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Jan Švankmajer: Film as Puppet Theatre

Abstract:
Jan Švankmajer's use of the puppet as a bridge between live action and stop-motion animation dominate his feature films and shorts. The confusions and interactions between reality, the controlled puppet and the animated object express the idea that animation is not merely a special effect but a tangible metaphor for manipulation. Švankmajer's interest in the occult arts reveal the underlying philosophy of cinema as an ultimately magical event.

This paper considers the films of the Czech Surrealist Jan Švankmajer (b.1934) from the perspective of puppetry[1].The majority of his films involve stop-motion animation[2], usually combined with live action. He often uses puppets, as both live action effects (i.e. actually pulling strings) and animated using stop motion techniques. This paper will explore his relationship with the puppet and understanding of animation; it will conclude by exploring the magical philosophy underpinning his creative decisions.

As well as puppets, Švankmajer often animated antique dolls and other toys, most notably in the short film *Jabberwocky* (1971), and feature length films *Alice* (1988) and *Surviving Life* (2010). On the one hand this echoes the surrealists' interest in childhood; on the other the doll is closely related to the puppet.

It is worth considering the everyday nature of animating the inanimate, as this has a bearing upon Švankmajer's understanding of puppetry and animated film. In 1853 Charles Baudelaire observed how children will animate any object, but also felt that looking for the 'soul' in the toy "is the first metaphysical stirring" (1994, p.24). Rainer Maria Rilke further developed his suggestions. Children make an emotional investment in dolls and thus breathe life into them, while knowing that behind the mask face of the doll there is nobody there. For Rilke the doll is a silent vessel, which we fill with our own incomprehension of being; "We mixed in the doll, as if in a test-tube, everything we were experiencing and could not recognize" (1994, p.31). So, behind the doll there is a nothingness which we fill with meaning; it becomes a signifier for the meaning of our own existence. Similar to this notion of the doll, the puppeteer Roman Paska recently discussed the puppet as hiding a profound nothingness. This differs from the mask, which hides a living being; "The mask of an actor or dancer conceals a density of humanity; the puppet, nothing but emptiness" (2012, p.136). So how do we square these notions of the doll and puppet, as profoundly empty vessels, with the cinematic puppet or animated figure?

Alan Cholodenko distinguished two uses of the term 'animation'; in one sense, as the mechanical simulation of motion in animated film; in another sense, as the animistic

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[1] Švankmajer's surreal and grotesque films were a primary influence on my own career as a puppet maker and performer. Though I was always interested in animation I preferred the immediacy of live performance. For Švankmajer the movement was in the opposite direction.
[2] Often referred to as 'puppet animation', but to avoid confusion I will use the term 'stop motion' for frame by frame mechanical animation.

or magical notion of endowing something with life "transforming the inanimate into the animate" (1991, p.16). The animation of a doll, a marionette, or a stop motion object creates what he calls the "illusion of life". Its seeming presence never ceases to be only seeming. For Cholodenko animation always implies the inanimate, dead, suspended or inert (1991, p. 21). The animated object works as a metaphysical signifier by nature of its evident inertness. If the illusion was entirely convincing we would not take the object as a signifier, we would accept it as life itself.

When Švankmajer animates dolls, toys and antique puppets their identity and objectness is kept intact; so presumably is their evident emptiness as beings. We can compare them to the use of porcelain dolls in the animated films of the British Brothers Quay. Their film *The Street of Crocodiles* (1986) in particular, makes a point of the soullessness of the shopkeepers and seamstresses. However, for Paska the puppet tends to loses its identity as a thing when adopted by cinema "often smothered by its frequency of exchange with mannequins, masks, automata, stop-action animation figures, dummies, robots, and other staples of the animation, fantasy and horror genres" (2012, p.138). This list constitutes the object contents of the films of the Quays and Švankmajer alike. Rather than smothering the puppet's identity, a more generous interpretation would say that their use of puppets and dolls was intended to make a particular point about soullessness, and therefore the nature of the human soul, in their films.

Rilke refers to this kind of soulless effigy which is invested by human feeling as the "doll-soul". As he explains; "one could never quite say where you really were; whether you were at that moment in us or in that drowsy creature to whom we were constantly assigning you" (1994, p.36). In relating this idea to other kinds of animated figures we can turn to Steve Tillis' who coined the term "media figure" to encompass characters created by stop motion, cell animation or CGI: "Media figures share with puppetry the crucial trait of presenting characters through a site of signification other than actual living beings" (2001, p.175). They become signifiers for something outside of themselves. What lies outside themselves is a notion of self; without human investment they are empty representations. Thus the doll, puppet, effigy, or media figure is a signifier for an "other self": it is empty of soul but when we animate it with movement and therefore character we fill it with meaning. Stop motion figures and puppetry alike appear to stand as signifiers; their very point is that they are not living, they are objects used to signify otherness or emptiness.

Whether animation is a form of cinematic puppetry or conversely whether puppetry can be defined as live animation has become a contentious issue. Animator Tess Martin (2015) saw a great difference between the puppeteer manipulating an object in real time and the animator working frame by frame, as if in "extreme slow motion." She noted how these techniques involve very different skills with different history and context. Her plea was for a narrower definition of animation to be used in film festival categorisation. In doing so Martin disregards Cholodenko's second broad sense of the term 'animation' as the illusion of life: "Just because something is 'brought to life' does not automatically make it animation. If that were the case one could say that an actor bringing his character to life is animation" (Martin, 2015). Some commentators on Martin's web post felt that puppetry was a great deal closer to animation than to film with live actors (Eli Presser comments on Martin, 2015). One commentator helpfully separated the broad term 'animation' from the narrower understanding of

'animated film' and does so by applying Cholodenko's definition: "animated film, to me, seems more about the illusion of motion than the illusion of life" (A Stranger in the Alps comments on Martin, 2015). Martin would probably characterise Švankmajer's work as "a puppetry and animation hybrid" (2015)[3]. However, Švankmajer did not define filmed puppetry and stop-motion animation as distinct categories in this way but used them interactively and fluidly to convey a sense of the uncanny and surreal[4].

Paska saw the puppet's illusion of life as being overtaken by the technology of cinema (including that of animation) but, he felt, the primitive objecthood of the puppet-being was retained in some contemporary performance. In live performance the "puppet seems to *come* alive without pretending to *be* alive, with an effect closer to magic than technology" (Paska, 2012, p.140). Animators like Švankmajer transfer the signification of the puppet-object to the screen, and we shall see the notion of the magical act is of paramount importance to his understanding of film.

Švankmajer's notion of animation came initially from the world of performance. A key influence on his work as a filmmaker, and particularly as an animator, was his early career as a puppeteer. Before his first short film of 1964 Švankmajer directed the company *Theatre of Masks (Divadlo masek)*, firstly at *Semafor Theatre* in Prague, then with the experimental multimedia company *Laterna Magika*, which is still active today (Schmitt, 2012a, pp.68-74). Along with his fascination for traditional folk puppetry "with their wonderful diction and spontaneous humour" (Švankmajer cited in Hames, 1995, p.97), Švankmajer utilised 'black theatre' and 'black light' techniques. In 'black theatre' the manipulator is set back from the "corridor of light" illuminating the puppets, concealed entirely in black against a black backdrop (Blumental, 2005, p.68). For the audience this involves some awareness of the presence of the unseen puppeteer, whose body is discerned occasionally as a shifting shape in the black void behind the main action. Sometimes the puppeteer's gloved hands become disembodied protagonists interacting with objects and puppets. In 'black light' the objects and puppets are luminescent.

Alfréd Radok launched Laterna Magika following his theatrical spectacle at the Brussels World Fair, 'Expo 58' (Schmitt, 2012c, p. 45). Early *Laterna Magika* performances used black theatre and combined puppetry and full size puppet costumes with live actors and dancers, film and slide projection. Their appearance was a forerunner for much multimedia theatrical spectacle today, such as interactions between real elements on the stage (actors, scenery and sounds) and their virtual counterparts conveyed through recordings and projections. In 1962 when Švankmajer joined the company Radok had just been dismissed for "political reasons", but his brother Emil became an important early mentor and collaborator (Schmitt, 2012a, p.74). Švankmajer was hired as a graduate assistant on Emil Radok's puppet film, *Johanes Doktor Faust* (1958), proposing ideas for the dream sequence in particular

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[3] At the Seattle International Film Festival Martin's remarkable film *The Lost Mariner* (2014) was beaten to the animation prize by a live action puppet film. *The Lost Mariner* adopted a technique used by Švankmajer in *Surviving Life* (*Přežít svůj život*, 2010), that of animating still photographs. Both these films could be described as a hybrid of animation and live action as they are dependent upon the acting skills of the photographed models.

[4] For an extensive discussion on the uncanny and surreal aspects of Švankmajer's earliest feature-length films see Rickards (2010).

(Schmitt, 2012a, p.66). The film begins with black theatre and a playful use of the puppeteers' isolated hands. This serves both to emphasise the objectness of the puppets, but also their manipulation by the puppeteer. Though the film is based on live performance, the editing is powerful in its rhythm and abruptness, owing something to Sergei Eisenstein's "dialectical" montage techniques (1929)[5]. There is some use of cinematic trickery, such as dissolves and superimposition in the dream sequence, and stop-motion animation of toy 'jumping jacks'.

In 1964, six years since Emil Radok's film, Švankmajer turned from puppetry to directing his own films. Švankmajer's stated reason for the shift from performance to film was pragmatic: "Film has one great advantage over theatre. It can wait for its audience" (cited in Hames, 1995, p.99). The theatre audience of his time were not necessarily ready for his avant garde experiments. But although his films were often shelved or banned by the censors, he did not seem overly worried by this: "I never made it out to be a tragedy whenever they banned one of my films. I got on with other things" (p.100). Instead he felt that they would eventually find their audience, whereas in live performance the audience could be easily driven away for good. Radok recommended Švankmajer to the Krátký Film studio to capture black theatre on film. Švankmajer offered a theatrical sketch seen at the Semafor Theatre and crew from his Theatre of Masks, which dissolved after the filming (Schmitt, 2012a, pp.75-78).

Švankmajer's first film, *The Last Trick* (1964), used black theatre with a similar pace to Radok's film. Like the *Laterna Magika* performances, it used live actors and mask to create a theatrical automaton-puppet. What at first sight appear to be two carved, painted puppet heads in the style of traditional Czech folk marionettes turn out to be huge papier maché mask heads worn by the actors. The actors' comparatively diminutive bodies move in a stiff and mechanical way. Their movement is more like the automaton figures on the medieval astronomical clock in Prague's Old Town Square, than like a marionette. The cinematically-animated elements are few, such as the painted eyelids which are animated to open and close on the otherwise static mask faces. In all his work Švankmajer is selective about when and why he introduces animation. Some films are entirely animated, such as the celebrated *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982), whereas others have no animation at all. Often animation is integrated with live action and used sparingly to disrupt the sense of realism: "…I use real animation for mystification, for disturbing the utilitarian habits of the audience, to unsettle them, or for subversive purposes" (cited in Hames, 1995, p.112). For Meg Rickards his editing style intentionally disrupts the narrative, "more of a collage than a synthesis" of stop-motion and live action elements (2010, p.36). In *The Last Trick* the gesture of the real actors shaking hands is pixilated to produce a mechanised exaggeration - an impression further emphasised when they destroy each other to the sound of a scratched vinyl record. Like the variations of two duelling magicians in European folktales and songs[6], their sole purpose is competitive struggle. As they are equally matched there is an inevitability to their destructive fates and only one

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[5] Švankmajer acknowledged early interest in the films of Eisenstein and Vertov as a student (Hames, 1995, p.96).
[6] Categorised by Zipes (2001, p. 347) under the "triumphant apprentices" type of tale, sometimes as two sorcerors of equal status (as in Švankmajer's film) but more commonly as a master/apprentice conflict.

possible outcome to their game[7]. In *The Last Trick* the conciliatory gesture of shaking of hands itself becomes competitive, like two politicians who cannot let the other have the last word. In parallel to the jumping record they cannot move on; they are programmed to take every gesture too far. The combination of live puppet-actors and animation emphasises their mechanical nature but also serves to draw parallels with our own very human behaviour.

There are some significant differences between live and filmed puppetry. A live performance is present for the audience in a unique temporal way: it inhabits the space of the audience and sometimes interacts with them. In the ghostly realm of the cinema, filmed puppetry does not have the same ontological ground that it does in performance[8]. But as Laura Ivins-Hulley pointed out, performance through stop motion "carries a paradoxical indexality: the puppet tangibly exists outside the film, but its movement does not" (2008, p. 61). The filmed live puppet similarly has an ontological status outside the film but its movements are indexical. Suzanne Buchan discusses how, in live action film, "the moment of shooting is unique. Yet the actors, settings and the physical world in which they carry out their actions are extant, tangible and constitute a part of the real world" (2006, p.21). For Buchan stop motion animation is a "complex hybrid form" in that the events did not occur but the puppets do exist. The puppet itself is a simulacrum of a living being: in cinema it exists within an entirely simulated reality where even the actors are not 'live'. So, in a sense, the whole of cinema is a kind of puppetry; it is a world that can be fully manipulated.

For Cholodenko film itself should be considered a form of animation as it simulates life through mechanical movement (1991, pp.20-22). Utilising Cholodenko's definition of animation as the "illusion of life", live puppetry could also be considered a form of animation. Any object has the potential to become a puppet, animated through direct manipulation. What we call puppetry is an instantaneous 'live' form of animation. Whether filmed or performed in a theatre, in puppetry we are discussing an event in real time. The stop-motion 'puppet' however cannot be operated in real time; it is manipulated through an often painstaking, labour-intensive process. The objects of stop-motion are tangible, like other puppets, but their movement is illusory. With a performed puppet the illusion of life is conveyed by actual movement, but in stop-motion the illusion of life is conveyed through the illusion of movement. As Steve Tillis put it "…their visible movement is not being reproduced at all, but produced for the first time through the medium of film" (2001, p.181). Buchan considers stop motion as a bridge between worlds; "*a* world" and "*the* world" of real objects (2006, p.21). In Švankmajer's films the relationship between the filmed puppet performance and the stop-motion figure creates a bridge between the tangible world of things and the illusory world of film: between live movement and the mechanical simulation of movement.

In cinematic animation the manipulator is hidden in the process; in live puppetry the operators are often visible, their deftness part of the spectacle. Švankmajer's second

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[7] Švankmajer revisited the irreconcilable contest many times in other films. For example, in *Dimensions of Dialogue* the battle between materials, objects and sexes is also by implication a battle between indistinguishable political positions.

[8] Cholodenko (2004) argues that the "spectre" of the screen as more than a mere metaphor. The images literally haunt the "cryptic" space of the cinema. Thus the cinematic experience is inherently uncanny, the gaze from the screen also turning spectators into spectres.

feature film *Faust* (1994) was based on literary and theatrical versions of the story about a dissatisfied scholar who summons the devil Mephistopholes and sells his soul in exchange for knowledge and renown. The film used the motif of the traditional marionette theatre as a setting for live actors, puppets, actor-puppets and stop-motion. Švankmajer had a long-standing affection for the traditional Czech puppet show of Dr Faustus. In 1961 his own theatre company staged a version with masked actors, based on Radok's film (Schmitt, 2001a, p.68). According to Švankmajer, the story of Faust had broader themes which touched upon other aspects of life such as politics and psychology. He noted; "I felt a great urge to bring my own obsessive theme into the work: the theme of manipulation. Manipulation is not just a principle of totalitarian regimes. Of this I am becoming more and more convinced" (cited in Hames, 1995, p.114). By creating a "manipulated reality" in *Faust*, in which modern-day Prague was intercut and intersected with theatrical sets, Švankmajer also made extensive use of traditional Czech marionettes. As they are visibly and directly manipulated by strings, marionettes are the supreme metaphor for other kinds of manipulation. Švankmajer asserts that "man is in a certain way determined. I am convinced that we are still manipulated: by the stars, by our genes, by our repressed feelings, by society, its education, advertising – repression of all kinds. We have to rebel against this manipulation – by creation, magic, revolt" (Švankmajer, 1996, p.xiii). Under the Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia, manipulation appeared to be taking place at every social level; by extension Švankmajer sees us manipulated by astrology and even by our own biological being. The implication here is that filmmaking, as an act of creation, is a form of rebellion against manipulation; as is Faust's utilisation of occult arts. Demonic magic is against nature and against the natural order of things; therefore it is a rebellion against the divine 'manipulation' inherent in our genes and in the stars. For Švankmajer however, Faust remains a tragic figure because he has let himself be manipulated; he is led through the story, even his speech is read directly from the play script.

The theme of a demonic summoning and shady deal with the devil was also echoed in his short film *Don Juan* (1969). In the productions of both *Don Juan* and *Faust*, the marionette theatre set needed to be made at both puppet and human-sized scale. In *Faust* the hands of an actor as puppeteer are sometimes seen above the stage, as they often are in traditional Czech puppet theatre. Rickards notes this appearance of a fragment of the body as one of the uncanny dimensions of the film (2010, p.31). Eileen Blumental mentioned this kind of device in puppetry performance: "…lack of believability amplifies the theatrical kick" (2005, p.71). This theatrical device has an additional cinematic 'kick' when, in the next shot, an actor steps out of a full-scale carved marionette body. In *Faust*, and early films like *The Last Trick*, the actor and puppet are merged as one being.

In *Faust* (and also *Don Juan*) the full-size puppets are shown hanging lifeless in the wings of the theatre: Faust kicks them to test their reflexes but gets no reaction from them. Outside the performance itself the puppet is, in Paska's writing, a "dead thing, a potential signifier only" (2012, p.138). As an object the puppet is reborn for each performance, rather than having the illusion of continuous character. The 'dead thing' of the puppet is contrasted with the continuous living presence of the actor and deliberately confused when the actor breaks out of the puppet shell.

Archaic-looking marionettes also appear in Švankmajer's first feature-length *Alice* and hand puppets in the short *Punch and Judy* (1966). Along with the metaphorical power of puppets Švankmajer was also drawn to their latent meaning as objects. All such objects suffer the impact of time and touch, and become meaningful through the emotional attachments we have to them. Thus he comments how old objects carry the traces of former owners, being "…witnesses of the various histories inscribed in them" (1999, p. 462). The puppets, even if replicated in large-scale papier maché, are chipped and battered having apparently undergone heavy handling in performance. Many objects in his films are from his own extensive and bizarre personal collection, exhibiting his "weakness for the decayed genres of folk art: puppets and the scenery of folk puppeteers, old toys, shooting ranges, mechanical fairground targets" (Hames, 1995, p.111). Thus, what is defunct and abandoned is given new life and new meaning. This contrast between the living and the lifeless is seen elsewhere in Švankmajer's films: the beetle which crawls inside and around the papier maché heads in *The Last Trick*; the live guinea pig which Punch and Joey the clown squabble over in *Punch and Judy*; the cat which disrupts the game in *Jabberwocky*[9].

In some films, Švankmajer's traditional customary puppets are instead given independent life using stop motion. In *Faust,* for example, the giant angel and devil heads roll through a wooded landscape; the miniature devils batter and abuse the angels independent of their operators. However, Švankmajer makes no attempt to animate the puppets' facial expressions. Their expressions remain blank, their gazes fixed. The 'doll-soul' is made manifest in his films; it eats and drinks (*Jabberwocky*) and defecates (*Faust*); it experiences the world for itself, but its expression remains blank to remind us that it is still just an empty vessel after all.

From my own experience as a puppeteer I know that under high-contrast lighting the expression on a fixed puppet face will appear to change. The eyes of the audience can be tricked when apprehending a moving three-dimensional object. The audience will interpret the puppet face just as they interpret the expressions of a living being. In film animation the trickery is not in the eyes of the beholder but in the creation of the work itself. In film there is no such ambiguity of interpretation: the audience has only one viewpoint and the fixed expression remains fixed.

We can look back to Weimar cinema for an antecedent to Švankmajer's expressionless puppet faces. One notable example, Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920), is set in the Jewish ghetto of an imagined medieval Prague. In a pivotal scene, the Kabbalist Rabbi Löw uses the dark arts to summon the demon Astaroth, who then appears out of darkness as an isolated carved mask, and was moved using black theatre techniques. The mask has a fixed blank stare, smoke issues from its mouth as it slowly turns toward the camera. But despite the moving shadows which could potentially trick the eye in a live performance, there is no doubt that this is a fixed mask. Wegener went to such lengths to bring the Golem itself to life that perhaps he intended the demon to appear as a mere façade, as an empty theatre trick.

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[9] An early example of this kind of juxtaposition was his resistance to a mandatory 'socialist realist' puppet project whilst studying at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU). Much to the consternation of his professors, Švankmajer placed a live fish in a bowl in the centre of the puppet stage to "reinforce the play's naturalist and realist aspects" (Schmitt, 2012a, p.65).

Wegener's film took many of the main motifs from the traditional versions of the Golem legend, told and retold by both Jews and Christians in Prague since the middle ages[10]. The central motif is the modelling of the Golem figure from clay, its magical animation, and its return to clay when destroyed. The Hebrew word *golem* means 'unformed', or simply 'matter'. So, *golem* is the silent effigy waiting to be animated[11]. Švankmajer's puppets, hanging lifeless in the theatre wings in *Faust,* or slumped in a box at the beginning of *Alice,* are in the state of *golem.*

The clay Golem refers to the secret of creation. In the Czech legend it is created ostensibly to protect the Jewish quarter in Prague from destruction. Similarly, Švankmajer said: "I create my golems to protect me from the pogroms of reality" (cited in Hames, 1995, p.107). In this kind of story the animated being becomes a monster out of control, even if it is technically a soulless automaton. It either rampages or is itself destroyed, and this tends to happen in Švankmajer's films. Also the static fetish object or doll may be destroyed if it doesn't live up to expectations "…we can always punish it: chop it up, burn or bury it" (Švankmajer, 2003, p.471).

The concept of the Golem allows us to draw together other threads in Švankmajer's work, particularly his use of clay as a stop-motion medium[12]. In Švankmajer's short film *Darkness-Light-Darkness* (1989), a generic human figure is manifested from unformed clay, a piece at a time, in a room the scale of a doll's house. The title implies the creation of life from nothingness, which will return to nothingness again. In the end it reaches the point where it can switch the light off itself, plunging the scene into darkness. For Ivins-Hulley the material of clay is itself a kind of performer in Švankmajer's films and also shows evidence of its maker's hands, which is how "Švankmajer inscribes himself as a performer within the film" (2008, p. 64). In the summoning scene in *Faust*, the devil Mephistopheles is configured through unformed clay, animated using stop motion rather than a carved mask or puppet. The clay rolls into the room and forms itself into a copy of Faust's human face; it becomes his doppelganger. Later in the film the Mephistopheles doppelganger appears in the mirror of an actor's dressing room, denoting at once that the devil has no more substance or soul than a reflection and that Faust himself is merely playing a part. The scene is also prefigured when Faust makes an "embryo of a small homunculus" from clay in a glass vessel, which he shatters (Švankmajer, 1996, p.13). This artificial embryo is a Paracelsian motif distantly related to the Golem (Scholem, 1965, p.173). Consistent with the Prague version of the Golem, the homunculus is animated with a written spell inserted into its mouth. The head of Švankmajer's clay homunculus grows larger and mimics the face of Faust before morphing into a mocking skull. Faust destroys it by removing the written spell from its mouth and tearing it to pieces. In Jakob Grimm's version of the legend published in 1808, the Golem grows and grows until it crushes its maker and returns to clay again (cited in Scholem, 1965, p.159).

In a similar vein, Švankmajer's feature length film *Little Otik* (2003) modernised Karel Jaromir Erben's tale about a monstrous anthropomorphic tree root that grows

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[10] For further discussion and review of the literature see Dekel and Gurley, 2013.

[11] The biblical Adam, made from clay, is *golem* before he has life breathed into him by God (Scholem, 1965, p.161). He is nothing but inert matter before being animated.

[12] Plasticine seems to be used as a fleshy alternative in the more jocular and grotesque of Švankmajer's films, for example *Virile Games* (1988).

out of control. Like the Golem, the monster is brought to life from dead matter. It begins life as a doll-soul, but through nurturing and emotional investment becomes an animated being. Švankmajer used real tree roots as puppets for the baby Otesánek, and switched them in succession. So the animated montage of different still objects becomes a continuous being, much as a stop motion figure may have a sequence of heads for different facial expressions. Dead matter has life breathed into it: it is literally animated through the use of ritual magic, or in the case of *Little Otik* through a wish.

From 1990 onwards, Švankmajer began making puppet-like objects as sculptural works and exhibited them alongside film props. Among these were his 'gestural marionettes', lumpen shapes of clay bearing the rough imprint of their creator's hands (Schmitt, 2012b, p. 325). The clay pieces were strung with a marionette control, though often mounted against a frame and clearly beyond meaningful performance. These golems were unformed and arrested before arriving at their animated state. Yet they were not simply the 'dead thing' of the inactive puppet either. For the Czech Surrealist František Dryje, Švankmajer's unanimated 'gestural marionettes' could not be considered actors but were instead "a kind of *proto-fetish*" (2012, p.312), referring to the multiple symbolic values of the work before the meaning is established as an emotional or magical association. So, we could say their potential as a signifier is reached not through live performance or animated film but through their latent magical properties. The fetish object suggests a certain kind of investment in the object, similar perhaps to the doll-soul. For Dryje it acquires its own symbolic value independent of a dramatic narrative in film or theatre. What gives it meaning is not its role in a story, or indeed its capacity for animation, but rather it is the emotional involvement of the maker as he manipulates matter. Švankmajer himself discussed the fetish as a 'contract' with an external object, one which is invested with imagination, desires and secret wishes (2003, p.471). There is an inherent power in the fetish object and as we have seen, clay has historically been considered to have the most fundamental of symbolic and magical properties.

To conclude, in Švankmajer's films the seemingly real and tangible is made to do the impossible. By contrasting the fluid movements of live film with the jerky mechanical appearance of stop-motion Švankmajer is disrupting the illusion of film; showing the artifice of the mechanical process whilst uniting the real with the impossible. Like his use of live puppetry, his use of stop-motion is not merely a special effect but a tangible metaphor for manipulation and, potentially, for playing god. Švankmajer's interest in puppetry, occult ritual, and the Golem also point towards his conception of cinema as a form of magic. In his text *Decalogue*, a kind of personal manifesto for his filmmaking, he describes animation as "a magical operation" (1999, p.462), as if it is itself a kind occult summoning. It is is a way of conjuring the inert or lifeless into life. In his essay on Švankmajer, Roger Cardinal had drawn the analogy between animation and the occult practice of alchemy[13]. Through animation, base matter (such as clay) is capable of "transcending inertia", and "…nothing in the world can really be written off as dead." In the genre of animation the objects of ordinary life divide into "the animate and inert"; the filmmaker sabotages this logic with the "…breathing of life into what is dead or has never been alive" (1995, p.89). This brings us back to

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[13] Švankmajer himself lives in an old alchemist's house in Prague and built an alchemist's kitchen in his vast *kunstkammer* country residence at Horní Staňkov.

Cholodenko's broad definition of animation as magically "endowing with life", rather than the specific role of animation in film as "endowing with movement" (1991, p.16). The simulated movement conjures the "illusion of life". But because of his belief in the latent magical properties of objects, animation is for him more than illusion. In Švankmajer's words: "Animation does not consist of moving dead things around but of reanimating them. Or to put it better to give them life" (1999, p.462). He made much the same point in an interview for Czech TV:

> To me, animation is like magic. It's not about making things move, but making things live. This is the domain of magic. And that is what I have always tried to achieve in my films – not just to move objects, but to breathe life into them and explore their inner being. (*Příběhy obrazů a soch*: *11. Od reality k fantazii,* 2001)

We could say the same of the puppeteer, who does more than simply move objects but seems to breathe life into them. In conveying a character to an audience, the puppeteer apparently calls into being or summons a living presence. As this paper has demonstrated, Švankmajer applied the same magical philosophy to sculptural objects, puppetry and filmmaking alike.

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