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The imagination of touch: surrealist tactility in the films of Jan Švankmajer

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Abstract
This article is a theoretical examination of tactility in the Czech surrealist filmmaker Jan Švankmajer’s film Down to the Cellar (1983). Švankmajer’s deployment of tactile images in a surrealist context shows the need for a discussion of the imagination’s role in the embodied film experience. Departing from Laura Marks’s The Skin of the Film, this article seeks to explore the surrealist embodied imagination through surrealist poetics of analogy, as defined by André Breton, and the link between these and Walter Benjamin’s writings on mimesis. Finally, the film is viewed from the perspective of Gaston Bachelard’s ideas of “the imagination of matter,” where matter is seen as a highly potent stimulant for the imagination. Bachelard’s notion of the imagination’s multisensory properties further lends credence to Švankmajer’s aims to liberate the imagination of the spectator through images that invoke touch.

Keywords: Czech film; mimesis; Walter Benjamin; poetics; analogy; materiality; André Breton; Gaston Bachelard

In Jan Švankmajer’s 1983 short film Down to the Cellar (Do pivnice), a little girl encounters teasingly fleeing potatoes, a man resting on a bed of coal, and a woman mixing coal dust and eggs into a black dough. The Czech filmmaker and artist skilfully evokes the tactile properties of these phenomena as they are played out in the half-illuminated darkness of a cellar in an apartment house. The film fuses reality and the imagination in a way that recalls both dream logic and a child’s flights of fancy, but it does so with a concrete materiality that not only enhances the film’s tactile properties but also invites the viewer’s own active imagination into the equation. This makes Down to the Cellar a telling example of Švankmajer’s use of tactility, which works as a manifestation of a highly material form of the surrealist imagination. For the director is not just a renowned animator but also arguably one of the most important filmmakers to emerge from the surrealist movement. This not least takes expression through his desire to resuscitate the human capacity for analogical thinking, where likeness relations connect diverse phenomena that the identity principle of scientific thinking keeps apart, and so, from the viewpoint of surrealism, has the potential to

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poetise and re-enchant a world in the grip of habit and utility.

Film theorists like Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks have established that the film experience is not merely visual and cerebral but also multi-sensory and embodied, appealing to both touch and taste. A number of Švankmajer’s films evoke touch like few others. Transforming matter, putrefying foodstuffs, coarse or sticky surfaces, and the sudden stop-motion animated life of otherwise inert objects are some of the elements that combine to create tactile sensations through a combination of the director’s surrealist inventions with the viewer’s own sensory experiences. In this article, I discuss how Švankmajer’s tactile film experiments call for a partly different approach to tactility than what is dominant in contemporary film theory, and how this is connected with the director’s emphasis on the imagination and analogical thinking. Neither Sobchack nor Marks devotes much space to the imagination. This means that the theoretical understanding of Švankmajer’s films in part must differ from the dominant view of tactility in film, displaying the need for an extended discussion of the role of the imagination in the embodied film experience.

How, then, can we understand these attempts to activate and stimulate the imagination through tactile surrealist images? Here, I develop the film theoretical views on tactility through a discussion of Laura Marks’s work in The Skin of the Film, which I negotiate and expand through a meeting with Švankmajer’s own research into tactility, as well as surrealist writings on the imagination and its relation to perception. Marks and Švankmajer share the basic conviction that touch has been neglected in an ocularcentric civilisation. It is, however, mainly her use of Walter Benjamin, and particularly his work on the mimetic faculty, that allows her theories to be readjusted and adapted to illuminate the workings of a surrealist tactility in moving images. This theoretical investigation of the embodied imagination leads to a discussion of Gaston Bachelard’s writings on the imagination of matter. I propose that these add a valuable new perspective to the theories of an embodied imagination of touch, concerning both its workings in the film and its activation of the spectator’s own associations. Bachelard’s notion of poetic images of matter as stimuli for the reader’s, or in this case viewer’s, own imagination not least resounds clearly with Švankmajer’s findings that touch can liberate the analogue imagination. Throughout the article, I use Down to the Cellar as the main example, but I relate many of the questions to other Švankmajer films as well.

JAN ŠVANKMAJER AND SURREALIST TACTILITY

Jan Švankmajer has participated in the Czechoslovak—later Czech and Slovak—surrealist group since 1970, and his work in film has much to gain from being considered in the light of this collective environment. A surrealist group was established in Prague already in 1934, but national and personal politics alike caused the group to dissolve and reform several times up to the late 1960s. When Švankmajer joined the group, it had recently intensified its activities and entered a phase marked by a new intensity. Soon thereafter, the increasingly repressive regime forced the group into a secret underground existence. Unable to publish any writings or hold any exhibitions for almost two decades, they nonetheless kept up their activities unceasingly. Working in animated film, Švankmajer was able to make his work public to a larger extent than his fellow surrealists, but even so his freedom was limited. In 1972, he made unauthorised postproduction changes to Leonardo’s Diary (Leonardův deník), which combines animated drawings by Leonardo da Vinci with documentary sequences of contemporary life. Consequently, he was banned from directing films for several years, and he had to interrupt the making of The Castle of Otranto (Otrantský zámek), which was completed only in 1979.

During the intervening years, Švankmajer rejected sight in favour of touch. He turned from the film medium to exploring tactility in art, as a way to investigate the potential of touch in an ocularcentric civilisation. The tactile experiments were to a large degree executed together with the artist Eva Švankmajerova, but they also involved the whole surrealist group and were often done as one facet of the collective games that were especially important for the group in the 1970s. Sculptures, portraits, objects, collages, and even poems were used as the basis to explore touch in its capacities as both an epistemological tool and as a stimulant for the imagination. Through games and enquiries based on the tactile works,
Švankmajer found that touch has some capacity to afford objective knowledge, but, more importantly, in the right context, it can also activate the imagination in ways that trigger analogical associations that diverge from the habitual stimulus of purely visual sensations. Švankmajer collected the results of the games, some of the answers to the enquiries, and reproductions of tactile artworks in the book *Hmat a imaginace*, which was first issued as a samizdat edition in 1983 and then published officially in 1994. The book also contains references to both various psychoanalysts and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, alongside quotes from or reproductions by a number of literary and artistic sources, such as Arthur Rimbaud, Max Ernst, Edgar Allan Poe, Meret Oppenheim, Claude Cahun, and a lengthy extract from the futurist F.T. Marinetti’s writings on “tactilism.” Švankmajer’s research, then, rested on both readings in medicine and philosophy, and works by artists and writers that in various ways had incorporated tactility in their work.

Švankmajer’s tactile experiments emphasise the essential value of sense impressions for the imagination. This is in line with the Prague group’s overall conviction of the need for surrealism to confront a stagnant historical present by taking root in raw, brute reality. It also calls for a discussion of surrealism’s overall attitude towards reality and matter. There is still a recurring misconception that surrealism is an escapist attempt to abandon reality, when the movement in fact has always striven towards the experience of more facets of reality by integrating it with the imaginary, not to abandon one for the other. Indeed, in striking contrast to the popular notion of surrealism as an escape into fantasy, André Breton early and repeatedly emphasised its close relation with reality. Most tellingly, as early as in “Surrealism and Painting” (1928), he describes surrealism as related to a “particular philosophy of immanence,” which means that it “would be embodied in reality itself and would be neither superior nor exterior to it.” Then, in *Communicating Vessels* (1932), Breton states that surrealism strives to “cast a conduction wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness.” In the essay “The Automatic Message” (1934), he specifies the imagination’s dependence on the material world in a discussion of surrealism as an attempt to restore a lost primordial faculty where perception and representation are one (i.e. where the imagination actively transforms sense impressions). Surrealism scholar Michael Richardson even claims that it was always a surrealist goal not only to enrich the perception of reality through the imagination but also to lead the imagination away from its purely visual aspects and strive for synaesthetic experiences of the poetic image.

Švankmajer’s tactile experiments can then be seen as one very concrete way of fulfilling these ambitions. He uses tactility to dissolve the descriptive registering of the world that sight is so often the hallmark of, in an attempt to liberate the analogue imagination of touch. Underlying the experiments were a conviction that touch has been neglected in an instrumentally rational and ocularcentric civilisation; the Czech surrealist Bruno Solarik even calls Švankmajer’s work with tactility one aspect of the surrealists’ “anti-crusade” against civilisation. Švankmajer’s critique of ocularcentrism is close to positions found in both film studies and anthropology, but he diverges by seeing touch not only as a neglected complement to sight but also as a vehicle for the imagination. This is not least shown in his playful text “The Magic Ritual of Tactile Inauguration,” which ends with the optimistic statement: “Because touch, freed from its practical contexts and constantly realised as an experience … begins to speak with the voice of a poet.” The embodied imagination, then, adds another explicit dimension to the surrealist attempts to liberate dormant faculties from habitual existence.

Švankmajer’s experiments also add an emphasis on embodiment to the Czech and Slovak surrealists’ focus on *Invention, Imagination, Interpretation*, as their concerns were summed up in the title of a 1992 group exhibition in Wales. Imagination and interpretation are strongly related to analogical thinking, which has long been a central method in surrealist poetic practice since it offers an alternative epistemology of, and relation to, the world. André Breton’s brief essay “Ascendant Sign” (1948) is perhaps the most beautiful declaration of the central place of analogy in surrealist poetics, in the surrealist method at large even. There, Breton expressly states that poetic analogy can liberate us from the utilitarian relation with the surroundings that dominate the current order. Dictated by analogy, the surrealist poetic
image—whether visual or in writing—establishes new and unexpected relations between diverse phenomena, correspondences that stretch beyond modern civilisation’s habitual worldview. Breton therefore believes that through the resuscitation of poetic analogy, humans can once again perceive of the world as a forest of signs to be interpreted. Ultimately, this means that analogy has the ability to reintegrate man and the world. The Czech surrealists, not least Švankmajer, have forcefully emphasised the continued importance of poetic analogy, while tempering Breton’s ascendant optimism with a more cynical black humour borne out of decades of despair. All the same, Breton’s high-flying hopes echo clearly in Alena Nádvorníková’s conviction that analogical thinking has the possibility to change not only our perception of the world but also our relation with it, so that “every individual will be a creative mirror of the universe.” Vratislav Effenberger more harshly posits analogical thinking as a form of antidote to the narrow identity principle that structures scientific thinking as well as realism in its most narrow sense. Unlike this descriptive way of perceiving the world, ruled by the reality principle, analogical thinking is dictated by the pleasure principle, and encourages the active interpretation of the surrounding world.

The working of the imagination when liberated from utilitarian concerns by analogy and set upon playfully interpreting the world is tellingly elucidated by André Breton in the essay “On Surrealism in Its Living Works” (1953). Here, Breton states that the surrealist poetic image makes us realise that ‘everything above is like everything below’ and everything inside is like everything outside. The world thereupon seems to be like a cryptogram which remains indecipherable only so long as one is not thoroughly familiar with the gymnastics that permit one to pass at will from one piece of apparatus to another.

The clash of distant phenomena in the surrealist poetic image thus amounts to a revelation of the world in its heterogeneous unity, an attempt to create a totality that does not dissolve differences—a central argument already in “The Second Manifesto of Surrealism”—but contains them in an ever-expanding, intricate network of correspondences.

In accordance with this view, Švankmajer considers interpretation of the world viewed as a set of signs and symbols to be a way of uncovering a more complex reality by going beyond its surface. At the same time, it is important to emphasise the fact that Švankmajer is careful to depict this expanded reality with an attention to the everyday, a result of his ambition to film with a style that is as realist as possible, so that the eruptions of the imagination are all the more striking and convincing. This may seem paradoxical, but Effenberger stresses the imagination’s absolute dependence on reality in no uncertain terms: “Imagination does not mean turning away from reality, but its antithesis: reaching through to the dynamic core of reality.”

When Švankmajer returned to filmmaking after the ban was lifted, he sought to bring the experiences from the tactile experiments with him to the film medium. While he first thought it paradoxical to try to transfer touch from the direct experience of objects and plastic artworks to the second-hand experience of touch in film, his reading of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty convinced him “that sight is capable, to a greater or smaller extent depending on individuals, to transfer tactile sensations in a mediated way.” Švankmajer’s conviction that touch can be mediated via vision is also supported by contemporary film theory. Like Švankmajer, Vivian Sobchack largely builds on Merleau-Ponty’s discovery that the senses are not discrete, but interrelated. She writes that the sense impressions of the multisensory film experience are not identical to actual ones, but nonetheless constitute “a real sensual experience.” Švankmajer’s experiments and their subsequent applications in films also seem to indicate that Sobchack’s insight that “[w]e are in fact all synaesthetes—and thus seeing a movie can also be an experience of touching, tasting, and smelling it” can be applied to surrealist cinema just as well as to realist films.

The first film in which Švankmajer incorporated his tactile findings was The Fall of the House of Usher (Zánik domu Usheru, 1980), an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story. The director was especially inclined to employ tactile images after he realised the importance of touch in Poe’s writing in general and this story in particular. The film is made without actors, and instead expresses the tortured mood of the original short
story through matter in agonising transformation. Here, Švankmajer mainly utilises his method of gestural sculpture, where touch makes a direct imprint of emotions on clay. The same method recurs in *Dimensions of Dialogue* (*Možnosti dialogu*, 1982), but Švankmajer’s ways of conjuring tactility are otherwise manifold and diverse, and not always intentional. For while there is an overall increased emphasis on tactile images in his films in the years directly after the tactile experiments, his striking ability to bring out the coarse materiality of objects and things can also be seen in both earlier and later films, and it is thus not entirely dependent on the methods he evolved during the experiments. Indeed, Švankmajer has said that his tactile research made him aware of how important touch had always been for him. There are moments of heightened tactility in early films such as *J S Bach – Fantasy in G Minor* (*J S Bach – Fantasia g-moll*, 1965), *Historia Naturae, Sutta* (1967), and not least *The Flat* (*Byt*, 1968), where the contents of a cramped flat come alive before the eyes and touch of the bewildered protagonist.

In the same vein, even when Švankmajer ceased to actively apply tactile methods to his films, they still abound with the sort of images that invite the viewer’s touch, from the putrefying objects in *Alice* (*Níco z Alenky*, 1987) to the animated animal tongues in *Lunacy* (*Šílení*, 2005), writhing and slimy to the touch of at least this spectator. This is further enhanced by his recurring use of extreme close-ups of body parts, objects, and surfaces, a stylistic device that emphasises textures and materiality.

A sampling of Švankmajer’s various methods can be found in the feature film *Conspirators of Pleasure* (*Spíklenci slasti*, 1996), where the results of the tactile experiments are incorporated to the arguably most literal degree. Here, several objects created as part of the tactile research are used as props. Among them are metal lids with rubbery appendages attached to one side, rolling pins with nails stuck in them, and a TV set equipped with several pairs of robotic hands, to mention but a few. In the diegesis, the objects are all designed by the main characters, the eponymous conspirators, as sexual objects made to satisfy their peculiar desires. In *Conspirators of Pleasure*, then, tactility is used in a very direct way, through the incorporation of the results of the experiments. Sometimes the film makes for an immediate corporeal impact, like when one of the characters kneads bread-crums into tiny balls which she then proceeds to suck into her nostrils through two thin rubber hoses, a sight which may cause uncomfortable sensations in the spectator’s own nostril area. One should also note Švankmajer’s use of sound to enhance the tactility of the images. Both aurally and visually, in *Conspirators of Pleasure* disgust and discomfort stand out as key features in creating tactile impressions, whether it is in the form of direct bodily identification with unpleasant actions or sensory impressions of matter, dead or living, that one is reluctant to touch.

**TACTILITY, FILM THEORY, AND THE AURA**

The premise of *Down to the Cellar* is not very complicated: a young girl is going down to the cellar of an apartment building to fetch some potatoes. This deceptively simple narrative takes on new meaning as Švankmajer skilfully shows events through the wide-eyed perspective of a child, turning the simple visit to the cellar into a nightmarish yet humorous journey with heightened sense impressions. The hazards of the everyday start even before the girl descends into the underworld: a leering man tries to give her candy when she walks down the stairs, and she has to make her way past a woman cleaning the floor who gives her a stern look. A black cat sits at the entrance to the cellar, as if to emphasise the passage as a gateway to another realm. Once in the semi-darkness of the cellar, things take on new life. Old shoes in storage turn out to have mouths, greedily snapping their leather jaws with pointy little teeth. A shovel starts shovelling coal on its own, suspended in the air. And the man from upstairs turns out to actually live in the cellar, where he lies on a bed filled with coal in lieu of a mattress. The woman from the stairway is also present, and is in the process of making an odd dough out of eggs and coal dust which she proceeds to bake. Once the girl has made her way past these oddities and reached the crate she came for, the potatoes turn out to have their own will, mockingly escaping her by rolling out of the crate and out of her basket. When she has finally managed to gather enough of them and is about to make her way back up the stairs, the black cat scares her; twitching, she drops the potatoes.
After a sullen look into the camera, she starts her descent into the cellar once again.

In *Down to the Cellar*, the imagination transforms reality. This is made all the more powerful by the highly material qualities of the film, and further enhanced by the way Švankmajer creates a feeling of tactility. The torn-down brick walls shrouded in darkness are almost there to the touch, something that is enhanced by Švankmajer’s frequent use of close-up shots. The way the woman stirs eggs and coal dust together to form a black dough invites the imagination into the tactile images: we may never have experienced a mixture of this sort, but it is still easy to imagine the feeling of the sticky raw eggs when they blend with the dry coal dust. Sound is highly important in creating an embodied experience of the cellar. There’s the sound of dripping water and a constant scraping noise in the background. When the camera lingers on dirty pipes, it is accompanied by a loud noise of flushing water. Most tellingly, when the shoes fight for the piece of bread, the sound of growling animals can be heard on the soundtrack. These are some of the means by which Švankmajer creates a surrealist tactility, which not only lets us experience the touch of things we would never have encountered in real life but also may trigger further analogical associations of the kind that structure the dream logic of the film.

The evocation of sense impressions through food and objects rhymes well with Laura Marks’s investigations of the embodied experience of intercultural cinema, even though they diverge in crucial ways. Generally, the films Marks writes about refer directly to sensuous aspects of reality and the memory of actual events, whereas Švankmajer is committed to engaging the viewer’s analogical associations and plays on memories of childhood to de-familiarise the world from the blasé and utilitarian adult viewpoint. There are some particularly fruitful points of connection between Marks’s theory and Švankmajer’s films.

One similarity is more obvious than the others. Part of the tactility in *Down to the Cellar* derives from images that can be described as “haptic,” in Marks’s definition of the term. She defines the haptic as a mode of visuality where the eyes almost function as organs of touch, which rhymes well with the sort of multisensory perception that Švankmajer seeks to stimulate. With the haptic, Marks, however, also refers to a specific type of image of concrete things that are too blurry or grainy for the spectator to get a good, sharp look at them. Instead, denied a view of the whole, one is drawn in closer to the surface, which invites a feeling of touch. In *Down to the Cellar*, when the girl first enters the cellar, the image is largely shrouded in darkness and the field of vision is further limited through close-ups and her flashlight that selectively illuminates parts of the walls and floor and the wooden boards from which the storage rooms are constructed. This denies the spectator an overview and instead forces attention to move to the details, bringing increased focus to surfaces and their materiality and textures. In her definition of the haptic image, Marks locates it primarily in grainy, semi-abstracted images, and she explicitly turns against any form of identification with the body parts on screen as a prerequisite for haptic images, claiming that the haptic bypasses identification and instead allows the spectator to become closer to matter itself. The final point is valid for parts of Švankmajer’s films as well. The extreme close-ups of dirty walls that can at times barely be made out make for haptic images of exactly this kind. Likewise, Švankmajer often conjures up similar feelings of touch through coarse textures and gesturally impressed clay and earth, as in the already mentioned *The Fall of the House of Usher*. As noted in this article, he has however never limited himself to one tactile method, but rather uses a panoply of them. Just as often, the register of the tactile is evoked through more traditional bodily identification, albeit with unusual elements. In *Conspirators of Pleasure*, the feeling of tactile sexual objects against the skin of the characters is evoked through the use of materials both coarse and gentle: nails and feathers, brushes and metal lids combine to heighten the tactile sensations. Indeed, against the emphasis on the haptic as it is conventionally defined, Švankmajer “shows us that tactility can also be promoted by the very opposite approach: through heightened clarity and sharpness of the image, which renders the object vividly real, virtually tangible.” Through unflatteringly sharp depictions of a world that constantly threatens, or promises, to metamorphose, Švankmajer brings the viewer closer to objects.

While images that can conventionally be called haptic provide part of the general emphasis on tactility in *Down to the Cellar*, other manifestations
of tactility are more important in the context of Švankmajer’s overarching surrealist ambition to stimulate the imagination through a sense of touch. To reach a theoretical understanding of this, we need to turn to other aspects of Marks’s writings that, I would argue, actually invite surrealist perspectives. Marks’s references to Benjamin’s notions of aura and the mimeticfaculty are particularly well suited when it comes to understanding surrealist tactility as a simultaneously embodied and imaginative way of relating to the world. This will furthermore, eventually, enable us to see Švankmajer’s films from the angle of the imagination of matter.

Benjamin was strongly affected by what he called the “profane illumination” of surrealism. He gave voice to this in an insightful and influential essay on the movement, and surrealism was one of the main sources of inspiration for his monumental, unfinished “Arcades Project.” Despite this, Benjamin saw his attraction to surrealism as a “dangerous fascination” and sought to keep a certain distance from the movement. Nevertheless, the affinities are far-reaching. Margaret Cohen calls Benjamin, alongside André Breton, an exponent of a “Gothic Marxism.” Michael Löwy has emphasised that this designation is most relevant in their shared fascination for enchantment, the marvellous, and pre-modern cultures. It is here, in the mutual emphasis on enchantment and its conditions in modernity, that we will find the vital links between Benjamin and surrealism that will allow us to rethink Marks’s theories.

Švankmajer has often claimed that he believes certain objects to be charged with events from the past and that we need to learn to listen to them, a conviction derived from his interest in esotericism. Marks writes about objects in intercultural cinema in a way that is similar to Švankmajer’s reasoning. Referring to Benjamin’s concept of the aura, she claims that the object becomes auratic through its capacity to remind us, if cryptically, of the past, of situations or phenomena buried deep down and brought to the surface through the violent mechanisms of involuntary recollection. In Down to the Cellar, Švankmajer’s use of the child’s perspective effects something similar. Through the eyes of the child, the world becomes strange and the objects in it are once again permeated with a threatening sense of mystery, as already exemplified by the shoes that grow teeth and the potatoes that come alive, so that the very cellar in itself turns into a mythical underworld. Marks also connects the aura of filmed objects with tactility; for her, the aura gives the object an almost physical presence that transforms it from something purely visual. Thus, it invites a sense of touch that can act as the very counterforce to Western civilisation’s emphasis on vision that both she and Švankmajer oppose.

Benjamin of course, in his most famous text, posited the aura as a negative, conservative property that could be destroyed by liberatory “mechanical reproduction.” Miriam Hansen has, however, located a fundamental ambivalence in Benjamin’s view of the aura. This, Hansen points out, is even evident in the artwork text itself, most teasingly in Benjamin’s cryptic reference to the highly auratic “blue flower” of German romanticism. Hansen argues that Benjamin, in fact, in both earlier and later writings, displays not only a fascination for the aura but also the hope that it can be reconciled with modernity and its secularised mode of experience, and that he found a key to this in the “profane illumination” of surrealism. For their part, surrealists have embraced the aura in no uncertain terms. In the collective 1987 statement “Hermetic Bird,” surrealists from Paris, Prague, Buenos Aires, London, and New York, including Švankmajer, argue that surrealism is in fact “an obstinate attempt to re-establish the magical aura of art as one could still find it in the so-called primitive societies or in the esoteric (hermetic) tradition.” Marks is more cautious in her hopes for the aura, but still sees in it, in this historical moment, the potential for an enchantment of the object that differs from the commodities we are otherwise surrounded with. Her view of the emergence of the aura in tactile images of objects thus links her writings with Švankmajer, even though Švankmajer’s aims to restore to art its magic capacities is a less timid and less ambivalent way of embracing the aura.

For Benjamin, auratic art and objects come alive to such an extent that they return the gaze of the viewer. In Švankmajer’s films, inert matter and objects seemingly come alive both within the diegesis and in front of the viewer, and their tactile properties are but one aspect of their auratic function. In Down to the Cellar, the phantoms of the childhood imagination materialise and not only strive to be touched or repel touch, but also
interact with the world, thus returning a gaze that is used to the mute response of an alienated world. In Marks’s view, these auratic moments have the capacity to blur the division between subject and object, a division that Švankmajer has similarly professed hope could be “overcome through tactilism, even if only in special cases rather than as a general principle.”

**ANALOGY AND THE MIMETIC FACULTY**

One of Švankmajer’s initial goals with the tactile experiments was to explore touch as an epistemological tool, and not least to liberate it from the utilitarian use in which it merely acts as a complement to sight. Here, Švankmajer found that touch has the capability to not only transmit information but also induce analogical associations—touch does indeed have an imagination. Laura Marks also discusses tactile epistemologies. She is mainly concerned with how film can evoke a sense of touch that rekindles the viewer’s knowledge about things and places, and that activates memories and reconnects the viewer with a past that may be half eclipsed by temporal or geographical distance or trauma. While she stresses how the viewer in certain cases has to fill in the blanks when memory is not sufficient, her theory of tactile epistemologies nevertheless does not explicitly involve the imagination. Tactile epistemology for Švankmajer is also rooted in memories and sense impressions of the real, but it unites these in new combinations, and in the process it invites the viewer to experience things never encountered in real life. The concrete depictions of fantastic events arguably enhance the viewer’s likelihood to associate further through analogical thinking. But how can we understand Švankmajer’s tactile epistemologies of things that can never actually be encountered in real life through film theory?

As part of the answer to this, the relationship between embodied film theory, surrealism, and Benjamin becomes clearer. For if the aura of objects is responsible for some of their tactile properties, it also plays a part in a more unexpected link between Marks, Benjamin, and surrealism: her use of the term “mimesis.” Marks claims that tactile epistemologies in moving images rely heavily on mimesis, since it designates an embodied relationship with matter and the world. Mimesis is a concept that is deeply rooted in the Western philosophical tradition, and in an aesthetic context it is most often used to designate the ideal of a faithful depiction of reality, or what for a couple of centuries has gone under the rubric of realism. Mimesis would seem far from compatible with a surrealist perspective, since surrealism is hostile to realism in its most basic forms. Ultimately, realist mimesis can even be equated with the descriptive identity principle the Czech surrealists wish to complement with analogical thinking. While Marks does not use mimesis so much as an aesthetic category as a tool to describe a form of film and spectatorship that works in tandem to bring the viewer closer to the phenomena depicted, she does not differentiate her use of mimesis from its signification of realism. The films she proceeds to analyse also relate to reality in a way that, together with her references to Eric Auerbach’s influential writings on mimesis as the representation of reality in Western literature, suggests a conflation of realism and an embodied mimesis.

There are nonetheless clues towards an understanding of mimesis as an embodied imagination also in Laura Marks’s theoretical construction, since she, in her discussion of tactile epistemologies, refers to Roger Caillois’s much-discussed “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia.” In this essay, written while Caillois was a young surrealist, he describes how certain insects mimic their environment so well that they cannot even distinguish each other from it. Caillois gives the terrifying and haunting example of leaf insects whose rugged looks are caused by the fact that they start eating from each other, since the leaves they mimic form their very own sustenance. For Caillois, this shows that nature has its own propensity for a dark form of anti-utilitarian poetry. The symbologist René Alleau has even more clearly shown the roots of analogically working mimesis in the physical environment, something that strengthens the connection between the imagination and the environment that is necessary for the embodied tactile imagination to be a working possibility. Analogical thinking and the sort of mimetic behaviour that is related to it comprise, Alleau claims, a vital survival strategy for human and animal alike. It is furthermore an activity that indeed unites the mind and the surrounding world, much like in surrealist notions. Alleau writes that:
We should not separate humans, as symbolizing animals, from our concrete, corporeal, and material conditions, our daily existence. Too often, attempts are made to forget these connections; we consider only the relationship of symbolism to cultural, artistic, religious, and initiatory life, or even to individual and collective psychology. Although we should not deny the obvious importance of these relationships, they are not the first, original conditions of the analogical process—which comes from a far-off and profound source that is purely experiential and common to all living beings.  

If we turn directly to Benjamin, we can further rethink mimesis in Marks in a way that is revelatory in its compatibility with a surrealist outlook, and which gives an added emphasis to the analogical imagination’s potential role in tactile epistemology. 

In his brief text “On the Mimetic Faculty,” Benjamin defines his own experiential take on mimesis through examples of both modern phenomena, such as a child acting like an airplane, and ancient ones, such as the reading of entrails, which requires humans to believe that nature is full of messages to be deciphered, and interpretation of the night sky, which posits a relation between the stars and events on Earth. Mimesis in this account has little to do with aesthetics, and even less with its use in the realist tradition; instead, it is a way of establishing relations between distant phenomena. Margaret Cohen explicitly links the mimetic faculty with surrealism when she points out that Benjamin’s definition of surrealism as “profane illumination” echoes in the text, since Benjamin writes that similarity emerges “like a flash.” Miriam Hansen has also emphasized how “it seems safe not to expect anything resembling a realistic concept of representation” in Benjamin’s mimesis. In her posthumous book *Cinema and Experience*, she develops this further, and states that for Benjamin, mimesis signifies “a relational practice” and “a mode of access to the world involving sensuous, somatic, and tactile, that is, embodied, forms of perception and cognition; a noncoercive engagement with the other that resists dualistic conceptions of subject and object.” Mimesis is then highly involved in the abolition of the divide between subject and object that Švankmajer strives for when activating the imagination of touch, but this mimesis is far from the realist tradition.

In modernity, Benjamin claims, the mimetic faculty has waned, so that, as he expresses it in an earlier draft of the text “The Doctrine of the Similar,” “[t]he perceived world (Merkwelt) of modern human beings seems to contain infinitely fewer of those magical correspondences than the world of the ancient people or even of primitive peoples.” Benjamin did not, however, believe that the mimetic faculty had disappeared altogether, but that it had been transformed through technology. Hansen interprets the modern mimetic faculty along lines that are relevant for surrealist cinema in general and Švankmajer’s films in particular, when she writes that the mimetic capacities of film rest “less on the principle of sameness . . . than on their ability to render the familiar strange, to store and reveal similarities that are ‘nonsensuous’, not otherwise visible to the human eye.” One can certainly claim that Švankmajer’s minute attention to the life of the most seemingly insignificant material phenomena in *Down to the Cellar* lives up to this hope for the modern mimetic faculty.

The surrealist ambition to restore analogical thinking, together with its unabashed fascination for magic and pre-modern ways of relating to the world, nonetheless means that Benjamin’s description of the pre-modern mimetic faculty is most relevant in this context, since it presupposes a relation with the world that is associative and interpretative. Benjamin’s equation of the mimetic faculty with analogies and correspondences, with magic and interpretation, is remarkably in tune with surrealist poetics and its will towards the re-enchantment of the world. Just like surrealism prides itself on trying to restore the aura, it can then be seen as a way to restore the mimetic faculty, not least due to its active interpretation of nature and the surrounding world, here posited as an ancient way of relating to the world which is undergoing radical transformations in modernity. It is this ancient way of interpreting the world and establishing a new, contradictory totality that surrealism strives for in its attempts to find the keys to decipher the cryptogram that is the world.

Benjamin’s definition of the ancient mimetic faculty shows it to be an embodied relation with the world, and surrealist analogical mimesis points
the way towards a new form of embodied imagination. As already stated, the surrealist search for analogies and correspondences is based on an intermingling of mind and matter. Michael Richardson sees this as a way to work against the “Cartesian notion of reality based on an identity of sensation and image.”

Seen through the mimetic faculty, the sense impressions can be understood as just the beginning of this sensation, which is then analogically elaborated upon by the embodied imagination. In fact, as seen through embodied film theory’s stress on the multisensory character of the film experience, Švankmajer’s films make it appear as if the modern mimetic faculty once again assumes a decidedly direct sensory nature—no longer simply nonsensuous, it actually creates bodily sensations even though physically distant. His work with tactility can thus be seen as part of a dialectical move towards a new synthesis of the ancient and the modern versions of the mimetic faculty.

Analogical associations, then, as shown by Alleau, Benjamin, and surrealism, do not signify a purely mental process, but one that is also embodied, grounded in human interactions with the surrounding world. The prominent tactility in Down to the Cellar means that these moving images are not purely audiovisual, but a case of an embodied form of analogical thinking. Seeing these surrealist theories of the imagination through Benjamin’s writings on the mimetic faculty adds a highly sensory emphasis to them. Susan Buck-Morss explicitly connects this sort of mimetic practice with an attempt to re-establish “the connection between imagination and physical innervation that in bourgeois culture has been snapped apart,” something that Margaret Cohen relates to Benjamin’s and surrealism’s mutual ambition to “overcome the modern alienation of the senses.”

With this elaboration of Marks’s analysis of tactile epistemology, we can see how Švankmajer’s films are involved in a dual liberatory project of activating an imagination of the senses and freeing them from their reductively utilitarian, habitual everyday use. This, as well as its relation to the pre-modern aspects of both Benjamin’s and surrealism’s thinking, can be further elucidated by Gaston Bachelard’s writings on “the imagination of matter,” which furthermore provides us with some keys to the importance of the transformations of matter in the films of Švankmajer.

**THE IMAGINATION OF TACTILE MATTER**

Švankmajer’s use of stop-motion animation means not only that he can make the most unusual, otherwise inert things come alive—he frequently animates meat, skeletal body parts, and furniture—but also that more undifferentiated matter—dirt, clay, and coal—can transform into solid but often temporary shapes, always on the verge of new and unexpected metamorphoses. This is closely connected with the locations and props he uses, even when they are not animated: the environment in itself is highlighted in its materiality. This depiction of the independent life of the surrounding world and the general focus on matter closely aligns Švankmajer with what Gaston Bachelard has called “the imagination of matter.” Bachelard shows how the elements infuse and structure the imagination, manifesting itself in poetic images of matter that work through the principle of analogy. In his first book on the imagination of matter, The Psychoanalysis of Fire (1938), Bachelard, as a philosopher of science, is mainly concerned with how the scientific mind can purge itself of these pre-scientific conceptions of matter—for even though repressed, these are potent and strong, and if the scientist is not wary, he may find himself a victim of them. In the subsequent books on the topic—Water and Dreams (1942), Air and Dreams (1943), Earth and Reveries of Will (1948), and Earth and Reveries of Repose (1948)—Bachelard himself appears to have been seduced by the elements and the attendant imagination of matter. His studies contain ever more breathless and beautiful descriptions of the many ways in which matter and the elements make their presence known, analogically or directly, in poetic and pre-scientific thinking—his wide range of examples include everything from alchemical manuscripts and Friedrich Nietzsche to modernist literature and Edgar Allan Poe.

My aim here is not to argue for a direct and exact—identical—relation between Bachelard’s view of the imagination and Švankmajer’s thinking. Rather, I wish to use the imagination of matter as a tool to further elucidate the workings of the imagination of touch, particularly from the viewpoint of Švankmajer’s deployment of poetic images and their interaction with a diegetic world of heightened materiality. First, it can nevertheless
be worth dwelling on some fundamental similarities in attitude, not least since Bachelard’s thinking provides Švankmajer’s views of epistemology and the imagination with a more solid philosophical grounding.

In Švankmajer’s critique of the diminished capacity for analogical thinking in Western civilisation, he has stated that this relegates analogical thinking to the unconscious. For Bachelard, the imagination of matter is a residue of precisely an old propensity for analogical thinking, to the extent that he calls it the unconscious of scientific thinking. Hence, the many expressions of the imagination of matter demonstrate that there is an “alchemist in the engineer.” This means that unlike scientific thinking, the imagination of matter is not applied but strictly anti-utilitarian. One telling example is Bachelard’s sharp dismissal of theories that the constellations were invented as a means to aid navigation—for him, any utilitarian uses of such pre-scientific ways of understanding the world have to come after their construction, a mere side effect of the imagination’s desire to infer meaning to the world. Bachelard instead regards the discovery of the constellations as the result of the constant search for imaginative meaning, the dynamic interpretation of the world that results from the imagination’s active intrusion upon it. This rhymes well with Švankmajer’s, and surrealism’s, wish to render the world meaningful through poetic interpretation, and in the light of this, it seems that it is precisely the alchemist within the engineer that is the contemporary human that Švankmajer wishes to give multisensory voice to.

For Bachelard, the elements are in fact so potent that he calls them veritable “hormones of the imagination,” by which he means that the very awareness of them is enough to incite hordes of images. The sensory experience of the elements is thus merely the starting point for their life in the imagination of matter, where they are continuously transformed in a dynamic dialectic between reality and the imagination. In Bachelard’s view, this dynamic is at work in both the writer, or in this case the filmmaker, and the reader, or in this case viewer, so that the elements first infuse the poetry and then continue to work through the receiver.

How, then, are the elements more specifically manifested in Down to the Cellar? The film is most closely and obviously related to earth. The murky, enclosed space contrasts sharply with the bright staircase above ground. Even though both in their own ways are threatening spaces, the cellar is also the realm of dream logic and the fantastic, and with them events that have no place in the light of day. The cellar can then, in a fairly obvious manner, be construed as a locus of the unconscious, something that is further emphasised by the black cat, a frequent symbol of the unconscious in Švankmajer’s films, that deviously seems to lead the girl’s way down there, and then, at the end of the film, scares her so that she drops her hard-earned potatoes and is stuck there for another attempt at fetching them. In this case, however, the cat can also be interpreted as an inverted, diabolical version of the white rabbit from Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland (1865), a figure that would later take on a somewhat more sinister quality in Švankmajer’s adaptation of the book, Alice. The cellar is then also a subterranean wonderland, something that serves to emphasise the many interpretative possibilities inherent in the film, but also shows that Švankmajer here effects an almost archetypal descent into the underworld.

In Bachelard’s writings, the cellar is closely related to the element of earth, as a manifestation of the archetypal image of the cave. In Down to the Cellar, the cellar is in itself charged with an imaginative force that makes it into a particularly potent, modern example of this archetype. It is, however, important to note that, as Švankmajer himself has pointed out, there are culturally specific inflections related to the layout of the cellar and the central place that coal takes in it. Here, then, there is a dialectic between the archetypal and the modern and culturally specific. In line with this, Bachelard shows how the cave is often displayed as simultaneously threatening and comforting, a place for both nightmares and warm reveries. The latter dimension could be argued to lie dormant in Down to the Cellar, since there is a definite enchantment to the events that take place, no matter how dark.

Within this manifestation of earth, Švankmajer unleashes a series of images that are also related to the element. The scattered earth on the floor, the coal in both the man’s bed and the woman’s kitchen, and the potatoes that grow underground and are kept in the doubly dark interior of the
cellar and the closed casket are all manifestations of the imagination of earth. The hormonal abilities of the element are then displayed in the unlikely transformations of matter, substitutions of things, and collisions of substances that take place. Švankmajer here also enhances the propensity for analogical associations by turning matter itself into the kind of analogical poetic images that André Breton describes as “flashes from the lost mirror,”86 images that through analogy clash and unite separate phenomena to create a poetic spark.87 This kind of merging of distant phenomena can be seen in the absurd cakes baked with coal and eggs, and the bed that is made with coal instead of a mattress and a blanket. Seen through the imagination of matter, Down to the Cellar, however, shows that the analogies so valued by Švankmajer work not only through the poetic images or the fantastic depictions of for instance shoes that suddenly have mouths, but also through the very locations and the matter of the everyday as it is estranged and enchanted when put in dialectical relation with the imagination. As noted in this chapter, the haptic images and the emphasis on the coarse materiality of the surroundings create a particular sense of touch, which is enhanced when seen through the perspective of the imagination of matter. The melding of substances primarily invites a tactile perception that not only appeals to touch but also activates a multisensory imagination. The unlikely merging of raw eggs and dirt is something most people have probably not encountered, yet it’s easy to imagine the sticky feeling of the resulting dough, against hands and tongue alike. Here, then, the film also speaks to the other senses.

As stated before, Švankmajer is interested in liberating not merely his own imagination but also that of the viewer. His tactile experiments largely consisted of registering the participants’ own impressions of the artworks and objects, and the associations they derived from them, and so showed the associative potential of touch. The mimetic faculty shows one facet of an embodied analogical thinking, which reveals a potential surrealist take on the tactile epistemologies Laura Marks theorises. Another part of the answer to how this works can be found in the very materiality of the films, their anchoring of the fantastic in raw reality, and its material properties as viewed through the logic of the imagination, and this is what aligns them so closely with Bachelard’s thinking. Because seen through the writings of Bachelard, these dynamic images of earth are not just dependent on the director’s imagination of matter. They are also likely to activate the viewer’s own associations of the element. Here, the tactility of the images only enhances the potential for further analogical imaginings. For Bachelard also favours images that have a multisensory impact, to the degree that he writes that the ideal image should seduce us through all our senses and even lead us away from the sense that is most obviously engaged.88 In the resulting realism of the imaginary, the subject and object are united,89 and humans are reintegrated with the world through their own analogical imagination of the life of matter and the elements. Bachelard’s writings thus forcefully support Švankmajer’s conviction that tactility can activate the imagination.

Notes

1. Michael Richardson, Surrealism and Cinema (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 134.
2. See Vivian Sobchack, Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Laura Marks, The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
3. For a discussion of the group’s activities up until 1951, see Lenka Bydzovaká, “Against the Current: The Story of the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia,” Papers of Surrealism no. 3 (2005), http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal3/acrobat_files/lenka.pdf. See also Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, “Years of Long Days: Surrealism in Czechoslovakia,” Third Text vol. 10, no. 36 (1996): 15–28.
4. František Dryje, “Formative Meetings,” in Anima Animus Animation: Evášvankmajerjan: Between Film and Free Expression (Prague: Arbor Vitae, 1997), 10–11.
5. Tereza Stehlíková, “Tangible Territory: Inviting the Body into the Experience of Moving Image,” PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, 2012, 127.
6. Fijalkowski, “Invention, Imagination, Interpretation: Collective Activity in the Contemporary Czech and Slovak Surrealist Group,” Papers of Surrealism no. 3 (2005): 6–7, http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal3/acrobat_files/Fijalkowski.pdf.
7. See Fijalkowski, “Invention, Imagination, Interpretation,” 6–7; Cathryn Vasseleu, “Tactile Animation: Haptic Devices and the Švankmajer Touch,” Senses & Society 4, no. 2 (2009): 144.
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8. Jan Švankmajer, _Hmat a imaginace: Taktní experimentace_ 1974–1983 (Prague: Kozoroh, 1994/1983). For an extended discussion of the book, see Vasseleu, “Tactile Animation,” 144–148.

9. See e.g. Vratislav Effenberger, “The Raw Cruelty of Life and the Cynicism of Fantasy,” in _Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture_, vol. 6, ed. Ladislav Matejka (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1987), 439.

10. Bruno Solarik, “Golden Silence,” in _Other Air: The Group of Czech-Slovak Surrealists 1990–2011_ (Prague: Sdružení Analogonu, 2012), 41.

11. André Breton, “Surrealism and Painting” (1928), in _Surrealism and Painting_, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002/1965), 46.

12. Breton, _Communicating Vessels_, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997/1932), 86.

13. Breton, “The Automatic Message” (1934), in _Break of Day_, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Mark Polizzotti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 143.

14. Richardson, “Afterword,” in _The Myth of the World: The Dedalus Book of Surrealism 2_, ed. Michael Richardson (Cambridge: Dedalus, 1994), 287–288.

15. Švankmajer, “J. E. Kostelec,” in _Jan Švankmajer: Transmutation of the Senses_ (Prague: Stedoevropská galerie a nakladatelství, 2004), 71.

16. Solarik, “The Walking Abyss: Perspectives on Contemporary Czech and Slovak Surrealism,” _Papers of Surrealism_ no. 3 (2005): 5, http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal3/acrobat_files/Solarik.pdf.

17. See e.g. Marks, _The Skin of the Film_; Paul Stoller, _Sensuous Scholarship_ (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

18. Švankmajer, “The Magic Ritual of Tactile Inauguration,” trans. Gaby Dowdell, _Afterimage_ no. 13 (1987): 43.

19. See the catalogue _Invention, Imagination, Interpretation: A Retrospective Exhibition of the Group of Czech and Slovak Surrealists_ (Swansea: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, 1998). I would like to thank Ellie Dawkins at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery for kindly providing me with photocopies of this catalogue.

20. Breton, “Ascendant Sign” (1948), in _Free Rein_, trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d’Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995/1935), 105.

21. Effenberger, “Švankmajer on the Fall of the House of Usher,” _Afterimage_ no. 13 (1987): 36.

22. Alena Nádvorníková, “Surrealist Cognition,” _Analogon_ no. 44–45 (2005): xiii–xiv.

23. Effenberger, “Interpretation as Creative Activity,” in Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia, “Surrealism as a Collective Adventure,” special issue, _Dunganon_ no. 4 (n.d [1986]): n.p.

24. Breton, “On Surrealism in Its Living Works” (1953), in _Manifestoes of Surrealism_, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 302–303.

25. Breton, “Second Manifesto of Surrealism” (1930), in _Manifestoes of Surrealism_, 123–124.

26. Michael Brooke, “Free Radical,” _Vertigo Magazine_ vol. 3, no. 5 (2007), http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-5-spring-2007/free-radical/.

27. Ian Walker, _City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris_ (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 23. See also Brooke, “Free Radical”; Sarah Metcalf, “Black Cats Are Our Unconscious: An Interview with Jan Švankmajer,” _Phosphor: A Surrealist Luminescence_ no. 3 (2011): 57.

28. Effenberger, “The Raw Cruelty of Life,” 439.

29. Peter Hames, “Interview with Jan Švankmajer,” in _The Cinema of Jan Švankmajer: Dark Alchemy_, 2nd ed., Peter Hames (London: Wallflower, 2008), 117–118.

30. Quoted in Stehliková, “Tangible Territory,” 127.

31. Sobchack, _Carnal Thoughts_, 76.

32. Ibid., 70.

33. Švankmajer, “Tactilism,” in _Švankmajer in Wales: The Communication of Dreams: An Exhibition by Jan and Eva Švankmajer_ (Newtown: Oriel 31, 1992), 45; Vasseleu, “Tactile Animation,” 150. See also Dagmar Motycka Weston, “Down to the Cellar: The Architectural Setting as an Embodied Topography of the Imagination in Two Films by Jan Švankmajer,” _Papers of Surrealism_ no. 9 (2011), 15, http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal9/acrobat_files/Dagmar%20Weston29_11_11.pdf.

34. See Jonathan L. Owen, _Avant-Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties_ (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 196.

35. Švankmajer, quoted in Stehliková, “Tangible Territory,” 127.

36. This is also in line with Jennifer Barker’s view that stop-motion animation is particularly well suited to conjure a sense of tactility. See Jennifer M. Barker, _The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 136.

37. Marks, _The Skin of the Film_, 162–163.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 171.

40. See Antonia Lant, “Haptic Cinema,” _October_ 74 (1995), 45–73.

41. Stehliková, “Tangible Territory,” 45.

42. See Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intellectualsia” (1929), in _Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings_, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 2007), 177–192.

43. Michael Löwy, “Walter Benjamin and Surrealism: The Story of a Revolutionary Spell,” _Radical Philosophy_ no. 80 (1996): 17.

44. Ibid., 17.

45. Margaret Cohen, _Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995/1993), 1ff.

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46. Löwy, “Walter Benjamin and Surrealism,” 18.
47. E.g. in Švankmajer, “Gestural Sculpture,” in Animus Animus Animation, 74.
48. Marks, The Skin of the Film, 81.
49. Ibid., 140.
50. Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), in Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 217–251.
51. Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: ‘The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology’,” New German Critique no. 40 (1987): 204.
52. Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience,” 192–194.
53. Vincent Bounoure et al., “Hermetic Bird” (1987), in Surrealism against the Current: Tracts and Declarations, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London: Pluto, 2001), 79.
54. Marks, The Skin of the Film, 121.
55. Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience,” 188.
56. Marks, The Skin of the Film, 140.
57. Fijalkowski, “Invention, Imagination, Interpretation,” 7.
58. See Marks, The Skin of the Film, 138–145.
59. Ibid., 50–51.
60. Ibid., 138.
61. Realism is, of course, not easily defined. For a nuanced discussion, see Robert Stam, Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992/1985), 10–17.
62. See e.g. Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924), in Manifestoes of Surrealism, 8.
63. Roger Caillou, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia” (1935), in The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillou Reader, ed. Claudine Frank, trans. Frank and Camille Naish (Dumfries: Duke University Press, 2003), 91–103.
64. René Alleau, The Primal Force in Symbol: Understanding the Language of Higher Consciousness, trans. Ariel Godwin (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2009/1976), 5.
65. Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” in Reflections, 336.
66. Hansen, Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 147.
67. Cohen, Profane Illumination, 41.
68. Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience,” 195.
69. Hansen, Cinema and Experience, 147.
70. Benjamin, “The Doctrine of the Similar,” New German Critique no. 17 (1979): 66.
71. Hansen, Cinema and Experience, 155.
72. Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” 334. See also Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 267.
73. Breton, “Surrealism in Its Living Works,” 303.
74. Richardson, “Afterword,” 287–288.
75. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing, 270.
76. Cohen, “The Art of Profane Illumination,” Visual Anthropology Review vol. 10, no. 1 (1994): 47.
77. Gaston Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, trans. Alan C. M. Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968/1938), 3.
78. A revealing example can be found in his lyrical description of the oneiric beauty, and continued poetic relevance, of alchemy. See Bachelard, Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay on Images of Interiority, trans. Mary McAlister Jones (Dallas: Dallas Institute, 2011/1948), 236–237.
79. Effenberger, “Švankmajer on The Fall of the House of Usher,” 36.
80. Bachelard, Psychoanalysis of Fire, 10.
81. Ibid., 4.
82. Bachelard, Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement, trans. Edith R. Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute, 1988/1943), 175–177.
83. Ibid., 11.
84. Metcalf, “Black Cats Are Our Unconscious,” 58.
85. Bachelard, Earth and Reveries of Repose, 133–135.
86. Breton, “Ascendant Sign,” 105.
87. See also Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 20.
88. Bachelard, Earth and Reveries of Repose, 60.
89. Ibid., 66.