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Animation Studios: People, Spaces, Labor

In the 1980s, after a long hiatus, Film Studies began to pay attention to the division of labor in the film industry from a historical perspective. Much of this was due to the publication of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. At the beginning of the 21st century, American media scholar John T. Caldwell spurred a major revival of so-called production studies and research on the media industry and film studios as places of work, careers, and shared values and norms. The methodological impetus for research on film studios has been provided by the work of media and visual culture historian Brian Jacobson, who has put forward the possibilities of studying film studios as virtual and material environments; as symbols that take on a wide range of meanings; or as points at which different forms of scientific and technical knowledge, different technologies, resources, and materials, and groups of professionals of different competencies intersect. This has been followed up by a recent project led by British film historian Sarah Street *Film Studios: Infrastructure, Culture, Innovation in Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, 1930–60*.

Animation production has specific demands and conditions depending on the animation technique, the size of the studio, or possible collaboration with other film production sectors. Studio spaces impose specific architectural demands on lighting, equipment, workshop facilities, and support staff, whether it is a puppet, cartoon, computer animation, or filmmaking combining animation and live action. An animation studio is a stimulating object of investigation as a site of work, careers, and shared values and norms. At the same time, many animation techniques were already very flexible in terms of space requirements before the advent of digital animation. Some phases of work did not require studio conditions, which created space for non-standard types of collaboration between animators and studios. It is possible to study the impact of technological change and its effect on collaboration, communication, conventions, and artistic solutions. Another set of

specific questions relates to the coordination of animation and sound, dialogue, dubbing, the process of education, and craft training.

Animation has its own ‘canonical’ global history in the form of a three-volume publication by Giannalberto Bendazzi,¹⁾ its international organization (Society for Animation Studies — SAS), and several journals on animated film production, including *Animation Studies*, published by SAS. The literature is extensive and focuses on the history of animation studies, important filmmakers, or the analysis of individual films. This journal actively participated in the scholarly reflection on animation (e.g. by the thematic issue in 2020,²⁾ or by the paper providing a reconstruction of the process of professionalization of amateur animators).³⁾ In Poland in 2007, the by-then Polskie Wydawnictwo Audiowizualne released valuable DVD sets with Polish animation classics entitled *Anthology of Polish Animated Film*, *Anthology of Children’s Animation* and *Anthology of Polish Experimental Animation*, for which the films were selected and annotated by Marcin Giżycki. Shortly thereafter, the publishing market was enriched by works by Jerzy Armata,⁴⁾ Joanna Prosińska-Giersz and Armata;⁵⁾ Armata and Anna Wróblewska,⁶⁾ Mariusz Frukacz,⁷⁾ Marcin Giżycki,⁸⁾ Hanna Margolis,⁹⁾ Adriana Prodeus,¹⁰⁾ Paweł Sitkiewicz,¹¹⁾ Bogusław Zmudziński.¹²⁾ The literature on Polish animation has expanded in recent years, with collective works and monographic issues of academic journals being produced, including *Kwartalnik Filmowy* (112/2020 — half on animation, half on documentaries)¹³⁾ and *Pleograf: Historyczno-filmowy kwartalnik Filмотeki Narodowej* (3/2023).¹⁴⁾ Lately, film animation studios are also being examined, mainly through the angle of the films produced there.¹⁵⁾ The perspective of production research, in particular examining the preparatory processes, the

- 1) Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Animation: A World History: Volume I–III* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2016).
- 2) See especially Lukáš Skupa, “Která bude ta pravá? Počátky žánru pohádky v českém animovaném filmu po roce 1948,” *Iluminace* 32, no. 4 (2020), 9–27, and Lucie Česálková, “Zboží především: Československá animace a reklama na počátku 60. let 20. století,” *Iluminace* 32, no. 4 (2020), 29–46.
- 3) Tomáš Hubáček, “Přímá profesionalizace režisérů v animované tvorbě,” *Iluminace* 36, no. 1 (2024), 93–120.
- 4) Jerzy Armata, *Śnione filmy Piotra Dumay* (Kraków: Korporacja ha!art, 2009) and Jerzy Armata, *Z Armatą na Wilka: Animowany blues Mariusza Wilczyńskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nowe Horyzonty, 2011).
- 5) Joanna Prosińska-Giersz and Jerzy Armata, *Witold Giersz: Malarz ekranu* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Nowe Horyzonty, 2012) and Jerzy Armata, *Hobby: Animacja: Kino Daniela Szczechury* (Warszawa: Studio EMKA, 2009).
- 6) Jerzy Armata and Anna Wróblewska, *Polski film dla dzieci i młodzieży* (Warszawa: Fundacja Kino, 2014).
- 7) Mariusz Frukacz, *24 klatki na sekundę: Rozmowy o animacji* (Kraków: Klub Lokator, 2008).
- 8) Marcin Giżycki, *Kino artystów i artystek: Od Mélièsa do Maciunasa* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2023).
- 9) Hanna Margolis, *Animacja autorska w PRL w latach 1957–1968: Ukryty projekt Kazimierza Urbańskiego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019) and Hanna Margolis, *Niewidzialną ręką: Filmy animowane kobiet w (męskich) strukturach kinematografii w Polsce* (Kraków: Universitas, 2024).
- 10) Adriana Prodeus, *Themersonowie: Szkice biograficzne* (Warszawa: Świat Literacki, 2009).
- 11) Paweł Sitkiewicz, *Polska szkoła animacji* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2011).
- 12) Jerzy Armata, Marcin Giżycki, and Bogusław Zmudziński, *Polski film animowany* (Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Audiowizualne, 2008).
- 13) *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 112 (2020), accessed January 15, 2025, <https://czasopisma.ispan.pl/index.php/kf/issue/view/23>.
- 14) *Pleograf: Historyczno-filmowy kwartalnik Filмотeki Narodowej*, no. 3 (2023), accessed January 15, 2025, <https://pleograf.pl/index.php/film-animowany/>.
- 15) Patryk Oczko, *Nie tylko dla dzieci: Studio Filmów Rysunkowych w Bielsku-Białej 1947–2021* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego and Bielsko-Biała: Książnica Beskidzka, 2024).

day-to-day reality of teamwork, the economic and material concerns of the production process and the self-reflections of the members of the film crews, is becoming present in Polish film studies on animated film.¹⁶⁾ However, there are very few academic monographs or papers approaching animation production from the perspective of the sociology of art (although one chapter in a book on Soviet animation by Balakirsky Katz¹⁷⁾ goes in that direction).

The project of comparative research on Czechoslovak and Polish animation studios, led by the editors of this issue of *Iluminace*, Pavel Skopal and Ewa Ciszewska, seeks to provide new methodological inspiration. The project draws on the prosopographical approach as applied in relation to the field theories of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu; the concept of art worlds of the American sociologist of art Howard S. Becker; the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour; and social network analysis, which allows to describe and explain the role of social contacts, distribution of knowledge and different types of capital, or the role of intermediaries in the professional environment. Investigating the history of two social worlds of animation film production operating in Central Europe allows for a new path of research on film history by internalizing the objectives of film production studies and combining them with the tools of sociology of arts.

The proposed approaches for researching Central-European film studios in post-war era have been tested in two books, a series of articles, and two databases.¹⁸⁾ This project's findings are represented in this issue with texts authored by Szymon Szul & Michal Večeřa and Tereza Bochinová & Agata Hofelmajer-Roś. The first text deals with the question of creativity within state socialist film production on the example of animation studios in Gottwaldov and Łódź. Since the internal dynamics of each studio were shaped by its em-

16) On the preparatory process in animation, see Szymon Szul, "Kierunek Wschód: Kulisy realizacji filmu *Mamo, czy kury potrafią mówić?*," *Panoptikum*, no. 27 (2022), 104–121; the determinants of teamwork see Margolis, *Animacja autorska w PRL*; on the self-understanding of film crew members see Anna Wróblewska, "Produkcja filmów lalkowych we współczesnej polskiej kinematografii," in *Polska animacja w XXI wieku*, eds. Małgorzata Kozubek and Tadeusz Szczepański (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Biblioteki Wyższej Szkoły Filmowej, Telewizyjnej i Teatralnej, 2017), 302–321.

17) Maya Balakirsky Katz, *Drawing the Iron Curtain: Jews and the Golden Age of Soviet Animation* (New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

18) Pavel Skopal, ed., *Lidé – práce – animace: Světy animovaného filmu na Kudlově* (Brno: Host, 2024); Ewa Ciszewska, Agata Hofelmajer-Roś, Michał Pabiś-Orzeszyna, and Szymon Szul, *Společné světy Studia Malých Form Filmových "Se-Ma-For" w Łodzi* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2025); Pavel Skopal, Ewa Ciszewska, and Michal Večeřa, "Functionality in The Production of Animated Films: Czechoslovak and Polish Film Studios, 1945–1960," *JCMS — Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* to be published in 2025; Ewa Ciszewska and Agata Hofelmajer-Roś, "Lalka filmowa — perspektywy badań: Rozważania na podstawie wybranych produkcji lalkowych zrealizowanych w Studiu Malých Form Filmových 'Se-Ma-For' w Łodzi," *Acta Universitatis Lodzensis: Folia Litteraria Polonica*, no. 2 (2024); Ewa Ciszewska and Szymon Szul, "Animation Workers From 'Se-Ma-For' Studio of Small Film Forms in Lodz (Dataset)," *Journal of Open Humanities Data*, no. 10 (2024), 1–7. P. Skopal, E. Ciszewska, T. Bochinová, A. Czajkowska, A. Hofelmajer-Roś, M. Gonciarz, M. Kos, K. Kunkelová, O. Nadarzycka, M. Pabiś-Orzeszyna, D. Piekarski, T. Porubčanská, J. Pospíšil, M. Rawski, S. Szul, K. Šrámková, M. Večeřa, and P. Veinhauer, "Animation in Czechoslovakia and Poland, 1945–1990" [dataset] online database, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University; Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz, accessed December 9, 2024, <https://animation.phil.muni.cz>; Ewa Ciszewska and Szymon Szul, "Animation workers from 'Se-Ma-For' Studio of Small Film Forms in Lodz (dataset)," *Repozytorium Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego*, accessed December 9, 2024, <https://repozytorium.uni.lodz.pl/handle/11089/52081>.

ployee structure, dominant personalities, and interactions with other institutions and given that most serials were co-productions or commission projects, character of the series was primarily influenced by the demands of the co-producer or commissioning entity, rather than the studio itself. Authors claim that filmmakers at “Se-Ma-For” enjoyed a higher degree of creative freedom and autonomy in their work than those from Gottwaldov. Similarities and differences in the functioning of the two Central European animation studios are researched by Tereza Bochinová & Agata Hofelmajer-Roś in an article tracing the agency of technical equipment on animation production in studios “Se-Ma-For” and FS Kudlov in the 1970s and 1980s. Both studios managed to develop specific actor networks to navigate and mitigate their constraints.

Animated films during the socialist period were not only made by studios specialising in short films, Polish film historian Emil Sowiński analyses the production strategy of the Irzykowski Film Studio in the field of animated film production, a communist-era film institution founded in 1981 that produced debut films of all types and lengths, without animated film being prioritised.

With a text by Jane Cheadle, we are moving to contemporary animation market. This paper uncovers difficulties and challenges related to transcontinental studio partnerships in the production of the African-futurist anthology *Kizazi Moto*. Analysis of points of tension allowed a closer examination of specific aspects of transnational animation production, including its barriers and opportunities, with the aim of better questioning and understanding patterns of labour circulation and meaning making.

Cultural capital enhances professional expertise, serving to showcase one’s ability to think and express freely. A studio’s role is to harness and commodify creative energy, making it tangible and exchangeable. The practice of desk decoration analysed in Colin Wheeler text, offers a glimpse into how animators balance the use of personal space with the cultivation of cultural capital to foster communication with colleagues and peers.

The issue of control in the context of the architecture and organizational aspects of film studios is revisited in the conversation with Brian Jacobson, also featured in this issue. In the conversation, Jacobson describes how his perspective shifted toward a broader technological history, linking it to the development of infrastructure, technologies, and larger systems. This reframing connects the studio and cinema to the history of technology in novel and unexplored ways.

As this thematic issue hopes to demonstrate, research on animated film studios welcomes a range of perspectives, including working conditions, work coordination, and the social, architectural, urban, technical, or technological aspects of animation studios, and opens floor for an exploration of their international cooperation and coordination.

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