PIOTR DUMALA
Lodz Film School

Out of the trees and into *The Forest* – a consideration of live action and animation

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Abstract

This is a highly personal consideration of my role and identity as a film-maker delivered at the Holland Animation Film Festival in Utrecht 2010, focusing on some of the formative influences I drew from 'live action' film, and took in my long-established practice as an animator and animation film-maker. Both the philosophic and technical understanding of the work of, among others, Ingmar Bergman enabled me to both think about and engage with animation in a hopefully distinctive way, an approach that I wanted then to readapt back into my own live-action feature, The Forest, *and a reworking of one of my earlier animated films,* Crime and Punishment. *This highlighted the particular place of the animator in the process and the degrees of control and choice in creating specific kinds of imagery, and the ways that it was possible to transfer life, motion and thought between forms.*

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When I try to compare the mediums of *live-action* film and *animated* film I instantly think back to my first experience with cinema when I did not ask such questions. Possibly it was somewhere in 1960 when, being four or five years old I was watching my first programmes and films on a black-and-white television. This television receiver named 'Wisła' ('Vistula') had such a poor cathode-ray tube that it was impossible to see anything on it in daylight. Then my father came up with a simple but smart piece of equipment that was based on attaching two long rods to the television and covering them with a blanket. Only one person could enter this tunnel, which had a screen at the end of it. You could watch films and at the same time experience a magic visit to a miniature cinema.

I remember how important the TV was in our home – how desperately my family strived for the possibility to watch the moving picture which, despite various efforts, was getting weaker and weaker each day, like a fading candle. Waiting for the specialist who was to come and fix the set was a difficult time, full of tension and hope, as if we were waiting for a miracle. When the technician was opening the TV box for the first time, I expected all the figures I knew from screen to come out. I looked with surprise and disgust, despondent that it was filled with strange but familiar lamps and cables.

I am sure I was not interested in the division between the live-action feature and the animated film back then unless it was on another possible division line: between the films for adults and the films for children. I think a similar division still exists now in the mind of my four-year-old daughter. In a way, everything that was on the TV screen was long perceived by me as a sort of a home puppet theatre, a small house from a fairy tale, with a window through which you could look into other worlds. Today, there is also no doubt that cinema for me, both as a viewer and a film-maker, is a way to access an alternative world. In this way, it has preserved its magic character.

First visits to the cinema had a rank of a holiday similar to going to the theatre or to the circus. But the cinema interested me most; it brought the thrill of adventure, the sense of endless freedom of moving in space and in the imagination, meeting the most amazing characters while staying safe at the same time. The scale and community of audience was of great importance here. This is what the magic of movie stars and the power of advertising is about. I remember when, many years later, at the festival in Venice after the screening of *Age of Innocence* (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1993), I saw Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Rider and Michelle Pfeiffer running down the stairs to escape from the paparazzi. It struck me then how tiny and plain-looking they were compared to the people they were on the screen. As a child I dreamt of meeting Donald Duck or Pinocchio, as a teenager it was Winnetou and Old Shatterhand from the screening of westerns based on Karl May novels, and later it was Barbarella.

The cinema was accompanying me as I was entering the world and maturing. In those days in Poland entering the cinema was restricted with several age limits: older than 7, older than 12, then 14, 16 and 18 years old. This reflected the stages of becoming an adult. The world beyond 18 was something actually impossible to imagine.

1. Belphegor is a figure in demonology who leads victims to their downfall by playing on their shortfalls, ambitions and desires. He figures in a 1927 horror novel by Arthur Bernède, but in the TV series he figures as a vampiric figure, who lives beneath the Elysium of The Louvre. The character often features in contemporary anime and manga.

Going to the cinema was restricted but the TV gave an opportunity to enter the forbidden worlds of adults: the worlds of excitement and horror. Among such films watched through a keyhole I recall a terrifying French series: *Belphegor or The Ghost of The Louvre*.[1]

The film that impressed me most at that time was one of the cycle from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (various directors, USA, 1955–65) entitled 'Glass Eye' (Robert Stevens, USA, 1957). Last year, I was able to see it again for the first time since childhood.

The narration is conducted at three levels and it attains its peak in the last sequence, which is to make the biggest impression on the spectator. The first narrative layer is the presence of Alfred Hitchcock himself, presenting the film and the second – a young man (William Shatner) telling his female friend (Jessica Tandy) a story that forms the third and principal layer of the film. It is a story of a lonely sensitive woman (Rosemary Harris) charmed by a mysterious actor (Tom Conway) performing in theatres with a large talking puppet (Billy Barty). The woman follows the magician to passionately watch his subsequent shows dreaming of meeting him in person. Finally, she receives a letter from him, with an invitation to meet him in a hotel room after the end of the show.

No one gets murdered, no monster appears. The woman loses her illusions, the dwarf loses his job and the puppet his eye. But there is horror in the final scenes, which results from a disturbing change of knowledge for both the woman and the audience about 'who is who' and in consequence, a loss of control and trust in one's own judgement of things. This is the basis of the feeling of insecurity, especially in the case of an unarmed sensibility of a child. Interestingly, this story could be retold as a comedy of errors. But it was told differently.

This is my attempt at analysis (considering I was a spectator aged 6 !!). A young pretty lady comes at night to a small hotel she does not know. A concierge gives a knowing and lascivious smile, and informs her which room the actor is awaiting her. She moves along a dark corridor, and knocks on the door. Her romantic hero is sitting with a mysterious puppet behind a desk at the back of a shaded room. A short and pleasant conversation takes place while they remain at a distance. Eventually just before saying 'goodbye', the woman decides to come closer to touch her idol. At that moment, he falls over to the floor, turning out to be a mannequin. At the same time, the dwarf who had pretended to be the dummy discloses himself, jumping on the table, shouting and stamping his feet. The woman escapes. Her role in the story ends here. The dwarf lifts his mask, picks up the mannequin from the floor to discover with horror that it has lost a glass eye. He tries to find the eye but without success.

We then move one layer closer, as the young man, the narrator of these events, shows his listener the glass eye as a proof of his story being true. The question about the dwarf comes up. Where is he, what happened to him? One meaning might be, 'Is he still looking for the missing eye?' and prompting another, 'How did the young man come into possession of the eye?' The youngster is recalling with difficulty that he heard about the future fate of the dwarf and that he was travelling with a small circus on a horse-drawn cart in an unknown direction, and on-screen his image crops up, no

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longer in the past, but in the present moment seen in the narrator's 'mind's eye'. The dwarf drives the cart but we see no horse or carriage, not even a moving landscape but an empty foggy wall. The scene gives an impression of a dream-like vision. Suddenly, the dwarf turns to the camera as if he felt he was being watched and noticed by us, too. Then it shows that he is wearing a black eye patch over his eye. This detail, on the one hand, confirms the suspicion of the never-ending search for the eye conducted by the mutilated dwarf, but on the other hand, it establishes a strange irrational relationship between him and the mannequin figure with whom the woman thought she was in love. It gives a strange impression that life could be transferred between them in some unknown way, as if they were one person in two bodies, merely naturally accepting this condition. Maybe the dwarf travelling through this unknown space is still the puppet brought to life.

In this moment, we come one layer closer to the viewer. In this layer, we see Alfred Hitchcock filmed in an undefined studio who says goodbye to us showing us 'not a glass eye' in a small box (and gives us a wink at the same time). The eye suddenly gets physically closer to the glass of the screen from the other side. One more moment, and it will seem like it is on our kitchen table.

I do not know if it was this film that directly influenced my future choice of profession, but probably it was then that I experienced for the first time the force of film images. It was then for the first and perhaps the only time in my life that I felt the strange world entering my personal consciousness as a nightmare, and it felt real, and dangerously close to me. And it came about through the TV set. I presume that, apart from fear, this memory also left me excited and with a feeling that film may be a vehicle to travel into the unknown. Looking closer at this experience today may be a tool to get to know the medium of the film better, and its possibilities for influencing the viewer.

Belief and disturbance – these two phenomena must take place in order for the film to enter into a relationship with the spectator. A film must invoke a belief in its existence, in its reality. It does not mean that it should tell the objective truth but it must have its inner truth. Otherwise the viewer withdraws, sees the film as the 'chattering' of a liar, and then becomes either physically distant – leaving the cinema or metaphorically doing so – simply losing attention. If there is belief, the disturbance may occur. It does not have to be through suspense like in Hitchcock-type films. What I call disturbance is the connection with the viewer's expectation, the work of his or her subconscious mind, which is always one step ahead of the action. This is how the film holds our attention, because it surprises us and gives us satisfaction, which comes from fulfilling our expectations.

A Polish film theoretician, Konrad Eberhardt, compares film matter to the process of dreaming (Eberhardt 1967). He draws attention to the fact that a dreaming person, although he or she remains in a self-created world, does not have a feeling of creating this world or the sense of ownership. This is similar to the presence of the viewer in the world of a film they watch. Eberhardt cites the words of a psychiatry professor, Antoni Kępiński: 'You cannot touch a reality of a dream […] It develops before our eyes as an interesting film in which we take part' (Eberhardt 1967: 13).

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'The Glass Eye' privileges different layers of storytelling to shift the narrative voice, encouraging different levels of empathy, perception and uncertainty, as assumptions are challenged and revised.

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I think also that the creative process may be compared to a dream. A creative process is understood as the birth of an 'inconcrete' vision and an attempt at expressing it in the form of an artwork. The vision escapes us so the phase of trying to transfer or translate it into a form of expression is about trying to create an order for it, to control it, to see it objectively and to make it communicative to others. If the viewer watches a film, his or her reception of it naturally becomes another link in the chain of storytelling. The viewer enters the stream of storytelling and fills it with their own interpretation. This process is taking place both when watching a live-action film and an animated film, although each of these approaches uses different formal means.

If there exists a close connection between the film and the dream, and I think there is, I will now try to prove it with another example of a film that I watched as a young person and which impressed me a lot. I saw it thanks to the irreplaceable medium of television when I was staying at home alone during a vacation in the countryside. Maybe these circumstances were of importance then.

The scene of the professor's dream from Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1957) made me admire cinema and admire Bergman. This discovery motivated me later to watch almost all of his films, and some of them many times. Growing up, I got very interested in dreams and how they inspired art, so I focused on how dreams could be reproduced in films. The professor's dream has long remained for me the most accurate in depicting the dreaming process in a film. I have always seen the other Bergman films through the light of this first scene I saw. The professor (Victor Sjöström) appears in an empty sun-lit street. He seems to be overdressed for the sunny weather. The strong motionless light and complete silence make the scene seem unreal and disturbing. This is because obvious reference points are missing, things that we instinctively look for to locate ourselves in a known reality. The windows and doors are covered with paper and shut, and serve the same purpose in this scene. Another element of disorientation is that it is impossible to determine the time because the clocks have no hands. The professor is helpless and lost; he gets hot, wipes his forehead and hides in the shade. It strikes the viewer how empty the street is. He notices a man standing nearby, wearing a hat, who faces the other way. The professor is not surprised, but only a moment ago there was nobody there. He touches his arm with hope, but the man is not a person but a dummy, quite a funny one, but the professor is not in the mood to appreciate it. The dummy falls down, but then it appears that he was a living being, blood is flowing from his head, although it actually seems a bit too watery to be real blood. Then a church bell tolls and a hearse comes up the empty street. The hearse has no driver, and the horses run the vehicle into a street lamp, which loses its light. The hearse loses a wheel, rolling towards the professor, falling and shattering too. The hearse sways, making a sound that resembles a child's crying. The coffin slides and falls to the pavement. The horses run away with the hearse, as if liberated from their burden. Silence falls. A man's hand is revealed in the coffin, as the professor leans over it. Suddenly the hand becomes alive and grabs the professor's hand, as he sees that it is his double emerging out of the coffin.

Apart from composition and lighting, we see here a special way of editing the image and sound, which creates narrative and topographic inconsistencies. A man in a hat appears and disappears just like that, leaving no trace. Images of deserted streets seem to come from different places and not necessarily from the area that surrounds our main character. The silence is only broken by selected sound effects. After the hearse runs away, the sound it makes suddenly stops. One shot may be followed by a shot from a different angle, which is incoherent and disorientating. In close-ups, smooth transitions, so important for editing, are disrupted, so they resemble silent cinema, especially the famous surrealist film *The Andalusian Dog* (Spain, 1929), by film-maker Luis Buñuel and artist Salvador Dali (and also *The Phantom Carriage* (Victor Sjöström, Sweden, 1921) actually directed by the actor playing the professor). As a result our imagination, in attempting to follow the film, experiences similar disruptions and disorientation as the mind of a dreaming person.

I saw the other films of Ingmar Bergman (see below) also as dream-like descriptions of reality, although I am sure it was not the assumption behind them. *Sawdust and Tinsel* (Sweden, 1953), *The Seventh Seal* (Sweden, 1957), *The Virgin Spring* (Sweden, 1960), *Through a Glass Darkly* (Sweden, 1961), *The Silence* (Sweden, 1963) and *Persona* (Sweden, 1966) were in my opinion records of human relations that were so dissected and concentrated that they created a reality similar to vivid dreams. Maybe they also reflected my own dream of becoming a film director.

My first immature attempt at animation (a running cat) also seemed to be an impression of a dream scene materialized. And the first screenplay I consciously wrote was an attempt to communicate my character's dream. I immediately became aware that animated film is the purest derivative of dreaming. It is much more difficult to make such impressions in a live-action film. In animation, a running cat, which only existed in someone's imagination, appears on screen, so it is as immaterial as a dream; the author's imagination given life on screen.

The film *Glass Eye* also had this quality. In principle, a large majority of horror films, especially those of early cinema such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, Germany, 1920), *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, Germany, 1922), *Dracula* (Tod Browning, USA, 1931) or *Frankenstein* (James Whale, USA, 1931) have this. The latter based on the terrifying fact of the artificial creation of a monstrous creature brought to life with some supernatural power. I do not need to mention that these characters were some of my favourites. I admit I still hope to make an animated horror film inspired by *Nosferatu.*

After Bergman I made other film discoveries: Antonioni, Buñuel, Kurosawa, Polanski. At the same time I admired and enjoyed the burlesques of Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, and Laurel and Hardy. These films, all of them in black and white, created a deconstructed reality that looked like a drawing, similar to the early Bergman films. Because of this they were not realistic. The characters in burlesques moved in an expressive way close to pantomime, which proved a great lesson for action and physical storytelling in animation for me, and a school for how to create gags.

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Animated films for adults were not available; in fact, I did not know much of their existence. Thanks to a school trip to an animation film studio in Warsaw, I saw films by Mirosław Kijowicz, but they only stayed in my memory because of the music by Krzysztof Komeda, a great jazz-music composer and creator of memorable soundtracks to *Knife in The Water* (Roman Polanski, Poland, 1962) and *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, USA, 1968). His music inspired me to start doing animation; unfortunately Komeda died in an accident before I began making films. My first three animated works were silent. For my first film that had a soundtrack, I hired jazz musicians and asked them to play like Komeda.

It was a director, Daniel Szczechura[2] who taught me the art and thinking of film practice. Observing my dreams, I educated myself in the language of non-verbal narration, telling stories with image and mood. The images and ideas I took from dreams were unique and fresh. The animation in the classical sense was never the centre of my interest. I used it as a method to bring my drawings to life and as a way to tell a story. My literature professor very accurately told me: 'You write through films.' He knew me from the times when I mostly wrote, imagining that I would become a traditional writer. After many years I realized that my literary attempts were a training for writing film scripts. Literature precedes film images; this is how I have always seen it. But it is film that I wanted to use to tell stories.

The live-action film has attracted me from the beginning but animation and the method of its creation matched my personality better. Staying alone in an isolated room, which every animator at the time of using a film camera knows, and the frame-by-frame registration of images is an intimate and almost mystical experience. In a sense it resembles the work of a writer, but it is different because the process of creating a film image is unbelievably slow compared to the time of its playing on the screen. Of course, some personalities like it a lot. This is a price you pay for a wonderful peace of mind and freedom from the hustle of the world and its pressures. What you need is self-discipline and the ability to sustain lengthy periods of creative tension without an immediate possibility of seeing its effects. In the early days I had to wait at least one month to see my footage from the laboratory and, as a matter of fact, I got used to it.

The set of a live-action film is about controlling physical matter under the pressures of changing weather, fading light, managing the moods of your co-workers and of course, your own weaknesses, which must not be seen by the film crew. It means solving problems that are far from pure creation, which may be enjoyed by makers of artistic animation.

In the 1980s, I was already developing my activity in animation that I was to pursue for another thirty years. Gradually I was learning the language of animation and I was developing my own expression. The method of animating pictures scratched in gypsum plates covered with dark paint, which I invented in 1983, was very important in this process.

The method of creating movement in animated film is very different from that of live-action images. We do not see subjects filmed in real-time motion, but determined movement by movement,

2. Daniel Szczechura's films include *The Machine* (1961), *The Chair* (1963), *The Journey* (1970) and *XYZ* (1986).

simulated by quickly changing the shape or position of a motionless object or drawing, and recording the change. As a result, in the case of a stop-motion or puppet film we see on screen a real object that gives the impression of being alive, or in the case of classical or computer animation, the suggestion of the existence of an object, which does not exist at all.

Because the presence of these objects is illusory and discontinuous, the viewer receives them in a specific way. First of all, he or she liberates all events on the screen from the rules and restrictions imposed by objective reality. This liberation may also take place in the case of a live-action film but it is not so evident and easy. In a live-action film, the film's inner truth is built mostly at the level of the scenario. Any unrealistic quality may be achieved in general by playing with contexts, that is, with the editing, or in some cases, with special effects.

In an animated film, the objects' lack of substance and the discontinuity of their movement are standard. This is why, in one take, we can see figures that are slightly distorted between different phases of movement. Or the character slightly changes his appearance in subsequent frames. When editing the film *Franz Kafka* (Piotr Dumula, Poland, 1992), I noticed with surprise that Kafka emerging from under the table consisted of six different guys only vaguely resembling the one you can see when freezing the movement!

In the film *Little Black Riding Hood* (Piotr Dumala, Poland, 1982), the figure enters the frame having proportions of a child and after doing a few actions leaves as a visibly older person. Such distortions not only may be overlooked (to a certain extent, of course) but they may also be used on purpose to give the viewer the pleasure of transcending the strict limitations of reality. Because of this, he or she may experience the sense of 'pure creation' emerging before their eyes. We feel the same satisfaction when we see an animal running on screen in slow motion or a flower blooming in seconds.

Distortion and discontinuity, which are characteristic of animation, result in a specific kind of identification with characters and objects. The fact that their identity is continuous comes from a context either created by editing the film or is achieved at a superficial level that we often use in an everyday conversation or in literary descriptions. Descriptions like 'a tall blonde lady in a red dress' or 'a stout older guy with a beard' or a 'funny Woody Allen type of guy', and so forth, are enough to describe a person and not confuse them with another. Such types of description are usually sufficient in animation to be able to follow the story and not get lost in a more complex identification with characters. In a live-action film, this mechanism was consciously used by Luis Buñuel in *That Obscure Object of Desire* (Luis Bunuel, Spain, 1977), when one character was performed by two different actresses and it had a special surreal meaning for the action. What is interesting, as Buñuel recalls in his book, the majority of viewers did not even notice it (see Buñuel 1985).

Discontinuous identity, the changing appearance of objects and rapidly changing scenes are characteristic of dreams. This is how our imagination functions. This is why we allow for such things in film narrative or even welcome them. When I started work on a live-action film (*Las*/*The Forest*

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By examining the frame-by-frame process more carefully it is possible to see the level of distortion in the construction of a figure as it moves through a sequence of motion, simultaneously revealing the technical 'difference' in the creation of the image for the purpose of showing convincing shifts in movement, and the variety of 'identities' each person possesses in the act of moving.

(Piotr Dumala, Poland, 2009)) I began in the same way as when I was preparing animated versions of Dostoyevsky's novels. That is, I wrote a short story, which I could then adapt for a film. Then I omitted the stage of scriptwriting and instead I drew a very precise and long storyboard composed of over 360 drawings. When Professor Jerzy Wójcik saw the storyboard, he asked me why I wanted to make a film with real actors when I could draw everything better. 'There is nowhere you can find a lizard like that,' he said, 'The one in your drawing has a face; it is like an actor.' Of course, I used the same way of thinking as I do in animation. In animated films, the lizard would be a character in the same way as human figures. The human expression of its eyes would be the one that I, as an author of the drawing, gave it in order to achieve or suggest some-thing. In artistic animation, each human character, animal, insect, or even a tree, some water or the wind has a director sitting inside it, whether he wants it or not.

I wanted to achieve the same thing in my live-action film. After screenings of *The Forest* I had questions from the audience like: 'What was the meaning of the iguana?' or 'Where did a chameleon come from to be in a forest in Poland, and why?' Actually it was some Australian lizard, which I do not know the name of, and it had no meaning to me. The only problem was that it did not want to move because of the cold and it was not able to climb trees. *The Forest* is not a realistic film, but it uses real images. It is not a fantasy or science fiction film, where it would be normal to have lizards in it, and I would not have to answer such questions. It is a live-action film made by an animation director.

This precise storyboard also contained drawings that ultimately looked much better as real objects. First of all, this relates both to actors and locations. This is most visible in the scene showing the son's fishing dream. I managed to find a place that was as beautiful as in a dream; and to capture it in equally amazing weather. In the film this scene looks as if it was artificially constructed and decorated, and shot in a studio. It seems unreal, and matches the mood of the scene, which is about the description of a dream. When we started shooting, some other shots seemed to me to be almost living storyboard drawings. I am thinking here of the sequence of the father walking with the son through the woods. The actors seemed to me almost like figures from an animated film.

While in animation I was aiming at realism; in shooting the real world I wanted to move away from realism and question it. The story that I decided to tell was, with all its realism, to have a universal dimension. This was achieved by omitting, from the description of the characters, such information as their profession, their relationships with other people, the place they live in or any aspect of their past. I was only interested in what was happening between them, how they reacted to their surroundings, and what they dreamed about. The theme of death was the most important preoccupation. In this way I did not need any developed realistic background because the presence of 'death' negates the importance of factual circumstances and sets everything in a new context. I wanted to show this special atmosphere of the nearness of death and set it as a background for the father–son relationship. Against a background stripped of all contextual information, it becomes

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Storyboard and actual shot of the lizard, seeking to play out the same level of control and choice in both approaches.

seemingly redundant in the face of a greater mystery. The relationship between the father and son is built from the beginning of the film and each ordinary activity gains a new meaning accordingly. Time passes differently in the last days of a person's life.

This knowledge and the knowledge of the realities of everyday care over a dying person I drew from my own experience with my father. I tried to not to make the film autobiographical, though. I tried to achieve this by introducing a parallel story layer that takes place in the forest, and a third animated layer showing a sort of primal non-material existence. *The Forest* is a film telling a serious story about dying. But there is humour in it, which was noticed only by the audience during the screenings in the Czech Republic!

The idea of the film itself had its roots in the script of another film, which I wrote a few years earlier, but was never made. It had an episode of two men lost in the forest, which prompted me to develop it in the form of a separate film. *The Forest* was also a narrative experiment for me. I wanted to combine two threads involving the same actors. Their relationship becomes reversed and the surroundings change. The action was supposed to run in different directions. Both of the threads were to provoke the feeling of the proximity of death. I named the animated fragment, which was a prologue to *The Forest*, a song of the dead. I wanted to leave the interpretation of combining these two threads to the viewer. I wanted to see for myself what would be the result of it.

Drawing a storyboard made the work on location a lot easier. It was like a map leading us to our point of destination. The animator's precision turned out to be useful in controlling a living and often wild process of shooting with actors. The patience always required when making animated films also helped when we were waiting to obtain the necessary funding to start work. Three years passed between drawing the storyboard to the sound of the first clapperboard snapping before the opening shot. A break between shooting in an apartment and in the forest itself, caused by a lack of funding, resulted in another year passing. *The Forest* was shot in thirteen days in total. Four days indoors and nine days on location. The whole production from the moment I sat down to write a short story to accepting the film copy took over five years. The film lasts 75 minutes.

Just for comparison – it took me six years to make a 35-minute *Crime and Punishment* (Piotr Dumala, Poland, 2000), including three and a half years of animating in front of a camera. With other films, the amount of time spent on the animation process itself compared to the rest of the production was even greater. The reasons for this are simple. At a live-action film set you can shoot in one day a hundred times more material than in the case of animation. The circumstances of shooting animation do not pose the same kind of pressure as that present on a film set of a live-action film, which is understood first and foremost through its cost. The accounting of such a cost does not exist in animation at all. You can talk of a cost of one second or one minute of a finished film. In the process of animating it is possible to change the script completely because you have time to think about it again.

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When shooting with real actors you can add different versions in different takes but bigger changes are too risky.

Because animated film is created so slowly, it is tempting to introduce changes. On the other hand, the static nature of this process makes it possible to prepare everything in detail and follow a plan. If you work alone you have to sustain your creative energy in some way, and your interest in the project, or otherwise you can die of boredom or go mad! To be conscious that the film is still a living process is very helpful in long periods of working alone. However, you need a specific personality to do this. People who like to be in the company of others more often, and to see the results of their work quickly, will not make good animators.

Shooting in a live-action film may not take too long because of a greater intensity of activity during this process – overcoming many technical problems and conflicts, directing the team, making decisions under the pressure of time and bearing financial responsibility, etc. – while still remaining an artist who is trying to realize his idea. Shooting a live-action film for three years seems to be madness. It is confirmed by experience. A prolonged shooting of one of the last films of Henri-Georges Clouzot (the unfinished *Inferno* began in 1964) resulted in the main actor running away from the location and the director being taken to hospital with a heart attack!

The stages of work in film-making involve writing a script, preparing production, shooting and post-production. Because a period of shooting in a live-action film is relatively short, the creative work must often take place during the editing, which gives the film its final shape and mood. Of course, then the pictures are already shot and it is not always possible to shoot additional material. This poses a great burden of responsibility on the period of shooting and the period of preparation before it. It is always the case that animation is more focused on its period of pre-production.

I have often heard opinions that my animated films use formal means borrowed from live-action films. Maybe I have always been a fan of live-action films, and I am pretending to be an animator. But it seems to me that I have been trying to tell a story and I used ideas that seemed best for a given situation. For example, in my film *The Gentle* (Piotr Dumala, Poland, 1985), based on Dostoyevsky's short story, I used simulated panoramas and moving camera effects, which I was animating for long weeks in order to make certain scenes different and more expressive and place attention on the flow of time. They were to express a very emotional subjective image seen through the character's eyes. The imperfections resulting from animating make the scenes even more hallucinatory. Thanks to the gypsum technique, I used morphing[3] then for the first time. The trick soon became very popular thanks to introduction of computer-made special effects. In *The Gentle,* the movements of the camera were more about experimenting for formalist aesthetic effects, rather than being functional, and all the more surprising than using 'morphing' because of their different nature in being essentially derived from live-action shooting.

3. Morphing is the fluid metamorphosis from one image or scene to another, without editing, and demonstrably shows the mutability of form in the process of transition.

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Out of the trees ...

A panoramic sequence achieved through animating the sequence frame by frame aping the movement of the camera in live-action shooting.

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The problem of controlling the flow of time also featured in the film *Franz Kafka*. It was supposed to be a documentary based on imagination. Fitting 41 years of Kafka's life in sixteen minutes of a film required finding another method of condensing time beyond morphing or animating panoramas. Episodic editing served this purpose. The film is divided into chapters as in a book, or strictly speaking, in a diary – Kafka's diaries were the basis of the idea for this project. Old photographs of Prague and Kafka's family pictures influenced my decision to use a multi-plane camera in order to get a realistic effect through the photographic depth of image, and to make the film look like it was composed of documentary photos. The only morphing, which was contradictory to the conventions I adopted, is in the final scene where Kafka turns into a dog, where I used it to signify his final resignation from presence in this world.

This film was to me a step in a direction of a live-action film, although I realize that the same scenes with the participation of actors would not give the same kind of hallucinatory results. Stop-motion animation is very special because it is discontinuous. Ultimately, its specificity, as well as the non-realism of animated figures, was the only tool I could use to carry out my task. For the same reason I dared to adapt Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. When asked by Truffaut why he never made 'Crime and Punishment', Hitchcock answered: 'I will never do it. It contains a lot of words and each of them is important. In order to express the same in film, I would have to make a six- or ten-hour film' (Truffaut 1986: 85). Also, Hitchcock could never make a film without suspense and everybody knows the ending of *Crime and Punishment*. To me the use of animation itself introduced some suspense and was a way to translate words into images.

The realism and construction of the film of *Crime and Punishment* made me move away from animation that I had made before. My objective was to make a multi-stranded animated feature film in which the figures would be like actors. I sensed that I had exhausted the kind of animation that I had always been using, but I still wanted to make films. In my first live-action film, which is *The Forest*, the animation was to intersect with the live-action footage through the whole film in such way that the viewer following the action does not pay attention to the changing medium. After editing the whole footage it seemed, however, that this concept destroyed the coherence of the film, and introduced a strange element that undermined the credibility of the story. The effect would be a fantasy with special effects. It still demonstrated that there was some fundamental difference between animation and live action.

Putting a five-minute animated sequence at the beginning of the film was inspired by the construction of a Greek drama, which is preceded by the chorus singing. The content of the song is not directly linked to the later story but was the essence of it. The beginning of *Hamlet* is constructed in a similar way. I decided to make a separate short animated film and to combine it with live-action footage. The effect of this combination and its interpretation is left to the viewer.

The soundtrack of *The Forest* also echoes its use and function in animation. We were preparing it very carefully. When cooperating with sound technicians I was drawing their attention to the fact that

the film contains almost no dialogue. Also, the dialogue does not serve to drive the action, but is more of a texture that creates the ambience of the father–son relationship. The sound effects and background sounds were to perform an important narrative function. It happened automatically because of the reduction of dialogue and in the end also resulted in the minimum presence of music.

It was my previous experience with animation that gave me the habit of telling a story only with the image supported with sound effects. The language of the body and the language of the image are, in my opinion, the essence of film because they make the meaning more condensed and change the awareness of time in a film narrative, whereas dialogue 'as such' takes place in real time. This is what Hitchcock noticed in his conversation with Truffaut when he said: '… isn't shrinking or expanding time a main task of a director? […] time in the cinema should have nothing to do with real time' (Truffaut 1986: 382). Animation has a privileged position here compared to live-action films. By itself, it addresses the time issue by creating illusory objects existing in illusory time. In a live-action film this effect is mostly constructed in editing.

When making *The Forest* I used the principle of reduction – little dialogue, only two characters, a minimum of knowledge about them, a lack of information on their relationship with other people, two locations: the house and the forest, and last but not least, a lack of colour. I think that the reason behind it was that I consciously and subconsciously wanted to treat a live-action film as if it were animation. A film frame is a selected and composed fragment of a larger implicit reality extending beyond the frame. In a live-action film, although we know the location is arranged specifically for the film, we have an impression of space outside the frame. The space in an animated film extends theoretically in our imagination, but it does not exist physically, because it was never there in the first place. It is a similar effect to the space of a theatre stage; I used to perceive the TV box in the same way as a child.

The solution I used when making *The Forest* sought to create a situation where the 'real space' outside the frame operated in the same way as in animation – purely in the imagination. Surely the characters must live somewhere else in real place and time, probably they have some family or work; the forest must have a beginning and an end somewhere, and there has to be a place where people live somewhere around – but the film gives us no evidence of that. What is more, it has no impact on the action of the film. The story is about a specific thing, and it only concentrates on that, distilled as in many animated films.

This is how I constructed my animated stories. It was a disappointment for some of my audience and a surprise to me that, although I am an animator, I did not make a live-action film with inventive animated effects, but I transposed onto a live-action film a way of thinking born of bringing to life non-existing objects in non-existing time. I think it may be very interesting to further experiment in this direction, by creating a narrative of a live-action film in a way similar to a the specific creation of an animated film. For me, this is strictly connected with a literary work, because film language

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must be used to tell a story. On the other hand, I now understand why I got fascinated so much by films in which a living creature turned out to be a puppet and vice versa. The secret of the magic of film images, which I had a chance to discover early in my life, is perhaps here: on the boundary between what is alive and what is made alive. Making *The Forest* changed my attitude towards animated film. It became for me a field to experiment with movement and rhythm, it got closer to music and became a testing ground for abstract, non-literary work. The best example of this may be my last work from the spring of 2010. It is a complete re-edition of the film *Crime and Punishment*, created to the music of the String Quartet no. 8 of Dmitri Shostakovich. The result is to me an interesting proof that one film – live action and/or animated – may hide other films and, with a help of Shostakovich, Dostoyevsky may turn into Gogol in the end.

References

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Contributor details

Piotr Dumala was born in Warsaw in 1956, and has been an established animator and film-maker for thirty years. His films include *The Gentle* (1985); *Franz Kafka* (1991), which won the Grand Prix at festivals at Zagreb and Espinho; and *Crime and Punishment* (2000). Dumala created the frame-by-frame technique of scratching in plaster, and effacing each image in the development of the next. He has taught at Harvard University in the United States of America, and is a Professor of Animation at the Lodz Film School in Poland.

E-mail: piotrdumala@gmail.com