

**What is ‘Surreal’ about Surrealism?  
An Investigation of Surrealism as Seen Through the  
‘Looking-Glass’ of Jan Švankmajer.**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the filmic representation of surrealism in the films of Jan Švankmajer between 1964 and 2010. These films were analysed in light of two key areas expressed in recent literature regarding the representation of surrealism in film. The first key area is the complicated relationship between surrealism and film and fantasy film, which has resulted in misconceptions about surrealism and its relationship with reality. This was examined with regard to the misconception of surrealism equating to fantasy and escapism. The second key area is how the filmic representation of surreality by the surrealist filmmaker Švankmajer supports the relationship of the movement with reality. This is analysed in terms of Švankmajer's filmic engagement with the socio-political context at the time of production and his beliefs regarding a civilisation in crisis. Contingent to Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality is an examination of his style, aesthetics and techniques used to convey surreality or the notions of surrealism in his films to depict the affinity of the movement with reality. The main issue addressed in relation to all his films is the narrative on repression. This dissertation examines his narrative on repression, its dimensions and its role in reaffirming the affinity of surrealism with reality.

The examination in this study of the subject matter included a diverse field of relevant sources, which was necessitated by the status of the surrealist movement as a belief rather than a formal theoretical framework. This includes, but is not limited to, surrealism and its main considerations and the relationship between surrealism and film compared to fantasy and film with regard to their relationship with reality. This was extended to include significant theoretical considerations with regard to Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality, including the representation of loss, the significance of childhood, the presence of objects and the role of tactility. The study entailed an analysis of his films within the ideas expressed in Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality. The films were then analysed within the context of the socio-political atmosphere at the time of their production, specifically during the former Czechoslovak communist oppression, followed by the emersion of the Czech Republic into the global consumerist market.

The findings of the study indicate that the filmic representation of surreality in Švankmajer's films portrays a heightened awareness of the socio-political reality of the former Czechoslovakia

as well as the current Czech Republic, while resonating universal truths on civilisation. The films challenge the misconceptions on surrealism and its filmic representation as equating to fantasy and escapism. The findings further revealed that Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality counters such misconceptions, with the films reflecting Švankmajer's experiences in Czechoslovakia as well his intimate account of the destructive nature of civilisation.

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## GLOSSARY

Surrealism is a diverse concept that in practice translates into a shared philosophy rather than any set theory. The movement covers a diverse range, as it borrows alternate ideas to further its objective of surreality. The field of psychology is a significant influence on surrealism, which this dissertation refers to in its discussion of surrealism. For the sake of clarity, a brief discussion of key terms is provided.

**Ego:** The ego is the “decision-making component” (Weiten, 2010:494) of Sigmund Freud’s personality structure that counters the primitive urges of the id. The ego operates decision-making thought processes, including rationalism, and mediates the urges of the id with social convention (Weiten, 2010:494). It channels the primitive urges of the id into “appropriate outlets” (Weiten, 2010:494).

**Id:** The id is the primitive component of Sigmund Freud’s personality structure. The id operates primary thought processes, including fantasy and irrationalism (Weiten, 2010:494). It represents the realm of primitive urges that demand “immediate gratification” (Weiten, 2010:494). It essentially defies conformity and obedience.

**Psychoanalytical theory:** This theory was pioneered by Sigmund Freud as he attempted to explain personality, motivation and psychological disorders through a study on the influence of early childhood, the unconscious and methods used by people to cope with their primitive urges. Freud theorised a structure of personality composed of the id, ego and superego, which determined personality, behaviour and psychological disorders based on their interactions (Weiten, 2010:493).

**Superego:** The superego is the “moral component” (Weiten, 2010:494) of Sigmund Freud’s personality structure. The superego represents social conventions that one has routinely learnt through social interactions and distinguishes right from wrong. The superego ensures conformity and obedience (Weiten, 2010:494).

**Surrealism:** Surrealism is a philosophy that evades precise definition. It is associated with dreams, the imagination and Freudian notions on the relationship between the conscious and the repressed unconscious. André Breton, founder of surrealism, defined surrealism as:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express — verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner — the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (1972:26).

Breton continues:

ENCYCLOPAEDIA. *Philosophy.* Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principle problems of life (1972:26).

Surrealism is a philosophy that spiralled into an art movement that sought to strengthen the relationship between reality and art. Surrealism incorporates unconscious thought processes in the creation of art to heighten the affinity between art and daily reality. The hope was to merge conscious and unconscious thought processes and perceptions of reality in art, to create a surreality.

**Surreality:** Surreality parallels the suspended moment before waking when dream and reality cannot be distinguished. It is the merging of the conscious and unconscious at the point where “life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions” (Breton, 1972:123). Therefore, surreality reflects a heightened awareness of reality that resurfaces unconscious thought processes to interact in unison with conscious reality.

**Uncanny:** The uncanny was coined by Sigmund Freud to explain the combined experience of something that is both familiar and unfamiliar. The uncanny is an emotional response that overrules rational objections. It describes the unsettling sensation one has towards something with which an individual can identify through association, while also finding it completely alien. The commonly referred to example is of a doll that is familiar for its lifelike or animate appearance, but unfamiliar or inanimate because of its non-lifelike matter. Central to the uncanny

is the unsettling sensation evoked by the encounter as it threatens one's sense of security or identity by blurring the boundary between real and unreal (Freud, 1919).

**Unconscious:** The unconscious is a level of awareness that encompasses the id of Sigmund Freud's personality structure. It is the most internalised level of awareness and contains memories and desires. These internalised memories and desires exert a significant influence on human behaviour and personality, despite their internalisation (Weiten, 2010:494).

## 1. Introduction and Methodology

Surrealism and film present a complicated relationship, with a union resulting in a genre too often equated with that of fantasy. The boundaries between surrealism and fantasy are seemingly blurred by the commodification of surrealism and the habitual reference to the bizarre or fantastic as ‘surreal’ (Norris, 2007:74; Owen, 2013:4; Richardson, 2006:2). Surrealism and fantasy share aesthetic and stylistic characteristics, but they exist as separate genres, distinguished by their affinity with reality. Fantasy films offer imaginative glorious worlds of escapism. In contrast, one of the former leaders of Czech surrealism, Vratislav Effenberger, argues that surrealist films are the antithesis, “reaching through to the dynamic core of reality” (cited in Frank, 2013:100). This dissertation challenges the misconceptions of surrealism as equating to fantasy and escapism through an examination of surrealist considerations and an analysis of Jan Švankmajer’s films between 1964 and 2010 to reaffirm the affinity of surrealism with reality. The Czechoslovak socio-political narrative of Švankmajer’s surreal films revealed a close affinity between reality and surrealism, which supported the surrealist principle to express a heightened awareness of “two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*” (Breton, 1972:14). An examination of Švankmajer’s filmic representation of surreality revealed childhood as a medium of expression for a narrative on instinctual repression as he actively seeks “to make man more free, to liberate us precisely from those domesticating habits that our civilisation drums into us from childhood” (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:447). Therefore, in opposition to fantasy and escapism, Švankmajer’s surreality confronts daily reality and the destructive nature of civilisation. This heightened awareness of reality reinforces surrealist notions and counters the reductive and commodified misconceptions of surrealism.

The principle question this dissertation investigated was the affinity of surrealism with reality by examining the filmic representation of surrealism in Švankmajer’s films and their affinity with reality. This investigation was conducted along three paths, which are reflected in the following chapters of this dissertation. Firstly, a literature review of surrealism and its adoption within cinema was conducted to distinguish the heightened affinity of the movement with reality. Secondly, this was followed by an analysis of Švankmajer’s practice of surrealism and filmic representation of surreality. This focused on the ability of Švankmajer’s practice of surrealism and filmic representation of surreality to further illuminate surrealism and in turn understanding

of his films. This focus related to a diverse range of surrealist influences and themes, including, but not limited to, loss, childhood, objects, tactility, 'vision' and instinctual repression. A qualitative analysis of Švankmajer's films based on these themes and influences revealed a preoccupation with instinctual repression and a commentary on civilisation. Thirdly, contingent to this was an examination of Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality alongside a contextualisation of the former Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). This revealed the heightened awareness of reality of his films through the analogy of the socio-political reality of a communist dystopia followed by the excesses of a consumerist society post revolution. The combined investigation of these three avenues reappropriated surrealism as the antonym of fantasy and escapism.

The motivation for this dissertation and its investigation was inspired by personal interest in Švankmajer's films. Švankmajer's films are strangely nostalgic of my cherished childhood films by Tim Burton and Henry Selick, filmmakers who prefer filmic representations of fantasy and surrealism. As a young fanatic of animated movies, I remember my obsession with the glowing green pasta worms in Selick's *James and the Giant Peach* (1996) as the film slowly started to disrupt boundaries between reality and fantasy. I was fascinated by the animated movement of the characters and completely subsumed into a fantasy world that, as any child would believe, was 'obviously real and totally surreal'. Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), which was also directed by Selick, was another childhood favourite. The conventional monsters of Halloween were transformed into unconventionally enchanting characters with their nightmarish 'presents' softened by the characters' misguided good intentions. It was with the same sense of awe, wonder and fascination that I first watched Švankmajer's films. The bizarre, disturbing and often grotesque animated films stirred an uncanny nostalgia of childhood movies that I was unable to place. It wasn't until the following Christmas and the traditional screening of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* that I experienced déjà-vu. This interest led to research on Burton and Selick, which revealed their own interest in Švankmajer and his significant influence on their filmmaking style (Uhde, 2007:61). It is with this experience of completing a long-fated circle that I chose to research Švankmajer – becoming, like Alice, prey to his Wonderland. The relationship between these films and their affinity with fantasy and surrealism revealed misconceptions in film regarding surrealism and fantasy. This dissertation attempts to restore conceptions of surrealism and its affinity with reality in opposition to its reductive equation with fantasy.

In addressing the questions of this dissertation, it was important to note the status of surrealism as a philosophy and an activity rather than a formal theoretical framework. Surrealism was never established as a film movement or genre, but rather the practice of surrealist ideas as the philosophy spiralled into an art movement of collected activity that included film. André Breton's idea of merging dream and reality – unconscious and conscious reality – is founded on juxtaposition and it is the surrealist's role to break these barriers and resolve the two into a heightened awareness of reality. Therefore, surreality can be broadly understood as “the place in which oppositions of real and imaginary, high and low, life and death, and so on, are no longer perceived as contradictions” (Richardson, 2006:5). This revealed a poignant difference between fantasy and surrealism, especially surrealism as the antithesis of fantasy. A film, whether surreal or fantasy, may share stylistic and aesthetic traits to surrealist ideas, but it is a film's portrayal of surreality that must be judged as an indicator of surrealism. This formed the theoretical framework of this dissertation in its analysis of Švankmajer's representation of surreality. This approach provided a broad scope of analysis for surrealism in Švankmajer's films, which was necessary for reflecting on such a diverse and wide-ranging influence of collective activity within his films.

The former Czechoslovakia of the 1960s is recognised as a period of Czech film miracles. The then repressed communist satellite state was approaching the Prague Spring with its series of political reforms. This resulted in a cultural thaw, with censorship laws temporarily eased. Artists immersed themselves in the cultural movements sweeping Europe, which had been previously deemed as too bourgeois for communist Czechoslovakia. The surrealist movement became one such obsession for artists and inspired “abrupt, rebellious flowering of cinematic accomplishment in the Czechoslovakia of the 1960s” (Owen, 2013:2). Surrealism also contributed to the experimental style of the flourishing Czechoslovak New Wave film movement of the Prague Spring as filmmakers incorporated surrealist preoccupations within their films. Among the notable filmmakers of the Czechoslovak New Wave were Jan Němec (*The Party and the Guests*, 1966), Jaromil Jireš (*Valerie and her Week of Wonders*, 1969), Jiří Menzel (*Closely Observed Trains*, 1966), Miloš Forman (*The Firemen's Ball*, 1967), Pavel Juráček (*A Case for the Young Man*, 1969) and Věra Chytilová (*Daisies*, 1966). It was against this backdrop that Švankmajer made his film debut with *The Last Trick (Poslední trik pana Schwarcewalldea a pana Edgara*, 1964).

Švankmajer is an artist of many trades: painter, writer, sculptor and filmmaker, with a limitless bag of tricks, but the overriding constant in his arsenal of artistry is surrealism. Švankmajer is a filmmaker who has completely surrendered himself to surrealism and the ideas of the movement that permeate the diverse range of his artistic work. He is especially known for his experimental stop-motion animated films, which blend animation with live action and defy boundaries between the real and the imagined. Peter Hames has become the academic cornerstone of Švankmajer's film work. His writings, alongside colleagues including Roger Cardinal, Michael O'Pray and František Dryje in *The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer: Dark Alchemy* (2008), provide foundations for contextualising Švankmajer and his films within Czech culture, traditions and the course of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, which have been previously marginalised in Western academia (Hames, 2008(a):8). This was in part due to the language barrier of available Czech literature on Švankmajer translated into English and the limited contact with Czech academics and artists following communist control in the former Czechoslovakia until recently.

The primary problem encountered in researching this topic was the focus of academic studies on Švankmajer and the relationship of his films with communist Czechoslovakia, which limited the scope of study of Švankmajer's representation of surreality to his affinity with communist Czechoslovakia. Hames and colleagues' writings in *The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer: Dark Alchemy*, discuss Švankmajer's significant cultural influences and their theoretical considerations, including mannerism, psychoanalysis, puppetry and objects. Theoretical considerations are discussed primarily in relation to a communist socio-political reading, which has resulted in an ethnocentric narrative on Švankmajer's work (Owen, 2013:7; Richardson, 2006:123). The recent writings of Alison Frank (2013), Jonathan Owen (2013) and Michael Richardson (2006) reveal the tendency to limit Švankmajer's films as politically subversive within the socio-political context of Eastern Europe, specifically the formerly repressed communist Czechoslovakia. This scope limits the significance of Švankmajer's post-communist era films and the universal significance of his surrealist narrative on instinctual repression in society. This dissertation readdresses surrealist understanding of Švankmajer's films by illuminating his surrealist preoccupation with instinctual repression and freedom through the study of childhood as medium of expression. Both Švankmajer's Czechoslovak socio-political narrative and instinctual narrative revealed his inherent affinity with reality, as he actively reinterprets and confronts civilised reality. This examination revealed the symbiotic nature of the

two narratives with Švankmajer's narrative on instinctual repression and its commentary on civilisation providing an analogy for the Czechoslovak socio-political narrative and further strengthening his surrealist affinity with reality. Therefore, this dissertation was less concerned with the ethnocentric polemic of Švankmajer's films, but rather the existence of both narratives – socio-political and instinctual – as evidence of the affinity of surrealism with reality.

## 2. Content in Context

Švankmajer was born on 4 September 1934 in Prague, Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic. The country's turbulent history, diverse culture and bohemian legends have profoundly shaped his work and provided a springboard for his imagination. This chapter provides a contextualisation of the historical, political, social and cultural factors that have influenced Švankmajer.

### 2.1 Cultural context

Švankmajer's childhood and background serve as a poignant point of perspective when reflecting on his adaptation of surrealism and its influence on his films. Despite being born during a politically unstable period in Czech history, Švankmajer had a fairly modest upbringing living in Prague's working class districts. His father worked as a shop display designer and his mother worked as a dressmaker (Schmitt, 2012(a):63). Their careers introduced him at an early age to a world of textures and a keen eye for detail, which would come to predominate his own career. His childhood serves as a well of memories that he continually refers to for inspiration, where "events, places, dreams, childhood fears and more profound traumas, would be taken up again and transposed in some of his films" (Schmitt, 2012(a):63). Alongside these memories were "[c]ertain objects, smells or colours from his very earliest childhood" (Schmitt, 2012(a):63) that would have a profound effect on his filmmaking style. This is evident on a more simple level in Švankmajer's reoccurring reddish brown floors in his movies, which is reminiscent of his childhood home (Schmitt, 2012(a):63).

Švankmajer's obsession with childhood was outlined in the 1980 collective enquiry, *Mental Morphology*, instigated by Effenberger (Schmitt, 2012(a):63). Švankmajer's childhood memories revealed the beginning sparks of his fascination with textures, excess and puppetry. His grandmother was the first to capture the young boy's attention to the value, albeit painfully, of texture, which he recalls in the collective enquiry. His grandmother often watched over the grandchildren while their parents were at work. On one particular occasion, instead of playing in the street where his grandmother could observe him, Švankmajer ventured off into the nearby park (Schmitt, 2012(a):63). Švankmajer was only five years old and his grandmother was

understandably concerned and aggravated. Despite his young age at the time, he recalls the day with exceptional clarity, remarking, “[a]s a punishment I had to stay kneeling on a grater (my first tactile memory)” (Švankmajer, cited in Schmitt, 2012(a):63). This awareness of texture playfully haunts all of Švankmajer’s films with his visual appreciation of these textures on screen, enabling a sensory experience for the viewer.

Švankmajer also had a traumatic experience of scarlet fever at the age of six, which would root in him a fear, desire and disgust of ‘excess’. At the age of six, Švankmajer was sent to a clinic for several months as part of his recovery process. The clinic was known for its treatment of coercion, or ‘force-feeding’, to help the children gain the needed weight and stamina to recover (Schmitt, 2012(a):63). This traumatic experience is an indicator of the grotesque excess and greed that are displayed in his later films, including *Dimensions of Dialogue* (*Možnosti dialogu*, 1982), *Food* (*Jídlo*, 1992) and *Little Otík* (*Otesánek*, 2000). These films portray characters who have a constant need to ingest surrounding food, objects or other characters in a grotesque manner. The stylistic impact of Švankmajer’s treatment at the clinic is also apparent in the depiction in his films of excessive actions in extreme close-ups and attention to the ‘consuming’ process; whether spreading jam on toast or the licking of lips. Švankmajer’s experience at the clinic is further significant because it profoundly changed his personality and interests at a young age. Once readmitted to school, his teachers found him to be withdrawn and timid; a “retiring and taciturn child who avoided participating ... preferring to draw and paint” (Schmitt, 2012(a):63). While Švankmajer’s teachers found this behaviour “introverted and morbid” (Schmitt, 2012(a):63), it indicated a turning point in the young child who was greatly expressing and exploring these experiences through a heightened artistic outlet. This creativity and artistic expression were propelled by the imaginative worlds of Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allan Poe novels. The works of both authors influenced the child during his adolescence and inspired his later feature-length films *Alice* (*Něco z Alenky*, 1987) and *Faust* (*Lekce Faust*, 1994). The fantasy of these novels, their mystification and dark undertones are early instigators in Švankmajer’s surrealist interests.

In hindsight, the 1930s seems a historically and culturally appropriate atmosphere for the birth of a filmmaker whose work would be defined by the movements, culture and political events of the period. The renowned Liberated Theatre was established in 1926 and Jiří Trnka, leading figure in puppet theatre and mixed live action animation, founded his first puppet theatre in 1936. In 1945,

Trnka joined the Trick Brothers Studio, a film studio specialising in animation. At the studio, Trnka specialised in the adaptation of puppet theatre into film. This laid the foundation for Švankmajer, whose own transition to cinema mirrored that of Trnka; initially working in puppet theatre and later adapting his techniques for film despite no formal training in film. The 1930s was also the rise of surrealism throughout Europe with the French Surrealist Group's first manifesto, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, published in 1924 and the second, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, in 1930. Furthermore, the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was established in 1934 in alignment with the French surrealists. The ideas of both groups profoundly influenced Švankmajer during his tertiary education and became defining features of his work. Recent research on surrealism has discussed the tendency to marginalise Czechoslovak surrealism as a subplot to French surrealism (Owen, 2013:25). This dissertation discusses the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group as an equal counterpart to the French Surrealist Group. The ideas of both groups are evident in Švankmajer's work and both provide areas of relevant discussion. The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group will be the primary focus of this chapter because,

[t]he story of the Czech avant-garde in the twentieth century is ultimately the story of its relationship with Communist authority, and the course of Czechoslovak Communism can itself be traced in the ups and downs, the crises, redefinitions and resurgences, of the avant-garde's turbulent history (Owen, 2013:30).

The following contextualisation on the historical and cultural factors relating to Švankmajer therefore includes a discussion of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group.

Švankmajer's birth country is another poignant point of reflection, with Jan Uhde's extensive research on Švankmajer citing Prague as his source of "genius loci" (2007:64). Prague is integral to the magic of Old Europe, which was an obsession of Švankmajer's and the surrealists. They were inspired by its culture, folklore, traditions and architectural charm. Founding surrealists Breton and Paul Éluard visited the city in March 1935, with Breton speaking on "The Surrealist Situation of the Object" at the Mánes Gallery (Sayer, 2013:14). Breton preceded his lecture with a speech on his first impressions of Prague, saying, "Prague with its legendary charms is, in fact, one of those cities that electively pin down poetic thought" (1972:255). He continued, "with her towers that bristle like no others, it seems to be the magic capital of old Europe" (1972:255). The spiralling towers of Prague are most notably those of the Prague Castle and the St Vitus Cathedral, surrounded by the smaller bordering towers that were previously occupied by the great

artists, philosophers and scientists of the Bohemian era. Breton summarises Prague's cultural history as something that "carefully incubates all the delights of the past for the imagination" (1972:255).

Breton's claims are supported by Švankmajer, whose life and work were inspired by Prague's legends. Švankmajer's films constantly draw on the "city of Prague, and the region of Bohemia with its history, mystery, magic, suffering and centuries-old culture" (Uhde, 2007:60). Švankmajer's former residential properties in Prague also reflect an obsession with Prague's historic and cultural relevancy with one former home near the Astronomical Clock in Old Town and the other in close proximity to the Prague Castle (Uhde, 2007:64–65). The relevancy of Švankmajer's proximity to Prague Castle lies in its former history. Prague Castle was once home to Franz Kafka, who resided at number 22, now a souvenir gift shop that sells his novel, *The Metamorphosis* (1915), alongside books on the legend of Rabbi Löw and the Golem, and miniature calendars of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's paintings. A discussion of the influence of Prague will be returned to in the examination of Švankmajer's surreality, which is revealed as inspired by similar occult beliefs, especially in reference to the legend of the Golem and alchemy. At this point it is relevant to mention the role of Prague's cultural and political past, which has significantly shaped Švankmajer's style and beliefs. The gift shop at the Prague Castle provides a relevant starting point to this journey with its Kafka and Arcimboldo commodities, with their namesakes inspiring the filmmaking style of Švankmajer.

Prague is the birthplace of Kafka and his novels have influenced Švankmajer's stylised representations of life in Prague. Švankmajer's films display characters thwarted by unforeseen and illogical circumstances, which echoes the work of Kafka. While Švankmajer's *Alice* was inspired by the novels of Carroll, the forces of height, strength and obstacles, which the protagonist struggles against throughout Švankmajer's film, are reminiscent of Kafka's George Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* as he readjusts to his transformed insect body. The protagonist in *The Flat* (Byt, 1968) is another reminder of Kafka's Samsa as he struggles to carry out daily tasks when the objects continually confound him. The character is unable to make his way around the flat or eat his food without an object becoming an obstacle in his path, infuriating his every move. The film mimics the struggles of Samsa, who wakes to find himself transformed into a beetle, unable to climb out of bed, open a door or eat his food.

The work of Arcimboldo is another significant stylistic influence echoed in Švankmajer's films. Arcimboldo was from Milan but moved to Prague under the rule of Emperor Rudolf II (1576–1612) and remained a solid figure within his court. It was under Rudolf's reign that the artist's "weird and wanton imagination" (Burton, 2009:53) gained its highest acclaim. Švankmajer was inspired by Arcimboldo's mannerist paintings of drawn objects combined in collage and reimagined to create new and realistic figures. Švankmajer's short film *Flora* (1989) is quintessentially Arcimboldo in style with the moulded clay character's hair, bones and organs made from rotting vegetables (figure 1). The animated vegetable creation combines both the famous painting of Arcimboldo's, entitled *Flora* (1589) (figure 2), and his allegorical portraits, especially *Vertumnus* (circa 1590) of Rudolf (figure 3). Arcimboldo's artistic influence on Švankmajer can also be seen in the drawn figurines in *Et Cetera* (1966) and in the all-consuming faces of the food figurine, the metal figurine and the figurine made of paper, plastic and wood in *Dimensions of Dialogue*.



Figure 1: *Flora*



Figure 2: Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *Flora*



Figure 3: Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *Vertumnus*

One of the most culturally diverse and artistically vibrant eras of Czech history was during its Bohemian rule, specifically under Rudolf. Rudolf's personal interest in all the arts was borderline obsessive, with a relentless quest to surround himself with Europe's greatest artists and their creations. The apparent trend throughout his cabinet of curiosities, the *Kunstkammer* or *Wunderkammer*, was artworks of mystique and imagination, with the artists becoming known as Europe's greatest alchemists (Burton, 2009:1). Rudolf invited artists of his collected creations to his court, where they would stay and discuss their art and privately create new pieces. *Zlatá ulička* (Golden Lane) would become their temporary home and later in history, a place of fascination for surrealists who admired these early visionaries. Former Czechoslovak surrealist Vítězslav Nezval's poem describes the area that he himself frequently visited: "In the Golden lane in the Hradčany / Time almost seems to stand still / If you wish to live five hundred years / Drop everything take up alchemy" (cited in Burton, 2009:48). Nezval's poem highlights the immortality of these earlier alchemists through their curious works of art that continue to inspire artists, especially the Czechoslovak avant-garde.

Prague remains one of Europe's oldest and most charming cities, with its very foundations reflecting centuries of different cultures, styles and artistic movements. It is important to note Rudolf's historical role and relentless collection of Europe's curiosities at the very heart of Czech identity, because it also mirrors Švankmajer's personal obsessions. Švankmajer was fascinated by Rudolf's cabinet of curiosities, which inspired him in the creation of his own artworks: those exhibited under the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group and the animated creatures that can be seen in his films. Švankmajer's inspiration from this period errs on the side of passionate obsession, spending much of his adult life creating his own *Kunstkammer* when censorship laws made it difficult for him to produce films during the 1970s. Švankmajer filled his cabinet of curiosities with assemblages of objects, similar in spirit to the bizarre, playful and provocative artefacts of Rudolf's cabinet of curiosities and in style with Arcimboldo's collage-like paintings (Schmitt, 2012(b):133).

## 2.2 Cultural and political shifts over the course of two world wars

The spirit and culture of Old Europe in Prague provided Švankmajer an outlet from the politically repressive regimes that governed his childhood and adult life. Within a few years of

Švankmajer's birth, the former Czechoslovakia's state of independence was neglected, ignored and destroyed by decades of alienating international policies and occupation from within Europe. The socio-political Czech history serves as a backdrop to Švankmajer's experiences growing up in Czechoslovakia and as a source for subversive commentary in his short and feature-length films. This chapter traces socio-political historical moments that are relevant to following discussions of the Czechoslovak socio-political reading of Švankmajer's films and his opinions on civilisation.

The former Czechoslovakia originated as one of the successor states of the Austria-Hungarian Empire, which fell apart after World War I (WWI). It declared independence in 1918 with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk as the country's first president. The Czechoslovak Communist Party was founded in 1918 in Moscow by Czechoslovak prisoners of war. The former democratic Czechoslovak prisoners were indoctrinated by their Bolshevik captives into pro-communist supporters. At the end of WWI, the prisoners were released and returned to Czechoslovakia. The indoctrinated soldiers were sent to Czechoslovakia to propagate Vladimir Lenin's ideas and prepare for 'imminent' social revolution. The end of WWI was a period of revolution, especially a cultural revolution, with the spread of the avant-garde, including dada and later surrealism throughout Europe. Within Czechoslovakia, avant-garde artists established the Devětsil group led by Karel Teige. The Devětsil became the ideological centre of the Czechoslovak avant-garde and forerunner of Czechoslovak surrealism. During this time, the *Komunistická strana Československa* (KSČ) – the mass Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – was established in Prague in 1921 from the radical left-wing factions of the Social Democrat Party. By 1929, Klement Gottwald became leader of the KSČ and repositioned the group as one of the largest parties of the Communist Internationale. The Great Depression of 1929 had a severe impact on Czechoslovakia with a significant decrease in exports and increased unemployment. This resulted in the rise of poverty and famine. The KSČ sought to take advantage of the political and social unrest in the hope of gaining the support of the masses and taking majority control of parliament.

The ideologies of the Czechoslovak avant-garde and the KSČ were initially declared as companions; both sought to challenge bourgeois values and were engaged in heightened political activity (Harper & Stone, 2007:1). This alliance was strengthened by the KSČ's cultural openness, which was welcomed by members of the Devětsil, who were transitioning towards the

surrealist movement. By 1934, the Devětsil had transformed into the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, led by Nezval. Nezval was key to the transition of the movement to surrealism after he had formed a personal bond with Breton during visits to their respective cities. Nezval was also a communist sympathiser and was appeased by Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, which declared the French Surrealist Group's support for the French Communist Party (Owen, 2013:30). Teige was initially cautious of the new group's alignment with surrealism and the French surrealists. Teige was especially reluctant to join the group because of artistic differences, but these were resolved with the strengthening and development of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group. Teige's transition to the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group resulted in his leadership of the group in the late 1930s (Frank, 2013:61–62).

The relationship between the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group and the KSČ continued to grow under Nezval's leadership. At the 1934 Soviet Writer's Congress, Nezval spoke of surrealism as compatible with the communist's revolutionary struggle. This was challenged by the adoption of socialist realism as the official aesthetic model of the Soviet Union and its 'bloc' allies. Nezval was adamant to maintain ties with the KSČ and relied on Teige to try to reconcile the ideas of surrealism with socialist realism. Surrealist notions of reinterpreting life into an aesthetic of heightened awareness could not be reconciled with socialist realism, which sought only to interpret and portray a socialist-approved life with goal-orientated narratives and no symbolism. The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group's preoccupation with dream and poetic imagery was not allowed within the confines of socialist realism and by the late 1930s, Teige had become disillusioned with the Soviet authorities. This resulted in a bitter fallout with Nezval, which triggered divisions within the group. Communist powers in the Soviet Union had also begun to denounce surrealism and broke ties with the movement. Nezval attempted to dissolve the group and realign himself with the KSČ. Members of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group defied Nezval's declaration and regrouped, led by Teige. The reinvented group immediately released a surrealist pamphlet denouncing Josef Stalin's extremism, the communist system and the socialist realist model (Owen, 2013:31). The growing Czechoslovak Surrealist Group and the increasingly powerful KSČ were both halted in their actions by the threat of German occupation.

The former Czechoslovakia was a liberal state that was left helpless in the pathway of Nazi-led German aggression in the wake of World War II (WWII). Within a few years of Švankmajer's

birth, previous European alliances that had been set in place to help protect Czechoslovakia from German aggression would fail. This inevitably resulted in the invasion of German soldiers in Czechoslovakia. Adolf Hitler's intentions towards Czechoslovakia was a combination of politically motivated desires, military strategy and personal prejudice against a nation that he considered "the dread enemies of Germans" (Bažant et al., 2010:295). In Hitler's *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier* (circa 1941–1944), he publicly denounces Czechoslovakia as a splinter race (Bažant et al., 2010:295). His racially prejudiced speech reveals a deep-seated jealousy and resentment of Czechoslovakia's inhabitation by a large number of German-speaking citizens with minority control. The rise of Nazism and the propaganda surrounding Hitler as the 'saviour' of Eastern Europe, combined with the severe impact of the Great Depression experienced by the German population of Czechoslovakia, provided Hitler with circumstances to gain control of Czechoslovakia.

The pathway for Nazi Germany's domination of Czechoslovakia was aided by Konrad Henlein, Nazi politician and leader of the Czechoslovak Germans. Henlein resented the minority status of Czechoslovak German nationals, which was becoming a growing point of fracture within the country with the rise of Hitler's idolised status. While Henlein's political party employed a democratic dialogue with the nation, he secretly prepared the stage for Czechoslovakia's domination by masking his party's intentions to annex border regions of Czechoslovakia and incorporate Czechoslovakia into the German Empire (Bažant et al., 2010:296–297). Ultimately, it was the Munich Agreement in 1938 that enabled Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Munich Agreement was a severe blow to Czechoslovakia, whose previous alliances with Western powers had been ignored for the sake of appeasement. The country's future had been externally decided and its political representatives were excluded from the process. A once liberal state was now torn, left to question the integrity of democracy and the nation's inter-socio-political relations.

The failure of democracy to safeguard the independence of Czechoslovakia requires a significant point of reflection on Czech history. With the end of WWI and German aggression still a fresh fear within Europe, Czechoslovakia had signed various treaties with France and Great Britain in the 1920s. These treaties ensured mutual relations and aid if one of the nations' sovereignty should again be threatened. The action of the allies of the Munich Agreement broke these treaties.

In a British parliamentary debate on the outcome of the Munich Agreement, Neville Chamberlain's words go against the democratic core of promoting and protecting democracy: "How horrible, fantastic, incredible, it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing!" (cited in Bažant et al., 2010:307). Chamberlain's words as a democratic ally were unsympathetic and offered no compensation to the Czechoslovak nation who had been undemocratically sacrificed at the Munich Agreement. This resulted in a devastating blow to the nation's trust in democracy, which was "blamed for the grim situation" (Bažant et al., 2010:297).

Germany's control over the former Czechoslovakia was strongly contested by consecutive presidents Edvard Beneš and Emil Hácha. Beneš hoped to fight against Hitler for Czechoslovakia's independence, but his nation's exclusion from the Munich Agreement presented him with the harsh reality of their isolated state as the West politically turned a blind eye (Bažant et al., 2010:297). Hácha followed Beneš, but was also left defenceless against Germany after Prague's safety was threatened during talks with the Nazis (Demetz, 2008:8). The consequences of Beneš and Hácha's decision to stand down for the greater safety of Czechoslovak civilians "broke the moral backbone of the society" (Patočka, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:426). Jan Patočka argues that society, "was prepared to fight, not only for this moment but for a long time, for the whole war and the time after it" (Patočka, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:426). The passive actions of Beneš and Hácha's to maintain peace resulted in a society whose national spirit was "wasted, thwarted, and probably forever buried" (Patočka, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:426). Švankmajer's films repeatedly allude to the submissive passivity of its characters and, indirectly, the nation, to take positive action during their lengthy history of various forms of occupation and repression. In Švankmajer's *Virile Games* (*Mužné hry*, 1988), the passivity is suggested as self-imposed under the communist regime with propaganda tactics, including sport, as a tool for instilling national unity. The main character of *Virile Games* sits at home watching an away game of the national football team while quenching his thirst with beer and guzzling down biscuits glazed with the symbolic red star. His consumption of the sport and its excesses is symbolic of a passive consumption or submissive subscription to communist ideology. While this film is directed at communism during the country's Soviet occupation, the notion of a repressed and morally broken society stems in part from the devastating blow to the nation's spirit of defiance by the actions of the Munich Agreement.

German occupation of Czechoslovakia would be marked by an era of intimidation. It was during this stifling period of occupation that the formerly disbanded Czechoslovak Surrealist Group continued to reinvent itself. There was also an increase of younger artists adopting surrealism as they sought to engage in free creative thought (Owen, 2013:31). The question of freedom was on the mind of every Czechoslovak since German occupation. The country's previous autonomy became highly regulated by German officials and the Czechoslovak government, media, arts and education fell under German supervision. German occupation attacked the nation's sense of identity and society responded by reflecting on their history, traditions and legends, with Czechoslovak historian Peter Demetz claiming, "[p]eople turned to the past to discover what constituted Czech traditions and the ways their historical defenders upheld them" (2008:90). Demetz continues this trend was instigated by a need for "self-preservation" (2008:90). Historicism was a common theme in the arts with different mediums reflecting on various aspects of history or traditions. The return to Czechoslovak origins and practices was also an act of defiance to German ideas on arts and culture. This shared practice included a revival of marionette theatre, which provided a source of entertainment and cultural expression during Nazi rule in Czechoslovakia (Schmitt, 2012(a):64).

The thriving period of marionette theatre extended to the domestic space and deeply influenced Švankmajer as a child, who received his first puppet theatre as a Christmas gift from his father. A booklet accompanied the gift with traditional and folklore plays that Švankmajer would perform for his family (Schmitt, 2012(a):64). Marionette theatre became a source of inspiration in his own plays as a child and deeply shaped his imagination which continued throughout his film career. At a time of social tension, marionette theatre provided the nation with a platform for creative and cultural expression, which for Švankmajer became a reoccurring aesthetic in his films, with puppets reoccurring as characters and stand-ins for human characters. Despite Švankmajer's young age, it would not be premature to identify his younger self essentially enacting in an aesthetic style and medium of dialogue that would come to define his later work. Švankmajer's earliest films are dedicated to his puppet theatre roots, with *The Last Trick, J.S. Bach – Fantasy in G Minor (J.S. Bach – Fantasia g-moll, 1965)* and *Punch and Judy (Rakvičkárna, 1966)* all featuring puppets as the protagonists. The tradition of puppetry has a significant role in Czech history and has often served as a symbolic form of resistance (Hames, 2008(b):84; Petek, 2009:80). Puppets have a historical role of providing an unconventional form of theatre, that has

helped to preserve Czechoslovak traditions and language during historical periods of cultural oppression (Hames, 2008(b):84; Petek, 2009:81). Therefore, the resurgence of marionette theatre during Nazi occupation was a form of cultural opposition to the enforcement of the German language and German traditions on the arts.

The end of WWII in 1945 brought an end to Nazi occupation in Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia was liberated by the combined efforts of American and Soviet soldiers, including former Czechoslovakian soldiers who had been prisoners of war in Russia. Former political agreements resulted in the Soviet Union identified as the 'rightful' liberators and inevitable rulers of Czechoslovakia. After the horrors of WWII and Nazi occupation, the inhabitants of Prague enthusiastically welcomed their Soviet liberators. The nation's support for the Soviet Union reignited the KSČ's plans to overthrow parliament. The KSČ used the idolisation of Stalin's Red Army and his communist policies to gain further support among the masses. Support for the KSČ was also an indirect effect of the Munich Agreement, which destroyed the nation's trust in democracy after the allies broke former treaties. Communism was raised to the level of "a quasi-religious faith, promising an ideal world without suffering, with no racial or social barriers" (Bažant et al., 2010:303). The KSČ branded themselves as the party of the masses, "open to anybody who wanted to join" (Bažant et al., 2010:304). The nation's faith in what came to be referred to as Stalinism and the KSČ's alignment with the Soviet Union enabled the KSČ to become a decisive political power.

With the former Czechoslovak government operating in exile, Gottwald, who led the KSČ from Moscow, was able to establish a communist dictatorship that lasted forty years. The KSČ instigated a political crisis, forcing Beneš to accept parliamentary resignations so new positions could be filled by communist members and supporters. History was repeated with the Soviet Union positioning itself to take control of Czechoslovakia. Beneš, aware of the intentions of the KSČ and the Soviet Union, recognised that the country was defenceless to such power and therefore re-enacted "the 1938 capitulation to the Nazis, this time to Stalin" (Bažant et al., 2010:305). Beneš was pressured by Gottwald to authorise temporary decrees, enforcing laws without any approval by parliament. This allowed the KSČ to arbitrarily prosecute traitors and collaborators, and the police were encouraged to actively seek out anti-communists for the deadliest show trials in Czechoslovak history. The elections of 1946 resulted in a majority win for

the KSČ, partly due to genuine support and to aggressive intimidation. Gottwald became Premier of Czechoslovakia and the success of the party resulted in an increase in members. A centralist document passed into law, which intimately tied the government to the KSČ and established the party as the leading force in the state and society (Owen, 2013:36).

### 2.3 The rise and impact of communism and socialist realism in Czechoslovakia

In 1947, the former Czechoslovakia became a Soviet bloc member under the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). The Soviet Union and its satellites were entering the Cold War with the United States of America (USA) and Great Britain as the world became divided into socialist and capitalist camps. Post-war Europe was in economic crisis, with the Marshall Plan of financial aid of the USA providing needed relief. Soviet satellites were banned from accepting the USA's aid. Soviet propaganda promised a socialist utopia and branded capitalism as the root of post-war immorality, poverty and hunger. Czechoslovakia fell behind the socialist side of the Iron Curtain and was shielded from the successful restorative impact of Western capitalism in non-socialist European cities. In Czechoslovakia, KSČ propaganda promoted that hard work combined with the nation's faith in socialism would provide prosperity. The KSČ's strongest support base was labourers who favoured Stalin's ideological doctrine that society should revolve around industrial production (Bažant et al., 2010:304). KSČ propaganda idolised the labourer as the nation's hero, with slogans and posters depicting either strong and heroic or smiling, happy and hard-working labourers as the epitome of social conventions.

Švankmajer's *Punch and Judy* mockingly alludes to a less-than-happy working force of faithful society in the opening scenes of the film. The film opens with an animated circus band that plays jovial circus music. A visibly worn and cracked animated monkey is the star attraction with a series of cuts in close-up examining its form and showing the detail of its clapping cymbal hands and swivelling head. This is intercut with shots of an animated metal panel with scenes of domesticity and labour performed by animated figures. The jovial circus music and editing suggest a happy atmosphere. This is undermined by a series of intercut shots that juxtapose the domestic and working scenes with glimpses from behind the metal panel. These 'behind-the-scene' shots are close-ups of the clogs and wheels that are revealed as operating the animated figures. These shots disrupt the jovial atmosphere and distort the 'accepted reality' of the happy

figures. This juxtaposition transforms the jovial circus music with the gradual build-up in tempo and editing to an unsettling and dramatic mood. The happy mood of the figures is undermined by this juxtaposition of appearances versus reality. This reveals the façade of appearances and pokes at the viewer's consciousness of the less-than-genuine nature of socialist propaganda in Czechoslovakia.

By May 1948, the communist support and election victories in Czechoslovakia culminated in the proclamation of a new constitution dubbed as the "people's democracy" (Bažant et al., 2010:335). The inevitable presidency of Gottwald in June resulted in a long succession of communist presidents. His reign was noted for the widespread injection of communist leadership throughout governing institutions, including the economy, arts, culture, education and social organisations; even stemming down to civilian-operated local clubs (Bažant et al., 2010:335). The nation fell under the watch of a police state, identification books were released, travel was banned, media were censored and there were continuous spot checks of citizens' mail (Bažant et al., 2010:337). Private businesses and property were nationalised and the film industry was significantly restricted by state management of studios. Film censorship was enforced and films were only approved if they conformed to the KSČ's official ideology on Russian history or Soviet social development within the Eastern blocs (Frank, 2013:59; Gillespie, 2007:48; Owen, 2013:37). Czechoslovakia of the 1950s was marked by the totalitarian control of the KSČ in all aspects of political and social operations. The nation's belief in the promised 'people's democracy' was shattered by the actions of the KSČ and further waned with the economic crises and political show trials of the early 1950s. With the KSČ and Soviet socialism gaining increasing criticism for its façade of democracy and a fading promised paradise of socialism, intimidation and repression became the tools of communism, resulting in four decades of oppression.

The KSČ's control of Czechoslovakia resulted in Czechoslovak culture being replaced by the spirit of Soviet art, and communist ideology was raised to the status of state ideology. Socialist realism was the official aesthetic model of the Soviet Union, and the KSČ's state control of Czechoslovakia resulted in its official adoption within Czechoslovakia. Soviet art and the social realist model was an extension of Soviet propaganda with its promotion of enthusiastic labourers and an imagined socialist utopia in art and literature. Speaking at the First Soviet Writer's Conference in 1934, Andrei Zhdanov, cultural spokesperson, explained as follows: "Soviet

literature should be able to portray our heroes; it should be able to glimpse our tomorrow. This will be no utopian dream, for our tomorrow is already being prepared for today by dint of conscious planned work” (cited in Gillespie, 2007:49). Socialist realism required artists to ‘realistically’ and humourlessly depict the party’s revolutionary measures of social progress and conditions. Socialist art was not banned from depicting harsh realities or conflict, but dictated that such conflicts must be resolved and promote a radiant future (Gillespie, 2007:49). The goal-oriented narrative of socialist realism was not a fair representation of actual reality in Czechoslovakia with its show trials, censorship and the aggressive intimidation techniques of the KSČ. The reality of hunger, unemployment and financial crises in Czechoslovakia was a daily struggle, hampered by the revolutionary measures of socialism. Therefore, socialist realism was not actual reality, “but reality as it ought to be, and one day will be” (Gillespie, 2007:49). The social realist model was reduced to a propaganda tool and resulted in an artistically dry period for those who pursued and appreciated the arts in Czechoslovakia.

Socialist realism restricted artistic development and experimentation within Czechoslovakia with all non-ideologically aligned art forms being censored or banned. Socialist realism was to be easily comprehensible for distribution within the masses and the use of symbolism was banned. Avant-garde artists were severely restricted by socialist realism and resorted to public retaliation or clandestine activities. The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, which had flourished during the initial post-war years, continued to aesthetically and philosophically reinvent themselves. By 1951, the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was a completely changed movement; their work had evolved separately from the French surrealists and their values were no longer aligned with the now-governing KSČ. This presented a difficult situation for the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group to publish or exhibit their work, as the arts were regulated by state censors who restricted everything that countered official ideology. State censors functioned as watchdogs of the social realist model and banned “alternative views of reality and history, and the adoption of foreign or ‘alien’ ways of cultural expression” (Gillespie, 2007:49). Under the classification of ‘foreign’ cultural expression was “illogicality, the subconscious, Freudianism and fantasy” (Gillespie, 2007:48). This severely restricted the activity of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group of the 1950s.

Following Teige’s death in 1951, Effenberger assumed leadership of the group and reinforced the group’s unequivocal anti-Stalinist stance. Effenberger was a writer and theorist who centred his

work on surrealist games and experiments, which further defined a shared surrealist philosophy for the group. He initiated a new surge within surrealism that sought to focus collective activity on redefining the changing Czechoslovak socio-political landscape (Owen, 2013:33). Effenberger perceived socialist realism and communist ideology as “emptied-out ideas, discredited in a blindingly obvious manner by recent history and everyday events” (Dvorský, cited in Owen, 2013:32). Central to this phase of Czechoslovak surrealism was ‘concrete irrationality’. According to Owen, concrete irrationality within the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was a transference of emphasis: “the irrationality that had previously manifested itself in dreams and fantasies was now to be observed in the social and political systems of the real world” (2013:33). Czechoslovak surrealism distanced itself from its utopian Devětsil origins and turned towards a “laconic depiction of a dystopian present” (Owen, 2013:33). In contrast to socialist realism, the dystopian depictions of surrealism was a genuine reflection of the Czechoslovak reality of unemployment, poverty, political persecution and death camps. Czechoslovak surrealism still valued imagination as an integral component, but it evolved as a “means of uncovering the ‘objective humour’ of the social world, the irrational qualities of the real” (Owen, 2013:33). Therefore, the perceptions of socialist realism and surrealism in contrast to their intentions became the centre of irony, with socialist realism equating to fantasy and surrealism offering a genuine interpretation of reality.

Socialist realism claimed to be reality, but it ignored present problems and was set in a future reality of a socialist utopia, which society no longer believed could be attained. Surrealism was unacceptable within the confines of socialist realism because of its preoccupations with fantasy, dreams and irrationality. The creative character of surrealism, however, adopted a critical role and surrealist techniques centred on the depiction of Czechoslovak life. Surrealist depictions of bizarre worlds and the atmosphere of death, claustrophobia and intimidation portrayed the actual reality of communist Czechoslovakia. Irrationality within surrealism was employed to point at the irrationality of life under communist rule, resulting in the communist government denouncing the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group as “the Trojan horse of western imperialism” (Král, cited in Owen, 2013:32). This forced the surrealists to work in secret, although this was considered preferable, as it allowed for complete artistic freedom. Underground activities prevented censorship and the restriction of art, which Czechoslovak surrealists viewed as passive collaboration with the communist system.

The restrictive cultural atmosphere of the 1950s resulted in a new surge of Czechoslovak surrealism as the emphasis of the group's collective activity shifted from Teige's notion of 'synthesis' to Effenberger's notion of 'disintegration' (Owen, 2013:33). Effenberger's notion of disintegration was based on his rejection of any theory, idea or belief claiming universal validity. Effenberger claimed that the previous two world wars and the politics of the Cold War revealed a non-existent unity, integrity or universality (Owen, 2013:33). He relaunched the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group as the 'UDS', a deliberately undefined abbreviated name. Effenberger stressed: "the new group did not constitute any unified 'artistic movement', only a 'system' by means of which 'individual opinion-related, creative and interpretative standpoints' could interact" (cited in Owen, 2013:33). This reorganised front of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group embodied a post-modernist spirit with its rejection of totalising ideology, themes or narratives (Owen, 2013:33). The group functioned as a platform for artists to experiment with and explore unconventional approaches to art and allowed for a freedom of expression renounced by the official ideology of Czechoslovakia. This new surge within the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was typical of the values, themes and styles that define Švankmajer's films.

It was during this period that Švankmajer was studying at the Prague School of Decorative Arts in the scenography department. Pursuing an education in the arts was limited by the ideological closure of the period, but Švankmajer was fortunate to be under the tutelage of teachers who discreetly displayed artworks by Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee (Schmitt, 2012(a): 64). He continued to study to the end of his secondary studies and pursued a degree programme at the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) (Schmitt, 2012(a):65). Švankmajer, inspired by his childhood fascination with puppet theatre, registered for the marionette theatre department. Švankmajer's studies and projects had to be aligned with socialist realism, which frustrated the young student. This was glaringly clear to his supervisors during a mandatory project where he was to stage a proletarian Russian play in the aesthetic of the social realist model:

So as to protest against this exercise, which he considered both sterile and mind-numbing, Švankmajer decided to place a bowl with fish right in the middle of the small stage of the puppet theatre. The inordinately large and completely incongruous object in its scenery, with living animals placed right in the centre of the theatrical space, suddenly brought to the surface all the absurdity of the supposedly 'realist' play (Schmitt, 2012(a):65).

Švankmajer's actions captured in a witty, provocative and confrontational manner the glaring absurdities of socialist realism. Švankmajer's graduation projects all shared the aesthetic trend of mixing genres and mediums. He revelled in subverting genres and breaking conventions with his reoccurring plays of puppetry combined with masked actors. This technique is evident in his short films, including *The Last Trick*, with its use of two live actors who perform with masks on their heads to appear as animated puppets. As an art movement, socialist realism was hindered by communist ideology and it failed to address the Czechoslovak reality of communism. Švankmajer's actions epitomise his filmic approach to ideology. This is apparent through the placement or use of random and unconventional objects, narratives and actions that break ideological conventions of rationale to confront the irrationality of repressive systems.

Following graduation, Švankmajer collaborated with his mentor and friend, Emil Radok, on *Johanes Doktor Faust* (1958). Radok, alongside his brother Alfred, founded the now-renowned Magic Lantern puppet theatre in Prague. The shared appreciation of traditional marionette theatre and puppetry resulted in a life-long bond between Švankmajer and the Radok brothers. Initial collaboration between the three was limited by Švankmajer's departure to carry out military service in Marienbad. Švankmajer recalls his military service as a particularly dull time, resorting to sketches and Klee-inspired drawings for comfort (Schmitt, 2012(a):67). On his return to Prague, Švankmajer married fellow artist Eva and they collaborated throughout their marriage on various projects. Švankmajer began his career in the theatre industry and formed the *Divadlo Masek* (The Mask Theatre) in 1960. Švankmajer was fascinated by the avant-garde and experimented with surrealist texts, including a play by Nezval. Švankmajer's Mask Theatre initially struggled to find theatre owners who would allow them to perform; until the mid-1960s, when they were welcomed by the Radok brothers at Magic Lantern. Švankmajer left the theatre in 1964 to join Krátký film studios after a recommendation from Emil Radok. Radok was supervising on a studio project that was struggling to adapt theatre techniques of black light theatre to film (Schmitt, 2012(a):75). Švankmajer immediately established himself as a skilled filmmaker in adapting theatre techniques for film.

Švankmajer was always interested in film after his exposure to the works of Sergei Eisenstein and the cinema of montage during his academic studies (Hames, 2008(a):36). Švankmajer was fascinated by the confrontational shock tactics of cinema of montage and he combined this interest in film with his theatre experience, resulting in a life-long career in film. During the late

1960s, Švankmajer produced, directed and released his first animated shorts. Švankmajer's *The Last Trick*, *J.S. Bach – Fantasy in G Minor* and *Punch and Judy* are examples of his blending of theatre techniques and film with his use of marionettes or actors with marionette masks. Švankmajer's other earlier films, *The Last Trick*, *Et Cetera*, *A Game with Stones (Spiel mit Steinen, 1965)* and *Historia Naturae (Suita) (1967)*, are examples of his initial experiments in animation and establishing of surrealist themes and ideas on film. These films are examined in the surrealist discussion of Švankmajer's films in Chapter 4, but at this point it is relevant to highlight the films as indicative of Švankmajer's cultural interests. *Historia Naturae (Suita)* is reminiscent of Arcimboldo's montages and the puppetry of these earlier films reflects his passion for the cultural tradition of marionette theatre. The films also share a critical commentary on the destructive nature of mankind, which is present throughout his work and which was increasingly poignant during the oppressive era of the KSČ's dictatorship.

#### 2.4 The Prague Spring and the Czechoslovak New Wave

Communist Czechoslovakia of the late 1950s and early 1960s was state-controlled, ideologically repressed and financially vulnerable. In 1960, the country was renamed as the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic under a new constitution. There were only brief signs of reprieve with economic recovery, easing of ideological doctrines and censorship laws. This reprieve was threatened by Antonín Novotný, head of the KSČ and Czechoslovakia. Novotný was a hard-line Stalinist and fervently opposed to change. He intensified propaganda campaigns and tightened censorship laws. Novotný faced backlash from ministers and the wider arts community. Politicians argued for greater autonomy of Soviet bloc member countries, whereby policies could be judged by the situation in the individual country, while still reflecting socialist ideology (Owen, 2013:38–39). The Congress of Writers (1967) argued for greater freedom of expression and was united in their criticism of the KSČ's totalitarian rule and control of the arts (Owen, 2013:41). In 1968, Novotný was replaced by Alexander Dubček, the 'smiling face' of communism. Dubček spearheaded the campaign for political reform by abolishing censorship and investigating previous communist crimes.

Dubček's democratic campaign resulted in a series of reforms known as the Prague Spring, a period of renaissance and revival with greater human rights and autonomy. There had been minor

gestures towards reform before the 1960s, but full support and activity only began in earnest in the early 1960s. Instigating factors included investigations into previous show trials and reoccurring economic crises, which resulted in debates on economic policies and decision-making protocol. As a member of the Cominform, Czechoslovakia fell under the centralist planning of the Soviet Union. Soviet members attacked this command structure for its inability to address competing group interests within the Cominform. Reformists advocated that the Soviet Union should function as overall supervisor and relinquish control to allow member countries to efficiently structure policies based on the situation and abilities of individual countries. This ensured the Soviet's role as director of ideology while appeasing Soviet members (Owen, 2013:39). A committee was established in 1966 to forge a new political system, suggesting the need for a "level of democratisation" (Owen, 2013:39). The demands for greater autonomy resulted in widespread reforms throughout the Cominform and within all areas of governance, including the cultural and intellectual spheres. Artists embraced the reforms and hoped they symbolised the beginning of radical change within the former Czechoslovakia.

The Prague Spring was a watershed for cultural reform, with Czechoslovak culture "offering a bravura opening round of assaults in the fight against ideological and aesthetic restriction" (Owen, 2013:39). There was an increase in the production of cultural journals as artists gained prestige and became public spokespersons for the civil rights movement (Bažant et al., 2010:341–342). The easing of censorship allowed for greater freedom of expression in the arts and this reinvigorated the Czechoslovak avant-garde. The various avant-garde movements and their developments were bound by the shared rejection of communism and its role in ideologically repressing culture and life within Czechoslovakia. This translated throughout the arts by "asserting values or ideas contrary to those of the authorities, or simply turning one's back on 'politics' (in its narrow sense) altogether" (Owen, 2013:40). Artists embraced the avant-garde for its sheer polarity, experimentation, individualism and creativity compared to the social realist model. This resulted in the rise of the Czechoslovak avant-garde theatre in Prague and in a wave of avant-garde films collectively known as the Czechoslovak New Wave.

The Czechoslovak New Wave debuted in the early 1960s with key filmmakers Pavel Juráček's *Josef Kilián* (1963), Jaromil Jireš's *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* (1970) and Věra Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966). The movement was defined by a shared filmmaking style that

experimented with the avant-garde, generic hybridity and a theme of opposition. The stylistically diverse group of filmmakers who comprised the Czechoslovak New Wave cannot be considered a formal movement, but rather as acting around a collective activity that was united by their rejection of the social realist model (Frank, 2013:59). The Czechoslovak New Wave reflected Effenberger's notion of the 'disintegratory' tendency of Czechoslovak culture (Owen, 2013:33). This was because there was no formal structure to the film movement, but the films of the Czechoslovak New Wave also countered his notion of 'disintegratory' art and rejection of universal validity because they shared a narrative rejection of ideological repression.

The Czechoslovak New Wave was not a cohesive stylistic group and there was no collective manifesto. The Czechoslovak New Wave primarily comprised of young filmmakers recently graduated from the Film and Television School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU). FAMU provided a safe environment to explore contemporary and experimental aesthetics and an opportunity to establish contacts within the film industry. There was no formal film school style, but rather the shared benefit of a strong and liberal education, resulting in filmmakers specialising in a diverse range of genre films, from documentary to fantasy. Hames (2010) has written extensively on Czechoslovak New Wave themes and traditions, which routinely combined genres, especially comedy, realism, lyricism, surrealism and animation, and dealt with historical and domestic themes. Humour was a reoccurring trend in Czechoslovak New Wave films and functioned as part of the filmmakers' "subtle dissidence to the political regime" (Frank, 2013:57). Erotic humour was frequently used because it acted as a disruptive force within the otherwise sophisticated stylised films and was a sharp contrast to socialist realism (Frank, 2013:57).

The Czechoslovak New Wave was further propelled by institutional changes, with Czechoslovakia's film industry of the early 1960s "reorganised into small, quasi-autonomous production groups" (Owen, 2013:43). This reflected the general trend of decentralisation triggered by the reform process of the Prague Spring. Animation studies in Czechoslovakia already existed within this unique framework and had not suffered under censorship laws as severely as live action films. Within the context of Prague Spring's cultural renewal, Czechoslovak New Wave filmmakers gained increasing freedom, resulting in a Czechoslovak film miracle where they were able to break away from not only the aesthetic restraints of socialist

realism, but also classical aesthetics in general. Many Czechoslovak New Wave films continued the tradition of literary adaptations, but the adoption of avant-garde movements, especially the borrowing of surrealist techniques and aesthetics, presented moments of poetically charged symbolism. The shift towards the avant-garde in the collective films of the Czechoslovak New Wave was indicative of the “tendency towards a greater narrative and interpretative openness” (Owen, 2013:15). Czechoslovak New Wave filmmakers also benefited from the publicly owned Barrandov studios, which provided technical and financial support. Extremely symbolic or ‘oppositional’ films were censored or banned, and therefore the degree of cultural liberalisation was merely one of concession, which ensured communist control through appeasement. This presented a complex relationship with the political forces, which enabled the cultural renaissance while also limiting the degree of cultural renewal and freedom of expression (Frank, 2013:58).

The government funding of Czechoslovak New Wave films enabled the communist government to continue regulating films and maintain their censorship role, which only spurred Czechoslovak New Wave filmmakers to challenge the boundaries of cultural renewal (Frank, 2013:58). Czechoslovak New Wave director Menzel recalls the period as an ideal atmosphere for making films, arguing: “On the one side, there was an ideological ease and plenty of topics for films, but on the other side there wasn’t total freedom, so there was a stimulus for creativity to break the ideological barrier” (cited in Frank, 2013:58). Czechoslovak New Wave filmmakers gained the ability to push official boundaries while bypassing censors. As the cultural reform process continued to strengthen, filmmakers were offered more freedom than previously granted in determining the course of their films. Filmmakers turned away from social realist dictates of the idealised collective future and rather focused on the more familiar domestic experiences of society.

The Prague Spring reforms allowed for greater freedom of expression within the arts, with members of society forming various organisations in solidarity against ideological extremism. In 1956, Švankmajer joined the Máj group, which brought together “Czech artists who refused the official diktat of totalitarian power in art” (Schmitt, 2012(a):72). The leading figure of the Máj, František Dvořák, pleaded in the group’s opening letter for the abolishment of “enslavement of art to ideological or dogmatic ends” (Schmitt, 2012(a):70). This resulted in the Máj’s growing strength during the 1960s because of their ideals aligning with the hopes of the Prague Spring

cultural reformists. The Máj was an eclectic group of artists who shared an interest with all non-official art figures and movements (Schmitt, 2012(a):70). Švankmajer participated in various Máj exhibitions over several years, displaying his surrealist-inspired sketches, drawings and sculptural objects. The Máj provided Švankmajer with a platform to freely express and display his own work, which would have been censored or banned by officially sponsored art groups or studios. It also provided Švankmajer with a safe environment to pursue his artistic interests without the constraints of social realist aesthetics, which he vehemently rejected. The rejection of socialist realism and its control of the arts was the uniting force for this eclectic group of artists.

Despite political and cultural progress, the Prague Spring faced internal pressures. The Prague Spring instigated mass support for the civil rights movement in Czechoslovakia, which presented an immediate threat to the KSČ and the Communist Party. Dubček's reform campaign faced backlash from authorities in the Soviet Union, who feared the reform process had instilled the nation with greater hope and courage towards radical change at the cost of communist control. Soviet fears were realised with the publication of the *Two Thousand Words* manifesto (1968), instigated by prominent writer Ludvík Vaculík. Vaculík's manifesto stemmed from the Czechoslovak Writer's Congress of 1967, where prominent writers, including Vaculík, Milan Kundera and Antonín Liehm, publicly criticised the communist system (Owen, 2013:41). The manifesto was pursued with the objective to "encourage mass mobilisation in the interests of political improvement" (Owen, 2013:41). The manifesto was signed by numerous philosophers, scientists, athletes and artists, including Švankmajer. It is important to note that while the diverse group of individuals signed the manifesto, their objectives were not necessarily aligned. The signatories partook of the same cultural and political movement towards greater independence, but while some were content to continue under a more democratic communist system, others, such as the surrealists, maintained an aggressively oppositional stance (Owen, 2013:41). Therefore, it would be wrong to identify the signatories as closely aligned regarding objectives and causes other than to claim that they were all united in their rejection of the extremist ideological control of the KSČ and the social realist model. This is echoed in the demands in the manifesto for genuine democracy and freedom within the arts.

The *Two Thousand Words* manifesto was a significant document for its criticism of both the KSČ and the hypocrisy of the Prague Spring reforms. The manifesto identified WWII as the initial

fracture to the country's broken independence and deflated national spirit after its capitulation to Hitler and its destroyed faith in democracy. The manifesto continued its diagnosis, identifying socialism as the country's ultimate downfall and the KSČ as the enemy of human rights. It criticised the KSČ for functioning merely as an institution for exerting extremist control, condemning "power-hungry individuals eager to wield authority" (Vaculík, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:377). The manifesto was equally critical of KSČ officials and civilian members, whom it described as "cowards who took the safe and easy route" (Vaculík, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:377). The manifesto continued its criticism, claiming "[w]e all bear responsibility for the present state of affairs. But those among us who are communists bear more than others, and those who acted as components or instruments of unchecked power bear the greatest responsibility of all" (Vaculík, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:377). The manifesto condemned the unregulated nature of the KSČ, whose activities went unchecked, and this criticism extended to the general population. The manifesto continued that society lost faith and interest in public affairs as elections lost validity and fear of persecution resulted in submissive self-censorship.

The references in the manifesto to the Prague Spring are especially significant for its evaluation of the reform process. It claimed that the reforms were not the extraordinary measures for which society had hoped and ultimately, the socio-political landscape had remained the same: "The regenerative process has introduced nothing particularly new into our lives" (Vaculík, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:378). Vaculík argues that the Prague Spring served as a form of appeasement by leaders who tried in vain to maintain their power and predicted reactionary intervention from Soviet powers. The films of the Czechoslovak New Wave can be seen in this context, because the degree of liberalisation and subversive commentary was underscored by state funding and thus continued censorship. Vaculík's prediction of intervention was proven when the panic-stricken Soviet Union sent Soviet soldiers over Czechoslovak borders and seized control, which brought an end to the Prague Spring.

The call to action in the manifesto resulted in unarmed citizens attempting to stop the Soviet Army from entering Prague by destroying road signs to disorientate the invading Soviet army. The nation was united in protest against the invasion, resulting in clashes with the army and devastating fatalities of innocent civilians. As word spread of clashes, the nation returned indoors, unanimously rejecting the actions of the Soviet Union but unequipped to retaliate (Bažant et al., 2010:347). The nation was repressed into silence when "Czechoslovak radio announced that the

KGB planned legal action against the signatories of the protest manifesto *Two Thousand Words*” (Schmitt, 2012(a):88). While legal action was never pursued, the fear of persecution was evident in the signatories who sought shelter, including Švankmajer, his recently married wife and newborn daughter, who fled the country in 1968 and sought refuge in Austria. The couple feared retribution and questioned whether to return home to a repressive life under communist control and Soviet occupation. Švankmajer’s decision to return in the following weeks marks a significant turning point in his work and values. Švankmajer believed it was his right to fight ideological repression through his work in the hope of reclaiming freedom for himself, the nation and the future generation of his daughter. His films of the Czechoslovak New Wave already represented his critical tone of communist ideology and the films following the Prague Spring became increasingly symbolic and critical of the negative impact of the regime on Czechoslovak life.

### 2.5 Repression, resistance and revolution

The Soviet Union invasion in 1968 resulted in the strengthening of communist policies in the 1970s as they attempted to re-educate the nation into subordination. Reform advocates were arrested and those left in power were forced to return to hard-line policies. With Dubček still in power, cultural life in Czechoslovakia hardly changed in the first months after the invasion. Owen argues that the cultural bravado of the Prague Spring continued into 1968 and 1969, with members of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group openly pursuing collective activities and the production of the “most aesthetically radical and politically provocative New Wave films” (2013:45). The defiance of these artists revealed the “conscious demonstration of a refusal to give in” (Pryl, cited in Owen, 2013:45). Following Dubček’s ‘smiling socialism’ came ‘real socialism’ under the rule of Gustav Husák, “Stalinism with a human face” (Bažant et al., 2010:388). Under Husák’s leadership, Czechoslovakia entered a period of ‘normalisation’, which resulted in the end of reforms, the restoration of a neo-Stalinist system and the reintroduction of strict censorship.

While the surrealist movement in Czechoslovakia continued to flourish underground, the surrealist movement in France was facing its demise. The *Platform of Prague* (1968) was a collaborative manifesto between the French and Czechoslovak surrealists. It was a significant document that asserted the surrealist movement as an active force opposing ideological

repression. Despite the unity of the two groups, differences remained, stemming from their separate origins, shifting ideas and historical factors. The solidarity of the two groups was broken after the French Surrealist Group announced its disbandment shortly after the publication of the manifesto. A significant factor was France's liberation post WWII. While the French surrealists enjoyed their new freedom, Czechoslovaks continued to experience oppression and felt the continued need for oppositional surrealism in art. Frank argues that “[f]inding their activities and public presence radically limited, [Czechoslovak surrealists] began to take on a pessimism and rage more characteristic of dada” (2013:62). Therefore, the continuation of surrealism in Czechoslovakia under the stifling governance of communism resulted in a pessimistic shift as the group collectively explored the darker side of the unconscious. The repeal process of the Prague Spring resulted in renewed repression and an increasingly harsh climate. Effenberger was compelled to recall his emphasis on ‘disintegration’ and return to a shared activity of defiance against totalitarian ideology. The group reclaimed its identity as the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group and proceeded to produce *Analogan*, a surrealist journal. This public announcement of the existence of the movement and resolve was a defiant act against the KSČ, who banned the journal for twenty years.

The period of normalisation under Husák spread to the film industry with the abolishment of production groups and the leading film studio, Barrandov, placed under hard-line communist Ludvík Toman. Toman brought an end to experimentation in film, outlining a new studio policy for artists to obey. Toman's film policies banned any films containing “scepticism, feelings of alienation, desperation, inconsiderate sexuality, egoistic bourgeois individualism” (Owen, 2013:45). This resulted in numerous Czechoslovak New Wave films banned and filmmakers unable to work. The social realist model dictated that all art should be easily comprehensible for the masses and censors feared the complex nature of Czechoslovak New Wave films. Censors also banned Czechoslovak New Wave films based on their paranoia that they may be “smuggling in dissident messages safely wrapped up in impenetrable aesthetic forms” (Owen, 2013:10). Furthermore, censorship of Czechoslovak New Wave films post Prague Spring was frequently based on the filmmakers' personal political sympathies. The extreme censorship of the normalisation period forced Švankmajer to abandon filmmaking for several years. Švankmajer instead used this time to focus his surrealist interests on sculptural and gestural art. He also reinstated a series of surrealist games on the nature of tactile phenomena and the “relationship

between imagination and our sense of touch” (Vasseleu, cited in Švankmajer, 2014:xv). The findings of these games were clandestinely published in *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art* (2014), which includes an account of the numerous difficulties Švankmajer experienced making films in communist Czechoslovakia. Švankmajer was forced to amend many of his films during normalisation and this pushed him towards foreign and independent film studios to fund his films.

During Husák’s reign there was a façade of democracy, but the communist regime remained firmly in power and control. The final decade of communism was to be dubbed ‘real socialism’ as propaganda distinguished between “the form of socialism that actually existed in communist countries from the final stage of socialist utopia ... and the promised utopia of communism” (Bažant et al., 2010:385). Anti-communists reinterpreted the same term of socialism of ‘actually existing’ to refer to the ‘actual control’ of power, economy and culture by the KSČ (Bažant et al., 2010:385). An atmosphere of apathy dominated the country, as national solidarity appeared useless in the wake of Russian tanks patrolling the streets. The suffering and exhaustion of the nation are epitomised in the actions of the student, Jan Palach. Palach was actively involved in the numerous student protests held at Wenceslas Square against the repeals of the Prague Spring reforms. The occupation of Prague by Soviet soldiers extinguished all hope for radical change and freedom within Czechoslovakia. In the greatest act of protest, Palach committed suicide by setting himself alight in the centre of Wenceslas Square. In hindsight, Palach’s ultimate act of defiance at the end of the Prague Spring reforms, was symbolic of the dormant period that Czechoslovakia entered in the 1970s, one that was marked by poverty, intimidation and repression.

Husák used the situation in Czechoslovakia following the Prague Spring for political gain by realigning Czechoslovakia with the socialist bloc to appease communist officials in Russia. Central to this was the ‘rewriting’ of history with the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1970, issuing a document reinterpreting the Prague Spring as a counter-revolution (Bažant et al., 2010:387). This became the official party view of the normalisation era that aimed at the restoration of “authoritarian Stalinism” (Bažant et al., 2010:387). This entailed a series of purges and the banning of all intellectual, cultural, religious and social traditions or ideas not aligned with communism. The former glorious history of Czechoslovakia was buried beneath communist ideology, which lined the streets with the infamous red star. Italian poet Angelo Maria

Ripellino had travelled numerous times to Czechoslovakia before and during the normalisation period. In the early 1970s he wrote *Magic Prague* (1973), which details the country's slow eradication of its former self after decades of repression: "Has everything I have written about really happened or is Bohemia merely a figment of my imagination, a castle in the air accessible only by flights of fancy?" (cited in Bažant et al., 2010:400). Ripellino continues this narration of a 'lost Prague' when he later writes, "everything is a jumble in my grey memory: alchemy and defenestration, sausages and the Bílá Hora, Pilsner beer and the Prague Spring" (cited in Bažant et al., 2010:401). Ripellino poignantly captures the impact of Husák's authoritarian Stalinism at reducing the culturally diverse Czechoslovakia and once vibrant heart of Bohemia to legend. Czechoslovakia was transformed into a desolate dystopia imprisoned by ideological extremism.

In the late 1970s, Švankmajer and other members of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group were able to exhibit their work in France thanks to the flourishing clandestine art channel that enabled artworks to be smuggled out of the country (Schmitt, 2012(b):162). Clandestine activities were of some reward for censored and banned artists, who could finally gain recognition of their work. The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group attempted to hold numerous exhibitions in Czechoslovakia, but was continually thwarted by officials. In 1976, Švankmajer joined several Czechoslovak surrealist members in Moravia as an advanced party to set up an exhibition entitled *Sféra snu* (*The Sphere of Dream*), which had been officially approved by officials in Prague. The exhibition was a collection of projects undertaken by the group on the realm of dreams and the possibilities dreams offered for reinterpreting reality. Its themes of dreams and focus on psychoanalysis and individualism were a stark contrast to the notions of collectivism and the simplicity of socialist realism. Two plain-clothed police officers arrived before the opening of the exhibit and banned the exhibition. The officers photographed the exhibit as evidence of the supposed amoral nature of the event (Schmitt, 2012(b):176). The group later responded with a protest letter, objecting to the audacity of the officers and the badly veiled attack by the KSČ to silence artistic freedom. The protest letter poignantly concluded "[a]nd so it was proved that dream can be made illegal" (Schmitt, 2012(b):176).

In response to Husák's censorship reforms, unofficial culture centres were established, ensuring the exposure, exhibition and publication of 'illegal' works. Cultural underground and opposing movements mirrored the reformists of the Prague Spring, as they were all united by the principle of opposition. The underground publications of these unofficial culture centres provided a

platform for irony and criticism. The struggle of unofficial culture centres was supported by Czechoslovak exiles, who smuggled resources, including books and copy machines. This support was mutually beneficial, with unofficial culture centres gaining support from exiled Czechoslovaks and offering exiles a connection to home and a channel of information about the continuing struggle for freedom (Bažant et al., 2010:390–391).

Charter 77 was a prominent informal civic initiative from the normalisation period that proved to be a formidable force of opposition against the KSČ. The initiative grew from the *Charter 77* (1977) document signed by Czechoslovak citizens of different religious and political beliefs who were united by their shared opposition of the repressive political regime. The document gained mass support and inspired a popular civil rights movement in Czechoslovakia. The document echoed the demands and values of unofficial culture centres with its criticism of the KSČ and the need to preserve Czechoslovak culture and traditions. Charter 77 supporters and activists became an organised resistance movement led by Václav Havel. Havel created the document and his demand for change attracted international attention to the human rights movement and the violations committed by the KSČ. The document publicly criticised the communist government through a series of proclamations signed by prominent writers and philosophers, including members of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, which Švankmajer had formally joined in the early 1970s. Effenberger signed the protest document on behalf of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group. Effenberger was adamant that this did not rule out fundamental divisions between the group and individuals who conceived and signed the charter (Schmitt, 2012(b):149). The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group held the position of ‘double isolation’: “explicitly proclaiming its opposition to the Stalinist or post-Stalinist communist regime, but equally keeping a distance from those who opposed the regime with the intention of instituting a ‘democracy’ of the capitalist and bourgeois type” (Schmitt, 2012(b):149). The political alignment of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group mirrors Švankmajer’s personal political beliefs regarding and opposition to ideological institutions, which ultimately propel instinctual repression.

Švankmajer’s films are oppositional films and their communist context presents them as typically anti-communist ideology. Švankmajer’s narrative of repressive ideology also offers itself as a universal narrative on the repressive nature of all forms of ideological or institutional repression. The discussion returns to the universality of this narrative in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, but it is

relevant to discuss its significance in relation to the Czechoslovak stance of double isolation. The universality of Švankmajer's socio-political narrative allows his films to be considered outside the Eastern European context. Švankmajer's films of the normalisation period equally relate to the impact of capitalism with their reoccurring images of food and consumption alluding to the greed and excess of consumerist culture. This is a significant interpretation in Švankmajer's recent post-communist films, which reflect on the impact of the emergence of a free market in Czechoslovakia. Švankmajer's personal political beliefs echo the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group's position of double isolation and provided further insight into the political position of his films. Despite the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group's political position, it signed Havel's proclamation as a symbolic act of mass defiance against the KSČ. The Charter 77 initiative attracted diverse support, gained the initiative international attention and significantly raised international awareness of the social, political and cultural situation in Czechoslovakia (Bažant et al., 2010:392). This resulted in backlash from the KSČ with a series of threats and attacks against its signatories and activists. The significance of the Charter 77 initiative and other unofficial culture centres is that they emphasised the growing activism towards a civil rights movement.

Czechoslovakia under Husák's rule was dictated by an extremely rigid set of political reforms. Despite the nation's disdain for communism and the Soviet Union, they were forced into submission and a false show of support. The world in which Czechoslovaks existed was one of empty rituals with "nonsensical speeches, stupid May 1 parades, superfluous elections, hypocritical ovations" (Bažant et al., 2010:398). Czechoslovaks responded to this tightly controlled repressed state with parody and mystification in:

culture and social life; everybody was ready to play any game with a stone face. All were excellently trained for it, because everybody took part in empty rituals at school, in offices, in workshops, or on public squares during state holidays (Bažant et al., 2010:398).

It was during this socio-political climate that Švankmajer was again unable to make films due to censorship battles and his anti-socialist identity. Švankmajer retreated to his surrealist *Kunstammer*, where he and his wife experimented with tactile objects and creating ceramic and porcelain objects.

On the fortieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the nation was united in widespread demonstrations against the KSČ and Soviet interference. This was propelled by the

series of liberating reforms in the Soviet Union by Russia's Mikhail Gorbachev, which "resonated throughout the eastern bloc countries" (Bažant et al., 2010:463). Czechoslovaks were spurred by the signs of change and this instigated an influx in student demonstrations in early November 1988. The demonstrations continued into 1989, with students joined by the nation, and mass demonstrations occurred in Prague, "where half a million people gathered every evening in Wenceslas Square" (Bažant et al., 2010:464). Wenceslas Square was the meeting point for mass opposition and the surrounding theatres opened their doors and offered their stages as platforms for public speakers (Bažant et al., 2010:463). The Charter 77 initiative was also responsible for the successful collective protest petition "Several Sentences", with Švankmajer's name among the signatories (Schmitt, 2012(b):192). By late November, the nation's voice was unanimous in its protest and the disintegration of Husák's authoritative regime finally followed after a general strike.

The KSČ and the official ideology of communism in Czechoslovakia was brought to its end in 1989 when "[s]uddenly, the wishful thinking of fifteen million Czech and Slovaks became reality" (Bažant et al., 2010:463). KSČ control was finally relinquished with the removal of the party's monopoly in politics and the removal of Marxism-Leninism as state ideology from the constitution. Within a few months, the KSČ was derailed, with elitist members banned from participating in the new political regime and prominent KSČ politicians excluded from high posts in office (Bažant et al., 2010:464–467). Husák resigned and Charter 77 activist Havel was unanimously elected as president. The Soviet Union and KSČ's stronghold over Czechoslovakia was an unimaginable obstacle to defeat, but within a few months it was swiftly and peacefully destroyed in what came to be known as the Velvet Revolution. On the day of the Velvet Revolution, an excited Švankmajer and his wife celebrated by hanging a banner from their home. Written for all to see, the banner was titled: "All Power to the Imagination" (Schmitt, 2012(b): 192). The slogan was made famous during the Prague Spring of 1968 and its use in 1989 was a celebration of its actuality.

### 3. Literature Review

Švankmajer's life work was deeply influenced by the surrealist movement established by the French surrealists and the development of its ideas by the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group. Surrealism was a significant movement in France, with the French Surrealist Group operating as the leading base of the movement, but the ideas and practices of surrealism were universally adopted with groups established across the world. Surrealism began as a philosophical examination of the relationship between life and art, which inspired an art movement. Originating as a literary movement, the ideas of surrealism were later adopted in painting and film. It is important to highlight surrealism as a set of ideas for reinterpreting life instead of a formal theoretical system (Coombs, 2008:26). The objective of surrealism is the resurfacing of unconscious thought processes, dreams and desires to act upon conscious or physical reality. This is achieved through various techniques, including automatic writing, automatic drawing or frottage and juxtaposition. The ideas and techniques of surrealism are rooted in dada, occultism and the significant research of Sigmund Freud on personality structures, the unconscious and dreams. The diverse range of ideas and collective activity of the movement are united by the desire to confront and capture daily reality in new and interpretative ways that reflect a heightened awareness of reality. This literature review examines the main concerns of surrealism to establish the profound affinity of surrealism with reality. This is revealed through the main considerations of surrealism, including the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, the practice of surrealism in film and its opposition to fantasy despite shared aesthetics.

#### 3.1 Surrealist beginnings: The avant-garde and the significance of dada

The decade of Švankmajer's birth offers an appropriate cultural atmosphere that would ultimately shape his artistic interests. Following the aftermath of WWI, 1924 was a period of hiatus in the arts and culture. Dada was in decline and surrealism was spreading throughout Europe. Breton published his first surrealist manifesto in 1924 and the second in 1930. By the mid-1930s, surrealism gained a foothold in Eastern Europe with the first surrealist exhibition in Czechoslovakia in 1932. This was made possible by ties with the Czechoslovak Devětsil group, led by Teige, and its movement of poetism. The Devětsil's first manifesto, *Poetismus*, was also published in 1924 with its second *Second Manifesto of Poetism*, circa 1927–1928, revealing

similar surrealist preoccupations with psychoanalysis and subconscious inspiration. The Devětsil was the forerunner to Czechoslovak surrealism, therefore the French and Czechoslovak surrealist movements developed similar preoccupations independently before they united in 1934. Prague was an obsession of Breton's for its history of alchemy and folklore. A year after Švankmajer's birth, Breton visited Prague and lectured at the Charles University on "The Surrealist Situation of the Object". In 1939, this period of relatively free artistic experimentation in Czechoslovakia and throughout Europe was forever changed by the outbreak of WWII.

The global surrealist movement was tested and challenged by the ideological restraints of WWII, but the ideological and political obstacles only spurred avant-garde artists. The course of surrealism echoes the history of the avant-garde movement, which was created in response to the elitist controlled art at the turn of the twentieth century. Instead of the repressive and controlling art forms of elitist tastes and patrons, avant-garde artists broke from conventional aesthetics of classicism and romanticism in attempts to forge new innovations in art. Avant-garde artists wanted to affect the viewer and change the way in which art was experienced (Hopkins, 2004:3). This shift in art is evident when comparing the work of nineteenth-century traditionalists to twentieth-century artists such as Picasso and Salvador Dalí. Contrasts in shape, form and tone are clear, as Picasso and Dalí abandoned the soft strokes of nineteenth-century artists and created bold, abstract works of art.

Avant-gardism was a significant movement of the twentieth century that countered the increasingly bourgeois traditional art movements of the nineteenth century. The traditional art of the nineteenth century failed to connect with the changing landscape of the modern, industrialised world and the harsh realities of WWI. Therefore, avant-gardism established itself in opposition to the 'old world' order as it sought to address this void in art and confront daily reality. The avant-garde is a constantly evolving movement, adapting to changing social, political and cultural contexts. The sanctity of art as set apart from life was abandoned by avant-garde artists, who believed that life and art were inherently connected. It was vital for avant-gardists that art depicted the realities of daily life and this principle inspired artworks that aimed to "shock or disorientate its viewers into rethinking their relations with reality" (Hopkins, 2004:3). Therefore, the central aim of avant-gardism was to move "beyond aesthetic pleasure" (Hopkins, 2004:3) and merge art and life. Avant-gardism forged the way for the early twentieth-century futurists,

constructivists and later dadaists and surrealists. These movements continued to challenge art conventions while further developing the affinity between art and reality. Surrealism as an avant-garde movement is steeped in a history that actively sought to confront and change viewers' relationship with art as it turned away from romanticised landscapes in favour of the everyday. Therefore, surrealism was founded on avant-gardist principles, which desired art to engage with reality as opposed to contemporary escapist misconceptions.

Surrealism is characteristically avant-garde with its breaking of aesthetic conventions, erosion of boundaries between art and life and the elevating of the everyday to the status of art. The journey of surrealism as an avant-garde movement was paved by dada. Surrealism was an outcome of dadaist and other literary and aesthetic occult experiments of the late nineteenth century. While it is a generalisation to label surrealism as the heir of dada, similarities exist between the two, suggesting that surrealist roots stem from the evolution of the weaknesses of dada and an adaptation of its strengths. It is beneficial to briefly discuss dada as a prerequisite to surrealism, because the dadaist roots strengthen surrealist understanding of its affinity with reality. Dada was also a contributing factor to Švankmajer's identity as a militant surrealist, as he adapted dadaist aesthetics in his films of the 1950s to heighten his confrontation of daily reality under communist oppression. Švankmajer's adoption of dadaist aesthetics, specifically its shock tactics and pessimism, echoed the collective activity of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group of the 1950s (Frank, 2013:62).

Dada was a brief international artistic experiment of the early twentieth century. It was a reactionary movement that mirrored avant-garde tendencies to undermine artistic and social conventions through shock tactics. Dada was not established in isolation, but its roots in Zurich have become symbolic of the ideas and collective activity of the movement. With the horrors of WWI sweeping across Europe, artists of different nationalities sought refuge in Zurich. Zurich provided artists with a safe haven from the harsh and violent conditions of modern trench warfare. The rapidly increasing death toll of trained soldiers was accompanied by the conscription of young men to aid in the war effort, which resulted in thousands of young fatalities and a symbolic loss of innocence for Europe. The horrors of modern warfare were also an unsettling reminder of the individual's fragile mortality as the world moved forward into the industrialised machine age. While Zurich may have been at a safe distance from the war front, the

occupying artists were united in their opposition to and disgust at the war and the changing values of society.

Dadaists perceived traditional pre-war art as promoting decadent, romanticised and nationalistic ideals, which war had proved no longer realistic (Coombs, 2008:15–16). Dada was established as Zurich artists experimented with avant-garde aesthetics, which resulted in unconventional styles as they addressed the new world order and daily reality in their work. This was achieved through a process of opposition to conventional aesthetics: “If poetry was synonymous with refined sensibility, they would wrench it apart and reorientate it towards babble and incantation” (Hopkins, 2004:7). This oppositional process was to be echoed in surrealism with a reinvigorated purpose. Dada was a cultural and political movement that simultaneously spread to Paris and Berlin. Common throughout were themes of “nihilism, anarchism, Bolshevism, irrationalism, primitivism, and mysticism” (Choucha, 1992:38). These themes are apparent in Švankmajer’s films with their pessimism closely aligned with the nihilistic and shock tactic aesthetics of dada. Švankmajer’s *A Quiet Week in the House* (*Tichý týden v domě*, 1969), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (*Zánik domu Usherů*, 1980), *Dimensions of Dialogue* and *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope* (*Kyvadlo, jáma a naděje*, 1983) are especially nihilistic with their unpromising and cyclic endings of continued anguish and torture. Their unconventional narratives offer no plots of progression towards a desirable change, but rather centre on exhausting and repetitive cycles of dystopian stalemates.

The above selection of films, which are mainly from the normalisation period of the former Czechoslovakia, share a cynical atmosphere with occurrences of black humour and mystification. Švankmajer believed that the dark tone of these films was a more “adequate means to express the depression and decay of the time than the stink of sentimental moralising, so hypocritical yet so popular in Czech films” (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:447). The pessimism of Švankmajer’s normalisation films echoed the nihilistic spirit of dada and represented his militant approach to filmmaking, as he actively opposed the ideological dictate of socialist realism and the communist values it espoused. The films broke social realist convention, but their depiction of a Czechoslovak dystopia was a comparatively genuine reflection of the socio-political reality of the time to the depictions in social realist art. Therefore, the fantasy sequences of Švankmajer’s films cannot be seen as a form of escapism, because they visually confront the reality denied by

socialist realism within the media and arts. By placing these sequences of dystopian fantasies into the 'real world' of the films, Švankmajer was able to mirror the communist reality in Czechoslovakia and depict a heightened awareness of reality that contradicts escapist misconceptions.

Central to dada was an exploration of consciousness or unconsciousness in the creation of new art forms. Dadaist Hans Richter explains how dada artists explored the experience of consciousness in their work: "The absence of any ulterior motive enabled us to listen to the voice of the "Unknown" – and to draw knowledge from the realm of the Unknown" (cited in Choucha, 1992:38). The search for the 'unknown' became a game of chance as artists transcended the barriers of convention and logic so that "new sequences of thought and experiences made their appearance" (Richter, cited in Choucha, 1992:39). Dadaists were exploring their conscious relationship with reality and attempted to break the confines of consciousness, that is, rational thought processes. This resulted in newfound meanings and styles achieved through juxtaposition, collage and 'found' objects. Švankmajer's earlier films of the 1960s represent his transition from theatre to film with the adaption of puppetry to film, but *Et Cetera, Historia Naturae (Suita)* and *A Game with Stones* offer imaginative dada-esque scenes that defy logic. Švankmajer's *A Game with Stones* is quintessential of dadaist countering of logic to create new sequences with its stone scenes. Each new scene of the stones is an imaginative account of interaction between the stones. Each scene provides alternative interactions between the stones as they are animated to create playful but equally violent patterns. Švankmajer continued his dadaist flare in later films, including *Dimensions of Dialogue*, with the final act, 'exhaustive dialogue' exemplary of dadaist shock tactics and the unconventional cycles of interactions between the two clay heads.

The adoption of juxtaposition and irrationalism by the dadaists was part of the objective of the movement to re-evaluate art and by default reinterpret reality and restore a sense of immediacy to art that was lacking in classicism (Choucha, 1992:39). This resulted in a return to primeval instincts in art, which was significantly influenced by primitive art. 'Primitivism' or 'primitive art' was the term given to non-Western art that was considered comparatively unsophisticated. Primitive art was of interest to dadaists because of its use of utilitarian items in the creation of art and items considered to be of art. Renowned dadaist and later surrealist sculpturist Marcel

Duchamp was inspired by the breakdown in distinction between art and everyday life in primitive art. It influenced his search for the 'unknown' in the creation of his ready-made sculptures that repurposed existing everyday objects into new and bizarre formations. Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) was a sculpture that repurposed a urinal, signed 'Richard Mutt' (Choucha, 1992:42). The sculpture challenges convention by inverting societies' accepted hierarchy of objects. The urinal, an unsophisticated, utilitarian item, is traditionally inferior, but its placement in an art gallery for reverent public viewing elevated it to a newfound level of aesthetic superiority. It visually attacked traditional notions of art as something separate from life by merging the everyday with art and this raised the status of the mundane to the level of art. Švankmajer's films contain numerous animated objects or character objects that are collages of mundane, utilitarian items. These items are animated to life and raised to the level of art in Švankmajer's films as he readdresses physical, everyday reality. While the animated actions of the objects are of importance to the following discussions of Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality, their visual composition mirrors dada aesthetics of raising the status of the everyday through art.

Duchamp's irreverent approach to art and his parody of aesthetics transcended the boundaries of conventional art. Duchamp's sculptures embodied the dadaist flare for confrontation and challenged notions of art as separate from life. Suddenly 'mundane reality' was addressed in art; art was subjected to everyday reality, and everyday reality was subjected to art. Dada artists revelled in this fusion as they captured the chaos and fragmentation of twentieth-century reality in their work. Dada was not a coherent system, but a belief in the rejection of traditional art and previously conceived ideas of aesthetic reality. David Hopkins argues that dadaists identified themselves as "cultural saboteurs" (Hopkins, 2004:6), but that their oppositional stance was directed at "the way art served a certain conception of human nature" (2004:8). Dadaist Hans Arp describes collective activity as centring on the objective of the movement of restoration: "We were seeking an art based on fundamentals, to cure the madness of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance between heaven and hell" (cited in Hopkins, 2004:8). This restorative aim was attempted in an aesthetic that mirrored the chaos of everyday reality for resolution.

The dadaist flare for chaos was revolutionary in confronting the 'madness' and disconnect of the twentieth century, but it failed to continue with its promise of action, in Arp's words, to also "cure

the madness of the age” (cited in Hopkins, 2004:8). The focus of dada on chaos and confrontation increasingly limited the potential of the movement, as evidenced in its manifesto: “I am writing a manifesto and there’s nothing I want, and yet I’m saying certain things, and in principle I am against manifestos as I am against principles (Tzara, cited in Coombs, 2008:17). While dada was successful in actively challenging the artistic ideology of the late nineteenth century, its obsessive pursuit of art for art’s sake became its downfall and overshadowed the affinity of the movement with reality. Dada fell short on its promise to ‘cure’ society of cultural, social or political afflictions because it was overly preoccupied with its portrayal of the changing twentieth-century reality. Therefore, the mainly reactionary function of dada was also its pre-emptive demise, with artists pursuing the movement along new avenues.

### 3.2 Surrealism: The transition of ideas from a philosophy to an art movement

Former dadaist Breton sought to address dadaist concerns while also examining the flaws of the movement. Breton felt dada attitudes had become insolent and had grown “a taste for ‘scandal for its own sake’” (Hopkins, 2004:16). He was concerned that dada shock tactic aesthetics, pessimism and lack of progressive engagement or activity limited the longevity of the movement. His calling of the *Congrès de Paris* to discuss the regrouping of avant-garde activities signalled the demise of dada and the rise of surrealism. Breton embraced the erosion of distinctions between reality and art by dada and its unconventional aesthetics, but he wanted to further explore its interest in the ‘irrational’ as a mirror into the unconscious through “psychic free play” (Hopkins, 2004:16). Breton’s objective was to reorientate the nonchalant priorities of dada for cultural politics by applying psychoanalysis (Hopkins, 2004:16–17). Breton served as a medical orderly during WWI for the French army. He was stationed at a psychiatric hospital where he treated soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress. Breton referred to Freud’s research in this field as well as his theories on the unconscious and dreams in his treatment of shell-shocked soldiers (Choucha, 1992:52; Hopkins, 2004:16–17). Freud is renowned for his expertise in psychoanalysis, which enabled greater understanding of the unconscious and unconscious thought processes. His extensive research into the field of psychoanalysis resulted in the personality structure that encompassed unconscious functioning as a determining factor of human behaviour. The personality structure provided insights into unconscious thought processes, which

covered the human lifespan and significantly influenced Breton's approach to developing surrealism.

Freud's extensive work on psychoanalysis was first translated into French in the 1920s, which Breton proceeded to study and apply to surrealist thought (Hopkins, 2004:17). Breton embraced Freud's findings on the unconscious and his theories on the uncanny, repression and the internal struggle between the id, ego and superego, as outlined in Freud's personality structure. Freud believed that the internal struggles of the unconscious – the struggle between the id, ego and superego – as well as repressed memories and dreams were mental processes that shaped human behaviour and perception of conscious reality (Weiten, 2010:491–494). Through therapy, Freud hoped to 'tap' into the patient's unconscious by exploring dream symbols as representative of these internal processes and repressed memories. Freud was trying to further understand his patients' personal understanding and perception of 'reality' by resurfacing their unconscious fears and desires in an attempt to then readdress areas of concern. Freud therefore aimed at curing patients by helping them to confront repressed memories of the unconscious, which would provide a cathartic experience (Coombs, 2008:37). Dreams were a crucial component of psychoanalysis, because they provided glimpses into the unconscious and an individual's repressed desires, wants or needs. Before Freud, dreams were predominately uncharted territory within the field of psychology and dismissed as insignificant. Dreams, however, comprise a significant proportion of one's life and Freud was paramount in the development of dream analysis; recognising dreams as glimpses into one's unconscious.

The deconstruction of dream symbols was key to unlocking repressed memories and deciphering unconscious thoughts. Freud's framework of human psychology proved undeniably that the individual's experience of reality is deeply affected by internal struggles, which in turn affect one's perception of reality. Psychoanalysis revealed reality as shaped by both our external reality (everyday occurrences) and our internal reality (dreams and unconscious fears and desires). Breton's study of Freud's theories submerged him into the limitless world of the unconscious, which he recognised as an integral component in an individual's perception, understanding and experience of life or reality. This became the cornerstone of surrealist thought, as the unconscious or the latent world of dreams was to be combined with conscious reality to create a heightened reality or surreality. This was a significant influence on the ideas of the surrealist movement,

which transcended the dadaist understanding and relationship between life and art to further elevate the depiction of reality in art. Therefore, the psychological inspirations of surrealism establish a significant counterpoint to the misconception of surrealism as equating to escapism. Instead, surrealism adopts psychology to further explore and confront one's conscious and unconscious perceptions of reality.

Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism* provided an introduction to the central ideas and collective aspirations of the movement, including the "revolutionary power of the unconscious" (Coombs, 2008:19). To progress from the dadaist fusion of art and life, Breton believed that surrealism had to embrace life or reality in all its capacity, external and internal: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*" (1972:14). Surrealists sought to reconcile these two opposing states, believing that art produced from the combination of the conscious and unconscious mind "would say more about reality than conscious attempts to create art" (Coombs, 2008:20). Surrealism continued in the path of dada, but further elevated the fusion between art and life by deepening understanding of life or reality with its inclusion of the latent realm of the unconscious. The resolution of these realms resulted in surrealists abandoning the destructive spirit of dada as it sought to reinvent art and heighten awareness of everyday reality. This objective is reiterated in Breton's essay *On Surrealism in Its Living Works* (1953) in relation to the surrealist poetic image:

that 'everything above is like everything below' and everything inside is like everything outside. The world thereupon seems to be like a cryptogram which remains indecipherable only so long as one is not thoroughly familiar with the gymnastics that permit one to pass at will from one piece of apparatus to another (Breton, 1972:303).

Surrealism sought to destroy differences or opposition in reasoning by merging conscious and unconscious reality to reflect a heightened awareness of reality. This echoes Effenberger's claims on surreality as reaching through reality to its dynamic core (Frank, 2013:100). Therefore, surrealism was established as artists embarked on a search for universal truths by breaking accepted rules of behaviour regarding social conventions, religion, politics and taboos in their artistic endeavours (Coombs, 2008:20). French surrealists moved away from the nihilistic dada roots of the movement as it adopted a positive and proactive approach that sought to solve "the principle problems of life" (Breton, 1972:26). Surrealists believed that the merging of these

different realms of reality into a heightened reality would provide a cathartic release for the creator and a cathartic opportunity of realisation for the viewer to confront their own interpreted inner conflicts from the words, sounds or images of surrealist art. Therefore, the principle similarities between dada and surrealism were the self-referring autonomous style of the movements and the blurring of distinctions between art and life (Hopkins, 2004:17).

Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* focused on the crisis of consciousness. Breton argued that the success and longevity of the movement depended on its ability "to provoke, from the intellectual and moral point of view, *an attack of conscience*, of the most general and serious kind" (Breton 1972:123). Richardson argues that Breton's 'crisis of consciousness' reflected Western civilisation in the aftermath of WWI, which destroyed notions of Western culture as having a 'civilising' mission (2006:16). Richardson remarks: "surrealists recognised that what they had been brought up to respect and see as the pinnacle of civilisation was nothing of the sort but rather was deeply implicated in the 'crisis of consciousness' they experienced" (2006:16). Surrealists believed that the resurfacing of the unconscious and unconscious thought processes provided restorative views on reality and civilisation. Švankmajer reiterates this belief, claiming "[i]rrationality needs to be given back an 'official' space adequate to the place it occupies in the human psyche" (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:441).

Surrealism reappropriated the role of irrationality in art by abandoning the crippling effect of consciously produced art in favour of unconscious creativity. Surrealists were encouraged to find new ways to approach art that would mimic unconscious activity such as dreams and therefore delve into the latent world of the unconscious for a surreal representation of life. As the ideas of the movement were adopted throughout the arts, this objective was achieved by various techniques, including automatic writing, automatic drawing or frottage and juxtaposition. Surrealism initially began as a literary movement as Breton assimilated his ideas with Freud's work of free association into a process of automatic writing. Artists were encouraged to abandon any preconceived ideas and rather create art in a manner that parallels a stream of consciousness; writing whatever came to mind without conscious editing or constructed narratives. Breton's interests in literature centred on the broader sense of language or understanding through dreams, hypnosis and cognitive games that revealed the "true function of thought" (cited in Coombs, 2008:19). Automatic writing reflected the creativity of the unconscious by reflecting on dreams

and indirectly duplicating the dream process. This liberated the imagination from the confines of rationalism. Automatism within literature restored irrationality to the level of art and redefined reality in a manner equivalent to the dadaist notion of elevating the everyday to the status of art. This ‘raw’ nature of unedited surrealist literature restored imagination, which resulted in meaningful and intimately produced art.

The ideas of the surrealist movement expanded as visual artists adopted surrealist activity within their work. Common to the different art mediums was a preoccupation with the aesthetics of the surrealist object. The surrealist approach to the aesthetic of objects was a continuation of Breton’s ‘crisis of consciousness’, redirected as a ‘crisis of the object’. The crisis of objects was the attempt to “increase the intervention of the unconscious in relation to objects” (Frank, 2013:13). This was inspired by Comte de Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror* (circa 1868–1869) and the description of a “chance meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table” (cited in Frank, 2013:14). This became the premises for juxtaposition within surrealism with the surrealist object defined as the bringing together of two previously unassociated objects in a place common to neither (Frank, 2013:14). The purpose of this juxtaposition was ‘defamiliarisation’; by removing objects from their usual environment, the viewer was forced to “stop ignoring these objects as a familiar part of everyday life, and to imagine a new relationship that these objects might have with their new environment” (Frank, 2013:14). Juxtaposition or defamiliarisation therefore liberated the creation of art from the confines of logic and encouraged unconscious activity in relation to objects.

Defamiliarisation in relation to the surrealist object was beneficial to the surrealist objective of reinterpreting reality, because it resurfaced unconscious activity and imprinted this onto the surrealist object to act upon conscious or physical reality. This process encouraged active participation of the viewer through analogical thought processes. The illogical relationship between objects encouraged one to consider how the two objects might be associated, how they might be combined to function as one object and the possible intentions behind the association. This process encouraged analogical thought processes of unconscious functioning, which liberated the viewer from conventional, conscious thought processes. This sought to address the concerns of the crisis of consciousness within art by confronting the viewer’s sense of irrationalism and restoring unconscious activity that is repressed by convention. This process

reflected Breton's vision of surreality, as conscious and unconscious states were actively engaged in combination and heightened the viewers' perception and relationship with their surroundings. The relationship between surrealist objects and the unconscious was achieved through three fundamental characteristics: "defamiliarisation, association and mysterious power" (Frank, 2013:14). The combination of the three characteristics in relation to the surrealist objects "demonstrated the intervention of the unconscious in relation to physical objects in waking life" (Frank, 2013:14). This was a significant process, as it mirrored Freudian notions of dreams and unconscious activity.

Freud has written extensively on the significance of the unconscious regarding dreams, which shed light on the mental thought processes. Surrealists assimilated Freud's texts on dreams with regard to the surrealist object and its relation to the unconscious. Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) outlines that dreams are the result of two key processes of unconscious thought: condensation and displacement. The process of condensation is the manner in which "the unconscious selects an object to represent more than one thought" (Freud, cited in Frank, 2013:14). Displacement is the way in which the dream object "takes on the importance of the thoughts connected to it" (Freud, cited in Frank, 2013:14). Frank explains that objects appear in dreams "because they connect a number of different thoughts: the unconscious has selected these objects not because they are necessarily important per se, but simply by virtue of their chance frequency in thoughts that are significant to the dreamer" (2013:14). Therefore, the appearance of objects in surrealism may appear bizarre or fantastical, but they reflect the unconscious thoughts of their creator. This further aligns the affinity between reality and surrealism, as the movement constantly strives to confront a heightened sense of reality.

Surrealist objects highlight the significance of dream psychology in surrealism. Dreams were an obsession of surrealists and this necessitated further contextualisation of dream theory. The power of dreams to both fascinate and disturb the 'dreamer' is explained by the contrast between manifest content and latent content. Manifest content is that which appears in the dream and condensation is the selection process of manifest content. Latent content refers to the meaning behind the imagery or the objects similar to displacement (Frank, 2013:14). Latent content is complicated by the process of condensation and displacement, but Freud's theoretical framework

for dream interpretation allows for psychological insights. Surrealists mirrored Freud's theoretical framework of dreams in relation to surrealist objects, with Frank arguing:

In the context of surrealist objects in waking life, processes of association and defamiliarisation are characteristic of the unconscious and thus point to or elicit its intervention: just as the unconscious is skilled in discovering a common element linking two important thoughts in a dream (condensation), so it will easily intervene to find similarity between objects in waking life (association) (2013:14–15).

The encountering of a surrealist object evokes unconscious activity that parallels the phenomenon of dreaming. Surrealists therefore adopted dream theory in relation to surrealist objects as a framework for evoking unconscious activity in conscious reality. Frank continues that the effect of the surrealist object is “comparable to the way in which unimportant objects in dreams seem inordinately important because they have taken on the significance of the thought that they represent” (2013:15). Therefore, surrealism relies on the knowledge of the creator's reality as a template for deciphering meaning as well as offering new meanings to occur as viewers are forced through condensation and displacement to decipher their own meanings. The former insight is significant, as it highlighted the importance of reality of the artist's experiences as a narrative on the significance of the symbolic objects. This signalled the importance of Švankmajer's experiences in the former communist Czechoslovakia and now consumerist Czech as a perspective narrative on his films in relation to his socio-political reality. Despite this affinity with reality, there will always be a degree of mystery surrounding the meaning of a surrealist object because of its relationship with the unconscious, which still evades complete psychoanalytical insight (Frank, 2013:19). The unconscious is founded on a degree of mystery, therefore the evoked unconscious thought process of the individual viewer will vary. This allows for a range of interpretations, as the surrealist object can never be limited in meaning because it always varies according to the unconscious associations of the individual observer.

Surrealist objects take on different forms depending on their intentional or unintentional production. Surrealist objects include three different types, namely ready-mades, collages and frottages; damaged or worn and symbolic objects; and found objects. Ready-mades, collages and frottages share the aesthetic of juxtaposition, which evokes analogical thought processes and unconscious activity. Readymade objects are surrealist embodiments of Duchamp's creations, which highlight the transformation by the movement of dadaist aesthetics for surrealist intent.

Damaged or worn, symbolic and found objects are of significance because of their relevancy to the films of Švankmajer. His films are filled with surrealist objects, therefore it is beneficial to outline their surrealist intentions. Damaged or worn objects were considered surrealist objects because their changed appearances evoke defamiliarisation. Symbolic or general symbolic objects were considered surrealist objects because of their ability to be simultaneously familiar and “represent any number of different ideas” (Frank, 2013:16). Symbolic objects were destabilised objects that had lost a part, their whole meaning or function as they take on new meanings or functions (Frank, 2013:16). Symbolic objects infiltrate Švankmajer’s films and typically evoke analogical association with the socio-political context of Czechoslovakia during communism and consumerism, which are discussed in the final chapters as reaffirming his surrealist affinity with a universal reality.

Found objects are the third type of surrealist objects, which Breton describes as the “outmoded, fragmented, unusable, almost incomprehensible, ultimately perverse” (cited in Frank, 2013:16). Found surrealist objects overlap with the characteristics of damaged or worn surrealist objects. Despite and perhaps in favour of this overlap, the found object has become the equivalent of a surrealist treasure with its discovery hinging on objective chance: “a case of the unconscious influencing perception so that chance occurrences (such as finding an object) take on immense relevance to the individual” (Breton, cited in Frank, 2013:16). The surrealist object occurs and exists as a symptom of the unconscious and its appearance cannot be seen as mere fantasy, but as symbolic insight into the creator. Frank supports this notion, arguing objects are personal because the “associations that the unconscious suggests in relation to the object will be symptomatic of the individual’s preoccupations” (2013:16). This highlights the interpretative potential of surrealism, as viewers are able to interpret new meanings by applying their own unconscious preoccupations in association with the surrealist object. The surrealist object therefore becomes a vehicle for analogical thought processes and unconscious activity. The found object is crucial to this process, with Frank’s arguing “[w]hereas other types of surrealist objects are calculated to provoke the unconscious, in the case of the found object it is the unconscious that provokes the conscious mind” (2013:16). Therefore, the surrealist object reiterates the power of the unconscious over perception and the surrealist preoccupation of capturing this heightened reality strengthens the affinity of the movement with psychical and unconscious reality.

Neil Coombs argues that the broad assimilation of surrealism in the arts resulted in two main types of surrealist practice: automatism and “[h]yper-real representations of dream images” (2008:20). Automatism is the continued practice of automatic writing within the visual medium, with artists encouraged to paint, sketch or draw “without the control of reason or aesthetics” (Coombs, 2008:20). Automatism limited painters and therefore the depiction of hyper-realities was the preferred and shared surrealist practice in the visual arts. Following the literary movement, surrealist painting became a significant movement that bridged surrealism and filmmaking. Painters visually represented hyper-realities or hyper-representations of dreams, but this was limited by space and time. While dreams unfold over a course of time, paintings could only capture one still moment. This paved the way for the adoption of surrealism within film, which was appropriately suited to respond to and adopt surrealist requirements (Hopkins, 2004:18).

### 3.3 Czechoslovak surrealism

Before examining the relationship of surrealism with cinema and fantasy, it is important to discuss the main considerations of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group of which Švankmajer has been an active member since 1970. Czechoslovak surrealism has been side-lined as a subplot to the ideas of the French Surrealist Group (Owen, 2013:25). Czechoslovak surrealism originated from independent Czechoslovak cultural movements. The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group’s alignment with the French surrealists should not render the Czechoslovak group’s main considerations as secondary, but rather as complementary to surrealism. Both groups complemented each other and ultimately strengthened the collective ideas and activities of the movements. An examination of Czechoslovak surrealism proved beneficial, as it supported the main considerations of surrealism and its affinity with reality. This was apparent in the disparities between the two groups, with the alternate ideas of the Czechoslovak surrealists strengthening the affinity of surrealism with reality.

The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was established after Nezval aligned the existing Devětsil group with the French Surrealist Group. This was possible because of their shared notions of art and its relationship with reality. The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group should be recognised for its independent development, which stemmed from the country’s avant-garde movement of the time.

An examination of the Devětsil's course and ideas paralleled the roots of surrealism in dada. The Devětsil group was established in 1920 in response to the changing socio-political landscape after WWI with the barbarity of war and the rejection of bourgeois and Western culture. The Devětsil mirrored the focus of dada on everyday concerns, but differed in that it was both an aesthetic and a political movement. The Devětsil further differed in that it sought a viable alternative to the nihilism of dada, preferring folk art and an emphasis on traditional lifestyles and simple pleasures (Frank, 2013:60). The Devětsil was an optimistic movement compared to dada and actively sought constructive principles for positive change.

Within the Devětsil group's first two years, the group radically changed under the leadership of Teige and Nezval as they promoted constructivist approaches that returned a positive attitude towards technology (Owen, 2013:26). The Devětsil group's focus on everyday reality within the scope of the simple pleasures of life was developed and reflected in the group's "modern utilitarian approach of constructivism" (Frank, 2013:60). The Devětsil group evolved its ideas during its initial years and developed Teige's movement of poetism. Poetism parallels Breton's crisis of consciousness in art with Teige's *Second Manifesto of Poetism* (1928), stating: "Our sight yearns for other spectacles than what is offered by the tedious paintings in exhibitions and galleries, our touch wants to be cultivated and enchanted by rich sensations" (cited in Švankmajer, 2014:100). Teige continues:

We search for poetry that addresses all the human senses, saturating the spectators' sensibilities, inwardly entertaining and enlightening them. We want to base this new poetry on a sensory, physiological alphabet, on the infinitesimal quiver of senses and nerves, these 'strings of the soul'. Poetism wants to address all senses (cited in Švankmajer, 2014:100).

Teige's *Second Manifesto of Poetism* echoed the surrealist preoccupation of expressing a heightened reality in art. Poetism continued the thematic concerns of representing a heightened reality, but sought new and imaginative approaches "to turn life into a magnificent entertainment, an eccentric carnival, a harlequinade of feeling and imagination, an intoxicating film track, a marvellous kaleidoscope" (Teige, cited in Frank, 2013:60). Owen states that Teige's desire for poetism was to "diffuse poetry into life, and the life of the collective rather than that of the cloistered few" (2013:29). The defining features of poetism were imaginative free play and humour, which sought to liberate the unconscious from reason. This echoed the main considerations of the French surrealists, but the two movements were distinguished by their

alternate attitudes, with poetism being enthusiastic in spirit compared to the austerity of French surrealism. The contrasting attitudes can be contextualised, with poetism reflecting the national spirit of optimism and celebration post WWI (Frank, 2013:61). Czechoslovakia declared independence after WWI and this, combined with the end of WWI, resulted in a celebratory socio-political atmosphere that influenced the carnivalesque spirit of poetism.

Poetism shared with surrealism an interest in language, which was explored through pictorial poems and typographical experimentation. Owen describes pictorial poems as a distinctive quality of poetism compared to the French Surrealist Group's concerns with language, as it focused on the visual quality of words and "incorporated text into visual collages, once again underlying the physical dimensions of words" (2013:27). Similar to the French surrealists, members of poetism were fascinated by popular culture, especially cinema, as they extended the ideas of the pictorial poem into poetist screenplays (Owen, 2013:27). The foundation of poetism coincided with the founding of the surrealist movement in France, but Frank argues that poetism was not the Czechoslovak equivalent of surrealism (2013:60). The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was established several years after the French Surrealist Group. While the two groups shared similar preoccupations with the relationship between art and reality, disparities existed based on different areas of focus. This is perhaps a result of surrealist association and adoption of psychoanalysis compared to poetism, which developed independent of psychoanalytical research until 1928 (Frank 2013:61–62; Owen, 2013:28).

The main preoccupation that distinguished poetism from surrealism was the approach to poetry, with poetism having a significant "attachment to physical reality" (Frank, 2013:61). Frank explains the different approaches to poetry between poetism and surrealism as centring on language, with the French surrealists approaching language on the principle that "language and experience [were] separate realms" (2013:61) and using language "to transform reality" (2013:61). In contrast, Frank argues that poetists "believed that language should follow experience, and be used as a tool to translate the marvellous that already existed in reality" (2013:61). While French surrealists sought arbitrary connections, poetists sought "possible connections arising from the individual's subjective and pleasurable experience of reality by means of the senses" (Frank, 2013:61). This highlights a significant difference between the two movements. Poetists explored the imagination as a tool for heightening their conscious experience of reality, while the French surrealists explored the imagination as a tool for the

investigation of the unconscious (Frank, 2013:61). This formed a significant factor in the following analysis of Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality. At this point, it is necessary to highlight the significance of these different approaches in distinguishing Czechoslovak surrealist roots from French surrealism as furthering the affinity of the movement with reality.

Possible reasons for the two groups establishing different approaches to similar preoccupations stem from Czechoslovakia's political context. Communism was spreading throughout Europe, especially in the former Czechoslovakia. Avant-garde groups initially aligned themselves with communism, which they recognised as countering the status quo of the bourgeois and revolutionising social conventions. When poetist member Nezval established the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group in alignment with the French Surrealist Group, Czechoslovak members were initially hesitant. Czechoslovak avant-garde artists were reluctant to align themselves with surrealism because of its focus on psychoanalysis, which communists discouraged (Frank, 2013:61). The Devětsil group's interest in psychoanalysis was not as committed as the French surrealists, with the group focusing on the creativity of the unconscious. Resistance to the transition of the Czechoslovak avant-garde to surrealism was predominately expressed by Teige. Frank argues that poetism, as a precursor to Czechoslovak surrealism, "looked outward as much as inward" (2013:61). Teige was concerned that an alignment with the French surrealists would negate the Czechoslovak approach to the relationship between art and reality. This stemmed from Teige's concerns over the French surrealists' focus on automatic writing, which he believed "emphasised unconscious at the expense of conscious experience" (Frank, 2013:62). Despite Teige's concerns, the Devětsil group reinvented itself as the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group in 1934 under Nezval's leadership.

Despite Teige's concerns, he made peace with the Devětsil's transition to the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group and became a prominent member. Teige was a significant figure within the Czechoslovak avant-garde and his contribution to the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group ensured its poetist influence and integrity. Teige assimilated poetism within Czechoslovak surrealism, resulting in a surrealist expression of surreality that comprised "a synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements" (Owen, 2013:30). This resulted in Czechoslovak surrealism striving for a greater affinity between the conscious and unconscious states. Frank compares the surrealist

balancing act of objectivity and subjectivity against the French surrealists, which he argues were “fixated on the distinction between the two, and on demolishing that distinction” (2013:67). Frank argues that Czechoslovak surrealists were less preoccupied with this distinction, preferring “to convey their individual experience of the marvellous without troubling over how much of that marvellous existed objectively outside the mind and how much was dependent on the poet’s or artist’s subjectivity” (2013:67).

This was evident in the films of Švankmajer with the examination of his filmic representation of surreality revealing a constant shift between conscious and unconscious creativity. This is indicative of Švankmajer’s belief that dreams and reality are interchangeable, arguing “[t]here are no logical transitions. There is only one tiny physical act that separates dreams from reality: opening or closing your eyes” (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:462). Czechoslovak surrealist preoccupations strengthen the Czechoslovak surrealists’ affinity with reality, as they strived for a synthesis of surreality that was less preoccupied with emphasising either conscious or unconscious experiences, but rather their combined practice into a heightened reality. This effectively mirrored a heightened perception of conscious and unconscious awareness of reality. Teige significantly contributed to this with his approach to the unconscious and imagination, favouring it as a medium of conscious expression that reinforces conscious perceptions of reality in harmony with the unconscious.

### 3.4 Surrealism and film

Surrealism evades the very language of cinema with its unconventional narratives, juxtaposition and dream symbolism. The difficulty of surrealism and its relationship with film lies in the question of what makes a film surreal. Formal concepts that come to mind are a juxtaposition of images, unconventional arrangements or editing and an incoherent narrative that lapses into a stream of consciousness – a dream world. These are the shared methods of surrealist filmmaking, but they do little to answer what makes a film surreal or what distinguishes a surrealist film genre. Surrealism refuses a formal theoretical framework and style, which complicates the understanding of surrealist cinema. Richardson argues that the concept of surrealist cinema and a surrealist film does not exist in theory, because surrealism is not preoccupied with the surrealist product but rather with the practice of surrealism (2006:2). Richardson’s argument is supported by surrealist ideas that centre on the fascination of the movement with the practice of surrealist

thought, analogical thought processes and the eliciting of surreality. The following examination of the production of surrealism focused on the medium of film and its ability to adopt surrealist notions and thus depict a heightened reality or surreality. Therefore, instead of defining a surrealist cinema or a surrealist film, it is appropriate rather to examine the potential of film for representing surreality and the adoption of surrealist practices for identifying surrealist-inclined films. For the sake of clarity and convenience, this discussion refers to cinema and film as surrealist while also recognising Richardson's argument that such a claim is debatable.

The relationship between surrealism and painting provided a necessary prerequisite to the relationship between surrealism and film. The relationship between painting and surrealism is also significant because of Švankmajer's background in scenography, painting and sketches before he transitioned into marionette theatre and later filmmaking. Breton's manifesto, *Surrealism and Painting* (1926), discusses the qualification of a surrealist-inspired painting as constituting "the absence of contradiction, the relaxation of emotional tensions due to repression, a lack of the sense of time, and the replacement of external reality by a psychic reality obeying the pleasure principle" (cited in Richardson, 2006:5). This echoes the central ideas of the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, which focused on surreality as the supreme point of a new heightened vision or awareness of reality. Surrealism is preoccupied with the depiction of surreality or the 'supreme point' in a manner that eradicates the repressive nature of conventionality on perception. This is reiterated in Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* and his emphasis on surrealism as eradicating contradictions between the conscious and unconscious, "life and death, the real and imagined" (Breton, 1972:123), to the point where boundaries can no longer be distinguished (Richardson, 2006:5). Breton's manifesto on surrealism and painting emphasised the importance of a new perception, claiming the "eye exists in a savage state" (Breton, cited in Richardson, 2006:10). Richardson argues that the significance of this claim is the surrealist testament of 'cleaning the slate' by engaging with the mind's eye so as to "place the eye in such a state of receptivity that it becomes able to see in a savage way" (2006:10). Therefore, the ability of the medium of film to represent surreality provided a framework for examining the relationship of a film with surrealism.

Surrealist theorists Breton and Jacques Vaché first realised the ability of film to elicit surreality during a visit to the cinema. Feeling uninspired by their chosen film, the two men randomly

drifted from one cinema room to another in the hope of finding a more intriguing film to view. As they entered the different cinema rooms at random, they viewed the films out of context and chronological order. This unique film experience resulted in the images from one film juxtaposed with those of another with a new series of meanings and ideas created that left the men feeling “charged” (Matthews, 1971:1). While the individual films did not centre on the practice of surrealist notions, the process that the men were enacting evoked surrealist notions of unconscious thought processes on condensation and defamiliarisation. Therefore, cinema presented itself as an ideal medium for practising surrealist ideas. The ‘charge’ that the men experienced was the complete extraction from their natural, material and emotional surroundings, as they were forced to surrender to the overwhelming freedom of the on-screen image into an alternate heightened representation of reality. Breton referred to this marvel of cinema as the *dépaysement* of surrealism – the disorienting effect of surrealism (Matthews, 1971:2–3). The ‘marvel’ was the ability of cinema to remove the viewer from his or her everyday reality; for a period of time one is plunged into another world that is made real by its mere existence as an image before one’s eyes. Therefore, cinema offered itself as an appropriate medium for Breton’s hopes of resolving the unconscious and conscious into the surreal and eradicating their distinctions.

Breton and Vaché’s cinematic experience highlighted the problematic significance of cinematic conditions over film as a medium for surrealism. Cinema was initially recognised as surrealist, while film was not, because of the viewing experience. Cinema placed the viewer into a darkened room and provided conditions that paralleled a hallucinogenic film viewing to the dream state (Richardson, 2006:5–6). This alludes to cinematic predecessors, with Graeme Harper and Rob Stone echoing Plato’s reference to shadows cast by fire on cave walls: “truth is nothing more than the shadows of artificial things” (2007:1). The cinematic experience of light and shadows is indicative of dreams that “trigger memories of our primal pasts” (Harper & Stone, 2007:1). Therefore, the relationship between surrealism and cinema was established by the viewing environment of cinema and its impact on the audience. This presented a dilemma in contemporary society, where viewing habits of films have drastically changed, combined with the increasing availability of films in different formats. A film can be viewed at any location, whether on a television, a computer or portable screening device under different conditions.

Richardson's argument on the non-existence of a surrealist cinema or film is therefore a crucial point for consideration. The focus on the relationship between surrealism and cinema limited the scope of investigation of the filmic representation of Švankmajer's surreality. His films were frequently banned during the communist era of Czechoslovakia and were only viewed by a mass audience in the subsequent years post revolution, which was made possible by their distribution on DVD. Therefore, a focus on the relationship between film and surrealism and the ability of film to depict surreality, provided a broader scope of analysis on the relationship between the affinity of surrealism with reality in film. This is according to Richardson who argues that surrealism is less preoccupied with surrealist products but rather the practice of surrealism to counter the crisis of consciousness in art (2006:2). This re-established surrealism and its relationship with cinema, with an equal emphasis on the actual film to evoke surreality, as opposed to the prerequisite of the cinematic experience. This is evident in the initial interests of filmmakers in surrealism and the savage eye of surreality:

Surrealists credited the new eye of the camera with an accurate ability to capture the otherwise inexpressible, visual unfolding of dreams, thus paving the way for an unprecedented revolution in poetic language, away from the constraints of logical and verbal discourse (Fotiade, 2007:14).

Therefore, it was the ability of film to elicit surreality that attracted filmmakers and constituted the focus of surrealism and its relationship with cinema or film. Surrealists were fascinated by the power of cinema and its ability to confuse the boundaries between the real and the imagined. Films provided the quintessential platform for surrealists in their aim to eradicate the "cancer of the mind which consists of thinking all too sadly that certain things 'are,' while others, which well might be, 'are not'" (Breton, 1972:187). Surrealists recognised the ability of film to evoke Breton's supreme point of surreality, with film situated as "a meeting point between the opposites of light and dark, presence and absence, actuality and imagination" (Richardson, 2006:1). Richardson argues that surrealists were especially intrigued with the potential of film to "disclose what lies dormant within the collective consciousness, making manifest what is latent without destroying the mystery of its latency" (2006:1). Film offered itself as a complementary medium for expressing surreality because it could visually, without constraint, capture unconscious activity acting upon conscious reality.

Cinema has the power to disorient viewers by temporarily extracting them from their natural surroundings, “be these material, mental or emotional” (Matthews, 1971:2). This ability extends to the film medium, which is able to “arrange concrete images in an order alien to that of spatial and temporal reality” (Matthews, 1971:3). Breton distinguished disorientation as the ‘lyrical substance’ of a surrealist film that creates a sense of “visual, mental and emotional dislocation” (Matthews, 1971:1). Surrealism replaced the tired language of the everyday by threatening that “everything recognised as true to life are in danger of being dismissed as irrelevant to imaginative experience” (Matthews, 1971:5). Surrealists were able to convey on camera how “man’s sensitivity to what is real is deeply influenced by his desires, which lend outline and consistency to what he wishes to see” (Matthews, 1971:4). This became the epitome of surrealism, which aimed to disorient viewers from reality and forced them to surrender to their unconscious activity. Therefore, the surrealist sense of dislocation was twofold: it was to extract the viewers from their everyday reality, but also to reconcile them with reality by confronting a heightened version of reality. This was significant when reflecting on the affinity of the movement with reality in film, because it strengthened the relationship between the two. This is evident in the following chapters, which discuss the examination of Švankmajer’s surreality and its socio-political narrative on communist Czechoslovakia where daily reality was repressed by the official ideology of the KSČ. The surrealist films of Švankmajer reconciled society with the experienced, daily reality of communist Czechoslovakia. This was in contrast to the propagated social realist version of daily reality that banned such dire and realistic depictions of the socio-political reality. Švankmajer’s surreality therefore counters escapist misconceptions of surrealism.

Breton compares the marvel of film as equivalent to the moment “at which the waking state joins sleep” (Matthews, 1971:2). During this moment, reality is threatened by the imaginative experience of dreams that enable unconscious activity to be acted upon by conscious perceptions of reality as one slowly awakens. Breton’s analogy was relevant when examining Švankmajer’s surrealist films, which mirror this psychological moment. Švankmajer’s surrealist films repeatedly appear as dreams, confusing the real or conscious state with the unreal or unconscious state. The surrealist film therefore mimics the disorienting moment before waking where one is unsure as to the reality of what one is witnessing. The surrealist script envisions reality as a mere departure point, with the surrealist glance moving from the everyday to the unknown and the contact between these different realms of existence (Richardson, 2006:3). Like a knock on the

door in the real world suddenly transforming into a sound or action in one's dream, the real is but the premises for the surrealist vision. The real and unreal is combined into a single moving image onscreen, making it 'real' in the sense that 'seeing is believing'. Therefore, the filmic representation of surreality aimed to "complete and enlarge tangible reality" (Buñuel, cited in Matthews, 1971:3), as it was able to erode barriers between conscious and unconscious states.

Surrealist films offer a heightened awareness of physical reality, as it resurfaces unconscious fears and desires to act upon conscious reality. Through purposeful play of objects and images, the appearance of conscious reality is manipulated and called into question. The surrealist camera refuses to mimic reality, as it prefers to portray a heightened awareness of reality, a surreality, on screen. This surrealist glance is a "*une réalité rehaussée*: reality raised to a new level of significance, more in accord with the inner needs of man" (Matthews, 1971:4). Conscious reality is stripped away to provide a heightened awareness of reality that reimagines unconscious activity and unconscious desire, acting upon conscious reality. The surrealist camera or surrealist lens is therefore capable of "opening reality upon reality, of raising the real to the level of the surreal" (Matthews, 1971:7). This process allows surrealists "to reassess and to reclassify experience, against a background which is no longer realist (because alien and frequently antagonistic to man's desire), but surrealist (because sympathetic and attuned to his yearnings)" (Matthews, 1971:4). Surrealism and its mixture of reality and fantasy offered a heightened or hyper-reality, with Breton declaring "[w]hat is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real" (1972:15). Therefore, the surrealist film script functions similar to automatic writing and the stream of consciousness; it does not abide by the rules of time, order or narrative, it simply exists as an insight into unconscious thoughts, desires and needs and their contact with consciousness.

Surrealist films force viewers to question what is real and challenge one's perceptions of the world. Just as a surrealist film carries over the dream world into the real world, a viewer is forced to carry over into reality the fiction witnessed on screen. Surrealist films solicit and provoke contemplation, as they linger in the viewers' mind like an inescapable dream in need of deciphering. While no individual may view the world the same as another, the depiction of surreality on screen allows for a deeper engagement between individuals to compare and contrast their perceptions of the world. Therefore, film as a medium for adopting surrealist practices

enabled analogical thought processes in the hope of resolution. Illusion, fantasy and disorientation may be the stylistic techniques of surrealist-inspired films, but the reinterpretation and confrontation of reality through surreality was the overriding aim. Surrealism forces individuals out of their comfort zone to contemplate what is real in their own lives. This was paralleled in surrealist films, with Harper and Stone arguing as follows:

Surrealist cinema presents an unsilvered screen offering no reflection to an audience except the possibility of examining, through unsettling the status quo, the Truth of their own lives; reality, that is, caught in the moments, the memories, the unexpected glimpses beyond the everyday. A sometimes dark Truth, therefore, but equally an often potent comedy of human existence (2007:8).

The adoption of surrealism in film did not provide an aesthetic that sought to evade reality, but rather revived the unconscious as it interacted with the unconscious to convey a heightened awareness of reality. Surrealist film therefore confronts what one understands to be real by readdressing one's affinity with a heightened reality.

### 3.5 Surrealism versus fantasy

Surrealism has become synonymous with fantasy and escapism, but the ideas and hopes of the movement profoundly counter this misconception. Therefore, the question that arose was how surrealism became synonymous with fantasy in popular culture and how this had an impact on its relationship with film. Surrealist interests provided a starting point to this misconception. Surrealists were interested in popular culture as a medium of expression that countered bourgeois art and aesthetic conventions. Surrealists identified popular culture as an oppositional mode of cultural expression that echoed surrealist activity (Richardson, 2006:16). Surrealists were particularly interested in genre films, including comedy and horror (Richardson, 2006:62–63). Richardson argues that surrealist interest in horror films coincided with the rise in Hollywood horror films of the early 1930s, with both movements sharing “an air of strangeness that goes far beyond a simple depiction of fear to reveal some of the more uneasy facets of existence” (2006:63). The two movements reflected a preoccupation with similar ideas in different forms during the social conditions of the inter-war period. This inevitably led to popular culture assuming similar ideas as surrealism in an attempt to find new modes of expression. This

is evident within Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak New Wave movement of the 1960s, which borrowed surrealist notions and practices within film to counter socialist realism.

As surrealism turned to popular culture for cultural opposition inspiration, so did popular culture turn its attention to surrealism. This symbiotic relationship resulted in surrealism being assumed within the public domain. Richardson argues that this allowed filmmakers to “make use of what are considered to be ‘surrealist’ effects as part of [their] narrative armoury” (2006:72). This had an impact on film in that the cinema-viewing experience was no longer a prerequisite to identifying a surrealist film. Rather, a film can be regarded as surrealist or surrealist-inclined because it “contain[s] elements derived from surrealism that have consciously been crafted into the film” (Richardson, 2006:72). This complicated the relationship between film and surrealism, as popular culture genre films consciously assume or reject surrealist notions. This was compounded by the conscious or unconscious adoption of surrealist notions in fantasy films. Fantasy and surrealist films both “challenge our perceptions of reality by rejecting conventional ways of telling stories and structuring narratives” (Coombs, 2008:8). Richardson argues that this symbiotic relationship has become parasitic, with surrealism losing its validity within the public domain:

Having gained currency as an idea in the public domain frequently used to describe things that are non-surrealist or even distinctly anti-surrealist, surrealism might be considered to have become so diffuse that almost anything can be said about it (2006:165).

Animation expert Van Norris reiterates this argument in his research on animated shorts and their incorporation of surrealism, that further confounds surrealist misconceptions, stating:

Indeed there are arguably a number of American animated shorts and bodies of work that, while not proclaimed to be directly ‘Surrealist’ in intent, demonstrate through connections in form, narrative and particular applications of dream imagery – as well as dialogues of subconscious and unconscious desire – that certainly one might argue would be part of *any* credible and definable Surrealist blueprint (2007:73).

Burton’s animated film *The Nightmare Before Christmas* reflects this process. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is a fantasy film that borrowed surrealist notions in the framing of its narrative and stylistic aesthetics. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is especially significant with its reference to Švankmajer’s imagery of obscure creatures and animated objects (figure 4). *The*

*Nightmare Before Christmas* is a charming homage to the grotesque and obscure animated objects of Švankmajer's films in *Alice* (figure 5). The inhabitants of Halloween Town make Christmas presents, which are nostalgic of Švankmajer's films. In one particular scene, a character can be seen using a sieve-like spoon (figure 6), which also appears in Švankmajer's *The Flat* (figure 7).



Figure 4: *The Nightmare Before Christmas*



Figure 5: *Alice*



Figure 6: The sieve-like spoon in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*

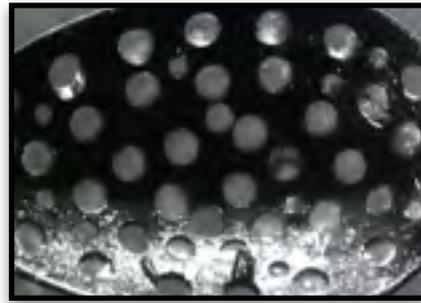


Figure 7: The sieve-like spoon in *The Flat*

*The Nightmare Before Christmas* narrates the story of Jack Skellington, who feels creatively repressed by the annual conventions of Halloween. After an accidental visit to Christmas Town he is inspired to hijack Christmas. In one scene, Skellington struggles to capture the spirit of Christmas as he sits in his alchemical chamber experimenting with Christmas objects and woefully singing:

There're so many things I cannot grasp. When I think I've got it, then at last through my bony fingers it does slip like a snowflake in a fiery grip. Something here I'm not quite getting. Through I try, I keep forgetting. Like a mem'ry, long since past. Here in an instant, gone in a flash. What does it mean? What does it mean? In these little bric-a-brac, a secret's waiting to be cracked. These dolls and toys confuse me so, confound it all, I love it though. Simple objects, nothing more. But something's hidden through a door, though I do not have the key. Something's here I cannot see (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*, 1993).

Skellington's song of frustration echoes the frustration and fascination of Švankmajer's personal accounts in *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art*, where he recalls dreams and memories that he desperately deciphers for greater meaning and creative inspiration. Skellington's song is significant because of its numerous allusions to memory and the role of objects, which are among the main preoccupations of surrealism and of interest to Švankmajer. Skellington's lyrics hint at the purpose of dreams and memory as holding the key to perceiving a heightened awareness of reality. The song alludes to surrealist notions of worn, found and symbolic objects, which gain greater meaning because of their antiquated form and tactile history. The "snowflake in a fiery grip" (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*, 1993) echoes the juxtaposition of imagery found in the work of Guillaume Apollinaire, a writer whose literature significantly influenced the avant-garde movements of dada and surrealism as well as Lautréamont. Surreal imagery was founded on these preoccupations with juxtaposition, dreams and objects, but these ideas were borrowed in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* for stylistic and aesthetic purposes. They were used to create fantasy worlds that are detached from reality and ultimately offer themselves as escapist entertainment.

In comparison to Burton's relationship between fantasy and reality in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Švankmajer prefers "to place [his] imaginary world into reality" (cited in Uhde, 2007:61). The examination of surrealist practice in this dissertation supported this claim, with surrealism preoccupied with exploring the supreme point where conscious and unconscious states no longer contradict one another but react to create a heightened awareness of reality. The approach to reality and the imagination therefore differs between fantasy and surrealism. Norris argues that fantasy films borrow surrealist preoccupations "in a fractured and distanced fashion, and then, in turn, transmitted this corrupted information back to mass audiences in simplistic culturally and artistically modified fragments" (2007:73–74). *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is an example of fantasy films borrowing surrealism for aesthetic purposes that are detached from surrealist intentions and therefore, render the movement of its original concepts.

Surrealism is reduced to a generic medium for introducing the bizarre, the irrational and fantasy into mainstream art and literature (Norris, 2007:72–73). This is a corruption of surrealism, which has now become the "shorthand for the 'wacky', the 'out of kilter'" (Norris, 2007:74). This is hampered by the usage of the phrase 'surreal' in the public domain. Surrealism has become a popular word for fantasy in contemporary society, with Richardson questioning "[t]he notion of

the ‘surreal’ [as] a curious one. Having assumed a vernacular ascription, can we say that it has a precise meaning, or is it simply a lazy synonym?” (2006:2). The answer to this question leaned towards the unfortunate transition of surrealism as shorthand for fantasy. Surrealism has been robbed of its political and revolutionary aspects that strengthened its political and intimate affinity with reality. In Harper and Stone’s study of surrealism and film they discuss the reduction of the movement as a symptom of commodification, with reference to a television guide that described the television show *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002) as surreal (2007:5). This claim was based on the show’s depiction of an animated dancing baby as a figment of the protagonist’s imagination, which symbolised her reproductive body clock (Harper & Stone, 2007:5). While this aesthetic depicted the protagonist’s heightened awareness of reality and her unconscious thought processes acting upon her physical reality, it is derivative of the revolutionary roots of surrealism to reimagine life towards positive progression.

Richardson (2006:2) contextualises the transition of surrealism as a state of ‘naive realism’, which is a theory of perception. Individuals perceive objects as they really are and therefore reality is shaped by a direct relationship with our external world. It is an ‘outward’ perception of the world that limits the role of the unconscious in perceiving our physical world with an object only ever existing as determined by its material characteristics and utilitarian functions. This counters surrealist ideas on perception, namely that ‘reality’ is significantly shaped by the constantly engaging relationship between the conscious and unconscious, which can at any moment transform an object’s material characteristics and utilitarian function for alternate purposes and imaginative meanings. Therefore, according to naive realism, when confronted by the surreal the individual:

either reduces it to an aesthetic or poetic phenomenon (‘it was really surreal, let me tell you’) or rejects at once any attempt to discern in it a dream, a failed act, a verbal or casual association beyond the normal (Cortázar, cited in Richardson, 2006:2).

The commodification of surrealist characteristics into fantasy films is exemplary of a naive realism reduction of surrealism. Fantasy films reduce surrealist methods of filmmaking for the purpose of aesthetic phenomenon, but they also reject a detailed engagement with associations beyond conventionality. The absorption of surrealist notions into the production of fantasy films has rendered surrealist films and the surrealist movement equivalent to fantasy films. This has

stripped surrealism of its very essence: the moment of surreality that has the power to open reality upon reality (Matthews, 1971:7).

Surrealism is not a fixed theory with a set of shared filmmaking methods, but rather an idea that film should centre on capturing moments of surreality. Breton's idea of merging dream and reality – unconscious and conscious – was founded on juxtaposition and it was the surrealist's role to break those barriers and resolve the two into a heightened awareness of reality where contradictions no longer existed. This revealed a poignant difference between fantasy and surrealism, especially surrealism as the antithesis of fantasy. A film, whether surrealist or fantasy, may share stylistic and aesthetic traits, but it is a film's portrayal of surreality that must be judged as an indicator of surrealism. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* borrows surrealist ideas to create an alternate universe, but this universe is detached from reality and does not seek to dissolve conceptual oppositions between real or imagined. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* borrowed surrealist notions as a means of expression, but it did not pursue the objectives of the movement to elevate and confront everyday reality. A discussion of the examination of Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality and his intimate affinity with reality now follows.

#### 4. Švankmajer's Filmic Representation of Surreality

The investigation of Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality was conducted based on Richardson's question of surrealism and film, that is, "how does consideration of this particular film or film maker in relation to surrealism help us to illuminate either surrealism or the film?" (2006:7). This provided a broad scope of analysis, which was necessary when reflecting on such a diverse and wide-ranging influence of collective activity within Švankmajer's films. His filmic representation of a heightened awareness of Czechoslovakia and civilisation is achieved through the medium of childhood, with his films perceived from a child's perspective of conscious reality. The perception of a child's imagined fears of conscious reality was resurfaced to act upon the physical reality in Švankmajer's films. Childhood is a significant medium of expression for Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality, because it reveals Švankmajer's beliefs with regard to civilisation and provides an analogy for the socio-political narrative of his films. The following chapter contains a discussion of Švankmajer's surreality and its form and practice within in his films as enhancing the surrealist affinity with reality.

##### 4.1 The filmic representation of loss

An examination of Švankmajer's films revealed their relation to Andrea Sabbadini's study on the filmic representation of loss common to European cinema (2007:1). The filmic representation of loss in European cinema was symptomatic of European history, notably two devastating world wars. Švankmajer is an Eastern European filmmaker whose life experiences have been shaped by the course of Czechoslovak and European history. This history is marked by the theme of loss: loss of political, cultural, social and autonomous freedom. The experience of loss was common to all Europeans who lived on the forefront of both world wars and art, as with film, represented this loss in an attempt to explore "its many different aspects and meanings" (Sabbadini, 2007:1). This was reflective of the avant-garde, which established itself in response to the void in art in the wake of WWI and its impact on social values. Avant-garde artists simultaneously strove to eradicate borders between life and art and to represent the reality of a changing global landscape.

The loss felt by Europe can be broadly defined as innocence. Family life was disrupted by death with the insurmountable death toll of two world wars, which included many young conscripted

soldiers among its fatalities and innocent civilian casualties. Society was confronted by the barbarity of death as the industrialised machine age spilled into the development of industrialised mechanical weaponry, which forever changed the face of war. The machine weaponry of WWII was a disturbing reminder of the fragility of human life, which could be so easily and violently destroyed instantaneously and on a mass scale. Both world wars occurred predominately on European soil and had a devastating impact on the European economy as well as the infrastructure of whole cities. Europeans were directly affected and confronted by the horrors of war and the twofold loss of innocence. Sabbadini argues that the experience of loss cannot be underestimated for its intensely distressing and disabling effect on society (2007:1).

Švankmajer personally experienced this course of European history and conflict. Švankmajer's films share a narrative on loss through their imagery and the socio-political narrative that symbolises the nation's loss of autonomy and freedom. Švankmajer's films related to Sabbadini's study of loss in European cinema, but his exploration of loss extends beyond the confines of a loss of innocence due to war. Švankmajer's filmic representation of loss continues in his recent films produced after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia and the rise of consumerism in the Czech Republic. This continued filmic representation and exploration of loss are indicative of Švankmajer's beliefs with regard to the broader loss of innocence as a result of civilisation. Švankmajer considers civilised society as a destructive force that resulted in its self-inflicted losses through conventions and ideology. Europe's turbulent history of war was the result of human actions, especially the destructive ability of humans. Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality centres on his study of civilised societies' lost innocence and their destructive nature:

When any civilisation feels its end is growing near, it returns to its beginnings and looks to see whether the myths on which it is founded can be interpreted in new ways, which would give them a new energy and ward off the impending catastrophe (Švankmajer, cited in Richardson, 2006:133).

Švankmajer's experiences in Czechoslovakia are marked by dystopian downfalls, with his birth corresponding with the Czechoslovak struggle against Nazi aggression in the events leading to the outbreak of WWII. This was marked by the failure of Western allies to maintain democratic treaties with the unsympathetic and haunting words of Chamberlain on Czechoslovakia's occupation by Germany. This resulted in the non-humanitarian and irrational conventions of Nazism in Czechoslovakia, followed by Czechoslovak leaders appeasing Nazi officials to prevent war, which inevitably occurred. The country's destruction continued with the repressive state

control of the KSČ. Until the Velvet Revolution, Švankmajer's experience of civilisation had always been dominated by repression, violence and destruction. Therefore, his study on loss and the filmic representation of its destructive impact are indicative of his socio-political context.

#### 4.2 The significance of loss and childhood

In Švankmajer's search for the 'beginnings' of civilisation, he returned to the realm of childhood to find alternate ways of expressing this sense of loss and destruction while finding possible resolutions. Sabbadini argues that one's experiences of losses are not limited to death, with the experience of loss also "profoundly affected by losses of less tangible, if not always less painful, kinds" (2007:2). Sabbadini continues that the theme of loss dominates the universal human experience:

From the moment of birth, when we lose the comfort of intrauterine life, to our last breath, losses of all kinds, and our efforts to gradually come to terms with them through mourning, constitute important points of reference in our existences (2007:2).

Sabbadini touches on the loss of intrauterine life at birth, which is a key component in Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality. Švankmajer's films share a narrative on instinctual repression, which is indicative of the loss of instinctual freedom during childhood. Instinctual repression is the result of societal codes and conventions that are taught from childhood and routinely reiterated throughout adolescence and adulthood. Sabbadini describes this process as the "conflictual coexistence of unrestrained id drives [and] the need to contain them" (Sabbadini, 2007:3). The need to contain our id drives is indicative of instinctual repression, as people constantly edit their own behaviour and actions according to societal conventions. The question arose as to how Švankmajer's narrative of instinctual repression relates to that of the representation of loss that dominated the European cinema of the inter-war and post-war eras. The answer is apparent in Sabbadini's emphasis on the origin of loss, that is the lost comfort of intrauterine life where one is completely free of institutional, ideological or instinctual repression. The unborn child exists and acts completely in accordance with his or her own needs and desires, unrestrained from the conventions of civilised society. Once the child is born, societal conventions are slowly but meticulously taught.

Švankmajer believes that childhood provides the immediacy of intrauterine life. The period of early childhood closely resembles the freedom of intrauterine life before societal conventions are entrenched. Childhood is a crucial theme and form of expression in Švankmajer's films. In Švankmajer's search for the 'beginnings' before the downfall of civilisation, he found childhood to provide the myths for reinterpreting a new impulse that could avert catastrophe. Richardson (2006) has written extensively on Švankmajer's practice of surrealism and the significance of childhood. Švankmajer believes that society's approach to childhood is flawed because the enforcement of the adult's codes and conventions onto the child repeats the already existing codes and conventions of a destructive civilised world. Richardson supports this notion, arguing that children are "not considered in their own terms but treated as prospect adults, so that childhood becomes merely a stage in a progression that leads into the maturity of adult society" (2006:131). Richardson continues:

This is a significant part of the sickness of society: in a sense it forecloses childhood, causing adults to regard it as merely a stage through which they have passed and left behind and so they disregard their own childhood wisdom (2006:20).

Švankmajer identifies a hypocrisy in this treatment of children, whereby they are protected from the cruelty of adult or civilised society but also prepared to become acceptable or conventional members of adult or civilised society (Richardson, 2006:130). For Švankmajer, this represents an inherent flaw in society to address the pitfalls of contemporary civilisation and readdress them in childhood so that future generations can prevent their reoccurrence.

Švankmajer identifies the 'evil' of civilisation as a product of the human condition and social conventions that can only be diagnosed by readdressing the processes that created them. This is exemplary of Švankmajer's beliefs regarding communism as symptomatic of a destructive modern society (Richardson, 2006:123). Švankmajer identifies the 'evil' of communism and the violence of the world as predominately human-made, arguing, "the ulcer of Stalinism would never have appeared if the whole of civilisation itself had not been diseased" (cited in Richardson, 2006:123). Švankmajer's filmic representations of human-made destruction is indicative of his opinions on civilisation. Švankmajer approaches the medium of childhood from the hindsight of adulthood and with an awareness of the violent destructive flaws of adult society. Švankmajer submerges himself into the world of the child to examine the adult world from the

child's perspective, that is, before instinctual or ideological conventions of society can be enforced. This allows Švankmajer to re-examine the adult world from the outside and "through the perspective of the untutored eye of the child he once was" (Richardson, 2006:131). Švankmajer revisits his own childhood memories in this process as he explores Freudian preoccupations with childhood.

Švankmajer's study of childhood and the world of the child in his films parallels Luis Buñuel and Dalí's slicing of the eye in *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). *Un Chien Andalou* is recognised as the first surrealist film in that it was made by two artists who practised the ideas of surrealism and incorporated surrealist notions into the filmic representation of surreality. The eye-slicing scene symbolised the surrealist objective to reinterpret life, which requires one to abandon convention so as to become susceptible to a heightened perception of reality. The slicing of the eye serves as a visual trigger, warning viewers to adjust their 'sight', perception and awareness of reality. Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality from the perspective of childhood functions in a similar manner. In *Alice*, the protagonist warns the viewers to close their eyes, and this signals to the viewers to readjust their perception and awareness of reality. Švankmajer's films are framed from a child's perception of conscious reality, which opposes logic, as the child's imagination constantly acts upon the physical reality of the films. The childlike perception represents the unconscious aspect of Švankmajer's films, which acts upon the conscious and physical reality of everyday Czechoslovakia. This is evident in Švankmajer's *Down to the Cellar* (*Do pivnice*, 1983), which depicts a young girl who makes her way down to the cellar to collect potatoes. The child's descent is symbolic of the portrayal by the film of unconscious fears surfaced to act upon the conscious reality of the cellar. The child fears the dark and foreboding atmosphere of the cellar. The film depicts through fantasy sequences her imagined fear of objects animated to life. The animated objects disobey their utilitarian functions and become increasingly threatening as they enact her unconscious fears. The film successfully portrays the child's heightened awareness of reality and this is exemplary of Švankmajer's films and their socio-political narrative.

Švankmajer's imaginative animation of physical reality in his films is symbolic of the socio-political reality of Czechoslovakia. While the objects in *Down to the Cellar* imaginatively represent the child's fear of the foreboding cellar, the objects in Švankmajer's films imaginatively allude to the Czechoslovak fear of the KSČ and its repressive impact of communism on daily

reality. Human characters and their representatives in Švankmajer's films are typically attacked or challenged by the animated objects. When human characters or their representatives are absent, the camera stands in by offering point-of-view shots that interpolate the viewer into the world of the film. The imagined sequences of the films are placed in the physical reality of Czechoslovakia, with the majority of the films produced during the repressive dictatorship of the KSČ. The physical reality of Czechoslovakia is reinterpreted as Švankmajer's and the nation's unconscious fears are imaginatively acted upon by the physical reality of the films. This strengthens Švankmajer's surrealist affinity with reality, as the films evoke the emotional and physical experience of communist daily reality. This daily reality was banned from all media depictions and the nation was intimidated into silence. Švankmajer's childhood medium of surreality therefore enabled the Czechoslovak socio-political reality to be portrayed and confronted through analogy.

In Owen's discussion of the role of childhood in Švankmajer's films, he claims that Švankmajer's objective approach to "animation and filmmaking is to make us perceive the world as we did when we were infants" (2013:200). Švankmajer interpolates the viewer into his filmic representation of childhood. When confronted with the surreality or the reimagined worlds of Švankmajer's films, Richardson argues that the image of destruction predominates (2006:126). The viewers are placed in a hostile world that they must either succumb to or resist. The unsettling nature of Švankmajer's destructive film world encourages resistance and this is not only indicative of Švankmajer's desire for active opposition against the KSČ, but also of ideological repression in general. Švankmajer's films are dominated by scenes of destruction that are predominately the direct result of human characters and the human representatives of puppets or animated figurines. In *Punch and Judy*, the puppet figurines violently fight each other to their death over possession of the hamster. Their destructive attempts to possess the instinctually free creature highlights the inherent destructive nature of civilisation. The use of puppets to narrate this is significant because of their historical role as a form of cultural resistance. Švankmajer's preference for puppets during communism was a defiant act of cultural opposition to socialist realism during the former Czechoslovak. The theme of destruction is continued in *Darkness-Light-Darkness (Tma-světlo-tma, 1989)*. The clay figure of the film is created as the various body parts enter the small room. The clay figurine slowly assembles its individual parts together within the confines of the small room and inevitably creates its own prison in the process. The film

poignantly alludes to the passivity of the Czechoslovak nation during communism and the nation's sense of fault for voluntarily and involuntarily allowing the KSČ to maintain control.

The representation of human-made destruction is present throughout Švankmajer's films. *Dimensions of Dialogue* is quintessential of Švankmajer's theme of destruction with the chomping heads that consume one another, the lovers who inevitably destroy each other and finally the two clay heads that are responsible for their own demise. In *The Garden (Zahrada, 1968)* the man voluntarily gives up his freedom and the puppets in *Punch and Judy* violently attack each other until their death. Švankmajer's recent long feature films, *The Conspirators of Pleasure (Spiklenci slasti, 1996)*, *Little Otík, Lunacy (Šílení, 2005)* and *Surviving Life (Přežít svůj život, 2010)*, are especially uncomplimentary of humans. This is heightened by the use of real-life actors over Švankmajer's preference for animated figurines. The adults in *Little Otík* are responsible for their own demise at the consumption of the root baby when they fail to listen to the child's warnings. The choices, behaviour and actions of Švankmajer's protagonists are constantly portrayed as questionable, unsettling and grotesque. Švankmajer's recent long feature films continue this representation of human destruction, but they are not limited to the socio-political analogy of communism. Rather, the actions of the characters in *The Conspirators of Pleasure* and *Surviving Life* are reflective of the country's transition into a capitalist democracy and the negative excesses of the rising consumerist society at the time of their production.

An examination of Švankmajer's earlier films also revealed the prominence of human destruction that predates the more pronounced socio-political impact of the KSČ. *Et Cetera* was released in 1966 and consists of three animated acts that ridicule the futile and destructive nature of humankind. The third act is especially poignant with its male paper figurine whose body is a cut-out from an image. The image changes according to the figurine's actions; when the figurine is quaint and creative, the image on its body depicts nature with birds and lush vegetation. When the figurine performs acts of violence and destruction, the image on its body depicts war with soldiers on horseback and their swords drawn. The figurine draws a line on the whitewashed canvas of the mise-en-scène in the shape of a building. The figurine draws the line from the external side of the building, drawing no door or point of entry. When the figurine is unable to 'walk' inside the line's interior it begins to pull, tear and storm the line, but to no avail. The figurine erases and redraws the building, but this time, it draws the line around its body. The figurine inevitably draws itself trapped inside the building and is forced to erase the line and

begin again. This becomes the cycle of the film's third act, with no resolution provided. The first two acts of the film mirror the theme of the third act, with man represented through animated paper figurines that are ultimately responsible for their depicted destruction. Therefore, characters that represent humans in Švankmajer's films are rarely shown in a positive light. The representation of human destruction in his films is constantly represented as the result of human action. This becomes a reoccurring motif with the characters creating their own prisons, from the figurine in *Darkness-Light-Darkness* that creates its body within the confines of a small room (figure 8) to the animated figurine in *Et Cetera*, which repeatedly draws itself within the boundary of the building (figure 9). The theme of destruction alludes to society's self-inflicted destruction and this is significant, as it is suggestive of Švankmajer's study of human destruction as the result of instinctual repression and a flawed civilisation.



Figure 8: *Darkness-Light-Darkness*



Figure 9: *Et Cetera*

The filmic representation of destruction in Švankmajer's films is also evident in his use – or lack – of dialogue in his films. Richardson argues that dialogue in Švankmajer's films is 'anti-dialogic' in that there is rarely direct verbal communication between characters or objects throughout his films (2006:124). Meaning is often conveyed through action rather than dialogue, with characters or objects making use of "signs and gestures" (Richardson, 2006:124). Švankmajer's films predominately rely on the mannerisms of the objects and the characters to convey meaning, with the use of dialogue often short and nonsensical or foreboding, resulting in miscommunication and destruction. This is echoed in the vision in *A Quiet Week in the House* of a tongue placed through a meat grinder, which exits as shredded printed paper. Švankmajer's bleak portrayal of consumerist society in *Conspirators of Pleasure* is absent of all dialogue and *Faust* only uses dialogue to further confuse the story rather than impart any useful story information. The use of dialogue in *Lunacy* is at most nonsensical, offering no insight into the story or actions of the characters. The Marquise's butler's tongue has been removed and the film

includes repetitive random scenes of tongues wriggling and sliding about different locations. The presence or absence of tongues in *Lunacy* is symbolic of Švankmajer's theme of dialogue in his films: useless or untrustworthy. The representation of tongues in his films routinely alludes to the propaganda of the social realist model in Czechoslovak art, which is discussed further in the following chapter.

Švankmajer's critically acclaimed *Dimensions of Dialogue* ironically contains no dialogue, but rather a cyclic series of actions that emphasise the destructive nature of dialogue. The first and final acts account the exhaustive nature of destructive dialogue. This is especially evident in the third act with the clay heads. After several failed attempts of frustratingly nonsensical communication through gestures and actions, the heads collapse into a melted mess as they breathlessly pant. The second act offers a brief glimpse of successful dialogue after the two animated clay figures are able to respond to each other's gestures in a passionate embrace. This union is symbolically represented in the clay offspring, but the unwanted responsibility of the offspring results in destruction. The two clay figurines violently destroy each other and the clay offspring in the process. Therefore, dialogue in Švankmajer's films often results in a breakdown of communication and exhaustion. Richardson remarks that the breakdown of language in Švankmajer's films suggests "a profound distrust of the word, and understanding emerges, when it does, from touch and recognition of what is contained within the power of images" (2006:125). Švankmajer's preoccupation with touch is derived from the ideas of tactility as a medium of expression and vision, which is a more reliable source than words. Švankmajer's use of tactility and his techniques for representing objects to evoke the sense of touch and encourage analogical thought processes are now discussed.

### 4.3 Evoking reality

In Švankmajer's *Alice*, the young child warns the viewers to close their eyes. This is suggestive of Švankmajer's belief that sight is unreliable, and this is echoed in Švankmajer's argument on the importance of touch over sight:

If you are trying to decide what is more important, the experience of the eye or the experience of the body, always trust the body, because touch is an older sense than sight and its experience is more fundamental (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:462).

Therefore, it is not that one's sight is wrong, but rather that one's sole reliance on the sense of sight over any other sensory organs and unconscious perceptions is a disservice to the experience of touch. Surrealism is the representation of a heightened awareness of reality that encompasses all factors that influence perception: conscious and unconscious. One's conscious perception of reality relies on more than just one's eyes for 'vision' or awareness, and this leads to Švankmajer's obsession with sensory perception. One's senses of touch, smell, hearing and taste are equally relevant to one's sense of sight in perceiving the immediate surroundings. Švankmajer's use of tactility evokes such tactile sensations and strengthens the affinity of his films with physical reality. This aids in the interpellation of the viewer into the world of the film, as the viewer is forced to confront the heightened experience of daily reality, which is more attuned to expressing the needs and the desires of one's conscious and unconscious realities.

Švankmajer's films are dominated by objects and filmic representations of their tactile properties. Švankmajer's filmic representation of tactility is present throughout his films, but its usage and adaptations are intensified over time. This is primarily due to his battle with the censors during the normalisation period of Czechoslovak history, with Švankmajer choosing to temporarily abandon film. During this period, Švankmajer focused on sculptural art. Švankmajer and his wife created gestural art and reimagined objects to add to their own Rudolf-inspired surrealist cabinet of wonders. This led to Švankmajer's study of objects, specifically their evocative power, to "find out if touch is capable of penetrating (as an independent sense) the realm of art, and to what degree it is able to influence and enrich it" (Švankmajer, 2014:82). Švankmajer developed a series of surrealist games and invited surrealist members to participate. These games often included a series of objects that Švankmajer had selected or created, which he would hide behind a curtain or in a concealed box. The participants were then invited to feel the objects through the curtain or in the box. As the participants were blinded from viewing the objects, they became more attuned to their sense of touch, but also relied on their sense of smell, hearing and unconscious associations to aid in their assessment.

The participants reflected on the experience, writing down what they felt, what they thought the object may be and what associations came to mind during the process. The experiments revealed that touch has the ability to evoke both the imagination and the memory. The participants' perceptions were lifted from their instinctual perceptions as they began to explore imaginative

possibilities. Švankmajer wrote in his tactile diary that the tactile object changes with every touch and “enriches the emotions of everyone who touches it” (2014:115). The findings of the experiments reinforced Švankmajer’s belief that one’s visual perception of ‘reality’ is limiting, but that tactility could heal this flawed vision and heighten awareness. The tactile nature of Švankmajer’s films invites the viewers into the film world and engages with their own active imagination while heightening the realism of the films and strengthening their affinity with physical surroundings. Kristoffer Noheden has written extensively on the significance of tactility in Švankmajer’s films and argues that this process is indicative of Švankmajer’s aim to:

resuscitate the human capacity for analogical thinking, where likeness relations connect diverse phenomena that the identity principle of scientific thinking keeps apart, and so, from the viewpoint of surrealism, has the potential to poetise and re-enchant a world in the grip of habit and utility (2013).

This echoes Švankmajer’s beliefs regarding the flaws of perception as he tries to free the viewers’ perception and awareness of their reality from visual and conventional confines. Švankmajer readdress the importance of touch, which he conceives as “neglected in an ocularcentric civilisation” (Noheden, 2013). Noheden argues that Švankmajer’s preoccupation with tactility is indicative of his “conviction that touch can be mediated via vision” (2013). While sense impressions do not equate to actual tactile sensation, the filmic representations of tactility evokes a sensual experience (Noheden, 2013).

Švankmajer’s films represent hostile alternate realities filled with animated objects that confound rationale. The viewers become the protagonist in *The Flat* who blink their eyes, scratch their heads and stare in disbelief at the irrationality of the physical reality of the fantasy sequences in the film. The tactility of the animated objects that represent unconscious reality could easily be rejected by the viewer, but the physical realism of the objects and their interactions with the human characters force the viewer to ‘believe’. This is reinforced by the objects being typically everyday or domestic objects and their fantastical animation occurring in domestic, everyday spaces. This reinforces Švankmajer’s preference to place his imaginary worlds into daily reality and strengthens the relationship of his films with reality. The sensual experience and habitual reality evoked by the tactility of the films heighten their affinity with a physical reality. Švankmajer evokes tactility through extreme close-ups and diegetic sound effects, which emphasise texture and materiality. The first act of *Dimensions of Dialogue, dialog věčný*

(‘material dialogue’), is typical of Švankmajer’s stylistic tactile methods. The camera follows the actions of three figurines filmed in close-up and from a side profile. The camera in turn introduces the three Arcimboldo-inspired figurines and their encounters with one another in extreme close-ups as they attack one another’s individual parts. Food products are shredded, sliced and grounded by the knives, scissors and graters, with their diegetic sound effects forming the sound track. The screeching, slimy, crushing, slurping and grinding soundtrack heightens the tactility of the scene and the affinity with physical reality.

*A Quiet Week in the House* is a poignant example of tactility in Švankmajer’s films, which reinforces Švankmajer’s preference of touch over sight for depicting surreality and heightening awareness of reality for the viewer. The protagonist in the film routinely drills a hole into a door at the start of each new day. Each time the protagonist places his finger into the hole to clear it of saw dust. This action is filmed in extreme close-ups and creates an immediacy of touch for the viewers, who imagine the experienced sensation of the freshly drilled and rough surface of the wood against their skin. The scene includes a shot from the opposite side of the door as the camera points towards the door in an extreme close-up. During this shot, the protagonist’s finger pokes through the hole. The shot creates a physical reaction in the viewer, who blinks or jolts in response to the sudden appearance of the finger that invades the viewer’s physical reality. This scene precludes each of the vision scenes and the action echoes the child in *Alice* who warns to close one’s eyes and alter one’s vision.

Švankmajer’s use of tactility routinely interpolates the viewer into his surreal film worlds. In *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope*, the protagonist is never shown and the camera is positioned to align the viewer with the protagonist’s point of view. Through identification with the protagonist, the viewer is placed in the torturous warren of the film. Tactility strengthens this relationship through extreme close-up shots of the protagonist’s hands or feet from the protagonist’s point of view. This is accompanied by the sound of his anxious breathing as the viewer experiences similar anxiety. As the protagonist sneaks his way through the torture warren, there are extreme close-up shots of his hands against the rough brick laid walls and his bare feet on the soiled ground as he occasionally scrunches his toes. This creates a sensual identification with the protagonist and a sensual experience for the viewers, who imagine the texture of the walls against their own hands or the ground beneath their own feet. One shares the protagonist’s sense of fear and anxiety and

through sensual association responds with equal discomfort as the protagonist's hands are stabbed or his bare feet tread along rough flooring (figure 10; figure 11). Švankmajer's use of tactility produces a multi-sensory experience of the film world for the viewer and strengthens the affinity of the film with physical reality. This is reinforced through the characteristics of objects in Švankmajer's films.



Figure 10: Tactility in *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope*.



Figure 11: Tactility in *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope*.

Frank highlights that Švankmajer animates his filmed objects “based on their specific formal characteristics” (2013:93). The chess pieces in *Picnic with Weissmann* (*Picknick mit Weissmann*, 1968) are animated to independently play chess, the china dolls in *Jabberwocky* (*Žvahlav aneb šaticky Slaměného Huberta*, 1971) occupy themselves in an actual doll's tea party and the tongues in *Lunacy* crawl and slither independently of a human body. The animation of the objects based on their natural properties strengthens the degree of realism, but equally acts as a disruptive force. The animated china dolls appear amusing at first because of their familiarity and familiar actions, but this is countered by the disturbing realisation of their independence. The china dolls are defamiliarised by their independent actions as they “move in ways that they rarely do when humans are present, but which are all the more convincing because they correspond to the objects' form” (Frank, 2013:94). Despite the impossibility of these actions, the viewer is encouraged to imagine the reality of the objects.

The uncanny encounter of objects in Švankmajer's films is heightened by the reoccurrence of objects acting in an unfamiliar, destructive manner towards human characters or the interpolated viewer. The china dolls' uncanniness in *Jabberwocky* is intensified by their consumption of smaller baby toy dolls with limbs replacing sugar cubes in their tea or floating in their food. The objects in Švankmajer's films act according to their own id-motivated drives. The objects are

routinely animated as defying their utilitarian functions: the soup spoon in *The Flat* changes to a sieve-like spoon denying the protagonist of food, the chairs in *Picnic with Weissmann* go for leisurely walks before returning for the man's burial and the metal panel in *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope* moves towards the protagonist and the viewer while spouting fire and projecting blades. The amusement of the objects animated independently is disrupted by the hauntingly intimidating manner in which their actions are motivated by a desire to cause their creators and the viewers serious harm. This is evident in Švankmajer's *A Game with Stones*, where the tactile nature of objects and their actions present a serious threat to the interpolated viewer. *A Game with Stones* is absent of human characters and the camera functions as a stand-in for the viewer through point-of-view shots. This is established in the opening scene as the camera pans a whitewashed and empty room, surveying the cracks in the wall until focusing on a mechanical clock-like structure that mimics one's glance across a room.

The mechanical clock in *A Game with Stones* repeatedly triggers a series of sequences where stones fall from the device and in extreme close-up shots perform a series of interactions. The stones appear to dance and create a series of new patterns during each sequence. The stones create an uncanny sensation with their texture and shapes being familiar, but with their sudden animated form defying logic. The tactility of the stones is evoked by the extreme close-up framing of their surfaces and sound effects. The interaction between the stones is increasingly violent as they clash with one another to form smaller and rougher textured stones. The stones are unpredictable and their proximity to the interpolated viewer heightens the immediacy of danger towards the viewer. The question that arose was why the objects appear to pose a threat to humans in Švankmajer's films, and this redirects one to Švankmajer's ideas on civilisation. His filmic representation of objects is predominately of everyday, mundane objects. The mundane objects are routinely animated in several significant ways. The objects in his films are often portrayed as destroyed or broken down into smaller parts, and this is symbolic of communism and its repressive effect on the people of the former Czechoslovakia. The objects in his films also function as harbingers of destruction to the human characters and human representatives. These violent and threatening objects symbolise the equally violent and threatening nature of the KSČ. At other times, the objects in Švankmajer's films create new patterns and new ways of being as they break free from their instinctual repression. This reflects his desire for the viewer to create new patterns or thought processes that could potentially liberate the viewer from their own

instinctual repression, especially that of communist oppression during the rule of the KSČ at the time of production.

Švankmajer's surrealist animation of objects highlights a significant affinity between surrealism and daily reality. This affinity opposes misconceptions of surrealism as equating to fantasy. Instead, Švankmajer's surrealist animation of objects and evocative analogies, embodies the hopes of the surrealist movement to confront the crisis of consciousness and its destructive impact on civilisation. Central to Švankmajer's animation of objects is his desire to resuscitate their inner lives, which he regards as imperative to their animated behaviour:

Before reanimating an object in your film, try to understand it. Not through its utilitarian function but through its internal life. Objects, especially old objects, have been the witnesses of the various histories inscribed in them. They have been touched by people in different situations who were subject to various emotions, and who left within them a trace of their various psychic states (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:462).

Švankmajer believes that civilisation is inherently flawed because of its destructive nature and that the treatment of children as prospect adults only repeats the social conventions that created the present dilemmas. If Švankmajer believes that humans have imprinted their different mental states onto objects, then his belief regarding civilised societies' destructive nature would have imprinted onto the objects. This explains to some degree the violent nature of Švankmajer's objects, which symbolises the violent and repressive nature of civilisation.

Švankmajer's films are often structured around repetitive narratives of destructions, with *Et Cetera* and *Dimensions of Dialogue* offering quintessential examples of exhausting circular sequences of destruction. The animated characters find neither a resolution to their situation nor do they learn from the consequences of their destructive actions. Instead, the animated characters continue their actions, which result in increasingly intensified scenes of destruction. This is symbolic of adult society repeating flawed or destructive socio-political ideology to children as prospect adults so they can distinguish right from wrong and become accepted members of civilised society. This creates a hypocrisy, as the ideology taught to determine right from wrong for children still results in war, destruction and oppression. Therefore, the cyclic nature of Švankmajer's destructive objects mirrors this cyclic nature of civilisation's destructive tendencies. Švankmajer's surreality can therefore be regarded as raising awareness of societies'

own irrational and destructive capabilities. Švankmajer's films evocatively confront the viewers' relationship with their daily reality, with Frank claiming that "the films all suggest that everyday reality should be treated with caution, as the principles which govern that reality may be turned upside down without notice" (2013:98). This shows that the utilitarian free objects in Švankmajer's films also function as disruptive forces that confront the viewers' awareness of reality through analogy. This is reiterated in Švankmajer's claim that "[a] world inhabited by these objects will cease to be enslaved to formalised utilitarianism, and will [become] a play of analogies" (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:442).

Švankmajer's filmic representations of tactile sensations reactivates the viewers' imagination. Noheden argues that this activation allows for "analogical associations that diverge from the habitual stimulus of purely visual sensations" (2013). Analogy is a significant component of tacitly and a shared preoccupation with surrealist activity. Breton first applied surrealist ideas in literature with poetry, arguing that poetic analogy had the power to free one from a "utilitarian relation with the surroundings that dominate the current order" (Noheden, 2013). Švankmajer states that his practice of analogy through objects encompasses this surrealist aim to restore awareness: "My tactile experimentation is paradoxically aimed at the healing of Vision and, in its final analysis, at analogical connections between individual senses, thus striving towards synaesthetic poetry" (2014:82). Noheden extends on this notion with surrealist poetic imagery that "establishes new and unexpected relations between diverse phenomena, correspondences that stretch beyond modern civilisation's habitual worldview" (2013). This connects Švankmajer's preoccupation with childhood as a medium of expression with his heightened depiction of objects existing within a heightened awareness of reality. In *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art*, Švankmajer quotes from an exhibition of surrealist objects, which declared that "[o]bjects would say more to us if we were to touch them in the darkness, or half-darkness" (cited in Švankmajer, 2014:106). Tactile objects offer an alternate discourse, as "touching them provides associations and analogies for our own flashes of the unconscious" (Švankmajer, cited in Hames, 2008(c):118).

Švankmajer's estrangement of objects through their non-utilitarian actions and tactility encourages a sensual experience for the viewer to 'touch' the objects within the 'half-darkness'. Frank argues that hybrid objects reflect the psychology of the characters of the films, as "the

main characters' personal preoccupations will intervene to inflect object meaning" (2013:68). Švankmajer's films constantly place the viewer as a character in the film through identification with human characters or through camera placement and tactility, which in turn interpolate the viewer into the film. The viewer is invited to inflect object meaning based on their own personal preoccupations. Meaning can also be inflected by projecting Švankmajer's personal preoccupations with surrealism and the socio-political context of Czechoslovakia during the time of production. By inflecting Švankmajer's personal preoccupations with surrealism, childhood and the Czechoslovak context, the narratives on instinctual and socio-political repression become paramount.

Švankmajer's use of tactility attempts to restore unconscious awareness in the viewer, as his films became analogous with instinctual repression, with Noheden claiming "Švankmajer is committed to engaging the viewer's analogical associations and plays on memories of childhood to defamiliarise the world from the blasé and utilitarian adult viewpoint" (2013). This echoes his ideas on childhood as the realm that is comparatively free from instinctual repression and where alternate ways of being can be reimagined. While the films present destructive characters who cannot be trusted and a reality that appears 'un-real', the tactility of the films forces the viewer to confront this alternate reality as surreal. The surreality or heightened awareness of reality represented in his films is the resurfacing of the unconscious and its id drives to act upon conscious reality so that awareness of inner needs and urges can be addressed. This internalised reality that surfaces is the fear of instinctual repression, which evokes a sense of progressive action towards freedom.

Švankmajer's surreality offers a heightened perception of the Czechoslovak experience and its socio-political context during the different periods of production. The establishment of Czechoslovakia as a communist state had a significant influence on the course of the Czechoslovak surrealist movement and Švankmajer's personal values as a filmmaker. The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group was founded on the ideas and principles of poetism, which was noted for its proactive and jubilant spirit (Frank, 2013:26). The totalitarian rule of the KSČ and its impact on the arts profoundly instigated a long history of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, altering ideas and values in reaction to the extremist policies of the KSČ. The surrealist movement in Czechoslovakia would shift towards a pessimistic tone and this is especially

prevalent in the films of Švankmajer. His films that predate the Prague Spring, were playful experiments despite their bleak commentary or original sources. These earlier films reflected the euphoric spirit of poetism before the strengthening of the KSČ's dictatorship of Czechoslovakia. The discussion in the following chapter on Švankmajer's films alongside the continued historical account of Czechoslovakia reveals that his films of the Czechoslovak New Wave, particularly those produced during the Prague Spring, were increasingly pessimistic. Švankmajer's films of the Czechoslovak New Wave were examined to reveal their increased focus on bleak themes or commentary, including criticism of the KSČ and ideological repression. This was reflective of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group's adoption of dadaist pessimism and confrontational aesthetics. This is evident in Švankmajer's films and the increased practice of cinema of montage aesthetics, as he actively engaged with the socio-political reality of Czechoslovakia.

The expression of pessimism in Švankmajer's films was increased during the normalisation period of Czechoslovakia. Švankmajer's normalisation period produced films that were significant for their heightened criticism of the KSČ and their shared bleak depictions of Czechoslovak reality with images of death, decay and confined spaces. The presence of a pessimistic tone throughout Švankmajer's films, including those predating his joining of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group and its move towards pessimism, is reflective of Švankmajer's personal experiences. Švankmajer's life has been marked by political oppression from early childhood with Nazi occupation, to the rise of the KSČ during his adolescence and to the extremism of communism in his adulthood. This experienced theme of repression throughout his life made a significant contribution towards his surrealist preoccupation with instinctual and ideological repression. This idea was further supported by Švankmajer's personal recollections in *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art* with his explanation of the book's production. The book was produced during the normalisation period of Czechoslovakia when Švankmajer was unable to produce films under the restrictive ideological dictate and censorship protocols. Švankmajer has since written a prologue to the republished book on its conception, despite the ideological barriers of the time, stating:

so much for the idea that totalitarian systems and censorship act as a brake on original creativity. In a sense they act in exactly the opposite way. To overcome difficulties and to get around prohibitions whips up defiance and subversion, which is inherent in all creativity worth that name; it achieves fine nuances (2014:xix).

The surreality of Švankmajer's films subversively counters the equally irrational Czechoslovak reality under communist oppression followed by free market consumerism. This reflective process reiterates Harper and Stone's assessment of surrealist cinema as providing an 'unsilvered' screen that offers "no reflection to an audience except the possibility of examining, through unsettling the status quo, the Truth of their own lives; reality, that is caught in the moments, the memories, the unexpected glimpses beyond the everyday" (2007:8).

#### 4.4 Fighting madness with madness: Confronting the irrationality of civilisation

As discussed in Sabbadini's study on the representation of loss in European cinema, the experience of loss is a constant throughout one's life, with birth being first (2007:2). Sabbadini argues that the process of loss is accompanied by mourning, which provides a "stimulus to recovery, to learning and to creative growth, whenever a successful negotiation of ambivalent feelings can be accomplished" (2007:2). Švankmajer indirectly 'taps' into the child's other "system of wisdom which it is important for us as adults not to lose contact with" (Richardson, 2006:131). This is the purpose of Švankmajer's surrealist study and vision of childhood, which he uses to create awareness of the devastating impact of instinctual repression on society. Švankmajer treats childhood as the starting point for addressing new myths and conventions to prevent the repetition of modern society's destructive nature. His films provide viewers with a reimagined world of heightened awareness that they can accept, deny or engage with, as they are encouraged to take action. This is central to the aim of transformation inherent to surrealism. Breton's merging of the conscious and unconscious into a surreality aimed to transform perception so that new possibilities could be imagined for society to act on the world in a positive way. Švankmajer's merging of childhood and adulthood reflects the merging of the conscious (our adult perception ruled by our superego), with the unconscious (our childhood), which was more attuned to our id drives.

Childhood is a privileged space in Švankmajer's films because it offers a medium for expressive exploration of conscious reality by resurfacing the unconscious and letting it act upon the physical objects of his films. Richardson argues that tactility is essential to Švankmajer's childlike perception, but that "touch belongs to childhood, and the injunction 'do not touch' is part of the initiation into adulthood" (2006:132). Švankmajer returns to the realm of childhood to

reinterpret reality before instinctual repression can be imprinted. The removal of ideological limitations frees the objects to act according to their own desires, resulting in chaotic and destructive imagery. The objects are frequently animated consuming and destroying their surroundings and one another as they break down materials into their basic matter. Richardson argues that Švankmajer's breaking down of materials mirrors notions of alchemy, which has a rich history in Prague (2006:132). Švankmajer's films constantly draw on the legends and traditions of Prague, and this includes alchemy. The mystery and magic of Czech lies in its folklore and alchemical past, especially the legend of Rabbi Löw.

The legend of Rabbi Löw is of his creation of the Golem, the monster who lies sleeping, "preparing to wreak a terrible vengeance on either its citizens or enemies" (Burton, 2009:2). The Golem, a man-like creature made from clay, was created by Rabbi Löw. Its creation was a challenge to the biblical origins of man, where God breathed life into man and thus became a living soul. The Golem was an effigy of creation of the living soul and was modelled as a man-like replica, brought to life by repeating the process of man's biblical creation. The Golem was to function according to his creator's desires and perform domestic orders, but the Golem rebelled, wrecking havoc on the town and causing Löw to destroy his creation and returning it to its basic clay properties contained within a jar (Burton, 2009:62–64). Švankmajer alludes to the legend of the Golem in *Faust*, when the protagonist enters the alchemical chamber filled with eerie preservation jars, bones and an old potions book. The protagonist uses the book to bring a clay baby to life, which he destroys out of fear, which further emphasises Švankmajer's notion of civilised societies' destructive nature.

Švankmajer's breaking down of materials into their basic matter is reflective of the second stage of alchemical work, known as the "'melting' or 'coagulating' stage, [which] is referred to as 'child's play'" (Richardson, 2006:132). The focus of this stage was decay and its objective was "to draw out the properties of things" (Richardson, 2006:132). Švankmajer believed that civilisation is in a state of decay and that the breakdown of objects into their basic matter for renewal was symbolic of his objective to renew civilisation by returning to a starting point: childhood. *Et Cetera* alludes to Švankmajer's preoccupation with flawed civilised beginnings in its first act. The first act depicts an animated paper figurine standing above a series of figures labelled one to four. Figures two to four each contains a set of wings that increase in size, with

figure one depicted as missing its set of wings. The animated figurine tries on a set of wings from each numbered figure, starting with set number two, as it flies across the screen. After trying on figure four's set of wings, the paper figurine turns towards figure one and despite the missing set of wings, it attempts to fly to no avail. This scene is significant, as it alludes to Švankmajer's dissatisfaction with contemporary society, which he believes has gone astray. The film is a depressingly pessimistic view of civilisation, which is continuously echoed throughout Švankmajer's films.

*Jabberwocky* is a poignant example of Švankmajer's pessimism, especially in terms of the realm of childhood and repression. *Jabberwocky* depicts an animated nursery with a young boy's animated pyjama set serving as the protagonist of the film, which symbolises the child. This uncanny film is both enchanting and disturbing, as the relics of childhood are brought to life but behave and act in a grotesque and terrifying manner, with the occasional appearance of a black cat. Despite the often unsettling nature of the film, the childlike play of the animated pyjamas and nursery toys is strangely nostalgic and enchanting. The film ends discouragingly, with the child's pyjamas hanging lifelessly in the wardrobe before transforming into a man's suit. Accompanying the lifeless clothes is the cat, now caged below in the wardrobe as it struggles in protest against the cage. Helen Robinson poignantly remarks in her psychoanalytic reflection of *Jabberwocky* that,

[i]n the image of the cat struggling, helpless to get free, we are reminded by association of the child now 'hung' and 'stilled' in his adult cage, with the implication that the film has been creating all the wriggling and protest and the stance of assault on our mental reality (our small cupboard-minds) in challenge to the small cupboard of civilised reality we are forced to abide within (2007:104).

This is indicative of Švankmajer's films, which purposefully confront reality through surreality. The surreality of Švankmajer's films is a heightened awareness of an instinctually repressed civilisation. *Et Cetera* and *Jabberwocky* are pessimistic views of civilisation, but their production predates Švankmajer's official alignment with the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, which echoed Breton's preoccupation that surrealism should aim for transformation.

Švankmajer's films rarely offer positive transformations, preferring bleak portrayals of a destructive society. This is reflective of the socio-political context of Czechoslovakia. The

heightened awareness of this reality, its surreality, countered the frustrating experience of conscious reality. The affinity of the films with their physical reality invigorates the viewer with a sense of urgency and action to prevent the claustrophobic and exhausting continuation of destructive imagery. This in turn effectively urges the viewers to take action in their own lives towards transformation against all forms of repression. *Punch and Judy* begins with an animated toy monkey, a circus band with merry-go-round waltz music and the clanking machinery of juxtaposed animated metal figurines. Robinson argues that the circus-esque waltz music and clanking machinery are sound motifs in Švankmajer's films, which "suggest the effective repetition of the same" (2007:107). This is reinforced by the cyclic nature of Švankmajer's films that evoke the nauseating sense of exhaustion that accompanies the sound motif. Robinson further argues that this echoes the repressive nature of instinctual life, which Švankmajer successfully mirrors in his films through the 'unsilvered' screen of surreality: "Švankmajer is faithfully holding our faces to these truths imaginatively, while we might well wish to change perspective" (2007:107). This is indicative of Švankmajer's claims on the subversive nature of the imagination that "puts the possible against the real" (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:462).

Wardrobes were a reoccurring motif throughout Švankmajer's films and are often related to death. In *Picnic with Weissmann*, the cupboard conceals a lifeless bounded body, the cupboard in *Jabberwocky* functions as the pyjama's prison and in *The Flat* the door turned cupboard at the end of film concealed the names of artists and philosophers who symbolised ideological freedom. This illustrates Švankmajer's surreality as effectively urging the viewers to break free from their instinctual cupboards and to join the protagonist in *The Flat*, who symbolically writes his name alongside the names of practising surrealists. Švankmajer's surreality is testament to Effenberger's claim that "[i]magination does not mean turning away from reality but its antithesis: reaching through to the dynamic core of reality" (cited in Frank, 2013:100). Švankmajer's surreality is a heightened awareness of instinctual reality, which he reconciles by resurfacing the unconscious to act upon conscious reality. Švankmajer achieves this through analogy with objects, as he aims to "liberate us precisely from those domesticating habits that our civilisation drums into us from childhood" (Švankmajer, cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:447). Childhood provides Švankmajer with a medium to express his surreality in the hope of encouraging action towards positive transformation. Švankmajer's surreality of a heightened instinctual life strengthens his affinity with reality, as he actively confronts the destructive nature

of civilisation. This is reinforced by the socio-political context of Švankmajer's films during communism and consumerism in Czechoslovakia, which is now discussed.

## 5. Reinterpreting and Confronting Daily Reality

This dissertation has so far reported on the affinity of surrealism with reality through an examination of the main preoccupations with surrealism and its relationship with film in opposition to fantasy and escapism. These discussions outlined that surreality is the combination of conscious and unconscious thought processes of reality into a heightened awareness of reality. Švankmajer's identity as a Czechoslovak filmmaker and his socio-political experiences serve as the conscious reality upon which his unconscious acted through the animation of objects. The following discussion incorporates the analysis of the socio-political and instinctual narrative of Švankmajer's films against the backdrop of Czechoslovak history, which revealed his heightened affinity with reality.

### 5.1 Švankmajer's surrealist films of the Czechoslovak New Wave

Czechoslovak New Wave filmmakers typically filmed "what they were living through, their uncertainties, their experiences, their suffering" (Frank, 2013:59). The representation of daily reality was disrupted by the adoption of the Czechoslovak New Wave's shared "ambiguous discourse of dreams" (Owen, 2013:16). Ambiguity was commonplace in the films of the Czechoslovak New Wave, primarily for its juxtaposition with the social realist model, but also because of the filmmakers' "desire to manipulate the spectator's thoughts and feelings in a particular way" (Owen, 2013:16). The ambiguous nature of the films changed the dynamics between filmmaker and viewer, allowing for participation as the viewer was forced to interpret and consider the unconventional open-ended films. With the films often adapting literary classics, the ambiguity enabled the already established and known themes of the novels to be reinterpreted in the films as symbolic of the socio-political reality. This was a stark contrast to the social realist model of simple, goal-oriented narratives, which represented futuristic utopias and closed ideology.

Czechoslovak New Wave films portrayed contemporary everyday life within the domestic sphere, which had been previously discouraged in Czechoslovak films. The focus on the domestic sphere paralleled the safety of one's home as the only place where one could freely express oneself during communist rule. The domesticity of the films and the use of symbolism resulted in

subversive commentary and political satire. While focusing on the domestic sphere, the narrative of Czechoslovak New Wave films “exposed the ambiguities, challenges, absurdities and disappointments of life in the present” (Frank, 2013:59–60). This alluded to life under communist rule and contributed to political debates on the socio-political context of Czechoslovakia. Therefore, the distinguishing feature of the Czechoslovak New Wave was the shared rejection of socialist realism and the “opposition to uniformity itself” (Owen, 2013:42). Švankmajer’s films of the Czechoslovak New Wave period are similarly positioned within this political context, as they all indicate opposition to classical conventions and socialist realism. Švankmajer’s films are ambiguous, with open-ended conclusions and continually grim depictions of reimagined domesticity. The films are dominated by images of death and decay, which represent the socio-political reality of the country and allude to the repressive nature of communist ideology as the source of ‘disease’. Subversive commentary is present throughout Švankmajer’s films regarding the negative impact of the alluded-to KSČ. The films also share scenes of spying, anxiety and control, which are representative of social relations and censorship.

*Picnic with Weissmann*, *The Garden* and *The Flat* were produced during the Prague Spring and are Švankmajer’s key films of the Czechoslovak New Wave, including *A Quiet Week in the House* which was released in the declining months of the reform process. Švankmajer’s short animated film *Picnic with Weissmann* opens with extreme close-up shots of a gramophone winding up as a tango-inspired melody begins to play, intercut with rhythmically timed close-up shots of garden weeds and shrubs. The editing of the shots creates a visual dance of shots in time with the music and opens on a playful tone. This is followed by a medium shot of a picnic setting, including a table, chairs, a wardrobe, a lounge, a carpet, a chessboard and the gramophone. There is a gradual build-up in shots as the film intercuts close-up shots of the surrounding wood with increasingly closer shots of the picturesque picnic area. The camera functions as a magnifier for the audience as it moves from one section of the picnic area to the next. The viewer is provided extreme close-up shots of the furniture, the animated playing cards depicting lyrical scenes, male pyjamas positioned as if relaxing on the lounge, the chessboard with the animated pieces playing and the wardrobe with pictures pinned on the outside of quaint country scenes filled with gentry-looking individuals. The camera playfully explores the area in detail for the viewer as it establishes a charming landscape scene typical of the traditional classical or romantic landscape paintings, which is heightened by its tactile focus.

The charming scene is suddenly disrupted by a close-up shot of a dustpan jumping down from the side of the wardrobe. The dustpan begins to mark a rectangular area in front of the wardrobe, which it then proceeds to dig. This occurs as the disc on the gramophone has reached the end, rolls away and a new disc rolls into place with the gramophone winding back up so the music can continue. The film returns to its cycle of intercut shots, moving from one area to the next of the animated furniture and its objects. With each sequence the animated furniture and objects become further lifelike but, contrary to their utilitarian functions, they act according to their own desires. Therefore, the male pyjamas helps himself to the prunes, the cards and chess pieces continue to play and the music continues in the background. The pleasant scene is briefly disrupted by the erotic humour of an old-fashioned football being inflated as the table drawers are pushed in and out, revealing a nude female photo inside the drawer. These scene are continuously intercut by the mysteriously digging dustpan and close-up shots of the pictures on the wardrobe. The table, chairs and the lounging pyjamas are depicted as enjoying an afternoon stroll in the surrounding woods and on returning, take turns posing for portrait and group photos by the old-fashioned camera, which has crawled from the side of the wardrobe. The picturesque scene is typical of Czechoslovak New Wave domesticity and the use of objects instead of characters is in spirit with the embracing of avant-garde techniques in film.

*Picnic with Weissmann* continues with a close-up of the wardrobe but its pictures of smiling individuals have been replaced by the posed photos of the lifelike furniture and objects. The human pictures are shown crumpled and torn on the floor. This is followed by a close-up of the wardrobe as the handle is finally lifted and the opening of its doors reveal a man's corpse, bound and gagged. The man's lifeless body rolls over, falling into the dustpan's grave as the dustpan begins to toss the soil over and bury the corpse. The pleasant domestic scene of the film is betrayed by the dire ending. The charming animated objects are now understood as revelling in the demise of their symbolic creator and master – a person just like the viewer. The curious dustpan is equally intimidating, for it spends the length of the film quietly plotting the demise of the man and, symbolically, the human race.

The use of domesticity and blending of lyricism, comedy and dark humour in *Picnic with Weissmann* is typical of Czechoslovak New Wave films. While Švankmajer was not yet an official member of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, he borrowed surrealist ideas and

symbolism as he explored the filmic repression of loss and destruction inherent to civilisation. Symbolism in *Picnic with Weissmann* is effectively used to portray a laconic dystopia, which is reflective of the Czechoslovak socio-political reality. The mischievous inanimate characters allude to the equally intimidating and destructive KSČ. The KSČ had gained mass support by manipulating the nation into their favour. The nation's trust in the KSČ was betrayed by the KSČ's violation of human rights and negative impact on the Czechoslovak economy and employment. The furniture and objects in *Picnic with Weissmann* symbolise the actions of the KSČ and the misplaced sense of trust by Czechoslovak society. The death of the man is symbolic of the nation whose freedom was bound, gagged and destroyed by communist ideology. The man is therefore also symbolic of artists who continually battled against the social realist model in their pursuit of unhindered expression in art.

Švankmajer's second Czechoslovak New Wave era film was *The Garden*, which is equally haunting with its filmic representation of self-inflicted imprisonment and passivity. The film depicts two friends driving into the country to spend time at the one friend's country home. The film opens with a series of short scenes of two friends, talking in the car, stopping occasionally along the way and wiping their glasses. As in *Picnic with Weissmann*, the film appears to operate according to expected narrative conventions. The film suddenly breaks from narrative convention when upon arrival the visiting friend is astounded by the fence of the property, which is made of living people, obediently standing shoulder to shoulder. The owner is oblivious to the peculiarity of his fence and rather displays a sense of steely pride. The human fence is revealed to be missing one position, which the visiting friend inevitably fills by the conclusion of the film. As with the other human fence members, the visiting friend relinquishes his freedom as he submits to his 'friend's' will and joins the fence. His symbolic actions highlight the theme of passive submission in Švankmajer's films. Czechoslovaks unwittingly welcomed communist powers into their country and voted the KSČ into power. While society had come to learn the error in this judgement, they were threatened into submission, as with the visitor in the film. *The Garden* subtly symbolises the repressive and morally broken atmosphere of Czechoslovakia under communism, a theme that is repeated in *A Quiet Week in the House*.

*A Quiet Week in the House* is a poignant example of the relationship of surrealism and film and its ability to blur perceptions of reality and imagination. The film's depiction of the protagonist's

visions as alternate worlds that lie on the other side of each of the doors, echoes the moment before sleeping where conscious and unconscious reality merge into a moment of suspended surreality. The film opens with a softly howling background sound that is reminiscent of an air raid warning. The film immediately establishes the feeling of anxiety in the viewer. This is supported in the opening shot of the black and white film of a camouflaged man lying shielded in a ditch alongside the road. The man waits until a car has driven past before hastily crossing the road and running across a field. A plane can be heard flying overhead alongside the sound of the man's anxious breathing as he runs. The opening of the film is atypical of Švankmajer, with its conventional narrative and sequence of actions that heighten the experience of the protagonist. The man eventually enters a dark and foreboding building with the *mise-en-scène* depicting its dilapidated state. The building interiors are old and cracked with peeling walls and doors. The film introduces imagery of death and decay, which define Švankmajer's films, and the pessimism symbolises Švankmajer's beliefs regarding the dire impact of ideology.

*A Quiet Week in the House* continues with the man's spying of the alternate rooms behind the door. The visions from the other side of the door are contrastingly filmed in colour without sound. A series of unconventional sequences occurs, ending as the man pulls away from the door and returns to the black and white interiors of the building. Background sound returns as he swivels round, scratching days off a calendar, setting his alarm and then laying down to sleep. Six days presumably pass with six visions from behind the door. The first is of a tin of sweets that opens up, revealing screws (figure 12); the second is of a tongue that wriggles out from a wall and down to dirty plates, which it proceeds to lick clean before it is then processed through a meat grinder into shredded pieces of text (figure 13). The third vision depicts a wind-up toy bird moving against restraints to reach a bowl of seeds, only to be crushed into pieces by falling clay (figure 14). The fourth vision is an unsettling scene of pigeons escaping from a table drawer and flying upwards out of shot as feathers fall down in their place. These images are cut by a shot of the gathered, lifeless and de-feathered birds hanging on a wall with their feathers now covering the chair, which flutters about the room before crashing to the ground (figure 15). The fifth vision is of a coat hanging on a wall with a hosepipe creeping out and slithering into a nearby vase. The hosepipe sucks the vase dry, causing the flowers to wither and eventually self-combust. The hosepipe slithers back into the coat where it proceeds to expel the water, as if urinating, onto the ground (figure 16). The final vision is equally unsettling and grotesque as a wire breaks into a

cupboard, stitching its way through pigs' trotters (figure 17) as a set of gnashing dentures swing from side to side.



Figure 12: *A Quiet Week in the House* — vision one



Figure 13: *A Quiet Week in the House* — vision two



Figure 14: *A Quiet Week in the House* — vision three



Figure 15: *A Quiet Week in the House* — vision four



Figure 16: *A Quiet Week in the House* — vision five



Figure 17: *A Quiet Week in the House* — vision six

Each vision appears to strain the spying man who hesitates each night before turning the lights out. The grim visions all suggest betrayal, destruction and violence. They suggestively represent the depressing socio-political context of Czechoslovak life. The first vision is a reminder of the nation's misguided trust and the KSČ's betrayal, with the sweets revealed to be nails and therefore mere façade. It is a symbolic reminder that appearances can be deceiving, with the KSČ's promise of a socialist utopia being the country's greatest deception. The tongue is also symbolic of the KSČ who greedily seized Czechoslovak control and resources at the nation's expense. The mincing of the tongue into shredded pieces of text is a subtle jab at the KSČ's broken promises to Czechoslovak citizens and the falsity of socialist propaganda and socialist art. The vision of the wind-up toy bird is another depressing allusion to Czechoslovak life. The toy bird symbolises the Czechoslovak individual desperately trying to survive against the restraints of communist ideology. When the toy bird does break free, it is destroyed by the falling clay, which is symbolic of the numerous Czechoslovak individuals who were persecuted for opposing political beliefs during communist rule and initiated into passive silence.

The final three visions in *A Quiet Week in the House* are dystopian depictions of the desolate and unsettling socio-political experiences of everyday Czechoslovakia. The vision of the doomed pigeons and chair offers no relief or signs of hope with its dominating theme of death. The scene continues with the theme of the toy bird vision and symbolises the discouraging consequences of resistance. This is reinforced in the wire and pig trotters vision with the pig trotters bound and imprisoned by the wire. It creates an unsettling atmosphere of claustrophobia and entrapment and captures the all-consuming atmosphere of communist extremism. The hosepipe and vase vision is the bleakest, with its continued theme of betrayal and death. The hosepipe once again is representative of the KSČ who had seized control of all aspects of Czechoslovak life. It is also representative of socialist realism and the hosepipe symbolises the combined impact of these forces as literally sucking the country dry of its former, vibrant culture and history. The adoption of socialism and socialist realism in the arts left the country barren, like the flowers. The self-combusting flowers symbolise the aftermath of the negative impact of communism and this is intercut with the shot of the hosepipe expelling the water, alluding to the wasteful suffering of the nation. Therefore, the objects in the film function as surrealist objects because of their associative symbolism that is analogous of daily reality.

In conclusion to the pessimistic visions of *A Quiet Week in the House*, the spy packs his belongings and taking the detonating roll of wire, he hurriedly exits the building and runs back into the field with dogs that can be heard barking in the background as the film closes. The conclusion of the film is left open-ended and its ambiguous visions open for interpretation. It is unclear whether the spying man alludes to Prague Spring reformists, who desired greater freedom, and human rights activists, or whether he acts as a communist enforcer. Perhaps the depressing scenes are too much to bare and he is compelled to destroy the building as an act of defiance against the forces that have imposed the bleak scenes of repression. Or the man could represent the censor who fears the display of Czechoslovak reality, which had been repressed from view through socialist realism but highlighted by the cultural renaissance of the Prague Spring. If the man signifies the censor, his actions symbolise the censorship, banning and destruction of such images from public viewing. Considering Švankmajer's anti-communist position and the character's concern to remain anonymous and in camouflage, one can assume that the character suggests the former and symbolises defiance to repressive confines of ideology.

In hindsight, the spy in *A Quiet Week in the House* is representative of Toman and the new film studio policies that sought to end experimentation and political subversion in film.

*The Flat* continues the commentary on defiance with its subtle subversive commentary. The film subverts genre conventions with its mix of comedy, realism and drama. It opens with dramatic circus-inspired music and a man entering the frame as he rolls into a room with the door locking behind him. Close-up shots of the character reveal him to be bewildered and lost in his surroundings. Intercut shots of the ground reveal chalked arrows, which he proceeds to follow as the camera mimics his movement with unsteady point-of-view shots. The mise-en-scène is dark and cramped with worn basic living conditions, including a bed, a table and chair, a wash area and a wall on which two pictures hang. As with *Picnic with Weissmann*, the film focuses in turn on the different areas of the mise-en-scène with detailed sequences of the character's interactions with the animated furniture and objects. The film turns into a comedy of errors, which is reminiscent of the surrealist-favoured Charlie Chaplin movies. The man goes to the wash area to see his reflection in the mirror, only to be faced by a reflection of the back of his head. He then attempts to light a heater with a lit match, only for it to be extinguished by a gushing of water where there should have been gas.

*The Flat* continues with comedic scenes of the man's intentions constantly thwarted by the independent animated objects and furniture. When he tries to eat his soup, the spoon becomes riddled with holes, making his efforts futile. The fork gives way against the surface of the sausages and he is unable to eat any of his food. When a hole appears in the wall as if providing a window to the outside, a boxer's glove protrudes from a mechanical device, punching the man squarely in the face. Scenes of thwarted actions are repeated throughout the film with increasing speed and the building tempo of the soundtrack. This echoes Robinson's notion of Švankmajer's surreality as depicting the heightened awareness of a repressive, habitual reality (2007:107). Towards the end of the film there is a shot of the frustrated and dismayed character as he looks around the room, intercut with shots of the different areas where he has suffered at the expense of the furniture and objects. The character is depicted as trapped in a room destined to destroy him and it is symbolic of the sense of the despair experienced by the Czechoslovak individual suffering under the control of ideological extremism. This realisation creates a dynamic shift as the humour of the film is replaced by a sense of horror.

Throughout *The Flat* the camera provides the audience with point-of-view shots, causing the audience to identify with the doomed protagonist. It is with a shared sense of hope and defiance that the film ends, with the character engraving his name into the wall alongside Breton, Dalí, Benjamin Péret and Švankmajer and his wife. These artists are representative of the anti-communist movement as well as dissidents within the arts who fought for greater ideological freedom. They are symbols of everything the KSČ sought to repress, censor and ban, and the film's identification with these individuals is a defiant stand against communism and symbolic of the mass movement towards radical change. The protagonist in *The Flat* may be seen as a member of Czechoslovak society who are forced to confront their irrational and repressive socio-political reality under KSČ rule. The protagonist is forced to either accept his entrapment within the confounding walls of his flat – communism – or take a stand and join in the battle for freedom. This sentiment is echoed in a public speech by Švankmajer in 1990, stating,

[e]ach person is one day faced with a dilemma: to live his life in conformity with the vague promise of an institutional 'happiness', or else to rebel and to take a path in the opposite direction from civilisation, and to do so without taking the consequences into account (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:444).

Therefore, the message or plea of Švankmajer's film appears to be a call for action to break away from the repressive conformity of the ideological prison of communism. It is symbolic of Švankmajer's cupboard motif and the resurfacing of unconscious fears and desires to bring about radical change.

Švankmajer's films produced during the sixties, especially those during the Prague Spring, share the spirit of experimentation and opposition of the Czechoslovak New Wave. These films gained from reforms through state-funding, which provided an environment for experimentation without "pressures of the marketplace" (Owen, 2013:12). This resulted in significant advancements for Czechoslovak film with the adoption of avant-garde aesthetics despite the social realist model. Czechoslovak New Wave films gained appraisal for their advances in experimental filmmaking as well as their reactionary stance of opposition to the conventions of the previous decade (Owen, 2013:15). The miraculous nature of the Czechoslovak New Wave, especially of its status as 'oppositional', is controversial. The reorganising of film studios and state funding presented new complications with Owen, arguing that "Czechoslovak filmmakers were at the mercy of political concerns" (2013:12). Artistic intentions of opposition within the collective activity of the

Czechoslovak New Wave was undermined by it being “implicated in the system from which it ostensibly stood apart” (Owen, 2013:12). This creates an uneasy indirect complicit relationship with the films “situated within the confines of what was permitted” (Bergant, cited in Owen, 2013:12). Menzel’s earlier comments on the Czechoslovak New Wave echo this sentiment, with his admittance that ideological ease did not equate total freedom, and this stemmed from the power granted to state censors due to state funding. This is evident in the experiences of Švankmajer during the Prague Spring with the continual attacks by censors who demanded changes to many of his films. In reflection, this censorship battle heightens the dramatic ambiguous ending of *A Quiet Week in the House*, with the bomb symbolising the restrictions and forced changes to Švankmajer’s films at the demand of censors. Furthermore, it symbolically marks the end of the Prague Spring and the return to ideological closure in Czechoslovakia under the rule of Husák.

### 5.2 Švankmajer’s surrealist films of the normalisation period

Husák became the ‘humane face’ of Stalinism, but his ‘humanity’ was tainted by his use of social discrimination and intimidation as means of control during the normalisation period. In August of 1969 he issued *A Legal Measure of Maintaining Public Peace and Order*, which legalised “arbitrary police brutality” (Bažant et al., 2010:387). This allowed for the imprisonment of communist opponents without a court order, resulting in thousands of arrests (Bažant et al., 2010:387). Added to this fear of unlawful arrest were threats of unemployment, tightened censorship over artists, banning of public displays of artwork not aligned with communist ideology and refusal of admission to higher education institutions (Bažant et al., 2010:388). This politically intense and threatening atmosphere of the normalisation period is repeatedly alluded to in several of Švankmajer’s films produced between 1970 and 1988 with their commentary on the destructive nature of civilisation. *The Ossuary* (Kostnice, 1970); *Jabberwocky*; *Leonardo’s Diary* (*Leonardův deník*, 1972); *The Fall of the House of Usher*; *Dimensions of Dialogue*; *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope* and *Virile Games* are notable films from the normalisation period with their shared style of a bleak, discouraging, diseased and violent reality. Švankmajer’s adaption of Poe’s same-titled novel, *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope* (1983), is quintessential of the period with its dark, threatening and suffocating atmosphere. Filmed in black and white, the camera positions the audience with the victim of the film as he makes his way through an underground warren of torture.

*The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope* opens in darkness with the unsettling sound of mechanical devices that are later revealed to be torture devices. A dark cloaked man offers a glimpse of light with his lit match before blowing it out. The film returns to darkness as a restrained man in minimal clothing and bare feet is led down a dark, damp and jagged tunnel. A door is opened and the man is heard screaming as he falls into darkness. The opening establishes a foreboding and threatening atmosphere that is evocative of the socio-political period. The film continues with the man fastened down on a table as the camera pans the cramped, darkly lit walled room. A skeletal image representing death is painted on the opposite wall and the sound of clinking machinery is heard. The restrained man pulls at his restraints and nearby levers, which triggers the blade to start swinging down from the skeleton's mouth towards the man. The intensity of the scene is heightened with intercut close-ups as the blade swings faster and closer. The man's heavy and anxious breathing increases as he twists and convulses in an extreme close-up, trying to avoid certain death. The man narrowly misses death as he stumbles into the next room, only to be faced with continued torture. This cycle of torture is symbolic of the continued political persecution in Czechoslovakia.

*The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope* continues with point-of-view shots, following the man through roughly lined and dark tunnels. It evokes tactile sensations as the viewer physically feels the rough nature of the environment and heightens the sense of panic and fear by placing the viewer into the world of the film. The film effectively evokes the panic and fear of the nation, who are symbolised by the man. The torture and machinery allude to the KSČ and their ideological systems that resulted in the gross human rights violations of Czechoslovaks. The audience is forced to identify with the tortured man and through evocative editing is placed into the same bleak and fearful atmosphere of Czechoslovak reality. The filmic representation of the torture warren also parallels the geography of Prague, especially the district of Old Town with its warren of side streets that double back onto the square. The geographical similarities between the torture warren and the former Czechoslovakia heighten the relationship between daily reality and the film. This echoes Breton's earlier remarks: "that 'everything above is like everything below' and everything inside is like everything outside. The world thereupon seems to be like a cryptogram" (1972:303).

The protagonist finally escapes the underground warren of torture by climbing through a narrow hole into the light. As the camera and the man focus on the ground, the camera tilts slightly up, extending the vision and revealing sandalled feet belonging to a hooded, dark-robed man. The hooded man reaches out towards the camera, offering his hands and inevitable torture. Despite the film's title, Švankmajer offers no hope of escape for the man, who will inevitably be bound and led back underground. This is reflective of the course of events in Czechoslovakia with the end of WWII and the Prague Spring, both followed by renewed repression and persecution by their KSČ wardens. It is a grim depiction of Czechoslovak history and it forces the viewer to confront the depressing and repressive socio-political reality of the country. It is also indicative of Švankmajer's beliefs regarding the destructive nature of civilisation, which continues to espouse its flawed codes and conventions from generation to generation. Therefore, the 'hope' in the title of the film can only be achieved through the viewers, specifically the Czechoslovak viewers of the time, through active opposition to their situation as they reimagine transformative possibilities. The evocation of analogical thought processes in the film begins the objective, as the Czechoslovak viewer is forced to confront a heightened awareness of the socio-political reality.

The subversive symbolism of communism and evocative depictions of torture in Švankmajer's *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope* represent his personal objections to the KSČ, and this angered censors. The depiction of torture in the film is also never contextualised with the man's crime, if any at all, left unexplained. This parallels *The Flat* with the protagonist's entrapment in the flat not contextualised. The man's unwarranted torture echoes the punitive measures of the KSČ, which required no official justification, while also alluding to the instinctual nature of civilisation with regard to destruction. The normalisation period was defined by discriminatory measures aimed to curb active opposition. The success of such measures is evident in statistics, which show a significant number of menial jobs during normalisation occupied by senior businessmen and higher degree-holding citizens. These individuals were fired or unable to attain skilled work because of their opposing political beliefs to communism, therefore job security or lack thereof was a common tool of intimidation and submission (Bažant et al., 2010:388).

Sport was another KSČ tactic of mass submission during the normalisation period. This is depicted in Švankmajer's short film *Virile Games*, which criticises the nation's "spirit of

submission” (Schmitt, 2012(b):128). The film consists of a series of violently animated football games juxtaposed with cheering crowd scenes and a man watching from his home. The film attacks the use of sport for nationalistic ends, with its collective nature creating a mindless state. The Soviet Union used the success of its Cominform members during the 1952 Olympic Games for state-sponsored propaganda. *Virile Games* hints at the power of sport for passively creating support for the communist nation. It suggests that national unity of opposition to the ruling party is easily wavered by mob rationale as crowds consume their beer and cheer on their national teams. The film suggests that the show of national support is indirectly transformed into a false show of support for the KSČ. In *Virile Games* the animated footballers continually sustain head injuries that reveal brainless skulls. The crowd cheer on in its masses while the viewer at home consumes his beer and biscuits. Among the plate of biscuits is one in the shape of a star with red jam in the middle, symbolic of the communist red star. This creates an association between the mindless state of the sport as a form of nationalistic consumption that creates a false bravado for communist powers and results in the submission of the nation. Therefore, the film is suggestive of society as rendered unfixed by “sport, television and alcohol into submitting without protest to the mediocrity of its fate” (Schmitt, 2012(b):188). The mindless state of the characters is also symbolic of the mindlessness created by conventional ideology that represses unconscious reality and imagination.

Reality for Czechoslovaks during the normalisation period was divided into “two worlds with incompatible norms of behaviour” (Bažant et al., 2010:398). These two realities were the inner disdain for the KSČ and its official ideology and a fear that resulted in the external reality of submission. Švankmajer sought to merge these two realities in his films to reflect the irrationality of the socio-political landscape. The only available options for Czechoslovaks were silence, resistance or escape. The two main options of escape were emigration or retreating to the countryside. The move to the countryside was a financially viable option for the majority of Czechoslovaks and it offered a cathartic break from the politically claustrophobic city centres controlled by the police and communist spies. Švankmajer and his wife bought a building in the Šumava region in the 1980s, which they renovated on weekends. The rural building soon took the shape of a living surrealist exhibition as the two began to fill it with their *Kunstkammer*-inspired assemblages (Schmitt, 2012(b):170–171). With Švankmajer’s work as a filmmaker taking a backseat to censorship battles, the building offered him an escape from the political restraints of

the city and allowed freedom of artistic expression. Such retreats were only superficial in their escapism of communist oppression, which is highlighted in Švankmajer's earlier films *The Garden* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

*The Garden*, which, as discussed earlier, depicts two friends who travel to the countryside so that one can show the other his home, is a reminder that even in the countryside one is still trapped by one's ideological prison. The retreat to the countryside may provide a brief relief, but the human fence, like the brainless players and supporters of *Virile Games*, is symbolic of the wider and distressing reality of the nation's voluntary and involuntary submission and the repressive nature of instinctual repression on the unconscious. With communist ideology ruling the lives of the nation, it is appropriate to suggest that the film negatively alludes to the impact of the KSČ and Soviet-driven communism. *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which depicts a decrepit stately manor estate, was released during the shift to the countryside and the film continues with bleak scenes of domesticity. The film is an adaptation of Poe's same-titled short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), which is narrated by the protagonist who has rushed to the side of an ill-stricken acquaintance. Upon arrival, the protagonist describes the dire appearances of the estate with its moulding, dilapidating and fractured exteriors and equally dishevelled interiors.

The protagonist's friend in Poe's novel is obsessively paranoid and anxious, believing the house to be the source of the family's misfortune and health problems. His bedridden sister dies soon after the protagonist's arrival and the two friends are forced to bury her in the buildings catacombs. The friends, however, are haunted by the house, believing they can hear her knocking from the inside of her coffin. The story continues to build tension, with the grief-stricken friend becoming increasingly anxious, combined with the unexplainable noises of the house. Suddenly the sister emerges to enact revenge on her brother for burying her alive. Disturbed by events, the narrator flees the scene as the house finally caves in from all of its fractures and collapses. The gothic novel is typical of its genre with its bleak motifs, grim imagery and themes of horror and mystery. The house is the symbolic root of the character's neuroses with his unconscious fears acted upon by conscious reality through the haunting characteristic of the house. This forms the point of adaptation for Švankmajer's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which removes people from its story and replaces them with objects that take on lifelike qualities through animation and evocative editing to depict a heightened awareness of the Czechoslovak socio-political reality.

The camera fulfils the role of narrator with its point-of-view shots placing the viewer into the world of the film. The film opens with a series of shots exploring the muddy, tumbled and harsh-looking garden with equally intimidating exteriors of the fractured façade of the building as it reimagines the descriptions of the novel. Scenes of the interior of the building suggest it has been abandoned; the rooms are old, dusty and in disrepair.

The building in *The Fall of the House of Usher* is the haunting figure of the film that looms over the lone chair. The lone chair suggests Poe's ill-ridden character whom the narrator has rushed to visit and Švankmajer's film establishes the viewer as Poe's protagonist through the point-of-view shots leading inside. The chair is similarly haunted by unexplainable circumstances with scenes of animated nails, falling bricks and a ravaging storm that blows inside the open window. The building becomes an omnipresent figure and the source of disease, as in Poe's novel. The film ends with equally destructive and depressive scenes as the chair breaks down and furniture tries to flee the violently shaking building. Furniture leaps through windows only to drown in the surrounding mud and other items escape through the door only to fall and break apart. The film is depressingly tense and hauntingly exhaustive. As with Švankmajer's other films of the normalisation period, *The Fall of the House of Usher* is an imaginative interpretation of the normalisation period and the individual's emotional experiences acted upon by the physical reality of the film. The derelict building is symbolic of the state of affairs in Czechoslovakia and its dire effect on the nation, represented by the chair and fleeing items of furniture. The bleak conclusion is evocative of the claustrophobic and repressive nature of communist ideology under the reign of Husák. The time of release of the film also allows one to interpret a commentary on the hopelessness of retreating to the countryside, because it is impossible to escape the ever-present repressive ideology of the time. It is also indicative of Švankmajer's claims that communism was a symptom of the destructive nature of civilisation and therefore offers a universal commentary on the repressive nature of ideology.

Czechoslovak artists, including writers, filmmakers and painters, actively opposed Husák's communist series of reforms through charters, proclamations and lectures. They also expressed criticism through their art and sought out a connection with audiences through the shared sense of loss, confusion and frustration at their institutionalised lives. Censorship reforms made it impossible to achieve this freedom of expression in officially approved art or media, with the

poet Ripellino commenting, “[t]oday more cellulose is turned into denunciations” (Bažant et al., 2010:401). Ripellino’s thoughts reflect on the misuse of the media and arts for propaganda. American film director and animator Gene Deitch lived in Prague during the late 1950s. In Deitch’s private recollections he comments, “[o]f course there was complete censorship of the press, radio and television ... Communists seemed to believe there was only one side” (cited in Bažant et al., 2010:457). Švankmajer suffered from the one-sided approach of communist censors, with many of his films subjected to criticism. Censorship verged on the side of paranoia, as censors feared any dissident messages, whether intentional or indirectly interpretive. Švankmajer’s *Leonardo’ Diary* provides one example of overly sensitive censors.

*Leonardo’s Diary* consists of a series of animated images from Leonardo Da Vinci’s notebooks, juxtaposed with modern-day images of destruction, war and sporting events. The association of the film between modern-day destruction and the renaissance stems from Švankmajer’s ideas on the renaissance period as something both great and destructive and indicative of his view on the destructive nature of civilisation. The greatness of the renaissance was in its explosion of creative and experimental progress, but for Švankmajer, this was also negative: the end of the old world and the birth of a new order marked by war and the repression of the unconscious due to the rise of a scientific technological civilisation (Schmitt, 2012(b):128). Švankmajer verbalised these concerns during an exhibition in 1990, stating:

Perhaps the only thing we can do is fight about when it was that our civilisation started to go downhill. I think ... the Renaissance to be that moment ... From that turning-point the spiritual world of the Gothic was progressively replaced by the ideology of consumption (cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012:444).

Švankmajer’s ideas on the destructive nature of civilisation is alluded to in the film when the sketched female face is animated to appear as if she were turning her face towards and into the juxtaposed images of modernity. This association results in playful subversive meanings of civilised society.

The inclusion of sporting images in *Leonardo’s Diary*, which were originally of an international hockey game between Slovakia and Russia, caused censors to believe the film was an attack of socialism, specifically ‘Mother Russia’. The depicted hockey game between Slovakia and Russia resulted in a win for Slovakia and a symbolic loss for Russia with regard to propaganda

objectives. The game was a symbolic defeat for those in Czechoslovakia and censors believed the film was attempting to capture this moment of mass dissidence. Censors were also concerned that the film associated Russia and socialism as the destructive force alluded to in the film. Such a reading or assumption of communism being a destructive force would not be unfair, with its negative impact evident in Czechoslovakia. Da Vinci's sketches are transformed into sarcastic animations by Švankmajer, but he admitted that the juxtaposition of images was innocently improvised in the editing phase (Schmitt, 2012(b):128). However, the interpretive readings by censors of the film promoting the defeat of Russia and alluding to communism as a negative force resulted in Švankmajer being forced to make several changes before his film could be released. Švankmajer was only able to release the film after the Velvet Revolution, when he was content that the film could be viewed as his uncensored version. This alludes to a possible exaggeration by Švankmajer on the 'accidental' subversive commentary of the film, with the interpreted narrative closely reflecting his personal preoccupations and offering a heightened awareness of civilisation in the twentieth century. It would not be unfair to suggest that Švankmajer's 'accidental' subversion would have amused him in regard to his unconscious subversion of the film's narrative, as a result of his conscious editing of the film.

During Husák's reign, Švankmajer made his short film *The Ossuary*, filmed in the Baroque chapel decorated entirely with human bones in Sedlec, a suburb of Kutná Hora (Schmitt, 2012(a): 93). *The Ossuary* was released during the initial political changes of the normalisation period and therefore was not hindered by the tightening film restrictions. The location of the film of the Ossuary also helped Švankmajer to appease censors, as the documentary style footage enabled the film to be recognised as a poetic documentary of this national landmark. The experimental and documentary style of the film continued the spirit of Czechoslovak New Wave experimentation with generic hybridity. The content of *The Ossuary* distances itself from the domesticity of Czechoslovak New Wave films, as it explores the unsettling but awe-inspiring skeletal framed church. The mise-en-scène of the film is reflective of the sombre and barren socio-political and cultural landscape after the fall of the Prague Spring and persecuted death toll. The documentary style of filmmaking and the realism are established in the opening scenes of the film as the camera follows a man who cycles towards the church. The editing becomes more jagged with elliptical cuts and contrasting compositions that break documentary standards of realism and signal the transition towards a heightened experience of reality. This is continued

once inside the church, where the observer role of the camera is broken by the intercutting of extreme close-up shots of the skeletons as the camera plays with the shapes and patterns of the bones. This is accompanied by a sung poem about a bird.

The sung poem in *The Ossuary* describes a caged bird unable to fly away and the editing of extreme close-up shots of the bones creates a pattern similar to prison- or cage-like bars, with the viewer interpolated into the prison-like imagery (figure 18; figure 19; figure 20). The stylistic and aesthetic characteristics of the film echo dadaist shock tactics as well as the adoption of surrealism of dream analysis to evoke analogical thought processes on the association of objects and patterns. The imagery of the film echoes the theme of the song of imprisonment and symbolises the ideological prison of Czechoslovakia. The imagined presence of the bird in the church frames the church as the bird's morbid cage of imprisonment. The morbid, ossified and skeletal mise-en-scène of the church suggests an atmosphere of death and doom, which captures the socio-political atmosphere of normalisation. Censors banned the film, arguing it evoked “the atmosphere following the Soviet occupation of 1968” (Schmitt, 2012(a):93). The censors' interpretations revealed the awareness of those in power of the destructive impact on Czechoslovakia and were testament to the filmic representation of surreality as having a strong affinity with the socio-political reality of the period. The KSČ and the foreign communist powers were unwilling to relinquish power and censorship became a tool for preventing any criticism. The media and the arts were reduced to propaganda for controlling public opinion. This extended to pre-recorded announcements at the start of scheduled television screenings explaining the entire content to be viewed, “just in case you might miss the point” (Deitch, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:458). Some films were chosen precisely for their dissident themes and subversive symbolism as examples for censors of content that should be banned.



Figure 18: *The Ossuary*

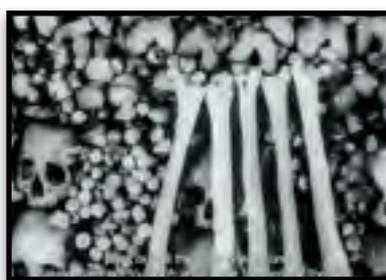


Figure 19: *The Ossuary*



Figure 20: *The Ossuary*

Švankmajer's difficulties with censorship and filmmaking were worsened by the production of *Dimensions of Dialogue*. The film is a prime example of state-managed censorship of ideology with its screening of the film for the Central Committee of the KSČ, organised to provide censors with a template of content, subject and imagery that was not allowed to be portrayed in film (Schmitt, 2012(b):176). The film comprises of three acts: *dialog věcný* ('material dialogue'), *dialog vášnivý* ('passionate dialogue') and *dialog vyčerpávající* ('exhaustive dialogue'). The individual acts of the film are each depressingly exhaustive with their cyclic acts of utter wanton and irrational destruction. By the end of the film one feels equally exhausted as the over-heated clay heads. In 'material dialogue', the camera follows the actions of three figurines filmed in close-up and from a side profile. The three figurines take turns meeting one another before consuming the other in a violent attack. The film continues this narrative of encounters or 'dialogues', with each figurine having an opportunity to violently meet the other and considerably alter the other's appearances for the worse.

The process of destruction is initiated between the food and metal figurines with expected outcomes as the food products are shredded, sliced and grounded by the knives, scissors and graters of the metal figurine. Each encounter becomes increasingly violent and unconventional as the figurine made of paper, plastic and wood, squashes metal plates with a book. The figurines eventually wear each other down to their basic matter until they spew out a human clay figurine, which repeatedly spews out more until fading to black. The repetitive destructive nature of the encounter is tiring and it is indicative of Švankmajer's beliefs regarding the destructive effect of civilised society and alludes to hypocrisy in the espousing of destructive civilised conventions through the generations. The metal figurine initiates the attacks and this is symbolic of the industrial age that followed the renaissance with its weapons and machinery of war, which Švankmajer identified as repression of unconscious activity because of technological civilisation (Schmitt, 2012(b):128). The theme of civilised or manmade destruction is continued in 'passionate discourse' with its depicted interaction between the naked male and female moulded clay figurines, which are animated into a passionate embrace and parting to reveal a remaining, small, misshaped and unclaimed mound of clay. The mound of clay desperately tries to gain its makers' love and attention, but is thrown between the two adult clay figurines. Eventually, the two figurines destroy the innocent mould of clay and violently wear down each other in the process.

The 'passionate discourse' of *Dimensions of Dialogue* extends on Švankmajer's passionate reflection on the destructive nature of civilised society. The adult figurines represent the authority figures of the scene and symbolise the authoritative figures of society. These authority figures are portrayed as reckless and dispassionate in their actions towards the small clay figurine, which stands in for society. Society in the technological civilised age and especially in communist Czechoslovakia was a casualty of ideological repression. This commentary is continued in the final act, 'exhaustive dialogue'. The two clay heads face each other and proceed to interact according to conventional expectations, toothpaste is squeezed onto a toothbrush, butter is spread on bread, a pencil is sharpened and shoelaces are woven and tied into a shoe. These encounters are rendered impractical and irrational, as unexpected items are forced together; a toothbrush is sharpened, toothpaste is squeezed onto spread butter and a shoelace ties around a pencil. The violent and unconventional interactions echo 'material dialogue' as the film comes full circle. 'Exhaustive dialogue' reflects on the ideological 'dialogue' that influences socio-political society. The irrational bending of convention in the scene through its irrational and unconventional encounters is reflective of the irrational – extremism – of communist ideology during the normalisation period.

The 'exhaustive dialogue' title of *Dimensions of Dialogue* quintessentially captures the main emotion evoked by the film and in turn evokes the experience of Czechoslovak reality for the viewer. The film thus interpolates the viewer into the depressing world of communist extremism, but offers no hope of resolution. Instead, the breathless and exhausted clay heads and the similarly evoked emotion of the viewer are Švankmajer's confrontational plea for society to resist repressive ideology. The critical, aggressive and evocative style of the film is a significant political act of defiance and represented everything that Husák and the KSČ desperately sought to repress. Therefore, it is unsurprising that *Dimensions of Dialogue* became an example of undesirable subject matter during normalisation. While the film was shelved, Švankmajer was allowed to continue filmmaking, but after the release of *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope*, he experienced further difficulties.

### 5.3 Švankmajer's surrealist films in the wake of revolution, democracy and consumerism

After four decades of ideological repression, Czechoslovakia's freedom was symbolised by Havel, "dissident, writer, philosopher, author of absurdist plays, and a liberal politician" (Bažant et al., 2010:464). Havel represented everything the KSČ and Soviet powers had tried to suppress and destroy. Havel's rise to presidency in the new Czechoslovakia was testament to the nation's endurance. During this triumphant period, Švankmajer released a flurry of short films as he returned to filmmaking. The year was marked by joyous celebration, especially in the media and arts, with the demise of socialist realism as official ideology and the reclaiming of artistic freedom. Švankmajer's *Meat Love* (*Zamilované maso*, 1988); *Darkness-Light-Darkness*; *Flora*; and *Self-Portrait* (1989) are all examples of the unrestrained freedom in filmmaking. *Meat Love* and *Self-Portrait* share a playful and witty style that revels in artistic freedom and echoes the socio-political atmosphere of the Velvet Revolution. In contrast, *Flora* is depressingly pessimistic in regard to its portrayal of civilisation. The vegetable figurine lies restrained in bed as it desperately pulls against its restraints while longingly staring at the nearby glass of water. Unable to reach the glass of water, the figurine shrivels and rots away as the film fades to black. The short animated film symbolises civilisation, restrained by repressive instincts that render one unable to break free and reach for freedom — symbolised by the glass of water — in urgent need of renewal. *Flora* and its pessimistic portrayal of civilisation would never have been allowed during the KSČ's rule. The film signals the renewed freedom of expression within the Czechoslovak arts and culture at the decline of communism.

After fifty years of external control between German and Soviet oppressors, Czechoslovakia finally declared independence. This freedom came with its own obstacles, including internal political struggles, the sudden rise of consumerism and a cultural shift. The Velvet Divorce swiftly followed the revolution, with Czechoslovakia dividing into the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. Havel carried out two successful terms of presidency, receiving awards and honorary titles for his role in Czech's period of peaceful transition. In 2003, Havel was replaced by long-standing opponent Václav Klaus. The rise of capitalism came with the reprivatisation of enterprises that had been seized by the previous communist state. Foreign investors were attracted by the country's major enterprises while small-scale privatisation businesses were primarily auctioned to Czech citizens (Bažant et al., 2010:468). This was followed by voucher

capitalism, with citizens able to buy vouchers for purchasing shares in state-owned companies. A gangster capitalism emerged, with the voucher system becoming vulnerable to corruption at a great cost to ordinary Czech citizens (Bažant et al., 2010:468–469).

After forty years of a highly regulated economy and consumerist culture, there was the sudden exposure to the omnipresent hand of capitalism with the introduction of capitalist markets and a rising consumerist culture. In Owen’s view, “the arrival of free-market liberal democracy thus presented the most serious threat of all” (2013:36). The new socio-political dilemma of greed, consumerism and materiality would replace communist ideological repression as the primary concern of the renamed Czech Surrealist Group. Consumer capitalism was targeted for its detrimental impact on production and repressive control of mass wants, needs and desires. The effect of capitalism is evidenced in the transformation of Wenceslas Square. As the former symbolic location for mass demonstration, Wenceslas Square is now a First World shopping haven with international luxury designer brands, bespoke boutiques, global commercial brands and fast food chains lining the avenue and its side streets (figure 21; figure 22; figure 23). The all-consuming nature of consumer capitalism is alluded to in Švankmajer’s *Little Otík* with its ever-ravenous animated root baby.



Figure 21: Wenceslas Square



Figure 22: Shops lining Wenceslas Square



Figure 23: Shops lining Wenceslas Square

The demise of the KSCĚ was greatly received by the arts community, who were free to develop, create and explore their various fields without the imposition of socialist realism. The removal of the communist band aid, however, did reveal the painful loss of state subsidiaries. This was accompanied by a changing global audience post WWII, from which Czechoslovakia had been significantly sheltered during their communist stalemate. There was also a shift in the local target audience who no longer relied on the work of unofficial culture centres because media outlets were free to objectively broadcast news (Bažant et al., 2010:470). Despite these obstacles,

funding was possible and the combined freedom of expression allowed artists to officially publish many works previously banned during communism. This is evident with Švankmajer's release of *Food*, which gained greater significance with the post-communist and emerging consumerist culture. The film is divided into three acts, each dealing with man's need to consume all that surrounds him to the point of his own destruction. The film was conceived during Švankmajer's break from filmmaking, but its release in the wake of consumerist culture in Czech is equally poignant. The film is symbolic of strained social relations of consumerist culture, with the characters only interacting when instigated by greed, gluttony and a consumptive desire.

The end of communism created shifts in local target audiences and there was international academic intrigue that allowed for greater exhibition and interest. The global celebratory mood at the decline of communism resulted in the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC) proposing a short animated feature to be made by Švankmajer that would capture recent political events. Švankmajer was initially hesitant of the BBC's proposal. He believed the jovial mood of the 1990s was fleeting because of larger and deeper issues that needed to be radically addressed within Czech society (Schmitt, 2012(c):325). He was also opposed to the idea of a 'thesis' film because of its vulnerability to dogmatism, stating "I have always sought to avoid my creations being placed in the service of any kind of ideology" (cited in Schmitt, 2012(c):328). The temptation to create his own short agitprop film in the style of Soviet cinema persuaded the filmmaker otherwise, and *The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia* (*Konec stalinismu v Čechách*, 1990) was produced. The film is a historical panorama that reflects the rise and fall of communist power, beginning with the country's liberation from Germany by the Red Army and ending with the Velvet Revolution.

*The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia* continues Švankmajer's sarcastic treatment of clay figurines and animated characters as passive spectators whose submission enabled the KSČ's historic stronghold and repeats the destructive characteristics of twentieth-century civilised society. This connotative narrative is provocative because it "seems less to deplore a succession of tragic historical events which befell a *victimised* population than to denounce a kind of partly *guilty* 'wait-and-see' attitude" (Schmitt, 2012(c):329). While the film is untypical in style of Švankmajer's overall work, it provides further insight into his personal socio-political view, which is suggested throughout his films. Švankmajer's previous films of the Czechoslovak New

Wave and normalisation period portray scenes of submission, with *Virile Games*, *The Ossuary* and *The Garden* being notable. The notion of submission is returned to in *Darkness-Light-Darkness*. The extreme close-up of the visibly terrified and squashed clay figure that has imprisoned itself is an unsettling image and evokes the fear of claustrophobia. Distributed on the brink of freedom, the film explores the “existential question of freedom, showing that each individual often himself builds the bars of his own cage” (Schmitt, 2012(b):190-192).

While Švankmajer seems critical of the passive nature of Czech society, the peaceful removal of communism is a merit to the nation whose recent history had only provided examples of oppression and malice. The end of communism created challenges for Czechs, but the nation successfully adapted to its new world status. The country was sheltered from the world for almost five decades, but within the last two it has experienced great transformations. Therefore, the question regarding the Czech Republic’s future lies in its present, with philosopher and writer Erazim Kohák arguing a case of “velvet hangover” (cited in Bažant et al., 2010:493). Kohák refers to Czech philosopher Karel Kosík’s remark that the country has continually defined its identity “by finding a threat to defy” (Kohák, cited in Bažant et al., 2010:493). Since the liberation of the country, Kohák questions its identity and vision: “with the Cold War over, *nothing* is threatening us. Literally, *nothing*. A leering, yawning *naught*...” (cited in Bažant et al., 2010:493). This is relevant to the challenges faced by Czech artists who must adapt to changing circumstances and a now global socio-political audience unhindered by totalitarian ideology.

It is this lack of an ideological threat that invariably adds to the decline of the great, politically avant-garde artists who have continued with their work since the demise of totalitarian regimes in Europe. To refer to Menzel’s earlier remarks on filmmaking during KSČ-governed Czechoslovakia, the stifling atmosphere of ideological control provided the perfect atmosphere for creativity. Ideological constraints served as a spark for creativity, as it forced artists to experiment and find alternate ways of expression. Kohák argues that the destruction of an opposition from which to react, respond and challenge presents a new threat; the threat of complacency as the country turns towards consumerism and instinctual repression:

*Naught* is what threatens us as the consumer addiction interpenetrates us bone and sinew. *Naught* to live for, *naught* to believe, *naught* to cherish, plenty to eat, but *naught* to nourish the heart and the mind. There remains only the cycle of feeding, reproduction and death ... (cited in Bažant et al., 2010:493).

Kohák's description of the feeding, reproductive and death-like cycle of consumerism and habitual life echoes the imagery and motifs of Švankmajer's films. While this imagery was in response to the destructive and oppressive power of communist ideology, it stems from Švankmajer's universal exploration and rebellion against all forms of ideological and institutional repression.

This flexibility in interpretation of Švankmajer's films has resulted in a universal interest in his films as society becomes increasingly repressed by monetary, technological and egocentric consumerism. Švankmajer has often raised his concerns on the degenerative impact of capitalism and consumerism in his films and artworks in other media. In 2007 he proposed an *International Project for the Devaluation of Money*, which was a "sarcastic critique of the modern capitalist world" (Schmitt, 2012(c):409). The project was in response to the monetary and consumer crisis that the project hoped to symbolically satirise through the "wearing out of currencies" (Schmitt, 2012(c):409). Švankmajer's proposal for the devaluation and revaluation of money included the destruction of coins and called upon members of society to participate (Schmitt, 2012(c):409). Švankmajer's recent films, *Faust*, *The Conspirators of Pleasure*, *Little Otík*, *Lunacy* and *Surviving Life* all symbolise society's self-imposed consumerist and habitual prison of instinctual repression.

The appearance of people in Švankmajer's films is predominately grim, with human characters portrayed as dead, tortured, repressed or extremely violent. These representations are heightened in Švankmajer's recent films as they continue his criticism on the submissive nature of society in the consumerist age. These films present the bleakest portrayals of civilisation with the most unsettling use of human actors compared to Švankmajer's earlier films. The portrayal in *Faust* of civilisation is of a bored and desperate man who creates and destroys life in the alchemical chamber scene and continues the violent path of civilisation as he rapes the puppet towards the end of the film. *Faust* presents an unlikable protagonist, which is continued in *The Conspirators of Pleasure* with its narcissistic, obsessive and unsettling characters. The human characters in *Lunacy* are again unlikable figures, with the Marquise portrayed as a grotesque, cruel and unnerving individual. In *Little Otík* it is the animated baby root that kills the human characters, but the representation of human destruction and the desperation of its human parents continues

Švankmajer's negative portrayal of civilisation in a dystopia representative of consumerist repression.

The characters in *The Conspirators of Pleasure* are preoccupied with the creation of their autoerotic pleasure devices at the cost of genuine human contact despite their inherently unknown interactions. The protagonist in *Surviving Life* is unable to find pleasure in his everyday life and retreats into the latent world of his dreams. The broken human relationships in *The Conspirators of Pleasure*, *Little Otík* and *Surviving Life* are symbolic of the continued flaws of civilisation, as they depart from the history of war and political persecution into the present consumerist and habitual state of society. Švankmajer's continued narration on instinctual repression and its accompanied theme of destruction reiterates the importance to continually question the ramifications of ideology. This reflects Švankmajer's concerns on the destructive nature of civilisation which continues to exist in modern society. *Faust* is evidence of this ideological concern with its reinterpretation of the Faust legend echoing Švankmajer's belief that in times of turmoil, one returns to 'beginnings' to find new meanings for renewal (Richardson, 2006:133). The film was released post-communism and continues Švankmajer's commentary on a passive society, which is represented by the protagonist who barely resists at the devil's betrayal. The film is a poignant reminder of an individual's submissive acceptance of ideological repression. The film's release post-communism echoes Švankmajer's earlier remarks that Stalinism was "nothing but a particular emanation of the sickness of modern civilisation" (Richardson, 2006:133). Švankmajer's continued narration on repression indicates his view of consumerism as an extension of this crisis because of instinctual repression.

*Lunacy* is one of Švankmajer's recent and more shocking portrayals of civilisation. The film depicts the story of Jean and his interaction with the Marquis. The film opens with a prologue from Švankmajer who states:

the film is essentially an ideological debate on how to run a lunatic asylum. Basically there are two ways of running such an institution, each equally extreme. One encourages absolute freedom. The other the old-fashioned, well tried method of control and punishment. But there is also a third one, that combines and exacerbates the very worst aspects of the other two. And that is the madhouse we live in today (*Lunacy*, 2005).

The film can be divided into three parts that reflect the above approaches. The first half of the film serves as the first part with its portrayal of Jean's interactions with the Marquis and his experience at the insane asylum. This part of the film suggests the approach of total freedom with its graphic portrayals of social taboos, anarchy and manipulation. It is an unsettling portrayal of a completely liberated society. The actions of the Marquis cause Jean extreme distress and discomfort. When Jean decides to leave out of disgust, the Marquis confronts him, enquiring:

What exactly was it about last night you didn't like? Was it that we were acting as free, unprejudiced individuals? Rejecting false morality and slavish convention in favour of pleasure? Using our imagination, rebelling? Is that what you object to? (*Lunacy*, 2005).

The Marquis's description of his actions echoes the theme of this part of the film. The chaos of the first part of the film is heightened during the scenes at the insane asylum that Jean discovers has been taken over by the patients. Desperate to restore order, Jean frees the actual medical staff who seize control of the asylum. This desired control is usurped by the severity of the medical staff, especially Dr Coulmiere. Coulmiere's returned control of the asylum marks the second part of the film which reflects the second approach of complete control and punishment.

The second part of *Lunacy* is equally horrific with Coulmiere's extremely aggressive punishment of the patients. His method of 'treatment' is based on corporal punishment: "[i]f the mind is sick we must subdue the body. Only by weakening the body can we restore the balance. The more severe the illness, the more severe the punishment" (*Lunacy*, 2005). Jean regrets his actions as he witnesses the cruelty of Coulmiere's treatment and woefully watches the Marquis dragged away. Jean's sense of regret and sorrow is also experienced by the viewer as the film successfully evokes sorrow for the Marquis, despite the first half of the film dedicated to evoking horror and disgust over his actions. These two parts of the film capture the two extreme approaches announced by Švankmajer in the prologue. The third approach is represented in the film's interlude scenes of animated body parts and organs which serve as the third part of the film. The first animated scene occurs after Švankmajer's prologue and depicts a slaughtered pig, invisibly sliced open as internal organs spill out from the pig's body. This is followed by several interlude scenes of body parts and internal organs that intercut the film's story. During these interludes: body parts are sliced into smaller sections, a tongue is cut into slices that roll away,

eyes slide out of jars, tongues are animated with strings to dance, bones are crushed beneath a hammer and brains slide out of tins.

The animated actions of the body parts and internal organs depict both approaches discussed by Švankmajer; at times liberated from their instinctual repression and dancing, while at other times crushed and sliced. The final animated interlude occurs in a supermarket with the cuts of meat packaged in plastic on the refrigerated shelves. The meat is animated as breathing against the confines of the plastic packaging. This symbolises the instinctual repression of civilisation and Švankmajer's desires to remove the restraints of ideology to find new meanings for renewal. Therefore, Švankmajer's ideological debate on how to run a lunatic asylum is a metaphor for civilisation. The film's first part highlight his opposition to an anarchic civilisation and the second, his opposition to one of extreme conformity and punishment. The third part of the film symbolises his view of modern civilisation as the exacerbated combination of the two approaches that is portrayed as equally undesirable. This reinforces Švankmajer's desire to return to the 'beginnings' to find an alternate form of existence that counters the destructive and repressive state of civilisation.

Švankmajer's more recent films share Kohák's fears and concerns, as he depicts various characters whom all share a common enemy: the invisible hand of consumerism and instinctual repression. This invisible hand of the puppet master is a constant theme in Švankmajer's films. It was the invisible hand of communism in his earlier films that lulled the nation into submission through intimidation, beer and football. As Švankmajer deals with the present liberated Czech and looks towards the future, the hand of oppression remains prevalent, merely replaced by a new institution that is indicative of the broader instinctual repression of civilisation. Švankmajer continues to create films in this changing socio-political context and his films maintain the themes of struggle and opposition to an external force, despite Europe's ideological liberation. This is poignantly indicated in Švankmajer's refusal of an honorary award by the Czech president in 2011:

All my life I have respected certain principles, among them that of never accepting honours or awards from the state. From any state. This is why in 1989 I refused the title of Honoured Artist; nor did I accept the distinction of *Chevalier des arts et des lettres* from the French state in the mid-1990s. I thus see no reason at all to behave differently today. The state is the source of organised violence, it is a tool of repression and manipulation. In everything I

create I have always belonged on the other side (Švankmajer, cited in Schmitt, 2012:421).

Švankmajer's earlier films remain applicable today and have become universal because of their overriding theme of ideological repression. Švankmajer's continuing scepticism echoes the position of 'double isolation' by the Czech Surrealist Group and aligns with the group's ambivalence at the fall of communism. As the group entered a new era, they maintained their belief in double isolation, "well aware as they were that the keys jangled by the crowd to demand the departure of the former leaders are all too often only jingle bells shaken by clowns asking only to be duped by the new masters" (Schmitt, 2012(b):192).

## 6. Conclusion

I am a hand. And the hand is a tool. I am therefore a tool. A tool to externalise and capture emotions (Švankmajer, cited in Dryje & Schmitt, 2012: 461).

An examination of Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality revealed a significant narrative on repression, which was inherently contextualised within the former Czechoslovak socio-political reality of communism as well as the Czech Republic's recent emersion into the global consumerist marketplace. This revealed a symbiotic nature between the narratives of the films on the socio-political and instinctual context of repression. The symbiotic narrative is indicative of Švankmajer's personal reflections on civilisation and its destructive nature. This was represented in his filmic representation of surreality through the medium of childhood. The medium of childhood offers a realm relatively free from socio-political and instinctual repression, where unconscious activity is expressed through objects and their interactions with the conscious or physical reality. The filmic representation of surreality reflects a heightened awareness of the socio-political landscape of the former Czechoslovakia, its emersion into the global consumerist market place and its universal theme on the destructive and repressive nature of convention. Švankmajer's films create a dark, claustrophobic atmosphere that portrays a pessimistic view of humanity, but this forces the viewer to reflect and debate on the depicted reality and its interpretations of daily reality. His adoption of surrealist ideas within his films symbolises his choice to rebel not only against the KSČ but also against the universal confines of ideology and instinctual repression. Therefore, the depiction of fantasy sequences in Švankmajer's films is rooted in daily reality with a complete lack of escapism, as the surreality of the films ensures that daily reality is magnified by its interaction with unconscious fears and desires.

Švankmajer's films were profoundly influenced by the cultural and socio-political history of the former Czechoslovakia and the broader European course of history marked by two world wars. His creation of imaginative and irrational objects is indebted to the mannerist paintings of Arcimboldo and surrealist juxtaposition. His artistic obsessions reflect those of the former Emperor Rudolf, as his films depict his own embodiment of a *Kunstkammer*. Švankmajer's experience of the socio-political history of the former Czechoslovakia and the broader history of Europe has imprinted on him a pessimistic view of Western civilisation that is prevalent

throughout his films. Švankmajer's experience of Western civilisation is marked by destruction and repression both within the former Czechoslovakia and its history of human rights violations and within Europe with two world wars marked by mass fatalities, gross human rights violations and political tyranny. Within the scope of recent history, the former Czechoslovak socio-political landscape is marked by betrayal. The first betrayal was of democracy when the Western allies pursued the policy of appeasement with Hitler, which resulted in the country's inevitable capitulation to Germany. At the end of WWII, due to the combined fear of future German aggression and the lack of faith in democracy, the country turned to Stalin and communist Russia. This resulted in the totalitarian rule of the KSČ for four decades, which was marked by violence, persecution, intimidation, repression, mass unemployment and widespread poverty. This profoundly shaped Švankmajer as an artist, as he actively retaliated through his art against the oppressive regimes that dictated his daily socio-political reality.

Švankmajer recognised that the course of Czechoslovak history did not occur in isolation, because acts of violence, human rights violations and repression existed throughout Europe as well as the world. His experiences of this history revealed to him that society was inherently flawed. Despite societies' policies, justice system, codes, conventions and ideology, destruction prevails. Therefore, Švankmajer identified the destructive course of mankind as symbolic of the dire consequences of conventions. This influenced his artistic endeavours as he sought to re-evaluate the flawed system of ideological convention and repression. The objective of his films was to reveal this inherent flaw to society and this is quintessentially captured by the reoccurring sound motif of carnival music juxtaposed with the sound effects of machinery, the representation of laconic dystopias and the exhaustive cyclic scenes of destruction in his films. This stylistic aesthetic was indicative of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group and its poetist roots, which favoured a carnivalesque spirit and had a positive, followed by a cautionary, interest in the rise of the machine age.

The sound motif combined with the cyclic depictions of laconic dystopias countered the social realist propaganda images of the former Czechoslovakia at the time of production. It reinterpreted the daily reality of repression equal to that of the excessive horrors of a carnival and the nauseating carnival ride that never seems to end. This symbolised the propagation of communist ideology but also the recycling of socio-political conventions from one generation to the next,

with ideology serving as society's 'superego'; quietly conforming the individual to the repressive accepted conventions of society. The submissive and passive conformity of society was symbolised in Švankmajer's films with the portrayal of human characters and human representatives as dead, buried and trapped. This pessimistic portrayal of civilisation should not be regarded as fantasy or escapism, which suggests a certain reprieve from reality that Švankmajer's films refuse.

A close analysis of Švankmajer's films revealed a significant style and aesthetic in his filmic representation of surreality, namely the presence of objects, the medium of childhood and the evocation of realism through tactility. This filmic representation of surreality creates fantasy sequences that reflect his heightened awareness of reality and strengthen the affinity of surrealism with reality. Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality further illuminates surrealist notions on the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, analogy and the perception of reality. Destruction is a common theme depicted throughout Švankmajer's films, and this was investigated to reflect the destructive socio-political context of the former Czechoslovakia as well the universal destructive nature of civilisation. This was revealed to be indicative of Švankmajer's beliefs regarding instinctual repression and the destructive recycling of socio-political conventions. This reflected the surrealist concern about the crisis of consciousness in civilisation and art, as Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality liberated the unconscious from conscious repression.

Švankmajer's filmic representation of surreality is reflective of the surrealist movement. Surrealism sought to merge conscious and unconscious reality into a heightened awareness of the two. Surreality reflected Freudian-derived notions on the individual's perception of reality as intricately determined by conscious and unconscious thought processes. Surrealist art sought to resurface unconscious thought processes to act alongside conscious thought processes in physical reality. This aimed to heal the void in the relationship between art and reality or life to provide a cathartic experience towards positive transformation and radical change. Švankmajer's surreality reflects this process, albeit in an aesthetically pessimistic style. This pessimistic aesthetic was influenced by surrealist roots in dada and the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group's transition towards laconic dystopias that countered socialist realism.

Švankmajer's filmic pessimism is reflective of the socio-political reality of the former communist Czechoslovakia, where society was intimidated into submission and the socio-political reality was denied in the media or arts due to socialist censorship and the social realist model. Švankmajer's depiction of a fantastical pessimistic reality subversively countered these limitations, as he evocatively fought against the ideological madness of the period with the façade of irrationality in his own films. The medium of childhood offered Švankmajer a medium for heightened expression to act upon conscious and physical reality in his films and mirrors the repressed unconscious awareness of communist reality. This forced the viewer to confront the reality of the time. Despite the aesthetic pessimism, the films encouraged radical change by reinforcing an exhausting and all-consuming destructive reality that begged to be brought to an end.

It is hoped that this study will stimulate further investigation in this field, specifically the relationship between surrealism and fantasy, to contribute to the heightened and intricate affinity with reality of the surrealist movement. It is clear that additional work in the future would be to further investigate the similarities and differences between fantasy and surrealism and their individual relationship with film to further distinguish their separate affinities with reality. This dissertation sought to address this situation with its discussion of the surrealist movement and the affinity of surrealist films with reality compared to the relationship between fantasy films and reality. This analysis revealed that fantasy films tend to borrow surrealist notions for aesthetic purposes, which was evident in Burton's Švankmajer-inspired *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. In comparison, the surrealist-inclined films of Švankmajer prefer to incorporate surrealist aesthetics to represent surreality, that is, a reinterpreted and heightened awareness of conscious and unconscious reality that seeks to confront daily reality. This distinguished surrealism and the filmic representation of surreality as having a deeply personal relationship with reality as it delves into the unconscious soul of the filmmaker and viewer to surface fears and desires onto conscious reality. This process is indicative throughout Švankmajer's films, as he liberated the imagination from the confines of reason to act upon and in unison with conscious reality for cathartic expression. Švankmajer's filmic representation of unconscious and conscious realms of perceptions is indicative of surrealism and its Freudian inspiration on the unconscious, especially the transformative power of therapy to readdress unconscious thought processes.

Švankmajer's films offer a dark yet magical world that is imaginative and frightening because of its uncanny resemblance to real life. This complex and confusing nature of his films with their dreamlike quality and confounding logic is the epitome of surrealism and the filmic representation of surreality. Numerous academics, including Hames (2008), Owen (2013) and Richardson (2006), have examined Švankmajer's mystical films in an attempt to demystify his filmic representation of surreality. These academic writers offer detailed factors that have shaped Švankmajer's style of filmmaking as a means of understanding the various elements of his films: from the political to the cultural and historical, no pebble has been left unturned in the search to understand Švankmajer's films. This dissertation followed in the ink steps of these academics by incorporating research on Švankmajer to further understand his heightened awareness of reality and distinguish its actual relationship with reality in contrast to misconceptions of surrealism as equating to fantasy and escapism. The study on Švankmajer revealed him as an artist who is greatly attuned to reality, even that which lies beneath the surface of instinctual consciousness but always resists against its confines, like the black cat in *Jabberwocky*. Therefore, Švankmajer's artistic endeavours as a surrealist filmmaker can be summarised by his graduation project, with his films functioning as the fishbowl: by simply placing reality on display. Švankmajer places the viewer into the heightened awareness of daily reality so, like the fish, one is forced to realise their self-inflicted 'glass bowl' of repression and destruction.

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