Framing realities; A critical analysis of perspectival distortion in the film Alice by Czech Surrealist Jan Švankmajer.

By

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Abstract

My MFA exhibition *Through the looking glass; altered states of perception*, explores my experience of mental distress: Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), through the medium of painting and multimedia collage. Situated in the Main Fine Art building on Rhodes University campus, this practical submission takes the form of a collection of oil paintings accompanied by an immersive wall of collaged experimentations, depicting the perspectival shifts I have experienced in coping with mental distress. The paintings explore concepts of *framing* and *perspective,* both literally and metaphorically in unpacking how our perceptions are manipulated by the way in which situations and concepts are *framed.* I use strategies and techniques drawn from the Surrealist and Cubist movements in order to depict my distorted experience of time and space, but also to tap into my own unconscious.

In this mini-thesis: *Framing realities; A critical analysis of perspectival distortion in the film Alice by Czech Surrealist Jan Švankmajer*, I explore the strategies and concepts developed during the Surrealist and Cubist movements in relation to strategies used by Švankmajer in his disturbing interpretation of Alice's Adventures into Wonderland. Here, he visually explores the psyche of an imaginative child. His unique interpretation is expressed through the combination of live-action film and stop-motion animation. I position my work in relation to themes proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ernst Jentch, Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva. In the first Chapter: Framing and Perspectival shifts, I unpack *framing* and *perspectival* shifts exhibited in the Cubist (a physical shift), Dadaist (a social shift), and Surrealist (an unconscious shift) movements. In Chapter Two: A critical analysis of *Alice* by Jan Švankmajer, I engage in an analysis of themes (examined in the above art movements) relative to the film *Alice.* These are found objects and assemblages, ambiguity, distortion of scale, the Unconscious, the uncanny and multi-sensory modalities. Chapter Three: *Through the Looking Glass; Altered states of perception,* I discuss how the themes discussed in Chapter Two apply to my own body of work and how these themes are addressed with regards to my lived experience of mental disorder and distress.

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete bibliographic references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at another university.

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Simone Soutter   19 February 2021

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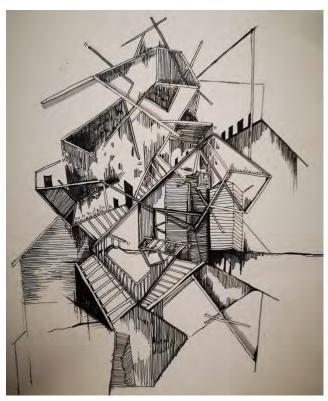
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Introduction

My Master of Fine Art submission titled: *Through the looking glass; altered states of perception* comprises an exhibition of collages and paintings exhibited in the Main Fine Art Department Gallery on Rhodes University Campus. My body of work explores two major themes: *framing* and *perspectival shift* as informed by technical strategies borrowed and adapted from the art historical movements of Cubism and Surrealism. The personal impetus for this body of work draws inspiration from my own experiences with mental distress specifically major depressive disorder (MDD).

The supporting mini thesis is entitled *Framing realities; A critical analysis of perspectival distortion in the film Alice by Czech Surrealist Jan Švankmajer*. In this thesis I explore these themes of *framing* and *perspectival shift* by examining a brief history of the following technical and conceptual strategies employed by Surrealism and Cubism: the ready-made, ambiguity, distortion of scale, the unconscious, the uncanny and multisensory modalities. This is followed by a close reading of Jan Švankmajer's film *Alice* (1988) examining his use of these strategies. My final chapter examines my own use and modification of these strategies to inspire the practical body of work.

Chapter One explores Cubist, Dadaist and Surrealist technical, compositional and conceptual strategies in relation to *framing* and *perspectival shifts.* I explore how *framing* and *perspective* work within the movements of Surrealism and Cubism, following on from Dada. The discussion of these themes can be broken down into three sections that discuss elements of *framing* and *perspective*: the physical in terms of Cubism, the social in terms of Dada and the Unconscious in terms of Surrealism. I use the term *frame*; to describe both the manner in which an issue is outlined metaphorically (making use of a positive or negative frame in order to subtly influence the opinion of the receiver of information), as well as the literal visual strategy of composition in artmaking. Similarly, I utilise the term *perspective* as both a metaphor for a conceptual point of view, and as a visual technical device. *Perspective* as a technical strategy, considers geometric representations of depth, width, and height in the process of representing a three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional picture plane (Arcas, Arcas & Gonzalez, 2003).

The second Chapter utilizes the understanding of these terms as unpacked in Chapter One in relation to an understanding of filmic devices to conduct a close reading of Czech Surrealist artist Jan Švankmajer's film *Alice. Alice* (1988) is a haunting adaptation of Lewis Carrol's

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. The film is a surreal visual exploration into the mind of Alice, and combines live action and stop motion animation to examine the dichotomy between dreaming and waking and how these two states are seamlessly intertwined. Themes analysed encompass: found Objects and assemblages, ambiguity, distortion of scale, the unconscious imagination, the uncanny and multisensory modalities.

Alice makes use of found objects and assemblages, in that every character (aside from one instance of the protagonist), prop and scenography in the film is a tangible object, animated through stop-motion animation. Ambiguity is used to confound the distinction between waking life and her dream. The real-life objects present in *Alice's* room in the opening sequence re-emerge throughout her dream in obscure and distorted ways. Distortion of scale is used as a metaphor for transitions between dream sequences, *Alice* shrinks and enlarges multiple times throughout the film which is used to mediate the relationship between the real and imagined. Alice's unconscious imagination manifests in her dream exploration. It is evident that all the characters Alice encounters (when they do speak) are in her head as they are all given the voice of Alice. The repeated motif of doors, entrances, windows, and tunnels are all strongly suggestive of entering a different reality, emphasising the power of imagination (Noheden, 2013:5). The Freudian uncanny is explored by defamiliarizing otherwise familiar objects, by altering the context in which they are placed (Orgeron & Orgeron, 2011: 100). Lastly, Multisensory filmic techniques are used to emphasise sound and tactility over dialogue (Vasseleu, 2007: 95). Alice's minimal use of dialogue allows the visceral nature of characters and objects to narrate through sound, with intricate textures in the close-up props and characters. This provokes the viewer to 'touch' them with their eyes and imagination.

The Third Chapter: *Through the Looking Glass; Altered States of Perception* discusses the application of *framing* and *perspectival shifts* in my own work, I use themes discussed in Chapter Two in relation to my own work. Using *framing* devices such as thresh-holds, doors, frames and windows, I make use of *framing*, *perspectival shifts* and other tactile and unconscious strategies to create a collection of multimedia collages using various printed material and found visual imagery to construct a set of alternative realities, which I, in part, transpose into paintings. I discuss how painting these collaged realities flattens my multiple points of reference into a singular *frame* that contain multiple *perspectival shifts.* The body of paintings are accompanied by a collage wall in which I document my experimentation process with techniques of decalcomania, automatism and collage and visually depict my mindscape. For Alice, Wonderland "is her dream, and so its creatures and landscape reflect the contours of

her own peculiar psychology" (Schatz, 2015:108). In turn, I create a visual reality that reflects my own psychological state.

Chapter 1

Framing and Perspectival Shifts

1.1. Framing

While the words 'frame', 'framing' and 'framework' are frequently used outside of scholarly discourse, it is important for this thesis to identify, and make explicit, my definition of framing in relation to other understandings of the term. Political scientist and media expert Robert Entman defines framing as:

> "select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (1993:52).

Speaking more specifically about how news media might frame a political or socio-historic moment, Entman's definition nevertheless is useful as my starting point. My use of the term *frame* describes both the manner in which an issue is outlined metaphorically (making use of a positive or negative frame in order to subtly influence the opinion of the receiver of information) as well as the literal framing that is part of the visual strategy of composition in artmaking. The social sciences have shown that individual judgement about an issue is often dependent on how the issue is framed and what salient characteristics are used to describe the issue, in terms of a positive frame or negative frame (De Martino et al., 2006:684). Depending on how something is framed, will influence how receivers of this information will respond to the issue. If a subject is discussed using a positive frame, one would use the term 'saving lives' as opposed to negatively framing the issue as 'minimising deaths' (Gonzalez et al., 2005:2). These two statements say the same thing, but are framed differently, manipulating the way the issue is viewed.

Druckman notes that there are two distinct uses for the metaphoric term frame (2001:227). The first, 'frames in communication', refers to the images, words, phrases, and the presentation style the speaker uses to relay information. The second is 'frames of thought' which refers to an individual's perception of a given situation (2001:227). Frames in communication influence frames of thought resulting in the framing effect. The framing effect holds a significant role in influencing an individual's decision making (De Martino et al., 2006:684), and can be observed when the description of certain opinions are described with a positive or negative frame to elicit a desired response from the receiver (Gonzalez et al., 2005:4).

Individuals can thus be subconsciously manipulated through the positive or negative framing of an issue. Through automatic, subconscious processes subtly priming a positive or negative tone of evaluation, the disseminator of knowledge may be able to manipulate individuals by strategically employing so called alternative, but equivalent frames (Druckman, 2001:228). The concept of framing provides a way to describe and understand the power of a communicating text. The analysis of frames illustrates the way in which influence over a reader/viewer's consciousness is exerted by the construction of information (Entman, 1993:57).

1.2. Perspective

Similarly, I shall utilise the term 'perspective' as both a metaphor for a conceptual point of view and as a visual technical device. Perspective as a technical strategy, considers geometric representations of depth, width, and height in the process of representing a three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional picture plane (Arcas et al., 2008:4). Perspective can also be defined as a paradigm, model of thought, or an individual's point of view (Iversen, 2005:193). The gradual development of perspective as a technical strategy historically has had a major influence on how we make use of perspective in modern society (Arcas et al., 2008:5). The convention of perspectival drawing (established in Western Art in the early Renaissance), centred everything around the eye of the beholder (Berger, 1972:16). Prior to the Renaissance there were no set rules for perspective in Western art, but rather an accumulation of different ways of illustrating what might be a satisfactory representation. The problem of representing depth on a flat surface had been previously solved using a variety of different strategies. These strategies were informed by the frames of thinking and social/cultural conventions of each age. We perceive and understand art of the past differently to how it was perceived at the time, this shift in perspective was informed by developments in technology and alternative philosophies of thought and culture. Berger notes a particular example of technological advance on perception in that "[t]he invention of the camera changed the way men saw. The visible came to mean something different to them, this was immediately reflected in painting" (1972:18).

To contextualise perspective in art history as a compositional device, I will briefly discuss the development of two and three-point perspective, technical strategies employed by Renaissance artists whose methods of composition influenced much of subsequent Western art's representation of perspective. With their renewed interest in Greco-Roman antiquity and architectural forms, an objective of Renaissance painting became to create works that would

have a realistic, if idealised, resemblance to reality. A distinguishing feature of Renaissance art was the development of linear perspective, a mathematical system used to create an illusion of distance and space on a flat surface (Bauer, 1987:212). Leon Alberti (1404-1472) influenced the development of various techniques and viewing devices to illustrate perspective; the perspective grid, visual pyramid and the concept of using a transparent veil of glass in front of a composition on which he drew what lay behind it (Andersen, 2008:4). Alberti's perspective construction held at its core the idea of a 'window' through which an 'outside' reality could be observed and recorded (Levy et al., 1996:43). These scientifically constructed viewing devices were used as lenses of seeing and framing. Another influential technical strategy used was the development of the perspectograph by Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519), which involved a pane of glass with a small peep hole that held the same point of perspective when constructing a composition. The application of this rigid geometric perspective continued to be the primary device in Western art composition until the end of the nineteenth century, when a shift occurred when Post Impressionists maintained the basis of perspective, but began manipulating the depiction of space (Arcas et al., 2008:9).

This shift in conceptualising perspective discarded old, naturalistic, and mimetic productions of space and developed reflexivity, reflecting upon the impression objects had on their creators. This reflexivity took cognizance of the fact that a painting is a constructed depiction rather than necessarily an accurate representation of reality and developed a "self-awareness [for both viewer and artist] about the relation of mind to things and about the nature of art as being essentially about that relation, rather than, say, the imitation of some supposedly pre-existing reality" (Iversen, 2005:194).

Essentially, the way perspective was understood changed significantly with the invention of the camera, which influenced a literal re-framing of perspective through a lens. Western artistic movements prior to the camera proposed various shifts from strict representations of reality, but it was not until the camera that people started making a shift to deliberately distort. The development of a machine that could capture a closer semblance to the reality we perceive, shifted the way perspective was understood. The camera illustrated that the notion of time passing could not be separated from the experience of the visual (Berger, 1972:18). The development of the camera had a major effect on several artistic movements of the early 20th century. For the Cubists it was particularly the conceptualisation of space relative to time, in that "the visible was no longer what confronted the single eye, but the totality of possible views taken from points all-round the object (or person) being depicted" (Berger, 1972:18).

1.3. The Physical, the Social and the Unconscious

In this section, I explore how *framing* and *perspective* work within the movements of Cubism and Surrealism, following on from Dada. The discussion of these themes can be broken down into three sections that discuss elements of *framing* and *perspective*: the physical in terms of Cubism, the social in terms of Dada and the Unconscious in terms of Surrealism. Although, it must be noted that this discussion on early 20th Century art movements is not rigidly sealed off, but moves between these themes fluidly as one group of artists influenced or moved from one artistic movement to another, bringing with them concepts and strategies developed from other movements.

1.3.1. Cubism and the Physical

Cubism revolutionised the representation and perception of images in the early 20th century. Pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the movement emerged as a technical reaction to the increasing use of the camera which transformed the way artworks were created (Berger, 1972:15). Cubism can be considered revolutionary in that it radically shifted away from classical methods of representation, by "breaking with tradition and the laws of perspective" (Kissane, 2002:62). Cubists deviated from the classical representation of three-dimensional perspective which had been custom since the Renaissance. Instead, artists simplified natural forms into geometric shapes, intentionally flattening perspective (Flam, 2016:36). While traditional tools of perspective and foreshortening were abandoned for the camera lens, artists were able to compose perspective from a multitude of angles, no longer having to work with classical tools of perspective (Einstein & Haxthausen, 2004:163). Cubists viewed the camera as a tool for new ways of expression to be explored, influencing the abstract and fragmentary nature of temporal and spatial perspective in paintings. With help from the camera, artists were able to capture the same subject from multiple viewpoints simultaneously (Golding, 1988:29). Simultaneous overlapping of forms became indicative of multiple ways of seeing with the eye through time. Prior to Cubism, Impressionists dissociated forms by means of colour, while Cubists did so tectonically. By physically changing their perspective their aim was not the "representation of objects, but a pictorial figuration of [a] visual (and mental) process" (Einstein & Haxthausen, 2004:160).

The movement marked a shift in technical perspective as well as a development in perspectives of thought, informed by the increased development of mechanised forms of production, significantly affecting the way art was produced (Spiteri, 2014:12). Cubism led to a change in

how the world was perceived, experienced, and represented through art, as technology began to shift the individual and collective experience of reality (Flam, 2016:35). This shift brought about by photography "has opened our eyes and forced us to gaze on that which we have never before seen…an inestimable service it has rendered to art…it will never go back again" (Spiteri, 2014:20). Photography facilitated the painting process in its ability to capture motion, allowing for new elements of a composition to be discovered that could not be perceived by the human eye. Artists' perspectives moved towards a new modern way of thinking and producing art with the camera, challenging established traditions of art production, and thus re-framing preconceived *perspectives* of art making (Spiteri, 2014:9).

Shifts in technical perspective can be observed in the simplification of geometric forms and deconstruction of perspective, with the development of multiple perspectives as an integral technique that explored notions of time and movement passing on a continuum (Golding, 1988:82). Cubists aimed to represent time beyond the singular instant, which they successfully achieved by using multiple perspectives simultaneously. This aided in emphasising the temporal dimension of their work. This emphasis on representing the passage of time was something artists prior to Cubism struggled to articulate, often resorting to multiple sequential panels to convey the passage of time. Cubists, however, sought to represent this simultaneously in a single frame as Kern notes: "each instant of perception synthesises a sequence of numerous perceptions. It is precisely those moments that are put together as a simultaneity" (1983:22). The visual representation of time in constant flux was like that of streams of consciousness. This literal re-framing of images through the camera lens, modified notions of time, restructuring experiences of the past and present. Photography's initial association with 'visual truth' was to assume that subjects in a photograph were as exact depictions of reality (Robbins, 1982:6), but artists challenged this view in manipulating and altering 'true depictions of reality'. Innovations in "technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space" (Kern, 1983:1), establishing the groundwork for a re-framing in societal thinking. Kern explores this in terms of painting: "Cubists rendered both the interior and exterior of objects from a variety of perspectives on a single canvas" (1983:7), thus, providing them with the ability to transcend traditional spatial and temporal boundaries of their work.

Cubists used photography as a way of manipulating one's perception of nature, developing various technical strategies of distortion and abstraction of organic forms (Flam, 2016:33). Artists like Picasso made use of a cracked camera lens to assist in his distortion of forms, while

Marcel Duchamp experimented with motion photography assisting in his representation of movement (Spiteri, 2014:17). Étienne-Jules Marey in 1882, studied movement using a technique called chrono-photography (Fig.1). This format depicted the photography of time "by means of a series of instantaneous photographs taken at very short and equal intervals of time" (Kern, 1983:21). Marey asserted that the best way to understand motion was to break it into parts and reassemble them into a fused composition (Kern, 1983:21). Marey's method falls in line with Cubist goals of multiple points of perspective, in that the ability to represent movement (and ambiguous dimensionality) on a two-dimensional picture plane was one of Cubism's greatest achievements.

The use of the camera's ability to capture movement as a compositional inspiration was best illustrated by Marcel Duchamp in his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase. No 2. 1912.* (Fig.2). Duchamp considered photography as a new medium of visual expression, aiding in a new perspective of depicting dimension and movement (Spiteri, 2014:3). Photography opened a door into a vast array of possibilities, aiding in new methods of manipulating and illustrating subject matter. Cubist paintings physically re-framed objects into abstract geometric forms, through a process of constructing, deconstructing, and reassembling these subjects into new compositions (Frascina, 1993:141).

Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2. 1912*, painted prior to World War I, was initially ridiculed for its extreme abstraction and futurist qualities (Klein, 1974:314). Inspired by stroboscopic motion photography, (the process of documenting movement through a succession of images captured every few seconds) Duchamp superimposed these in his painting to emphasise movement within the work (Steefel, 1973:72). The painting illustrates various overlapping geometric forms in movement, applying 'attributes' to a bodily frame as opposed to explicit form. Duchamp decomposed his framed composition by keeping an aspect of classical order within his abstraction wishing to "disrupt these classical forms internally as much as possible without quite abolishing their formal type" (Steefel, 1976:25). The superimposed static frames imply motion and are reminiscent of Eadweard Muybridge's 1887 photographic series *Woman Walking Downstairs* (Fig.3) (Tomkins, 1996: 83). The complexity of focus points allows the viewer's eye to be drawn to various elements of the work simultaneously. The composite of intersecting shapes agitates the perceptual field of the viewer, forcing one to shift focus more radically between salient and implicit aspects of the artwork (Frascina, 1993:135). The work represented three-dimensional space and four-dimensional time simultaneously on a two-dimensional surface.

In contrast to the Impressionists, who used vibrant colours as a technical strategy in depicting light on form, the Cubists discarded vivid colour palettes for limited tones which distinguished their own determination to break out of conventional notions of visual representation (Frascina, 1993:146). The development of colour photography seemingly made representational paintings of subject matter redundant, as this could be achieved through the camera. Cubist abstraction developed out of this (Kern, 1983:118). Ambiguity plays an essential role in abstract paintings, provoking the viewer to decipher and interpret the work from multiple perspectives. Technically, Cubists expressed minimal legible form to their subjects adding only a "few points of reference designed to bring one back to visual reality" (Flam, 2016:33). The depiction of form through geometric shapes and these recognisable 'attributes' contributed to the artwork's ambiguity (Frascina, 1993:142). Paintings became puzzle-like in their ability to look like unrecognisable geometric parts, but on closer inspection forms are revealed (Flam, 2016:34). The way paintings were viewed changed, requiring similar kinds of deciphering to that of a jigsaw puzzle. Viewers' perspectives shifted from being passive observers to being able to decipher and decode paintings, prompting viewers to be self-reflexive in the process of interpretation (Flam, 2016:36). Flam discusses this idea of a jig-saw puzzle in relation to Cubist paintings as a:

> "metaphor for the gradual illumination of universal truths by understanding that the whole of reality is greater than what could possibly be understood by any of its parts" (Flam, 2016:35).

The concept of simultaneous overlapping images discussed by Marey (1894) and Flam (2016), applies to the technical strategies of collage and photomontage, mass media made use of photography in newspapers *framing* socio-political events. This printed visual material became the subject matter for collages that expressed social commentary, found materials like discarded prints and letters were used in the process of constructing new realities (Frascina, 1993:87). The assemblage of found objects in Cubism informed the later development of the ready-made object in Dadaism, although Duchamp succeeded in depicting movement in painting, critics disagreed, arguing that it was too abstract. Duchamp began to question the very nature of art and "abandoned painting altogether in favour of…ready-mades" (Taylor, 2012: 58).

1.3.2. Dadaism and the Social

The Dadaist movement emerged around 1915, as a direct political and artistic response to the Great War and acted as a form of social protest. Artists began to question the so-called 'progress' of technology that had led up to the war, becoming sceptical about governing social systems (Dickerman, 2003:12). Through art they expressed their revolt and disgust against modern capitalist societal values (Short, 1980:7; Rexer, 2006:53). Appalled by the developments of contemporary society, artists sought to direct their dissatisfaction by means of cultural action and protest against bourgeois society, creating irrational, nonsensical poems, collages, and objects (Frank, 2006:51). Dadaists reacted to societal conventions that had been *framed* by the constraints of capitalism (Berard, 1999:150), and thus exposing the moral decay and civic rot of society, through social criticism.

Politically charged collages were designed to re-frame this catastrophic social order through the medium of abstract assemblage, illustrating Dada's dichotomy between destruction and creation (Short, 1980:46). Collage made use of mass media materials such as newspapers, advertisements, and magazines, arranging elements into unusual juxtapositions to narrate their social realities. This social critique sought to expose and illuminate the superficiality of materialist society (Gale, 1997:18). The Dadaists' awareness of the War being a direct product of the competitive age of industrial capitalism, prompted a new *frame* of mind: "Dada was not some new 'ism' seeking its place among the movements of modern art, but a frame of mind or 'moral revolution'" (Short, 1980:18).

The negative criticism Duchamp received for *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2. 1912* contributed to his questioning the very nature and status of the art object. Ready-mades developed out of this thought process, and he coined the term 'anti-art' to describe the earliest examples of ready-made objects. Duchamp stressed that "ready-mades are not works of art but of non-art" or anti-art (Dickie, 1975:420). Anti-art relied heavily on the role of 'chance' as a guide, for example the process of playing with random compositions, e.g. dropping pieces of paper onto a page and allowing the random arrangement of elements to guide the work (Gale, 1997:63). The laws of chance were best articulated through collage, acting as an "assault on the 'logical' bourgeois subjectivity of traditional artistic production" (Demos, 2003:156). This technique was used to break out of traditional and received methods of composing, rather ambiguously critiquing the state of the world.

Artists' refusal to indorse developing bourgeois culture (Dickerman, 2003:7) turned to the use of unusual, discarded non-art materials and found objects to produce ready-mades (Humble, 2002:245). Duchamp experimented with collages and ready-made objects, distorting the function and original context of these images and objects. Duchamp initiated a new approach to the perception of mundane utilitarian objects, shifting societal perceptions of what constitutes a work of 'art'. Ready-made objects were created with everyday items that served a specific function e.g. mop, coat rack, urinal, transformed by the artist by removing their utilitarian function completely through addition or strategic curation (Molesworth, 1998:51). Duchamp prompted the dismantling of boundaries confining an 'artwork' by changing the perception of the 'art object' through *framing* utilitarian objects differently. The context in which these works were displayed was crucial to how they were read and understood, displaying these objects in museums and galleries with the clear intention of illustrating that the "idea of 'Art' was produced contextually" (Molesworth, 1998:51). By changing their context, viewers were compelled to think of the 'art object's' status (Short, 1980:22).

Dadaists questioned the nature of language as well as art, using multi-sensory modalities in performing illogical noise poetry that directly assaulted the communicative function of language (Dickerman, 2003:11). Dadaists believed that journalists and politicians had irredeemably corrupted and distorted the meaning of words through the way they *framed* the socio-political climate of the time. This, they felt, was symptomatic of the broader decay of Western civilization, deconstructing language was a way to subvert this (Gale, 1997:49). The function of Dadaist publications was to distribute information internationally concerning the movement's activities, with the intention of bringing about a social revolution (Gale, 1997:16). Publications allowed Dadaists to *frame* knowledge concerning the movement from their *perspective*, counteracting what they perceived as the misrepresentations of the movement by journalists and politicians (Dickerman, 2003:8). Dadaist's intentions, to visually articulate their protest and discontent towards their socio-political climate, can be best illustrated by Hannah Höch's, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Epoch of Weimar Beer-Belly Culture in Germany,* (1919), (Fig.4). Höch's montage made use of mass media periodicals and sought to engage the world in contemporary politics from a female perspective (Makholm, 1997:19). In this collage, Höch juxtaposes images of German politicians of the time at the top of the composition with images of crowds gathering at the bottom. These are linked with various wheels, cogs and machine-like objects pointing to the machinations of the political elite over the general populace which had led to the slaughter of World War I. Interposed are images of

landmark events for the burgeoning feminist movement including Käthe Kollwitz, the first female professor appointed at the Prussian Academy of Arts and a map at the bottom right which shows countries in Europe where women had achieved the right to vote. Makholm notes the feminist slant in the titling of the work in that "by metaphorically equating her scissors with a kitchen knife…[Höch] cuts through the traditionally masculine domains of politics and public life" (1997:21).

Though technically a Cubist work, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) (Fig.5) marries the technical perspectival distortions of Cubism with the social-political position of the Dadaists (as a reaction to the industrialisation of warfare in the early 20th century). A Surrealist influence is also evident in the symbolism used, such as the light bulb as a firebomb; the nearly erased peace dove; and the nightmarish distorted figures which are synecdochal of individual suffering rather than direct visual references (Greeley, 2006:241).

The painting, now globally renowned as an icon of political protest (Kopper, 2014:443), is arguably one of the most impactful anti-war paintings ever created. Commissioned by the Spanish Republic for the Paris International Exhibition in 1937, Picasso produced an emotionally charged illustration of the disasters of war brought on by the bombing of the small Basque village of Guernica in Spain. The painting portrays the suffering, death and dismemberment of people and animals affected by the Spanish Civil war, consisting of crowded figures intersecting, a bull, a horse, dismembered soldiers and crying women (Rhodes, 2013:21). Living in Paris at the time, Picasso made use of newspaper accounts and photographs of the tragedy as his impetus for the mural - illustrative in the illusionistic abstraction and representation of movement.

Compositionally the work makes use of a central pyramidal construction, flattening the *perspective* of the painting by means of intersecting geometric forms and blocks of muted greyscale colour. The image is stark in its monochromatic palette forcing the viewer to contend with the content like a newspaper image, rather than being decorative in its colour range. Figures are *framed* with an illusion of light (Clark, 1941:74), illuminating the brutality of the dismembered subjects beneath it. The compositional structure of harsh intersecting lines, juxtaposed with the organic abstract forms, draws the viewer's eye to the flattened foreground, but upon closer inspection a narrative develops. The work's abstract interpretative qualities enhance its ambiguity as there is an uncertainty as to whether the scene is depicted within a concealed room or outside. *Framing* devices of a window and door indicate the scene being

depicted in an interior space, but certain elements of the painting e.g. a horse and bull, suggest otherwise. Removing these figures from their original context (outside) creates a tension between the internal mental struggle of the war subjects and the broader external socio-political struggle (Clark, 1941:77). The impact of the work lies in its distortion of scale, as figures/animals and objects are portrayed on a similar scale, providing each subject with equal importance. Picasso compositionally placed a dismembered body in front of a horse's head allowing one to interpret it as a hybrid creature or simply an intersection of abstract forms. As a piece of social commentary, the work asks viewers to reflect on the repercussions of war and their part in this socially and politically. This self-reflexivity is essential to the process of social change. Dieleman argues, "reflexivity is one of the important mechanisms that create[s] change. We do not simply reproduce the social frames, but we interpret them and while we interpret them and reflect on them, we change them, often little by little over time" (2008:4).

The values and beliefs of some in society are not entirely fixed and are open to change, and thus individuals' perspectives can be shifted as a result of this reflection, *Guernica* provides an opportunity for these perspectival shifts to take place. Societal modernization affords individuals with more opportunities to reflect on their social conditions and artworks like *Guernica*, became agents of change, to stimulate, guide, and facilitate individuals to reflect on the conditions in which they live (Dieleman, 2008:6).

The Dadaist movement, and its ambitions to shift societal *frames* of thought, through their quest for liberation and self-expression can be observed through the various international incarnations of Dadaist social protest, all of which are unique to their socio-cultural context (Short, 1980:9). One of these incarnations developed in 1920's Czechoslovakia and is known as Devĕtsil. Like Dada, this movement was a direct reaction to the horrors of World War I (Frank, 2013:60). Subsequently, Czech Surrealism developed out of this, illustrating far more cynicism than French Surrealists. Czech Surrealist artists were faced with a harsher socio-political climate that restricted many artistic productions who attempted to critique political authority.

1.3.3. Surrealism and the Unconscious

Developing out of (and influenced by) Dadaism, Surrealism sought to liberate thought from its oppressive boundaries. Andre Breton, led the French Surrealist group to a large extent, creating the Surrealist manifesto in which he defines Surrealism as:

"Pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason" (Breton, 1924:4).

Breton's Manifesto *framed* strategies, attitudes, and activities that encompassed the movement, emphasising the groups values in their investigations into modern thought, particularly the emerging study of Psychoanalysis. In contrast to the social reaction of Dadaism, Surrealism sought to uncover the inner workings of the mind. The devastations of war had damaged the psyches of many and so, to purge these traumatic experiences, artists looked inward to the core of their trauma which lay in the unconscious mind. Breton aimed to "cast a conduction wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleeping, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness" (Noheden, 2013:3) all of which could be explored through unconscious imagination. Interest thus grew in experiments and artistic productions which had this common goal of expanding normal consciousness though growing dependent on the 'inner' world of the mind as sources of inspiration (Criel, 1952:134). It was this dependence on the internal structures of the mind that brought about shifts in *frames* of thought and a "desire to find a visual language capable of expressing the inexpressible" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1993:446).

While previous movements predominantly emphasised external objectivity, Surrealism illustrated the internal perception of the mind (Levy et al., 1996:7), by subverting the ordinary and upsetting the dichotomy between conscious and Unconscious (Rickards, 2010:27). Shifts in *frames* of thought can be observed as Surrealism became a system for acquiring knowledge as well as a tool for *re-framing* society in thought, this revision of values allowed for painting to be considered from an alternative perspective (Hugnet & Scolari, 1936:23).

Breton's manifesto placed emphasis on Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis, which proposed that "people's behaviour is strongly affected by 'unconscious' impulses about which they know little and over which they have only limited control" (Frosh, 2012:3). Freud's theories made a considerable impact on advancing the psychological therapy and treatment methods of 'shell shocked' patients during both World Wars. Freud believed that talking through trauma as therapy helped individuals to cope and that one's dreams might reveal how structures and processes of the Unconscious work in revealing repressed experiences, wishes and desires. Although Psychoanalysis focused on psychotherapeutic methods of treating mental distress, Breton's focus predominantly drew upon the structures and workings of the Unconscious mind

and dreams as a source of artistic inspiration. Breton affirmed that the importance of dreams were:

> "to the poet, painter, or sculptor, dreams furnish the models procedures and products of an activity which is unencumbered by the constraints of realist representation; to the explorer of daily life, they indicate by analogy how spaces and events which initially appear disconcerting are organized among themselves; to man in general, that 'definitive dreamer,' the analysis of dreams provides the most vivid sense of all the possibilities which existence offers" (Morel & Lewis, 1972:18).

By embracing the psychoanalytic idea of unconscious desires, Surrealists began devising various artistic strategies and techniques to explore and capture the thoughts of the unconscious mind. The Unconscious can be understood as "the existence of ideas that are 'in' the mind yet are not available to introspection and hence are hidden away from conscious knowledge" (Frosh, 2012:7). These ideas and unacknowledged wishes that reside in the Unconscious are hidden, but are observed to break through into consciousness through indirect means, e.g. dreams. Surrealist strategies were thus developed with the aim of finding various methods of allowing the Unconscious and dream states to dictate, and break the rules of *framing* and *perspective*. Psychoanalysis sought to revolutionise society in thought (Kuspit, 1993:52), and became a direct impetus for strategies and techniques that held the aim of liberating consciousness from reason (Cardinal, 1968:116; Criel, 1952:135; Stokes, 1982:201).

Breton's manifesto upheld automatism as an integral strategy in that it was an act of art making that was free from all conscious control, allowing the unconscious imagination to dictate the artistic production. Breton claimed that "psychic automatism in its pure state by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought" (Breton, 1924:26). Through creative methods of investigation, Breton ambition was to resolve the "contradictory conditions of dream and of reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality" (Hugnet & Scolari, 1936:20).

Prominent Surrealists (Max Ernst, Hans Arp, Joan Miro and Yves Tanguy) all experimented with various strategies that stimulated their unconscious imagination. Artists previously involved in Dada brought with them techniques of collage, abstraction, juxtaposition, and the propensity for the irrational (Gale, 1997:215). Ernst's painting *Europe after the rain II* (1941) (Fig.6) made use of decalcomania (a process of roughly placing paint onto a hard surface, placing a sheet on top of it and pulling it apart, revealing unusual abstract patterns and shapes) developed by himself and fellow Surrealist Óscar Dominguez. The painting depicts war torn

landscapes and dismembered bodies, with the intent of portraying the post-war mindset with a *perspective* of "the world filtered through neurosis" (Kavky, 2012:37). This perspective is observed in his collages, in which subject matter of humans and animals are manipulated and distorted into unusual hybrids, evoking a sense of uncanny. The practice of assemblage was not restricted to painting and collage but the ready-made object as well.

Meret Oppenheim's Surrealist ready-made object *Le Déjeuner en fourrure* (Known in English as *Fur for Breakfast*) (1936) (Fig.7) re-enforces the idea of utilitarian objects holding a multitude of meanings. The work consists of a porcelain teacup, saucer and spoon covered in animal fur; Oppenheim manipulated the function of her objects much like Duchamp. Rather than simply recontextualising utilitarian objects as art, Oppenheim deliberately undermines the functionality of the utilitarian object with an inclusion that is both disconcerting and tacitly disturbing. Oppenheim's inclusion of fur is "liberated of its use-value as a protecting sheath, the fur pelt is re-presented as pure tactility" (Powers, 2001:368). Her highly tactile "fur teacup is paradigmatically the stuff of Wonderland, as useful for drinking from, as the Mad Hatter's watch for counting down an eternal tea party" (Powers, 2001:364).

France has historically been regarded as the gravitational centre of the Surrealist movement, while Czech Surrealism as a movement has not been explored as extensively (Fijakowski, 2005:163). Frank (2011:1) observes that the main differences between the two can be exemplified by their attitudes towards film and their approaches to, and relationship with, physical reality. I have contextualised the Surrealist movement in the West as a point of departure to better elucidate the role that physical reality plays in Czech Surrealist Cinema.

1.3.4 Czech Surrealist Cinema

French Surrealist filmmakers distanced themselves from physical reality by focusing more on the Unconscious. By contrast, Czech Surrealists fixated on representing their physical reality (Frank, 2011:1). Their experience of oppression under a strict Communist regime distorted their connection with the physical world (Fijakowski, 2005:166), which in turn caused a shift in attitudes, rejecting their previously 'idealistic' perspectives of reality, focusing on more oppressive aspects (Frank, 2011:2).

Czech Surrealist filmmakers took on a position of pessimism and rage like that of Dada, while French Surrealists depicted idealistic productions, influenced by the freedom they experienced post World War I (Frank, 2013:62). Post-World War II, Czechoslovakia, as the most industrial and developed country in the Eastern Bloc, was subject to strict communist rule and the harsh

social controls of soviet Stalinism. Under new reformist leadership, the Prague Spring (1968) made attempts at social reform but these were again repressed by the Warsaw Pact invasion by the USSR (Stoneman, 2015:103).

Czech cinema establishes itself above all as an entranced examination of the everyday (Walker, 2004:103). Their central focus on the everyday, allowed representations of the mundane to be *re-framed* through film (Fijakowski, 2005:164). Film played an important role in documenting and interrogating the essence hidden in everyday objects (Walker, 2004:106). They illustrated the Surrealist sensibility of depicting dream and reality, real and imaginary, simultaneously (Eagle, 2012:446). Their passion for creating ambiguity in film was influenced by their views of the world being an "unsolvable puzzle created out of desire and psychic need" (Eagle, 2012: 447). Developing a sense of uncertainty in the viewer is one of the main precursors for ambiguity and the uncanny to emerge, disrupting pre-existing systems of filmic narrative, by illustrating a fragmented one.

Czechoslovakia encountered many barriers to art/film production due to their politically oppressive environment, having many productions censored by governing systems for fear of socio-political critique. The emergence of Czech New Wave cinema in the 1960's compensated for this period of censorship by initiating an intensely experimental form of Surrealist cinema (Owen, 2011:3). The liberation of Czech culture inspired filmmakers to engage in, and express their cultural heritage that had been suppressed during the inter-War years. Artist and filmmaker Jan Švankmajer, who will be discussed extensively in the close reading of his film *Alice* (1988) in Chapter Two, is considered one of the most influential Czech Surrealist filmmakers of his time. Švankmajer makes use of integral components of Czech cultural heritage (puppets and marionettes) in his films which aimed to explore oppositional and subversive themes, asserting ideas that had previously been taboo and censored (Owen, 2011:9).

Czech Surrealist film's emphasis on the human condition, illustrated existence as grotesque, tragic and absurd (Owen, 2011:9), and so their films depicted this. These filmic productions were not received very well as they were critiqued as too ambiguous. Viewers were unable to understand them and denounced them as incomprehensible. These films' ambiguity, illustrated multiple layers of meaning, making it difficult to discern a singular meaning from them (Walker, 2004:109). Czech Surrealist film's resistance to easily comprehensible meaning emphasised "that reality itself is never fully comprehensible but always ambiguous and

multifaceted" (Owen, 2011:10). They sought to provoke audiences into an "uncertain[ty] whether or not what they are seeing is symbolic, their imagination is mobilised, scrutinising the reality portrayed for possible meaning" (Frank, 2011:2).

Through innovative methods of animating objects, observed in Švankmajer's masterful use of stop-motion animation and live action simultaneously, animators developed an escape from language allowing objects to narrate (Eagle, 2012:447). These films stress that the materiality of objects hold a multitude of meanings, evoking affect in the viewer, and carry more meaning than their first appearance. Surrealist strategies of addressing states of waking (conscious) and dreaming (unconscious) via filmic means was exemplified by Švankmajer in *Alice* (1988) where the merging of interior and exterior space "represent[ed] interior as well as exterior realities" (Walker, 2004: 106). With regards to their pessimistic views of physical reality, Czech film highlighted their ever-present fascination with decay and disintegration, observed in their eerie filmic imagery of dusty interiors and debris (Walker, 2004:108).

Chapter 2

A Critical analysis of Alice by Jan Švankmajer

Czech Surrealist artist Jan Švankmajer's film *Alice* (1988)*,* is a haunting adaptation of Lewis Carrol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, presented as a visual exploration into the psyche of Alice. Švankmajer's unique interpretation, expressed through the combination of live-action film and stop-motion animation, examines the dichotomy between waking and dreaming and how these two states are seamlessly intertwined. Švankmajer is of the belief that "objects have an independent inner life, and that it is the director's job to draw out this inner life" via filmic means (Frank, 2011:3). The themes discussed in this section are non-compartmentalized, rather they shift between each other, much like that of the art movements discussed in Chapter One.

Found and assemblage objects in *Alice* play an essential role in the construction of this Surreal cinematic experience, as every creature, prop and even the scenography in the film is a tangible object, masterfully manipulated into animated and uncanny characters. Švankmajer comments that he seeks to transform everyday objects through animation, thus evoking doubt in the viewers' understanding of everyday reality, and disrupting the expected utilitarian nature of objects (Švankmajer, 2011:103). He does not differentiate between everyday objects which might be typically animate or inanimate, as any object can suddenly come to life or be animated as a character, whether it is furniture or architecture; or crude assemblages of skulls, taxidermied animals and other parts which become puppets. He adds to the sense of unease as objects which one might expect to move (given their anthropomorphic nature: e.g. dolls) are not guaranteed to do so. When they do, the motion is often mechanical rather than life-like. In Švankmajer's cinematic reality, everything is alive, and everything is dead.

Rickards states that "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" (2010:26). Ambiguity is ever present in *Alice*, observed in the uncertainty Švankmajer creates between the boundaries of waking and dreaming states, using filmic strategies that are interpretative, rather than explicit. The film's narrative is not explicitly told, but rather suggests, or reflects upon the narrative of Carroll's original tale. This subtle gesturing to the original adds to the dream-like quality of the film, allowing viewers to make up their own mind about what they are interpreting and "invit[ing] the viewer's own active imagination into the equation" (Noheden, 2013:1). Švankmajer uses distortion in the shrinking and enlarging of the character of Alice which acts as indicators of

transition between the varying phases of her dream, enhancing the Surreal nature of the film. The scenes in which Alice shrinks or grows, uses shots of her real body intercut with the various doll bodies she transforms into. For Alice, wonderland is her dream and thus a window into her unconscious imagination, seen in the simultaneous use of live action depicting 'the real/waking' and animation depicting 'the imagined/dream'. This sense of the familiar strange or the uncanny creates doubt as to whether an object is animate or not, real or imagined. Švankmajer also employs a strategy using multi-sensory techniques (sound and visuals which evoke texture) in which he stresses the importance of tactility in "extending [the] filmic experience to include tactile as well as audio-visual sensations" (Vasseleu, 2007:91). Švankmajer uses tactility as a sensory modality "in which objects of all sorts can kindle affect by analogy" (Vasseleu, 2009:143).

Alice's minimal use of speech allows for the visceral sounds of objects (creatures) to replace words, becoming the primary metaphoric vocabulary throughout. According to Flitterman-Lewis (1993:448), Surrealist film subverts idealistic constructions of reality, by illustrating a more accurate representation of reality - one of disorder. As an artist, Švankmajer's work was greatly influenced by the socio-political context of Czechoslovakia, initially subject to the harsh social controls of Soviet Stalinism. Following the Prague Spring, attempts at social reform and decentralisation from USSR were again repressed (Stoneman, 2015:103).

2.1. Found Objects and Assemblages

Andre Breton defined the ready-made as "manufactured objects raised to the dignity of works of art through the choice of the artist" (Iverson, 2014:45). Iverson argues that there is a distinct difference in the readymade vs the concept of the found object in that: "While the readymade is essentially indifferent, multiple, and mass-produced, the found object is essentially singular or irreplaceable, and both lost and found" (2014:50). I would argue that this subtle difference is in the question of *framing* and it is therefore not so simple to differentiate a readymade from a found object. A mass-produced object might be equally a found (and therefore lost, with all its incumbent pathos) object. A found object may be singular or an amalgam of objects and therefore not technically a found object at all but an assemblage or in essence: a three-dimensional collage.

Švankmajer does not differentiate his use of these objects by so strict a classification. He raises the dignity of the most mundane objects through *framing* them as characters through animation which might classify them as ready-mades. However, the use of skulls, taxidermied animals

and antique or seemingly second-hand, discarded objects, reference a previous life for these objects: one which the object has lost in order to become a found object. Through animation and characterisation, he gives these objects a consciousness of their own which lends them their Surreal quality: dream objects lost to the conscious mind are reanimated in an unconscious one. Chryssouli states that "in this way, he can be seen to breathe new life to the real world of objects" (2015:306) and thus the animation of real objects becomes the leitmotif of the film. These objects serve to distinguish Alice's reality from her dream, constructing an alternative reality in which everyday objects engage viewers' analogical associations. Analogy is a cognitive process of transferring information from one subject to another. Analogical thinking is therefore dependent on noticing and applying an association drawn from one domain of already existing knowledge (and applying it to another) allowing a viewer to draw comparisons and make assumptions. In other words, "analogies may be based on a mapping of relations between two very disparate domains" (Gick & Holyoak, 1980:306).

Noheden discusses Švankmajer's "desire to resuscitate the human capacity for analogical thinking, where likeness relations connect diverse phenomena" (2013:1). By drawing on objects associated with childhood, Švankmajer invites the viewer to perceive objects from a remembered child-like perspective. The material qualities and function of Švankmajer's objects change when they experience an "effective dislocation from a habitual environment and re-location into a new artistic context" (Chryssouli, 2015:306). Švankmajer's manipulation of found object/assemblage puppets and marionettes "best symbolise the manipulated character of man in the contemporary world" (Chryssouli, 2015:308) as well as signifying human experience. The use of these objects has roots in the ancient art of puppetry, central to Czech culture. These objects hold the intention of protecting Czech culture (that had for so long been suppressed in the Stalinist regime) as well as acting as a communicating vessel of protest (Chryssouli, 2015:311).

Alice demonstrates that the "mysterious workings of the human mind [and] dreams" played an essential role in the Prague Surrealist movement (Petek, 2009:77). This becomes apparent in the opening scene, in which Alice stares into the camera instructing the viewer "You must close your eyes, otherwise you won't see anything" (Alice, 1988, 00:02:02- 00:02:20), implying that the scenes to follow will be that of a dream. The scene cuts to Alice's room where she is surrounded by: a White Rabbit in a display case, dolls, marionettes, teacups, building blocks, preserving jars, and toys, amongst the clutter. At first glance, these mundane objects appear normative in a child's room, but upon closer inspection the objects reveal themselves as slightly

unnerving. Close up shots reveal rotting fruit, dead flies, a mouse trap, and bell jars containing sharp pins. These objects hold potentially violent and uncanny associations as if we are in a forgotten room of a specimen collector rather than a child's bedroom. The room is noticeably dangerous and unclean as the decay and disorder observed is unsafe for a child. The uncanny nature of these objects indicates that what follows might be more of a nightmare than a dream.

Objects become the primary metaphoric vocabulary as the prominent creature characters (the White Rabbit, its servants, the frog-footman and fish-footman) use very little dialogue. Rather, their experience is narrated by the texture, movement and sounds they make when interacting in Alice's dream. Whether taxidermized animals, or antique wind-up toys and puppets, these characters are brought back to life through stop-motion animation but retain, by association, the vestiges of the dead or the discarded through their physical appearance. The simultaneous use of live action (Alice) and animation (other characters) is illustrative of physically breaking down the barriers between the real and the imagined, the living, and the dead.

Švankmajer's found objects and assemblages, serve a multiplicity of narrative roles, often taking on a macabre comedic function that imbue them with additional layers of resonance. Hybridity is a recurring theme in Alice, as objects morph together and act as a source of instability and curiosity (Frank, 2013:8). The White Rabbits servants have hybrid qualities as Alice is confronted with; a cow skull with glass eyes and human feet, a skeletal fish-head attached to leg bones, and a cat skull attached to a gasoline can. These unsettling assemblages of corpses come to life in Alice's interactions with them, increasing their realism as well as dismantling established assumptions of representations of reality. Metamorphosis is also a recurring theme: apart from her own transformation of scale (between the live actor and the different sized dolls) Alice encounters her socks unexpectedly animating into caterpillars, a cardboard flamingo morphs into a squawking hen, and a pin cushion transforms into a hedgehog.

Physical objects and familiar items take on a variety of meanings in relation to Švankmajer's context, emphasising the multitude of meanings inherent in our everyday surroundings (Frank, 2011:20). The animated objects can be divided into three types of characterisation: firstly objects that animate (moving meat, leaves that move on their own), secondly, toys and objects which are anthropomorphised (a bed flies with bird wings and feet, the taxidermized rabbit and puppet doll Alice come to life, a sock caterpillar with dentures and glass eyeballs) and lastly,

hybrid (or assemblage) objects (a horse drawn carriage of skeletal chickens, a fish skull attached to leg-bones, a cat skull attached to a gasoline can, to name a few).

Considering that a child's world view is inherently distorted, Švankmajer manages to illustrate this distorted perspective as he "values the view of the world formed in childhood as one of the basic sources of creativity" (Vasseleu, 2009:147). The objects used in the film are articulated through the eyes of a child, new experiences of objects considered normal in the adult world, manifest strangely in Alice's dream. This perspective intentionally distorts the adult viewer's preconceived notions of the objects encountered. Švankmajer explores the concept of animism in relation to his ready-made objects. This is the belief that all objects possess a spiritual essence something he sees as central to a "child's primitive belief in the power of wishes to animate objects" (Rickards, 2010:30). This wish is seen to be fulfilled in Alice's dream as her dolls, toys, and objects come to life before her eyes. Walter Benjamin attributes an aura to objects, arguing that mimesis is highly involved in dismantling the divide between subject and object as well as "a mode of access to the world involving sensuous, somatic and tactile, that is, embodied, forms of perception and cognition" (Noheden, 2013:9). Švankmajer's preoccupation with seeking out the 'soul' of objects can be seen to fall in line with Benjamin, engaging with this dissolved distinction between internal and external properties of objects.

2.2. Ambiguity

Central to Czech Surrealist films is the concept of ambiguity, used to depict the uncertainty of their physical reality, "these ambiguities concern the border between human and non-human, the puppet and the free agent" (Shera, 2001:127). Their affinity for depicting the ambiguous nature of reality was in reaction to the oppressive political regime which distorted the physical reality in which they lived (Frank, 2011:1). Švankmajer's application of ambiguity is interpretative, activating the imagination by conveying a sense of uncertainty in the viewer. The concept of ambiguity will be explored through Merleau-Ponty's views on perception and Kristeva's idea of the abject as a point of departure in analysing Švankmajer's application of ambiguity. Fundamental to this exploration is the blurring of boundaries between the real and imagined through the ever-changing landscapes of Alice's dream e.g. Alice's room seamlessly integrates into a desolate landscape (Fig.8).

As discussed in Chapter One, Picasso's painting *Guernica* (1937) addresses the external social conflict of war and the internal mental struggle of war survivors through the interpenetration of interior and exterior spaces. Švankmajer applies this strategy similarly in filming by merging

inside and outside spaces. This application creates ambiguous uncertainty as to where the subjects are located in time and space. The merging of recognisable space speaks to the spatio-temporal discontinuity of dreams and Alice's subjectivity. Sharot discusses that dreams depicted through film "occupy a discrete place within the narrative and were used to reveal the subjectivity of a protagonist rather than as an opportunity for special effects" (2015:67).

There is a doubt in distinguishing between Alice's waking life and her dream as "Wonderland involves a merger of dream-states with waking consciousness" (Schatz, 2015:96). The uncertainty of whether Alice is in a state of waking or dreaming is illustrated in the treatment of recognisable but altered spaces. It is often unclear where interior rooms and exterior spaces permeate each other, making it difficult to discern the inside from outside (Rickards, 2010:28). This interior/exterior ambiguity can be seen when a pile of leaves move, though seemingly not through a breeze (Fig. 9), trees spontaneously emerge in a concealed room (Fig.10) and a garden stage-set is overlayed with sounds of a real garden and stream (Fig.11).

Merleau-Ponty's describes this permeation of inside and outside space as "the horizon of the external world and the horizon of interior space" (Küppers, 2007:10). Expressed in relation to the body, one's exterior social identity can be in conflict with one's interior sense of self. Švankmajer applies this idea with his treatment of 'space' being used as a metaphor to illustrate Alice's interchanging and merging of internal (dream) and external (waking) states. The stage-set can be interpreted as a construction of multiple layers of perceiving reality. The viewer's visual and auditory senses become conflicted as Alice's "dream tells of different spatial experiences: moving effortlessly between locations" (Küppers, 2007:13). Cinematic techniques used to highlight ambiguity can be observed in Švankmajer's unusual "style of animation [that] generates a sense of fragmentary chaos, of disharmony" (Shera, 2001:139), through non-sequential filming. This film "offer[s] many examples of narrative ruptures that leave space for surrealism" (Frank, 2013:7). Ambiguity re-emerges in the creature's refusal to exist in a defined state: we observe the White Rabbit, injured, oozing sawdust from his stomach and a hybrid crocodile falls to the floor, injured with sawdust protruding from his wound. These events reveal that the Rabbit holds reviving powers of his own, repairing himself and the crocodile by stitching their sawdust 'blood and organs' back into themselves.

The order of the filmic narrative is disturbed by the narration of a disembodied voice (Alice) and close-up shots of Alice's mouth. The same voice is given to all the animated characters throughout, as though we are inside her head and hearing her thoughts. Švankmajer's

intentional use of a single child's voice is to exemplify the imaginative properties children possess. This can be closely related to how children use role voicing when engaging in imaginative play activities. Psychologist Richard Sawyer explores the concept of role voicing as "the way a child enacts a play role by using different types of verbalizations" (Sawyer, 1996:291). Children often play imaginative games, voicing and narrating the objects at hand. Cohen & Uhry observe that "children playing alone frequently use high and low voices and engage in monologues" (2007:310), this can be observed in the various tones *Alice* uses when narrating characters movements.

The use of sound as a narrative strategy is articulated through the movements and interactions of the creatures, overlayed with contradictory sound pieces that confuse the senses of the viewer. Švankmajer observes that "words don't suffice to fully describe feelings unambiguously" (2014:61), and thus he manipulates the viewer in seeing one thing and hearing another, purposefully disorienting viewers in that what is seen, and what is heard, don't correlate, e.g. the sound of a horse drawn carriage, visually appear as skeletal chickens that sound like horses (Fig.12).

Alice's encounters with multiple versions of herself speaks to the Kristevian abject. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva proposes that abjection encompasses a "view of extreme otherness in which a profoundly disturbing encounter between self and other and with the self as other, 'causes horror'" (Kristeva qtd. in Shera, 2001:127). Alice encounters herself as 'other' in her dream as all events in Wonderland 'happen to her' initially with no control. Her continual cry for help to the White Rabbit 'please sir' is repeatedly dismissed by him running away. Alice's "othering" is exemplified by how all the characters view her with mistrust, forming a kind of 'undead' alliance against her. This can be best observed when she is trapped inside the rabbit's building block house, and all creatures come together to remove her. Alice is also 'othered' in that she is the only live character in the film, inciting a sense of horror, as Kristeva suggests invokes sensations of the uncanny observed in this 'othering'. Shera (2001:131) argues that animation as a filmic device exaggerates the subject's removal from real life, purposefully disturbing the object's function by bringing it to life.

Kristeva describes abjection as that which "disturbs identity, system [and] order" (1982:5). This can be observed in the interaction between live Alice and the 'undead' creatures she attempts to converse with, emphasising the borders between human (live action) and non-human (animation) (Shera, 2001:140). A disturbing feeling of the uncanny emerges in this

interaction, due to the extremely life-like movements of the creatures. This sense of abject unsettlement is amplified by the objects in the film always maintaining a large degree of mystery (Frank, 2011:3).

Alice experiences various phases within her dream that disturb her sense of self and identity. Regression can be seen in her inability to control her environment, falling victim to her changing state. She then experiences transition as she gradually realises, she has the power over her changing scale (Sera, 1997:73). This occurs when she encounters the caterpillar who gives her two sides of a wooden mushroom, one side allowing her to grow and the other allowing her to shrink.

2.3. Distortion of scale

> "Manipulation is the key concept that connects Švankmajer's personal motifs – fantasies and anxieties in his childhood, his interest in the tactile, a disgust for food and eating habits, and the latent life in inorganic objects – and transforms them into a sharp critique of social reality" (Kawakami, 2014 :79).

Švankmajer's application of metaphorical manipulation as a strategy is that of a socio-political critique. His beliefs surrounding the liberation of humanity from any kind of constraint can be contextualised by the politically oppressive climate in the former Eastern Bloc Czechoslovakia. He emphasises a resistance to all forms of societal manipulation by exposing this manipulation via filmic means. He enacts a "protest against its concealment as a convention" as societal manipulation is subtle and often *framed* as 'truth' (Kawakami, 2014:78). Through the use and manipulation of puppets, Švankmajer associates the controlling powers of a puppeteer with that of the societal control exerted by the Communist government of the mid-20th century USSR and its satellites. By animating puppets and hybrid objects through stop-motion animation, the inanimate becomes animate illustrating metaphorically the tension people experience between freedom and restraint (Kawakami, 2014:79).

To return to Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) as a work of protest, this composition uses distortion of forms to fully articulate the disorder and suffering brought about by war. Švankmajer's performance of protest has more of an ambiguous nature, critiquing society and the human condition through his distortion of physical objects. By changing the scale of objects and forms to evoke an unsettling reaction, Švankmajer's manipulations later become characters within Alice's dream. Her own changing scale and form (live actor/doll) is used metaphorically to distinguish between the transitional phases of her dream. Distortion as a strategy thus re-frames

the viewer's perception of objects as well as Alice's own scale and form as the protagonist. Švankmajer's unique application of physical manipulation through stop-motion animation provides creatures and dolls with uncannily human movements and expressions (Kawakami, 2014:79). Through this method of distortion, viewers are manipulated into believing these creatures could exist in real life.

There is also a suggestion of a metaphorical distortion in Alice's sense of a split-self shown through the physical distortion in her ever-changing scale. The lack of control over her size implies a dissociation from the body. Psychologists have examined the association between unusual sleep experiences (vivid dreaming) and dissociation. Dissociation can be understood as "an altered state of consciousness, in which normally integrated mental processes become separated. This separation leads to disruptions in awareness, memory, and identity" (Koffel & Watson, 2009:549). This idea of dissociation can be observed through the animation of Alice's changing scale, in which she transitions between a puppet body and the body of a little girl (Shera, 2001:62). The disjuncture of this transition contributes to the uncanny sensation evoked in viewing this metamorphosis.

Prior to Sigmund Freud's writings on 'the Uncanny' Ernst Jentsch explored this concept in relation to dolls, believing that "dolls, because of their likeness to real life, create intellectual uncertainty, the inability to ascertain whether or not a figure is human" (Schiffman, 2001:162). Within this instability, Schiffman explored the idea of dolls being a site of the uncanny and "illustrates how the uncanny is solidly rooted in the unconscious mind of the child" (2001:159). Alice's ever-changing scale exemplifies this sense of the uncanny and acts as a metaphor, indicative of her changing states of mind throughout her dream, "trafficking between a live action and an animated world, and a corresponding movement between the conscious and unconscious realms" (Rickards, 2010:27). The viewer is introduced to different versions of Alice: narrator Alice, live action Alice, small doll Alice, and Alice cocooned in a large doll version of herself. Her scale is used to mediate the interconnected relationship between the real and imagined, particularly observed when live Alice enlarges into a larger doll doppelganger version of herself cocooning her live self inside (Fig.13). This entrapment is illustrative of Alice being stuck in a state of reverie, symbolic of a stage of metamorphosis in her character development. With each distortion in scale, the viewer perceives her from a different perspective. Bakhtin describes that "one of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and [the other] dying" (1984:26). The cocoon body of Alice is representative of a distorted image of identity (perhaps one

enforced by another e.g. a dominant political establishment). In breaking out of this cocoon, live Alice physically frees herself from the oppression of a distorted sense of self.

Švankmajer's reimagines the 'Drink Me: magic potion' of the original story as writing ink. This inedible substance, possibly toxic when ingested, speaks to the absurdity of Surrealist dream logic by changing the function and perception of this utilitarian object. In ingesting the means of writing, Alice initially has limited agency in her own story. The writing ink contains the secrets of sequences of events that will follow in the story, and Alice can only access these 'secrets' by drinking the ink. Reoccurring symbols associated with the ink are that of the rabbit hole (writing desk) acting as a door into a story world. Alice's initial inability to determine which object will enlarge or shrink her size, is illustrative of her powerlessness in the beginning phases of her dream. Her encounter with the sock caterpillar, who gives Alice two sides of a wooden mushroom one to enlarge her and the other to shrink her. It is at this point at which Alice is given agency to choose her changing scale.

The ink can be metaphorically *framed* as the consumption of written knowledge and its ability to distort, manipulate, and *frame* our thoughts, indicative of written expression and knowledge that 'ink' should empower. Influenced by his society built on oppression and censorship, Švankmajer uses ink as a reference to this oppressed freedom of expression, by physically shrinking Alice. This concept of consumption infiltrates almost all Švankmajer's films, specifically in *Alice.* A recurrent use of foodstuff and its associations with consumption is applied as a metaphorical strategy that speaks to the societal need to constantly consume. Bakhtin asserts that:

> "Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination…all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven" (1984:317).

The process of consumption discussed by Bakhtin is illustrative of the universal basic need to participate in the repetitive process of consuming, excreting, and eventual death. Food is also illustrative of a tension between self and other, interior, and exterior as well as the cycle by which food transforms into excrement that feeds soil to bring about new life. This commentary on Capitalist consumption is bleakly expressed through Alice's and the creature's consistent acts of consumption. Švankmajer illustrates this concept, first through a close-up shot of Alice's mouth when narrating, as a visual site of consumption. Alice's ingestion of ink, biscuits and wood act as manipulative tools that influence change. The animated objects also partake

in this consumption, observed by the White Rabbit eating his own sawdust (internal organs) and a mouse who tries to cook food on Alice's head (Fig.14). The last process of consumption can be observed when Alice's socks come to life in the form of caterpillars that consume the wooden floorboards. Švankmajer's representation of consumption speaks not only to the process of life and death but also with "each act of consumption creates a commentary on the nature of class structure and power in both socialist and capitalist societies" (Dowd, 2009:33). This political commentary was to better illustrate the disparity between class structures of citizens living in Czechoslovakia. We observe a violent aspect of consumption when Alice attempts to consume the contents of a jam jar to later find it contains thumb tacks which disrupts, and challenges preconceived notions of food and familiar objects. Other signifiers of violence are depicted in the close-up shots of; scissors, mouse traps, rotting fruit and dead flies.

Švankmajer's use of thresholds or 'doorways' take on variable scales into the numerous phases of Alice's dream. Švankmajer's rabbit hole acts as a door into a story world, 'the rabbit hole' manifests more realistically, reimagined into a desk drawer (Fig.15) and later the second 'rabbit hole' (Fig.16) encountered, is that of an elevator shaft. The small desk drawer acts as a *framing* device as well as a mediating portal between reality and Alice's dream. Reoccurring doors, passageways and basement tunnels pose as thresholds leading her deeper into her dreamscape. Tiny rooms with multiple doors interconnect with strange corridors. No matter how bizarre and otherworldly the sequence, the viewer still feels as though they have not fully left the waking world (Rickards, 2010:29).

> "Humans have faced two major life passages in which our habitual mind seems to dissolve and enter a radically different realm. The first passage is sleep, humanity's constant companion, transitory and filled with the dream life that has enchanted cultures from the beginning of history. The second is death, the grand enigma, the final event that organizes so much of individual existence" (Lama & Engel, 1997:3).

Considering these two passages of sleep and death, Švankmajer's depiction of death within Alice's dream can be observed by his manipulation of dead taxidermied animals that are revived through stop-motion animation. Dreams can be understood as states of temporary death, and by animating once living animals, their impermanence is emphasised, implying the inevitability of dying. Visual symbolism of death is evident in Švankmajer's construction of creatures from bleached animal skeletons with unblinking glass eyes that move with life. His articulation of this idea of death, is emphasised by confronting the viewer with a manipulated corpse (Shera, 2001:136).

2.4. The Unconscious Imagination

The Unconscious is ever present in *Alice* (1988), as her exploration into Wonderland is a journey into her unconscious dream. Sigmund Freud's writings on Psychoanalysis influenced and contributed greatly to Surrealist goals of revolutionising society, with specific emphasis on the Unconscious and dream logic. The Unconscious can be described as "the tendency of unacknowledged wishes to break through into consciousness through indirect means" (Frosh, 2012:20). In other words, the Unconscious can be imagined as a storeroom in the mind containing repressed experiences, wishes, dreams and desires that are inaccessible to the conscious mind. Dreams are one such example of this infiltration which can be understood as "uncensored expressions of unconscious ideas" (Frosh, 2012:41). Dreams express discontinuities in time and space merging past, present and future events, allowing for impossible events to occur. Švankmajer applies these discontinuities in time through his non-sequential filmic narrative, prompting the viewer to feel as though they themselves are dreaming.

Rendering psychological states such as dreams via filmic means is a challenging undertaking. Švankmajer's unique style of animation subverts dominant Disney fairy-tale animations that are so prominent. He *re-frames* and reinvents, via filmic means, how one can articulate a psychological phenomenon such as the Unconscious dream state, through his simultaneous use of animation and live action (Shera, 2001:128). In the opening scene of *Alice,* she states "now you will see a film, made for children, perhaps" (Alice, 1988, 00:01:42 – 00:01:54), this contradictory statement leaves the viewer in doubt as to whether the film is targeted towards children or something more sinister.

Alice encounters an intermediate state between waking (live action) and dreaming (animation), a kind of reverie or daydreaming. Henry Holland conceptualises reverie as a state in which "the mind shift[s] to each side of the imaginary line", a state of semi-consciousness (Schatz, 2015:99). Holland observes that this state is where the conscious mind takes curious notice of the dream state. 19th century psychologists characterised the concept of reverie as dangerous. This was because it merged the imagination with the conscious mind and in doing so merged fantasy with reality, the so-called taproot of madness at the time. In writing *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll was influenced to a large degree by his disagreement with these psychological theories proposed. By positively depicting the childhood imagination

intertwined with internal dream states, Carroll's story was a response to the claims made by prominent psychologists that such flights of fantasy were dangerous (Schatz, 2015:98).

Carroll's construction of Wonderland drew upon prominent theories of the Unconscious, apparent in Alice's difficulty differentiating her reality from dream, which was a foundational aspect in the Victorian creation of the 'mad subject' (Schatz, 2015:98). Švankmajer's interpretation stays true to Carroll's main concern, being that of a journey into the psyche of an imaginative child.

The objects in Alice's waking world re-appear in slightly altered and distorted ways within her dream. The recurrence of these objects in her dream verify that she is in an altered state of consciousness, because in dreams, objects or sounds from the waking world appear unexpectedly. The emotional connotations of old manipulated objects carry the experiences of their previous owners in them. Švankmajer admires the lived experience these objects hold in their imperfections (Chryssouli, 2015:308). Surrealism aimed to liberate the mind from traditional reason, Švankmajer does this through liberating his objects from their mundane static existence via animation.

The filmic articulation of this dream state is viewed in Alice's narration of the characters she encounters, indicating that they are in her head and of her own making. The recurring motif of *framing* devices (doors, entrances, windows, and tunnels) are all strongly suggestive of accessing different levels of her unconscious, one imbued with unpredictability. *Framing* devices like these allow access to Alice's raw uncensored unconscious imagination, as Surrealists believe that the "Imagination does not mean turning away from reality, but its antithesis: reaching through to the dynamic core of reality" (Noheden, 2013:4).

The nature of this dream takes on nightmarish qualities which can be observed through the creatures' violent treatment towards Alice. The White Rabbit and hybrid creatures make several attempts to physically hurt her in her own dream, emphasising her 'otherness' and lack of control. Violence is enacted on Alice by the creatures throwing rocks at her to remove her from the rabbit's building block house, and in the process the rabbit attempts to saw off Alice's arm. The creatures' behaviours towards her create an eerily unwelcome environment, a precursor for evoking the uncanny, discussed further in the next section.

The White Rabbit is observed as the most conscious of all the creatures, displaying more human attributes than other creatures. Using almost no dialogue, characteristics such as: licking its lips, following time on his pocket watch, feeding himself, dressing himself, and the act of

taking a key out of its food, aware it is inedible, all indicate his consciousness. The rabbit's consciousness (and perhaps architect of the dream) is confirmed by the plaque on his display case in Alice's waking-world room which reads "Lepus Cuniculus" which translates to conscious rabbit. This plaque re-emerges in Alice's dream when intruding on the rabbits building block 'house' seen previously in (Fig.10).

2.5. The Uncanny

Sigmund Freud's seminal essay 'The Uncanny' (1919), explores this concept by analysing the properties and circumstances needed for a sensation of the uncanny to emerge. Freud argues that a feature central to the uncanny, is the feeling which it evokes in the viewer, stating that "the uncanny is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar" (Freud,1919:220). Ernst Jentsch, a German psychiatrist explored the concept of the uncanny prior to Freud in his writings on 'The psychology of the uncanny' (1906) inspiring Freud's thoughts on the subject. Jentsch's description of the word uncanny "appears to express that someone to whom something 'uncanny' happens is not quiet 'at home' or 'at ease' in the situation concerned" (Jentsch, 1906:2). Further illustrating that the feeling of the uncanny arises when there are "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive or, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not in fact be animate" (Freud, 1919:226). This concept speaks to both the distorted familiar reality of Alice's dream landscape as well as the unexpected animation of the living-dead creatures who enact violent unwelcome behaviours on her.

Jentsch (1906:12) provides an example of this concept by referring to the impression that wax doll figures have on a viewer. When observing a strangely familiar human form, one is unnerved by the anatomical similarity that the inanimate object holds, but semi-conscious secondary doubts emerge when observing the finer details of the figure, revealing its inanimateness. In *Alice*, the viewer is left in a state of uncertainty as to whether characters in the story are living or automaton, evoking a sense of the uncanny. Vardoulakis emphasises that "the uncanny is characterised by an inherent ambiguity" (2006:107). When an inanimate object holds too close a likeness to an animate human form, one is confronted with conflicting emotions (Freud, 1919:251). Freud notes that dolls are often a site of the uncanny, closely connected to childhood and a child's inability to differentiate between animate and inanimate objects. Children are often observed to treat dolls as living people. This is demonstrated in the introduction to Alice's room where she recreates the real-life scene of her sister and herself

sitting on the river bank. She reimagines this on the floor of her room where dolls and creatures sit around a makeshift river made of building blocks.

The source of the uncanny here would lie in the child's wish or belief that the object 'could' come to life. James Sully, child psychologist, discusses how children can think through their own forms of existence in relation to dolls (Shuttleworth, 2015:86). This belief in the possibility of an object coming to life can be attributed to the concept of animism, broadly defined by "the tendency to regard objects as living and endowed with will" (Jahoda, 1958:197). Childhood developmental psychologist Jean Piaget proposed that young children pass through a stage in their development where their relationship to the physical world is distinguished by animism (Jahoda, 1958:197).

Both Freud and Jentsch's theories draw strongly upon theories of animism, being considered a foundational concept of the uncanny (Shuttleworth, 2015:87). Sully attributes emotions of fear and the uncanny as an intrinsic element of childhood development (2015:88). Jentsch (1906:13) argues that the effect of the uncanny can be achieved when an attempt is made to reinterpret a lifeless object as part of an organic creature, specifically in anthropomorphised terms. This can be clearly observed in Švankmajer's assemblage of hybrid objects (Fig.17). The uncanny locates itself as something strangely familiar, in *Alice*; dolls, puppets and marionettes all have a human-likeness and in animating them they become eerily familiar. Unexpected, mundane objects spontaneously come to life, observed when Alice's sock transforms into a caterpillar with glass eyeballs and clacking dentures (Fig.18). Another unexpected utilitarian object, a bed with bird wings and feet, takes flight (Fig.19). Alice's interaction with these familiarly strange objects speak to the absurdity of dream logic, changing the function and perception of these 'ordinary' utilitarian objects.

Individual's propensity to experience varying levels of the uncanny are "subject to certain conditions combined with certain circumstances" (Freud, 1919:237), which may elicit an uncanny reaction. The uncanny valley is a concept in which the relationship between the degree of resemblance an object has in relation to a human being, and the emotional response that is evoked by such an object (Hanson et al., 2005:24). Individual perceptions of such circumstances differ greatly, as do their reactions. What might evoke an uncanny reaction in one, may not evoke the same effect in another. This might account for Alice's contradictory statement in the introduction "a film for children perhaps". The concept of the uncanny can be closely linked to that of abjection as both incite horror and uncertainty in the viewer. Barbara

Creed suggests "the uncanny and the abject share features, for the uncanny also disturbs identity and order" (1993:53) as well as being concerned with the idea of death.

The uncanny is also concerned with the phenomena of 'the double': the repetition of the double in features, traits, or symbols (Freud, 1919:234). The 'double' can be observed in *Alice* through the mirroring of the objects in the real world of Alice and the same objects distortedly mirrored in her dream. The doppelganger as a motif is often associated with something threatening, however with the rise of Psychoanalysis the doppelganger became representative of a loss of self. The doppelganger in the form of multiple versions of Alice is seen as inherently uncanny, Freud attributes this feeling to the return of the repressed which according to him is characteristic of a doppelganger (Vardoulakis, 2006:101). Vasseleu also notes that "[t]here is a doubling in the perception of contact that can be illustrated in a reanimating touch that passes through the living and the dead" (2009:143).

2.6. Multisensory Modalities

Tactility as a sensory modality is central to Švankmajer's unique filming style. He implies properties of touch through the highly textured objects he animates, as well as the sounds these textures and objects produce as a form of dialogue. Švankmajer's use of tactility as a Surrealist strategy, evokes tactility in the most mundane of objects (Noheden, 2013:7, Vasseleu, 2007:91). His experimentations with physically tactile sculptures and objects became the basis for his synesthetic exploration of touch in film. The tactile dimensions of these objects dwell on textures both coarse (nails) and gentle (feathers) (Noheden, 2013:6). This tactility is enhanced through visceral sounds, narrating objects movements, and interactions. The simultaneous use of tactile and audio-visual sensations aims to activate and stimulate the viewers tactile imagination through analogical associations (Vasseleu, 2007:9). By engaging in analogical associations in *Alice*, viewers recall and associate memories of their childhood that defamiliarize the world from its purely utilitarian adult viewpoint (Noheden, 2013:6).

Švankmajer emulates multisensory perception, by paying considerable attention to the concept of haptics. Vasseleu defines haptics as "the study of how human beings' sense and manipulate the world through touch" and by "stimulating the 'feel' of material objects, active haptic interfaces restore some connection between contact and tactile experience in tele-interaction" (2009:142). Haptic visuality can be defined as "a mode of visuality where the eyes almost function as organs of touch" (Marks, 1998:332). Marks notes that haptic visuality draws from various forms of sensory experience specifically kinesthetics and touch. Due to this activation

of other senses, the viewer's body is more involved in the process of multisensory associations. Marks argues that touch as a sense is located on the body and that haptic cinema informs a bodily relationship between the viewer and the viewed image thus emphasising that the visceral nature of cinematic texture can force a viewer to become self-reflexive (Marks, 1998:332). The cinematic environment therefore becomes more immersive as an experience. The reoccurring close-up shots of objects, textures and surfaces is used as a stylistic device to enhance the 'feel' of textures and their materiality. Specific materials evoke different emotions, coarse (material), sticky (jam) and sharp (nails) textures create feelings of discomfort that one is reluctant to touch, enhancing these tactile impressions.

The use of tactility invites viewers to activate their imaginations, as the imagination holds great dependence on the material world. Sound is used to enhance the tactility of the images being viewed and thus creates an embodied experience of space (Noheden, 2013:7). Švankmajer's investigation into the potential of touch in an ocular-centric civilization places emphasis on sound and touch over dialogue. This can be observed in *Alice* as the exaggerated sound effects given to objects movements, e.g. the sound of the Rabbit pulling nails out his feet that the taxidermist used to secure him within his glass case. Vasseleu argues that "the best weapon to liberate the imagination is the emotive charge of inner states communicated by tactile analogy" (2009:152). Švankmajer achieves this through his minimal use of dialogue, allowing the visceral nature of creatures to narrate through sounds of their movement. Intricate textures in reoccurring close-up shots of props and creatures provoke the viewer to touch them with their eyes and imagination. Švankmajer's decision to allow *Alice* to narrate the creatures, was not only to illustrate that the creatures are in her head and of her own making, but also to subtly comment on the lack of freedom of speech experienced in Soviet Czechoslovakia. This political commentary is illustrated through the minimal use of dialogue within the film as well as reoccurring close-up shots of Alice's mouth. In narrating the creatures, Alice speaks for them, which can also be perceived as an act of silencing them, as all the creature's thoughts are *framed* by Alice's narration of them. This speaks to the manipulation and *framing* of information governing systems imposed on their people, speaking for them, and silencing them simultaneously. Vasseleu observes that:

> "Švankmajer credits physical objects, words and images with the same energy and ability
> to communicate with equally forceful, physical impact as live actors or animated
> characters" (2009:147).

The waking world and Alice's dream of Wonderland are linked by a convergence of sound from one world into the other. Macnish notes that when sleep is not very interesting, the sleeping individual might recollect sounds, smells and other external sensory experiences that occur during sleep (Macnish cited in Schatz, 2015:105). This free association between internal dreamscapes and external stimuli is indicated by the sound of a stream in the opening scene of *Alice*, this same sound emerges in her dream when looking through a door into a garden stage set (Fig.11). Tactile sensations in *Alice* are used metaphorically for conveying the interior of the subject and its capacity to arouse emotion within the viewer (Vasseleu, 2009:143). The deliberately uncomfortable sounds, noises and squeaks remove the film from a fairy-tale dimension enhancing its visceral and uncanny nature.

Chapter 3

Through the Looking Glass; Altered states of perception

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

— Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

Entman's definition of *framing* (as discussed in Chapter One) explains how certain scenarios can be positioned in a particular way (positively or negatively) in order to manipulate how the scenario is perceived and to influence a desired response. Within my own body of work, I use the term *frame* both literally (as a compositional strategy) and figuratively (in the way in which the concepts of my work are relayed). Erving Goffman's studies in *frame* analysis address that "individuals interpret experiences and situations through a series of *frames*. These *frames* are cognitive structures that guide perception" (Edwards et al, 2015:4). This notion is broken down by Merleau-Ponty in his essay 'Eye and Mind' discussing how these two vehicles of perception (eye and mind) work together in making sense and understanding of our reality: "man sees before he thinks and no doubt he arrives at thought because vision incites it" (Dufrenne, 1980:168).

The concept of *perspective* is used similarly in this body of work, drawing on Alberti's views on perspective construction, with his idea of a 'window' through which an 'outside' reality could be observed and recorded (Levy et al, 1996:43). I apply this idea in my use of *perspective,* depicting a reality outside this window and outside of one's self. The term being used both literally (in depicting a visual technical device) and metaphorically (as a conceptual point of view). Merleau-Ponty asserts that "our perceived world is structured by a plurality of overlapping *perspectives* within which different aspects are somehow seen together, as aspects of just one world" (2004:19). By painting my collaged compositions, I thus flatten my multiple points of reference into a singular *frame* that articulate multiple shifts in *perspective* within a singular work. I retain my collages as part of my work because the final flattening of *perspective* is only one solution for some of these ideas, and not a final destination. Schatz observes of Švankmajer's *Alice* that "Wonderland is her dream, and so its creatures and landscape reflect the contours of her own peculiar psychology" (2015:108), this body of work aims to achieve just that, my own disordered psychological state.

This collection of works applies the above-mentioned themes in Chapter Two, to visually explore the *perspectival shifts* I have experienced in the process of grappling with major depressive disorder (MDD). 'Disorders' of the mind often alter the way an individual has previously perceived or perceives reality. Krantz states that "the cognitions of depressed individuals are not only negatively toned, but unrealistic and distorted" (1985:595). Psychologist Richard Gregory argues that perception is a constructive process which is based on prior knowledge, claiming that humans actively construct their perception of reality determined by their environment and stored information (Gregory, 1972:707). Perceptions of reality have long been subject to debate, philosopher Merleau-Ponty's empiricist belief claims all knowledge is built on experience derived from the senses (2004:19), *framing* the way we perceive reality.

By using *framing* devices such as thresholds, doors, *frames* and windows, I explore this concept in terms of mental 'disorder', questioning how various *frames* of thought surrounding 'disorder' and diagnosis have been *re-framed* by technological and psychological advances. The *framing* of mental 'disorder' or 'madness' has thus shifted dramatically from the 19th Century. In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault speaks to these *framed perspectives* of medical professionals "to question the construction of knowledge on which the diagnosis of 'normality' is bound, and to acknowledge the value of new ways of knowing [and perceiving]" (2001:616).

Prominent medical experts had, and still have, a major influence on *framing* societal perceptions surrounding mental 'disorder'. This is exemplified by 19th century psychiatrists, specifically James Crichton who denounced practices of imaginative play, daydreaming and reverie in children, claiming that these actions would lead to mental derangement in adulthood (Schatz, 2015:94). Crichton's characterisation and *framing* of childhood psychopathology greatly influenced societal perceptions of 'disorder' and the Unconscious imagination. As discussed in Chapter Two, Lewis Carroll's writing of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* intended to subvert these claims, by embracing the portrayal of childhood imagination as a kind of 'madness' and questioning received perceptions on the idea of 'normalcy'. Švankmajer's adaptation of the story expressed a highly surreal visual portrayal of a child's journey into her unconscious mind. I draw on this ominous illustration of a child's imaginative mindscape as this resonates with my experiences of grappling with childhood depression. Current studies assert that children's ability to construct their own realities and worlds through daydreaming, reverie or imaginative play is observed to be a critical stage in childhood development (Singer & Singer, 2005:98).

3.1. Found Objects, Assemblage and Collage

As discussed in Chapter Two, Breton identified ready-mades as manufactured objects raised to the dignity of artworks. Found objects, as argued by Iverson are: "essentially singular or irreplaceable, and both lost and found" (2014:50). Collecting found imagery which holds a specific (though sometimes unconscious) resonance, allows one to produce a newly constructed narrative/reality and visually illustrate a fragmented path through time, communicating experiences and emotions that could not be otherwise verbalised (Diakopoulos & Essa, 2005:183). Surrealists viewed collage as a poetic display of the Unconscious mind, by juxtaposing pre-existing elements, mirroring the process of how dreams are constructed. Ernst described this juxtaposition of collage as a "coupling of two realities, irreconcilable in appearance, upon a plane that apparently does not suit them" (1948:13). These seemingly dissimilar elements are transformed by their new context, altering their original significance as they become part of a new world. The act of collage came to exemplify a direct manifestation of unconscious thinking. Like the collection of waking symbolism in the Unconscious reality of Alice's dream, I mirror this construction of a dream through collage. Each constructed reality emulates dream-logic, integrating and distorting time and space through spatial-temporal discontinuities that merge interior and exterior space.

3.2. Ambiguity

Surrealists depiction of uncertainty in their representations of 'reality' are exemplified by Ernst's use of decalcomania in producing ambiguous patterns, which transform into seemingly recognisable landscapes. Unlike the Cubists' flat geometric representations, Surrealists aimed to depict a more three-dimensional illusion of space in their dream-like paintings, constructing unseen worlds of the Unconscious imagination. Švankmajer's depiction of Alice's dream through film required a considerable amount of ambiguity and manipulation of scale and space to illustrate the non-sequential narrative of a dream. This body of work draws on this strategy to illustrate ruptures in time and space, by painting scenes that combine the real and imagined. These boundaries between waking (real) and dreaming (imagined) are blurred in my depiction of recognisable space, merging and intersecting interior and exterior space.

The interpenetration of these spaces exhibits the spatial-temporal discontinuities experienced in dream construction, this applies to '*Inside Out*' (Fig.20) in that there is no clear distinction between the inside of the room and the external landscape. '*Blindfold*' (Fig.21) exhibits similar discontinuities, by relocating interior space into a contrasting desolate landscape. Curry states

that "dreams are characterized by spatio-temporal discontinuities that are very like cuts in a film. The dream, like the film, freely leaps from one place or situation, or one position in a place or situation to another" (1974:83). In *'In-between'* (Fig.22) discontinuities are exhibited in the figure's dislocated body that partially emerges through the house window, suggesting a warped passage in time. *'Split-Self'* (Fig.23) further illustrates this discontinuity through two children who appear as though they have been cut into a dream or memory.

Curry further observes that films and dreams are similar in that they are "discontinuous and evanescent, we want to call them kinds of illusion; our feeling that they are kinds of illusion sustains our sense that they are alike" (1974:84). *'Disordered Order'* (Fig.24) depicts this fragmentation of cut sequences and alternating *frames* common to films and dreams, with contradictory representations of subject matter that are compartmentalised in a passage of *frames*.

3.3. Distortion

Surrealists and Cubists use of distortion offered an alternative *perspective* on conventional objects, figures and scenes, using distortion as a way of illustrating a type of social and internal disorder. As discussed in Chapter Two, *Alice's* changing scale acted as a metaphor for her shift between the real (waking) and the imagined (dreaming). My work applies this strategy by means of merging these elements, the ghostly children in *'Split-Self'* are significantly enlarged suggesting that they are of the imagination. The veiling of the figures' sight in '*Blindfold*' similarly addresses this state of dreaming within a seemingly real environment. Considering Alice's distorted sense of time and space, '*Inside Out*' emulates this merger of waking and dream through the integration of recognisable space.

This concept is further illustrated in *'In-between'* where a figure is observed to be caught in a state of reverie, between two worlds, simultaneously inside (unconscious) and outside (conscious) a house. The exterior is clearly viewed but the interior is hidden, much like our unconscious thoughts are hidden from consciousness. The windows as *framing* devices act as thresholds of entry and doorways, the house holding its own space in time observed through the distortion of the figure's limbs.

In my collages, I have experimented with the geometric structure of M.C. Escher's geometric illusionistic prints (Fig.25). He demonstrates tricks in *perspective* by illustrating mathematical concepts visually, using complex intersecting shapes that distort *perspective* (Schattschneider, 2010:706). An example of one of these perceptual distortions is the Necker cube. Louis Albert

Necker created the Necker illusion in 1832 and observed that a transparent rhomboid spontaneously reverses in depth, the shape can appear either as an outer surface or inner surface of a transparent box (Gregory, 1968). If one observes the shape, lines "change their appearance during prolonged viewing: a sudden and unavoidable 'mental switch' occurs whenever two or more interpretations of a given picture are equally likely" (Kornmeier & Bach, 2005:956). *'Disordered Order'* speaks to these manipulations of *perspective* and perceptual distortion in space and time. Interior and exterior spaces merge, creating an uncertainty of whether the scenes depicted are of an illusion or lived reality. The compositional structure forces *perspective* in the varying scale of manipulated subjects and their placement within the passage allows the eye to shift in and out of focus much like a camera lens.

3.4. The Unconscious Imagination

As discussed in Chapter One, Surrealist goals of expanding normal consciousness explored different ways of viewing the world through a Psychoanalytic lens, by exposing the internal workings of the mind. Švankmajer articulated this window into the Unconscious mind in *Alice* through his use of *framing* devices (doors, windows, tunnels) which act as thresholds into various phases of her mindscape shifting between waking (conscious) and dreaming (Unconscious). Henry Holland's conception of reverie, discussed in Chapter Two, addresses this intermediate state of waking and dreaming which Alice and I have experienced. In my work *'Split-Self'*, physically painted *frames* act as thresholds into imagined realities that the ghostly children can enter. Surrealist painting synthesises dream and reality as though "a ghost standing in for an unconscious dream reality that we know exists, but have trouble seeing simultaneously with the conscious reality" (Rudosky, 2015:706). A child depicted simultaneously inside and outside in '*Inside Out*' references the semi-conscious state of reverie/daydreaming, and challenges the borders between waking and dreaming, merging these mental and physical spaces together.

In '*Blindfold*', a physically painted floating frame becomes symbolic of this intermediate space between two worlds. As discussed by Gregory (1972) humans construct their own perceptions of reality, this is explored through the collaged mound of fragmented unconscious experiences in the foreground of this image as if they are to be added to, or have fallen out of the frame. These elements are metaphorically indicative of how our unconscious minds compartmentalize only parts of experiences, which eventually frame our perspectives of reality. As discussed by Krantz (1985), the cognitions of depressed individuals are negatively toned, I contemplate my

own negatively toned experiences of depression through this collage and how they have come to frame my perspective of reality.

Escher's influence in *'Disordered Order'* is not solely based on his geometric structure but his own shift from depicting "landscapes...replaced by 'mindscapes'" (Schattschneider, 2010:707), no longer relying on his external reality but the internal recesses of his unconscious mind. The disembodied head suggests that the subjects surrounding her are products of her mind, much like Alice's narration of the creatures she encounters in her dream are indicative of them being of her mind. The fragmented nature of the subjects and figures speak to the disordered construction of a dream, only making sense of parts.

3.5. The Uncanny

Jentsch's understanding of the uncanny in Chapter Two, discusses that feelings of the uncanny emerge when one is not quiet at home or at ease in a situation. My body of work addresses this 'uneasy' feeling through dislocation of subjects in space, dismembering or removing discernible body parts to evoke a sense of the uncanny. The erasure of distinct facial features in *'Split-Self'* makes them unidentifiable, implying an uncertainty as to whether they are animate or mannequins. In relation to Freud's *perspective* on the uncanny as strangely familiar, yet alien, can be observed in *'In-between'* as the scene of the home and figure is familiar, but the figure's dislocation in the space is unknown.

In Chapter Two, Freud further discussed that dolls often evoke a sense of the uncanny due to their human likeness and observed that the uncanny is often ingrained into the Unconscious mind of a child. The figures within my work are predominantly children dislocated in space and can be seen in '*Inside Out*' where a boy sinks into his unsettling, dilapidated surroundings. Freud also discussed the phenomena of 'the double' in evoking a sense of the uncanny, in terms of repeated features or in the case of Alice, her doppelganger is imagined as a doll. This concept is applied to *'Split-Self'* depicting the doubling of two identical looking children. Psychoanalysis observes that the doubling of self is also synonymous with the loss of self, I explore this through these faceless children, commenting on this loss of self, experienced in childhood depression.

This concept of 'the double' is also evident in *'Disordered Order'* as the disembodied doll head is mirrored in the background, smaller and less significant, speaking to this loss of self. Objects in Alice's reality are reimagined in her dream slightly distorted, but recognizably similar. This

is explored through the fragmented familiar subject matter that appear vaguely distorted within the ordered geometric structure.

3.6. Multisensory Modalities

Švankmajer's emphasis on tactility and texture in *Alice* was to enhance a multisensory experience in his depiction of a dream, Macnish affirmed that dreams recollect surrounding sensory experiences that occur when sleeping (Schatz, 2015:105). This can account for the visually tactile subject matter observed in *Alice*. I apply this concept in my work through dislocated visual motifs of the senses (eyes, ears and hands). In *'Split-Self'* the children's ears and hands are the only senses intact, and by removing the other senses, it is suggested that the subjects are elements of a dream, by them being depicted only in parts.

My work explores these dislocated senses, *'Disordered Order'* visually illustrates this through a phantom ear in place of a bird's head, and puppeteer hands manipulating the composition. Various fields of vision are depicted within and through the geometric *frame*, infiltrating both inside and outside. The elements surrounding these senses speak to the external sound stimuli one experiences within a dream. Much like *'In-between'* a figure's head is completely submerged in the sand, indicative of refusing perception. This refusal to perceive is further expressed by the house's roof on fire, and the figure's continued refusal to acknowledge their reality. The ghostly transparency of the figure seen through the dilapidated house indicates her otherness within her dream.

3.7. Collage wall

The collage wall applies similar concepts of Cubist goals of assemblage, discussed in Chapter One, by making use of found images and textures (Fig.26), like that of early cubist collages. Found letters, materials and discarded prints used are applied to this process of constructing new realities. I use this strategy to articulate and document my thought process in the form of a visual mind map, influenced by Surrealist experimental techniques (free association, automatism, decalcomania (Fig.27) and collage) with which I explore my unconscious imagination. By visually expressing an internal *perspective* of my thought processes, each work begins to inhabit its own reality, articulating different *frames* of mind while simultaneously being part of a cacophonous and multi-layered whole.

The overwhelming quantity of visual stimulation intends to flood the viewer's perceptual field and is a product of compulsively creating, as the process is cathartic in relieving a considerable amount of anxiety and mental distress.

Conclusion

In conclusion I have created a solo exhibition of painting and collage work exploring my own experience of MDD through the lens of *perspectival shift* and *framing.* I utilised a practice-based research methodology to explore how my own perceptions of reality are shaped by mental distress. This has been done by transposing my collages into paintings, layering collaged elements through painting, using various techniques.

In this mini thesis, I have explored the technical strategies of Cubism, Dada and Surrealism, and how this pointed to shifts in perspective relating to the Physical, the Social and the Unconscious respectively. I have conducted a close reading of Svankmajer's *Alice* (1988) and used this theoretical examination to inform my body of work. In Chapter One, I explored the following techniques: found objects and assemblages, ambiguity, distortion of scale, the unconscious, the uncanny and multisensory modalities in relation to Surrealism and Cubism.

In Chapter Two, I have conducted a close reading of *Alice* in relation to the themes mentioned above. I have analysed how *Alice* (1988) makes use of these themes. In Chapter 3, I have addressed how my own work incorporates these themes mentioned above in relation to *framing* and *perspectival shifts*. I have used these theories to inform my own technical strategies of *framing* and *perspectival shift* within my own work.

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