 21 April 1974) in making the captivating Kámen (‘Stones’, 2010). It is a puppet animation musical running 26 minutes, set in an open quarry. Everything is grey and the miners mourn their dead comrades and sleep in rusty caravans. It is a vision of hard labour and roughness. A young lady with a pink (though muted pink) dress arrives, and eroticism, violence, death, spirituality, magic, and love all blossom subtly.

‘Four’ was produced by Ivana Laučíková Zajacová (b. Partizánske, 12 October 1977), a Jill-of-all-trades who worked on several films in various capacities. Her best film to date is Posledný autobus (‘The Last Bus’, 2011), a powerful, derisive live-action/pixilation work. ‘The Last Bus’ was codirected by Martin Snopek (b. Bratislava, 13 November 1974), a director, graphic designer, and teacher who began his career in 1995 with the anthology film Kinky, skoky, roky . . . a posledný zhasne (‘Steps, Jumps, Years . . . and the Last One Turn Please off the Light’).

Veronika Obertová (b. Žilina, 18 June 1984) and Michaela Čepíková (b. Žiar, 27 August 1984) studied in various countries. Back home, they joined forces and in 2010 they created the production company Ové Pictures. *Dust and Glitter* (original title in English, 2011) is their first short animated film. In San Francisco, the lives and desires of a young, naive girl and an older homeless man overlap, mirror, and affect each other.

Peter Budinský (b. Bratislava, 3 September 1983) made his best film so far with *TWINS* (id., 2011), the winner of several awards. Siamese twins fight each other inside the boxing ring, and outside too. They share professional and private lives, but each sees things from a different perspective. *TWINS* is a cutting, strong film, drawn in an appropriately murky style.

Michal Struss’ graduation film *V kočke* (‘In the Box’, 1999) won two dozen international prizes and was nominated for a Student Academy Award. For undisclosed reasons, this golden boy (b. Handlová, 18 June 1976) spent the following years as a postproduction supervisor.

**Hungary**

With the change of regime in 1989, the unique position of Pannónia as Hungary’s only animation company ended, and several smaller private studios were founded. They were primarily committed to international productions and had less capacity to produce their own artistic works. The Hungarian National Television halted its financial support to the film industry, and this was the main reason why the state-owned Pannónia went bankrupt.

The central financial role of the Ministry of Culture was over. In 1991, the Motion Picture Public Foundation of Hungary was established, distributing the subsidies granted by the parliament annually. It did so by means of tenders among the film producers until 2010. Meanwhile, the National Cultural Fund of Hungary started giving financial subsidies, mainly to initiate productions. Since 2011, through newly established grant systems, Hungarian Public Television has reinitiated the production of animated content for television – mainly television shorts, pilots, and series.

Poetic, sometimes aphoristic, visionary shorts – often inspired by the fine arts – which dealt with art and philosophy, creation and existence, had been prevalent in contemporary Hungarian animation since the 1970s. The younger generations preferred cartoons motivated by a gag or a twist. The wide accessibility of computer software and Flash animation programs made it easier – and cheaper – for them to make their own films.

Pannónia headed slowly into bankruptcy, without any state purchase or privatization. Only the two branches in Pécs and Kecskemé特 were privatized. The Pécs studio, managed by Hernádi Tibor,153 changed its name to Funnyfilm and was best known for provocative commercials for Red Bull, the energy drink. The Kecskeméťfilm Studio was managed by Mikulás Ferenc (see below). In 1995, Pannónia’s manager Matolcsy György was replaced by animation director Jankovics Marcell, who said: ‘They placed me as a captain on a wreck, to be the last one to sink with it [. . .] To me, privatization always meant it would be the end of Pannónia; in a private studio, there is only lease work which barely could be called art.’154

In the 1990s, the company mainly produced feature films for families, since the manager considered them profitable, and, hence, ‘the way out’155 from the studio’s woes. Such features were made in an American style and included *A hetedik testvér* (‘The Seventh Brother’, 1995), directed by Koltai Jenő and Hernádi Tibor, and *Vécak, az erdő hős* (‘Tiny Heroes’, 1997) by Gémes József. Jankovics himself made *Ének a csodaszarvasról* (‘Song of the Miraculous Hind’, 2002), an encyclopedia-like film about an astro-mythological interpretation of Hungary’s ancient history.

The manager-director’s other ambitious project was the adaptation of *Az ember tragédia* (‘The Tragedy of Man’, a symbolic epic of the Hungarian drama-literature) by the nineteenth-century playwright Mádách Imre. The series of episodes were produced, scene by scene, over

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152 By Orosz Anna Ida.

153 Surname first, given name second, according to the Hungarian custom.


two decades (1990–2011). They were made in the art style of the respective historical periods covered by each scene (Egyptian, Athenian, Roman, etc.), with anachronisms. The series was finally released as a three-hour feature in cinemas in 2011.

The last successful team within Pannónia was Grácia Workshop (managed by Mikle Judit). The group’s most prominent personality was Reisenbüchler Sándor, whose films in the 1990s expressed longing for a natural state of life. Allegro Vivace (1989) is a celebration of youth, hope, and spring, based on a Tchaikovsky theme. Later Reisenbüchler portrayed grotesque apocalypses and harsh critiques of civilization. Ecotopia (1995) commemorates Fritz Lang’s Metropolis, followed by Boldog világvége (‘Merry Apocalypse’, 1999).

He consciously finished his oeuvre with A fény pillanata (‘The Advent of Light’, 2002), saying, ‘With this film I meant to say that today’s civilization has not much chance left [. . .] I had a conceptual oeuvre, all my works were planned and made very consciously. A fény pillanata was the last part in this conceptual series.’

The other outstanding director of the group was Macskássy Kati, who continued mixing genres and visual styles, socio-films with children’s drawings. In Van itt jó is, rossz is (‘There Are Good Things and Bad Things Here’, 1997), children talk about their homeland, Hungary. Her last film, Sosemvolt Cigányország (‘Never Never Gypsyland,’ 2004), contrasts stern and gloomy pictures with the colours of imagination.

Many of the directors of Grácia were fine artists, and their films were influenced by their graphic art. The work of Gyulai Liviusz (b. Barót [Baraolt, Romania], 1937) is full of small, ironic gags. In jónás (‘Jonah’, 1997), a little man gets into a giant whale during a huge storm and refurbishes it to his own fancy until its death. Az én kis várom (‘The Small Town of Mine’, 2002) invokes the nostalgic and ironic tone of Jirí Menzel, a Czech live-action director.

In 1989, Orosz István made a ‘system-changing’ short (Vigyázat, lépcső!, ‘Mind the Steps!’). A paradoxical, no-way-out Budapest apartment building is shown from a boy’s perspective. Orosz’s next monochrome films, resembling etchings, were highly poetic without any political undertones. Kert (‘Garden’, 1993) is a melancholic coming-of-age story about a boy who wanders in the abandoned park of a villa and peeps at a mysterious lady in a wheelchair. Az idő látképei (‘Time Sights’, 2004), compared by critics to Alain Resnais’s Last Year at Marienbad, plays with time, space, and parallel worlds, visually and acoustically.

Keresztes Dóra made the black-and-white De Profundis (2002, produced in Studio Exist), an original vision of Genesis. The film is based on the topos, ‘Out of the depths have I called to you’, showing a continuously forming and transforming world of humans and creatures, symbols of life and soul.

Figure 3.27 Orosz István, Vigyázat, lépcső!, ‘Mind the Steps!’, 1989.

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Several young animators started their careers at Grácia. Graphic designer M. Tóth Éva’s (b. Kaposvár, 1962) films were expressive works with tensely waving graphic lines. *jelenések* (‘Revelations’, 2001) envisions M. C. Escher’s spiral dimension-traps.

Péterffy Zsófia (b. Budapest, 1971) continued the rich tradition of Kovásznai György’s painted animation in her hot, dynamic oil painting-film *Kalózok szeretője* (‘The Lover of Pirates’, 2002). Based on François Villon’s ballad, the film was improvised under the camera.

Finally, Rofusz Kinga’s (b. Budapest, 1970) *Harlequin* (2003) is a finely drawn short about an old circus artist’s memories as he prepares for his last show.

Kecskemét Animation Film Studio had been founded in 1971 as a branch of Pannónia. It became independent in 1991 and was privatized in 1993 when the employees of the studio bought the state-owned assets – a unique event in Hungary – Mansfeld Péter emlékére (‘Court Record – in Memoriam’). The most popular internationally was *Magyar Népmesék 1976–1985; Vízipók a csodapók* (1985, and became a biennial event in 2005. One can say that Kecskemét became Hungary’s capital of animation.

From the start, the studio produced children’s series (Vízipók a csodapók, ‘Water-Spider, Wonder-Spider I-III’, 1976–1985; *Leo és Fred, ‘Leo and Fred I-II’, 1984–1985*). The most popular internationally was *Magyar Népmesék* (‘Hungarian Folk Tales’), with one hundred episodes. Its production was started in the 1970s by Jankovics Marcell. From the 1990s, the episodes have been directed by Horváth Mária and Nagy Lajos (b. Marosvásárhely [Targu Mures, Romania], 1956).

Artistic shorts, often pushing the boundaries of animation form, were made by several directors. Horváth Mária’s *Zöldfa utca 66* (‘Greentree Street 66’, 1992) mixed live-action film with animation. There are animated graffiti-like drawings on the walls and paperboard figures on the roofs.

Szlágyi V. Zoltán has already been mentioned (see Vol. 2) as a Romanian filmmaker. He was from the Hungarian minority in that country and left to become a Hungarian citizen. In Kecskemét he continued his outstanding production with exceptionally finely drawn short films.

Éjszakai kultúrtörténeti hadgyakorlat (‘Culturehistorical Maneuuvre at Night’, 1991) is about the aggressive political misinterpretation of culture. *Jegyzőkönyv – Mansfeld Péter emlékére* (‘Court Record – in Memioriam Péter Mansfeld’, 2006) was made for the anniversary of the Revolution of 1956, showing the youngest victim’s visions before his execution. The memorable metaphor of the film depicts the characters as human beings versus wooden puppets.


Pajafilm is Tóth Pál’s one-man studio in Szeged. He founded it in 1996 and made computer-animated shorts. In his interviews, he emphasized that to him computer animation was only a technique to build his minimalist worlds; he was not interested in creating bombastic effects. His slowly unfolding stories usually ‘originate from a feeling, a random drawing or a short melody’. Their values lay in a surreal, meditative, deliberately existentialist humour through which conventional themes (identity-loss, creative crisis, the impossibility of communication, love conquering the world) can be freshly portrayed.

Egy újabb nap* (‘Another Day’, 1998), in which clothing takes on human body parts as accessories, illustrates the everyday role-plays of people who have lost themselves. *A szentjánosbogarak nemé életé* (‘The Sexual Life of Fireflies’, 2000), an animated lighting artwork, shows a young firefly with a crush on the moon. *Rajzfilm* (*Cartoon*, 2004) shows the process of making a cartoon as an amusing brainstorming on a drafting table.

It can be considered a self-reflection on Tóth Pál’s present and past creative course.


Varga Studio was the first private studio in Hungary, founded in 1988 by the animation film director Varga Csaba and producer Erkél András (b. Budapest, 1962). Talented artists freelanced from neighbouring countries, including Slovenia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Russia. Varga grew to become one of the leading studios in Europe, producing series, music videos, commercials, and TV spots. It also made some artistic shorts.

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157 Bodolai László, *Egy újabb nap* – Beszélgetés Tóth Pálral [‘Another Day’ – Interview with Tóth Pál], Filmvilág, Budapest, 1999/08, p. 27.
One of its best-known products was the cartoon series *Mr Bean* (2002; with Tiger Aspect), based on the British live-action comedy of the same name. Its director was Alexey Alexeev (b. Moscow, 1965), who had come from Pilot Studio in Moscow. Varga Csaba, the studio’s art director, made the well-known *Bestiák* (‘Beasts’, 1993) with Igor Lazin (b. Novi Knezevac [Serbia], 1964). In it, avant-garde paintings by Lugossy László, Zámbo István, and Wahorn András come alive to Frank Zappa’s music.


In 2003, Erkel András, the former producer of Varga Studio, bought the Swedish-owned Studio Baestarts and asked Alexey Alexeev to be the coproprietor and art director. The international award-winning *Log jam* series (2008) by Alexeev was a Flash-animated collection of jokes. A jazz collective rehearses in the middle of the wood—the bear plunking a log, a rabbit drumming on a trunk, and a wolf singing out of tune. They are always interrupted—by heavy rain, the full moon, a hungry snake, or a dumb hunter.

The multi-award-winning feature film *Nyöker!* (‘The District!’ 2004), written by Novák Erik and directed by Gauder Áron (h. Kőszeg, 1973), was a low-budget cartoon action comedy, a romance between a Romeo and Juliet of rival Gypsy and Hungarian families, set in contemporary Budapest. The film has a provocative tone similar to *South Park*, similarly taking the children’s perspectives. The twodimensional, digital cut-out characters are presented in the city’s CGI setting, making the movements especially clumsy.


The films of Bánóczki Tibor (h. Šarospatak, 1977) have an engaging visual style and scripts of high literary value (by Bánóczki himself). He made the expressive, sometimes brutally realistic, painting animation film, *Holtágban* (‘Dead Water’, 2001). It is the bizarre story of an ex-train driver’s breakdown, set in an abandoned village on a hot summer day. *Tefjogak* (‘Milk Teeth’, 2007) is a surreal, eerie digital paper cutout film about a girl’s night love affair in a cornfield, from her little brother’s perspective.


Magyárosi Éva (h. Veszprém, 1981) seeks to portray the inner state of human beings from the subjective point of view of a female protagonist. Her elliptic narratives are sensitively combined with a very poetic, sensual, and visual world based on her drawings and digital glass pictures. Her original art works are usually exhibited in galleries together with her films (*Hanne*, 2005; *Lena*, 2009; Láthatatlan rajzok, ‘Invisible Drawings’, 2012).

In Hungary, university-level animation courses have been available at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design (MOME) since 1980. (Before 1989, the training was provided by Pannónia, and courses were held by the studio’s filmmakers.) Some of the highlights of MOME graduation films were: *Élettonal* (‘Lifeline’, 2006) by Polish-Hungarian Dukci Tomek (b. Budapest, 1982), also nominated for a Cartoon d’Or in 2007; *Simon vagyok* (‘I Am Simon’, 2009) by Molnár Tünde; *Orsolya* (‘Ursula’, 2009) by Szerkerényi Bella; *Nyuszi és ôz* (‘Rabbit and Deer’) by Vácz Péter; and *Symphony No. 42* (2013) by Búcsí Réka.

Slovenia159

The already mentioned Zvonko čoh (see Vol. 2), working with Milan Erič (b. 1956), made the feature *Socializacija*
bika? (‘Socialization of a Bull’), 1998). For almost ten years, čoh and Erič worked on a story ‘written by life, a story about enthusiasm, naiveté, selfishness, vengefulness, lies, milk, stock cubes and last but not least love’.160 In 1999, they jointly received the Prešeren Fund Award. The film was a breakthrough in Slovenian animated film.

Despite ongoing difficulties with production, the 2000s witnessed the rebirth of Slovenian auteur animation. The first to cause a stir was Dušan Kastelic (b. 1964), who showed command of computer animation in his short Perkmandeljc (‘Perk’, 2002). His čikorja an’ kafe (‘Chicory ‘n’ Coffee’, 2006), set a new standard for local computer animation.

Puppet animation also had a breath of fresh air. Špela čadež (b. 1977) successfully toured the festival circuit with her films Zasabanec (‘Mate to Measure’, 2004) and Ljubezn je bolezni (‘Lovesick’, 2007). She collaborated with the Swiss Marina Rosset to make Last Minute (id., 2010), a combination of puppet animation, shadow animation, and chalk drawing.

In 2006, Nejc Saje (b. 1976) made Dvoršče (‘Courtyard’), a 25-minute puppet animation from an original story. It boasted beautifully detailed sets and props and outstanding puppet design. Its complex animation — involving up to fifteen characters at a time — is wanting at times, but it was a big success.

Kolja Saksič (b. 1981) had his professional breakthrough with the 10-minute puppet film Mulc: Fraža (‘Kiddo – Slingshot’, 2009), completed with an unusually large team. In the course of his work, Saksič struck up many international contacts. The Polish studio Semafór, for instance, helped construct the puppets for Koyaa: Lajf je čist odbit (‘Koyaa the Extraordinary’, 2011).


While groups of filmmakers have joined forces and set up local studios in recent years (among them Bugbrain, Zap! Strup producija, Zvívks Production, and Invida), these can hardly be considered cornerstones for a lasting professional production environment. There were no schools in Slovenia providing practical and theoretical education in animation until 2009. It is encouraging that growing numbers of fine and visual arts students complete their studies with animated films, but most of them are not screened at international festivals.

Without support at the state level and without much interest from the public broadcaster, the talents in Slovenian animation will gradually divert their energies to other creative areas.

### Croatia

The country was at war from 1991, when it declared its independence from the Yugoslav Federation, until 1995, when its borders were internationally recognized. Zagreb was the capital of the new state, but the Zagreb School of Animation had disappeared. Almost all the masters had retired or died. For the Croats of 1995, what had existed just four years before belonged to the distant past. ‘Why are you recalling that old filmic crap?’ the foreigner was repeatedly asked.

Despite the bombings that almost hit the capital, and various shortages, the Zagreb Animation Festival was never interrupted.161 Animated entertainment and propaganda films were made. But, to quote from an article by Hrvoje Turković:

In the 1980s, the production situation in Zagreb Film started to fall apart. The administration section overgrewp its function, became self-indulgent, treating its main authors as incidentals. The company got entangled in a succession of bad business moves (in feature film production, damaging international contracts etc.), absorbing most of the state film subsidies to cover its own salaries, company losses and expenditures — all at the expense of its authors. Feeling their position to be of second-rate hired hands, many of the main authors scattered abroad, or withdrew into their own home studios.

Zagreb Film fell into deep debt, and by the beginning of the 1990s had virtually collapsed. [...] In spite of the continuous (though heavily reduced) state support, the animation production in Croatia almost stopped.162

When peace returned, production was reestablished but it was not a school anymore. Everybody went his or her way, no one was interested in the ‘tradition’.

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160 From the film’s press kit.
161 Praise must be given to the strength and warmth of the managing director, Margit ‘Buba’ Antauer, an award-winning filmmaker who gave up directing for organizing.
Joško Marušić

Born in 1952, Joško Marušić was the youngest of the Zagreb School masters and the only one who was still full of energy. During the hardest years, he was the artistic director of the Zagreb film animation studio, from 1987 to 1990 and again from 1995 to 1998.

From 1993 to 1998, he was the president of the Croatian Independent Artists’ Association; he was the artistic director of the World Festival of Animated Film between 1992 and 1998; and he was head of the festival board from 2000 to 2006. In 1999, he founded the Department for Animated Film at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb (today the Department for Animated Film and New Media), where he taught three courses. He also published several books, and his artwork was shown at many exhibitions.

His U susjedstvu grada (‘In the Neighbourhood of the City’, 2006) was the best animated short film of its decade in Croatia, telling a love story between two homeless people. History flows round them without touching them; poverty becomes violence, violence becomes tragedy. The sea is a major character in the film. As in his early Fish Eye (1980), Marušić shows his deep knowledge of its beauty and its menacing, lethal presence.

Not surprisingly for a teacher of young people, he chose the generation gap as the subject of his first feature, a great film. Duga (‘Rainbow’, 2010) is the tragedy of a childhood, and of a person unable to communicate with the adult world. In the opening live-action sequence, a storm forces a father with children to stop his car in an isolated area. During this break he observes a landscape of ruins, a place that has witnessed historic events. Thus begins a memory that blends reality and legend.

The gap between the two is underscored by different graphic styles and uses of colour. There are grey and ochre...
hues and figures inspired by antique prints for the historic happenings, which contrast with vivid colour and stylized images for the legend. Against the background of wars between generations, two legends interweave: a father and son consumed by the same passion, and a young girl who decides to swim through the lake at the foot of the rainbow to become a male.

Serbia

As far as pure talent is concerned, few people have reached the level of Rastko Ćirić (b. Belgrade, 24 May 1955). He was a director, writer, music composer-performer, illustrator, and graphic artist. He gained international fame with Labilonska Kila (‘The Tower of Bababel’, 1988). This short, featuring an absurd neverending fall, followed many other successes for Ćirić, but it was his first film that was well distributed in the festival circuit.

His début had been Odlazi Ćirac (‘The Circus Departs’, 1982, from a popular song by Djordje Balašević), followed by the anti-war Stop (id., 1983). Tango Ragtime (id., 1985) is a creative and colourful fantasy on music, composed by Ćirić himself; it features the joking merriment of North American ragtime and the melancholy of South American tango.


On the centenary of animation, Ćirić made Fantasmagorie 2008 (id.), a computer reworking of the eponymous film by Émile Cohl. It wasn’t completely satisfactory, but it connects two centuries very well, synthesizing traditional and computer animation. There was also a stereoscopic version.

Ćirić’s artistic output can be compared to a series of fireworks, each amazing the spectators with intellectual freedom and the risk of a quick oblivion. To fully appreciate their intrinsic poetry, the films should be screened together.


For Bikić, an animated film was not just an art product for the festival elite. About a hundred animators went through his workshops. In just under a decade, the Biki Studio worked on five series, all coproductions, and produced around forty short films.

Although he led a big studio, made commissioned films and commercials, and worked on projects of wide importance, Bikić never forgot to be a film author. His signature is on such award-winning films as 1993’s Kist, Kiadat, Kugaj (Kazimir Malevich), inspired by the great artist. The miniature Prica o... (’A Story about...’, 1997) takes an ironic view of the world. Bikić died before he could make the animated feature Kapetan Džon Pipl hảo (‘Captain John Pipplefox’), of which only a trailer remains.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

We have already met Midhat ‘Ajan’ Ajanović, a Bosnian short animated film director in the 1980s (see Vol. 2). The war chased him from Sarajevo to Göteborg, in Sweden, where he continued a prolific career as a novelist, screenwriter, caricaturist, teacher, and organizer. Above all, he studied and wrote essays on animation, and in a few years he was one of the best scholars in the world.

His Point of Mouth (id., 2010) is a documentary about a man from Sarajevo; the animated drawings let us see images from his life subjectively. The film is about reminiscences, about growing up in Sarajevo, and about never being able to leave no matter how far one travels. The film extends the author’s studies on realism in animation as an aesthetic concept. Sometimes crude in the drawing style and the events depicted, Point of Mouth has the hidden, melancholic tenderness of a person who has lost his world.

MI / US (id., 2011), in contrast, is a collection of bitter gags in the tradition of the old Zagreb School. Laughter blends with the ultimate pessimism, describing humanity’s eternal belligerence.

A third generation of Bosnian animators has emerged after the war. The first to be internationally recognized
is Ivan Ramadan (b. Zagreb, 1985), whose computer-animated film *Toleranceja* (‘Tolerance’, 2008) received awards at several significant festivals.

**Bulgaria**

Due to its traditional ties with Russia, Bulgaria was a loyal satellite of Soviet politics. The fall of the system took many of the population by surprise, and the transition to democracy and capitalism was long and confused.

The animated film studio Sofia, which had previously produced 20 or 30 films per year on average, now struggled to survive. It employed its previous staff as freelancers in a German-Bulgarian coproduction, *Kiselo zele* (‘Sour Cabbage’). The film’s producers later became owners of a private company, Pillion Films.

Several other private companies emerged, initially working on outsourced foreign productions. Among them was a Ukrainian-Bulgarian company (in the mid-1990s), as well as the local branch of the American Sugarshack Animation, Studio Hill, Nagual Ltd, Venelin-Animation, Zografic Film, Chaos Group, Gekon, and Sokerov Studio. Some of these had a measure of success, considering the lack of tradition in commercial animation and computer games in Bulgaria in addition to the strong global competition.

In 1995, Sofia merged with the larger Boyana Film Studios. It took part in several foreign productions but collapsed in 2006. (The state sold it to the American film production company New Image after a period of disputes and ineffective protest by the disunited filmmakers’ society.) Boyana’s successor, Nu Image Film Studios, produced a few pilots for animated series but limited its animation production to its large visual effects unit, Worldwide FX.

The most significant step in the transition was the creation of a National Film Centre in 1991, following the French film production financing scheme. At this point, the independent production companies, that were supposed to raise funds for the films with only partial state support, had yet to be created. Some of the new production companies began as structures involved with the outsourced foreign productions.


The World Festival of Animated Film in Varna, which won prestige internationally in the 1980s, closed in the 1990s. The theatres did not keep up their tradition of showing animated shorts.

In 2003, the Bulgarian Parliament passed the Film Industry Act, amended in 2008. It decreed that the annual national budget should allocate a subsidy to the agency (the National Film Centre). The annual amount should not be smaller than the sum of the average preceding year’s budgets, funding 160 minutes of animation. This sounded encouraging, but the animators’ enthusiasm withered as production shrank still further. The state had to secure the money but was not bound to put the funds to use.

Even so, animation survived – mainly through the efforts of the professionals themselves. Bulgarian animation was strong in art films, mainly shorts, which were generally difficult to distribute. During the following years, most of the leading figures made great efforts to sustain the tradition, trying their hands at more commercial products. Many became independent producers or teachers of animation, passing on their experience and knowledge to new generations.

Meanwhile, artists of great importance passed away: Todor Dinov (1919–2004), Proiko Proikov (1927–2000), Christo Topuzanov (1930–2006), and Donyo Donev (1929–2007). All of them were active till their last days – making films, exhibitions, and caricatures, and teaching animation at the National Academy of Drama and Film Arts.

Perhaps the most active personality of the period was Anri Kulev (b. Shumen, 1949), an artist, filmmaker, producer, and professor at NBU. He tried many kinds of animation in his films *Drakonati i moomcheto* (‘The Dragon and the Boy’), 1995) and *Gorgonata* (‘The Gorgone’), 1994), and in the mixed-media shorts *Ochi Chornie* (‘Black Eyes’), 1992, a tribute to Louis Armstrong’s music), *Slameniat chovek* (‘The Strawman’, 2001), and *Partsalat* (‘The Rag’, 2007).

Slav Bakalov (b. Sofia, 1945) also tried different formats, directing several episodes of the series *Malkiat Zmei* (‘The Little Dragon’) and the CGI short *Zaro* (ed., 2007). He also wrote scripts, including *A Biahe Krushi* (‘And Pears We

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163 By Pencho Kunchev, Giannalberto Bendazzi, and Tsvetomira Nikolova.
Chapter 3: Romania


Vitko Boyanov (b. Sofia, 1947) made several very short children’s films, financed by a private sponsor. Nikolay Todorov (b. Sofia, 1952) worked for many years on German commissions and also directed several animated shorts. Andrey Tsvetkov was very active, making several acclaimed shorts, including Cherno Na bialo (‘Black on White’) and Felinichita (id., 2009).

Pencho Kunchev (b. Sofia, 1951) directed several episodes of the Slovak-Bulgarian series The Baby’s Adventures, then the subtly erotic short Lunata sus sinite ochi (‘Blue-Eyed Moon’, 2001).

Notably, there were several animated adaptations from foreign literature, perhaps trying to break the local boundaries. They include Dessetiat King (‘The Tenth Circle’, 1998), loosely based on Dante’s Inferno by Anna Haralampieva (b. Sofia, 1961). She later made Zashko e visoko nebeto (‘Why is Heaven So High’, 2003) and Papagalski zalugalki (‘Uncle Parrot’s Rhymes’, 2008), together with Tsvetomira Nikolova (b. Sofia, 1960).


Quite a few well-known and promising filmmakers and animators went abroad. Some returned home, joining the struggle to keep Bulgarian animation alive – working on foreign commissions, supervising productions, and making TV pilots or auteur films. Among the latter, the most successful at festivals were Vlado Shomov’s (b. Sofia, 1954) Kogato biahme greshnitsi (‘When We were Sinners’, 2011); Ivan Tsonov’s (b. Sofia, 1956) Kragovrat (‘The Circle’, 2006) and Ednochipochno (‘One Way’, 2009); and Tsvetomira Nikolova’s Supofonia (‘Soup Symphony’, 1994) and A+E (2007). Vlado Shishkov (b. Plovdiv, 1964), Dido Nedelchev (b. Burgas, 1958), Iavor Kaluchev (b. Sofia, 1959), and Georgi Dimitrov (b. Silistra, 1964) were also active as authors of award-winning shorts, promos, ads, and headers. They also produced and supervised commissioned work from abroad.

Among the most discussed authors in the 1990s is Zlatin Radev (b. Sofia, 1960), mainly for his first film Consersfilm (1991). Its festival success led to Shock, made with Vladislav Budinov (b. Sofia, 1953). Radev’s project for the feature puppet film Boklutsite (‘The Junk’) was among the first animation projects to receive a development grant from MEDIA.


The first Bulgarian animated Web series was Bulgar (‘Bulgar’, 2008–2010) by Nedelcho Bogdanov (b. Nessebar, 1982). Another development was the revival of the Varna world festival of animated film in 2011, joining other new international short films and animation festivals in the country.

Romania164

In 1991, Animafilm Studio ceased to belong to the state and became a private company. It went bankrupt nineteen years later. In the interim, it produced about 140 short films, all broadcast in closed circuits (schools, museums, and similar institutions), for educational purposes and with almost no artistic value. In addition to the high production costs, Animafilm could no longer be competitive using decades-old equipment.

After the fall of the Communist system, most of the best animators left the country. A few new studios appeared, focusing on advertising. The only one that stood out was Dacodac (founded in 1992). It was basically a joint French venture, which aimed at making features for export. The

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164 By Mihai Mitriță.
studio had around sixty employees, including many former Animafilm animators, and it produced films for France, Australia, Ireland, India, Poland, and Ukraine.

The company signed partnerships with important foreign studios such as Milimages France. In 2007, it released the animated feature Aventurile lui Piccolo și Saxo (‘Piccolo, Saxo & Company,’ 2007), the first feature entirely produced in Romania after 1989. The studio closed in 2009.


The first anim’est, the only international animation film festival in the country, was held in 2006. Independent animators appeared including Matei Branea (a successful illustrator and animator); Raul Taciu (winner of the best Romanian short at anim’est 2007 for Acrofobia, a mixture of puppet animation and CGI); Alexei Gubenco (Marile speranţe, ‘Great Expectations’, 2008); and Marius Pandele (Zgomot alb, ‘White Noise’, 2009, and GOPO nominate in 2010). All of these films were low-cost productions, made with passion and savings.

Romania had only one financing institution for cinema projects, the National Centre of Cinematography (CNC). Statistics show that three to four animation projects were submitted each year but usually none of them received funding. As of writing, only one approved and financed project has been finished: O zi din viața lui Ionescu (‘A Day in Ionescu’s Life’, 2010) by the former Animafilm director, Mihai Şurubaru. It features a character that could easily stand for all of us in everyday situations.

Cyprus

A country with a rich cultural legacy stretching back to mythical times, Cyprus became an independent state in 1960. The history of its filmmaking began three years before that, with the creation of Cypriot public television (CYBC) in 1957. Animation first appeared in the late 1960s.

In 1968, painter and graphic artist Andis Ioannides (b. 1939) animated the first graphic title for Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation and later worked on many animated music clips. Writer, painter, TV and theatre producer, and director Kyros Rossides (b. 1944) graduated in 1973 from the London Royal College of Art with Ta paidia tou Pirai ("The Piraeus Children"), hand drawn on celluloid film under camera. Painter Spyros Demitriadis (b. 1950) recalled the agricultural life of Cyprus and its folk traditions in his graduation film Cypriot Transfigurations at the Academy of Applied Arts in Prague in 1976.

During the 1980s there were several animated commercials but no auteur works. In 1994 the first coordinated steps were taken to create a distinct national cinematography, with the establishment of the Cyprus Cinema Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Education and Culture. This body provided government grants for film productions.

In 1997, video artist Yiannis Economou (b. 1959) produced 2000 Miles and Thirteen Years. This puppet film was the first animation commissioned by the Cyprus Cinema Advisory Committee. In 1999 Nicos Synnos (b. 1971) formed Toonachunks Animation Films. He produced a number of shorts, including Animal Behaviour (2005), the second animated film to be commissioned by the Cyprus Cinema Advisory Committee and the first to win awards at international festivals. Toonachunks established itself as the first specialized studio in Cyprus, producing hand drawn and puppet films, classic and avant-garde films, animated documentaries, art videos for gallery exhibitions and museums, television spots, and cartoon commercials.

In the mid 2000s a new generation of mainly CGI animators emerged, basically working on a freelance basis and in small teams.

Since 2007, the newly founded Cyprus University of Technology has educated students in animation by offering six classes through their multimedia and graphic arts courses. The same year marked another turning point with the inauguration of the Countryside Animafest Cyprus – Views of the World (originally established in 2002 as the first documentary festival in the country). The founding team was headed by artistic director Yiorgos Tsangaris (b. 1976), graphic artist, animator, and animation film curator. The festival screened independent authors’ films and included international and national competition sections.

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165 Directed by André Clavel and Eric Gutierrez. It should not be mistaken for the namesake short film by the Dutch Joop Geesink (1960).
166 The Romanian film industry awards.
167 Inspired by the song written by Manos Hadjidakis for Jules Dassin’s live-action movie Never on Sunday (1960).
Among its founding principles was the cultivation and education of a wide audience on the art of independent auteur animated films. Animafest Cyprus and Cyprus University of Technology collaborated to organize annual international academic events.


Ukraine169

After the Declaration of Independence on 24 August 1991, the new social situation opened opportunities for creativity. Ukrainian animated filmmakers had accumulated great experience (the greatest in the area, after Moscow’s Soyuzmultfilm). In the first half of the 1990s, the government still provided the necessary conditions for regular work. There was a blossoming of activity, especially among the new generation of animation directors who had started as layout men or animators.


These films were successful domestically and represented the Ukranimafilm studio at international animation festivals. They focused on expressing national culture, folklore, and literature. These had always been characteristics of Ukrainian animation, but now they helped in the search for a national identity.


The films based on Ukrainian literature include: Topolia (‘The Poplar’, 1996) by Valentina Kostyleva (b. Belogorsk, Ukraine, 18 March 1946), based on the poem by Taras Shevchenko; and Viy (‘Viy’, 1996) by Alla Gracheva, based on a horror story by the Ukrainian-born Nikolai Gogol.

Audiences and critics were delighted to discover Oleg Pedan (b. Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, 2 February 1969) and his puppet film Scettlaya Lichnost (‘Light Personality’, 2002), which was followed by Nikogo net doma (‘There Was Nobody at Home’, 2004) and Sany malenkiy (‘The Smallest One’, 2007). The films’ characters are created from old clock components, springs, lamps, and other surprising objects.

The promising situation descended into a protracted crisis from the late 1990s, due to the reduction and then the almost complete cessation of government financing. The offices of Ukranimafilm studio were gradually deserted. The best and most experienced professionals left to work in the US, Russia, Poland, Hungary, France, and elsewhere.

A Ukrainian/French production company, Borysfen-Lutes, opened its doors in 1994. It was the country’s first privately owned commercial studio. At the beginning, the Ukrainian employees of the company aimed not just to make money to please their partners, but they also made quite successful auteur films.


If Ukranimafilm experienced almost no development in the 2000s, it could boast some individual achievements.

168 We are grateful to Yiorgos Tsangaris, who provided the information on which this section is based.
169 By Elena Shupik and Elena Kasavina.
170 A distinguished Ukrainian poet and painter, Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) wrote Topolia in 1839.
The most notable film of the period was Shel tramway nomer deviat (‘The Tram Number 9 Goes’, clay animation, 2002) by Stepan Koval (b. Novomoskovsk, Ukraine, 18 July 1965). Funny and subtle, the film was awarded the Silver Bear at the Berlin film festival and received more than ten awards at different animation festivals.

In 2005, Koval founded the Novatorfilm studio and continued working with clay animation. Among its productions are 26 short films called My Ukraine.


Sivokon was a shy, taciturn, benign artist. He already had a very long list of internationally successful films under his belt, including the masterful Len (‘Laziness’, 1979). He didn’t mind learning a new technique, such as sand animation, in order to continue creating — so long as it was inexpensive.

Pysea dlia triokh aktoriv (‘The Play for Three Actors’, 2005) by Alexander Shmygoon (b. Kiev, Ukraine, 25 September 1976) received the award for best children’s film at the international animation festival KROK.


Georgia

All too predictably, Georgia’s independence from the Soviet Union led to economic collapse. Animation suffered for many years. Capitalism gradually turned state-owned cinema studios into private companies, the studios Orbi and Kvali. In 2005, a fire damaged the film archives of Georgian Film Studio.

However, life went on. Merab Saralidze (see Vol. 2), made Tutiqhushi (‘A Parrot’) in 1989. A colt gallops into the forest, surrounded by music. But cruel animals throw him in the air, where he turns into a parrot and can hardly hear the sound of freedom. Tutiqhushi was followed by Saprtkho-belbi (‘Bugbears’, 1992) and Qosiphinos Meshenebelbi (‘Builders of the Country’, 1997), a musical screened in the year of the director’s death.


In 1997, Shadimam Chavchavadze, who had made the memorable Mebaghe (‘The Gardener’, 1975), directed Sazghrebi (‘Borders’). In 2009, the Kartuli Filmi (Georgian Film) and Samta studios joined to make another Chavchavadze film, Tsinda Mela (‘Holy Fox’, 2009), based on Reinike Fuchs by Wolfgang Goethe. This short, with no positive characters, was a metaphor for contemporary society.

In the same year, two other companies, MIFASI Film and MK Productions, financed Chavchavadze’s Ratom Ar Akes Mtares Kaba (‘Why the Moon Does Not Have a Dress’, 2009), based on a Georgian story.


Between 2007 and 2009, the film studio Marao produced his next film, C’est la vie (‘That’s Life’, 2009), about life’s fast pace. Sikharulidze’s Art Romani (‘Art Novel’, 2009) was about a jealous wife, while Gavardnilebi (‘Outlaws’, 2008) was based on the facts surrounding the battle of Gurias, a small Georgian region, against the Russian empire.

The production companies MIFASI Film and MK Productions also commissioned four works between 2007 and 2009 from the veteran Vladimir (Lado) Sulakvelidze (b. Tbilisi, 9 February 1957). They were Legenda Gvinoze

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171 It’s the story of a man so lazy that he becomes a fish. In five minutes, the film shows the difference between living and just surviving.

172 By Mariam Kandelaki.

173 The importance of this writer and teacher (1840–1912) is enormous in Georgia. Mother Tongue, the manual that he created, has taught millions of Georgians their language since its first publication in 1880.
Chapter 3: Armenia

174 The country’s restored independence (on 21 September 1991) brought new challenges and hopes. Though there was no real national animation industry, Hayfilm continued its activity; other new studios were born; and Armenian masters continued working with Russian and French studios. The film’s subjects continued to be inspired by Armenian literature, but the social and political situation figured more often in animated film scripts. In 2009 an animated film festival, Re:Animania, was established in Yerevan.

Robert Sahakyants’s works became sarcastic and ironic. Until his untimely death in 2009, many of his cartoons were coproduced with studios in Moscow and France. They included Katsin (The Axe’, 1994), Enterituynner (Elections’, 1994), Taipan (The Ark’, 1997), Viktoria (Victoria’, 1997), and Banalan kyangi nshannare (‘Signs of the Reasonable Life’, 2001). In his later years he became more and more politicized, feeling the responsibilities of an intellectual to speak out about social and political issues. When necessary, he worked by the light of candles and kerosene lamps.

In 2009, the year of his death, his team began work on five projects with completely different styles and formats. One was the feature Anahit, directed by Robert’s wife Lyudmila Sahakyants and their son David, based on the fairy tale by the Armenian writer Ghazaros Aghayan (1840–1911). The Robert Sahakyants Production studio was registered in March 2010 by David Sahakyants and his siblings, Nana and Hayk Sahakyants.

Since 1992, David Sahakyants (b. 1975) has worked in Armenfilm, now the National Cinema Centre of Armenia. In 2008 he became a member of the Union of Cinematographers of Armenia, and in 2010 he became the artistic director of cartoon production for the National Cinema Centre of Armenia.


Sergey Galstyan,175 film critic and writer, interviewed Robert Sahakyants while preparing his book The Magic Carpet. ‘An animated film] expresses my thoughts’, said Sahakyants. ‘I have no desire to show purely the art of my

174 By Giannalberto Bendazzi and Marianna Aslanyan.

175 Critic Sergey Galstyan should not be mistaken for the director Stepan Galstyan.
drawings or of my directing; my wish is my word to reach the spectator. My cartoon films are close to journalism or literature. If I could write the way I draw, I would. [. . .] My films chronologically bound in one collection have become my biography, the history of my attitude towards life and people. And if I even try to feel sorry for my vain efforts in making political and publicity films, I blame not me but that situation, which was forcing us to react at every conflict.\(^{176}\)

The puppet specialist Gayane Martirosyan continued her career with *Hin Jrağhatsi Bari Vəginere* (*Kind Ghosts of the Old Mill*, 1993), *Bari Hogineri Nor Arkatz-i* (*New Adventures of Kind Ghosts*, 1999), *Paterazme* (*The War*, 2000), and *Esəq Zangak* (*Three Bells*, 2004). Since 2003, Martirosyan has been teaching at the State Institute of Theatre and Cinema, where she supervises the animation directing course. In 2006 she released the first part of *Vishapagorgi Gakhsituqe* (*The Mystery of the Dragon-Carpet*).


Yubik Muradyan directed *Hayots Geer* (*Armenian Letters*, 1992), about the Armenian alphabet,\(^{177}\) one of the first films made after independence. Later he made the remarkable *Bilis* (id., based on William Saroyan’s short story, 2000).\(^{178}\) A project called *John Silver* was unfinished at his death in 2009.

With *Jik yev Jak* (*Jik and Jak*, 1993) Muradyan started collaborating with his wife Naira (b. Yerevan, 17 December 1961). Naira Muradyan was formerly an art director in the animation department at the Armenfilm studio and had also worked with Lyudmila Sahakyants. Among her own best films are *Naapet Quchak-Noch* (‘Naapet Quchak-Night’, 2002),\(^{179}\) *Iz zhinzi trollei* (‘From the Life of Trolls’, 2008), *V etot den* (‘On that Day’, 2010), and *Balet* (‘Ballet’, 2011). In 2002 she started her career as a TV director with the series *The Flight of the Pierrots* (a seven-episodes series), followed by the series *Biblical Tales* (2010).

**Robert Sahakyants**\(^ {180}\)

Robert Sahakyants was born in Baku (Soviet Azerbaijan) on 30 August 1950 and died in Yerevan, Armenia, on 24 September 2009. He burst into animation – provocative, irreverent, and eccentric. He challenged the clichés of sugary storytelling and the total censorship of the time. *The Fox Book*, made in 1975, was a shock both for Armenian and international animation. Spectators could not follow the metamorphoses of his characters; the sheer number of gags and transformations were beyond belief.

A whole range of interpretations of Armenian national tales followed. At first sight, they seemed to be brilliantly modern readings. At a deeper level, they were the original vision of a great artist responding to the spiritual heritage of his nation. Each new film became an event for his growing number of fans.

Sahakyants enjoyed breaking stereotypes, debunking myths, and ignoring restrictions, bans, and dogmas. His films are undisguised attacks on stupidity, violence, and ignorance. They are also stunning, with national colour pattern techniques, original images, funny scripts, and cascading gags.

Sergey Galstyan recalls: ‘\(^ {181}\) *Lesson by Robert Sahakyants* was projected in 1987 at the Soviet Union film festival in Moscow. It received an award and got the appreciation of the professionals. The heroes of the film are space-men who appear on another planet, and as soon as they try to destroy a living creature, they are transformed and become the same type of creature. Do not kill . . . The planet gives a cruel and wise lesson to the invaders.’

From *The Fox Book* until *The Axe* (1994), which depicted mankind marching to catastrophe, Sahakyants made a

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\(^{176}\) Galstyan, *Kakhardakan Gorg*, p. 62.

\(^{177}\) By Armen Vatyan and Giannalberto Bendazzi.

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Again, Sergey Galstyan writes: ‘In 1989 Robert Sahakyants, not yet forty years old, had already gained the title of master, and completed his political film-pamphlet Button. [...] Not only houses and towns are breaking, but the whole empire is breaking.’

Sahakyants himself said: ‘We finished the film at the time when the committee Kharabakh was in jail, and the army of the Soviet Union was in the city. We organized the first presentation in the Cinema House. I was thinking that it was risky to do so, but on the other hand I was eager to give the situation a sharp shock. When the film ended the audience was cursing the government. Ten, fifteen minutes of people yelling. I would not change that wave for the ovation of any festival.’

Azerbaijan

In April 1990 Azerbaijan animators experienced capitalism for the first time in the Soviet Union. The title of the animation film department was changed to the Azanfilm Creative-Production Union. The nation became officially independent in December 1991 but was shaken for some years by a war with Armenia for control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The conflict ended in 1994.

In the 1990s, Azanfilm (whose art director was Elchin Hami Akhundov, a production designer and film director) made 19 animated films. They included Once Somewhere... , a political satire, for which its director Vakhid Talybov (b. 1949) received the prize for best animated film at the 1993 Baku II Festival-Contest of Azerbaijan films.

The cel film Dedication by Shamil Najafzada (b. Baku, 13 November 1960) is dedicated to the victims of Stalin’s repression. In 1991 the film was awarded the diploma at the Oberhausen International Film Festival. Fortunately Najafzada never made another animated film, instead devoting his talent to documentaries.

Ode (directed by V. Talybov and R. Ismailov) reflects philosophical ideas about the meaning of life (the soundtrack features Beethoven’s Ode to Joy). The cel-animated Sohbataz-esmar is dedicated to the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the poet Mehmed Fuzuli; the same film was inspired by the works of the miniature artist Soltan Mahammad Tebrizi. Director Elchin Hami Akhundov won the prize for best animated film at the 1995 Baku III Festival-Contest of Azerbaijan films.

The expert Aydin Kazimzada writes: Hafiz Akbarov has his own, unique style. He has worked at the Azarbayjanfilm studio for more than 40 years, on films including A Jackal, Son of a Jackal; Ring Out, My Saz, Ring Out; Stone; Baby Hedgehog and an Apple; A Human Comes to the Forest; The Magic Tree and The House in the Glade. Rauf Dadashov was born into the family of famous Azerbaijani actor Mammadagha Dadashov. He [...] worked on many animated films, including The Lion and Two Bulls [...] Firangiz Quliyeva worked at the Azanfilm studio for some 30 years. She animated My Chickens, Rooster and Tural and Zari. [Quliyeva] was the artist on The Astrologer’s Apprentice, Chase, Dreams... Dreams, and others. Oqtay Zulfuqarov is a famous Azerbaijani composer, who wrote music for the best Azerbaijani animated films.

Kazimzada adds:

Another of the key figures in Azerbaijan’s animated cinema is Arif Maharramov, a production designer, film director and scriptwriter. [...] In 1981–93, he worked as a production designer on live-action feature films, film director and scriptwriter at the Azarbayjanfilm studio. In 1988–91 he was the art director of the animated films association. [...] Arif Maharramov created Apprentice Astrologer, Tune for Bed, Joke-1, Joke-2, A Chrysanthemum Leaf, Dada Qorqud, The Sarkar Epic, Molla Nasreddin, Basat and Tepelog and others.

In 2010, the output of the Azanfilm studio (which mostly made CGI animation) was three to four films a year.

183Some young intellectuals formed this committee in 1988, claiming that the Armenian-inhabited Nagorno-Karabakh enclave in Azerbaijan, which had insurrected, had to return to Armenia. After a few months, they were arrested on specious grounds.
184Mehmed bin Suleiman Fuzuli (1495–1556) composed poetry with equal facility and elegance in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic.
Around 1990, the Greek state became somewhat indifferent to ‘cartoons’. The cause was the death, in 1989, of the enlightened writer Pavlos Zannas (who was the president of the Hellenic Centre of Cinematography and a strong supporter of animation). Around the same time, though, digital technology entered the field with a vengeance. Traditional animators, who were already sidelined and having to survive through commercials, found that advertising agencies were now turning to cheaper, less demanding solutions.


In 1997, Kostopoulou made *Ti ta ghnis otan megalonis?* (‘What Will You Become When You Grow Up?’). A young man is overwhelmed by apathy, fearing the transition to adulthood and responsibilities. Kostopoulou’s films are characterized by fast pacing, continuous camera movements, a combination of various two-dimensional animation techniques, and a light and personal tone.

In 1996, the indefatigable Iordan Ananiadis made *Moi oi ellines* (‘We, the Greeks’). He observed his compatriots with a caustic, self-critical approach, which could also be funny. In 2005, he made *Mis petaxis tipota* (‘Do Not Throw Anything’).

The same year Spyros Rasidakis made his debut with *35 x 50* (id.), in which a pencil, an eraser, and a sharpener dance to Chaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*.

In 1998, Spiros Siákas (b. Arta, 1967) made *Kops’to* (‘Stop It!’), a pilot for an anti-smoking campaign. The same year, Zachos Samoladás made *Genesis* (id.), based on chapters from the Bible’s first book. In 1999, two films were screened: *Continuation of Genesis* by Zachos Samoladás, and *Dodecanimo* (‘A Dozen Days’) by Cristóstóros Sotirákos. The latter was the result of five years of preparation and effort, with rich and impressive classic drawings.

In 2001, Panagiotis Rappas and Nassos Vakalis (b. Athens, 1966) opened the Greek branch of the Time Lapse Pictures studio in Athens. The company had been founded in 1999 in Los Angeles. The two branches successfully collaborated on the international production of animated films for cinema, television, and the Internet. Time Lapse Pictures became a meeting place for the best Greek animators, who found the opportunity to work on international projects.

In 2002, Dimitris Vorris directed *Sto simposio tu Arkeuli* (‘The Symposium of Arkeuli’), a sharp satire on contemporary Greek people, appealing to the mentality of the ancient Greeks. *Star system* (id.) by Spiros Siákas had expressionistic drawings, rendered with detailed colouring; the film matched and combined various techniques. It was followed in more depth by *The Mirror Stage* (2005), which used puppet animation, pixilation, and drawing on paper.

In *O nomos tis variatitas* (‘The Law of Gravity’) by Spyros Rasidakis, a lone pigeon tries to escape from smog and skyscrapers. In 2003, *I fili mu ta diaskamakia* (‘My Friend from Outer Space’) by Dimitri Patrìkiú was the first Greek 3D computer animation: a girl befriends two extraterrestrials who show up in her room.

Stelios Polychronakis (b. Athens, 1972) animated on *The Mirror Stage* and later worked in Greece and Great Britain, with considerable success. In 2005, again working with Siakas, he made the spot for the 2005 COJI Island games.


In 2006, Angeliki Salamaliki (b. Patras, 1983) made *Metanomismenos Erotas* (‘Love in Disguise’), a love encounter in disguise, with vibrant drawing. In the final dance the protagonists are just outlines floating in the music. *My Doll Plays Alice* (2007) was Akrivi Simeonidi’s first film, animated in collaboration with Vangelis Georgakopoulos. Made with cutouts, it reflects the absurd atmosphere of Lewis Carroll.

Angelos Spartanis (b. 1973; he grew up in Crete, Greece and in Düsseldorf, Germany) made several films, including *Erato*, which was loosely based on Arthur Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer*. His films often mix techniques, including live-action, drawn animation, and collage.


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186 By Michela Morselli.
is an animated version of the Manifesto that E. A. Rauter wrote during the rebellious era of the European Sixty-Eight.

Stelios Polychronakis won the Best New Director Award at the Balkanima film festival with I Do Art (2007), which summarizes contemporary art in two minutes.


More studios opened in Athens, most of whom made commercial work. Among the best known is Deep Green Sea, which offered quality services to ActionAid, Coca Cola, Honda, and Katerina Myrianthropoulou’s DesignerBlock.net.

**Yiorgos Sifianos**

Yiorgos (George) Sifianos was born in Khanyá, on the island of Crete, on 14 August 1952, and has lived in Paris since 1980. In 1994, Sifianos made Odeur de ville (‘Scent of City’), about a woman who lives with her cat. The loneliness is palpable through the dark coloured drawings, through the flickering light, and through lines that vibrate as if they were the nerves of the woman.

In 2001, he made the short film Tutu (id.) with Pascal Dalet. The film has saturated colours and wide-angle images. The young Tutu lives in a neighbourhood in Paris; the city and its inhabitants devour him in a whirlwind of violence. With no happy ending, Tutu condemns the psychological impact of society’s violence on children.

C’est Môa (‘Ego’) was released in 2007. Sifiano says, ‘This film is an animated choreography.’187 Its structure is based on musical principles. There are two actors and two puppets on stage; the opposing pairs reflect the relationship between manipulated and manipulator.

In his capacity as a scholar, Georges Sifianos has taught at the University of Paris VIII, at CFT Gobelins, at the ENSAD (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs), the FEMIS, and abroad.

**Albania**189, 190

The Communist regime in Albania ended in March 1992. As usual, the sudden advent of capitalism produced a social crisis. Until 1991, the state had forced animation filmmakers to make a film a year (clearly under censorship – indeed, there was so much censorship that self-censorship was a common practice). This guaranteed them a job – a guarantee that ended with capitalism. The system had been guaranteed by the film studio Kinostudio Shqipëria e Re (‘New Albania’), founded in 1952. In 1991, it became Alba Film (divided into four sections: Albafilm-Studio; Albafilm-Animation; Albafilm-Distribution; and State Film Library). It finally closed in 1996.

A period of stagnation followed, during which the system was reorganized with new private production companies. On 29 April 1996, the Albanian National Centre of Cinematography (Qendra Kombëtare and Kinematografise, QKK)192 opened, giving additional funding to filmmakers and facilitating many coproductions (especially with France). Production increased and de-provincialized and equipment was updated.

The main authors of post-Communist Albanian animation were born in the 1950s and 1960s and had studied in foreign film schools (Romania, Italy, and Greece). Later, however, there were more training opportunities for animators within the country.

Gjin Varfi (b. Tirana, 14 May 1954) directed many films, including Ekstremistet (‘Extremist’, 1994), Ndodh e the keshtu (‘It Happens Like This, Too’, 1996), and Dhe Nderroi lekure (‘And the Skin Was Changed’, 2001), produced by Studio 4+1. In 2003, he used animated Plasticine for Ndryshimi (‘The Change’), produced by Pegasus Animation Studio. A cockerel is deposed by a newcomer, but the usurper’s fate will be inevitably the same.

The following year, Varfi made Besë ujku (‘The Wolf’s Promise’), followed by 2005’s Kam një kungulleshke (‘I Have a Pumpkin’). Bshitëperat (‘Cut Tales’, also known as ‘The Tailless Fox’, 2007) was a puppet film, appreciated at festivals. The same year also saw Varfi’s Ditari i një maceje të zezë (‘Diary of a Black Cat’).

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188 Ulrike Koennecke-Bennet and Robert W. Bennet.
189 By Michela Morselli.
190 Thanks to Bertrand Shijaku for his invaluable help with this chapter.
191 All phases of filmmaking were censored, from script to distribution.
192 The centre’s purpose was ‘promoting and supporting all genres’ and to ‘enhance the competitiveness of Albanian cinema abroad’. In ten years (1997–2007), the QKK allocated 700,000 euros for 35 animated projects, out of a total of 132 projects.
Bertrand Shijaku (b. Tirana, 11 January 1968) was a director, writer, producer, and artist. In 1996 he was an animator-painter at Alba Film Animation Studio. His first important film was Koha e dashurisë së akreptuar (‘The Love Time of Scorpions’, 2002), codirected with Ergys Faja and produced by Art Grishaj Studio. A love-fight between two scorpions is drawn with a black vibrant line on a white background. Love and hate coexist in a seductive dialectic. The film combines a simple construction with a complex rhythm.

In 2003, Shijaku produced and animated Les fauves, animated by Stefan Taçi and Ergys Faja. In 2004, still with Faja, he made the 13-minute Princesha dhe hena (‘The Princess and the Moon’). The little princess Dea travels to the Moon, a parallel world where everyone finds a copy of him or herself. It is a cut-out, hyper-decorative film.

In 2006 Shijaku directed the tender Bilbizi dhe nibreti (‘The Nightingale and the King’), based on The Emperor’s Nightingale by Hans Christian Andersen. In 2007, together with Zhani Terpini, he directed and produced the avant-garde Dita e fundit (‘The Last Day’). In 2008 he made Tattoo with Adrian Çene, using frame-by-frame animation and black and white live-action.


Artur Muharremi (b. Pogradec, 2 June 1958) made Ura (‘The Bridge’, 2004), a successful film produced by Pegasus Animation Studio. A live-action painter contemplates his blank canvas. We follow the thread of inspiration that leads him to paint a bridge, representing the path through life to death.

Stefan Taçi, active from the 1980s, made 1992’s Kompozimi (‘Composition’). Its non-sequential narrative followed its author’s mood. Taçi’s 2006 film Les fawes (id.) won the award for best film (all categories) at the National Albanian Film Festival. It opens in black-and-white live-action, with a painter preparing to work in his Paris studio. Slowly, a colourful animation of Henri Matisse’s themes swarms over the screen, combined with footage of the Fauvist master. In 2007, Taçi made Flutura (‘The Butterfly’).

Artan Maku (b. Tirana, 11 August 1954) was already active in the 1980s (Aventurat e reja te Pikut, ‘New Piku’s Adventures’, 1983; Portreti, 1988). In the 1990s, he created Dashuri ne kater stinet (‘Love in Four Seasons’, 1997) and Fotografatë (‘The Photos’, 1999). During the 1990s, he also collaborated with studios in Greece.


In 2010 Artan Maku founded and directed the event AniFestRozafa, which is dedicated to animated films for children.

Artur Dauti (b. Tirana, 13 November 1957) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana (picture and scenography branch). He became an eclectic animator and director at the AFA Studio and the 4+1 Studio. In 1995 he directed Marioneta (‘The Marionette’), followed by Kon-sensus (‘Consensus’, 1999). In the latter, everyone is busy in an old sailboat in the middle of the ocean, but it does not move. At the same time, however, a bottle advances confidently through the waves.

In 2000, Dauti directed Tuneli (‘The Tunnel’), the story of a train ride. Nente vjet e nente dite (‘Nine Years and Nine Days’) followed in 2002, and Metamorfoza (‘Metamorphosis’) in 2004. In 2006 Dauti adapted a Grimm Brothers’ tale in Fëmija im, princë i bukur (‘My Son, My Handsome Prince’).

Shaqir Veseli directed Bibet e Morët i Brehkaçave (‘Bid the Frog King’, 1994) and Sipas kapeles koken (‘To Find One’s Match’, 1997). In 2008 he won many awards with Tsunami (id., codirected with Sirge Veseli and Gjergj Xuvani). Corruption destroys human conscience with a force like a tsunami.


Italy

The indifference of the public and opinion makers, the mediocrity (to put it mildly) of TV executives and

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199 Produced by Alba Film Animation Studio; Bertrand Shijaku was among the principal collaborators.
producers, and the extinction in 1977 of the TV advertising format Carosello all were factors in the cessation of the development of Italian animation. As a result, two generations of artists gave up before getting started or migrated. Nonetheless, talent couldn’t be completely eradicated.

The Neo-Pictorial Current

The 1990s and 2000s were characterized, in the fragile world of independents, by what critics called the ‘neo-pictorial current’, the only distinctive, original invention the country ever gave to animation. Among the outstanding neo-pictorials were Gianluigi Toccafondo (b. San Marino, 6 March 1965), Ursula Ferrara (b. Pisa, 28 May 1961), Roberto Catani (b. Jesi, 12 March 1965), Simone Massi (b. Pergola, 23 May 1970), Massimo Ottoni (b. Fano, 9 February 1975), Magda Guidi (b. Pesaro, 28 July 1979), Mara Cerri (b. Pesaro, 7 August 1978), Elena Chiesa (b. Genoa, 6 April 1963), and Andrea Pierri (b. Turin, 26 August 1968).

The first common feature of these animators was that they created real ‘moving pictures’ with explicit reference to painting techniques, which were used as the basis for animation. The neo-pictorial style might be called the ‘incessant metamorphosis of forms’, characterized by lengthening shadows, the blurring of boundaries, and the expansion of the figures. In these works the authors create a true comparison between the art of movement and the movement of art. But a difference divides the movement. On one side are the directors who attended the State Institute of Art of Urbino (Toccafondo, Catani, Massi, Ottoni, and Guidi). On the other are the self-taught Ferrara, Pierri, and Chiesa.

This neo-pictorial approach began with Toccafondo’s first films: La coda (‘The Tail’, 1989), Boxe (‘Boxing’, 1990), La pista (‘The Track’, 1991), and La pista del maiale (‘The Track of the Pig’, 1992). The approach reaches its maximum intensity and completeness in Toccafondo’s Le criminele (id., original title in French, 1993), Essere morti o essere vivi è la stessa cosa (‘Being Dead or Being Alive Is the Same Thing’, 2000), and La piccola Russia (‘Little Russia’, 2003).


Magda Guidi did the same with Nuova identità (‘New Identity’, 2003) and Eco, è ora (‘Here, It Is the Time’, 2004).

Even more significantly, this approach is found in the aloof, unconformable work of Ursula Ferrara, especially in her colour films: Quasi Niente (‘Almost Nothing’, 1997), Cinque stanze (‘Five Bedrooms’, 1999), La partita (‘The Match’, 2002), and News (id., 2006). The style is also found in Andrea Pierrri’s Moon (id., original title in English, 2003) – he declared openly that he was influenced by Toccafondo.

Toccafondo basically used the technique of retouched photocopies. Starting with a preexisting realistic base, he distorted the image with the photocopier, stretching and deforming it, and then painted on it. Ursula Ferrara utilized her own oil paintings then animated them traditionally, frame-by-frame. Massi, Catani, Ottoni, and Guidi preferred to animate handmade drawings on paper, coloured with crayons, chalk, graphite, and charcoal. Elena Chiesa and Andrea Pierri used computer animation and digital colouring.

In the neo-pictorial current, memory is understood both from a personal and a historical point of view, as a baggage of experiences from which to draw. Reflecting on the past allows the authors to escape from the certainty of the present, which stifles and restrains thinking. Tengo la posizione (‘I Hold My Position’, 2001) by Simone Massi is linked to the experience of anti-Nazi resistance and partisan warfare. Catani’s ‘The Goldfish’ and ‘The Rite’ reflect the centuries-old traditions of the rural world. In ‘The Tightrope Walker’ (Catani’s masterpiece), a woman takes refuge in her past, balancing on a thread of memories.


Another constant factor in the neo-pictorial narrative is escape, expressed most intensely by Toccafondo. In ‘The Track of the Pig’ or Pinocchio (1998) the escape is an existential and introspective journey. In Le criminel it is a getaway in real gangster movie style. The movement also uses words, written and spoken, inserted into the universe of images. Broken locations and almost inevitably undecipherable sentences flashing over the screen show the inability to communicate conventionally. We see words, in fragments of sentences or in letters floating somewhere, but with the relentless movement we barely read them.

This is especially true in Catani’s ‘The Tightrope Walker’, where piles of letters and papers rain from the sky.
like white snowflakes. Toccafondo also plays with words in ‘Being Dead or Being Alive Is the Same Thing’, which is rich in quotations from the poetry of Pier Paolo Pasolini. In Pierri’s Moon, a voiceover by the jazzman Wayne Tooker reads a text, Moon, marking the rhythm of the film.

The works of Elena Chiesa are projected in museums. Her Video Poetry freely interprets four contemporary poems and was shown in 2001 at the Galleria d’Arte Moderna in Bologna. Chiesa is also a poet, and she turns her poems into films. The technique that characterizes her work is the ‘dissolution of pictorial pixels’, which she invented in the early 1990s. Her formal maturity came with her association with the British poet Felix Dennis, in the series Videopoésie di/per Felix Dennis (2006–2008).

Simone Massi’s work is outwardly simple but complicates realism with absurd travelling, an extraordinary sense of film language, nostalgia for peasant traditions, and political condemnations. The latter two are his dearest, most lyrical, subjects, and his complete works form a large poem in which every film performs the function of a single canto. An artist, intellectual, and man of total integrity, Massi devoted his life to pure creation, never accepting compromises. Eventually he became the most internationally known and most awarded Italian animator, making such classics as Io so chi sono (‘I Know Who I Am’, 2004), La memoria dei cani (‘The Memories of the Dogs’, 2006), Dell’ammazzare il maiale (‘About Killing the Pig’, 2011), and Lieve, dilaga (‘Softly Flows’, 2012).

Neo-pictorial directors can be identified by their common stylistic basis, yet their work also reveals the solitary dimension of their experience. For them, animation is craftsmanship. They start from scratch and have full control over every step, sometimes creating the material itself to work on. Almost all the neo-pictorials are also artists, illustrators, or graphic designers.

In 1996, the Turin-based company Lanterna Magica made the feature film La freccia azzurra195 (‘The Blue Arrow’). Director Enzo D’Alò (b. Naples, 7 September 1953) coordinated some outstanding collaborators196 with skill and a light touch. It was a critical and popular success. In 1998, an even more successful feature followed: La gabbianella e il gatto197 (‘Lucky and Zorba’, 1998). A former jazz musician, D’Alò took great care with the soundtrack (probably the best achievement of the film). His experience of children’s workshops taught him how children communicate. He can be considered the best Italian director of animated feature films ever.

During the making of Momo alla conquista del tempo (‘Momo’, based on Michael Ende’s book), a financial scandal hit the company and a fuming D’Alò left. Momo was completed by another producer but was released in 2001 to mixed reactions. Opopomoz (id., 2003), an original story set in Naples, was probably too intellectual for children’s tastes – and too specifically Neapolitan to be fully understood abroad.

In the following years Enzo D’Alò devoted himself to TV series.198 Pinocchio went into production in 2008, to be completed four years later. The world premiere was in August 2012 at the Venice Film Festival. Captivating and sprightly, the film focuses on the father-son relationship between Pinocchio and Geppetto.

Lanterna Magica kept going under the leadership of producer Maria Fares, but it lost its initial creative momentum. Maurizio Forestieri (whom we met in Volume 2 as the director of the brilliant short Orpheus, 1986) was the

195 From a short story by Gianni Rodari (1920–1980). The good witch Befana (a female Italian version of Santa Claus) is sick and cannot deliver the Christmas gifts. Her treacherous assistant Scarafoni is poisoning her, but the undelivered toys rebel, including a train called Blue Arrow.
196 They included the designer and background artist Paolo Cardoni, the musician Paolo Conte, and the voice actors Lella Costa and Dario Fo.
197 From Luis Sepúlveda’s novel The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly. A mother seagull is dying; a soft-hearted cat promises that he’ll take care of her egg until the chick hatches, and that he’ll teach the baby seagull to fly. All the cats at the port eventually adopt the chick, who of course thinks she is a kitten herself.
198 Pipì Pupù e Rosmarina, 52 episodes of seven minutes each (2009). Script by Vincenzo Cerami, drawings by Annalaura Cantone, music by Daniele Di Gregorio, narrated by Giancarlo Giannini.
new creative hope, but his Totò Sapore, o la magica storia della pizza (‘Totò Sapore, or the Magic History of the Pizza’, 2003) was snubbed by critics and audiences. Forestieri’s frenetic drawings couldn’t save an uninvolving story and characters.

Lanterna Magica turned to TV series, captivating their audience with Andrea Zingoni’s Gino il pollo perso nella rete (‘Gino the Chicken Lost in the Net’, 2006) and Le avventure di Neve & Gliz (‘Neve and Gliz’s Adventures’, 2005, directed by Maurizio Nichetti [b. Milan, 1948]), as well as Matt & Manson (id., 2009, directed by Gregory Panaccione). In 2011, Enrico Carlesi (b. Alessandria, 1950) completed the feature Il Generale e i Fratellini d’Italia (‘The General and the Little Brothers of Italy’), Carlesi called back designer Paolo Cardoni from The Blue Arrow and made the most of a tiny budget with humour, imagination, and national history.

A multifaceted creator, Paolo Conte (b. Asti, 6 January 1937) was a successful songwriter and performer, a jazz singer and pianist, and a painter. In 2000 he made the ‘vaudeville’ film Razmataz. In this audiovisual production of 140 minutes, distributed on DVD only, the music dominates while the camera moves on the still paintings and drawings. The film has an atmosphere of energy mixed with nostalgia (the story is set in 1920s Paris).

‘It is a story’, wrote Paolo Conte, ‘about the meeting between old Europe and young black music. [...] We have to pretend that cinema hasn’t yet been invented. In other words, the work should be taken as an illustrated radio serial, or alternatively as a storyboard with soundtrack’.

It is an enchanting, elitist musical kaleidoscope. It mixes Dada, Futurism, Jazz, Swing, the French songs of the 1920s, Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Benny Goodman, Carlos Gardel, Italian opera and Neapolitan songs,

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199 Born in Florence in 1955.
200 A masterful slapstick-style comedian and a gifted director, Nichetti’s first love was animation. He had written for Bruno Bozzetto on the various adventures of Signor Rossi and Allegro non troppo, yet he had directed animated films. He repeated the experience in 2010 with Teen Days, about teenagers in a music school (for a preteen audience). This series (26 episodes of 26 minutes each), produced by Cartoon One, was also screened with great success on Disney Channel France.
201 In the film, a dog and mice go through battles, sea trips, ballooning, and the founding of the secret society Little Brothers of Italy (‘Brothers of Italy’ is Italy’s national anthem) to help General Giuseppe Garibaldi.
202 Razmataz is the nickname of the protagonist, an American black dancer who goes to Paris to perform.
204 Italics in the original text.
Edith Piaf, and Georges Brassens – not for the postmodern intellectual pleasure of quoting and assembling, but because of the love of a true poet.

Andrea Martignoni (b. Bologna, 19 September 1961) worked as a promoter and organizer of events involving animation. He was an excellent musician for avant-garde animated films and performances, often collaborating with Canadian masters such as Pierre Hébert and Normand Roger. His Compagnia d’Arte Drammatica (Andrea Martignoni, Mario Martignoni, Diego De Vincenzi, Marco Venturi, Giovanni Oscar Urso) was an ensemble devoted to experimentation that created new soundtracks for classics such as Bertold Bartosch’s L’Idée (1931), Alexandre Alexeieff’s Le Nez (1963), and Harry Smith’s Heaven and Earth Magic (1959–1962).

We have already mentioned Yusaki Fusako (see Vol. 2). She was born in 1937 and settled in Italy in the early 1960s. Educated as a sculptress, she was never happy with a still shape. The discovery of Plasticine animation gave her opportunities in metamorphosis, transformation, and the uninterrupted flow of change over time. In short, the essence of her style is the same as that of Emile Cohl.


The first series is a tour through the 26 Helvetic Canons. The second is a vivid exploration of masters of contemporary art, from Van Gogh to Picasso, from Hokusai to Klee. The viewer gets inside each painter’s visual universe, without ever losing contact with Yusaki’s own visual style. Naccio & Pomm is named after its protagonists, two aliens who visit our planet. The first series (26 episodes of...

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205 Andrea Martignoni and colleague Paola Brutst scouted young independent animation and then self-produced and financed the anthology DVDs Animazioni (2010) and Animazioni 2 (2012). They wrote the following lines for this book:

Michele Bernardi travelled from a classic animation style in his 1980s collaborations on the animated series La Pin’pa by Altan and La Linea by Cavandoli. In his most recent works, Senza Testa (Without Head, 2010) and Djuna (2012), he developed a refined technique.

Virginia Mori’s pencil drawings in Il gioco del silenzio (The Game of Silence, 2010) and Marco Capellacci’s debut Le fobie del guardrail (The Guardrail’s Phobias, 2011) have strong imaginative power. So does Alessia Travagnini’s Silenziosa-Mente (Silent Mind, 2011), a hand-drawn rotoscoped film, where odd creatures and symbols distort reality. In Imago (id., 2008), Beatrice Pucci works with sophisticated animated puppets. Donato Sansone had already disclosed his sense of grotesque in Luce Cube (2004). His Videogioco (Videogame, 2009) is a special labyrinthine flip-book with extraordinary narrative branches. Arithmetique (Arithmetic) is Giovanni Munari and Dalila Rovazzani’s excellent adaptation of Maurice Ravel’s L’enfant et les sortilèges. Lorenzo Latrofa and Sergio Basso’s Giallo a Milano (Police Mystery in Milan, 2009) is part of a film on Milanese Chinatown. The storyboard is based on an interview with Longxing, the film’s main character, who cooperates with the Italian police and gives an account of his journey from China to Italy. At the beginning of 2008, Ivan Manuppelli and Gianluca Lo Presti produced a TV pilot, Azotifis & Mario, wacky and ironic, for the unmade series Si danno al crimine.

The outsider Blu produced two animated films based on his giant metropolitan mural paintings, Muto (Silent, 2008) and Big Bang Big Boom (2011). He moves along an oversized space, with amazing results. J (2009) by Virgilio Villoresi is based on filmed material printed on paper. The protagonists float around a black and white metaphysical dimension. Alvise Renzini, with his experimental contact prints – very close to rayographs – has established himself as a pivotal figure in visual arts. His Ci sono gli spiriti (Ghosts are here, 2009) shows his high quality. Cinema and photography intersect in Basmati’s Transit City02: Roma Astratta (2008), and Corpus No Body (2011) by Saul Sagauti and Audrey Cotaniz, for whom animation is merely one multimedia research field. In The Journey of the Birdboy (2007), Chiara Ambrosio imitates the style of Maya Deren and the 1920s avant-garde. Massimo Nisa Barbini and Matteo Giachella pay homage to Jan Švankmajer and the Quay Brothers in Contrappassouno (2005). Alice and Stefano Tambellini prove themselves skilled animators in their short L’insalata del ди válido (The Devil’s Salad, 2010). Music clips, videogames and video art are closely linked in Igor Imhoff’s Percorsos0008–0209 (2009) and Percorsos0009–0410 (2010). Nicola Console’s Dieci cadute (Ten Falls, 2012) uses drawings on plastic sheets, photographs, and collages in works based on his research on stage design. Mano (2003), by Ignazio Morello, links illustration with graphics in a soft, poetic way.

206 Made for foreign companies.

207 The protagonist is a dog, though its name in Italian sounds like ‘moley’. It was made to order for the Japanese TV company NHK.

208 Peo was made to order for TSI, the TV company of the Italian-speaking Canton (Swiss member state) of Ticino.
five minutes each) was produced to order for the Japanese TV company NHK in 2003–2005.

Mario Addis (b. Sassari, 11 December 1961) was probably the most gifted designer of his generation. His stroke is thin, strong, and sinuous. His film *Pene* (‘Penis’, 2007) is an elegantly mischievous series of variations on the theme of male genitalia; it eschews vulgarity thanks to the drawings’ excellent taste. Its 1914 remake, *Pene e crudità* (‘Penis and Crudità’), is well designed and has perfect timing and a fitting soundtrack. The world that it evokes is innovative and deep. It is a good film by a new Rabelais or a new Jarry, but it will probably outrage many viewers.

No less versatile, but stylistically very different, was Gabriele Zucchelli (b. Pavia, 22 January 1972, but active in London since 1994). He could make the sensitive and elitist short *For a Tango* (2004) and also supervise the animation of the family feature *The Tale of Despereaux* (directed by Sam Fell and Rob Stevenhagen, 2008). Zucchelli even made a documentary, *Quirino Cristiani – The Mystery of the First Animated Movies* (2007), about the Argentine who made the first animated feature films.

Leonardo Carrano (b. Rome, 23 July 1958) was a distinguished painter, ceramist, and engraver, who combined styles and techniques in a semiabstract way. In the 1990s he transposed his universe into films, winning acclaim for *Pentesilea* (id., 1994) and *Il cerchio e la soglia* (‘The Circle and the Threshold’, 1996). In 2006, he made three Mozart films: *Sanctus* (id.), *Confutatis* (id.), and *Kyrie* (id.) The subsequent film, *Recordare* (id., 2009), was created from tomographic images of two corpses (a man and a woman), donated to science. ‘Through continual metamorphosis, the sliced flesh becomes digital painting. The film is inspired by Mozart’s *Requiem KV626*, giving the images an intense poetic feeling.’

All of these films were sections of an ambitious (and splendidly successful) feature project that took twelve years of the author’s life: *Aeterna – Requiem Op. KV626 W.A. Mozart* (2012).

Composer Ennio Morricone wrote: ‘Leonardo Carrano’s *Aeterna* is an extraordinary, unique, exceptional work. Mozart’s *Requiem* is exalted by the invention of images where a world higher than ours appears. The suffering faces, the mangled and intertwined bodies – in images that are abstract but distinctly designed, and consistent (from white to black) – give extremely high emotions to the spectator who knows how to watch.’

*Jazz for a Massacre* (2014) is a filmic jam session in which the Noise of Trouble’s jazz improvisation combines well with the abstract forms created directly onto film. With remarkable humility, director Carrano lets the stereophonic soundtrack stand esthetically above the images he created as a painter.

A filmmaker, painter, illustrator, and architect, Laura Federici (b. Rieti, 29 July 1964) made very few films, but those she made were semiabstract and very short. Her images have the dark colours of pain, or the bright ones of happy moments, or the light ones of dreamy soft moods. The continuous flow of memory is punctuated by written words that show the precise date, time, and title of the episode or reminiscence.

*Un amore* (‘A Love’, 1999) is a jewel in auteur Italian animation. The technique (a collage of photos from the set, magazines, and newspapers, photocopied on polyester and

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210 Catalogue festival INVIDEO 2012 video e cinema oltre, Milan, 8/12 November 2012.
Chapter 3: Spain


Spain\(^{213}\)

After the crisis of the late 1970s and the early signs of renewal in the 1980s, the 1990s were one of the most vital times in Spanish animation.\(^{214}\)

In the 1990s, Spain seemed only a provider of cheap manpower. Most designers had been trained at film studios such as Filman or Cruz Delgado, whose style looked very much like the standard American one. The arrival of digital technology brought new possibilities for national production, as well as considerable reductions in working times and costs. Producers and directors became aware of the savings of the new technologies and of the importance of international distribution.


BRB International, founded in the 1970s by Claudio Biern Boyd, and D’Ocon Films, created by Antoni D’Ocon in the 1980s, were the most successful and longest lasting companies. After its heyday in the 1980s, BRB launched some successful series such as the second part of *Willy Fog* (id., 1993) and *El nuevo mundo de los gnomos* (*The New World of Gnomes*, 1996). The studio’s attention to educational content is shown in *Las mil y una Américas* (*The One Thousand and One Americas*, 1991), made to celebrate the fifth centenary of the discovery of America in 1992, and *The Cobi Troupe* (1991), featuring the mascot designed by Javier Mariscal for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games.

D’Ocon Films had more impact internationally. During the 1990s they created a large number of series, some of

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211 Emailed message from Paola Bristot (26 June 2014).
212 Titles originally in English.
213 By Francesca Guatteri.

Painted with tempera colours) vaguely resembles Andy Warhol’s series on the stars. The images are intensely emotional.

Blu (pseudonym of an artist born in 1981), devoted himself to a street art animation, even of colossal proportions. *Muto* (‘Mute’, 2008) and *Big Bang Big Boom* (id., 2010) are full of energy, and transform the everyday urban space in a fantastic universe. Cityscapes so ugly and trivial as to be removed from our minds become the material with which Blu tells his stories, making them memorable.\(^{211}\)

An advocate of animation, Mario Verger (b. Rome, 22 September 1970) investigated its history and popularized it in countless articles. He was one of the very few animators who dealt with current events, with such shorts as *Moanal- and* (1995, about a porn star whose adventures expose the political corruption of the country), *Milingo the Spirit of Africa* (1998, about a black Catholic bishop who pretends to be a quack doctor), *Giulio Andreotti* (2000, about a smart and controversial Italian politician), *Wojtyła* (2001, about the then Pope), *Berluscomie* (2004, about the controversial Italian leader), and the weightier *Pasolini Requiem* (2009), possibly his best film, on the assassination (on 2 November 1975) of the poet, novelist, and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini.


Most animated Italian TV series of this time are best forgotten. Veteran Giuseppe Lagana, though, showed professionalism and love of detail in *Spaghetti Family* (from an idea of Bruno Bozetto, 2003), *L’ultimo dei Mohicani* (*The Last of the Mohicans*, 2004), *Farhat, il principe del deserto* (*Farhat, the Prince of the Desert*, 2005), and *Kim* (id., 2009).

Two more veterans, Giorgio Valentini (b. Fano, 9 January 1948) and Silvio Pautasso (b. Nichelino, 9 January 1956), made *Uffa, che pazienza*! (‘Oh . . . Boy!’, 2007). The series is set in an imaginary jungle inhabited by animal characters with punning names. Aimed at children, the series is merrily educational.

There was a major increase in production across formats: television series, feature films, short films, and commercials. Nevertheless, the companies struggled to get financial support and had to look for grants, taking continual risks on their projects. Some, such as Anima2 and Aragon Animados, had to close down.

The creation of new television channels made it easier to sell animated series. The channels included animation in their schedule, though they often didn’t leave enough time for Spanish producers, thus allowing Asian, American, and other European cartoons to gain ground. Nonetheless, from the mid-1990s, Spanish animation was in its prime.

### The New Era

In the 2000s, the sector ceased to be the domain of designers and became part of a more complex, and perhaps more complicated, but more productive world. Films could reach large audiences and obtain international awards. New software cut times and costs.

However, there were some problems. There was a lack of adequate regulation in the sector; the importance of marketing was underestimated; public support was insufficient; and TV series did not benefit from direct aid. In addition, Spanish television showed little interest in domestically made products, even as Spanish professionals emigrated to other countries.

However, during these years many companies related to the audiovisual world were established. They included Ben Connection and Lion Toons in Barcelona, the Andalusian M5 Audiovisual, and Icon Animation, Zinkia Entertainment, Ilion Animation Studios, Kandor Graphics, and Perro Verde Films. The big, established companies such as BRB International, D’Ocon Films, Neptuno Films, Motion Pictures, Cromosoma, Irusoin, and Pasozebra also continued to operate.

The feature film became the new frontier. During the previous decade, fewer features had been produced than series because few producers wanted to risk working on such demanding projects, which generally involved at least three million euros each in addition to 18 to 24 months of work. However, at the start of the new millennium, the feature benefited from the state’s Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales (ICAA). It led many companies to commit to features.

Many companies produced only one film, some made two or three, but there was generally very little continuity of production. Some of the companies that did produce continually were located in the Basque Countries, reflecting the greater tradition and history that animation had there, though the subject matter and distribution of these companies’ films stayed in Basque territory. In less than ten years, 55 feature films, over seventy TV series, and about 130 short films were produced in Spain.

The sources of funding were diverse. On one side, there were private investments from producers, in the form of cash or bank loans. On the other, there was public aid granted by municipalities, autonomous committees, or the state – through the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales (ICAA). The sales in Spain and abroad generally only recouped expenses. (TV channels never advanced money until a finished project was delivered.)

Financing also came from companies unrelated to the audiovisual world. Spain had a long and positive history of international film coproductions. These collaborations combined strengths and spread risks.

### The Turning Point

*El Bosque animado* (*The Living Forest*, 2001, directed by Ángel de la Cruz and Manolo Gómez) is a feature film produced by Dygra Films. It is loosely based on the novel by the Galician journalist and writer Wenceslao Fernández Flórez. The film’s staff spent countless hours in local woods, in an attempt to recreate the light and shapes during different times of the day, in every season. ‘The Living Forest’ won two Goyas (the top Spanish film award) in 2001 for best animated film and best original song.

It was a turning point for Spanish animation. ‘The Living Forest’ had record revenues, showed a new way to make animated features for international markets,
and demonstrated that quality animation could be profitable. ‘The Living Forest’ was the first animated feature produced in Spain that could count on an excellent promotional campaign. The revenues, on Iberian territory alone, amounted to about two million euros. The film sold 160,000 VHS editions and about 40,000 DVDs.

Many people followed Dygra’s model and embarked on new projects. Professionals realized how important distribution was and how much attention should be paid to communication, marketing, and promotion.

_De Profundis_, created from the colour palette of the Galician designer Miguelanxo Prado, stands out for its stylistic choices. It is a work of poetry and art rather than a narrative; its music is magical and relaxing. _Gritos en el Pasillo_ (‘Screams in the Corridor’, 2007) by Juanjo Ramirez, an original horror film, had a starting budget of just 6,000 euros.

_El lince perdido_ (‘The Missing Lynx’), by Raúl García and Manuel Sicilia, won the Goya Award in February 2009. It was a coproduction between Perro Verde Films (whose executive producer, Manuel Cristóbal, had had the same position on ‘The Living Forest’), Kandor Graphics, and Green Moon España (Antonio Banderas’s producing company). _Planet 51_, by Jorge Blanco, Javier Abad, and Marcos Martínez, was a science fiction film in which aliens encounter humans. It won the 2010 Goya Award for best animated film.

_Arrugas_ (‘Wrinkles’, 2011) is a very special achievement. Ignacio Ferreras was born in Argentina in 1972. After jobs that took him all over the globe, in 2002 he completed *How to Cope with Death*, which won many awards. After more wanderings, in 2009 he started work on ‘Wrinkles’, his feature director début.

Wrinkles was for me a unique chance to direct it in the way I thought an animated film should be directed. Above all, directing means to me being able to personally draw the storyboard and edit the animatic. It is in this physical, hands-on process of drawing and editing each shot that the film really takes shape in my mind. With the help of my wife and collaborator Rosanna and thanks to the trust of the producer Manuel Cristóbal, I had the opportunity to put all this theory to the test.

People often ask: why do you do as an animated film a story which could have easily been told in live-action? But animation brings something very different to such a story, the possibility of injecting meaning in every detail, of making every single element on the screen, every blink, every shadow, the speed at which something moves, contribute to the story and, at the same time, removing anything superfluous from the screen – with animation you can really distil the story in order to arrive at its most essential elements.

For me, the great master of this kind of cinema is the Japanese director Isao Takahata. The concentration and depth of meaning that you find in a film like _Only Yesterday_ could not be achieved in anything other than animation.\(^\text{217}\)

\(^\text{216}\)We have already met this gifted filmmaker (see Vol. 2) as the author of *A Woman Waiting in a Hotel* (1979) and *The Tell-Tale Heart* (2005).

\(^\text{217}\)Ignacio Ferreras, e-mail message to Giannalberto Bendazzi, 15 August 2012.
**TV Series**

The introduction of the euro in Spain led to a rise in prices and a considerable decrease in sales of animated products, especially television series, since foreign producers began entrusting their animation services to Asian countries. Spanish television still was not interested in national products, but some autonomous, local television channels began to schedule more entertainment content within their own programming grids.

The budgets were rather low, with each episode lasting a few minutes. In the 1990s, episodes could last about half an hour; in the 2000s, they did not exceed five minutes. BRB Internacional, Baleuko, Cromosoma, Neptuno Films, Motion Pictures, Imira Entertainment, Pausoka, D’Ocon, and Zinkia all followed this path.

Between 2000 and 2001, BRB launched *Nicolás*. Nico, the protagonist, is a blind boy leading a normal life. BRB also produced *Angus & Cheryl*, *Storm Hawks*, *El diabillito* (‘The Little Devil’), *Dibo*, and *Papasa. Berni*, a well-known series in 2007, promoted fair play and participation in sports.

During the same years, Imira Entertainment produced *Lola & Virginia*, *Vitaminix*, and *Sandra, detective de cuentos* (‘Sandra, Detective of Tales’). Motion Pictures screened *Boom and Reds*, *Telmo and Tula – Los pequeños cocineros* (‘Boom and Reds, Telmo and Tula – The Little Cooks’), *LMNS*, *Green Light, Zumbers*, *Telmo & Tula – Artes y Manualidades* (‘Telmo and Tula – Arts and Dexterity’), and *Alex*. D’Ocon produced *Laces, Lua, Frog, Kong*, *Conspiración Roswell*, *Ubos*, *Monster Rancher*, *Capitán Fracase, Fix and Foxy*, and *Mitos y Leyendas*, to name a few.

*Pocoyó* (id., 2005), produced by Zinkia, was a revolutionary series in CGI, characterized by original aesthetic choices. The design of the main characters is elementary and simple, but its bright colours and rounded forms were popular with both young and old. The series was broadcast in over a hundred countries. Local television stations in Spain ignored it, but funding came from a British channel. The series is about the world of childhood: relationships with friends, parents, nature, animals, first love, and early fears. Diverse animation techniques create magical worlds and unreal characters, closer to fantasy than reality.

*Shorts*

*Shorts*, by nature, are rarely involved in the production, distribution, and marketing process, often being relegated to amateur screenings and festivals. There were about 130 short films made during the 2000s.

*Pollo* (‘Chicken’), created by Manuel Sirgo at Estudio 12 Pinguinos Animados, won a Goya in 2002 for best animated short.* Regaré con lagrimas tus pétalos* (‘I Will Water with Tears Your Petals’, 2003), directed by Juan Carlos Marí, a romantic and delicate film, was made with 10,000 hand-painted drawings on paper.

Under a coproduction agreement between Eduardo Elosegi and Emilio Luján (and therefore between the Basque Countries and Madrid), *Llucía* (‘Rain’) was made in 2002; it was a hyperrealistic short directed by Diego Agudo Pinilla. The short was coordinated by animation historian and critic Emilio de la Rosa. In the same year he helped create, together with Carlos Navarro and Gabriel Martínez Rodríguez, *Noche de Ronda* (‘Night of Rounds’, 2002), which was also produced by Luján and Elosegi.

In 2003, Emilio de la Rosa and Gabriel Martínez Rodríguez directed *Nuevas islas* (‘New Islands’), about freedom as an illusion. *La habitación inclinada* (‘The Sloping Room’), by Pako Bagur Gomila, Frederic Cordoba Schwaneberg, and Iban José Pérez, projects the viewers into a grey world with a door to another universe.

*Vuela por mí* (‘Fly for Me’) is a short directed by Carlos Navarro reflecting on a lonely woman who cannot stand the buildings around her. *Los fusilados de Goya* (‘The Shot Ones of Goya’), directed by Héctor Caño Diaz in 2007, recreates the Spanish War of Independence in five minutes, told through a painting by Francisco Goya and animated in 2D. *La Flor más grande del mundo* (‘The World’s Largest Flower’) combines 2D, 3D, and Plasticine animation. It is full of symbolism and meaning and is suitable for both children and adults.

Isabel Herguera (b. San Sebastian, 1961) worked as an artist, filmmaker, cultural organizer, professor, and critic. In *Safari* (id., 1989) and *Cante de ida y vuelta* (‘Song of a Round Trip’, 1989), she blended animation with sculpture and video installation. Later, with her own Los Angeles-based company Loko Pictures, she produced both commercials for important clients and independent films, such as *The Balloon* (2003) and *La gallina ciega* (‘The Blind Hen’, 2005). In 2012, her *Bajo la almohada* (‘Under the Pillow’) received an award at the Bilbao festival of short films.

**Portugal**

A new rise in Portuguese animation began with a sharp little film in 1993: *Os Saltadores* by Abi Feijó. It concerns the
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219 Filmógrafo closed in May 2002. A couple of years later, Feijó and Pessoa established Ciclopefilmes, which coproduced *História Trágica*.

_Fado Lusitano_ (‘Lusitanian Fado’, 1995) was a cut-out film based on traditional Portuguese music, produced by John Halas as a segment of his international project, _Know Your European_. *Clandestino* (‘Stowaway’, 2000) can be considered Feijó’s masterpiece. Taken from a short story by José Rodrigues Miguéis, it tells of a stowaway on a ship, using sand animation on two layers for the background and characters respectively.

In 2006, _História Trágica com Final Feliz_ (‘Tragic Story with Happy Ending’, 2005) by Regina Pessoa won the Grand Prix at the 2006 Annecy Animated Film Festival. In a small town, people are annoyed by the loud heartbeat of a little girl; she says it’s because her body is not suited to her heart. As time goes by, wings grow on her back. When the metamorphosis is complete, she flies out of her window (and the people soon miss her heartbeat).

Before making this film, Pessoa (b. Coimbra, 16 December 1969) had studied painting at the Fine Art Academy in Porto and had animated on _Os Salteadores_. Her first personal work was _A Noite_ (‘The Night’, 1999), in which a girl alone at night in her room must confront her fears. Pessoa’s interest in unusual and suggestive techniques has been visible since _A Noite_ in which she engraved a plaster plate and photographed it, then slightly changed the image and photographed it again. The process is similar to that used by the Polish animator Piotr Dumala.

Pedro Serrazina (b. Lisbon, 27 December 1968) started working with Filmógrafo in 1992, as a cinematographer after the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), when Spanish republicans fled to Portugal, only to be caught by the Portuguese dictator Salazar. It inspired a short story by the antisalazarian writer Jorge de Sena. Álvaro Graça de Castro ‘Abi’ Feijó (b. Braga, 18 June 1956) realized it was already written in a ‘very cinematographic language’, and in 1986 he started working on a storyboard.

He had completed a six-month internship at the National Film Board of Canada in Montreal, during which he had produced his first animated film, _Oh que calma_ (‘How Calm It Is’, 1985), using combined techniques. Feijó was one of the first representatives of the ‘Cinanima Generation’, and he established the studio Filmógrafo in Porto with half a dozen other young enthusiasts. _Os Salteadores_ tells the story of three people on a car trip at night. One of them starts remembering a similar night, many years before, when police were hunting some fugitives. The three confront their memories; as they try to reconstruct the truth, they reveal how history can be forgotten or modified.

The 14-minute black and white film is drawn on paper with no greyscale, a metaphor for the impossibility of compromise in the ‘long night’ of Portugal. It won the Special Award of the Jury at the Cinanima Festival (where Feijó and his friends had first encountered animation) as well as 13 other international prizes. Moreover, it brought more business to Filmógrafo, especially from RTP and from the children’s programmes _Jardim da Celeste_ and _Rua Sésamo_ (‘Sesame Street’).

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Pedro Serrazina (b. Lisbon, 27 December 1968) started working with Filmógrafo in 1992, as a cinematographer
and as the voice of a character in Os Salteadores. He storyboarded Fado Lusitano and made his directorial debut in 1995 with Estória do Gato e da Lua ("Tale about the Cat and the Moon").

In 2010, after a long gestation, Pedro Serrazina presented the fifteen-minute Os olhos do farol ("The Eyes of the Lighthouse"), one of the best Portuguese animated films. On a rocky coast, a little girl plays alone, enjoying the objects washed up on the beach. Her father is the lighthouse keeper, surly and solitary, his face half-covered by a sweater. We discover that he couldn’t get over the death of his wife, the girl’s mother. Eventually a tempest reunites father and daughter.

The film is a love story between a girl and her father, but it tells the even greater love story of humans and the sea, where the sea is at once mate, seducer, murderer, mother, past, and future. The film combines drawn animation, painting, and CGI, but Serrazina used live-action for the sea. ‘We, in Portugal, are acquainted with the evocative power that the sea contains, and animation couldn’t convey its aleatory and organic side.’

José Pedro ‘Zepe’ Cavalheiro (b. Porto, 25 April 1956) made Stuart (2006), a compelling exploration of the graphic world of Stuart de Carvalhais. It mirrors the artist’s style and crosses between his life in a bohemian Lisbon and his comic book characters. Candido (2007) is powerfully unsettling, with well-made animated camera movements, cleverly used point-of-view shots, and a contrasting dynamic of shots and style involving the two main characters (Candido and the woman he drives to suicide). His films are slow, subtle, and sincere, though sometimes Zepe appears to lose himself in virtuosity.

In 2011 Zepe directed his own TV series, the absurdist Ginjas ("Sour Black Cherries"). It features a characterless, oddly designed protagonist (three white tufts for moustaches and hair, a blue ball for a nose) and some chickens,

221 The father of comic strip art in Portugal, Stuart de Carvalhais (1887–1961) was also a painter, illustrator, costume designer, and background artist.
one of which is enormous and malevolent. The series is Zepe’s little theatre of the free imagination, joyous and unsettling at once.

José Miguel Ribeiro (b. Amadora, 18 January 1966) was as an animator on Os Salteadores. Having studied at the Fine Arts School of Lisbon, he specialized in drawn and puppet animation in Rennes, France. During his time in France, he codirected Ovos (‘Eggs’, 1994, with Pierre Bouchon and Yvon Guillon). An egg and a spatula duel in the arena of a frying pan, through Plasticine and object animation.

Ribeiro’s talent became clear with O Banquete da Rainha (‘The Queen’s Banquet’, 1996) and peaked with A Suspeita (‘The Suspect’). In the latter film, a moody young man, a voracious fat lady, an elegant and haughty woman, and a clumsy petty-bourgeois (joined from time to time by the ticket collector) share a train compartment during a long journey. One of them must be a serial killer. Ribeiro animates very expressive Plasticine puppets with a Hitchcockian touch, guiding and misguiding the audience to the final coup de théâtre. In 2000, A Suspeita was the first Portuguese film to receive the European Oscar, the Cartoon d’Or.

The first Portuguese animated feature was a joint production with Spain, O Sonho de uma Noite de São João – El Sueño de una Noche de San Juan (‘A Saint John’s Night Dream’, 2005). Made in CGI, it was directed by Ángel de la Cruz and Manolo Gómez and was based on Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. An all-Portuguese feature was Até ao Tecto do Mundo (‘To the Top of the World’, a.k.a. João Sete Sete, ‘John Seven Seven’, 2008). Its directors were Carlos Silva, António Costa Valente, and Vítor Lopes, who used an experimental 2D computer technique. Scored by António Vitorino d’Almeida, the film was screened at many international festivals.

Russia

History of the 1990s

Two weeks after the failure of the 1991 Communist hard-liners’ coup in Moscow, the first ‘floating festival’ KROK launched from Kiev on board a ship down the Dnieper River. It was publicized as an international festival, and though it was mainly attended by Soviet citizens it became international along the way – as the ship was en route it was announced that on 6 September the Soviet Union had officially recognized the Baltic republics’ independence. This news prompted a celebration (albeit a halfhearted one) onboard. In December of that year, the entire Union would be dissolved.

Russia is the nation with an unpredictable past – so goes an old saying. The historical identity of post-Soviet Russia is still fluid and uncertain as these lines are being written (in 2015), and periods and developments are being repeatedly redefined and reevaluated. Lately, it has become more and more common to refer to the 1990s as ‘slash-rakish-wild’ years, but many would still hold quite the opposite view – that the decade was the most important breath of freedom in ages.

A number of troubles marred the nation’s path to political and economic liberalization under Boris Yeltsin, first president of the Russian Federation from 1991 to 1999. A clash with vice-president Aleksandr Rutskoy and legislators in 1993 resulted in a constitutional crisis, armed rioting, and repression; a bloody lengthy war in the separatist province of Chechnya resulted in many civilian casualties. On the other hand, democratic institutions were being built, civil society was becoming active, and a robust free press was developing.

From 1992, with an economy in disarray, a shock therapy was introduced and prices increased very quickly. Privatization was also underway, triggering the creation of a dramatic wealth divide in a society that had long been, supposedly, homogeneous. Many would be deprived of the customary humble but steady livelihood, while some would make tremendous fortunes virtually overnight. The term

222 ‘Saint John’s Night’ (the summer solstice) is the shortest night of the year. Thousands of years ago, European superstition maintained that it condensed all the evil ghosts, sorcerers, demons, and monsters. This superstition gave inspiration to William Shakespeare for his A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

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‘oligarch’ was used widely, and the new masters largely came from the ranks of former apparatchiks.

After losing a good deal of GDP and industrial output, the economy was relatively stable by the middle of the decade – only to be severely hit again by the national default of 1998.

The society seemed traumatized. The Cold War was lost, as well as superpower status, imperial grandeur, and the empire – not to mention the ideological project long-embedded in the Russian mindset. Settling accounts with the past proved to be inconclusive at best; the distorted mix of all the different mythologies was boiling over the edge.

In the interest of sheer survival, many from the educated class would change professions. Scientists became janitors or bankers, depending on their luck, or sought job opportunities abroad – as would numerous animation professionals. Intelligentsia seemed to be losing its footing as a trendsetter and nouveau-riche tastes largely shaped the cultural landscape.

Cultural life managed to hectically flourish despite it all – but cinema, because of its heavy dependence on production capacities and resources, languished. The organizers of the first national animation festival in 1996 barely managed to find a handful of Russian films to show (without any selection). There were still high-quality and sincere works among them – not everything was lost in the new world.

History of the 2000s

In a surprise announcement on New Year’s Eve, 1999, President Yeltsin resigned, leaving behind his recently appointed prime minister to serve as the acting president. That was the hour of Vladimir Putin, a KGB career officer who rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel before moving into Saint Petersburg city administration at the dawn of new times and subsequently enjoying a rapid rise in Moscow. Putin won the presidential election in 2000 and was reelected in 2004.

By the start of the new millennium, the mood in Russia was one of fatigue over the havoc and disappointment in the reforms. The very words ‘democrat’ and ‘liberal’ would become almost obscene for many, as the notions behind them had been distorted and devalued. The thirst for stability was in the air, even if that would mean a strong-handed order. So, within the first year or two of Putin’s presidency, most of the independent TV channels were put under governmental control. Other media would experience increasing pressure in the years to come. Media tycoons became the first victims in settlements with oligarchs and from that point on were supposed to stay put and not challenge power. A new breed of business masters was arriving on the scene, many closely associated with the state. In time, the sprawling bureaucracy would come, once again, to stand for a ruling class of sorts.

The country experienced impressive economic growth, due in large part to exporting oil and gas, with oil prices rising from below 20 US dollars per barrel in early 1990s to over 100 US dollars by the mid-2000s. Critics would say that Russia became a petro-state, with other sectors being put in second place, where they risked losing formerly solid positions (e.g. basic science, heavy industry, and education). In any event, living standards were improving substantially, especially in the capitals and big cities; certain small businesses and service industries were growing; and a middle-class that enjoyed cars and restaurants, travel and entertainment, was emerging. Sadly, this era of stability would be once again be marred by terrorist acts and corruption.

In 2008, barred constitutionally from running for a third term, Putin backed close associate Dmitry Medvedev and assumed the post of prime minister himself. For the 2012 election cycle (announced in September 2011), the tandem team switched chairs again. This, in addition to controversial parliament elections, sparked mass street protests and the rise of vocal opposition. The so-called creative class (relatively young urban professionals, modern in lifestyle and mentality) was at the core of this opposition.

Ideologically, the period was marked by contradictory trends and leanings. Rather early on, the old Soviet anthem was returned, slightly disguised, as were other similar traditions. Later, ‘patriotism’ would become more and more of a buzzword, as would manifestations of almost imperial pride in foreign policy actions or in domestic slogans like ‘Russia has risen from its knees’. Migrant workers, mainly from former Soviet Asia, flooded the cities, and xenophobic sentiments became apparent. The 1990s had seen a certain religious revival, perceived as a natural reaction to the end of official atheism, but in the 2000s the Russian Orthodox Church became a powerful state institution, attaining a status close to the one it had in tsarist Russia.

In cultural life, nostalgic trends coexisted with the unabashed proliferation of Westernized pop-culture, as did ‘sovietisms’ – with religious zeal and modern experimentation – with nativist archaisms. Television was generally considered lowbrow entertainment and/or a propagandistic vehicle, though there were small marginal niches of quality cultural programming. In the realm of theatre and the
performing arts, Moscow turned into one of the principal world focal points, thanks to a variety of international festivals and tours. Book publishing experienced economic hardships, but intellectual literary fairs were thriving. In live-action cinema, industrial revival was evident, although not-quite-sufficient distribution systems filled the screens with Hollywood blockbusters and left even possible hits of domestic production in the second row. Art films remained on the margins. Festivals and film societies made a good range of them anyway, and they were screened in the capitals. Being very much dependant on state financing, filmmaking was vulnerable to succumbing to servile mode. The film community was divided, with the old union leaning toward the power under the personal rule of Nikita Mikhalkov (a talented actor-director turned into a faithful functionary) and, on the other side, the new rebellious association, formed mainly by directors in this new wave. As often happens in turbulent times, a fresh focus on documentaries was evident.

In 2004, the share of domestically produced films (of all genres) in the national box office was about 13 percent; in 2005 it increased to close to 30 percent; in 2006–2009 it was around 24–26 percent; and it decreased still further in 2010–2012 to only 14–15 percent. The unquestionable leaders were always American imports, but over several years a few Russian films were also among the top ten.

Economy

In the 1990s, Russia would not fit into the business schemes of the developed world. Problems began with financial resources. The state did give money for animation, but not very much. All the money available for state animation could provide for one season of an American series or one-quarter of what it cost to make a feature. Private investors were not much interested in the subject, since an animation project took years to be developed and years to make any profit. Russian businesspersons, due to the general economic instability in the country, preferred a quick turnover of their capital. Up to the mid-2000s, there was no precedent for self-sufficient animation projects. Smeshariki producer Ilya Popov’s objective was to dispel the myth that children’s animation in Russia could not be profitable.

The labour force resources in animation were also low. According to estimates, only between a thousand and five thousand people were working in the field. Producers and studio executives asserted that it would be impossible to launch ten feature projects simultaneously, since there would have not been a sufficient workforce to create them (even considering that Russian features employed not hundreds, but just dozens, of professionals).

The financial problems and scarcity of professional labour were both part of the same vicious circle. Low production budgets did not allow fair wages, and even this minimum compensation was not guaranteed since studios that lived from one state handout to another were themselves on the hook. Teams were often assembled on a particular film (that is, for a year or a year and a half, usually) and then disassembled upon completion. As a result, studios did not have stable trained workers and professionals had to rush from one project to another, in addition to trying to turn a penny on the side in advertising.

These sorts of prospects were not attractive to most people, so colleges that prepared students for professions in animation were not bursting with eager prospective students. This was so much the case that the competition was less than one person for each seat – so practically everyone was admitted, regardless of talent.

There would always be some enthusiasts, however, so films were being made regardless. But these films faced total obscurity. They would be shown at some national festivals, and maybe also at some international gatherings, and then they would simply sit on the shelf.

Why didn’t exhibitors and distributors show interest in Russian animation? Basically because there was too little volume. It was much easier to purchase big content packages through international agencies. Aleksandar Tatarsky agonized, for example, over putting together the national production of Gem Mountain. For a couple of years, if not longer, he camped on doorsteps to try to get Mountain shown on TV – even though TV channels were only paying about 300 dollars for an hour of content. DVD publishers and theatrical distributors were not interested either. Why would one want to mess around with some murky projects when it was so easy to buy an American feature and earn money on it? Obviously, there was no living to be made in animation in Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s.

\[ \text{By Maria Tereshchenko.} \]

\[ \text{This paragraph is based on the longer essay ‘Mult-economics’ [Anim-economy], by Maria Tereshchenko, 2 April 2013. http://kinote.info/articles/9506-mult-economika, or http://www.kino-teatr.ru/blog/y2013/4–2/.} \]

\[ \text{Even quite distinguished directors at noncommercial studios were paid only 10–15 thousand roubles (300–500 dollars) a month.} \]
In Soviet times, kids subsisted on 30–40 hours of new animation a year and were happy with that. Post-Soviet kids consumed much more and also wanted options so they could choose what they wanted to watch.

The situation changed in the late 2000s. Several commercially successful projects, like Smeshariki, the pentalogy of features on bogatys, the series Luntik, later Masha i Medved (‘Masha and Bear’), and Fiksiki increased the interest of investors, distributors, and TV bureaucrats. Thanks to certain initiatives taken by the animation community, state financing increased and viewers, fed up with foreign cartoons, started to demand national products. Furthermore, a number of projects started without state money and TV channels became quite interested in domestic animation.

A Look Back, in Anger227

As a result of numerous and often criminal ‘final settlements’ with regard to ownership, the state studio Soyuzmultfilm ultimately faded out and numerous private studios emerged. They would take commissions from the West for cheap third-order work and look for private money, sometimes tying up with all but gangsters. By the middle of the decade a good few animators had switched to different occupations and many had left the country in search of work. Theatrical film distribution and exhibition had died out, and animation had disappeared from national television. In order to plan the broadcasting schedule for a year ahead, post-Soviet TV wanted to purchase films in packages that met their rigid requirements. They wanted films that were 26, 13, six, or three minutes long. The standard screening unit had been 10 minutes, and so the entire body of Russian animation could not correspond to this new format. Thus, in the 1990s and 2000s one saw only old American or Asian series on TV.

There was a turning point in the early 2000s, although it was a backwards one: on the state level, it was decided to support cinema for children. Money came in, along with firm directions on how it should be spent. The most solid studios started to recover, switching from auteur animation to children’s productions.

The Saint Petersburg studio Melnitsa (‘mill’) started doing features; Pilot took up the fairy-tale cycle Gem Mountain in a format convenient for TV series (the first package of eleven 13-minute episodes was completed in 2004); Animos launched Russian Classics for Children; and the Petersburg studio was formed specifically for the project Smeshariki.228 Gradually the proportion (but not the quantity) was similar to that of former times: the overwhelming majority of production was for children, plus a few auteur films.

By the late 2000s, Smeshariki, despite its simplified design and Flash technology, turned out to be the only definitely successful Russian animation series. This was mostly due to smart, witty scripts full of quotations and hints tailored for grown-ups in order to attract teenagers as well as adults, film buffs, and so on. Russian animation in the 2000s remained state funded in general, and the supposedly commercial projects did not bring in enough profit for production studios to become self-sufficient. On one hand, this situation was rooted in the underdevelopment of Russian production: the production capacity of all the studios together was not sufficient to provide a convincing package of animation for TV, either for foreign or domestic channels.229 On the other hand, the system of state funding was non-transparent and corrupt. As for good auteur films (that were nevertheless made), the public and even animation buffs hardly knew them. These films almost never turned up on TV; they were impossible to purchase, and animation festivals in the country were very few and far between.

Eventually, there was also a technological weakness in Russian animation. In anything related to hi-tech, powerful machines, costly software, or advanced training, the Russian situation was very bleak.

After some hectic activity, amid no less hectic changes in the higher echelons and in cinema authorities and funding agencies (which amounted mainly to power games and carving up the pie), the situation in 2013 was still fluid. Certain financing, however, did come through later in this period, and after the lion’s share of the spoils had been grabbed, the remains did go to finance some auteur prokects.

Tatarsky and Pilot, the Greatest Adventure

Aleksandr (‘Sasha’) Tatarsky (Kiev, 11 December 1950–near Moscow, 22 July 2007) is an emblematic figure in the

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227 By Dina Goder.
228 They are stylized rounded animals, known as Kikoriki in Britain, GoGoRiki in America. The original name is derived from smeshne, meaning ‘funny’, and shariki, meaning ‘little balls’.
229 There wasn’t a sufficient workforce to build up the necessary production capabilities at the lower and middle levels (renderers, inbetweeners, etc.). Those without much creative ambition were the first to leave when studios were on the brink of dissolving.
post-Soviet period. He would enter the new era proper, however, with considerable baggage.

As a child he was enchanted with the art of the circus and especially clowning. He was lucky to see some of the great master clowns at home, as his father was writing sketches for them. Then he discovered animated films and realized that this was another incarnation of the comic. So in 1968 he went to Kievnauchfilm studio, the home of Ukrainian animation. He worked on many mediocre conventional productions, but he also worked for talented directors like David Cherkesky and Evgeny Sivokon, whom he considered mentors. The bold young Tatarsky was viewed as an enfant terrible – and indeed he often behaved as such, with no respect for reputations or for the order of things.

Kitty o pitcheks (‘By the Way, About the Birdies’, 1979) was made independently and half-amateurishly by Tatarsky and his friend Igor Kovalyov (who would be a coworker and coauthor for years to come). The pair brought the film to Moscow and applied to the newly opened animation division of higher courses for directors and screenwriters. The admission committee was impressed. Yuri Norstein later observed: ‘A fantastic and harmonious world emerged. Both graphic metaphor and character’s manner of behaviour – all was just special.’

The backing of the Kiev studio officials was necessary to be accepted at the higher courses and only Kovalyov received it, but Multtelefilm invited Tatarsky to Moscow at the same time. In 1981, filling a gap in the studio’s production plan, he got a chance for his directorial debut – which turned out to be a hit. Plastilinovaya Vorona (‘Plasticine Crow’, essentially a paraphrase of the classic ‘The Fox and the Crow’ fable) was a rare exercise in clay animation and the poetics of metamorphoses – things and creatures were constantly being transformed one into another. Shockingly fresh in the brave gags, clownish humour, and dialog, the film at first frightened the studio officials, but the intervention of many prominent live-action actors made that aired after all. Later it went on to gain international acclaim and immense popularity at home.

Tatarsky had to engage in a number of ordinary stock commissions before making his next hit, Padal proshlogodniy sneg (‘The Last Year Snow Was Falling’, 1983). Again he barely made it through the approval process and was accused of ‘being hostile to Russian people’. In this film Tatarsky revealed yet another dimension of his audacious humour, albeit with deeper bittersweet overtones, in a story of a hapless but likeable man lost in the snowy woods and trying to bring home a Christmas tree. Obratnaya strona luni (‘The Dark Side of the Moon’, 1984), with Kovalyov’s script, followed. It was perhaps more exquisitely artistic, in painterly gouache drawing, but its witty gags were no less sparkling.

The very short Kubik-Rubik, Klonnada (‘Rubik’s Cube, Clownade’ [‘farce’], 1983) fully lived up to its title. Krylya, Nogi i Khvosty (‘Wings, Legs and Tails’, 1986) – a laconic joke on ‘how a vulture teaches an ostrich to fly’ – was his most eccentrically auteur creation (both of these were codirected with Kovalyov).

Sledstvie vedut kolobki (‘The Kolobki Investigate’, 1986–1987, again directed with Kovalyov) followed. This was a larger project in several parts, a pungent parody on TV police crime series. The graphic design is stylishly sharp and it features a duo of buffoonish heroes and buffoonish gags. This work also turned out to be an immediate and enduring popular hit.

An unlikely star in the stringent state-run TV environment, albeit still with an enfant terrible reputation and constant tensions with Multtelefilm bosses, Tatarsky managed to dig his own semi-autonomous hole where the so-called ‘Tatarsky gang’ had a chance to come together and work in an artistic workshop atmosphere. Sick and tired of the shaky status quo, he was dreaming of his own studio.

By the advent of perestroika, he was quite well known and even exerted considerable aesthetic influence. He had an energetic nature and an entrepreneurial streak and was the first to organize, in late 1988, an independent animation outlet – Pilot studio. His cofounders were Igor Kovalyov, technical producer Igor Gelashvili, and creative producer Anatoly Prokhorov (yet another unique and important figure of the coming era).

They produced an anthology of extra-short films called Lift (‘Elevator’, 1989) in which many young professionals directed side by side with the ‘founding fathers’. This modus operandi would become a regular practice and would remain a priority as the studio sought to attract and nurture new talent.

The studio’s strategic plans were ambitious, if only a little vague: to become both an auteur’s heaven and a commercial outlet – or, rather, to remain both in one. There

231 Tatarsky and his artists treated clay not as a variety of puppetry but rather as a quasi cut-out technique, or a kind of flattened drawing in/with Plasticine.
was a strong unspoken rationale behind that. Tatarsky’s identity was clearly of this two-fold nature – in his sharp
exquisite style he was doing essentially people’s movies.
What he was really interested in as an artist happened
To be an open-for-everyone spectacle, however complex
it might be in its inner structure (which is characteristic
of the art of the circus, and of clowning in particular).
Anatoly Prokhorov articulated the aesthetic credo more
explicitly, within the tradition of pantomime and the early
slapstick comedy.

There were ambitions of different sorts as well. The entire
enterprise was thought to be a multifaceted venture: produc-
tion division proper, training programs, and also a ‘cul-
turological’ centre. Prokhorov held seminars and symposia,
inviting scholars and critics, and even managed to publish a
few issues of the magazine Animatograph Study Notes. Animat-
ors were trained with respect to their individuality but within
Pilot’s style. The stylistic effect on the entire professional envi-
ronment was obvious and strong: by the mid- to late-1990s
more and more artists and studios were mimicking, if only
superficially, the Tatarsky style (for which Kovalyov, though
strictly artistically, was largely responsible).

Life was rough nevertheless, and biting. In the early
1990s, there was just not enough money around and peo-
ple had to look for work themselves. The first to leave for
Hollywood was Kovalyov, who was already known interna-
tionally. Others followed, veterans and youngsters alike.
At Klasky-Csupo alone, at some point all but a dozen ‘brethren-Pilots’ worked. Others ended up in Hungary or
elsewhere. Years later Tatarsky lamented: ‘A super-team
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partially in-house, partially commissioned on the side. A similar leader introduced the regions and ethnic-
ties at the beginning of each one. Obviously the quality
is uneven, but many in Russia considered the project as a
whole to be a breakthrough and a decisive push towards
restoring the industry’s vitality and cultural significance.235

But, truth be told, there was also a practical impetus: to
give the studio another breath of life on secured state
financing and the status of a socially important commis-
sion. For Pilot as an institution, though, this arguably might
have been a mixed blessing: the studio effectively turned
into a single-product-line factory. After Tatarsky’s death
it functioned under Nazarov’s creative supervision; at the
beginning of 2013, Igor Gelashvili (one of the founding
producers) took over.

238 Tatarsky himself directed two decent but ordinary episodes (again with Telegin): Kak pan konem byl (‘How the Gent Had to Be a Horse’), a Belarusian tale, 2004) and Tolkovanie snovideniy (‘Interpretation of Dreams’), a Tatar tale, 2004).
Chapter 3: Russia

Tatarsky died of a sudden heart attack in July 2007, at the age of 56, in his dacha near Moscow — the wonder-house that he had been building for years and filling with old toys and other arty artifacts. This house was probably the last grand project of this restless imagination. His death was a shock to the community and to those beyond as well. Many expressed their sympathy over the loss of this true artist, charismatic leader, teacher, public figure, dreamer, and down-to-earth doer.

As to the essence of his legacy, just two out of the many perspectives really are outstanding. First: Tatarsky started creating post-Soviet animation cinema still in the era of Brezhnev-Chernenko. That was why Communist bosses were putting his films on the shelf. It was with his works that true perestroika (reconstruction) of the brain started. And it was with him — a decade later — that the Russian animation industry, of national scale and of world level, started.

Second: In essence, he never pursued ideological objectives. He was longing for renewal. In addition, he enjoyed constantly playing a game with thrills and chills.

Producers: The New Class

Closed, once and for all, the economic and ideological dissimilarities with the rest of the world, Russian animation (and Russian film-biz at large) became a story of studios and of producers.

In the late 1980s, three young men started to turn up in the wings — in Filmmakers’ Union hallways, at seminars, and so on.

One, Sergey Skulyabin, a seemingly entrepreneurial type, in just two or three years would be presented to Soyuzmultfilm, which was already in disarray, as their prospective saviour. He indeed would become the studio head — to embark on a long and dramatic saga of deceit and demise. He personally pushed through, scandal by scandal, the selling off of the film library, the privatization of tangible assets, and the elimination of both the production process and the creative staff. He vanished into thin air in the early 2000s and left behind a desert in place of the bygone institution of national pride.

The second one, Aleksandr Gerasimov (b. 1966), would, on the contrary, become a studio builder. In 1993, along with Khitruk, Khrzhanovskiy, Norstein, and Nazarov, he built and then ran the School-Studio ShAR; later he established Master-Film, along with the noncommercial Guberniya Foundation. In addition, in 1996 he organized the annual national animation festival (held first in Tarusa, later in Suzdal) and effectively ran it for many years. He is credited in dozens of notable films of the 1990s and 2000s, including numerous debuts and art projects, and is broadly considered one of the most active, responsive, and successful animation producers in the country.

The third, Sergey Seregin (b. 1967), participated as Gerasimov’s fellow associate in all the endeavours mentioned above. But at these same studios he also made a couple of quite informative and intelligent documentaries on animation: Mikhail Tsekhmanovsky. Dynamic Graphics (1995) and Fedor Khitruk. Profession — Animator (1999). Without relinquishing his administrative duties, he then went into animation directing. He first made a couple of rather sincere short subjects like Lukomorye. Nanya (‘Lukomoye: The Nurse’, 2000) and Klyuchi ot vremeni (‘Keys from Time’, 2004), and then series and features of a more commercial and conventional nature.

ShAR (an acronym that stands for Shkola Animatsionnoy Rezhissury — School of Animation Directing) was conceived as a ‘school-studio’, a kind of extension of the famous two-year higher courses for directors and screenwriters in the animation division. According to the charter of these higher courses, only applicants with prior higher education could be admitted — to receive, in essence, an additional professional degree. At ShAR, those restrictions would not apply. The function of producers-administrators at ShAR would then be to dig for financial resources. In post-Soviet years it was a challenge to find companies to

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238 In 1992, the American company Films by Jove was granted the exclusive foreign distribution rights for the major part of principal studio titles; the ensuing controversy and numerous lawsuits lasted for years and ended in a collection buyout by a loyal Russian oligarch in 2007.
239 From early 1990s on, Soyuzmultfilm underwent multiple clinical deaths and attempts at resurrection in disguise. By 2004, two entities functioned under the same classic studio name: a film fund and a creative production unit. The president personally promised in 2011 to reunite them, and by 2013 the new strategy was launched under the artistic supervision of Mikhail Aklashin, who succeeded Stanislav Sokolov.
support debut films, and so in this respect the new institution came to play a crucial role in launching many careers. It also was the base where Khrzhanovsky’s later projects, both small and large, were produced. Many significant films of the 1990s, and to a lesser extent those of the 2000s, were marked with the ShAR logo – including, among others, some works by Ivan Maksimov, Oksana Cherkasova, and Aleksandr Petrov.240 When the animation division of higher courses was closed in the early 2000s, ShAR filled the void. Gradually, training would become more and more fee-based here as well; by the early 2010s, the school-studio, under the artistic supervision of Khrzhanovsky, was struggling but still moving forward.

Master-Film, founded initially in the mid-1990s as a convenient parallel to ShAR241 and not limited to animation alone, also served as an indispensable debut launch pad. (As Seregin comments: ‘Lately it’s like a fair or exchange: everyone from each side is on the look-out – who finds whom.’) It was also an art film outlet (being responsible for most of the films of Maksimov and several others auteurs) and the principal sponsor-organizer of the national festival. It also became more and more involved in commercial production. On both planes, it’s a rather serious player in the field, with the capacity to produce about two hours of animation per year (ShAR at the best of times was only capable of turning out about 90 minutes).

Elizaveta Babakhina (1934–2012) was a longstanding top manager at Multitelofilm – and rather a force for the good there. She moved to Soyuzmultfilm at the very end of the 1980s. Considering the international contacts she had collected and the prospects for coproduction on the near horizon, she founded Christmas Films. At first it was under the auspices of Soyuzmultfilm but left a little later, taking with it a good number of leading directors. Christmas, under Babakhina’s leadership, started with a few films by Valentin Karavaev (Istoriiya odnogo goroda, ‘History of a Town’, 1992, after a classic satire by Saltykov-Shchedrin), Galina Barinova, young Aleksei Kharitidi, and Aleksei Demin. Christmas then boldly embarked on a huge, probably unprecedented, coproduction adventure with British S4C and BBC Wales. Through the decade these films included: Shakespeare – the Animated Tales (twelve 26-minute films, from Hamlet to Tempest), Operavox (six 30-minute films, from The Magic Flute to The Barber of Seville), and Old Testament – the Bible in Animation (six 26-minute films). Then followed the TV short Bozshelf, the feature The Miracle Maker (The Jesus Story), Canterbury Tales in three films and, in the early 2000s, yet another cycle of Animated Tales of the World (six 13-minute films). The scripts and general decisions, as well as voice talents, came from the British side and were to be creatively implemented generally by Russian crews and directors – including the veterans Serebriakov and Gamburg; Ugarov, Sokolov, and Zyabliakova from the middle generation; and the younger Orlova, Dabizha, Mouat, Saakyants, and Karacev, among others. The results were impressive, albeit arguably uneven and somewhat contradictory at their core. Many films carried the traces of the Russian school and showed genuine artistic ambition along with masterful execution; at the same time they showed the restraints of commissioned work. They brought signs of professional recognition, from Emmy to Oscar nominations.

Lately the studio has been working on a much smaller scale, engaged in domestic projects. Among other things, the Christmas studio tried to reincarnate the famed Nu Pogodi! (“Just You Wait!”) series of the past decades; the nineteenth film was directed in 2005 by Aleksei Kotechochin, son of the original creator Vyacheslav. After Babakhina’s death, Natalia Dabizha took over the leadership of the Christmas studio.

Animos was mainly the domain of Natalia Orlova and a sort of safe harbour for traditional puppet films, in particular the later works of Maria Mouat (though she eventually went to lead the new outlet Pchela [‘The Bee’]). Studio Melnitsa (‘The Mill’) was founded in Saint Petersburg in 1999 with backing from Sergey Seliyanov. It was perhaps the first truly independent major producer of post-Soviet cinema and was led by Aleksandr Boyarsky. It’s the major features manufacturer of work that is far from flawless but of stable quality with a focus on the stories rather than style. The sheer capacity is impressive: about seven hours per year, between series and features. Konstantin Bronzit was one of

240 It should be noted that interinstitutional cooperation became almost a rule of the game in new times: many films carry multiple logos, initiated under one roof and finished under another, or with the support of third parties. Most importantly, financial backing, even and especially from state funds, should go through authorized or otherwise smartly arranged channels. Gerasimov insisted, however: ‘We never were in business of just purchasing essentially completed projects: we nurtured them in any case, if only distantly or partially.’ (This, and all further quotes from Gerasimov and Seregin, are from personal communication from Aleksandr Gerasimov to Mikhail Gurevich, December 2012.)

241 It was also Gerasimov’s fully independent enterprise, run together with Vyacheslav Mayasov (1954–2006), a documentary producer and film scholar.
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their distinguished directors, making few personal projects here besides commercial ones. Then, of course, A-Film in Yekaterinburg was the heir to the animation division of Sverdlovsk studio. It prospered under the management of another former administrator of Soviet times, Valentina Khizhnyakova, carrying the ‘Sverdlovsk school’ through the hurdles of the new era to younger generations, in frequent cooperation with other institutions.

Studio MIR was founded and headed by the screenwriter Irina Margolina (in partnership with director Vladlen Barber) and dealt primarily with her projects, employing different directors, including Oksana Cherkasova.

The Studio of Computer Animation Petersburg, under the creative supervision of Anatoly Prokhorov and the management of Ilya Popov, was established in 2003 specifically for the project Smeshariki (208 six-minute instalments). Subsequently the studio devoted attention to less interesting TV-oriented projects and to theatrical features, producing up to 10 hours per year. In addition, it launched the nonprofit National Children’s Foundation in 2008, thus positioning itself on the plane of education and social responsibility as well. MetronomFilm, headed by producer Arsen Gotlib, was mostly engaged in a single, yet impressive, art project: Kolybelnye mira (‘Lullabies of the World’, a few dozen films of three minutes each), directed mainly by Elizaveta Skvortsova (b. 1978). Georgy Vasiliev’s Aeroplan studio made the series Fiksiki and participated in Gem Mountain.

Producers Dmitry Gorbunov and Aleksandr Kuguchin, on the occasion of the 850th anniversary of Moscow in 1997, came up with the idea of a collective portrait of the city in extra-short subjects commissioned from all over the world. Mikhail Aldashin assumed the position of creative supervisor, using his own extensive professional connections to attract talent. In about six months, some 50 submissions were received – representing perhaps not everyone but everyone noteworthy on the Russian animation scene. It attracted a good number of foreign directors as well, from Plympton to Schwizgebel. The resulting collection showed original and bright mini-films. But the producers framed them in a quasi-documentary format, showing a cabby driving a provincial man around the place. Some individual entries were dropped altogether, others suffered cuts and reediting, with original soundtracks often obstructed by chatty voice-overs. Aldashin chose to leave the project at that stage. The result was named Optimus Mundus (‘The Best of the Worlds’, original title in Latin) and was released in 1998; it was shown at festivals two years later but has still never been released commercially.

Many individual pieces deserve attention. In Underground (or Metro-Night), famous statues and decorative panels of the Moscow subway are let loose in wild play – staging a Walpur-gis-like night; not accidentally, it was scripted by Aleksandr Tatarksky and directed by his understudy Vasiko Bedoshvili (b. 1960). In contrast, Andrey Zolotukhin (b. 1966, worked in Sverdlovsk-Yekaterinburg and in Switzerland) showed subtly stumped pastel angels soaring in midair and then a freakish little devil stealing the tiny bell tower (Two Angels). Vadim Medzhibovsky (b. 1956) pictured a couple’s stroll through the park in lightly ironic old-Soviet nostalgia (Gorky Park: Returning). Mikhail Aldashin, with Aleksei Demin as codirector, visualized the entire historiosophic survey in a multiscreen exercise with events developing simultaneously on different planes (History of the Moscow Tsars).

Prokhorov, from Science to Children’s Films

Anatoly Prokhorov (b. Oslo, Norway, 1948), a career scientist with a PhD in physics, turned to the theory and practice of the performing arts in the late 1970s, appearing at animation guild events and being introduced as a discussant at production reviews, where his unconventional perspectives would receive the close attention of some and be adamantly rejected by others.

Having been tasked by Aleksandr Tatarksky to help establish and run his new studio, he became the first, and the best, of a kind: a creative producer in a broader sense. At Pilot, he became part of practical creative efforts. In addition, he formulated the aesthetic programme, educating, if not indoctrinating, studio employees with a specific philosophy of the trade. For some time, Pilot was a centre of cultural research, with a hands-on focus. It was a playground for discussions, an umbrella for conferences, and a scholarly-educational publishing unit.

Eventually, and maybe inevitably, Anatoly Prokhorov felt he had exhausted his mission at Pilot and he left in 2003 to found another studio. As we have seen, the Studio of Computer Animation Petersburg was established especially to produce the series Smeshariki, a family-oriented show that was smart and playful enough to attract different groups. It was not particularly groundbreaking in the art of animation, he admitted,242 but what was

242 Anatoly Prokhorov, personal communications to Mikhail Gurevich in February–April, 2013.
really important for him was that it was a notable event in post-Soviet Russian life on the social and cultural plane. He considered Smeshariki to be edutainment. Prokhorov the scientist maintained a realistic perspective. Good, witty scripts and creative supervision notwithstanding, the series turned out to be feasible only when a fully developed market of goods-for-kids emerged in the country. It was the only commercially successful animation output, and it was built almost exclusively on merchandizing.

**Directors**

Aleksandr Petrov

Aleksandr Petrov²⁴³ (b. Prechistoe, district of Yaroslav, 17 July 1957) studied painting at the Yaroslav Art School and graduated at age nineteen. He then studied cinema at the VGIK (the world-famous Moscow school) under the guidance of Ivan Ivanov-Vano. After a period of time as a draughtsman at the Armenfilm in Yerevan, in 1984 he took the role of art director in Nach (‘The Night’, directed by Vladimir Pektevich) and the following year created Dobro Pozhalovat’! (‘Welcome!’) together with Alexei Karaev (all at Sverdlovsk studio).

The first animated film Petrov directed alone was Korova (‘The Cow’, 1989). He painted successive frames with his fingertips, using slow-drying oil paint on glass plates; this technique, that would become his distinguishing mark, was, in his own words, ‘the fastest way from the soul to the animated work’.²⁴⁴

‘The Cow’ brought international attention to his talent and in 1990 was nominated for an Academy Award.

In 1992, he created Son smeshnogo cheloveka (‘The Dream of a Ridiculous Man’) and in the same year he opened his own company in Yaroslav, the Panorama Animation Film Studio. In 1996, he directed his third film, Rusalka (‘The Mermaid’).

Petrov won an Oscar in 2000 for The Old Man and the Sea, an animated adaptation of Ernest Hemingway’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same title. This film was made in Canada and produced by an international consortium led by Montreal-based Productions Pascal Blais. With the help of Imagica Corporation, Dentsu Tec., and NHK Enterprises 21 of Japan and, obviously, the Panorama Animation Film Studio in Russia, Petrov created the film using the large-format IMAX, which was a successful choice.

Once The Old Man and the Sea was finished, Petrov returned to Russia and in 2006 released Moya lyubov (‘My Love’), his longest work (26 minutes and 35 seconds).

Special attention must be given to Petrov’s choice of subjects: generally he gives form and colour to literary works, emphasizing the topics that are important to him.

In that way he adapted works by Andrei Platonov (‘The Cow’), Fyodor Dostoevsky (‘The Dream of a Ridiculous Man’), Ernest Hemingway (‘The Old Man and the Sea’), and Ivan Shmelev²⁴⁵ (‘My Love’), emphasizing fantasies, fears, reflections, and hopes in a romantic atmosphere that involves the public with his passion.

‘The Cow’ is the story of a young boy who faces the death of his first special love: a cow that has gone crazy after losing her calf. In ten minutes, Petrov shows his sensitivity for the relationships between men and animals, reflecting Platonov’s respect for nature and destiny. Even though the film has a tragic ending, the director gives the film a kind acceptance of sufferance and a spiritual depth.

In ‘The Dream of a Ridiculous Man’ Petrov confronts the philosophical topics that have always haunted human minds – basically, he explores the meaning of existence.

Looking at the images that seem to come out of our worst nightmares, we empathize with the story of a man that wants to commit suicide. This man feels indifference for the world around him. One night he meets a young girl who asks him for help. After leaving her alone, he comes back home and falls asleep. He dreams about uncorrupted heaven, about a perfect world that he will turn into hell by destroying every form of beauty and purity. When he wakes up, he is a different person. The dream saved him, allowing him to understand that life needs to be emotionally felt and not only rationally known.

In the first part of the story, the public recognizes Dostoevsky’s characteristic ‘Man from the Underground’, with his slothful retreat from life, his desire to harm himself, and his need for suffering and humiliation.

From a story full of visions, Petrov creates a film in which every image becomes something else in just a few seconds. During the dream, a special role is given to an

²⁴³Aleksandr Konstantinovich Petrov should not be mistaken for his colleague Anatoly Alekseyevich Petrov.

²⁴⁴Interview with Aleksandr Petrov recorded by Clarissa Filippini in Turin (Italy) on 5 December 2009, at the Sottodiciotto Filmfestival press conference.

²⁴⁵Ivan Sergejevich Shmelev (also transliterated Shmelev, 1873–1950) died in exile in France, after having devoted his last decades to writings that idealized pre-Bolshevik Russia.
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important object: the mask. When someone puts on a mask this person feels an interior change and takes up all the qualities of the creature he is representing (a god, a demon). In this way, he who wears a mask loses his own identity to acquire the identity of someone else. But if all the people living in heaven lose their own identity, this means that they will lose their souls, too, and the corruption of heaven will begin.

In ‘The Dream of a Ridiculous Man’ we often see the mask of the plague’s doctor, which is the symbol of death. ‘Death’ must be considered as a devil and as the greatest symbol of sin.

If ‘The Dream of a Ridiculous Man’ leaves the public with a bitter taste, The Old Man and the Sea is about tenacity and respect for nature.

Hemingway is the first and only non-Russian author that Petrov adapted. In this piece in which an old fisherman catches and then loses a large marlin, after a long period of bad luck, Petrov demonstrates a simple but strong poetry of images and sounds and a lively realism that touches the viewers, though it eschews sentimentalism.

‘My Love’ is based on Shmelev’s short novel. The story takes place in the late nineteenth century. During one summer, a teenager called Anton has to confront his first love. The film emphasizes the young man’s feelings, proving that Petrov is a careful explorer of the human mind.

‘The Mermaid’ is possibly not Petrov’s best film, but it’s the most emotional and, for non-Russian spectators, the most original and new. Written by the director himself and Marina Veshnevekaya, it’s inspired by Russian and German legends about the main character, the rusalka.

The rusalka is a mermaid of lakes and rivers who wants to take revenge on the man whom she loved while she was in her human shape, and because of whom she decided to kill herself by drowning.

The film tells the story of this betrayal between an old monk and a young woman. Though the story is told with very few spoken words, there are some interesting biblical references. In the monk’s dream, for example, we first see ‘Jacob’s stairway’ connecting Earth to heaven. Then we see the lamb’s blood that saves men from sin thanks to his purity (a lamb is totally innocent, just like Jesus Christ); and finally we see the vision of a female saint (who may be the Virgin Mary).

Using these references, Petrov gives a deeper understanding of these stories and a unique perspective. He prefers to reveal things slowly (with images and sounds that suggest important topics) rather than delivering them explicitly. It’s what distinguishes a work of art from a sermon.

Mikhail Aldashin

Mikhail Vladimirovich ‘Misha’ Aldashin (b. Tuapse, on the Black Sea, 11 November 1958) developed his career most significantly from the 1990s on. He attended maritime vocational school and served as a draftee in the Navy before enrolling at the Moscow film institute VGIK. He graduated in 1987 as a life-action designer. Luckily, he had a chance to switch to a more appealing path and graduated in 1989 from higher courses for directors and screenwriters, animation division, where he studied under Yuri Norstein and other masters. He then worked at the Soyuzmultfilm in Moscow. Here, together with schoolmate Pehep Pedmanson, he directed his official debut, Kele (a.k.a. Keh, id., 1988; black and white, animated drawings). It adapted a traditional fairy tale from the northeastern Siberian people of Chukchi and told the story of an evil spirit who captures two little girls but is scorned by their wittiness. With this debut, Aldashin showed his preference for a naïf look, with the combination of traditional styles, smart scripts, and knowledge of directional tricks that would distinguish his films.

Kele brought Aldashin to the attention of other Russian animators, and in 1989 he joined the Pilot studio. His first film at Pilot was Pums (‘Poumse’, 1990), in which

Figure 3.36 Mikhail Aldashin.
comics-like characters are animated with a sharp sense of rhythm. An eager merchant reaches the shore of an island of primitive people and corrupts them with modern clothes and goods. The primitive people abandon their old things, made with animal skins, teeth, and feathers, and the native animals are happy to keep them. With ‘Poumse’, which received awards in Russia and France, Aldashin’s works started to be screened at international festivals. This film was the first of a series that never went further than the second one, _Ohotnik_ (‘The Hunter’, 1991).

In the same year, 1991, the coup against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that would lead the country to its dissolution was a theme for a short animation, _Putsch_ (‘The Putsch’, 1991) made with Aleksandr Tatarsky in those days as Russian president Boris Yeltsin rose as the new political star opposing the tanks and Communist restoration.

_Drugaya Storona_ (‘The Other Side’, 1993) is about a worm that gets out of the soil with a friend but immediately has to face the harshness of the outside world. An ugly bird eats his friend and hunts him, so he decides to escape to the other side of the world, where he will discover that things can get even worse. This delicate, touching movie appears like a metaphor for the newly obtained freedom, which for the Russian people meant, for years, spiritual happiness combined with economic, political, and social difficulties.

From 1993 to 1995 Aldashin worked as a producer, scriptwriter, and film director at the Teko advertising company. Then he founded the Mishka animation studio, which coproduced with Pilot in 1997 what is still today considered his masterpiece, _Rozhdestvo_ (‘Nativity’, 1997).

The film tells the story of the birth of Jesus, taking episodes from the Gospels and mixing them together into a new narration with multiple lines. Everything begins with the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel and ends with a triumphal symphony. There are at least three different narrative lines: Gabriel urges characters (humans and animals) to act following the Scriptures; Mary and Joseph try to find a safe place for the birth; the Magi start their trip to the Holy Child. Gabriel in particular appears like a stage director, since all the lines start from his actions. But he is a very ‘human’ angel (he eats fruit, has to face landing problems, and so on). In fact, the sense of the divine supernatural is absent from every character – from Gabriel himself but also from Mary, Joseph, and the Child. They are all presented with realistic features that, by contrast, emphasize the holy nature of the people and of the happenings. It’s the author’s intentional choice, which finds its roots in Aldashin’s artistic background.248 The touch is gently ironic, and, while it is far from the usual dignified and high tone used to treat sacred matters, it never offends the

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Figure 3.37  Mikhail Aldashin, _Rozhdestvo_, ‘Nativity’, 1997.

248 ‘This kind of attention paid to convincing realism in small manifestations, this way to construct and to animate a character, this strive to catch true life in the net of actor’s observations turn into playfully serious devices of performing – if only through drawing – all this, of course, is a celebration of Russian school. And of one master in particular – Yuri Norstein. A teacher of Aldashin (and even an advisor of sorts on this project) and a mentor figure for the entire generation, Norstein more than anyone embodies this understanding of the very stuff of animation, and also, perhaps, the underlying spiritual thrust, which gives meaning to all the elaborate techniques.’ (Gurevich, ‘Playful Sophistication’.)
sensibility of the believers.\textsuperscript{249} In the same way, Aldashin scored the film with pieces from Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig Van Beethoven, but their impact is everything but pompous. The visual look of \textit{Nativity} recalls the world of Marc Chagall, but with the same colour unity that we find in old medieval manuscripts, in which brown and gold usually prevail.

In the same period, Aldashin served as artistic supervisor to the so-called Moscow animation project (later arranged as the mixed-genre feature \textit{Optimus Mundus}, without Aldashin’s participation), a collection of a few dozen extra-shorts from various directors to commemorate the 850th anniversary of the Russian capital. He also contributed to this project as director of two films, \textit{Muravey} (‘Ant’, 1997) and \textit{Tsari} (‘Csars’, a.k.a. ‘History of Moscow Czars’, 1997–1998, with Aleksei Demin).\textsuperscript{250}

Together with Mikhail Shindel and Charles Swenson, by the end of the decade Aldashin had created and supervised an American TV series, \textit{Mike, Lu and Og} (id., 1998–1999, 53 episodes of 13 minutes each). Individual episodes were directed by Aleksandr Tatarsky and Pilot team members, among others. \textit{Mike, Lu and Og} dealt with the adventures of the student Mike on a foreign island, where he meets the princess Lu and the native boy Og. Produced by Kinofilm, the series first ran on Cartoon Network between November 1999 and August 2000.

In 1998–2002 Aldashin held the position of ‘(film) director-in-chief’ at Pilot, supervising a number of works. Although engaged in long-running projects, Aldashin did not quit his authorial activity and in 2002 he released \textit{Bukashki} (‘Bookashkis a.k.a. Bugs’, 2002), produced by Pilot. In a house, a colony of bugs tries to change its difficult conditions. The arrival of extra-terrestrial bugs will inspire a space escape, but the starship built with a bottle and some matches will only give them the illusion of being free. Again, as in the first movies, we find a bittersweet plot developed in a comics-like style conveying irony and a good rhythm that mixes the gags. \textit{Bugs} received awards at the most important world animation festivals (Annecy, Zagreb, Espinho, and Hiroshima).

In 2004, Pilot began \textit{Gora Samocvetov} (‘Gem Mountain’), a large project of 52 animated films, each one taken from a traditional tale from the Russian Federation. Aldashin contributed as the director of \textit{Pro Ivana-Duraka} (‘About Ivan the Fool’, 2004–2005, with Oleg Uzhinov) and \textit{Malchik S Palchik} (‘Pinkie Boy’, 2006, with Igor Volchek), and in both of them he once more explores the naïveté of folk stories by means of his typical rhythm, irony, and delicate touch. His third film for this series, \textit{Bessmertnyi} (‘Immortal’, 2012), with slight stylistic references to his masterpiece ‘Nativity’, was highly praised and received the national film award Nika.

In the spring of 2013 Aldashin assumed the responsibilities of artistic supervisor at Souzmultfilm, when new strategies of studio reincarnation and development were introduced.

Besides his work in film, Aldashin remained active through these years as an artist, participating in numerous exhibits and never giving up this facet of his creative life.

\vspace{3em}

\noindent\textbf{Oksana Cherkasova}

The work of Oksana Cherkasova is essentially based on a deep love for her country’s culture and traditions, and especially the ones from the northeastern regions. Even at first sight, her arctic-blue eyes and soft snow-white hair seem to symbolize Siberia.

Oksana Cherkasova was born on 20 August 1951 in Norilsk, a city in Northern Siberia founded in the 1930s as a detention and forced labour camp for Stalin’s opponents.

In 1976, she graduated from the Sverdlovsk Architecture Institute, and in 1981 she finished a course in screenwriting and directing in Moscow. During that same year,

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure3.38_oksana_cherkasova.jpg}
\caption{Oksana Cherkasova.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{249} At the same time, the newly influential Orthodox clerics and ideologists wouldn’t exactly praise the film.

\textsuperscript{250} ‘He experiments with multi-image split-screen, as if projected onto traditional narrative windows of Russian icon.’ (Gurevich, ‘Playful Sophistication’.)
she began working at the Sverdlovsk film studio. In 1984 she collaborated in the making of *Kot v kolpake* (‘The Cat in the Cap’, by Aleksei Karaev), taken from a short story by Dr Seuss. This film is characterized by vivid colours and round figures, stylistic elements that are quite different from the subsequent works directed and animated by Cherkasova. At Sverdlovsk, she had her first and most important encounter with Chukchi culture, an indigenous population from the extreme northeast part of the Russian confederation. This culture aroused her curiosity and admiration.

She began to study and research this people thoroughly, considering in particular the elements that characterized the Chukchi’s spiritual life, and how this spirituality intimately connected with other aspects of their life. As she has said, she transferred what she learned about that culture to many of the films she has worked on since then.

The three Cherkasova films that are most inspired by the legends and mythology of these people are: *Kutkh i myshi* (‘Kutkh and the Mouse’, 1985), *Beskrylyy gazyonok* (‘The Wingless Gosling’, 1987), and *Plenyannik kuskshki* (‘The Cuckoo’s Nephew’, 1992). ‘Kutkh and the Mouse’ explores the Chukchi cosmogony regarding the universe creation by Kutkh, a god with the appearance of a crow and a shaman’s power. The big crow Kutkh, tired of continually flying around the universe, brings the Earth up and lands on it, taking on the features of an old man. The first mice were born from Kutkh’s first footsteps on the ground. Curious, playful, and fearless, they get into Kutkh’s nostrils while the god is sleeping. The violent sneeze that follows shakes the Earth, creating mountains and valleys. Oceans were born from Kutkh’s attempts to squeeze the mice with his hands. The god’s anger inaugurates the eternal battle between fire and snow, creating the seasons. Therefore, the world was born from the interaction between the valiant Kutkh and the tiny mice.

Cherkasova succeeds in telling the legend with a smooth style as well as with respect and consistency. She offers a pleasant portrait of the god (often depicted as a quick-tempered and unpredictable figure), as well as of the nice and likeable mice. The result is pleasant, thanks to a stylized design, the use of a few, soft colours, and a soundtrack made with a narrative voice and traditional Chukchi music. All of these elements together make the short film evocative. The movie, made inside the Sverdlovsk film studio, was regarded as the best debut of Russian animation in 1985.

‘The Wingless Gosling’ is a folkloristic tale based again on Kutkh, and on a little duck without wings that gets lost and begins a journey into an afterlife world filled with strange creatures. What is really noticeable about this short is – as in her previous work – the evocative power of the whole, due to the soundtrack and the graphic technique inspired by the primitive Chukchi’s rock painting. This particular technique was created by the artist Valentin Olshvang, who succeeded in creating a special soft and luminous effect adding glycerine to the ink.

‘The Cuckoo’s Nephew’, for which Oksana Cherkasova worked in close contact with a real shaman, who transmitted the secrets of his charm and his work to her, was made in 1992. Andrey Zolotukhin made the drawings, using a wooden support to obtain the desired effect.

Two other films by the Russian author, both based on legends and tradition, are outstanding: *Delo proshloe* (‘Let Bygones Be Bygones’, 1989) and *Nyurkina banja* (‘Nyra’s Bath’, 1995).

Made at the Sverdlovsk film studio, ‘Let Bygones Be Bygones’ tells the story of a greedy man punished by two kikimores, feminine home spirits often characterized by a monstrous appearance and by a spiteful and evil-minded temperament. In this case, though, they are represented in an ironic way, without a disposition that might arouse fear. Nadya Kozhushanaya, friend and schoolmate of Cherkasova, wrote the script. In this case, too, the drawings, made by Valentin Olshvang, were executed on paper placed on a rough wooden table, so that the surface irregularities would be seen through. The result is a folkloristic and funny film that doesn’t lose any of the refinement and poetry that distinguish the Russian director’s work.

‘Nyra’s Bath’, the melancholic and metaphorical story of an about-to-be-married couple, and of the preparation of the young bride into the traditional steam bath (banja),
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254 It’s not by chance that Cherkasova dedicated a short film to the banja. This practice is intimately connected with the Russian tradition that conceals meaningful spiritual elements in the unmistakably practical idea of a place for relaxation and hygiene. Traditionally banja is a building separated from the houses and built with logs; inside there is a stove for producing the steam. Bathers, men and women together, alternate relaxing moments and massage with small branches of birch wood with swinging outside, where they sought thermal contrast through contact with the snow. The banja was also a place used for social purposes that were related to magic rituals of ancient beliefs and pagan traditions. In particular, as it’s represented in the short film, the banja had an important function in premarital rituals, mainly for the bride, who is described in the film as a young and shy girl. In some local traditions the groom also went to the banja together, alternate relaxing moments and massage with small branches of birch wood with swinging outside, where they sought thermal contrast through contact with the snow. The banja was also a place used for social purposes that were related to magic rituals of ancient beliefs and pagan traditions. In particular, as it’s represented in the short film, the banja had an important function in premarital rituals, mainly for the bride, who is described in the film as a young and shy girl. In some local traditions the groom also went to the banja together with his wife to take part in the ceremony.

255 By Maria Tereshchenko.
In the slow and hermetic Malchik (‘The Boy’, 2008), he told the spiritual journey of a colt that eventually finds an adult to adopt him.\textsuperscript{256} In 2010, he made the children’s film Vorobey, kotoroy umel derzhat slovo (‘The Sparrow That Could Keep His Word’). In 2011 and 2012, while leading master classes with Chinese students at the Jilin Animation institute, he created the shorts Ya vidiel, kak myshi kota khoronili (‘I Saw Mice Burying a Cat’) and Malenky prud u podnozhiya velikoy steny (‘Little Pond by the Great Wall’; dedicated to the late Chinese animation director Te Wei).

Geller aimed at making the latter film short, in the form of haiku. He cut off any excessive content and made a light and clear picture, having reached, like great Japanese poets, the point where language breaks off.

Konstantin Bronzit

Born in Leningrad\textsuperscript{257} on 12 April 1965, Konstantin Eduardovich Bronzit worked as an animator at Lennauchfilm, where he made his first short Ochen malenkie tragedii (‘Very Tiny Tragedies’) for the almanac Karusel (‘The Merry-Go-Round’, 1988), and then he worked for two years with the studio Panorama. In 1993, he joined the Pilot studio in Moscow, where he created Petechevuy (‘Chew!’, 1993), Tuk-Tuk (‘Knock Knock’, 1993), and Pustyshka (‘Hollow Man’, 1994). Aleksandr Tatarksky’s influence enabled him to mature his great sense of comedy. In 1995, he graduated from the higher courses in scriptwriting and directing in Moscow, under the supervision of Fedor Khitruk.

After Svichkraft (‘Switchcraft’, 1995), a brilliant comedy of the absurd that won the Grand Prize at the Annecy festival, Bronzit went to France in 1998 and worked with Folimage, where he completed his most important work: Na krayu zemli (‘At the Earth’s End’, 1999). This film explores the everyday life of an old couple who live on a mountain peak and are busy trying to find a balance for their house, which continually leans from left to right due to the weight distribution. In this film (which owes something to Charlie Chaplin and The Gold Rush), Bronzit created a set of original but naturally comic gags. ‘At the Earth’s End’ won more than 70 prizes over the course of two years and was nominated for the César, the most important annual prize in French cinema.

Bronzit’s films are the essence of the comedy. He used some recurrent elements to upset normal situations and provoke laughter. For instance in Bochevstvo (‘The God’, 2003), a fly, another recurrent element in his stories, is able to disturb the unlimited serenity of a divinity.\textsuperscript{258} This film was produced by Melnitsa animated studio, where Bronzit began to work in 2000. With this studio he also created Ubornaya Istoriya – Lyubovnaya istoriya (‘Lavatory Love Story’, 2006), for which he was nominated for an Academy Award in 2009.

The director considered this film a new step: it is an emotional story told with simple black and white drawings. A lonely woman works as an attendant in a public bathroom and dreams about love. An unknown man secretly gives her some flowers, and from this point on the whole film is about the woman trying to understand who he is. The simplicity of the drawings counteract the colourful flowers, which stand out from the black and white world.

In 2004 Konstantin Bronzit also directed a full-length film, called Alosha Popovich i Tugarin Zmei (‘Alosha Popovich and Tugarin Dragon’, 2004). It is a parody of Russian popular epic poems, with many comic characters like the speaking horse that helps Alosha to catch Tugarin. Totally imbued with Russian soul, it speaks about eternal values like love, bravery, and honour.

In 2008, Bronzit made another parody, this time repainting a fairy tale well known everywhere: Provdivaya istoriya o trech porosyatach (‘The True Story of the Three Little Pigs’, 2008).

Garri Bardin

In 1991 Bardin left Soyuzmultfilm and created his own Stayer Studio, where he has worked ever since. The first film with his studio was Kat v sapoge (‘Puss in Boots’, 1995), again a tale that tells something about his country. Thanks to a careful analysis of the characters he manages to create an animated world in which a thankless man is still a thankless man even when he is dressed by wealth.

In 1997, Bardin invented his best character ever: Choo-choa (‘Choo-Choo’), a magic nurse created by a little child on Christmas night, with old useless things, while his parents are organizing an elegant dinner. Choo-Choo comes

\textsuperscript{256}This film is inspired by Leo Tolstoy’s novella Khokh瘤, the Story of a Horse.

\textsuperscript{257}Now Saint Petersburg.

\textsuperscript{258}We try to avoid the excesses of political correctness, but in this case we feel obliged to point out that fun is poked at a Hindu-like divinity, thus offending about a billion people on Earth (Giannalberto Bendazzi).
to life because of the child’s deep need to have someone who loves him, plays with him, and makes his life a special adventure – a universal childish hope.\footnote{During the following years, Bardin made Chucha 2 (‘Choo-Choo 2’, 2001) and Chucha 3 (‘Choo-Choo 3’, 2004), which are both extremely good and sensitive films too.}

Another film that received a number of awards, Adagio (‘Adagio’, 2000), was based on another special material: origami. It is a strong story. A white goose one day joins a group of grey geese. The different color is the reason why the white one ‘deserves’ to be killed. But the white goose starts living again and, in this way, becomes a god. When the crowd discovers a black goose, nothing changes: there is again a reason to kill the different one.

The soundtrack is based on Albinoni’s Adagio, which gives a perfect musical comment to the painful and dramatic events in the story.\footnote{With the help of well-known music, the director often lends a humourous note to his works. In Break! the public recognizes Paco de Lucía’s Tico Tico, in Grey Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood there are Bertolt Brecht / Kurt Weill’s Mack the Knife (the song of the anti-hero, readapted and sung by the Grey Wolf), and Edith Piaf’s / Louis Guglielmi’s La vie en rose, Puss in Boots is a succession of famous classical music tunes: Boccherini’s Minuetto during an elegant dance (interrupted by Puss and Karabasov, who also maims the Venus de Milo), Mozart’s Eine kleine Nachtmusik during Karabasov’s false drowning, and Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D Minor when the terrible man eats people, and so on.}

Stanislav Sokolov

The career of Stanislav Sokolov was not interrupted by the political happenings around him. In cooperation with S4C BBC Film, the Welsh branch of Channel 4, he directed the first two films of the series based on Shakespeare’s tales, Burya (‘The Tempest’) and Zimnaya Skazka (‘The Winter Tale’), and received an Emmy Award.

The most important work on the feature The Miracle Maker (2000) was equally distributed between the Welsh and the Russians: Stanislav Sokolov and Derek W. Hayes shared the director’s chair, Murray Watts wrote the script, and Elena Livanova managed the art direction. The story tells the life of Jesus Christ, from the first miracles to the resurrection, through the eyes of Tamara, a little ill girl, whose father, Jairo, mistrusts Jesus’ supernatural skills. ‘While in many animated films biblical characters are mostly depicted in their human dimension, in Hayes and Sokolov’s film Jesus is clearly a divine character, speaking and acting different from the other ones, though living among them.’\footnote{Francesco Filippini, ‘The Miracle Maker’, eMotion 4, (April–May 2003).}


Ivan Maksimov

Ivan Maksimov (b. Moscow, 19 November 1958) was a stand-alone figure in professional landscape and a colourful showy personality (one critic defined him as essentially an ‘animation character’).\footnote{Or, maybe, a galaxy of multiple planets-films that he himself would call ‘small houses’, places we could glimpse into, as if through the window, to watch the life inside.} An artist-animator-director (often all in one, plus a scriptwriter) with pure aesthetic focus, he enjoyed a broad and almost cult following.

He managed to develop and to persistently maintain an original graphic style and created an entire wholesome but alienated world\footnote{As a graduation work in 1987, he made Bolero, based on the classic Maurice Ravel piece. In 1992, he undertook a professional remake of it, which brought him the Gold Bear in Berlin.} inhabited by weirdly strange, but likable, species. Even the physical properties of this separate universe of his are different and self-sufficient.

That might be rooted in the path he took to his profession, which was also unusual. Born to a family of academics highly-reputed in the field of physics, he couldn’t escape graduating from the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and then working at the Russian Space Research Centre before studying animation directing.

Officially,\footnote{Maksimov preferred to put credits to his films in both English and Russian, and we take the English translations of titles mostly from these credits.} he debuted with Sleza naprawa (‘From Left to Right’, 1989),\footnote{His graduation work in 1987 was Chucha 2 (‘Choo-Choo 2′, 2001) and Chucha 3 (‘Choo-Choo 3′, 2004), which are both extremely good and sensitive films too.} based on a piece by Polish electronic music composer Marek Biliński. The moon jumps into a mincer and splits into bizarre creatures walking, jumping,
and crawling from left to right; at the end they mix all together and turn into a bone and . . . a dog is there wait-
ing for his bone. His next film 5/4, based on the famous music by Brubeck and Desmond (1990, under the Pilot label), propelled him to inside-the-guild immediate and controversial fame. Full of strange half-zoomorphic creatures busy with their no less bizarre routine, on a platform-island hanging somewhere in dark space, it feels like an exercise in pure movement and pantomime.266 This is not to say, however, that Maksimov is the poet of pure absurd. This estranged world is lively, and it does have logic, and thus a meaning, even if it is not that obvi-
ous and easygoing; not surprisingly, it provoked extreme interpretations – from Freudian to Zen Buddhist.267

Maksimov’s ‘monstrosity’ is soft-taken and gentle, and often quite funny. Characteristically, he does not need any dialog, even in gibberish; everything would be expressed through visuals, always accompanied with a precisely chosen soundtrack.

After those early music etudes, he turned to Provinzial‘naya shkola (‘The Provincial School’, 1992), a rough phan-
tasmagoria of school-day routines and mores. Libido Bendzhamina (‘Benjamin’s Libido’, 1994) is a satire on psychoanalysis, albeit still in a trademark distilled and seem-
ingly detached style. Niti (‘The Strings’, 1996) gives a hint of Miró imagery and presents almost a clear-cut romantic story, if only with ‘android’-like characters. Medlennoe bistro (‘Slow Bistro’, 2002) was another ‘realistic’ sketch – about the hurdles of waiting to being served, full of arrogantly funny gags. Among other films that followed, Tunnelirovanie (‘Tunnelage’, 2005), is important to note. It’s an extrava-
tant yet transparent parable on incarceration, modes of soundtracks.

A bright and fresh Maksimov appeared in the cycle that started with Veter vdol berega (‘Wind along the Coast’, 2003) and continued with Potop (‘The Spate’, 2004), Dozhd sverkhun vniz (‘Rain Down from Above’, 2007), and Prilivy tuda-syuda (‘Tides To and From’, 2010). Here his ever-present and weird bestiary meets the elements: wind and water, sea and land. The design becomes more and more akin to Chinese or Japanese prints; micro-gags and funny details abound, but what dominates is the general tone of lyri-
cism. Such lyricism returns, not without moral overtones, in Dlinnyi most v nuzhnuyu storonu (‘Long Bridge of Desired Direction’, 2012).

Aleksei Demin268

Aleksei Demin (b. Moscow, 20 March 1956) began his ani-
mation career working as an editor. In fact, he studied at MADI269 and then worked at TsNIMASH.270 During these years he met Irma Pavlova, a well-known designer, who helped him find work in the publishing field. From 1983 he worked at the Pushkin Institute271 as editor-in-chief and then as the computer lab’s designer. His first extra-
short film, 5-ya noga (‘The 5th Leg’, 1992) was part of the series Chudaki (‘The Cranks’) at Christmas Films. In 1992 he graduated from the higher courses in scriptwriting and directing in Moscow, studying under Khitruk and Nazarov. Eventually, in 1995, he made a serious debut with Attrakt-
sion (‘The Attraction’); in 1997 and in 2001 he worked at the Atelier for animated cinema in Annecy, France.

Working in animation suited him much better than engineering, because Demin was one of the most poetic men in contemporary Russian animation. His last films were made with watercolour that gave them a distinctive handmade style. His drawings seem to live their own lives; they breathe and vibrate, giving the audience a feeling that is romantic and ironic at the same time.

Kosha pod dozhdem (‘Cats Under the Rain’, 2001) was his most famous film; it is about a group of cats and a ducky fisherwoman. It was inspired by the children’s song by Sofya Abramova Milkina272 that was performed by her

266 Due to music copyright issues that no one bothered to clear until now, the film was not distributed in any commercial form though it was widely known through festival circles, professional screenings, and the like.

267 ‘He first made accessible for the screen the philosophy of the neutralism and reciprocity of all things, ataraxy and emotional reserve. […] He introduced into national animation modern aesthetics of absurd and Freudianism, kinetism and philosophic parable, combining elitist exquisiteness and most wide democratism of visual form.’ (Aleksy Orlov, ‘Ivan Maksimov and “Maksimov Phenomenon” in national animation’. www.animator.ru/articles/article.phtml?id=313).

268 See also the collection of essays and interviews by other authors in Aleksandra Vasilkova, World of Films of Ivan Maksimov, Moscow, State Institute of Art Studies Publication, 2011.

269 MADI is the Moscow Institute of Automobiles and Roads State Technical University.

270 TsNIMASH is the Central Research Institute of Machine Building.

271 The state Russian language institute in Moscow.

272 Violinist and later film director (1922–1997).
husband, Mikhail Shveytser.273 Probably Demin defined his style once and for all during this film. He was mostly influenced by Shveytser’s stories about his dead wife. Indeed, he developed his tender mood at this time and used the same mood in his next works: Tikhaya Istoriya (‘A Calm Story’, 2003) and Buatel (‘Boitel’, 2006).

The former is a beautiful and touching film about the relationship between a bear cub and his mother. The young animal does not understand maternal advice because it craves to learn everything about the world around him.

The latter is sadder. It was inspired by Guy de Maupassant’s short story of the same title. People thought that it would become a satirical story, but Demin’s film was about the soldier’s sad and thwarted love for a black woman he will never forget.

Ochumelov (id., 2009), was another adaptation. It was inspired by Anton Chekhov’s short story ‘The Chameleon’. In this occasion, Demin created a unique work of art composed of three elements. First, drawings were made with watercolour by the film’s director; second, the soundtrack came from Igor Flinsky’s recordings; and finally the animation was unexpected – every character is like a press clipping and lives over his own piece of paper. The effect is strange but interesting because of its innovation and because it showed Demin’s continuous interest in doing something new.

A Trio

In 1988, at Soyuzmultfilm, a trio of friends and coworkers made the joint film Medvezhat (‘Bear-Night-Mare’), in which three individually directed plotlines were interwoven in freshly ironic, absurdist humour, with deliberately rough stylistics. This film had almost a cult following for years and put their names solidly on the map.

One of them, Vasily Kafanov (b. 1952), made one more brave piece (Vitamin rosta, ‘Vitamin of Growth’, 1988, on the unconventional children’s poetry of Oleg Grigoryev), then in 1990 emigrated to the US where he continued working as an occasional music clip maker.

The second, Aleksey Shelamnov (1955–2011), turned to the writings of Daniil Kharms, an avant-gardist of the 1920s and 1930s, in Puteshestvie (‘The Journey’, 1989), a dark yet deeply lyrical piece in exquisitely sketchy style. Before his premature death, he made the bright Pageoka (‘Little Button’, 2010), a variation on an old-time song about evil foreign spies and child heroes, with a unique air of sharp parody and gentle nostalgia.

The third, Aleksey Turkus (b. 1955), undertook another Kharms adaptation: Sluchai (‘Incidents’, 1990) – an intelligent and rather radical exercise in collage exploration of Soviet symbols, grand-style architecture, and the spirit of time. Later he was involved in a number of quality conventional productions, but in 2004 he amazed festival audiences with Burevestnik (‘Stormy Petrel’), in which a classroom reading of Maksim Gorky’s classic poem ignites an extremely funny and brilliantly inventive ironic phantasmagoria.

In 2012 he triumphed at the national festival in Suzdal with his Zasnezhennyj vsadnik (‘Snow-covered Horseman’, 2011), a sincere and gentle homage to his own father, a prominent architect and professor.

In Saint Petersburg

Saint Petersburg appeared to be the foremost playground for avant-garde animation, with video art and other out-of-cinema forms and formats. Irina Yevtseyeva (b. 1956) has a PhD in film studies. She is a professor, researcher, author of scholarly writings – and an independent animator/director. Her first film Loshad, skripka . . . i nemnogo nervno (‘Horse, Violin . . . and a Little Nervous’, 1991), on and about early Mayakovsky poetry, is an unabashed exercise in collage employing drastically different textures. For her next film, Elikir ([‘Elixir’, 1995], made in a more restrained mode with a variety of pixilation striving to transform live actors into a painterly imagery, Yevtseyeva chose E. T. A. Hoffmann motifs. Another exercise in painterly transformation of live footage, Klown (‘The Clown’, 2002) is an elegant metaphoric ‘portrait’ of remarkable mime-actor Slava Polunin in performance. Yevtseyeva received the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival for this film. Then she undertook Petersburg (2003), exploring possibilities in the montage of archive materials representing the great city through its visual mythology. A study in the interbreeding of poetry and fine arts, Demon (2004) is based on a poem by Lermontov and paintings by Vrubel. In the director’s own words, ‘what is of essential importance for me, as an artist-animator, is to work with drawn cinema which is rooted in real image and in interpretation through painting.274

273 Mikhail Shveytser (1920–2000) was an outstanding Soviet live-action film director.
Wife-and-husband team Olga and Aleksandr Florens (both born 1960), artists who belong to the punkish group Mitki (founded in 1985), undertook some influential animation projects. Rasskaz o chude iz chudes (‘Story of Miracle of Miracles’, 1994), was a highly, albeit gently, ironic take on the Left-Handed Man story. Trofeyne filmy (‘Trophy Films’, 2003), a collection of five two-minute subjects in mix media-technique, was openly sarcastic.

In Yekaterinburg

At A Studio, Aleksei Karaev added to his works from the 1980s yet another touching and funny subject in painterly style, Ya vas slyshu (‘I Hear You’, 1992), and also Tarantella (id., 2008), an adaptation of Maksim Gorky’s Tales of Italy. In addition, Sergey Anutdinov continued his grotesque exploration of the current condition (Autism, 1992; Autism, 1995; and Zapiski animatora, Animator’s Notes’, 2001). Designers-turned-directors also produced interesting work. Valentin Obshvag (b. 1961) debuted with Rozovaya Kukla (‘Pink Doll’, 1997). Built upon a little girl’s fears and jealousy towards her mother’s love life, the film presents an unusually hard eye on the realm of childhood. He contributed to the Optimus Mundus project with the gentle and elegant sketch Tea House (1998), and he later made two important personal pieces: Pro rakov (‘About Crawfish’, 2003), based on a local gothic-like legend of a fatal romance between a village girl and a dragon-serpent, and So vechora dozhdik (‘Spatter of Rain from the Evening On’, 2009), an unhappy relations story with folk roots about a little mermaid and an old man. Both films are marked by unfailing artistic taste and insightful narrative tone.

Andrey Zolotukhin (b. 1966) directed Babushka (‘Grandma’, 1996), a pointed and loving etude alternating wistfulness and buffoonery in tone. He showed quite a different aesthetic tint in the subtle painterly miniature Two Angels (1998), and yet another facet of his artistry in John Henry the Steel Driving Man (2001, made for Animated Tales of the World, distributed by HBO), a full-blown rotoscope painting, impressive in its sheer energy and rhythm. For the latter he received an Emmy award for outstanding animation.

More About It 1

Dreams of Piotr Dumala

‘My film is a kind of dream. As if one had read Crime and Punishment and then dreamt about it,’ said Piotr Dumala in an interview. 276 I think this statement holds the key to the whole work of this artist.

In Dumala’s book, The Game of Razors,277 there is a striking number of stories that either have ‘dream’ in the title or relate to someone’s dreams: ‘From the Collection of Dreams’, ‘From the Portfolio of a Dream Salesman’, ‘Dreams. A Tale from Fernhead Road’. Even the texts that don’t refer to dreams explicitly are dreamlike.

The surrealists also referenced the mechanisms governing the fantasy of dreams. But there is a fundamental difference between them and Dumala: the surrealists never referred to their works as dreams. For Dumala, however, cinema and literature are extensions of dreams, conscious dreaming.

From Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz’s, Narcotics:

In a dream, when a glass falls off the table as a result of an inadvertent bump, it is inexplicably strange and mysterious, because it symbolizes an essence not readily apparent in the event itself. It suggests a wish of the dreamer to unwittingly kill someone, upon whose death he is counting on (and who is fragile like glass, perhaps in sickness or age). No one would consciously admit to such a wish, but when it appears in associated thoughts then it exists regardless of the stated intention.

In Dumala’s world, glass breaking often seems to embody the same symbolic essence. In The Gentle Woman, a bursting wine glass is associated with a scene in which the heroine, in her imagination, pulls out a revolver to kill her husband. A similar association appears in Crime and Punishment, in which a breaking glass of borsch precedes the murder of an usurer, a woman old and brittle. A dish breaking like a firework into many tiny, triangular fragments appears in the finale of Franz Kafka and is associated with the transformation of the protagonist into a dog.

Dumala, with great virtuosity, exploits the inherent capacities of his medium to achieve the delirious atmosphere of the story being told. In dreams and animation, fantasy is natural, indisputable. On top of that, Dumala developed his own, exceptionally suggestive visual language. Transformations occur almost tangibly, realistically, and we have no reservations that they are only the projections of characters’ inner states.

275 Giannalberto Bendazzi is happy to acknowledge Irina Margolina, Natalya Lozinskaya, Alice Dugoni, Lara Ermacora, Clarissa Filipini, Alberto Rigoni, and Anna Catella for their contributions to this chapter.

276 By Marcin Giziycy, translated by Jack Lenk.


Chapter 3: More About It

Metamorphosis is the subject of Dumala's first film, *Lycanthropy*, a tale of werewolves, or people who transform into beasts – or who, as it turns out, only don wolf skins. Hence another important motif shows up in the film: the exchanging of roles. In *Little Black Riding Hood*, the wolf predictably tries to be the grandmother; less predictably, Little Black Riding Hood is a sadist. In *The Gentle Woman*, almost everything transforms. A table changes shape numerous times, eventually becoming a bed, clock faces become a marketplace, and the heroine briefly takes on the form of the woman from Munch's painting *Scram*. 

In *Freedom of the Leg*, a sleeping man's body undergoes disintegration. His detached leg becomes a bird and flies off to the sky. In *Franz Kafka*, apart from the dog transformation, there is also an insect transformation, clearly drawn from Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Finally, in *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov's face transforms into the face of a rapacious cat, like Jekyll into Hyde.

Dumala is also an innovator in the field of animation technique, more specifically an explorer of new materials: animation on plaster boards. In painting and repainting, scraping and wiping over the same painting, the artist achieves beautiful, soft transitions between sequences with a surprisingly rich texture, reminiscent of a painter's canvas. Dumala came up with the technique thanks to experiments carried out as a student in the conservation department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where he specialized in stone conservation.

The first ‘plaster’ film was the third in Dumala's body of work, *Flying Hairs*. It is a poetic and enigmatic tale about a ‘rain’ of real hair, which wreaks havoc but leaves a pair of lovers unscathed. Even in this first work, it was clear that this technique was seemingly crafted specifically for stories that unfold in dark tonalities (the film is black-and-white).

It wasn’t until the two Dostoyevsky adaptations, *The Gentle Woman* and *Crime and Punishment*, that the full potential of plaster boards was exhibited. Today it’s hard to imagine these works realized by any other means. The density of drawing and texture, as well as the incredible fluidity of animation achieved by the continuous transformation of one initial image, instead of its replacement by successive images as in classical cartoons, can be equalled only by the effect achieved by Alexandre Alexeieff and Claire Parker in their use of the pinscreen. The technique proved especially suitable to the extraction, from the character’s souls, of giant spiders and other nightmares.

That same type of dark, monochromatic vision of a Freudian descent can also be found in *Walls*. This film is – on the surface – a study of claustrophobia. A Tiny Man is locked in a small space, a box, observed through a peephole by a Giant Man. The behaviour of the captive changes, progressing from fear through revolt to a state of hallucination and apathy. Then the observer drops a coin into the box, as if into a piggybank.

Dumala’s lighter films include *Little Black Riding Hood*, *Nerwowe życie kosmos*, and a television miniseries. The artist reveals himself in these works as a talented satirist-cartoonist, although one can detect his predilection for unearthing dark layers of the human soul. *Little Black Riding Hood* combines a dark version of the fable with an extremely simple, almost childish, drawing style. That contrast constitutes the essence of the film and is its primary source of humour.

‘I don’t know what lies ahead, I don’t know what else I could do. Perhaps here ends my autotherapy. The opportunity is ending for me to exploit animated film as a medium’, said Dumala while working on *Crime and Punishment*.281 Does that mean also the end of his beautiful dreams?

**Piotr Dumala’s Franz Kafka – The Realism of Animation**

From the darkness emerges the barely lit, grey face of a man. Actually it’s just a small, narrow rectangle of eyes drawn on a plaster board between the black and the white. Yet in this one-dimensional drawing we instantly perceive a depth of gaze. The eyes come alive in an unusual way for animation, through a shimmering flicker of light on the pupils, reflected from some faint lamp nearby.

The camera retreats and for a moment we are able to contemplate the silhouette of a head and torso held in the frame, reading in these shapes an impression of one of the most popular photographs of Franz Kafka – a portrait of a nearly forty-year-old man with dark hair, dark eyes, and an extremely slender and pale face.

Before the first shot of Piotr Dumala’s film about Franz Kafka, the name of the director appears. Whether by chance or by design we register these separate elements as a whole. Dumala’s film about Kafka is indeed also (always? only?) about Dumala himself: the consciousness, sensitivity, and the whole microcosm of one artist contained in the vision of another. The film’s fabric is reminiscent, paradoxically, of photography – its material being equally difficult to grasp, and each detail referencing a very concrete reality.

It is often said that black-and-white photography is in some sense more ‘realistic’. It concentrates our attention not on external colours but on the depth of the image, the contrast, and play of shadows. With its density and texture, it illuminates the raw subjects it reflects. The black-and-white animation of Dumala also focuses on the ‘pure’ matter of reality: on the sunlit, shimmering surface of a river, on the narrow cone of light from a streetlamp surrounded by a buzzing swarm of insects, on the strange efficiency of a millipede traversing a doorknob by the beam of a flashlight, on the clamour of a stairwell, and on a teacup slowly being filled with milk.

Using mostly wide shots, Dumala brings forth the sensuality of things, showing objects in their obviousness and hyperreality. Surrounding the writer with these details from daily life, the

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filmmaker seeks to grasp his inner character through the fantastic absurdity of the outside world.

Beginning with the first scene, we see the eyes of the protagonist very often throughout the film. Kafka looks at the teacup being filled by his mother, he observes an insect, glances through a window, looks at a clock and paintings on the wall, and he examines himself in a mirror. The world shown in the film is Kafka’s world, as seen by him. His perspective is the central guide through the film; it is through his eyes that we observe the strange reality, suspended in its functionality, imploring with its most enigmatic details.

It is difficult to ‘bring forth the sensuality of things’ only through drawing. Franz Kafka tries to shatter the barriers of two-dimensionality and conventionality, breaking the ties that bind the tradition of animation. The striking depth-of-field effect is still revolutionary in animation, giving this film a deceptively strong sense of perspective. Similar to optics in the human eye (and camera lenses), the degree of focus changes with the distance of the subject from the camera (both ‘subject’ and ‘distance’ from other objects are effects of the illusion of perspective). Obstructing the frame are wind-swayed tree limbs, completely blurred, then further we see, though not yet clearly, arches of a bridge over the Vltava, until finally the sunlit waves of the river achieve clarity of lens focus.

The scenery of apartments, rooms, and stairwells is also built out in space. In accordance with camera movements, the spatial layers change focus and relative position. In order to add to the subtlety of the rendered world, the director varies the density of blacks and introduces the play of blots (especially in ‘urban’ scenes). This is also a move that brings Dumala’s technique a step closer to photography.

It is his drawing and animation that are most awe-inspiring. The characters move with an elastic fluidity that is hard to describe; their mimicry has a melancholy peacefulness quite different from a Disneyesque choreography of movement. The moving images are so evocative that even in a still face we can feel a pulsating life force. This expressiveness is enhanced by the assertive sound. The soundtrack of animated films, corresponding to the inventiveness of the visuals, will often utilize transformed and distorted sounds. Here, all of the sounds are particularly realistic, although rather than registering them subconsciously as a natural part of the world we perceive them as a strong counterpoint which expands the dimensionality of the film.

Mostly, it is difficult to ascribe to the film scenes a concrete literary match (save for the brief images of the insect in bed, referencing Metamorphosis, but its context in the film comes from the director). They are the sum of certain ideas about Kafka, a function of literary fantasy and the concreteness of film. The artist’s effort is not only directed toward the expression of inner space, where the sensibilities of the writer and filmmaker overlap. The deepest structure of the film reveals a need for the ‘grasp of a deeper, more essential reality contained in things or people’, in this case through the laden physicality of the world – the reality of a certain concrete human loss.

It is difficult to discern a logical relation among the sequence of scenes. Seamlessly random images emerge from the darkness that don’t relate in their ‘external resonance’ to previous ones, nor do they signal any connection to the following ones. From these images comes a tale, all the clearer to viewers familiar with the phenomenon of Franz Kafka. This drama is, among other things, the drama of responsibility, of growing up, and of avoiding maturity – which also means avoiding routine life.

Kafka, while entrenched in the rhythms of family, home, and city, is also completely detached. We see him at dinner, sitting across the table from his father, but his attention and his actions are focused neither on eating nor on interaction with any other person. Kafka peers under the table to observe his father’s legs, then with a strange satisfaction he contemplates a fly running around the table, and so on. Not participating in daily events, resigned to a faulty routine of estrangement from life, Kafka loses himself in his observations. Thus the chronology of ongoing life holds no meaning for him – reality exists in individual, passing glimpses, somewhere between the common and the unreal. In his isolation the protagonist is both sensitive and defenceless. The whole empire of his mind, poured into a dishevelled stack of papers, could blow into dust if only the father forcefully opens the door.

Kafka’s reactions are often an escape into fantasies that transfigure him into animals. In an amazing moment, we see the young hero exploring his house with a flashlight. The beam of light falls on an insect, defenceless and naked like the subject of an observation but also fascinating and mysterious in its countless movements and in the flow of its fast legs. Suddenly, in a visually surprising image, we see Kafka himself in the aura of light in a peculiar exchange of perspectives.

The thread weaving the scenes in the film together is flimsy and hard to grasp, and the substance of the images is often mysterious. The film’s grey darkness, from which people, buildings, and objects barely emerge to catch a glint of pale light, emphasizes the imagery’s ambiguity. The light source is a bit too weak and muted to fully illuminate the scenery. It is mostly diffused and undecided.

On the evening streets of Prague, where the moon’s light shines brighter than the dim lanterns, and more so in the gas-lit apartments, there is enough darkness to hide the entire cosmos of one’s fantasies, dreams, and fears. Their ultimate sense will always be difficult to grasp, escaping our imagination like the hero of the film ‘escaping’ from humanity and from the ‘questions’ posed for him.

He cleverly upends the obviousness of the situation to which he is ascribed by the dining table, the progression of dishes, clanking of utensils, ceaselessly ticking clock, and unexpected guests. He aimlessly tosses a plate in the air so he can spin it on his finger, then puts it away and floats away from the table, transfiguring himself as a dog. When he exits the frame, we see the plate he disturbed, falling for an exceptionally long time like the infinity of human life, and at the end we finally hear the disturbing sound of the dish breaking, multiplied by its echo. Kafka, whose attentive eyes follow, along with the viewer, the subsequent metamorphoses...
of his surrounding reality, and who was the guide to this tale, hands over its meaning to us. Any person who collapses into the centre of their own existence cannot objectively describe it from their position—they can only show us what they see.

In this ‘helplessness’ the director identifies with the protagonist. Dumala’s film seems to have been ‘written’ by Kafka’s hand, unsure of the absolute shape of things, rather than the author participating with him in endless metamorphoses of the world. It is difficult to distinguish artistic interpretation from that which belongs strictly to the writer’s imagination. Thus understanding this film cannot be limited to biographical or literary references. It is a story about Kafka, as well as Kafka’s own story about the world.

More About It 2

About his technique, Jerzy Kucia writes:

‘I use a somewhat different technique for every film. I fit it to the film’s needs, be it drama, language, movement, etc. I also always try to find the simplest technical solution available, but my films often end up being difficult and time-consuming. The effects on the screen are what are important to me, and not how they come about.

The dramaturgy of my films requires believable situations; they cannot have a drawing, painting or sculpture in the foreground. Awareness of technique disrupts the viewer’s engagement in the action, and stifles the emotional response. For this reason, I try to make the technique used in the creation of the film unrecognisable to the viewer, and subordinate it to the narrative.

‘In my animation I have used painting and drawing on paper, celluloid and glass. I have used various cut-out techniques, light animation, and even lasers for creating special visual effects. I have used computer animation very little, though the computer is very helpful in the realisation process, e.g. during editing, animation tests, etc. The computer interests me more as a medium than as a technique.

Some of my films use very simple techniques. Reflections was drawn on paper and celluloid. The camera was hung in a single position while the photos were taken. The various decorations and elements were lit with a constant upper and back (lower) light. In most of my films, however, I have applied mixed and often difficult techniques. For Parade I mixed drawing on celluloid with documentary film material. I selected certain frames from that material, setting them in loops and cycles, submitting them to repeated photographing with the use of laser light. Colour was introduced in forthcoming exposures in masks and reverse-masks.

The photographing stage plays a vital role in the creation process. I often apply multiple-depth or multiple exposures. In Tuning the Instruments, some fragments had over a dozen exposures on a single frame of film. All the visual material was manually done on celluloid and paper (around 15,000 drawings and many decorations), but the final visual effect was achieved in bringing them together via photography. The photographing stage was precisely mapped out, and not improvised.

‘I usually start the work on the audio layer at the film’s concept stage. The dramaturgical, narrative function of the sound is worked out in the script and the screenplay. Then I begin working with the composer. Often, some fragments of music are recorded before the realisation of the animation and photography.’

282 From Jerzy Kucia’s typewritten pages, undated, provided to Giannalberto Bendazzi by the artist.