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The Švankmajer Touch

I am a hand with six fingers with webs in between. Instead of fingernails I have petite, sharp, sweet-toothed little tongues with which I lick the world.

JAN ŠVANKMAJER, SELF-PORTRAIT, 1999 (2002, 6)

Jan Švankmajer's animated films are renowned for their tactile dimensions. Heads devour one another in devastating conversations, objects collide painfully with mismatched intentions, lovers' bodies melt into one in a tender embrace (*Dimensions of Dialogue*, 1982). A master at extending filmic experience to include tactile as well as audiovisual sensations, Švankmajer also offers us a unique vision of the communicative powers of touch. We can draw this insight out if, instead of observing Švankmajer as a filmmaker whose movies work at a tactile level, we regard him as a Czech Surrealist for whom touch is indispensable. Although Švankmajer is best known for his films, the vitality of touch in his creative practice is most apparent in a range of static artworks and poems made during a period (1974-1983) in which he experimented intensively with tactile experience.

Commentators have made reference to this interlude when noting how touch is integral to Švankmajer's films. However, film/animation scholars have not studied the tactile experiments as artworks in their own right, nor has their intrinsic value to the artist been analysed in detail. Naturally enough, film/animation scholars are more interested in observing the application of his tactile experiments in his films. If, however, we focus on Švankmajer's turn from film to tactile art (instead of the other way round) we discover a more remarkable objective. In his tactile experiments Švankmajer animates with touch, in the same way as he animates with a camera (or a pen, or a puppet). His aim is to liberate tactile perception as a means of poetic expression.

Švankmajer's experiments with tactilism

In the 1970's, a few years after the Soviet Union put an end to the progressive communist government of Czechoslovakia, Švankmajer stopped making films and turned instead to experimenting with tactile art. There is a simple explanation for what motivated this shift in Švankmajer's creative focus. He had been banned from working as a cinema director. First, his politically satirical short film *Leonardo's Diary* (1972) was denounced in the Czech Communist newspaper. Then, after attacks on his next film, *The Castle of Otranto* (1973-1979), by the internal censor at Krátký Film, he resigned after the film-shoot. He was unable to direct his own films again until 1979¹.

Švankmajer had previously worked in live and puppet theatre (the Theatre of Masks and the *Lanterna Magika* Puppet Theatre), and as a artist and writer. Now, in collaboration with artist Eva Švankmajerová, he worked with graphics, ceramics, everyday objects and poetry. The pair made collages, art implements, 'natural history' cabinets, 'tactile' scenarios and portraits. Most of the pieces were made between 1974-1983 (mainly 1977-1978), and Švankmajer continued making tactile art after he returned to making films again. The name they gave to all these artworks was 'tactile experiments.'

¹ See Michael Brooke's interview with Švankmajer (Brooke 2007). *The Castle of Otranto* was eventually cleared for distribution in 1979. Most filmographies indicate that the film was made between 1973-1979, which would suggest that Švankmajer did in fact make a film during the period. I was alerted to the need to explain this otherwise puzzling discrepancy by an anonymous reviewer's comment about the confusion over the film's production date, for which I thank them

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Švankmajer published a book, *Hmat a Imaginace* [*Touch and Imagination*], documenting his and several other artists' tactile experiments.² In 1970 the Švankmajers had joined the subversive Prague-based Czech Surrealists group. The tactile experiments began in 1974 as a collaborative game, called 'Restaurateur' [Restorer], which Švankmajer devised for members of this group. The game began with a newspaper photograph of an art restorer at work, chosen by Švankmajer. Švankmajer presented the participants in the game with a tactile interpretation he had made of this photograph, which the participants had not seen. Participants were asked to manually explore the artwork, which was hidden under a cloth, and list the items they identified, along with their first impressions of them. Each participant was asked to create a visualized impression of Švankmajer's artwork. Participants then described their tactile impressions as associations, analogies and an imagined whole. Finally, the participants were asked to figure out which one of a group of photos they were shown was Švankmajer's model for the tactile interpretation. Most of the participants found it difficult to choose only one picture; they saw analogies with their own interpretations in many of them.

The primary purpose of the game was to study the extent to which touch is capable of stimulating associative thinking and becoming an imaginative stimulus, as opposed to touch having a merely identifying or utilitarian function. Švankmajer was also curious to compare tactile perception and visual perception of an artwork. His conclusion was that touch, in the sphere of art, is a sense unruled by convention. As such, it is difficult to imagine its confinement to any purely aesthetic, or formally determined purpose. Equally though, Švankmajer was convinced by his 'Restorer' experiment that tactile objects could express feelings objectively just as well as words, colours or shapes could describe them (Švankmajer, 1994: 36). If Surrealism is directed at the restoration of universal powers of irrational thought, emotion and perception, then Švankmajer sought to demonstrate that tactile experience, as poetry, restores access to them.

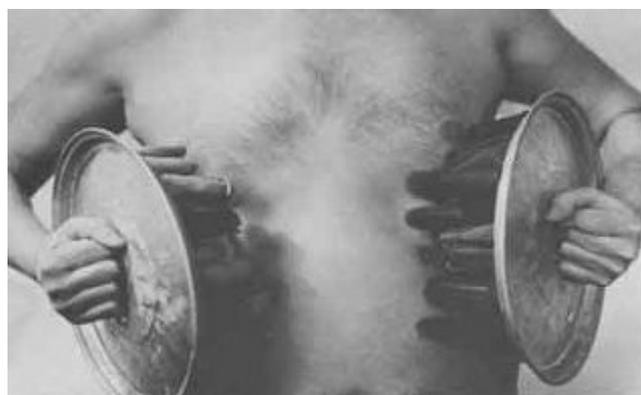
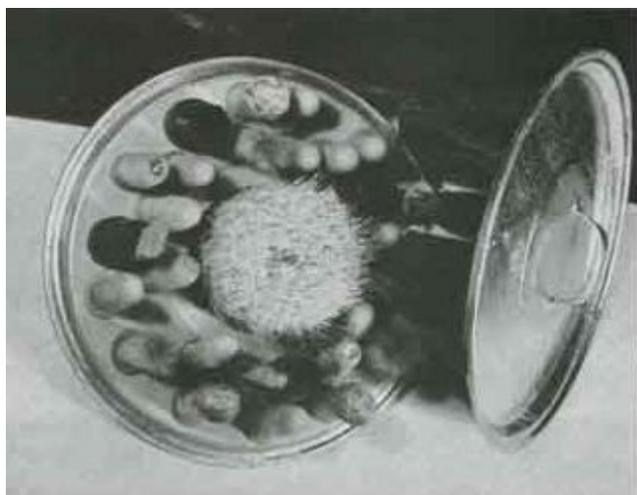


Fig. 1 & 2 - *Tactile lids*, 1978 (Švankmajer 1994; reproduced by courtesy of J. Švankmajer)

Švankmajer then embarked on an exploration of sources of tactile creativity. These included erotica, childhood tactile memories, tactile dreams, and other stimuli of tactile experience. He devised various techniques for stimulating imaginative tactile experience, observing that although hands are the most communicative organs of touch, they are not the most sensitive or excitable:

² *Hmat a Imaginace* (1994) includes artworks and poems that Jan Švankmajer and Eva Švankmajerová created between 1974-1983, as well as works from after that time. It was preceded in by a samizdat (five copy) edition with a 'tactile' cover in 1983. There is no published English translation of the book, apart from English and French translations of some fragments that are included in the Czech edition, and some that are published in *Afterimage*, 13 (Autumn), 1987: 4-67. I have been fortunate to have access to an English translation by Stanley Dalby, which, at the time of submission of this article we are in the process of editing, with revisions by Jan Švankmajer, for publication.

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‘It is the “passive” parts of our bodies, and their connections to the entire surface, cavities, internal organs and mucous membranes, which act as a link to our most intensive sensory experience’ (Švankmajer 1974: 43).



Fig. 3 & 4 - *Arcimboldo Elements Game*, 1990
(Švankmajer 1994; reproduced by courtesy of J. Švankmajer)

Fig. 5 (below) - *Utilitarian bondage (tactile chair)*, 1977
(Švankmajer 1994; reproduced by courtesy of J. Švankmajer)



Švankmajer also experimented with ‘tactile’ hand gestures, realised in the form of sculptures and poems. During the creation of any such artwork, he stipulates that there should be a discharge of accumulated emotional tensions, through gestures that express the creator’s psychical state. Unlike gestural painting however, these works were created without the mediation of instruments such as brushes or scrapers (Švankmajer 1994: 191). In the process of making gestural sculptures, Švankmajer literally thrusts and squeezes his pent-up emotions into the clay.



These objects are created by hand gestures that are made without seeking analogical structures that correspond to our feelings (Švankmajer and Švankmajerová 1998 :74). In other words, they are fossilized impressions made by injections of emotion that can pass directly into our own psyches and affect or animate us too, rather than passive, representational artworks. As in the case of rubbings of objects made with pencil and paper (frottage), which Švankmajer has also experimented with (Švankmajer 2004: 84), the artist’s hand becomes the ‘medium’ of an intertwined external and inner reality coming into being.

Švankmajer makes some qualifying remarks about the visual reproduction of tactile artworks, which apply to the images that are reproduced here. Tactile perception involves a gradual exploration of the tactile art object, which entails seeking out elusive identifiable connections. In a visual representation, a viewer can immediately appraise the tactile

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artwork as a whole, including making formal judgements about its aesthetic qualities (Švankmajer 1994: 26). In making this observation Švankmajer asserts that time, movement and interaction play an essential role in the tactile perception of objects. We experience this directly in works such as *The Reverse Side of Touch* (1978), and *Game of Cunnilingus* (1990).

Instructions for touching: First have a careful look at the drawing. Select a place from which to begin and start touching. Gently place fingers on the starting point, close your eyes and set off on a journey from memory. The whole way keep repeating in your mind: ‘I will never see this again.’ (Švankmajer 1994: 168; trans. Gaby Dowdell.) The aim is to push the ball with the tongue into the furry hollow as fast as possible.

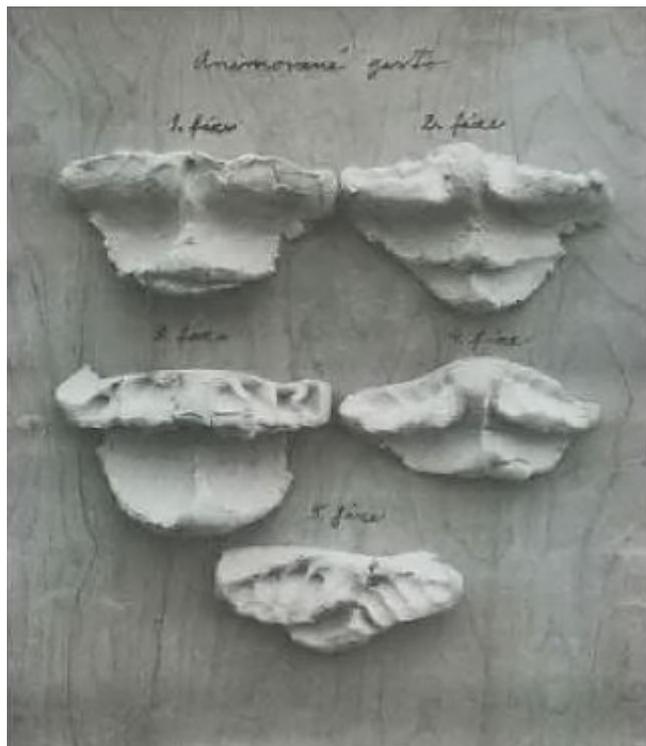


Fig. 6 - *Animated Gesture*, 1990 (Švankmajer 1994; reproduced by courtesy of J. Švankmajer)

Švankmajer made many observations about touch and visual perception in his tactile experiments. These, in turn, enabled him to convey tactile impressions using cinematic means. Having studied touch in isolation, without the influence of visual perception, he also observed the ways touch merges with sight in everyday perception. He was struck by the extent to which the feeling of an object can be ‘visualized,’ and the intensity with which this occurs in some forms of psychosis. Having become attuned to the evident cross-over of sensory experience at play in touch-vision, Švankmajer supposed that the connection between the two senses made it possible to transmit tactile impressions through sight (Švankmajer, in Brooke 2007).

Although Švankmajer gives prominence to touch in his earlier films, the tactile experiments are widely recognised as having an important influence on his later films (Hames 1995: 1; Jackson 1997: 3; Wells 1997:

181; Brooke 2007). Nevertheless, the reason why the artist would make tactilism the focus of his creative practice during the seven year break in his filmmaking career is not immediately apparent from such observation. (Nor does it explain why Švankmajer continued to make tactile artworks after being permitted to resume filmmaking). Švankmajer acknowledges this himself when asked how film and the tactile fit together. He says, ‘At first glance it may seem paradoxical. After all, film is an overwhelmingly audiovisual form’ (Švankmajer 1994: 234). Even so, Švankmajer was determined to make use of his discoveries about touch when he returned to making animated films, and there can be no doubt he succeeded in making the transition. Eruptions of tactile force became an integral part of Švankmajer’s idea of filmic experience.

Underlying any observable continuity between Švankmajer’s tactile and film works is his adherence to Surrealist principles. This is the clearest motivating factor in his turn to tactilism. Švankmajer explores tactile sensation as an implement for realising the imagination. As Vratislav Effenberger, a leading theorist within the Czech Surrealist group, observes: ‘Like his objects and collages which through film strive for a temporal and spatial continuity, at least two dimensional, his imagination demands the expansion of the field of sensory perception to live more and more

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on the dynamics of reality, to reach its universal integrity' (Effenberger in Švankmajer 2004: 67-68). Thus we can observe in the tactile artworks that Švankmajer credits physical objects, words and images with the energy and ability to communicate with equally forceful, psychical impact as live actors or animated characters. He was able to build on his tactile experiments in his filmic practice because he understood them both as co-extensions of his fascination with psycho-sensory dynamics. This occurs, for example, in *The Fall of The House of Usher* (1980). In the film, Švankmajer evokes Usher's spiritual descent into a state of insanity, which is communicated in an animated sequence of tormented gestures forced into clay (Švankmajer 1994:195). Conveyed in the tactile 'torture' of yielding matter is the reality of Usher's inner world.



Fig. 7 - *The Reverse Side of Touch (tactile drawing)*, 1978 (Švankmajer 1994; reproduced by courtesy of J. Švankmajer)

Despite Švankmajer's determination to make films that are visually and aurally 'tactile,' he doesn't think of himself as an 'animated film-maker,' or even as a 'film director.' Film is just one medium among many that he uses in his art. When pressed to name his calling, Švankmajer says he considers himself to be a poet: 'If I should say it in a slightly exaggerated way, I would say I consider myself to be a poet. There is only one poetry, and whichever tools or methods you use, poetics is all one' (Švankmajer 2006). His reference to poetics alludes to his location within Surrealism as a broad artistic movement.³ Aiming to transform their powers of vision, the first surrealists referred to themselves as poets, or seers who are said to work with eyes turned inwards. As graphically depicted in the legendary eye-ball slitting scene of Bunuel's and Dali's *Le Chien Andalou* (1928), vision must cut through the visible to become a conduit to the inner realities of madness, dreams and the unconscious⁴. Likewise, Švankmajer's first feature film, *Alice* (1988), based on Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice in Wonderland*, opens with the instruction: 'Now you must close your eyes, otherwise you will see nothing!' The deliberate excision of the visible in this way frees sight from its outward alignment with rationality. By means of this 'opening,' we enter the dreamworld of Alice, in accord with André Breton's understanding of waking and dreaming as 'communicating vessels' (Breton 1990). We also enter, following Švankmajer, into the domain of touch as extravisual experience (Dryje, in Švankmajer 2004: 9).

³ For more on Švankmajer's connection with both surrealism and Czech surrealism see Peter Hames' interview with him (1995: 101-14). An extended interview is also included in the forthcoming *The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer: Dark Alchemy* (Hames 2008), which I have not yet sighted. For an account of the Czech and Slovak surrealists' approach to their more recent cultural circumstances see *Solarik* (2005) and Michael Brooke's interview with Švankmajer (2007). For an English language survey of Czech and Slovak surrealist art see the 'Anthology of Czech Surrealism' published serially in *Analogon*, 37-43 (2003-2005).

A brief background note on the interconnections between Czech surrealism and another movement, Czech poetism, is also in order here. In the 1920s, *Devětsil*, a loosely aligned, prominent group of artists, writers and architects within the Czech avant-garde, took poetism as its creed. Poetism was an attitude, or a style of living, that celebrated the ludic spontaneity of modern life in a way that put paid to previous, artistically drawn boundaries between art and life. Karel Teige, a prominent theorist and art critic of the interwar Czech avant-garde, is an important figure in this regard. Teige penned 'The Poetist Manifesto' in 1924 (and a second one in 1928). Poetism and surrealism existed in dialogue with each other for a while. In 1934 one of poetism's main practitioners, the poet Vitězslav Nezval founded the Czech surrealist movement, which Teige also joined. For more writing in English language about the practitioners of Czech poetism and its relationship to other European interwar avant-garde movements see Bydžovská (2003), Zusi (2004), Thomas (2005) and Bronislava Volek's review article of Vladimír Müller's *Der Poetismus*, München: Otto Sagner, 1978 (1980).

⁴ Surrealist photography is crowded with images in which sightless women embody this principle (Lassalle 1987).

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Fig. 8 - *Game of Cunnilingus*, 1990 (Švankmajer 1994; reproduced by courtesy of J. Švankmajer)

For Surrealists, poetry resides in the plasticity of literal meaning. Švankmajer's poetics also lie in the interruptions, fissures, discontinuities and figures of exteriority that characterise the plasticity of alchemic transformation. Alchemy seeks for means of transmutation (the key to changing base metals into pure gold). In the Czech Surrealist's view: 'alchemy is about trying to connect things that you cannot connect, that are "un-connectable." Poetry is a parallel for alchemy, and alchemy is a parallel for poetry' (Švankmajer, interviewed by Jackson 1997: 8). Thus we can understand that Švankmajer is saying he is the alchemist-poet of objects, sensory modes and realities that are capable of metamorphosis on every level.

If Surrealism invests cinema with the power to perform the transition from one reality-state to another – unanchoring sounds and images from their referents (Levi 2006: 110), tactile connection is invested with the power to resuscitate memories of illicit conjunctions. 'Tactilism,' an art practice made

famous by the Futurist F.T. Marinetti, was embraced with a competing sensory poetics by Surrealism. Believing that touch was the most basic and important of all the senses, Marinetti proclaimed the need to investigate, tabulate and reshape tactile experience according to harmonious combinations of 'tactile values.' Marinetti prophesied that 'hands would become organs as knowing as brains, penetrating into the true essence of matter' (Marinetti 1924, reprinted in Classen 2005: 332).

Like other Surrealists before him, Švankmajer is critical of Marinetti's belief in the omnipotence of scientific progress and aesthetic formulations of touch.⁵ In his turn to a poetic tactilism Švankmajer wields tactile sensibility as an unlikely political weapon that slips under the radar of a State that is more concerned with policing audiovisual mass media. When Švankmajer returned to filmmaking, he added the evocation of tactile sensations to the emotive arsenal already available to him in the audiovisual medium. The self-styled 'militant Surrealist' of Prague believes, as Marinetti did, in a fuller grasp of reality that can be achieved through an attentiveness to touch. However, Švankmajer's interest in tactilism has a poetic twist that does not adhere to Marinetti's inadvertent reassertion of a tactilist metaphysics.⁶

⁵ Švankmajer makes numerous comments about Marinetti's 'Tactilism' essay in *Hmat a Imaginace*, some to the effect that Marinetti is not as radical in his thinking about touch as the anti-aesthetic stance of the Surrealist poets. This stance is uppermost in Švankmajer's own assertion of 'the importance of touch ... for the restoration of sensibility that has been so poorly represented in our civilisation' (Švankmajer 1994: 234).

⁶ For a sustained argument that touch founds an entire philosophical tradition of haptocentric metaphysics see Derrida (2006). I should emphasize that I, rather than Švankmajer, read Marinetti's tactilism as belonging within this tradition. See note 5 above for Švankmajer's reading.

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Švankmajer's tactile art dwells on the textures, temperatures, densities, surfaces and malleability of objects. This is not intended to simply communicate the physical qualities of things, or to create a tactile image of a physical object. It aims to free tactility from its utilitarian, organic functions. Tactile art is a creative tool with no aesthetic objective for Švankmajer. As a Surrealist, his primary intention is to let the abilities of the imagination loose to flourish freely. The alchemist-poet aims to create analogies that, taking the route of magical and infantile regression, achieve satisfaction in accord with a primal pleasure principle. This is a method of working that Švankmajer devised in his period of tactile experimentation.

Švankmajer's films are unclassifiable, indiscriminate mixtures of genres: live-action footage, puppets, drawn animation, montages, claymation and object animations. The 'undead,' a thematic preoccupation of the horror genre, which Paul Wells points out is literally present in the 'life' of any animated object (Wells 2002: 4), is transfigured into the 'inner life' of fear, anxiety, and repressed sexual, sadistic, and perverted impulses in Švankmajer's films. As much as we might recognise references to our own psyches, Švankmajer is not encouraging us to enter into anthropomorphic identification with his strange spectacles of vitality. As Maureen Furniss observes, it is the inner life of inanimate objects, beyond the complexities of human psychology, that is the real focus of Švankmajer's animation (2005: 157). Inanimate objects have such a profound effect on Švankmajer, he even concludes that he must be a necrophile because he communicates with dead rather than living things!⁷

The objects of Švankmajer's tactile experiments are similarly charged with the interdiction of taboo, awakening repressed memories of the same labyrinthine, mutable reality. Mere connection transforms tactile sensations that we barely perceive in our everyday lives into fragments of transgressive poetry: 'there is a "tactile memory" that stretches back to the most remote corners of our childhood, from which it bursts out in the form of analogies evoked by the slightest tactile stimulus or by stirred tactile fantasy. Tactile art thus becomes communicative' (Švankmajer 1994: 234).

Švankmajer activates the sensory modality of touch to investigate the psychical powers inherent in ordinary objects. These investigations serve a particular purpose for Švankmajer. The tactile experiments were a crusade against 'civilised society' (Solarik 2005: 5). The Surrealist poet thinks of his tactile experiments as forceful, defensive measures against the repressive institutions of civility, and its monstrous political inventions such fascism, totalitarianism and, more recently, consumerism. Some suggest that Švankmajer's employment of tactilism as a Surrealist strategy may be circumscribed in its effectiveness. Michael Nottingham describes it as one of various 'palliative' attempts made by the Czech and Slovak Surrealist group to address the same sober truths that his films do (Nottingham 2004-5: 131).⁸ However it is more accurate to say that Švankmajer was determined to pursue his obsession with tactilism, even in the audiovisual medium of film, convinced that his best weapon to liberate the imagination is the emotive charge of inner states communicated by tactile analogy.

⁷ Geoff Andrew quotes Švankmajer, in 'Malice in Wonderland' (Time Out 19-26 October, 1988: 17), as saying: 'Since I communicate with dead things rather than living people, according to the psychologist Erich Fromm, I am a necrophile' (Wells 2002: 4).

⁸ Nottingham does not make this comment critically, but rather to include Švankmajer's tactilism in his assessment of the Czech Surrealists generally. Nottingham notes that their emphasis on co-operative group activity and aesthetic interdependence also offers a constructive model for the concept of the collective, in the face of an individuality that is at the mercy of hostile objects and unseen forces.

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Animating with touch

The tactile experiments fulfil Švankmajer's aim to make the creation of tangible connections a dynamic process of discovery. His 'restoration' of the ability to animate objects in this way is one of Švankmajer's most remarkable achievements. Indeed, animating with touch is essential to Švankmajer's poetic vision in a way that film animation isn't – or, as he proposes, once wasn't. While acknowledging that film animators cannot do without technological tricks and techniques, Švankmajer also invokes a prior, animistic ability to breathe life into inanimate matter merely by willpower or magic (Švankmajer 2004: 111). Švankmajer's objectives are realised more by alchemic transmutation than the creation of animated illusions: 'Animators tend to construct a closed world for themselves, like pigeon fanciers or rabbit breeders. ... I never call myself an animated filmmaker because I am interested not in animation techniques or creating a complete illusion, but in bringing life to everyday objects' (Interview in Jackson 1997: 111). We see this in Švankmajer's films, where he favours puppets, old toys, mechanised dolls and items in states of decay (Jackson 1997: 111). Likewise, the static, tactile artworks demonstrate that, in the metamorphosis of their functions, physical objects have the power to touch and move us in unexpected ways. Magically altered, they are not inanimate; rather, like words and images, they have an eloquence that can manipulate human sensibilities.

Švankmajer doesn't use animation techniques to create illusory motion. He awakens the senses to animate objects. Film animation is just another alchemical aid to the performance of a magic ritual in which Švankmajer summons forth the immanent vitality that resides in inert material. He reveals the mystery of how this happens in the poem 'The Magic Ritual of Tactile Inauguration': 'touch, freed from its practical contexts and constantly realised as an experience, at certain moments passes through the barrier of its merely identifying existence and without noticing, begins to speak with the voice of a poet' (Švankmajer 1994: 235). This capacity for metamorphosis extends to moving images. Here objects undergo the same metaphoric transformation that occurs in the tactile art experiments, where they abandon their handy functions in life to become tactile metaphors for denied memories, emotions, sexual fantasies and alternate ideologies.

Švankmajer's work explores the idea that both direct and indirect tactile experience is mediated by the 'tactile' imagination. This is the magical ingredient in Švankmajer's alchemy. He cites Merleau-Ponty's studies of Goldstein's neurological cases, which discredited the idea that touch only occurs as a result of direct physical contact, as proof of the existence of 'tactile memory' (Švankmajer 1994: 234). The tactile imagination is capable of retaining and transforming tactile memories into analogies that are charged with psychical intensity. For Švankmajer, seemingly inert objects have the mutability to arouse this tactile sensibility, which can be recalled from earliest childhood, and resurfaces in states of extreme emotional agitation.

The meeting of heterogeneous elements in Surrealist assemblages was said to produce an irrational spark of 'convulsive beauty.' The chance meetings of heterogenous elements in Švankmajer's assemblages produce a subliminal quiver of surprising reality. Švankmajer concretises the Surrealist insistence that phantasms are indistinguishable from normal perception. Irrational as the 'dialogues' between his objects may appear, Švankmajer fabricates them in such a way that audiences can believe that these meetings are really able to happen.⁹ The uncanny relationships these unpremeditated exchanges create suspend and alter normal perception.

⁹ The 'chance meetings' are not mere illusions or fantasies. They are governed by a logic that Švankmajer thinks will ensure that the audience has the feeling of a certain 'everyday reality' (Interview in Hames 1995: 110).

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Echoing André Breton, Švankmajer says: 'My ambition is to render the audience's utilitarian habits unstable' (Interview in Hames 1995: 110). Rather than serving the utilitarian ethos of Communist agitational propaganda, Švankmajer alludes to unspeakable fears and primal urges that conflict with the ideals of 'civilised' cultures. He also values the view of the world formed in childhood as one of the basic sources of creativity. That is why, above all else, the 'Švankmajer touch' is vehemently opposed to the 'Disney touch,' a form of illusory realism said to give life to objects and drawings. Švankmajer's tactile analogies have the capacity to be frighteningly, ludicrously, disturbing, but the benign realism of Disney animation is infinitely more alarming. It's trademark magic has the capacity to dampen children's ability to imagine.¹⁰

Švankmajer understands the power of touch in terms of poetic metamorphosis. We see this most clearly in his experiments with tactile perception. Here touch becomes a creative sensory modality in which the analogous play of objects can, like words, sounds and images, kindle thoughts, perceptions and emotions. The tactile imagination is the unseen binding/moving force of Švankmajer's bifold Surrealist universe. He is fascinated by the memories that physical objects contain by virtue of their enduring material existence, and their ability to affect us. These memories awaken the senses to motility within inert matter they would otherwise miss in a singular universe, ordered only by either movement or stasis.

Švankmajer's tactile artworks are as playful and erotic as they are perverse and poignant. As such, their ultimate value lies in their contradiction of any 'function' assigned to touch within socio-cultural, scientific, or political systems or frameworks. Švankmajer is not motivated by a desire to create artworks in which touch serves an aesthetic purpose, or that extend the usefulness of haptic perception. Instead, the webbed, tongued, hex-digitated hand of the alchemist-poet restores communication between the material world and occult psychical realities by investing touch with uncanny, transformative powers. 

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¹⁰ Asked by Peter Hames why he described Walt Disney as a leading destroyer of European culture, Švankmajer contends: 'Disney is among the greatest makers of 'art for children.' I have always held that no special art for children simply exists, and what passes for it embodies either the birch (discipline) or lucre (profit). "Art for children" is dangerous in that it shares either in the taming of the child's soul or the bringing up of consumers of mass culture' (Švankmajer 2002: 5).

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Filmography

Alice/Nêco z Alenky (1987) 84m col 35mm. Directed by J. Švankmajer. Switzerland/W Germany/UK: Condor Film (Zürich)/Hessischer Rundfunk (Germany)/Film Four International (UK).

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The Castle of Otranto/Otrantský zámek (1973-79) 17m col 35mm. Directed by J. Švankmajer. Prague: Krátký Film/Jiří Trnka Studio.

Dimensions of Dialogue/Možnosti dialogu (1982) Directed by J. Švankmajer. Prague: Krátký Film/Jiří Trnka Studio.

Leonardo's Diary/Leonardův deník (1972) Directed by J. Švankmajer. Prague: Krátký Film/Jiří Trnka Studio.

The Fall of the House of Usher/Zánik domu Usherů (1980) 15m bw 35mm. Directed by J. Švankmajer. Prague: Krátký Film/Jiří Trnka Studio.

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