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The KINEČKO

Slovak film magazine / issue 2 / 2013



Welcome! Dobro došli! Bienvenue! Willkommen! Benvenuti! Youkoso!

"I write essays in the form of novels, or novels in the form of essays. I'm still as much of a critic as I ever was during the time of 'Cahiers du Cinema'. The only difference is that instead of writing criticism, I now film it."

J. L. GODARD

...to Kinečko and to the area of Slovak cinema, which comprises not only films as such, but also writing about movies. This issue of Kinečko comprises articles from four different film periodicals. *Film.sk* (a monthly magazine published by the Slovak Film Institute in A5 format), *Kino – Ikon* (a biannual journal for sciences of the moving image and cinema published by the Association of Slovak Film Clubs – ASFK) for readers specialized in film, *Homo Felix* (a gorgeous full-colour magazine about animated film published twice a year), and *Kinečko*, published every two months in the same format as you are reading right now.

KINEČKO is a relatively young bimonthly magazine (founded August 2010) that reflects cinema in the context of contemporary culture, presents to the public a profound non-conformist analysis of film, and supports writing about film as a relevant component of living cinema. It also serves as a source of information and a platform for unofficial, yet well-founded debate between contemporary filmmakers and critics. The target group for KINEČKO comprises film professionals, students, festival-goers, film club members, film enthusiasts, and those interested in sharing a bolder perspective about contemporary cinematography.

In February 2012 Kinečko published the first issue in English, and thus became the first Slovak film periodical aimed at foreign readers to present the small, yet ambitious Slovak cinema.

We decided to dedicate the second issue of the international Kinečko mainly to the reflection of Slovak cinema, but this time we are focusing on Slovak film periodicals. We wanted to introduce their distinctive features and the work of their respective editors: Slovak film critics and journalists. Each magazine was given four pages in this issue to present themselves through their texts.

The chief editors Daniel Bernát (*Film.sk*), Martin Kaňuch (*Kino-Ikon*), Ivana Laučíková (*Homo Felix*) and me (*Kinečko*) selected articles that would best illustrate the character of each magazine in question. Apart from this criterion, we also took into consideration to what extent the texts were representative of Slovak audiovisual production, so that readers from abroad could learn as much relevant information about Slovak cinema as possible. As for interviews with non-Slovak respondents or texts focused on the cinema situation in other countries, we chose them because they were related in some way to Slovak audiovisual reality, and they offered us an external perspective (for example Kinečko's interview with Paolo Cherchi Usai that reveals his erudite opinions about the problem of the end of 35 mm film footage, which is a very contemporary topic in Slovakia that Kinečko has been trying to analyse not only in its articles, but also in accompanying events.)¹ with my colleagues and friends from the editorial boards of *Kino-Ikon*, *Homo Felix* and *Film.sk*, we have strived to put together a manifold collection of texts that will create a picture of the Slovak film environment. This publication can also be considered as a degustation of different specialized film magazines, as this year at least two such magazines (*Kino-Ikon* and *Homo Felix*), plan to publish their own international issues in English.

If I were to briefly define each of the periodicals and indicate their different specializations, I would say that:

Film.sk mainly focuses on current affairs in Slovak cinema.

Kino-Ikon is a specialized magazine oriented at film theory and history that doesn't restrict its focus to topical events. It represents a platform for scientific debate about film.

Homo Felix is a magazine about animated film, aimed at both professionals and amateurs in the field of animation.

Kinečko is a magazine intended for readers who aim to broaden their cinefile views, and gain an orientation about the current situation in Slovak and international cinema.

Our country's audiovisual environment is proportionately small to the five million inhabitants of Slovakia, and it is natural that people working in cinema therefore know one another. But it doesn't necessarily mean that they help each other, in

fact the opposite is often the case. Therefore, I consider it a very positive sign that we have managed to cooperate with three other film periodicals to compile this issue. After all the background hard work and difficulties, I find these 16 pages that you are now reading to be a minor miracle, and I would like to thank all those who made it happen for their help and support.

Some two and a half years ago, when we were founding Kinečko, one of the main ideas we wanted to spread was that cinema consists not only of films, but also their critical reflection because without such reflection, there would be no platform for film development. We also wanted to revive the tradition of thinking about film in writing, and I think that in our 30-or so months of existence, many positive things have been set in motion.

EVA KRIŽKOVÁ, editor in chief (*Kinečko*)
translated by BĎ

PS: On the DVD enclosed in this issue, you will find a collection of short films created by young filmmakers during the 2012 summer workshop of MPhilms that took place in Banská Štiavnica. The workshop's topic and central theme of all the films on the DVD is "Borders."

PS 2: Our special thanks go to the team of translators and proofreaders for their quick and efficient work.

1 In 2012, Kinečko started to organize a series of workshops called Pristihni si! / Cut it yourself! These are collective workshops of experimental film that give the participants an opportunity to learn some basic techniques of work with found footage. During seven film festivals, we created seven experimental movies that were edited manually from 16 mm and 35 mm film footage. Some of the films can be found online in their digitalised version at www.vimeo.com/kinecko.

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Film.sk

Film.sk is a monthly magazine about Slovak cinema that has been published by the Slovak Film Institute since January 2000. Until 2010 it had been the only printed film periodical in Slovakia. The magazine has undergone many content changes, but its conception has always been based on informing the public about the latest events in Slovak cinema.

The monthly strives to cover all shades of current events by means of various genres of journalistic writing. From factual news summaries, surveys, opinion pieces, interviews, features analysing current problems and characteristics of local cinema, to film reviews and many others...

From its foundation to the autumn of 2012, the magazine was led by Editor-in-chief Simona Nôtová. Since then, Film.sk has been following the journey she marked out and cultivated – informing about the diverse aspects of Slovak cinema, and communicating meaningfully both with readers and filmmakers. Film.sk currently has these regular sections: Interview, Feature, Review, My Favourite Slovak Films (articles by important characters in art and culture), I Think (a short essay or comment about current affairs in cinema), Calendarium (Slovak film events in the month), Film Now (short texts about current affairs in Slovak cinema), Film Publications (information about recently published film literature), What Are They Working on? (where filmmakers speak about what projects they are currently working on), The World of Newsreels (the renowned film journalist Rudolf Urc informs about the historical newsreels that news channel TA3 reintroduced in its programme in cooperation with the Slovak Film Institute). In addition, there are occasional sections like News (filmmakers inform about the basic parameters of their newly released films or films about to be premiered), Echoes (reflections about film events, their content, quality, value, etc.), Profile (texts dedicated to important figures in Slovak cinema), etc.

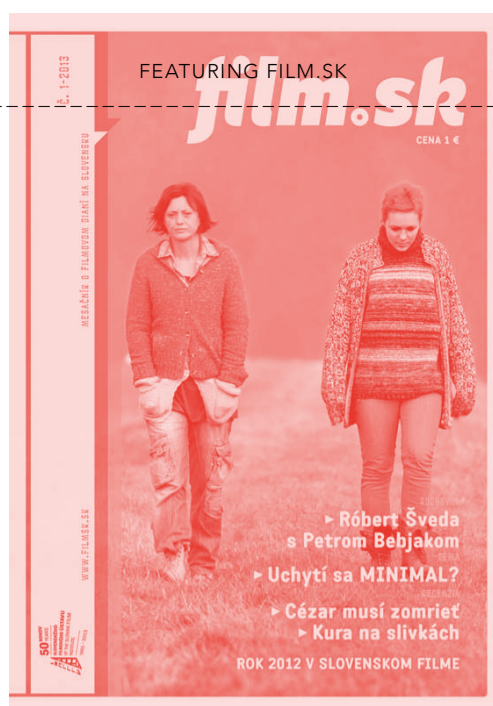
As well as Slovakia, Film.sk also focuses its articles on intersections with international cinema and the experiences of Slovak film professionals abroad, international co-production, and the Czech audiovisual industry, which has much in common with the Slovak one. As for Film.sk supplements, they give readers interesting statistics, lists and other materials about Slovak cinema (e.g. yearly data about film production, attendances, numbers and condition of cinemas, awarded films, and which projects were supported by the Slovak Audiovisual Fund).

The texts for Film.sk are mainly written by film publicists, critics, theoreticians and historians. Nevertheless, it is aimed at film professionals as well as the general public. Since 2001, the print version has been supported by the webpage www.film.sk, which is continually updated and modernised to make it more user friendly.

Film.sk is published by the Slovak Film Institute, the only state organisation in Slovakia dealing with audiovisual production. It incorporates a film archive containing collections and resources that represent the core of Slovak (and also international) audiovisual heritage. The Slovak Film Institute takes special care of these collections, administers and catalogues them, and makes them accessible to the public. The organisation also secures the presentation and promotion of Slovak cinema, as well as its editorial work. In 2001, it became a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF), in 2006 it joined European Film Promotion, and it also cooperates with the European Audiovisual Observatory and the Council of Europe Cinematographic Fund Eurimages.

For the English version of Kinečko, Film.sk selected an article by renowned Slovak film journalist Pavel Branko, analysing the forms of Slovak investigative documentary filmmaking post-1989. Branko mentions the director Zuzana Piussi, who released a number of films in recent years, and whose new film has just premiered. She is one of the few Slovak filmmakers who currently dedicate themselves to investigative documentaries. From the documentary genre, Film.sk selected a review of *The Gypsy Vote* (Cigáni idú do volieb) by Jaro Vojtek, which has received positive critical acclaim by our magazine editors. As for Slovak feature films, our film critics chose *Made in Ash* (Až do mesta Aš) as the most successful in 2012. As you can read in the review, its director, the debutant Iveta Grófová, “explores the permeability of the border between a documentary and a fiction film.” Via the English Kinečko, Film.sk is trying to inform at least partially about the big subject: the digitalisation of Slovak cinemas and distribution, and how this influences the present and future of open-air cinemas. You can also read an interview with script editor and film journalist Rudolf Urc, who currently writes for Film.sk, and is a professional with much experience in animated and documentary filmmaking, and is hence fully qualified to evaluate conditions for film production and the changes in Slovak cinema.

DANIEL BERNÁT, editor in chief (Film.sk)
translated by BĎ



Film.sk cover

Loves of a Brunette

The conjunctural upsurge that may be seen in the Slovak film in 2012 has brought a variety of genres, even at the cost of seasonality that characterizes several Slovak movies currently in cinema distribution. One of the latest artistically more ambitious projects is the first feature film of director Iveta Grófová *Made In Ash* (Až do mesta Aš), which opened the competitive section East of the West of the International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary. A seemingly uninteresting social drama, which for no obvious reasons occasionally tends to be described as a tragic comedy, undoubtedly belongs to the most remarkable debuts of the past years.

In her graduation documentary Grófová followed the fates of guestworkers coming from various post-socialist countries. The thematic focus of her feature film is similar: After graduating from high school, Dorotka, a little girl from a Roma settlement somewhere near Bardejov leaves for the town of Aš (pronounced Ash) in search of work. She finds a job as a sewer in one of the local German-Czech textile factories and becomes a part of a mechanism recently described by Czech documentary producer Vít Janeček in his film *Race to the Bottom* (Závod ke dnu): female workers sewing ready-made clothes for export, while themselves dressed in cheap Chinese garments, must work with the knowledge that they are expendable. Dorotka gets a firsthand experience, when after a short time she is fired. In the town of Aš, a popular destination of German sex tourists, her story unfolds in quite a predictable way.

In Janeček's film, work is portrayed as an economic and sociological category, while for Grófová work forms a backdrop against which an individual human story is told. However, the trajectories of individuals are determined mostly socially. Also in this aspect *Made In Ash* is rather innovative: the identity of Roma protagonists in Slovak films is usually based on ethnicity, however, in accordance with the logic of the story, Dorotka is first and foremost a student coming from an impoverished family, later a worker, who all of a sudden finds herself jobless. The situations in which she finds herself have to do with her social status. And she is also a passive, easily manipulated, immature woman. That's why she acts the way she acts.

In context of the Czech-Slovak tradition of film civilism, Grófová's debut attracts attention by an unseen amount of frankness. And perhaps Miloš Forman's *Loves of a Blonde* (Lásky jedné plavovlásky) will also come to mind. Work and intimacy collide in a strikingly similar setting of workers' dormitories and bars frequented at nights for fun and dance.

New times bring new dangers into the protagonists' lives, which is reflected in the new film language.

Grófová uses the permeability of the border between a documentary and a feature film in accordance with the current trends to her benefit. In her films she uses non-actors and puts them in real environments, among real female workers and bar regulars. This method creates the most convincing moments, when one needs not act anymore, while it is enough to simply be. When Dorotka agrees to get a piercing and has her lower lip pierced by her friend after a work shift, the pain and the swelling are real. However, Grófová does not use this “Seidel” principle based on corporeality and its signs that go far beyond the traditional ontology of film acting again. Not even at moments when anything else seems like a compromise. Despite this inconsistency she manages to keep the audience in uncertainty between reality and fiction.

All the key creative components of the film are subjected to the defined concept. Viera Bačíková's functional camera does not engage in unnecessary aestheticism nor does it look for pretty compositions. It focuses on the relation between the characters and the environment (wholes) and on faces (half details, details), while following the characters from a distance through a lens with a long focal length. The unveiled digital coldness of the picture, the use of a mobile phone and a web camera as thematic (subjectivizing) alternatives of a professional camera feel very refreshing. The film contains functional animated sequences of moving “diary” sketches revealing Dorotka's inner world, which surprisingly seethes with dissatisfaction. In this way the main protagonist, played in a subdued way and therefore hardly psychologically distinguishable, gets a new dimension.

Made in Ash is not an easy film to watch, but it is a must-see. And as it is not meant to attract moviegoers with colorful posters, may this review serve as an invitation and a recommendation.

PAVEL SMEJKAL
translated by ZS

MADE IN ASH

Slovakia/Czech Republic, 2012
director & story: Iveta Grófová
writers: I. Grófová, Marek Leščák
cinematographer: Viera Bačíková
editor: Maroš Šlapeta, Anton Fabian, Peter Morávek, Marek Kráľovský
music: Matej Hlaváč
cast: Dorota Billá, Silvia Halušicová, Robin Horký, Jarka Bučincová, Mária Billá
runtime: 80 min
(review first published in Film.sk no. 10/2012)

Nowadays, every film is animated



Rudolf Urc, photo: Miro Nöta

Professor **Rudolf Urc** (1937) graduated from Script Editing at Prague's Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in 1960. He worked as a script editor of newsreel and in the Studio of Short Films in Bratislava. In 1971, he was "cast off" to animated film and became its *éminence grise*, taking part in all the crucial moments of Slovak animation. He co-founded the Department of Animation at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, he is the author of the first Slovak theoretical publication on animated film, and of a spectacular publication dedicated to the great Slovak animator Viktor Kubal.

MJ: You have experienced several eras of Slovak cinema, from the golden age in the 1960s, through the tough years of normalization, to the critical 1990s marked by the weakening of animation. Each has surely left its marks on you. Which has affected you most?

RU: For me, the sixties were crucial. My point of view might be a little idealised, but it was a romantic era. Of course, there were all kinds of pressure, but it was a time of enormous creative freedom. It was far more intense than today. Back then, creative freedom was accompanied by self-discipline. And the amount of topics that were swarming from nowhere was amazing. Everyone could speak for himself or herself. And filmmakers strongly believed in their work. I find this era the most inspiring for my personal growth.

MJ: Is there a chance that art could again become a medium to express opinions and attitudes? The voice of a generation?

RU: Art should always have this ambition. If it ends up as a business article, then it won't be something that humanity will be proud of. It is art's duty to not only be the mirror of the era, but also the stimulus that forms it. Artists of today find themselves under a lot of pressure and the more complicated the situation gets, the more viewers escape from the serious side of art and look for less demanding genres. Documentary appears to handle these pressures, but feature film still hasn't found its balance. It seems that the baton hasn't been passed on as it should have.

MJ: You were part of the golden age of animated film, you worked with the best, and later helped the rising generation of animators who are now harvesting prestigious international awards. Michal Struss's film *In the Box* (*V kocke*) was even nominated for the Student Academy Award.

RU: The working conditions were totally different in the sixties. The technological background we had at Koliba Studios was a result of many years of construction and development. Quality is conditioned by quantity. When there are many possibilities for filmmaking, you are constantly confronted with audiovisual production, and you know that the movies you make will be screened and people will talk about them, it encourages you enormously. In the '60s, the situation at Koliba Studios was next to ideal. Obviously, there were some ideological interventions, but we could always get over them. In the second stage (after 1989), the "Koliba Generation" lost all its opportunities. We had to start over. And none of us were quite ready to start raising funds for our films, to look for filming locations, and to chase specialised equipment by ourselves. Suddenly, we found ourselves in a filmmaking vacuum. Those who were skilled and assertive managed to adapt, but these were exceptions. Jaro Baran and Ivan Popovič, for example, were used to freelancing, so they adjusted to the new environment quite smoothly. At that time, the chance to open a Department of Animation at the Academy of Performing Arts was crucial. For me, it was a new beginning.

MJ: What do you find worse: the ideological diktat or the diktat of money?

RU: From my experience, even in documentary, ideology can always be outwitted. There was always somebody you could contradict. Even if a censor stopped your work, you could turn to someone above him. There was always someone who would show comprehension with our work, even in the main office. And when you won their approval, the censor would sign it too. But now? What door will you knock on now? Fortunately, the Audiovisual Fund works well and things have started to improve.

MJ: However, it is quite paradoxical that the Department started to work when Slovak animated creation was experiencing a decline.

RU: The existence of the Department was very significant. Before the revolution, Slovak television was very interested in animation. They opened a new studio in Ostrava, and in Zlín they worked almost exclusively for Bratislava. At Koliba Studios were very few animators, and they were all waiting for a miracle to happen. Each time people from the

management came from a business trip abroad, they were talking about big projects we should start doing. But there were not enough people. After 1990, television started to lose interest in making animated bedtime stories, which was closely related to the new work organisation and new management. And these problems persist.

MJ: But animation was one of the branches that endured longest in the disintegrating Koliba Studios.

RU: That's right. There was the group around Jaroslav Baran that arose from the circle of animation for children he had run. He used to choose the most talented kids and teach them animation. In this way he had been preparing a team of his future colleagues. In 1989, when the situation changed, he had already trained a group of people who could work with him. All he had to do was give them instructions, help them a little, and they would know how to proceed.

MJ: How did you motivate students at a time television turned its back on animated film?

RU: It was tough. But fortunately, a new perspective for employment arose for animators: to work in advertising. Many talented graduates of animation like Vlado Král, for instance, found employment in advertising agencies. They make interesting things, but in this sector, all professionals remain anonymous. I remember many foreign animators who lectured at our Department, saying that when they want to make an auteur film, they have to do plenty of commission work first. But they do it propelled by the belief that every job is a good experience on the way to their own movie. Obviously, not everyone can be successful in animation. Our market is too small for that. It always depends on one's determination to find his or her place. Ivana Laučíková, for example, broke through and now she's helping others to make their way to success. There are not many people like her. But the important thing is that she has an opportunity to share her experience with young students of animation. I'm very pleased about that.

MJ: What are your views on the current status of script editors in animated films?

RU: At present, there is much less auxiliary labour in animation than before. Copiers, contourists and colourists have become history. Today, the core of animation work is done by computers. Sometimes it is almost impossible to tell where hand-drawn animation ends and where computers begin. Animation has penetrated into all branches of the film industry. The renowned British animator John Halas said half a century ago that the time would come when the borders would gradually disappear and all films would be animated. It may sound exaggerated, but he was not far from the truth. Thanks to computers, films undergo various technical metamorphoses. Even an actor's performance can be modified by animation. And script editing has to take this fact into account.

MJ: The role of script editor is often underestimated today. What according to you is the essence of this job?

RU: Script editing is a kind of external examination. Sometimes artists need to be "hyped up" to the best result they are capable of – that was Viktor Kubal's favourite statement. I always tried to let the artists I worked with know that I was there to help them, and they could lean on me whenever they needed.

MJ: Two years ago you paid homage to Viktor Kubal by means of an extensive monograph.

RU: Originally, it was supposed to be a regular publication. But the Slovak Film Institute decided to make it a spectacular illustrated monograph, because they understood that Kubal was an exceptional artist. And a book about a visual artist has to represent the artist as a man who draws, invents and works with colours. So we conceived the book as a book about visual art. And I'm very grateful it worked out. I didn't attempt a critical analysis of Kubal's work. Our relationship was too close for that. My ambition was to offer stimuli for a scholarly debate, and I hope that it will inspire film scientists and analysts to explore the subject more profoundly.

MJ: Before you were "cast off" to animated film, you had been working in documentary film. Weren't you tempted to return to documentaries after the Velvet Revolution? The times were unsettled and there were many topics to be treated.

RU: It crossed my mind for sure. But I'm not an investigative filmmaker. I've always preferred doing historical documentaries or compilation films. A few years ago, I got back to documentary with the film *The Men of 1938* (*Muži roku 1938*). That was my last encounter with documentary filmmaking. My "swan song". It is a historical excursion to 1938, a very exciting and complicated year of our history. A documentary is a challenge. You have to decide how to grasp a topic, and how to deal with it. Making documentaries and processing historical footage has taught me a lot. I also liked doing portrait documentaries, because I was very fond of tracing life stories. I met people who survived gulags, concentration camps, I met politicians at the height of their careers and others on their decline... My interest in history has its origin in my childhood in Gelnica. To be more specific, at the lessons of religious education, where our pastor Mr. Bohuš instead of feeding us dogmatic talk used to narrate biblical stories. He would unfold maps of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel, and show us where the events the Bible tells about had taken place. We always listened to him with open mouths. These moments were simply unforgettable. If I hadn't been accepted at the Academy of Performing Arts, I would have probably studied Archaeology.

MJ: And in a certain way, your current work for Film.sk resembles that of an archaeologist.

RU: I really enjoy preparing the section on newsreel. It reminds me of my adolescence, when in cinemas there used to be a newsreel before every film screening. The editorial board of Film.sk asked me to prepare overviews of newsreels from the 1950s. So I regularly visit archives and even consult old newspaper to recall the era. In addition, I am currently preparing a series of profiles on Slovak documentary filmmakers in cooperation with the Slovak Film Institute. In this way I can return to the 1960s, to my generation, to the times when I worked in documentary film. I have many experiences from those days, and I want to remind the public of what my colleagues created, because not many people remember them nowadays. And there is one more thing I would like to do: write a book on censorship in Slovak cinema. But as my grandmother said, who knows, if I live long enough...

MJ: You are often labelled as a legend of Slovak animated film. How does that make you feel?

RU: Disconcerted (laughs). There are a number of figures in Slovak animated film who deserve to be called legends far more than I. Those who were making the films. Havettová, Sláviková, Jurišič, Slivka and several others. I was just helping them. Those weren't my films that became key works of Slovak cinema. If I were to talk about my achievements, I would probably mention the fact that we managed – thanks to the Biennial of Animation Bratislava – to bring to Slovakia a number of renowned foreign artists who gave lectures about animated film. Several were Academy Award holders, and they came not only to project their films, but they also brought some props, figures and their screenplays to show us how they worked. The brilliant Canadian animator Frédéric Back brought a suitcase filled with tools and requisites, and he was willing to demonstrate us the whole process of his work. He drew each phase separately, which was very difficult. He literally showed Koliba how he animates. We also hosted Faith Hubley, one of the founders of modern American animated film in opposition to Disney. And many other international artists. These were the people I would call legends of animated film, and it was very significant that they accepted our invitation. They are true legends. Not me.

MARIANA JAREMKOVÁ

(the interview was published in Film.sk, No 6/2012)
translated by BĎ

Filmmaker - Scout and Warrior at the same time

Investigative Documentary Production post-1989

How far does it extend? Bribery, behind-the-scenes machinations, and mafia practices have somehow naturally placed the investigation within activities to reveal those matters kept out of the public eye by individuals, corporations and countries (Watergate, Wikileaks, or Slovak political affair Gorila) and bring them to light. Investigation has another face too – it reveals and makes public those things that no one tries to cover up – they have just dropped from our memories. It is no longer a struggle, but a discovery, intentional as well as accidental, the same as when the investigator Christopher Columbus discovered America.

And then there is the rather extensive borderline. Namely, one of the basic characteristic features of documentary production is the effort to bring to light something unknown or unnoticed. In this sense, every documentary (and journalistic) film worthy of its name is also somewhat investigative. Such an extension, however, would only lead us ad absurdum.

What immediately strikes the eye is the fact that the most glaring example of the Slovak documentary film belongs to the second category. The archaeological expedition into the World War II by Matej Mináč and Patrik Pašš brought to light the dust-covered and forgotten rescue operation of Nicholas Winton. The two parts of their duology, *The Power of Good* (Sila ľudskosti, 2002) and *Nicky's Family* (Nickyho rodina, 2011), overlap and at times even repeat themselves. Considering its genre, the duology sometimes crosses the boundaries marked by conventions of documentary film, and tends to resemble the mainstream esthetics of film reconstructions and docudramas. Its social impact and international reception support the authors' main goal – the depiction of a journey in search of the un-Hrabal pearl in the sea-bed, promising that in this world driven to destruction by consumerist entropy there might still be a speck of hope left. The revelation of a historical phenomenon of the Oskar Schindler kind by means of documentary and reconstruction methods in an attempt to address the world, at a time when the media are feeding us with new celebrities as promoters of the consumerist mentality, is something that transcends the boundaries of cinema. And as such, it is quite unmatched in the said period. Of a similar sort is the inventionally shaped film by Olga Pohánková, *Built-In Photographs* (Zamurované fotografie, 1997), which is not an investigative documentary anymore, but rather the finding of a golden egg.

Another kind of investigative documentary brings to light events and circumstances not so much unknown as tabooed, shattering national myths and going against the stubborn reluctance to look historical truth in the eye, where first place in the value hierarchy of institutionalized patriotism belongs to the nation in the nationalistic concept, and only then (if at all) come other values, namely civil ones. In the predominantly Catholic Slovakia, this may be seen in the aversion to the citizenly perceived and therefore critical reflection of the parish republic (1939-1945). At one time one enters this minefield as a buck passer like Lubomír Mlynárik in 1991 in his *Attempting a Portrait* (Pokus o portrét) of president Dr. Jozef Tiso. Other times a fierce headwind will blow the author in the face, as happened to Dušan Hudec, when his distinct presentation of xenophobia and “folk anti-Semitism” archetypes depicted in the post-war pogrom in Topoľčany entitled *Love Your Neighbor* (Miluj blížneho svojho, 2004) clashed with the censorship barrier in the management of Slovak Television under a Kafkaesque legalist pretext. However, the author arrived at this final point of investigation—the synthesis—by means of continuous systematic research: from the extensive documentation comprised in *Messengers of Hope* (Poslovia nádeje, 1999) through a focused look at the atrocities of the fascist guardsmen from an internal perspective in *The Witness* (Svedok, 2000). Or the author will cast a critical look at the holocaust, but only from the victims' perspective – Peter Hledík, *We Were Not Loved* (Nemali nás v láske, 1991). If the author aims the spotlight at the current myths of Jozef Tiso rather than at the past, he usually has to search for a producer somewhere abroad, as evidenced by the production of Trančík's *Tiso's Shadows* (Tisove tiene, 1996), which was screened by Slovak Television (STV) only after 1999, after the fall of the authoritarian regime of the politician Vladimír Mečiar. A documentary based on a book by Slovak emigrant Dušan Šimek *The Sixth Battalion* (Šiesty prápor, 1997) was screened at the same time. It dealt with the hard work of Slovak Jewish recruits, which also cuts deeply and was also produced in the Czech Republic

without Slovak participation. The same song is sung by the audio-visual production of the Nation's Memory Institute, which takes the study of the 1939–1989 period as one of its goals, and although it has already released seven DVDs, none have dealt with the period of the parish republic, even though this period is covered by the institute's publications.

One way or another the topic of fascism and the Jewish holocaust remains one of the dominant themes of the historiography and art in the Euro-Atlantic world. With certain obstacles, it prevails here too. On the other hand, the historical investigative documentary by Pavol Korec *This Railway* (To trať, 2002), very convincingly supported by archive research, deals with another kind of holocaust that has fallen into oblivion – the Roma one, standing vicariously for similar atrocities perpetrated on yet another traditionally victimized ethnicity.

Lately, it was Zuzana Piussi, professional snooper, who set off to research the intolerance, this time the contemporary one. Her *Fragile Identity* (Krehká identita, 2012) revealed the layered image of the Slovak version of nationalism in all its varieties from moving old-world selfless love through both concealed and clear, decently as well as cunningly masked nationalism and xenophobia, or the romantic search of Slovak roots to radical anti-Semitism. The topic is organically linked to Catholicism, the creation of myths and the tradition of missionaries. The final image is created mainly as a reportage using the cinema direct method in combination with testimonies in front of the camera. In that way, everything is seen from the perspective of the protagonists, while the author's share lies in the choice of shots, choice of performers, and editing. It is probably the most complex depiction of the syndrome of the link between nationalist conservatism and the church in a specifically Slovak version. At the same time, it serves as a model with variants of this syndrome, mutatis mutandis, showing through, as they exist in all predominantly Catholic and Orthodox countries of the post-Soviet bloc.

Zuzana Piussi's work is a distinct phenomenon in this field, as it focuses increasingly on the investigative part or at least borders it. Therefore, her non-investigative films recall the rest of a warrior. With what builds the core, she reminds of a scout who feverishly keeps looking for trails, which the shredders and “cleaners” failed to erase. She is also rather prolific in what she is doing, after all almost concurrently with *Fragile Identity* she was finishing a similarly bizarre investigative documentary *The Grasp of the State* (Od Fica do Fica, 2012) and the recent couple of films *Men of Revolution* (Muži revolúcie, 2011) and *Dis(ease) of the Third Power* (Ne(moc) tretej moci, 2011) also belong to the same category. At the beginning of the investigative career of “the angry young woman” stands a student documentary *Wipe-out* (Výmet, 2003), awarded for “its daring treatment of a taboo subject” and *Koliba 2003*, in which the author is trying to untie the Gordian knot of machinations around the privatization (i.e. embezzling) of the Slovak national film studios. Although the revelation of this labyrinth was perhaps a little beyond her powers, what she revealed as a filmmaker remains a stimulating and sometimes also grotesque view into the interior mechanism of mafia practices with the assistance by a part of filmmakers themselves.

Under the heading investigative documentary comes the series *Right of the People*, “an online advisory centre” for civil initiatives, on which Zuzana Piussi worked on her own and occasionally in collaboration with Robert Kirchhoff. His occasionally reflexive, associative and socially-critically focused work has so far always contained an investigative feature, mainly in the sociologically relevant and metaphorically dense, pure-blood documentary *Hey, You Slovaks* (Hej, Slováci, 2002). While his “never-ending story” of *Normalization* (Kauza Cervanová), ambitiously characterized as “a documentary tragedy about the right to justice”, is basically an investigative

documentary, even if it is not clear yet what it will reveal and how it will present it.

We have been focusing on the most important titles and names in film investigative documentary production. However, a large number of producers from both television and film industry have dealt with it. Post-November investigative documentary production, naturally, focused on pre-November cases. The post-totalitarian cases were only being born then. Apparently, the first were Štecko's *Stanislav Babinský – Life Is an Uncompromising Boomerang* (Stanislav Babinský – Život je nekompromisný bumerang, 1990), a depiction of “the taste of power”, and Kamenický's *The Last Letter* (Posledný list, 1990), revealing the profile of Vladimír Clementis until his execution through his correspondence with his wife in the backdrop of the Slánský Trial. Off the own initiative of people such as Mário Homolka and Lubomír Štecko, merging the tradition of authentic film documentary production with television documentary journalism, journalistic, documentary, educating, as well as civil-critical and even satirical series were produced in Slovak Television – *Variations, As I See It* (Ako to vidím), *Women About Women* (Ženy o ženách), *Cactus* (Kaktus), *What Next with the Ecology* (Eko ďalej), *Subjective* (Subjektív) or *Surrealities* (Surreality), with the subtitle *What's Burning Us*, which revealed present maladies, and from time to time even slid into interventionist journalism as Blanka Purdeková in the series *Terra X*. Even in the longest lasting STV series, *Historical Panorama* (Historická panoráma), which can be seen on TV even today, and whose contributors include renown authors such as Rudolf Urc, Martin Slivka, Marcela Plítková and Dušan Hudec, beside the standard and mainly objectivistic approach to the processing of archival material, commented by old hands or contemporary experts in the field, one may come across some creativity accompanied by features of investigative documentary.

The same kind of experienced authors came up with authorial ambitions. Rudolf Urc in *People from Hauerland* (Ludia z Hauerlandu, 1994) immersed himself in the historical evolution of the co-habitation of two ethnicities, according to Viliam Jablonický's screenplay. However, he depicted the massacre of Carpathian Germans by guerilla groups outside the historical context, which proves how easy it is to slide from the pre-November retouch to the opposite extreme. While in *People From Hauerland* the massacre is just one of many episodes in a broader context, Milan Homolka's *The Night at the Swedish Wall* (Noc na Švédskom vale, 2006) takes a similar massacre perpetrated on Carpathian Germans by a troop of Slovak soldiers after the war as its main theme, and in detail reveals the process of the slaughter and its circumstances. Only the search for traces of the initiator of the massacre, Pazúr, which logically should have been one of the main parts of the investigation, got stuck half-way, even though it had the potential to become one of its highlights.

Two fair examples of reconnaissance related to Soviet terror in our country are Lihosít's *Dubček, Internation* (Dubček, Internácia, 1998), which is part of a larger biographic intention, and Palonder's de-tabooing *My Father Gulag* (Môj otec Gulag, 2008), examining the fates of abducted Slovaks through the fate of a camp orphan on the one hand and the hopeless look of today's archipelago Gulag on the other hand.

Subconsciously, we may relate investigative documentary production to history, politics, diplomacy, organized crime etc., but it does not always need to be so. Berák's *Meine Wehrmacht* (2009), revealing the virulence of the neo-militarist thinking “in civvies” with Nazi sympathies, as well as Begányi's *Erotic Nation* (2009), depicting transformations of Slovak forms of the sex business in connection with political developments and the attitude of Slovaks towards a de-tabooed theme – are remarkable examples of investigative documentary production, although not always with an unequivocal



THE END OF OPEN-AIR CINEMAS IN SLOVAKIA?

In the magazine Film.sk we have dedicated several articles to the situation regarding outdoor cinemas. The last article with the optimistic title *Open-Air Cinemas Haven't Disappeared Yet* (Letné kiná ešte nevymreli) was published in the 2009 summer edition. The reason why we are discussing this topic now is exactly the opposite. It seems that the summer of 2012 was the last season for the majority of these cinemas. We talked to those most involved in the matter – managers of outdoor cinemas – about the current situation.

Open-air cinemas are places for pleasant holiday entertainment, for many people associated with their nostalgic memories of first movie experiences or first dates. To watch a movie under the stars with loving company is truly charming. In addition, the whole family or group of friends can enjoy a movie outdoors for the price of a single ticket to a multiplex. But only if they can do without the newest Hollywood films, popcorn, and they don't mind sitting on wooden benches. In the late 1960s and early 70s, outdoor cinemas were extremely popular in Slovakia, with 34 dotted around the country. By the end of 2011, only 19 remained open.

Of these remaining outdoor cinemas, only two (in Martin and Komárno) are owned by private companies, the rest being run by a city or smaller town. However, this list also includes the outdoor cinema in Šurany (closed since 2010), and the movie theaters in Zlaté Moravce and Prešov (which stopped screening in 2011). Apparently, others will follow. *"This is the first season when we don't intend to operate the outdoor cinema, as a result of the previously performed conversion to digital projection in the indoor auditorium. The second important factor is the inaccessibility of 35mm films that would be commercially attractive and the screening of which during the summer season in the outdoor cinema would be interesting for the public,"* explains Peter Kolek from the town of Galanta.

"This year, the town invested in new cinema benches. Our Apollo cinema went digital, therefore all the movies presented in the outdoor cinema have already been played there. Let's see how this influences the visit rate. I suppose this will be our last season," worries Martina Hodliaková from the Municipal Office of the town of Lučenec. The situation is similar at open-air cinemas operated by private companies. Michal Vanko, representing the outdoor cinema Amfiko in Martin explains: *"The summer of 2012 will probably be the last in regular operation. Next year we will work in low-budget mode, playing older and specific artistic titles. Our future depends on the willingness of the town to invest in digital technology. My personal opinion is that Amfiko will have to close for several years. In larger cities open-air cinemas will be gradually reconstructed, in small towns they will vanish."*

The situation with outdoor cinemas is almost the same as with the old-style single screen movie theaters that have not yet transformed to digital projection. Another disadvantage is that outdoor cinemas are only open a few days a year, and they have to cope with unpredictable weather. In recent years, not a single cent has been invested in them, with some exceptions, such as the open-air cinema in Pezinok with its new sound readers bought after 2007. The cinemas are equipped with MEO 5 projectors and mono sound systems. In the last two years competition has been on the rise, since digital cinemas opened in the same towns or nearby. Outdoor cinemas cannot compete with digital cinemas' program or comfort. Most movies played at open-air cinemas are also already available on DVD or can be downloaded from the Internet. Over time, less people are willing to move from their couch or computer and go out. One of the reasons for declining visit rates are the fixed entrance fees for presumably successful movies, resulting in ticket prices increasing from €2.00/2.50 to €3.50, often unacceptable for visitors to outdoor cinemas.

What is the future for outdoor cinemas?

Three years ago, when we published the article about the situation regarding outdoor cinemas, we mentioned E-Cinema (Electronic Cinema Systems) as one of the possible ways to cope with the development of digital technology and the expected reduction of invested money. Using E-Cinema, the projection does

not meet the DCI standard for screening first run Hollywood films, but it enables the playing of movies on DVD or Blue-ray with copyrights for public screening. But this solution also requires a relatively expensive projector, in order to provide high quality screening. A professional Full HD projector with sufficient luminosity costs from €10,000 to €13,000, which is beyond the means of most local authorities.

Despite the stagnation in this area, we have recently witnessed two events. The first case is Magio Beach on Tyršovo river bank in Bratislava, where summer projections took place in 2011 and 2012 under the Bažant Kinematograf project. Digital copies, as well as 35 mm films were projected on an inflated screen with Dolby stereo sound. The second outdoor cinema in Bratislava started in June 2012 at the Slovak National Gallery auditorium. It has a capacity of 200 seats, and was open for a short time in the 1970s. But because of complaints from people living nearby, it had to be closed down after just three screenings. During the summer of 2012 it had two projections a week of European movies, among them the new movie by Marek Šulík and Jana Bučka, *Bells of joy (Zvonky štastia)*. One of the big advantages of this outdoor cinema is the option to relocate the projection only ten meters away into the Gallery indoor cinema in case of bad weather.

In cases where municipalities administer both the open-air cinema and the indoor single screen movie theater, it is also possible to move digital projectors during the summer season from the indoor theater outdoors. This solution can work only in towns which have the resources to convert to digital projections, and a relatively high number of visitors. For instance, the visitor rate to the open-air theater in Pezinok was 49,010 in 1992. Even though it dropped in 2001 to 11,579, during the last ten years the number has remained approximately the same. In 2011 it was 10,875 people, with an average of 119.51 visitors per screening. The record number is from 2008, when 1,236 people saw *Bathory* by Slovak director Juraj Jakubisko at a single screening. *"One transfer from the outdoor cinema to the indoor theater costs approximately €550,"* explains Timo Matiaško. *"Expenses for the next two years are covered by the budget, after that we will have to find the money ourselves, but I believe it's worth it."*

A similar strategy will be applied in Senec, with a single screen movie theatre (Mier) with 225 seats and an outdoor cinema with 1,500 seats. Recently, both cinemas have undergone repair, which helped to increase the number of visitors. During the summer season the outdoor cinema is screening almost every day, and thanks to tourism, the number of visitors during those three months is equal to the visit rate to Mier in the remaining nine months. Since 31 May 2012 it has given 2D digital projections. In Senec they know that thanks to converting to digital and moving the projectors from the outdoor to indoor cinema, the number of visitors and flexibility of program planning will rise, and most importantly, it will be possible to screen first run films. They believe that after increasing ticket prices in 2D projections from €2.50 to €3.50, and by adding 3D projections at €6.50 a ticket, annual profit will increase by 40% in comparison to 2011. If this assumption is correct, the investment in digital technology will be returned in 4-5 years. *"Outdoor cinemas can survive only if they go digital. Otherwise they will close, or be used for different culture and social events,"* states Zuzana Ležáková from Senec.

MIRO ULMAN

(The article was published in Film.sk magazine No. 7-8/2012)
translated by TD

result. On the other hand, Dezorz and Páleník's docu-drama *Devín Massacre* (Devínsky masaker, 2011) offered a chance to take a look behind the scenes of a key social problem, i.e. conflicts with inadapted neighbors. Instead it focused on the reconstruction of the said event and the personal background of the gunman, while the image of the social background remained hidden under an assemblage of personal opinions and impressions, which in fact suggest nothing relevant.

In the past few years, STV has been producing documentary TV series such as *Slovak Cinema* (Sovenské kino), *Science in Europe* (Veda v Európe) and *Tins of Time* (Konzervy času), which from time to time offer some scope for actual creative ambitions. However, only one, *Citizen Behind the Door* (Občan za dverami) bears the characteristics of an investigative documentary. After all, in an attempt to win audience, STV or at least Channel 1, has been competing with the commercial television stations for years now, with their own weapons and no longer by means of the public service. Private channels do not produce investigative documentaries, although a fierce investigative documentary could be a real blockbuster. After all, there were times when TV Markíza built its success around such documentaries, and its series like *Gunfire* (Paľba) and *In the Shadow* (V tieni) brought shocking revelations of anomalies, and at times even came close to interventionist journalism. You would vainly look for similar programs in its current profile (or the profile of other commercial television stations). And if I am wrong, mea culpa.

It is hard to imagine the new generation would neglect investigative documentary production. After all, some "daring" films have been produced also at VŠMU (Academy of Drama and Performing Arts). To me the most inspiring seems to be *Vote 98* (Hlas 98, 1999) by Marek Kuboš, who in the pre-election atmosphere used a motif of electoral campaign for mystification in the tradition of cinema direct. The telephone questions served as bait, and the recorded answers on the other hand offered an authentic group portrait of Slovak people, the children of totalitarianism. Paradoxically, in the centre of the film built primarily on images stands the human voice, while shots of streets, people and buildings create the surroundings. The result is an impressive image of a "landscape" with the shadow of Big Brother hovering above it. Even this kind of investigative documentary met with resistance, this time right at the film school, which refused it as a graduate film.

At the time *Voice 98* was produced, another student, Marko Škop, looked under the surface of the protection mechanism of our top brass by shifting the image of how the security machinery works into the grotesque *Security of Office* (Ochrana úradu, 1999).

Students at Film faculty of VŠMU have not dealt with investigative documentaries in the past decade very much, although youth usually goes hand in hand with fighting spirit. Whether it is the hostile reception of *Vote 98* or the growing pragmatism of the new generation, it is hard to say from the outside perspective. And perhaps I am just wrong...

This fragmentary review certainly has some gaps. The author expresses his apologies in advance. But perhaps a little something amounts to more than nothing.

PAVEL BRANKO
translated by ZS

(web version of the text first published in the monthly Film.sk no. 11/2012)

still from *The Grasp of the State*

How to Help Cinema

In Tomášovo in March 2012, the Film Europe Media Company organized a nationwide conference of cinema people and professionals from the film industry entitled Quo Vadis Cinema, whose main theme was digitization as part of global change for cinemas, cinema distribution, as well as financing digitization and the survival of single-screen cinemas. But its participants did not leave the conference in an optimistic mood. However, after the second conference Quo Vadis Cinema II, which took place in Bratislava in November, things were quite different.

The panel discussion resulted in an unequivocal standpoint: the situation concerning the digitization of cinema is becoming critical, and undigitized cinemas will surely disappear. It was assumed that by the end of 2012, a maximum of 40 brick-and-mortar cinemas would be in operation and open-air cinemas would most probably cease to exist.

Quite a lot of work has been done in the past six months. The most important was probably the survey of cinemas in Slovakia conducted by Film Europe with the help of the Audiovisual Fund (AVF). *“Such a survey which comprised direct visits of individual cinemas, photo documentation and data collection in the form of questionnaires was conducted for the first time ever, and as such is an indispensable condition for the formulation of further strategy and concrete steps. These will depend on the focus of the supporting activities of the AVF in 2013 and The Strategy of Cinema Digitization in SR that is presented to the government by the Minister of Culture in connection with the objectives included in the current government program,”* said Martin Šmatlák, director of AVF. *“Of the 111 single-screen cinemas that we visited, several have not screened anything in months, or have been screening films only rarely,”* says Peter Novák from Film Europe. *“It’s hard to say how many of them will survive 2013. Of 23 open-air cinemas, only those in Pezinok and Senec are screening regularly. Digital technologies are constantly moved between the brick cinemas and amphitheaters. In the majority of amphitheaters, screening remains out of question. The alternative venues included in our survey were the cultural centre KC Dunaj in Bratislava, and Station Žilina-Záriečie.”*

At the Quo Vadis Cinema II conference, concrete solutions for how to digitize Slovak single-screen cinemas within a reasonable time and to the maximum extent possible were proposed. Cinemas that have already undergone the digitization process and have achieved remarkably better results served as optimistic examples. The presentation of technologies meeting E-Cinema parameters inspired the smaller cinemas as a financially and technologically acceptable solution for digitization, and a way of maintaining their business. Another positive piece of news was that the AVF in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture had decided to maintain financial resources for the support of digitization at the yearly average of 2011 and 2012, and at the same time with the help of autonomous regions to look for other ways of project financing. Regarding the AVF in 2013, *“it will be possible to apply for the support of other technological models of digitization that are financially more accessible also for smaller cinemas or towns. The financial models of support from AVF will be extended by the option to combine grants with loans guaranteed by the city (municipality), payable within three years at a discounted rate,”* said Martin Šmatlák. *“The AVF will support training and educational activities for cinema staff in order to increase the level of programming, dramaturgy and communication with audiences after digitization. One of the strengths of the current strategy of digitization is above all the fact that it is built on a detailed analysis of the current state of cinemas, while at the same time it proposes different solutions for individual cinemas, considering their opportunities and potential, and opens up more flexible ways of financing.”*

There is no point in keeping a cinema alive at all costs. However, the conference showed that in the end over a hundred single-screen cinemas could survive.

MIRO ULMAN

(article first published in Film.sk no. 1/2013)
translated by ZS



still from *Gypsy Vote*. photo: Mandala Pictures

ELECTIONS AS A JOURNEY TO SENDREI

Looking at Slovak documentaries and feature films dealing with Roma issues in comparison to others, what never escapes the critics' eye is the depiction of an ethnic minority, their topicality in terms of current trends in European and world cinema, and how adequately and authentically they manage to portray the relations of a minority to the white majority. On the other hand, what only few take into consideration are the stylistic, genre and production aspects of these works. The anonymity of internet discussions helps spread intolerant vulgar reactions, hidden under nicknames, from behind the safety of a computer screen. Jaro Vojtek's film *Gypsy Vote* (Cigáni idú do volieb) is surrounded by such an atmosphere.

Inappropriate comments appearing in online discussions have to be removed more often the more audibly Vojtek's documentary has been entering the Czech-Slovak environment – through its award at the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, and its premiere at the International Film Festival in Bratislava.

Most importantly, *Gypsy Vote* is a portrait of Vlado Sendrei, the first gypsy in Slovakia to run for a seat in the mayor's office. While in Vojtek's previous films *Border* (Hranice), *Here We Are* (My zdes) and *The Back Passing* (Malá domov) sketches of (group) portraits helped depict the crucial situations and problematic regions, in *Gypsy Vote* by using the time-lapse method the author concentrates on the protagonist and his wife Janka Sendreiová. One of the setbacks of such an approach is the need to sort out the rich material for the sake of the dynamics of the story development, and emphasize the confrontation of the starting points and chronologies in accordance with the shape of the reportage. The selected description of campaign activities causes several important situations to pass almost unnoticed, while the more trivial repeat themselves.

Vojtek concentrates mostly on the characteristics of Sendrei's political activity, which works as a stimulus for taking notes of a particular point in one's life. The analysis of the Roma ethnicity is present rather implicitly. The minimal interaction between Sendrei and the white majority present through glimpses of the SNS (Slovak National Party) election billboards, or a strategic agitprop group planning the campaign, attests to the containment of the work. Vojtek's relationship to characters here is less visible than in his previous films. The Sendreis are in front of the camera throughout the runtime. After all, they are used to them and are also experienced in appearing in the media, i.e. in the reality television program *Wife Swap* (Zámena manželiek) and their own, once popular docu-soap. While in the previous Slovak film about Roma ethnicity *Bells of Joy* (Zvonky šťastia), the authors emphasized performance and staging, in the case of *Gypsy Vote*, we can only guess which scenes the couple had prepared beforehand and which not. However, humor is not used to cover up or lessen the gravity of problems arising from Sendrei's candidacy and character.

Vlado Sendrei is not depicted as a positive character, which I think is a good thing. Vojtek's and the Sendreis' courage is not common in documentary portraits, since the authors attempt to create heroes and heroines that the audience can easily identify with, and at the same time can accept their moral perception. Sendrei unscrupulously talks about the personal motives behind his candidacy, and unlike politicians with polished manners, he steps out of his stage role and gives us a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes mechanism of the campaign, his marriage, and even of himself as an imperfect man of flesh and blood. It is not a soothing look that would play on the audience's sympathies. The least offensive name his wife Janka calls him is “moron”, and she also does not overlook his careless attitude towards family life, his materialist system of values, and his way too daring ambitions. Likewise, she reveals his paradoxical relationship to other Romas, which results from the fact that he grew up in a non-Roma environment and had to find his way to gypsies.

How does Sendrei's compare with the other two “most influential film” gypsies Ignác Červenák from *Other Worlds* (Iné svety by Marko Škop) and Soňa from *Soňa and Her Family* (O Soni a jej rodine by Daniela Rusnoková)? Červenák was portrayed as a bizarre pawn in the spirit of exoticization of the Šariš region, starring in the music video of a popular music show, and helping catch potato stealers as part of his transformation process. On the other side of the imaginary line stands Soňa, mother of ten, who opens her heart to the director and audience, talking about her joys and miseries. Sendrei's character displays outer characteristics attractive to the media, refined through his own experience of the environment with an intimate confession through his wife. And that is why the film is so convincing – because of the inner perspective that Vojtek consistently maintains.

ŽOFIA BOSÁKOVÁ

(article first published in Film.sk No.12/2012)
translated by ZS

GYPSY VOTE

director: Jaroslav Vojtek

story and screenplay: J. Vojtek, Tomáš Kaminský

cinematography: J. Vojtek, Noro Hudec, Tomáš Stanek, Ján Meliš

editor: Terézia Mikulášová, Peter Harum

music: Kokavakére Lavutáris aka the Sendreis (Sendreiovci)

cast: Vlado Sendrei and his campaign team

runtime: 72 min.



KINO-IKON

journal for the science of moving
image and cinema

Kino-Ikon was founded in 1996 by the lecturers and students of the Department of Film Science at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, in cooperation with Association of Slovak Film Clubs (ASFC). Kino-Ikon became the first filmologic journal in Slovakia to focus on theories, histories and aesthetics of cinema. The editorial of the first issue stated that: "The Slovak market obviously lacks a periodical, the objective of which would be to analyse in depth the important works of local and international cinema. No magazine in our country publishes the translations of fundamental texts regarding filmologic trends abroad. Neither is there any publication with more than just popular comments about Slovak and international cinema."

Kino-Ikon has worked as a regular representative anthology of original texts and translated papers dealing with current film perspectives (selected according to a certain topic, e.g. genre, film noir, western, neuroscience and film, Jacques Rivette, contemporary Italian film, etc.). The basic sections – studies, features, interviews, film and literary reflections, editions of archive material – create a platform for detailed reflection about the transformation, or more precisely, the development of local and international audiovisual culture. Kino-Ikon emphasises the comprehensive study of Slovak cinema's history.

Kino-Ikon has always been published by the ASFC, first with the mentioned Department of Film Science, and since its fourth issue in 1999 (upon becoming a regular biannual journal), it has been published in cooperation with the Slovak Film Institute. The Film Institute considerably contributed to the quality of the editorial work when it gave the journal the necessary technical support, as well as access to facilities such as their library, archive documents and photos, etc.

The journal is published thanks to the financial support of several public and private institutions and foundations (in the 1990s it was supported f.e. by Pro Helvetia, the Open Society Fund, SCCA, and the Visegrad Fund). Since 2000, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic has contributed to its publishing. It is now also financed by the Audiovisual Fund.

Since 2003, Kino-Ikon has also been publishing the critical supplement FRAME, prepared by students of Film Science at the Academy of Performing Arts. Its chief editor is Zuzana Mojžišová. To some extent, Frame has become thematically and graphically independent from Kino-Ikon. It was conceived as a medium for new adepts of *film studies* to practice their skills.

For the English issue of *Kinečko*, we have selected two shorter texts. In the article *When Sexus Ruled the World*, Eva Filová analyses the context of Slovak cinema in the 1960s (topic: Dušan Hanák; no. 1, 2008). The essay by Petra Hanáková *Rebro's Wife*, dedicated to the comedy of Slovak cinema's legend Paľo Bielik *Friday the Thirteenth* (V piatok trinásteho, 1953), represents the long-time popular section on stories about supporting characters in film (no. 1, 2006).

MARTIN KAŇUCH
translated by BĎ

Wife in supporting role

Paľo Bielik is known in Slovak cinematography as an author of charismatic male characters – as a director of films whose plots are animated by a masculine hero of the Captain Dabač type. It is also generally accepted – and most of the author's best films confirm it – that Bielik was weak with female characters.

He is actually known for his inability to develop an authentic woman character. This deficiency, which is one of the characteristic features of Bielik's distinct directorial style, can be traced back to his early films, and it also occurs in his production from 1950s as well as in his later commercial projects.

However, if we focus on secondary female characters in Bielik's films in more detail, we will find that this theory, although definitely applicable at first sight, is not completely true. A closer look will reveal several vigorous, spontaneous and active female characters in Bielik's filmography. We mean such energetic, occasionally cheeky and thus conventionally non-melodramatic women as Granddad Bórik's daughter-in-law in *Captain Dabač* (Kapitán Dabač), played by Elena Latečková, attacking Nazi soldiers with a bucket; or the inventor Kováč's wife seeking a bride for her son in the propagandistic film from 50s *The Mountains Are Stirring* (Lazy sa pohli). It seems that Bielik never had problems depicting elderly village women. As a sensitive boy growing up in a female-dominated environment, he knew them very well.¹ What he wasn't so good at was the authentic (that is, not generic but realistic) portrayal of young women, mostly the girlfriends or wives of the male protagonists, in love's intoxication. What seems to be common to the strongly melodramatic female characters of Poppová's Theresa from *Jánošík*, Marica from *Forty-four* (Štyridsaťštyri), but especially Naďa Dabačová, is filmic rather than lived experience. They seem to be typical of genre films and Harlequin romances rather than drawn from real life.²

What seems to be common to the strongly melodramatic female characters of Poppová's Theresa from *Jánošík*, Marica from *Forty-four* (Štyridsaťštyri), but especially Naďa Dabačová, is filmic rather than lived experience. They seem to be typical of genre films and Harlequin romances rather than drawn from "a catalogue of life" and its relatively wide (even though not unlimited) spectrum of women's roles.

What follows is a short study of an interesting secondary female character in a film ranking relatively low in the director Bielik's canon. It aims to refute or at least question the myth of Bielik as an author of exclusively male charismatic characters.

The secondary female character under discussion here is Rebro's wife from Bielik's 1953 comedy *Friday, the Thirteenth* (V piatok trinásteho). It is a socialist-realist schematic story based on simple situational humor and dealing with the transformation of a bigoted petit bourgeois Jozef Rebro (Ondrej Jariabek) into a new class-conscious citizen. The film's appeal stems from Ondrej Jariabek's vivid performance. Oľga Adamčíková, a renowned actress often playing the parts of elderly village women and maternal figures in Slovak cinematography and theatre, plays Rebro's tolerant and heavenly patient wife.³

Although Ms. Rebro seems to be only a "shadow" character peering from behind her husband's back, it is enough for the viewer to zoom in a bit to see a lifelike and very subtly constructed character. Ms. Rebro makes her first appearance on the screen only a few minutes after the film starts. Wearing the obligatory apron, she welcomes her newly retired husband on the porch of their house. It is her first and last appearance outdoors. In scenes to follow, this fully domesticated figure never leaves home or, to be more precise, the kitchen. While her husband (charismatic Ondrej Jariabek whose exaltation appears as an anachronism in today's acting world) will be spending his "well-deserved rest" combining the pleasant with the useful, duties with relaxation (he will potter about in the garden, go fishing, on Sunday he will go for a walk in the old town, in the afternoon he will go to church and from church to a pub, of course, to talk politics a bit...), Ms. Rebro will never retire and have a rest, not even for a moment. She will be cooking, baking, cleaning or just hanging around the house with one of the traditional woman's attributes: a knife, a bottle

of rum, a stirring spoon... Her occasional appearances in the film, always dressed in a different apron, are a catalogue if not a guide to women's chores.

Besides the role of a housekeeper, cleaner and "bedmate", Ms. Rebro occasionally also takes on the role of an intergenerational communicator or, to use a more postmodern term, facilitator between her old-world husband and her modern, independent-minded children who are slowly leaving the family's nest. Ms. Rebro is both invisible and omnipresent in the household. So is the presence of Oľga Adamčíková in the role of Ms. Rebro. Compared to the pathetic Jariabek, her acting is moderate, natural and almost involuntary. It seems as if she always stood a step back, leaving room to her husband and Jariabek's pathetic acting. This step back could, however, mean that she could assess situations soberly, perceive and evaluate things from a distance, and deal with them only after things have cooled off. As for the gender distribution of roles, hyperbolized by comedy, the character of Ms. Rebro is a lightning rod or cement in the household. Dramaturgically, she is a silencer of Jariabek's nearly indigestible pathetic acting and his character's craziness. Altogether, Adamčíková's Ms. Rebro is not a passive character. Unlike Jariabek's character that is marked with centrifugal spectacularity, she is centripetal. She is in charge of the household's schedule and, unfortunately, she is the only one to hold a firm place in it. Although Bielik, obviously absorbed primarily by Jariabek's character, does not question this conventional role of a woman in a household, he depicts her with so much consistency and empathy that it couldn't be overlooked by some period critics. One of them called Ms. Rebro "the prettiest and most genuine character of this Slovak film [...], who, as the only one, isn't a comic figure though."⁴

Adamčíková's Ms. Rebro from *Friday the Thirteenth* confirms that even an author with such a macho reputation as Paľo Bielik was able to develop a woman character that could today, without any problem, be given the attribute "gender friendly".

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- 1 Paľo Bielik was born as an illegitimate son to a young single mother. As she remained living with her parents and unmarried sisters after his birth, Bielik grew up in predominantly female company.
- 2 An exception that does not quite fit into this pattern is Anča from *Wolves' Lairs* (Vlčie diery), played by Magda Husáková-Lokvencová. Although at times she appears to be a bit absent-minded and in melodramatically somnambulant trance (just like Naďa Dabačová later), her physical appearance is not very typical of a melodramatic role: she comes across as a mature woman, looks older than her suitors and somewhat out of place in the village. Husáková's intellectual partisan woman Anča is thus indicative of socialist-realist imagery rather than melodrama.
- 3 For more information about Adamčíková's theatrical career see Ladislav Čavojský, "Adamčíkovci - herci dobrých ľudí," *Prvá prvoradi herci SND* (Bratislava: Tália-press, 1995): 170-172.
- 4 "Slovenský film V piatok trinásteho" ["Slovak Film Friday, the Thirteenth"], *Lidová demokracia* 5. Feb. 1954.

Friday the Thirteenth (1953), photo: Milan Kordoš | Source: Slovak Film Institute Photo Archive





Silent Joy (1985); photo: Vladimír Vavrek, Source: Slovak Film Institute Photo Archive



322 (1969), photo: Gita Polónyová, Source: Slovak Film Institute Photo Archive

When Sex Ruled the World

Hardly any other decade has brought so many political turns and had such an impact on people's thinking as the 1960s. The decade that began with Khrushchev's notorious shoe-banging incident in the Soviet Union, ended with a large-scale replacement of party leaders in Czechoslovakia.

It was a decade of international crises, coups, power struggles, wars, assassinations, nuclear threats, peace agreements, space exploration, political and cultural revolutions... In addition, the world was transformed by the sexual revolution, which couldn't have been avoided even beyond the Iron Curtain.

Although the criticisms and verdicts pronounced at the First Festival of Czechoslovak Film in Banská Bystrica in 1959 had not quite faded from living memory, the 1960s meant a slow return of the themes and techniques branded as idea-free attractivism, escapism from serious social issues, West-inspired platforms, overemphasis on form and artistic aspects, naturalism, a vilification of reality, scepticism, withdrawal from ideological positions, and a swing to liberalism.¹ 1962 marked not only the beginning of a socio-political "thaw," but also the reassessment of the role and mission of art.

Domestic film journalists responded to "re-emerging" social themes and dealt with sometimes inappropriate viewers' responses to "Western" films in distribution: "Restricted to adults! Cinemas are currently showing *Viridiana* involving a rape scene and *La Dolce Vita* featuring a striptease. The British film *A Taste of Honey* is about a minor girl whose mother is a promiscuous alcoholic, and who becomes accidentally pregnant from a brief affair shortly after she leaves school and who later moves in with a gay man. People who are not physically, mentally and emotionally mature yet can't understand these unusual although realistic life circumstances soberly and proportionally. While 'soberly' involves a sense of self-control here, 'proportionally' refers to an awareness of the relationship between a work of art and life."²

Carnality and sexual desire were still thought of in leftist terms, and condemned as a reactionary panacea to all social malaises. Sex was associated with egoism (examples being the films *Room at the Top* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*) and satisfying one's suppressed instincts, and its cause – Freudism – was an expression of the decline of capitalist morals.³ Sexuality was put on par with consumerism, and flirtation with an aesthetically pleasing game. "If the sexual intercourse of two individuals excludes the likelihood of conception, it ceases to be a primarily social issue and is bereft of its social consequences. [...] The requirement of safety and the pleasure-oriented attitude to sexual behaviour are mutually conditioned. American 'petting' (affectionate play) as an exchange of sexual stimuli leading to orgasm without coition itself is considered standard premarital sexual behaviour by American youth. 'Petting' is a compromise of morals."⁴

The onset of the New Wave generation marked a slight departure from the popular genre of communal satire that had pinpointed some "minor" shortcomings of society: alcoholism at the workplace, corruption and a housing crisis (*The Devil Never Sleeps*, *Three Wishes*) and from themes like marital crisis and divorce (*The Last Home-Coming*, *The Man Who Never Returned*, *Rocks and People*). It meant new themes like the generation gap, acceleration of youth sexual development⁵, teenage pregnancies and prostitution. Stories about naive girls escaping from home and heading into the arms of equally psychically immature partners, accidental lovers or older, more experienced well-to-do men, only to face unplanned pregnancies, fell within the category of individual revolt (they were not motivated only by existential or social despair). This kind of rebellion was supposed to be a sign of one's ability to survive on one's own (or immaturity), and emancipation from continual parental or institutional supervision.

"What did our audience find attractive about *Nights of Cabiria*? A certain appeal stemming from its subject-matter – scenes from a prostitute's life – must have evaporated quite soon after its first showing, and so must have the inevitable realization that clothing is clothing in this film, and not a curtain that would reveal the scene itself. [...] *La Dolce Vita* was one of the few examples of modern art which received the same public popularity as, let's say, a prominent sports event. A football match between Czechoslovakia and Italy wouldn't have aroused so much interest. The atmosphere surrounding the introduction of *La Dolce Vita* was somewhat comparable to the atmosphere surrounding the eccentric modern dance style that is coming into fashion: nobody knew what it was all supposed to be about, but it had already produced controversies – and substantial ones. [...] If factual knowledge is missing, one relies on hearsay. Suddenly it was found that the public had been expecting bottomless pleasure, maybe a three-hour sequence of erotically intense scenes... or maybe... difficult to say what some segments of our audiences had been actually expecting. The scandal finally broke and anyone who had been following the situation closely must know that it was a great scandal. [...] It must be stated openly that the 'struggle' for establishing *La Dolce Vita* as a serious work of art was lost. [...] That the

viewers left the screening of this film at the 13th Workers' Film Festival indignant wasn't so much Fellini's fault, as the fault of the distribution policy."⁶

Slovak filmmakers also responded to western trends and models of youth life style (modern musical forms and the quotation of *La Dolce Vita* in *They Are Not Playing Blues for Me*) and presented Slovak youth as educated and cultivated (*The Sun in the Net*, *Seven Days Every Week*, *Nylon Moon*). While any reference to western culture would have unleashed an avalanche of protest and ridicule back in the 1950s, in the 1960s it was understood as a manifestation of belonging to the surrounding world. It is therefore not a coincidence that we can find allusions to world literature, music and films in some Slovak films of this period.

"*The Silence*, although a box office hit abroad, faces censorship. Some have called it 'a morally corrupt excitant' or 'pornography'; others have labelled it as 'an untouchable work of art'. [...] Almost all cinemas showed a version that was about 14 metres shorter than the original. Only the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 1964 screened the authorized version. [...] It is obvious that the millions of Swedes that saw *The Silence* in the less than six months since its premiere, and the further millions of viewers outside Sweden, didn't stream to cinemas to see 'Bergman's great art'.

They wanted to see the three incriminated scenes featuring unembellished sex, sex in such a raw, primal form that no other film had dared to bring to the screen."⁷

Published polemic articles, opinion polls, interviews with doctors and psychologists about pathological social and sexual phenomena and culturally accepted sexual promiscuity in Western and Northern Europe, revealed the helplessness and hesitancy of Czechoslovakia waiting for instructions and absolution "from above" – the legitimization of the existing state. Some films by Czech authors became defining for "emotional" (*The Cry*), "sociological" and "behaviourist" film genres (*Audition*, *Black Peter*, *A Bagful of Fleas*).

The greatest sensation was caused by Forman's *Loves of a Blonde*. Its introduction to cinemas was accompanied by newspaper headlines like "Is Humanity More Immoral?", "Sex Rules the World", "Sex Troubles" or "Is *Loves of a Blonde* Corrupting the Youth?"⁸ It was the loose morals and accidental sexual adventures

presented in the film that irritated audiences. The 9th London Film Festival, which was supposed to be opened by *Loves of a Blonde*, (probably on purpose) received a low-quality copy of the film, for which the English had subtitles made at their own expense.⁹ In defence of the film against coarse invectives and manifestations of moral indignation, the chairmanship of the Union of Film and Television Artists issued a Declaration (for Slovak artists, signed e.g. by Štefan Uher, Peter Balgha, Stanislav Barabáš and Peter Solan): "Manifestations of moral indignation such as those provoked by Miloš Forman's film have nothing in common with useful discussion. They are symptomatic of socially dangerous tendencies."¹⁰ An even more straightforward statement was offered by Pavel Branko: "It's [...] hideously typical of our narrow-minded puritanism that it was *Loves of a Blonde*, this purest and most innocent Czechoslovak film of recent years, which became a target of backlash by self-appointed guardians of morals, who used this opportunity to vent their complexes."¹¹

Films by Czech filmmakers did not touch only upon sexuality; this was considered a natural part of young people's lives. The films primarily focused on collisions of desires and reality, lack of understanding, search for one's self (*A Bagful of Fleas*, *Black Peter*, *Loves of a Blonde*), personal dissatisfaction, desire for escape from the grey, dull routine of one's days, feelings of life and material frustration (*The Ceiling*, *Something Different*, *Audition*). They were expressive of a similar outlook on life: life absurdity, the state of the middle-aged generation who could no longer look up to an unambiguously defined idol or cult and who were therefore wandering the corridors of abandoned institutions and looking for the lost almighty Kilian (*Joseph Kilian*, *Golden Queen*, *Searching*, *Courage for Every Day*). The authors who felt free – to seek a specific film language, to liberate meanings and their interpretations, to break away from prejudice and the burden of the past – also passed this feeling of freedom on to their audiences.¹² The coming-of-age generation "rejects symbols and false labels, which are seemingly supposed to bring a solution and reassure the audience at the end of a film about different life troubles that 'everything is alright after all'."¹³

8

Kino.

Hanák and His Diagnosis of Individual and Society

It is this social situation that Dušan Hanák responds to with his short semester live-action film project *Alcron* (1963). It shares themes with Chytilová's films *The Ceiling* and *Something Different*. Thematically, it deals with the phenomenon of prostitution (material advancement, anonymous sexual relations), and dramaturgically, it involves parallel development and the alternation of two contrary positions. Alena, a young girl initiated by an older and more experienced, "emancipated, non-aging, still elegant" friend Jarmila into the mysteries of "practical life", is, like Marta, Věra and Eva Bosáková, experiencing a crisis, which is characterized by the contrapuntal alternation of her double life.¹⁴ Besides living their "official" lives (the socialist regime required everyone to have a regular job), both of them spend time in a café at Alcron Hotel, where they "hook up" foreign clients paying in hard currency. Dreams and desires about having a husband and settling down collide with reality. They are replaced by small gifts, short-term enjoyment of luxury, and a sense of one's attraction to men.

The live-action part of the film is complemented by authentic film shots of Prague streets and the interior of a department store. Every scene is a response to a scene preceding it. A view of busy streets and Alena and Jarmila standing in front of a shop window and then entering Alcron Hotel (secretly tailed by Alena's boyfriend) is a reaction to Jarmila's introductory confession over coffee and a cigarette about expectation, disillusion and indifference to life. Alena's bed conversation with her boyfriend and signs of dissatisfaction with their relationship that lacks in sincerity is followed by a scene showing Alena meeting foreigners in the café at Alcron Hotel. A night spent with a foreigner in his hotel room is a response to Alena making evasive excuses while turning down a date with her boyfriend.

The hotel, shop windows, foreign cars, foreigners, imported cognac, photographs of film actors and actresses on the walls in Alena's room – all of this seems to be a distant, unreachable, escapist part of the world of idols. Large-size promotional photographs of women's eyes in the department store, one of which is made up while the other is not (or each of the eyes is wearing different eye shadow), offer two possible identities or represent a double identity. Alena's eyes look away from the pictures and look at the displayed furniture, kitchen cupboards with a food mixer, a male dummy dressed in a jacket and a Macintosh, and jewellery. In the end, her eyes rest on baby clothes. Jarmila's earlier remark ("Don't be silly, girl. With this figure? Do you think good fortune will smile on you?") becomes a response to Alena's unvoiced desire for a baby and family. Unlike Chytilová in *The Ceiling*, Hanák leaves his film open-ended: Alena's smile over "the luxury in the shop windows" can be interpreted as admiring (desiring) or ironic (parting).

"Alcron has a big city atmosphere. It is a reflection of city dwellers' culture and worldview and a product of an urban man's outlook on life. Besides an intellectual Werich (*Six Questions for Jan Werich*) and a lonely mime (*Melancholy*), Hanák features a prostitute as a third character. A different degree of stylization, different generations and settings, and different social classes. A common element: to understand the human soul."¹⁵

Alcron provides soil for the development of typical Hanákesque characters: Jarmila is an example of a line of cynics, fallen angels, "who have lost belief in anything and anyone"¹⁶ (Dr. Macko from *Silent Joy*, the editor-in-chief Lichner from *Private Lives*); Alena is a prototype of stigmatized characters or characters facing inner dilemmas (Lauko from 322, Soňa from *Silent Joy*, Martin from *Private Lives*); Alena's boyfriend is a sketch study of an angel (without the principle of playfulness yet), whose existence is conditioned by living in truth (Vladko from 322, Jakub from *Pink Dreams*, Jarko from *I Love, You Love*, Vlado from *Silent Joy*). Pragmatism is embodied by the character of Alena's mother: wearing a

bathrobe, she is putting on face cream in front of a mirror (just like Lauko's ex in 322 or Elena having a facial mask and fighting a double chin in *Private Lives*) and forcing Alena to reply to her question, "Tell me, do you love me at all?" Mother advises her daughter to find better company than the uninteresting peer, "university-educated librarian". Like most parents and drawing on her parents' and their parents' experience, she wants her child to make a pragmatic choice and marry an older man who would offer her financial security. Her mother's emphasis on material well-being indirectly encourages Alena in her prostitution.

The theme of the prostitution and promiscuity of girls and women was a frequently addressed issue at that time: cinemas showed *Nights of Cabiria*, *Mamma Roma* and *La Dolce Vita* (in Czechoslovak cinematography, promiscuity and prostitution had until then been associated mainly with the first republic and extreme war situations in films like *Transport from Paradise* or both adaptations of *Death Is Called Engelchen*). Hanák returned to the theme once more in a short-footage film entitled *Old Shatterhand Came To See Us*.

The theme of the generation gap was also linked with the choice of a life partner: the young feel closer to their peers than to older, more experienced people, who they would be tied to by respect. Some gender conventions had reversed (laws valid from time immemorial had also re-emerged in socialism): mature women are attracted to younger lovers, who they sustain, although only for a short time (*Courage for Every Day*, *Return of the Prodigal Son*, *The Years of Christ*, 322).

Alena has a choice: she can follow in the footsteps of her parents and continue in the line of pragmatism and hypocrisy (this is what hairdressing female apprentices in *Learning* do), or she can go her own, although a bit more complicated, way (like Cilka, Soňa and Naďa). Compared to their male counterparts who excel in intellect, creativity and playfulness, Hanák's female characters are diffident, unimaginative and ambitionless, they lack identity and revolt only in silence. While men live vivid fantasy lives (Vladko, Jarko, Vlado) and indulge in leisure activities and hobbies (keeping pigeons, playing the helicon, building a house, beekeeping, radio technology, writing), the existence of women is conditioned by the reality of their love relationship. They melt in others; they are like empty vessels that can be filled with love and motherhood.

"What I find exciting is uncovering in a film what's hidden yet intimately familiar to us all."¹⁷

The more visible pregnancy is, the more decisiveness and inner freedom Hanák's female characters display – it is impossible to cover up things and doubts, and fear of loneliness is becoming redundant. Childless women are like stray sheep who failed in their relationships and life's mission. Cilka (322) can't decide between losing her partner, who does not want a child, and losing her baby; Jolanka (*Pink Dreams*) must choose between "white" Jakub and "tribesman" Vojto, who offers a promise of "a big family" in the future; Viera (*I Love, You Love*) is cheated on by the philanderer Vinco and after he dies, being pregnant she must cope with living with the alcoholic Pišta; until Soňa (*Silent Joy*) gets pregnant, her identity resembles the photograph of a woman from a container torn in half; when Naďa (*Private Lives*) loses her ovaries, she is worried about not being a woman anymore – her dream and her "kitchen" reality embodied in a disembowelled chicken are expressive of her condition.

In *Alcron*, the possibility of Alena's motherhood is only suggested. However, what is typical of Hanák is the mother figure's loneliness (Alena's father is non-existent or absent). It is *Learning* that starts the line of pregnant women and their "silent joys" – although there is no joy in their lives yet. "What does being preggers feel like?" enquires a less experienced hairdressing colleague, but she does not get a reply. Hanák chose the character of a pregnant apprentice to uncover subtle social mechanisms, and the way children of "the bright future" adopt the practices of their parents belonging to "the dark past". The pregnant apprentice is servile (and lifeless) in serving her

customer, she accepts a tip and remains alone in the empty hairdressing salon full of mirrors. Her apprenticeship is close to completion, she has learned what is essential – for living a life of compromise and hypocrisy.¹⁸ Her expressionless face, in juxtaposition with the attractive and smiley pin-ups in the shop window and the conversation with the customer taking place off-screen ("How are you?" – "Great, thanks."), mirrors the state of society: on the outside everything seems to be fine, but the inside cannot be seen or does not matter.

If we admit the thesis that Hanák draws on Christian tradition, the motif of pregnancy is linked to Marian cult: the asexuality (almost frigidity?) of his female characters and their pregnancy or motherhood seem to allude to the Immaculate Conception (and salvation). However, the asexuality is not an attribute of all Hanák's female characters: Soňa (Magda Vášáryová) from *Silent Joy* appears to be an incorporal, almost ethereal body, an aural woman, but her femininity and sensuality emerge from below her flimsy nightdress, which reveals her protruding nipples and nudity. It is part of Hanák's omnipresent ambiguity and relativization of values.¹⁹

Private Lives reflects the themes of family and motherhood at multiple levels: for example, Naďa, who has lost her ovaries, has a complicated relationship with her mother and her sister Elena, she has some relationship problems with her adolescent daughter, and she has a reproduction of Galanda's painting Mother in her room. Hanák contrapuntally characterizes (and comments on) his characters and their situations, and photographs play a meaningful role in this characterization. The double representation of eyes in *Alcron* finds a follow-up in a photographic collage of a shrouded figure by Luba Lauffová in *Private Lives*. Hanging in the intimate space of Elena and Martin's flat, it is expressive of the inhomogeneity of their relationship: while Elena's character comes across as transparent (narcissistic and almost egoistic), Martin's soul, motivation and relationships are difficult to penetrate – even for him. And the winged Pegasus over the desk in Martin's study is an idolization of eternal inspiration and free spirit – even though only a provocation.

The exploration of self-deceptive life, which started with *Alcron*, concludes with *Private Lives* – the state of forty-year-old Naďa (and other characters) corresponds with the hopeless state of forty-year-old society. When Karel Kryl released a record entitled *Cancer* in 1969 (haunting Lauko from 322), nobody thought that "it" would last for so long. Unlike cancer, gallstones can be extracted and forgotten. Bringing children into a society where forgetting (and denial of the "institution" of memory) is a national hobby has a tragic flavour in Hanák's films. It is not until his *Private Lives* that the motif of a newborn baby acquires the firm meaning of the long-wished-for product of love (and also the "reborn" citizen of a democratic country in subtext).

Expressionless stone faces²⁰ concealing trauma, pain or secret, sexuality without eroticism, loveless relationships, parentless children, communication without understanding, abandoned houses, cemeteries where graves are difficult to find, ideology without faith, etc. – this is the world of Hanák's characters, the world of spiritual or material surrogates, where people pass each other without meeting.

EVA FILOVÁ

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- V. Macek, "Pozri štyri kategórie postáv," *Dušan Hanák* (Bratislava: FOTOFO/SFÚ, 1996): 117-119.
- Eva Čobejová - Ján Štrasser, "Filmový režisér Dušan Hanák: Zaujímá ma „územie nikoho“," *Domino fórum* 48 (2003): 8-9.
- V. Macek, *Dušan Hanák*, 26.
- Ibid. 127.
- Ibid. 117-119.

Homo Felix

the specialist magazine for animation

Homo Felix is a magazine that focuses on animation – a specific form of cinema. Since it was launched in 2010, it has been published biannually with a circulation of 500 copies, containing 72 color pages. Every issue features articles in both the Czech and Slovak languages, and it is therefore distributed to the Slovak as well as Czech market.

The main aim of the publisher is to fill the information vacuum by initiating a scholarly discussion of animated film in our area. Animation has only recently emerged as a separate branch of film studies, and even at the international level there have only been a handful of experts engaged, in spite of the fact that animated film is one of the most dynamically developing film genres. We have been trying to create such an environment that would facilitate a full-scale development in our Central European context.

Anyway, *Homo Felix* is not intended exclusively for film theorists. Creators and students of related disciplines represent an equally important target audience. The magazine offers them inspiration from abroad, analyses of aesthetic and production issues, as well as new insights into their own creative endeavors. We would also like to address the interested laymen, the audiences and fans of animated films who will find interesting topics covered in popular articles. The philosophy of the magazine is based on the belief that by cultivating the three mentioned audience groups, the quality of animation art and industry in the area can be increased. By cultivating we mean assisting in their professional development as creators and theorists, and also educating a knowledgeable audience.

Six issues of the magazine have been published so far, and some recurrent topics have appeared, which are mostly presented in regular sections:

- A survey of the contemporary Slovak scene (reviews of new titles, interviews with their creators, reports on current productions)
- Scholarly discussion of films in distribution (reviews of current films at cinemas and films available to a wider audience)
- Developing the theory of animation (reflections on the definitions of new terms, genre classification, etc.)
- A survey of the historical development of animated film in Slovakia and globally (chapters in history)
- A survey of marginal and minor genres (experimental scene, Japanese anime)
- Introducing foreign authors (interviews with directors, their profiles, translations from interesting theorists' works)
- Cooperation with festivals (announcements of upcoming festivals and cinemeetings, reports from these events, interviews with interesting participants and members of the jury, etc.)

The philosophy of *Homo Felix* is based on our awareness of broader connections and contexts. We apply this philosophy mainly when we form the concept of a particular issue (to date the Puppet Renaissance, Animation and Children, Music, Distribution, Education), which always features the opinion of an expert from a different socio-scientific field (we have cooperated with a psychologist, an expert on puppetry, a composer, etc.). Yet the context may also be broadened in a different manner – geographically. The problems that plague Slovak (and Czech) animated film are not local, but rather regional; therefore we have been focusing on the V4 countries and also other post-communist countries. We assume that the solutions to complicated local animation art and industry issues lie in a careful analysis of the situation before and after the fall of the communist regime. The situation is very similar in all the mentioned countries. Moreover, today the conditions in which artists can create in these countries are approximately the same.

The logical outcome of all our efforts is to overcome language barriers and to expand the scope of the periodical to an international level. In 2012 we started preparations for an English edition of *Homo Felix*, which is aimed at the V4 countries and the post-socialist bloc. The first issue in English is to be published in 2013.

IVANA LAUČIKOVÁ

translated by KK



Homo Felix cover

Who's There? A Child Viewer?

A few years ago I wasn't as sensitive to children's animated films as today. I appreciated the Biennial of Animation Bratislava (BAB), I embraced the Fest Anča festival, and I was familiar with students' animation production and independent animated feature films, which are occasionally brought to cinemas by the Association of Slovak Film Clubs (ASFK). I even hardly ever missed seeing Pixar or DreamWorks cartoons in cinematic distribution. In principle, I didn't care if the films I saw were primarily meant for juvenile audiences, a wider range of viewers, or adult audiences only. All I cared about were the film techniques employed, the theme, and its cinematic representation. As a result, and quite logically, I took no notice of the fact that Slovak public television practically ignores child viewers up to three or four years of age, commercial television companies don't respect "the biological clock" of pre-school and younger school-going viewers, and distribution companies have recently been literally forcing glasses for 3D screenings on whole families. It also didn't occur to me that the unbelievably boring, monotonous and non-narrative programmes on toddler television channels of the Bebe TV type (today's Duck TV) are part of a plan to adapt such programmes to babies between 6 and 24 months of age, i.e. viewers whose speech capabilities don't usually go beyond denoting, enumerating or providing a static description of things. Its programmes are not dissimilar to the well-known BBC puppet show *Teletubbies*, whose repetitive structure and duplication of information in image and sound serve as an aid in learning the mother tongue.

For over fifty years it has been known that even very young children can maintain attention when watching a several minutes long film, and understand the meaning of longer film sequences if the story is told linearly, without temporal leaps, ellipses or several parallel plotlines. In addition, children are not even confused by quickly changing shot sizes and camera angles, if such feature the same environment. For example, a three-and-a-half-year-old child has no problem understanding the narrative and point of Vlado Král's dynamic *Invention A-mol for Two Voices* (Dvojhlasná invencia a-mol), where a wolf is chasing Little Red Riding Hood (both the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood must be labelled as such, otherwise the child wouldn't understand the film) in a nearly abstract geometric space, although images are shown in an exceptionally fast sequence. On the other hand, the child may not understand causal relations if he or she doesn't see the cause and effect in one shot, or if the effect is only suggested.

Vanda Raýmanová seems to have been well aware of these limitations while making her film *Who's There?* (Kto je tam?). Its narrative line is miraculously straightforward and continuous, yet the film as such, especially as regards work with space (and mental space), is relatively sophisticated.

Who's There? is set in a single place. At the beginning, it is very basic: we find ourselves literally on "a green field". Gradually, the field, like a construction kit, becomes increasingly complex through the accumulation of building blocks, narrative motifs and plots. The place is inhabited by three real paper-made characters (two boys and a dog) and an imaginary one (a wolf). The boys have character traits typical of brothers: the older boy is self-conceited, moralizing, braggart and cowardly; the younger one is emphatic, hardy, adaptable and flexible. The perfect caricature of a brotherly pair. The boys don't develop in the course of the film, which guarantees story stability. The only thing that develops is the environment in which they move around. It is through the place that Vanda Raýmanová creates and moulds the mental world of fantasy, play and imagination. Hatching from an egg is the act of entering the world of play. It is where the wolf lives – the wolf whose existence, strength and scariness are directly proportional to the power of the children's imagination. It is also where one can build a house out of nothing. This is the exact meaning of the Greek word *poiesis*: 'creation' or 'poetry'.

The principle on which Raýmanová's fantasy world is built thus goes back to children's play, a construction kit or Lego. Just like them, it works on an "additive" principle. The world grows and takes in new elements and layers, but it is happening mainly on a visual and only partly on a semantic level. The boys build a house, fortify it, then they have a quarrel, divide the house and reign each in their own way, they develop their property, divide it again and add rectangular elements, squares, rectangles, horizontal and vertical lines. The space is eventually reminiscent of a children's construction kit or an arcade video game, in which the two characters are exposed to each other's attacks and threatened by the imaginary wolf – that means, by each other only

or possibly by a harmless dachshund. They run and jump around and fall over until the arcades of their fantasy collapse, and they hit... the bed. The space actually reflects the film's dramatic arc: the need to hide from the imaginary wolf leads to the construction of a fantastic fortress, which almost immediately collapses due to the arrival of the "real" dog.

Building and subsequent demolition are characteristic of play. The construction of the fantasy world involves something feverish, something that denies the principle of reality. The demolition then, invites the "reality" back. Sometimes it is enough to step out of the play for a moment: for example, "base" in a tag game is equivalent to the "pause" button – it is the possibility to step out of the game and take a rest for a minute. The "base", shelter or refuge, turns into a huge, sprawling labyrinth of corridors and levels of children's imagination in Raýmanová's *Who's There?* The driving force of its construction is the relationship between the two boys, and their fear of the wolf. The way out of the intolerable situation (and the over-complex structure) is "a return to the earth", a fall, and the ensuing awakening.

However, the film *Who's There?* does not rely only on play with space. Its appeal resides, first and foremost, in details – in gestures, in how the older boy cradles the younger one's head in his hands when he is yelling to scare off the imaginary wolf, in dialogue lines which reflect the author's perfect familiarity with children's sapient conversations, in the seeming haphazardness that has the dog (maybe because of its bigger size) play an important role in the story, while the dragonfly (fly, six spotted burnet moth, or whatever it is) remains only a decoration embellishing the backdrop of the green field.

The decision to make a children's film necessarily involves giving up intertextual references, cleaning up the form, simplifying the screenplay, and leaving out subversive jokes. It requires the authors to become disciplined to the benefit of the film's target group. I think that the film *Who's There?* is understandable from the first to last minute for any three-year-old viewer. Sound, music, story – everything works to the advantage of children's perception.

I wonder to what extent this decision is unrewarding – if the target group can ever expand to include adults as well. Of course, I don't count the parents of child viewers who are grateful for any film that doesn't involve violence or black humour, and whose existential dimension doesn't suppress the pure joy of watching.

A children's film usually emerges from a (social) vacuum, and usually returns to whence it came. The boys in Raýmanová's film don't have parents, hatch from eggs, and end up alone with the dog in some kind of house. This leads me to wonder about the family background of characters in children's fairytales, films and bedtime TV stories: Pocoyo lives only with his pet friends, Pippi Longstocking with a horse and monkey, Raýmanová's boys start a new life with a dachshund... It may look like negligence of child care from the point of view of adults, but it has a lot of significance for children. It teaches them to trust the outside world, to trust themselves, or possibly perceive other children as equal partners and turn initial distrust into a friendship.

It was no coincidence that I mentioned a three-year-old child as the target viewer of Raýmanová's film. Based on my estimate, the age of three is not only a prerequisite for understanding her film. It is also the age suitable for adapting to group life and the environment in which children have to handle life or relational situations without the help of parents; not being able to rely on those who otherwise give them a feeling of security and strength.

From this perspective, Raýmanová's film also has an educational role: it teaches children to trust the world, no matter how wild it looks at first sight.

It also has another indisputable advantage for parents: children are not likely to tire of it, even after multiple viewings. And that is quite an achievement!

MÁRIA FERENČUHOVÁ

translated by LO

WHO IS THERE?

Script, direction, art design Vanda Raýmanová

Animators Gabriela Klaučová, Vanda Raýmanová, Michal Struss

Image postproduction Michal Struss

Music Michal Novinski

Editing Marek Šulík

Sound Tobiáš Potočný, Michal Pekárek, Martin Merc

Producer Vanda Raýmanová

Length 9,5 min.



Stones

Interview with director **Katarína Kerekes**
and music composer **Marek Piaček**

JK: The director calls the film an animated musical, whereas the music composer uses the term animated opera. According to you, what are the distinctive features between the two genres and which of these does the film contain?

MP: The serious theme and story are more characteristic of the opera genre. Personally, I preferred the name opera because the classical operas by Verdi convey similar things. Katarína wanted to make the theme less serious by calling it a musical. Some choreographies, for example those with quarry workers, are definitely closer to a musical. Of course, if Katarína uses the term musical and I say opera, both of them are slightly exaggerated. The film is neither. When I compose a serious, symphonic music, it is possible to denote it as a symphony, even though it does not meet the criteria of one. This case is similar. Music ideas and themes are not light as in a musical. The singing is not in the musical nor operatic style. Dada Mazalová sings in a straight tone, she doesn't use a vibrato or bel canto, typical of opera. Nevertheless, it is not "sporty" musical singing either. The movie is halfway between the genres, we would both agree on the label music film with the features of a musical and opera.

KK: Nowadays, the musical genre has lost its original value, but I denoted it that way because the choreographies were closer to a musical. I avoided the word opera to make it accessible to the audience.

JK: The story has a balladic character. Why did you choose this style?

KK: I like ballads. They speak to me. I like when the theme carries some serious features. I've never been inclined towards gag animation or comic storytelling.

JK: What reaction did you want to cause by using balladic techniques? Did you succeed?

KK: I didn't expect such a strong reaction from the audience. The response of some women – mostly women – surprised me a lot. That puppet could bring them to tears. I don't know whether it is only a matter of gender. Marek, how do men react to the film?

MP: I have received some reactions from the male audience, but mostly to the structure of the film, not so much to the story or emotions. In fact, my approach was similar. Naturally, the film provoked certain emotions, but more interesting for me was the structure of the story, how it is divided, how it ends, where it takes place. I've always been fascinated by regional motives. It is often vaguely said that Slovak classical music is balladic. When I was a student, we didn't like that opinion, although it is true that the ballad has been a fundamental literary and artistic genre. So for me, the balladic character of the film was interesting. Since I always rejected something like that before, now I had the chance to face a serious situation, a tragedy.

JK: *Stones* deals with the universal topic of man and woman relationships, similarly to your previous films *Milenci bez šiat* (Lovers without clothes) and *Pôvod sveta* (The origin of the world). The common feature of the displayed relationships is the lack of harmony, they are dysfunctional. Why do you emphasize the negative side of relationships?

KK: I cannot imagine a story about a happy relationship without any conflict. You need to create some conflict. I am not presenting my personal experience; I am not planning to kill my husband. It is more about the perception of a family, about the desire to have a baby, about the problems in communication. I try to express ideas that I know, that are familiar to me, things that happen every day.

JK: So the skeptical, ambiguous and – in the case of *Stones* – even tragic endings of your films, result from the need to show that these relationships should work differently?

KK: Rather from the necessity to identify the things. I have probably reached the age when it is not possible to be a true idealist. We have to find the little big happiness in the way things work. Everybody has experienced some tragedies, and

I want to make their footprints in the movie. There is a story about stones behind every relationship between a man and a woman. It was important for me that the stones be present in the movie, as a metaphor of our everyday troubles. Stones remain. All the story leads to that: the woman does not actually die, she flies away. As if at that moment I wanted to say: never mind, we are only ants and the universe is vast. There are things that remain unchanged. Paradoxically, our emotions can stay unchanged too.

JK: As you mentioned earlier, the music composing for this film was a new experience for you. How did you cooperate? Did you start to compose based on some early defined motifs, for example rhythmic, or did you react to the animated material?

MP: I think we always try to make the music first, and then start to animate according to the music. It didn't work again this time, but it was the first time that we had at least some rhythmic structure. We defined the ratio between the number of film frames and the rhythmic structure, which helped us a little. The music didn't come first. Animations were made based on an abstract scheme. Fortunately, the technology these days allows you to compose the music, and simultaneously watch the film in real time. The software permits to have the film divided into frames, and to see that when the leg touches the ground there is place for a sixteenth note. So the first thing was the image, real animations, to which I composed the music and we tried to adjust it very precisely. The final melodies of singing parts were made relatively late because they were connected to the text, which was also created simultaneously. But there were more people involved, Ivan Lacko as the expert in English, Kata as the director, me as the composer, and Dada as the singer. We were matching the sound with the mouth movement, Ivan was checking the English, Dada and me, we controlled the melodiousness, and Katarína the sense of the utterance.

JK: That sounds complicated.

MP: Not really. We took our turns at the computer every time somebody else came. I tried to create the melody that would be easy for Dada to sing. I never compose the melody first, not even music that is not for movies. For me the most important is the music structure, harmony, to make the development of the music surprising for the listener. The melody will create itself, it is an imaginary thing. Dada can sing on a single tone, if the music around her is moving, it sounds like a beautiful melody.

JK: Did the way of composing this film influence your future work – or your work in other genres?

MP: This music is a turning point of my composing development. There was something before, and some other things will follow. This is one of the milestones in my music thinking because this work allowed me to do what I wanted. Never before had there been a reason to do it this way. For example the merging of a beautiful, sweet music with breakcore. We had a reason for that, it was justified. And I like the resulting structures, I will definitely continue to work with them.

KK: The use of breakcore actually resulted from the idea that there would be a choir of machines.

MP: The rhythm could be generated from the sounds of stones, machines, iron, grinding, etc. That was the original idea, but in the end we decided not to mix those two things, music is music and sounds are sounds. It would be too complicated if the music was based on the specific sounds.

JK: Let's talk about libretto. You have mentioned that it was also created simultaneously.

KK: Yes, I wasn't sure who could write the libretto for our story until I discovered the poetry of Mila Haugová. It enchanted me; it was fragile, and connected to the story. Seriously, some lines "were falling" from the mouth of that woman. In the meantime we were working on the translations, since those poems had not been translated yet. Mila Haugová did not protest against

this kind of use. In this way we created the text word for word. It is poetry, so it has an irregular word order, in English it may sound differently; therefore we kept in mind to use simple words to make them comprehensible.

MP: Definitely, it is not a standard libretto, actually it's experimental. As a composer I have a lifelong aversion to composing music to lyrics, the less text, the more independent I feel. The more abstract the text, the better. This film was a good compromise, there was relatively little text, it was simple, and related to the music.

JK: The movie is out, it has received its first reviews and awards, it will be presented at film festivals and many projections. Is there anything, any details that you are not satisfied with? Would you do anything differently?

MP: Very often, we have an inferiority complex because we work using methods, material, technologies that are at a lower level than a few hundred kilometers westwards. But among the music composers, we think it creates a unique style. Although we work with worse technology, the result has a specific magic, without any irony, typical for this region. Something that makes us different from the western music or sound.

KK: I worked on the story by myself. Almost in the final stage of shooting, Katka Moláková joined us as a script editor. I have learned not to be afraid to cooperate with someone on the script level. To have a script editor is really important and substantial. During the shooting we discussed the question of a prologue. Where is this woman coming from, who is she? It wasn't important for me at all, the story was a metaphor, but when we started to logically think it over, we realized it might be a problem for the audience. But at that point, we could use only the finished material. This is the kind of experience that teaches you something. So the good advice for every animator is, don't hesitate to work with script editors and other screenwriters (*she laughs*).

JK: In your work as a producer, have you learned anything from this experience?

KK: Absolutely, it was my first project as a producer, starting from the very beginning, from the first Excel charts. I still don't feel like a true producer. On the other hand, it has taught me to be efficient, you know what you can afford, and you can decide about it without waiting. Of course, mistakes occurred. Now I feel that the film deserves someone who would be fully devoted, who would promote it, because now I want to advance in my creative work.

JK: Your new project, a series for children, is a radical shift from your previous work aimed at the adult audience.

KK: This movie was emotionally very demanding. I suddenly feel that I want to do something light, that will bring joy. To create something for children is not automatic. It is not so easy. I need to have experience with children, to be used to creating values for them. This series is based on a story that I originally narrated to my kids.

JURAJ KOVALČÍK
translated by TD

STONES

Script, direction, art design Katarína Kerekesová

Animators Katarína Kerekesová, Slávka Bilíková, Leevi Lehtinen, Ivana Šebestová, Lenka Pajerová and others

Cinematography Peter Hudák

Music Marek Piaček

Editing Marek Kráľovský

Sound Peter Mojžiš, Hannes Plattmeier

Producer Katarína Kerekesová

Length 26 min.

Ülo Pikkov - Animasophy

**Animated Film:
An Independent Category
and a Forerunner of the Cinema**

As we all know, the concept of cinema came into being thanks to the discovery of the 'persistence of vision' at the end of the first quarter of the 19th century. This expression refers to the minor deficiency in human physiology which enables an afterimage to persist on the retina a while after the visual perception has disappeared from the field of view. The success of film lies in the illusion of motion created by rapidly displayed sequences of still images.

As Mary Ann Doan reminds us in her book *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (2002), early cinema was enchanted by lost time, the black hole, the vacuum between two film frames (she did not fail to hint at this phenomenon for instance on the thematic level of some films)¹. However, the transition to narrative cinema in the first decade of the 20th century signified the removal of any traces of imperfection, focus on the story, and efforts to hide discontinuities. In contrast to live action, animated film, even after the transition to narrative cinema, retained many features of the early cinema of attractions, including the willingness to admit its fragmentation. It is this peculiar ambivalence that makes animated film so unique, and endows it with the gift of independence, while enabling it to mirror, in a very special way, the major areas of cinema.

Animasophy: Theoretical Writings on Animated Film was written by Ülo Pikkov, the Estonian film-maker and pedagogue at the Estonian Academy of Arts. His work is one of those that does not present animated film as a marginalized film genre, but rather as an area which differs from live action cinema in certain aspects of technical detail, while retaining the ability of reappearing as the catalyst of its development, together with the ability to metaphorically represent the substance of film as such. *Animasophy* is written in a way which predestines it to become university study material, but it also tries to transcend this scope. On the one hand, the author systematizes the theory and nature of animated film, but on the other hand he is trying to create a philosophical concept of animation. Animation is in fact an inter media phenomenon, which was present at the inception of cinema, and has been used beyond the realm of filmmaking as well. In this respect, it is crucial to differentiate between animation and animated film. Animated film is only one form of animation. On the other hand, animation widely surpasses cinema, religion or art, and affects such secular areas of life as telecommunications, marketing and computer graphics, although it is probably rooted in religion or magic rituals. Moreover, animation influences other forms of cinema too, not only the animated one. The basic difference between live action film (including live action documentary) and animated film should be that live action film records real motion, whereas animated film creates motion, characters, and everything that surrounds them. It forms an entirely new film 'world'. However, technologies exist today that force us to review the traditional classification into types and genres. Borders are blurring not only between the traditional techniques of animated film making, but also between animated and live action film, even documentary film. Live action cinema, mainly the major Hollywood productions, increasingly rely on the benefits of computer animation. Animated film, by contrast, focuses on extreme techniques, such as pixilation or time lapse (whereby the frequency at which film frames are captured is much lower than the frequency used to view the sequence). Animation is therefore a broader term than animated film, both from the synchronic and diachronic points of view. Its enormous popularity is connected with the period of transition to digital technologies; however, this period also signifies a certain kind of return to early cinema. Pikkov, for instance, refers to the animation historian

Giannalberto Bendazzi, who noted that 'animated photography' used to be the common term for film, and the term 'motion picture' came into use a little later (p.23). Pikkov adds that "as the field of film relentlessly expands, as the role of animated elements in other types of films constantly grows, and as animation literally takes over most modern electronic media, it seems appropriate to suggest that the term animation should once again be applied to all moving pictures." (p.23)²

Although the term 'animated film' is still normally used, it has been apparent for some time that the term 'film' itself has become a little obsolete, also due to the rapid advancements in digitalization. On one hand, the boom of 'cartoons' created mostly by computer animation urges a change of terminology, on the other hand, the border-blurring between animation, live-action and documentary prompts a search for the deeper roots of the phenomenon of 'moving inanimate objects'. The wordplay in the book title leads to a consideration of animation and animated film as a phenomenon beyond the limits of history or theory. Moreover, it suggests that animation by and of itself contains a certain '(philo)sophy'; it can function as a medium for a unique type of knowledge and wisdom. The author of the book believes that the essential characteristic of animation is its ability to preserve animistic and totemic rituals. Another aspect which predestines animation's continued popularity is its fulfillment of the desire to reproduce motion. This desire, which was present in early cinema as well, leads the author of the peer-reviewed book to establish such bizarre ancestors of animated film as ancient cave paintings and the Paleolithic calendar with moon phases. According to Pikkov, the Paleolithic calendar represents the oldest form of animation (p.43-44). The desire to depict motion is also present (narratively) in a series of Egyptian pictograms, in six-legged or eight-legged animal paintings in Altamira (suggesting an effort to convey movement), and in an Iranian earthen bowl decorated with images of a jumping goat. When the bowl was spun it may have created the illusion of movement (p.43). Pikkov's quest to find the roots of contemporary animated art in ancient civilizations' way of thinking may appear bizarre at times (for instance when he is looking for parallels between contemporary and ancient 'mass culture', p.45), however I consider the juxtaposition of the two mentioned tendencies inspiring, especially concerning the change of traditional classification into animated, live-action, documentary and experimental film. Animated film will always reflect motion – created by means of frames, still images – more faithfully than live action or documentary film. With the exception of film-essay, live action film and documentary will always try to hide the fact. Moreover, animated film will never cease to reflect the totemic or post-totemic desires of the archaic as well as the contemporary human.

Animated film most frequently applies the technique of shooting one frame at a time. As becomes clear from some of Pikkov's examples, including his own work *Gone with the Wind* (Tuulest viidud 2009) – a stop-motion animated documentary about the demolition of a house in Tallin over the course of one year (2008-2009) – many animated films have a documentary basis, or eventually are created by means of digitalized live action sequences. The process of mutual influence is visible not only in practice but also in theory. Under the influence of what is known as the New History movement, we have accepted the idea that documentary is not more objective than any other kind of fiction. Pikkov develops this idea and almost over-interprets it by claiming that at least on the theoretical level, the animated film is more 'documentary' than a conventional documentary. In this respect, early cinema is the key to today's chaos in terminology and classification. Besides common examples of fiction animation, early cinema has given us for instance the animated documentary *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (d. Winsor McCay, 1918) – a detailed recreation of a ship's tragedy. Unfortunately, there are no preserved authentic photographic or cinematographic recordings. In fact, none of what puzzles us today

is new, and this idea often recurs in Pikkov's book. The use of animation in live action cinema, especially in big-budget Hollywood films, is so common nowadays that one doesn't know sometimes which parts of the film are acted and which animated.

Besides the introductory chapters dealing with the roots and definition of animated film, a major part of the peer-reviewed book focuses on two important topics: the systemic and the semiotic stage in film theory. The third chapter deals with animated film as communication. Eight chapters cover the topics of time, space, sound, realism, and the structure of animated film. Two chapters are dedicated to animated film characters. It is the credibility and liveliness of the characters and their realism which conditions whether the animated film is going to work or not. The author frequently highlights the similarities and differences in production, distribution and construction, which make animated film totally independent in contrast to other film types. In terms of film theory, Pikkov draws mainly on the ideas of the Tartu School of Semiotics, as well as Lotman's writings on film, not only animated. However, this line of thought in the book seems restrictive, inasmuch that it stems from the necessity to find structures, information and codes in a cinematographic work. On the other hand, the semiotic tradition still proves useful for the interpretation of animated film. Indeed, the animation technique, as Pikkov repeatedly reminds us, is related to extreme control and information saturation. Moreover, it is also connected with the fact that, in animated film, the cameraman's or actor's input into the process of the creation of meaning and style is not defining. It is thus true for animated film more than any other film type that everything in it has its meaning. That is the reason why Pikkov can refer to both Béla Balázs and Lotman (e.g. p.126-130). Pikkov also refers to the most recent works on animated film theory by Paul Wells, Stephen Rowley, Maureen Furniss, Ed Hooks, Giannalberto Bendazzi and Lev Manovich, although Lotman is the most cited film theorist in the book. In general it applies that Pikkov's theoretical educational background is heterogeneous rather than narrowly specialized in the most recent film theory trends. The author supports many of his ideas with the writings of great philosophers. Among the first animasophers Pikkov believes are Plato and Freud. We can consider the inversion of Plato's Allegory of the Cave as the most accurate definition of animated film, where the world is represented by shadows on walls.³ According to Freud, everything within the realm of human expression is meaningful, and even seemingly meaningless dream images can be deciphered and hidden meanings can be found therein. Pikkov is also influenced by Heidegger, Bachelard and even Schopenhauer – they help him to establish the essential rule of animated film. According to the rule, it is necessary to place characters in a world which is natural for them, a world they can potentially understand. The author relies more on his aesthetic sensibility than on research, and claims that in animated film the environment should not be created in a different visual code, such that doesn't match the characters, as was the case of *The Lion King* (d. Roger Allers, Rob Minkoff, 1994) – see page 130-133.

Although Pikkov draws on seemingly very traditional theories, he analyzes most of the proposed themes innovatively, with many digressions. The side effect of such digressions is for instance a remarkable outline of animated film history. Many digressions are repeated in successive chapters and contexts, but he always approaches the problem from a new angle. Pikkov's book leads us to realize that the classical theory of animated film forcibly shuts its eyes to many exceptions, especially back in early cinema and after the transition to digital technologies. Furthermore, it reminds us of several important milestones in the seemingly homogeneous mass of traditional animated film. In the chapter on sound, we will be reminded of the generation conflict in the Disney Studios, the crisis of European animated film after World War II, and we will find out about the rather recent departure from the idea that animated film (with the exception of authored festival products) is a children's medium.

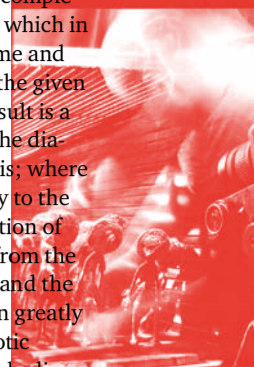
From the fourth to the final eleventh chapter the amalgam of the theoretical, historical and philosophical thoughts is always complemented with a case study of one film, which in some way surpasses the common frame and introduces innovative approaches to the given theoretical or aesthetic issues. The result is a structure that loosely connects with the dialectic triplet thesis-antithesis-synthesis; where the synthetic function pertains mainly to the mentioned case studies, and the function of antithesis is performed by examples from the most recent history of intermediality and the overlapping of genres. These are often greatly underestimated by the classical semiotic theories. For example, in the chapter dealing with animated film structure, it is stated that animated film is in many ways inspired by the Aristotelian three-act structure of the dramatic plot. Nevertheless, at the end of the chapter, it becomes clear that the closed structure is superseded by the introduction of innovative structures such as the haptic interactive film or machinima.

The book by the Estonian animator and pedagogue Ülo Pikkov is not intended only for students, but also for film experts and theorists. To a great extent it fulfills the current need for theoretical publications about animated film, with the unexpected extra being the author's view of animated film as a matter of *animasophy*. The term *animasophy*, as the author confesses, is a neologism that was coined by his students of animation at his home university, the Estonian Academy of Arts. This term testifies the need to overcome the barrier between theory and practice. Animated film is to a much greater extent, or at least much more often than live action film or documentary, a result of pushing the limits of and solving theoretical, aesthetical and philosophical problems. It always involves the creation of an entirely new world, almost always reflects its own medium, and hardly ever works with chance. In contrast to animated film, chance determines the development of photograph-like realism in live action films and documentaries. As we have witnessed in the last 25 years, this development gives rise to innovations in both artistic techniques and technology, including computer graphics. Last but not least, Pikkov's book can be seen as a confirmation of the proposition that animated film embodies something from the substance of film and cinema, even though it differs widely from other fields of cinematography in its production, distribution and construction.

Pikkov, Ülo (2010). *Animasophy. Theoretical Writings on Animated Film*. Tallinn : Estonian Academy of Arts.

JANA DUDKOVÁ
translated by KK

- 1 A good example is the film produced by Edison Studios *What Happened in the Tunnel* (1903), in which a young man tries to kiss a young lady as the train they're traveling on enters a tunnel. However, instead of the young lady he ends up kissing her elderly corpulent African American maid. Mary Ann Doan believes that this is a type of film that recognizes (and highlights) the empty time between film frames. She also stresses that it is an example of the potentially anarchistic predecessor of narrative cinematography, whose primitive stories contained a thematized fear of the different, nonetheless this fear had not yet been overcome by the well-known norms of the later narrative film – where normalcy is defined, besides other things, by a heterosexual relationship which leads to (racially homogeneous) marriage.
- 2 A similar strand of thought appears with other contemporary animation theorists as well, such as Lev Manovich. See for instance: Palúch, Martin (2010). *Hľadanie definície animácie* (Searching for the definition of animation). *Homo Felix*, 1, 16-19.
- 3 In the original version of the Allegory of the Cave, the people in the cave believe that the shadows on the walls are real. Yet the reality – in Plato's terminology the 'world of ideas' – is outside, the shadows are just an illusion. In the inverted version, people see and hear the world of ideas on the screen because "every element of the film is an idea of something ('bearer of meaning' according to Balázs, or 'sign' according to Lotman)" (p.130).



Homo Felix



book cover



Eva&Eva, foto: Tobiáš Potočný

13

Kinečko

KINEČKO means 'small cinema'

The idea to found a film magazine to reflect cinema in the ever-changing context of contemporary culture arose approximately three years ago. To introduce their magazine, **Eva Križková** (chief editor) and **Eva Pa** (producer) opted for their favourite genre – the interview.

EP: You had a dream that the Slovak audiovisual environment was in desperate need for a magazine like this. But there was also a man behind this idea, wasn't there?

EK: Now I feel a bit confused and embarrassed, as I'm not sure which one you mean... J. L. Godard, whose interviews I was reading while down with the flu and who inspired my feverish hallucinations about what was to become KINEČKO? Or Tobi? Because it was my boyfriend Tobi, a sound engineer, who inspired me to do something with my life. Not that he would ever say it. It was enough for me to watch him work, and I realised that life can only be meaningful when you do something you love. So my answer is that on the one hand was the fact that in the 1960s in France, a magazine appeared that was so inspirational and powerful that it became the impulse for the birth of the New Wave. And Godard was the man behind it. On the other hand, there was a man of flesh and blood who inspired me to invest all my energy into making this chimeric become real. What was it that convinced you to become involved?

EP: You did! You came to me when I had decided to change my life and take up film studies. At that precise moment I found the combination of my studies with work in a specialised film magazine to be the most beautiful way to get to know film really well. Now I know that KINEČKO has taught me the majority of what I know about film (excluding your own influence). Apart from its content, which mostly deals with film, we also did our best in terms of form. We wanted it to have a distinctive design. It has a newspaper format, every issue is printed in a different colour, and it is in an envelope?

EK: The envelope was the idea of our graphic designer Pavka (Pavčina Morháčová). In fact, we barely knew her either. I remember our first meeting was in a pub, with a certain mutual insecurity. We had nothing tangible to offer her yet, nothing to win her over with, and I felt that this young talented girl didn't really trust something with such an "infantile" name as KINEČKO. I suppose I don't have to remind you how painful it was to decide on the name.

EP: As far as I can remember, at first we dismissed KINEČKO, which I felt very sorry about. But now I know our final decision was right. Even though people around us sometimes see us as the little girls from the small cinema – KINEČKO.

EK: Yes, exactly. We had to fight really hard against the general opinion that KINEČKO was the name for a children's magazine. And now, two and a half years later, everyone tells us that they can't imagine another name for our project. We simply admitted right from the start that we were small. We wanted to let people know bit by bit what we were capable of, instead of inventing a grandiose and international name and then, after a few months, drown in a flood of insignificant projects. Our editorial board is very small (you, me, Lukáš Sigmund, Katarína Gatialová, Michal Michalovič), and we work in the context of small Slovak cinematography. Why should we dissimulate?

But let's return to the envelope. In retrospect, we named it a "cultural surprise egg". As soon as Pavka came up with the idea, it was clear that she truly belonged in the team – because it totally suited our aim. The envelope contains the magazine as well as many other surprises such as DVDs, cinema programmes, invitations to festivals, film posters, stickers, etc. Because KINEČKO is not only a film magazine, but also a platform for the development of new film. And young film requires dialogue and meetings between filmmakers and theoreticians, between avant-garde and tradition, between the young and old. So much for the story of how the mothers (the two Evas) with the help of a midwife (graphic designer Pavka) conceived the ideal form for the content. Since then, they have been bringing to life a new child every two months. The printing office just gives the final push. Although the circumstances of the delivery are often fraught with suspense.

EP: And what do Eva and Eva busy themselves with when not preparing for print?

EK: You're asking me? I don't know what you do, but if I'm not printing or preparing for print, then I'm at least thinking about it. But that wasn't your question, was it?

EP: I was hinting at the accompanying events that we organise to encourage systematic debate about a wide-range of contemporary issues in cinematography. For instance, I'm very fond of the expositions of visual artists² we have organised in several Slovak towns with the help of our editor and curator Katarína Gatialová. She has her own section in KINEČKO called Beyond Cinema, dedicated to video art and other film/fine art crossovers. But my favourite activity is the project Pristrihni si!/Cut it yourself!, an experimental film workshop that gives participants the opportunity to learn some basic techniques of working with found footage. It is our symbolical "adieu" to analogue film stock. Nevertheless, I would say that last year we found many new fans of experimental film and film footage, because our workshops resulted in the production of seven films.³ Which of these activities is your favourite?

EK: I would say that in this regard, I am quite traditional. My preferred activity is interviewing, because an interview is not only an activity for gathering material for an article. It is the confrontation of two worlds. Sometimes it resembles a game of chess, sometimes a lesson of scuba diving in the depths of cinema. It depends on how the interviewer is prepared, and to what extent the interviewee is willing to expose his world. There are interviews which are completely useless, but others apart from providing new information to the public, can also result in very special friendships. Ok, that's probably it. Do you have anything else to say in this interview?

EP: Thanks for giving me the opportunity to thank all our supporters: the Slovak Audiovisual Fund, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and all the readers, advertisers, individuals and institutions that help our magazine both financially and materially. KINEČKO couldn't manage without them.

EVA AND EVA
translated by BĎ

- 1 www.pavka.sk
- 2 In the past two years we organised mainly exhibitions of Czech visual artists, namely Jan Žalio, Petr Kocourek and Richard Loskot
- 3 www.vimeo.com/kinecko

Homo Economicus endangered



still from *Thanks, Fine*, source: Filmtopia

Both films are characterized by preference for the genre of social drama and the authorial participation of Marek Leščák, the most distinct figure of contemporary Slovak screenwriting. Despite the different degree of Leščák's involvement in Martin Šulík's *Gypsy* (Cigán), Iveta Grófová's *Made in Ash* (Až do mesta Aš), Matyáš Prikler's *Fine, Thanks* (Ďakujem, dobre) and Juraj Lehotský's *Miracle* (Zázrak) and different authorial poetics of their directors, these films about the dark sides of contemporary life display some common features and themes: casting of non-actors or a combination of non-actors and professional actors, a fusion of staged and documentary shots, real-life inspiration, coming-of-age heroes, dysfunctional families, the Romani, prostitution, existential problems... While *Gypsy*, *Made in Ash* and *Miracle* are social dramas about underdogs living on the edge, *Fine, Thanks* captures the appalling ordinariness of special offer salami and relationships in post-socialist housing estates.

Prikler has chosen a similar debut strategy as Róbert Šveda did in *Demons* a couple of years ago and transformed his successful graduation film into a feature film. Since his student medium-footage film was intended as part of a bigger whole, he has chosen a different path and taken it more energetically. Instead of using it as one of the short stories in his debut feature film, he integrated his story of a pensioner and his children into a more complex narration. This was not simple as three years had passed between his filming of his graduation film and his debut. The child actors had changed, and so had part of the film crew. Nonetheless, Prikler succeeded in maintaining the stylistic unity of the whole. The screenwriter and he were, however, less successful with the proportionality of storylines – and this is what I consider the only weakness of the film worth mentioning. The narration consists of a prologue, three stories and an epilogue, and these individual parts are marked off by blundered family rituals that were supposed to manifest the significance of family as a solidary and spiritually kindred community. The funeral, the Christmas dinner and the wedding, however, reveal destruction of relationships and their reduction to meaningless, impersonal rites. Although the individual segments are of similar length, they are not balanced out in terms of dramaturgy. The prologue introduces individual characters in a mosaic of suggestions and hints. The first part starts building up their mutual relationships, but the next two stories unexpectedly abandon them and it is only in the epilogue that we return to them again. The lack of balance is emphasized even more by documentary or documentary-like episodes featuring a party at an old people's home and a wedding reception. They reinforce the impression of authenticity, yet they have a digressive effect: the character portraits of the old people's home inmates or the never-ending conversations of the wedding guests are enumerative and deprive the narration of vigour. As a result, there is no remaining space for putting the finishing touches to the more important story motifs. What is impressive about Prikler's directorial nature is that he is good at having scenes fade away, thus reinforcing the embarrassment of the situations. The fragmented point, however,

does not become the narration as such. It's a shame because otherwise *Fine, Thanks* has a potential to diagnose ills afflicting the Slovak society without moralizing, something yet unseen in the Slovak cinematography.

Prikler's film speaks of two kinship families whose lives constitute the film's two storylines. An entrepreneur in meat industry lives a double life. He has an adult daughter and lives in a burnt-out marriage. He hires his brother, an unsuccessful psychologist, as an HR manager for his company and personal therapist for his depressed and often drunken wife and seeks occasional escape in his newly established but secret family. A pensioner sells parking cards and argues with his ill wife over each cent in his spare time. After she dies, his son and daughter put him in an old people's home against his will because they are too busy to look after their ailing father. The son is dealing with the breakup of his marriage and awkwardly trying to get through to his own children. All of them meet up at a wedding which unites the two families.

Given the imbalance in proportionality, the combination of the two story and family lines may seem like a screenwriter's construct, yet it plays a key role. On one hand, it makes a socially stratified statement about family ties, which are disrupted under whatever financial circumstances, and on the other hand, it exposes the economic causality of interpersonal relations without oversimplification. The joyless view of the microeconomics of family relations thus becomes a picture of the macroeconomics of contemporary Slovak society or, to be more precise, Central Europe. is a blistering report on the homo economicus of the 21st century found in an extreme existential and existentialist situation. The story is set against the backdrop of an economic crisis: people are broke, there are layoffs and politicians make speeches on TV. Prikler connects the economic crisis with an existentialist crisis, with a decline of fundamental values and securities, devastated by alienation, conflicts, divorces and deaths of close relatives. Leščák and Prikler termed their creative method "looking around". It refers to an observing narrative strategy which focuses on several characters, observes their behaviour from the outside, seemingly uninvolved, and characterizes them through their environment (without psychologising, almost like in a nature documentary). It also refers to a realistic stylization which is rooted in current reality and which evokes the impression of authenticity by using suitable stylistic means. It doesn't, however, rely on a more or less random selection of social symptoms. Yes, the symptoms are present here as a realistic background, but what is much more important is capturing the atmosphere of the period and society's sense of life.

Fine, Thanks reports on the state of humanity through conversations taken from real life, which may also have involved people like us. Despite sounding trite, the conversations have a surprising power to unmask the absurdity of reality. I believe that they can be labelled, without exaggeration, the best dialogues in the post-1989 Slovak cinematography. They don't make a forced effort to introduce catchphrases, slogans or incorporate wheedling humour. Their language is lifelike thanks to its authenticity, harmonization of the language of professional actors with non-actors and a

natural mingle of Slovak and Hungarian. The humour that the dialogues are filled with is a side (although not undesirable) product of observation of reality, which is absurd in itself. That's why it is inappropriate and effective at the same time. It doesn't work only symptomatically¹ and situationally², but especially contextually.³ *Fine, Thanks* doesn't belittle serious situations using humour. Its absurd punch lines mirror the absurdity of the whole world.

The absurdity of the dialogues reveals the trend of economization of relationships and the role of power principle in them. Conversations between the relatives in the film, who hardly ever call each other by names, are often replete with arguments about who owns what, who pays what and who lives under whose roof. In reality, they only disguise weakness and helplessness. Despair is also at the heart of effort to express relationships in monetary terms. The retired husband and wife enumerate who has done what during their married life. Attila reproaches his father for always preferring his sister and giving her golden necklaces and jewellery. While waiting for Christmas presents, Attila gives the children a lecture in economic history convincing them that the only thing that has ever mattered is profit and not human rights.⁴ According to tradition, every wedding guest has to pay for a dance with the bride. Attila also wants to pay for at least one round of dance with his wife, who rejects him. Even the dog, although being the man's best friend, has to earn its treat by fulfilling its master's wish.

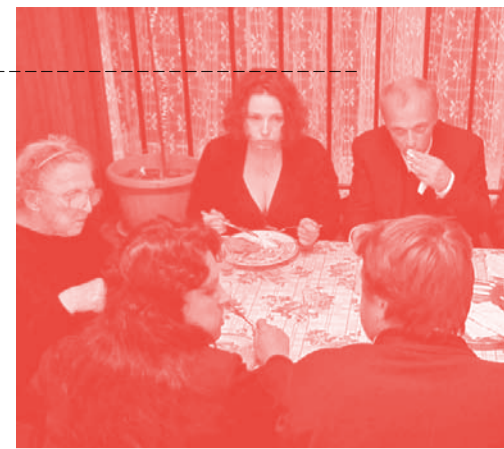
The traditional family unit has changed into an economic one and relationships which have been deprived of love by everyday routine have lost their inner ethos. Real communication has been replaced by surrogate TV reality (putting the deceased wife's portrait aside on the television altar can be thus understood both literally and metaphorically). Prikler makes use of television and radio not only as noise backdrops, tranquilizers for emotionally dumb characters and media freak shows, but also as means of making an ironic commentary on the action of his characters through juxtaposition with reality. A press conference on the economic crisis constitutes a counterpoint to the household accounting of the elderly married couple. The Slovak prime minister's verbal abuse of journalists parallels the quarrels of the husband and wife. When the husband and wife go to bed, they lay down in beds pressed against the walls of adjacent rooms like in a double bed divided by a wall. In the sound track we can hear a pop singer from a Pop Idol show praising the qualities of a contestant, who, in her view, has everything a woman wants to hear. A celebrity news show features a presenter explaining how charity saved her from a speeding ticket. The reverse side of charity is what the old people's home inmates experience, abandoned by their own blood. After the Christmas dinner, a priest on TV explains the spiritual significance of the Lord's birth to the lonely Attila.

This is how Prikler works with elements of spirituality – he puts them into inappropriate juxtapositions and desecralizes them in the process. The entrepreneur's arrival in the plant is captured as a reflection in the glass of a display case exhibiting a pieta. The sound of death knells in a crematorium is drowned out

by the noise of a drilling machine and curses of workers. Waiting for Christmas presents turns into a faux pas for the children. Parents are laying flowers at a cross for their dead son close to a road in busy morning traffic. Father who doesn't recognize his own son is listening to his flatmate saying the Lord's Prayer. The characters in *Fine, Thanks* are too busy and too exhausted to foster their relationships with others or themselves. Time is money and the money is a necessity for sustaining one's family. The circle of absurdity closes and becomes the central symbol of the film – a labyrinth, a prison of relationships full of concealed obstacles. It is these obstacles that are highlighted by the elaborate composition of scenes filmed in minimalist conditions, often without additional lighting. The protagonists are often shown out of focus, "divided" by a glass pane, a mirror or a decorative element (especially by walls), almost "deframed". This way, the narration suppresses empathic identification with the characters whose subjectivity remains out of reach for the audience. However, the visual disharmony deepens their sorrow over the wounded lives. The deconstructed picture is a visualization of relationships which have become dysfunctional as a result of some obstacles, and it is this dysfunction that the title of the film hints at. "Fine, thanks" is a meaningless response to a formal question and an ironic response to a question about the state of the world that we're living in.

KATARÍNA MIŠÍKOVÁ
translated by LO

- 1 For example, "You can't lie; you're such a twat."; "It's me who pays the phone bills, so I have a right to use the phone to call my son, don't I?"
- 2 For example, husband and wife while doing the household accounting: "I'll make a price list too. Dinner – five euros. Washing – seven euros."; brother and sister while eating fried cheese at a funeral reception: "He's been ill all his life and outlived her. A Communist."; father and son during a family crisis: "You must be a man now. You must see what the truth is. And the truth is that I love you. I don't have anyone else. Why don't we go to Koliba now, have some fried cheese and take Bobby to the pound?"
- 3 When Boris informs Attila about his being dismissed from the meat-processing plant because he doesn't participate in team-building activities and the company's social functions and Attila raises the objection that he has a family: "And is it your family who provides for you?" In the conclusion Boris and Attila meet over a shot of 'borovička' at the wedding. Feeling guilty, Boris brings up the dismissal: "Didn't know we're family. You couldn't have told me? I did my job only." Or when during an argument with his wife, Attila wants to throw a puppy out of the balcony and blackmails his children to make them decide if they want the puppy, and his son Abel speaks up to say that it's going to be Bobby, the imaginary dog whose role he takes on to bully his younger sister.
- 4 Another of the great dialogues: "It's about water and energy. Hitler also cared only for these. Actually, everybody does. (...) It's always the rich who win wars. (...) What's the lesson?"/ "That you have to be rich." / "And will you ever speak normally to your mom?" / "Ask mom." / "Hope we'll get presents."



still from *Thanks, Fine*, source: Filmtopia



Destruction is one of the most powerful forms of creation

“The ultimate goal of film history is an account of its own disappearance, or its transformation into another entity.”



On the picture, you can see film stock thrown away from the Chaplin Studio at La Brea Boulevard in Hollywood, as the new owners were preparing to launch TV production in February 1954. Scott Eyman Collection.

Paolo Cherchi Usai (PCHU) is an internationally acclaimed expert on film preservation. He is a co-founder of the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation and a Senior Curator of the Motion Picture Department of George Eastman House, a film archive and museum unparalleled to any institution in Central Europe, except from, perhaps, the Vienna Film Museum¹. It is highly probable that in a not-so-distant future, film institutes will be the only places where projections of analogue films will be realised. Let's hope that the Slovak Film Institute will be among them.

Recently, I had the chance to read one of many significant publications by Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age*. Having overcome my initial queasiness, I started reading and entered recesses of film history I had been completely unfamiliar with. The book made me realise that analogue film is turning into an entity with an aura of the last unicorn. I recommend it strongly to those who are not only interested in “the moving image”, but also in the alchemy that created them. Among other things, you will find out about the three stages of the evolution of film stocks: cellulose nitrate, cellulose acetate and polyester², and learn about the author's outspoken view about the practice of the preservation and digitalisation of film. Here is an interview with the man who claims that the history of cinema would not exist if particular stages of its evolution didn't end at some point.

EK: In your book *The Death of Cinema* you defined some basic terms. Could you mention a few and offer readers a brief insight into the field of film preservation?

PCHU: The image: an artificial representation of the world. The viewing experience: the moral act of attributing meaning to the images we make and see.

Visual memory: the human impulse to control pleasure and pain through mental representations of the past. Image destruction: the creative force deriving from the intentional or unintentional erosion of visual memory and its objects.

Film restoration: the illusion of controlling the biological life of the image through technological means. Such control is not possible, in cinema as well as in all other aspects of human life; its illusion is nevertheless inevitable.

EK: Many things have changed in the situation of film material since the last release of your book *The Death of Cinema*. Would you like to adjust or correct anything you wrote in 2001?

PCHU: I still endorse the principles expressed in the first part of the book. The second section is a product of its times, although many of the ideas contained in the last pages are, in my opinion, still valid. So much, of course, has changed since 2001; in this respect, the “Reader's Reply to the Publisher” has necessarily aged (an occurrence which I foresaw and actually encouraged through the epistolary format of that section), but recent events in our field don't seem to contradict the views I expressed there. When the book came out, my views were sometimes dismissed as apocalyptic; in retrospect, what happened in the last decade makes my forecast quite tame by comparison. When we are afraid of the truth, we often call it an exaggeration: see, for instance, what's happening with the debate on global warming.

EK: In the above mentioned book, you gave a definition of a “Model Image” as an ideal film entity that has never been possible to achieve. Therefore, you find the struggle for the restoration of film material to its original state pointless. Is there any possibility of creating a “Living Model Image” that would expect and consciously work with the predicted decay of film material and the changing conditions of film projection?

PCHU: The “Model Image” is an abstract entity; as such, it cannot be achieved. Conversely, it is quite possible to conceive moving images whose life and decay are monitored at a technological and cultural level. I'm deliberately using the term “monitoring” as opposed to “restoring”, which

has always left me perplexed and I now find totally inapplicable to the cinematic event and its digital imitation. I tried to be as clear as possible on this in the “Lindgren Manifesto”³ presented at the British Film Institute in 2010; together with my 2007 film *Passio*, this text is a follow-up to the core principles expressed in the book.

EK: You have worked for important film archives in countries with highly developed film culture. What advice regarding film material, film preservation and film as an artifact would you give to small, peripheral cinemateques deprived of the necessary financial support?

PCHU: Keep the artifact. Let it have its biological life. Continue showing cinema on film for as long as possible, at any cost, even if this involves the eventual disappearance of film as an object. More importantly, don't make apologies for it. Even more importantly, don't play the “nostalgia” card: that would be the equivalent of cultural suicide. Younger generations are rediscovering the value inherent in the materiality of the moving image; we need to talk to them in a curatorial language they can understand, support, and promote, as proven by Tacita Dean's 2011 “Film” installation at the Tate Modern in London. If the funding agencies of collecting institutions want “digitization”, let them have it (at their cost). Don't try to stop them. It's not worth it. Let the Trojan horse be brought (at their cost) inside the city. Let them discover (at their cost) that digital will also eventually see its own demise. Destruction is one of the most powerful forms of creation.

EK: In Slovakia, we are now talking about digitalisation as the only way to prevent the extinction of small cinemas. But if there are no other cinemas than digitalized ones, what will happen with the film material? Do you think that film archives and cinemas pay enough attention to saving analog material and cinema equipment? Do you find it necessary?

PCHU: In historical terms, film archives and museums have completely failed in their mission to explain why the cinematic event is so important for what it is – an event: not the “film object” per se, not the “film experience” per se. Now that film is on its way out, we are being given a second chance. We must take full advantage of it. We should push for digitization as hard as we can. No need to dwell on how accurate or unfaithful a digital reproduction is. It really doesn't matter. We should do our best to accelerate this kind of process and intensify its violence, rather than engage in futile attempt to slow it down or, worse, dilute its effects. The more and sooner we let it deflagrate, the better.

EK: What do you consider as an ideal model of transition from the material to the digital image, and what do you think will follow?

PCHU: My ideal model of transition from what you call the “material” to the “digital” image can't actually be called “ideal” any longer, because it is now coming to fruition. It is a transitional model based on the indiscriminate and irrational reshaping of an old viewing practice into a new one – with no regrets and no prisoners taken – in the name of a new visual regime. In order to assert its creative potential, this new ideology must do its best to obliterate its predecessor. This is a good thing, because it will ensure that the new regime will eventually generate a sense of loss, which is a prerequisite of history. This process won't take a long time to be completed. We are now talking about it only because we still remember there was a thing called “film”, and there are still people who saw it. When there is nobody left to communicate the memory of the cinematic event, the history of cinema will begin anew and another emerging visual regime will start the process that leads to the demise of digital.

EK: In the chapter called *Unseen*, you stated that the death of cinema is primarily a mental phenomenon that will occur whether or not the factors in other parts of the book actually take place, and will be sanctioned by the natural tendency to forget the experience of visual pleasure. What is supposed to replace the human desire to search for visual pleasure then?

PCHU: There may be a search for visual indifference (the “content” syndrome), or a search for visual irrelevance (the gradual elimination of any distinction between “natural” and the “artificial” image). I am no clairvoyant, but I tend to see the former as a prologue to the latter. We should be able to get there well before the end of the century, and I'm actually quite hopeful about it. Now, *that* will be a true revolution! By then, digital will be another footnote to the history of the image, probably a much shorter one than the phenomenon called “cinema.” But then, our planet will also be very different from what it is now, and I'm not at all sure it will be a great place to live in.

EVA KRIŽKOVÁ

(first published in KINEČKO goes to heaven)
translated by BĎ

History has seen several instances of the mass destruction of film material. P. Ch. Usai divides the destruction of cinema into 6 basic phases:

- 1 around 1909 – as a result of the standardization of film stock dimensions (35mm, 16 frames per foot)
- 2 around 1920 – rise of the feature film, loss of public interest in old short films
- 3 transition to sound film
- 4 1951 – Eastman Kodak ceased producing nitrocellulose as a film base, and replaced it with cellulose triacetate which was much less flammable.
- 5 1985 – 1995 – rise of video
- 6 conversion of films from photochemical to digital media.

1 www.filmmuseum.at

2 George Eastman began to use nitrocellulose, also called celluloid, for his Kodak system in the 1880s.

3 Cherchi Usai, Paolo. *The Lindgren Manifesto: Film Curator of the Future*. In: *Journal of Film Preservation*. ISSN 1609-2694, April 2011, no. 84, p. 4, available online at www.fiafnet.org/content/jfp%2084.pdf.

The manifesto is a transcription of the speech PCHU gave on 24.8. 2010 on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Ernst Lindgren, the founder of the film archive known today as the BFI National Film Archive.

In fourteen brief points it indicates what the future will be for curators after the transition from analog to digital.



P. Ch. Usai, photo: Renata Gorgan

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IN ERA OF THE HOBBIT

“This is not a problem of the state, nor of the cinemas, nor is it a problem of distribution companies. This is a problem of all those who like to go to the movies.”¹

Last year it seemed that in Slovakia cinema as a cultural institution would cease to exist, and only multiplexes would be left for us. Many single-screen movie theatres were in danger of closure.² In this hopeless situation, the project Quo Vadis Cinema organized by the Film Europe Media Company³ appeared. It comprised direct visits of individual cinemas and data collection in the form of questionnaires, in order to survey the status, potential and needs of cinema halls.

I. What once was will never be again

In 1989, immediately after the Velvet Revolution, there were 711 cinemas in Slovakia. We had single-screen and multi-screen cinemas, open-air cinemas and cinemas where 16 mm films were projected. Yes, it was the result of the excessive socialist cinefication that almost every village could pride itself with a movie theatre. Between 1990 and 1992, small cinemas were privatized by individuals and recently founded private enterprises. This resulted in a radical decrease in the number of cinemas, so that by 1995 only 326 were left. The downfall of movie theatres was mainly caused by the reluctance of the new owners and operators to invest in the property that they had gained in the ill-conceived privatization. And thus the number kept decreasing to the 135 single-screen cinemas surveyed by the

Quo Vadis Cinema Project. Of the 154 Slovak movie theatres, 88% are single-screen halls, mostly administered by municipalities, and their existence is endangered by the industry's conversion to digital projection.

II. Movie theatres today

The state never cared much about cinemas. For decades, they were financed only by the municipalities that administered them. And small single-screen cinemas are still operated according to this model. Nobody invested in cinemas. Only the Audiovisual Fund founded in 2010 initiated a change of the system. Single-screen cinemas together with multiplexes started to contribute 3 cents from each sold ticket to the Fund, and in exchange they could use the Fund's subventions. In 2010, these subventions represented 2.5% of the AVF's grants, and in 2011 they reached 5%. But it is clear today that two years have not been enough, and too little has been done. To date, only 25 single-screen cinemas and two open-air cinemas have been digitalized.⁴ Eleven single-screen movie theatres are currently undergoing the process of digitalization, and 34 more have shown great interest, according to the Quo Vadis Cinema Project.⁵ Up to now, the AVF has approved 39 applications for digitalization grants, amounting to €1,231,000. An average subvention for a new format conversion is €34,000 per theatre, and covers 50% of the costs. The grants for digitalization increase every year. Recently, AVF's strategy to support the transition to digital has changed. It continues to support the digitalization of single-screen theatres by means of D-cinema projection technology, which is in accordance with DCI⁶ standards, but recently another option has arisen – cinema modernization by means of E-cinema HD technology⁷. The conversion to digital projection has even become one of the Government's priorities for 2013. The Minister of Culture has been reported to be planning to propose the Ministry of Finance a subvention for digitalization amounting to €700,000 per year in the next two years.⁸ Does

it mean progress? One statement is not enough. The preservation of brick-and-mortar theatres is crucial not only for art cinema, it is vital for Slovak cinema. Multiplexes don't show Slovak films. And they never will. Those exceptions that make it to multiplexes are usually screened only for a week or so. Besides the fact that they are scheduled for totally unpopular projection times, the distributor has to pay a Virtual Print Fee of €500 for the film to be screened at Cinema City (multiplexes in Bratislava) and €390 for Cinemax (multiplexes around Slovakia) – they call it a “digitalization contribution”. For years, Slovak film has been unprofitable for distributors. Most Slovaks still haven't taken a fancy to going to see local movie production. But it would be a shame if our national cinema became banished to DVD distribution, now that it has finally risen from ashes.

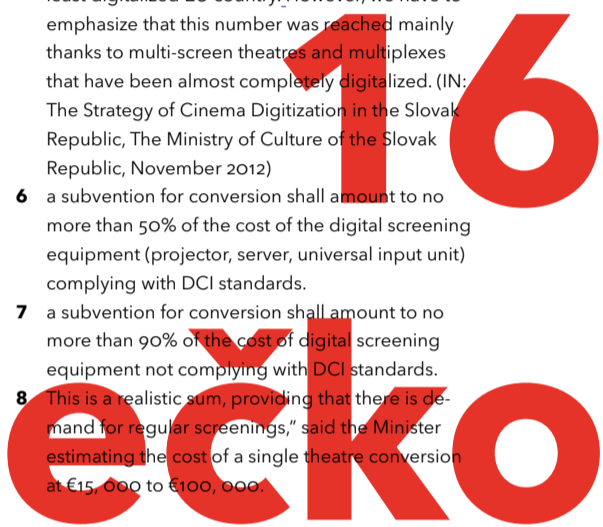
III. Movie theatre as a cultural institution

So let's go digital! But what will be the actual result of bringing digital projection to every possible cinema? The head of the Union of Film Distributors, Peter Kot, stated at the Quo Vadis Cinema Conference that “we live in times of the Hobbit”, which expressed quite well the current programming of digitalized single-screen cinemas. Auteur film is disappearing, and commercial tendencies have taken over even the small cinemas. The AVF commits those theatres that have been granted subventions that 20% of their programming must represent European cinema. That is a very low rate, given that all Slovak cinema is included under the label “European”. And viewers deserve the opportunity to watch quality Slovak films as opposed to the omnipresent blockbusters. Cinema is one of the most efficient ways of spreading cultural values. That is why I strongly believe that Slovak cinema programmers sober up from the boom of American commercial movies, and that the market finally reaches a balance where viewers can see quality art films if they so choose. Not only Hobbits in 3D. The

argument that we screen only what viewers want to see is not valid, because viewers want to see only what they have been accustomed to.

EP
(first published in KINEČKOdreaming)
translated by BĎ

- 1 Ivan Hronec, CEO of the Film Europe Media Company
- 2 In 2011, the number of Slovak cinema goers was 3.6 million, i.e. the third highest since 1998.
- 3 The Film Europe Media Company specializes in the financing, development, production and distribution of European films. The company also runs the TV channels: Kino CS, Doku CS, Muzika CS and Film Europe Channel.
- 4 while 97% of multi-screen movie theatres administered by private companies have already been transformed to digital.
- 5 comparing the situation in Slovakia with the rest of the European Union, the rate of digitalized movie theatres in the EU was 54% in 2011, while in Slovakia it was only 32%, which made us the sixth least digitalized EU country. However, we have to emphasize that this number was reached mainly thanks to multi-screen theatres and multiplexes that have been almost completely digitalized. (IN: The Strategy of Cinema Digitization in the Slovak Republic, The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, November 2012)
- 6 a subvention for conversion shall amount to no more than 50% of the cost of the digital screening equipment (projector, server, universal input unit) complying with DCI standards.
- 7 a subvention for conversion shall amount to no more than 90% of the cost of digital screening equipment not complying with DCI standards.
- 8 This is a realistic sum, providing that there is demand for regular screenings,” said the Minister estimating the cost of a single theatre conversion at €15,000 to €100,000.



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Short films on the DVD were created during the 5th MPhilms Summer Workshop, designed for young people in the age of 15 to 25 interested in film, photography, performance and visual arts. Workshop participants consisted of 20 chosen participants from Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Czech Republic, who – led by professional and experienced lecturers – met individual forms of art in a playful way. During each workshop, the participants were developing their skills creatively and shaping their ideas into a final form. With the practical exercises they learn ways to express in film, photography and creative arts. Both theoretical and practical part of the workshop fill up the gap existing in education in Slovakia, unlike in the other countries, and that is media education and related fields.

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