**Jacek Rokosz**

Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz, Faculty of Director of Photography and Television Production ul. Targowa 61/63 , Łódź 90-323

**Summary of professional accomplishments**

Information regarding formal requirements


Author: Jacek Rokosz
Diplomas, academic/artistic degrees held:

University diploma of Faculty of Director of Photography and Television Production
2002

Academic degree of Doctor of Film Arts awarded by a decision of the Department Board in
Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz, Faculty of Director of
Photography and Television Production at Targowa 61/63, Łódź 90-323
2010

**Between theory and practice**

My work has always been marked by a certain dualism. On one hand, I received thorough practical education in the Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz, thus becoming animated films director. On the other hand, I was consumed by matters related to film theory. Films directed by me, research studies, lectures and most recently, a book on cinema – these are the results of two simultaneously growing passions. Both pursuits complement each other, thus providing me with opportunity to join practical knowledge with theory by means of artistic expression.

While exploring cinematography during my education from practical and theoretical side, I steadily became aware that one of the domains still unexplored in Poland is the so-called genre cinema. Throughout many years, Polish cinematography, including animated motion pictures, was branded by the message of individual authors. Auteurism led to many remarkable pieces, but at the same time, the genre cinema was practically nonexistent in Poland. Clearly, many factors contributed to this situation. They often transcended art and pertained to, among others, geopolitical context.

For many years, I have been trying to understand and acquaint myself with genre cinema. The subject was more and more clearly encouraging me to unscramble and reorganize my personal knowledge of the broadly defined entertainment cinema. By accessing information mostly through professional literature in English language, I discovered an aggregation of film legacy that was completely unknown to the Polish audience. Step by step, I verified and classified my personal knowledge. Terms that vaguely appeared during my education were beginning to merge into a fascinating story about cinema that was forgotten, or perhaps even exiled, as it was excluded from any serious research in Poland. Further investigation led me to the very origin of genre cinema and the birth of exploitation films. I discovered that everything started with the beginning of the 1930s in the United States of America. Faced with unfolding of the Great Depression of 1929, American production studios tried every method to halt the industry collapse. In order to prevent the downfall and resist the growing recession, they encouraged the audience to visit cinemas by every means possible. Among others, they introduced the double feature events. This phenomenon gave birth to the distinction between A films (of better quality and more expensive in production) and B films (cheaper in production and less sophisticated). The early 1930s proved that cinema based on narrative structure templates is one of possible ways to escape bankruptcy. During the years marked by omnipresent recession, it turned out salutary for almost every part of the film industry. The grand production companies, such as MGM, Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures, and the smaller production studios, like Universal Pictures or RKO Radio Pictures, all adopted a more controlled production system to rescue their financial situation.

As the years went by, films produced according to this system gradually gained more artistry. Today, one cannot deny that genre films can be equally original, surprising and artistic as the auteur cinema. After all, the greatest film creators contributed to the genre cinema: Billy Wilder, Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick. Moreover, we should not forget about the so-called new adventure cinema represented by Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, or Martin Scorsese. It has long been apparent that western, crime, science fiction, or even horror films can be used as a metaphor and a platform for triggering significant, timeless truths about oneself.

Matters described above have been occupying my mind throughout my education. I have been trying to learn as much as possible about the origins of the B movies. My

lecturers and archives of the PNFT&TS in Lodz proved to be very useful. Although the subject seemed greatly stimulating to me, gathering the materials and preparing the right methodology could take years. Therefore, I decided to foster my passion alongside my filmmaking practice.

Immediately after completing my MA studies in n the Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz, I began my professional career in the Se-ma-for animation studio. In my eyes, working as part of the film crew has always been linked to the creation process and the opportunity to draw upon know-how and endowments of people involved in a given project, which is why for several years I was part of the team often working on exceptionally original film projects.

Together with Kamil Polak, we produced a short animated film *The Lost Town of Switez*. During the production process, I took on key roles. I acted as assistant director, aided with the editing, created storyboard and visual art projects for the movie. Based on the original ballad by Adam Mickiewicz, *The Lost Town of Switez* was one of my first attempts to confront an adaptation of the classic fable. This theme resurfaced in my work several years later, which is discussed further in the summary.

*The Lost Town of Switez* received many prestigious awards in 2011. Most notably, it was recognized as the Best Short Film on the LPA Film Festival. At the Krakow Film Festival, *The Lost Town of Switez* also received the main prize – Silver Hobby Horse. The Palm Springs International Shortfest Film recognized the animation as the Best Animated Short. In Rapallo, at the International Cross-Media and Children's Television Festival Cartoons on the Bay, the film received the Best Animated Feature Film award.

I was also involved with creating computer-generated imagery for animated puppet films. The most interesting project in this field was *Peter & the Wolf* film. In this case, I was responsible for image post-production. More precisely, I was in charge of compositing, i.e. digital image processing and combining the picture created on the film set with digital effects. The film received many awards. Besides the Best Short Animation awarded by the British Academy Film Awards, the most important was Oscar for the Best Animated Short Film awarded by the Academy Awards.

In 2010, my collaboration with another film studio began – Opus Film. This is where my animated film debut, *Terror z kosmosu kontra czerwona gwiazda* (*The Terror from Space Versus Red Star*) was created in 2010. It was the result of my personal fascination with the American genre films from the 1950s. The film was presented, among others, during the Man in Danger Media Festival.

In the Opus Film studio, I continued to work with special film effects. Building on the previously gained experiences, this time I focused on postproduction for live action film. In 2011, I created computer-generated effects for the *Courage* film, directed by Grzegorz Zgliński. This film also received awards, in particular at the Polish Feature Film Festival and in 2011 and at the Rome Independent Film Festival in 2012, for the Best Foreign Feature Film.

**Research work – book**

Between 2011 and 2015 I focused on activities promoting the international cinema of B films. I organized series of original film presentations and began conducting public lectures within the scope of national film festivals. The fruits of my labor were culminated in the form of book.

Everything started with the promotion of B films, executed as original project combining cinema exhibition with my lectures. I boisterously named the project *Najgorsze filmy świata* (*The Worst Films Ever Made*) knowing that a buzzing label will attract curious audiences. That was exactly what happened. To my astonishment, the series is still unwaveringly appreciated today (2019) and tens of thousands of people across the country have attended my lectures.

The label of *Najgorsze filmy świata* is in fact covering the unclassified, yet widely spread phenomenon of lower quality cinema. For the first time, thanks to my work, the Polish audience has had a chance to familiarize themselves with genres, directors and motion pictures that never before appeared in this region. During my lectures, I acquaint the audience not only with the historic background of the B film, but also divulge relatively unknown phenomena such as exploitation cinema, poverty row, blaxploitation, giallo, carsploitation, sexploitation, splatter, or mondo.

My multiannual work managed to fill a considerable gap related to undiscovered cinema. The films in question were produced simultaneously with the mainstream international productions. One could certainly say that this recalcitrant cinema was truly underground and independent. I often mention authors, who used to be considered excluded and overlooked, but are nowadays perceived as classics. Roger Corman, John Waters, George Romero, Mario Bava and Lucio Fulci are some of directors counted among them.

Cooperating with film festivals nationwide, I organized hundreds of film screenings. I conducted lectures at the Transatlantyk Festival in Poznan, at the Festiwal Filmów Kultowych (Festival of Iconic Films) in Katowice, at the Octopus Film Festival, at the International Film Festival TOFIFEST in Toruń and during the Letnia Akademia Filmowa (Summer Film Academy) in Zwierzyniec. On permanent basis, I cooperate with *Muranów* cinema in Warsaw, where I continue screening lower quality films within the framework of monthly debate film club meetings. The collaboration with this unique cultural centre in Poland has lasted nine years non-stop. At numerous occasions, my project and I were invited to various cultural centers in Poland. I gave dozens of interviews for radio, television and press (e.g. *Polskie Radio Program III* and *Polskie Radio Program IV* radio channels, *Canal+*, Polish Press Agency, *Polityka* newsmagazine).

By the end of 2017, I wrote a book titled *Stracone dusze – amerykańska eksploatacja filmowa 1929-59* (*Lost Souls – American Film Exploitation 1929-59*). Not only was this a product completing my multi-annual research of this domain, but also an attempt to answer a vexing question: how did the beginnings look like? How did the American genre cinema come into being? Composed of over two hundred and fifty pages, this publication presents facts described nowhere before. As one of reviews of my book, film and culture expert Piotr Kletowski, pointed out:

> *The book by Jacek Rokosz is a unique in Poland (and possibly in Europe) study, which evaluates its author with the highest rate for expertise in American exploitation cinema and American cinema in general, in a broad cognitive context. Certainly, it will become a must-read for every admirer of the 10th Muse [cinematography], as an art not only defined by well-known and widely recognized film-makers, but also by enthusiasts and brave explorers.*[1]

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[1]  Original source: *Stracone dusze – amerykańska eksploatacja filmowa 1929-59* by PWSFTiTV, 2017, review on the back of the book jacket.

*Stracone dusze – amerykańska eksploatacja filmowa 1929-59* found its way into the hands of readers and shelves of university libraries in the entire Poland. At the very moment I am writing these words (2019), authors of at least two master's thesis invoke my book in their references. It is an extremely uplifting feeling, which motivates me to further my research.

*Stracone dusze – amerykańska eksploatacja filmowa 1929-59* is not merely a book that subjects exploitation cinema to the tortures of interpretation. I do not forcibly look for metaphors and philosophical plot lines in films, which were created mainly for entertainment purposes. The true essence of my book is an attempt to provide the most accurate answer to the question: in what conditions and on what principles has this cinema emerged? I would like to remind that my film education is of practical and technical character. The Film School provided me with tools to describe phenomena not in the metaphysical sense – my approach to the subject is purely empirical. Consequently, the book contains factual information about budget of the productions discussed and conditions in which they were developed. Moreover, I consider distribution strategies, mention shortened biographies of film creators and embed the entirety in historical context. Therefore, the book does not discuss the cinema exclusively, but also acknowledges issues related to social sciences, widely defined culture and customs.

The book received praise for undertaking a unique topic. What's more, both readers and reviewers emphasized its polished style, which was equally significant for me. The reception encouraged me to pursue my work. In 2019, I have submitted for printing the second part of the book, a continuation of the 1960s decade that was previously cut short. The title: *Nadzy i rozszarpani – amerykańska eksploatacja filmowa 1960-80* (*Naked and mutilated – American Exploitation Cinema 1960-80*).

Researching the phenomenon of exploitation cinema grew into an educational mission. Through hundreds of lectures and cinema presentations, I enabled Polish audience to acquaint themselves with a previously unknown part of cinematography. Before every screening, not only do I depict the authors and describe the offstage production, but I also make an effort to outline the historical context. During my lectures, interviews and in my book, I have always stressed that the films in question cannot be separated from the times they emerged in. Obviously, the main objective of the genre cinema never was to focus on metaphors and symbolism. However, being able to cater to audience's tastes required close observations as to what would fire their imagination. Thus, in the 1950s, appeared dozens of films about mutated monsters, as an unrefined visualization of phobias related to the nuclear apocalypse. My other great ambition was to familiarize audiences with the amazing authors, who were not included in the Polish professional literature due to their filmography. Names such as Bela Lugosi, John Waters, or Andy Milligan often constitute idée fixe of my public speeches.

In my mind, this is the essence of my activities in this area.

The most pleasant surprise was discovering how abundant was the audience drawn to my screenings. In times when the younger generation spends most of the time in front of their computers and smartphones, such a phenomenon is absolutely astonishing. Encouraging the next generation to make an effort to acquaint themselves with fields of culture not advertised before is difficult. Even more so in this case, since my undertaking has no business backing. All my actions in this field are based solely on my work and knowledge gained over years.

It is astounding how much I achieved as one man band. On some evenings over 700 people are listening to my lectures in *Muranów* cinema in Warsaw. There, on the night of

my book launch, all copies were sold out in just a few hours. Such experiences are extraordinarily uplifting for the author and prove that even artistic operations of unconventional character, if conducted with passion, will find its audience.

Once I became an expert of genre cinema and American exploitation cinema in particular (thanks to my previously described activities), I began to contemplate more than the historical aspects of the subject. I started researching the mechanisms that emerged during the evolution of these films and explained the intricacies of their production in my book.

Another query that intrigued me concerned the methods of building a narrative and how they evolved. I fully comprehended this part of the film production would equip me with new tools to use in my own film projects.

Already during my university studies, I became interested in the principles of building film stories included in theorists' publications, i.e. Joseph Campbell and Bruno Bettelheim. I was aware that narrative patterns described by Campbell were applied in hundreds of cinema productions. The brightest and perhaps the most widely known example would be the epic saga *Star Wars* by George Lucas. Relentlessly, Campbell insisted that the narrative patterns of the Hollywood films (and others) exploit stories known from hundreds of years and rely on archetypal characters and events. Concentrated on mythology, the author proposed that the structure, leitmotifs and attributes of characters in every modern story (i.e. film narrative) are borrowed straight from myths. In his most significant work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell describes the journey of archetypal hero. For the purposes of his research, he borrowed from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* a new term – monomyth. Through this term, Campbell tried to convey the universal character of stories told by humanity over centuries. According to Campbell, no matter whether one examines Greek myths, German legends, or Slavic fables, there's a great similarity and a common thread binding narratives and characters of all these stories. Ideas of the American mythologist gained popularity in the second half of the 20th century, thus granting the Hollywood studios access to the Holy Grail. Ever since, the screenwriters have been able to utilize these narrative patterns, at the same time feeling as if they are reaching into the grand legacy of international written culture. The motives of journey, quest, revenge and hero's fall have taken on a broad meaning and emboldened many authors, who created the genre cinema.

Another important factor, more substantial in regards to animation, was encountering the works of Bruno Bettelheim. Born in Vienna, this Jewish psychoanalyst was focused on examining the influence of fairy tales on the consciousness of younger audience, i.e. children. In his iconic book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, he formulated theory according to which fairy tales (in its broad definition, including such genres as legend, fantasy, fables etc.) constitute an element crucial to perceiving the real world later on. Bettelheim argues that in fairy tales, all archetypes coexist and merge. The everlasting battle of good against evil is one of them. Other motifs described by Campbell appear as well: the journey, the growing and taking on responsibilities, the punishment for evil deeds and the revenge for misery caused. Bettelheim concentrated mostly on the Grimm brothers' fairy tales and used them to point out the canonical characters reused and redone in miscellaneous variations – from the early Disney animations with sound effects, to the modern-day Pixar films. The evil witch, the stepmother, the prince, the hardworking, yet fearful orphan are only a small fraction of characters that the young audience identified with years ago and still does today.

Research brought another significant finding.

Bettelheim attempted not only to understand how a child perceives the message behind fantastic stories. Examining what impact the stories heard, or seen, by the child had on its adult life was equally important to him. Although the platitudinal statement that people remain children throughout their entire lives may be far-fetched, the act of reaching into the core (i.e. structure of building narrative patterns) and trying to understand how profoundly a story can impact human psyche is at the very least intriguing. Almost every story "smuggles in" a hidden truth about oneself and the world. According to Bettelheim, the moralizing tone concluding every fairy tale is a key that allows the recipient to comprehend difficult and complex moral dilemmas. If you use appropriate style is to disguise the fundamental matters of love, responsibility, righteousness, or even sickness and death, your message will reach the young audience much more efficiently.

Let's take a look at some of the classical examples.

Cinderella is a half-orphan suffering maltreatment through no fault of her own. The girl lost her mother and her father took another wife. Outwardly, the child gained a chance at starting a life within a new family. However, the animosity of the girl's step-mother and her children cause only humiliation and pain. Despite everything, the girl remains good and honest, which eventually guides her to a new life with prince by her side. In another example, the Little Red Riding Hood does not heed her mother's warning and gets herself into trouble the moment she decides to trust the wolf. Fortunately, with the help of adults, the girl manages to regain the control of her life and the wolf receives just punishment (in the original story by brothers Grimm, his end is particularly cruel).

At first glance, the plotlines of classical fairy tales seem naive and straightforward. There is no place for gray areas – everything appears to be black or white. Despite numerous and severe trials, the good characters usually stay good, and the evil ones receive punishment for their deeds at the end. In truth, a fairy tale is supposed to carry a simple and clear message. Similarly to the genre cinema, where the rules established at the beginning must resonate and be fulfilled by the end. To quote the classic: „If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired."

Nevertheless, it's only a façade. Through works of Bettelheim and Campbell I managed to notice the deep layers of humanistic psychology that these outwardly simple tales may hold. I realized that in this case, symbolism and ambiguity of certain situations play a crucial role.

As has already been mentioned, rereading the canonical tales by the aforesaid researchers enabled me to see the bigger picture in relation to narratives and, to some degree, canons used by the genre cinema. Once I discovered the source of these interpretations, it was easy to indicate numerous examples in the modern cinema. After all, both expressionists and surrealists resorted to constructing metaphors in their films. Fairy tales became a mean of driving the plot for such notable creators as Andrei Tarkovsky (*Ivan's Childhood*), or Ingmar Bergman (*The Virgin Spring*). David Lynch might be the best contemporary example. Let's have a closer look at fragments of *Wild at Heart*. It features not only the classic witch character, but also a prop – the ruby slippers, artifact from the classic fantasy *The Wizard of Oz*.

Due to imbuing myself with theory from narrative pattern research and assimilating cinema examples, I began to consider creating my own animated film, which would combine fairy tale and genre cinema. My intention was to fuse them into a distinctive piece, which would arouse interest of young and adult audiences.

**Idea behind and preparation of *Ally the Cat***

This is how my idea to produce a film for young audience, which could also be perceived on a deeper level, was born.

My knowledge of animated films stems from long-standing cooperation with film studios in Warsaw. On permanent basis, I work with Animoon, Letko and Pigeon studios, which all specialize in short animated films. They produce artistic motion pictures with original art style and scenarios, as well as adeptly formatted animated series for the Polish and international markets. The entire crew working for the aforementioned studios consists of the young and the middle generations of film creators. Thanks to these factors, the studios are constantly seeking new and novel solutions in the animated film field.

My established acquaintance with the management of the studios resulted in cooperation on a project, which fell perfectly within my own pursuits.

In 2016, I was invited to take part in a nascent project to create a series of animated films under a common title of *Ally the Cat*. The authors behind this idea were Magdalena Grabowska-Wacławek and Grzegorz Wacławek. Grzegorz Wierzbięta was responsible for developing the scenario. The Animoon studio offered me the director's position. The initial project description, presented to me before making the final decision, looked interesting:

> *Six-year old Ally lives with her parents in a colorful house in the suburbs. Her two playmates are cats – the black Id and the white Ego. Ally has a great imagination, where sometimes her cats dwell also. Their interactions are governed by extraordinary logic. However, no one knows that when Ally is alone with her cats, they start to talk. Id and Ego have difficult characters and their own opinions, which they eagerly express and often comment on situations with unusual acumen. Ally also has her little secret. Whenever she plays with her feline friends, cat ears appear on her head and a tail hangs out from under her sweater.* [2]

The correlation between the initial film idea and my personal creative quest immediately drew my attention. I was presented with an opportunity to direct a film, which beneath the façade of a children's story could store a wide range of associations and connections to studies and theories, thus extending far beyond simple public entertainment. *Ally the Cat* had references to theories of Freud and Jung.

I was aware that if I guided the action of this film cleverly, I could emphasize its double meaning. There was enough space to reveal deeper and more meaningful messages. The search for unobvious solutions would deliver the final flourish. Again in this case, just as I did with the classic stories, I managed to find space for metaphorical expression of serious events, which would convey something significant about the shape of modern man.

I began working with screenwriter Bartosz Wierzbięta, who had enormous experience in directing dubbed versions of animated blockbusters. Wierzbięta created the amazing Polish dubbing versions to films such as *Shrek*, or *Rango*. All films that Wierzbięta translated, or rather directed their Polish language versions, demonstrated narrative patterns characteristic for genre cinema, like clear three act drama structure, or characters created strictly according to Campbell's solutions.

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  ☐   Promotional materials of Animoon film studio, original source: https://animoon.pl/projekty/ala-ma-koty/

The completed scenario altogether fulfilled my expectations. The plotline was not only sparkling with well-constructed dialogues, skillfully developed and interconnected scenes, but also had an intelligent undertone – a quality that has been captivating me for years.

Now, I will try to summarize how I construe my own film. The protagonist is a remarkably intelligent young girl, who discovers hidden truths about life by reaching deep into her own subconscious. Ally is a sensitive and resolute girl. The plotline is an attempt to present childhood through a child's eyes and from her perspective, which is why realistic elements and imagination intertwine in the film. Whenever Ally is moved or emotional, also when she gets sad or angry, Id and Ego are always with her. Alongside her pets, Ally tries to understand the mechanisms governing the adult world. In various circumstances, the girl learns how to handle unexpected situations and her own emotions.

The plotline unfolds on two levels. One part is realistic, based on events taken from everyday life, for example Ally's dad's birthday. The second layer consists of developing drama in plotline positions, where the protagonist must deal with an emerging conflict. It could be envy or anger, or events that Ally has no control over. Whenever she finds herself in such a predicament, she resorts to her imaginary world and talks with the cats.

Id and Ego are significantly distinct characters. Ally converses with them, but also argues, listens to their advice, and becomes their mentor. In many situations, it's Ally who restores peace and balance during incidents between her mischievous feline friends. This is how she passes every test and comes out on top, how she grows to resolve serious real-life problems.

The film synthesizes real-life situations, bestows them with fantastic tones that are so representative for animations. Thanks to these qualities, *Ally the Cat* carries weight and transcends simple entertainment. To invoke the words of the repeatedly mentioned Bruno Bettelheim:

**The gist of the film is to discover the amazing world of the child.**

It is an apprehension of childhood's marvels, of child's emotions and wisdom; of childhood's ingenuousness and candor; of the world of games and learning.

The film is addressed to family film audience, who can watch and experience it together. Its philosophy creates a suitable place for adult audience (the parent) and the child. The scenario is created in such a manner that it entertains both young and adult audiences.

The animation technique was inspired by the traditional Polish animation school. Needless to say I relied on modern digital technology, but without forgetting about the standards and rich culture of the Polish animated film. The style of the film was based on the principle of "manually" preparing backgrounds, characters and animations. The entire style consistently resembles drawings and cut-outs. I tried to ensure that ultimately, the film style would take after the artistically rich and living world of illustrations for children. All animation effects are more akin to a classic cut-out and cartoon film, than a film created through computer technology.

The animation technique does not flaunt with special effects created with digital tools. The film was made by means of key frames; frame by frame that is. I wanted to achieve an effect that would represent traditional techniques most faithfully.

*Ally the Cat* is a film about childhood, growing up and solving everyday problems. It is also a heartwarming story about parents' love for their child and vice versa. The film addresses issues fundamental to understanding the world of a child, it looks upon significant aspects of this time. There's place for fun, tenderness, emotions and revealing meaningful

life lessons.

This is how I perceive general postulates that formed *Ally the Cat*.

The film was created in a professional film studio. From the very beginning, it was the result of team work, which I managed and supervised on every stage of production. The process of creating an animated film is partially analogous to that of a feature film, but there are some essential differences, which clearly manifested themselves in the creation process of my film. By analyzing the production meanders of *Ally the Cat*, I'd like to demonstrate my distinctive approach to directing an animated film.

### Development of *Ally the Cat*

Since the very beginning, my cooperation with Bartosz Wierzbięta was progressing well. After Wierzbięta wrote over a dozen scenarios, together we selected the one most suitable for the "first round" of *Ally the Cat*. The producer accepted the script selection and we commenced the pre-production process. The initial visual art projects were created by Magdalena Grabowska-Wacławek.

The style of the future film already chosen, I could boldly move forward and create the first storyboard.

To me, a scenario is the primary method of recording narration, which takes its more complete form when illustrated with a storyboard. This is when the plotline, for the first time, gains the appropriate momentum and the story, previously contained in the written form, is being divided into particular takes, which are split into specific film sets.

In my personal opinion, developing the storyboard is of crucial importance when creating an animated motion picture. Compared to films involving actors, animation is closer to the realm of canvas. In animation, visual arts can express more, than in any other film format. Animated film gives freedom and ability to portray the world in a way that's normally concealed.

My credo of animated film can be concluded in the following points:

1. Animation offers others, more exuberant means of expression than conventional actor film.
2. Animation gives more control over the creative and production processes.
3. Animation allows creating completely different, unreal worlds.
4. Animation makes it possible to achieve everything one imagines.

Storyboard, understood as an illustrated film script, constitutes a rudimental method of communicating with one's own imagination and the rest of the film crew – especially important in studio productions. Long before I started directing *Ally the Cat*, I knew that the rule "don't say, just show" works best in animation. When telling a story, I try to use as many visual elements as I can. In my view, it's the visual aspect of the film that should tell the story and be responsible for narration. Since the first frame, animated film guides audience to a new, unknown, fantastic situation. Moments later, the viewer becomes aware what kind of game the author has in store for him. It is a simple and conscious process. A mental connection established between minds of the viewer and the creator.

This process warrants the significant need for establishing internal rules governing the animated world of the film. It is crucial to answer these questions:

Who are the film characters?
In what environment do they operate?
What principles rule this world?

Acting on the presumptions used by the so-called Polish animation school, I knew that every instance of introducing dialogue had to be justified – does it truly change the perception of the image on the screen? If the narration is still legible without the dialogue, perhaps the dialogue is not necessary in this place at all.

These matters were particularly relevant to me, because *Ally the Cat* was supposed to involve dialogues. Although aware that dialogue will drive action, I did not want it to become the medium for all substantial information addressed to the audience. Image was supposed to be the most significant part, responsible for leading the dramaturgic line.

Typically, I create storyboards by means of traditional techniques: pencil, hatching, or wash drawing with paintbrush. However, I enhance these techniques, or even substitute them with digital technology just as often. With tablet and software, it's possible to create storyboard frames faster and cheaper.

Yet with *Ally the Cat*, my starting point was just a paper sheet and a pencil.

To me, another important element of a proper storyboard is a legible, lapidary sketch (which is why I often compare the storyboard style to the classic American comic books). The character (personified human being or an animal) is the most crucial part of the storyboard drawing. When drawing the first sketches for *Ally the Cat*, I wanted to focus the audience's attention on action, which is driven mostly by the film characters.

The visual aspect of animated film has, in my opinion, a fundamental impact on developing the method of driving the story. The simplest, but at the same time the most elementary way of guiding the initial creative process is through drawing. Conceptual drawings are the least expensive method of visualization and communication for the film authors, no matter whether they take form of simple sketches, or sophisticated chiaroscuro drawings. Image activates imagination by demonstrating gestures, gags, proportions, expressions; even allows making a decision concerning the technique of a given film.

For these reasons, even when designing frames, I was still drawing sketches with characters acting out imaginary situations. Narrative drawing in animation is akin to an actor exercising and repeating dialogues attributed to the character he will be impersonating. For me, narrative drawing is an ability to create stories without the need for words. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to confront one's own vision of the story and to seek the best visual solutions for the film.

I always believed that the text underlying the scenario of an animated motion picture should closely correspond with the created world.

Combining story and visual arts also requires considering the technique. This decision entails meeting certain economic conditions, i.e. establishing a budget, which influences the production time of the film. I came to realize what visual technique will be used to create *Ally the Cat* while drawing the first storyboard, together with the rest of the crew involved in the project. The storyboard helped to answer the questions related to tangible specialist procedures:

How will the camera behave in particular shots?
How many shots will involve a moving camera?
How many shots will require long shots and close-ups?

How complicated will the characters' gestures be?

At this point, I had to solve all these dilemmas swarming in my head myself. I knew that preproduction is extremely important for the nascent film. Decisions made now would have an impact on the final shape of the creation.

Back then, with only scenario in my hands, my animation could have evolved into various, completely different ways. Being director and working within a film studio, I was aware from the start that I must fulfill my duty in a way that would ensure straightforward operation of the entire production process. Although all final decisions were made by me, *Ally the Cat*, like any other film created in a worldwide studio, was supposed to emerge according to all the rules of professional film production.

The creation process would be carried out in conformity with the established stages. Stages are essentially sets of rules implemented consecutively with the aim of producing a film. Moreover, *Ally the Cat* came into existence on the basis of set guidelines, which together constitute the creative process of making an animated film. Early on, I defined all stages together with the film producers, remembering that I will be personally involved in every part. I established the creation process of my film in the following way:

**Concept:** starting the project – forming the idea behind the future scenario.
**Creating work schedule:** planning, i.e. defining the project timeline.
**Checking resources:** establishing the work technique and technical requirements, gathering materials.
**Expanding the idea:** collecting references and inspiration; integrating story; narrative work; refining the scenario.
**Storyboard:** initial visualization via sketches, models, formal project, creating characters, decoration and costumes.
**Recording dialogues:** preliminary soundtrack used as sound for an animatic.
**Production:** animation, filming, animation analysis, devising action, effects, aesthetical analysis, style, color.
**Editing:** combining sound and image elements.
**Postproduction:** special effects, color correction, recording in selected formats.
**Presentation**

The technique used to produce an animated film is not an issue. Whether one uses a pencil, or a computer mouse; whether the result is contained in stacks of paper drawings or in information saved in megabytes. My aim will always be to skillfully express thoughts, emotions and to shape them into action. As a director of animated motion picture, I must draw upon my own experiences and become a reference source of behaviors for the characters that I am animating. Preparing reference videos with movements and gestures of living people is crucial to me. Like many animation creators, I make use of a mirror placed close to my work station. Thanks to its proximity, I am able to practice activities that will be performed by film characters.

In my view, a film is a sequence of constantly changing images that present action from various points of view. Thanks to my arrangements and planning, in a short time span, the audience can enjoy an extreme close-up of character's face and see a vast landscape immediately after. The spectator can follow the action and watch it in detail, or embrace the surrounding space; he may even move together with the camera, hovering over the ground.

Based on albeit theoretical knowledge of genre cinema, I knew that the main purpose

of film (animated or not), no matter its target duration, is to interest the viewer. To attain this objective, early on I had to create a sequence of images that would encourage the audience to watch the film.

While creating the storyboard, I had a clear intention in mind. I knew that in the event the viewer starts pondering the lack of logical explanation behind the means applied in the film (camera movement, credibility of character's behavior, inconsistency of montage), the illusion of the world created through film will be immediately shattered. My film had to create and uphold the magic. I was aware that the spell would be broken, if any element of the world created on the screen stops being believable. Of course, credibility of animation does not equal realism. In my film, the most credible element had to be the succession of all events, often surreal ones. The viewer had to believe that all of the film world components are operating.

How to achieve it? How to present the situation where, for example, the protagonist is experiencing a temporary breakdown and unexpectedly takes on feline features? Should one present the entire situation literally, or resort to ambiguity?

Dilemmas of this kind were, obviously, quite numerous.

The answers for these fundamental questions, necessary to maintain the illusion of the film, were to be found in the so-called visual fluency and continuity principle. In animated film, this aspect may contribute the most to creating an absorbing story that plays out on the screen in front of the audience. After all, a professionally produced animated film is a fluent, logical series of thought-out images, supplemented with sound and forming the action. The visual continuity decides whether a film is a successful work, or not.

Creating a fine, based on visual continuity story for an animated film begins at an early stage of preproduction. Already while drawing the first sketches and building the initial storyboard, I was establishing the rhythm of the future film. By planning particular close-ups and long shots, I determined how the viewer will perceive the actions of characters and on that basis, interpret the relations between them and their surroundings. Zooming on the faces of film characters discloses their emotions and thus, encourages the audience to feel the quandaries and reflections of fictional personae. On the other hand, long shots reveal action objectives and possibilities of my film characters.

Therefore, while drawing the storyboard I was simultaneously making decisions about the film length, the application of particular shots, even the length of individual scenes and sequences. In addition, I was determining the types of camera angles and assuring the proper course of montage sequences.

Planning at such an early stage is fundamental for an animated film creator. I knew that by completing imaging of the entire film at the preproduction stage, I would avoid committing mistakes during more advanced production works.

Moreover, as a director, I was assuming responsibility resulting from collaboration with a group of animators. My errors or indecisiveness could suspend the work and jeopardize the entire project. Hence, the importance of creating a precise plan of visual continuity for the future film, already at the stage of planning the storyboard.

Later on, when the film was at the production stage, I often managed to avoid repeating the mistakes I had previously encountered on a paper sheet. Indeed, every animated motion picture begins on paper. Whether we discuss professional productions, which are developed by a team of artists and specialists, or humble films produced by a knot of enthusiasts, creating a film always starts with writing down casual comments and plotline ideas. The next stage involves transforming the idea into a scenario and a screenplay. Afterwards, a storyboard and an animatic are created.

The more detailed the "paper" planning is, the greater are the chances of success. The storyboard and animatic always provide a lot of necessary information about the resources used to produce the film. At this stage, I already know whether the film will have visual integrity. To paraphrase the words of Mozart from the *Amadeus* film: "Once the film is planned on paper, the only thing left to do is to make it move and resonate."

## Production of *Ally the Cat*

Production of the film, the animation process, began in 2016. Earlier on, after a casting session, we recorded all dialogues for the film. While recording, I had to take care of leading the actors, thus becoming director of the film dialogues. The film characters were voiced by a team of professional actors.

Full cast of the film:

<div align="center">

Ally (Maja Kwiatkowska)
Mom (Barbara Kałużna)
Dad (Artur Kaczmarski)
Id (Tomasz Borkowski)
Ego (Paweł Szczesny)

</div>

Equipped with dialogues that had been prepared and combined with animatic, I could fully control the animation process.

*Ally the Cat* is a fusion of traditional animation with cut-outs. According to modern categories, this animation technique is often dubbed as 2D animation, from two-dimensional.

The film *Ally the Cat* was created using digital software and computer techniques. However, despite the use of digital tools, such as tablets, pointer, etc., *Ally the Cat* was produced similarly to animated films that were made on celluloid sheets and with multiplane camera. When the viewer sees a single frame of my film, he may be under impression that it's actually an illustration made with pastel crayons and colored pencils.

It was a deliberate choice.

Selection of this technique was motivated by creating a reference to traditional Polish book illustrations and classic animated film style. This manipulation gave a unique character to the artistic aspect of the film. Through delicate colors and simulating painting tools, the film gained an aesthetic value and began to resemble illustrations that came alive. Like a creation made by human hands, not generated in a digital environment.

Since the very beginning, the animation was supposed to have a simplified form, but reliant on key stages, I wanted all main poses of the characters studied and refined. The greatest challenge turned out to be animating the cats – Ally's playmates and confidants.

I did not intend to apply rotoscoping, or any other modern techniques, such as motion-captures. The animation of cats was supposed to rely on key frames, just like it was the case of all other characters. For that end I prepared guidelines for animators. Id and Ego were supposed to differ not only by appearance and figure, but also by personality. One cat was nervous and hotheaded; the other was guarded and self-centered. Video materials with live cats (public domain) became a reference for creating a motion book, which summarized the cats' movement styles.

The cat characters in the film correspond with Ally's emotional states. In this way, the audience gets visual information about what happens inside the protagonist's head. For me, one of the paramount scenes with Id and Ego is the "cat fight" occurring in the second act. The cats cannot reach a conclusion as to which one is the girl's favorite and begin to quarrel, only to start fighting. The cat fight, filled with references to popular culture symbolism, involves no dialogue. It was an opportunity to show what animation can become – pure fun, based on dynamic motion within frame.

To ensure full clarity concerning the film staging and movements within frames, I envisaged yet another idea. According to the scenario, the entire animation was supposed to take place in the flat, where Ally lives with her parents. To provide a charming mechanism framing the entire story, I decided to place the flat on the highest floor of apartment building. It allowed me to create visually attractive takes for opening and ending the film.

By probing the details of the film staging, I came to realize which rooms and scenographic element will be crucial for the story. This analysis was useful to me and to the visual artists designing the film decoration. I drew a "staging map" for the entire film. It consisted of almost technical projections of individual rooms with character positions described according to the storyboard. It further helped me to visualize what will be visible before the camera's eye, or rather, in the case of my animation, what will be included in the film frame. This procedure proved to be quite useful and enabled to limit creating useless and random frames, filled with superfluous decorations and props.

Once the animation work was completed and amended, the postproduction process began. It involved editing of sound and images, as well as defining the final color scheme for the film. At this stage, we created the animated opening and closing credits – all retaining the unique style of this film. The closing credits were accompanied by an original music piece composed and made for the film by a singer, Bovska.

In my view, color correction of the film carried the same significance as editing the sound and images. Action of the entire movie takes place in one place, Ally's flat. Nonetheless, confining the action to one location was not supposed to entail a coloring monotony.

The film events happen in one day. The opening credits appear with morning city skyline in the background. The gist of the action plays out before noon – before and during breakfast. The finale unravels in the evening. These various degrees of natural and artificial light combined allowed me to apply interesting color solutions in the film. Light, just like other plastic elements of the film, has its own artistic value. It can be scattered and soft (morning), or warm and focused (evening). By implementing such techniques, I was able to create a credible climate, unified in place and time of action.

When the film was completed and internal preview in the film studio concluded, the animation was ready for public screening in Poland and abroad. *Ally the Cat* was presented on various occasions during film and animated film festivals. The following list shows the most important film events that included screening of my film:

2017

**Ale Kino! International Young Audience Film Festival**
http://2017.alekino.com/film/ala-ma-koty/
**T-Mobile New Horizons International Film Festival**
https://www.wroclaw.pl/go/wydarzenia/kino/38593-kino-dzieci-zestaw-1-nowe-olskie-seriale-na-horyzoncie-4

**Krakow Comic Book Festival**
https://instytutksiazki.pl/aktualnosci,2,krakowski-festiwal-komiksu,198.html
**Kids Film Festival**
http://kinodzieci.pl
**MakeDox Film Festival in Macedonia**
http://makedox.mk/mk/en/filmovi/мачката-али/

2016

**Cartoon Forum in Toulouse**
http://www.polishanimations.pl/pl/aktualnosci/3041/cztery_polskie_projekty_na_cartoon_forum

During the aforementioned screenings, *Ally the Cat* aroused considerable interest of the audience. The scenario fiber and intriguing art used in the film were often praised.

For me, this film became important thanks to the opportunity of incorporating my personal passion of the narrative film theories. Moreover in my opinion, *Ally the Cat* managed to show the possibilities of combining entertainment cinema, addressed to young audience, with a more serious message. As I have already mentioned, the film relies on figurativeness to solve noteworthy problems that occupy and perturb human psyche.

The film became a beginning of further artistic activities in this field. After completing the animation, the film studios responsible for production of *Ally the Cat* requested me to direct another, equally challenging project.

In 2018, I commenced preparation for the animated film *Bella z brzuszka* (*Belle in the belly*). Similarly to *Ally the Cat*, this film was supposed to combine a story intended for young audiences with an in-depth observation of mechanisms that shape human personality. *Bella z brzuszka* is a story about five-year-old Ben, who waits for his sister Belle to arrive into this world. By using a miraculous means – his imagination – Ben communicates with his sister and explains the outside world. Thanks to her brother, the girl learns about music, smell, color and so on.

The moment I'm writing these words (2019), the production of *Bella z brzuszka*, another film directed by me, has already ended. This year, the film will be ready for public presentations.

**Educational work**

Finally, I would like to mention my educational activity. For over a dozen years I have been a lecturer at the Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz. During this time, I have been supervising tens of theses, both theoretical and practical.

I began to work on the university as an assistant in the Department of Film and Digital Media. For several years I have been teaching Production of Animated Film as assistant professor. I teach first-year students, which is particularly significant. Being able to teach young people, who are barely getting familiar with the film craft, is an exceptionally absorbing and satisfying job. Under my direction, students create their first film etudes, which are traditionally screened publicly by the end of academic year in the cinema room of

PNFT&TS.

Since 2015, on behalf of my home university, I became responsible for preparing and conducting art meetings between PNFT&TS and Sapir College in Israel. The purpose of these meetings is to enable collaboration regarding animated film production. Students of both universities share their experiences and cooperate by creating animated shorts during artistic workshops. The meetings occur periodically and in different locations; one year the Israeli students arrive to Poland, another the Polish group works with students in Israel.

My main task is this area is close collaboration with the lecturers of Sapir College and the students creating films. The backbone of film etudes always lies in literature. Together we select short texts (stories), which become the basis for future scenarios. In three years, animated adaptations of works by Bruno Schulz, Stanisław Lem and Hanoch Levin were created as part of this partnership.

Actions described above develop student commitment and provide a possibility to make young creators more aware of team work in their future professional life outside the university. Thanks to participating in workshops, students of both universities have a chance to test their abilities in a dissimilar artistic environment. In addition to practical classes, participants learn about the achievements of both universities. Every day of the workshop involves cinema screenings: film etudes from each university.

One tangible benefit drawn from these artistic meetings is the dissemination of cultural uniqueness of both countries through presentations of film achievements in Poland and Israel. By exploring new fields, where young creators engage in artistic activities, we break cultural stereotypes.

Films created in group projects are later presented during screenings on both universities. Every screening session is accompanied by discussions and exchanging experiences. It is a development project. In 2019, we will commence the fourth year of collaboration. This time, students from Poland and Israel will create films based on the literature of Amos Oz.

In addition to working on the university in during academic year, for many years I have been the co-maintainer of artistic outdoor workshops organized periodically in the spring break. During those trips, students of the PNFT&TS in Lodz create films inspired by the unique qualities of visited locations. Animated short films produced under my supervision are then publically presented on-site and during the ceremony inaugurating the beginning of new academic year.

I still continue my artistic pursuits. My creative work is constantly stretched across research concentrated on the film theory and practice that involves directing short animated film.

Today, I can see that my artistic interests matured due to production of film *Ally the Cat* and writing the first book *Lost Souls – American Film Exploitation 1929-59*. Personally, I feel the most confident in this area of artistic activity. I have a satisfying career as creator of film series, director of animated films for children, author of professional literature and educator. Growing number of my readers, viewers, listeners and coworkers seem to support the claim that I demonstrate professional approach in each and every one of these fields.

I intend to continue all these activities in the future. Like I already mentioned, I am currently completing production of another animated short series. While working on this project, I wrote my second book. I continue to organize cinema presentations preceded by my lectures as part of *Najgorsze filmy świata*. I still conduct lectures on PNFT&TS in Lodz and currently, I am preparing another edition of artistic meetings between Polish and Israeli universities.

Although it might could cliché, each and every one of these activities was born from my genuine passion. Discovering new areas of widely defined art of motion pictures has always been and still is a thrilling pursuit.

For example, by screening films that were never distributed in Poland, I feel akin to an explorer. By constantly learning more about the exploitation cinema, I continue to discover new, yet to be examined grounds. Another great joy brings the realization that part of my passion is shared with the audience, who take this feeling home with them. Ever since I began my cinema presentations, I consistently receive positive feedback from the viewers. Similar thing happens regarding my educational work. Polish and foreign students, with whom I had the chance to collaborate, frequently expressed their gratitude and fondness. Multiannual cooperation with professional studios producing animated films also confirms my competent and imaginative approach towards directing.

I am acutely aware of how fortunate I am to work professionally in the area of my personal passions. Nevertheless, as my experience shows, work and passion brought together can produce truly exciting results.