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Communication, Consumption and Manipulation:
The Body as Language in the Films of Jan Švankmajer

by

Amanda Marie Dowd

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
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Dedication

For the women who inspire me. Emme Brigitte Carlé, I will always remember the joy of *Hoppe hoppe Reiter* and the frightening lessons of *Der Struwwelpeter*; thank you for passing on the pleasant memories of your childhood in Germany. Dolores Innea Lowe, I never grew tired of your amazing stories and delicious recipes; thank you for teaching me the true nature of compassion and patience. Evelyn Patricia Gorman, words cannot express my love for you mom; thank you for teaching me that as long as you work towards your goal, you can achieve anything. Last, but certainly not least, for you Innea Greene Kersey; you bring life to all objects. Your laughter and love fill me with the confidence I've been in search of for so long. You're my favorite girl.

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Communication, Consumption and Manipulation:
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Amanda Marie Dowd

Abstract

In this thesis I will analyze and discuss the work of renowned director Jan Švankmajer. Specifically, I will examine how director Jan Švankmajer's representation of the body creates a metaphorical language. In addition, I will address what meaning can be gathered from, or made apparent through the commentary of the body's language and discuss the significance of the socio-political implications. Prior to my discussion of Švankmajer's work I will give a concise socio-political history of the Czech Republic from 1968-1994; this discussion will provide a framework for the subsequent analyses. In order to provide support for my argument, I will discuss the relationship between Švankmajer's work and Michael Foucault's theory of the "body politic", Patrick Fuary's theory of the "cinematized body" and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the image of the grotesque body. After discussing the implication of these theories I will discuss three of Švankmajer's films in order to specifically address the ability of the grotesque body to subvert discourses of power and how the socio-cultural environment has an impact on Švankmajer's choice of body representation. The films I discuss include *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982), *Food* (1992) and *Faust* (1994)

Introduction

Director Jan Švankmajer is regarded as one of the most successful surrealist filmmakers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Living in the city of Prague since 1934, Švankmajer draws inspiration from a rich variety of sources, including the city's centuries old puppet theater tradition, dark folklore, and the turbulent political climate. Švankmajer seamlessly combines the surreal, Czech folklore and grotesque images to create unique works that leave the spectators re-evaluating the 'normal' order of one's self and surroundings. A master at animation and depicting the unreal, Švankmajer's work is often examined solely through the lens of surrealist aesthetics. Little of the scholarly literature pays specific attention to the relationship between the oppressive and often violent totalitarian regime that Švankmajer lived under for most his life and his choice of content and means of representation. When socio-cultural environment is discussed in scholarly literature it is only mentioned as a slight influence on Švankmajer's ultimate goal of portraying the surreal. Scholars tend to overlook the often obvious political statements made in Švankmajer's films (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 7-42, 96-114; O'Pray *Surrealism, Fantasy and the Grotesque* 252-253; Uhde, *The Unsilvered Screen* 60-62).

One author who does approach Švankmajer's work through a socio-political lens is Paul Wells. Wells examines the relationship between socio-cultural context and the nature of bodily function and representation in Švankmajer's work. Wells specifically

addresses three areas of interest, including “the body in transition, the body as mechanism, and the body under threat” (Wells 177). Wells carefully examines Švankmajer’s treatment of the body in terms of the materials used, observing that Švankmajer often portrays the body with materials such as clay or inanimate objects. Wells believes the transition of the physical material Švankmajer uses to create the human form differs from the standard representation of the body, thus resulting in a connection between the body and social change or transition. Wells pays special attention to Švankmajer’s representation of the body in the film *Dimension of Dialogue* (1989), specifically, the way the body symbolizes a mechanism within a larger oppressive class structure. In his analysis, Wells concentrates on the way Švankmajer intentionally dehumanizes the body in order to portray it as an automata within a social environment. According to Wells, Švankmajer creates a dialogue about social and political control through the representation of the body as being vulnerable to manipulation and control. Wells’ argument addresses that social commentary exists in Švankmajer’s films, but there is little consideration to the way in which the body signifies that commentary (Wells 187). In order to fully understand the implications of Švankmajer’s bodies, I will build upon Wells’ work in this thesis. I will argue that the body serves as a metaphorical language in Švankmajer’s films and that this language makes commentaries by way of grotesque imagery. I will examine how the commentary made by Švankmajer’s bodies has a unique relationship to the socio-political situations that occurred during Švankmajer’s life in present day Czech Republic.

A brief history on Švankmajer and a concise explanation of Czechoslovakia’s period of normalization and the Velvet Revolution will provide a framework for

understanding the implications of the commentaries made by the bodies. A discussion of Foucault's theory of the politicized body, and its relationship to Fuery's theory of the cinematized body will provide a basis for understanding how the body can both receive and transmit social control and power. After discussing this aspect of the body, the discussion will focus on the importance of the way in which the body can resist this social control; for this discussion Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque image of the body will be discussed. Three of Švankmajer's films will be analyzed, in order of discussion they are *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982), *Food* (1992) and *Faust* (1994).

A Renowned Director

Born to a middle class family in Czechoslovakia, Jan Švankmajer's exposure to the visual and creative arts began at an early age. At the age of eight, Švankmajer received a puppet theatre as a Christmas gift; this would mark the beginning of a lifelong fascination with puppetry. As Švankmajer grew older his interests led him to study at the College of Applied Arts in Prague. Švankmajer was introduced to Surrealism for the first time while studying at the college; this encounter would eventually lead to Švankmajer joining the Czech Surrealist group in 1972. After studying at the College of Applied Arts, Švankmajer received acceptance into the esteemed Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. While at the academy, Švankmajer studied experimental theatre, stage design and assisted with play productions consisting of both live actors and marionettes. He also studied the avant-garde films of famed Soviet directors Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein, as well as Surrealists Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí (Hames *Dark Alchemy* 7-42, 99; Uhde *The Unsilvered Screen* 60-61).

Exposed to a world of mixed media theater, Švankmajer was often involved in performances that included puppets, ballet, and most importantly, film. Švankmajer explains his ideas on the creative possibilities of film at the time:

That's where I first had access to film-making, and discovered that film has three major advantages over theatre. One, actors can't spoil it for you once you get it into the editing room. Two, film can wait for its public; theatre can't. Three, film time is so much faster than theatre time. It took ages in the theatre to transform one picture, one composition, into another. The fast, speeded-up time of film made that easy; that was my luck, and I've never returned to theatre. (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 99)

Shortly after his time with the theater group *Laterna Magika*, Švankmajer produced his first film, *The Last Trick* (1964). Švankmajer incorporated theater and puppetry in the film by portraying the lead characters as life-sized marionettes. The story unfolds as two magicians compete to out-do each other's tricks and eventually start to destroy one another. *The Last Trick* serves as the earliest portrayal of Švankmajer's tendency towards disturbing themes (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 96-114; O'Pray *Surrealism Fantasy and the Grotesque* 252 – 253; Uhde, *The Unsilvered Screen* 60 – 62).

In 1972, after writing a script for *The Castle of Otranto*, Jan Švankmajer was banned from producing films by the Czechoslovak Communist Party. It is likely that the decision of the party came as no surprise to Švankmajer. Many of his previous works were censored, banned or locked in vaults as a direct result of the normalization of Czechoslovakia that followed 1968. The enforced silence prohibited Švankmajer from continuing his work as a director, but this seven year span of time was filled with tactile

experimentations, visual art and producing props. When the authorities decided to allow Švankmajer to resume his work as a film director in 1980, it was under the condition that the themes of his work be based on literary classics. While complying with these conditions, Švankmajer produced his interpretation of Edgar Allen Poe's classic *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1980). However, it would not be long before Švankmajer abandoned the guidelines and created a film that addressed the nature of constraint and communication (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 96-114; O'Pray *Surrealism Fantasy and the Grotesque* 252 – 253; Uhde, *The Unsilvered Screen* 60 – 62).¹

The disparity between the Czechoslovak Communist Party's imposed conditions and Švankmajer's following film *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982) is of considerable proportion. Despite having suffered the consequences of displeasing the party officials in the past, Švankmajer created a film that lacks any connection to the theme of a literary classic. In contrast to the party guidelines, the film blatantly rejects traditional narrative and subject matter. Subsequently, *Dimensions of Dialogue* was not only banned from being viewed, but used by the Czechoslovak Communist Party as an example of what was completely unacceptable in film production. Švankmajer's characters aren't spouting out anti-communist rhetoric, or displaying sympathies towards Western ideals, yet the film was found to be intolerable and was used to show others within the party what was to be considered unacceptable for the public eye (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 97).

¹ For a comprehensive biographical history and filmography see Hames, *Dark Alchemy*; O'Pray *Surrealism Fantasy and the Grotesque* 252 – 253; Uhde, *The Unsilvered Screen* 60 – 62.

In spite of displeasing the authorities, Švankmajer was allowed to continue his work; this is due to some extent to the lack of dialogue in Švankmajer's work. Much of the literary and entertainment censorship that took place in Czechoslovakia depended on a written manuscript being read by the censor (Šimečka 54). Most of the films produced by Švankmajer in the years following *Dimensions of Dialogue* typically exhibited little spoken dialogue; therefore what appeared on paper could be deemed acceptable. However, Švankmajer himself attests to the fact that the chances of his films being approved and released after being viewed ultimately depended on the "ideology of the censor" (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 115).²

From the Prague Spring to the Velvet Divorce; Socio-Political Turmoil

Švankmajer's work was undoubtedly influenced by the turbulent socio-political climate during his lifetime in the present day Czech Republic. In order to provide a framework for analyzing his work, it is imperative to give a brief history of the monumental events that unfolded during the director's time in Prague.

Czechoslovakia's move towards a democratic form of socialism in the mid 1960's led to a surge in political reforms and a relaxation of the restrictive authority on cultural practices. The Prague Spring, as it is known today, gave citizens the hope of economic prosperity and a return to a rich cultural life; however, this hope would be short lived. Czechoslovakia's public battles surrounding reform proved to be too unpredictable for the Soviet image of solidarity that Brezhnev required. The Central Committee of

² See Faraday's *Revolt of the Filmmakers* for more information regarding film censorship in the Soviet Bloc.

Czechoslovakia suffered from a division that proved to be fatal to its functioning. Some committee members pushed for reform, others were staunchly against it, and some fell in the center, thus creating the impression of disorder. In the short span of three years, the citizens of Czechoslovakia experienced a disorienting amount of political turmoil that ended with the invasion of Soviet troops in August 1968 and a subsequent “restoration of order” known as normalization (Williams 146).

The primary objective of the Soviet invasion was to replace the disordered leadership with what Brezhnev considered the “healthy core” of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, that is to say, the committee members who were completely against the reform process (Williams 116). However, Brezhnev knew the importance of keeping a popular leader such as Dubček in place to ease the initiation of normalization. For this reason, Dubček would remain as party leader until April 1969, and it was under his leadership that the citizens of Czechoslovakia complied with the request to stand down from their protests and oblige the Soviets. Dubček appealed to the people by assuring them that if they stopped demonstrating resistance to the Soviets, the occupying forces would soon leave and the party would resume its path of reform. Having faith in Dubček’s word, the protests came to an end; unfortunately the people of Czechoslovakia didn’t realize that their faith in the reform movement would ultimately lead to the return of complete authoritarian rule (Williams 144 – 146).

The first objective of the normalization process was to replace what the Soviets considered “unhealthy” sources within the party (Williams 156). This operation began with the top leading officials and quickly reached all members. Previous to the invasion,

Brezhnev was familiar with the conservative members of the Presidium that he felt would be able to carry out the daunting task of normalization; with this information in hand, Brezhnev appointed new leadership positions, yet allowed Dubček to remain as party leader. From this point, the process of normalization would infiltrate every sector of the party; the “screening” or investigations began at once and continued for as long as it took to eliminate any members who were less than conservative. While the process of normalization would have an effect on every aspect of Czechoslovak society, the Soviets knew that in order to achieve proper normalization the most critical order of business was restoring complete control over the media (Šimečka 52; Williams 147).

The task of restoring strict order over the media proved to be unproblematic due to the general compliance of Czechoslovak society to the invading forces. However, this compliance would not save the numerous liberal news programs and publications that openly criticized the party prior to the invasion; almost instantly, familiar news programs, magazines and newspapers went out of production and publication (Šimečka 52). In addition to the disappearance of the liberal media, the new outlet of information would come directly from the top party officials and spread throughout the country through a system of national and local outlets that essentially reported identical stories. The screening of the media began at the highest level with the firing of management, but it didn't stop there; many writers, actors, radio voices, songs and popular films were completely banned from the public. Many of these unlucky individuals were forced to work in occupations that were completely unrelated to their experience, manually intense and underpaid. This quick and decisive act of normalization was put in place not only to stop the spread of liberal information, but also to serve as an example of the severity of

the Soviet's intentions for the restoration of Czechoslovak society. From this point forward, with the media serving as the first example, all matters were approached from the strict guidelines of the party; any deviation from the given path would end with unsympathetic disciplinary action. The complete elimination of the liberal media and the misinformation the new media reported served as example of what the party was willing to permit (Šimečka 55). Milan Šimečka specifically describes how the restoration of order and complete control over the media provided the people of Czechoslovakia with a guide of what was acceptable.

It allows people to establish some sort of standard by which to judge everyday matters: a simple ideological rule of thumb for circumspect behavior. The ordinary citizen learns from graphic examples in the media, what is allowed and what is not; what the state rewards and what it punishes; who are friends and who are enemies; what is black and what is white. (55)

With normalization under way, Czechoslovakia's issues surrounding reform all but disappeared, and as Šimečka described, the future of domestic issues would be one free of complex ideas or choices on the behalf of the ordinary citizen. The party made it very clear what was acceptable in all aspects of society, and it's for this reason that censorship was almost unnecessary by the end of the normalization process. Writers, producers, and newspaper companies no longer had to worry about editing the information that passed through their media channel; it was clearly understood that any information that deviated from official party script was banned and whoever produced such information was blacklisted. While the need for censorship dramatically decreased

as a result of normalization, the authorities were always vigilant and ready to act when faced with the production of “unhealthy” media (Šimečka 52; Williams 146).

The legacy of the Prague Spring resided in the hearts of Czechoslovakian citizens until late 1989 when revolution spread like wildfire across the Soviet Bloc. In contrast to the idea of merely reforming a socialist government, the revolutionaries of 1989 wanted democracy and a free market economy. With the revolutions of Poland, Hungary and the fall of the Berlin wall in the preceding months, the citizens of Czechoslovakia took the opportunity to complete the East European break from socialism. With peaceful and even visually pleasing demonstrations consisting of flowers and candle lit protests, Czechoslovakia’s uprising came to be known as the Velvet Revolution. Also known as the Artists’ Revolution, this time would be marked with noteworthy figures of the arts taking on leadership positions, most notable of which would be the presidency of an accomplished author, Vaclav Havel (Vogt 54).

For the citizens of Czechoslovakia the transition to a democratic government and free market economy was riddled with strife, which ultimately led to many feeling ambivalent about their new freedom of choice (Vogt 105). The economy was unstable and most of the new goods that were available were too expensive for the majority of the public to buy. With fresh memories of a time in which things were predictable, it’s logical that citizens would be both optimistic in their prognosis of the future, but at the same time disappointed and longing for certainty. The Velvet Revolution was barely two years behind them when the people of Czechoslovakia experienced yet another upheaval in late 1992, the Velvet Divorce. The Velvet Divorce is a term for the separation of

present day Czech Republic and Slovakia that made up Czechoslovakia. This separation occurred without incident, in fact most citizens had no idea that it was going to happen and didn't feel that it was even necessary (Dryzek and Holmes 242).

The separation came as a result of the different directions that the prime ministers of each respective region were heading in and the restrictive constitution under which they operated. Czech Prime Minister Klaus and Slovak Prime Minister Mečiar had very different ideas about the future of the democratization their respective states. Prime Minister Klaus wanted to make sure the transition to a free market economy was rapid, thus furthering the transition into a completely democratic society; Prime Minister Mečiar however, wanted to take things slowly during the period of transition. Having to act under the same constitution led to many disagreements and roadblocks for both regions; so it was decided by the federal parliament to separate the territories.³ Ironically, in an effort to become more democratic, the government ultimately made this choice and took it away from the people. Despite this sudden separation of territories, the Czech Republic had what many scholars consider to be the smoothest transition into democracy of all the former communist countries.⁴ This is often attributed to the nation's previous history as a democratic nation. Before the early to mid twentieth century, the Czech lands were a successful democracy. It was not until the Nazi occupation of 1938 and the subsequent Soviet take over in 1948 that the citizens experienced the harsh life under totalitarianism (Dryzek and Holmes 240). With democracy as part of their cultural

³ For a more complete history of the Democratization of Czechoslovakia see Dryzek and Holmes, *Post-Communist Democratization*.

⁴ Though there are differences of opinion surrounding the transition, Vogt 247; Dryzek and Holmes 240-250; and Kavan and Palouš 78-91; agree that the Czech Republic was distinctively successful in their transition to democracy.

history, it can be said that even though the generation of the Velvet Revolution never knew what it was to have freedom of choice, they felt obligated to reinstate it.⁵

The Spectacle of the Body

When discussing the implications of the bodies within Švankmajer's work it is necessary to discuss the way in which Švankmajer is able to create commentaries on specific socio-political situations by way of body representation. In order to provide a frame work for such analysis I will discuss and summarize the theories that apply.

Foucault's theories of discourse, and in particular the theory of the 'body politic' found within *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, establishes a basis for understanding the investment of the body as a symbol of social order and control.

When describing the ways in which the body can be studied Foucault states,

The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination...the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (26)

Foucault continues to describe how the political investment of the body can be demonstrated in different ways. Some ways include actual acts of violence against the body, while other forms of control take on an organized or calculated character that do

⁵ For more information regarding the cultural identity of present day Czech Republic and Slovakia see Cravens' *Culture and Customs of the Czech Republic and Slovakia* and Travnickova 78-84.

not use force against the body, such as the layout of industrial factories or the way in which a soldier is trained into a specific stature. It is important to explain that in either case the body can transmit and receive social control and power. Foucault's analysis focuses on the shift from public forms of control such as the "spectacle of the scaffold" to the "birth of the prison," a comparatively private form of control. In his discussion, Foucault describes the way in which the "spectacle of the scaffold" serves as a primary example of how the body can transmit the knowledge of power. Long before the construction of the modern day prison and the regulations surrounding capital punishment, public execution was a widespread practice. Foucault argues that the most important factor in transmitting the knowledge of power through public execution is the creation of a spectacle based on the infliction of torture and pain on the body. According to Foucault, the gathering of witnesses to an execution was necessary in order for the public to receive the message of power and control; this was a message sent from the sovereign forces at play within any given country (Foucault 50). Foucault describes in detail the relationship between the "spectacle of the scaffold" and the powers that be:

Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength. (48)

Foucault continues his discussion by examining the decline of public execution in favor of a more 'humane' and subsequently more private form of punishment, that of the prison. According to Foucault, with the loss of the public execution the knowledge of power would ultimately be transmitted through the body in a more organized and

calculated way (Foucault 138). Foucault states “Discipline is a political anatomy of detail...The meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life and of the body will soon provide, in the context of schools, the barracks, the hospital or the workshop, a laicized content, an economic or technical rationality for this mystical calculus of the infinitesimal and the infinite” (140). Foucault makes it clear that the body can transmit the knowledge of power in a considerably different and altogether subtler way than the spectacle of physical punishment. While the organized power structures that Foucault describes are still intact today and the ‘spectacle of the scaffold’ has altogether disappeared, it can be said that the ‘spectacle of the scaffold’ has been replaced with a modern day equivalent, the “spectacle of the screen” (Foucault 148; Fuery 84).

Similar to the public execution, the body on film creates a spectacle that demonstrates the knowledge of both power and control. According to Patrick Fuery in *New Developments in Film Theory*, the body instantly comes under certain forms of control when being filmed, such as how the body is positioned in a certain place or time, as well as its actions and appearance. Fuery specifically addresses the relationship between cinema and the knowledge of power:

[c]inema itself is part of these power relations, - it *cinematizes* the body by positioning it within specific structures, and in doing so participates in these processes such as investing the body with particular traits, training it to represent certain relationships, marking it with specific effects and meanings, and emphasizing its signifying possibilities. These cinematized bodies are also

producers of knowledge – of knowledge about the body, and about other fields of knowledge. (84)

This knowledge will inevitably be different from one culture to the next, but the underlying issue is the role of the cinema as a discourse. With this in mind, it is important to clarify that the body as it appears on screen has the ability to comply with, subvert, or resist the knowledge of power that is already in place within a given culture. Fuery continues his discussion by focusing on the themes or ‘fields of knowledge’ that are produced by the cinematized body, such as desire and alteration. In each example the body can either reinforce or resist the existing knowledge of power, and when resisting, the body is able to produce alternate meanings or truths; this is of great significance when considering the way in which Švankmajer represents the body in his films (Fuery 84). In order to completely understand how the body can resist the knowledge of power invested in it, I will discuss the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais focuses on the semiotic functions both within and outside of the work of the author. Bakhtin is interested in the relationship between different sign systems within Rabelais’ work and the “old and new bodily canon” (320). According to Bakhtin, the depiction of the body found in medieval literature or the “old bodily canon” is in a constant state of transformation, with protruding body parts, and exaggerated features, all of which can devour and regurgitate these parts to create a second body/life (322). However, the depiction of the body in literature from the Renaissance forward, or the “new bodily canon,” is intact and individual (321). According to Bakhtin, for around four hundred years the “old bodily canon” of European

literature was filled with grotesque imagery before the advent of a new depiction of the body emerged. Such grotesque imagery consisted of figures of human and animal traits, excessive features, all of which are involved in bodily functions such as eating, drinking and bodily elimination (Bakhtin 321).

Cultural ideas of the grotesque have existed for centuries across all cultures and have a profound influence on art, folklore and the “extra-official life of the people” (Bakhtin 319). Bakhtin discusses how the image of the grotesque body also contributes to humour and mockery, citing the countless derogatory terms associated with the parts of the body that comprise the grotesque image, such as “the anus and buttocks, the belly the mouth and nose” (Bakhtin 319). Bakhtin describes the imagery in the new bodily canon, which is in stark contrast to that of the old:

All orifices of the body are closed. The basis of the image is the individual, strictly limited mass, the impenetrable façade. The opaque surface and the body’s “valleys” acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world...The verbal norms of official and literary language, determined by the canon, prohibit all that is linked with fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth. There is a sharp line of division between familiar speech and “correct” language. (320)

As Bakhtin describes, the body of the new canon displays an individual body that reinforces the correct language and in many ways exhibits a substantial amount of control (Bakhtin 320). When considering Bakhtin’s ideas concerning the new bodily canon it is

imperative to examine how they relate to Foucault's theory of the body politic and Fuery's theory of the cinematized body.

Both Foucault and Bakhtin examine the point at which the treatment of the body changes in a significant way. For Foucault, the focus of the analysis is situated in the change from public execution and the spectacle of the scaffold, to the birth of the prison, a private, orderly form of bodily control. For Bakhtin, the focus of the analysis is located in the change from a bodily canon consisting of considerable freedom when using language associated with the body, to a restricted use that places bodily function in a space separate from society. In both cases, the body has been placed under a considerable amount of privacy and control, both in the way it is punished and the way it is depicted in language and literature. When considering the way in which Foucault's theory of the body politic is applied to cinema, creating what Fuery considers the cinematized body, Bakhtin's theory of the "old and new bodily canon" significantly contributes to the explanation of how the cinematized body can either reinforce or subvert discourses of power (Bakhtin 321). When the spectator is presented with a body that falls within the standard depiction of the "new bodily canon," the body reinforces that depiction and subsequently the discourse of power associated with it (Bakhtin 321). However, when the spectator is presented with a bodily image that exposes the grotesque, or the parts and functions of the body that have been restricted, a sense of uneasiness comes into play due to the image resisting the standard depictions. It is in this grotesque depiction that the body is able to produce alternate meanings or truths. By depicting the body similar to the "old bodily canon," Švankmajer creates a sense of uneasiness in the spectator due to the fact that this representation of the body is uncommon and has over time become

synonymous with unpleasant and improper notions. The grotesque depiction of the bodies in Švankmajer's work draws the spectator in and forces him or her to pay attention to the interactions of the bodies. In paying attention to the body and its interactions, each film focuses on a specific type of action or interaction by and between bodies.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one will focus on Švankmajer's ability to create nonverbal dialogue by depicting the bodies of *Dimensions of Dialogue* with grotesque imagery. In my discussion I will argue that Švankmajer's use of grotesque imagery of the body emphasizes the act of communication. By emphasizing this act Švankmajer also draws attention to the inability of the bodies within the film to effectively communicate. After having discussed the body's ability to serve as a metaphorical language and its subsequent commentary, I will discuss the implications of that commentary in relation to the socio-political situation occurring in Czechoslovakia during the period of normalization and its debilitating effect on the ability to openly and effectively communicate.

In chapter two I will continue the discussion of Švankmajer's ability to create a metaphorical language through the image of the grotesque body. This discussion will focus on the film *Food* and while focusing on the same metaphorical language, it will become apparent that the emphasis lies on the act of consumption, rather than failed communication. Again, I will discuss the implications of the body's commentary, but in relation to the socio-political situation and the sentiment of ambivalence felt by Czechoslovakian citizens following the Velvet Revolution.

Chapter three will focus on one of Švankmajer's first feature length films, *Faust*. While the film does incorporate a limited amount of spoken dialogue, Švankmajer once again turns to the body as a means of expression. In *Faust* the metaphorical language of the bodies emphasizes various acts of manipulation, thus drawing attention to forms of control and agency over one's body. The commentary of the bodies found in this film will be discussed in relation to the socio-cultural transition of the Czech Republic after a major revolution and subsequent division of territories.⁶

⁶ For reviews of Švankmajer's work including, but not limited to the titles above see Grant 135-152; Newman 84-85; O'Pray, *Between Slapstick and Horror* 20-23; Shera 127-144; Strick 40-42; Udhe, *The Bare Bones of Horror* 16-25.

Chapter One

Bodies Breaking the Silence

As the title suggests, *Dimensions of Dialogue* is based on different kinds of communication, and yet there is no spoken dialogue in the film. In lieu of spoken dialogue, it can however be said that after a long silencing, Švankmajer uses the body to speak. Focusing on the director's attention regarding the relationship between the body and communication, I will argue that Švankmajer uses the body as a metaphorical language, and by depicting the image of the grotesque body, he draws attention to and comments on failures of communication. A unique relationship exists between the commentary of Švankmajer's bodies and the complex issue of the diminishing ability to openly and effectively communicate in Soviet ruled Czechoslovakia.

The bodies in *Dimensions of Dialogue* are placed in situations regarding communication, yet the representation of the body resists any recognized form of conversation; Švankmajer achieves this with the construction of the body and the action between bodies. Švankmajer produced *Dimensions of Dialogue*, a 12 minute animated film, while living in his native city of Prague. The film is comprised of three segments, each with a separate title in the following order: *Exhaustive Discussion*, *Passionate Discourse*, and *Factual Conversation*. Each of the segments has the common thread of

the failures of conversation and interaction, yet they are altogether different in their compositional elements.

A Failure to Communicate

In the first segment, *Exhaustive Discussion*, the spectator is presented with three heads that repeatedly consume one another in a most destructive manner. The material make-up of these heads takes on a style similar to that of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's mannerist paintings, mainly in their individual inanimate parts, such as food or manmade utensils creating a whole which is the head (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Summer*



Figure 2: Jan Švankmajer, *Exhaustive Discussion*

This curious representation of the human head, with its emphasis on individual parts creating a whole, is, according to Bakhtin, one of the primary forms of the grotesque body: "Of all the features of the human face, the nose and mouth plays the most important part in the grotesque image of the body; the head, ears, and nose also acquire a grotesque character when they adopt the animal form or that of inanimate

objects” (316). The first head that appears on screen is made up of separate pieces of food: items such as cooked chicken, cauliflower, cabbage, lemon, and potato come close together to form the head. Just as the spectator sees the head of food moving across the screen, another head appears; this head is made of mainly manmade or metal objects such as pots, pans, silverware, scissors, salt shakers, rubber bands and bristle brushes. The action soon occurs when the head made of manmade objects swallows the head of food and subsequently demolishes the food. Through a series of quick close-up shots the spectator views potatoes being destroyed by scissors, sugar cubes being crushed by a wrench, bread being smashed by a colander and cabbage being torn apart by keys; this is to name but a few of the shots of the overall scene of destruction. After the destruction occurs, the head morphs into a head made up of both the food and manmade objects, but this image only appears for a moment when the head regurgitates the smashed food, subsequently forming a separate head of food that appears less than appetizing. Once the food has left the head of manmade objects, this head begins to move across the screen; it’s not long, however, before another head comes along, this one made primarily of office stationary.

Once more the process of devouring and destruction begins, this time with the head of stationary supplies swallowing that of the manmade objects. In a rapid succession of close-up shots the spectator views the destruction of materials, such as pot lids being smashed by books, graph paper destroying a shaving brush, an envelope enclosing thimbles and smashing them up. Again, the heads come together to make one being just before that head regurgitates the manmade materials that are now severely damaged and unusable. This process of devouring and purging continues in a varied manner for a short

amount of time, before the regurgitated heads slowly form into clay and take on a similar appearance to one another. The clay heads continue the process, ultimately creating heads that cannot be differentiated from one another until this segment of the film comes to an end. Bakhtin describes in detail how this repetitious act of swallowing in order to create another form is of great significance when presenting the grotesque body:

The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world. (317)

With Bakhtin's words in mind, it is evident that Švankmajer undeniably presents the spectator with grotesque images of the head. In doing so he presents the spectator with an image that draws their attention to the body's interactions; in this case, the focus of the body's interactions is destructive. By continuously devouring and regurgitating, the bodies demonstrate a breakdown of communication that leads to mutual destruction.

The first point of interest within this segment is the material used to create each head. The first head is constructed of vegetables and poultry, both of which can be found on a farm. For the spectator living in Czechoslovakia at the time of the film's production, a reference to both food and farming would be loaded with political implications, specifically the problematic issue of food shortage due to the collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union. During the Prague Spring the future of collectivization was somewhat unknown, many regulations were loosened and some reformists pushed for de-collectivization, but this idea was ultimately crushed when the period of

normalization began. The second head presented to the viewer is constructed of manmade metal objects such as, pots, pans and utensils. These objects are directly associated with the push by the Soviet Union towards the industrialization of all its party's states. Lastly, the spectator is presented with a head composed of stationary supplies; these supplies directly correlate with all attributes of office work, and subsequently with the state of bureaucracy.

The second and most important point of interest in this segment is the interaction between the three heads. As previously described, the heads engage in an act of destruction by devouring and regurgitating one another. The first act of destruction takes place when the head of agriculture is destroyed by the head of industrialism, this leads to the subsequent destruction of industrialism by the head of bureaucracy. This continuous act of devouring and regurgitating signifies a breakdown of communication and cooperation between the three symbolic heads. The inability of these three sects of Czechoslovak society to effectively communicate and work harmoniously played a significant role in the events leading up to the Prague Spring, specifically in the issue of reform. The citizens and the leaders of Czechoslovakia were desperately pushing for the reform of systems that were dysfunctional. This was apparent in both the country's economic hardships and the inability of the leaders to make changes in a government laden with bureaucratic stagnation. All efforts for reform came to an end when Brezhnev and other top Soviet leaders could no longer tolerate the publicity surrounding the debates, and decided upon an imposed normalization. This point leads us to the end of the segment when the act of devouring and regurgitating produces clay figures that are formal representations of the human head; these heads do not devour, but do regurgitate

an identical head in an act that takes on the appearance of an assembly line. The spectator is witness to the restoration of order and individuality to the grotesque body when the heads upon the assembly line become formal representations of the human figure, closed off, non-protruding. This orderly body correlates directly with the period of normalization, a period that was dominated by silence and the false appearance of order.

The segment titled *Passionate Discourse* begins with a medium shot of two realistic full body clay figures sitting at a table, one male, and one female. As seen in Figure 3, neither figure has hair and both are undressed. After a close-up of the male's smiling mouth and the female's eyes slowly blinking and her head nodding in acceptance, the two figures touch hand to hand and engage in a kiss. At this point their heads begin to meld together and shot by shot the viewer watches the bodies blend together at each touch and embrace until the bodies have come together in a symbolic act of lovemaking. Just as Bakhtin described the "old bodily canon" in which the body is depicted as being free of bodily limitations, the two bodies are free in their interactions, without regard to the constraints of society (Bakhtin 318).



Figure 3: Jan Švankmajer, *Passionate Discourse*

During this interaction there is little distinction between man and woman, only brief glimpses of hands touching, or a face in ecstasy, which allow the viewer to perceive this as an act of lovemaking. The bodies lose all distinctive characteristics of human anatomy as they form one animated lump of clay. Bakhtin describes how this melding of the human form creates the image of the grotesque body:

The grotesque body has no façade, no impenetrable surface, neither has it any expressive features. It represents either the fertile depths or the convexities of procreation and conception. It swallows and generates, gives and takes. Such a body, composed of fertile depths and procreative convexities is never clearly differentiated from the world but is transferred, merged, and fused with it. (339)

Bakhtin's description of the grotesque body as being "composed of fertile depths and procreative convexities" leads us to the latter part of this segment when the two bodies break apart into their separate male and female forms. Again, the figures are seated at the table, but there upon the table sits a small anthropomorphic figure. This figure waddles over to the female and tries to gain affection with a soft and playful touch, but the female is not receptive and she pushes the figure away and towards the male. The small clay figure lands on the male's hand, and within a second or two the male forcefully pushes the figure off the edge of the table where it struggles to climb back onto the table. Once on the table, the small clay figure again tries to approach the female only to narrowly escape her hands trying to smash it. Then a close up of the male's hand shows a gesture of welcome, but upon arrival to the male's hand, the small clay figure is flung at the female's chest, landing directly between her breasts. In a rapid movement, the female picks up the small lump of clay and flings it at the male's face. The following shot is a

close-up of the female's face smiling with accomplishment just before the male's hand comes into the frame and tears a chunk of her face off (see Figure 4).

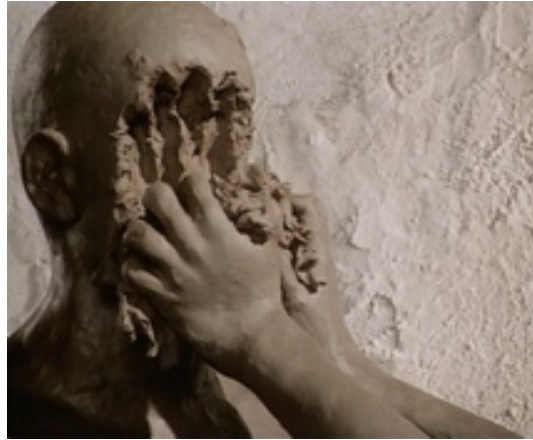


Figure 4: Jan Švankmajer, *Passionate Discourse*

The series of shots that follow are filled with images of the male and female grabbing at one another, ending in their mutual destruction. According to Bakhtin, “The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image” (322). Bakhtin’s statement directly correlates to the interaction of the three clay figures; out of the interaction between male and female there is conception, and with conception there is destruction and death. The bodies of this segment emphasize the inability to take responsibility for one’s actions, and with actions substituting words, it is clear that these two bodies are not effectively communicating.

In this segment the spectator is presented with a commentary on the complex issues surrounding freedom of expression in Soviet ruled Czechoslovakia. As previously

described, this segment depicts a male and female in the symbolic act of lovemaking; their bodies join together creating odd and grotesque imagery. During this act the bodies are effectively stripped of the power that has been invested in their form and appropriate interaction; the most obvious way this occurs is found in the representation of lovemaking. The bodies appear naked, and the act itself leaves little to the imagination; both of these elements were not considered appropriate in Czechoslovak film during this time (Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* 132). Their motions are fluid and the interactions seem effortless and carefree. It is only after the two bodies separate into their individual and representational forms that there appears to be a consequence to this symbolic act of freedom: the conception of a child. Neither the male nor female has an interest in the child. Both attempt to pass the responsibility to the other, thus leading to the ultimate failure of communication when the two resort to an act of violence that leads to their mutual destruction. Again, the action that unfolds in this segment correlates to the events of the Prague Spring, a period when the citizens of Czechoslovakia experienced an unprecedented amount of freedom. Take for example the uncensored media, government relaxation of regulations on business, reforms and the freedom of protest. Just as the two figures fail to take responsibility for their actions, it is also true that many of the leaders of Czechoslovakia failed to take on the full responsibility of their actions within the reform movement. Take for example, Dubček's failure to present the reform movement to Brezhnev in a manner that would allow the government of Czechoslovakia to remain in control. In addition to Dubček, there were several leaders involved in the reforms that denied responsibility, thus siding with conservatives and eventually aiding the process of normalization.

In the segment titled *Factual Dialogue* the spectator is presented with an opening medium shot of a small wooden table with a drawer. The drawer opens and out of it comes a medium sized lump of clay. The clay lump climbs onto the table and separates into two heads; each head is similar in that it is gendered as male, bald and has bulging eyes that are made of fiberglass to appear realistic. Once the heads are situated on the table, each mouth opens and an object comes out. This repeats in a series of semi rapid shots; in the first series of shots the items that protrude from the mouth match one another in their use. For example, the first set of objects is a toothbrush and toothpaste, the second a piece of bread and butter, third a shoe and its laces, and the final a pencil and a sharpener. In this series of shots the two objects interact according to their proper use, such as butter spread onto bread and toothpaste onto the toothbrush. Once each set of objects has interacted, the heads switch places on the table and another series of semi rapid shots begins, this time the objects interact with each other in a mismatched way. For example, the bread receives a pair of shoelaces; the butter is spread onto the pencil, and the shoelace is put into the sharpener (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Jan Švankmajer, *Factual Dialogue*

This series of shots grows more and more grotesque with the large red tongues (actual cow tongues) of the two clay heads sticking out further away from the mouth, and with the messy mixture of objects. In the following statement Bakhtin describes how the bulging eyes and the mouths' protruding objects contribute to the depiction of the grotesque body.

The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes...It is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside. Moreover, the bulging eyes manifest a purely bodily tension. But the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss. (316)

In the case of the two clay heads, the mouths open up to reveal objects of the world, and the objects extend themselves to one another. In the next series of shots the interaction between the objects become more violent and destructive. Each object is matched with its identical object, for example, toothbrush to toothbrush, bread to bread. With this placement the objects interact in a violent manner leading to their mutual destruction. As this destruction occurs the camera switches to a medium shot of the heads, which at this point have become cracked and worn down due to the exhaustive interaction. The segment ends with the two grossly misshapen heads positioned towards the spectator, both with their mouths wide open, tongues hanging out and panting. In this segment the image of the grotesque body emphasizes the way in which communication can slowly

deteriorate into chaos. As the two heads interact, their ability to communicate effectively diminishes to a debilitating degree.

In this final segment the spectator is presented with a commentary on the diminishing ability to effectively communicate. As described in the analysis, the segment consists of two representational male clay heads that project objects from their mouths. These objects interact with one another in a process that deteriorates from harmonious to complete exhaustion. Initially the objects that come in contact match one another and work together as implied by their traditional function, such as bread and butter, pencil and sharpener. This interaction only lasts temporarily, and soon the objects are mismatched and their interaction becomes confusing and dysfunctional. Eventually the objects interact with an identical object, and they proceed to mutually destroy one another, leaving the two heads badly misshapen and exhausted, therefore unable to communicate. This interaction is interesting in a distinctive way; the importance is found in the diminishing capacity of the objects to effectively work together or communicate. This idea correlates to the exhausting nature of the reform movement for both the leaders and citizens of Czechoslovakia. Initially the move towards reform was accepted amongst most of the country's leaders and a vast majority of its citizens; it was only after the Soviets applied pressure that the communication between party members started to deteriorate. In addition, there was a loss of open communication between the government of Czechoslovakia and its citizens in regards to how rapidly the Soviets expected a restoration of order without having to assist; when the Soviets assisted with an invasion and period of normalization, the citizens were at a loss as to an explanation of how and

why this occurred. Unfortunately, the leaders and citizens of Czechoslovakia also arrived at a point where communication was no longer possible.

Švankmajer's representation of the grotesque body clearly draws the attention of the spectator to the inability to effectively communicate in Czechoslovakia. Once the spectator is aware of the problem, Švankmajer doesn't provide a concrete answer as to how it can be solved. Rather, each segment leaves the spectator with an open ended question of what will happen next: will there be a remedy for the failures of communication? In the instance of *Dimensions of Dialogue I* consider the focus of the question to be of greater significance than its possible answers. Švankmajer's bodies emphasize the control placed on the many aspects of communication in Czechoslovakia under the period of normalization. With the hard penalties associated with displeasing the censors in any given area of media, the need for censorship all but disappeared. The ability to argue an issue became obsolete and so too the ability to openly express oneself. *Dimensions of Dialogue* breaks the silence brought on by normalization and forces the viewer to contemplate the disappearance of the right to openly and effectively communicate.

Chapter Two

Consuming Bodies

Food is a film based on human acts of consumption, specifically the act of cannibalism. Švankmajer's grotesque representation of the body and its interactions with food create a metaphorical language that draws attention to and emphasizes the differences in how people consume. With *Breakfast*, *Lunch* and *Dinner* taking place in dining establishments that range from working to upper class atmospheres, each act of consumption creates a commentary on the nature of class structure and power in both socialist and capitalist societies. In addition to the ability of the body to emphasize the disparity between class structures, there exists a unique relationship between this commentary and the complex sentiment of the citizens of Czechoslovakia from the time of the Prague Spring through the Velvet Revolution. Švankmajer builds upon this sentiment and offers a criticism with the commentary of his bodies.

The grotesque representation of the body in *Food* is significant in two ways. First, grotesque imagery is only apparent in the preparation of and consumption of the meal; all other elements of each scene are represented in a formal or orderly fashion, thus giving emphasis to the grotesque nature of the act. For example, Švankmajer uses live actors in plain dress, with little make-up and with all of their features intact. The sets are made of practical materials; it is only when in the act of preparation or consumption that an

actor's face becomes misshapen clay or cutlery appears from their ears. Secondly, the focus of all three segments is on the interaction between the body and food. Bakhtin states that the interaction of the body and food is directly linked to the grotesque image, such as when the body eats, regurgitates and defecates (Bakhtin 303). Bakhtin adds that the interaction of the grotesque body and food is usually excessive and filled with exaggeration. In this film, the focus is placed on the interactions of the body, the most notable of which is the body of one man giving nourishment to another. According to Bakhtin, the cycle of life is directly linked with the image of the grotesque:

Actually, if we consider the grotesque image in its extreme aspect, it never presents an individual body; the image consists of orifices and convexities that present another, newly conceived body. It is a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception. (318)

Here, Bakhtin stresses how the grotesque image of the body is in a constant state of rebirth. In the case of *Food*, the grotesque imagery of the renewal of life is apparent in the film's three acts of consumption. Each segment offers a different representation of the act of consumption, but the common thread amongst all three is the theme of cannibalism. In each act of cannibalism the body consumed provides sustenance to the body consuming, thus giving life through its death.

Table Etiquette

The film begins with a rapid succession of shots depicting a variety of cooked meals, including poultry dishes, desserts, and casseroles. Despite the rapid pace of the shots, the food is recognizably lavish and appetizing; this is followed with the title of the

first segment, *Breakfast*. Next, a medium establishing shot of a man sitting in a sparsely furnished room sets the stage for the following interactions. A man enters the room and shuts the door behind him; both men are elderly and dressed alike in clothing that is sensible and unadorned. For the sake of clarity, the man who first appears in the shot will be referred to as “sitting man” and the man entering the room as the “active man” (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: Jan Švankmajer, *Breakfast* (active and sitting man)

The active man enters the room and has a seat at the table across from the sitting man. The active man takes a look at the table and swipes a paper tray with left over bread and mustard onto the floor, he then looks around the room and notices that many of these trays are scattered across the floor. A quick series of close-ups depicting trash items within the room and tally marks on the wall foreshadow the following acts of repetition. Upon his inspection he notices a set of instructions placed around the sitting man’s neck; he takes a handful of change from his pocket and counts out three coins, he then looks for a place to insert the coins on top of sitting man’s head. He takes another look at the instructions and proceeds to squeeze the sitting man’s nose until he is forced to open his mouth for a breath. This act is depicted in a quick series of shots that create an image of convulsion; this image is accompanied by the sound of rattling change.

Once the sitting man's mouth is open, the active man pulls up his sleeve and sticks his hand into the sitting man's mouth and pulls out his tongue. This act is a particularly grotesque representation of the mouth and head, because as the active man places his hand in the sitting man's head it deforms by getting larger and misshapen; in addition, the tongue is pulled very far from the mouth almost to the point of detachment (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Jan Švankmajer, *Breakfast* (cow tongue)

For these shots, Švankmajer depicts the head of the sitting man with an exact clay replica that he is able to grossly shape and manipulate with stop motion animation. According to Bakhtin, “In the example of grotesque, displeasure is caused by the impossible and improbable nature of the image” (305). It's unimaginable that a man's tongue can be pulled this far from his mouth without being detached. This type of imagery certainly presents the spectator with something that causes “displeasure”, thus Švankmajer depicts and emphasizes the act of consumption with grotesque imagery. This type of grotesque imagery continues in the following shots.

Change is placed on the sitting man's tongue and it slides back into the sitting man's head. The active man then hits the sitting man on the head in an effort to push the change into the sitting man, as though he were a vending machine. The active man reads the instructions again and proceeds to lift the sitting man's glasses from his eyes, opening one of his eyes, and pushing his finger into it. At this point the sitting man begins to shake, the sound of rattling change is heard. The clothes on his chest begin to open; this reveals a cavity that resembles a dumb waiter. The pulley slowly pulls up a metal bin with a paper tray on it. The tray has one cooked sausage, some mustard and a small piece of bread on it; next to the tray there is a paper cup filled with beer. The active man proceeds to read the instructions again and punches the sitting man in the jaw, thus facilitating the projection of plastic ware from the sitting man's ears (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: Jan Švankmajer, *Breakfast* (utensil dispenser)

The active man's consumption is portrayed in a rapid succession of close-ups. Again, he reads the instructions and proceeds to kick the sitting man in the shin, which in turn produces a napkin from his coat pocket. After wiping his mouth, the active man

takes a seat and begins to move in a robotic manner; this movement is accompanied with the sound of metal squeaking and change rattling.

The active man becomes still and the sitting man becomes active as he begins to get up from the table. He gathers his belongings, takes a crayon and tallies one line on the wall before exiting the room. Just before the door has time to shut, another man enters the room and the same process begins again. This man, just like the last, has the laborious job of reading the fine print instructions placed around the sitting man's neck in order to obtain a meal. When this process comes to an end, he becomes still and the sitting man gets up to leave, makes a tally on the wall and exits the room; only this time, the door stays open for the spectator to see that outside of the room there is a long hallway filled with men waiting in an equally long line.

When considering the sequence of events described above, it's evident that the grotesque is most noticeable in the implausible interaction between the two men. Take for example the sitting man's stomach turning into a dumb waiter; while all of the items in the shot are formally represented, the image of a dumb waiter within the man's torso is impossible, and therefore creates a sense of uneasiness in the spectator. The source of this uneasiness can be found in the way in which the body is typically portrayed as being closed off and separate from the outside world. The implausible grotesque imagery used in this segment calls attention to the act of consumption and lays emphasis on the laborious nature of the act. The active man is forced to use the body of the sitting man in a series of unimaginable ways, but this doesn't happen all at once, it is a long and arduous process of physical force, that results in minimal compensation. The impossibility of the image can be found in the following segment as well. In addition to

the elements of the grotesque listed above, the image of the grotesque body is found in the cannibalistic nature of this act of consumption. By literally eating food that has come from within his fellow man, the active man is provided with nourishment; he then takes his turn as the provider, thus continuing the renewal of life.⁷

In the segment titled *Breakfast*, the spectator is presented with an act that emphasizes the laborious nature of consumption, but it is important to remember that this act isn't taking place between a man and machine; rather it takes place between two men. These men have to wait in line for a very long time before they have to go through the arduous process of receiving their meal from their fellow man. Once they receive their meal it is minimal at best. This scenario would be quite familiar with a Czechoslovak audience due to the conditions set in place by their socialist government. Socialism supports the ideology that every citizen should have access to resources provided by their government, and that each should be compensated according to their contribution (Kenez 96). In both the Soviet Union and Soviet Bloc, this ideology unfortunately led to a lack of resources such as adequate housing and consumer goods (Kenez 105). In addition to a lack of resources, the resources that existed were available through what was perceived by many as an unnecessarily bureaucratic process. The arduous act of cannibalism between the two men serves as a metaphorical language that speaks volumes to the unfortunate nature of the socialist ideology "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (Kenez 14). Švankmajer is drawing attention to and criticizing how ideological beliefs, regardless of their good intentions, can produce a negative effect on citizens.

⁷ See Ferry's *Food in Film A Culinary Performance of Communication* for more information regarding the relationship between food, society and communication.

The second segment, *Lunch* begins with another rapid succession of shots that depict a variety of cooked meals; these appear just as appetizing as the previous meals. This is followed by a medium shot of two men sitting at a table in what appears to be a casual dining restaurant. One man, who appears to be slightly older than the other, is wearing a professional suit with a tie and a handkerchief; his hair is cut short and neatly combed. The younger man is wearing a suit jacket with a plain t-shirt underneath; his hair is long and unkempt. The two men try to get the attention of the waiter to no avail. The older man begins cleaning his cutlery with his handkerchief in an effort to pass time; the younger man imitates, but does so in an unseemly way when he spits on his cutlery (inadvertently spitting in the eye of the older man) and begins to wipe the cutlery on his sleeve. A waiter quickly walks past the two men and again they try, but fail to get his attention. The younger man looks down in disappointment as he grabs his stomach, thus signaling his hunger. Again the waiter walks by and they try to get his attention to no avail; in his effort to get the attention of the waiter, the younger man disrupts a small vase of flowers placed on the table. He proceeds to put one of the flowers in his mouth after attempting to straighten out the bouquet; he takes a second thought and pulls the flower out of his mouth and places it on the lapel of his jacket. This act gives the older man an idea; he proceeds to take out his handkerchief and place the flowers on his plate, and begins to eat them. This leads to an interaction between the men that resembles a game of follow the leader. After consuming the flowers, the older man drinks the dirty vase water. The young man proceeds to eat the vase in one swallow; this is followed by the older man eating his handkerchief. The young man follows suit and pulls out an old dirty handkerchief and tries to eat it as well, but unlike the older man who uses his cutlery in a

proper manner, the younger man cannot get his cutlery to do an adequate job; this leads the young man to eat his handkerchief in a crude way. The inability of the younger, unrefined man to eat with proper table etiquette is a constant theme throughout the meal, yet the older man doesn't make a fuss or try to correct the young man.

Again, the waiter walks by and the two men try to signal him to their table only to fail. At this point the older man takes off his socks and shoes and places them on his plate and begins to eat them. The young man looks in disbelief at the older man, but decides to follow suit and begins to eat his shoes as well. Each act of consumption depicts a more deformed image of the young man's mouth and head. The mouth gets bigger, the head becomes misshapen, the skin cracks and the eyes bulge. The older man begins to eat his clothing and the younger man again imitates his actions. Though his bites do become larger, the older man is still using his cutlery to consume his food. In contrast, with each act of swallowing, the younger man's consumption becomes more and more exaggerated; he neglects to even pick up his cutlery and simply stuffs his mouth with each item of clothing. Both men are sitting naked at the table and the server walks by yet again without notice of his patrons. This leads the older man to begin consuming the tablecloth and the table; again the younger man imitates the act consumption. Each act of consumption grows in exaggeration; both men take bigger bites, use less table etiquette, and become more misshapen in the act of swallowing (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: Jan Švankmajer, *Lunch*

Finally, the two men have devoured the table and chairs. They sit naked on the floor as the server walks past them and they fail in their final attempt to get his attention. At this point the older man takes a look at his cutlery and places it in his mouth as though he were consuming it. Just as before, the younger man does the same, only this time the older man has tricked the young man. The young man learns that the older man has not swallowed his cutlery when he proceeds to regurgitate it. The older man gives the younger man a look that implies a devious sense of victory and proceeds to back the young man against the wall in an effort to consume him. The young man has a look of terror on his face as he raises his hands in an effort to defend himself. In the last shot, the spectator sees is the older man coming closer with his cutlery until it fades to black.

This segment offers images of consumption that are slightly more grotesque than *Breakfast*, mainly in the fact that the faces of the two men become more misshapen, such as the mouths widening and the eyes bulging further from the face with each bite, leading to the ultimate act of consumption, cannibalism. Remembering that “the most important of all human features of the grotesque is the mouth” and that “the grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes” (Bakhtin 317), as well as the endless destruction and renewal of

life found in the grotesque, it is clear that Švankmajer's imagery in this segment also brings attention to, by way of the grotesque, the act of consumption. The grotesque imagery in this act of consumption emphasizes the fact that everything is consumable, from the clothing to the table, and finally to man himself.

In this segment the spectator witnesses a slightly different commentary on the relationship between class and consumption. This scenario depicts a well-to-do man of the middle class seated with a younger lower-class working man. The distinction between their positions can be drawn from the attire they wear, their personal grooming and table etiquette. These men try and try to gain the attention of their waiter to no avail; subsequently they begin to devour all that surrounds them. As previously described, for the middle class man, there is not a single item that is beyond consumption. The working class man follows his lead and consumes with him, albeit in a less mannerly way. They consume and consume until they're left with themselves, and at this point the middle class man consumes his working-class companion.

This is a familiar scenario in two distinctive ways. First, the inattentive waiter would most certainly be recognized by the audience as a criticism of the state of Czechoslovakia during its time as a socialist society. This is due to the fact that during this time waiters were paid the same wage regardless of the service that they gave, thus leading to their inattentiveness; this problem was notorious not only in the Soviet Union, but to countries within the Soviet Bloc. Secondly, at the time of the film's production, 1992, the citizens of Czechoslovakia had only experienced life in a free market society for a little over two years, but they would have been familiar with the idea of the well-off exploiting the lower class, mainly because during the early years of democracy for

Czechoslovakia, it became apparent that only the wealthy could afford all that was available, and in order to continue to thrive, exploitation of the lower classes was indeed necessary (Vogt 112). Therefore, this segment can be taken as a dual criticism of the unfortunate nature of both socialist and capitalist ideology.

The final segment, *Dinner*, begins with the same rapid succession of shots depicting cooked meals; this is followed by a medium establishing shot of an elderly gentleman sitting at a dining table. He is dressed in a tuxedo and the décor of the dining room is of fine quality as well. The table is crowded with various assortments of sauces and relishes (see Figure 10).



Figure 10: Jan Švankmajer, *Dinner*

The man prepares to eat his meal by placing a napkin in his lap; this is followed with a series of shots in which the man applies a sauce or relish to his dish. During these shots the spectator is unable to see what food item is on the plate and the focus is primarily on the detail of each sauce and relish being applied. Each item is applied again and again to the point of excess. The individual shots are close-ups and focus on the transfer of liquids or relish from the original container to the plate; the closeness and repetitious nature of the dressing of the plate produces a grotesque depiction food.

The overindulgence of the dressing comes to an end when the man begins to eat the meal. He does this in a very unusual way by placing a fork in his hand, which is wooden; he then proceeds to hammer the fork into place with two nails and checks to see if the fork is sturdy. He picks up his knife and moves both of his hands over the plate in order to cut the food item on his plate; it is at this point that the food item, the man's hand and part of his arm, is finally revealed to the spectator (see Figure 11).



Figure 11: Jan Švankmajer, *Dinner* (severed hand)

It appears to be amputated and neatly placed upon the plate but covered with the assortment of sauces and relishes. The man carefully removes a ring from the ring finger of the hand on the plate and begins to cut into the hand. At this point the camera pans over to a medium-close shot of a man's torso.

The torso of the man is covered by an athletic tank top with a number pinned to the front. The spectator doesn't see his face as he opens a silver platter that is placed before him on the table. When he lifts the top off the platter he reveals a foot and part of a leg on the plate; it is lying on a bed of greens with onions scattered on top and the foot has a runner's shoe on it (see Figure 12).



Figure 12: Jan Švankmajer, *Dinner* (severed leg and foot)

The man takes off the shoe with his fork and knife and proceeds to cut into the foot, but at this exact moment the camera quickly pans to another table into a close-up of two halves of a lemon. This is followed by a female picking up the lemons and squeezing their juice onto a pair of breasts that lay on a plate with garnish (see Figure 13). As she picks up her spoon and begins to eat, the camera pans to yet another table.

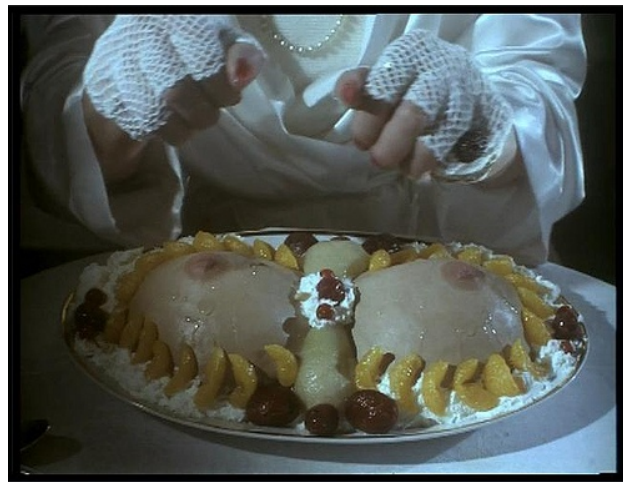


Figure 13: Jan Švankmajer, *Dinner* (severed breasts)

This shot depicts the hairy torso of an overweight male; a large glass of beer blocks a complete view of his chest as he scratches it. He proceeds to pick up his fork and

spoon, both of which are made of flimsy metal; in this shot the spectator can see that the table is no longer covered with fine linen, but a dirty red checker table cloth covered with ashtrays and ashes. The following shot shows his fork and spoon cutting into a penis that lies on a white plate (see Figure 14); it is surrounded by a red sauce and onions with a side of bread. The man quickly places his hands atop the penis to hide them from the spectator, he then shoos the spectator away with one hand as the shot fades to black.



Figure 14: Jan Švankmajer, *Dinner* (severed penis)

The depiction of the grotesque in this segment relies on the dressing and consumption of unimaginable food items. Again, the actors and the set are formally represented, and all attention is drawn to the act of consumption itself. In this act of consumption the emphasis is on excess. The relishes and sauces applied to the food are in their own right grossly represented and it is implausible that anyone would apply this amount of relish to any one dish. The consumption becomes even more unimaginable when the food item is revealed to be the diner's own body part. In the case of *Dinner*, the renewal of life found in the grotesque occurs when man devours himself.

Dinner places the spectator in the bourgeois fine dining restaurant that exemplifies the ultimate criticism of the upper-class. In this scenario the emphasis is on the grossly excessive nature of upper class consumption. The body parts depicted as dinner can be seen as a metaphor for how the diners in this establishment are so accustomed to thriving off of the lower classes that they can consume in such excess without a second thought. Their plates are lavishly garnished and they appear oblivious to who may be watching them; this clearly serves as a criticism of the lavish and blatant lifestyle of the capitalist bourgeoisie. This continues until the spectator reaches the table of a man who is clearly out of place; yet he too is about to indulge in himself. This appears to be a direct commentary on the capitalist ideology that even the lower class can achieve wealth and propriety as long as they work hard and imitate the upper class.

It is evident with the previous analysis that each segment of *Food* emphasizes various attributes of the act of consumption through grotesque imagery, thus pointing out the differences in how people consume. Each segment offers a different commentary to the spectator regarding how one consumes and in each segment the type of consumption and the emphasis of that consumption change according to the class level of the individuals and their environment.

The commentary of the bodies in *Food* criticizes the ills of both socialist and capitalist societies. Primarily by pointing out that regardless of their optimistic ideologies, both demonstrate though quite differently, the unfortunate nature of man having to exploit his fellow man in order to thrive. The poignancy of this criticism lies in the fact that from the period of the Prague Spring through the Velvet Revolution, the people of Czechoslovakia yearned for a more democratic form of government and a free

market society. When the events of the Prague Spring took place, the people and their leaders agreed that the current form of socialism needed reform, but many were unsure of which direction and how far this should go. Some wanted a complete departure from socialism altogether, but this seemed unlikely at the time. Regardless of what the citizens wanted, they unfortunately were unable to see any reform to the end with the intervention of the Soviets. But the people were once again faced with this very complex issue after the Velvet Revolution. The Velvet Revolution marked the end of a socialist government, but brought on the beginning of a time in which the people experienced a great amount of economic instability. There were more goods to buy and more options at hand, but inflation made it impossible for all but the wealthiest to afford purchasing them. This left most of the citizens feeling ambivalent about the nature of their present free market society. They often thought that things were better, more stable, under socialism (Vogt 141).

Though he produced *Food* twenty years after writing it, it is striking that the complex issues that Švankmajer wanted to address were still absolutely relevant in the time of its production. This is possible not only because of the socio-political situation that plagued the Czech lands for so long, but also of the fact that Švankmajer focuses on issues that plague many societies. Švankmajer addresses how he feels about the nature of his work: “The subversiveness of my films was always aimed at a point beneath the surface of phenomena such as Stalinism. That is why I have no need to change the direction of my themes” (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 118). Švankmajer’s distaste for both socialist and capitalist ideology was common among Czech citizens considering the unstable condition of Czechoslovakia during transition, but for Švankmajer, there are no

easy answers to the questions surrounding the direction Czechoslovakia would take in the years after socialism, though it can certainly be said that his position appears pessimistic (Vogt 105).

Chapter Three

Manipulating Bodies

Švankmajer's *Faust* is presented to the spectator in a myriad of settings, some realistic, some fantastic, yet there is a constant theme within all of these settings: the manipulation of characters, especially that of *Faust*. Characters are often being manipulated by an unknown source that appears as a hand; the hand controls the characters through the use of puppet strings and marionette sticks. In many scenes various props are put in place to create a theater setting in which the puppets and marionettes interact, often under the control of the hand. While in some scenes the characters are free of the hand's manipulation, there are other factors of manipulation at play. Švankmajer often depicts these acts of manipulation with grotesque imagery of the body, thus emphasizing the act of manipulation within the context of the film. Again, it is evident that the representation of the grotesque body and its interactions serve as a metaphorical language that creates a commentary on socio-political issues. In the case of *Faust*, the bodies create a commentary on the nature of control and agency in post-communist Czech Republic. When considering the commentary of the bodies, it is important to specifically address the relationship between what is said by the bodies and the complex socio-political time in which the film was produced.

The Faust story has been adapted in literature, music and more recently film.

Though each adaptation is different, there are common themes found in the way in which

the story is told; often times in Eastern Europe, the story concerns itself with specific political problems that face society (Hedges 6). Take for example Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Bulgakov satirizes the absurd and terrifying conditions under Stalinism. Similarly, Thomas Mann's adaptation of the legend *Doctor Faustus* deals with the complex issues surrounding German cultural identity and its significant relationship to Nazism (Hedges 44). Though Švankmajer is not the first to engage political implications in the story's retelling, his adaptation is unique in the fact that while one can draw political implications from the film, Švankmajer's storyline and dialogue do not deviate from Christopher Marlowe's original text *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1594). Švankmajer's political implications are subtle but effective. Take, for instance, his use of an unknown hand that manipulates characters and sets in both theatrical and open space settings, as well as the characters morphing from live actors to molded clay figures, controlled puppets, and life-sized marionettes: all of these separate parts combine to present the spectator with the fact that all elements can come under manipulation. The more obvious political implication of Švankmajer's adaptation is the way in which he forces his Faust to choose between the old and the new Prague.

Lecke Faust (The Lesson of Faust): Synopsis

The film opens with a live action scene that depicts the crowded streets of contemporary Prague, people and cars presumably on their way to and from work. All seems ordinary within the first few scenes; however, the spectator is slowly subjected to an environment that becomes increasingly strange. The protagonist of the film, a middle-aged working-class man, encounters two men on the street who are passing out maps; he takes one, only to discard it into the nearest trashcan. The protagonist encounters the map

in his mailbox, finds an egg within his loaf of bread, and subsequently cracks the egg only to find nothing inside. The cracking of the egg leads to a sudden storm within the man's apartment and it appears to represent the opening of an alternative dimension of reality. He looks out of his window to see the two men who were handing out the flyers on the street. They stare back at him with white eyes; one man is holding the chicken that left the apartment in the earlier shot. When the protagonist turns away from the window, the two men proceed to take out white colored contacts from their eyes; only the spectator is able to see the two men doing this. This shot is especially important, because it establishes from the beginning that the two men are manipulating the actions of the protagonist. It is apparent that they have placed the additional map in his mailbox, as well as the chicken in the apartment and are now enticing the interest of the protagonist with the mysterious storm and eerie white eyes.

Their manipulative efforts pay off, and the next day the protagonist follows the map into a dark and decrepit part of the city. He enters what appears to be a rundown building. From this point forward, he and the other characters address him as Faust. As Faust begins his journey through the multi-dimensional theater, he encounters additional characters, such as Mephistopheles, a jester and the devil himself. These characters are played by life-sized marionettes, small puppets and clay figures. At no point within the film does the protagonist address the fact that he is interacting with inanimate objects that have taken a life of their own, and at times the protagonist himself is turned into a marionette.

Faust's journey continues both in and outside of the theater that he originally enters, but in a very distinctive way. He conjures the demon Mephistopheles while in the

theater and signs his pact with the devil upon the theater's stage, but once he has signed this pact his interactions are strictly within the controlled environment of the theater and alternating open air settings. Faust travels through strange alternate dimensions and encounters a myriad of characters that engage his attention until he becomes frustrated with the lack of knowledge provided in all of these situations. Faust is once again in the theater when he begins to contemplate his pact with the devil and decides to flee. At this point the devil enters the room only to find that Faust has escaped; the following shots show Faust as a live actor running through the building. Just as he makes his way through the door and runs into the streets of Prague he is hit by a red car and killed.

As a result of its appearance in an earlier scene, the spectator will most certainly recognize the red car that hits Faust. In the earlier scene, after being exhaustively manipulated by the jester, one of the demons is seen getting into the red car and speeding away. The scene in which Faust is hit by the red car is one example of the many scenes within the film in which the spectator becomes aware of the fact that in every situation there is a source of control over Faust and his environment. In the case of this scene, Faust is being prohibited from doing something, which is running away from the commitment he has made to the devil; in most scenes, however, the source of control is manipulating Faust into action. In either circumstance Faust is being manipulated and loses a great deal of agency throughout his journey. Interestingly, most of the acts of manipulation are depicted with grotesque imagery. By depicting the act of manipulation with grotesque imagery, Švankmajer is drawing attention to and emphasizing the lack of control and agency over one's body and its subsequent actions.

The Grotesque Body and Manipulation

To illustrate exactly how the image of the grotesque body emphasizes the act of manipulation, it is necessary to closely analyze a scene in which this takes place, first focusing on the depiction of grotesque images of the body, then on the way in which it emphasizes acts of manipulation. The scene to be analyzed takes place late in the film and depicts Faust being manipulated away from contemplation and into physical pleasure by a demon. The scene begins with Faust inside of the theater in a backstage room; he encounters Mephistopheles in the form of a clay head. The head rolls in the direction of Faust in the form of a solid ball of clay, and as it slows to a stop it forms into a misshapen head with bulging eyes, oversized nose, large dirty teeth and horns. Here we can see that Bakhtin's description of the grotesque eyes, nose and mouth most certainly apply to Švankmajer's depiction of Mephistopheles (see Figure 15). The eyes are bulging, the nose protrudes from the face and the mouth is oversized and misshapen (Bakhtin 317).



Figure 15: Jan Švankmajer, *Faust* Clay Head of Mephistopheles, Krátký Film, 1994

Faust curses Mephistopheles and grabs his head and smashes it, but the head reforms. Again, Faust curses Mephistopheles and vows to “renounce the magic and repent;” as he yells these verses, he grabs the head and smashes it, picks it up and throws it out the room, shutting the door behind him. The backstage room is turned into a set stage and an oversized wooden marionette head is lowered onto Faust’s shoulders. According to Bakhtin, the image of the grotesque body can take on the form of a human with animal traits or a human form represented as an inanimate object (Bakhtin 303). The latter of the two is directly related to the representation of Faust as a life-sized marionette. As Faust kneels to the picture of Christ, the life-sized marionette-devil-head appears from the side of the stage; after seeing that Faust is in the act of contemplation, the devil turns and calls one of his demons to come and “take on the guise of lovely Helen, we shall deceive him one more time.” As the devil calls out this command, there is a series of shots of a demon head rolling through a dark forest, it attaches to a marionette body in the theater and the unknown hands dress it in a female disguise. This is followed by a close-up shot of the hands taking a screwdriver and screwing a hole into the pelvic area of the wooden marionette; then the hands place a fake patch of pubic hair above the hole.

This image correlates to what Bakhtin describes as the “lower stratum” of the grotesque body (311). The “lower stratum” is connected to the ability of the grotesque body to outgrow or “transgress” itself through its reproductive organs (Bakhtin 317). According to Bakhtin, this part of the body has lost its representation in the “new bodily canon” unless it’s referred to in the manner of a joke or slur, but in terms of the “old bodily canon” it is simply a symbol of the body’s ability to produce a second body

(Bakhtin 319). By depicting the vagina on an inanimate object by means of a screwdriver, Švankmajer is instantly causing the spectator uneasiness that draws attention to the act at hand.

Helen enters the stage and begins to entice Faust; he is quick to react to her beauty and declares “she deserves the ecstasy of love.” The scene continues with Faust chasing Helen through an old crumbling castle; he proceeds to follow her through darkened rooms until they come to a room that is filled with caskets. Helen crouches down in a corner with her back turned to Faust; he approaches her, lifts her to her feet and begins kissing her wooden face. Faust proceeds to lay the marionette body on the ground and begins sexual intercourse. Throughout the shots that follow the spectator can see the demon's arms and legs as they are revealed; they are red with deep black lines, and black claws. It is only when the sexual act is complete that Faust lifts the dress of Helen and reveals the demon's wooden body with a gaping hole in the pelvic area; he then realizes that he has been deceived by the demon. Again, this gaping hole that represents the vagina is depicted in a grotesque way, both by appearing on an inanimate object and being shown in general, for that which belongs to the “lower stratum” is hidden away from and separated from the rest of society (Bakhtin 320). This is the point at which Faust goes back into the theater and begins contemplating his choice to sign a pact with the devil, and ultimately decides to abandon his commitment, only to be killed while trying to escape.

Švankmajer's use of the image of the grotesque body during this scene draws attention to and emphasizes the act of manipulation. Rather than using live actors or two marionettes, he chose to portray the act in a way that would disturb the spectator, thus

getting them to pay special attention to the way in which Faust is being manipulated. The first example of this can be found in the beginning of the scene when Faust's body is turned into an inanimate object, with this grotesque imagery the spectator pays close attention to the actions of Faust, actions that are manipulated by an unknown hand. The second example of the grotesque body emphasizing the act of manipulation can be found in the depiction of Helen as a demon marionette in disguise.

Here the spectator is presented with imagery that is unsettling in a number of ways. For example, the depiction of the "lower stratum" of Helen's body and the sexual interaction between live actor and marionette. This imagery emphasizes the way in which Faust is being manipulated into action; there are no strings attached to either Faust or Helen, and still Faust is under the manipulation of the devil. While this scene is only one example of the image of the grotesque body being employed during the act of manipulation, grotesque imagery is seen many times throughout the film, certainly during each act of manipulation.

From the onset of the film it becomes apparent to the spectator that Faust is either directly or indirectly manipulated into action. The direct manipulation occurs mainly when the unknown hands control both Faust and his environment through the use of stage props and puppet strings; the indirect manipulation often occurs when Faust encounters the two nameless men. They lead him into action by giving him clues to unlocking the alternate dimension. In both cases, Švankmajer uses grotesque imagery in order to emphasize the act of manipulation, thus drawing attention to and making a commentary on the nature of control and agency of one's own body.

The Message of *Faust*

Švankmajer's choice to adapt the story of *Faust* is in itself a form of manipulation. By applying one's interpretation to a previous text, one adapts and manipulates that material in the process. In Švankmajer's *Faust* the adaptation takes on one explicit theme, manipulation. Švankmajer explains his reasoning for such an adaptation:

During the filming I felt a great urge to bring my own obsessive theme into the work: the theme of manipulation. Manipulation is not just a principle of totalitarian regimes. Of this I am becoming more and more convinced. (Hames, *Dark Alchemy* 114)

Švankmajer's words are significant in a very distinctive way. It is clear that the director himself has an obsession with the act of manipulation. There is evidence of this not only in his statement, but also in his choice of medium when working in film; claymation and stop motion animation are among the most tedious forms of filmmaking, but with these two mediums the artist can manipulate the subject to his or her exact taste. Švankmajer's statement about manipulation and choice of medium brings to light the theories of Patrick Fuery concerning the cinematized body. According to Fuery, the cinematized body comes under different forms of control when it's being filmed (84). In the case of *Faust*, it is clear that Švankmajer has complete control over the depiction of the bodies and it appears as though Švankmajer is playing with this idea when he shows the unknown hand. Instead of asking the audience to believe that this is the unknown hand of a universal puppet master, I would argue that he is cleverly alluding to the fact that he is in control. Švankmajer's commentary in the statement above and his choice of

medium, share a unique relationship with the socio-political situation in the Czech Republic prior to the film's production. Švankmajer's obsession with manipulation and the lack of control and agency over one's body can be directly linked with the socio-political turbulence many Czech citizens experienced leading up to and after the Velvet Divorce. Prior to the Velvet Revolution, the citizens of present day Czech Republic experienced a life that lacked any real sense of agency. Along with the rules that were explicitly in place according to law, there were implied conducts of order facilitated through all forms of media (Šimečka 51).

The second matter of significance in Švankmajer's statement is the way in which he hints at the idea that manipulation is occurring even after the fall of the totalitarian governments across the Soviet Bloc. Here it seems as though he is once again alluding to the ills of capitalist and socialist societies. Švankmajer's Faust exists and interacts in both a modern and antiquated Prague. While in the modern streets of Prague, Faust has a reasonable amount of agency; upon entering the old city which appears as the rundown theater, Faust immediately comes under the control of another unknown source. The new and modern streets of Prague in the film appear to represent the newly democratic Czech Republic, a place in which citizens have agency. The old abandoned, crumbling Prague filled with dilapidated buildings and castles appears to represent the nation under harsh communist rule, a place in which citizens have no control and are at the mercy of the puppet master. It is in this place that Faust encounters the most devious forms of manipulation, but that is not to say he doesn't encounter manipulation in the modern city as well. There is always someone or something guiding Faust before he enters the old city and it's in the modern streets that Faust meets his end. While the especially grotesque

acts of manipulation allude to the repression and control of past totalitarian states, the subtlety of what occurs in the modern Prague clearly presents the spectator with a caution to be careful of putting complete faith in the status quo. This cautionary tale would have certainly reached Czech audiences, due in part to the fact that after the Velvet Divorce there were many financial scandals in the Czech government. This corruption led citizens to truly understand that money equaled power of choice, thus forcing many to come to grips with the inevitable shortcomings of capitalism (Dryzek and Holmes 250).

Švankmajer's *Faust* appears to embody the collective anxiety of a nation struggling with the transition from a state of complete control into a state of agency, but what can be said of the way in which Švankmajer ends the film? Here the spectator encounters the "*Lecke Faust* or The Lesson of Faust." Faust chooses agency, but in doing so, he flees the old building for the streets of Prague only to be hit by a car and killed. This scene appears to represent Švankmajer's position towards the status quo; it's obvious that Faust is damned in either situation. Švankmajer explains his distaste for both socialist and capitalist forms of government, as well as his bleak outlook for the future of not only the Czech Republic, but for all of civilization:

Half the world played the "social justice" game while happily murdering people in its name and the other half played on the "freedom of the individual" while, using advertising tricks, creating unified consumers who did not have their own will and happily licked up any old scum. These two worlds created each other as irreconcilable enemies so that they could gladly arm themselves and thus ensure enough work for the people and enough gain for the military industrial complexes on both sides. The collapse of "socialism" was the last nail in the coffin of this civilization. (Hames, *Dark Alchemy*

118)

Švankmajer clearly states that regardless of where one may exist, the powers that be will implement control over the individual and that power will be used in one way or another. This statement appears to personify many aspects of Foucault's theory of the "body politic." First, Foucault states: "[t]he body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body," (26) this theory shares a direct relationship to Švankmajer's statements regarding the "gain of the military industrial complexes on both sides." In this case the body is invested with power in order to produce and sustain economy, both in socialist and capitalist societies. The manipulation of the body is essential in its ability to receive and transmit the knowledge of social order and control, thus serving an economic purpose. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the body can receive and transmit knowledge that resists social order and control, thus creating an altogether different purpose.

This is the unique characteristic of both Švankmajer's bodies within his films and his films as a 'bodily' discourse. According to Patrick Fuery, the cinematized body has a unique relationship with the existing knowledge of power, conforming to, reinforcing or resisting it (84). As we have seen in *Faust*, and the previous chapters as well, the body in Švankmajer's work actively resists the existing knowledge of power; this resistance is evident through the grotesque depiction and interactions of the body. While many of the actions of the bodies in Švankmajer's work represent the destructive and unfortunate characteristics of human interaction in socio-political situations, Švankmajer's films as a 'body' within the discourse of film produces a unique knowledge of resistance to this destruction. In this sense, it can be said that within the filmic discourse, Švankmajer's

work is a beneficial criticism regarding the investment of power on the individual and its relationship to society.

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