Animation in Europe

Rolf Giesen

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There is a lot one could say about animation in Europe, but above all, there is no consistent European animation. It is as disparate as the various countries involved. Audiences will certainly recognize American or Japanese animation, but in Europe, it can range from Czech, Polish, and Hungarian to Greek, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and British. *Animation in Europe* provides a comprehensive review of the history and current situation of animation in over 20 European countries. It features numerous interviews with artists and producers, including rare documents and first-hand accounts that illustrate the rich history of Animation in Europe. Additional features include

- An extensive chronology with key events in European animation
- A Who's Who of producers, directors, writers, and animators working in Europe
- An examination of the origin of European animation and its influence

Animation in Europe is the first book devoted entirely to this topic and, therefore, will be of value for animation buffs as well as practitioners and researchers.

Rolf Giesen, PhD is a German film historian, screenwriter, lecturer, and collector who specialized in VFX and animation. He has shared his knowledge through numerous university and public lectures, cinémathèque exhibitions, and monographic, historiographic, and lexicographic books such as *Acting and Character Animation*. He received the Award for Outstanding Contribution to Animation Studies, 32nd World Festival of Animated Film – Animafest Zagreb 2022.

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Introduction

The Origin of European Animation

There is a lot one could say about animation in Europe. But above all, there is *no consistent European animation*. It is as disparate as the various countries involved. An identical appearance is only due to the applied technology and thanks to artists who traveled throughout Europe, from country to country, from production to production – and still do so. Frankly speaking, there is not that much European spirit guiding the Europeans. Just think of Brexit with British companies now outside the European community. Animation made in America, despite variety in style and story, will always be *American Animation*. In Europe, it's Czech, French, German, Italian, Spanish animation. This is the reason why this book is titled *Animation in Europe*, not *European Animation*.

There are renowned film schools all over Europe, in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Denmark, with their output of short films distributed to national and international film festivals but never released under the label "European."

There is, however, money in these productions coming not only from national but also from European funds. Thanks to the combined efforts of national *and* European funding, there is an increasing number of animated feature films, but the bulk of them are seen only in their respective production countries and not released all over Europe, where, as elsewhere, due to the standardization brought by globalization, American product dominates.

Right with the start of movie-making, there was a competition in animated images between Europe (i.e., France) and the United States, a race that was won (at least technically, economically, and particularly distribution-wise) by the Americans.

The crude Gaumont-produced *Fantasmagorie* created in 1908 by Émile Cohl, a French pioneer of animation, and contemporary or even forerunner of Winsor McCay, showed all kinds of metamorphosis: faces transforming from young to old, from beautiful to old hag, from human to animal, from human to surreal hybrids. It was certainly the prototype of the morphing techniques of the digital age, up to *The Mask* (1994) and beyond. They brought Cohl to America, but the individualist wasn't able to contribute much to the development of the United States' factory-like, assembly-line structure of animation production.

> While Émile Cohl was exploring and contributing to these new technologies, to some extent he was also becoming their victim. The comic strip, which would eventually make the old style of caricature commercially obsolete, would become dominant in the United States rather than France. Films would quickly become studio-made mass-produced commodities, subordinating the role of the individual creator.[1]

But even Walt Disney wouldn't have denied his European roots. Some of his most famous cartoons are a mix of classic fairy tales with all kinds of rodents and farm animals on board, a mix of European style with Americana. On his European trips, especially in 1935, Disney would buy all kinds of reference books and ask one of his artists, Albert Hurter, who was born in Zurich, to create inspirational artwork authentic to the respective background.

What else, by the way, was Chernabog, the mountainous devil from Disney's *Night of the Bald Mountain* segment in *Fantasia*, first mentioned as Chernobog or Czarnobóg in the *Chronica Slavorum*, other than Emil Jannings disguised as Mephistopheles towering above the town in F. W. Murnau's Ufa production *Faust* of 1926?

Even the menagerie of anthropomorphized animals in animation is based to a great extent on the work of the great storytellers of history from Aesop to Jean de La Fontaine.

And don't forget that after World War II, Europe was divided by an Iron Curtain: Disney remained in the West while the East tried to do without his influence and apply new aesthetics.

NOTE

1. Donald Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. xxii.

Austria

THE DISCOVERY OF VIENNA AT THE NORTH POLE

Concerning commercial animation production and festivals, there is not much going on in Austria.

Two pioneers must be singled out: Peter Eng and Ladislaus Tuszyński. Eng was known for his Viennese types. Besides his work for papers in Germany, Denmark, and the United States, he created advertising films and some shorts. Ladislaus Tuszyński, who was born in Lemberg (Lwów) in Galicia, started his career as an illustrator in 1900. In 1919, he began to create animated films, mainly for the Astoria film company, fairy tales like *Caliph Stork* (1921) and surreal films like *The Hunt for the Head* (1921). Both artists worked on *Die Entdeckung Wiens am Nordpol* (*The Discovery of Vienna at the North Pole*) in 1921.

A number of Austrian animators were hired by German companies in the 1930s and 1940s: Johann Weichberger, Susi Weigel, and Bruno Wozak. Wozak operated a small trickfilm studio in Vienna where he made advertising films and an opera spoof, *Carmen* (1937–1938). Weichberger was involved in an ambitious series made in Berlin for the Tobis-controlled Degeto Schmalfilmschrank: 12 home movies about twin brothers *Fritz and Fratz*. Supported by Susi Weigel, he worked on another series titled *Peterle's Adventures* (less ambitious because it relied heavily on cycle motion).

ONE LEFT

Today, there are still not many film companies in Vienna focusing on animation. One of the few is the Cine Cartoon Filmproduktion GmbH that created animation parts for a feature-length Austrian documentary, *Plastic Planet* (2009). The 3D animation was done by Peter Höhsl. Cine Cartoon is also involved in the production of TV animation for children. Another company is the arx anima animation studio specializing in high-end character animation and development. Arx anima mainly handles commissional work for commercials, film and TV, and games and apps. Their biggest project so far has been an animated TV series titled *Talking Tom & Friends*.

There have always been, however, experimental filmmakers and artists like Peter Kubelka and modern painter Maria Lessing who tried to use frame-wise techniques for

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avant-garde shorts. Additionally, short films as well as student projects like *The Way to M* (2011) by Zsuzsanna Werner; *Tekno Cabaret* (2012) by Peter Hutter; *Family Portrait* (2013) by Birgit Scholin; *Domino* (2014) by Anna Vasof; *Uncanny Valley* (2015) by Paul Wenninger; *Ginny* (2016) by Susi Jirkuff; *Fragmented* (2017) by Anne Zwiener; *Up and Down – The Wheel Goes Round* (2018) by Christopher Aaron who tells about a man who finds himself in a cycle from which there seems to be no way out; *Apfelmus* (*Applesauce*, 2019) by Alexander Gratzer: while two uniformed guards disclose themselves as spineless beings, animals carry on a philosophical dialogue about important existential issues; *Rats in the Wall* (2019) by Miranya Sarandeva who was inspired by one of H. P. Lovecraft's gripping horror tales; *There Must Be Some Kind of Way Out of Here* (2020) by Rainer Kohlberger; *Rest Mode* (2020) by Louise Linsenbolz; *Wormholes* (2020) by Felix Weisz; and *One Left* (2020) by Sebastian Doringer: several patients are waiting in a doctor's office to hear test results regarding their remaining lifetime. In most cases, the allotted time is not as long as they had hoped.

Today, most of these short films are made with state funding, the support of the International Animated Film Association (ASIFA) Austria, and rising small companies like Amour Fou Filmproduktion.

SNOTTY BOY

Finally, in June 2021, Marcus H. Rosenmüller, a live-action director from Bavaria, Santiago López Jover, a Spanish animator, and Viennese producer Josef Aichholzer joined forces to present Austria's first feature-length animation film in Annecy that in its early stages went back to the year 2012: *Rotzbub* (*Snotty Boy*) covered the biography of Austria's late cartoonist and enfant terrible Manfred Deix, a great illustrator of the grotesque facial features that dominate Austrian society and a chronicler of right-wing tendencies in Austrian society. Deix sadly passed away during production on June 25, 2016, at age 67 after a long illness. In his early career, his main influence had been Robert Crumb.

Santiago López Jover:

> What I find interesting about this film is that it examines the artist Manfred Deix from different points of view, also in its visual treatment of the subject. Animation was probably the best way to bring his illustrations to life. […]
>
> Normally, every animation film has an art director. I would say that, here, the art director was Deix. From the very beginning, all of the artwork was inspired by the material that had been passed on to us. The animation is very faithful to the essence and illustration style of this material. Not just the characters, but the texture of the film itself is also heavily inspired by the watercolor technique he used. There was a previous attempt at a film, before this one came along, which examined the 3D effects of Deix's artwork. […]
>
> I also feel that the film is very topical at present. It portrays the Austrian youth of the sixties, who suddenly realised their parents were involved in a terrible war and were going on the wrong side, and these young people wanted to disengage from

it. Deix belongs to this generation. Somehow, many parts of the world are now in a similar situation, with the rise of extremist ideas from the past and younger generations having to contend with them.

The biggest challenge was to match the story to the animated images.

It was difficult getting by on the limited budget we were given. The script was pretty hefty; there were a lot of characters and situations that were expensive in animation terms. We had a 110-page script that would result in a 100-minute film. But there were only twelve of us in our animation team, which isn't very many by industry standards. So we had to make quite a few cuts to bring it down to its present length of 84 minutes, before animating the film.[1]

NOTE

1. https://cineuropa.org/en/interview/406003/, June 15, 2021.

Baltic States

ESTONIA

The Eesti Joonisfilm Studio in Talinn

In 1931, Voldemar Päts, Elmar Janimägi, and Aleksander Teppor made *The Adventures of Juku the Puppet*. But not much happened until 1947 when an animation title department was established at the state-run Tallinnfilm Studio. Out of it grew, in 1958, the Tallinnfilm Puppet Film Studio which introduced itself with *Little Peter's Dreams*. In 1971, when a special animation branch, Joonisfilm, was established, production focus shifted from puppet to 2D animation thanks to director Rein Raamat. Raamat directed *Veekandja* (*The Water Bearer*, 1971), *Lend* (*Flight*, 1973), *Suur Tõll* (*Töll the Great*, 1980), and *Põrgu* (*Hell*, 1983). Another important filmmaker at the studio was Priit Pärn who did *Eine murul* (*Breakfast on the Grass*, 1987) and *1895* (1995).

With Estonia regaining its independence in 1991 and the state-run Tallinnfilm Studio losing its Moscow backing, Joonisfilm animation studio continued to operate as a private enterprise.

The experience and ambitions of Eesti Joonisfilm are applied in two directions – according to the appraisal of its owners, balance has been achieved in the studio's production between high-quality (non-violent) family films intended for a broad audience and the production of films d'auteur, or festival films that are comprehensible for a narrower audience. […]

The unique characteristic of Estonian *auteur* animation is considered to be consistency in applying the co-effect of caricature, absurd humour and rationality, and playfulness, individuality, and a multifaceted approach in telling stories. All these traits are present in the works of Eesti Joonisfilm's permanent authors Priit and Olga Pärn, Ulo Pikkov, Priit Tender and Kaspar Jansis. According to critics, films by Eesti Joonisfilm's authors treat children like grown-ups and grown-ups like children (Jaan Ruus). Janno Põldma, Heiki Ernits and Andrus Kivirähk, the authors of the *Lotte* series films for children and the whole family, have set their main task in direct contrast to entertainment industry standards. Their aim is to create a film out of interwoven stories that continuously holds

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children's interests and gives them surprises in such a way as not to use the bad custom originating from times immemorial of spicing the action with violence.[1]

The Spider Queen of Gadgetville

The *Lotte* films are the main asset of the former Tallinn animation studios. The first entry was released in 2006 (and led to the character becoming an object to merchandise and TV episodes): *Leiutajateküla Lotte* (*Lotte from Gadgetville*), a co-venture of Eesti Joonisfilm in Estonia and Rija Films in Latvia, tells of an annual competition of new inventions in a small village named Gadgetville, where inventing all types of domestic gadgets is held in great esteem and everybody longs to be an inventor. Such starts the adventure of a doglike girl, Lotte, the daughter of one of these inventors. No scary moments disturb the story, nothing age-sensitive: "The mild conflict" – without which no story can do –

> comes in easily digestible bites of misunderstandings, dealing with child-appropriate fears and family relationships. A bit of suspense comes because a beloved dad has been missing for a while; it's well-resolved. In this movie, there are lots of small plots – from an invention competition to unexpected new friendships – even a hot-air balloon journey to Japan for a judo tournament.[2]

Another feature-length animation film, this one done in stop motion, was *Captain Morten and the Spider Queen* by Kaspar Jancis, which was three years in the making and turns out just a little bit scary. It was premiered at Animafest Zagreb's Grand Competition (Feature Film). Morten, a 10-year-old boy, is the son of a ship's captain. While Dad is away, Morten dreams of becoming a sailor himself, sailing the "Southern seas," like his father does. Out of an old shoe he creates a miniature ship and populates it with insects. Then he tries to teach them to sail in an aquarium. All of a sudden, with the arrival of an Italian cockroach who owns a magical fog gun, an incident allows Morten to shrink to the size of a bug and get involved in the hunt for pirate treasure.

> While the puppet stop-motion animation is nothing less than gorgeous, and the whole design is well thought-out and attractive (all of the sets were made by hand, just like the puppets), the overwhelming number of characters prevents the viewer from becoming more strongly attached to the hero, Morten, as do some inconsistencies in their motivations, with the treasure hunt coming in and out of the story's focus.[3]

LITHUANIA

Snow Shelter

It is mainly animated shorts that are made in Lithuania by a young generation of filmmakers – and they would be lost if there were no international festivals to screen them, the fate of most European animation shorts. Some examples are below.

Matilda (12') is a story about a girl who wants to be the smartest person in the world. When all the things she has learned can no longer fit into one head, her mother brings

her a backup one because she thinks that two heads are better than one. But the girl soon becomes confused about which head she should wear at what time, and shortly she loses the second one. The animator, Ignas Meilünas, was born in 1958. He graduated from Vilnius Gediminas Technical University with a BA in computer engineering in 2008. In 2011, he started working as a freelance 3D and stop-motion animator.

Milkshake Bar (12') was made by Urté Oettinger who graduated from the Estonian Academy of Arts with an animation short titled *Song of Songs* in 2010. She experiments with different animation techniques and styles, including stop motion, rotoscoping, and hand-drawn and painted animation. Urté is a member of the Lithuanian Film Academy and the Danish Animation Union. She lives and works in Aarhus, Denmark. Every day after school, Mikas and his best friends – squirrel Sonata and cat Gabriel – meet at the *Milkshake Bar*. One day, the friends unexpectedly come across a photo of a bun-eating champion bear who looks an awful lot like Mikas. The friends decide to organize the Great Milkshake Bar Championship in hopes of finding the legendary champion – and probably even identify the lookalike as Mikas' dad.

While these are kids' topics, Robertas Nevecka (born 1948) who graduated with a BA in film directing from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, prefers a dystopian adult approach with his short film *Snow Shelter* (17'): A freezing winter in today's Vilnius that was devastated by war. Several years have passed since the destruction and rebuilding of the city. A 30-year-old Kostas is living in a squatted apartment with a group of strangers. He struggles to survive and find more comfort. One night, he nearly burns the flat down in order to sleep warm. His roommates begin to hate him, so the guy has to find another shelter.

They live in the same house – but in different apartments, jobs, situations, with different beliefs and visions, each one in his or her own compartment, fooling themselves: *Žonglierius* (*The Juggler*, 11') was made by Skirmanta Jakaité, a filmmaker with a BA in animation from Vilnius Academy of Arts. Her 2D graduation film *We May Meet, We May Not* was screened at many international film festivals including Ottawa, Hiroshima, Stuttgart, and Melbourne.

Angelų Takais (*Trail of Angels*, 20') by Kristina Buožyté is an immersive virtual reality (VR) animation that invites the viewer to explore a mysterious afterlife world based on the art of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911), a Lithuanian painter, composer, and writer. Observing and interacting with the surrounding during visually stunning day–night cycles. The surrounding reacts to the viewer's glance, bringing it closer toward the original look of the paintings. Starting a journey as a human being, the viewer soon realizes that he is an angel who contemplates the states of life, death, and mergence with the universe.

Ann-Laura Tuttelberg received her MA in animation at the Estonian Academy of Arts in 2013. Her graduation film, a puppet short, was screened at more than a hundred festivals. *Žiema Atrogrąžu* (*Winter in the Rainforest*, 7') is set in a rainforest amid lush nature, a surreal world populated by fragile porcelain animals. Strange white stony creatures are born in wild river streams. Birds with feet that look like human fingers hunt for flying fish. Vicious spiders catch miniature dancers in their traps. As the film is shot in real nature,

the changes of light create a strange shift between the passing of time and the movement of the artificial characters. Tropical nature, ceramic creatures, and Nordic music form a bizarre world.

NOTES

1. www.joonisfilm.ee.
2. www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/lotte-from-gadgetville.
3. https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/355646/.

Belgium

A GIFT FOR THE FAIRY

In 1932, Flemish artist Frans Masereel made an experimental animation film titled *L'Idée* (*The Idea*) in cooperation with Bohemia-born Berthold Bartosch, but as there was insufficient infrastructure in Belgium at that time, the two were forced to work in Paris over a period of 15 months at Jean Tédesco's studio.

Belgian artist Ernest Genval, however, ignored all difficulties and animated a short in spite of all limitations: *Plucki en Egypte* (*Plucky in Egypt*). His associates were A. Brunet, M. Van Hecke, and Montreal-born Leo Salkin. Cambier wrote the story. The picture (820 ft) was released in 1932. But it remained an exception. As everywhere else in Europe, if at all, advertising and educational films (*A Lecture in Agriculture*; *Buy Belgian!* in 1935) dominated animated filmmaking in Belgium.

In between, there were attempts to create independent cartoons. In 1935, Norbert and Roger Van Peperstraeten, two brothers who operated a small studio in Brussels, used simple cut-outs and added a soundtrack of popular songs. Three years later, Edmond Philippart entered the scene. He was not influenced by American cartoons but tried to apply simple methods with sketch-like animation, stylized silhouettes, and finally puppets, initially recorded on 16mm film. The subjects of the respective cartoons were dictated by the lyrics of chansons. (After the war, Philippart produced an ambitious short film *My Paris* about an American who spends 24 hours in the metropolis at the Seine.) In 1938, another Belgian artist, Charles Conrad, began a short in Dascolor, a process developed by Léon Josse Dassonville, but the animation was interrupted in 1939 due to mobilization.

During German occupation, oddly enough, animation shorts weren't that restricted as were live-action features and educational films and newsreels. There was even a certain amount of creative freedom. And there was no fear of competition from American studios. So, hatched in the hidden, the foundation of future Belgian animation was laid.

In 1937, in Liège, Paul Nagant, a former journalist and photographer, established CBA (Compagnie Belge d'Actualités) and produced some news films; however, in 1940, following the German takeover of the news media, he turned to animation. For some time, Albert

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Fromenteau, a former assistant of André Rigal, became his animator. (Between 1940 and 1944, on his own, Fromenteau produced *L'auberge fantôme* and in 1945 *Will le renard/ Will the Fox*.) Nagant went on to hire Édouard "Eddy" Paape and Jacques Eggermont, who had enrolled at the Institut Saint-Luc in Brussels, section Arts and Decoration. Both artists were disappointed that they were offered mostly religious art assignments, so they switched to animation and teamed under the joint pen name *Jackeddy*. For Eggermont, animation became a passion. (After the war, he even wrote to the Disney Studio and attached some samples of his work but received only an angry letter to stop copying them.) Producer Nagant operated the camera. Between 1940 and 1942, inspired by Disney's *Silly Symphonies*, the group produced *Zazou chez les Nègres* (*Zazou with the Negroes*) and *La Petite Brosse à Rimmel's* (*My Little Pinsel in Rimmel*), both 7 minutes running time. In 1942, Nagant published a brief article "The Production of Cartoon Films." The same year (while working on *Zazou gardien de phare*) a fire destroyed his studio. Near the end of the war, Nagant settled in Brussels which proved a better place for his operation than Liège. Up to 28 persons were employed at that studio. One of the young artists was Maurice De Bevere, known to comic fans as Morris, creator of *Lucky Luke*. De Bevere was very eager to learn the craft and even enrolled in a correspondence course with Jean Image in France, developing a style of his own. Another asset was André Franquin (later to create *Gaston* and *Marsupilami*). One of the studio's more ambitious projects, however, wasn't finished: *Le Cadeau à la fée* (*A Gift for the Fairy*). Actually, the dwarves of this cartoon who prepare a gift for the fairy became the prototypes of the *Schtroumpfs* (*The Smurfs*). They were designed by Pierre Culliford a.k.a. Peyo who reused the revised characters in a 1958 comic book: *La flute à six trous* (*The Magic Flute*). Although slowly prospering, CBA folded in 1945 and its most talented employees decided, as we have seen, to work on comics.

THE CRAB WITH THE GOLDEN CLAWS

The revival of Belgian animation after the war wouldn't have been possible without the influence of these comic strips and comic books. And the history of the Belgian comic is inextricably linked with the name of Hergé, born Georges Prosper Remi in Etterbeek in the Brussels-Capital Region. In 1925, he joined *Le XXe Siècle*, a reactionary Catholic newspaper where he became a protégé of editor Norbert Wallez, an ultra-right-wing priest who was accused of Nazi collaboration after the war. Four years later, on Wallez's advice, Hergé created *Les Aventures de Tintin* (*The Adventures of Tintin*) for the paper's new weekly supplement for children, *Le Petit Vingtième*. Tintin is a Catholic boy reporter who travels the world fighting communism and supporting colonialism, accompanied by his faithful fox terrier Milou (Snowy). Hergé's dubious politics, however, didn't do any harm to the popularity of the characters. On January 11, 1947, the first feature-length *Tintin* movie was released: *Le crabe aux pinces d'or* (*The Crab with the Golden Claws*). Producers Wilfried Bouchery and Cle Keerbergen-Malines Belg and director Claude Misonne didn't use 2D but dimensional puppet animation. However, right after the start of the movie in the ABC Cinema in Brussels, Bouchery was forced to declare bankruptcy and fled to Argentina, and the film was seized.

Tintin would return animated in 2D as a TV series in November 1957 as *Les Aventures de Tintin, d'après Hergé* (*Herge´s Adventures of Tintin*): 5 minutes per episode, initially black and white, later in color. The series' director was Ray Goossens.

Having studied drawing in Antwerp, Goossens, accompanied by fellow artist Jules Luyckx, joined Henri Winkeler and Edmond Roex. Winkeler and Roex had established a company called AFIM: Antwerpse Filmaatschappij. None other than Wilfried Bouchery was the manager. Marcel Colbrand, Gaston Lambert, Andrée Van de Velde as well as Bob de Moor and Mon Van Meulenbroeck, later known for their comic strips, were among the artists. Between 1940 and 1943, they made *Metamorfose*, *Rapi Roum*, *Smidje Smee*, and *Hoe Pimmeke ter Wereld Kwam*. After the war, they followed with an *Atomic Fantasy* that explicitly tried to avoid the Disney influence.

BELVISION

In 1957, after some time spent as a comic strip artist for a weekly youth magazine, *LZV Kleine Zondagsvriend*, Goossens became the artistic director of a company that for some time would become synonymous with Belgian animation: Belvision. Belvision was founded in 1954 by Hergé's publisher Raymond Leblanc and his editor Karel van Milleghem and developed into Belgium's leading animation factory. But this wouldn't have been possible without the right product from Franco-Belgian comics. Belvision produced animated versions of *Suske en Wiske* (1955), *Tijl Uilenspiegel* (based on Willy Vandersteen's comic series), and Goscinny-Uderzo's *Oumpah-pah le Peau-Rouge* (*Ompa-pa the Redskin*).

Belvision's and Goossen's first animated feature film, initially aimed at a TV audience but halfway through production changed into a product for theatrical distribution, *Pinocchio in de Ruimte* (*Pinocchio in Outer Space*), was released in 1965. This time the production was not based on a comic series owned by Belvision but came in as commissional work from a US company, Swallow Ltd.

The picture had Pinocchio fighting a ferocious whale that travels through outer space. It was not well received and turned out a critical and commercial disaster, but Belvision had tasted blood and felt strong enough to try another feature film, this time of their own: Goscinny-Uderzo's *Asterix le Gaulois* (*Asterix the Gaul*, 1967). Again, Goossens helmed the project with Nic Broca, Louis-Michel Carpentier, Eddy and Willy Lateste, Luc Mazel, Vivian Miessen, Ploeg, Jean Torton, and Claude Viseur as key animators. *Asterix the Gaul* turned out to be a rather slow film. Goscinny and Uderzo were disappointed with the result and complained legally. Nevertheless, *Astérix the Gaul* was popular enough to launch a highly successful series of *Astérix* films with Goscinny and Uderzo involved in the production.

Following criticism concerning his version of *Asterix*, Ray Goossens left the company to join a rival publishing house, Dupuis (established in 1922), while Leblanc continued with *Astérix et Cléopatre* (*Asterix and Cleopatra*, 1968) which became a smash hit all over Europe, *Lucky Luke: Daisy Town* (1971), *La Flûte à six schtroumpfs* (*The Smurfs and the Magic Flute*, 1976), and sure enough feature-length *Tintin* adventures: *Tintin et le temple du soleil* (*Tintin and the Temple of the Sun*, 1969) and *Tintin et le lac aux requins* (*Tintin and the Lake of Sharks*, 1972) – a cartoon compendium of Europe's most favorite comic characters.

BELGIUM AS CATALYST OF THE EUROPEAN COMIC SCENE

I asked animator and director Piet De Rycker who had worked all over Europe including Ireland (for Don Bluth on *Rock-A-Doodle*) and Germany (*Laura's Star*) about growing up in Belgium and his biographical influences:

> Belgium is a center of comic books, a culture very open-minded towards visuals, from the French to the American to the Manga. All influences from children comic strips to graphic novels are familiar to our cultural background. It means we were visually raised eclectically. The range of art goes from copying styles to mixing styles to finding an own style. Without this inner path that we all somehow have to follow one can't come into his or her own bloom. I place myself for the moment on a spot between Miyazaki and Disney. I was brainwashed by Disney's great movies till the age of 30, and all I wanted to do was to work in the classic animation industry. But around 40 the work of [Hayao] Miyazaki was introduced to me. That was really an eye opener. One can tell stories based on totally different parameters in design, animation style and story concept and still be successful. I don't mean necessarily in money terms but more meaningful to a wide audience. This has influenced my own art towards something that I can see now as a marriage between East and West, and maybe just because I'm a European filmmaker, it was possible to see the beauty of both ends and combine them to an own style.

Summing up his career as an animator-turned-director:

> First of all, a director must have a vision. Secondly, a language that is deeply connected to the particular story he wants to tell. Thirdly, the courage to fight for his vision, because the amount of high-risk money at stake in this industry makes it possible that, in the course of the daily work, he might have forgotten the initial sparkle that generated the whole reason of making the movie anyway. There are many ways a boat can sink. Fourthly, he must be able to stir a team, through arguments and not feelings, and mediate the way the story should be told. There are still too many pictures made in a ground soap of ideas driven by team decisions that lack a good view on strong and bold storytelling. Fifthly, he must be capable to listen very, very carefully to all what is being said by any person working on the project. One might be surprised by the amount of accidental input given for free by all those nice people at only an arm length away from you. In short, one must have a brain to have a vision, an eye for a view, a mouth to express the ideas and an ear to hold you back from making mistakes that your brain wasn't able to grasp: A heart to be brave. A belly to feel. Strong legs and feet for emotional storms coming in from nowhere.

Author: You worked with preconceived characters from popular children's books but developed also figures of your own. Do you develop the story, in the best case, out of these characters, limitations included?

Piet De Rycker: There are two ways to tell stories. One is to narrate a tale character-driven, the other is story-driven or structure-driven. And in the middle, you will find infinite options. Best is to find a combination wherein both will have their perfect moments. But in all cases, it must be believably unique.

Another approach I use is that I can't write a story or define a character without having at least an idea of the visual look and feel. This means that during the writing process we also draw character models to see what would work best. Sometimes a character doesn't come from design but is a pose one finds that will fill in the right personality.

Once the story is storyboarded one can fine-tune the rough models into more precise models, but most of the time they don't change too much, since everybody in the meantime got used to them.

It is more or less the writer of live-action movies who writes a role with a specific actor in mind. If for one reason or another it is not possible to hire that particular actor most of the time the script has to be re-written.

Author: Do you consider acting theories helpful for animation directors and animators?

Piet De Rycker: They are extremely important and will help you to create believable and unique scenes. One must become an encyclopedia of gestures in well-defined moments of life to avoid generic fill-ins of none telling poses which won't evocate an emotion in the spectator. A moment is always connected to the character's behavior, its outlook and the believability of its action, given under these specific circumstances.

Author: How do you create the emotional part, the empathy?

Piet De Rycker: I think "build" is a better word than "create." It is a fine planning of the right elements that makes the audience first feel for the character, understand its dilemma and then hit at the right moment the string where the character will fall apart and lose all it was standing and hoping for. If the first part is poorly done, it will be hard to convince any audience to feel empathy, regardless of the number of weeping violins one likes to place on top of it. That means if you don't feel for the character at that crucial moment late in the movie, one has to do his homework again in the first and second act.

Author: In some of your children's films you had to do without antagonists. Isn't it difficult to develop a story without a villain?

Piet De Rycker: I don't believe that it is possible to tell a story, to do a book, film, stage play without a villain. But if the villain should always be the Joker from Batman or a brutal, devilish person with a silly sidekick and a sardonic team member that has no connection to any reasonable human argument, I'm not convinced. When using this kind of villains, it becomes always the same kind of structured project: very hero-driven with a big party at the end arranged in the community that was saved. Some films are better off with an internal villain that one has to overcome. Or a set of combined evil forces, being it a sum of characters or a sum of disasters (volcano, lost on a wild river, a bear, a pack of wolves). Like *Inside Out*, or *Pinocchio*, or *Laura's Star*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*. In live action the range of storytelling has a much bigger spectrum than what's allowed in animation. Probably because merchandising isn't a necessity to recoup the invested money.

This would lead to the question: Is it difficult to write a story that doesn't follow the archetypical structures of a hero movie? Then the answer would be: Any movie is difficult to write being it a hero movie in a landscape of fierce competition or being it an internal conflict story in an unknown landscape. Personally, I feel more at ease with projects where humanity is in the centre of storytelling instead of: I killed the beast. Although I might like to watch one of those, once in a while.

Author: There is a lot of bad, standardized animation around. In spite of all the digital tools some of it looks as if they have done it in the early days of animation. What does good character animation mean to you?

Piet De Rycker: Evoking emotions! Creating moments one can relate to as if you were there, together with the other characters, waiting to say your own lines. This can't be done with poor design. This can't be done in poor light conditions, but it can be done in limited animation if the type of characters is symbolic archetypes, in a design as simple as the animation and backgrounds will be. The problem is that a lot of animation has a kind of humanized realistic character style without the budget to animate them believably or without the budget to place them properly in the background.

Real art is a fine chemistry wherein all elements, such as style, color sets, brushstrokes, the blackness of shadows, the fluency of successive troughs and on and on, are combined in the right balance of values creating one specific visual language that could only be this one to tell this particular story.

Another story, another style. Another style, a different kind of storytelling.

Author: Please tell us about the difficulties adapting children's books: illustrating kids' imaginary world.

Piet De Rycker: Animation properties are about world-building. It isn't just enough to have a funny character or a story idea. One must be able to translate it to a world people like to wander in. The exploration of that world is part of the fun, and the better one can create such a world the longer you can hook your followers. Which means one has to make a choice at the start. With a lot of questions to ask oneself. Where do the characters live? Are they like us? Or are they timeless and ageless? Is the real world wherein kids dream the thing we want our audience to feel and see and explore? So, if you enter such a project you have to be aware that the only way to succeed is to deliver something that is unique, believable, empathic, and, if possible, doesn't resemble something that already exists. Success is not only guaranteed by the greatness of an idea but also by the capability to get imbedded in the daily life, with all its merchandising potential. One cannot sell if one cannot communicate. And communication is all about hope, dreams, wishes.

Author: Can you name a few movies that have influenced your work considering role profiles and character animation?

Piet De Rycker: *Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Ratatouille*, *Pinocchio*, *Iron Giant*, *The Secret of NIMH*, *Thumbelina*, *Tobias Totz*, *Tekkon Kinkreet*, *Grave of the Fireflies*, *Cinderella*, *Peter Pan*, *Jungle Book*. As you see these are all well-controlled animated features, hardly any television work.

FLY ME TO THE MOON

But Franco-Belgian films, and European films in general, weren't accepted by the American market. If needed at all, American companies simply adopted European characters for their own purposes: 20 years after Peyo's death, Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Entertainment transformed the *Smurfs* into 3D-animated American entertainment that was much better budgeted than would have been possible in Europe. At the same time, Steven Spielberg, with the assistance of Peter Jackson's New Zealand–based performance capture systems, commanded an even better budgeted 3D computer-animated *Adventures of Tintin*. *Astérix*, in the meantime, went into different cinematic ownership: from Danish animation to French 3D to French live action.

In the meantime, some fresh wind was needed in Belgium and a company named nWave Pictures was going to supply it. January 30, 2008 saw the release of the company's *Fly Me to the Moon*, directed by nWave co-founder Ben Stassen, a 3D-animated feature about a trio of flies who join a NASA mission to the moon. The movie was clearly intended for American audiences, with some bad Cold War jokes included: July 16, 1969, NASA's space program is in full swing. Astronauts Neil Armstrong, "Buzz" Aldrin, and Michael Collins head up the moon mission. Three tween-aged flies, Nat and his friends I.Q. and Scooter, manage to sneak aboard Apollo 11. Certainly, it's not the plot nor the comparatively weak character animation but the attempt to prepare prints for stereoscopic release in IMAX theaters that's impressive: *Fly Me to the Moon* was the first feature-length animated film conceived and created as a 3D experience. nWave had created a stunning state-of-the-art 3D computer-generated imagery (CGI) technique. Even Dennis Muren, one of the world's leading visual effects (VFX) experts, was amazed. He said to this author that *Fly Me to the Moon* belonged to the best stereoscopic experiences he had cinematically. For American audiences, it has the voice talents of Kelly Ripa, Christopher Lloyd, Adrienne Barbeau, Ed Begley Jr, and Tim Curry, with a live-action cameo appearance by astronaut "Buzz" Aldrin. The total production budget of *Fly Me to the Moon* was €17.3 million, not bad for feature-length animation in Europe although still way too low to compete with American productions. nWave financed about 75% of the budget itself. To raise the rest, investors could benefit from Belgium's tax shelter system. The Flanders audiovisual fund contributed €100,000, 10% of its annual budget for animation. In its first 10 days, 449,000 patrons came to see the movie which was to be released internationally by Summit Entertainment. A 13-minute version of *Fly Me to the Moon* was screened at special theme parks such as Bellewaerde (Ypres, Belgium) (Figure 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1 German pressbook *A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures 2*. Author's collection. Photograph by Anna Khan.

nWave continued the stereoscopic route with *A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventure* (working title: *Around the World in 50 Years 3D*, 2010) and its sequel, *A Turtle's Tale 2* (2012), *The House of Magic* (2014), and two *Bigfoot Junior* pictures (2017 and 2020) (Figure 3.2).

FIGURE 3.2 German pressbook *House of Magic*. Author's collection. Photograph by Anna Khan.

They never had any problems with the technique, but did have problems all the way through with the screen stories. For instance, looking for a safe harbor, an American writer drew their attention to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. They decided to make it in 3D and it turned out to be a disaster story-wise because they shifted their interest from the main character to secondary animals. Although Robinson Crusoe's name is on the posters, he does not have much screen time. It's some of the animals, only one of each species (so they are damned to extinction), that have to fend off ferocious cat attacks from the shipwreck. An animated feature starring only sidekicks.

Belgium is known to be particularly attractive for co-productions as it has one of Europe's most effective funding mechanisms for audio-visual production via its tax shelter. This tax shelter provides additional funding up to 25–30% of the total qualifying expenses in the European Economic Area.

Additionally, Brussels is considered the de facto capital of the European Union which means all kinds of funding that, animation-wise, is channeled by Cartoon Media. Therefore, in a way, the misappropriate term *European Animation* was coined in Belgium too.

CARTOON MEDIA BRUSSELS

Cartoon Movie and the Cartoon Forum are the most important pitching events organized by Cartoon Media Brussels, the European Association of Animation Film, bringing

together animation producers from all over Europe to Bordeaux and Toulouse, France, respectively (Figure 3.3).

FIGURE 3.3 Covers of program brochures. Author's collection. Photograph by Anna Khan.

The Cartoon Forum has been in existence since 1990. It is an annual event aimed at advancing the production, distribution, and financing of European animated series for television and new media. It has dynamized European animation and has played an essential role in the structuring of the European market, by creating a true network of transborder cooperation, restoring confidence in the relationship between producers and broadcasters, and showing that there is sufficient quality on offer within the European Union. Where previously European animation was in its infancy, it has become the leader in its own territory. The number of productions has very appreciably increased. Export sales are among the best of any in the European audio-visual sector. Every year, over 250 potential investors – decision-makers from television channels, book publishers, financiers, video publishers, and representatives of new platforms all interested in animation – attend the Cartoon Forum. This includes over 100 broadcasters and 150 investors/video editors who have the advantage of getting a sneak preview of the latest animation projects made for television from 31 different European countries. Over 300 animation projects (with a total budget of more than €1,000 million) presented at the Cartoon Forum have secured financing so far.

The concept created by Cartoon Brussels is run very smoothly, and the forum provides European producers, broadcasters, distributors, and investors with a fortunate occasion to negotiate and conclude business.

The Cartoon Forum is neither a fair nor a festival, but rather a co-production forum, where European producers can negotiate financing for new projects. The forum combines trailer presentations, working sessions, and business meetings with opportunities

for socializing and sightseeing: the relaxed setting of the Cartoon Forum has become an intrinsic element for the whole European animation industry. The procedure allows European partners interested in a given project to gather around the same negotiating table and set up sound co-productions which are able to compete, in terms of both quality and cost-effectiveness, with American and Asian series.

Only projects that have completed their preproduction phase and are therefore ready to go into production are accepted. Whereas financial packages generally take between two and five years to be completed, backing for about one-third of the projects presented at the Cartoon Forum is secured in less than two years.

The event brings together hundreds of investors, broadcasters, and video editors looking for partners with which to negotiate financing for new projects.

Most of the animation projects are series with an average length of 10–13 minutes and most of them are aimed at 6- to 13-year-olds. In terms of production, 2D animation continues to prevail over 3D, with the average cost per minute standing at between €9,000 and €12,000. A significant number of the projects are also conceived to be reproduced on new technology formats – high definition (HD) – and distributed on new platforms including video on demand (VOD), internet protocol television (IPTV), asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) TV, and mobile telephony. The Cartoon Forum is a suitable resource, especially for smaller, lesser-known producers who want to get their projects in front of the right investors.

There certainly are different ways leading to animation in Europe. What counts is quality above quantity, in style and content. To generate more attention in competition with American product (although Asian series are increasing in popularity everywhere), Cartoon Brussels, with the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union, has established a synergy between distributors, investors, and producers to accelerate the financing and distribution process of animated *feature films* in Europe. Thus, a second event called Cartoon Movie was designed along the lines of the already successful Cartoon Forum. Cartoon Movie, a regular annual event lasting three days, also offers improvements in the management of cross-border film distribution systems in Europe. Distributors in Europe were not very comfortable about producing projects that did not originate in their respective countries. Cartoon Movie was supposed to change the behavior patterns and mentalities within this business sector. With a structure and organization similar to the Cartoon Forum, Cartoon Movie unites producers from all over Europe to negotiate the funding of feature-length projects. The event combines trailer presentations, business meetings, and screenings with opportunities for socializing (Figure 3.4).

With the inevitable progress of moving images to digital, European animation is now forced to focus on the arrival of new players with new platforms (VOD, IPTV, telcos, et al.) that are in increasing need of more content.

At both Cartoon Movie and the Cartoon Forum, you experience some novel ideas. The sad truth that shines through, however, is that TV, once the cornerstone of animation funding, is no longer the partner it once was. TV networks are spending less money and are not willing to pay €12,000 per minute for European animation when they can get it cheaper from Asia.

FIGURE 3.4 Cartoon Movie 2020. Photo © Galia Prod. Courtesy of CARTOON – European Association of Animation Film, Brussels.

And what is claimed to be European animation's strongest asset, diversification, is also its biggest obstacle. There is not just one leading European animation company, but several middle-sized companies, and even combined, they would not be as strong as the American market leaders.

Actually, there is no more than a dozen relatively big studios operating in Europe: in France, Britain, Spain, Germany, and Denmark, able to turn out feature-length animation for cinema release which is still the main target of European production. But they are unable to compete with American quality, budgets, and distribution.

In fact, animation produced in Europe doesn't have a big box-office share and there is no reason to think it will be different in the on-demand habitat on the web, IPTV, or digital cable. As for funding (which is 90% of the reason producers fork out fees to go to conferences), they might as well forget about the net. Google, Yahoo, and others will not invest in European animation. The internet is still largely a parasitic medium where TV and film entertainment is concerned. It seems to be a common fate of European films to fail. They simply fall flat concerning the right marketing. US releases capture 80% of the market for animated features in Europe.

Producers are getting nervous, and the Corona crisis has proved another nail in the coffin. The social situation for creative personnel in Europe has changed for the worse. Of course, they do not talk about these issues in Bordeaux and Toulouse or, during Corona, in the digitized counterparts of the Cartoon Forum and Cartoon Movie, at least not officially. They largely ignore the developments in Asia and try to preserve the status quo as long as possible. Although they might have ideas story-wise, they don't have ideas marketing-wise. And what they sell has no handwriting of its own. There is a lot of (in cheap 3D animation

aesthetically rarely pleasing) *variety* which they call their greatest asset. But it is also a burden: You can easily identify American animation, Japanese anime, and so on. But animation from Europe, well, what is it? How would you define it? There is simply no European animation deserving of that brand name.

Marc Vandeweyer, co-founder and former director general of Cartoon Media Brussels, and a strong supporter of European cartoons, retired in 2020. Not only in Belgium, but all over Europe his opinion mattered. Vandeweyer and his colleagues started work in 1990. He knows the problems, but he still believes in European variety and diversity and in *European animation*. He defends his policy in an interview I conducted with him.

> Back in 1990 when we published the first economic study, it revealed a disturbing observation at the time: European animation represented only 20% of market share in its own territory. It came as no surprise that the other 80% was shared by the overwhelming dominance of the United States and especially Japan.[1]
> If we compare two decades, the one before the creation of Cartoon Movie in 1999 and the one after, we see that Europe has produced 5 times more animated feature films! It is striking that before Cartoon Movie there were hardly any European films on offer and Disney ruled the world. Since then, there has been a continuous growth with the current production rate at 30–45 European animated films per year! This shows that a real opportunity and a larger place are left to independent producers and distributors in Europe.

Then, however, Vandeweyer qualified this statement:

> Obviously, it is necessary to offset these euphoric figures with the audience figures, which remain largely favourable to the United States. To a great extent, we can be satisfied with the quality of European films, which in only 15 years have managed to master the length of a film, the rhythm, the writing, the dialogues, the music, the boldness of the graphics, the relevance of the themes. However, we must recognize that we are still too weak at marketing and finding ways to convince the audience that our films are as interesting and beautiful, and even more original than most U.S. films.
> The major challenge for the coming years will be to reach the European audience. This is a tough battle for independent distributors faced with the Majors[2] who have responded by producing more in order to further occupy the field and who have often shown that a well-orchestrated promotional campaign is enough to tip the balance.[3]

I asked Mr. Vandeweyer specifically:

> *Author:* Over the years, Cartoon Brussels, as part of the Media Program, has done a lot for animation in Europe and helped to preserve national identities in cartooning. But how come that, although there is a lot of variety, we don't have, commercially speaking, a

European handwriting in animation? We are able to identify American or Japanese product, but we can speak of European product only in terms of funding, not artistically.

Marc Vandeweyer: I do believe that the diversity of graphic designs, concepts and target groups is an added value for the European animation. The U.S. series and films are "formatted," which means that there is much more creativity and audacity in Europe. We don't need to have a "European handwriting in animation," not at all!

The diversity of the European animation is confirmed by an increase of number of productions financed, by a worldwide distribution of the European animated series and by a greater number of European series co-produced by US producers and/or broadcasters and/or SVOD, like Netflix. Europe should be proud of its cultural diversity and must continue to keep this strength in the global market. European producers and artists dare more than in other continents, in term of content as in term of graphic designs, more modern. They are not "formatted."

At the same time, European producers are courted by Asian and American and South-American producers… thanks to their creativity!

We have to emphasize that it is thanks to the European Commission and its Creative Europe-Media Program that this could have happened!

Author: While there is no true European style, there *is* a Franco-Belgian style in comic books and animation. What could other countries learn from the Franco-Belgian scene?

Marc Vandeweyer: I don't think that other European countries have to learn about the Franco-Belgian style in comic books. Each European country has its own cultural history and has enough creativity to develop its own projects with specific graphic designs. I can observe that the first Polish projects proposed at Cartoon Forum were too "old-fashioned," today the Polish projects presented are among the most modern ones… It took several years to the new European countries to understand the market, but today they know and they dare to propose projects in line with the expectations of the market. Look at the newest projects presented at next Cartoon Forum, coming from Serbia, Greece and Ukraine (!): you will be surprised by the level of originality, modernity, and creativity! The creativity is everywhere in Europe with so many different styles and cultural diversities. And this makes the difference with the other continents.

Author: European animation product is spread all over the world, in a minor way. We see that, regarding theatrical releases, the global market leaders care that European product will not be part of their global release programs, even if they are involved in funding it nationally. We mean, for instance, Warner Bros. or Buena Vista. Even leading European characters such as *Astérix* or *Lucky Luke* are not on a par with *Mickey Mouse* or *SpongeBob*. Can you please tell us about the attitude of American major distribution companies towards animation produced in the European Union. The Americans seem to call this "policy" (which of course is not new) local production. Be it French, Italian, German, Indian or Chinese – it's always *local*.

Marc Vandeweyer: I don't have the same feeling as you regarding the success of the European animated series. You take as U.S. examples two huge worldwide successes, maybe the biggest ones, *Mickey Mouse* and *SpongeBob*. In Europe we have also huge worldwide successes such as *Peppa Pig*, *Wallace & Gromit*, *64 Zoolane*, *The Triplets*, *Oggy and the Cockroaches*, *Little Princess*, *Maya the Bee*, *Jungle Bunch* and many others that were sold in more than 100 countries in the world. We have to be proud of our successes! We don't have the financial artillery of the U.S. majors for the marketing but our films are circulating very well in the world. For a "local production," it is a "worldwide distribution."

So, in terms of distribution, we don't have to be ashamed. The difference is made in the licensing sector where *SpongeBob* is everywhere in the world and the European heroes are less visible. That's the next challenge.

On the theatrical releases, the gap is bigger. The USA has already and for years a protectionist policy that Europe doesn't have… It is still rare that a European animated film can make a huge success in the United States. And the circulation in Europe for European animated films is better but still not optimal. The U.S. majors have discovered that they had less income than previously in Europe (sometimes three times less for a Disney film for instance), that's why they have multiply their offer by two on the same year, to occupy the field and to stop the increase of the European animated films that they had only ten years ago. Today, the European distributors don't have the time anymore to install a "word to mouth" strategy. Everything goes too fast. The only solution is to invest in massive marketing as the U.S. majors do, and Europe doesn't have the capacity to compete against these giants. The need is to build a European major distributor as the U.S. distributors do in Europe.

Author: There are a number of "niches" occupied by European producers such as preschool or adult films but rarely the American-style Family Entertainment. One leading European animation producer told us that he is able to produce fresh lemonade but never do it the grand style. Do you consider co-production a way of entering the international scene in a bigger way than in a kiddie matinee: co-production between European and international partners who suffer from the policy of local product too? In 2011, for instance, three German animated feature films entered the Chinese market, two of them co-productions. The late Manfred Durniok seemed to have good experiences with such co-productions. What can we do to particularly spread European product on the "Eurasian" market? We have seen also interesting Franco-Chinese product, by the way.

Marc Vandeweyer: Yes, there are some niche animated films in Europe, but there are also family films. The difference is not the quality or the target of the film but mainly the financial power of the U.S. majors to promote their films and to develop a strong marketing plan and strategy that we don't have in Europe. How many Europeans are conquering the U.S. market? A few, such as Luc Besson, Roland Emmerich, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Tom Tykwer or Wolfgang Petersen, … but the goal, in my opinion, is not only to succeed in the U.S. but to have a worldwide distribution including the U.S. or not.

Regarding China, we can observe that several European animated films are distributed in China, which is quite new, but co-production seems to be still more complicated. I have heard several stories of attempt for (ambitious) co-productions between Europe–China that didn't succeed at the end, after losing a lot of time. So, we have to wait and to observe if it will change or not. Cartoon is acting in Asia, for already nine years, with Cartoon Connection in South Korea, thanks to the Creative Media Program. Here we can also observe that some deals are done between South Korean and European producers (copro, distribution), but we are not laughing about the same gags, and, as the European producers told me, there is a bigger cultural difference that is not so easy to deal with. It will take time to find the right way to write a script together and to work together. Some producers already found that way and work together. It is not only a question of economic strategy but also of human relationships. We are not producing shoes or clothes, but art and stories!

Author: Among the thousands of producers in China or India, there is a need for quality preproduction and development that we are experienced in Europe. Could you ever

imagine that some European animation companies will not produce but mainly preproduce as a service for bigger international companies abroad?

Marc Vandeweyer: No, I don't believe at all in that scenario. On the contrary, with the technological changes, a lot of the production made previously abroad (mainly in Asia) is coming back in Europe. See France for instance: They don't have enough animation artists and technicians, and new animation schools are opening in several cities to meet the demand of the French animation studios!

The idea of European services companies in animation for Chinese producers is perhaps developed in Germany – you know that better – but not in the rest of Europe.

The reason could be that there is a structural problem in Germany, that handicaps the creativity and the production of new animated projects and that the animation producers are trying to change, but for me it is incomprehensible that the biggest country in the European economy is still so weak in the animation industry, with all their competence and talents. I guess that Belgium is doing better than Germany in animation. It is not normal… Europe needs stronger German producers, such as the French ones!

Author: What about European animation and digital media? While TV sales are declining, the new media are on their way up. Why doesn't Europe, contrary to the United States or China, have an individual big digital platform of her own? Do you consider this an "oversight" on the part of European politicians to entirely depend on Google or YouTube?

Marc Vandeweyer: You are right… it is not normal that no big digital platform emerges in Europe. I don't know the reason, perhaps because there is only one country in the U.S. and one in China and twenty-eight countries in the EU?… Europe needs to be present on that level.

Author: CARTOON has done a lot to lead European animation producers up to the new media and create ties, for instance, with game developers and so on. How do you see the future of European animation? What do you hope for? What can you do to break up a worldwide standardization on the international markets in terms of theatrical releases, TV product and the digital media? Is there still a commercial chance for variety?

Marc Vandeweyer: I hope that there will be a chance for variety and diversity… And Europe is the best chance for this diversity!

But you are right again, we have to be attentive: if we observe the animated features' successes, they are mainly going for CGI films, formatted in U.S.-style, even European productions such as *Minuscules*, *Animals United*, *Tad the Lost Explorer*, and *The Jungle Bunch* for instance that have a "U.S. CGI look"… The public doesn't know that these films are European, they look like U.S. animated films and they have more success than artistic and creative films such as *Ernest & Celestine*, *Loving Vincent*, *Mullewapp* and *Ma vie de Courgette* (*My Life as a Zucchini*), for instance.

It is a question of artistic education through the media and intelligent promotion. It is a pity for instance that *Another Day of Life* was in the official selection in Cannes but not in the official competition, only in a special screening. We need this kind of promotion to show the public that there are different types of images, other types of animation films than only Disney and Pixar.

We have proposed to the Creative Europe – Media Program to open a reflection to support the marketing of some animated films every year, because animated films are the best sellers in the world of the whole audio-visual sector. I hope that this idea will be achieved in order to give a better chance to the European animated films to find its public in Europe and worldwide, such as for the European TV series. (Figures 3.5 and 3.6).

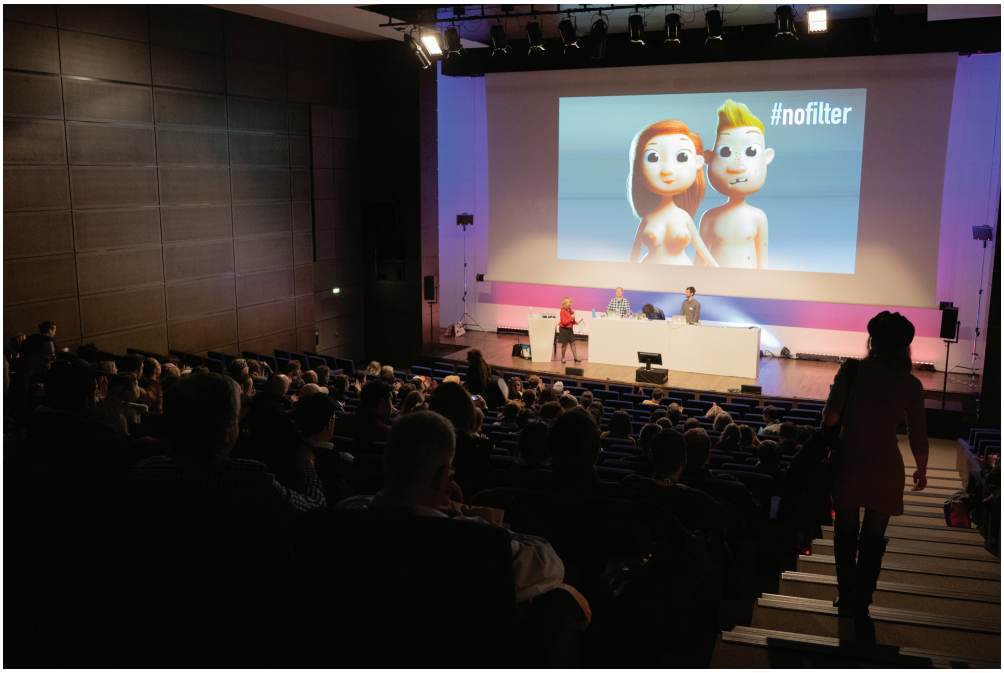

FIGURE 3.5 Cartoon Movie. Photo © Galia Prod. Courtesy of CARTOON – European Association of Animation Film, Brussels.

FIGURE 3.6 Cartoon Movie. Photo © Galia Prod. Courtesy of CARTOON – European Association of Animation Film, Brussels.

CAFAR

One of the animated feature films that Vandeweyer strongly supported during Cartoon Movie events in its production progress was *Cafar*, a World War I drama by Jan Bultheel, basically a highly stylized motion-capture project budgeted at €2.9 million.

Jan Bultheel about the production history:

> By accident I came across *Reizigers door de Groote Oorlog* (*Travellers through the Great War*), the book by Professor A. Thiry and Dirk Van Cleemput[4] that tells the story of a very special, very secret, very expensive and highly modern division of Belgian armored vehicles: the ACM: Automobiles Canons Mitrailleurs.
>
> The first ever military division of tanks or "blindés" as they were called. The dramatic irony of their story is that being the big hope of the Belgian Army, these elite troops achieved virtually nothing, but traveled around the world during four dramatic years to get in Belgium as the war ended.

But as Bultheel didn't understand himself as a documentary filmmaker, he invented a fictitious story to link it with this historical backdrop:

> The story of Jean Mordant is the story of a man who evolves from a romantic 19th century idealist into a cynical but self-conscious 20th century world citizen.
>
> Because that is exactly what the Great War has done to us Europeans, I think. His personal vendetta – his daughter is raped by German soldiers – evolves into acceptance and resignation and finally – his daughter was pregnant and had a child – in taking his responsibility for his grandson, son of his enemy. […]
>
> For me the story of Jean Mordant is a universal story of a man trying to cope with the adversities of life. Although he is popular as a sports hero, a world champion admired and revered by everyone, he is also vulnerable, indecisive and weak. An anti-hero who wants to protect his daughter by taking revenge, by exactly doing what he shouldn't.
>
> Of course, Cartoon was a catalyst, but also the very favorable Flemish film financing funds were key to the *Cafard* financing: the Flemish Audiovisual Fund – VAF – seed funded the film and supports the production. We were very lucky to be able to apply to the brand new "Screen Flanders" economical support. And of course, the Belgian Tax Shelter meant a world of difference as ever.

Motion capture, Bultheel, who worked with five principal actors over 15 days in Studio Solidanim in Angoulême, France, says:

> is really handy if you're looking for a realistic style. You have to have some experience though with working with actors. This is a completely different approach than directing animators in a studio. But I worked with actors in the past and really love the discussions, the input, the tryouts and all the hassle that it involves. It enriches your story.[5]

WALKING THE DOG

One of the most renowned animation studios working from the center of Brussels and Gent involved in co-production all over Europe is Walking the Dog. The company was set up in 1999 by Eric Goossens and Anton Roebben. Walking the Dog holds a fully equipped CGI studio and specialized software tools for 2D- and/or 3D-animated projects. The company's profile includes (besides the obligatory shorts and TV series) work on feature films such as *Jack et la Méchanique du Coeur* (*Jack and the Cuckoo-Clock Heart*, 2013) about a boy born with a mechanical heart; *Charlotte* (2021), the story of a German-Jewish artist on the eve of World War II; and *Where Is Anne Frank?* (2021) by Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman, the son of Auschwitz survivors, who had already co-produced *The Congress* with the Belgian studio. Folman's version of *Anne Frank* is considered the first international Holocaust film for young people, ages 12 and up: "Working with animation director Yoni Goodman, whose innovative work gave Folman's 2008 documentary, *Waltz with Bashir*, its hauntingly distinctive look, the filmmaker has taken another novel approach, placing 2D characters against stop-motion backgrounds."[6]

NOTES

1. Cartoon Forum, September 11–14, 2012, catalogue.
2. At least in Germany independent distributors are forced to release their films via American majors.
3. Cartoon Movie, March 5–7, 2014, catalogue.
4. August Thiry and Dirk Van Cleemput, *Reizigers door de Grote Oorlog: De odyssee van een Belgish pantserkorps 1915–1918*. Leuven: Davidsfonds Uitgeverij nv-Distributie, 2008.
5. Vassilis Kroustallis, Cafard Animation Feature on WWI: Interview with Jan Bultheel. *Zippy Frames*, May 1, 2014.
6. Sheri Linden, 'Where Is Anne Frank': Film Review/Cannes 2021. *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 9, 2021.

Bulgaria[1]

TYPEWRITER PAPER AND NO CHAIRS

According to some researchers, the first attempts to create an animated film in Bulgaria date back to 1915, when the press published a report on the presentation of what they called the "first Bulgarian cartoon" made by Rayko Alexiev (1893–1944).

Two decades later, in 1937, Stoyan Venev (1904–1989) teamed up with Vasil Bakardzhiev (1906–1980), who had been active in advertising films, and Dr. Zahari Zahariev, and made the drawings for a film titled *Scoundrels* (*The Fly*), the story of a fly that plucks typhus bacilli to scatter them all over a village. As a result, an epidemic breaks out, which has to be stopped by the village doctor. The animation was part of a "scientific-instructional film" sponsored by the Ministry of Health to promote hygiene among Bulgarians. Unfortunately, no print of this movie has been saved.

But the real story of animation in Bulgaria began when Dimiter Todorov-Jarava seriously delved into Disney animation after he had seen American cartoons and particularly Disney shorts as supplements to feature films in Bulgarian cinemas in the early 1930s: "The great mastery of the plastic grotesque, the richness of the means of expression and the magnificent characters of these films captivated me and I decided to try my hand at creating cartoons in my country." Jarava got hold of some Disney prints and studied them frame by frame thanks to a sort of phénakistiscope that he had invented. It was Jarava who convinced the authorities to open an animation section within the now state-run film industry.

In 1945, Aleksandar Denkov (1925–1972), who was born in Prague and was to become one of the first comic-book authors in Bulgaria (*The Brave Eskimo* and *Banja Luka* published in the magazine *Wonderful World*), assembled a team of young enthusiasts to make two cartoon films for the new animation unit: *Malkiyat kradetz* (*The Little Thief*) was the story of a raven that tried to steal a sleeping rodent's pipe. It bears all the hallmarks of the Disney style – black body, white gloves, wide eyes, rounded contour. The second one, titled *Bolen* (*Sick*), was a propaganda-agitation campaign film and told the story of an opposing grandfather who gets a prescription from the doctor that should heal him from opposition to the new system.

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Denkov's group turned out the nucleus of a society for trick film production. Three years later, on October 1, 1948, an animation film production department (for cartoons and puppet films) was officially set up in Sofia by the Bulgarian State Film Industry. Initially, the animation studio was located in a dilapidated building at 11 Lege Street in Sofia. They had nothing but poor equipment which was installed in one of two rooms, alongside the artists. There weren't even chairs for them. The other room housed a workshop for puppet making. There were two cameras manufactured in Germany: one Ernemann from Dresden (in a wooden box) and an equally ancient Kinamo by Zeiss with 15-meter cassettes. In 1950, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Karagutevski from the Chronicle Film Studio (who sympathized with the animators and managed to "steal" some techniques from the already scarce equipment of the Chroniclers), the department received an Arriflex camera which, of course, was not specially equipped for animation photography and had to be adjusted. The camera was mounted on a wooden stand for drawing films and was connected to a frame-by-frame mechanism invented by operator Dimitar Hadjiev. Hadjiev used an electric gramophone motor and a stop and inertia disc.

Initially, the 2D artists had to use plain typewriter paper, because no transparent paper was available. And instead of celluloid plaques, they used X-ray photos washed with caustic soda. As usual in socialist countries, they had to learn to improvise and develop their own makeshift systems.

In 1951, the studio released its first puppet animation *Strashnata bomba* (*The Scary* [or *Fearful*] *Bomb*) by Dimo Lingorski who worked with artist Boyka Mavrodinova. It was the story of an American tycoon, who had invested large sums of money in the Korean War and now hides away, apprehensive of an atomic bomb created in Soviet Russia. Despite the emphatically propagandistic character of the film, the movie had its merits technically: good composition and relatively good animation. It also used drawn animation besides dimensional one.

AN ANGEL BORROWED FROM JEAN EFFEL

In 1953, Lingorski completed his next puppet film *Sultán a smělý stavitel* (*Master Manol*) based on the legend of a folk master who built a mosque for the Turkish sultan to free his enslaved brethren. Mavrodinova created quite naturalistic human puppets for the picture. The work of the puppeteers was more smooth than that of the 2D animators. In this initial stage of socialist animation, dimensional technology was more accessible and more amenable to production, as well as to artistic reasoning. Everything was new and had to be started from scratch. The animated films shown on Bulgarian screens at that time could hardly push the beginners in the puppet film on the path of new searches. They had to invent their own devices. At the end of the 1940s, only some of Jiří Trnka's work from the world of puppet animation was known in Bulgaria, as well as Aleksandr Ptuško's *Novýy Gulliver* (*New Gulliver*) that dated back to 1935. Later, some of Karel Zeman's films followed.

The only way to learn was to send someone to the Soviet Union. In 1951, Todor Dinov (1919–2004) was the first to go to Moscow for some training in animation techniques. For two years, he studied at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), the Russian

State University of Cinematography. Upon his return from the USSR, Dinov finished the 2D-animated epic *Yunak Marko* (*Marko the Hero*), which was released in 1955 and hailed as the first professionally made Bulgarian animated film. The film tells of the battle of Marko Kraljević, a Serbian king, a central character of South Slavic folklore, with the Black Arab. The characters were designed in proportions close to nature, and the drawings have a rounded contour and a minimal degree of stylization. This adherence to the realistic image could be explained not only by the imposition of some party dogmas for the realistic general accessibility of the characters, but also by the lack of information on the various manifestations of the aesthetics of the animated film from that time. From 1955 to 1957, Todor Dinov, soon to be called "The Father of Bulgarian Animation," made four entries of *Cinema Hornets*, animated films with a political and propaganda tendency, three with drawn animation, one with puppets. In these cartoons, he used an angel, a character he borrowed from French artist Jean Effel. This figure, which had a graceful appearance and rounded lines, despite its symbolist character, participated in stories exposing bad imperialists. Dinov later introduced graphic symbolism to his short *Prometey* (*Prometheus*) to tell what could have happened if the Greek Titan god had tried to bring the gift of fire to humankind in the 20th century.

One of Dinov's assistants at that time was Zdenka Doytcheva (1927–2019),[2] a lady born in Czechoslovakia who had worked for the *Bratri v triku* in Prague before she came to Bulgaria in 1952. She introduced the studio to the kind of professionalism, discipline, and artistic rigor that she had experienced during her work in the Czech studios. In 1958, Doytcheva joined forces with Radka Bachvarova (1918–1986) and Donyo Donev (1929–2007) in making *Mishok i moliv* (*Mouse and Pencil*): At night, a hungry little mouse wanders around the nursery and nibbles at everything within range. Before being bitten, a worried pencil draws a cat to chase the mouse away.

So, in a way, the Czech animation school was very present at the cradle of Bulgarian animation. In an official letter dated September 26, 1951, addressed to the director of the production sector of Bulgarian cinematography, it was expressively recommended "to use the proposal of the general director of the Czechoslovak State Film, Mr. Mahacek, to send three of our workers from the cartoon studio to their three groups (in Prague and Gottwaldov) for a month or two," as well as "to make steps for a one-month invitation of the puppet film director of Gottwaldov, Mr. Karel Zeman (as suggested by the head of the Gottwaldov studio itself, Mr. Moravec) ".

Particularly, Stefan Topaldjikov (1909–1994) who became an expert in Bulgarian stop-motion puppet films, stayed in touch with his Czechoslovakian colleagues and was invited to do a movie with them: "This is how the film *Sling and Kite* came about which Czechoslovak specialists rank third in their annual production." Topaldjikov would follow Zeman's example and devote his later career to live-action movies.

In 1970, a selection of eight Bulgarian animated films won the FIPRESCI Award at the Third International Animated Film Festival in Mamaia, Romania. At that time, only the Zagreb School of Animation enjoyed such an award. In fact, Bulgarian animation was second in the world to receive a selection award at a specialized animated film festival.

CARICATURES AND LIMITED ANIMATION

Regarding other connections with the Zagreb School, Bulgarian authors deny that they were influenced by it. It is also uncertain whether in the late 1950s and early 1960s, behind the Iron Curtain (with Yugoslavia in a special position) and when film festivals were few, they had had a chance at all to see films made by their Croatian colleagues. According to some film critics, Bulgarian animation reached the state of so-called limited animation at almost the same time as the artists from Zagreb did – around the mid-1950s. Perhaps the influence of caricature in general on the shaping of the more modern design of the current Bulgarian animation film was more acceptable. Film historian Krassimira Guertcheva wrote: "In this case it is especially important to note that our artists have found in the traditions of caricature the possibility of an adequate form of new animated content." A source of inspiration might have been issues of the famous Polish cartoon magazine *Szpilki* that were, although in a limited run, available in Bulgaria. Additionally, as a member of the Communist Party, Todor Dinov was able to travel to Western countries where he could obtain some information about contemporary and modern artists and films.

Initially, Bulgarian animated films were mainly aimed at children. However, with the appearance of animation festivals such as the one in Annecy in 1960, many authors began to focus their efforts on making films for older viewers. Moreover, in selecting films for such festivals, their authors had (in those days) the rare opportunity to visit Western European countries by invitation of these festivals.

They began to experiment with other techniques such as simple cut-out animation, as seen in *Nozhichka i momchentze* (*Scissors and a Boy*, 1965) by Hristo Topuzanov, as well as drawing on film strips (Roman Meytsov), painting under the lens of the camera (Ivan Andonov, Anri Kulev, Nikolay Todorov, Krassimir Ivanov), rotoscope animation (Nikolay Todorov), drawing on paper (Anri Koulev, Velislav Kazakov *Cuckoo*), clay animation (Assen Munning, *A Short Plasticine Play*), and pixilation (Zlatin Radev).

The bulk of the production, however, was focused on television. Bulgarian filmmakers began to concentrate on folklore. In 1970, Donyo Donev started his popular TV series *The Three Fools: Trimata glupatsi*, 10 episodes in total until 1990.

FROM SOFIA TO PRAGUE

Some of the filmmakers at that time, such as Stoyan Dukov and Donyo Donev, entered the Animated Film Studio of Sofia after graduating from the National Academy of Arts. Others were trained at the VGIK in Moscow (Anri Kulev, Nikolay Todorov, Slav Bakalov), while Assen Munning and Pencho Kunchev were lucky enough to get some education in Czechoslovakia. Kunchev:

> After graduating from the Art High School in Sofia, I took the entrance exam for the specialty of Film and Television Graphics at the Higher Institute of Applied Arts in Prague. The training there was focused primarily on the highly artistic design of the animated film. Although this was shortly after the occupation by the Warsaw Pact troops, the atmosphere at the institute was relaxed. In the library we

had access to beautiful Western art albums, and I had the opportunity to subscribe to the Swiss magazine *Graphis* – something that was unthinkable to happen in Bulgaria at that time. My teacher, Mr. Miroslav Jagr, a well-known Czech illustrator, had signed the famous manifesto *2,000 words*, which was the reason why he remained in the position of an assistant professor at the institute until 1989 and wasn't promoted. However, this did not prevent him from teaching his students to follow the best examples of the Western art. During my training in Prague, I had the rare opportunity to do every year one-month internships at the studio *Bratri v Triku* and work with such important representatives of the Czech animation scene as Břetislav Pojar, Zdeněk Smetana and Vlasta Pospísilová. After I finished my studies, I returned and began working at the Animated Film Studio Sofia as an animator and later as a director.

In 1980, an animation department was established at the National Academy of Theater and Film Arts of Bulgaria. The aim was to prepare new professional staff for the needs of Bulgarian animation. Among the teachers and lecturers were Todor Dinov, Donyo Donev, and Dimitar Tomov.

Later, in 1993, a similar department was opened at the New Bulgarian University. Anri Kulev, Ivan Veselinov, Stoyan Dukov, and later Pencho Kunchev lectured. As a result, during all these years, a number of young filmmakers graduated whose films were successfully presented at film festivals in Bulgaria and abroad.

Concerning the political and economic changes in the East including Bulgaria after 1989, state subsidy of the Animation Film Studio was stopped. With the establishment of the National Film Center, a new system of financing and funding was created. The emergence of private producers allowed filmmakers, despite serious difficulties in the beginning, to continue with projects. The activities of these producers were financed by the National Film Center (NFC) according to competitions. Twice a year there are sessions to determine which projects have the artistic qualities and prerequisites to be funded. The price per minute for animation in Bulgaria is about €5,000, only half of what it would cost in Germany for instance. Along with established names, a number of young artists and authors were successfully involved in the creation of animated films.

In Sofia, and other places, small, private animation studios were set up which worked on both Bulgarian films and productions commissioned from foreign companies. Some of these studios have a permanent staff while others hire talent only for certain projects. The number of employees varies from 5–6 to 20–25 people, depending on the volume of the respective project or the quantity of episodes in a series. Some studios specialize in short and feature film animation, while others deal with the new media, computer games, animation for websites and phones, and educational films.

NOTES

1. Grateful thanks are due to Pencho Kunchev who assisted with compiling this chapter.
2. IMDb spells her name Doitcheva.

CHAPTER 5

Czechoslovakia

Czech Republic and Slovakia

DODAL AND TÝRLOVÁ

The first to enter the field of animation in Czechoslovakia was Karel Dodal who was influenced by American slapstick and cartoons. Dodal was married to Hermína Týrlová. Hermína had started as an actress, as did Lotte Reiniger in Germany, but Dodal was so fascinated by American cartoons, particularly by Max Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell* series, that his wife began to focus on animation too. Both worked for the Elekta Journal company in Prague. Together they began to supply animated bits and pieces for advertising and feature films. But Dodal had the ambition to create more than just advertising. In 1928, they produced their first 2D animation short: *Zamilovaný vodník*. Eventually, Dodal and Týrlová divorced. Dodal married Irena Leschnerová. The two founded their own studio, Ire-film. While Karel supervised the production, Irena Dodalová worked as producer and acted as script supervisor. Advertising films served as a financial basis for more ambitious projects.

A few years after Dodal left, Elekta folded. Out of work, Hermína Týrlová was forced to ask her former husband and his new wife for a job. In the meantime, she seemed to be more interested in puppet than in 2D animation. Her father was a miner who died in a tragic accident. Hermína remembered him carving puppets from wood.

In 1935, *Nový Gulliver* by Aleksandr Ptuško was released to great acclaim, particularly in Eastern Europe. Greatly influenced by it, the first Czech puppet animation evolved, an advertising film promoting Bata shoes: *V lucerne straši*. Týrlová got involved with this project. One year later, another advertising film (for Czech Radio Broadcast) was released, this time in 2D: *Všudbybylovo dobrodružstvi*, and in the opening sequence a famous Czech puppet character was seen: *Hurvínek*. In the background, an artist participated whose name would become synonymous with Czech puppet films: Jiří Trnka. Dodal and Týrlová, as professional workers, were back with *Nezapomenutelný plakát* in

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1937 and a year later with *Myšlenky hledající světlo*. When the Germans prepared to occupate Czechoslovakia, Dodal emigrated, via Italy and France, to the United States. Irena who was Jewish stayed behind and was deported to Theresienstadt on June 20, 1942, but survived. She went to the United States in 1945, where she published a *Black Book: The Nazi Crime Against the Jewish People* and produced some animation in New York before she settled in Buenos Aires.

During the German occupation, Týrlová accepted an offer from Elmar Klos to focus on puppet animation films. Klos was in charge of the newly founded film division located at the old Bata shoe factory in Zlín.

WEDDING IN THE CORAL SEA

At the same time, another small trickfilm studio was founded in Prague: AFIT (Ateliér filmového triku). The studio had only six employees, but the Germans had big plans for it. They absorbed AFIT with the intention to create some outstanding animation. Richard Dillenz, a Berlin fashion designer with virtually no animation experience, was hired to supervise the studio. The idea was to have him produce a sort of animated opera: *Der Zauberlehrling* (*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*). But the project got nowhere, and AFIT became part of Prague Film Animation which was also controlled by the Germans.

On July 29, 1943, Horst von Möllendorff, a German animation writer working in the Nazi film industry, signed for two cartoons to be produced outside of Berlin in occupied Prague. For the script of the first, *Hochzeit im Korallenmeer/Svatba v korálovém moři* (*Wedding in the Coral Sea*), he would receive a total fee of RM 5,000. It was a tale of two fish falling in love, but the sweet love story is interrupted when the bride is kidnapped by an evil pirate Cossack octopus. Möllendorff was also asked to go to Prague for a few days per month to "supervise" the Agfacolor production.

My activities in Prague were a totally new task for me. Now I was creative director in charge of more than one-hundred artists. They worked, contrary to German animation, on a high, professional level. I always thought that there were some artists with Disney experience involved. To create the optical illusion of underwater life they clamped two panes of glass on top of each other under the camera lens. Between the panes of glass some drops of oil dissolved and, due to the heat and fast photography, left the impression of life in the sea. They had built even some kind of [horizontal] multiplane camera. On the floor they had laid 30 feet tracks and a camera moved towards the different layers to produce depth of focus.[1]

Not knowing it, Möllendorff worked with the nucleus and the cream of the future Czech animation industry: Jiří Brdečka, Eduard Hofman, Stanislav Látal, Josef Kandel, and Jilis Kalaš.

Möllendorff's story left enough room for action and imagination: The pirate polyp kidnaps the fish bride and hides in the wreck of a sunken ship. To please her and win her over, he performs wild Cherkessian dances (that reveal him as an aggressive Russian type), but this frightens the fish girl who starts to cry. In the meantime, the bridegroom isn't idle. He assembles auxiliaries and frees his beloved with the assistance of other fish, mostly sword and saw fish. Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft (UFA) acquired the release rights for

RM 337,134 as a supplementary short for Martin Fric's *Dir zuliebe*; 158 prints were struck for a total cost of RM 61,569.

While the Czech animators were finishing this short, Möllendorff was already working on a second script. On September 15, 1943, as required by contract, he submitted *Das Wetterhäuschen*. The story of a *Weather House* and its residents, a couple of wooden puppets, was apparently inspired by a Pinschewer puppet film of the same title released in 1929.

On May 25, 1944, Möllendorff's contract was renewed for a third short, *Das Fledermäuschen* (*The Little Bat*), which earned him another RM 5,000. Again, Möllendorff conceived a detailed sequence list. *Das Fledermäuschen* was to be a charming spoof on the Johann Strauss operetta *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*), which at that time was to be filmed in live action, in color, by UFA at Barrandov Studios using the talents of Marte Harell and Johannes Heesters (however, it was released after the war, in 1946). The cartoon version was supposed to open in the ruins of a little rococo castle. In an alcove, a couple of bats hang sleeping. Mr. Bat in black cloak, Mrs. Bat in nightgown. Mr. Bat wakes up, takes his top hat and a mask, and sneaks away. As he does so, Mrs. Bat wakes up too. On realizing this, he hastily returns, taking off his top hat and mask. While she eyes him suspiciously, he lulls and rocks her to sleep. Then he leaves again. Over a spiral staircase, he enters, or better falls, into a banquet hall, with a bat girl ballet on stage. He ends up in the lap of a bat lady. He kisses her and also flirts with the ballet dancers. At that moment, Mrs. Bat turns up and sees what is going on. She takes a silver-gray spiderweb for a dress, then hides behind a mask. So, he doesn't recognize her when she turns his head. While he is inflamed with passion for this mysterious lady, she challenges the attention of four other cavaliers to make him jealous. He dons a crown of champagne foam. Finally, she lets the cavaliers go and both start to waltz. While they dance, he tries to remove her mask, but she raps him over the knuckles. In the meantime, the four cavaliers entertain themselves with a champagne firework. Mr. Bat and the unidentified inamorata retreat to a loge. Again, he tries to unmask her. A red crown of foam froths on her head. A rococo clock beats. All participants unmask and throw their masks through the ballroom. With the final beats she takes off her mask and the spiderweb gown. With surprise he recognizes his wife. Then he smiles and both start to hug.

> *Möllendorff:* As I said, I didn't stay in Prague continuously. In Berlin there were rumors claiming that due to the war animation companies would be evacuated or closed. I had to reckon that Prague would be shut down too.

Möllendorff was right. None of his later short film projects was made. On October 2, 1944, Reichfilm Intendant Hans Hinkel reported to Dr. Goebbels that according to recent activities in Prague all personnel of the animation studio was now employed at Junkers factory: "The animators will remain in their previous workrooms and are put under the supervision of the responsible management of Junkers Werke."

(Another small studio, operated independently under German protectorate, was founded in Brno by Otakar Blažek who called himself Otakar Brenten. Brenten financed the studio out of his own pocket. He was a great admirer of Disney films. He made some

advertising films. His pet project about the girls' war, however, didn't materialize. Instead, the Gestapo accused him of espionage, but all he had done was to secure some transparency paper for his work. After the war, his studio was nationalized.)

THE TRICK BROTHERS

The Germans' funding of and support for Czechoslovakian animation would lead to the establishment of an important Czech animation industry after the war. In Prague, the outstanding Jiří Trnka founded the *Brothers in Trick: Bratři v tricku*. Trnka directed the antifascist *Pérák a SS* (*Springman and the SS/The Chimney Sweep*). After some more 2D work, he turned to stop motion and created some of the finest puppet film work ever.

Trnka, the new rising star of the Prague animation scene, hadn't worked in comic strips as George Pal had done in his time in Germany. Nevertheless, he was an accomplished illustrator. During the war, he had illustrated children's books. People sometimes refer to him as the "Walt Disney of the East." He sure was not. Contrary to Disney, Trnka pleaded not for naturalism but for stylization of the scenery, an artificially heroic look for human actors, and the lyrical content of the theme.

Trnka's ambition was moving three-dimensional figures in space. From the beginning, he said, he had his own conception of how puppets could be handled. Each of them should have an individual but static facial expression, as compared with the puppets that by various technical devices can change their facial expression in an attempt to achieve a more life-like aspect. In practice, this hasn't enhanced realism but rather conduced naturalism.

The puppet in Trnka's short and feature films would act just by movement, body language so to speak, and body stance. George Pal's *Puppetoons* replacement animation as practiced in the Netherlands and later in Hollywood was totally different, just the contrary in pace and character.

Trnka was born on February 24, 1912, in Pilsen. As a young man, he became interested in puppets and puppet play. He liked art and, thanks to his grandmother, enjoyed sculpting and puppet making. Early on in his hometown, he got in touch with Josef Skupa, the creator of the Spejbl and Hurvínek father and son marionettes. From 1929 until 1935, Trnka attended the Prague School of Arts and Crafts and started a puppet theater of his own.

Trnka was very Czech in style and narration: the delightful *Špaliček* (*The Czech Year*), the heroic fairy tale *Bajaja* (*Prince Bayaya*), *Staré povesti české* (*Old Czech Legends*), and a puppet film version of Jaroslav Hašek's *Dobrý voják Švejk* (*The Good Soldier Svejk*). He also did Anton Chekov's (*Román s basou/Story of a Bass*), a spoof on John Ford's *Stagecoach* (*Árie prérie/Song of the Prairie*), Hans Christian Andersen (*Císařův slavík/The Emperor's Nightingale*), and his masterpiece, a puppet version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Sen noci svatojánské*) in color and scope (4-track stereo). Czech officials hoped this film would win the Golden Palm (*Palme d'Or*) at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959, but when it didn't, the Literature Paper of the Czech Writers' Association criticized Trnka's venture into Shakespeare:

> With this, Trnka has entered a field on which he hadn't worked before. *The Midsummer Night's Dream* isn't close to our people, and Trnka didn't try to make