

Animation as an art therapy method.

First a bit of history :

Animation (from Latin animation) is the apparent animation of the inanimate, such as cartoon characters, various objects, materials or puppets.

The principle of animation is to record a sequence of frames that are themselves static and show movement in small steps. When these frames are viewed in rapid succession, they merge into a moving image due to the imperfections and inertia of the human [eye](#). However, the images must be played back at a speed that is imperceptible to the human eye.

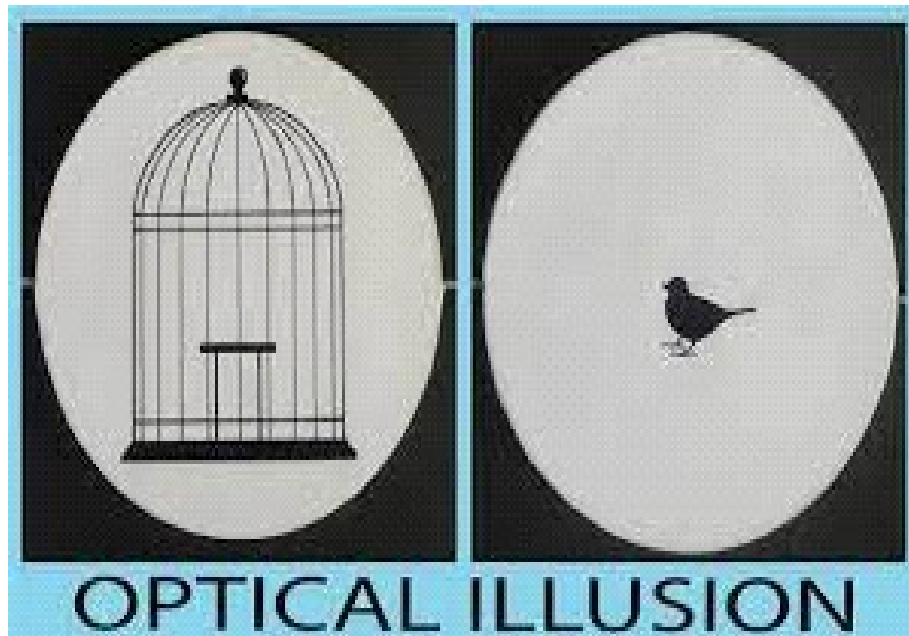
Since ancient times, man has depicted the life around him in drawings. He has longed to capture it as faithfully as possible. Already in prehistoric cave paintings we can see animals in motion. They are depicted with their legs in several positions at the same time, which is actually the basis of future animation.



Attempts to depict apparent movement or illusion were fully developed in the 19th century. Various instruments such as the [phenakistoscope](#) were developed.



It was a disc that had the different phases of movement painted around its perimeter, for example a couple dancing in different dance positions. As the disc was rotated, the couple moved - an animation of the dance was created.



Another simple device was the **thaumatrope**, which consisted of a double-sided painted disc suspended from both sides by a string.

An example of one of these is a bird painted on one side of the disc and a cage on the other.

If we twist the disc, it seemingly looks like a bird in a cage.

J. Stuart Blackton was the first American filmmaker to use stop-motion techniques and hand-drawing to create animation. He obtained the copyright to his first work in 1900. His most famous film was 1906's *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*, which was later considered the first animated film ever made and its creator the first true animator.



A French artist, **Émile Cohl** began drawing comic strips and in 1908 created the film "*Fantasmagorie*". The film mostly consisted of a stick figure who encountered all sorts of shape changes in the things around him, such as a bottle of wine that turned into a flower. There were also live action scenes where the animator's hand entered the picture. This made "*Phantasmagoria*" the first cartoon to use the traditional method of drawing.



A huge contribution to the technique of hand-drawn animation was **John Randolph Bray** and **Earl Hurd**'s idea of using transparent cellophane sheets. This greatly simplified the production process and the technique was used until the advent of computer graphics. However, even today some artists prefer to hand-paint each image separately, as this method ultimately displays their original work.

This gradually led to the animated films that are now made using computer techniques.

An animated film is a type of **film** that is shot in **stages** so that it is played back at full speed to give the impression of fluid **motion**.

More than 16 years ago, the Rehabilitation Centre Křídla was founded by the Civic Association of relatives, friends and people with psychological disorders in Bratislava.

Psychiatric disorders such as Schizophrenia, Bipolar Affective Disorder or other severe anxiety, complex OCD psychiatric disorders can often exclude people who have experienced them from their former lives, school, work and social environments for long periods of time, sometimes permanently. Although the symptoms of their disorder have subsided, they do not trust themselves enough, they remain wary of their surroundings, their original communication and adaptive skills are altered, limited, interests and social contacts reduced or lost altogether.

They often stay at home without a meaningful agenda.

For this group of patients, we have created a safe social space that provides varied resources and opportunities for rebuilding confidence, for freeing communication, and for making friends. At the same time, it releases a return to older skills and abilities, but also offers previously unknown interests and space for creativity.

At past meetings we have reported on the rich program that day center visitors participate in. A large part of it consists of various types of art therapy, which is a great means of not requiring more detailed verbal communication from new members of the community, but can also be used for psychotherapeutic purposes if the participants are willing and comfortable.

Primarily, it is a proven means of venting accumulated emotions, relieving stress, and correcting life's troublesome relationality.

An original kind of art therapy, which we have managed to develop in our centre, is **animation and animated film making**.

This therapy was created thanks to the collaboration of teachers and students of the Department of Animation at the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava.

The former student, now animation director works regularly and systematically with a group of patients.

Animation therapy discovers and addresses the hitherto untapped creative abilities that, in the process of creating the work, "suppress the intensity" of the psychological disorder and the learned inactivity of the patients.



The creation of an animated film in an art therapeutic intention is a long process. The whole group of patients is involved in the creation of the story.

It starts with animation exercises as in the training of professional animators.



Participants draw various objects, a dummy with movable joints, a live model - a rabbit, which is cared for in the Wings... they draw facial expressions...

They learn to use different materials and techniques - drawing movement on foils, paper technique, use of fabrics, different materials, sand, plasticine models, various objects, Lego sets, puppets ...

Together they create backgrounds, then backdrops, they learn to move and film etudes with a short plot.



They create a story with their own hero, to whom they attribute certain characteristics, emotions, identify with him, place him in the action, or in relationships with other objects or participants, play with him the role they have assigned to him.

Other times we use paired etude creation (includes characters, a small story /gag/, simple action, animation).

They will learn how to move a static object, according to their individual abilities they will learn how to work with a camera, tripod, computer, set up and take a shot, edit.



Patients learn to create individually /often to awaken the forgotten, but also to discover new creative abilities/. The process of creation then opens up possibilities for communication, for matching ideas, for linking stories. Imagination is awakened, imagination is opened.

Gone is the learned helplessness and the psychological disturbance-induced tendency to inaction.

The group works once a week for about 2- 2,5 hours.

Animation classes include training in dramaturgical skills.

Participants analyze short animated films with a therapist, learn the basics of film grammar /size of shots, rule of thirds, film punctuation/.

They create individual etudes or jointly invent a storyboard - capturing a short subject for a film in a sequence of images, with the therapist they dramaturgically analyse the story.

The whole group of patients is involved in the creation of the film story.

The creative aspects of this process bring new impulses to the patient, support his communication, /descriptions, explanations, questions in the process of creation, /activate him by the dynamics of the activity itself.

Individual work connects to the work of the whole team, teaches empathic understanding, mutual cooperation of participants.

The first comprehensive work was

animated film LOOK AT ME! / (LOOK AND SEE !, SK, 2010, 7 min.) , which was created as an unconventional project of the day rehabilitation centre Krídla and collaborators from the Department of Animation, introduced a new form of art therapy on a professional platform.

This original animated film, which draws attention to the ecological problems of our time in a humorous fairytale form, was selected and screened in competition at the International Animated Film Festival "Anifest" in Teplice, Czech Republic in 2011.

Its authors - patients with psychological disorders - participated in the complete creative process - from literary preparation, through artistic designs and animation under the guidance of the then student Marián Staň.

The dynamics of the animation process and the development of the story in teamwork has moved traditional forms of art therapy into a new area - animation becomes a great means of contributing to the complex process of treatment.

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