

The Ambivalent Objects in Jan Svankmajer's *Lesson Faust*

Jan Svankmajer's cinematic animation of puppets and use of life-sized puppets renders a situation where animated objects have a dominant function that is separate from their pragmatic function. This plurality of function constitutes dynamic characteristics for the object whereby the object has an ambivalent status at the semiotic level – the object can also be a subject. For Jiri Veltrusky, the animation of the object is a profound 'action force' demanding recognition of the dominant function and plurality of function for the object (the puppet remains a puppet but is also an active participant in the drama)(Veltrusky, 87). In "Man and Object in the Theatre", Veltrusky writes, "the prop is not always passive" and that 'action force' for an object in the absence of a subject is a mode of personification (hence, the object becoming subject at the semiotic level)(Veltrusky, 88-89). When animated, the puppet foregrounds its dominant function as being separate from its pragmatic function through the mimetic relationship it has with humans – the personification has unpredictable effects (Veltrusky, 89). This play on the mimetic has the effect of creating ambivalent status for the object as the object can also be understood as a subject within the drama. Cinematic animation and cinema specific properties and techniques such as editing, framing or superimposition foreground this plurality of an object's function by altering its spatiotemporal context and allowing it to be liberated from its recognition as a prop of the mise-en-scene. The Faust tradition foregrounds the plurality of function for the object most near and dear to us – our bodies – when Faust challenges the supernatural world into manipulating the body's natural relationship with the course of time. Svankmajer's Lesson Faust (1994) adeptly negotiates the complexities of a discourse on the dramatic and semiological process of objects becoming subjects (and vice-versa) while foregrounding the ambivalence

surrounding such ‘transformations’. Cinematic animation (technological), puppets (material) and the Faust tradition (narrative) can each be demonstrated as modes of presentation which actively endow objects with dominant functions separate from their pragmatic function thus creating ambivalence for the object at the semiotic level. The combination of these modes in Svankmajer’s Lesson Faust leave no doubt that Svankmajerian objects have dynamic characteristics and would be considered dramatic subjects in the Veltruskian sense. This combination is also adept at representing the Mannerist and Surrealist tendencies of Svankmajer as a filmmaker.

In Lesson Faust (1994), Jan Svankmajer produces a profoundly complex text by combining cinematic animation, the puppet and the Faust legend in order to foreground the tension or ‘blurriness’ among functions that subsequently create ambivalence for the semiotic analysis of objects and subjects. A recurring motif in Svankmajer’s work is the puppet which is presented with a plurality of functions. The plurality of functions for objects through cinematic animation, the puppet and the Faust legend constitute a ‘semiosphere’ that is rich in significance and has a surfeit of connotations for the objects. It is this surfeit of connotations that operates to render ambivalence for objects and subjects. The Faust legend, the puppet and cinematic animation are able to foreground the plurality of functions for the body (the ‘ideal’ object) through various juxtaposition devices that manipulate the spatiotemporal register. The juxtaposition devices and subsequent manipulation of the spatiotemporal register provide the body with a plurality of presentations along a kind of ‘subject-object continuum’ foregrounding the ambivalence of the body-object’s semiotic status as subject. The animated body of the puppet and use of the life-sized puppet head provides ironic effects on the ambivalent status of the

human body and at the same time this irony suggests dynamic characteristics for the animated objects (puppet or otherwise) bringing about a separate concern for their dramatic status as subjects. It is this kind of dialogic relationships that leads Veltrusky to conclude, “the relation of man to object in the theatre can be characterized as a dialectic antinomy” (Veltrusky, 90).

A starting point for this discussion on plurality of function and the ambivalent status of subjects and objects is itself plural, and considerably historically-based - the history of the Faust legend, the history of puppet theatre and animation, as well as, Jan Svankmajer’s cinematic oeuvre and use of puppets and animation techniques. These areas of inquiry have points of convergence for a later textual analysis of Lesson Faust. The Faust tradition has richness exceedingly difficult to account for in a shorter paper. Christopher Marlowe and J. W. von Goethe’s versions of Faust have produced their own unique textual lineage while many texts from various media hybridize these versions into a fusion not easily segmented or separated for a neat analysis. The textual lineage of Faust most pertinent to my analysis is the puppet play and the cinematic adaptations.

Faust in cinema has a relatively independent tradition through rich historical development and by the medium having made liberal use of adapting the legend, often manipulating key features of the story that tend to lose the essence of Faust’s plight in lieu of playing-up spectacle, drama and sensationalism. Holman notes that the puppet film has its origins in the trick film (Holman, 19) and many of the first cinematic presentations of Faust can make similar claims. The first instances of Faust in cinema are through the work of the medium’s pioneers. Alice Guy’s 1903, Faust and Mephistopheles uses stop-motion animation to trick the audience and

provide for a set of transformations of character and set in order to play out the drama of Faust's undoing in a matter of two minutes. The manipulation of space and time as animation reconfigures sets and characters instantaneously underscores the dynamic characteristics of objects in the diegesis – a theme pervading the Faust legend, generally. Emile Cohl's puppet film, Le Petit Faust (1910) has some remarkably similar elements to the Guy film, through the use of stop-motion animation – space and time are reconfigured for transforming bodies in a manner that foregrounds the body's dynamic characteristics and creates an uncanny marrying of the puppet object with the human body provoking a sense of ambivalence for the status of objects and subject as such.

The great cinematic 'magician', Georges Melies was the first to make use of the Faust tradition in cinema. In his 1903 film, Damnation of Faust, superimposition is used to metaphorically juxtapose the distance between Faust and his pleasures. The image of Faust on the superimposed film strip fades his physical inscription into the mise-en-scene thus foregrounding the body's dynamic characteristics (in fact, Faust's character is largely outside the frame itself during this sequence, which may be intentional, a mistake, or a fault of the surviving print). Later in the film, Mephistopheles is forcing Faust to his fate of existing in Hell and Melies uses stop-motion animation to transform the real actor into a dummy which is then easily hoisted by the devil character and thrown into a pit below the stage. This transformation of animate to inanimate bodies through the use of animation techniques further adds to the dynamic characteristics of bodies and objects through early cinema as they shift ambivalently across a kind of subject-object continuum. In 1904, Melies created a sequel, Faust and Marguerite based on the opera by Charles Gounod. This film used Melies's 'wizardly' techniques sparingly and

the story is more focused on the redemption of Marguerite's soul. In 1913, Stellan Rye and Paul Wegener combined talents to produce Der Student von Prag which used the medium specific techniques of cinema to juxtapose Mephisto- and Faust-like characters within the same frame. This motif of the double, or *doppelgänger*, has a rich history in Central European literature and film, however it is largely outside the purview of this paper. That being said, the superimposition of the same body within a single frame through matte techniques does provide further evidence of cinema's propensity for deforming and transforming the spatiotemporal register in order to create dynamic characterization effects for bodies/objects.

The Faust tradition continued in cinema – the next most significant entry being that of great German expressionist filmmaker, F.W. Murnau, in Faust (1926). Murnau's treatment of the legend is less interested in play on plurality of function for bodies and objects, and is instead, much more interested in the moral and ethical questions of freedom of choice. Good and evil are juxtaposed by their deeds which do not necessarily have a physical character. That being said, two elements of the film – one narrative, the other stylistic – pronounce the physical body as having dynamic characteristics distinguishable from the personality which it houses. The first instance of this is from the opening sequence where Mephistopheles (played memorably by Emil Jannings) shrouds the town in his enormous darkness. Although, Mephistopheles is characterized as an uncharitable, nefarious and impish fellow – always small in stature with regard to deeds – his physical body acts to represent the immensity of his position in the spiritual hierarchy. In this respect, his body has a plurality of function as it is manipulated by the techniques of cinematic representation through the *mise-en-scène*. The second instance of dynamic characteristics of the body itself is in the juxtaposition of miracles and plague which proliferate the themes of

Murnau's film. The personality's reasoning power is rendered irrational by the body's acquiescence to illness, disease and other hardships of the environment. Helmut Schanze comments that the Hans Kyser script written for the film is eclectic, not genius and is a "deforming reading of the myth" (Schanze, 225). Later in his essay, Schanze remarks on Mephistopheles as a man of magical machinery – implying that the soul is but a gear for the spiritual engineer to work (Schanze, 231). Matt Erlin proposes another direction for analyzing Murnau's film – "through its citation of disparate elements of the Faust tradition and its highly self-conscious relation to the cinematic medium, Murnau's Faust offers an implicit commentary on contemporary Weimar-era debates concerning the contested status of cinema as art form, as commodity, and as contributor to a sense of national community" (Erlin, 158). This thesis on the remediation of the textual and the self-reflexivity of the medium by which the textual is appropriated provides a point of departure from the literary roots of Faust which appear to still be guiding Svankmajer's film, Lesson Faust. Arguably, most cinematic adaptations of Faust have followed Murnau's example – making something out of nothing to create the something as new and different.

Several films lay claim to a 'new' Faust specific to cinema and its ability to effectively manipulate space and time at the level of the visual. William Dieterle's The Devil and Daniel Webster (1941) distorts the Faustian discourse on objectification through juxtaposing it with a discourse on instincts. Humans are to be distinguished from other animals by virtue of freedom exercised against the more innate and *a priori* 'judgment' of instincts. The film is a conservative and heavy-handed political manifesto on American isolationist policy and seems a step removed from what Erlin noted of the politics behind Murnau's Faust. Vincente Minelli's Cabin in the

Sky (1943) is a discourse on Foucauldian heterotopias where the manipulation of the film's mise-en-scene can represent a fictional environment bereft of racial bigotry and strife. The proposal of the film is that human behaviour has a unique character and the exercising of will takes on new forms when there is racial isolation. The film has been often criticized for manipulating characterization to spur ideas in audiences about the 'true nature' of African Americans. These films may be a sign of their times, but certainly carry with them the burden of anachronistic hegemonic formations in sociopolitical discourse and are a far cry from the essence of the Faust legend which could be seen as mostly interested in questions of fate for the individual as they negotiate the function of the body as ambivalent to the will of the personality.

Stanley Donen's Bedazzled (1967) provided Faust with a fashionable image, playing on themes of irony in a comical manner. Dudley Moore and Peter Cook's witty repartee as Faust and Mephistopheles characters, respectively, begins another political take on the historical moment. This time the tables are turned and youth have brought the system into question through a liberal personification of societal and spiritual forces. God is positioned as mad tyrant of fate and spurious patriarch to a generation that has better things to do than value His design. In this scenario, the Mephistopheles character becomes the quintessential aloof revolutionary – a contradiction in terms. The Faust character is left awaiting instruction. Arguably, characterization of the object is rather non-existent in Bedazzled as the main characters never transform their bodies except through the sartorial selection. John Frankenheimer's Seconds (1966) presents a Faustian adaptation with decidedly more edginess in conforming to its source material. The Faust character is a bloated capitalist fat-cat having made his fortune in investment banking. Fearing the slowing down of his aging body, he enters a secret program bent on

capitalizing (possibly to the point of world-domination) through providing the service of creating a ‘second life’ for its clients. The capitalist entrusts himself to the company and soon discovers that a body has its own demands, its autonomy and perhaps agency from the personality which it houses. The body has a plurality of function – serving itself (or higher powers) as well as the personality which it houses - characterized dynamically and thus become a subject in the dramatic presentation of Seconds. The Faust character (in his second body played by Rock Hudson) comments on the lack of control he exerts over the object of the body and how this is more profound than the endowment of autonomy for the personality. Later, ‘things’ are criticized for not acquiescing to the realization of specific pleasures and desires that might be considered to constitute human will. The cinematic apparatus is employed to vivify and enliven ‘things’ without the use of animation. Editing techniques (alternation of POV shots) and cinematographic choices (use of POV shots and mobile framing) construct a spatiotemporal register that flattens the sense of the present into that of memory. In effect, there is no present for the Faust character... when his ‘first’ body died on the operating table so too did his link to the past. The ‘second’ body is in a state of constant dissociation with the personality leading to a perpetual present with no referential signifying chain to past or future – in a sense the present is a memory for future consideration but not momentary introspection. The discourse on articulation in Frankenheimer’s film is rich and the theme of fate is loyal to the Faust tradition established by Christopher Marlowe and J.W. von Goethe.

Other films playing with the Faust tradition should be regarded as machinations on the theme of fate. Rene Clair’s La Beaute du Diable (1950) introduces the fate of Mephistopheles as paramount through positing him as a character struggling with issues of friendship and

disingenuousness. Alan Parker's Angel Heart (1987) is but another step removed as Mephistopheles ('Lou Cipher') plays out the drama as a bounty hunter in neo-noir New York and shabby Louisiana. Cipher (played by Robert DeNiro) need not do any of the work of 'hunting' as he has his marks hunt themselves rather uninspiringly. Clive Barker's Hellraiser (1987) appropriates the concept of Hell to explain the spiritual consequences of mistrust and adultery – the hate that scoundrels of love afford are revisited on them eternally. This is a common theme in Barker's literary work underscoring the loose appropriation of the Faust tradition for the Hellraiser film series. Oliver Stone's Wall Street (1987) and Taylor Hackford's The Devil's Advocate (1997) transform Mephistopheles figuratively and literally into tycoons of industry – economics and law, respectively. These films take a particular position on the moral high ground questioning the ethics of American laissez-faire economics and conspicuous consumer culture. The 'devil' and its challenger are a transparent surrogate for society and the individual. Finally, by the time gross-out director and traditional special effects master, Brian Yuzna, sinks his teeth into the Faust tradition, it is mere raw bone. The creative manipulation of space and time through cinematic techniques in mise-en-scene, cinematography and editing which allow objects to be characterized dynamically is now replaced by modern spectacles of gore and sex. The cinematic apparatus is employed in service of visual pleasure. These later films tend to present the Faust character as a prodigal son of Hell which as a sensational narrative device inevitably negates the essential existential, metaphysical, phenomenological, epistemological, intellectual and spiritual discourses by which the Faust tradition can more properly be read, reasoned through and understood. Rene Clair makes the reality of this trend clear when he states, "[Faust] imposes its own style on those who have permitted themselves, at their own risk, to approach it" (Clair, 115).

The puppet theatre Faust tradition has its own unique lineage and development. This tradition is arguably more influential on Svankmajer's work, including Lesson Faust. The puppet theatre in Europe had its beginnings in a strictly proletarian context (Malik, 5). Jan Malik explains that the historical record is poor because early puppeteers and their audiences were predominantly illiterate. The first records on puppet plays in Europe emerge in the context of listing banned plays and performances (the oldest pictorial evidence of the Czech puppet is from 1588)(Malik, 7). The marionette has been privileged over the hand puppet because its range of stylization has seemed a better substitute for the live actor. The marionette became popular after the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) when puppet plays had been popular with companies of foreign troupes. In some cases, former actors from stage companies left to work independently and substituted a cast by becoming puppeteers (Malik, 7). Malik traces this phenomenon to explain why puppet plays took up Marlowe, Shakespeare, Moliere and other classics of the theatre (Faust featured early in the repertoire).

There were two primary reasons for the Czech puppet play to remain popular with lower and middle classes regardless of appropriations from bourgeois theatre – the low price of admission and the use of vernacular Czech language instead of Latin, German, Italian or other European languages of the actors' theatre (Malik, 8). The puppet theatre was highly mobile and traversed the Czech lands in the mid-19th century, reinforcing nationalist awakenings. Two major figures centre this movement – the 'father' of Czech puppeteers, Matej Kopecky and playwright, Jan N. Stepanek, whose plays in contemporary theatre provided for the majority of puppet play adaptations (Malik, 9-10). Malik remarks that the puppeteer's pathos matched well with the era and its attack on Romanticism. Puppet theatre became identified into two popular types – the

child's play and burlesque sallies (Malik, 12). In 1852, headmaster Frantisek Hauser began the institutionalization of marionette theatre – primarily incorporating puppet theatre into schools and their curricula (Malik, 12). The First Puppeteers' Congress was held in Prague in 1903 and *Faustus* as a puppet performance was critically reviewed in 1905 (Malik, 13). The link between the traditional and modern age in puppetry was Professor Jindrich Vesely, who in 1909 took his degree of PhD with a thesis of the *Faustus* element in traditional Czech puppetry (Malik, 14). In 1911, Vesely completed the institutionalization of the Czech puppet theatre when he formed the Czech Union of Friends of the Puppet Theatre (Malik, 15).

The First World War dampened the renaissance despite the founding of a trade press (*Loutkar* or "The Puppeteer") in 1917 which ran until 1939 (Malik, 15). The late teens and twenties was an era of technical and aesthetic innovation by veterans such as Josef Skupa. Skupa also created some of the first Czech puppet films featuring his character, *Spejbl* (Malik, 24). Malik suggests that the organizational successes of the Czech puppet theatre were external effects reflecting the internal maturity of the art form (Malik, 25). The Second World War saw a virtual complete suppression of puppet theatre activity and many talented puppet theatre personnel lost their lives to the ravages of war and the Nazi atrocities (Malik, 35). Jiri Trnka's *Wooden Theatre* had opened in 1936 in Prague and much of the post-war development of Czech puppet theatre has been influenced by his work.

The puppet film can be defined as a film using free-standing, articulated puppets made of wood, plastic, or other materials (Holman, 11). Puppet films can be challenging to define because they are often mixed with live action, such as in *King Kong* (1933) or *The New Gulliver*

(1935). L. Bruce Holman notes that the puppet film is difficult to trace historically for a variety of reasons – use of alternate titles, poor distribution practices and variations on dates of production (Holman, 12). The first puppet animation film is Arthur Melbourne Cooper's Dreams of Toyland (1908) and in 1910, Emile Cohl produced the first animated puppet film using Faust in Le Petit Faust (Holman, 21). The puppet film proliferated throughout the era of early cinema through the work of Cooper and Cohl, but also Ladislav Starewicz, George Pal, Howard S. Moss, Willis O'Brien and Helena Smith Dayton. Pal had the widest distribution for puppet films, leading to his protégés' recognition in the industry and their subsequently being dubbed 'Dollywood' (Holman, 21). Hermina Tyrlova and Karel Dodal produced the first Czech animated puppet film in 1936, entitled The Adventures of Mr. Pry. Mr. Pry combined the puppet and cartoon film. Most of Tyrlova's work was aimed at a children's audience, and many of the new Czech puppeteers started in cinematic animation - Bretislav Pojar, Karel Zeman being the most prominent – made possible through the trailblazing efforts of Tyrlova, Skupa and Trnka (incidentally, Trnka was himself trained by Skupa)(Holman, 32). Although Svankmajer introduced unique elements and techniques to puppet theatre and puppet animation in cinema, Czech puppet theatre and animation had had major developments for quite some time.

I have endeavored to demonstrate some important points from both the history of puppet animation in cinema and the Faust tradition in cinema. This provides a broader context for understanding Jan Svankmajer's highly esoteric and unique cinematic vision through the use of animated puppets and the Faust tradition, specifically in his 1994 film, Lesson Faust. Svankmajer began his career in puppet theatre in 1958 with three performances at the Loutka Theatre on Wenceslas Square in Prague (Schmitt, 15). The play was The King Stag, an adaptation of Re

Cervo by Carlo Gozzi. Bertrand Schmitt notes that *Re Cervo* was situated in the magical register with the story emphasizing on the metamorphosis of characters through a magical formulation of transmutation. Schmitt remarks, “Svankmajer was interested in the complementary or ambiguous relations existing between the body and the object, between organic life and the illusion of life, between the animated and the manipulated” (Schmitt, 17). Svankmajer’s cinematic oeuvre permeates dialectic between subject and object – a conflicting relationship which sees symbiosis in the manipulation of objects by subjects, and vice-versa. This manipulation is posited throughout Svankmajer’s cinematic work as being a form of magical control. One of Svankmajer’s specific and original techniques for the interplay of this dialectic has nothing to do with cinema and its techniques per se – it is the life-sized puppet head placed on the body of a live actor. The life-sized marionettes create “deliberate confusion between the living characters and the animated objects” (Schmitt, 17). Schmitt notes that the object is thus imbued with a ‘soul’ while the living being has ambiguity cast upon the status of its own soul (Schmitt, 17). Many critics have interpreted this uncanny doubling as providing grounds for more fertile ploughing of Freudian psychoanalysis into a reading of the work of Svankmajer. Although, not openly attempting to disprove the validity of such readings, Svankmajer’s work has a complexity seemingly profound in its sophistication and articulation (often associated with his Rudolfian Mannerist tendencies) that seeks to refute psychoanalytic readings based in a more linear infinite regress into infantile states of articulation and consciousness (Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank see the double as related to an infantile desire for total power). Svankmajer continued his work in puppet theatre with the 1962 play, *The Shadow Collector* performed at the Semafor Theatre. This adaptation of von Chamisso’s story, *Peter Schlemihl* is an obvious entry in the Faust tradition (Schlemihl sells his soul to the Devil for life-long wealth). In 1970, Svankmajer directed his film

version of Don Juan – the film utilizes life-sized puppets while playing out the well-known story of quests for pleasure and the damnation that follows.

Svankmajer's use of life-sized marionettes with stories of magic could be seen as a form of ritual ceremony – a cathartic experience achieved through externalizing 'demons', naming them and mastering them - protecting and preserving the internal self (Schmitt, 26). However, this is generally the purpose of theatre as Antonin Artaud states, "for the theatre, as for culture, the question remains that of naming and directing shadows" (Artaud, 17). However, Schmitt understands this actor-marionette relationship (through the life-sized marionette) as an 'entanglement' whereby the signs of subjectivity and objectivity are ambivalent, ambiguous and constantly in flux (Schmitt, 30). Through its 'universal symbolism of masks' the puppet foregrounds subjectivity while the life-sized puppet is a distillation of that effect. The puppet is a symbol of the human body traditionally, but the life-sized puppet also signifies the puppet body as a living symbol with vital forces and vital links (Schmitt, 31). Schmitt understands the 'subject-object continuum' traversed ambivalently through the marionette as not being explained through the autonomy of the human body as abstracted object first-off, and instead connects the 'body as object' to the human personality. The human personality by the operations of agency and will becomes denatured through the Apollonian forces of civilization – the body seeming to become a subject is illusory and the ambivalence for Schmitt is determined by that illusion (Schmitt, 32). The effect of the illusion is that the body's Dionysian natural forces are alienated – an afterthought of the process, more-or-less. However, through Schmitt's conception, the marionette can become a fetishized representation of forces and links for the body in nature and civilization. I would contend that Svankmajer's Mannerist and Surrealist style of animating

objects with prolific and varied functions precludes the form of centered desire that constitutes a fetish. Perhaps it could be argued that Schmitt is interested in biographical historiographical explanatory arguments as much of his case on the significance of animated objects in Svankmajer's work relies on a single quote by Svankmajer himself – "I make my own Golems that are designed to protect me from the pogroms of reality" (Schmitt, 34). The fetish lies in the 'protective' power of the object as conceived by Svankmajer. However, to avoid the intentional fallacy a close textual analysis of Lesson Faust may provide some indication of the status and significance of the object in Svankmajer's work.

It is my hope that through a relatively close textual and formal analysis of Lesson Faust that the film text will reveal its convergent use of cinematic animation, the puppet and the Faust tradition as a means of creating plurality of function for objects, dynamic characteristics through that plurality and an ambivalence for the status of objects and subjects at the semiotic level. Death of the body acting autonomously from the will of the personality is at the heart of cultural myths such as the story of Faust whereby ritual enactments of the subject-object dialectic find their expression through puppets in Lesson Faust, and ambivalent spatiotemporal contexts for the object accent their plurality of function and dynamic characteristics by modern means such as cinematic animation. An analysis of such rich elements (Faust tradition, puppet theatre, cinematic animation) is a burdensome endeavor for the sheer magnitude of considerations and the breadth of discourses to which the elements already belong. The analysis of Lesson Faust stands as a mere prolegomenon for a larger project outlined in this paper.

The opening sequence of Lesson Faust involves a montage, juxtaposing demonic imagery in pictorial form (wood-cuts) with the emergence of everyday people from a subway exit in Prague. The cuts which constitute the montage break the temporal integrity of the diegesis – although the place is static and consistent, the moments do not denote their succession from a state of past-present-future. For example, the third shot of the subway exit may have been the first shot in the actual temporal succession of events, while the lack of match-on-action denotes temporal ellipsis either way. Cinematic editing thus suspends objects presented into ambiguous spatiotemporal contexts – the object has dynamic characteristics by virtue of appearing transformed from shot to shot in an edited sequence and thus occupying varied points of vantage within the sequence (something of a Kuleshov effect, generally). Svankmajer uses the cut-in close-up shot with great frequency and is a marked departure from modes of theatrical presentation. Recalling the sequence where the mother carries her daughter downstairs and out of the apartment while dragging a doll down the stairs with her free hand: a cut-in closeup to start a short stop-motion animation sequence shows the doll's head being squashed by the closing doors. The doll cannot be physically conceived as remaining in the mother's hand and achieving the effect of being squashed at the bottom of the door. The spatial integrity is constituted by the importance of the object expressing its new and dominant function – to be a manipulated body capable of reconstituting itself autonomously contra both the function of the human body which requires a time of healing after injury or the pragmatic function of a doll to be destroyed through physical punishment. This 'reconstitution' is achieved through cinematic animation allowing the object to have dynamic characteristics through the plurality of functions.

It is difficult to understand the doll's punctuation in the scene as tied to the protagonist's internal psychological state as no cues are provided for this (his emotional response and gesticulation do not denote a connectivity to the action, he is a mere visual witness to its independent happening). This element of the object's dynamic characterization begins to be explained through the Faustian magical and dark alchemistic themes – the empty egg in the bread coincides with the protagonist's successful venture into the unknown and the rotting fruit stop-motion animation sequence at the courtyard seems to be part of an internal state of mind as editing creates cuts between establishing shots and surveying POV shots. Lesson Faust is difficult to analyze precisely because of the self-reflexivity of Svankmajer's work where auteurship wrestles with the inspiring source material. Svankmajer uses the apparatus to guide the spectator to a new view as much as to a familiar one – perhaps this is in fact the source of his surrealist aesthetic. Regardless, Svankmajer uses cinematic editing to create a plurality of function for objects, dynamic characteristics and thus ambivalence for the semiotic status of the object.

The puppets in Lesson Faust also demonstrate dynamic characteristics through cinematic animation and through the use of the life-sized marionette. The first shot of an animated marionette is when the jester puppet (or what appears to be the jester puppet) is sitting on the toilet. The camera frames the puppet from the waist down. The object (the puppet) gets its privacy, whereas the ballerinas in the following scene do not! The cinematographic framing of the object presents the idea of autonomous needs and desires of the object as if personified – as if it were a subject. Bertrand Schmitt notes, “playing with depth of field, high and low angle shots and lateral tracking shots... breaks the frontal and fixed frame of the scenic spaces that are

normally defined by the margins of the miniature marionette theatre” (Schmitt, 47). Cinematography is an added dimension for cinema compared to the strict mise-en-scene of theatre and Svankmajer uses these properties (and those of editing) in order to bring about dynamic characteristics for his objects. Later, in the ‘humonculus’ sequence, the clay golem creates itself into the form of a newborn human baby – physically vivified through cinematic animation prior to the protagonist using dark alchemy to render that vivification into more familiar states of being. The ‘code’ (the Shem) placed in the mouth of the clay baby is ironic given that the vivified clay lump demonstrates a code operating outside the purview of the ‘creator’. The object exerts a force of function prior to the subject being aware of what is created. The magical element of the narrative might explain the invisible machinations which constitute the object’s relationship to the diegesis, but the object is presented with dynamic characteristics through the cinematic animation. Once the protagonist becomes frustrated with the vision of death, his fist-beatings are met with an active resistance by the clay figure – a resistance which is difficult to claim as being mounted by the external force which first infused some element of life into the lump of clay. What this indicates is that at some point the object has autonomy and acts it out in defiance of the pleasures and desires sought by the protagonist – the object is characterized dynamically and is no mere lump of clay for human molding and as such the object ambivalently shows signs of being a subject in the drama of the film’s story.

The puppeteer’s hand is another ‘object’ begging questions within the discourse on ambivalence of signs in Lesson Faust. The hand is presented, occasionally with forearms shown, but never a human to go with the appendage. Is it an appendage or extremity then? Does the puppeteer hand present a metonymical physical relationship with spiritual figures represented

from afar? The hand has clear limitations through cinematographic framing and cut-in closeup shot editing. The hand does not control multiple puppets at once in most scenes (the Portuguese court scene being an obvious exception). The hand does not control the rolling puppet heads. The hand often seems more mechanical than the puppets – single repetitive motions in one shot are juxtaposed with sophisticated, dynamic and nuanced gesticulation by the puppets in the reverse shot. This dichotomy suggests that the hand is an extremity of the object more than representing the *deus ex machina* purposes of an unseen force autonomous to the puppets. Admittedly, there is a flattening of representations of autonomy through the interchange of human and puppet bodies (especially through the life-sized puppet head). This ‘flattening’ constitutes an ambivalence of signs and forms dialectic between the characterization of subject as object, and vice-versa. The puppet’s ability to operate and articulate gesture equally well without the hand is a profound statement by Svankmajer and mounts a resistance to many of the ‘*deus ex machina*’ readings of the hand’s function. The hand can be understood as an external representation of the autonomy of the object as the human hand appears functionally superfluous.

By the end of the film, the puppets have experienced an economy of signs - traditional for puppet theatre. The crying baby in the pram foregrounds the inanimate nature of the puppet – disavowing interpellation into the fiction of the story and perhaps executed by Svankmajer as a device for separating identification with the protagonist and thus their fate (a source of displeasure for the spectator when not fortuitous). The life-sized puppets become caricatured human figures. That the life-sized puppets are mere puppet heads on human bodies is a biting irony. The self-reflexive use of the theatre stage, backdrop, proscenium and audience begins to comment on performance and that the human body is a ‘prop’ in the performance of life. The

driverless car at the end punctuates this cynical and sarcastic attitude through engineering an impossible situation into a context which up until then had been believable and where magical elements had realistic explanations – namely, the social experience of public space in Lesson Faust. The body of the car operates without personality and it is animated without dynamic characterization by virtue of its motives being unexplainable and unknowable. Perhaps, the ambivalence of bodies is an illusion as the deus ex machina fateful end comes into play – in the true Svankmajerian tongue-and-cheek way, his inspirational sources (Faust tradition) are allowed to trump his cinematic leitmotifs (objects as functionally plural) thus ironically and cleverly foregrounding his authorial control of the text. Svankmajer is effective through his treatment of Faust in challenging the function of the body and objects – creating a plurality of function through dominant functions that are separate from pragmatic ones. Svankmajer’s animation of objects foregrounds this plurality of function creating dynamic characteristics for the objects and an ambivalence of signs – the object can become subject, and vice-versa. Svankmajer’s treatment of the Faust tradition, innovations with puppets and techniques of cinematic animation, cinematography and editing have a promiscuous quality marking the ambivalence of the semiotic status of his objects as undeniable and profoundly compelling. The dynamic Svankmajerian object opens up new discourses on epistemology and natural hierarchies. In this regard, Svankmajer may be considered, above his Mannerist and Surrealist tendencies to be an odd and paradoxical mixture of misanthrope and humanist.

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