

## EDITORIAL

### Editorial

VOL. 147 (SEPTEMBER 2024) BY EDITORS

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The success story of *Flow*, a 2024 animated film directed by Latvian filmmaker Gints Zilbalodis, reads like a fable. The film was entirely created using Blender, an open-source 3D modeling software, and contains no dialog, relying solely on visual narrative and natural sounds. *Flow* premiered in the Un Certain Regard section of the 2024 Cannes Film Festival, where it received critical acclaim. The Associated Press [described](#) it as “quite easily the best animated movie of the year and one of the most poetic ecological parables in recent memory.” According to the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 97% of 107 critics’ reviews are positive as per 13 January 2025.

At the box office, *Flow* has beaten all expectations for an independent animated feature. A co-production between Latvia, Belgium, and France with a modest \$3.7 million budget, the film has grossed approximately \$7.1 million worldwide, with \$2.7 million from domestic markets and \$4.4 million internationally. It has since won numerous awards, including Best Animated Film at the 37th European Film Awards and the 82nd Golden Globe Awards. After the European Film Academy win, Latvian president Edgars Rinkēvičs expressed his pride in a [message](#) on X.

Like most fables, *Flow* is not about what it first appears to be about. Fables have always used simple plots and familiar figures to carry larger ideas – about power, morality, or survival. A tortoise might race a hare, but the lesson concerns patience and pride. In the same way, *Flow* is not really about cats, dogs, or even the environment, though it wraps itself in images of these things. As a cultural product, *Flow* represents a fable about Europe’s industrial ambitions, one in which collaborative ingenuity can overcome the market dominance of larger players, that is, where the EU’s smaller firms can compete against corporate behemoths from the United States.

*Flow*’s reliance on open-source tools and limited funding echoes the European Commission’s [rhetoric](#) on “strategic autonomy”, “agile forms of public-private partnership”, and “competitive sustainability”. The film’s funding came from various public European institutions, including the National Film Centre of Latvia, ARTE France, and Eurimages. As a product of state ambition, such publicly funded projects carry the weight of representing values – sustainability and collaboration. Compared to

animated blockbusters like *Moana 2* or *Mufasa* that have budgets in the excess of 100 million, the environmental costs of *Flow*'s production choices are obviously negligible.

*Flow* resonates because it plays into European cultural and political anxieties about its eroding clout. The real question, then, isn't whether such films can "compete", but whether celebrating their triumphs amounts to anything more than escapism – a wistful ode to a Europe now largely cheering for symbolic wins on the sidelines.

US critics have [praised](#) the aesthetic of *Flow* for its authenticity. However, observations like "the animals act like real animals" may say more about America's fatigue with CGI than about any meaningful alternative. Despite the lack of dialog, the film's sunlit landscapes and monumental ruins evoke a mythic grandeur, a vision of lost power and renewal. The purity of the surrounding nature contrasts with the decay, an idealized image of uncorrupted beauty tied to moral and cultural restoration. This aesthetic mirrors the visual language of totalitarianism, where ruins and nature serve as symbols of collective destiny and erased individuality. By turning simplicity into a spectacle, it loses the very quality of being simple.

Reviews calling *Flow* a poetic masterpiece might, in a different mood, critique it as being emblematic of Europe's industrial ambitions. As the EU seeks to forge "transition pathways for ecosystems," celebrating the achievements of under-resourced participants obfuscates its industries' deep reliance on subsidies and protective measures against the hegemony of American giants. The struggling cat at the heart of *Flow* mirrors Europe itself – small, fragile, and endlessly fighting battles it cannot win, its struggle is transformed into a comforting fable about anxieties over its decline.

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In this month's issue, Anna Doyle revisits the activities of [Łódź's Workshop of the Film Form](#), an experimental film group formed by film students in the 1970s. Margarita Kirilkina also revisits the history of Polish experimental film through the [sports films of Bogdan Dziworski](#), in which she recognizes a peculiar relation to the athletic body. Konstanty Kuzma saw two Georgian films, detecting early signs of a reinvention of Georgian cinema in Tato Kotetishvili's [Holy Electricity](#), and hints at the problematic role of the state vis-à-vis local communities in Elene Mikaberidze's [Blueberry Dreams](#). Finally, Tajana Kosor discusses Brigitte Stærmose's [Afterwar](#), a film that compels us to confront the inescapable reality of our shared humanity.

We hope you enjoy our reads.

Konstanty Kuzma & Moritz Pfeifer

Editors