



## Convulsive desires: Characters in the filmography of Jan Švankmajer in relation to the Freudian death drive

Authors: Julia J. Kirszman  
Submitted: 12. September 2018  
Published: 21. September 2018  
Volume: 5  
Issue: 7  
Affiliation: Universidad Nacional de las Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Languages: English  
Keywords: film, animation, uncanny, Svankmajer, eroticism, voracity, surrealism  
DOI: 10.17160/josha.5.7.467

### Abstract:

A character is a construct, a metaphor of the human nature, whose design consists in two principal aspects: the characterization and the true character – that which lies beneath the mask of characterization. Therefore, we can infer that every character, regardless of their level of prominence, consists always of two characters, the one it shows and the one that hides. In this research, we will focus on what remains hidden beneath the surface of characterization. In order to analyze the true character, it will be necessary to study the desire that conceals itself behind the motivation of the character. The uncertain abyss where desires flow is a field broadly explored by the Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer. His characters seem to be absolutely dominated by the pleasure principle and, therefore, in constant dispute between the pleasure

# JOSHA

josha.org

Journal of Science,  
Humanities and Arts

JOSHA is a service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content



**Convulsive desires:**

**Characters in the filmography of Jan Švankmajer in relation to the Freudian  
death drive**

presented by

Julia Kirszman

under the supervision of  
Marcelo Bentancour

Universidad Nacional de las Artes  
Department of Audiovisual Arts

Buenos Aires, 2016



2  
**Index**

Introduction .....	3
Švankmajer and Surrealism .....	3
Liberating automatism... (?).....	6
1. The object of childhood.....	11
2. Beyond desires.....	32
3 . Voracious Eroticism.....	48
Conclusions .....	58
References .....	66
Bibliography .....	66
Filmography .....	69

## **Introduction**

*“Be completely submissive to your obsessions. Your obsessions are, by far, the best you possess. They are relics of childhood. And it is from the depths of childhood where the greatest treasures come from.”*

Jan Švankmajer

A character is a construct, a metaphor of the human nature, whose design consists in two principal aspects: the *characterization* – all observable traits, such as, physical appearance, gestures, sexuality, age, personality, way of talking, intelligence, values, where and how they live – and *true character* – that which lies beneath the mask of characterization and can only show itself by the decisions the character makes when facing a dilemma. Their reaction under pressure will determine who they really are (McKee, 2013). From these words, we can infer that every character, regardless of their level of prominence, consists always of two characters, the one it shows and the one that hides. In this research, we will focus on what remains hidden beneath the surface of characterization.

In order to analyze the true character, it will be necessary to study the desire that conceals itself behind the motivation of the character. The uncertain abyss where desires flow is a field broadly explored by the Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer. His characters seem to be absolutely dominated by the pleasure principle and, therefore, in constant dispute between the pleasure and the reality principle. My intention is to observe how the desire emerges in the characters of the films of the Czech animator and what it is based on.

## **Švankmajer and Surrealism**

Since the end of the 80ies, the films of Jan Švankmajer, member of the Czech Surrealist circle, have been an object of interest to animation followers all around the world. His

works are defined by the influences of the Czech surrealism and the sixteenth-century Mannerism (Hames, 2008).

His films are inhabited by objects that show the passing of time and are situated in uncomfortable settings, such as houses in ruins, unkempt rooms or buildings with moldy walls. All of them communicate attachment to a world suspended between reality and somnambulism, between the animate and the inanimate.

For a better understanding of the influence of Czech surrealism in the films of the animator, it will be necessary to digress a moment, so we can become familiar with the history of this avant-garde in the Czech Republic.

In the 20s, the avant-garde artists of Prague were part of a collective group called *Devetsil*, whose members acknowledged the ideas of the Parisian Surrealist group headed by André Breton. Nevertheless, all of them agreed upon the fact that Surrealism was artistic and – especially- politically immature. From the communist point of view, the Czech criticized the anarchist features of the surrealist riots (Bydzovska, 2005). This position changes once Breton published the Second Surrealist Manifesto, where he explicitly states his support to communism and Marxism. The poet Vítězslav Nezval proposes then to Breton a French-Czech alliance and, on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1934, founds the Czechoslovakian Surrealist group, joined by eight other members of *Devetsil* (Petek, 2009).

In the previous years to the Second World War, the groups of Paris and Prague were very close. For example, in 1936 they published the first international surrealist bulletin, *The International Bulletin of Surrealism*, a bilingual publication in French and Czech. As explained by Bydzovska (2005), after the Kharkov Congress, which focused on socialist realism and rejected the European avant-garde, condemned by the right wing for being too revolutionary and, by the right, for not adjusting to the political policies of the

Communist party, the Czech group encouraged their interest psychoanalysis and focused their practices on the individual, the mysteries of the human mind, dreams and eroticism. The Czechoslovakians were particularly fascinated by the infantile sexuality. They looked for the transgressional potential in both childish literature and songs, and folk stories and legends. Besides, the Czechoslovakian surrealism was characterized by the omnipresence of humor -an aspect that portrayed the Czech culture years later- skepticism, attachment to the concrete and daily life through the value given to objects (Gutiérrez, 2010). As opposed to the French surrealists, the Czechoslovakians were attracted to “the magic of the Possible”, capable of producing the incredible out of the most trivial event. Due to the conflicts generated by Nezval’s sympathy to the Stalinism, in 1938 the poet announces publicly the dissolution of the Czechoslovakian Surrealist group. However, the rest of the members continue working without him.

Petek (2009) assures that during the Second World War, surrealism is prohibited and declared a degenerate art. As a result, many members abandoned the avant-garde, others continued working in exile and others remained hidden and functioning clandestinely. In 1950, the group rejoins –this time under the leadership of the intellectual Vratislav Effenberger.

Since the French and the Czechoslovakian groups found themselves in completely different socio-political circumstances, it is impossible to think at that moment of a French-Czechoslovakian collaboration. Since 1948, the work of the Czechoslovakian surrealists concentrates on the theme of ideology (or the distortion of the Stalinist ideology). The communism –that had been the surrealists’ hope- had become their main enemy.

In August 1968, after a brief period of calm during the Spring of Prague, when the leader of the Czechoslovakian communist party, Aleksander Dubcek, tried to reinvent the regime and turn it into a “socialism with a human face”, the USSR and the allies of the

Warsaw Pact (except Rumania) invaded Czechoslovakia. At that moment, the hope for a more flexible regime was destroyed and a process of normalization was initiated. Dubcek was sent to Moscow in chains and replaced for a much more obedient leader, Gustáv Husák.

On the other hand, the Czechoslovakians were aware of the destiny that surrealism had suffered on the other side of the Iron Curtain: incapable of adjusting to the model of postmodern cultural production, it had assimilated itself to the advertising world of capitalism and to other mechanisms of the consuming society.

During this new period of persecution and censorship, games represented for the group of Prague a collective expression of the pleasure principle. Therefore, they dedicated themselves to work clandestinely in interpretative games (Fijalkowski, 2005). Through these games, Jan Švankmajer develops his tactile experimentation in the 70ies. He sustains that touch is the sense that has been abused the least by art (Solarik, 2005). According to the director, there is a tactile memory that can connect us to the most remote corners of our childhood. This memory is aroused by touch and, in this way, can reveal memories that seemed to have been forgotten. Hence, touch becomes communicative (Vasseleu, 2009).

### **Liberating automatism... (?)**

Breton (1930) writes in the Second Surrealist Manifesto that surrealism was committed to reproducing ‘artificially that ideal moment when the man, in the grip of a particular emotion, is suddenly seized by this something “stronger than himself” which projects him, in self-defense, into immortality. If lucid and alert, terrified he wriggles out of this tight situation.

The most important issue is that he cannot free himself of this emotion, so that he does not stop expressing himself as long as this mysterious ringing lasts, since it is, in fact, the point at which he ceases to belong to himself that he belongs to us’.

It was surrealists’ aim that products of psychic activity, such as automatic writing and the descriptions of dreams, did not attempt to express any meaning nor were restrained by the idea of a certain responsibility. They stated that both resources would be key elements to scrutinize the interior of the complexity of man.

Breton expected that surrealism would be able to get past the opposition between the surreal and the real, with liberating effects. He regarded that psychic automatism allowed to re-associate different dichotomies, such as madness and reasoning, reality and dream, among others. This method led to the conception of the unconscious that was not based on its division but its reconciliation. Automatism seemed to grant access to an idyllic unconscious to achieve a primordial unity. However, based on this premise, we can deduce that psychic life is, in fact, established in repression and marked by conflict (Foster, 2008).

According to the Bretonian surrealists, automatism avoided the threat provoked by calculation and editing in relation to the authentic and pure presence of the automatic psyche. Nonetheless, this approach ignored the matter that automatism could actually lack a liberating aspect: the automatic practice exposed a compulsive mechanism that threatened a dissociation of the subject and manifested an unconscious primally conflicted and instinctually repetitive. Foster (2008) affirms that surrealist automatism alludes to the psychic mechanisms of compulsive repetition and death drive, and quoted them in the register of the uncanny.

Freud (1920) asserted that a drive is an “urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things”, in other words, the inorganic, that is to say, death. This way, another

dichotomy is presented between life drive –which subsumes the sexual and the self-preservative drives – and the death drive – of a conservative nature. Yet, this is not a pure opposition since both drives always appear combined and melt together... with the death drive charged with eroticism. Surrealists recognized pleasure in destruction and the desire that death can awaken (it is not by chance that surrealism had recovered Sade).

According to Freud (1919), anything that reminds us of this interior compulsion to repetition will be perceived as uncanny. We should remember that the Freudian *uncanny* refers to the return of what was once familiar but, due to repression, has turned strange. Their main effects are the lack of distinction between the real and the imagined, the confusion between animate and inanimate –it is appropriate to point out that surrealist automatism reduced the individual to an automat of its own unconscious-, the usurpation of the referent for the sign, in other words, the physical reality for the psychic one. What is experienced as uncanny discloses in experiences when repressed infantile complexes, such as the Oedipus and the castration complex, are aroused by an exterior impression or when primitive convictions, that were once overcome, seem to find a new confirmation. At this instance, we are in the field of *animism*, a conception of the world that is defined by the idea of human spirits wandering around the world, the narcissistic overestimation of subjective psychic processes, the omnipotence of thought and the magical practices based upon this belief, and the attribution of magical powers to outside persons and objects. As sustained by Freud, we all go through a stage in our childhood when we conceive the world in an animistic perception. This perception does not withdraw without leaving its effects.

The case that best exemplifies the uncanny is the doubt whether an apparently animate being is actually alive; and the opposite, whether an inanimate object is somehow animate. Marionettes (which we can compare to surrealists automats and mannequins) are

objects typically related to the uncanny, since they have a predisposition to be perceived as ambiguous beings, not animate nor inanimate (Foster, 2008).

According to Foster (2008), in the First Surrealist Manifesto, Breton points out the figure of the mannequin as a symbol of surrealism, due to its condition simultaneously intimate and outsider, that combines two opposite terms, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. On the other hand, the human figure of the mannequin transmutes to an article of consumption—the mannequin is the mere image of the capitalist reification. The mannequin (as well as the automat) creates an uncanny confusion since it evokes the conservatism of drives, the immanence of death in life.

The stage in the movies of the Czech director is characterized for portraying human beings as objects and also for giving life to inanimate entities. Consequently, they provoke the eerie ambiguity explained before. In fact, according to Švankmajer, objects have always been more alive than people to him. He assures that even though they are more static, are more eloquent. They inflame stronger emotions because of all they maintain hidden and their memory, which exceeds ours. He conceives objects as wardens of events they have witnessed. In his films, he always tries to size information of objects, to listen and translate their stories into images (Weston, 2011).

Objects, as well as humans in his films, are dominated by an apparently liberating desire, which ends up being the cause of their perdition (Sorfa, 2006). He sustains that his characters face the “dilemma: living their lives according to the vague promise of an institutional ‘happiness’, or to revolt and take a path against the current of civilization without taking into account any consequences. This second option always leads to an individual perdition downfall; the first is a downfall of Humanity as such. But is it perhaps the opposite? This ambiguity, nevertheless, does not minimize the tragedy of human destiny” (Hames, 2008).

In order to start elucidating what the desire that thrives Švankmajer's character to their (auto)destructive destiny is about, in other words, how it articulates with the death drive, it will be necessary to analyze and to describe the relationship between how the Czech director builds his characters, the concept of the Freudian uncanny, framed by the influence of surrealism in his work.

## 1. The object of childhood

*Beware the Jabberwock, my son!*

*The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!*

Lewis Carroll

It is often pointed out that Jan Švankmajer's filmography presents a first period marked by its mannerist elements and another characterized by a surrealist influence. However, some mannerist aspects can be found in all his films –for example, the saturation of images- as well as some surrealist ingredients, can be detected in his work before he joined the Czech Surrealist Group (Gutiérrez, 2010).

The medievalist aspect of surrealism manifests its fascination for magic and alchemy, due to its purpose of defying rational causality: in the Middle Age, the marvelous signaled a rupture in the natural order. Since its origin as not divine, it differed from the miraculous (Foster, 2008). The surrealists' aim of the marvelous was the negation of the real, or at least, of its philosophical equation with the rational as a construct without contradictions. Therefore, the marvelous would be the eruptions of contradictions in the real, which shows the construct as such. Švankmajer admits his inclination to these topics. "My weakness for the Rudolfian mannerism is well-known: my relationship with Prague, with Rudolf II and the fateful impression on every stone of this city of the Rudolfian era and the everlasting irradiation of that magical atmosphere through time" (Gutiérrez, 2010).

Rudolf II settles in Prague in 1583. Over time, he covered himself with a mythical demeanor, due to his alchemical interests –the reason why he summoned to his court scientists as well as singular personalities. His manifested predilection for the weird and predilection for automat and mechanic dolls was remarkable, which were among other objects of his collection in his cabinet of curiosities. Nonetheless, as indicated by Gutiérrez (2010), "in every collecting, an obsessive drive can be observed and also can be

connected to childhood -to dreams of taking over the world and symbolically appropriating it by accumulating things, such as Rudolf II, who longed for containing the world in his never-ending collections and, this way, to stop (at least only as an illusion) the melancholy of death”.

Among the extravagant personalities of Rudolf II’s court, could be found Giuseppe Arcimboldo, author of the famous “composed heads”: portraits conformed by realistic objects, whose perception altogether clouded momentarily each object in order to identify a face. These portraits were not mere whims of the artist -according to his contemporaries, they really resembled the models that inspired the paintings (Chryssouli, 2015).

Arcimboldo’s influence in the Czech’s films can be identified both in his *collage* practices and in his editing. Perhaps the clearest example is the first part of *Dimensions of Dialogue*, when three heads made up from diverse objects constantly devour one another, as in an eternal game of duel)<sup>1</sup>, each object loses its original singularities.



---

<sup>1</sup> I will delve into this short-film in chapter 3.

Foster (2008) considered that the surrealist marvelous, in all its variants, is the uncanny but projected (at least in part) away from the unconscious and repressed material, to the world and future revelations. "...on the one hand, the [Bretonian] surrealists exploit the uncanny return of the repressed for disruptive purposes, while on the other hand, they resist their consequences regarding the death drive". In order to explain his reasoning, Foster analyzes the marvelous from its two aspects: the convulsive beauty –as uncanny confusion between animate and inanimate states- and objective chance –that manifests in sudden encounters and found objects, revealed as an uncanny memory of the compulsion to repeat. Both terms imply some kind of trauma, as the marvelous does. Therefore, it is possible to understand the surrealist marvelous in terms of the repetition that relates to the uncanny and the death drive.

In this chapter, we will concentrate on the first aspect of the marvelous that we have introduced, that is, the compulsive beauty. Foster (2008) quotes two examples of the marvelous mentioned by Breton in the First Surrealist Manifesto: romantic ruins and modern mannequins. What turns them marvelous is the fact that, in both of them, two opposing elements converge (in the first example, the natural and the historical, while in the second one, the human and the nonhuman). "In both images, the animate is confused with the inanimate, a confusion that is uncanny precisely because it evokes the conservatism of the drives, the immanence of death in life". Breton is reluctant to associate the marvelous with the somber, whereas he connects it with the beautiful. Despite his resistance, if the beauty of the marvelous is convulsive (as he sustains) its force lies in the ominous return of repressed material. Thus, we can determine that the convulsive beauty is also compulsive: convulsive in its physical effect, compulsive in its psychological dynamic.

Breton reconfigures the anxiety aroused by the uncanny to transform it into an aesthetic of beauty. Yet, this aesthetic relates more to the sublime than to the beautiful, since the

convulsive beauty highlights the deformed and suggests what is impossible to represent – as it also happens with the sublime-, but also because it mixed delight with dread, attraction with repulsion. This way, the convulsive beauty involves the subject in the impossibility of unraveling desire from death (Foster, 2008).

In Švankmajer's films, the convulsive beauty appears in his eagerness to show the life of objects. This filmmaker emphasized the important part that daily objects played all along his work. They represent insurrectional characters that embody a longing for subversion, which stops them from fulfilling the functions assigned to them in daily life (Jodoin-Keaton, 2010). In words of the Czech director, "the animation of real objects, the metamorphosis of their functions in a real setting in combination with a man, creates a concrete irrationality, mother of all subversion" (Jodoin-Keaton, 2010). This insurrection is captured in his films in a ludic way, anchored in the infantile world. The important role of objects is also explained because of the attachment to the concrete and to the daily life that, as well as (black) humor and skepticism, are characteristic of the Czech culture (Gutiérrez, 2010). As a result, recalling Bruno Bettelheim, Gutiérrez indicates that, by means of the animistic thinking of childhood, objects gain faculties of living beings –one of the central topics of the Freudian uncanny: from a child's point of view, if there is not a clear dividing line between living and dead things, then the latter ones can also become something alive.

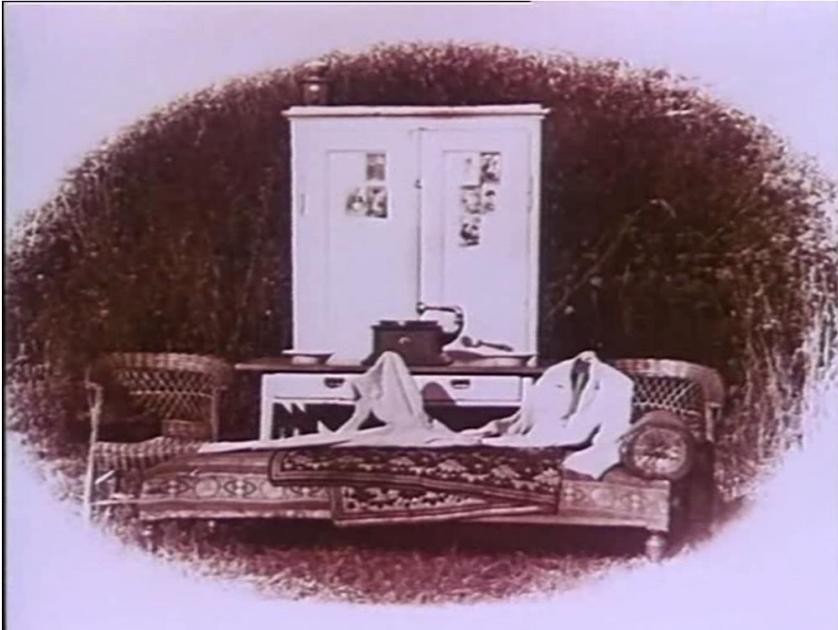
In *Picnic with Weissmann*, a field day of a group of pieces of furniture is portrayed; all of them have in common that they show evidence of having been used and the passing of time. This is not a casual detail, since –as stated by the film director- his interest for an object or a determined setting does not relate to its plastic eloquence, but with the matter of recognizing the materials from which they are made, who have touched them and how they are marked by the passing of time (Vimenet, 2010) –issues associated with his tactile experimentation.

A record player winds itself up and plays an old German song about Rio de Janeiro, whose music sound like a scratched record due to a snail that lies on the record. Meanwhile, a shirt, a pair of trousers and a hanger –which altogether make up the shape of a man- rest on a couch; a group of cards plays the solitary, the pieces of an incomplete chess (one of the pieces is a stone) play on the board, a shovel digs a pit in front of a wardrobe. There are photographs of people on the doors of the wardrobe. The record stops and changes for another one, and another German song is played.

The clothes sit up, take an apricot and spits the stone through a sleeve. A ball jumps from a drawer of a desk and inflates itself. In the drawers, we can see the poster of a naked woman. Some chairs play with the ball until it falls into the pit. The music stops, and we can only hear the shovel that descends and throws the ball toward the record player, so that the ball pokes against the device. The record changes again, and this time a melancholic music is played.

The couch with the clothes on it slides away, as if it were going for a walk, until it moves out of sight. The chair, all lined up, throw themselves away. The chess pieces jump off the board. Then, an antique camera takes itself down and takes photos of the clothes on the couch, which are posing for the camera. It takes photos of the furniture. These pictures appear hanging on the door of the wardrobe, where the photos of people had been before. The shovel finishes digging the pit, which now looks like a grave. The record player stops and is covered by leaves. The trees, that were once leafy, look now bare. Autumn leaves cover all the pieces of furniture. The doors of the wardrobe open up and let a tied and gaged man (possibly Weissmann) fall into the pit. The shovel throws earth on the man to bury him.

The short film that we have just described shows a universe furnished by living objects whose burlesque behavior resists the utilitarian functions that a character –in this case, Weissmann- would like to impose them. These characters-objects, suddenly excited, adopt an incoherent behavior that makes them damage themselves (flagellate



themselves). As a result, we can consider that these objects become characters absolutely dominated by their irrational drive, automat of

their desire to disobey their owner. Nevertheless, this desire is led by the conservative (death) drive, therefore, the auto-destructive attitudes of the objects. On the other hand, Weissmann, is kidnapped and then buried by his belongings. In this film, they embrace an active role, while the only human remains passive at the mercy of his things. We should recall that the lack of distinction between animate and inanimate not only is one of the manifestations of the uncanny, but also of the convulsive beauty. Jodoin-Keaton (2010) states that in this film the conformist adult world is condemned in favor of the ludic challenge of childhood, while it presents the fateful confrontation of the man and his environment. The autumn leaves cover the furniture as a sign of the twilight of childhood, whose only destiny is the symbolic death of the child to give way to adulthood.

This image also suggests one of the uncanny phantasies of surrealism, the one of maternal plenitude, in which the natural devours the cultural, that also evokes the return to the maternal womb (Weissmann falls in a fetal position into the pit that will be covered by earth). Consequently, we can infer that both Weissmann and the objects return to a state before life.

I also dare to add to Jodoin-Keaton's comment that in *Picnic with Weissmann* not only the adult conformism is criticized, but the film director also points out the transformation from human to object. This is remarked by Weissmann's passivity as well as by the portraits that hang on the wardrobe at the beginning of the short film, which are later replaced by portraits of objects. According to Foster (2008), "photography points to the logic of the death drive in two ways: in its shock [...] and in its tense (the future anterior of the photograph: this will have been). Foster also quotes Barthes's dilemma of the model that poses in front of a camera, a model that is neither subject nor object, but a subject that becomes an object. In this status, people are put at the same level as objects. It is important to mention that the photograph of the naked woman –which appears at the bottom of a desk drawer- does not show the woman as a simple object but as a consuming article.

In this "game of disorder" that the rebel pieces of furniture play, a ludic disobedience is set, associated with black humor (Jodoin-Keaton, 2010), which brings a liberating ending to the film. Contrary to what happens in the comic, in humor, the ludic loses its relevance in relation to the gravity of a certain matter or situation. This generates the absence of laughter and, as a result, the tension is never liberated. Therefore, the Surrealists' use of humor is connected more to psychology than physiology. Humor is used by them as a value judgment, which proposes another view of society. Black humor, in particular, takes importance from sacred topics rooted in our collective consciousness such as morality, society and its shackles, official art and death. Švankmajer suggests putting into action the humor of concrete irrationality. In his own words, "this type of humor pierces the power of everyday life and is never put to service of short-term utilitarianism" (Ayala, 2010).

In the short film we are about to analyze, this game of disorder also occurs. However, in this case, it is settled in an oneiric world where Švankmajer sets to rediscover the infant universe. In *Jabberwocky*, the objects again show an irrational behavior.

Unlike *Picnic with Weissmann*, the actions of the objects are manipulated by the enigmatic will of a child that we never see but clearly suspect. Just as it happens in the first short film -if we exclude its ending-, in *Jabberwocky* the main character is absent, and it is only presented by the presence of its belongings.

*Jabberwocky* takes its title from a poem by Lewis Carroll, which its character Alice reads this jabbering and nonsense words in *Alice through the looking glass*. The titles of the short film are presented with the background image of the naked butt of a doll that is being spanked, while a childlike voice reads Carroll's poem. This image evokes the title of Freud's essay *A child is being beaten*, where he elaborates his theory of infantile sexuality.

A wardrobe drifts through a forest, passes by the futuristic tour of Prague and continues sliding among the trees. Its doors open and we enter a child's room, full of toys and board games. An old man's portrait hangs on a wall and observes the room with a severe look. On a hanger, an infantile uniform comes out of the wardrobe and lively walks around. Some tree branches pierce the walls and get inside the room. From them, leaves, flowers and apples sprout – both the branches, as its fruits are artificial. The apples fall to the ground and crack open, rotten and infested by worms. We can explain the branches as the wild force of the rebel infantile spirit that bursts into the room. Nevertheless, this intent to hold on to this rebelliousness is as artificial as the branches. Childhood, as it is shown in *Picnic with Weissmann*, is destined to be corrupted, which is represented by the putrefaction of the apples, whose allusion to death is impossible to ignore. After each sequence of toys, some blocks reappear, which altogether shape a landscape

and, afterward, a labyrinth where the line of a pencil pointlessly tries to scape. Every time the line is cornered in a dead-end, a black cat throws away the blocks.

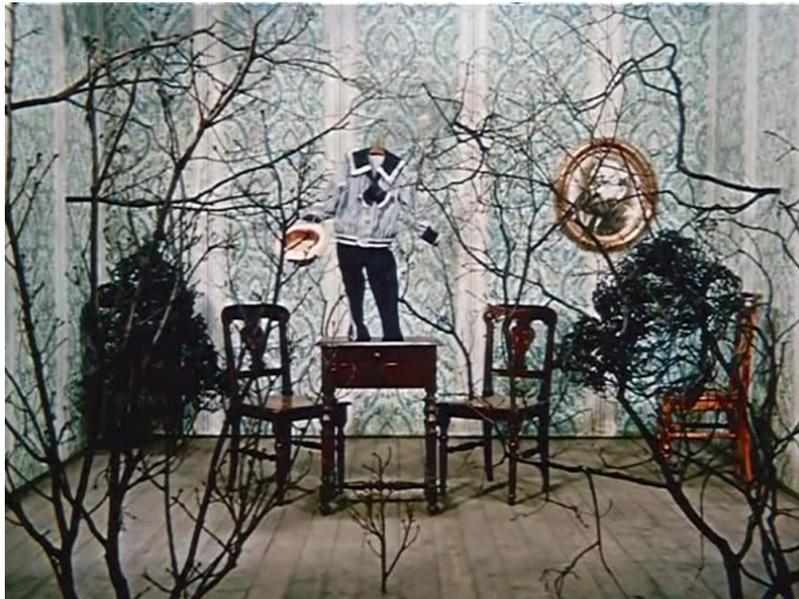
In the following sequence, a doll gives birth to little dolls that destroy their mother once they come out of her body. These dolls are dressed, dismembered and crushed in a dollhouse next to a grinding machine. The product is served as tea to other larger dolls that, as cannibals, consume them at the table in a sort of family scene.

Afterwards, an army of little soldiers comes out of the sleeve of the uniform and parade, until a porcelain doll smashes them.

Then, a hat on a table retires and uncovers an opened pocketknife, whose handle is a wooden carved damsel. This pocketknife evokes Breton's surrealist objects, especially the found spoon with the little boot base. In this case, the pocketknife is displayed as an uncanny object, since it recalls the threat of castration. On the other hand, the object can be linked to the myth of hermaphroditism, which obsessed Breton as well as Freud, because it points to the idea of a woman with the capacity to penetrate. The pocketknife performs dancing pirouettes until its blade folds into the handle, so that a drop of the wooden damsel's blood is spilled on the table.

In the following act, some sheets of paper scape from a Math school notebook and are folded in the shape of planes, ships and horses. With a condemning expression, the man's portrait observes the situation and sticks out his tongue (a real tongue), which shows Domino pieces covered by images of women. The paper planes fly out the window.

One last time, the wall of blocks forms a landscape and the pencil line finally resolves the puzzle of the labyrinth. Savagely it writes on the walls and on the portrait of the man. Accompanied by a somber music, the wardrobe doors open and reveal an adult's black suit. The black cat is trapped inside a birdcage inside the wardrobe. The infantile uniform lies lifeless on the floor. The camera closes in the adult suit and fades to black.



In *Jabberwocky* is exhibited a rage against growing, or in other words, against maturing, which is expressed through the frenetic rhythm of the animation. The accelerated activity of the dolls and toys reflects an urgent necessity of constantly exposing themselves as a spectacle for the viewer and predicts a fatality: the passage to adulthood (Jodoin-Keaton, 2010).

The sequence of the wall of blocks, the labyrinth and the cat, which repeats itself once and again, represents the intention to stay in the infantile world. It is understandable to believe that the pencil tray *simulates* to try to escape from the labyrinth, but in fact, it is only playing pretending to do so. Therefore, when there is no option but leaving it and ending the game, it abandons the labyrinth with a fury that leads it to tarnish the walls and the portrait of an authority figure. Furthermore, the cat, the only living character of the short film, which pretends to be a wild animal, has to accept that it is no more than a domestic animal, trapped in a cage that does not even correspond to it (at the end, the cat appears in a bird cage that is too small for it).

We can risk stating that the cat is locked in a cage just like, in reality, the rebelliousness of the infantile spirit is caged.

Once we enter the room, we do not get out of it. All the frenzy of the scenes, the abundance of objects and the locked room produce a claustrophobic effect on the spectator. Therefore, this spirit of childhood, that is, the character of the uniform shows a vulnerability that turns him tragic, because of his refusal to grow up. This anguish is expressed through the destructive behavior of the will towards the objects that it manipulates, while remaining invisible. Hence, the other characters –dolls and board games, show a vitality and reality of their own, even though they obey someone else's will. In other words, they behave as marionettes that obey just like automats someone else's desire, even if it implies their own destruction.

Marionettes are firmly anchored both in Švankmajer's imaginary as in Czech cultural tradition. They constitute one of his own childhood fascinations that he used to fight against anguish. The filmmaker narrates that when he was a child, his father gave him a marionette-theatre with which he performed spectacle for the children at home (Vimenet, 2010). In fact, at that time it used to be a common game at Czech homes, there was a small marionette-theatre at every one of them.

In Bohemia, marionette theatre did not have a marginal existence, contrary to the majority of the world. This type of theatre, apart from taking the place of conventional theatre, took on preserving the Czech language –during the National Revival, plays with marionettes were the only ones where Czech was spoken. Besides, marionette theatre carried out an important role of political resistance during the Nazi occupation (Hames, 2010).

On the other hand, we can relate marionettes with the figure of the surrealist automat and, without any doubt, of the Freudian uncanny. Hal Foster described the automat as an “uncanny sensitive being, neither animate nor inanimate”. Indeed, marionettes –as well as automats- are emblematic objects of the notion of the *doppelgänger*, which can be found within the repertoire of the oneiric world.

Just as the wardrobe in *Jabberwocky* transports us to a state of dream, doors and drawers also work as thresholds in Švankmajer's adaptation of Carroll's book *Alice in Wonderland*. Although in the original text, the author uses keys and doors, Švankmajer adds his own details, such as the desk, which not only enables de access to the oneiric world but also throws objects that allow the dramatic action to progress. In contrast to the short film that we have previously analyzed, in *Alice* the Czech director inserts a human main character that we can identify with. Thanks to this subjective point of view, we feel distressing what the hero experiments.

The world of dreams where the girl gets into could be better qualified as a world of nightmares. For example, regarding the physical aspect of certain characters, the director "chooses transubstantiations that blur the frontiers between human, mineral and animal, in a same flesh of metamorphosis" (Martin, 2010), such as the animals that chase Alicia. Furthermore, Švankmajer has made Alicia's encounters in the film more threatening than in the original text.

The main marionettes that the girl runs into in this oneiric world are the White Rabbit, the March Hare and the Mad Hatter. The three of them have the appearance of old toys (the White Rabbit's stuff keeps falling out, again and again, the eye of the March Hare must be constantly put back into place and the marionette of the Mad Hatter -carved in wood- looks old-fashioned). The three characters show having been used and the passing of time, as well as decay. These old and used up toys allude to the transformation of objects due to the passing of time.

Hames (2010), quoting Otkar Zich, explains that marionetted can be perceived in two different ways. The first one consists of paying more attention to the inert material. By doing this, we will not be able to take seriously its words and movements, that is, their expression of life; we will consider the marionette as something funny or grotesque. On

the contrary, in the other way, their manifestation of life (movements and speech) stands out and we perceive the marionettes as real beings. “The awareness of the lack of real life of the marionettes fades away and emerges only as a somehow inexplicable sensation, as a mystery that evokes the marvelous. In this case, marionettes affect us *mysteriously*”, recalling the uncanny.

Even Alice turns into a marionette under two different appearances: on one hand, as a little and inexpressive porcelain doll and, on the other, as a huge chrysalis which Alice manages to get out from- The constant size changes of Alice are seen by Švankmajer as a transformation from human to doll -here takes place the phenomenon that Zich calls the dual nature of the performed part (the one of the actor and the other of the character) and, besides, occurs a transition in which it is expected that the viewer maintains a continuity in the physical identification of the character that anytime can be interrupted (Hames, 2010).

Due to Alice's changes of state, also the fluctuates perception of the character of the White Rabbit. While the normal-size Alice finds it small and intriguing, to the little doll he is dominant and terrifying. In Švankmajer's version, the Rabbit appears in scenes where he did not in the original text. It opposes to Alice as an antagonist and, although it seems to be an odd character, it is also perceived as a personal threat towards her. Cherry (2002), suggesting links with the tradition of gothic horror, sustains that the White Rabbit, with its constant need to resurrect itself by eating sawdust, represents the Undead. Even towards the end of the film, it appears as an executioner with scissors in its hand. This castrating scissors also represent the confrontation present in the film between sexuality and authority.



According to Hames (2010), the grimmest sequence is the one where Alice is being chased by the monstrous animals. When they attack the normal-size Alice outside the White Rabbit's house, they look like out of a nightmare, but their movements turn them amusing and grotesque. The viewer observes them in a distant way, the same way as the protagonist does, since their inert material stands out and their “expression of life” becomes strange and ridiculous. However, when Alice as a little doll scapes in the open field, the animals turn terrifying, they corner her, bite her, grab her dress and push her ruthlessly towards her destiny. Apart from the connotations of rape and death, the scene also stages the threat of the individual by the group. In this case, the real danger of the animals sticks out. What we see as viewers is the violent life of the characters, beyond their material. Therefore, the alterations in the size of the character with whom the viewer sympathizes vary the impression of something as funny and mysterious to another sensation much more sinister. According to Cherry (2002), by replacing the real actress

for the doll, Švankmajer is able to let their characters endure different forms of violence that would be impossible to show in real-action films without risking censorship or disturbing the viewers' emotional tolerance. She states that the Czech director does not threaten the viewer with what he presents, but with what these images represent in the real world.

Contrary to Carroll's text, Švankmajer allows the permeability between the rational world and the oneiric reality to last until the end; he blurs the grounds between animate and inanimate, dream and reality. When Alice awakes, she finds all the toys that had previously appeared in the dream. The same way as the surrealists use the marvelous to reveal the supremacy of the real, which appears to be so rational, in this film fantasy recombines itself and inverts reality without escaping it: they exist in a symbiotic relationship. "The fantastic cannot exist independently of 'the real world', that seems to be so frustratingly finite. However, neither reality nor fantasy is exclusive nor incompatible" (Buljan, 2007). Even so, in the oneiric world, where we can find familiar objects such as toys, they are presented as unknown, that is, uncanny to the infantile child of the protagonist.

Why is it that Alice feels confident enough to open and taste everything, despite finding herself in an eerie setting? Her curiosity drives her not only to touch and see everything, but she has to taste it -for example, when she tries a spoonful of sawdust. We should not forget that the story is simultaneously imagined and narrated by Alice, so she controls everything (Hames, 2010). Thus, the narration works as a narrated dream. This sensation increases, besides, because Alice shares her voice with all the characters, whose dialogues are reduced to the minimum expressions. In order to make clear the double position of the protagonist, Švankmajer shows her mouth in a close-up and makes her say who said each phrase in every intervention (Jodoin-Keaton, 2010). The frame of the little girl's mouth arouses an uncanny impression in the viewer -more intense in the English version, where there is no lip synchronization- because it questions the innocent role of

the child. If she is the narrator, then she is capable of manipulating the actions in the movie. At the end of the film, this question is fully exposed when Alice repeats the words of the White Rabbit and expects to inflict it the same punishment that it wanted to apply to her: “Off with its head!”.



According to Cherry, the film makes reference to the night wanderings of the gothic heroin where she may encounter unexpected and abnormal creatures that haunt her in her castle. Likewise, *Alice* portrays the nightmarish journey of a little girl through a labyrinth of rooms, under the constant threat of the unforeseen and bizarre. In this ‘labyrinth’, the viewer loses the sense of space –perhaps Alice does not find a series of desks, but always the same one.

Before closing this chapter, I would like to analyze the following short film, which the Czech director mentions as the most self-referential (O’Keane, 2006). *Down to the cellar* has many features similar to *Alice*. This film also depicts the journey of a girl through a

rambling place that hides dangers and strange creatures that harass the main character. *Down to the cellar* clearly refers to *Little Red Riding Hood*: the little girl is dressed in red, holding a basket; the wood is replaced by the cellar, and the wolf for a cat of abnormal proportions.

The short film starts with a frame of a closed door; we hear daily sounds of a building, such as a dog barking and a vacuum cleaner. The door opens apparently by itself but then we notice a little girl who comes out of the apartment. With her braids and carrying just a flashlight in her basket, she goes down the stairs towards the cellar. At the stairs, she meets a man and a woman who, although they are kind to her, they intimidate her.

Before entering the cellar, she finds a black cat that gets into the basement before her. The cellar is dominated by complete darkness; the only light comes from the girl's flashlight. Besides, there are noises that we do not know where they proceed from. The girl suffers a



series of upsetting encounters. Firstly, she sees some shoes with teeth fighting for a piece of bread. These shoes also recall the Bretonian surrealist objects. Afterwards, she comes across a man –the same one

she previously met at the stairs-, who is on the point of sleeping on a bed of coal. As he notices the presence of the girl, he invites her to sleep on a bed (also of coal) next to his. His intentions are obscurely ambiguous. After this encounter, the girl sees a woman –the same one she came across at the stairs. The woman is preparing some bread made of coal.

As the woman sees the girl, with a macabre grin she offers her a piece of this bread. However, at the refusal of the girl, the grin on the woman's face disappears, leaving a threatening expression. The main character flees the scene.

In the darkness, she is lost and disoriented. Finally, she finds the place where the potatoes are. She manages to put them in her basket and begins her way back home. Nevertheless, she has to make another final encounter. A cat of seemingly gigantic dimensions pursues her. The girl reaches the door and escapes to the stairs but, by doing so, she lets the potatoes fall out of her basket to the darkness of the cellar. The girl hesitates and decides to go back to the cellar. The cat –in a close-up that recalls the huge size that we have previously perceived- observes her and runs after her.

At the beginning of the film, Švankmajer shows a seemingly real world, in order to launch us into the fantastic world of the cellar. As it happens in *Alice*, these two worlds do not present themselves in a parallel way but intertwined, thanks to the animation techniques used by the Czech director and also to the estrangement induced in the first part of the film. Another feature that these two films share is that in both of them we have a main character with whom we can sympathize and, again, it is a little girl. Švankmajer puts us in the mind of a child, not capable of making a clear distinction between reality and fantasy.

The descent of the girl to the cellar can be understood as the descent to the unconscious mind. The cellar -as well as the woods (in the case of *Little Red Riding Hood*)- is a symbol of the unconscious that contains bizarre, threatening and sexual latent elements (Weston, 2011). On the other hand, we could consider that the stairs represent the state of consciousness in the film.

The darkness of the cellar and its disjointed structure make the viewer feel lost. Since we do not have a complete view of the place and we cannot rely on the image due to the darkness, other senses, such as sound and touch become more important.

At the end of the film, the girl decides to return to the cellar, even though she knows what may wait for her there. However, is it not possible to assume that the girl may want to be captured by the cat, the same way as deep inside Little Red Riding Hood may have desired to be devoured by the wolf?

The return of the girl to the cellar is clearly related to the compulsion to repetition theorized by Freud. The girl decides to go back to the cellar in order to experience again the past unsettling events. Nevertheless, these events appear with a nuance of eroticism, for this decision is guided by the death drive.

At this point, we should resume Freud's text, which *Jabberwocky* alludes to in its beginning. In *A child is being beaten*, Freud (1919) analyzes children's beating-fantasies, which he takes as a possible primary sign of a future perversion. In this essay, Freud distinguishes three fantasies that correspond to the different phases of the development of the infantile sexuality. In the first one, the child (who is likely to represent a younger sibling) is beaten by the father. This fantasy is not purely sadistic, but egoistic since it satisfies the child's jealousy. Therefore, it cannot be considered as purely sexual. The second one consists of the child itself being beaten by the father. This second fantasy is unmistakably masochistic. Since the child's incestuous love cannot avoid its fate of repression, it remains unconscious with a sense of guilt. The sadistic element of the first phase reverts to masochism towards the child itself, also remaining narcissistic. However, this guilt comes together with eroticism. Consequently, we could link this second fantasy with the behavior of the main character of the short-film *Down to the cellar*. This film definitely alludes to the infantile sexuality. As we have previously mentioned, the girl

returns to the cellar in order to experience the same threatening encounters and, perhaps, to be finally caught by the giant cat. Therefore, we can sense the erotic tinge of this return.



The third fantasy that Freud analyzes is similar to the

first one: the person who beats is no longer the father, but someone who occupies the parental role; while the child itself does not appear in the fantasy anymore, unknown children are being mistreated. According to Freud, this fantasy is clearly sexual and is unambiguously sadistic. However, it is necessary to clarify that only the form of this fantasy is sadistic, since “the satisfaction which is derived from it is masochistic; its significance lies in the fact that it has taken over the libidinal cathexis of the repressed portion and at the same time the sense of guilt, which is attached to the content of that portion”. All the unknown children are substitutes for the child itself. We could relate this third fantasy to the ending of *Alice*. After her unsettling experiences in the nightmarish world, she wakes up wanting to chop off White Rabbit’s head. We can read in these actions that she exteriorizes on the doll that which she has suffered, where she deposits her libidinal drive. In order to protect the subject, this destructive drive is directed outwards, where it confronts other people, beings or objects as if they were things to dominate (Freud, 1919).

Surrealists revealed the erotic connection between sexuality and destruction, which fascinated them when it was represented in the form of sadism. In the next chapter, I intend to look deeper into the presence of sadism and masochism in Švankmajer's filmography.

In his staging, the Czech director calls our attention towards certain features of our “civilized” life in society and confronts it with that other version of reality, which we do not easily tolerate, and the anguishes that we individually experience. Švankmajer uses these distressing themes but exposes them by means of the animation of objects, so that it is easier for the audience to 'digest' them. Nevertheless, these objects do not lose their terrifying effect (Taylor Robinson, 2007). The horror that they arouse is implicit, even humoristic, and their effects in the viewer tend to appear with delay. As well as with humor, in Švankmajer's films there is no emotional discharge for horror. Therefore, the viewer retains the accumulated tension. When we watch his films -almost simultaneously enjoying and horrified- we recognize their relation to reality and, at the same time, we try to walk away from this recognition.

## 2. Beyond desires

*"I have demonstrated it theoretically -says Noireuil-let us now put it to the test of practice..."*

Marquis de Sade

In the previous chapter, we have analyzed—ñ some of the characters of Jan Švankmajer's films that portray the world of childhood, related to the Freudian concepts of the death drive, the uncanny and the Bretonian convulsive beauty, which are closely intertwined. In this chapter, I pretend to penetrate into the characters' desires. To do so, we will firstly focus on the other element of the surrealist marvelous: objective chance.

Objective chance has two aspects related to one another: the encounter and the trouvaille [or found object], defined by Breton as "fortuitous" or "foreordained" (Foster, 2008). In spite of his insistence on the fact that objective chance is spontaneous, we can suspect the opposite: "the encounter is rendezvous [a meeting] and the trouvaille is a lost object regained". It is a paradoxical category of experience that seems to be at once underdetermined and overdetermined (Foster, 2008). Objective chance and convulsive beauty share the confusion between intern impulse and external sign. However, in the case of objective chance, we can notice the mechanism that underlies this confusion, that it, the repetition compulsion. In his essay *Beyond the pleasure principle*, Freud (1920) associates the compulsion to repeat with the uncanny and the death drive in the repetition to dominate the loss of the love object—for instance, in the child's game (fort/da) facing his mother's departure. He connects these concepts to explain the repetition to 'prepare' futilely for a shock that has already come, as in traumatic neurosis, and the repetition that occurs in the analysand's memory. According to Foster (2008), these types of repetition can be linked to the trouvaille, but he also refers to the other form of repetition mentioned by Freud: the Schicksalzwang or fate compulsion, in which the subject feels pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some demonic force. Due to this compulsion, the subject repeats a traumatic experience that he does not recall, in other words, he repeats it

because he does not remember it (Foster, 2008). Therefore, each repetition seems random or fortuitous but yet foreordained, determined by present circumstances yet directed by some evil force (Freud, 1920).

Is not that, perhaps, what occurs with the main character of *The Lesson of Faust*, Švankmajer's second feature film? This character finds himself -at least in appearance- constantly manipulated both by the demon, the two strange men, and the hand of the puppeteer that moves the strings. This version of Faust joins fragments of dialogues of Goethe, Grabbe, Marlowe, Gounod and a Czech puppeteer called Kopecký (Vimenet, 2010). Švankmajer affirms, in regards to this "collage of influences", that in this film "as in an indissoluble union, the 'logic of dream' enters in a game where the apparent consequence acquires the form of an irreversible fate" (Hames, 2010). According to Vimenet (2010), Faust's peripeteia is, on one hand, conscious and, on the other, the result of the manipulation of other characters.

The theme of manipulation is evident in this film. In fact, the director is especially concerned in showing the device of the artwork, namely, the behind the scenes, to demonstrate that the film itself is also an intent of manipulation. We see the audience of the play of Faust, the theatre scenography, the metal plate that simulates the sound of thunders, Faust doing playback of an Opera... but what makes more evident that we are under effect of this manipulation that is the cinema are the hands of the invisible puppeteer, which moves the strings of the marionettes and the main character.

The film begins with images of the Devil and the entrance of a subway station in Prague, where the two strange men hand out maps. Faust picks one up but instantly throws it away. Later, at his apartment, while he is eating, he discovers an egg in his bread. In the egg, he finds the same map. Some bolts of lightning with their respective thunders enter the room, the main character walks toward the window and finds outside the two men. The next day, Faust looks for the address that appears on the map. When he enters the building, a man runs desperately out of it. Faust comes in a room that turns out to be a

theater dressing room. He puts on the costume and makeup and recites some lines of the theater play Faust -it is important to point out that that the only texts that the main character speaks are the ones of the theater play, in spite of having an existence independent to his role. Nevertheless, what do we know about this character? We only know his apartment, where he lives alone. Out of that, we are not presented with much information about him. Hence, we can see him as an empty vessel that fills itself as the film advances and he blends more into his role of Faust.

From the moment on, when Faust says the first lines of his text, he is moved from one location to another, in order to play his part and he is manipulated in a way that will increase in force and violence. For instance, after he has his meal in a restaurant, the main character is pushed by some men to wear the costume of Faust and to go back to the stage.

Until that moment, the manipulation had been more subtle, in charge of the two strange men. However, this changes drastically, after Faust accepts to give his soul to the Devil. Once this happens, he is put a wooden head of a marionette on his head. There is no doubt now



that he has turned into an object. In this scene, the Devil, as well as his acolytes and the little angels, try to influence Faust, ones to make him sign the contract, and the others to stop him. Finally, the demons defeat the angels by using a violence that is only tolerable -

and can even be considered smiling- thanks to the fact that the scene is performed by marionettes.

If we consider the film as a whole, it seems to be a constant repetition due to its cyclic structure: at the beginning, when the main character enters the building, a running man knocks him when leaving the place in a hurry. At the end, it is Faust the one that runs out of the building and clashes another man, which with curiosity enters the building. Faust ends up hit by a red car, identical to the one that picks up the demon harassed by the jester in the middle of the film. Besides, a man that we have previously seen carrying a dead man's foot, cuts Faust's foot. All these details allow us to believe that these events have already taken place with another man fulfilling the role of Faust.

The main character appears to be destined to become Faust and to follow his unavoidable path. Nonetheless, we should take into account the following theory: Freud sustains that the subject, victim of this supposed demonic force or evil destiny, actually wishes that the events take place. However, because the wish is unconscious, when they occur, fate appears to have been responsible for them (Freud, 1920).

This is how objective chance operates, that is, from the compulsion to repetition. The events -for example, the map at the beginning of the film that repeatedly appears to the main character- are interpreted as external signs of future events, instead of taking them as intern signs of past states (Foster, 2008). As a consequence of repression and reiteration, objective chance becomes a serial repetition of unique encounters, a repetition that is governed by the identification and desire.

What type of desire leads to the main character of the film to let himself get entangled in such a plot? The key to analyzing this is the scene in which Faust (literally) signs the contract of the Devil. According to Deleuze (2001), in the Middle Age, there were two forms of diabolism: one for possession (that gave the individual a sadistic character) or by a pact (masochistic). Deleuze asserts, referring to Sacher-Masoch's literature -from

which the concept of masochism derives- that with this author we find a victim searching for an executioner, with whom he makes an alliance with a quite particular aim. It is necessary to clarify that the masochist is a common person that finds their pleasure where others also find it, with the difference that a previous pain, humiliation or punishment are indispensable to them to achieve it. In order to the masochist to access pleasure, they require a form of time enables them, that is, the waiting, which consists of what one foresees (pain) and what one expects (pleasure).

To carry this out, the masochist hero has the necessity of a contractual relationship. Nonetheless, it is the same contract or law that generally prevents them to accomplish their desire under the certainty of the consequent sanction. In the case of masochism, the punishment is firstly imposed and it orders us, in consequence, to satisfy this desire. Here, the punishment or pain is a preliminary pleasure, a necessary condition to access true pleasure.

Freud (1919) sustains that there are two basic ways out of the Oedipus complex: an active sadistic one by identification with the father, and another one, passive and masochistic by identification with the mother. He supposes that, due to the sense of guilt, occurs the regression that derives in masochism. The punishment resolves the sense of guilt. Then the question arises: why does the masochist feel guilty? Deleuze (2001) answers that the cause is the image of the humiliated father that the masochist keeps in his mind. In the masochistic fantasy, the phallic woman-executioner absorbs and annihilates the figure of the father.

According to this scheme, we can interpret that in Švankmajer's version of Faust the main character signs a pact with the Devil ( woman-executioner/mother). The character that remains absent during the entire film, unlike other versions of the myth, is God, who - following Deleuze's theory- would represent the humiliated father. In this film, there is no place to be occupied by God, only the angels appear to try to stop Faust from signing the contract. However, their attempts are rather poor and in battle, they appear impotent

against the demons. Therefore, we can deduce that what hides in the character of Faust is the image of an absolutely weak (father) God.



Near the end of the film, in a last humiliation toward the main character, the Devil disguises itself as the Beautiful Helen and, with a false vagina; it gives itself to Faust to have sexual relations. During this intercourse, the Devil arouses its legs in a faked ecstasy, when it pulls out its mask to reveal its true face. This sequence provides an ironic comment to Faust's phrase "Amor vincit omnia" (love defeats everything), and merges the real and the imaginary in a tangible, nauseating and a disturbing way (Hames, 2010).

This episode evokes as well the frequent situation in masochism of "interrupted love". In general, the castration is the threat that prevents incest or a punishment that sanctions it. However, from the mother's point of view (in the case of *The Lesson of Faust*, the Devil), "the son's castration is the requirement of the success of the incest, now equated, due to this displacement, to a second birth in which the father does not fulfill any role" (Deleuze, 2001). Interrupted love allows the masochist to identify the sexual activity with

the incest and, at the same time, with a second birth. Through this process, the masochist does not attempt to escape from the menace of castration but makes from it the symbolic requirement of success.



The same actor with whom Faust stumbles upon when he tries to escape from the theater appears in the first scene of Švankmajer's next film, *Conspirators of pleasure*, by entering a shop of porn magazines. This is the first feature film in which the Czech director pretends to stand in the "real world" and in which he tries to portray interpersonal relationships (or the absence of them) (Hames, 2010).

This film shows the stories of five "conspirators" of Prague, who plan to free themselves and to fulfill their desires on a Sunday: two neighbors, Pivonka y Loubalová, -each one on their own- perform scenes in which they torture a doll that personifies the other neighbor; a postwoman that not only inhales little bread balls, but also fills her ears and her nose with them; a police investigator that ignores his wife, the news presenter Anna Wetlinská –who is a real presenter, outside the fictional world of the film-, to autoerotize himself with the use of utensils that he fabricates, using different objects to produce

different textures. His wife also is the object of the fantasy of a man who builds his own masturbatory machine. On the other hand, Wetlinská ends up becoming the sixth conspirator, when she has an orgasm in live television thanks to two fish that suck her toes.

In Švankmajer's words, the film is "a black-humor comedy ruled by the principle of pleasure (antisocial, nonconformist, that pursues wishes and freedom). It counterposes the 'inoffensive' and 'imaginative' perversions of the characters of the film to the monstrous ones of civilization, in which a sort of collectivization of desire leads to wars and servitude. In a society constrained to the imposed conformity through a reality delimited by the media, based on advertisement and consumption, the development of free imagination as a reaction will be unavoidable, but it will be seen by 'the masses and their manipulators' as a manifestation of perversion (Hames, 2010). According to Hames, the film presents a world of sad and discontinuous individuals that yearn for satisfaction against a background of routine reality. He also observes that the film suggests that desire and sexual love cannot be satisfied by an Other. Therefore, the desire returns to the self as autoeroticism. Consequently, the desire is transferred from real people towards objects, and eroticism ends up becoming a solitary and fetishist activity.

I believe that in order to sustain such argument, it is necessary to analyze the different perversions that appear in the film. Firstly, we can distinguish the ones related to Švankmajer's search for tactilism –this is the case of the postwoman, the investigator, the shopkeeper and the news presenter- and the perversions that consist of a performance – the ones of the neighbors. To represent all these perversions, Švankmajer uses animation to emphasize the magical moment in which the pleasure principle takes over, a moment where reality is suspended and desire reigns.

Švankmajer implements sound to evoke textures, and so he draws our attention towards the different sensation of the tactile world, capable of producing pleasure. As reported by his experimentation, objects of all sorts can affect us by analogy. Through tact, the filmmaker aims to awaken the vitality of objects in the viewer and to free the sense of tact, setting it aside from its



practical use. Since tact is a sense that has not yet been captured by the rules of conventions, it possesses a total freedom to arouse imagination and associative thinking in each individual.

Hence, it is not casual that Švankmajer is interested in objects that show having been used or the traces of the experimented hand that created them –an aspect that also attracted the surrealist due to their fascination for the antique. This feature is related to one of the registers of Benjamin's concept of aura: the cultural and historical register. The aura would be the perception of a forgotten human dimension. There is another register of the aura, the subjective one, which invests the previous one with a psychic intensity. It refers to the memory of a primal relationship to the body, that is, to the maternal body. Benjamin establishes that the same way as we look at a person, they feel observed and can look at us in turn, "to perceive the aura of an object we look at, means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return" (Benjamin, 1939).

Regarding Švankmajer's allusion to tactilism in the *Conspirators of Pleasure*, we can mention several examples, such as the furs that the investigator so desperately seeks, the postwoman's breadcrumbs, the velvet in Loubalová's robe, and the fish that suck the presenter's toes. These elements, as well as the polished nails of the masturbatory machine, act as fetishes for the characters in the film. What is a fetish? Foster (2008) –

quoting Benjamin- defines it as "the sex appeal of the inorganic". As reported by Freud (1927) in his essay about fetishism, it is the substitute of the woman's phallus, in which the child has believed and does not want to abandon. Therefore, he simultaneously conserves and gives up this belief. Facing the conflict between the weight of the unwanted perception –when he spied for the first time a naked woman and discovered the feminine genitalia- and the intensity of the opposite wish, he reaches the concession (in a psychic level) that the woman conserves a phallus but it is not the same as before. It has a substitute, which inherits the interest previously directed to the first one. However, this interest experiences a great increase because, by creating a substitute, the individual also conceives a reminder of the horror of castration. This way, the fetish endures in time as a triumphal sign over the threat of castration and as a protection toward it.

In the case of the presenter, I have to disagree with Hame's statement. She cannot fulfill her fantasy on her own, she requires an audience. It is not random that she reaches a climax in the middle of the news transmission –perhaps, in order to counteract her husband's indifference.

It is also worth mentioning that Wetlinská's look changes after this event and becomes an accomplice of the other conspirators. Throughout the film, we see a few brief moments when the characters interact and seem to recognize one another just by glancing at each other. Nevertheless, Pivonka tries to avoid this look that he seems to feel constantly present. For instance, before performing his fantasy, when he is out in the field, where we can perceive only the presence of some birds, he looks around and senses someone's gaze. This situation is connected to the previously mentioned auratic gaze: if we look at an object, it can look back at us. Thereby (Foster, 2008), Pivonka's active gesture of checking if someone is observing him turns into a passive one of being observed. He perceives the others' gaze as a menace.

Towards the end of the film, Pivonka arrives at his neighbor's apartment and discovers that his fantasy has come true. The police investigator looks at him –according to my understanding- in a way that indicates Pivonka that he should do his part as well. Pivonka, frightened, accepts and returns to his apartment. The ending suggests that he will end up just like the doll that represented him. I believe that this is an example that demonstrates that these characters were not as alone and uncommunicated as it initially seemed, although they recreate their fantasies on their own. Another example of this connection is that, at the end of the film, the characters exchange their fetish object.

Let us analyze now Pivonka's and Loubalová's perversions. In their representations, both neighbors adopt a particular costume. She uses a velvet robe, a black mask, and high heel shoes, which give her an appearance of a dominatrix. On the other hand, Pivonka has to create his own disguise with the head of a rooster –in a declared tribute to Max Ernst's Loplop-; this costume also contains a sadistic element.



To put together his disguise and to make the doll that personifies his neighbor, Pivonka breaks into her apartment. There, he sews his garment and recollects some clothes for his doll. Something in her wardrobe draws his attention, so he walks towards it and finds the velvet robe. At that moment, he looks at the floor and sees the legs of a doll; frightened, he runs away. Why? Pivonka finds his doppelgänger (another symbol of the Freudian uncanny). He finds himself turned into a doll and possibly anticipates his destiny –which he desires, according to the Schicksalszwang. Unlike Loubalová, who always maintains a sadist demeanor, Pivonka behaves in daily life as a submissive being. For instance, he is incapable of killing the chicken and looks down when he is observed with complicity. In fact, when he is performing his role as the rooster-man he seems to have authority and power, but as the mask of the rooster accidentally falls, he adopts his previous behavior. Apparently, this head/mask allows him to sustain the illusion of his fantasy.

Each neighbor chooses a different setting to perform their respective scenes. While Loublová abuses the doll that represents Pivonka in a sort of sanctuary or abandoned temple, he does the same on an open field, near a wall and an abandoned house. Both exercise violence over the dolls; she does it with a whip, and he by throwing huge rocks to scare the doll. Both scenes express a patriarchal fantasy of control. Nevertheless, this control does not seem to be enforced just over the dolls, but also over the desire itself. That is the reason why we can observe such level of care and caution before and during their performances. Due to this excessive control, the violence in these scenes appears to be theatricalized, even processed. Foster (2008) writes, in reference to Bellmer's poupeés, that they "not only represented their condition, but were punished for it as well". The same seems to occur in relation to the dolls that embody the neighbors. We could interpret that they also receive their punishment because of their condition of submission. This condition allows the characters to find the situation erotic and to arouse their "final triumph", mentioned by Foster. We can see this clearly at the end of Pivonka's recreation of his fantasy: after throwing a rock to the head of the doll, he gives her something to eat

and looks how the blood spills over its face. He smiles -a sign of triumph- and then we see a close up of the shattered face of the doll, which in spite of being an object, produces discomfort – we sense horror when facing the mistreated doll.



The neighbors' fantasies are clearly sadistic. Unlike masochism, sadism is based on the primary thinking of absolute solitude. Therefore, the only rule of conduct is that the sadistic individual must prefer everything that affects them happily and they must not care at all if this preference may harm others. The others' greatest pain will always count less than their own pleasure (Bataille, 1979). Bataille explains that this way of thinking is, evidently, artificial, since we are not alone. Consequently, it is a denial of the reality on which it is based. However, there are moments of excess when we have the strength to put this reality in crisis. These moments appear outside the bounds of rational thinking – Švankmajer manifests them through the use of animation. "The voluptuous excess leads to the negation of the other, which coming from a man, is the excessive negation of the principle on which his own life rests" (Bataille, 1979).

Pivonka and Loublová perform their tortures without exhibiting any passion nor showing more than a smile as a sign of pleasure. This is understandable from a sadistic point of view. Bataille (1979) quoting Maurice Bachelot enlightens this matter. According to the latter, the apathy is the spirit applied to the sadistic hero. According to this way of thinking, the individual disposes of a certain amount of force, which most of the time, he scatters in benefit of "those simulacrum called the others, God, the ideal; due to this dispersion, he makes the mistake of exhausting his possibilities by wasting them, and furthermore of founding his conduct in weakness, for if he wastes himself for others, it is because he thinks he needs to lean on them, because he believes he is weak". We must understand that the apathy does not consist of only getting rid of "parasite" emotions - such as love, compassion, etc.- but of opposing to the spontaneity of any passion.

It is possible to argue that in *Conspirators of pleasure*, the characters torture just the dolls that represent the neighbors, but not the neighbors themselves. Nonetheless, as we have mentioned in the previous chapter, Švankmajer's films present the struggle between the pleasure principle and the reality principle and are set in the verisimilitude of the infantile thinking, which has a strong belief of the omnipotence of thought and the animism. Freud (1919) refers to animism and describes that one of the most common magic methods to hurt an enemy resided on doing an effigy of them and executing violence over it.

Bataille (1979) sustains that cruelty is not other than self-negation, taken so far that it becomes a destructive explosion. He emphasizes that "on the top of the unlimited negation towards the other, it turns to self-negation. At the beginning, the negation of the other was the affirmation of oneself, but as soon as the unlimited aspect appears, taken to the extreme, beyond the personal joy, it accesses the search of a sovereignty free of any subjection". Loublová ends up crushed by a rock, while Pivonka is prepared to drown in a pool because, in the end, the negation of the other, has become the negation of themselves. Pivonka surrenders to this action with a smile on his face, since his personal joy is no longer important, but just the crime and it is not important to be the victim.

Someone can judge that this ending has a masochistic element, however, as we have observed in the analysis of *The Lesson of Faust*, the punishment for the masochist hero comes from the atonement of guilt. Instead, according to Deleuze (2001), in the case of the sadistic hero, the masochism -which is not the same as in Sacher-Masoch- arises as for its extreme limit and the sanction of glorious infamy that crowns them, the self-negation.

Why is it that these fantasies of violence and (self)destruction can appear erotic? Because the eroticism is the domain of violence. In this case, we should ask ourselves what is eroticism. According to Bataille (1979), is assenting to life up to the point of death. "We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost [prenatal] continuity. As a result, although we have a distressing desire that the perishable state of life lasts forever, we are obsessed with the primal continuity, which is linked to the being in a general sense. Since continuity is in the origin of the being, death does not affect it, in fact, death manifests continuity. In eroticism the

The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity. In eroticism, the dissolution of constituted forms is always at stake. Discontinuity is questioned and must be disturbed to the maximum since the transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity.

The second part of the short film *Dimensions of Dialogue, Passionate Discourse*, clearly shows the state of erotic desire. At the beginning, we observe a man and a woman made out of clay at a table, one in front of the other. After a brief moment of seduction, they kiss with a passion that blurs their faces. As they hold one another, they make their

shapes indistinct and they unite in the same continuous mass. They cease to exist as discontinuous beings. The clay molds in different forms and, for a few moments, it reveals different actions of the sexual act.

Finally, they separate from one another and regain their shapes; they transform into discontinuous beings again... but they leave on the table a leftover of clay, which we can interpret as a sort of baby, a result of the sexual intercourse. This result agitates both the woman and the man, who throw it to one another with an anger that increases in violence. In words of Bataille (1979), reproduction opposes to eroticism, since it leads to discontinuity of beings, but at the same time, it brings into play their continuity.. that is to say, it is intimately linked to death.

Due to the escalating violence, the lovers attack one another. As a result, they turn into a uniformed mass again. The passion they had expressed during the sexual act manifests this time as mutual destruction, which leads them again to the state of continuity.



Apart from sexual activity, there are other ways that tend to the state of continuity, that is, other forms of manifestation of the eroticism. All along his filmography, Švankmajer elaborates especially one of them, on which we will focus in the next chapter: the act of eating.

### **3 . Voracious Eroticism**

*Beauty should be edible, or not at all.*

Salvador Dalí

Sexual intercourse, according to Cunillera Pérez (2010), is a substitute to a more absolute merge, that is, the one we used to maintain inside the maternal body, in a state of pure continuity. The author quotes Dalí: 'We swallow in order to identify ourselves as absolutely as possible with the loved one'. However, how are sexual relations and the act of eating linked to the Batailleian continuity?

Melanie Klein's analysis of the first stages of the oral tendencies in the development of the child shows that the baby does not perceive the presence of the mother, but of her breast. The child divides the object in two: the good and the bad object. In the case of the maternal breast, we would have to refer, on one hand, to the good breast –which satisfies and accompanies- and, on the other hand, to the bad one –which in its absence frustrates the baby's wishes or which in some other moment could want to devour the baby. Therefore, the child will try to get rid of the bad object by destroying it through its oral impulses and to appropriate the good one by incorporating it. At the same time, the aggressive actions soon cause the fear of the baby towards the bad object, which will return for revenge, that is, that the bad object will come back to devour it (Cunillera Pérez, 2010). Thus, the child relates to the world through its mouth in actions that dangerously oscillate between care and violence.

According to Freud, the melancholic is a subject incapable of overcoming the loss of a loved one, who tries to revive them in their interior by incorporating it – correlatively to the oral or cannibalistic stage of the development of the libido- ingesting it, in other words, devouring it (Cunillera Pérez, 2010). Hence, the 'cannibalism' of the melancholic

is an effort to avoid the loneliness that marks our existence as individual beings, that is, to avert the separation from the mother. Nevertheless, this union that was once idyllic, can only return now as something uncanny. The regression to the symbiotic state with the mother would suppose the annihilation of the individual, their chaotic disaggregation, an inverse birth that signifies death.

Švankmajer exposes his point of view regarding the action of eating in his short film *Food*. The film, divided into three parts, *Breakfast*, *Lunch*, and *Dinner*, portrays food consumption in different places and different social classes. As we will see in the analysis, the menace that underlies in eating is expressed in the three parts: cannibalism.

*Breakfast* begins with a shot of a barely furnished room: a table, two chairs and a coat rack. A man (Man 1) sits at the table. A door opens and a man enters (Man2), who moves without walking –as an effect of animation- towards the rack. He takes out his coat and sits in front of Man 1. There are disposable glasses and dishes on the floor. On the wall, we can observe some marks that enumerate something.

A set of instructions hang from the neck of Man 1. Man 2 reads them, takes some coins from his pocket and looks unsuccessfully for a slot in Man 1's head. Then, Man 2 presses Man 1's nose. The latter opens his mouth and takes out his excessively big tongue, on which the second man puts his coins. Man 1 swallows them and makes mechanical noises. His shirt opens and we see a hole, as for an elevator. Man 2 peeks in the hole and sees his tray with food coming. Finally, the tray comes out with a sausage, bread and coffee. Man 2 reads the instructions again and hits the other man in the chin. Some plastic cutlery comes out from his ears. Man 2 eats greedily. He kicks Man 1. As a result, a napkin appears out of his pocket. After using the napkin, Man 2 puts the tray aside and begins to do mechanical movements.

Man 1 sits up and stretches. He takes out the instructions and puts them on Man 2's neck; he goes towards the rack, takes his coat and draws a line on the wall and goes out through

the other door, from which another man (Man 3) enters. Then, they repeat the whole sequence. Man 3 throws the remains of the previous breakfast to the floor, takes out some coins and puts his arm in Man 2's mouth in order to pay. He hits his forehead and puts his finger in the eye. Man 2 moves mechanically. His shirt opens and a tray with the same breakfast as before comes out from his stomach. Man 3 hits the chin of the other man, so that the plastic cutlery appears from his ears. He kicks Man 2 to grab the napkin. He finishes eating, sets the tray aside and does mechanical movements.

Man 2 stretches and sits up. He puts his coat on, draws another line and goes out from the door that he used to enter. He leaves the door open and we observe an eternal queue of people that will repeat the same process.



Jodoin-Keaton (2010) writes, referring to this segment of the short film: 'Gobbling what their predecessors have already digested, these individuals in a trance of becoming dispensing machines, are blurred in the mold of their appetite. Man inherits the tastelessness of the alimentary and intellectual misery, with which he fattens'. This episode exhibits the consumption of man by man. Nonetheless, there is no delight in the

act of eating: devouring and swallowing as fast as possible. The characters eat the same way as a machine that requires its gasoline. Therefore, we should not be surprised by Švankmajer's depiction of the characters as mechanical objects.

Breakfast embraces one of the typical figures of Surrealism that we have analyzed in the first chapter, that is, the automat. I would also like to point out that the characters that appear in this segment clearly belong to the working class. We could consider that that is the reason why they cannot enjoy their meal. Especially if we take Jodoin-Keaton's quote into account; the working class only has access to a 'tasteless', already digested education. I do not believe it is a random choice that the characters are workers: after all, while they act as machines, they are fulfilling their service and the way to clock out would be to draw a line on the wall. They are portrayed as human resources and, by doing this, they are also put at the same level as objects.

These characters represent links in a chain of reciprocal consumption that extends without an end. It is a continuous (compulsive, automatic and irrational) repetition of the same breakfast. We should also notice that this cannibal consume is not exempt from violence. In order to pay, get cutlery and napkins, the men have to hit and kick the mechanical beings- who, with their mechanic sounds and the deformations they suffer, become more dehumanized. Nevertheless, the same men that have their breakfast will turn into these beings that they mishandle. Despite being apparently active, the men also obey submissively the instructions of the men-machines -even though they know that, in turn, they will have to fulfill the same role. The same way as the dolls in *Conspirators of pleasure* receive their punishment because of the condition they represent, the mechanical men of *Breakfast* seem to be battered because of the dehumanization they incarnate.

In *Lunch*, we observe two men at a table in a restaurant. We can suspect that the one wearing a suit belongs to an upper class, while the other one, the younger one, belongs to a lower class. The man in the suit cleans his cutlery with a carefully folded handkerchief.

The other one tries to imitate him and spits on his cutlery -accidentally spitting the other man- and cleans them with the sleeve of his jacket.

The waiter passes by them and ignores the men's gestures. The younger man's stomach makes noises. He tries to stop the waiter and accidentally knocks a flower on the vase, the centerpiece of the table. He looks to both sides and takes the flower to his mouth. Embarrassed by the look of the other man, he takes the flower out of his mouth and puts it on the buttonhole of his jacket.

The man in the suit takes his handkerchief and puts it around his neck, as a napkin. He takes all the flowers from the vase, puts them on his plate and eats them using his fork and knife. The young man takes the only flower that is left, the one of his buttonhole and, after unsuccessfully trying to eat it with his cutlery, he eats it using his hands.

The man in the suit drinks all the water from the vase. After checking there is not a drop left, the young one grabs the vase and swallows it. In this process, his face deforms, his mouth adopts a huge size.

Never abandoning his fork and knife, the man in the suit eats his handkerchief. The young one takes a dirty and wrinkled handkerchief from his pocket. He tries to cut it with his cutlery but, since it is impossible for him, he grabs it and takes it to his mouth. Again, his face deforms, and he devours the handkerchief in one bite.

The waiter passes by and ignores them again. The man in the suit puts his shoes on his plate and eats them with his cutlery. The young one does the same but using his hands.

They repeat the same actions with their belts



and trousers. Now, also the man in the suit's face deforms while eating. The men continue eating their belongings until they end up naked. Then, they continue devouring their plates, the tablecloth, the chairs and the table. At that moment, the man that no longer has a suit looks at his cutlery and then at the young man and takes his fork and knife to his mouth. The young man imitates him and eats his cutlery. However, we soon discover this was a deceit of the older man, who takes the cutlery out of his mouth and walks threateningly towards the younger one, who will be presumably devoured by him.

By viewing this segment, we can interpret that the man in the suit represents the upper class, while the younger one, embodies a lower one. Lunch shows a hoarding upper class and a working class that uselessly pretends to imitate the other one. In its failure, it ends up being consumed by the upper class. Beyond the social analysis of this episode, I would like to focus on the voracity that both characters manifest. The men devour everything they find on their way. The young one swallows everything in one bite, while the other one -at least at the beginning- chews at great speed. Anyone would think that by the half of this segment, the characters would have satisfied their appetite. Therefore, the fact that they continue eating does not obey to a necessity, but to an insatiable hunger that cannot be satisfied, which Klein links to greed. She relates greed to oral impulses and their respective fantasies. According to her, greed reflects a longing to take more than what is needed or more than what an object is willing to give up (Philippou, 2013). This hunger for the good object to alleviate the internal dominance of the bad ones leads to destructive introjection. Facing the impossibility of refraining from this impulse, the individual will not stop until it has incorporated the whole object of desire. Hence, greed contains the seed of its own destruction. Because of his implacable voracity, the man in the suit ends up devouring everything and having nothing.

Why would the men in Lunch eat everything that is on their way, although they do not have any necessity to do so? According to Lacan, the child obtains satisfaction through

the oral seizure of the real object, that is, the maternal breast. This way, the good object enters in the dialectic of exigence of love for satisfaction. Thus, the act of eating no longer aspires only to the conservation of the individual, but becomes an eroticized activity. This activity does not respond to a necessity anymore, but to a desire. Therefore, even though the object is not indifferent, there is no need for it to be specific. Despite not being the maternal breast, it will not lose the place that corresponds to it in the sexual dialectic, whose result is the erotization of the oral zone (Lacan, 1957). Consequently, the activity of eating has adopted an eroticized function in the level of desire, which is ordered in the symbolic plane. Hence, we can interpret that the men devour everything they see, not because of hunger, but for a desire that corresponds to the erotization of the oral zone.

The voracious behavior of the diners obeys to a compulsive and destructive automatism, which responds to individuals outside the rational ways of conduct, since their oral impulses affirm the supremacy of their instincts. Their voracity suggests a continuity between interior and exterior, for everything can be incorporated. The same way as in sexual relations, there is a moment in the activity of eating when the one that eats and the one that is eaten form a continuous being. This search for continuity grants an erotic aura to the activity of eating.

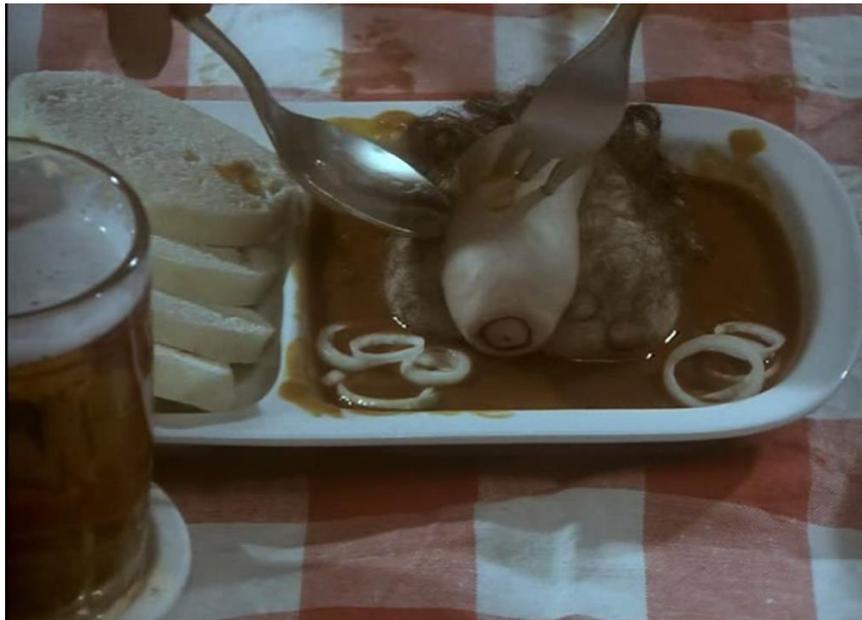
In *Dinner*, we are first situated in a fancy restaurant. A man in a suit is sat in front of a table crammed with sauces and condiments. The man, always with the same hand, drops an excessive quantity of dressings to a plate that we cannot see. With a hammer, he sticks a fork to a wooden hand and begins to eat his plate. At this moment, we discover that the other (extremely seasoned) hand is set on the plate. Using his cutlery, the man takes the ring out of the seasoned hand and starts to cut it.

The camera pans to another scene, where we see another table. A man with a sports T-Shirt -he seems to be a runner- sits in front of a metal food dome. The man lifts it and

reveals a tray with his leg, with its sports shoe and sock on, among meat and vegetables. The man begins to take out the shoe.

There is another pan and we observe a woman with red polish on her nails and pearls necklace along her neck, who hold to lemons and squeezes them over a plate that contains her breasts. She takes a spoon, willing to eat them.

Then, after the last pan, we face the naked torso of a hairy man. There is a chop of beer in front of him. On the table, we can identify consumed cigarettes and a dirty tablecloth. We see the plate with the man's penis and testicles. He starts cutting them, but, noticing the camera, he covers the food with shyness and makes gestures to throw out the viewer.



Dinner is the most ironic segment of Food. Unlike the other two, in this one we only see the face of the first character -since Švankmajer uses, in this case, the resource of surprise-, the others are just torsos. We can deduce their characterization through their clothing, the scenography and, above all, what they eat.

All the attention is focused on the act of eating, which is shown as an excessive act. One of the ways of exhibiting this excessiveness is the quantity of the dressing and sauces applied to the dishes. Eating is also described as a ritualized act. Independently of the food we consume, each of us performs a ritual while having a meal -either in groups or individually. The characters in *Dinner* do it with special care because they are carrying through a ritual of self-cannibalism. They eat a part of their bodies that is essential to them. This fact makes this segment become humorous as well as uncanny.

We could also consider that through the excessive use of seasoning and sauces, the characters intend to turn strange something that used to be familiar to them and so make them assimilable: since the dishes were part of their bodies but now they are no longer attached to them, they can only be seen as waste, so they need to disguise them to reabsorb them.

What lies beneath the fantasy of self-cannibalism is the phantom of being devoured. According to Freud (1926), this phantom (or fantasy) is the expression -in a form that has undergone regressive degradation- to a passive impulse to be loved by the father in a genital erotic sense. Lacan (1957) also explains that when facing the primordial scene of the coitus, there is an alternation in the identifications of the child: one with the woman confronted by the destructive penis (phallus), and another one with the imaginary phallus, which becomes an object that the woman can devour to the point of being destroyed.

In Švankmajer's filmography, the theme of being devoured is not only represented by food. An example of this is the short film *Down to the cellar*, which we have analyzed in the first chapter. We have already pointed out the masochist aspect of the behavior of the girl when she returns to the cellar. This return could be interpreted as a desire of being caught by the cat. In this film, the main character does not only face the threat of being devoured by the animal, but also by space. Due to its darkness, the space acquires a devouring force, capable of absorbing the child (Cunillera Pérez, 2010). Without her flashlight, the girl would also turn into darkness, that is, into space. This way, the cellar

envelopes the girl as a maternal womb, in which there are no distinguishable frontiers between individual and space -as a metaphor of the unconscious.

Therefore, the dichotomy devouring/being devoured takes us back to the opposition in Švankmajer of masochism. The fact of being chewed and shredded would be a punishment or previous pain that allow the masochist access to pleasure. Why do we not also relate this voracity to sadism? Although we could link it to the negation of the others by the sadistic hero, and to the perception of the others as introjectable objects in the voracious cannibal, both in its active aspect (devouring) as well as in its passive (being devoured), voracity implies purging a vacuum, something that is missing. While sadism consists of the absolute negation, in not purging, masochism requires the purge of this emptiness. We are discontinuous and incomplete beings in search of lost continuity and plenitude. Filling this vacuum is the main desire of the voracious search.

## **Conclusions**

All along this research, we have tried to discover the desire that motivates the characters in the films of Jan Švankmajer. My intention was to start from general aspects and finish with the more specific ones. I thought it was necessary to provide a brief introduction to the political context in which his films originated, especially considering that surrealism and Czech culture have a strong influence on his work.

On the other hand, in the introduction I have also explained the differences between French and Czech surrealism: the latter concentrated on infantile songs and literature as well as on infantile sexuality and was characterized by the omnipresence of humor, its skepticism and attachment to the concrete and daily, since they aimed to find 'the magic of the possible', that is, the incredible in the events of everyday life. The Czech surrealist group worked differently, since they made their creations in a collective way through interpretative games, which they considered a collective expression of the pleasure principle.

From the beginning, I considered necessary to explain the approach regarding surrealism that I would take throughout this research, that it, relating it to the Freudian uncanny. Contrary to what Breton imagined, psychic automatism reveals a compulsive mechanism that threatens a dissociation of the subject. Thus, the unconscious does not present as a primordial unity, but as conflictive and compulsively repetitive. In other words, surrealist automatism alludes to the psychic mechanisms of compulsive repetition and death drive and quotes them in the register of the uncanny.

Since most of the characters in the films of the Czech director are objects or behave like such, I began my work analyzing the influences of Czech culture and surrealism.

Some elements that he adopts from the Czech culture are: Rudolfian mannerism, the presence of humor, the use of marionettes and the predominant role of objects. We have

linked Rudolfian mannerism with the medieval aspect of surrealism, the same way we can connect marionettes with the fascination for antique objects of surrealists. The prominence of objects and humor are typical of Czech surrealism.

In his film, Švankmajer aims to show the hidden life of objects. Hence, they occupy an important position in his filmography. According to him, objects represent insurrectional characters that incarnate subversive desires, which distance them from their utilitarian purposes. This way, he tries to create a 'concrete irrationality', which he stages in a ludic form. Švankmajer uses marionettes and objects to expose anguishing themes of our civilized life.

Since the characters are sometimes perceived as inert materials and in other moments, when their life expressions are emphasized, we empathize with them, the director makes us oscillate between laughter and horror.

Švankmajer manages to exhibit objects as beings with a life of their own, because he anchors the verisimilitude of his films in infantile thinking (as a member of the Czech Surrealist Group, he also focused on the world of childhood). By adopting a subjective point of view, the externalization of actions is an expression of the will of a character – for instance, in *Jabberwocky*- or of their emotions -as in *Down to the Cellar*. Therefore, in this chapter, we have observed how the desire of the characters expresses, in other ways, in the externalization of the desire and its relation to the Freudian uncanny and surrealism.

The infantile mind is still in an evolutive stage, in which the individual still believes in animism. Since the child cannot draw a clear line between living being and non-living things, things can also become alive. This lack of distinction between animate and inanimate states is one of the typical examples of the uncanny, but also of convulsive beauty -one of the aspects of the surrealist marvelous- for it denotes the immanence of death in life.

Taking these topics into account, we have observed in *Picnic with Weissmann* how the fantasy of maternal plenitude manifests, one of the uncanny fantasies typical of surrealism, in which nature devours the cultural, recalling the return to the maternal womb. This fantasy is also connected to the death drive in its intent to restore a state before life, that is, death.

In the films we have analyzed in this chapter, the director exposes some aspects of the infantile sexuality, which according to Freud is typically sadistic. Such is the case in *Alice* and in *Jabberwocky* -in the first one, the girl maintains control during the entire film and at the end desires to punish the White Rabbit by cutting off his head; in the second film, the will of an invisible child controls the objects and destroys them, showing his anger towards growing up. Nevertheless, in *Down to the cellar*, the main character expresses a masochistic desire to return to the cellar where she was harassed by different characters, perhaps to be captured by them.

In the following chapter, I have tried to see where the lead of sadism and masochism could take us, in order to elucidate what is the desire that turns the Švankmajer's characters into (self)destructive beings. To do so, we have studied the second aspect of the surrealist marvelous: objective chance. As in convulsive beauty, in objective chance, an internal impulse is confused with an external sign. In this case, there is a clear mechanism that underlies this confusion, which is the compulsion to repeat. In our analysis, we have focused on one particular form of repetition, the *Schicksalszwang* or compulsion of fate.

Under the effects of this compulsion, the individual repeats a traumatic experience that they not recall, while believing they are haunted by an evil destiny. Thus, what happens appears to be fortuitous but, at the same time, predestined. Nevertheless, Freud explains that the individual actually desires that the (apparently random) events occur, but since the desire is unconscious, the individual blames fate.

Considering Freud's explanation, we have analyzed *The Lesson of Faust*, in which the main character seems to be at the mercy of the other characters manipulation, which drives him to his tragic destiny.

The film constantly plays with the resource of repetition, for instance, when the joker harasses the demon. Furthermore, the entire film has a cyclic structure: at the beginning, when the main character enters the building of the theatre, a man runs out of it – this same scene happens at the end, but this time is the main character who is running. Therefore, it is possible to think that the whole situation had already taken place before and will afterward happen again with another man who will perform the part of Faust.

What caught our attention was the fact highlighted by Freud that the individual actually desires that the events take place. In order to understand Faust's desire, I have analyzed the scene in which the main character signs his pact with the Devil, which I have linked to the masochist contract. The masochist hero needs a punishment or a previous pain to access pleasure; the contract or the law imposes a sanction first, which allows the masochist to reach pleasure afterward. Thus, the punishment or pain become a preliminary pleasure and, at the same time, in an indispensable condition for real pleasure. Masochism is the exit of the Oedipus complex by identification with the mother, due to the guilt. The punishment permits the purge of this guilt, whose cause we have determined is the image of the humiliated father that the individual conserves in their mind. In the masochist phantasy, the phallic woman-executioner absorbs and annihilates the paternal figure. Hence, we consider that in *The Lesson of Faust* the Devil occupies the role of the woman-executioner, while the absent character –God- would represent the humiliated father. Therefore, what the main character intends to purge is the image of a disgraced God.

In *Conspirators of Pleasure*, we have linked the characters' perversions with the fetishism and sadism. Fetishist perversions in this film are based on tactile aspects, as exponents of Švankmajer's interest for tactilism.

On the other hand, the sadistic perversions shown in the film are executed by two neighbors. They separately perform scenes where they torture one another through dolls that represent the hated neighbor. In order to stage the torture, the two neighbors disguise themselves: one as a dominatrix and the other one with a huge head of a rooster, such as Max Ernst's *Loplop*. With special care, both of them create their scenes by representing a patriarchal phantasy of control. Nevertheless, this control seems to be exercised not only on the dolls, but also on the desire itself- hence, the excessive caution in the preparation. This way, the violence inflicted on the dolls appears to be theatrical and processed. Consequently, the dolls not only represent their condition of victims, but also receive their punishment because of it. The erotic pleasure mixes with the horror and the triumphal contempt towards the dolls.

The neighbors perform their sadistic roles without showing any passion, exposing the apathy praised by Sade. Apathy consists on eliminating any 'parasite' emotions –such as love or hatred- and opposing to the spontaneity of any passion. Unlike masochism, sadism is based on the artificial thinking of absolute solitude. This type of thinking implies the sadistic hero prefers anything that provides them pleasure, despite the harm it may cause to others. Nevertheless, the voluptuous excess that leads to the negation of others becomes the negation of the self as well. In *Conspirators of Pleasure*, the neighbors end up fulfilling the destiny of the dolls that respectively represented them. The negation of each other –which at the beginning was the affirmation of themselves-, in an unlimited aspect, turns into the own negation. Both characters give in to their death, but not as the masochist receives their punishment, since the sadist hero does not try to purge a guilt. The 'masochist sadist' appears as an extreme limit, the negation of the self.

We have observed that these violent scenes possess a great charge of eroticism, since it is the domain of violence. Bataille interprets eroticism as the assenting to life up to the point of death. We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost [prenatal] continuity. Therefore, although we have a distressing desire that the perishable state of life lasts forever, we are obsessed with the primal continuity. Eroticism questions our discontinuity and disturbs it to the maximum, because the erotic desire implies a relative dissolution of the being.

The erotic game of continuity/discontinuity is exposed in the second segment of *Dimensions of Dialogue*, where a man and a woman made out of clay have sexual intercourse –which takes them to a state of continuity. After the act, each of them regains their respective shapes, leaving a rest of clay on the table, which exposes their discontinuity. Because of this piece of clay, the lovers begin to attack each other, increasing in violence, until they end up destroying each other into pieces –thus, returning to a state of continuity.

Eating is another way to bring us closer to the state of continuity, which is staged all along Švankmajer's filmography. The same way as with sexual intercourse, eating can be a substitute for the union with the maternal body, that is, it can recall intrauterine life (a state of continuity). Therefore, voracious eating can be read as an effort to avoid the loneliness that marks us as individual and discontinuous beings. Nevertheless, the regression to the state of primary union with the mother, which was once idyllic, can only return as something uncanny that threatens the individual with disgregation and even with death.

In *Breakfast*, the first segment of the short film *Food*, the director presents the consumption of man by man as an activity that produces no pleasure at all. The men in this segment are portrayed as machines. These working-class characters are put at the same level as objects, links in an eternal chain of reciprocal consumption. This

characterization brings up the themes of the Surrealist automatism –the men behave and have elements that are typical of the automaton- compulsive repetition –the same action takes place repeatedly- the uncanny and convulsive beauty –the stage questions if the men are actually men or machines.

This consumption does not lack violence, since the ‘eaters’ have to mistreat the machine-men. We can describe this abuse as sadistic, but it simultaneously hides a latent masochism, because the same ‘eaters’ that batter the machine-men have to submissively follow their instructions and then become mechanic beings themselves.

Voracity is the main topic of Lunch, the second segment of the short film. The two main characters devour everything on their way, even though they clearly do not have any more hunger nor any necessity to continue eating. The fact that they keep swallowing everything responds to an oral impulse related to greed: destructive introjection. Greed acts as an unstoppable impulse that will not abandon the individual until they incorporate the entire object of desire. Therefore, the two men eat constantly, until the one of a higher class deceives the other one... and presumably ends up devouring him. Nonetheless, this ending leaves us asking ourselves what this insatiable man will eat afterward. We should also notice that by devouring everything, the man ends up having nothing.

These characters seem to be able to eat absolutely anything due to the fact that the erotic satisfaction of eating is not related to the object itself. In these cases, eating does no longer obey an impulse of conservation. It has become an eroticized activity due to the erotization of the oral zone, which means that it has entered the symbolic stratum.

In the third segment of the short film, Dinner, we see a series of characters that eat parts of their own bodies. In this part, all the attention is drawn to the act of eating itself. By applying an excessive amount of sauces and dressings, the characters seem to try to disguise the body parts that they intend to eat, in an attempt to turn those residues –the inert material that once was part of their bodies- in something completely external to

them. However, this effort is useless. Therefore, even though this episode can be ironic and funny, it is uncanny as well.

Auto-cannibalism reveals the phantom of being devoured, which is an expression of a passive impulse to be loved by the father in a genital erotic sense. It is explained by the identification with the imaginary phallus, when facing the Oedipal scene of the parents' coitus. This identification makes the subject become an introjectable object.

What hides this irrepressible voracity? To my understanding, the dichotomy to devour/to be devoured recalls us the position in masochism, according to which to be chewed, or shredded would be a punishment or preliminary pain that permits the access to pleasure. While masochism aims to expiate a guilt, the voracious cannibal eats to purge a void. Voracity can be interpreted as the search for continuity and plenitude of the prenatal state, which we –now, as discontinuous and incomplete beings- have lost.

Before concluding my essay, I would like to add that Švankmajer exposes consumption (especially of food) as a metaphor for our society. In the third chapter, I have not explored deeply this analysis in order to focus on the topics of this research. According to the filmmaker, capitalism behaves as a voracious entity that devours everything that is foreign to turn it into something functional. It should be pointed out, as it is shown in the first episode of Dimensions of Dialogue, where the Arcimboldo's heads eat one another and become identical mass men. The risk within this seemingly enjoyable continuity is uniformity, or in other words, the loss of individuality.



## References

### Bibliography

- AYALA, J. (2010), De la risa y el miedo: El Humor Negro en el cine de Jan Švankmajer, en *Jan Švankmajer: La magia de la subversión*. T&B Editores, Madrid
- BATAILLE, G. (1979) El erotismo, Tusquets Editores, Buenos Aires
- BENJAMIN, W. (1939) Sobre algunos temas en Baudelaire, <http://www.rae.com.pt/wb3.pdf>
- BRETON, A. (1930) Segundo Manifiesto Surrealista, [http://sergiomansilla.com/revista/aula/lecturas/imagen/segundo\\_manifiesto\\_surrea.pdf](http://sergiomansilla.com/revista/aula/lecturas/imagen/segundo_manifiesto_surrea.pdf)
- BULJAN, K. (2007) The Uncanny and the Robot in the Astro Boy Episode “Franken”, *Animation Studies – Animated Dialogues*, 2007
- BYDZOVSKA, L.(2005), Against the Current. The Story of the Surrealist Group in Chekoslovakia, Issue 2
- CHERRY, B (2002), Dark wonders and the Gothic sensibility, en *Kinoeye*, Vol 2, Issue 1
- CHRYSSOULI, G. (2015) Surreally Human: Jan Švankmajer’s World of Self-Destructive Puppets, *Theathralia*, Issue 2
- CUNILLERA PÉREZ, M. (2010), Metáforas de la voracidad del arte del siglo XX, Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- DELEUZE, G. (2001) Presentación de Sacher-Masoch: Lo frío y lo cruel, Ed. Amorrortu, Buenos Aires
- FIJALKOWSKI, K. (2005), Invention, imagination, interpretation: Collective activity in the contemporary Czech and Slovak surreal group, in *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 3
- FOSTER, H. (2008), *Belleza Compulsiva*, Buenos Aires, Argentina: Adriana Hidalgo Editoria
- FREUD, S. (1919), Pegan a un niño, <http://www.alejandriadigital.com/>  
-(1919), Lo siniestro, <https://www.ucm.es/>

- (1920), Más allá del principio del placer, <http://laprensadelazonaoeste.com/>  
-(1926), Inhibición, síntoma y angustia,  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0By4kcibi6MzzdejhKdjRZUDc4bzA/edit>  
-(1927), El fetichismo, <http://intercentres.edu.gva.es/>
- GUTIÉRREZ, G.M.(2010), Jan Švankmajer: las raíces de una imaginación sin límites, en *Jan Švankmajer: La magia de la subversión*, T&B Editores, Madrid
- HAMES, P. (2008), “Entrevista con Jan Švankmajer”, en HAMES, P.(ed.), *Dark Alchemy: The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut  
-(2010) El meollo de la realidad, en *Jan Švankmajer: La magia de la subversión*, T&B Editores, Madrid
- JODOIN-KEATON, C. (2010), El mundo de la infancia, en *Jan Švankmajer: La magia de la subversión*, T&B Editores, Madrid
- LACAN, J. (1957), *Seminario IV*,  
<http://www.bibliopsi.org/docs/lacan/06%20Seminario%204.pdf>
- MARTIN, M. (2010), Mecánicas del sueño: Las marionetas en Charley Bowers y Jan Svankmajer, en *Jan Švankmajer: La magia de la subversión*, T&B Editores, Madrid
- McKEE, R. (2013) *El guión* (8ª Ed.), Ed. Alba Editorial, Madrid
- O'KEANE, D. (2006) Seeking Svankmajer: Illuminating the dark unconscious,  
<http://docslide.us/documents/seeking-svankmajer.html>
- PETEK, P. (2009), The Death and Rebirth of Surrealism in Bohemia: Local Inflections and Cosmopolitan Aspirations in the Cinema of Jan Švankmajer, en *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 17, N°1
- PHILIPPOU, Y. (2013) The expedience of anxiety and pleasure: A Kleinian approach to fairy tales by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm,  
<http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/133802/files/GRI-2014-11848.pdf>
- SOLARIK, B. (2005), The Walking Abyss: Perspectives on Contemporary Czech and Slovak Surrealism, in *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 3
- SORFA D., (2006) The Object of Film in Jan Švankmajer, en *Kino Kultura Special*, n° 4, 2006, 3

ŠVANKMAJER, J. (2012), Para ver cierra los ojos, Pepitas de calabaza ed., La Rioja (España)

TAYLOR ROBINSON, H. (2007) Two short films by Jan Svankmajer - Jabberwocky and Punch and Judy, en *Projected Shadows: Psychoanalytic reflections on the representation of Loss in European Cinema*, Ed. Routledge, Londres y Nueva York

VASSELEU, C. (2009), Tactile Animation: Haptic Devices and the Svankmajer Touch, en *Senses & Society*, Volume 4, Issue 2

VIMENET, P (2010), Una utopia del continuum, en *Jan Švankmajer: La magia de la subversión*, T&B Editores, Madrid

WESTON D.M. (2011), Down to the Cellar: the architectural setting as an embodied topography of the imagination in two films of Jan Švankmajer, en *Papers of Surrealism*, n°9

## Filmography

PULUJ, H. (producer) y SVANKMAJER, J. (director).(1968). *Picnic with Weissmann (Picnick mit Weissmann)*[cortometraje]. Austria: Studio A

KMÍNKOVÁ, E.; SICHOVÁ, M.; VANEK, J.(producer) y SVANKMAJER, J. (director).(1971). *Jabberwocky (Zvahlav aneb Saticky Slameného Huberta)*[cortometraje]. Checoslovaquia: Krátký Film Praha

GALBAVÝ, E. (producer) y SVANKMAJER, J. (director).(1983). *Down to the cellar (Do pivnice)*[cortometraje]. Checoslovaquia: Slovenská filmová tvorba Koliba (SFT)

SVANKMAJER, J. (producer y director).(1983). *Dimensions of Dialogue (Moznosti dialogu)*[cortometraje]. Checoslovaquia: Krátký Film Praha

FUETER, P.-C.(producer) y SVANKMAJER, J. (director).(1988). *Alice (Neco z Alenky)*[largometraje]. Checoslovaquia, Suiza, Alemania Occidental, Reino Unido: Channel Four Films, Condor Films, Hessischer Rundfunk (HR), Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft (SRG)

KALLISTA, J.(producer) y SVANKMAJER, J. (director).(1993). *Food (Jídlo)*[cortometraje]. Checoslovaquia, Reino Unido: The Jan Svankmajer-Jeremí Kallista Creative Group

KALLISTA, J.(producer) y SVANKMAJER, J. (director).(1994). *Faust (aka The Lesson of Faust)*[largometraje]. República Checa, Francia, Reino Unido: Athanor, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Heart of Europe Prague K Productions, Kominsk, Lumen Films, Pandora Cinema

KALLISTA, J.(producer) y SVANKMAJER, J. (director).(1996). *Conspirators of pleasure (Spiklenci slasti)*[largometraje]. República Checa, Reino Unido, Suiza: Athanor, Cominici, Delfilm

## Author



**Julia Kirszman** studied Screenwriting at E.N.E.R.C, where she received her Bachelor degree in 2010. 2016 she was granted the degree of *Licenciada* (MA) by the Universidad de las Artes. She has worked in film, television and festival production. Currently she is working in animation and theatre projects. Her main interests are Media Aesthetics and Media Sociology.