

ЗАБОРАВЕНАТА ЗЛАТНА ДОБА: МАКЕДОНСКИ АНИМИРАН ФИЛМ 1971 – 1991

Жарко Иванов

*Институт за македонска литература
Универзитет Св. Кирил и Методиј во Скопје*

Клучни зборови: анимација, историја на филм, аудиовизуелни архиви, Скопско студио за анимиран филм, проект *Македонски анимиран филм, 1971 – 1991*.

Резиме: Македонскиот анимиран филм, во минатиот век, ќе го има својот најплоден период од 1971 до 1991 г. кога ќе бидат добиени и најбројните награди и признанија на најважните светски филмски фестивали, а од критичарите ќе го добие епитетот *Скопска школа за анимиран филм*. Проектот *Македонски анимиран филм 1971 – 1991* з. сведочи за овој период правејќи детален преглед на материјали од минатите *аналогни* времиња: темелно архивско истражување, детектирање на материјалот за реставрација и за дигитализирање за негова понатамошна заштита и афирмација, а неговиот отворен концепт *work in progress* остава простор за нови истражувања и дополнувања на, веќе, богатата дигитална архива.

THE UNREMEMBERED GOLDEN ERA: MACEDONIAN ANIMATED FILM 1971-1991

Zharko Ivanov

*Institute of Macedonian Literature
University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje*

Key words: Animation, film history, audiovisual archives, Skopje school of animated film, project Macedonian animated film 1971-1991

Summary: Macedonian animated film in the last century would have its most fruitful period from 1971 until 1991. During this time, its greatest achievements were attained as witnessed by the steady flow of awards and recognitions bestowed by the most relevant festivals and critics thus earning it the epithet *Skopje School of Animated Film*. The Project *Macedonian Animated Film 1971-1991* evidence this period reviewing materials from the past analogous times: thorough archival research, detection of material for restoration and digitization for its further protection and

consolidation, and its open, work in progress concept leaves room for new research and additions to the already rich digital archive.

“Audiovisual archives tell us stories about people’s lives and cultures from all over the world. They represent a priceless heritage which is an affirmation of our collective memory and a valuable source of knowledge since they reflect the cultural, social and linguistic diversity of our communities. They help us grow and comprehend the world we all share. Conserving this heritage and ensuring it remains accessible to the public and future generations is a vital goal for all memory institutions as well as the public at large.”¹

Introduction

Macedonian national cinema was founded after the Second World War within the Yugoslav Federation, but in its own state and national corpus, common cultural heritage and language. Although all the republics that were part of the federation aspired to create their own cinema, they also created under the term Yugoslav cinema and very often the author members of the film crews participated in various film projects outside their own cinematographic centers in Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje, Ljubljana and Sarajevo. Gjorgji Vasilevski in his work "History of Cinema" notes: "In fact, in such a political, economic and cultural community composed of several nations, it was natural to expect that there would be a more dynamic exchange of staff, and more importantly, interweaving of productive and creative experiences, even of cultures, which, before living in the common state, had their own long, often differentiated, but authentic and rich cultural traditions" (Василевски, 2003: 172).

Hence, seventeen authors from different parts of the Yugoslavia, from Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, with a common vision in creating moving drawings, would become the leaders of an aesthetic avant-garde concept, which, due to the richness of genres and styles of which that they would develop over the years in the studio of Zagreb Film, would prompt the French film theorist and critic Georges Sadoul to introduce into film circles the syntagma *Zagreb School of Animated Film*. In their heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, the studio's authors won the world's most important film awards, including the Venice Film Festival Grand Prix and the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film.

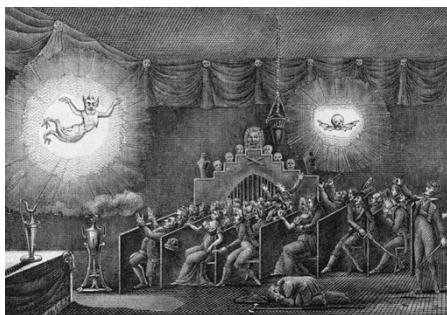
The founding, the animated film production and the successes of the Zagreb School within the *Zagreb Film Studio* was to have a strong impact on

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldaudiovisualday>

other animation enthusiasts throughout Yugoslavia. In Macedonia, an animation studio was founded within Vardar Film, where, in the period from 1971 until 1991 more than fifty animated films would be made. This led to remarkable success at world festivals and prestigious awards at the Berlinale, Annecy, Oberhausen, Montreux. Domestic film historians, theorists and critics would deal with this segment of the history of Macedonian cinema perfunctorily and the knowledge about this rich period of Macedonian film would remain almost unknown, until the publication of the study *Macedonian Animated Film 1971-1991*, the result of many years of research by the contemporary author of animated film, Ivan Ivanovski. This multimedia project in the form of a printed monograph, electronic edition and, at the end of 2021, an extensive exhibition in the premises of the *Youth Cultural Center* in Skopje, makes an exceptional contribution to the preservation of audio-visual cultural heritage and its consolidation in a contemporary context.

History of animated film

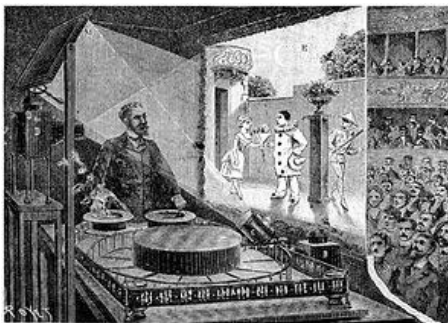
Animation, a term that has its etymological root in the Latin nouns *anima/animatio* and “can denote several things such as soul, spirit, life force



or anything that makes a fundamental difference between animate and inanimate nature. According to this linguistic foundation, the term animation can be defined on the one hand as the movement of the immovable, and on the other as the revival of the inanimate” (Мунитић, 2007:25). This

medium has a long history, originating much earlier than the history of the film. The earliest attempts at creating an illusion of moving images can be found in the Paleolithic caves in which animals with multiple legs were drawn in a moving position. Long before the invention of cinematic technology, people would attend plays with moving figures, puppets, shadows, magic lanterns, and in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Phantasmagoria horror plays would be popular in European theaters.

Next comes the discovery of several optical devices that would become the forerunners of the animated film: *phenacystop*², *zoetrope*³ and *flipbook*⁴. Typically, the mechanisms for displaying these short cyclic movements were rotated manually and contained up to 12 images, except for the flipbook, which



had a beginning and an end lasting no more than a few seconds. The first to make much longer sequences was Emile Reynaud. “Combining experience and ingenuity, he built a device of his own: the praxinoscope. It consisted of a cylindrical box attached to a pivot. A coloured strip of paper on the inside face of the cylinder showed the consecutive stages of a movement. When the cylinder rotated, these stages were reflected in rapid succession on a mirrored prism mounted on the pivot, and the viewer who looked at the prism would see the drawn image move freely” (Bendazzi, 2016:14). In addition, Reynaud’s *Théâtre Optique* film system, patented in 1888 is the first known instance of film perforations being used.

Although animation as a medium was present in public long before the invention of the film, the Lumière Brothers' first film screening with their *Cinematographe* motion picture system on December 26, 1895, would be acknowledged in the history of film as the birth of cinema, whereas the animated film would require several more years before reaching the cinemas.

Arthur Cooper and Edwin Porter were the first to start experimenting with the animated film, and Stuart Blackton had his first success with his 1907 stop-motion animation *The Haunted Hotel*. The audience would be amazed by the objects that move on the canvas by themselves, without a visible stage prop. The first film in a traditional, hand-drawn animation was Émile Cohl's 1908 *Phantasmagoria*, Ladislav Starevich in 1912 made the first puppet animated film *The Beautiful Leukanida*, and Windsor McCay, after *Little Nemo* and *Gertie the Dinosaur*, created the first propaganda film, *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), a silent animated short film re-creating the torpedoing

² An optical mechanism that shows a continuous animated movement and is considered the first form of moving image that will pave the way to the discovery of the film. It shows a short movement through a stroboscopic disk, which we find today in the form of a GIF sequence).

³ Cylindrical optical mechanism that creates the illusion of motion with drawings or photographs showing a progressive phase of motion.

⁴ Notebook with drawings stacked in sequential stages of movement with a single staple binding. When the pages were flipped, they would create the optical illusion of motion.

of the British liner *Lusitania* by a German submarine during the First World War. A major breakthrough in the world of animated film was the discovery of the transparent celluloid sheet animation process by John Bray and Earl Hurd, a technique that would dominate the late twentieth century until the beginning of the computer animation.

Almost all feature-length animated films from the American Golden Age and the Walt Disney era that would last until the 1960s would be made in traditional animation technique on celluloid sheets. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* from 1937 is Disney's first feature film and to date the most commercially successful film of all time. Especially popular was the introduction of animated characters who would have long careers in short film production: Disney's *Goofy* and *Donald Duck*; *Bugs Bunny*, *Sylvester the Cat*, *Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner*, by Warner Bros. *Betty Boop*, *Popeye* and *Superman* by Fleischer Studios etc. These animation studios, and Disney in particular, would be actively involved in the production of animated propaganda films during World War II.

Significant for this text in terms of the importance of audio-visual cultural heritage preservation is the example of the Italian-Argentine director Quirino Cristiani who in 1917 made the first ever feature-length animated film *El Apostol*, and after that in 1918 *Sin dejar rastros* both in cut-out animation technique⁵. The first, dedicated to Argentine President Hipolito Yrigoyen would receive positive reviews in daily newspapers and has been so successful in Buenos Aires that it has appeared several times a day for six months.⁶ The latter, due to its content, would be seized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the orders of President Yrigoyen himself. "The authorities did not appreciate such boldness, and this time they intervened drastically. *Sin dejar rastro* was shown to the public for only one day at the theater Select-Lavalle. The following day, the copies and negative were confiscated" (Bendazzi, 2017: 46). Neither of the two films exist today and are considered lost.

⁵ Cutout animation is an animation technique in which the illusion of movement is made by moving and photographing paper, cardboard or photograph cutouts.

⁶ <https://www.awn.com/mag/issue1.4/articles/bendazzi1.4.html>



length animated film.

The Soviet studio *Soyuzfilm*, founded in 1936, would produce more than twenty short and feature films a year, Italy, France, Belgium and Czechoslovakia, as well as Yugoslavia, were all to have a rich production of animated film after the Second World War.

Zagreb School of Animated Film

Soon after the Second World War, as a consequence of the oversaturation of the monumental approach and the story and drawing style of the Disney animated film, a certain *avantgardization* of the medium of animation took place. Following this trend, led by European authors Jiri Trnka and Karel Zeman, who won the Best Short Film Awards at the first edition of the 1946 Cannes Film Festival, a surprisingly original contribution was made by Yugoslav animators working in Zagreb in 1957 and 1958. With their original approach to drawing, animation, content, and the art of animation in general, at the 1958 edition of Cannes Film Festival, the program of seven Zagreb original animated films was a great success, and French critics Georges Sadoul and Andre Martin would dub this group of authors the *Zagreb School of Animated Film*. Until then, Zagreb had fostered a long tradition of art disciplines related to animated film (illustration, caricature, comics, graphic design) and attempts to produce animated commercials and educational films date back to the 1920s. In 1950 a group of caricature cartoonists working for the satirical newspaper *Kerempuh* would make the first art animated film in Yugoslavia. After a year of mastering the animation technique and working on the film, they completed the twenty-minute animated film *A Big Rally*. Based on this success, the state established the animation company *Duga Film*, which would set up continuous professional

production of animated film. Many authors starting their careers in this studio would leave a strong mark in the world animation: Dusan Vukotic, Borivoj Dovnikovic, Aleksandar Marks, Nikola Kostelac. This company would in 1956 become the *Animation Film Studio* within Zagreb Film and from that moment on the success story of Zagreb animation began. The above-mentioned authors would later be joined by Vatroslav Mimica, Branko Ranitovic, Nedeljko Dragic, Josko Marusic.

In the late fifties and early sixties, the Zagreb School would achieve its greatest success at world festivals: Dusan Vukotic in 1962 won an Oscar



for his film *Surogat (Substitute)*, as the first non-US author to win the award. After this, the films *Tup-Tup!* and *Dream Doll* followed suit as Oscar nominees, and many of the animated films in the next thirty years would win the awards at the film festivals in Ancey,

Berlin, Cannes, Ottawa, and more.

Skopje animated film studio

The Macedonian national cinematography was founded after the Second World War within the Yugoslav Federation and the establishment of film production and educational institutions would contribute to its development and consolidation: immediately after the liberation of Yugoslavia, in 1945 the *Film Directorate of Macedonia - FIDIMA* was inaugurated, which would be in charge of production, distribution and screening of films, and in 1947 the production company *Vardar Film* was founded, and until the independence of Macedonia would be responsible for the filming of all live action documentaries and animated films. The founding of the animated film studio within *Vardar Film* would take place in 1975.

Similar to the Croatian authors who at the beginning of their creative career worked as cartoonists at the satirical newspaper *Kerempuh*, the Macedonian directors of animated film would have their beginnings in the

famous satirical magazine *Osten*. Working at *Osten* and the contacts they would make in the world-famous *Skopje Caricature Gallery* with the best cartoonists from Yugoslavia and the world, would take the animators on a study visit to Zagreb, where, "with the help of experienced and well-known authors of the Zagreb school, such as: the Oscar winner Vukotic, then Dovnikovic, Bourek and others – they would gain some masterful experience and sharpen their artistic sensibility, collaborating in some of the films made in the studio, and also working on their own animation sequences, for later, in the phase of the author's independence, to continue receiving the necessary assistance from the Zagreb colleagues regarding the technical realization of their films" (Куновски, 1987: 84).

In the absence of critical reviews and historical texts, about most authors from this period of Macedonian animation we can only read in the extensive review of Blagoja Kunovski-Dore *Macedonian cartoon and animated film*. One of the most important authors of an animated film, Darko Markovic, an architect who would leave a lasting mark in the field of caricature, is described by Kunovski as "a type of author who combines the typical qualities of an animator: a great cartoonist and comic book maker and a graphic stylist" (Куновски, 1987: 85). Markovic would have his debut as an animator with the sequence *Stop*, resulting from the cycle with the same theme at the *Osten Gallery*. The next film that would express his authentic authorial style is the stop animation *Border* (1976). The film *Shootings* from 1977 depicting animating hands, combines five episodes into one. The hand will appear as a leitmotif in the 1980 film of the same name on a musical background by the group *Leb i Sol*, and would be his most layered and richest animated film. For his television animations *Soup* and a year later *Festival* (1982) he won the *Silver* and *Bronze Roses* at the prestigious Montreux Festival of TV Authors.

Petar Gligorovski graduated painting at the Belgrade Academy of Fine Arts and would also follow his abstract artistic expression in his animated work, starting with *Embryo-M* (1971), *Adam and Phoenix* (1977) and *UFO* (1980). He is our most award-winning animated film director, with awards from the most important animation film festival in Annecy and the Silver Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival.

The third most prominent author of this period is Boro Pejcinov, about whom Kunovski notes: If, inside the Skopje animation circle, the styles of Darko Markovic and Petar Gligorovski were representing the two standard animation manners of the Yugoslavian animation (gag-caricature animation and graphic-painting animation), then the third author from Skopje, Boro Pejcinov, follows a mixed "interposition" style, defining himself with his two films as a representative of another important trend - the subject animation...

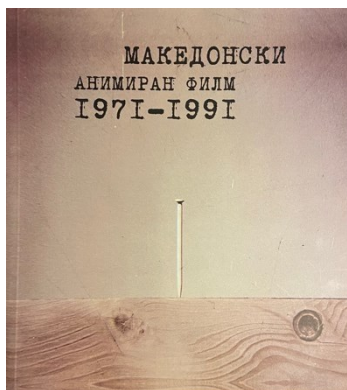
(animation of sand, plasticine, nails, needles, wool, textiles etc.) (Куновски, 1987: 89). His first film is *Our Neighbors* (1977), followed by the seven-minute *Resistance* (1978) which would receive awards at most domestic festivals and international festivals in Oberhausen, Annecy, Krakow and would become a Yugoslav Oscar nominee.

Of the other authors working in this period, we single out: Delcho Mihajlov, Slavoljub Ignat, Miroslav Greev, Mice Jankulovski, Milutin Roganovic and Afrodita Markovic, who, with her first film *Apartment*, would go on to win the main prize for animated film at the Martovski Festival in 1987.

The end of this fruitful creative period in Macedonian animated film and the discontinuum that would follow with over twenty years without the production of a single animated film was precipitated by several factors: firstly, the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation and the subsequent wars would minimize the enthusiasm for animation as a long and laborious process; furthermore, the unsuccessful transition from analog to digital (computer) animation technology that took place in the nineties; and lastly, as Kunovski notes in his text and it seems still to be a current problem in the Macedonian film - the way in which the primacy is given to the live action film at the expense of the documentary and the animated film: "...Skopje animated film studio started very well, but later it was seized by an inertia in which the atmosphere of sacrifice of the animated and documentary film, of course their authors, and especially of the animation studio, could be visibly recognized, in the name of the far more expensive live action feature film." (Куновски, 1987: 91)

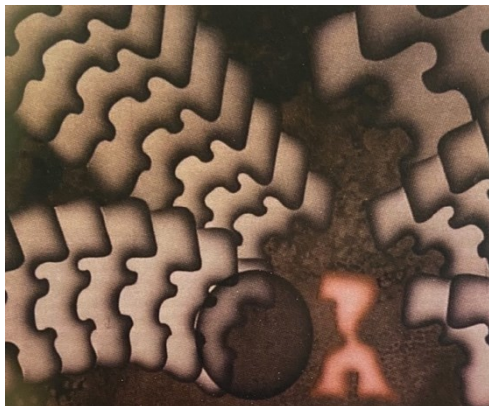
The Project *Macedonian Animated Film 1971-1991*

By the term audiovisual cultural heritage, we mean the moving images and the recorded sound through which the cultural achievement of a nation is expressed, as a record of history and everyday life; audiovisual goods are the source materials and audio copies of a feature, documentary, animated, experimental film, as well as other audiovisual works in the form of moving images with or without audio, regardless of the type of carrier they contain, and are intended for public display. Audiovisual



goods are also accompanying materials related to moving images: written documentation, screenplays, recording books, scenographic and costume sketches, costumes, scenographic equipment, microfilms, photographs, slides, posters and other materials.

This bureaucratic definition, specification and enumeration of everything that belongs to the corpus of the audiovisual heritage, will get its



true form and content in the project

Macedonian animated film 1971-1991. In the year of the 50th anniversary since the making of *Embryo-M* by Petar Gligorovski, the research work of the contemporary Macedonian animated author Ivan Ivanovski and the film theorist Slobodan Jakoski will be promoted, as a result of two years of research on the history of Macedonian

animated film in the archives of the Cinematheque of Macedonia and *Vardar Film*, but also in the private and family archives of the authors from that period.

The researches through conversations and interviews with the authors, their contemporaries and collaborators, but also with their relatives, as well as through the reflections in the criticism and press of that time, try to discover and capture the spirit of the time. During that period more than 50 films by nine authors who are professionally engaged in animated film were realized. These authors reached their zenith in the late 70s and early 80s of the last century, creating outstanding films that were to receive the most significant awards at the world's largest film festivals. According to one of the authors of the research, Ivanovski, this period can be considered the *Golden Age of Macedonian animated film* and in the preface to the printed monograph (that will be the result of extensive research) writes: "The universal myth of the Golden Age describes an era in which man was capable of great endeavors, lived a life of peace, harmony and prosperity ... When you look at the history of the Macedonian animated film, the time period that corresponds to the story of the Golden Age is from 1971 until 1991, more precisely, the time when the Animated Film Department was founded at *Vardar Film* in 1975 until 1982, when the management of *Vardar Film* decided that the animated film was no longer a priority. During this time, the

most important achievements were attained as witnessed by the awards and recognitions that come continuously from the most relevant festivals and critics thus earning us the epithet *Skopje School of Animated Film*" (Ивановски, 2021:104).

The printed monograph displays not only visual materials related to the films of the authors, but also atypical archival materials reflecting the life and achievements of the nine authors of this period. For example, the section about Petar Gligorovski includes frames and celluloid foils from his films, newspaper clippings with interviews, application forms for film festivals, recording books and storyboards. Apart from these archival documents, there are also documents that illustrate the character and private life of this author - for example, Gligorovski's appeal to the court in which he claims that to the owner of the bar at *Vardar Film*, who is suing him for insulting the character and work of Tito, he only gave him a suggestion of aesthetic character to move Tito's painting to another place.

Furthermore, it is ironically pointed out "the place where the *Silver Bear* that Gligorovski received at the Berlin Film Festival for the film *Phoenix* in 1971 could be located" (ibid: 23), but then, due to quarrels, misunderstandings and disappointment from the management of *Vardar Film*, he threw it away, in the river Vardar from the Stone Bridge.



In a similar way, the monograph presents not only the other authors of films, but also the collaborators who were an important link in the work of an animated film. In the introduction to their presentation, the entire production of an animation is described in detail: "The process of making an animated film was as follows: after the Council and the art director approved the script, the author makes a filming book and designs the characters and the world around them... Creating an animated film is a long and complex endeavor that involves many people - collaborators, who significantly contribute to the appearance of the film and are an important link in the process of creating an animated film..."(ibid: 87)

The monograph, together with the project website⁷, which contains interviews and additional visual materials that due to conceptual and visual solutions have not been moved to the print edition, were promoted at the opening of the exhibition at the *Youth Cultural Center* on the 16th November 2021. The exhibition itself was divided into two parts: the *Macedonian animated film 1971-1991* and the *Contemporary Macedonian animated film*. In the first part, 1971-1991, original artifacts from the creation of animated films from this period were presented: foils, storyboards, wallpapers, and there was a great response to the discussion with Professor Miroslav Grchev, from whom the audience could hear about the challenges in making animated film in the eighties. In the second part, as a continuation of the first, the "today's scene" was presented with a screening of six films and an exhibition of works in the process of their creation (dolls, models, storyboards, drawings ...) by authors who continuously work on animated films (Vuk Mitevski, Zharko Ivanov, Vladimir Lukash, Krste Gospodinovski, Goce Cvetanovski and Ivan Ivanovski, and the panel discussion on the manner of production and financing of the contemporary Macedonian animated film aroused great interest.

In an interview with *Film+* (Трајковски, Уневска: 2021: 14), Ivanovski notes that within the project Macedonian Animated Film 1971-1991, more than 2,000 documents of written documentation, artifacts and film footage from nine films were digitized, which for the first time made representative images from the films of these authors. In addition to the fifty films by the nine authors featured in the monograph, about twenty films were made by enthusiasts who found alternative ways of production, mostly through movie theaters. These films were made more than thirty years ago and the next step in the project is to digitize and restore them and make them available to the public.

Conclusion

Macedonian animated film today has been identified by critics, film theorists and journalists, with the phrase *new wave*; not as a reference to the French film *nouvelle vague* movement of the 1950s, but for the fact that it reappears as a success story after a hiatus of almost thirty years. The authors of this new wave create in the most modern computer conditions, in which, very easily and almost instantly, the animated films and the materials for their preparation are stored on digital media or online archives.

⁷ <https://macedonian-animation.com>

The Macedonian Animated Film Project 1971-1991 is an excellent example of working with materials from the past analogous times: thorough archival research, detection of material for restoration and digitization for its further protection and consolidation, and its open, work in progress concept leaves room for new research and additions to the already rich digital archive.

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