

equipped with oversized heads made out of a stable armature, covered in wet, light brownish-greyish clay (fig. 13). The pair appear to be androgynous while the faces are connected in the area where one would assume a mouth. The hands are slowly scanning the partner's head with its lumps and bumps, and clay is drying on body parts and clothing, while the sound is a recording of the smacking noise of the material. The couple are connected by the soft substance, but separated at the



Fig. 13. William Cobbing, *The Kiss 2*, 2017, video

same time; there is curiosity and pleasure involved, but all the actions seem to stay on the surface. This performance, as well as *Slap & Tickle*, *Phantom Limb*, or *Stuck in the Middle* (all 2023), where two similar figures explore each other with oversized clay hands – *A Mess of Help* and *on and on* (both 2023) features a third person – recalls Jan Švankmajer's short film *Možnosti dialogu* (Dimensions of Dialogue) of 1982.²⁶ In the first part of this claymation, *Dialog věčný* (Substantial Dialogue), we see two heads, reminding their audience of Arcimboldo's paintings, assembled out of things. They are constantly devouring and regurgitating each other, creating clay out of everyday garbage. The following *Dialog vášnivý* (Passionate Dialogue) shows a heterosexual couple, kissing and embracing each other. They become formless, flow into each other, body parts appear in this sea of clay, and in the end the pair are separated again while a little, childlike lump lies on the table. It is not met with love but with rejection, while the argument becomes heated, violent, and the two



Fig. 14. Jan Švankmajer, *Možnosti dialogu* (Dimensions of Dialogue), 1982, film

figures are destroying each other (fig. 14). In the last episode, *Dialog vyčerpávající* (Exhaustive Dialogue), the audience sees two older male heads forming themselves out of clay. They continue to produce items such as a pencil and a sharpener and the dialogue seems possible, until it becomes dysfunctional and we witness *Materialmüdigkeit*, material fatigue. Švankmajer was commenting on the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic under communist rule and during the process of what was called 'normalisation'. This period saw arrests and the imprisonment of people opposing the regime as well as other kinds of repression, while pressure was mounting to reform society. William Cobbing's social clay is more ambivalent, varying the subject of *The Kiss 2* in several other works. In *Long Distance* (2018) a cocoon-like clay tube is keeping bodies apart, while in *dumbmud* (2023) two full-body clay creatures are able to separate themselves from each other (fig. 15). This clay does not produce standardised bodies or cause the breakdown of communication, but it is, with its very own physical deadpan humour, commenting on



Fig. 15. William Cobbing, *Long Distance*, 2018, video