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Uncanny breaches, flimsy borders

Jan Švankmajer's conscious and unconscious worlds

The portrayal of a character's subjective, 'inner' experience onscreen is an enduring challenge for the filmmaker. Many techniques for conveying fantasies or dreams, such as blurring the frame's edges, cross-dissolves and bleached colour, have been used - from soap operas to advertising - to such an extent that they could be considered by audiences as hackneyed or clichéd. Yet the notion that cinema cannot deal with complex psychological states such as dream, memory, the imagination and the unconscious seems to be tied up not only with clichéd imagery, but also with the derision of film as a passive visual and aural experience that leaves little to the imagination. For instance, George Bluestone insists that the rendition of mental states cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language: "If the film has difficulty presenting streams of consciousness, it has even more difficulty presenting states of mind which are defined precisely by the absence in them of the visible world" (Bluestone 1971: 47). Frequently, when the topic of imaginative engagement with film arises, so does the claim that in visual texts much of the imagination's work is done for us. Malcolm Turvey (1997: 435) points out that in projecting representations of narrative content, images in film perform the work of the imagination for spectators. In other words, because the 'mental content' in film - that is the material with which the imagination works - is also *already* an image, the viewer does not need to engage with the creative level of imagining that takes place when reading, whereby mental images are evoked by linguistic signifiers.

I do not contest the difficulty of rendering mental states in cinematic terms, but I do believe that cinema, and animation in particular, has at its disposal its own armoury of techniques for conveying interiority, and that these are able to engage the imagination thoroughly, leaving it to forge connections - to 'do work', as it were. As a practising filmmaker, I find it informative to analyse particular cinematic examples - in order to dispel the notion that the medium is ill-equipped to screen psychologically complex states, and to seek inspiration for doing so in fresh ways.

One filmmaker and animator who has consistently screened the 'inner' experience is Jan Švankmajer, who for the best part of fifty years has been making films that both combine different media and traverse various states of mind - often to astonishing and unsettling effect. This article probes the crossing over between live action and animation in two of his feature films, *Alice* (1987) and *Faust* (1994). The juxtaposition of live action and animation in these works is frequently disquieting and unnerving for the audience, mingling the familiar with the unfamiliar, and creating uncertainty and hence the effect of the uncanny. The uncanny - a mysterious experience in which familiar objects or events reference unconscious material and seem suddenly and frighteningly strange - turns out to be particularly useful in revealing how character interiority is externalised in Švankmajer's films. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay 'The "Uncanny"', I will show how the phenomenon manifests itself in Švankmajer's work by various means: by undermining the familiar; by enacting animism; by dismembering, repeating and doubling; and by effacing the line between life and death, and between reality and imagination. I will argue that these are the uncanny's enabling devices, catalysts in implementing shifts in consciousness in Švankmajer's films, allowing the conscious and unconscious to penetrate one another, but never to unite.

Alice is loosely based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. A live-action Alice interacts with animated puppets, such as a stuffed White Rabbit. When Alice shrinks, she is transformed into a doll and animated by stop-motion. *Faust* is a loose adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1604), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1876) and folk treatments of the legend. The film blends live actors with stop-motion and life-sized marionettes. As in *Alice*, Faust himself at times becomes a puppet, and is also animated.

Finally, in order to throw Švankmajer's *modus operandi* into sharp relief, I will briefly visit two relatively mainstream films that mix live action and animation. I will refer to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988: dir. Robert Zemeckis) as a seminal meeting of live action and animated media, and to *Monkeybone* (2001: dir. Henry Sellick) as it involves extensive trafficking between a live action and an animated world, and a corresponding movement between the conscious and unconscious realms that this article aims to explore. The comparison is neither meant to deride these films, nor to make trite comparisons between more 'independent' film and the mainstream industry. Granted, this opposition exists in my argument's subtext, and I do argue in conclusion that more mainstream animation seems resistant to truly interrogating consensual reality, as does Švankmajer. Still, the comparison is in the first place pragmatic: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *Monkeybone*, in their recognisable means for communicating their characters' states of mind, provide useful counterpoints in ascertaining Švankmajer's particular, idiosyncratic means of doing so.

Live action and animation

Although one way of thinking about animation is in relation, or opposition, to live action media, Maureen Furniss (1998: 5) argues that there is an immense area in which the two tendencies overlap, especially in the realm of aesthetics. She suggests that, rather than thinking of the two modes of production as existing in separate spheres, one should view them on a continuum representing all possible image types, under the broad category of 'motion picture production'. Alan Cholodenko (1991: 215) evokes Derrida and deconstruction to argue further that it is, in fact, impossible to keep the terms 'live action' and 'cartoon animation' separate. The two meanings of animation, he suggests, are helpful here: the first is 'to impart motion to' and the second is 'to bring to life'. Cholodenko sees it as ironic, then, that the term 'live action' is given to a mode seeking to separate itself from animation.

Švankmajer's films constitute a hybrid form upsetting neat distinctions between live action and animation, reality and abstraction. Peta Allen Shera (2001: 25) points out that although there is no privileging of one medium over another in Švankmajer's films, animation nonetheless "occupies an othered position in relation to live action". I suggest that this 'othering' process is an integral means by which Švankmajer conveys different levels of experience. However, this is not to say that one medium is consistently used to represent reality and the other imagination. On the contrary, in discussion with Wendy Jackson (1997: 9), Švankmajer resists defining which medium should be employed to express a particular idea, insisting instead that he makes his work according to an 'inner order'. Rather than live action or animation routinely signalling a particular mental state, the shifts between the media embody a constant fluctuation between levels of experience: the familiar, conscious world is constantly undermined as unconscious material breaches what is a very flimsy border between realms.

According to Paul Wells (1999: 214), animation can interrogate previous representations of 'reality' and reinterpret how that might be understood. This interrogation is pivotal to Švankmajer's work, and is rooted in his long-standing commitment to Surrealism, which subverts

the ordinary and upsets the dichotomy of conscious and unconscious. Having joined the Prague-based Surrealist group in 1970, he still belongs to it to this day (O'Pray 1989: 48). Švankmajer's commitment to Surrealism has, moreover, been inextricably linked to an oppressive political climate and his anti-totalitarian stance. In a documentary entitled *The Animator of Prague* (1980: dir. James Marsh), Švankmajer claims: "I consider all my films to be political - some more than others." In the same documentary, Michael O'Pray discusses the sustained political impetus of Surrealism in Eastern Europe, as opposed to the West, where it "collapsed into advertising and mainstream cinema and didn't retain any force after the 1920s and 30s". Indeed, Švankmajer bemoans the fact that Surrealism is often superficially perceived in terms of aesthetics, and insists that Surrealism is rather "a psychology, about freedom, eroticism, the subconscious" (cited in Andrew 2004: 7) - notions in striking opposition to authoritarian control.

Švankmajer's versions of *Alice* and *Faust* certainly contain many of the hallmarks of Surrealism: familiar objects are rendered strange, unexpected elements are juxtaposed, and temporal and spatial realities are systematically negated. Surrealism has a defamiliarising effect akin, then, to that of the uncanny: according to Nicholas Royle, the uncanny's "happening is always a kind of un-happening. It 'un-unsettles' time and space, order and sense" (Royle 2003: 2). Their mutual destabilisation of the familiar brings the uncanny effect and the Surrealist agenda into close alignment.

Undermining the familiar

Early in *Faust*, the protagonist looks up at an ordinary window and suddenly, a row of apples rot to maggot-infested mush before his - and our - eyes. The apples are a tangible manifestation of Faust's deepest fears about mortality. We have not travelled into another realm; rather a moment of animation has been used to transport us swiftly into Faust's unconscious, and to express his foreboding about the transience of life. Conceivably, the abrupt nature of Švankmajer's shifts between live action and animation articulates the way in which the unconscious can unexpectedly disturb everyday reality**.** Indeed, Wells describes the way in which Švankmajer makes consciousness tangible, suggesting that he is:

> …creating a fictionalised notion of consciousness, which, if imagined 'real', both recalls the playful and liberal apparatus of childhood and makes concrete the irony and contradiction of the adult sensibility (Wells 1997: 15)

In constructing this "fictionalised notion of consciousness" and manifesting the contradictions of our adult psyches, Švankmajer treats live action and animation as filmic forms that carry equivalent value - if not equivalent meanings. Wells (1999: 214) maintains further that the process in animation of "giving life" to the inanimate should reveal something about the figure or object that could not effectively be achieved via live action. He suggests that, if it is live action's job to present reality, then animation is concerned with metaphysical reality - an alternative reality by which alternative perspectives are possible. It seems to follow that, where animation is combined with live action, the animation by extension affects and transforms the reality of the live action, making visible the unconscious aspects of interiority.

Conversely, Švankmajer consistently infiltrates the familiar with destabilising, unconscious elements; for instance, by his subjective treatment of recognisable space in *Alice*. As in a dream, we lose any sense of orientation as Alice wanders between basements, stairs and corridors. A door contains a door, a stream trickles through a field within a room, and a house stands behind the façade of a house made of children's building blocks. Yet, despite this erratic movement, we

never feel that we have entirely abandoned the waking world in that the *mise-en-scène* is so prosaic in its elements. According to Maureen Furniss (1998: 161), *Alice* was shot at full scale, with Švankmajer placing his live actress and animated creatures within what appear to be real rooms, or outside on rocky terrain, creating a very realistic diegetic space[1]. Moreover, as Geoff Andrew (2004: 6) explains, the real rooms were those of a converted old bakery, and were used once more for the shooting of *Faust*. The exteriors in both *Alice* and *Faust* are also largely ordinary. Hames describes the Prague of *Faust* as "no tourist picturebook, magic city or Expressionist vision, but an all too tangible world of the everyday – of trams, greasy raincoats, beer and sausages" (Hames 1995: 41-2). The uncanny's intervention, however, is to estrange these familiar spaces and render geography indeterminable, to evoke the disorienting effect of the dreaming unconscious.

Notwithstanding the bewildering evocation of unconscious material, the role of the uncanny in Švankmajer's work has been the subject of critical debate. Michael O'Pray (1989: 256-7) argues that Švankmajer's work should not be identified with the uncanny, but rather with the grotesque - a prominent feature of the Czech puppet tradition. He cites the meshing of humour with horror in Švankmajer's oeuvre, and the fact that Freud sees humour as undermining the fear, horror and menace that contribute to the uncanny. I maintain that while there are darkly comedic moments in both *Alice* and *Faust*, humour is neither a consistent nor overwhelming force, and there are numerous other occasions when the uncanny supersedes any sense of levity. Moreover, O'Pray's analysis in this instance is limited to that of Švankmajer's short films, the most recent work discussed being *Down to the Cellar* (1983). In my view, *Faust*, made eleven years later in 1994, is a far darker film.

O'Pray (1989: 256-7) further points out that for Freud, the uncanny effect cannot be achieved in a "world of representation" that departs from the realities we are familiar with, which is why, for him, the fairy tale rarely induces the uncanny. But in fact, rather than departing from reality, the primary settings in both *Alice* and *Faust* are indeed familiar and representational. Tellingly, in discussing Švankmajer's short works, O'Pray concedes that *Down to the Cellar* (1983) seems to be the closest Švankmajer comes to the uncanny: this short film notably prefigures *Alice* in style and subject matter. O'Pray attributes this uncanny sense to the use of a live-action young girl, "with whose terror we can identify", and also to the more naturalistic setting. Likewise, in determining what makes the images in *Alice* "somewhat uncanny", Furniss concludes, "clearly the linking of the 'real world' and animated imagery tends to encourage the effect" (Furniss 1998: 173). In *Faust* the quotidian world is similarly interrupted by animated sequences referring to Faust's innermost fears and desires: the resultant disjunctions help to create an abiding sense of the uncanny within the real setting of grimy Prague. The uncanny comes into play precisely because of the familiar nature of the setting, which is, in turn, rendered peculiar by the unfamiliar.

Enacting animism

It is ironic that, in the instance of the maggoty apples, inanimate objects are brought 'to life' in order to comment on death and mortality. The seeming implication is that death and life sit in uncomfortably close proximity. Notably, this 'life' on the part of the apples is fleeting: Faust bewilderedly observes them rot and collapse in an unconscious projection of his mortal fears.

[1] Furniss (1998: 161) indicates that shooting in real spaces and at full (1:1) scale is usual practice
films that employ pixilation or live action/animation, and could be described as the equivalent of location shooting in live action production.

In animating the inanimate, Švankmajer evokes what Freud (1919: 362-3) names the "omnipotence of thoughts", the uncanny phenomenon whereby mental properties are projected onto the world and its objects. The uncanny is related to the child's primitive belief in the power of wishes to animate objects, and this residual animism is a central feature of Švankmajer's ongoing project, as he has expressed:

> To my eyes, objects have always been livelier than human beings. More static but also more telling. More moving because of their concealed meanings and their memory, which beats human memory... In my films I have always tried to extract content from the objects. To listen to and to put their stories into images. (Švankmajer cited in Furniss 1998: 171)

Conversely, Švankmajer consistently animates and anthropomorphises inanimate objects with stop-motion animation. He shoots these objects predominantly in close-up, to render them in sharp detail. He feels that the close-up "searches out every last scratch on the illusion", and claims to be attracted to "brute reality" rather than "representational illusionism" (Švankmajer cited in Král 1985). In this way, Švankmajer consistently uses the innate properties of objects as the basis for the animated life he gives them. Alice's socks come to life as caterpillars, worming their way across the floor before burrowing down into it. Yet the caterpillars never lose the material quality of socks, and when one decides to go to sleep, it darns its eyes closed with needle and thread. The materiality of the sock becomes the basis for its animated life. Švankmajer speaks consistently of the power of things, claiming that rather than animating objects, he finds the life hidden within: "I coerce their inner life out of them - and for that animation is a great aid that I consider to be a sort of magical rite or ritual" (Švankmajer cited in Cherry 2002).

In extracting their essence, Švankmajer frequently causes his objects to mutate and even morph into living counterparts. In a sequence towards the end of *Alice*, the Queen of Hearts in the form of a 2-D playing card commands Alice to pick out a flamingo to use as a croquet club. Like the Queen, the flamingos are 2-D figures removable from cards, while the croquet balls are sewing kit pincushions. But just as Alice strikes, the flamingos turn into live squawking hens and the pincushions into live hedgehogs. What this extraordinary transition of objects into creatures does is to fuse the inanimate and the animate. On another level, the transition juxtaposes the prosaic and fantastical - letting the two worlds rub up against each other. The shift by no means represents a complete return to the ordinary, for no sooner do the hens flap their way out of the window than does the animated stuffed White Rabbit reappear. The implication is that the conscious and unconscious worlds are not separate and discrete, but co-existent and overlapping. The uncanny here acts as the 'joker in the pack' - de-familiarizing objects through unexpected transitions - so undermining our expectations and allowing the realms of conscious and unconscious, of reality and imagination, to co-exist in close proximity.

Dismembering, repeating, doubling

Švankmajer's passion for objects and their inherent instability not only sees them morph into living beings, but also fall apart or decay. Things routinely degenerate, as in the maggoty apples. In *Faust*, the head of Mephistopheles collapses into three lumps of bubbling clay, two with a single eye peering out and one with chattering teeth. The lumps burrow into the root of a tree, later reconfiguring themselves into Mephistopheles' head.

This preoccupation with disintegration evokes another device of the uncanny - that concerning fragmented body parts. Freud perceives "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist" and "feet which dance by themselves" as having "something peculiarly uncanny about

them, especially when they prove capable of independent activity" (Freud 1919: 366). In *Faust*, only the manipulating hands of the puppeteers are visible, and hands beating drumsticks appear out of a crack in the earth. The uncanny effect lies in the separation from the whole. And most sinister, an old man lugs around a severed human leg - recalling the horse-courser in Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* who breaks off Faustus' leg, only for it to be restored moments later. The broken leg in Švankmajer's *Faust* presages too the dismemberment of Faust's own limb when he dies at the mercy of Mephistopheles' car, reinterpreting Marlowe's version of the story, where Faustus is ripped apart by devils: "All torn asunder by the hand of death" (Act V, Scene iii).

The old man's severed leg in Švankmajer's *Faust* instils a sense of presentiment, of *déjà vu*, associated with another uncanny device, that of repetition. Like fragmentation, the occurrence of repetition is a frequent catalyst in Švankmajer's work for engaging with unconscious material, as he presents his viewer with recurring motifs and re-enacted scenes – therefore uncanny because of the strange return to the familiar. *Alice* opens with a complex pattern of repetition and foreshadowing that immediately blurs boundaries between the conscious and unconscious. After the title sequence, Alice sits beside her nanny, tossing pebbles into the river, and the action is re-enacted in the very next scene – this time using dolls in the playroom. And at the scene's conclusion, Alice runs from her nursery's floorboards directly onto the bare earth, trampling a miniature doll version of herself *en route*: the cut is so brief as to be almost subliminal. This repeated doll motif prepares the way for the transformation of the live-action Alice into a doll herself. Further, several of the inanimate objects we first see in the nursery reappear in animated form in subsequent scenes. In a glass cage is a taxidermist's White Rabbit who later leads Alice through into the unconscious underworld. Once there, her collection of skeletal heads will accost her; a mouse caught in a trap on the nursery floor will set fire to her hair, and the half-drunk cup of tea will reappear in the hands of the Mad Hatter. Thus, as Philip Strick (1988: 319) argues, the familiar childish clutter becomes the unfamiliar, uncanny space of the child's mind.

In the scene of the Mad Hatter's tea party, repetition evokes a dream-like helplessness and entrapment, each movement being replayed with increasing frenzy. The March Hare keeps spreading butter onto his fob watch and wiping it off. The Mad Hatter marionette drinks cup after cup of tea, crying endlessly for clean cups. The editing gathers speed as the characters move round the table, the montage repeating the same elements over and over, against a soundtrack of ticking clocks. It is a nightmarish loop that evokes what Freud (1919: 359-60) describes as fateful, inescapable and involuntary repetition.

Just as the ticking of clocks works to disturb us within the tea party scene, the replication of uncomfortable sound motifs across multiple scenes is another strategy in Švankmajer's work to mark pivotal points in Faust's fateful inner journey. When he first discovers the text for the play, Faust reads aloud, "So I resolve my soul to free, through blackest magic and darkest alchemy." No sooner has he uttered his intention (the very pretext for the plot of the play, and in turn for that of the film) than a red bulb starts to flash, attended by buzzing and ringing. On a literal level, this is Faust's first stage call, which he heeds, emerging on the boards to find an audience gathered. But the buzzing and ringing also craft subjective depth in articulating Faust's inner turmoil, and these sounds are repeated on two further occasions to help map his metaphysical voyage.

The second buzzing and ringing, which with heightened urgency persist for longer, underline Faust's dawning disillusionment as he accuses Mephistopheles of being a liar. Then, moments before Faust meets his fate, the motif occurs for a third time. At this juncture, the buzzing and

ringing are augmented by metal clashing, crackling flames and the clamour of devil marionettes. Faust runs out into the street, where he is run over before an audience of passers-by. Following screeching brakes and the collision with Mephistopheles' unmanned car, the crescendo cuts to silence as Faust dies. Nobody says a word. The sound design seems to suggest not only that Faust has met his end, but also that the turmoil in his mind has subsided at last. Uncannily, repetitive sound has been used at all three points to articulate Faust's inner menace, and to integrate the conscious and unconscious realms.

Connected to repetition is the concept of the double, considered by Freud (1919: 354-6) to be one of the most prominent themes of the uncanny. Notably both Alice and Faust's live action characters have animated doppelgängers. In his discussion of the uncanny, Freud (1919: 354-6) suggests that dolls are closely connected with childhood life. In a scene that is likely to instil particular disquiet in the viewer, the tiny stop motion figurine of Alice is forced to 'walk the plank' backwards into a pot of hot milk. She rises out of the milk as an enormous effigy, which cracks open in turn, to reveal the real-life Alice. The doubling in the transformation of doll to effigy, and redoubling in the return to the live-action Alice, uncannily perturbs us. It is a Chinese box of a situation, the effect of which is troubling. Of course the metamorphosis between the inanimate and the animate is a classic fairytale trope, which has been employed in tales from Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1883) to E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1816), the latter of which Freud dissects in 'The "Uncanny"' (1919: 348-55). This kind of metamorphosis is similarly the premise of Švankmajer's *Little Otik* (2000), based on a Czech fairytale about a childless couple who long for a baby. In adapting the tale, Švankmajer employs animation to morph a tree root into a voraciously hungry child creature. Doubling, then, as an uncanny device, is linked to that of enacting animism and also to that of effacing the line between reality and imagination.

In another case of overt doubling, Faust appears as a marionette, controlled by unseen forces. But perhaps the most disconcerting moments are those where Mephistopheles turns himself into a clay mirror of Faust, animated via pixilation: is Švankmajer implying that the devil is a projection of each one of us? The frame-by-frame animated treatment of the live action Faust's face creates an unnerving portrait of something neither dead nor alive. The doubling in this case erases customary distinctions between death and life - yet another device of the uncanny.

Life and death, reality and imagination

The line between life and death wavers to similarly disturbing effect when the live-action Faust seduces Helen - in puppet form. She lies back corpse-like, and, once Faust has satisfied himself, the animated Romilo puppet breaks out from within her shell. The wavering line between the animate and the inanimate - here evoking taboos on necrophilia - works to disturb and shock. Freud draws on the findings of German writer Ernst Jentsch, who suggests that the uncanny entails "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might be, in fact, animate" (Jentsch cited in Freud 1919: 354). It is, of course, precisely this kind of uncertainty that shapes our experience of watching much of Švankmajer's mixed-media oeuvre.

One occasion where Švankmajer explicitly uses animation to create a wavering line between life and death is when Faust finds a glass alembic with clay inside which morphs into an inanimate clay baby. In the words of Švankmajer's screenplay, Faust "draws the life-giving *Shem ha-m' forash*, carefully folds the paper and puts it into the baby's mouth" (Švankmajer 1996: 13). Instantaneously the baby comes to animated life, aging swiftly into a child, then into an adult with Faust's face, before morphing into an old man - and finally freezing into a grinning corpse that

Faust smashes in despair. The metamorphosis from baby to skeleton aligns life and death to chilling effect - both for Faust and for the audience. Animation, with its capacity to viscerally transform flesh, or in this case clay, is used here to enact a metaphor of mortality. The effect of the uncanny proximity of life and death is to manifest Faust's unconscious fear of aging and dying. And, in turn, the film offers the audience an experience of that fear, and brings to our consciousness what disturbs Faust's unconscious.

Just as creating uncertainty as to whether an object is alive or dead is an uncanny device, so too is effacing the line between reality and the imagination (Freud 1919: 367). Švankmajer's worlds are far from clear-cut, and Alice's journey between reality and imagination, conscious and unconscious, is multifarious. On first venturing out of her nursery, Alice crosses a wind-swept plain towards a desk with a single drawer. In pursuit of the White Rabbit, she squeezes herself into the impossibly small drawer - a portal between the ordinary world and the nether realm. But this slippage is not straightforward, as portals exist within portals. Alice emerges from the drawer into a corridor, only to fall down the iconic rabbit hole, re-imagined as an elevator shaft. In the nether world Alice discovers several more desk drawers, some containing ink or tarts that make her shrink or grow. In a sense, these drawers - or their contents - serve as further portals in allowing Alice access to different realms. After all, she needs to be tiny to fit through the miniature door within a door, the first in a whole series of doors through which she must pass. The existence of portals within portals defies any notion of distinct waking and dreaming states: rather Alice continuously journeys into new tiers of the unconscious.

Although Alice ostensibly re-enters the waking world back in the nursery, Švankmajer implies that activities taking place in the unconscious realm impact on the conscious one. On Alice's waking, playing cards are scattered over her body where there were none before; the glass case is really broken and the stuffed rabbit has truly disappeared. What is more, Alice finds a hidden drawer under the rabbit cage, and so the portal to the unconscious remains, suggesting that these transitions could recur at any given moment. The line between reality and the imagination is indistinct.

In enacting his multiple transitions between reality and the imagination, or the conscious and unconscious realms, Švankmajer for the most part eschews music, traditionally used to underscore such moments of slippage. In *Alice*, music is limited to the piano under the end credits. Faust features Johann Sebastian Bach's *Fugue* under the front- and end credits, but the sole music within the film is from Charles-François Gounod's opera version of *Faust* (1859). Švankmajer maintains that in his concept of "fantastic documentaries", there is no room for music, except as an artefact, and that "real noises are much more effective" (Švankmajer cited in Hames 1995: 112). According to the documentary *The Animator of Prague* (1980), in keeping with his object-based animation, Švankmajer - along with his long-time sound designer Ivo Spalj - is committed to the notion of 'concrete' sound recordings.

Even in its resolutely 'concrete' nature, Švankmajer's sound design articulates his characters' states of mind, and their oscillation between real and imagined spaces. And even in working with diegetic sound, with a verifiable onscreen source, Švankmajer plays on the difference between 'natural' and 'staged' effects. Thunder is a notable example in *Faust*. The first peals accompany shots of real lightning, but later the thunder is re-created by the puppeteer shaking a sheet of metal, an action repeated at several portentous moments; when tiny devil marionettes climb out of Mephistopheles' mouth, the thunder rolls incessantly. In turn, angel marionettes emerge from the angel effigy, accompanied by the tinkling of bells. The cacophony of low- and high-pitched sounds echo the clamour in Faust's mind as he wrestles with himself as to whether or not he

should sign over his soul. His decision, as he signs in blood, is sonically endorsed as the thunder wins out - and we cut to the hands shaking the metal. The thunder, though clearly created within the diegesis, speaks to Faust's inner, subjective experience, and blurs lines between what is real and imagined.

Despite Švankmajer's commitment to 'concrete' sound, he does occasionally include sound that is not literally appropriate, such as when, in *Alice*, a great whinnying emanates from the patently non-equine fish and bird skeletons hauling a cart. The low-fidelity sound articulates the free associations of Alice's unconscious, where reality and imagination overlap. There is a similarly dreamlike treatment of sound when Alice hears a baby crying. The White Rabbit hurls the wailing bundle at Alice, and the moment she touches it, it transforms into a grunting pig. Švankmajer (1987) claims that this transformation is part of the 'logic of dreams' and is, in fact, a moment directly transposed from Lewis Carroll's original. However, unlike in the original, on hearing that cry, Švankmajer's Alice never sees the baby's face, but only the snorting pig as it emerges from its swaddling clothes[2]. This is true for us as audience too, and thus sound in particular is instrumental in effacing the line between reality and the imagination, and producing the effect of the uncanny.

But in the vast majority of cases, sound retains an indexical relationship to its source, even as realms are traversed. The industrial elevator's mechanical cacophony transports Alice as she sinks into the depths of her unconscious; the clashing of the White Rabbit's scissors and the beating of pots with spoons accompanies her return to consciousness as she wakes in the nursery. Alice's 'reawakening' is startling in its fast rhythmical montage, wherein her head changes, in a speedy succession of dissolves, to that of the March Hare, Mad Hatter, Fish and Frog Footmen, Alligator, Queen of Hearts, White Rabbit, and finally back to her own head as she wakes in her nursery. The montage suggests one mental state superimposing itself on another, uncannily blurring the bounds between waking and dreaming. According to Frantisek Dryje (1995: 132), the answer as to whether Alice's experiences are dream or reality is paradoxical, echoing the sentence from the film's opening: "Close your eyes, otherwise you won't see anything." Dryje interprets this as an exhortation to dream, yet claims that Švankmajer does not want simply to paraphrase "perennial ideas about the unity of dreams and reality":

> He sees the unity as more of an inner coherence of the world and the imagination - of the child's world of ideas, which is not unreal, but which gives things more than one utilitarian function and recreates their essences in a relationship. Wonderland is not 'like' something. It is here, and the miraculous is in reality (Dryje 1995: 133)

It is in this portrayal of the imagined realm as lurking *within* reality, and the concurrent blurring of the lines between life and death, that the uncanny is epitomized. And it is in this inextricable intertwinement of realms that Švankmajer's films diverge from more mainstream treatments of parallel realms, where we invariably end up back in the real world, with the *status quo* re-established.

[2] In the novel, the transformation of baby to pig is achieved both via its reported grunting, as well as in visual terms: 'The baby grunted again, and Alice looked very anxiously into its face to see what was the matter with it. There could be no doubt that it had a *very* turn-up nose, much more like a snout than a real nose; also its eyes were getting extremely small for a baby: altogether Alice did not like the look of the thing at all' (Carroll 1912: 79).

Mainstream hybrids

Mainstream films mixing live action with animation are useful foils when examining Švankmajer's shifts, given that their transitional moments throw Švankmajer's approach into sharp relief. It is worth considering, in particular, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988: dir. Robert Zemeckis), because of its influence on other live action/animation mixes, and *Monkeybone* (2001: dir. Henry Sellick), given that its shifts between live action and animation correspond to movement between conscious and unconscious realms.

The transitions between live action and animation usually have more definitive, narrative and structural implications in mainstream films[3]. I interviewed David Russell, storyboard artist on a number of films that combine live action and animation, and also production illustrator on *Roger Rabbit.* In his experience, the decision to use live action and animation together is usually driven by the screenplay, and the need for a human or animal character to switch worlds (Russell 2004). Notably, *Roger Rabbit* and *Monkeybone* are both based on the premise that there exists a separate world where 'imaginary' characters reside. In *Roger Rabbit* the cel-animated cartoon characters commute from Toontown to the 'real' world of Los Angeles to work on cartoon shows. *Monkeybone*'s imagined figures inhabit the underworld of Down Town, and are represented by humans wearing costumes and manipulated via Computer Graphic Imagery, although Monkeybone himself is a 3-D model animated through stop-motion. In both films, the human protagonists (and sometimes their non-human counterparts) traffic between the 'real' world and these otherworldly dimensions. The realms remain discrete, so there is no undermining of the familiar world and the uneasiness of the uncanny is avoided.

Švankmajer's consistent use of diegetic - albeit scrambled - spaces in portraying the unconscious realm differs strategically from the carnivalesque sets and expressionistic, high contrast lighting used in *Monkeybone* to delineate Down Town from the ordinary world. The conventional thinking is, according to Russell (2004), that since one cannot achieve an entirely realistic look for the animated world, it is better for it to look significantly different from its real world counterpart. *Roger Rabbit* similarly distinguishes visually between Los Angeles and Toontown, which is rendered entirely in 2-D cel animation - an environment into which the human protagonist Eddie Valiant ventures for a short time. For the most part though, cartoon characters travel into the real world[4]. Cholodenko labels the relationship a "doubled *mise-en-scène*", and holds that the location of Toontown in relation to Los Angeles is in a sense "both determinable and indeterminable at the same time" (1991: 228). The relationship between the locations seems determinable - given that we can glimpse Toontown just behind the wall behind the Acme factory. Yet at the same time, in order to reach Toontown, Valiant has inexplicably to drive through a long tunnel. There is also a temporal disjunction between the two worlds: when Valiant drives down the tunnel, it is night in Los Angeles. Yet, when he emerges it is bright day in Toontown, so intensely high key in its rendering that Valiant squeezes his eyes shut against the glare - echoing our own impulse to do the same.

In neither *Alice* nor *Faust* does the unconscious realm receive any visual treatment to distinguish it from the prosaic world. Instead, remaining closely tied with the real world, the unconscious is presented - in visual terms - as closely aligned to conscious reality. Rather than

[3] In considering films which combine live action and animation, I do not include films which - although rooted in a real-world setting - employ some digital effects or computer animation techniques, which Furniss (1998: 177) points out is the case for the vast majority of Hollywood films.

[4] Russell (2004) claims that in *Roger Rabbit* we stay, for the most part, out of the Toon world precisely because of the huge aesthetic disjunction between cartoons and live actors. He points out that where the Toons appear in the real world, their colouring is not too high key: they are not bright red or green for example, but are instead graded down so that they can respond to lighting in a real world context. Russell believes that in *Scooby Doo* (2002: dir. Raja Gosnell), the characters are too high key in their colouring and cannot be integrated into the real world setting.

demarcating a distinct world, animation is often used unpredictably in Švankmajer's films, sometimes disrupting the flow of narrative. And unlike in mainstream live action/animation hybrids, where every effort is made to join the media seamlessly, the effect of Švankmajer's transitions is often more of a collage than a synthesis. Russell (2004) stresses the need for smooth continuity between all the filmic elements, lest the transition be too abrupt. Conversely, in Švankmajer's work, an animated element such as the maggoty apples might jarringly appear within an otherwise banal live action setting - creating a sense of uncanny duplicity within the otherwise familiar.

In *Alice*, the proliferation of portals within portals undercuts any notion of distinct waking and dreaming states, in contrast to the distinctive treatment of worlds in *Monkeybone*. Soon after the crash that sends Stewart into a coma, we cut to a low angle beneath his hospital bed. Next, we crane down in a slow revolve, with Stewart's almost mummified body descending with us, leaving a hole in the bed above. The perfect silhouette evokes the kind that cartoon characters leave - for example where Roger Rabbit is catapulted through an office window - in this way prefiguring the cartoonesque world of Stewart's unconscious, namely Down Town. From the revolving pull-back we cut to a close-up of Stewart's face as he descends a roller coaster. Notably, Down Town always maintains its 'below-world' status, and subsequent transitions frequently involve a directional movement up or down. Thus, on the first return to reality in *Monkeybone*, an intermediary shot of the hospital life support system is employed, effective in that it has a graphic quality similar to the Down Town shot that precedes it. We are led back to the carnival rides in Down Town by a close-up of a moving fairground contraption. Next the optical effect of a wipe transports us from Down Town up into the real world. Later a rotating shot from an ornamental ceiling in the real world ends in a two way wipe - resembling the opening of curtains – to a shot of the character Death, poised under a Down Town arch that echoes the domed ceiling in the real world. These consistent graphic matches and visual rhymes at points of transition create a smooth visual segue across the live action and animated realms, at odds with Švankmajer's more jarring juxtapositions that so uncannily destabilise the expected and familiar.

It is worth also considering the ways in which the cel animation in *Roger Rabbit*, and CGI in *Monkeybone*, effects how we view the material in relation to Švankmajer's stop motion. Stop motion, after all, presents a more direct and indexical relationship between object and camera, even when used to communicate the idea of the unconscious. Possibly it is the very familiarity that stop motion's use of real objects and spaces injects into the unfamiliar that helps create the disturbing sense of the uncanny. Indeed, according to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, the uncanny not only "concerns a sense of unfamiliarity which occurs at the very heart of the familiar", but also what they call a "familiarity which occurs at the very heart of the unfamiliar" (2004: 34). So even when engaged in strange visions of the unconscious, the presence of familiar, prosaic objects in the very medium of stop motion helps create an abiding sense of the uncanny.

Repetition and doubling are arguably devices of the uncanny that are employed in both Švankmajer's oeuvre and in more mainstream offerings. We recall that Švankmajer's repeated doll motif sets up the transformation of the live-action Alice into a doll herself. Russell (2004) claims that filmmakers mixing live action and animation usually seek to introduce aspects of the impending animated world early within the live action context; either aesthetic elements of the animation are introduced initially into the live action, or the human protagonist spends time with a creature from the animated realm before later being transported there with that creature. Both kinds of foreshadowing prepare the audience for the impending transitions. *Monkeybone* provides a plain example of both methods. Firstly, the opening credit sequence portrays the

protagonist, Stewart, painting in a style that prefigures the world to come - apt, given that the space manifests his own imagination, his own nightmare unconscious. Secondly, we meet a character from the imaginative world early on in the live action context. Following the credit sequence, an audience watches a premiere of Stewart's animated pilot, and we, along with the filmed audience, view Stewart's alter ego, Monkeybone, albeit still in 2-D form. And at the reception afterwards we are introduced - courtesy of the merchandising department - to 3-D models of the Monkeybone character. On arrival in Down Town, Stewart meets an exact replica of the 3-D version, now brought to animated life.

The use of a 'film within a film' at the beginning of *Monkeybone* functions similarly to that of the animated short *Somethin's Cookin'* at the start of *Roger Rabbit*. At the conclusion of the short, the camera tracks back from Roger - so that he is revealed to be on a film set in the live action world. Cholodenko (1991: 223) sees this operation as having "vertiginous consequences", as *Somethin's Cookin'* is ostensibly only a cartoon until its characters answer their director as 'live actors' and refigure *Somethin's Cookin'* as both cartoon animation and live action at the same time. The sense of vertigo is arguably akin to the effect of the uncanny, in that it is about uncertainty as to what is real and what is imagined, what is alive and what is dead.

Notwithstanding the uncanny sense of *déjà vu* created by doublings in *Monkeybone* and *Roger Rabbit,* there is nonetheless a concerted attempt to ease transitions between realms. The doublings are more logically founded, less vertiginous, than the dizzy, contortionist back and forth switching in *Alice* and *Faust*. The double-crossing transformations of Alice from girl to doll to effigy, and the redoubling as she emerges as human once more creates a nightmarish loop, as does the pixilated treatment of the live action Faust's face to create a mirror portrait of Mephistopheles - neither dead nor alive, real nor imagined.

Švankmajer blurs all boundaries between conscious and unconscious also through the use of concrete, diegetic sound even in referencing unconscious material and subjective states, and by avoiding musical cues for moments of transition between realms. On the contrary, such transitional moments are regularly underscored by music in more mainstream cinema. The car crash in *Monkeybone* is followed by an orchestral score, increasing in tempo as Stuart rides the roller coaster into limbo, where the inhabitants burst into song: "Welcome to Down Town while you're in your coma!" In *Roger Rabbit*, Valiant's approach through the tunnel to Toon Town is accompanied by a high adrenaline melody that rises with the red curtain at the tunnel's end. He emerges from the tunnel to the Toons singing "Smile, Valiant, smile." As in *Monkeybone*, music - and particularly song with its emotive power to convey one quickly into a new 'space' - is used to transport the viewer between realms.

Toon Town of *Roger Rabbit* is simply another suburb of Los Angeles (even if of indeterminable coordinates) rather than an unconscious realm, so we expect it to remain discrete. *Monkeybone*, however, contains the limbo world of Down Town, and the film, like *Alice* and *Faust*, traverses the conscious and unconscious. But Down Town remains nonetheless at a safe remove from the waking world. There is no doubt as to the character's status – and therefore no creepy, uncanny sense. The Monkeybone character is ultimately re-contained within Stewart's head, which, according to Death, is "where he belongs". This *denouement* implies a closure that is absent in the final scene of *Alice*, which hints instead that she could at any moment be flung back into the unconscious depths of 'wonderland'. The unconscious world in Švankmajer's vision is inseparable from the here and now; the line between reality and imagination is severely breached - if not altogether effaced.

In conclusion

Although there are moments in Švankmajer's films where the line between reality and imagination, conscious and unconscious, is uncannily erased, something of a line remains nonetheless: where parts are rubbed away, the gaps allow for intersections. The devices of the uncanny - undermining the familiar; enacting animism; dismembering, repeating and doubling; creating uncertainty between life and death, and between reality and imagination - are not devices of resolution. Rather than unifying disparate realms, these devices breach what is a flimsy, permeable border. In a sense, then, the uncanny works as a hinge, an intermediary, enabling the conscious and unconscious to co-exist in unsettling proximity, but never to be wholly integrated.

It follows that in *Alice* and *Faust*, there is no simple equation of live action with reality and animation with unreality; instead the interaction of the two media signifies the interpenetration of the conscious and unconscious realms. The abruptness of Švankmajer's shifts between media and between realms jolts and disturbs us, by making the familiar seem suddenly strange and so creating an abiding sense of the uncanny. This uncanny phenomenon is notably absent in more mainstream films that mix media, where every effort is made to create smooth segues between live action and animation, and to maintain discrete worlds. Granted, the fact that there are two such worlds does problematise a fixed notion of reality, but their coherence bespeaks an unwillingness to truly commingle conscious with unconscious - or to disturb the audience on any profound level. For what is ultimately at stake in the intermingling of the conscious and unconscious are consensual reality, unquestionable assumptions, and authoritarian hierarchies.

So Švankmajer's evocation of the uncanny, bound up in his commitment to Surrealism and disdain for totalitarian rule, arguably has grave socio-political import. After all, Royle suggests that "the uncanny can perhaps provide ways of beginning to think in less dogmatic terms about the nature of the world, ourselves and the politics of the future" (Royle 2003: 3). However, the shattering of assumptions that the uncanny instigates is something that mainstream animated cinema seems loath to take on. Royle remarks of the entire film industry that it "might be defined as a palliative working to repress the uncanniness of film" - a medium that he sees as inherently uncanny (2003: 75).

It is clear that film as a medium, and certainly as manipulated by Švankmajer, is endlessly capable of screening 'inner', subjective material, and of referencing the unconscious. The moving image has at its disposal an uncanny armoury of which Freud could scarcely have conceived. Cinematic capacities, for instance juxtaposition via editing and low fidelity sound, as well as animation's more specific faculties such as dissection and reassembly of the image, de-familiarize quotidian reality - creating a sense of unease in the viewer. The notion of animation extending or transforming the reality of live action could be much further explored in relation to other states of mind or conceptions of (un)reality. For example, animation in combination with live action evokes drug-altered states of mind in Terry Gilliam's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) and virtual worlds in Robert Rodriguez's *Spy Kids 3D: Game Over* (2003).

Live action and animation, however, do not represent separate sites or worlds in Švankmajer's work. Rather, the transitions between media indicate a permeable border between reality and imagination, conscious and unconscious. The uncanny, with its attendant devices, acts to breach this boundary and to enable what are often discomfiting shifts between worlds. The flimsiness of the border reflects Švankmajer's belief in the disturbing omnipresence of the unconscious in our waking lives and in its power to impinge, to undermine any semblance of humdrum existence, or of rigid, implacable notions about the nature of our world.

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