


International Conference

# Animation Films for Children behind the Iron Curtain 1945-1989

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

10 May, 2024  
Rome, Italy

organized by:


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Roma  
Biblioteca e Centro di Studi  
Accademia Polacca delle Scienze

 ISTITUTO  
POLACCO  
ROMA

  
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY  
IN KRAKÓW

DIPARTIMENTO DI STUDI EUROPEI  
AMERICANI E INTERCULTURALI  
 SAPIENZA  
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

 Země pohádek

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A VERONA DAL 1947

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FILMOVÝ ÚSTAV  
SLOVAK FILM  
INSTITUTE

 ISTITUTO SLOVACCO  
A ROMA

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ROMA

# Animation Films for Children behind the Iron Curtain 1945–1989

## 10th May 2024, Rome

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Země pohádek

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Polish Academy of Sciences Scientific Centre in Rome  
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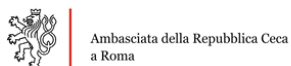
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Rome 2024

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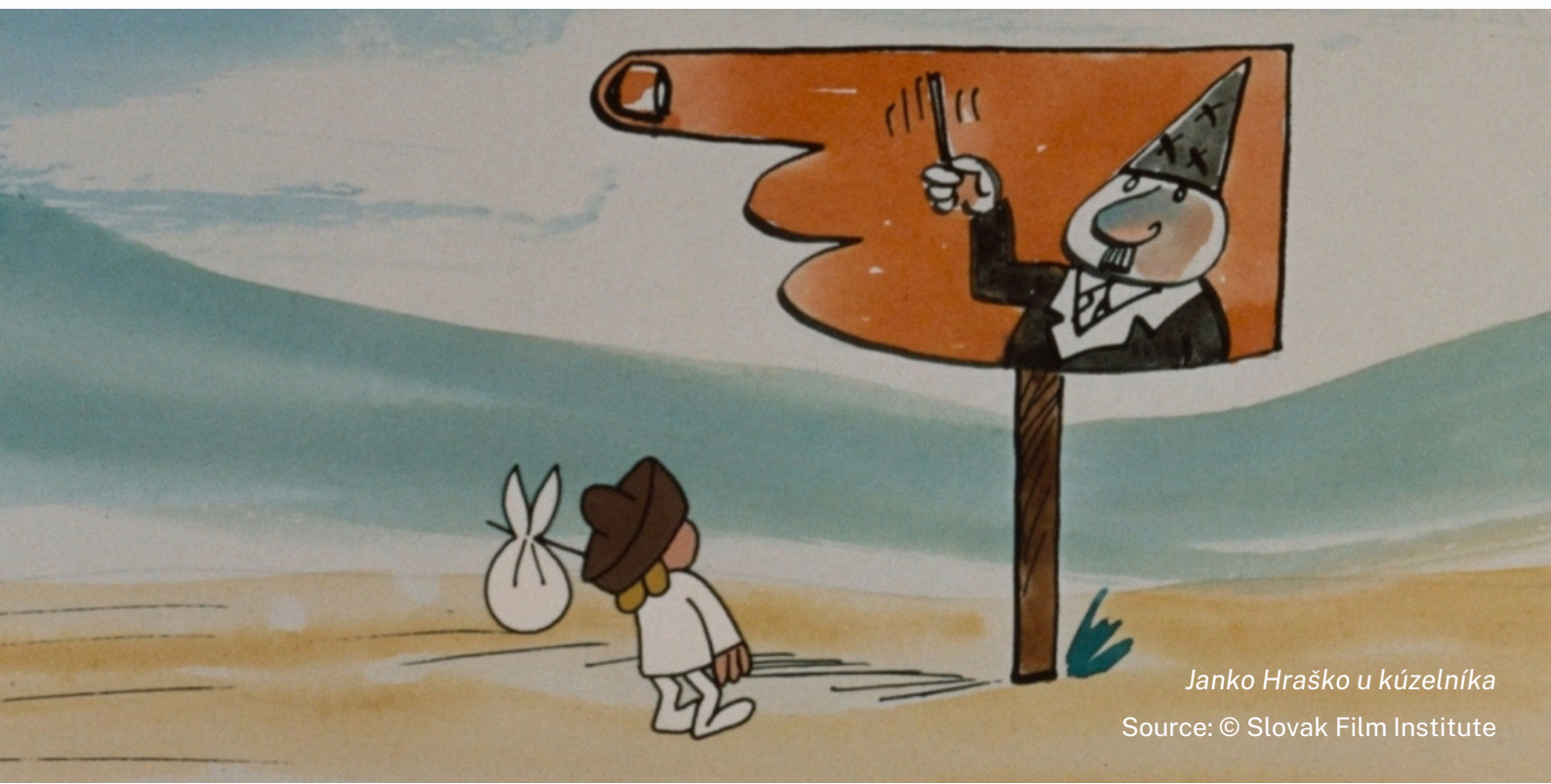
## Introduction

Animation is an independent and vital branch of film art with its own peculiarities, codes, and conventions. It is worth studying as a form of art in itself and as an original means for analysing cultural and social phenomena. This is even more appropriate in the case of animation in Eastern Bloc Countries, where those films were linked to the political and ideological context of their time.

Cartoons for children created during the communist rule, in relative isolation from (or in competition with) Western animation, above all, the Disney franchise, developed their inimitable style and managed to blend regional folklore, moral instruction, and support or critique of contemporary political ideology that became part of their cultural identity. Even today, the love for the most popular characters is passed down from generation to generation and classic cartoons continue airing.

Our event intends to bring to the attention and discuss the cultural importance of the Eastern European school of animation. We plan a one-day conference and the screening of a selection of cult animations created in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Ukraine between 1945-1989.

Monika Woźniak,  
Sapienza University of Rome



*Janko Hraško u kúzelníka*

Source: © Slovak Film Institute

- 09:00 – 09:15** Opening remarks
- 09:15 – 09:45** **Art and ideology. Polish cartoons in the period of socialist realism – 1949-1955**  
Patrik Oczko, University of Silesia
- 09:45 – 10:15** **Retellings of classic fairy tales in “Bajki of Bolek and Lolek” series**  
Monika Woźniak, Sapienza University
- 10:15 – 10:45** **Dolls on the glass. “The Moomins” from Se-Ma-For Studio (1977-1982)**  
Konrad Sierzputowski, Yellow Tapir Films
- 10:45 – 11:00** Discussion / Questions
- 11:00 – 11:30** Coffee break
- 11:30 – 12:00** **Soviet childhood in front of the TV: the canon of animated films in Russian collective memory**  
Jakub Sadowski, Jagiellonian University
- 12:00 – 12:30** **Imagining the West: soviet animated adaptations of English literature**  
Anna Svetlowa, Jagiellonian University
- 12:30 – 13:00** **Come out the fog: Russian animators against war**  
Elena Kurant, Jagiellonian University
- 13:00 – 13:15** Discussion / Questions
- 13:15 – 14:15** Lunch Break
- 14:15 – 14:45** **Introduction to the history of Slovak animated cinema**  
Eva Šošková, Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava
- 14:45 – 15:15** **The golden age of Czechoslovak animation, or why Little Mole had a dacha and Pat&Mat were continuously ruining the world**  
Urszula Kowalska-Nadolna, Adam Mickiewicz University
- 15:15 – 15:30** Closing remarks

## **POLISH ANIMATIONS**

**Introduction:** Jakub Sadowski

*Porwanie Baltazara Gąbki, odc. Smok – Expedition (1969, 7')* by Władysław Nehrebecki  
it. *Il Rapimento del Professor Spugna, ep. Il Drago – La Spedizione*

*Porwanie Baltazara Gąbki, odc. Nocna bitwa (1970, 7')* by Wacław Wajser  
it. *Il Rapimento del Professor Spugna, ep. La Battaglia notturna*

*Bolek i Lolek na wakacjach, odc. Kłusownik (1986, 10')* by Bronisław Zeman  
it. *Bolek e Lolek in vacanza, ep. Il Bracconiere*

*Bolek i Lolek w Europie, odc. Pod kraterem (1986, 9')* by Waldemar Kazanecki  
it. *Bolek e Lolek in Europa, ep. Sotto il cratere*

## **UKRAINIAN ANIMATIONS**

**Introduction:** Alessandro Achilli

*Як козаки інопланетян зустрічали (1987, 17'30")* by Volodymyr Dakhno  
it. *Come i cosacchi incontrarono gli alieni*

*Приключения капітана Врунгеля (1976, 9'40")* by David Čerkasskij  
it. *Le avventure del Capitano Vrungel*

## **CZECH ANIMATIONS**

**Introduction:** Urszula Kowalska-Nadolna

*Jak krtek ke kalhotkám přišel (1957, 14')* by Zdeněk Miler  
it. *La piccola talpa con i calzoni blu*

*Krtek zahradníkem (1969, 8')* by Zdeněk Miler  
it. *La piccola talpa giardiniere*

## **SLOVAK ANIMATIONS**

**Introduction:** Eva Šošková

*Janko Hraško u kúzelníka (1973, 7')* by Viktor Kubal  
eng. *Tom Thumb at the Magician's*

*Maľovanky – spievanky. Jar (1983, 7')* by Helena Slavíková-Rabarová  
eng. *Pictures – Folksongs: Spring*

*Ako Jožinko menil až vymenil (1981, 7')* by Vladimír Pikalík  
eng. *Joey's Traffic in Things*



# ABSTRACTS

## **Art and ideology. Polish cartoons in the period of socialist realism - 1949-1955**

Patryk Oczko, University of Silesia

The emergence of Polish animation following World War II was intricately tied to the socialist system. Initially, filmmakers enjoyed a degree of creative freedom. However, in 1949, the influence of socialist realism, directly imported from the USSR, began to make its mark on. The mandate for newly produced films was clear: they were to embody socialist values while maintaining a distinctly national character. Animation, in particular, was seen as a powerful tool for educating and entertaining children. Yet, the directives from ideological authorities were often vague, leading creators to navigate solutions through intuition. This period saw the production of visually stunning films with high artistic merit. In terms of content, the cartoons produced between 1949 and 1955 serve as a compelling reflection of the challenging socio-political landscape of post-war Poland.



## **Retellings of classic fairy tales in the “Bajki of Bolek and Lolek” series**

Monika Woźniak, Sapienza University of Rome

Among Polish animations for children, Bolek and Lolek, created in 1964 by Władysław Nehrebecki, are undoubtedly among the most important and popular. Bolek and Lolek appeared in 168 episodes of short films, making up 11 series and one feature film. The main compositional idea of the series was to play dozens of variations of boys’ games, playing various roles. The lack of dialogue and situational comedy recalled American cartoons. What was innovative, however, were the realistic adventures and the present time of action. In most of the series about Bolek and Lolek, everyday life prevails over fairy tales, and the power of imagination can explain fantastic events. One of the few exceptions to this rule is the 13 episodes of “The Fairy Tale of Bolek and Lolek” (1970-1971), inspired by classic fairy tales such as Cinderella, Red Hood, Sleeping Beauty, or The Ugly Duckling. In my presentation, I will look at the way these threads are adapted, pointing out the most exciting ideas, often anticipating the fashion for retelling fairy tales, which were to develop in Western Europe sometime later, e.g., gender games (Lolek willingly impersonates female fairy tale characters, such as Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood) and the “disenchantment” of magical elements, typical of the Polish fairy tale tradition.

## **Dolls on the glass. “The Moomins” from Se-Ma-For Studio (1977-1982)**

Konrad Sierzputowski, Yellow Tapir Films

“The Tales from Moominvalley” is a Polish animated series created between 1977 and 1982 at the Se-ma-for studio in Łódź, based on scripts written by Maria Kossakowska and Lucjan Dembiński, adapted from Tove Jansson's series of novels about the magical creatures known as the Moomins. A total of 78 short episodes were produced, also serving as the basis for six feature-length animated films. Se-ma-for Studio employed



an intriguing technique using plush semi-flat dolls animated on a glass plate, separating the characters from a painted background. The resulting effect of strangeness complements the post-apocalyptic dimension of the Moomin world as presented in Tove Jansson's literary works. The presentation aims to showcase a Polish interpretation of the Moomin world at a narrative, visual, and animation level.

## **Soviet childhood in front of the TV: the canon of animated films in Russian collective memory**

Jakub Sadowski, Jagiellonian University of Krakow

In my presentation, I aim to identify and describe the canon of Soviet animated films entrenched in Russian memory. The empirical material for this investigation stems from my in-depth interviews during field research in Russia between 2019 and 2020. The “canon of memory” objectified within these interviews will encompass specific works, overarching themes of Soviet animation, and the names of prominent directors. Additionally, I will analyse instances of the “great absentees” from this canon – films considered classic representatives of Soviet animation but not mentioned by the interviewees.

## **Imagining the West: soviet animated adaptations of English literature**

Anna Svetlova, Jagiellonian University of Krakow

In my presentation, I will discuss Soviet adaptations of English literature, focusing on several animated films for children from the 1970s and 1980s. During the Brezhnev era, adaptations of foreign literature were popular as a relatively safe space, from the perspective of censorship, for storytelling. It was also a means of connecting with another, otherwise inaccessible world for both authors and audiences. Alexei Yurchak referred to this phenomenon as the “imaginary West.”



When examining the cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, particular attention is warranted for the portrayal of the “imaginary England” and the phenomenon of late-Soviet Victorianism, which became entrenched in the collective consciousness through popular Soviet adaptation of Sherlock Holmes stories, though it is also evident in other works of this period. Given that creators of animations and children’s films often drew inspiration from English literature, I will focus on those adaptations set in a fictionalised England to explore the construction of this imagined world.

### **Come out the fog: Russian animators against war**

Elena Kurant, Jagiellonian University of Krakow

Speaking about animation from behind the Iron Curtain, it seems valid not only to consider the historical period during the Cold War but also the current situation, with the new Iron Curtain of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and aggressive indoctrination and repression of independent civil society and human rights, which have divided Russia from the Western world. Animation has become, among other things, a tool for protest against the war for numerous Russian artists, animators, and sound designers who have spontaneously united in a movement called Animators Against War. This paper aims to reflect on animated documentaries’ dynamic and powerful potential as protest art by exploring animated shorts from the Animators Against War movement, including their aesthetics and methods of working with reality. The author examines how documentary animation, a hybrid form that has become increasingly popular in recent years, visualises meanings based on lived experiences through personal interpretation while maintaining documentary value. This exploration aims to reveal the mechanisms by which documentary animation becomes an engaged medium, confronting the world and its contents through representation and documentation.

## **Introduction to the history of Slovak animated cinema**

Eva Šošková, Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava

The conference paper will take the audience through a brief history of Slovak animation up to 1989, focusing on children's films. At the same time it will explain the position of Slovak animation in relation to Czech animation in the common Czechoslovak Republic and introduce the most outstanding directors.

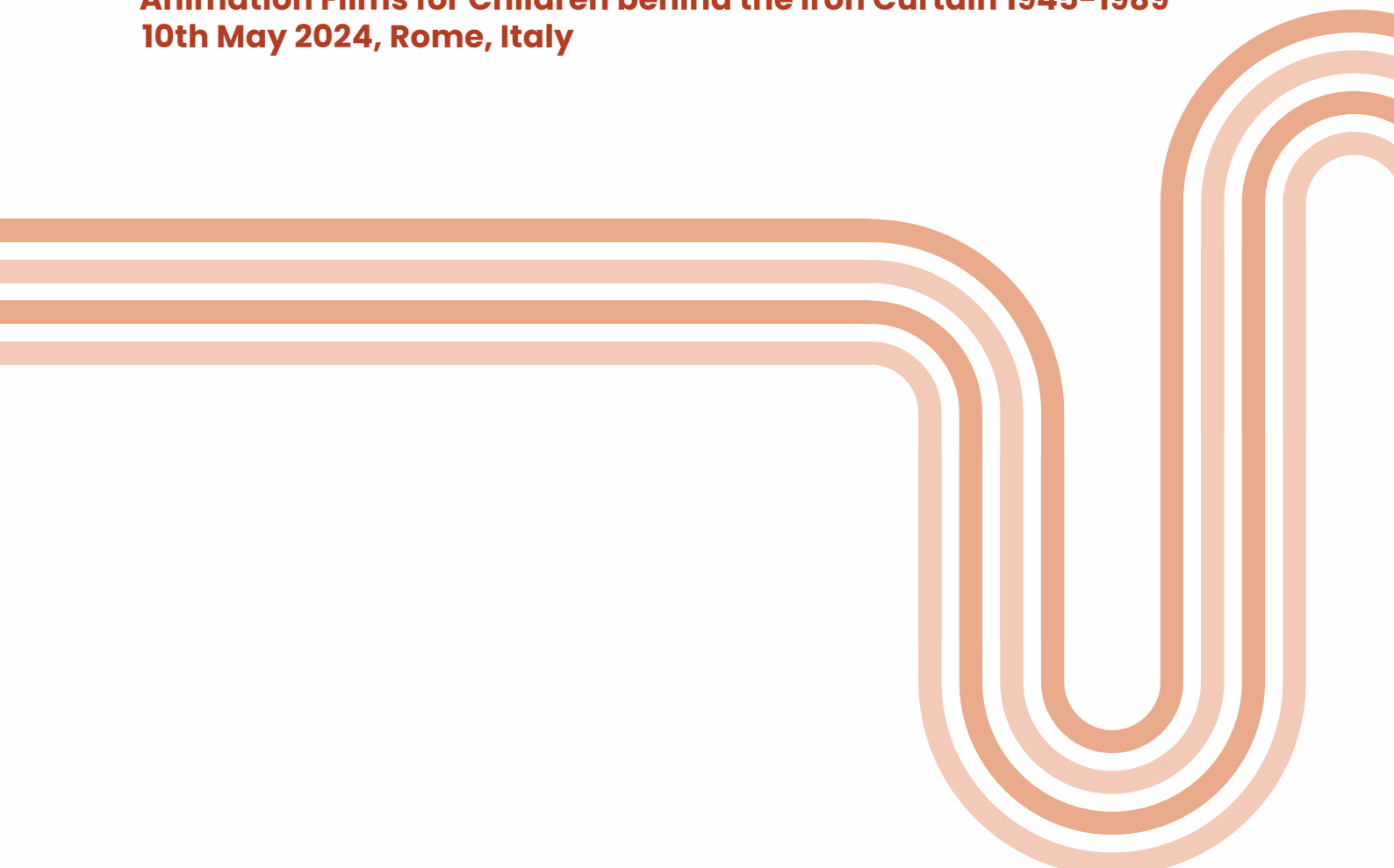
## **The golden age of Czechoslovak animation, or why Little Mole had a dacha, and Pat&Mat were continuously ruining the world**

Urszula Kowalska-Nadolna, Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań

In my speech, I would like to present the non-obvious history of the Czechoslovak school of animation in the second half of the 20th century. The times of cultural oppression resulting from the communist regime turned out to be relatively kind in the sphere of Czechoslovak animation, and censorship interferences have often ignored this type of artistic expression. Therefore, Czech animation has become a space of relative freedom of expression, a kind of “refuge” for artists, and a field for political and social allusions and metaphors.

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