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The Exquisite Corpse: Disarticulations of the Artificial Female

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THE EXQUISITE CORPSE:
DISARTICULATIONS OF THE ARTIFICIAL FEMALE

by

Allison de Fren

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Abstract

This dissertation examines artificial women in literature, art, and cinema from the myth of Pygmalion to the present, as well as the dialogue between such fictional beings and their real-life counterparts, from historical automata to the current development of life-sized silicone lovedolls and gendered robots. Whether real or imaginary, the artificial female tends to get theorized in relation to the Pygmalionesque desire for either perfection or perfect versimilitude; in contrast, this dissertation focuses on artificial female bodies that resist both realism and humanity and whose “mechanicity” is foregrounded. It argues that the “failed Galatea” expresses a different set of desires than the successful one, for she remains a borderline site suspended between contradictory states—the human and technological, aesthetic and scientific, animate and inanimate, perfection and imperfection, exteriority and interiority, fantasy and reality—and it interrogates the ambivalences engendered by such vacillation, as well as the particular meanings that accumulate around artificiality in relation to gender. For example, the “artificial” artificial female body is often pitted against classical and normative conventions around love and beauty; it is used as a cipher for that which cannot be seen or represented, but only intuited; and it opens a space for the imagination and play, both in the sense of what children do with

dolls and in the sense of linguistics or semiotics as that which decenters structure. Such roles are explored within a range of core texts—including Villiers d’Isle-Adam’s novel *L’Eve Future* (*Future Eve*, 1886), E.T.A. Hoffmann’s short stories “Automata” (1814) and “Der Sandmann” (The Sandman 1816), and Fritz Lang’s 1927 film *Metropolis*—and parallels are drawn to contemporary works from *The Stepford Wives* (1975) and *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007) to the Realdoll (a life-sized silicone lovedoll currently available for purchase on the internet) and ASFR (alt.sex.fetish.robots), an internet fetish community devoted to fantasies around robotic women.

Introduction

The fantasy of bringing to life the perfect artificially constructed female dates back to the myth of Pygmalion, most familiar in the work of Ovid. Part of his *Metamorphoses*—a collection of classic myths, all with the common theme of transformation—the Roman poet describes a protean world in which all things are rendered digital in the hands of the gods. Pygmalion prays to the goddess Venus to bring to life Galatea, the woman that he has carved from ivory who is so perfect that he has fallen in love with her. Venus grants his wish and Galatea becomes flesh; she and Pygmalion are married and the two live happily ever after.

Pygmalion's desire to animate his beautiful statue, as well as his underlying motivations (the hardened sexuality of the Propoetides), strikes a familiar chord in a city like Los Angeles, where living women are pumped full of silicone and silicone lovedolls are strikingly realistic. Indeed, the legacy of Pygmalion survives on the outskirts of the city in the factory of the company Abyss Creations, the maker of a silicone lovedoll called Realdoll, where life-sized artificial female bodies dangle

from what look like meat hooks, waiting to be made up, clothed, and sent to their expectant partners. It seems only a matter of time before a Realdoll walks out of the factory on her own two legs, and that is precisely what David Levy predicts in his book, *Love + Sex with Robots* (2007). According to Levy, we are within only a half-century of a science fiction future in which sexual intimacy between humans and their robot companions is so commonplace that society will need to address the issues around robot prostitution and human/robot marriage. An outgrowth of his doctoral research in artificial intelligence at the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands and his dissertation, *Intimate Relationships with Artificial Partners*, Levy broaches a topic that has lurked beneath the rapid advances in robotics technology and artificial intelligence at research institutions and corporations around the world, but that is rarely discussed in such settings.¹ His predictions are unapologetically utopian, and while he draws from research in a wide range of fields including sociology, psychology, and sexology, much of his argument is predicated on studies in attachment theory: in essence, that we have intimate relationships with our pets, our cars, our computers,

¹ Perhaps in response to such evasion, in 2001, former students at the MIT media lab launched a parody site for the Erotic Computation Group, which mimicked the design of a standard MIT web page (to such an extent that a great deal of commentary appeared on the web, taking the group seriously). The group's directive was, so the site claimed, to study "the implications of modern technology on human eroticism in its myriad forms," as well as how to "broaden the range of human amative expression." (I believe that the site no longer exists.)

and so on, all of which become personally meaningful and unique extensions of ourselves (whether or not they were bought on sale or look like a thousand others), and if such nonhuman objects can inspire deep feelings of attachment, then it is far from unreasonable to imagine sexual intimacy with and love for a machine that looks and responds like a human.

Indeed, whether or not human behavior can be extrapolated from animal studies, there have been noteworthy experiments that use robotic surrogates to study the mating habits of various animal species. For example, Gail Patricelli, an ecologist at the University of California at Davis, has studied the unique courting ritual of the male sage grouse using a grouse fembot with a hidden camera.² Patricelli's current research expands on her doctoral work in biology on the Australian bowerbird, in which she and colleagues in the engineering department at The University of Maryland built a female bowerbird-bot, whose signals of consent, such as beak tilting and wing fluffing, were realistic enough to prompt more than one male to attempt to mate with her, and in the trials for the experiment, a fight between two males for her attention became so violent that her head was accidentally knocked off. Such an image brings to mind the explosive fembot decoys in a range of media,

² She has posted a good deal of her footage on youtube; see, for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eY25pisBDmg>

from *Dr. Goldfoot* and *Austin Powers* to *Bugs Bunny*. However, it also invokes what many find most disturbing about human/robot sexuality, which is not the idea of an android so human that we can't tell the difference (an idea that brings to mind yet another series of media images), but that human sexuality is so programmatic, indeed so robotic, that it can be reduced to a series of triggers whose artificiality is inconsequential (think silicone breasts with artificial everything else attached). This, in fact, seems to be what David Levy is driving at via a series of studies, anecdotes, and hard data on human relational attitudes toward a range of technologies from vibrators and tamagotchis³ to artificial intelligence applications, all of which he suggests will add up to *Love + Sex with Robots* when organized into a totality that looks and acts like we do.

However, if Levy's exhaustive research indicates anything, it is the human capacity for investing emotionally in inanimate objects irrespective of the teleology of human-looking and acting robots. And if the humanoid robotics industry in Japan (currently the only corporate-backed effort to create robotic companions) is any indication, then verisimilitude is not only unnecessary, but may actually interfere with our ability to love robots. Levy (perhaps purposefully) overlooks the

³ A virtual pet created by the Japanese toy company Bandai, which sold in the millions in the mid-1990s.

“theory of the uncanny valley,” which has not only served as a central tenet of Japanese humanoid robotics, but also recently become a popular topic in relation to computer animation, gaming, and, in particular, CGI effects within cinema. Originally espoused in 1970 by the man considered the father of industrial robots in Japan, Masahiro Mori, the theory of *bukimi no tani* or the “uncanny valley” borrows from the essay “The Psychology of the Uncanny” by Ernst Jentsch, which theorizes the Uncanny as based in the confusion between the human and artificial (later critiqued by Freud in his more famous essay, “The Uncanny”). Mori’s theory suggests that when anthropomorphic creations are realistic enough to instill expectations of human movement, behavior, and appearance, but still fall short in some significant way, they evoke a creepy or uncanny feeling, an idea illustrated in a graph, which charts the degree of realism or humanness achieved (both in terms of motion and appearance) and the resultant sensation evoked (see figure 1).⁴

At one end of the graph are toys and puppets, while at the other end is perfect verisimilitude, both ends of which, according to Mori, inspire various degrees of pleasure. However, the graph dips dramatically into the unpleasurable uncanny valley between these two points, where one finds prosthetics and, at the lowest point on the graph, the moving

⁴ Masahiro Mori, “Bukimi no tani” (The uncanny valley), translated by K. F. MacDorman & T. Minato in *Energy*, 7(4) (1970), 33-35.

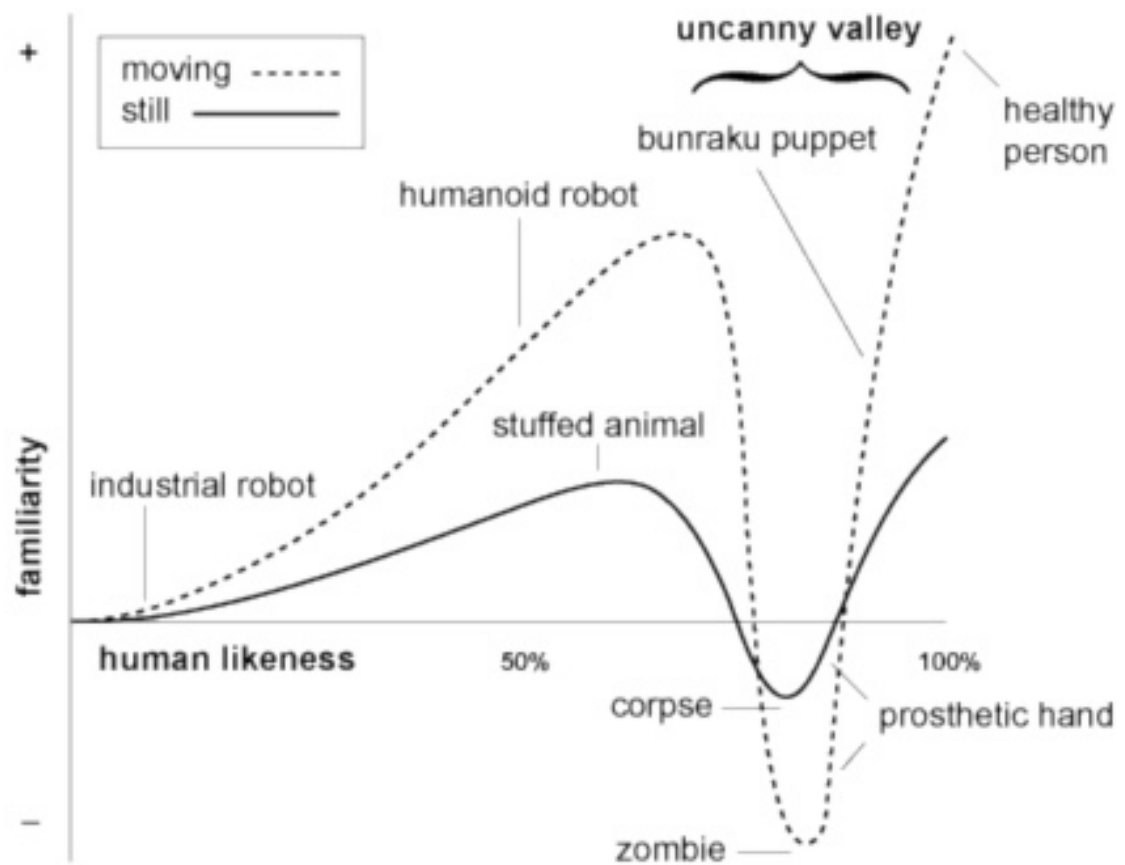


Figure 1. The Uncanny Valley

corpse or zombie. In no small part, due to the theory of the “uncanny valley,” the majority of humanoid robots in Japan have a distinctly anti-realistic, toy-like appearance (see figure 2). The theory, however, is also grounded in traditional Japanese aesthetics as influenced by Buddhism, which tend to emphasize evocation over description, achieved via the interplay of opposite states—such as light and shadow or sound and



Figure 2. Honda's ASIMO (humanoid robot)

silence.⁵ Such aesthetics are evident in a variety of cultural forms, from bunraku puppet theater to anime and, perhaps most significantly, an early form of mechanical human that dates back to the Edo period called *karakuri ningyo*, which many consider a precursor to present-day humanoid robots⁶. A small puppet-like figure, the *karakuri* would travel across the room with a teacup on a small serving tray and, after the cup was taken, it would wait for its return to the tray, after which it would turn and travel in the opposite direction (see figure 3). Its subtle and abstract motion influenced bunraku and *noh* drama, each of which uses an economy of expression to achieve a maximum emotional impact, reinforcing the idea, expressed by Mori's theory, that the deepest chords of humanity are better struck through a dedicated artificiality than a simulation of humanness.⁷

The “theory of the uncanny valley” not only points to cultural differences in ideas about artificial humanity and its representations, but it throws into relief an assumption about realism that has gone largely

⁵ Jun'ichiro Tanizaki explains traditional Japanese aesthetics of beauty in the following way: “There is an old song that says ‘the brushwood we gather—stack it together, it makes a hut, pull it apart, a field once more.’ Such is our way of thinking—we find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates.” Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1977), 29-30.

⁶ When I attended Robodex in Yokohama, at the time (2003), the world's only humanoid robot exposition, there was an exhibit devoted to *karakuri*.

⁷ Such minimalist aesthetics are evident not only in the robotics industry in Japan, but also the *lovedoll* industry (the oldest and largest *sexdoll* industry in the world, purportedly controlled by the *yakuza*, the Japanese mafia) in which the dolls are distinctly doll-like (as opposed to *Realdolls*, which are hyper-realistic) and anime dolls are not uncommon.



Figure 3. Karakuri

unquestioned. The artificial female, in particular, is read in relation to the myth of Pygmalion as an inanimate object magically transformed into a perfect human subject, a trajectory whose arc shoots straight from representation to realism with little contemplation of the zone in between. For example, in her essay “Pygmalionesque Delusions and Illusions of Movement,” Michelle E. Bloom traces “pygmalionesque desire” from the “‘happily-ever-after’ formula of Ovid’s version” of the myth through its failure within the literature of the nineteenth century (in which female androids are common, but happy endings are rare) to its metamorphosis “at the end of the century into ‘illusions of movement’ made possible by the advent of cinema.”⁸ As she notes, her primary interest is in the “longstanding human desire for the animation of the inanimate” for which cinema is a privileged site: “even when the Pygmalion paradigm fails in film, the medium itself succeeds in creating the illusion of movement.”⁹ Bloom’s thoughtful essay, however, glosses the “failed Galateas” of the nineteenth century, exemplified by Olimpia, the female automaton in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story “Der Sandmann” (The Sandman, 1816), discussed by both Freud and Jentsch in relation to the Uncanny. Although she suggests that Hoffman’s automaton was

⁸ Michelle E. Bloom, “Pygmalionesque Delusions and Illusions of Movement: Animation from Hoffmann to Truffaut” in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn, 2000), 291.

⁹ Bloom, 292.

intended as a parody of Pygmalionesque desire, her inquiry ends there without further elaboration.

It is my contention that the “failed Galatea” expresses a different desire than the successful one, but a desire worth interrogating nonetheless, and she is the subject of my dissertation. The following chapters are a historical, cultural, and critical exploration of the terrain around the “uncanny valley” populated by artificial women who eschew realism and whose artificiality is foregrounded. I choose to focus on female automatons (robots, androids, and mechanical dolls) because I am interested in underscoring the particular meanings that accumulate around artificiality in relation to gender, which are, as noted above, often in dialogue with the Pygmalionesque desire for either perfection or a perfect union (and as will become apparent, the latter is rarely dependent on the former). Indeed, the artificial female body that resists both perfection and realism is often pitted against classical and normative conventions around love and beauty; it is used as a cipher for that which cannot be seen or represented, but only intuited; and it opens a space for the imagination and play, both in the sense of what children do with dolls and in the sense of linguistics or semiotics as that which decenters structure. Such are the roles of many of the Galateas—more properly understood as “resistant” rather than “failed”— within the literature of

the nineteenth century. Thus, the following pages focus a great deal on the century leading up to the invention of cinema, in which many of the tropes and themes around artificiality that appear in film are first articulated.

In addition to tracing a line from literary representations of artificial women who resist humanity to both their artistic and cinematic counterparts, I examine the intersection between representational and material practices both past and present. For example, as I will discuss at greater length in Chapter Three, the proliferation of androids gendered female in the fiction of the nineteenth century was not only a response to the mimetic automata popularized in the century prior as a form of public entertainment, but also to the understanding and theorization of the human mind and body to which such mechanical humans contributed. Moreover, as will become apparent in Chapter One, current manifestations and uses of artificial women such as Realdolls, are often in dialogue with earlier representations and experiences of artificial bodies. For example, the two films recently released that feature a Realdoll, *Love Object* (2003) and *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), each recall a famous encounter between a modern-day Pygmalion and his artificial love. *Love Object*, a horror film, in which the central protagonist has a Realdoll made in the image of a woman on whom he has a crush (only to

realize that he would rather turn the real woman into a doll through plastination, than invest life in an artificial body) echoes the relationship between the artist Oskar Kokoschka and his “doll-fetish.” Kokoschka had a tempestuous three-year love affair with Alma Mahler, a Viennese socialite and former wife of composer Gustav Mahler. Unable to let go of Alma even after the affair ended, he hired the Munich doll-maker Hermine Moos to make a life-sized replica of her in 1918. As he wrote to Moos:

If you are able to carry out this task as I would wish, to deceive me with such magic that when I see it and touch it imagine that I have the woman of my dreams in front of me, then dear Fräulein Moos, I will be eternally indebted to your skills of invention and womanly sensitivity.¹⁰

The doll, however, was horribly disappointing. Kokoschka used it instead as an artist’s model and, after he grew tired of it, he threw a “going away” party for it, after which he broke a bottle of red wine over its head and decapitated it in the garden.¹¹ In contrast, *Lars and the Realgirl* is a saccharine sweet, Capra-esque tale in which a small town comes together around the central protagonist and treats his silicone lovedoll, Bianca, as if she were part of the community. Bianca’s active social life is reminiscent of Cynthia, one of the “Gaba girls”—realistic mannequins created in the 1930s by former soap sculptor Lester Gaba—to whom

¹⁰ Alfred Weidinger, *Kokoschka and Alma Mahler* (Munich: Prestel, 1996), 89-90.

¹¹ Police who were patrolling in the area the next day burst into the house when they saw what they thought was a gruesome murder scene outside.

Lester took a particular shine and who was his constant companion. Gaba took Cynthia to social clubs, to the opera, and on carriage rides; designers sent her dresses, Cartier and Tiffany lent her jewels, and she was featured in an article in *Life Magazine* in 1937. (Unfortunately, she too met with an early demise after slipping from a chair in a beauty salon and breaking into pieces.) Perhaps as a way of commenting on the relationship between Realdolls and historical representations of artificial female love interests, media artist Lynn Hershman features a Realdoll in her latest installation, which recreates three-dimensionally Edouard Manet's 1865 painting, *Olympia*.¹²

My approach to the topic of artificial women has, to a large extent, been shaped by my own experiences with practices in material culture around artificial bodies in the process of producing two films: a documentary short on a community of robot fetishists and a feature-length documentary that examines science fiction fantasies about artificial women in relation to the present-day technological reality of artificial companions, particularly within the “real-to-life” love doll industry. Before writing a single word, I spent a good three years conducting interviews with companies that manufactured lovedolls (in the US, Europe, and Japan) and their customers, as well as those whose

¹²See Hershman, *Olympia: Fictive Projections and the Myth of the Real Doll*: http://www.bitforms.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=91#id=28&num=1

work is affiliated with the lovedoll industry (such as Slade, who repairs broken dolls, whom I discuss in the first chapter); those who attempt to enhance the dolls through robotic animation, motion sensing, and artificial intelligence; and those who either fantasize about or build female robots.

The interdisciplinarity of my research is an outgrowth of the difficulties that I encountered, when I returned to the project of writing, of finding scholarly material, particularly within cinema and media studies, that corroborated or clarified the experiences I had “out in the field.” Within these disciplines, as well as cultural studies, artificial female bodies (to the extent that they are discussed at all) tend to get theorized in one of two ways: either within a psychoanalytic framework—in particular, as the object of a fetishistic gaze that is both restaging and attempting to circumvent the oedipal drama, castration, and those traumas associated with the maternal body in all its excesses as well as its fundamental lack—or within a Foucauldian paradigm of corporeal discipline and surveillance—as an ideological production of imaging technologies, from the scientific and medical to the popular. While I found both approaches helpful in thinking about the female body in relation to science and technology, in general, their lack of cultural and historical specificity ultimately proved them to be too myopic a lens

through which to make sense of the particular instantiations of the artificial female that I encountered in the course of working on the two documentaries.

Furthermore, much of the work that I encountered conformed to the “Pygmalionesque paradigm” within which robotic or artificial women fall into one of two camps—“failed” and “successful” or utopic and dystopic—understood in relation to a binary attitude not only towards women as either virgins or whores, but towards technology as either a symbol of human progress or destruction. Robotic women are seen as either walking Venuses, the ultimate example of the extraordinary power of technology to satisfy our desires or they represent the destructive potential of technology, and lurking within their alluring exterior are machine gun breasts or a nuclear warhead or a faulty program that goes haywire. In contrast to such readings, my own experience is that rather than conforming to these either/or categories, the artificial woman is compelling *because* of her inbetween or borderline status and the ambivalence and tension engendered by the vacillation between opposite states: the human and technological, animate and inanimate, perfection and imperfection, speculative fantasy and material reality. I have, therefore, attempted to situate her within a nexus of relations—social, cultural, scientific, literary-cinematic—and, in particular, to seek out

texts that provide a historical and critical context within which to understand a series of oppositional relationships that she embodies:

The Aesthetic and Scientific

One of the hallmarks of the artificial woman, in most every form in which she appears, is her marriage of the aesthetic and the scientific: when presented as an object of science or medicine, such as an anatomical model, she is often marked by aesthetic or erotic details unnecessary to the kind of objective knowledge she is intended to supply; as an erotic object, say, a sexy female robot in any number of science fiction books or films, her technological components are often unveiled in striptease fashion, as though they were the locus of erotic contemplation. The imbrication of the two is especially meaningful when one considers that fictional androids became increasingly gendered female during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a time during which science was disentangled from aesthetics, matter emptied of spirit, mind detached from the body, and the body reformulated as a machine. Thus, the machine-woman was simultaneously a culmination of the Enlightenment project and a site of resistance to scientific materialism and positivism, a role that I explore in great depth in the pages that follow.¹³

¹³ A parody of Cartesianism, in particular, took shape in an apocryphal story circulated during the eighteenth century about a female automaton built by René Descartes. The automaton, so it was told, was in the image of his daughter. Descartes did, in fact, have a daughter named Francine who died at the age of five of scarlet fever. Although she was born to a servant to whom Descartes never married, her death was, so he told a

Motion and Stasis.

The artificial female that “fails” to realize the Pygmalionesque fantasy of “coming to life” remains suspended between object and subject-hood, a space with a rich history in both literary theory and art history (and, in particular, work that straddles both disciplines, for example, the “picture theory” of W.J.T. Mitchell, which explores the tension between the figural and textural). And while the halted subject or the animated object is both a trickier undertaking and more difficult to nail down within the moving arts, such as cinema, the artificial female serves as a privileged site of the tension between motion and stasis and its attendant meanings (an example of which is the film *The Stepford Wives*, in which the mechanical breakdown of the perfect domestic female robot becomes a form of cultural critique, a strategy on which I comment at greater length in Chapter Two).

Interiority and Exteriority

The female image, particularly within cinema studies, has often been theorized in relation to “fetishistic scopophilia” as a visual exterior or

friend, the greatest sorrow of his life. The automaton Francine was supposedly built out of metal and clockwork, and she was stored in a trunk that he had taken aboard the ship on which he traveled to Sweden at the request of Queen Christina (a trip that, in actuality, he loathed to take and from which he never returned home). While he told those aboard that he was traveling with his daughter, no one ever saw her. Overcome with curiosity, some of the sailors snuck into his room one night, and while no one was there, they came upon the trunk, which they opened, whereupon they found the automaton. They showed the “moving marvel” to the ship’s captain, who thought that it was an instrument of dark magic that had somehow been responsible for the bad weather they were encountering, and he ordered it to be thrown overboard. See Gaby Wood, 3-6.

screen that masks a symbolic absence, protecting the male Gaze from the castration anxiety that it embodies; it is, as Laura Mulvey states in *Fetishism and Curiosity*, a “surface that conceals” born of the refusal to acknowledge sexual difference.¹⁴ However, the artificial female, seemingly the culmination of such fetishism and visual obfuscation, is, as I will argue, often a site of unmasking, particularly of the male subject’s self-amputation (and thus castration). As opposed to the “surface that conceals” in the form of the visual fetish, she represents a crisis of vision whereby male interiority is exteriorized. Like the hysteric (whom she both anticipates and supplants), she is a cipher of unseen forces through which her male spectators encounter (and indeed pursue) decentering and desublimation. And while such instrumental use of the female body is problematic in the case of hysteria, in which a female subject is manipulated, it is potentially instructive when enacted via an artificial female object whose “artificiality” is underscored, and it complicates, in productive ways, theorizations of the male Gaze in relation to specular wholeness and cohesion.

* * * *

Each of the following chapters, thus, examines strategies by which the “artificiality” or “mechanicity” of an artificial female is emphasized,

¹⁴ See Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

enacting a crisis of representation that becomes a metaphor for, and a way of apprehending, that which defies normal vision. In each case, the artificial female is offered as a counter to classical ideals of beauty, rather than their culmination, in an attempt to question the symbolic economy within which such ideals operate. In each chapter, I begin with a contemporary subject or object (taken from my documentary) and trace a line between it and female androids from core historical texts in order to find the overarching patterns that shed light on each:

Chapter One examines the work of Slade, the “Realdoll Doctor,” who enacts a form of “anatomy theater” on the internet using silicone lovedolls. Slade’s performances are reminiscent of the dissection of a female android by a fictional Thomas Edison in Villiers d’Isle-Adam’s *L’Eve Future* (*Future Eve*, 1886), which has been discussed by a number of theorists in relation to the invention of cinema, but whose “crisis of vision” in the form of dissection hearkens back to the emblematic tradition of the Renaissance, which I argue is reinvented within early cinema (particularly within the work of filmmaker Georges Méliès).

Chapter Two explores representations of the Uncanny body, using as a starting point the sexual proclivities of A.S.F.R. (alt.sex.fetish.robots), an internet fetish community whose collective fantasies tend to revolve around robotic breakdown and malfunction. The

“come shot” for A.S.F.R.ians is remarkably similar to the climactic scene of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story “Der Sandmann” (The Sandman, 1816) in which the love interest of the central male protagonist is revealed as an android through her disassembly. While Hoffmann’s story provides an example *par excellence* of the Uncanny, according to Sigmund Freud (who describes the term as the “shadow side of the beautiful and attractive”), the disassembled body of the automaton is largely occluded in his discussion, an oversight that serves as impetus for examining closer the visual effects of the Uncanny object in literature, art (particularly that of Surrealism), and the cinematic and televisual interests of A.S.F.R.

Chapter Three examines the artificial female as conduit of natural and “subtle” forces, whose “instrumentality” is emphasized over her realism, giving rise to what I will call kaleido-scopophilia (a mesmerizing visuality representing an interiority). I trace this leitmotif within the German imaginary, from the construction of early automata and *pneumatica* through fictional representations of female androids in German Romanticism and Expressionism (in particular, Fritz Lang’s 1927 film *Metropolis*) to present-day Nuremberg, in which the town’s historical legacy of both mechanical toy-making and fascism are invoked

by a latter day “mad scientist” building the most advanced sexual android in the world.

Taken together, these chapters present a cultural history of the (largely) pre-cinematic artificial female that prefigures the female androids and cyborgs within cinema, as well as the simulated women (and cyborgian constructions) within the digital. While the digital, in particular, offers unprecedented opportunities for both perfection and verisimilitude, my goal, in elaborating on the desires that have favored non-realism and “artificiality” in the artificial women of the past, is to lay the groundwork for further research into those present and future Galateas whose resistance is inevitable.

Chapter One

The Anatomy of a Living Doll

In Northern California resides Slade Fiero, a man who has made a name for himself as “The Realdoll Doctor.” Realdolls, which are produced in Southern California, are life-sized silicone sex dolls that achieve a remarkable degree of verisimilitude and that, for many, offer a glimpse into a future where one might be able to go out and buy the perfect female companion. Slade has become a cult figure in the Realdoll community not only because he restores broken dolls to their former condition, but because of the performative aspects of his repairs. Each doll “surgery” is conducted with an air of the theatrical; medical instruments procured from a coroner’s lab are positioned in and around the injured doll and the various stages of her reconstruction are photographically documented and posted to his website (see figure 4).¹⁵

A onetime tattoo artist, Slade embarked on this unusual “hobby” after a close brush with death, which occurred fatefully enough on his

¹⁵ <http://realdolldoctor.com>



Figure 4. Head Surgery

birthday. As a present to himself, he went skydiving and, on his final jump, his parachute malfunctioned, resulting in a tumultuous landing that broke his back. He was rushed into surgery and emerged, in his own words, “a new man.” He has since walked with a limp and requires a colostomy bag and a daily dose of painkillers, which have made it difficult for him to hold down a full-time job. As he tells it, he was so depressed after his back surgery that he kept a Colt ‘45 close at hand for almost a year, working up the courage to put himself out of his own misery. However, on a particularly difficult day, as he sat with the gun to his head, he had a brainstorm: why not attempt something beautiful before he died? After all, there was no damage to his hands and arms. Why not create something unearthly, like a sculpture? He proceeded to set to work on a series of small sculptures that occupied him, revived him, and of which he felt so proud, that he eventually sent them to the creator of Realdoll, Matt McMullen. Matt was duly impressed and the two became friends. Slade began repairing dolls for Matt and Matt began directing customers with injured dolls to Slade.

However culturally marginal Slade’s pursuits might appear at first glance, there is something almost mythic about his story and strangely familiar about his photographs. He strikes the imagination as any one of a long line of physically compromised artists/scientists dabbling at the

crossroads between life and death. It is a lineage that reaches as far back as Hephaestus, Homer's "god of the dragging footsteps," the lame artisan who, despite his stunted legs, was able to use his strong arms to build golden androids that gave the appearance of living women. And it perhaps finds its prototype in Rotwang, the mad scientist in the film *Metropolis*, whose creation set the bar for female robots, and whose prosthetic hand became such a common trope among his cinematic descendents that it was spoofed to hilarious effect in Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove* (1964).

Like Hephaestus who, most famously, forged a shield for the hero Achilles upon which such a dazzling spectacle of life and death unfolded that none were brave enough to look at it, or Rotwang, whose robotic Maria performed a dance of such hypno-erotic potency that it led to the destruction of an entire city, such men are instigators who assault the Gaze as much as they appeal to it with visual displays that render that which is intended as beautiful—whether the ornamentation on a shield or the artificial female body—horrifying. Slade's work simultaneously recalls the wonders of surgery (plastic and otherwise) and the horrors of autopsy, consciously playing to a medico-erotic Gaze that has centered on the female body since the Renaissance and that is sustained by both reality television and a parade of horror films (many of them b-grade) in

which beautiful women are made monstrous by their dissection. Such work peddles in a scopic ambivalence that has historical analogues in various media throughout history, but that many have argued culminates in the cinema.

Why create a spectacle that calls to the gaze only to avert it? Why dissect an artificial body when there is nothing to reveal? And what do such equivocal gestures mean in relation to the female body? These are some of the fundamental questions that this chapter will address, as it circles around the idea of the shield, in particular, that of Hephaestus, whose moving display within a still frame is a literary precursor to cinema, and whose very impossibility still haunts the cinematic image (and those like myself who attempt to understand it). In so doing, it will, like the visual construction of the shield within Homer's epic, vacillate between the figural and the textual, while making liberal use of the theoretical frameworks within a range of disciplines in order to interpret the interplay between the figural and the textual. The thread that will serve as a throughline is *L'Eve Future* (Tomorrow's Eve), a novel written at the end of the nineteenth century featuring a fictionalized Thomas Edison whose goal is to create a factory for the production of ideal artificial women much like McMullen's Realdoll factory. Written just over one hundred years before the Realdoll was invented by Villiers d'Isle-

Adam, the novel appeared in installments in *La Vie Moderne* between 1885 - 1886 and was published as a volume in 1886, only three years before the author's death in 1889, coincidentally the same year that the real Edison gave W.K.L. Dickson the task of developing the kinetoscope. A further coincidence was the pet project on which Edison was working at the time: the creation of what could be considered a female android, a small doll into whose chest was placed a miniature phonograph so that she could speak.¹⁶

The novel follows the creation of the fictional Edison's first robotic prototype, which he brings to fruition for a friend and patron named Lord Celian Ewald, a poetic type who is on the verge of suicide due to a failed love. In a turn reminiscent of Slade's encounter with artificial women, Edison's android, which is in the image of Ewald's beloved, restores to him the will to live. The real woman who necessitates such drastic measures is a young singer named Alicia Clary of unearthly beauty, but whose personality Ewald cannot stand. Shortly after the novel opens, Lord Ewald pays the great inventor a visit and explains the desperation to which he has been reduced by his mistress, whose body has the perfection of a statue that has come to life...

Miss Alicia is about twenty years old, and slim as a silver aspen. Her gestures are gently and deliciously harmonious,

¹⁶ Discussed at length by Gaby Wood in *Edison's Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

her body is molded in lines to delight and surprise the greatest sculptors. Her figure is full, but with the pale glow of lilies; she has indeed the splendor of a *Venus Victorious*, but humanized. Her masses of brown hair have the brilliance of a summer night ... Her face forms the most seductive oval, within which her mouth flowers like a deep-dyed rosebud ... Her lashes are alive with shadows, the lobes of her charming ears are fresh as April roses. Her nose exquisitely straight, with translucent wings, continues perfectly the line of her forehead. Her hands are more pagan than aristocratic; her feet have the same elegance as those of Greek statues...¹⁷

This brief encomium to Alicia's beauty is of note not only for the way in which it offers a piecemeal appraisal of the living woman, but also for the way in which it vacillates between the natural and the sculptural—the hand of the artist seemingly an extension of the hand of the divine creator—as well as between the woman who is being dissected and the statue that she resembles. Is Ewald describing a woman who is statuesque or a *Venus* that has stepped down from its pedestal to enter the human realm? The confusion between the two launches the primary tension around which the narrative unfolds, leading to a series of dissections, the end result of which will be the creation of the female robot.

The conflation between the human and the inanimate in the novel is rooted in the *ekphrastic* project, in which the representation of the female body, whether real or artificial, is invariably engaged. *Ekphrasis*,

¹⁷ Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve* (L'Eve Future), (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 29.

broadly defined, is a poetic description of something visual, the attempt to conjure through words a picture within the mind's eye.¹⁸ The genre dates back as far as the classical period, often appearing as an ornamental section within epic poetry wherein a figural account was rendered of an object often of utilitarian value, such as a goblet, urn or vase; weaponry or armor; embroidery or sculpture. Whatever the object or subject, its *ekphrasis* tends to serve as a moment of visual repose within the narrative, wherein the poet attempts "iconicity, or a 'still moment' of plastic presence through language."

The canonical and most celebrated instance of *ekphrasis* is Homer's description of the legendary shield forged by Hephaestus for Achilles in the 18th book of the *Iliad*. In response to an entreaty by Thetis on behalf of her son, the lame god forges first, the shield from bronze, gold, and silver, and then upon it scenes of elaborate complexity, including those of war and peace, within cities and on farms and vineyards, amidst festivals and trials, all unfolding as if in real time. Homer's shield as exemplary instance of *ekphrasis*, thus, reveals a paradox at the core of the genre that complicates our preliminary understanding of it, for what one finds on the face of Achilles's shield is

¹⁸ While more narrow interpretations of the genre confine the objects of *ekphrasis* to works in the plastic arts, "The early meaning given 'ekphrasis' in Hellenistic rhetoric (mainly in the "second sophistic" of the third and fourth centuries A.D.) was totally unrestricted: it referred, most broadly, to a verbal description of something, almost anything in life or art." See Krieger.

neither static nor plastic but a moving history of Greek culture. The shield, in effect, partakes of both the figural presence or state of being of the sculptural object and the state of becoming that only a temporal medium such as language can achieve, a duplicity that Murray Krieger has dubbed the “metonymic metaphor,” and which arises, he suggests, from two opposed aesthetic impulses: “the first which craves the spatial fix, while the second yearns for the freedom of the temporal flow.”¹⁹

W.J.T. Mitchell elaborates on the tension between “fixity and flow,” suggesting that it is a reflection of the tension between object and subject. If the “dead, passive image” seems to come to life in the ekphrastic poem, it is not without a certain ambivalence, which is ultimately “grounded in our ambivalence about other people, regarded as subjects and objects in the field of verbal and visual representation.”²⁰ Such ambivalence accumulates, in particular, around the female body, which is often either the object of *ekphrasis* or the subject that the *ekphrastic* object emulates. As Mitchell states:

... female otherness is an overdetermined feature in a genre that tends to describe an object of visual pleasure and fascination from a masculine perspective, often to an audience understood to be masculine as well. Ekphrastic poetry as a verbal conjuring up of the female image has

¹⁹ Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign.*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 10.

²⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 163.

overtones, then, of pornographic writing and masturbatory fantasy...²¹

However, while the *ekphrasis* of the female body operates within a similar symbolic economy as that of the “shield” or the “urn,” there is a reversal in effect. For that which is descriptive when applied to the inanimate object and which seems to bring the object to life, becomes dissective—as hands, body, face, mouth are isolated from the whole—transforming the living woman into a “still life” of disassembled parts which resemble a statue or corpse.

Such an effect is rendered particularly vivid in a subgenre of *ekphrastic* poetry, popular during the Renaissance, known as the *blason du corps* or *blazons anatomique*, in which discrete fragments or features of a beautiful woman are dissected from the whole and described in intimate detail. This form, which was prefigured by the head-to-toe *effictio* to which Ewald’s description of Alicia hearkens and which will echo throughout Villiers’s novel, is attributed, in particular, to Clément Marot and is considered a banalization of the psalms, which he translated during his exile from Fontainebleau. In place of the body of Christ or the holy relic, Marot substituted parts of the female body, the first being “Le Blason du Tetin” (The Blazon of the Breast) in 1535, which he presented to an esteemed group of court poets as a form of literary

²¹ Mitchell, 168.

challenge. Their responses, each dedicated to a separate part of the female body, were organized and eventually published as a single volume, *Blasons Anatomiques*, which experienced wide appeal in the French and English courts of the mid-sixteenth century.

The success of the anatomical blazon was likely due to its potent combination, in textual form, of two popular visual spectacles of the time. The first was the entertaining display of the “colorful paraphernalia of heraldry,” which fed into a nostalgic fascination in the waning chivalric tradition of knights and armor that “tended to proliferate as the practical function of knighthood disappeared.”²² As Nancy J. Vickers points out, blazon is a word that combines the French *blason* or shield and, in particular, the heraldic or ornamental display on a shield with the older English verb, “to blaze,” that is, “to proclaim as with a trumpet, to divulge, to make known.” The two meanings are combined in the poetic blazon, in which parts of women’s bodies are displayed by men in a gesture of rhetorical challenge to other men:

Combatants offer up blazons—poems or/as shields—for aesthetic judgments...the heraldic metaphor “woman’s face is a shield” emblemizes the conflict that motivates it. Here celebratory conceit inscribes woman’s body between rivals: she deflects blows, prevents direct hits, and constitutes the field upon which the battle may be fought.²³

²² Quoted in Nancy J. Vickers, “This Heraldry in Lucrece’s Face,” in *The Female Body in Western Literature*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 210.

²³ Vickers, 219.

The rhetorical displays of the *blassonneur*, although criticized by some as being either idolatrous or scandalous,²⁴ fed into the Renaissance tradition of *ut pictura poesis* in which the poet, who was able to construct verbal monuments of greater duration than the bronze from which many a shield was cast, was considered the equivalent if not the superior of the warrior, and equally deserving of glory. And if the female body inspired distaste in some, Love in the abstract was considered the highest object of both the courtier and the poet and a reflection of the Love of God.

A second contributing factor to the popularity of the blazon was the fascination with dissection, encouraged by the medical performances within the anatomy theatre (indeed, “the authors of the blazon poems were called by themselves and by their contemporaries ‘*anatomistes*.’”).²⁵ The practice of anatomy underwent a transformation in the Renaissance, which had far-reaching cultural effects that permeated art, literature, and philosophy. For over a century, anatomical practice had been influenced by the work of Galen of Pergamum (ca. A.D. 129-200), who produced over two hundred medical volumes, which extrapolated on

²⁴ Parisian poet-bookseller Gilles Corrozet published in 1539 *Les Blasons Domestiques*, which praised the “parts of a respectable house as correctives to the ‘anatomical blazons’” which he considered offensive. See Nancy J. Vickers, “Members Only” in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed., David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (London: Routledge Press, 1997), 2-5.

²⁵Nancy J. Vickers, “Members Only,” 7.

studies of dissected animals to describe human anatomy.²⁶ From the time of Galen, if and on the rare occasion that a body was dissected, it was conducted by barber-surgeons while an anatomy professor stood at a distance from the proceedings reading from Galen's works (see figure 5). Indeed, the physical findings were of less significance than the transmission of ancient knowledge, much of it incorrect since it was based on animal physiology. Within the anatomy theatre of the Renaissance, however, the visual began to vie with the textual for authority, eventually giving rise to the concept of autopsy or auto-opsis—"seeing for oneself"—as the basis of anatomical truth.

One of the first anatomists to perform dissections with his own hand, rather than to relegate them to assistants, was Andreas Vesalius, who published an exhaustive anatomical treatise that replaced Galen as authoritative reference. Vesalius's masterpiece, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, was published in 1543, the same year that the 'definitive' edition of the *Blasons Anatomiques* appeared, and both, according to Jonathan Sawday, operated within a similar erotic economy:

Both sought to gaze upon the body which they dismantled, piece by piece. Both too progressively constructed a new body made of the parts which they had examined. Just as Vesalius was to dismiss his scientific rivals in anatomical

²⁶ Of interest to our discussion here, perhaps, is the fact that Galen traced his manual skills to a childhood of playing with wooden toys, as well as to his first employment as a surgeon for injured gladiators. (from the *Introduction to the Fabrica* by Vivian Nutton in an online version of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* made available by Northwestern University: <http://vesalius.northwestern.edu/>).



Figure 5. Anatomical Demonstration, from FASICULO DE MEDICINA by Johannes de Ketham (1494)

demonstrations, so the poetic texts struggled in competition with one another, brandishing the dissected female form as a token of mastery.²⁷

The association between the poetic mastery of the *blasonneur* and the intellectual rigor and manual dexterity of the anatomist is made explicit in Villiers's novel in the narrative progression from Ewald's anatomical presentation of Alicia, the woman who resembles a statue, to the mechanical statue that Edison will create in her image, named Hadaly. As Edison tells Lord Ewald, Hadaly is a word that means *Ideal* in Persian, and which will be etched and mounted on a plaque in the coffin in which the android, upon her completion, will be presented to Lord Ewald. Below this plaque will be placed the Ewald family's ancient coat of arms (that is, his *blazon*), a symbol that will, according to Edison, sanctify Ewald's captivity of her. Furthermore, as a kind of riposte to Ewald's aesthetic dissection of Alicia, Edison conducts what can only be described as an anatomy lesson or demonstration on Hadaly. As he unveils her for his patron, he provides not only a thorough inventory of her various systems, parts, and functions, but an examination of her

²⁷ Sawday, 197. Unlike Sawday, who is interested in drawing correspondences between the blazon and anatomical dissection, Nancy Vickers suggests that while the practice of anatomy situated the fragmented body "in relation to an image of a vital whole," few attempts were made to recover bodily integrity in the presentation of the *blasons anatomiques*. See Nancy J. Vickers, "Members Only," 9.

innards, in a scene that Villiers compares to a corpse on the dissecting table in an amphitheater presided over by Andreas Vesalius.²⁸

It is on this scene, which simultaneously hearkens back to Vesalius standing above a female corpse and anticipates Slade's anatomization of silicone lovedolls, that we will focus. For within the *mise-en-abîme*²⁹ of the opened female body, we find a privileged instance not only of beauty rendered monstrous through dissection, but it has been argued of the dynamics of representation within cinema. A number of feminist film theorists have drawn persuasive analogies between the dissection of the female body and film form and content, suggesting that a form of fetishistic anatomy is not only enacted by the "cutting up" of the female through close-ups, medium and long-shots, but is formative in cinema and evident in even the earliest cinematic experiments.

Annette Michelson has drawn an explicit correspondence between the dissection of Hadaly in Villiers's novel and the "mutilations, reconstitutions, levitations, and transformations" to which the female body is subjected within the early "cinema of attractions," both of which she suggests can trace their rhetorical genealogy not only to the anatomical blazon, but also to the medical drawings and anatomical

²⁸This initial dissection is repeated in textual form later in the novel, in which the functionality of each part of Hadaly's body is explained at length and given its own chapter: Flesh; Rosy Mouth, Pearly Teeth; Physical Eyes; Hair; Epidermis. See also, Michelle Bloom, 302.

²⁹ Originally understood as the placement of a smaller version of a heraldic escutcheon within the same escutcheon.

models of the Enlightenment, in particular, the Waxen Venus, a figure that simultaneously invoked the objectivity of scientific inquiry and the subjectivity of erotic contemplation (see figure 6):

Here is the fastidiously and voluptuously modeled woman in the flush of youth, nude, recumbent, suave and tender of aspect, her digestive, pulmonary, circulatory, and genital systems revealed and resolved into detachable elements. Her balance, her posture, her ever-so-slightly parted lips, her long, gleaming tresses, her pearl necklace, the tasseled silken coverlet upon which she lies—these and the presence of public hair (none of these indispensable for the purpose of anatomical demonstration)—fashion an object of fascinated desire in which the anatomist’s analytic is modulated by the lambent sensuality of Bernini.³⁰

Giuliana Bruno offers further corroborative evidence for the connections that Michelson draws between the Waxen Venus, the dissection of Alicia/Hadaly, and the invention of cinema, by recounting the anatomical attractions of the first movie theatre to open in Naples, Italy. The proprietor, Menotti Cattaneo, began his film exhibitions with a spectacle called “the anatomy lesson,” which he had developed in his career as a showman. Dressed as a surgeon, Cattaneo would “dissect” a human body that he had constructed out of wax, removing various organs to the wonder and horror of his audience. He would follow this spectacle with a film exhibition, the latter seamlessly following the former since:

³⁰ Annette Michelson, “On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Facsimile and the Philosophical Toy” in *October*, No. 29 (Summer 1984), 11. For a further discussion of the aesthetic component in medical writing and images of women in the Enlightenment, see Ludmilla Jordanova.



Figure 6. Waxen Venus from Semmelweis Medical Historical Museum in Budapest, Hungary

Their common terrain is a discourse of investigation and the fragmentation of the body. The spectacle of the anatomy lesson exhibits an analytic drive, an obsession with the body, upon which acts of dismemberment are performed. Such “analytic” desire is present in the very language of film. It is inscribed in the semiotic construction of film, its *découpage* (as the very word connotes, a ‘dissection’ of narration in shots and sequences), its techniques of framing, and its process of editing, literally called ‘cutting,’ a process of (de)construction of bodies in space.³¹

In discussions of the fetishism inherent in the cinematic image, attention has been drawn, in particular, to the early films of the real Edison and especially to the film trickery of Georges Méliès, wherein women repetitively and, it seems, obsessively, vanish, reappear, are dismembered and then reassembled. The film *Extraordinary Illusions* (1903), in which Méliès produces a living woman from mannequin parts, is prototypical in this regard. As in most of his films, Méliès plays a magician and appears as if on a theater stage, addressing the camera directly. Surrounded by statues on pedestals (a foreshadowing of the Pygmalionesque fantasy that will follow), he places a “Magic Box” upon a table, from which he pulls a mannequin’s legs, torso, and head and then proceeds to assemble it into a make-believe girlfriend. After kissing and briefly conversing with her, he throws the mannequin into the air and she is instantly transformed into a living woman, a dancer who flits

³¹Giuliana Bruno, “Spectatorial Embodiments: Anatomies of the Visible and the Female Bodyscape” in *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory*/28 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 241.

around the stage. Her dancing costume is changed to pedestrian clothes by the magician, and the two promenade together around the stage in a kind of happily-ever-after jig. However, their happiness is short-lived, for not long after she has been brought to life, the woman unexpectedly transforms into a male cook with a grotesque, clownish mask, stirring a spoon in a pot. The magician attempts to turn him back into a she, however, each time he does so, she is transformed back into the cook, a cycle that continues until the magician, in frustration, grabs the cook and disassembles him into separate dummy parts.

Méliès enacted similar Pygmalionesque fantasies in many other films, most significantly, *Pygmalion et Galathée* (1898), which featured his wife, Jehanne d'Alcy, as a statue who comes to life and then literally falls to pieces as her sculptor attempts to embrace her.³² Lucy Fischer has described these films, in which the female body is the object of manipulation and disassembly, as engaging in a form of “magical misogyny” and Linda Williams traces such “perverse” proclivities not only to Méliès's pre-filmic work as a magician but also to his fascination and experimentation with the automata that he inherited when he purchased Robert Houdin's theater in Paris. Williams suggests that there is a parallel between Méliès's attempt to control the appearance and

³² From the Lubin catalog plot synopsis.

movement of the mechanical humans in the basement of his theater and his later manipulation and control of the female body in his films:

From the first trick of assembling a simulation of the whole body out of mechanical parts to the further trick of making the imaginary bodies projected on a screen appear and disappear, Méliès perfects his mastery over the threatening presence of the actual body, investing his pleasure in an infinitely repeatable *trucage*.³³

The anatomy lesson, particularly when performed on the female body is, then, presented as the primal scene of cinema, inaugurating a medico-erotic gaze that will be repetitively staged and re-enacted and that will serve not only as a form of cinematic pleasure but as the fantasmatic ground of cinema itself. “Primal scene” is the operative phrase here for, in their interpretations of the dismemberment of the female body in early cinema, Williams and Bruno in particular invoke psychoanalytical theory, taking many of their theoretical cues from Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” For Mulvey, the role of the female body in cinema is to remain passive, static, and emanating a “to-be-looked-at-ness” quality so that she is readily available for the visual delectation of the active male gaze. As in the *ekphrastic* moment within literature, wherein the visual study of the *objet d’art* seemingly halts the narrative flow, the appearance of the female body results in a moment of erotic contemplation that “takes the film into a no man’s land outside of time and space.” Mulvey explains the insistent, interrogative male gaze of the passive female body as rooted in

³³ Linda Williams, “Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 525.

early sexuality, in particular, the fear of castration launched by the realization of female lack:

Ultimately the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence of which is based the castration complex essential for the organization of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified.³⁴

In Mulvey's terms, the assembly and disassembly, appearance and disappearance of the female body functions in cinema—as in the child's symbolic restaging of his mother's absence in the game *fort!/da!*—as a contradictory gesture, an attempt at revealing the “truth” of the woman's body at the same time that it is an attempt at hiding that very same truth. The “truth” in this case, is that which Freud, in collaboration with his close friend and associate Sandor Ferenczi, dubbed the “Medusa's Head,” a figure that emblemizes the female's lack of a phallus:

The terror of Medusa is a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something ... it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother.³⁵

³⁴ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 208.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Medusa's Head” in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 202.

Medusa, we will recall, was the Gorgon in classical mythology with serpents for hair who turned to stone any who gazed upon her. In some interpretations of the myth, Medusa is the representation of the beautiful turned monstrous, for she was once a ravishing beauty over whose attention men competed. She was turned into a horrifying vision by Athena as punishment for lying in the goddess's temple with (or, in some versions, having the ill fortune to get raped by) Poseidon. Athena and Hermes would later help Perseus slay the Gorgon as she slept by providing him with, among other aids, a mirrored shield and *harpe*. By glancing at Medusa's reflection in the shield, Perseus was able to decapitate her with the *harpe* (the same instrument used by Zeus to castrate his father Kronos, helping Freud with the formulation: decapitation = castration).

However, once slain, Medusa became a source of both creative and protective power. At the instant that she was decapitated, the two children from her union with Poseidon sprang to life: Chrysaor, the hero with the golden sword, and Pegasus, the winged horse of the Muses (contributing to the link between Medusa and the arts). Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* tells of how the drops of blood that fell from the Gorgon's detached head as Perseus carried it across the Libyan desert were instantly turned into snakes. The head itself was used by Perseus to

petrify and vanquish his enemies, and he eventually offered it as a votive gift to Athena, who wore the head on her aegis or shield as a means of terrifying her foes.

Once decapitated and mounted on the shield, the Medusa head becomes the prototype for the *apotropaic* image, that which becomes a means of protection from the terror that it once embodied. For Freud, the invocation of the Medusa's head within literature and art is understood as a way of raising the specter of castration while simultaneously refusing, as well as defusing its threat, an interpretation that he suggests is supported by the site of its mythological display: the shield of the *virgin* goddess, Athena. Freud suggests that the snakes writhing around the face of the Gorgon, while terrifying, are a substitute for the missing phallus, multiplied as a form of compensation, and the stiffness that the spectator feels in their presence serves as a reassuring reminder of his own virile status. It is, then, via mediation, the filling in of an absence with a symbolic presence displayed on a shield, a protective barrier between the conscious mind and the suppressed truth, that the site of terror is transformed. It is within the apotropaic matrix as theorized by Freud that the display of the female body in pieces is generally understood—whether as heraldic display of parts in the form of the blazon or the female body partitioned and projected onto the cinema

screen—a double gesture, whereby the site/sight of sexual difference is submitted to that which Bruno calls the “anatomical-analytic Gaze” in order to mitigate its threat. And while it is perhaps less veiled in the primitive “tricks of anatomical dismemberment” within the early cinema about which Bruno and Williams write, it is no less present in contemporary narrative cinema, according to Mulvey.

Freud ends his short essay on the Medusa Head with a reminder of its interpretive status and an admission that “in order seriously to substantiate this interpretation it would be necessary to investigate the origin of this isolated symbol of horror in Greek mythology as well as parallels to it in other mythologies.”³⁶ This invitation was, in fact, taken up by Stephen Wilk in a book-length study of the Medusa figure, who found parallels to the visual depiction of the Gorgon Head within a wide variety of cultural settings at varying historical moments and on a diverse array of objects, from Mayan shields and Maori carvings to Peruvian metalworks and Indian temples (see figures 7 and 8). Indeed, as Marina Warner points out, there were numerous Medusa heads in the architecture of Freud’s Vienna, including the one mounted to the aegis of a statue of Athena on the fountain outside the parliament building.³⁷

³⁶ Freud, “Medusa’s Head,” 203.

³⁷ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 111.



Figure 7. Perseus decapitates Medusa as Athena looks on. A limestone metope (decorative panel) from Temple C at Silenus, near Palermo in modern-day Sicily. From Stephen R. Wilk. MEDUSA: SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF THE GORGON.



Figure 8. Sketch of the face at the center of the Aztec Calendar Stone. From Cecelia F. Klein, THE FACE OF THE EARTH, reprinted in Stephen R. Wilk, MEDUSA: SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF THE GORGON.

Wilk suggests that in order to solve the mystery of this pan-cultural symbol, one needs to pose a question with a surprisingly simple answer:

What item, common to the experience of a broad range of humankind, could produce a humanlike face with huge, staring eyes, broad nose, wide, gritted-toothed grin, protruding tongue, facial lines, and stylized hair? We are not familiar with the answer because it is kept from us, deliberately. At one time in our history it was a much more common sight, just as deliberately placed in view. Much of the time, it was simply considered inevitable. But it was distasteful at best, horrifying at worst, and so over time it has been carefully removed from immediate view, a process that has now gone on for so long that the object is no longer familiar.³⁸

According to Wilk, the Gorgon is not, as Freud suggests, a symbol of the opening from which we all enter the world, but the abyss to which we are all heading: Death. Specifically, the Medusa Head is an aestheticized portrayal of the human face one to two weeks after death when gases from putrefaction cause the body to bloat, pushing out the eyes and tongue (see figure 9). “The Gorgoneion is terrible because it shows us the transformation of a human being into Death, and does so by a process that destroys all dignity.”³⁹ It is in death and decay that the subject becomes an object and, in particular, one of horror. While it is a sight that is rarely encountered today due to embalming and the medicalization of death and dying, the horrifying specificities of

³⁸ Stephen R. Wilk. *Medusa: Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 186.

³⁹ Wilk, 190



Figure 9. Photograph of a corpse after more than 48 hours, face forward (left) and in profile (right). From Keith Simpson's FORENSIC MEDICINE, Fifth Edition, reprinted in Stephen R. Wilk, MEDUSA: SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF THE GORGON.

putrefaction were once all too familiar, particularly in instances in which the burial of the body was delayed, such as war, as well as public execution and decapitation.

When we consider the fact that the body within the anatomy theatre of the Renaissance was, in most cases, the criminal body recently removed from the gallows and saved from the ignoble fate of public decomposition in order to serve the greater good through its participation in the acquisition of anatomical knowledge, then a reconsideration of the symbolism of dissection in general and, in particular, its relation to the image of the Medusa Head seems warranted. Indeed, it is within the mise-en-scene of the anatomical demonstration that the reflective glances of the shield and the Medusa figure are transformed into those of

the goddess Anatomia, who holds a mirror in one hand and a skull in the other, a personification of the moral imperatives inscribed within the theatre's ritualized atmosphere: "Nosce te ipsum" (know thyself) and 'Pulvis et umbra sum[us]' (we are dust and shadows)"(see figure 10). Therefore, if we want to accept the argument that the anatomy theatre serves as the fantasmatic ground of cinema, we may find it productive to see how and to what extent our understanding of the anatomical/cinematic Gaze is elaborated by reading its visual coding through the lens of history. And to do that, we will return to the primal scene, epitomized by the title page of Vesalius's anatomical masterpiece, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (see figure 11), where Vesalius himself stands above a dissected female corpse revealing her innards, a scene that would, over 300 years later, inspire the scene in Villiers's novel in which Edison stands above the robot Hadaly revealing her mechanical parts and over 100 years after that, Slade photographing dissected love dolls.

On the title page of the *Fabrica*, Vesalius appears front and center (a novelty at the time; Vesalius was the first anatomist to show himself at work within a printed book), and it is as though he is personally welcoming us at the gates of the anatomical wonders to which we are about to receive admittance. To his left is the female cadaver, surrounded



Figure 10. Anatomia



Figure 11. The frontispiece from the 1555 edition of Vesalius's DE HUMANI CORPORIS FABRICA

by circular benches populated by a seemingly unruly crowd of humans and animals, the living and the dead, some of whom watch Vesalius while others are clearly distracted. Only Vesalius meets our gaze (with a significant look not all that dissimilar from that of Méliès before performing a magic trick), while he pulls open the abdomen of the dead woman as if gesturing us inside both the female womb and the mysteries of the anatomical body to which it gives birth and that the *Fabrica* will help to disclose. While Vesalius opens the womb with his right hand, with his left he points up to a skeletal figure directly above, a gesture that bifurcates both our focus and the page:

... if the womb marks our point of entrance into the world, then Vesalius's own left hand, with its finger raised in a gesture of signification, as well as rhetoric, guides our attention back to the skeleton, our point of departure: 'Nascentes Morimur' — we are born to die. A drama of life and death is, then, being played out within the circular confines of the temple of anatomy.⁴⁰

The symbolic circuit created between womb and skeleton is not just that between life and death, according to Sawday, but between death as representative of the Fall and eternal life as represented by the body of Christ. Indeed, the sacrificial pose of the body at the center of the title page of the *Fabrica*, as well as that within other anatomical treatises of the time (which were as often male as female) is a clear evocation of the

⁴⁰ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 71.

body of Christ after crucifixion. Such allegorical richness offers, perhaps, our first clue to the texture of the performance within the anatomy theatre and the argument, made convincingly by Sawday, that anatomy was not its sole aim, but one aspect incorporated into a larger sphere of multivalent significance:

The anatomical Renaissance, the reordering of our knowledge of the human body which took place in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was not merely a moment of high intellectual excitement. Instead, the discovery of the body was grounded in older, traditional, patterns of symbol and ritual ... The confrontation which had taken place outside the anatomy theatre, on the gallows, was transformed once the body had been taken inside the theatre. Instead of being a mere object of investigation, the criminal corpse was invested with a transcendent significance.⁴¹

To help us understand the constellation of signification circulating around the dissected corpse within the anatomical imaginary of the Renaissance, Sawday brings our attention to the arrangement of the scene on the title page of the *Fabrica*. Here, the womb forms the mid-point, and it and the skeleton above it form the central vertical axis around which all other elements in the picture rotate, including the semi-circular columns of the theatre dome. The heliocentric construction of the scene conforms to the architectural principles of Vitruvius, whose belief that the human body should form the foundation of proportional design served as the basis of many of the basilica churches built during

⁴¹ Sawday, 75.

the Renaissance. According to Sawday, such symbolism suggests that there is an overarching universal harmony, where the human body represents not itself but a greater organizing principle in which its dissection is “no less than a demonstration of the structural coherence of the universe itself, whose central component—the principle of life concealed within the womb—Vesalius is about to open up to our gaze.”⁴²

The dissection within the anatomy theatre is, then, not just a way of gaining knowledge of the body in an analytical or empirical sense, but a way of enacting a transfiguration of its base nature into a realm of divine abstraction of both spiritual and ontological significance. It represents a moment that helps set the stage for, but that must be differentiated from the Cartesian break in the seventeenth century and the eventual triumph of “science” in the modern sense, during which the body would be reformulated as a machine. As Sawday explains:

The development of the machine image dramatically transformed the attitude of investigators towards the body’s interior, and towards their own tasks of investigation. They no longer stood before the body as though it was a mysterious continent. It had become, instead, a system, a design, a mechanically organized structure, whose rules of operation, though still complex, could with the aid of reason, be comprehended in the most minute detail.⁴³

If the body had at one time served as a microcosm of the universe, it would become objectified within this new discursive regime, a body of

⁴² Sawday, 76.

⁴³ Sawday, 31.

physiological facts permanently separated from the Cartesian cogito. The body would henceforth be that against which “I” must be distinguished, the rational pitted against the somatic, and the anatomist, now representative of the scientific method, in direct contestation with that which he investigated:

...the connotation of a searching operation performed on a recalcitrant substance. One involved manual probing, the other cerebral grasping. Each suggested the stripping away of excess by decomposition and fragmentation for the purpose of control. The messiness of the body, as well as the unruliness of everyday life, were thus managed by the use of either a reducing tool or analytical system. The immobilized specimen under scrutiny could neither hide nor escape.⁴⁴

It is in response to the Enlightenment project in which the male Gaze subjects the body, often figured as female, to analytic scrutiny—in order to gain control as well as to reveal its insubstantiality—that the representation of the dissected female body, both figural and textual, has generally been read. However, Sawday complicates this reading by tracing historically many of the anatomical metaphors that continue to circulate in popular and visual culture. What his findings suggest is that within the ritualized atmosphere in which these tropes originally appeared, “an aesthetic investment in the liminal moment where an active masculine science defines itself in relation to the passive female form—would have been inconceivable” since both “the woman, just as

⁴⁴ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 47.

much as the man, had to be shown to be aiding and abetting the process of her own deconstruction.”⁴⁵ Moreover, the purpose of this deconstruction was not an “analysis” in the service of medical science in any sense that we would understand it today. “Public dissection ... was not primarily designed to demonstrate the facts of physiology to a professional gathering ... Instead it illustrated the rich complexity of the universe and its central physical component: the human body.”⁴⁶

In short, it was in the name of a higher order or gestalt that anatomization was conducted. “Fragmentation provided the means of discovering a unified truth,” according to Francette Pacteau, a truth that invoked a classical sense of organic coherence and harmony. One can see this kind of dual gesture in the work of Leonardo da Vinci, whereby “the human body was subject, by the same hand, both to the aggressive act of sectioning and dissecting, and to the totalizing act or representation.”⁴⁷ This transfiguration via dissection permeated Renaissance culture not only in medicine, but in art and literature. As Pacteau notes, sectioning and dissection were performed not only on the human body, both in the anatomy theatre and in the form of the *blazon anatomique*, but on a favored metaphor and any other topic worthy of

⁴⁵ Sawday, 217.

⁴⁶ Sawday, 63.

⁴⁷ Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 61.

consideration. Such works as *The Anatomy of Wyt*, *The Anatomie of Absurditie*, and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* were published within a fifty year span, and there was a wide circulation of spiritual anatomies, “moral works whose aim was to purify by cutting away the sins which conceal the truth.”⁴⁸

It is, indeed, this sort of Anatomy that Lord Ewald conducts on Alicia in *L’Eve Future*, to which her poetic blazoning is a mere prologue. Shortly after the brief paragraph in which Ewald extols Alicia’s beauty are three chapters entitled, “Analysis,” “Hypothesis,” and significantly, “Dissection,” in which Ewald conducts a moral appraisal of his mistress, ultimately suggesting that there is a lack of proportionality between her celestial body and her earthbound “soul”...

... between the body and the soul of Miss Alicia, it wasn’t just a disproportion which distressed and upset my understanding; it was an absolute disparity ... The traits of her divine beauty seemed to be foreign to her self; her words seemed constrained and out of place in her mouth. Her intimate being was in flat contradiction with the form it inhabited.⁴⁹

Alicia’s soul is alienated from its body, a distinctly post-Cartesian affliction; however, it is not, as we might expect, her soul that is imprisoned by the shackles of her body, but her soul that, in Lord Ewald’s judgment, defiles the sacred temple that is her body. And that

⁴⁸ Pacteau, 61.

⁴⁹ Villiers, 31.

which weighs down her soul is, according to Ewald, a bourgeois concern for the rational, the literal, the commonsensical. Alicia is, we might say, a material girl. Even her surname, “Clary,” likely inspired by “Clara” the practical woman in E.T.A. Hoffman’s story “The Sandman” whom the protagonist compares to an automaton and whom he rejects for the mechanical doll Olympia (read: she of Olympus), etymologically points to a consciousness within which all is submitted to the light of reason. As Ewald complains to Edison, although Alicia’s body recalls the *Venus Victorius*, a statue of classical and transcendent proportions, “in everyday life, Miss Alicia is the Goddess Reason ... she believes in heaven, but a heaven of rational dimensions.”⁵⁰

The set of contradictory distinctions that Ewald draws between Alicia’s “sacred body” and her “profane soul,” as well as between the Venus Victorius and the Goddess of Reason (whom, we are reminded, was Athena) provides a clue to the agenda of Villiers (for whom Ewald is a stand-in).⁵¹ As translator Robert Martin Adams suggests, Villiers was, like his contemporaries Baudelaire and Mallarmé, a man very much at

⁵⁰ Villiers, 40.

⁵¹ Translator Robert Martin Adams draws parallels, in particular, between Miss Alicia in the novel and Miss Anny Eyre Powell, a wealthy London woman whom Villiers attempted to court with disastrous results: “... Villiers escorted his young lady to Covent Garden, and in the privacy of a box declared his passion. But he recited so much poetry, gave such a long reading from his next novel, and grew so frantically agitated that the young lady was frightened, thought him a lunatic, and made her escape from his society as abruptly as she could ... of the whole episode what remained most strongly in Villiers’ mind was the spiritless, blockish female who had been utterly incapable of responding to his romantic declarations, had not even glimpsed the world of his ideal values.” See Villiers, xii.

odds with the positivist values of the time into which he was born. He loathed materialism and the very idea of progress, scientific or otherwise. However, he peddled in a form of romantic irony, and there is, indeed, an irony in the scientist Edison's proposed solution to the woman who is so afflicted by positivist rationalism that she acts, according to Lord Ewald, like a mechanical doll or puppet, and that solution is to create a mechanical doll in her image. Thus Hadaly, to whatever extent she is a fulfillment of a Cartesian worldview in which the body is rendered as a machine, is also in a dialectical sense (and Villiers loved Hegel), an antidote to it, for she restores to Alicia's body its metaphysicality. And she does so through an act of transfiguration, wrought by Edison, of macrocosmic proportions similar to that depicted on the title page of Vesalius's *Fabrica*. As Edison proclaims to Lord Ewald and, it seems, to the heavens:

In place of this soul which repels you in the living woman, I shall infuse another sort of soul ... capable of impressions a thousand times more lovely, more lofty, more noble—that is, they will be robed in that character of eternity without which our mortal life can be no more than a shabby comedy ... I will compel the Ideal itself to become apparent, for the first time, to your senses, PALPABLE, AUDIBLE, AND FULLY MATERIAL...⁵²

Within Edison's promise to lift the veil of appearances in order to compel the Ideal to reveal itself, we can detect the Platonic urge for the

⁵² Villiers, 64.

Intelligible beyond the rational or the sensible. That the immaterial realm will be revealed through Hadaly, a goddess forged from the latest technologies, may appear contradictory, but conforms to the aesthetic ideals of both Vesalius, whose work Villiers evokes in Hadaly's construction and Baudelaire, his mentor, and it underscores the semiotic relationship between the emblematisers of the Renaissance and the symbolists of the nineteenth century.

Vesalius's work, as Sawday suggests, was conducted in the service of a Christian neo-platonic conception of the universe, in which the material or aesthetic realm could lead, via a hierarchy of correspondences, to the invisible realm of Ideas. Within such a conception, there are two roads by which the sensible or material can lead to the Intelligible or Divine, *kataphasis* (affirmation) and *apophasis* (denial), Greek terms that were reworked by Dionysius the Areopagite in his exegesis on the Celestial Hierarchies, discussed at length by E.H. Gombrich in his seminal essay on symbolic imagery, *Icones Symbolicae*. It is worth examining each in succession since Hadaly, in the terms that Villiers imagines her, represents both.

Kataphasis, the affirmation of "like through like," attempts to emulate the Divine through images of beauty. It is born of the analogical method introduced by Plato in which the love of earthly beauty is but the

first step on the journey to the apprehension of Beauty as such.

However, unlike classical Platonism, which spurned Art, the neo-Platonic tradition as influenced by Christianity held a special place for the artist who, it was believed, had visionary powers that enabled him to see and potentially lead the faithful beyond the dross of matter to the supercelestial realm. In particular, symbolic imagery was held in great esteem, a common form of which was Personification, inherited from the Greeks, in which anthropomorphic figures were used to convey abstract ideas. Such imagery, it was thought, could awaken within the imperfect senses the memory of perfection. As Christoforo Giarda suggests in the introduction to his *Icones Symbolicae* (1628):

... it is impossible to love what cannot be apprehended either by reason or by the senses. As nothing can be apprehended by the senses that is not somewhat corporeal, nothing can be understood by our mind in its depressed condition that has not the appearance of a body. Who, then, can sufficiently estimate the magnitude of the debt we owe to those who expressed the Arts and Sciences themselves in images and thus achieved it that we can not only know them but look at them, as it were, with our eyes, that we can meet them and almost converse with them about a variety of matters?⁵³

It is precisely this sort of earthly analogue of the divine to which Edison aspires when he tells Lord Ewald that he will combine art and science to incarnate the “Ideal itself” in the form of Hadaly, an android who will

⁵³ Giarda in E.H. Gombrich, *Gombrich on the Renaissance*, Volume 2: Symbolic Images (London: Phaidon Press, 1972), 154.

make manifest in a conversant being all that Alicia inspires in Ewald but does not fulfill. Hadaly is the Personification of Beauty or, as Edison puts it, "... the first hours of love, immobilized, the hour of the Ideal made eternal prisoner."⁵⁴

The *apophatic*, on the other hand, which was the favored mode within the period to which we are referring, is the "enigmatic image" which attempts "like through unlike." Such an approach shuns mimesis, which might encourage confusion between a representation and the Ideal that it is attempting to emulate, ultimately leading down the false path of idolatry or the worship of graven images. Instead, it sidesteps the problematics of representation, while using its toolbox to construct that which would be impossible or monstrous in nature as a way of engaging the mind in a hermeneutic paradox that urges it beyond the sensible to the Intelligible. This is the realm of the chimaera, the hybrid, the hieroglyph, images that obscure as much as they reveal.

Such an approach was common in the emblem books of the Renaissance, in which abstract ideas or *topoi* were represented through the conjunction of words and symbolic drawings. Within these books, the idea of the emblem, at one time associated with the heraldic escutcheon, was invested with the mystical import of Egyptian hieroglyphics, an interest in which was kindled after the discovery in 1419 of Horapollo's

⁵⁴ Villiers, 135.

Hieroglyphica, a Greek guide to Egyptian hieroglyphics and their meanings.⁵⁵ Marsilio Ficino drew heavily from the *Hieroglyphica* in his theologically-grounded guide to emblematics, from which Gombrich culls, as an example of the apophatic image, the *ouroboros* (see figure 12), or winged serpent biting its own tail. Such images are codes that



Figure 12. Ouroboros

require deciphering, and to this one, Ficino ascribes the significance of eternity and the paradoxes of Time:

... the mysterious hieroglyph of the monster devouring itself sets the mind a puzzle which forces it to rise above the image. Not only can we not think of the sign as representing a real creature, even the event it represents transcends the possibility of our experience—what will happen when the

⁵⁵ Liselotte Dieckmann, “The Metaphor of Hieroglyphics in German Romanticism” in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Autumn, 1955), 307.

devouring jaws reach the neck and the jaws themselves. It is this paradoxical nature of the image that has made it the archetypal symbol of mystery. We are certainly not tempted to confuse the painted enigma with its manifold meanings ... Unlike the image of beauty, then, the image of mystery will not arrest the mind in its ascent to the intelligible world. The serpent biting its own tail is not a 'representation' of time, for time is not part of the sensible world and so it cannot appear to our bodily senses. The essence of time is accessible only to intuition, and it is this intuition which is symbolized in our response to the image which both demands contemplation and spurs us on to transcend it.⁵⁶

Critical to Ficino's understanding of this figure was the way in which it embodied "in one firm image" the multiple, shifting, and conflicted thoughts that may be conjured in reference to the abstract notion of time. This singular view encapsulating multiple meanings, which serves as an adumbration of an abstraction or higher reality, brings to mind the paradox of Achilles' shield, which contains within its circular confines an eternal unfolding. Both the hieroglyph and the shield present a contradiction in the form of an invocation to an aesthetic Other—the hieroglyph or pictorial enigma attempts the kind of abstraction that is normally conferred to the verbal arts, while the shield feigns the iconicity of the plastic arts—in order to achieve their divinizing effect.

While Achilles' shield is presented to the reader of Homer in a before-and-after series of events that corresponds to the order in which Hephaestus creates them, when taken as a totality, the shield renders

⁵⁶ Gombrich, 160.

linear time circular by encapsulating all that has led up to the moment of its creation and all that will follow. Indeed, the shield represents more of Homer's world than does the *Iliad* itself, presented in a kind of cosmogony, from Hephaestus's creation of the earth, sky, sun, moon, and stars down to the pettiest human dealings, all unfolding simultaneously and concentrically, in a spiraling display of life and death so awe-inspiring that "none had the courage to look at it."⁵⁷ Thus, the creation of the shield, whose *ekphrasis* appears at first to be a visual or ornamental side note to the narrative, is in fact its macrocosm, a totalizing vision of frightening sublimity, narrativized as the paralyzing effect that the shield has on the Myrmidons. Like the *apophatic* image, the *ekphrastic* image is an "illusionary representation of the unrepresentable," that which is "allowed to masquerade as a natural sign" but which is born of a paradoxical vacillation that renders it impossible, and this very impossibility enables it to conjure what Krieger calls a "magic semiotic":

This hermeneutic system has its alchemical home in the transmutation of base elements into gold and its ontological home in a pool of being in which separate entities, from the monstrous to the sublime, are dissolved into identity. The signs that such a hermeneutic is prepared to read evade the "natural equivalence" that would arise from their being matched, through perceptible similarity, to their referents

⁵⁷ Richmond Lattimore, translator, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 392.

and instead attain a meta-physically sanctioned identity with them, thereby achieving a meta-natural, intelligible status.⁵⁸

While the shield has a material presence (even if fictional) that affords physical protection, its *ekphrasis* leads us away from (even as it points us towards) its iconic properties and alerts us to its symbolic protection, which is, as Krieger suggests, of the order of the Palladium, “an empowered surrogate of divine presence.”⁵⁹ It is the shield’s “divine synoptic perspective” of the vast panoply of human enterprise both life-affirming and death-dealing that, as Stephen Scully suggests, terrifies its mortal viewers with “a sense of godhead made present. In their collectivity the scenes on the shield offer a ‘literary’ version of this presence, Gorgon-like in its effect upon humankind.”⁶⁰

It is, as well, a “divine synoptic perspective” born of a paradoxical vacillation to which the title page of Vesalius’s *Fabrica* aspires in the dual gesture between the womb and the skeleton, the instructional equivalent of which is the snake biting its own tail. And like the Myrmidons in the face of Achilles’ shield, the figures surrounding Vesalius are portrayed, in a kind of morality play, as hindered by the limitations of human perception from grasping its full revelatory potential:

⁵⁸ Krieger, 137.

⁵⁹ Krieger, xvi.

⁶⁰ Scully, Stephen. “Reading The Shield of Achilles: Terror, Anger, Delight” in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 101, 2003 (2003), 45.

Each of these: the naked figure, the spectral figure, the young man reading, the figure with the slashed arm, the monkey, the squabbling assistants, the figure with the dog, can be envisaged as contributing to the rich allusive web of meaning enfolded within the title-page. The spectral figure gazing down on the scene, for example, though it may remind us of Dante who imaginatively passed from life into the circles of the dead in the *Divina Commedia*, is also reminiscent of the iconic image of Death or Time, who stands in the world's anatomy theatre, quietly surveying the human attempt to unravel his mystery. The young man reading is suggestive of youth endeavoring to understand the world according to formulaic precepts contained in written texts, unable to realize that the most significant feature of the world is contained within the conjunction of womb and skeleton. The older man, who has closed his book (as though realizing the futility of written observation), answers the figure of youth by gesturing towards the dissective arm beside him. Again, the figures in the foreground, undoubtedly offering a commentary on older anatomical practices, also echo the central message of the image. Thus, the ape who distracts two of the spectators on the left of the image symbolizes the distracting power of human ingenuity, deflecting the understanding from contemplation of the central truth now understood by Vesalius and those who follow his left hand.⁶¹

The vacillation between life and death, space (womb) and time (skeleton), as well as the didacticism of the title page, holds sway throughout the folio pages that follow in the form of “living anatomy,” a convention that was common until well into the eighteenth century, in which the corpse was figured as alive and often engaged in a scene of allegorical significance. Throughout the *Fabrica*, dissected bodies re-enact familiar Christian narratives—the Creation story, the crucifixion, the martyrdom

⁶¹ Sawday, 71-72.

of various saints; they appear against scenic backdrops—strolling through pastoral landscapes, near tombs or crumbling ruins, imagery that itself vacillates between the monumental and the transient; or they assist in their own dissection, in some cases with knife in hand (see figure 13). Such imagery is both descriptive (of the bodily interior) and narrative, thus rendering the dissected body both dead and alive, both object and subject. This vacillation produces, as Janis McLaren Caldwell suggests, a self-reflexivity that not only collapses the distinction between viewer and viewed—encouraging the recognition of ourselves in a body that, while dead and dissected, still roams the countryside—but between cadaver and anatomist.⁶² It is, indeed, the self-reflexive circuit that the figure of Anatomia personifies, as mediating agent between the skull and the mirror, for within the anatomical demonstration we are all, the anatomist included, the future dead examining ourselves in a spectacle that both reveals and hides the truth from us. The animated corpse is, then, like the Medusa head, both a shield and a mirror. It is, as Kenneth Gross says of the statue that steps down from its pedestal to enter the

⁶² Caldwell, a medical doctor turned literary scholar, is unique in her reading of the animated corpse of the high Renaissance. Whereas most find themes of sadism, masochism, and misogyny in anatomical imagery that combines the aesthetic and scientific contemplation of dissected bodies *in situ*, Caldwell suggests that there is a self-referentiality implied that contributes to an ethics of medicine, which she finds lacking in the age of clinical detachment. See Caldwell.



Figure 13. Living Anatomy

human realm, "... a wedge between myself and my death, as well as a reflection of my astonishment at death."⁶³

The iconography of the anatomical scene would persist, albeit in a more private and secularized fashion, in the "stasis-motion paradox" of the "still life" painting, an art form popular in post-Reformation Northern Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is the "still life," particularly in the form of the *vanitas* that, I would argue, is a touchstone for understanding the paradoxes inherent in the *living statue* Hadaly within Villiers's novel. Within the *vanitas*, objects such as a human skull or an hourglass, serve as a *memento mori*, "a reminder of the illusory, flimsy, and ultimately unreal character of the things of this fading world in the face of death's eternity."⁶⁴ By introducing time into the spatial array depicted in the painting, the descriptive image is rendered allegorical, underscoring the illusionism inherent not only in the material objects being displayed, but as Rosalie Colie suggests, of the painting itself. Such self-consciousness, the image's full disclosure of its own illusionary qualities, becomes a testament to and a justification for the work of art:

It suggests that all worldly existence is to be seen as delusion, leading us astray, except for the conscious self-referentiality of the work of art: the work's confession that its

⁶³ Kenneth Gross, T. *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 19.

⁶⁴ Krieger, 210.

illusion reveals itself to us as a self-conscious version of delusion that can serve as our metaphysical beacon through these shadows and snares. In reminding us of its own status as illusion, as soothsayer of our universe, the work of art may be the only thing we can trust, even as it self-consciously retreats before itself.⁶⁵

The artistic work as allegorical beacon of the Real was a view that was both espoused and practiced by Baudelaire, to whom Villiers's œuvre owes its greatest debt. For Baudelaire, the Poet is he who is able to distill the eternal and universal from the dross of materiality. As many have pointed out, there is a neo-Platonic conception of hierarchical analogy running throughout Baudelaire's work, perhaps most apparent in the poem *Correspondences*, inspired, in part, by the 18th century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, who wrote of the correspondences between the material and spiritual realms. The poem begins:

Nature is a temple where living pillars
Let escape sometimes confused words;
Man traverses it through forests of symbols
That observe him with familiar glances.

To whatever extent Nature or the objects of the world are hieroglyphs from which greater truths may be decoded, they are meaningless until submitted to the interpretative faculties of human consciousness, in particular, that of the Poet, who is most equipped to serve as 'un traducteur, un déchiffreur' (a translator, a decipherer) of the symbols

⁶⁵ Murray Krieger discussing Rosalie Colie's "Paradoxia Epidemica" in *Ekphrasis*, 212.

and metaphors concealed in the outside world.”⁶⁶ Thus, it is the Poet’s own creative intuition and originality that serves as the philosopher’s stone in this sacred alchemy. As Baudelaire states in his essay on Philosophic Art, “pure art” in the modern vernacular is “the creation of an evocative magic containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.”⁶⁷

The ideal within art is, for Baudelaire, marked by a duality, which “is a fatal consequence of the duality of man,” and that encompasses both the immutable/eternal and the ephemeral/transient: “Consider, if you will, the eternally subsisting portion as the soul of art, and the variable element as its body.”⁶⁸ Such an approach leads to what, at times, seems like duplicity or contradiction, but that, as Maria Scott suggests, is grounded in an allegorical self-reflexivity. In an attempt to shed light on the obliquities within Baudelaire’s work, Scott draws a helpful analogy to the technique of visual anamorphosis. Anamorphic images are distorted or monstrous-looking images that, when viewed from a certain vantage point (often from an angle or through a curved mirror) appear in regular proportion:

At the moment that this angled image is perceived, the initial (frontal) image or impression fades in clarity, such that a

⁶⁶ Scott, Maria C. *Baudelaire’s Le Spleen De Paris: Shifting Perspectives* (Studies in European Cultural Transition), (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005).

⁶⁷ Charles Baudelaire, “Philosophic Art” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 205

⁶⁸ Baudelaire, 3.

simultaneous and clear perception of both images is impossible. The preservation of a tension between two viewpoints is essential to an anamorphic work; neither perspective ever entirely does away with the other.⁶⁹

By creating a tension between two perspectives, the anamorphic work underscores the illusionary qualities of all works of art, achieving the sort of allegorical self-referentiality to which Colie refers in her description of the “still life.” Indeed, one of the most famous anamorphic works, *The Ambassadors* (1533) by Hans Holbein the Younger draws on the iconology of the Northern European *vanitas* (see figure 14). In the painting, two well-dressed men, an ambassador and a bishop, lean against two shelves, the upper shelf containing objects seemingly related to the heavens, while the lower shelf has objects of earthly interest. Between them, at the bottom center of the painting, is an anamorphic image that is difficult to see unless one stands to the far right of the painting, at which point it reveals itself as a human skull.

As Scott points out, Baudelaire attempted a similar kind of double-edged text, “hovering between what is said and what is left blank, between the visible and the spectral.”⁷⁰ Although writing about the prose poems in *Le Spleen de Paris*, whose hieroglyphic ambiguities are left up to the reader to decipher, Scott attempts to highlight the kind of duplicity to which Baudelaire aspired by directing us to the poem “Le Masque (The

⁶⁹ Scott, 10.

⁷⁰ Scott, 67.



Figure 14. The Ambassadors (1533) by Hans Holbein the Younger

Mask)” in *Fleur du Mal*, which was inspired by an anamorphic statuette by Ernest Christophe (referred to by Baudelaire as “an Allegorical Statue in Renaissance Style.”) From the front, the statuette appeared to represent a grinning woman, but when viewed from the side, the woman’s smiling face is revealed as a mask, which hides her true countenance, distorted from pain and agony. The poem begins with a description of the statue from the front that recalls, in its evocation of classical beauty, Ewald’s description of Alicia as the Venus de Milo:

Behold this prize of beauties wholly Florentine,
See in this muscled body, lithe and sinuous,
Divine concinnity married to strength divine.
This woman sculpted by hands that wrought, miraculous.
So strangely strong, and strangely slim in scope,
She was born to throne on beds made rich and sumptuous
To charm the happy leisure of a Prince or Pope.

Baudelaire then replicates the experience of surprise that one would have if moving around the statue ...

On this proud creature vested with such stateliness
See what exciting charms her daintiness has shed.
Let us draw close and walk around her. O excess,
O Blasphemy of Art! O treachery unique!
That body filled with promise, rapturous and rare,
Turns at the top into a double-headed freak!⁷¹

In so doing, the poem describes “the movement from comfortable delusion to confusion to recognition of the artist’s ruse,” effecting a self-reflexivity that, as Scott suggests of the prose poems, lends it “un

⁷¹ Jacques LeClercq, *Flowers of Evil* (Mt Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 1958).

élément mystérieux, durable, éternel (a mysterious, durable, eternal element).”⁷²

It is to anamorphosis, a double gesture in which the artwork lays bare its illusionism in the process of its reception, to which Villiers points in his novel and to which the fictional Edison seems to aspire in his dissection and construction of the robot, Hadaly. Hadaly is artifice as revelation as opposed to art(ifice) for its own sake, a condition with which real women are, according to Edison, afflicted. Her allure will reside in the truth of her deception as opposed to the lie of the deception that real women perpetrate on men. The deception of the latter is emphasized throughout the novel, but is made explicit in two parallel instances, in which Ewald and Edison each conjure the equivalent of the anamorphic statue in Baudelaire’s poem. The first occurs during Ewald’s moral dissection of Alicia, in which he explains how the beautiful image of Venus that Alicia’s body projects is rendered horrifying every time she opens her mouth and reveals the utter banality of her thoughts:

The marble Venus, in fact, has nothing to do with thinking. The goddess is veiled in stone and silence. From her appearance comes this word: "I am Beauty, complete and alone. I speak only through the spirit of him who looks at me ... This meaning of the statue, which Venus Victorious expresses with her contours, Miss Alicia Clary, standing on the sand beside the ocean, might inspire as her model—if she kept her mouth shut and closed her eyes. But how to understand a Venus Victorious who has found her arms

⁷² Scott, 102.

again in the dark night of time, and reappears in the middle of the human race ...⁷³

The living statue was a common theme in the fantastic literature of the nineteenth century, particularly within the French tradition, in which “one can really speak of a ‘Pygmalion complex.’⁷⁴ In many of these tales, the animation of the statue is a horrifying event that results in the death of its beholder. By invoking such tales in its description of a living woman’s body, this paragraph closes the ekphrastic circuit initiated in Ewald’s original description of Alicia, in which she appears as a humanized Venus. It is in the indeterminacy between her animacy and inanimacy that Alicia rouses passion in Ewald, inspiring the kind of “ekphrastic hope” inscribed by the poet when he attempts to bring an aesthetic object to life through language. However, subtending such desire is, as Mitchell suggests, “ekphrastic fear,” “the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually.”⁷⁵ Although “ekphrastic hope” bespeaks the utopian desire to collapse the distinction between binaries—temporal and spatial, animate and inanimate, subject and object—it is sustained by the very

⁷³ Villiers, 41.

⁷⁴ “Pygmalion complex” is a phrase used by Chambers in his essay on Gautier, elaborated on by both Rigolet and Lathers.

⁷⁵ Mitchell, 154.

impossibility of the desire's realization. If, as Jean Hagstrum states, ekphrasis attempts "to give voice to the mute art object," it fails in the presence of an object that, like Alicia, is a subject who actually starts speaking.

In her refusal to remain silent, Alicia appears to Ewald as "the most hideous of the Eumenides," a comparison that raises the specter of Medusa and the return of the repressed from behind the mask of Alicia's beauty. The Gorgon is being invoked here neither in relation to Alicia's body, which for Ewald is heavenly, nor the lack implicit in her sexuality, but in her very subjectivity and refusal to be a symbol (whether of transcendental plenitude or phallic absence), which shatters the illusion of Ewald's solipsistic reverie. "Medusa is the image that turns the tables on the spectator," according to Mitchell, "She exerts and reverses the power of the ekphrastic gaze, portrayed as herself gazing, her look raking over the world, perhaps even capable of looking back at the poet."⁷⁶ Ewald is dumbstruck in the face of Alicia's literal and rational presence, in which all the subtle shades of his perception are rendered unambiguous. Edison's proposal to recreate Alicia in the form of an android *sans* her intrusive personality is the equivalent of the decapitation and mounting of the Medusa Head onto the Athenian shield, a reinscription within the symbolic order of that which signifies its disruption.

⁷⁶ Mitchell, 172.

The second instance in which the “beautiful mask” is uncovered to reveal a horrifying vision occurs when Edison recounts for Ewald a tale about his friend, Edward Anderson, who was ensnared, bankrupted morally and financially, and brought to his eventual suicide by the “seductive arts” of a dancer named Evelyn Habal. Edison states that after his friend’s demise, he made it a point to investigate in scientific fashion the dancer to determine the exact nature of that which seduced and demoralized his friend. What he discovers is that the dancer was rendered all the more intoxicating by the fact that her charms were spun around a complete absence of charm, a kind of abyss to which his friend was both repelled and drawn.

In order to demonstrate for Ewald the great disparity between the illusion cast by the woman who destroyed his friend and her reality, Edison both resurrects and deconstructs her *aura* by displaying a moving image of Evelyn Habal dancing. It is a scene that is prophetic in its anticipation not only of cinematic projection, which would not premier in reality for another ten years, but of cinematic content, in particular, the controversial Serpentine Dance, which the real Edison “borrowed” from the French performer Loie Fuller (the dancing muse of the Symbolists) and shot in the Black Maria:

A long strip of transparent plastic encrusted with bits of tinted glass moved laterally along two steel tracks before the luminous cone of the astral lamp. Drawn by a clockwork

mechanism at one of its ends, this strip began to glide swiftly between the lens and the disk of a powerful reflector. Suddenly on the wide white screen within its frame of ebony flashed the life-size figure of a very pretty and quite youthful blonde girl.⁷⁷

Shortly thereafter, in a move that collapses the functionality of the magic lantern and film projector, evoking a cinematic Phantasmagoria, Edison adjusts his device so that “a second heliochromic band replaced the first and began running as quick as light before the reflector,” on which appears “a little bloodless creature, vaguely female of gender, with dwarfish limbs, hollow cheeks, toothless jaws with practically no lips, and almost bald skull, with dim and squinting eyes, flabby lids, and wrinkled features, all dark and skinny.”⁷⁸ Edison informs Ewald that this is the same Evelyn Habal as in the first image, magically stripped of her make-up and accoutrements.

This doubled vision of beauty and decrepitude not only recalls the anamorphic statue in Baudelaire’s poem “The Mask,” but it references directly “Danse Macabre,” the second poem in *Fleur du Mal* inspired by a Christophe statuette, this one depicting a female skeleton dressed up as if for a ball. Indeed, the chapter shares the same name as the poem and begins with a quote by Baudelaire: “And it’s hard work being a beautiful woman!” The poem describes a female skeleton who dances in a ballroom

⁷⁷ Villiers, 117.

⁷⁸ Villiers, 118

encircled by couples perfumed with musk, but who smell of death and who, like those circling the skeleton on the title page of the *Fabrica*, remain oblivious to the truth in their midst. The Danse Macabre, a common allegorical trope in the late Medieval period often depicted as a death figure leading a group of dancing skeletons to the grave (see figure 15), was both admired and emulated by Baudelaire. In an essay on the 1859 Salon, in which he discusses the Christophe statuette on which his poem is based, Baudelaire expresses “a nostalgia for ‘those magnificent allegories of the Middle Ages, in which the immortal grotesque intertwined itself playfully, as it still does, with the mortal horrible.’”⁷⁹ As Marie Lathers points out, Baudelaire’s “syntagmatic association between sculpture, death, and the feminine” runs throughout *L’Eve Future*.⁸⁰ While both the poem and Villiers’s chapter play on the theme of the dancing skeleton, they also hearken back to a particular elaboration of the *vanitas* image in which a beautiful woman sits at a looking glass, her mirrored reflection appearing as a skull or skeleton (see figure 16). Such images lend themselves to a dual interpretation: one, a critique of female vanity, the other a *memento mori* in which the female figure represents

⁷⁹ Scott, 149. Baudelaire had intended to have a frontispiece with an allegorical skeleton in the tradition of the Danse Macabre for the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, published in 1861 (his vision for the piece was not realized until 1866 by Félicien Rops and was featured in *Les épaves*, published the same year). See Holtzman, “Félicien Rops and Baudelaire: Evolution of a Frontispiece.”

⁸⁰ Marie Lathers, *The Aesthetics of Artifice: Villiers's 'L’Eve Future.'* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 63.



Figure 15. Memento Mori



Figure 16. All is Vanity

the personification of Beauty as that to which the world of appearances aspires, made poignant by the face of death smiling back, which reminds the viewer of the transience and ephemeral nature not just of beauty, but of the entire world of things.

In Villiers's novel both readings are brought into play; if Evelyn Habal (who manifests a potentiality in all living women, according to Edison) represents the woman/death dyad as vanity, then Hadaly will serve as her antidote, the *vanitas* or that which Baudelaire describes admiringly as a "spell of nothingness, madly bedecked." The comparison between the two is underscored in the next chapter in which Edison leads Ewald to a drawer in which he has kept Evelyn Habal's things since her death. He is accompanied by Hadaly, who illuminates the collection with a torch, "like a statue at the side of a tomb," bringing to mind a statue of liberty whose call to freedom is in the form of a *memento mori*. Edison's presentation of the dancer's beautifying accoutrements is the *contreblazon* to Ewald's initial blazoning of the singer, Alicia, a parodic echoing of those same attributes upon which praise was bestowed, now rendered horrifying through their deconstruction:

Here we have ... the tresses of Salome, the glittering fluid of the stars, the brilliance of sunlight on autumn foliage, the magic of forest noontides, a vision of Eve the blond, our youthful ancestry, forever radiant! Ah! To revel in these tresses! What a delight, eh?

And he shook in the air a horrible mare's nest of matted hair and faded ribbons, streaked here and there where

the coloring had worn away, mottled and tangled, a dirty rainbow of wig work, corroded and yellowed by the action of various acids.

—Here now is the lily complexion, the rosy modesty of the virgin, here is the seductive power of passionate lips, moist and warm with desire, all eager with love!

And he set forth a make-up box filled with half-empty jars of rouge, pots of greasepaint, creams and pastes of every sort, patches, mascara, and so forth...

—Here now are the lovely breasts of our siren, from the salt sea waves of morning! From the foam of ocean and the rays of the sun, here are the ethereal contours of the heavenly court of Venus!

And he waved aloft some scraps of gray wadding, bulging, grubby, and giving off a particularly rancid odor.

—Here are the thighs of the wood nymph, the delirious bacchante, the modern girl of perfect beauty, more lovely than the statues of Athens, and who dances with such divine madness!

And he brandished aloft various old girdles, falsies, and apparatus of steel and whalebone, busks of orthopedic function, and the remains of two or three ancient corsets so complicated, what with their laces and buttons, that they looked like old dismantled mandolins, with their strings whipping at random about them.⁸¹

However frightening these objects are in isolation, they were able in their totality to cast a spell of seduction that, like a siren's call, lured Edward Anderson to his eventual doom. Echoing Baudelaire's views on the tricks of artifice with which modern women conjure an image that verges on the supernatural, Edison assures Ewald that even if Anderson had been aware of the dancer's trickery, his fate was sealed. "What is this craft called "make-up"? Women have fairy fingers, it's clear! And once the original impression is produced, I tell you the illusion clings forever ...

⁸¹ Villiers, 120.

even on the most hideous of all women.”⁸² Indeed, Edison conjectures that such “modern Furies” as Evelyn Habal benefit from an unfortunate equation in which “*their morbid and fatal influence on their victim is in direct ratio to the quantity of moral and physical artifice with which they reinforce—or, rather, overwhelm—the very few natural seductive powers they seem to possess.*”⁸³ Thus, the dancer’s deleterious effect on Edison’s friend, which was complete and all-consuming, must have been the function of a total negativity: “Only the absolute void could have imposed on him this particular *manner* of vertigo.”

The thematic of a spiraling nullity around which desire is constructed was, of course, explored to great effect by Hitchcock in his film, *Vertigo* in which a simple and ordinary woman, Judy Barton, is able to trick the main protagonist, Scottie, into believing that she is the wife of an old friend of his, named Madeleine, whom his friend has hired him to follow. As Madeleine, she will appear to be possessed by the spirit of a dead woman, in front of whose portrait in a museum she sits in a trance for hours at a time, and Scottie will find her so beautiful and mysterious that he will become obsessed with her. After “Madeleine’s” death, Scottie accidentally runs into Judy Barton with whom he becomes acquainted and, although he is initially put off by her banality, he is so taken by her

⁸² Villiers, 118.

⁸³ Villiers, 115.

visual similarity to “Madeleine” that he attempts to recreate the aura of the dead woman by asking Judy to wear her hair and clothes in a similar style. The conception of desire expressed in the film—that it can be catalyzed by an assemblage of technologies of artifice producing the effect of a woman and that it is all the more piqued the greater the absence for which such artifice compensates—is articulated explicitly in Villiers's novel by Edison. After discovering the secret of Evelyn Habal's allure, Edison concludes that if the vertiginous effect that the dancer had on his friend Edward Anderson can be reduced to the contents of a drawer, why not mobilize the same production to a more positive end?

In a word, I have come, I, the “Sorcerer of Menlo Park,” as they call me here, to offer the human beings of these new and up-to-date times, to my scientific contemporaries as a matter of fact, something better than a false, mediocre, and ever-changing Reality; what I bring is a positive, enchanting, ever-faithful Illusion. If it's just one chimera for another, one sin against another sin, one phantasm against all the rest, *why not, then?*⁸⁴

Edison then sets to work on Hadaly, in which he will recreate the formula of artificially-induced desire that he has distilled from his studies of Evelyn Habal, but which he will amplify by “*saturating it with a profound awe hitherto unknown.*” The mechanics of this awe is similar to that produced by the false Madeleine in Hitchcock's film, but with a difference. Hadaly not only benefits from a full arsenal of beautifying

⁸⁴ Villiers, 164.

effects, but some of them serve as the interface by which she can be controlled. On each finger she wears a ring, each with a different stone, which allows Ewald to influence her movements. Around her neck she wears a string of pearls, “every pearl of which has a specific *correspondence*” (italics mine. A direct reference to Baudelaire). Via two golden phonographs that serve as her lungs, she will speak words, captured in advance in Alicia’s voice, from “the greatest poets, the most subtle metaphysicians, the most profound novelists.”⁸⁵ Moreover, Hadaly is actually invested with the soul of a dead woman. As we will later learn, Anny Anderson, the noble wife of Edward Anderson for whom Edison had the greatest respect, was reduced to a cataleptic state after her husband’s demise. She was thereafter cared for by Edison, who learned to communicate with her through a form of mesmerism. The disembodied soul of Mrs. Anderson, who conversed telepathically with the inventor, began to take on a life of its own, as well as a new name, Sowana. Towards the end of the novel, as Ewald prepares to depart with Hadaly, Sowana will shed finally the mortal coil of Anny Anderson and incorporate fully within the android.

Sowana is the ghost in the machine, Hadaly’s *x factor*; she invests the android’s programming with an enigmatic and fuzzy logic that makes her not only clairvoyant, able to telegraph events from over large

⁸⁵ Villiers, 131.

distances, but unfathomable even to her creator. Edison insists, “though I know Mrs. Anderson, *I swear to you on my soul THAT I DO NOT KNOW SOWANA!*” Sowana serves as an organizational agent for the mechanical workings of Hadaly, while also investing her with an infinite mystery that is irreducible to the sum of its parts. This dual function enables Hadaly to embody in “one firm image” an awe-inspiring metaphysicality that is wrought in a similar manner to the ekphrastic shield. As Marina Warner tells us at the start of her essay on the “Aegis of Athena”—“The transfiguration of a Homeric hero is achieved through armour.”⁸⁶—and, indeed, our first glimpse of the android Hadaly in the novel is “a coat of armor, shaped as for a woman out of silver plates” upon which the divine agent Sowana, like Hephaestus, will sculpt the image of Alicia. The process by which Hadaly is created will be replicated in 1915 in the film *Metropolis* in which Rotwang, the mad scientist, builds an android whose initial appearance resembles a coat of armor (this one with a distinctly art deco flair), into which he invests the life force of the virginal woman Maria, an act that also magically transposes her image onto the android’s outer shell.⁸⁷ The technique by which Edison, with the help of Sowana, transforms Hadaly into the image of Alicia is, as Marie Lathers points out, reminiscent of the (then) new art of photosculpture, “a process that

⁸⁶ Warner, 104.

⁸⁷ I will discuss this film and, in particular, the process by which the android is ensouled, at greater length in Chapter Three.

combines the reproductive potentials of the ancient art of sculpture and the novel technique of photography,”⁸⁸ invented in 1861, and of which Villiers was clearly aware since Edison mentions it in the novel. But however modern the technique, the metal body onto which the female image is cast is figured as the base element in an occult process whose result is an alchemical transubstantiation (made explicit in *Metropolis* by a pentagram that hangs behind the android as she is being transformed), which will result not in a copy, but in a radically altered being. Hadaly is described by Villiers not as an android but as an “Androsphinx,” an apophatic enigma in the form of a living woman. Although a technological marvel, she will, from the moment that Ewald first encounters her, continually direct him beyond her own material presence to the metaphysical realm as the source from which she has incarnated.

When Ewald first meets the metallic being that will become Hadaly, her face is covered by a veil, an evocation of mystery reminiscent of the famous parable by Pliny the Elder on the nature of illusionism. There was, so the story goes, a competition between two painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasios, over who could paint the most authentic illusion. While Zeuxis was able to paint grapes that were so lifelike that birds attempted to peck at them, Parrhasios painted a curtain that fooled Zeuxis, who

⁸⁸ Lathers, 48.

attempted to look behind it. Enigmatic icon thus trumps faithful illusion in its ability to capture the imagination. As Marie Lathers aptly puts it:

Zeuxis's fruit is "for the birds," it is a lure, a mere illusion, or that which deceives in nature. Parrhasios's veil, on the other hand, is a *trompe-l'oeil* that, one may infer, aims beyond the satisfaction of need and demand to operate in the register of desire.⁸⁹

Hadaly continues to pose a riddle whose answer remains "beyond the veil" even after she has been transformed into the image of Alicia. In one of the later scenes in the novel, the newly transfigured Hadaly is reintroduced to Ewald, who mistakes her for his mistress. Confused in part by the fact that "the false Alicia ... seemed far more natural than the true one," he asks "Who are you?" In her explanation, Hadaly recreates the parable of Plato's cave, suggesting that she is an emissary from a more real, infinite reality, for which our own is "merely the metaphor." This supernal realm can be glimpsed in flights of the imagination, such as in the forms and figures that take shape in the shadows of night, when we are between sleep and waking. "And the first *natural instinct* of the Soul is to *recognize* them, in and through that same holy terror which bears witness to them." However, they are often quickly extinguished when, in the morning light, our sense of reason dismisses them as mere illusions cast by "clothes tossed hastily over the back of a

⁸⁹ Lathers discusses the veil in Pliny's parable in relation to Lacan's *objet petit 'a'* "the Freudian fetish or that which substitutes for the *allure* of the mother's phallus," see p. 37.

chair.” It is the reasonable mind that deadens the world by turning those objects, shapes, and colors that vibrate with metaphysical possibility into a world of dead things:

I am an envoy to you from those limitless regions whose pale frontiers man can contemplate only in certain reveries and dreams. There all periods of time flow together, there space is no more; there the last illusions of instinct disappear... Who am I? A creature of dream, who lives half-awake in your thoughts, and whose shadow you may dissipate any time with one of those fine reasonable arguments which will leave you, in my place, nothing but vacancy, sorrow, heartache—the fruits of that truth to which they pretend.⁹⁰

Like the ekphrastic shield, Hadaly/Sowana is a portal to an infinite realm beyond time and space, but which the rational mind, if it so chooses, can reduce to an aesthetic object, a piece of metal inscribed with a programmatic series of interactions. She implores Ewald to defend her against his reason for, she suggests, it is only in his imagination that the spark of her existence is ignited: “Attribute a being to me, affirm that I am! Reinforce me with your self. And then suddenly I will come to life under your eyes, to precisely the extent that your creative Good Will has penetrated me.”⁹¹ Hadaly is the Baudelairean work of art personified, for she represents (and speaks as) a modern monstrosity whose metaphysical and eternal qualities are catalyzed, in a kind of sacred alchemy, by the Artist’s imagination.

⁹⁰ Villiers, 198.

⁹¹ Villiers, 199.

Hadaly's relationship to the living woman Alicia is, in this sense, a microcosm of that between the fictionalized Edison in Villiers's novel and the real one. In his "Advice to the Reader" which precedes the novel, Villiers suggests that there are two Edisons: the first an inventor living and working in New Jersey and the second the wizard, magician, or sorcerer of Menlo Park. It is the second, the embodiment of the mystique, speculation, and enthusiasm that has circulated around the first, who belongs, according to Villiers, more properly to the realm of art:

For example, if Doctor Johann Faust had been living in the age of Goethe and had given rise to his symbolic legend at that time, wouldn't the writing of Faust, even then, have been a perfectly legitimate undertaking? Thus, the EDISON of the present work, his character, his dwelling, his language, and his theories, are and ought to be at least somewhat distinct from anything existing in reality. Let it be understood, then, that I interpret a modern legend to the best advantage of the work of *Art-metaphysics* that I have conceived; and that, in a word, the hero of this book is above all "The Sorcerer of Menlo Park," and so forth—and not the engineer, Mr. Edison, our contemporary. (*italics mine*)⁹²

Villiers has, in other words, reified the legend that surrounds the real Edison in the same way that the fictional Edison has "made captive the ideal" aura that surrounds the body of Alicia. In neither case is the double a copy or an imitation, but rather a transmutation achieved via the imaginative gifts of the Artist. Villiers thus suggests that it is in the creative work that not only the object, but the subject, achieves its

⁹² Villiers, 3.

highest manifestation; and it is in self-reflective illusionism that the creative work offers a glimpse of the divine. Thus, Hadaly's confession to Ewald of her own contingency is not just an entreaty, but a justification of her artificiality; it is what makes her the phantom that edifies, as opposed to the degrading phantoms that Villiers suggests "real" women may become.

It is as self-conscious illusion or apophatic enigma that the creation and dissection of Hadaly achieves its status as heir to the anatomical imaginary of the Renaissance and precursor to the cinematic image. As in the anatomical scene in which Vesalius points both to the dissected female body and away from it, the dissections performed in Villiers's novel are conducted in an ongoing attempt to inspire that which transcends reduction or quantification. Although Edison is all too happy to reveal the masterpiece of Hadaly's inner workings to Ewald, he warns him:

... knowing the mechanism of the puppet will never explain to you how it becomes the phantom—any more than the skeleton which lies beneath the surface of Miss Alicia Clary can possibly explain to you how *her* mechanism, integrated with the beauty of her flesh, idealizes itself to the point of developing those contours on which your entire love is founded.⁹³

And yet, even in the case of Evelyn Habal, who engages in the kind of feminizing tricks of artifice that, as Baudelaire once claimed about make-

⁹³ Villiers, 78.

up and fashion, are spellbinding even though they “are known to all,” there is, Villiers seems to suggest (in the manner of Baudelaire), a revelatory quality to the vacillating gesture between the beautiful woman and the horrible truth beneath her appearance, whether it is the skeleton beneath the semblance of glamour or the mechanism within the android. And it is this gesture of simulation and dissimulation that anticipates the cinema and is perhaps most evident in the films of Georges Méliès to whom many have drawn comparisons with Villiers. Indeed, the kind of vacillation that Hadaly/Sowana represents is writ large in the first trick film that Georges Méliès ever shot, entitled *The Vanishing Lady* (1896), a cinematic interpretation of the *vanitas*. In the film, a seated woman is covered with fabric by a magician (Méliès) and, when the fabric is removed, the woman has been replaced by a skeleton.

Lucy Fischer in her essay, “The Lady Vanishes” has written at length about early trick films, both those of Méliès and other filmmakers including Edison, as well as the rhetoric of stage magic. As she points out, there are many examples in which the female body is juxtaposed with or transformed into symbols of death, including Edison’s *The Mystic Swing*. She considers such films, along with the magical tradition that they emulate, as a site at which complex and contradictory attitudes

towards women, and in many cases a distinct fear of the Other, are enacted by the male magician:

Perhaps this fear of women explains why so many magic films involve tricks in which women are turned into men, thereby annihilating their disturbing sexual status. In *A Delusion* (Biograph/1902) a female model turns into a man each time the photographer looks into the camera lens. In *The Artist's Dilemma* (Edison/1901) a woman turns into a clown.⁹⁴

While Fischer's discussion is both broad and nuanced, drawing on insights from both anthropology and psychoanalysis, it overlooks the history of allegorical representation in which the female body represents not just itself (and thus attitudes towards women) but larger principles beyond itself. It is only by taking into account this historical tradition that we can more fully engage with those contemporary works in which we find the vestiges of its iconographical legacy. Indeed, we would do well to follow the lead of Gombrich who, in his study of symbolic iconology, encourages us to "abandon the assumptions about the functions of the image we usually take for granted" and, in particular, the distinctions that we tend to draw between representation (in which an image *represents* an object in the real world) and symbolization (in which an image may serve as a *symbol* of either an abstract idea *or* an

⁹⁴ Fischer, Lucy, "The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic, and the Movies" in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Autumn, 1979), 34.

unconscious desire or fear). As he tells us, these different registers may be, and often are, present in one image...

... a motif in a painting by Hieronymus Bosch may *represent* a broken vessel, *symbolize* the sin of gluttony and *express* an unconscious sexual fantasy on the part of the artist, but to us the three levels of meaning remain quite distinct. As soon, however, as we leave the ground of rational analysis we find that these neat distinctions no longer hold.⁹⁵

A particularly telling example of the extent to which such distinctions are collapsed is in Renaissance iconographer Cesare Ripa's introduction to his *Iconologia* (1593), the most famous of all the emblem books of the Renaissance, in which he explains why the virtue of Strength, which is so often associated with men, is personified as female:

She should be a Lady, not to declare thereby that a strong man should come close to feminine ways, but to make the figure suit the way we speak; or, on the other hand, as every virtue is an appearance of the true, the beautiful and the desirable, in which the intellect takes its delight, as we commonly attribute beauty to the ladies, we can conveniently represent one by the other; or, rather because, just as those women who deprive themselves of the pleasures to which nature has made them incline acquire and preserve the glory of an exceptional honour, so the strong man, risking his body, putting his life in danger, his soul aflame with virtue, gives birth to reputation and fame of the highest esteem.

As Marina Warner points out, such an explanation—"an intriguing cocktail, and a fair résumé of some of the thinking behind the Statue of

⁹⁵ Gombrich, 124.

Liberty, for example”⁹⁶— conflates Platonic ideas of beauty (as being a reflection of the divine) with cultural attitudes towards women (as being morally weaker and thus an appropriate symbol of strength if they manage to be virtuous). Moreover, it collapses epistemology and trope, the abstract and the particular, suggesting, in sum, that truth is beauty and beauty should be represented by women because they are more beautiful. Within such an equation, the female body, however particular, may become the site at which Beauty, in the abstract, is mined for Truth. And while such an interpretation doesn’t occlude those which are sensitive to the treatment of the female body as a threat, it is one to which we should be particularly attuned in works that peddle in the tropes of allegorical representation, such as the films of Méliès, many of which deal with hieratic themes—from Satan to Faust—and occult imagery.

As many have pointed out, Méliès revives in his films the mythological and ritual roots of modern magic, while borrowing techniques and themes from the stagecraft of his day, including theatrical repertory, opera, the circus, and, in particular, the *féerie*, a theatrical spectacle of acrobatics, music, and mime, which appealed to the newly liberated masses following the French Revolution and in which decapitations, dismembered bodies, and other magical transformations

⁹⁶ Warner, 65.

were often the highlight.⁹⁷ However, despite the proscenium arch beneath which many of these scenes unfold, Méliès's work is, above all, a celebration of the new technology of cinema to produce, in unprecedented fashion, an allegorical spectacle that, like the anatomical scene or the ekphrastic shield, points simultaneously at and beyond its own outrageous visuality. In attempting to understand Méliès's œuvre, it is helpful to consider the distinction that Walter Benjamin draws between the magician and the surgeon, as well as the homologues that he then makes between the magician and painter and the surgeon and cameraman. Although Benjamin is referring to the magician who heals through a laying on of hands, his insights still hold for the prestidigitator or the stage magician who is able to conjure magical illusions with the wave of a hand or a wand. According to Benjamin, unlike the magician, who faces his patient (or audience) directly, and whose art requires a certain distance, the cameraman, like the surgeon is invisible yet directly penetrates his patient's (spectator's) body:

Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman

⁹⁷ See Katherine Singer Kovács, "Georges Méliès and the 'Féerie'" in *Cinema Journal*, vol. 16, No. 1 (Autumn, 1976), 1 -13.

consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.⁹⁸

While the films of Méliès recreate the environment of the theatrical stage, with the magician performing at a substantial remove from his audience whom he faces directly, the magic of a Méliès film lies not only in what is conjured before our eyes by the magician played by Méliès, but also by the stop-motion substitutions and editorial splicing of the filmmaker, who is also Méliès. And there is enacted within many of his films a sustained tension between the two. While the magician attempts to conjure for our visual delectation (and his own) an image of monumental beauty (whether in the form of a beautiful woman or statue), the cameraman keeps replacing the image with its opposite: a man, a cook, or that ultimate reminder of the transience of all worldly things, a skeleton. The result is an ongoing vacillation whose equivalent is the anamorphic statue or the *memento mori*, and which achieves a self-referentiality that destabilizes the illusionism inherent not only in the magic act, but the act of representation itself. Indeed, as the examples given by Fisher make clear, it is not just the magician who is being undermined in such films, but the painter, the photographer, and the sculptor. Even Pygmalion, that rare soul whose encounter with a living statue ends happily, is in Méliès's reinterpretation, confronted with a

⁹⁸ Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, (NY: Schocken, 1969).

Galatea who refuses to be contained. Méliès is, like the fictional Edison who resurrects the illusion of Evelyn Habal in order to denature it, conjuring for us an image whose illusionary status he himself will repetitively emphasize by its transience. More particularly, however, he is (like Edison) showcasing for us the powers of cinema to explode the visual world with what Walter Benjamin hailed as “the dynamite of the tenth of a second.” While Méliès’s camerawork is virtually non-existent and his editing primitive⁹⁹, his films display an early romance with the eruptive possibilities of montage that will, in their later evolution, achieve the kind of unconscious optics to which Benjamin referred. The transience of the visual object, its repetitive substitution with people and things from an unseen field of action, and the parodic manner in which it is dissimulated, effect not only a destabilization of beauty (which proves to be two- and even three-faced), but the entire world of appearances in what often amounts to social satire, and which can be read as a revival of the carnivalesque-grotesque of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the *blazon anatomique*, to which Méliès’s and Villiers’s work

⁹⁹ This is a point of contention. Tom Gunning, for example, has argued that while many believed that most of the tricks in Méliès’s films were produced by stop-motion substitutions performed in camera, closer examination of the actual prints have revealed that, in most cases, such substitutions were perfected by splicing the film. See Gunning, “‘Primitive’ Cinema—A Frame-up? or The Trick’s on Us” in *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter 1989), 3-12.

¹⁰⁰ Darragh O’Donoghue suggests that the films of Méliès’ not only parody bourgeois values, but display a distinct anti-authoritarianism in evidence since his work as a caricaturist for his cousin’s journal *La Griffé*. See O’Donoghue “Georges Méliès” in *Senses of Cinema*, <http://www.sensesofcinema.com> (May 2004).

hearken, grew out of “the popular dual-faced praise of the marketplace” of the Renaissance, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, who reminds us that even Clément Marot’s ode to “The Beautiful Breast” was to be read in conjunction with its *contreblazon* “The Ugly Breast,” a combination intended to produce ambivalent laughter over a female body part that was never meant to be isolated from the whole, let alone addressed as if it were a person.

According to Bakhtin the imagery of the carnivalesque-grotesque—which often combined the ritualistic enactment of torture, abuse and anatomic enumeration with bawdy allusions to both sex and food—was based in the very ambivalence of being and, despite its excessive and oxymoronic visuality, it reflected a “deep realism” and recognition of the life-death cycle, through which the entire world is leveled and reborn and “the hero and author is Time itself.” In its suspension of real time and evocation of universal time, the carnivalesque enabled its participants “to see with new eyes” the ephemeral nature of reality and its universal destiny. For even the greatest individual dies and every epoch fades, but the life of the collective is continually renewed: “in the world of carnival the awareness of the people’s immortality is combined with the realization that established authority and truth are relative.”¹⁰¹ This

¹⁰¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 256.

evocation of “mass consciousness” is, perhaps, not all that different from that of Benjamin who, in hailing the revolutionary possibilities of cinema, compares the contemplative beauty of painting, which is experienced singularly and at a distance, with the “shock effect” of cinema, which assails its spectators, acquiring a tactile and participatory quality that has the potential for collective mobilization.

According to Bakhtin, although the carnivalesque-grotesque experienced a revival in the romantic literature of the nineteenth century, to which Villiers’s novel is heir, it was radically changed. Some of its more potent symbols, in particular the mask and the puppet, which were intended to be humorous in their original forms and connected to the “the joy of change and reincarnation,” become reflective of a somber disenchantment with and alienation from the world. Furthermore, the grotesque became nocturnal, chthonic, marked by darkness and subterranean dealings—and Bakhtin mentions Hoffman specifically in this regard, although Villiers equally fits the bill—whereas the folk version of the genre was light, fanciful, celebratory. Most significantly, that which was once representative of the people became individualized:

Unlike the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, which was directly related to folk culture and thus belonged to all the people, the Romantic genre acquired a private “chamber” character. It became, as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation. The carnival spirit was transposed into a subjective, idealistic philosophy ... However, the most important transformation of Romantic

grotesque was that of the principle of laughter ... laughter was cut down to cold humor, irony, sarcasm.¹⁰²

It is in its interiorized pathos and alienating idealism that the Romantic grotesque is understood within the register of the Imaginary, as a nostalgic dream of a wholeness that is forever elusive. And to the extent that such desire is projected onto a female Other, whether woman or female robot, and whether or not she is anatomically interrogated in the process, it reeks of fetishism or, in its most exaggerated form, a sexless sublimation, of which Villiers has been accused repeatedly.

Hadaly, a spiritual being incarnate, is incapable of having sex, a fact that has been read in terms of *machines célibataires* or the “bachelor machine,” best known by Duchamp’s work *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, and which Michel Carrouges called “a fantastic image that transforms love into a mechanics of death.”¹⁰³ The bachelor machine represents a narcissistic and totalizing autoeroticism experienced as epiphanic paroxysm, which marks, according to Allen S. Weiss, early modernism’s “transformation of the theological notion of demonic possession into scientific concepts of hysteria and psychosis” of which both “romantic morbidity” in general, and Hadaly in particular, is emblematic:

¹⁰² Bakhtin, 38.

¹⁰³ Allen S. Weiss, “Narcissistic Machines and Erotic Prostheses” in *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, ed. Allen and Turvey (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 58.

Such transformations describe the solipsistic circuit of an onanistic sexuality (incorporating all possible dualisms and perversions); a delirious metaphysics (conflating all possible ontological contradictions); a useless simulation (where every machine is essentially infernal); and a morbid functionalism (where time, solitude, and death are synonymous).¹⁰⁴

Drawing on Freud's essay in which he describes the sublimation of sexual impulses in the form of a non-sexual, "spiritual" love as a form of hypnosis, Raymond Bellour (whose essay Weiss acknowledges as formative to his own) suggests that it is in the service of ideal love as "a desire which oscillates between the satisfaction of a drive and its opposite" that the dissections in Villiers novel, particularly that of Hadaly, are performed:

Freed from all sexuality, fixing love in the heat of its first moment, the Android induces a transcendental form of "erotic subjection." In a state of self-purified feeling, the love object comes to occupy, once and for all, the place of the ego-ideal. This is why Edison says that in Persian (a way of shrouding the evidence with mystery), the name Hadaly "means the IDEAL."¹⁰⁵

It is in the tension between the collective and the individual expression of the anatomical grotesque that we will return, finally, to the place where we started: the work of the Realdoll doctor, Slade. The Realdoll is, like Hadaly, feminine artifice raised to its logical conclusion by the latest technologies. And although the Realdoll is mass manufactured, she is also individually conceived. The founder of Realdoll, Matt McMullen is,

¹⁰⁴ Weiss, 58. See also R.L. Rutsky.

¹⁰⁵ Raymond Bellour, "Ideal Hadaly" in *Camera Obscura*, No. 15 (Fall 1986), 123.

he would claim, first and foremost an artist and his foray into the lovedoll business was both serendipitous and Pygmalionesque. McMullen created a series of large sculptures of beautiful women, which he posted onto a website. They inspired a surprising flurry of emails from men expressing a willingness to pay top dollar for one of his sculptures if it were “outfitted” in such a way that they could have sexual relations with it. Matt obliged and Realdoll was born. Although now a multi-million dollar business, each doll still begins as a sculpture, which is handcrafted (and only later cast as a mold) by Matt, who claims that his inspiration comes from the women he encounters in his daily life, both friends and strangers, whose best qualities he combines and enhances with his own creative imagination. The technologies used to create the dolls, fittingly, are taken from the film industry, in particular special effects model making, a profession to which McMullen once aspired. In fact, Realdolls are made with the exact same effects technology (molded silicone over an articulated skeleton) as corpses in horror films, and thus, in more than one sense, McMullen is transforming the morbid into the erotic.

The difference between the Realdoll and the robot Hadaly, aside from the obvious inanimation of the former,¹⁰⁶ is homologous to the difference between the anamorphic statue and the Venus. Although molded from silicone, the Realdoll aspires to an ideal beauty that, if not entirely classic (Realdolls resemble silicone-enhanced pinups more than they do classical sculpture) is photographic. Indeed the appeal of the Realdoll is the ability for mere mortals to physically possess a beauty that normally exists only in a virtual, digitally-altered or airbrushed realm. Such beauty was never meant to step down from its pedestal and enter the human world and, when it does, even with the benefit of a malleable exterior of silicone, it takes little time for time to take its toll. And so there is Slade, a Baudelairean character for the virtual age, whose own vertiginous drop into the abyss provided the marginal vantage point from which he sees these ruined creatures as both a reflection and redemption. They are, in a sense, the heir to the prostitute, in whom Baudelaire found an endlessly generative symbol of modernity, the apotheosis of woman as commodity.¹⁰⁷ Slade's photographs, in which the sexual is eclipsed by the anatomical, and which reveal the

¹⁰⁶ Although McMullen has created a prototype for a doll who can swivel her hips, and he is already selling dolls that, like large interactive versions of Edison's doll, speak when fondled.

¹⁰⁷ The Realdoll is emblematic not only of a virtual culture, but of the age of AIDS; the primary justification that doll owners cite for buying a Realdoll over the services of a prostitute (whose association with syphilis, from which Baudelaire eventually died, echoes throughout his poetry in the conflation between women and death) is the avoidance of STDs.

nothingness at the doll's core, is in the manner of Villiers, a form of recuperation in which the commodity becomes art and the material is rendered metaphysical via an ambivalent vacillation between the beautiful and the horrible, the living and the dead. Moreover, by posting the photographs to his website, he renders that which is private and shameful, the physical degradation of a sexual surrogate, both public and parodic.

In attempting to explain to me why he does what he does, Slade led me to his version of Edison's drawer of death, a kind of cabinet of curiosities, which was located in his living room next to his theatre-sized television, in what was clearly a place of prominence. In the cabinet was a collection of fragments of the once living: skulls of different sizes—both animal and human—a porcupine quill, an ostrich egg. His prized possession, however, was not on display, but preserved in a red brocade box and wrapped in silk, which Slade carefully opened for me. It was an amputated finger. Slade told me that it was a *yubizume*, a ritual amputation (usually of the pinky finger below the first joint) performed on oneself by a member of the yakuza, the Japanese mafia, and presented to the yakuza boss as an act of contrition for doing something wrong. The act supposedly dates back to the time of the samurai; the littlest finger was considered the most important for wielding a sword,

and severing it made the person less effective as a warrior and more reliant on his yakuza brethren.

The phallic significance of the object was difficult to ignore, but it seemed to have the shimmer of something more. Indeed, it is strangely reminiscent of the amputated arm that appears, in bookend fashion, at the beginning and end of Villiers's novel. It is the first object to which we are introduced in Edison's laboratory, where he sits alone at the start of the novel, in a kind of idle reverie. Edison is lamenting his late arrival in history and all the moments that have been lost to time because he was not there to record them on phonographic cylinders for perpetuity:

Even among the noises of the past, how many mysterious sounds were known to our predecessors, which for lack of a convenient machine to record them have now fallen forever into the abyss? ... Who nowadays could form, for example, a proper notion of the sound of the trumpets of Jericho? Of the bellow of Phalaris' bull? Of the laughter of the augurs? Or of the morning melody of Memnon? And all the rest? Dead voices, lost sounds, forgotten noises, vibrations lockstepping into the abyss, and now too distant ever to be recaptured!¹⁰⁸

Edison then tempers his own remorse by suggesting that even if he had been able to capture these sounds, their original significance might not be heard or understood by the rational sensibilities of the modern ear:

If I could record them and transmit them to the present age, they would constitute nothing more, nowadays, than dead sounds. They would be, in a word, sounds completely different from what they actually were, and from what their

¹⁰⁸ Villiers, 10.

phonographic labels pretended they were—*since it's in ourselves that the killing silence exists.*¹⁰⁹

Edison's reverie is then interrupted by a dispatch from Lord Ewald, to whom we are for the first time introduced, announcing that he will arrive the next evening. He absentmindedly drops the piece of paper onto a table, where it auspiciously falls between two fingers of the hand on the amputated arm. Lying on a cushion of silk, the arm, we learn, is that of a young woman who was one of many people killed and dismembered in a head-on collision between two trains, the accidental result of an experiment in which the inventor played a primary role. "The delicate wrist was encircled by a viper of enameled gold; on the ring finger of the pale hand fluttered a circlet of sapphires." It is a frightening object that we are told would freeze the mind of any who accidentally encountered it with "an icy thought." However, for Edison, a modern-day magus dabbling in the space between life and death, it is a source of wonder, and the coincidental conjunction of the hand and the dispatch is a moment of curious inspiration, in which he wonders whether Ewald is the man who will bring Hadaly to life. As if in confirmation:

Suddenly, outside across the valleys, the moon passing a gap in the clouds shot a ray through the curtains and directed it, as if with malign intent, onto the table. The pale light caressed that inanimate hand, wandered across the

¹⁰⁹ Villier, 14.

arm, lit up the eyes of the golden viper, and caused the blue ring to sparkle.¹¹⁰

We will eventually come to understand that this moment is, in fact, not a coincidence, but one of divine intervention, in which the shade Hadaly/Sowana was whispering her intentions to incarnate. It is, as she later tells Ewald, through seemingly random objects and events that the visitations of the spirit world may, to the sensitive soul, be detected: “through the stone of a ring, the decoration of a lamp, a gleam of starlight in the mirror.” And while it was Edison who created her body and Ewald’s imagination that will provide the catalytic spark that will bring her to life, it is she who is ultimately the puppet master, calling herself into existence through each man:

...while he thought he was acting of his own accord, he was also deeply, darkly obedient to me. Thus, making use of his craft to introduce myself in this world of sense, I made use of every last object that seemed to me capable in any way of drawing you out of it.¹¹¹

The amputated arm, then, like the dissected arm on the cover of Vesalius's *Fabrica*, is a dead and empty object only to those who fail to see and hear that which is attempting to speak through it. We will be reminded of its symbolism at the very end of the novel. Three weeks earlier, Ewald and Hadaly boarded a transatlantic liner called *Wonderful* and headed back to Ewald’s castle. Edison is alone, once again, in his

¹¹⁰ Villiers, 19.

¹¹¹ Villiers, 198.

laboratory reading a newspaper, in which he finds an article about an accident involving the ship that his friends are on. A fire broke out mysteriously in the cargo compartment in the rear hold; the article makes it clear that while Ewald survived, Hadaly was consumed by the flames. Shortly after this disturbing revelation he receives a telegram from the bereft Ewald, which suggests that without Hadaly, he has no reason to live and wishes to bid the inventor farewell before killing himself. In a moment of *déjà vu*, which marks the last paragraph of the novel, Edison throws down the piece of paper, catching sight of the still appendage:

... a beam of moonlight fell whitely on that charming arm, on the pale hand with its enchanted rings. And the melancholy dreamer, losing himself in unknown thoughts, lifted his eyes to look through the open window, out into the night. There for some time he listened to the indifferent winds of winter, whistling and howling through the bare branches—then, raising his eyes even higher toward the ancient luminous spheres which still shone, unmoved, through the gaps in the heavy clouds, and sent their glints forever through the infinite, inconceivable mystery of the heavens, he shivered—no doubt, from the cold—in utter silence.¹¹²

How are we to read this final scene? Is Hadaly still whispering to the “melancholy dreamer” through the rustling of the branches and the illuminated rings on the once living hand or has she abandoned his surrounds and his thoughts, leaving them empty, dead, and silent? And who started the mysterious fire? Is Villiers suggesting that the voyage on

¹¹² Villiers 219.

which Ewald and his android were heading is itself, metaphorical, a voyage of the imagination or “Une Voyage,” in the sense of Baudelaire, realized most completely and exquisitely as death?

How we interpret the amputated arm, hand, finger, has everything to do with our final impression. Freud, in his essay on the uncanny, identifies the disembodied hand as a persistent motif in fantastic literature, a potent symbol of disrupted identity. And it is a motif that has carried over into film. As David Skal in his book *Screams of Reason* reminds us, *Metropolis* was the first in a long line of horror films in which a mad scientist, his assistant, or his creation possessed a withered, deformed, or transplanted hand. And like *Metropolis*, many of these films also feature an artificial or animated woman, from *Mad Love* (1935) to *The Brain that Wouldn't Die* (1962). Is the latter a compensation for the former? Or is the compromised physical status of the mad scientist an allegorical symbol, like Hephaestus's dragging legs, of his liminality and existence between this and another world?

Marie Lathers describes the amputated arm as “the floating signifier” of Villiers's novel, in which the narrative is propelled by “the restitution of the *Venus de Milo*'s lost arms. Since Alicia is a disappointing copy of the *Venus*, Edison's goal becomes the completion and perfection of the ancient statue through the addition of artificial

arms, those of the android.”¹¹³ She points out that this signifier is invoked, through its absence, in Ewald’s recounting of a visit to the Louvre, where he took Alicia so that she could see for the first time the *Venus de Milo*, hoping that it would inspire in her even a fraction of what her resemblance to the statue inspires in him. Instead, she evinces a distinct fascination with the obvious. “Look, it’s me!” she exclaims, and then adds, “Yes, but I have arms, and besides I’m more distinguished looking.”

Lather draws correspondences between Edison’s restitution of Ewald’s disappointing *Venus* and the hypnotic suggestion that formed the basis of the psychoanalytic practice of Charcot, who was able to produce in his subjects a form of artificial paralysis of the hand, “a phenomenon that constitutes ‘the sublime in this matter and the ideal as regards pathological physiology.’” In so doing, she reminds us that hypnosis plays a major role in the novel: Anny Anderson is mesmerized by Edison, Alicia is hypnotized by Sowana in order to copy her figure, and Hadaly’s allure is, in part, due to the impression that she gives of a sleepwalker. For Lathers, the *Venus de Milo* is, as is made clear by the novel as well as many other nineteenth century tales of animated statues, an aesthetic representation of the hysterical paralysis being

¹¹³ Lathers, 76.

dramatized in the same time period within the theatre of the Salpêtrière, the arm a “grisly reminder” of that which the female body lacks:

Nineteenth-century patriarchy is, these texts suggest, paralyzed or hypnotized before the threat of the female body. Villiers’s response to this threat, his mode of disarmament, is typical of a literature obsessed with stone images of women: the male protagonist would appropriate Medusa’s power to petrify, that is to fragment sculpturally and hypnotically and thus neutralize the (female) corpus. Typical, but with a (technical) difference, for the story of Hadaly foreshadows twentieth-century literary and cinematic representations of the post-Freudian female monstrosities imagined by science.¹¹⁴

Perhaps. And yet ... around the same time that Freud was writing his essay “The Medusa’s Head,” Walter Benjamin was translating into German the poetry of Baudelaire, for whom the female body and, in particular the body of the prostitute, was a symbol of the fragmentation of city life and a hallmark of modernity. It is the shock to the sensorium of modern life, which results in a crisis of the image, to which Baudelaire’s work is responding, Benjamin would later argue about the poet’s work. Baudelaire’s response, like that of the Surrealists after him, was *profane illumination*, “a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday,” in which the enigmatic is wrought from the detritus of the city, as Hephaestus once managed upon a sheet of metal. “It takes a heroic constitution” Benjamin says of Baudelaire “to live modernism,” and, as Ackbar Abbas points out:

¹¹⁴ Lathers, 83.

It is not the heroism of ancient times, as in the figure of the gladiator, but rather a heroism of little deeds, whose figures include the traveling salesman, the ragpicker, the collector, as well as the writer, the purveyor of images.¹¹⁵

Abbas, further, makes a connection between the dialectical and paradoxical practice of *profane illumination* and the glance of the Medusa, the latter of which Adorno once compared to the philosophy of Benjamin. It is what Benjamin himself would call an allegorical reading of history, that which opens up a fissure by which the appearance of historical continuity or of organic wholeness starts to crack:

Benjamin, we recall, speaks of modern experience as one of shock. And like Medusa, history in the sense of ‘things as they are’ remains invisible and can only be represented by something other than itself. In Freud, such a ratio gives rise to the theory of the sexual fetish, a surrogate or substitute for that forever missing object, the female phallus. In Benjamin, this is the moment when images—monadic, apotropaic, destructive of appearances—come into their own.¹¹⁶

Fetish object or modern fragment, the amputated appendage, so lovingly ragpicked and preserved by Slade and the fictional Edison, represents a loss and a redemption that might be personal or universal, compensatory or revolutionary. But no matter how we interpret it, that which stays invisible and missing, to be recuperated by other means, is the living Woman.

¹¹⁵ Ackbar Abbas, “On Fascination: Walter Benjamin’s Images” in *New German Critique*, No. 48 (Autumn, 1989), 46.

¹¹⁶ Abbas, 57.

Chapter Two

The Artificial Woman as Exquisite Corpse

If the anatomico-medical gaze explored in the last chapter is emblemized by the figure of Medusa, then the figure most representative of the gaze on which the present chapter focuses is Pandora. Hesiod describes Pandora as the first woman, an artificial being molded from clay by Hephaestus (the lame artisan who forged Achilles' shield) at the behest of Zeus, who wished to punish men for the gift of fire that Prometheus had given to them, after stealing its secret from the gods. The stolen fire has inspired various interpretations, many of which suggest a form of human knowledge or *technics*, such as the mechanical arts, science, or language. The artificial woman was, thus, meant to void whatever enlightening benefits were gained or progress made from Prometheus's gift. Endowed with desirable attributes by all the gods, she was a "wonder" to behold, but "sheer guile" (described with the oxymoronic *kalòn kakòn* or "beautiful evil"), an irresistible and deceptive exterior masking a secret horror in the form of a box (or jar), containing

sickness, toil, sorrow, and “a myriad other pains.” On the orders of Zeus, Hermes offered Pandora as a gift to Prometheus’s more gullible brother Epimetheus, who was so entranced by her beauty, that he forgot to heed Prometheus’s warning to beware all gifts from the king of the gods. And so Pandora entered the human realm and soon thereafter, incited by curiosity, she opened the box, releasing pain and suffering into the world of men.

In “Pandora’s Box: Topographies of Curiosity,” Laura Mulvey attempts to recuperate the iconography of Pandora and her box from the decidedly misogynist reading of Hesiod, employing her instead as an empowering figure of psychoanalytic feminist theory. In particular, she is interested in the possibilities opened up by Pandora’s curious gaze as an intervening agent in the closed circuit that she describes in her seminal essay, “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,” between the gaze of the spectator, understood as both active and masculine, and the passive female image that serves as its object. There is, Mulvey suggests, a self-reflexivity at work in the curious gaze (a gaze often coded as female), a desire to know that is “associated with enclosed, secret, and forbidden spaces” representative of female interiority. So when Pandora looks inside the box, a hidden space that many have read as a synecdoche for female sexuality, she is interrogating the site/sight of sexual difference

that she herself represents. Thus, the curious gaze as *epistomephilia* (the desire to know), by which the female image becomes a site or cipher to be decoded, serves as a challenge to fetishistic *scopophilia* (the desire to see, but not to know) through which the female image is constituted as a sight or “surface that conceals”:

While curiosity is a compulsive desire to see and to know, to investigate something secret, fetishism is born out of a refusal to see, a refusal to accept the difference the female body represents for the male. These complex series of turns away, of covering over, not of the eyes but of understanding, of fixating on a substitute object to hold the gaze, leave the female body as an enigma and threat, condemned to return as a symbol of anxiety while simultaneously being transformed into its own screen in representation.¹¹⁷

According to Mulvey, the inner/outer, surface/secret topography that the automaton Pandora emblemizes is elaborated through a long history of femme-fatales that includes the fictional female androids in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *The Eve of the Future* (1886), E.T.A. Hoffmann's story “The Sandman” (1816-17), and Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927), all of which “connote uncertainty, mystery, and are only readable in death.” Having spent a good deal of the last chapter on *Eve of the Future*, I am going to examine at various points in this chapter Hoffmann's “Sandman” in relation to the fetishistic “desire to see but not to know” described by Mulvey as integral to the male spectator's visual pleasure. (I will cover

¹¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, “Pandora's Box: Topographies of Curiosity” in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 64.

Metropolis in some depth in the next chapter.) The prompt for doing so is my experience interviewing subjects for a documentary short that I made in 2001 from a community of robot fetishists that, I believe, complicates in productive ways the psychoanalytic reading of fetishism employed by Mulvey, while shedding light on both the topography and iconography of the female android.

It was an act of Pandora-like curiosity that first led me to the community and that has kept me engaged in trying to understand their erotic peculiarities, which many find strange or disturbing. Spurred by the saying that “if you enter any object in a search engine followed by the word “sex,” you will find people who fetishize that object,” I decided early in the course of my research on artificial women to type into Google “robot” and “sex” and, indeed, found websites created by groups of people who collectively fantasize about, among other things, robots. While some refer to themselves as “technosexuals,” most call the fetish itself A.S.F.R., an acronym for alt.sex.fetish.robots, the name of the now-defunct Internet newsgroup where members originally congregated on-line.

The originary myth of A.S.F.R. is that it was started as a joke. However, the site began to attract a loyal following of participants, primarily men, who had a secret attraction to the mechanical and the robotic. Many of these men had believed that they were alone in their

sexual preferences, and the site provided a sense of relief and community, a place to share their interests and compare notes with others, and a definitive name for the ill-defined feelings that they had been harboring in isolation. Although today A.S.F.R. tends to be associated most strongly with men who fantasize about robots, it is, in fact, a blanket designation for a range of different fetishes, which includes sexual attraction to mannequins, dolls, and sculpture, and more specifically, real people acting like mannequins, puppets, dolls, or robots, or being hypnotized or frozen like statues.¹¹⁸ While all of these

¹¹⁸ Variations of ASFR were commented on in the early twentieth century by Iwan Bloch, a German doctor whose encyclopedic treatise on modern sexuality, *The Sexual Life of Our Time In Its Relation to Modern Civilization*, helped establish sexology (“Sexualwissenschaft”) as a science. In a chapter dedicated to sexual perversity, Bloch mentions two sexual deviations that are, he suggests, related to necrophilia. The first, “Venus Statuaria” is a desire to have sexual intercourse with statues or other representations of human beings, a passion that can seize some merely by walking through a museum. The second, “Pygmalionism” is based in the desire to enact the animation of an inanimate statue, usually by having real women stand atop pedestals, pretending to be statues and then gradually come to life. Such a request was, Bloch suggests, common in Parisian brothels at the turn of the century. Connected to the desire for statues is, according to Bloch, the use of new technologies to construct anatomically-correct human models for explicitly sexual ends: “There exist true Vaucansons in this province of pornographic technology, clever mechanics who, from rubber and other plastic materials, prepare entire male or female bodies, which, as *hommes* or *dames de voyage*, subserve fornicatory purposes. More especially are the genital organs represented in a manner true to nature. Even the secretion of Bartholin’s glands is imitated, by means of a ‘pneumatic tube’ filled with oil. Similarly, by means of fluid and suitable apparatus, the ejaculation of the semen is imitated. Such artificial human beings are actually offered for sale in the catalogue of certain manufacturers of ‘Parisian rubber articles.’” While in the case of “Venus Statuaria” Bloch makes a distinction between those who become sexually aroused by statues *because* they are artificial and those merely responding to a naked human body *despite* its artificiality (the latter of whom he suggests comprise the bulk of the documented cases), in general, he tends to collapse distinctions between the various desires that circulate around the inanimate and to suggest that they are equally perverse. Moreover, he treats such tendencies as a separate topic from fetishism, a category that he reserves for those who invest sexual energy in a part of the human body at the expense of the whole. See Iwan

fetishes were explored on the original newsgroup, many of their fans later splintered off and founded websites geared to their specific interests. They do, however, still consider themselves “ASFRians” and acknowledge their relation to one another and their point of common interest: the thematic of programmatic control—whether imagined as hypnotism, magic, a puppet master or artificial intelligence—of a human object. If taken in this sense alone, A.S.F.R. strikes the imagination as a technological elaboration of standard BDSM (bondage-domination-sado-masochism) fantasies, in which one person dominates another for sexual pleasure. Indeed, when I first discovered the fetish, I assumed that it was the ultimate expression of the domination, objectification and containment of women, and that the kind of robot about which ASFRians fantasized was a technologically souped-up gender ideal, without a will of her own, a vacant Stepford Wife (or Husband), mindlessly fulfilling the orders of its master, both sexual and domestic. And while my understanding evolved over time, it is this common assumption about their fetish that, according to ASFRians, necessitates its obscurity and keeps its members highly closeted, while fetishes like the Furies and Plushies (those who eroticize anthropomorphic and stuffed animals and animal costumes) have garnered enough acceptance to hold conventions

Bloch, MD, *The Sexual Life of Our Time In Its Relation to Modern Civilization* (New York: Allied Book Company, 1928), 648. See also Gaby Wood, 138-39.

in Las Vegas. ASFRians are so concerned about the accusation of misogyny that they have a mantra or tagline, oft repeated on their websites and by members in interviews: “ASFR is not about the objectification of women, it’s about the feminization of objects.”¹¹⁹

The mantra, unfortunately, seems to reflect even more negatively on the fetish than positively. Aside from raising obvious questions about the extent to which the feminization of objects can be extricated from the objectification of women, it is also somewhat misleading, encouraging the mistaken idea that ASFRians are more interested in artificial women that they can control than real ones, whom they can’t. In fact, while one might imagine that ASFRians, as lovers of feminized objects, are also Realdoll lovers and collectors, this was, in my experience, not the case. Moreover, and this is more surprising, few expressed interest in actually obtaining a female robot (if one, in fact, existed). ASFRians seem to prefer the fantasy of an artificial woman to the potential reality, and the fantasy tends to revolve less around the robot as indistinguishable from and an ideal version of a real person than as a site of tension and rupture between the human and the robotic. For example, while ASFRians are fascinated by the movie *The Stepford Wives*, their interest lies not in the

¹¹⁹ Despite the mantra, a notable portion of the community is homosexual. However, all the members with whom I communicated were heterosexual and because of that, as well as the focus of my research topic, my descriptions should be considered more representative of their proclivities.

idea of replacing women with robots or in creating the perfect female companion, but specifically in those scenes in the film in which the Wives break down or become caught in a repeat loop, scenes beneath which foreboding music plays and that are intended to evoke horror. Moreover, the sight of a real person acting like a robot (as in the film) is as, if not more, exciting to ASFRians than the actuality of a robot. Indeed, many ASFRians describe their earliest fetishistic experiences as occurring while watching actors and actresses playing robots on such television shows as *The Twilight Zone*, *Outer Limits*, and *Star Trek*, in which silver and gold costuming and behavioral mannerisms, such as robotic speech, stilted movement, and repetitive motion, were the primary indicators of mechanicity. ASFRians often attempt to recreate in private both the costuming and performances of these robots, giving the fetish a kind of do-it-yourself quality, on which Katherine Gates comments in her book *Deviant Desires*. Gates places ASFR alongside slash fandom as a group that appropriates science fiction effects in homemade productions to their own erotic ends; ASFRians often write their own stories, create their own pictures, and construct their own robot costumes using shiny materials like latex, PVC, and Lycra to which they attach toys that blink, bobble, and glow, in order to create the illusion of circuitry. As Gates notes, unmasking is a key aspect of such

performances, an act that emphasizes the tension between not only the human and technological, but surface and interior, outside and inside.

One of the ASFRians with whom I spoke described his primary fascination as that of transformation and the main triggers of his fetish as involving “the outward appearance of something going on inside that is different, that is mechanical, that is robotic.” While ASFRians tend to focus on moments of transition, such as those in which a human is being turned into a robot or in which a robot is being booted up, shut down, or programmed, many consider the most exciting fantasies to involve the sudden revelation of artificiality through either robotic malfunction—in which a human/robot gets caught in a repeat loop—or disassembly—in which a panel opens or a part is removed to reveal the circuitry beneath the semblance of humanity. The latter is, of course, harder to perform, but ASFRians either search television and film for such moments (which they then list obsessively on their websites) or they produce disassembly images themselves in the manner of ASFRian artist “Kishin,” who either renders them from scratch in a 3D program or creates them by adding exposed circuitry to figures from such magazines as *Playboy* using Photoshop (a practice that some call “rasturbation”) (see figures 17 and 18). When I asked Kishin what it was about disassembly that he most enjoyed, he replied, “It’s something about the

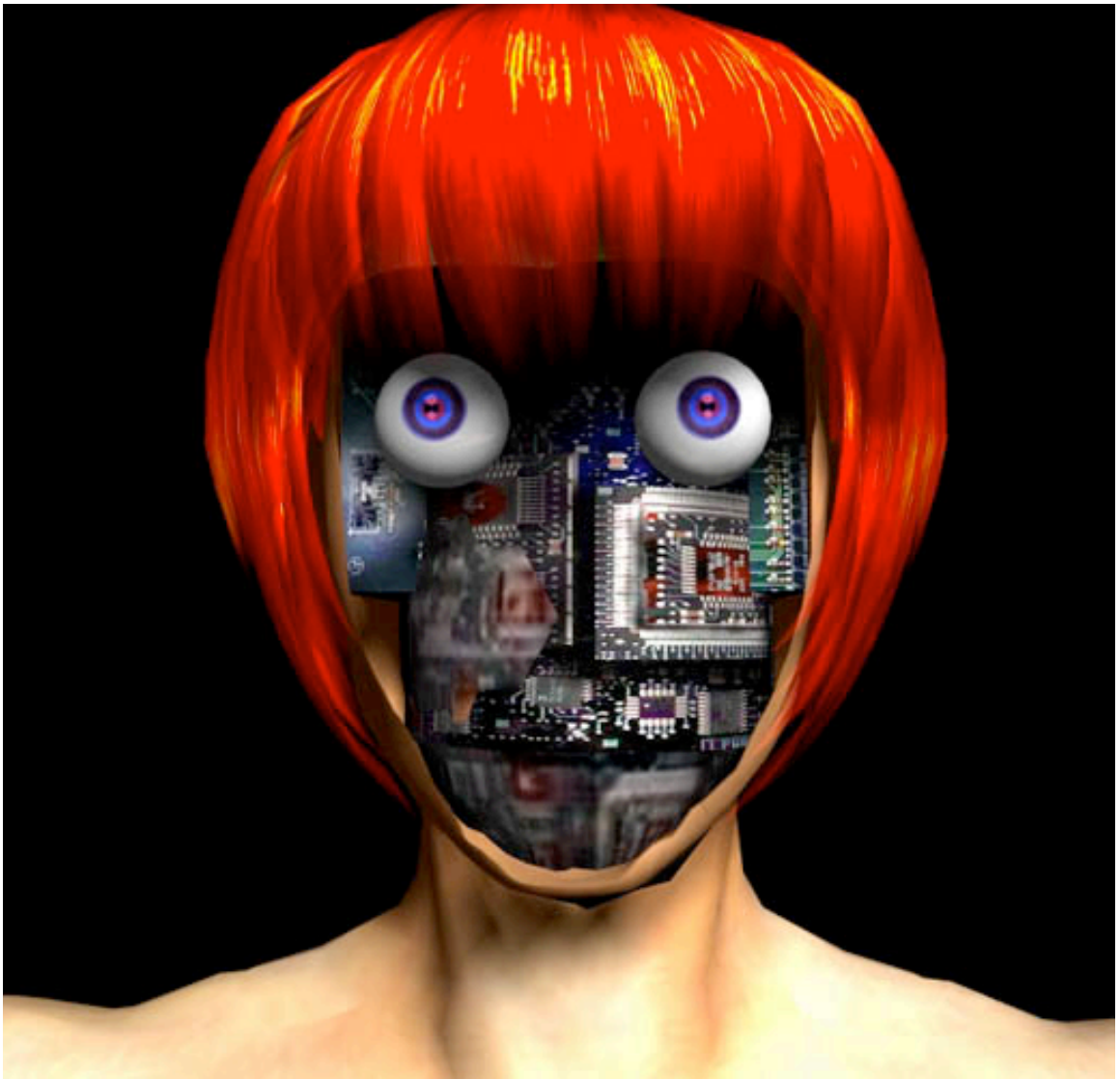


Figure 17. Kishin Image



Figure 18. Rasturbation

contrast between the cold hard steel and the circuits and the wiring and the smooth skin and the soft flesh.” The “come shot” or climax scene for Kishin occurs when a female robot reaches up “to remove the mask that is her face” because “it’s like a revelation of who she really is.”

But Who is She Really?

In his essay “Fetishism” (1927), Sigmund Freud tells us that in all cases, a fetish is “a substitute for the woman’s (mother’s) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego.”¹²⁰ It embodies an ambivalence, a double attitude towards female castration for which a compromise is struck by which the absent phallus is conjured elsewhere, a new point of erotic interest that serves as both an acknowledgement and denial, “a sort of permanent memorial” that may manifest itself in a single part, like a foot, which the fetishist then worships, or a set of opposing attitudes that involve both hostility and reverence, such as “the Chinese custom of first mutilating a woman’s foot and then revering it.”¹²¹ The ASFRian fetish object is, however, less a monument than a ruin. It is, to use Freud’s examples, like mutilating one foot while keeping the other whole, an ongoing reminder that a deformation has occurred. To the extent that it attempts to assuage the ambivalence around an

¹²⁰ Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism” in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1963), 205-206.

¹²¹ Freud, 209

absence via a displaced presence, it also repetitively restages the vacillation between absence and presence at this alternate location. ASFR is, thus, less a fetishistic fixation on a “surface that conceals,” than a re-enactment of the original trauma by which it was constituted. In this sense, it smacks of the compulsion to repeat that Freud links to the “death instinct”; indeed, there is a distinct similarity between the hiding and revealing of the mechanical interior of the robot female in ASFRian fantasy and the throwing away and retrieving of the wooden reel by the child in the game *fort/da* described by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.¹²² However, there is also something more. For critical to the game of ASFR is not just a hiding and revealing, but the import of what is being revealed, which is, I would argue, not technology so much as mechanicity or automatism, a force (imagined as programming by ASFRians) beyond the rational mind or will that controls behavior (brought to the fore in moments of robotic unveiling or breakdown). Gates argues that the automatism at the heart of the fetish is a metaphor for sexuality itself: “the sense that we have no control over it; that we respond mechanically to stimuli; and that our sexual programming makes us helpless. Fetishes, especially, are a kind of hard-wired sexual

¹²² See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, translated by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961), 13-14.

subroutine.”¹²³ Indeed ASFR, as an erotics of automatism (which Freud associates with the “death drive”), is a fetish whose object is, in part, a revelation of the psychic mechanism of fetishism itself.

In this sense, the ASFRian fetishistic gaze is less aligned to fetishistic *scopophilia*, the desire to see but not to know, which is generally read in relation to the cohesive male subject, than the self-reflexive curiosity of Pandora, the desire to see beneath the seen. Indeed, it embodies the etymological essence of curiosity as *cura*, the Latin word for care, which vacillates between its usage as a noun, meaning anxiety or sorrow, and a verb, meaning to provide relief or ministration. Curiosity often involves looking at that which causes anxiety rather than pleasure, and thus it stems from a different impulse than the visual delectation of the beautiful image. St. Augustine pejoratively referred to it as ‘the eyes’ urges” in his *Confessions*, explaining that while the beautiful inspires the body to delight in sensual pleasures, *curiositas* “experiments with their opposites, not submitting to the gross for its own sake, but from the drive to experience and know.”¹²⁴ It is *curiositas* that compels men to look at those things that make them shudder, the ultimate example of which is, according to Augustine, the mutilated corpse:

¹²³ Katherine Gates, *Deviant Desires* (New York: Juno Books, 2000), 228.

¹²⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Garry Wills (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 240.

This is something they do not want to see [in terms of sensual pleasure] even in dreams, or if forced to look at it while awake, or if lured to the sight expecting something pretty ... It is for this perverse craving that unnatural things are put on in the theater. This also leads men to pry into the arcane elements of nature, which are beyond our scope—knowing them would serve no purpose, yet men make of that knowing its own purpose.¹²⁵

Any act of looking that involves prying into things that are “beyond our scope” or “ken” raises the specter of the Uncanny, a word that, according to Victoria Nelson, is etymologically rooted in “that which cannot be ‘kenned’ or known by the five senses”¹²⁶ and that, by Webster’s definition, has “a supernatural character or origin” or is “beyond what is normal or expected.” Although an aesthetic concept, the experience of the Uncanny is worth investigating psychoanalytically, according to Freud, who describes it in a manner similar to Augustine as the “shadow side of the beautiful and attractive,” and who provides as an example *par excellence* of the uncanny the story “The Sandman” by E.T.A Hoffman, in which the central protagonist Nathanael mistakenly falls in love with an artificial woman named Olympia. Indeed, the scene in the story in which Olympia’s eyes are removed and she is revealed as an automaton, a revelation that drives Nathanael insane and leads to his suicide, is what ASFRians would call “the come shot.” The Uncanny is, therefore, a term (and an

¹²⁵ Saint Augustine, 245

¹²⁶ Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life Of Puppets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 17.

experience) that helps to shed light on that about which ASFRians are fantasizing.

Freud uses as a starting point for his psychoanalytical inquiry into the uncanny a study entitled “The Psychology of the Uncanny” by physician Ernst Anton Jentsch, published in 1906. For Jentsch, the uncanny is a function of *misoneism* (the fear of the new), in which the mind becomes disoriented in relation to a phenomenon that does not conform to one’s established conceptual framework or “ideational sphere.”¹²⁷ It is Jentsch, who initially links the uncanny to the German word *unheimlich*, the opposite of that with which one is familiar, the “heimlich” (homely) or *heimisch* (native) in German and who uses Hoffman’s story as a significant example of the uncanny since:

Among all the psychical uncertainties that can become an original cause of the uncanny feeling, there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect: namely, doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate.¹²⁸

In Hoffmann’s story, the psychical uncertainty around the automaton Olimpia is sustained by her mechanical behavior, the kind of behavior that is erotically-charged for ASFRians—stilted movement and limited and repetitive speech—which the reader is left guessing about until the climactic scene when she is revealed as a mechanical doll.

¹²⁷ Ernst Jentsch, “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” (1906) in *Angelaki*, 2:1 (1996), 8.

¹²⁸ Jentsch, 11.

Freud picks up where Jentsch leaves off but differs from Jentsch in his interpretation of the source of the uncanny. While for Jentsch the uncanny is rooted in uncertainty about something unknown, Freud insists that what makes this unknown thing frightening is the fact that it was once *known*, but has returned in an alienated form. As a kind of etymological proof, Freud returns to the German word “heimlich” whose multiple definitions include not only that which is familiar and homely, but also what is secret and hidden from view, suggestive of the magic arts. Within this definition are shades of the uncanny or *Unheimlich* as the supernatural or frightening and the preconditions for the experience of the *Unheimlich* as, in German philosopher Friedrich von Schelling’s words (quoted by Freud), “*everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light.*”¹²⁹ Thus, as Freud concludes, “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *Unheimlich*.”¹³⁰ Uncanniness is rooted [“the prefix ‘un’ is the token of repression”] in the return of the repressed, that which was once familiar but hidden from view. There is, according to Freud, no more *Unheimlich* place than the female genitals—that “entrance to the former Heim of all human beings, to the place,

¹²⁹ Quoted in Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII, translated by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press), 224.

¹³⁰ Freud, 226.

where everyone dwelt once upon a time in the beginning”—the home turned horror show following the Oedipal crisis.¹³¹ Interestingly, however, this interpretation leads Freud away from the figure of the female automaton in Hoffman’s story and the emphasis placed on her by Jentsch’s interpretation.

According to Freud, the mystery surrounding Olimpia is of less significance to the story’s ability to elicit an uncanny sensation than the theme of the “Sandman,” a mythological figure who steals the eyes of bad children while they’re sleeping, and whose image haunts Nathanael throughout the story. Uncanniness is based in the anxiety of losing one’s sight, which is a substitute for the fear of castration and steeped in Oedipal drama. As Freud points out, Nathanael’s anxiety about the Sandman (and losing his eyes) is intimately connected in the story with his father’s death (his father dies mysteriously in the company of the frightening lawyer Coppelius, whom Nathanael associates with the Sandman). Moreover, the reoccurrence and doubling of characters (Nathanael’s father is replaced by Spalanzani, the “father” of Olimpia; the Sandman is Coppelius who is also Coppola, the peddler who sells Nathanael the spyglass or “pocket perspective” through which he first sees Olimpia) tied together by the theme of eyes (Coppola, whose name translates to *coppo* or “eye socket” in Italian, also made the eyes of

¹³¹ Freud, “The Uncanny,” 245.

Olimpia, which he later steals back) all connect, in a logically circular way, to Freud's overall premise that the uncanny effects of similar occurrences is related to repressed infantile sexuality.

Freud's marginalization of Olimpia has been a point of great contestation, and many have argued that Olimpia is the repressed within Freud's theory of the uncanny. As Nicholas Royle puts it:

Freud's reading of 'The Sandman' is a violent attempt to reduce or eliminate the significance of Jentsch's work on the Uncanny, and in particular the importance of the figures of the doll and automaton for an understanding of the uncanny. It is also a violent attempt to reduce or eliminate the place and importance of women ... 'Freud failed to see that the question of woman is inextricably connected to Nathaniel's fear of castration.'¹³²

Particularly within the context of a fetish like ASFR, Freud's exclusion of the automaton from the locus of castration anxiety is unusual. However, when we consider the fact that he is drawing our attention away from the visual ambiguity of Olimpia's physicality towards the psychic register of the story, as represented by the imaginary Sandman, an intentionality begins to take shape. In particular, I would draw attention to the relevance of Freud's argument within the history and etiology of hysteria, an illness that serves as the backdrop of both Olimpia and Nathanael's mechanical behavior in the story, as well as Freud's development of

¹³² Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 41. See also: Helene Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (the Uncanny) and Sarah Kofman, "The Double is/and the Devil: The Uncanniness of *The Sandman* (*Der Sandmann*).

psychoanalysis. Our first clue to a connection between the automatic body of the mechanical woman in Hoffmann's story and the hysterical body is Freud's rationale for dismissing Olympia as a symbol of infantile sexuality. While Freud acknowledges that Olympia does invoke a sense of the uncanny, he suggests that it arises not from the return of the *repressed*, but from the return of the *surmounted*. The return of the repressed involves the revival of infantile complexes, or amputated aspects of oneself, which had been buried in the unconscious. The return of the surmounted involves discarded beliefs that are "primitive" or "animistic" in nature. While we have surmounted the animistic conception of the universe, wherein the gods are capable of—the omnipotence of thoughts, the prompt fulfillment of wishes, secret injurious powers and the return of the dead—vestiges of it remain. So that when something happens that we cannot explain—for example, a coincidence of events, the manifestation of secret desires or thoughts, the animation of an inanimate body—they revive and bring into expression these old beliefs, raising doubts about our current material reality and invoking the uncanny. Accordingly, the return of the surmounted, tends to operate in the realm of reality more than fiction (where supernatural events are less unusual).

Olimpia is, of course, fictional, but to the extent that her mechanical behavior strikes a supernatural chord, it evokes the real uncanniness of the hysterical body, whose paroxysmal and repetitive gestures make it seem as if it's animated by unseen forces. Jentsch in his essay on the uncanny draws an explicit association between the two, suggesting that while the automaton strikes some people more than others as uncanny, the uncanniness of a mental and nervous illness, such as epilepsy or hysteria, is nearly universal, since it renders the autonomous human subject mechanical or puppet-like:

It is not unjustly that epilepsy is therefore spoken of as the *morbus sacer*, as an illness deriving not from the human world but from foreign and enigmatic spheres, for the epileptic attack of spasms reveals the human body to the viewer—the body under normal conditions is so meaningful, expedient, and unitary, functioning according to the direction of his consciousness—as an immensely complicated and delicate mechanism. This is an important cause of the epileptic fit's ability to produce such a demonic effect on those who see it.¹³³

Indeed, it is because of its mechanical seizures, paradigmatically associated with grotesque body movements—such as spasms, convulsions, catalepsy, and fainting—that hysteria inspired varying interpretations about its animating force over the course of its history, invariably inflected by the ideational context and culture in which they appeared. The illness appeared in medical writing as early as 2000 B.C.

¹³³ Jentsch, 14.

in Egypt and was given a clinical definition by Hippocrates in the fifth century B.C. The word “hysteria” derives from the Greek word *hystera*, meaning “of the uterus.” While its symptoms have often been observed in both men and women, the hysteric has always been implicated in what is understood, both etymologically and culturally, as a feminine pathology. For Hippocrates, the illness was confined to women and based in physiology. In his treatise *On the Diseases of Women*, he links it to a dissatisfied and autonomous womb that wanders through the body causing disturbances in the various organs that it encounters. (The proposed cure was to lure the womb back to its proper place through marriage.) In *Timaeus*, Plato describes the womb as an animal (“within an animal”) with a voracious appetite for procreation that, when frustrated by lack of activity, starts moving about the body, defying both reason and will. Galen also believed that it was an illness of a sexually-starved uterus, to which licentious women were particularly prone, and he prescribed a technique of genital massage that, as Rachel P. Maines points out, “was to be repeated almost verbatim in later texts and to be regarded as therapeutic gospel in some medical circles until the end of the nineteenth century.”¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Rachel P. Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: “Hysteria,” the Vibrator, and Women’s Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 24.

With the rise of Christianity, the illness took on a moral tenor, and its locus shifted from physiology to the influence of external demonic forces on a female body compromised by both original sin and bestial instincts:

In the course of the Middle Ages, mental illness became coterminous with spirit possession—the devil tricking humans by taking over the imagination rather than the body—and hysteria came to be understood as the illness par excellence of the soul. Now the hysteric was no longer the sexually dissatisfied woman but rather a figure that appeared different than she really was, in the guise of a normal person when in fact she was the dangerous host of evil spirits.¹³⁵

The treatment of the hysteric reached a low point following the publication of the handbook for witch hunters and Inquisitors, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1494), in which the ailment was recast as a form of satanic possession, the proposed cure for which was physical and emotional interrogation and the extraction of a confession.

Although the etiology of hysteria began to shift with the birth of modern medicine, the man who freed it, once and for all, from its association with animist superstition was the famous neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, whose displays of hysterical symptoms in his Tuesday lessons at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris in the late nineteenth century became legendary. It is worth examining the work of Charcot in some detail since, as I will argue, there is a significant parallel between Freud's

¹³⁵ Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 106.

redirection of our attention from the mechanical body of the female automaton in 'The Sandman,' and his shift in emphasis from the external symptoms of hysteria charted by Charcot to an exploration of internal psychic processes, a shift that directly paved the way for his development of psychoanalysis.

The Napoleon of Neurosis

Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) arrived at the Salpêtrière¹³⁶ in the early 1850s as a medical intern. By 1870, having helped to establish neurology as a science and himself as its foremost practitioner, he became the head of a newly formed ward at the hospital in which both epileptics and hysterics were housed. Until his death in 1893, he dedicated himself to studying the specificities of hystero-epilepsy¹³⁷, and to differentiating between the seizures of the two illnesses. His approach was, above all, visual, influenced by the clinico-anatomic method developed in France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in which pathological phenomena were observed through the cases of numerous individuals

¹³⁶ Derived from the word "saltpeter," Hospice de la Salpêtrière was established by Louis XIV on the site of what had been a gunpowder factory. Less a hospital than a holding pen, it originally housed mostly indigent and insane women, whom the Sun King wanted cleaned off the streets of Paris; it incorporated a women's prison for prostitutes at the end of the seventeenth century; and it became the largest asylum in Europe between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The humanitarian and medical reform of the hospital is associated with Philippe Pinel (1745-1826), who became its chief physician in 1795; a statue in honor of him still stands outside the hospital today.

¹³⁷ Hystero-Epilepsy was, according to Veith, a misnomer by Charcot who, at first, failed to realize that the symptoms of epilepsy witnessed in his hysterical patients were, in large part, a result of their tendency to mimic the epileptics with whom they had contact in the new ward. See Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 230-231.

and categorized into “archetypes” against which future “variants” were measured. Charcot, who expressed disdain for theory outside of patient populations, found the Salpêtrière an ideal environment; with some 5000 residents, it was a “living museum of pathology” that provided an endless supply of specimens that he could submit to clinical scrutiny, as well as visual documentation and cataloguing.

Although Charcot deployed a variety of techniques, central to his system of visual documentation was photography, through which he captured the various phases of the hysterico-epileptic seizure in different patients and made comparisons, organizing the broad range of tics, grimaces, contractures, and spasms into categorical types or *facies*. As Georges Didi-Huberman puts it in his book on the use of photography at the Salpêtrière: “Photography had to crystallize the case into a *Tableau*; not an extensive tableau, but a tableau in which the Type was condensed in a unique image, or in a univocal series of images— the *facies*.”¹³⁸ In support of this practice, a veritable production facility was added onto the ward, with a glass-walled studio, dark and light labs, screens and backdrops, and special cameras and lenses. Through the ongoing photographic documentation of his patients, Charcot produced a system of classification for the “complete and regular form of the great hysterical

¹³⁸ George Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 48.

attack” comprised of eighty-six body postures, each of which was associated with one of five progressive phases: the *prodromes* phase which preceded the onset of the attack, often called the “aura,” included palpitations, nervous cough, yawning, and the feeling of obstructions in the throat; the attack itself began with an *epileptoid* phase, marked by convulsions similar to those within a standard epileptic fit; in the *clownism* phase, the body underwent strange contortions and illogical movements that often took the form of the *arc-de-cercle*, a spastic inversion in which the back arched in a manner similar to tetanus, and rhythmic chorea, named for its dance like movements; the next stage involved *plastic poses* or *attitudes passionnelles* that included expressive mimicry that ranged from the ecstatic to the cataleptic and in which the patient might begin conversing with hallucinated interlocutors; and in some cases, the *attitude passionnelles* would culminate in a fourth phase of extended *delirium*, which might last hours or even days.¹³⁹ The full set of poses and phases were sketched and schematized within a “single synoptic chart” by Paul Richer, professor of artistic anatomy at École National Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. (see figure 19). And both the photographs and charts, along with transcriptions from the case histories that they documented, were published in a series of medical volumes entitled *Inconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1876-77,

¹³⁹ See Didi-Huberman, 115-116. See also de Marneffe, 75.

1878, 1879-80), the most extensive clinical record of hysteria that had ever been produced.

What I hope to make apparent in this detailed explanation is the regimented systemization through which Charcot utilized the new visual technology of photography in documenting and classifying the poorly understood symptoms of hysteria. Photography was for Charcot and his staff a scientific instrument; Albert Londe, who was placed in charge of the Photographic Service of the Salpêtrière in 1884, hailed the photographic plate as "the true retina of the scientist," which made possible an unprecedented objectivity. There is, however, particularly in retrospect, an obvious disconnect between the scientific methodology of the *Iconographie* and the photographs themselves, in which something more than clinical observation seems to be at play. Indeed, there is a staged quality that is difficult to overlook, particularly in the photographs of the Salpêtrière's most famous inhabitant, Augustine (see figure 20).¹⁴⁰ In a series of images ordered in such a way to conform to the various stages of the complete hysterical attack, in particular the "Attitudes Passionnelles" phase—whose gestural markers are given such suggestive names as "Threat", "Call", "Ecstasy", and "Eroticism"—Augustine, enshrouded in white linen, raises her head skywards as if supplicating

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, who became famous for the photographs of her in the *Iconographie*, arrived at the Salpêtrière in October 1875 at the age of fifteen. She escaped five years later dressed as a man, and no record exists of her thereafter.



Figure 20. Augustine

the heavens. The similarity to, among other things, spiritual iconography seems more than coincidental and, in all likelihood, it wasn't. As Sigrid Schade points out, the demystification of hysteria at the Salpêtrière was conducted in ongoing dialogue with the ailment's ignoble history of possession, against which Charcot positioned himself as a liberator. On the walls of the ward were hung his collection of paintings and graphic images of exorcisms, witch inquisitions, and martyr executions. And while the intention of such images was a retrospective nod to the beneficence of science, which brought an objective eye to a condition that had historically been met with punitive cruelty, they could not help but serve as a visual reminder to the women who passed them on a daily basis of the gestural vocabulary that they were to submit to memory and perform on command.¹⁴¹ The similarity between the poses within the *Iconographie* and the fine art on the walls of the Salpêtrière was for Charcot, however, merely confirmation of his revisionist history of possession. As he famously stated in response to the charge that he was influencing hysterical phenomena in the course of documenting it, "but in truth I am nothing but a photographer; I register what I see,"¹⁴² And yet, even if one discounts the various tortures to which the patients at

¹⁴¹ Sigrid Schade. "Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body" in *Art History*, vol. 18, No. 4 (December 1995), 508-510.

¹⁴² Quoted in Daphne de Mernaffe, "Looking and Listening: The Construction of Clinical Knowledge in Charcot and Freud" in *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Autumn, 1991), 79.

the Salpêtrière were subjected to bring on their symptoms (including electric shocks, ether, magnesium flashes, loud noises, and ovarian pressure)¹⁴³, the objectivity, or “facticity” as Didi-Huberman puts it, of these images remains questionable. As Daphne de Mernaffe rightly observes:

The very naming of the *attitudes passionnelles* (“passional attitudes” or “poses”) renders primarily visual a subjectively meaningful state. The meaning of these variable states was further fixed through the use of captions, which ostensibly identified, but in fact constructed, the specific meaning of each gesture. Finally, the poses present as stereotyped depictions of emotion what were probably witnessed as chaotic gestures. In fact, the style of the photographs has much less in common with other early photographs of mental patients than with the theatrical portraiture of the day.¹⁴⁴

There was, then, a system of choreography and notation at work that transformed a cacophony of symptomatic gestures into a symphonic ballet whose movements could be anticipated. Charcot not only organized the symptoms and signs of hysteria, he aestheticized them. Indeed, by all accounts, he was less a photographer,¹⁴⁵ than an artist,

¹⁴³ As James Hillman notes, some of these tortures marked a vestigial link between hysteria and witchcraft, for example the practice of sticking patients with pins and needles, which was an old test for witchery, was used to bring on hysterical symptoms in demonstrations at the Salpêtrière. See James Hillman, *The Myth of Analysis: Three Essays in Archetypal Psychology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 255.

¹⁴⁴ de Mernaffe, 81.

¹⁴⁵ According to Tom Gunning, recent biographers “have questioned Charcot's personal devotion to photography as a method of medical investigation. They point out that the *Iconographie* was instigated by Desiré Bourneville [an intern under Charcot from 1870-1879] and that its hiatus coincided with Bourneville's departure from Salpêtrière for Bicêtre in 1879. They also claim Bourneville rather than Charcot was the driving force

whose work was conducted not only in dialogue with historical painting, but contemporary artistic practice. Charcot had shown artistic talent at an early age; as a youth, he helped out the family business by decorating the carriages that his father built, and he continued to draw and paint over the course of his life. At the age of eighteen, his father offered to sponsor his education as either a painter or a doctor and, although he chose the latter, he was an active participant in the artistic circles of Paris. As Schade suggests, Charcot:

... was obviously determined to make a name for himself not only in the world of medicine, but in the world of art as well. Marriage with a wealthy widow enabled him to become active as an art collector, to become a patron for various artists, such as Gallé and Rodin, to participate in the initiation of exhibition projects, and to conduct a weekly salon in his house in boulevard St. Germain, to which he invited the literary men, artists, art critics, actors and politicians of Paris.¹⁴⁶

His salon extended into the halls of the Salpêtrière, where he opened up his Tuesday lessons to an audience comprised not only of doctors, but also of artists writers, and performers, for whom he paraded in and hypnotized a series of hysterical patients in order to display their symptoms (see figure 21). In combining art and science, visual spectacle

behind photography at Salpêtrière, and that the photographic service as well as the *Iconographie* fell into stagnation until Londe took charge in 1884. From this perspective, Charcot's self-identification with the photographer may indicate he felt his own gaze was sufficient as the major device of visual investigation, rather than the photograph." See Gunning, "In Your Face" in *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology, and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940*, edited by Mark S. Micale (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 159.

¹⁴⁶ Schade, 505.



Figure 21. Charcot's Tuesday Lesson

and medical demonstration, however, the Tuesday lessons solicited a different gaze than that of the salon. The hysteric as “medical marvel” available for public viewing within Charcot’s “museum of living pathology” shared a kinship with the living human spectacles that had recently populated P.T. Barnum’s American museum.¹⁴⁷ As Tom Gunning

¹⁴⁷ The American Museum was owned and run by Barnum between 1841 and 1865 on Manhattan’s lower west side, until it was destroyed in a fire. Part museum, lecture hall, zoo, aquarium, waxworks, theater, and freak show, it combined “sensational entertainment and gaudy display with instruction and moral uplift.” See The Lost Museum, an American Social History Project: <http://www.lostmuseum.cuny.edu/>

points out, both employed an “operational aesthetic” that drew viewers who wanted:

... not only to see a marvel, but to understand and speculate on how it works. An impresario technique tailored to an age of technology and its fascinations, this aesthetic both excites and satisfies curiosity and supplies a very different aesthetic experience from that of the traditional art forms.¹⁴⁸

It was, according to Gunning, curiosity, the perverse desire to feed “the eyes’ urges” maligned by St. Augustine that served as the motivating impulse of visual spectacles like those of Charcot and Barnum, which combined scientific knowledge and popular entertainment, a desire encouraged by the indexicality of the photographic image and, he suggests, that brought the first spectators to the earliest motion pictures:

The gradual perfection of still photography stimulated the pursuit of visual phenomena that might otherwise slip below the threshold of conscious observation and opened up new possibilities of visual knowledge. A continual attempt to make photography ever more sensitive to the ephemeral and instantaneous events of physical nature was a major motivation for cinema's invention and perfection.¹⁴⁹

Gunning traces what he calls the “gnostic” impulse to know through seeing through various photographic and cinematic experiments that interrogated the human face, that “most polysemous of human objects.” His insights, however, easily apply to the hysterical body, whose physical

¹⁴⁸ Tom Gunning, “In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film” in *Modernism/Modernity* 4.1 (1997), 1-29.

¹⁴⁹ Gunning, “In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film” in *Modernism/Modernity* 4.1 (1997), 1-29.

expressivity conveys similar tensions between outer and inner, the visible and unseen, and which experienced a similar exchange between occult and physiological explanations as the practice of physiognomy. Indeed, a seminal figure within both spheres was G.B. Duchenne de Boulogne, the founder of neurology in France and mentor to Charcot, who in 1862 published *Mécanismes de la Physionomie Humaine*, a photographic investigation of human facial expressiveness in which the facial muscles of different subjects were sent into involuntary contraction through the application of electrodes. As in the documentation of the various phases of the hysterical attack, the combination of electrode and photography allowed the isolation and fixing of that which was normally too transitory to study. As in the photographs of the *Iconographie*, Duchenne's studies, to the extent that they were oriented towards objective visual analysis, were also gendered, aestheticized, and even narrativized in ways that defied scientific objectivity. Duchenne divided the photographic plates in his study into "scientific" and "aesthetic" sections, the former using predominantly male subjects and the latter female, posed in costumes and with props. Within these artificial tableaux, subjects were sometimes used like puppets in reenacting emotional gestures from spiritual imagery, as well as Shakespearean dramas (see figure 22), a histrionic



Figure 22. Duchenne de Boulogne, imitation of “Lady Macbeth” induced with electricity

practice that, as Didi-Huberman points out, was passed on to the theatre of Charcot.¹⁵⁰

Such tendencies were, however, far from unusual in nineteenth century studies of the body. The combination of the aesthetic and the empirical is also evident, for example, in Edward Muybridge’s protocinematic studies of human motion, about which Linda Williams has written. Like Duchenne’s studies of facial expression, Muybridge’s motion studies were intended to be relatively objective, and yet, as

¹⁵⁰ See Didi-Huberman, 226-227.

Williams notes, there was “gratuitous fantasization and iconization of the bodies of women that have no parallel in the representation of the male.”¹⁵¹ While the men in Muybridge’s studies are engaged in physical activities: running, jumping, kicking, boxing, wrestling, etc., the females are engaged in far more passive activities, such as standing, sitting, and kneeling, in which there is always some extra detail, as in one series where a female covers her mouth and another, where the female holds her breast. Furthermore, unlike the male series, the female series also include props unnecessary to the activity being displayed, such as a basket or jug of water. Perhaps most questionable are the series in which women use various materials, whether sheets in a bed, a dress, a scarf, or a veil to cover and uncover their bodies as if engaged in a kind of striptease. Such activities and objects, which invest the woman’s body with a diegetic and even erotic surplus of meaning, also overdetermine her difference from the male, according to Williams.

In making sense of these embellishments, Williams follows Laura Mulvey’s lead and reads them through Freudian ideas about fetishism, as a contradictory gesture, which is ultimately a disavowal of female castration. Gunning, on the other hand, seems to suggest that it is the grotesquerie of the human body interrogated in the most unnatural of

¹⁵¹ Linda Williams, “Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 511.

ways that requires disavowal. In the case of Duchenne, narrative and aesthetic framing helped to offset the monstrosity being displayed:

... as if familiar situations and cultural clichés of feminine roles provided a context of ideologically reassuring recognizability necessary to allow the viewer to see these shocking demonstrations of the human face as the play of muscles as part of a visible “natural language.”¹⁵²

In either case, the aestheticization or narrativization of physiological or pathological phenomena produces within a visual field that would otherwise encourage clinical and objective observation a vacillation between the diegetic framing and the dissimulating gesture that incites the “looking beneath the seen” of the curious gaze. While both staged and provoked (in the above cases), this sort of looking brings to mind the dialectical relationship between the *studium* and the *punctum* of the photograph as described by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. While the *studium* is the ostensible subject of the photograph, which bears the imprint of the photographer’s intentions, the *punctum* is an unintentional detail or accident within the image that “pricks” or “bruises” the viewer, that evokes a poignancy somewhere between love and pity, whose field of action extends beyond the visible toward the personal and subjective. Elaborating on this idea, Barthes draws a connection between the *punctum* and the *noeme*, the “that-has-been” of the photograph, by which the subject pictured, particularly within historical photographs, is

¹⁵² See Gunning.

irreconcilably suspended between the reality of his present death (“he is dead”) and his photographic presence, which posits his death as an inevitability forever postponed (“he is going to die”). “Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”¹⁵³ It is the *noeme*, the living death of the subject, that for Barthes imbues the photograph with a pathos that is closer to the experience of theatre than painting, and in particular those theatrical forms in which an intentional artificiality conjures a realm both connected to and separate from that of the living: “the whitened bust of the totemic theater ... the Japanese No mask ... a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead.”¹⁵⁴ Within the theatrical production whose verisimilitude is made partial by the presence of the mask, or the photograph whose unintentional detail snags the psyche of its viewer is, I want to suggest, a similar tension to that conjured within the photograph that theatrically or narratively frames a pathological disruption; each enacts a dissimulation in the process of construction that Barthes compares to madness (but that, in fact, involves a madness that is constrained to a “prick” or “bruise,” as we shall see). In an anecdote of particular significance to our discussion, he describes how the connection between photography and madness was made manifest to him while watching the

¹⁵³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc. 1981), 96.

¹⁵⁴ Barthes, 31-32.

dance between a female automaton, seemingly fashioned after Olimpia in Hoffmann's story, and the infamous seducer of women in Federico Fellini's film *Casanova* (1976):

... when Casanova began dancing with the young automaton, my eyes were touched with a kind of painful and delicious intensity, as if I were suddenly experiencing the effects of a strange drug; each detail, which I was seeing so exactly, savoring it, so to speak, down to its last evidence, overwhelmed me ... something desperately inert and yet available, offered, affectionate, according to an angelic impulse of "good will" ... At which moment I could not help thinking about Photography: for I could say all this about the photographs which touched me.¹⁵⁵ (See figure 23)

The dance between the lover and the automaton (as well as the *studium* and the *punctum*) invokes, like the *danse macabre*¹⁵⁶ once did, an acknowledgement of death in life, a "wakening of intractable reality" that bestows on its subject an exquisite poignancy that implicates its spectator. In the tension or vacillation between the simulation of a familiar scene and the unassimilable conjured in its midsts arises a spasm of recognition that "I too will die" or "I too am a puppet subject to forces beyond my control." The madness of this doubled vision, which Barthes suggests is inherent in the photograph, is tamed by society in one of two ways: first, by turning photography into an art "for no art is mad" and second, by universalizing or banalizing the image, so that all

¹⁵⁵ Barthes, 116.

¹⁵⁶ A common allegorical image in the late Medieval period depicting a death figure leading a group of dancing skeletons to the grave (see Chapter One).



Figure 23. Casanova: The Lover and the Doll

that is unique or scandalous becomes subsumed within a generalizable stereotype.

These are, of course, the two strategies by which Charcot attempted to tame hysteria. Indeed, both the Tuesday lessons and the *Iconographie* were geared towards the twin projects of aestheticizing and generalizing (that is, subjecting to the codes of both art and science) that which was otherwise indecipherable and which inspired horror in those who witnessed it. Even Charcot's predecessor Paul Briquet, the first to systematically examine the ailment, and whose *Traite clinique et Therapeutique de l'hysterie* (1859) provided an unprecedented empirical study (based on clinical observation of 430 patients over a ten-year period at the Pitié Hospital), remained ill-disposed to its visual symptoms, which he readily admitted inspired revulsion in him:

I was obliged to bestow all my attention on this sort of patient, although my taste for positive science did not in the least draw me to them. Treating illnesses that all authors see as the classic example of the unstable, irregular, fantastic, unforeseeable, ungoverned by any law or rule, not linked together by any serious theory: the task disgusted me more than any other.¹⁵⁷

As if in answer to this sentiment, Charcot, in his inaugural lecture, as the new university chair of diseases of the nervous system at the University of Paris, in 1882, acknowledged the mysterious nature of hysteria (along with epilepsy and chorea), which were presented to the

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Didi-Huberman, 68.

medical establishment “as so many Sphinxes” for which many saw “only an assemblage of odd incoherent phenomena inaccessible to analysis, and which had better, perhaps, be banished to the category of the unknown.”¹⁵⁸ However, by training his clinically grounded, artistically gifted eye on this odd assemblage, he believed that he could decipher its hidden patterns, of whose existence he had no doubt. As Freud would later state in his obituary for Charcot:

He was not a reflective man, not a thinker: he had the nature of an artist—he was, as he himself said, a *visuel*, a man who sees. Here is what he himself told us about his method for working. He used to look again and again at the things he did not understand, to deepen his impression of them day by day, till suddenly an understanding of them dawned on him. In his mind’s eye the apparent chaos presented by the continual repetition of the same symptoms then gave way to order ... He called this kind of intellectual work, in which he had no equal, ‘practicing nosography’, and he took pride in it. He might be heard to say that the greatest satisfaction a man could have was *to see something new*. (emphasis added)¹⁵⁹

Charcot’s nosography, dedicated as it was to an unflinching vision that saw “something new,” an intelligible order, within the unknown and visually chaotic, poses an answer not only to the indecipherability of hysterical symptoms, but to the uncanny as *misoneism* (the fear of the new) through which they are rendered demonic. The effect, however, was not as simple as a taming of madness, as Barthes is suggesting about

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in de Mernaffe, 75.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in deMernaffe, 92. See also Didi-Huberman, 26-27.

the banalizing of photography. Indeed, it seems impossible, in looking over the photographs of the *Iconographie*, not to experience a pathos or poignancy in the gestures of the women pictured, at once theatrical and unmotivated, a vertiginous disruption within a narrativized frame, which is evocative of the *pas de deux* between the lover and the automaton. In domesticating and aestheticizing the unassimilable and frightening, Charcot produced the kind of theatre through which the uncanny is rendered both pleasurable and cathartic; and this is precisely the role of the fictional uncanny, according to Ernst Jentsch, of which Hoffmann was a master:

In life we do not like to expose ourselves to severe emotional blows, but in the theatre or while reading we gladly let ourselves be influenced in this way: we hereby experience certain powerful excitements which awake in us a strong feeling for life, without having to accept the consequences of the causes of the unpleasant moods if they were to have the opportunity to appear in corresponding form on their own account, so to speak. In physiological terms, the sensation of such excitements seems frequently to be bound up with artistic pleasure in a direct way.¹⁶⁰

The theatrical framing of the uncanny, through which the spectator experiences dissimulation as pleasure is, to a certain extent, related to that which Nathanael experiences in his encounter with the female automaton, whose embodiment of both the human and artificial, the living and dead, strikes profound chords within him. Indeed, in the scene

¹⁶⁰ Jentsch, "The Psychology of the Uncanny," 12.

in “The Sandman” in which Nathanael and Olimpia dance, there are echoes of Barthes’s experience of the dancing automaton in Fellini’s *Casanova*. The stiff and measured gait and mechanical movements of Olimpia appear to Nathanael (as does the “desperately inert and yet available” figure of the automaton to Barthes) a cipher of hidden meaning; “As he [Nathanael] touched her cold hand, he felt his heart thrill with awe; the legend of ‘The Dead Bride’ shot suddenly through his mind.”¹⁶¹ Her repetitive and vacuous utterances strike him as “genuine hieroglyphs of the inner world of Love and of the higher cognition of the intellectual life revealed in the intuition of the Eternal beyond the grave.”¹⁶² However, whereas the viewer (or spectator) of the dance between the lover and the automaton is subject to the “emotional blow” of the uncanny at an aesthetic remove, Nathanael is undone by the madness of his love for this figure of death in life when he is awakened, at the end of the story, to the subjectivity that he has invested in the object of his love. While Barthes suggests that the *punctum* of the photograph is also invested with a subjective unraveling akin to madness, it “bruises” rather than destroys for it is mediated by the *studium*, a diegetic frame that both contains and distances the viewer from the madness while (as

¹⁶¹ The “dead bride” is a reference to Goethe’s poem “Bride of Corinth (Die Braut von Korinth)” first published in 1797, in which the corpse of an unwed bride comes back from the dead to consort with her betrothed.

¹⁶² E.T.A. Hoffmann, “The Sandman” in *Best Tales of Hoffmann* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 207-208.

Charcot's photographs make clear) also creating the conditions by which it can be experienced, and even enjoyed, in the first place.

It is this madness, which Barthes finds compelling in photography and Jentsch celebrates in Hoffmann's work, that Freud is interested in extracting from the visual and the aesthetic in his theorization of the uncanny. Freud is, in a sense, attempting to hone in on that which leads to Nathanael's death rather than the mediated experience of death in life enjoyed by the viewer (or reader) of the dance (narrative and otherwise) between Nathanael and the automaton. Moreover, his insistence that we ignore the automaton in our attempt to understand the causes of the uncanny is, I would suggest, related to the extent to which the aestheticization of the visually uncanny in Charcot's treatment of hysteria occluded the real causes of the ailment. As Freud's studies with Breuer made manifest, it was Charcot's gift for seeing what others could not that constituted his primary blind spot in assessing and treating hysteria, for the more he looked and documented what he saw, the more his etiology was bound to the ailment's physicality. While he entertained the idea of external influences or psychic trauma, he remained committed to a physiological explanation, in particular, that the illness was the result of brain lesions that were likely hereditary in nature and that traumatic events served merely as *agent provocateurs* for an

inherent neurological “degeneracy.” To the extent that Charcot was able to find meaning in visual disorder, he discounted that which was most meaningful—what his patients were saying—as delirious banter. However Freud, who studied with Charcot for seventeen weeks between 1885 and 1886, in his subsequent private practice began listening for the psychological content of what his patients were saying, ultimately concluding that their hysterical symptoms were the result of sexually-based trauma that was repressed, displaced from the lower body regions, and somatically converted into motor activity.¹⁶³ And in lieu of hypnosis, which Charcot had so theatrically induced in his patients before a crowd of onlookers, he prescribed “the talking cure” through which access was gained to the analysand’s “private theatre”¹⁶⁴ only within the context of the psychoanalytic relationship.

It is this core insight about the etiology of hysteria that, aside from its larger implications in the development of the field of psychoanalysis, serves as the backdrop of Freud’s interpretation of the uncanny as the return of repressed infantile sexuality and his insistence that we turn our attention away from the visual signs of Olympia’s ambiguous nature, suggestive of supernatural influences, towards the symbolic register of

¹⁶³ Freud would later revise his “seduction theory” concluding that hysterical symptoms were less dependent on a reality-based sexual trauma than projected fantasies and repressed desire.

¹⁶⁴ This was a term used by Anna O. for describing her “daydreams,” which she explored with Breuer.

Nathanael's castration anxiety, enacted through a narrative doubling in the form of the Sandman. Unlike Jentsch, who is interested in the aesthetics of the uncanny and how something frightening in real life can be rendered pleasurable within art and literature, Freud is interested in linking the uncanny to a psychological drive that overrides the pursuit of pleasure, which he will call the "death instinct" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) a book that served as the impetus for his essay "On the Uncanny" (1919) (the latter was written between drafts of the former and published the year before), as well as a reworking of his theory of the drives. In the book, he states early on that while the enjoyment derived from "painful experiences" in the theater or art hints at that which he is addressing:

They are of no use for *our* purposes, since they presuppose the existence and dominance of the pleasure principle; they give no evidence of the operation of tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it.¹⁶⁵

These tendencies are the function of instincts "*inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*,"(43) and since "*inanimate things existed before living ones*," this urge drives the organism towards inanimacy or quiescence. Thus, as Freud will famously put it, "*the aim of all life is death*."(46). In explaining the persistence of life despite the primacy of the "death instinct," Freud describes the way in which the "life instincts,"

¹⁶⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 17.

under which he groups both the sexual and self-preservative drives, interact with and delay the organism's primary imperative (death), in order to ensure that it dies "only in its own fashion" (47). Although seemingly at cross purposes, the two instincts—life and death, Eros and Thanatos—work not in opposition to one another, but dynamically, the individual life arising in the "field of force" created between them:

It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey.¹⁶⁶

Within the retrogressive logic of the organism's "vacillating rhythm" are echoes of the dynamic relationship between *studium* and *punctum* or between narrative or aesthetic framing or construction and the vertiginous gesture of deconstruction or dissimulation. Freud is, in a sense, offering his own oblique theory of art or poetry, describing in psycho-physiological terms that which Aristotle once called catharsis (*katharsis*) in relation to the tragic form.¹⁶⁷ Like the "fatal flaw" by which the narrative *unravels* in dramatic tragedy, the "death instinct" subtends the erotic drive, the latter of which is merely a preparatory act or

¹⁶⁶ Freud, 49.

¹⁶⁷ Indeed, one of many examples of the way in which the dynamic principles in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* are invoked in aesthetic or narrative analysis is Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, who uses it to describe the driving force of a narrative plot, which he suggests, like the living organism, must also "tend toward its end, seek illumination in its own death. Yet this must be the right death, the correct end." See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 103.

“preliminary function” for “binding” freely mobile energy “designed to prepare the excitation for its final elimination in the pleasure of discharge,” returning the organism to a “quiescent cathexis” through cathartic expulsion. In contrast to the vacillating rhythm of *catharsis* (which, as Freud notes, is most intense in relation to a cultural production experienced for the first time: “If a joke is heard for a second time it produces almost no effect; a theatrical production never creates so great an impression the second time as the first”¹⁶⁸) is the mechanically-driven ceaseless rhythm of the “death drive” enacted in the *compulsion to repeat*, a psychic phenomenon that, according to Freud, lays at the heart of the uncanny.

Although Freud might have elaborated on repetition compulsion using hysteria as an example, once again, he steers our attention away from the mechanical body towards psychic automatism, using as an example the traumatic dreams of soldiers returned from battle (with whom Freud had direct experience following WWI). Like hysteria, the neurotic symptoms of war veterans had been linked to a predisposition in the form of organic/hereditary lesions of the brain and nervous system, which were, it was argued, activated by trauma. However, the repetition of traumatic experiences in the dreams of the soldiers suggested a psychic component to their symptoms, while challenging the

¹⁶⁸ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 42.

idea of dreams as primarily a form of “wish fulfillment.” Freud concludes that the repetitive war dreams of the soldiers were attempts at preparing for and mastering retrospectively traumas that, at the time they were experienced, had caught them by surprise, or of developing after the fact the shielding “anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis”:

They thus afford us a view of a function of the mental apparatus which, though it does not contradict the pleasure principle, is nevertheless independent of it and seems to be more primitive than the purpose of gaining pleasure and avoiding unpleasure.¹⁶⁹

To extrapolate from this to Freud’s interpretation of Hoffmann’s story, the uncanny as a repetition compulsion that overrides the pleasure principle is better represented by the Sandman, who inspires repulsion and fear in Nathanael in every form in which he is recreated, than in Olympia whose mechanical movements, however much they hint at the “death instinct” lurking beneath Eros, are marked by a vacillation between life and death, beauty and its shadow, that is experienced by Nathanael (and the reader) as compelling.

Mad Love

In his essay “On the Uncanny,” Freud introduces the “compulsion to repeat” in a strange anecdote about an experience that he had of unintentionally and repeatedly returning to the red light district of a

¹⁶⁹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 37.

small Italian town that he was visiting, whose streets were unknown to him:

I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before ...¹⁷⁰

While Freud hints at the psychic origin of this “unintended reoccurrence of the same situation,” he quickly moves on, referring the reader in a footnote to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and ignoring the erotic significance of the “painted women” in the compulsion that repeatedly brought him back into their company. However, to the extent that the “painted lady” is repressed (both in this anecdote and in Freud’s theorization of the uncanny) in order to stress the “death instinct” over the sexual drives, she will return with a vengeance in the works of Surrealism, an anti-aesthetic art movement that came of age with psychoanalysis and that compulsively explored the link between Eros and Thanatos, often in the form of artificial women and imagery that invoked the disarticulation of hysteria. Indeed, Freud’s experience in the

¹⁷⁰ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” 237.

Italian town was virtually recreated in 1938 at the height of the movement at the International Exposition of Surrealism held in Paris, which featured a network of dimly-lit streets populated by mannequins, each outfitted by a different artist (with objects ranging from a bird cage to a fisherman's net) and standing near a street sign (all of which had provocative names like "Lips Street" and "Blood Transfusions Street"), an uncanny red-light district through which visitors were initially asked to find their way in the dark with a flash light.¹⁷¹

Although Freud attempted to close a Pandora's Box by diverting attention from the mechanical body, whether automaton or hysteric, he opened another in his "discovery" of the automatic psychic processes behind the compulsion to repeat. Just as the body of the automaton/hysteric was losing her meaning—for she had been emptied of demonic intrigue by Charcot and visual intrigue by the practice of psychoanalysis—she was once again invested with an invisible force (the repressed unconscious, whether her own or the projection of another) inspiring a generation of artists and writers to make her a site/sight of psychic exploration. André Breton, the founder of the Surrealist movement, famously called hysteria "the greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century," for in its manifestations of psychic automatism he

¹⁷¹ Robert Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 111.

saw not symptoms of pathology, but liberation, a means of expressing an inner psychic reality that was superior to external reality. Thus, the definition of surrealism offered by Breton in 1924, in the movement's first manifesto, was as follows:

SURREALISM, n. 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. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.¹⁷²

The human mind has, according to Breton, been kept hostage by rationality, logic, and commonsense, its imaginative capabilities withering beneath the weight of convention and utility. However, within Freudian psychoanalytic methods (especially his work on dreams) are the seeds of a liberatory praxis.

Breton had first gained exposure to hysteria, as well as the techniques of dream interpretation and free association, during World War I, as a medical student interning in a series of neuropsychiatric clinics under two former assistants of Charcot (Raoul Leroy and Joseph Babinski) in the treatment of soldiers who had returned from battle. In the same symptoms of “post-traumatic stress” that had inspired Freud’s theory of the “death drive,” Breton detected a psychic (sur)reality, and in those same techniques used to address the shock of war on the psyche

¹⁷² André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism” in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1971).

and shepherd it back to normalcy, he intuited a system for shocking the mind out of its normative conditioning and tapping into its imaginative potential.¹⁷³ While Breton's poetic interpretation and creative use of psychoanalytic theory put surrealism at odds with Freud, as well as the French School of Psychiatry as represented by Pierre Janet¹⁷⁴, Breton gave credit to Freud for bringing back to light "the most important aspect of intellectual life" and grounded surrealist practice in the "psychic automatism" of Janet.¹⁷⁵

The surrealists experimented with psychic automatism through a variety of collaborative writing and drawing games, whose goal was to bypass the mind and tap into the inner psyche, the results of which were often nonsensical phrases or imagistic disarticulations that reproduced the illogic of dreams and the physical disjuncture of hysteria (viewed as analogues by the Surrealists). A favorite was called *The Exquisite Corpse* and it was played by a group of people on a piece of paper. The first person would compose part of a sentence or drawing, fold over the paper

¹⁷³ Moreover, as Hal Foster notes, "whereas surrealism began with hypnotic sessions, psychoanalysis commenced with the abandonment of hypnosis." See Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 2.

¹⁷⁴ Following a paper published in the *Annales Medico-Psychologiques* in which psychiatrist Paul Abély condemned the attack on psychiatry (and the call for the murder of psychiatrists) in Breton's *Nadja*, Janet took part in a discussion at the Société Médico-Psychologique, in which he decried the work of Surrealists as "above all confessions of men obsessed, and men who doubt." Both the paper and discussion are reprinted at the beginning of the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* as a kind of initiatory prompt for the declarations that follow. See Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930) in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 119-123.

¹⁷⁵ Janet's *L'Automatisme Psychologique* was published in 1893. See Foster, 3, 1-5, footnote 8, 221.

so that his contribution would be concealed from the next person, who would add onto it, until all were finished and the paper was unfolded (see figure 24). The collaborative and free-associative nature of the game held great appeal for “holding the critical intellect in abeyance, and of fully liberating the mind’s metaphorical activity.”¹⁷⁶ And the resulting figures—disjointed hybrids that merged inanimate objects with parts of animals, as well as female and male body parts, conjoined or mutated beyond recognition—were extolled by Breton for their “total negation of the ridiculous activity of imitation of physical characteristics,” as well as for carrying “anthropomorphism to its climax.”

Reminiscent of the ASFRian “feminization of objects,” the anthropomorphism enacted by the *Exquisite Corpse* was one of a series of Surrealist interests—including dolls, mannequins, and the conjunction of the human and the mechanical—that dovetail with ASFRian proclivities, to which Breton gave the name *convulsive beauty*. At the end of *Nadja* (the last line of which is: “beauty will be convulsive or it will not be at all”), Breton links convulsive beauty to the trauma of a railway accident, which (like war trauma) Freud discusses in relation to the compulsion to repeat in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which results in a jolt, shock, or “short circuit” that *derails* the rational mind. In *L’Amour*

¹⁷⁶ Andre Breton, “Exquisite Corpse,” in *Surrealism* by Patrick Waldberg (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 95.

Y. Tanguy, Joan Miro, Max Morise, Man Ray, 1927

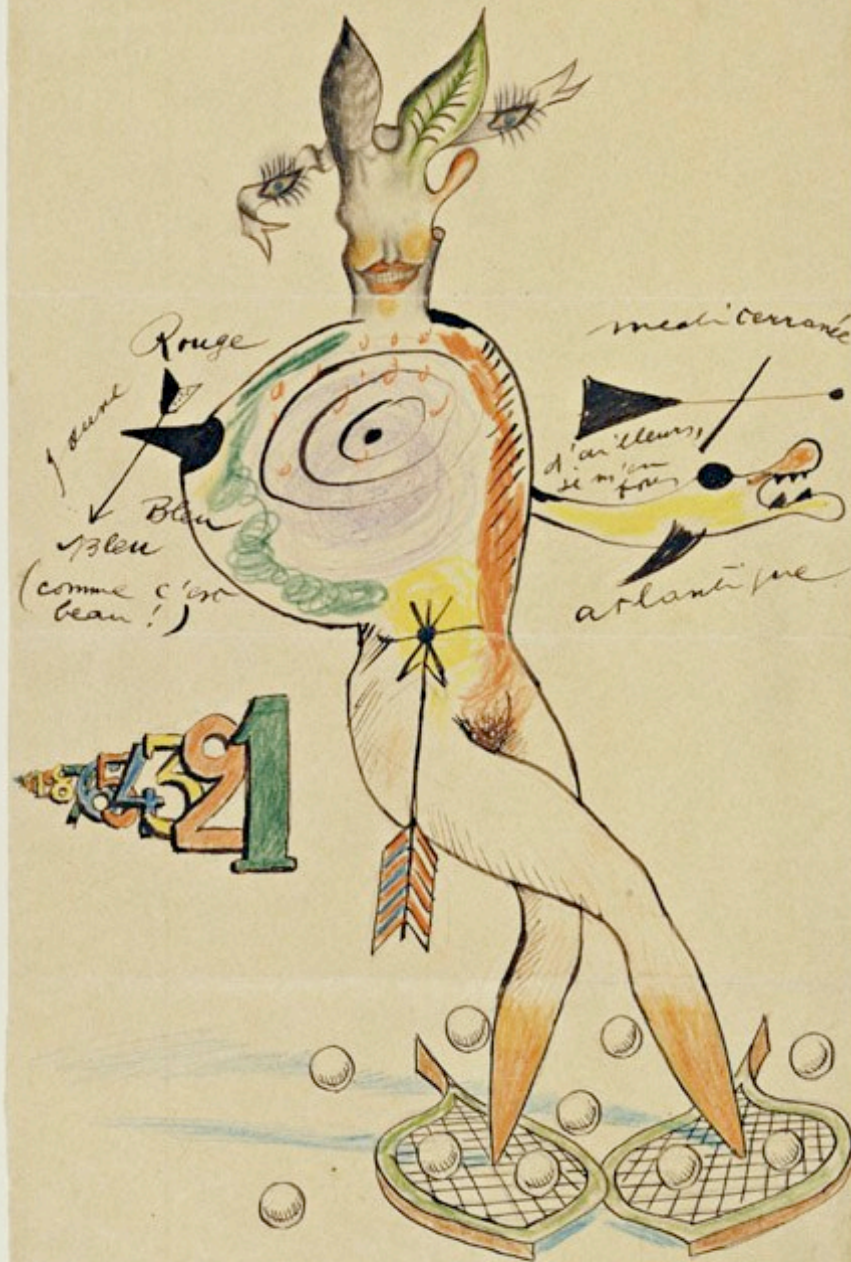


Figure 24. Exquisite Corpse

Fou (Mad Love), he elaborates on the concept (and the train analogy), suggesting that the perfect illustration would be “a photograph of a very handsome locomotive after it had been abandoned for many years to the delirium of a virgin forest,” for “there can be beauty—convulsive beauty—only at the price of the affirmation of the reciprocal relationship that joins an object in movement to the same object in repose.”¹⁷⁷ At the heart of convulsive beauty is a contradiction between animacy and inanimacy, life and death, motion and stasis, which Hal Foster calls “the punctum of the uncanny,” for its resemblance to the doubled and irreconcilable aspect of photography described by Barthes.

The artist who took the disarticulated figure of *convulsive beauty* even further than the Surrealists,¹⁷⁸ who was perhaps most responsible for the surrealist fascination with mannequins, and whose work intersects most blatantly with ASFRian proclivities is the German surrealist associate Hans Bellmer (1902-1975), best known for his photographed *poupees* or dolls. Bellmer drew an explicit connection between his dolls and the uncanny, stating that a large part of their inspiration was his attendance at Max Reinhardt’s 1932 production of the Offenbach opera “Tales of Hoffmann,” in which the story of

¹⁷⁷ Andre Breton, “Mad Love” (L’Amour Fou) in *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, edited by Franklin Rosemont (New York: Monad Press, 1978), 162.

¹⁷⁸ Bellmer is, in fact, generally discussed more in relation to the Sadeian materialism of Georges Bataille, who invited him to illustrate his *Story of the Eye* (*Histoire de l’oeil*) in 1945.

Coppelia/Olympia from the “The Sandman” is recreated in the first act. He began work on his first doll shortly thereafter, building its frame from wood brooms and metal rods jointed with nuts and bolts and filled out with flax fiber covered with plaster of paris. Throughout the doll’s construction he took photographs, ten of which were included in a small book that he published with his own money called *Die Puppe*, preceded by a short introductory text entitled “Memories of a Doll Theme.” In the winter of 1934-35, eighteen photographs appeared in a two-page spread in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure* (see figure 25), launching his career as an artist and his relationship with the surrealist movement. In these images, the doll appears like a mannequin hopeful caught in an ongoing state of arrested development between wholeness and dissolution, adulthood and adolescence, her sad, partial figure splayed on a bed or leaning against a wall and often posed against a backdrop of chiffon or delicate lace. Bellmer told his biographer Peter Webb that his work on the doll was not only a desire to return to the wonder of childhood, but also a reflection of the pain and anxiety of adulthood, articulated through a figure of erotic liberation. The resulting form of these psychic crosscurrents was, as Webb stated:

... pregnant with riddles—not only riddles posed by Hoffmann about the natural and artificial or the living and the dead, but fresh, Bellmerian riddles about the states of childhood and womanhood between which the doll is indeterminately suspended. Bellmer conveyed both the

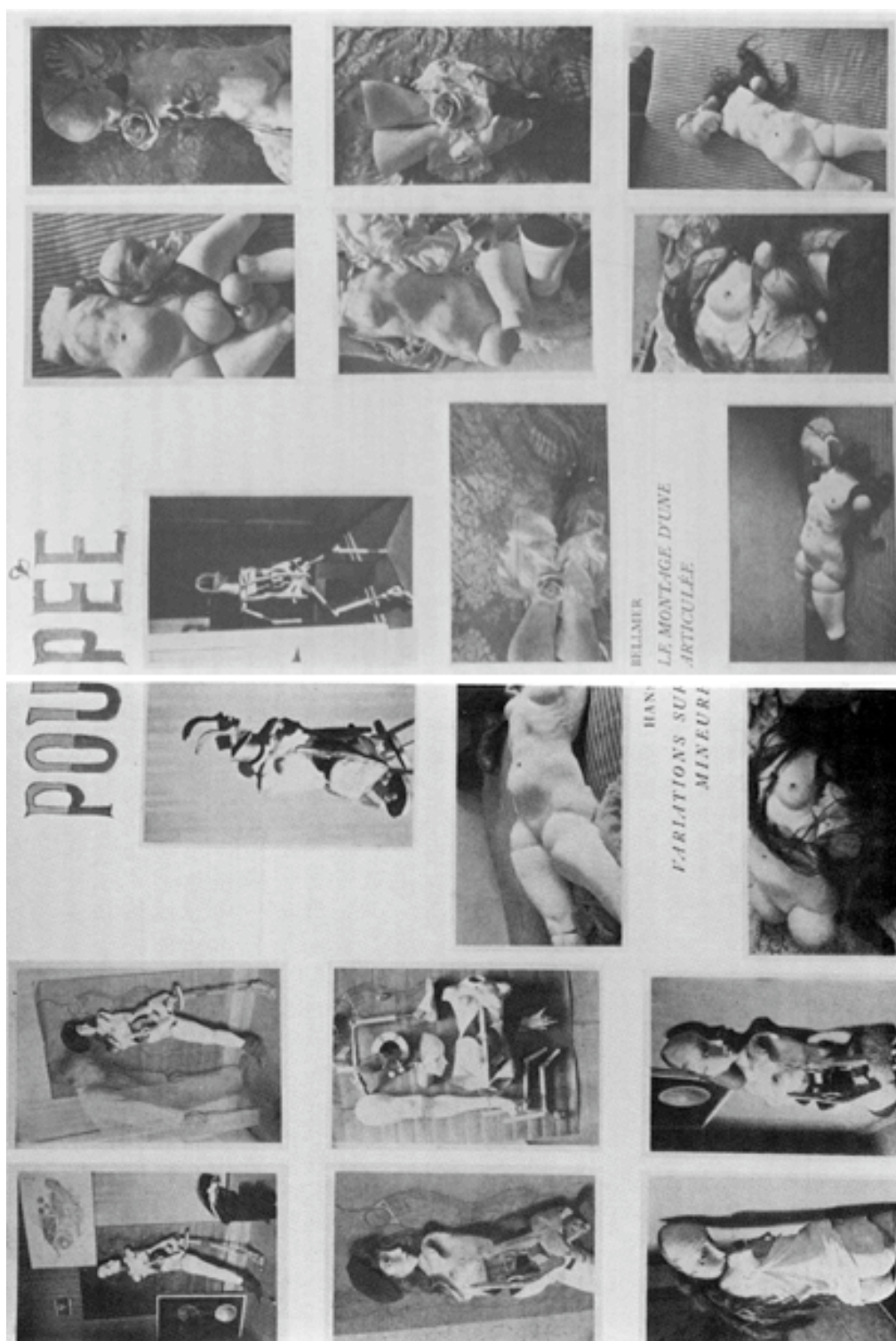


Figure 25. Bellmer's work in MINOTAURE

precocious sexuality of the child, already amply documented by Freud, and the residue of childhood imagination and longings in the adult. The effect is insidious and cruel, but ... the doll is simplicity itself.¹⁷⁹

Bellmer had wanted to allude to the internal or psychic nature of the doll's form through a kind of peep show embedded in her stomach. Activated by a button on the left nipple, it was to display in succession six miniature panoramas attached to a wooden disc (see figure 26), each of which made visible "suppressed girlish thoughts."¹⁸⁰ Although the peep show was never implemented, Bellmer's desire to produce a figure capable of articulating the gravity-defying permutations of the unconscious was more fully realized through a second doll, completed in 1935. Inspiration came in the form of a pair of 16th century wooden figures, each about eight-inches tall, that he and Lotte Pritzel¹⁸¹ discovered in the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin. Used by artists as aids to study human proportions and movement (similar to the wooden figures that artists still use today), they could be manipulated to a high degree since every body part, from limbs to neck and torso, were assembled around carefully crafted ball joints. Using them as a guide, Bellmer produced wooden ball joints around which he arranged a new

¹⁷⁹ Peter Webb, *Death, Desire & The Doll: The Life and Art of Hans Bellmer* (Washington, DC: Solar Books, 2004), 35.

¹⁸⁰ From "Memories of the Doll Theme" (1934) reprinted in Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors*, 174.

¹⁸¹ Lotte Pritzel (1887-1952) was a German artist best known for her wax dolls, which served as inspiration for Rainer Maria Rilke's essay, *Puppen*.

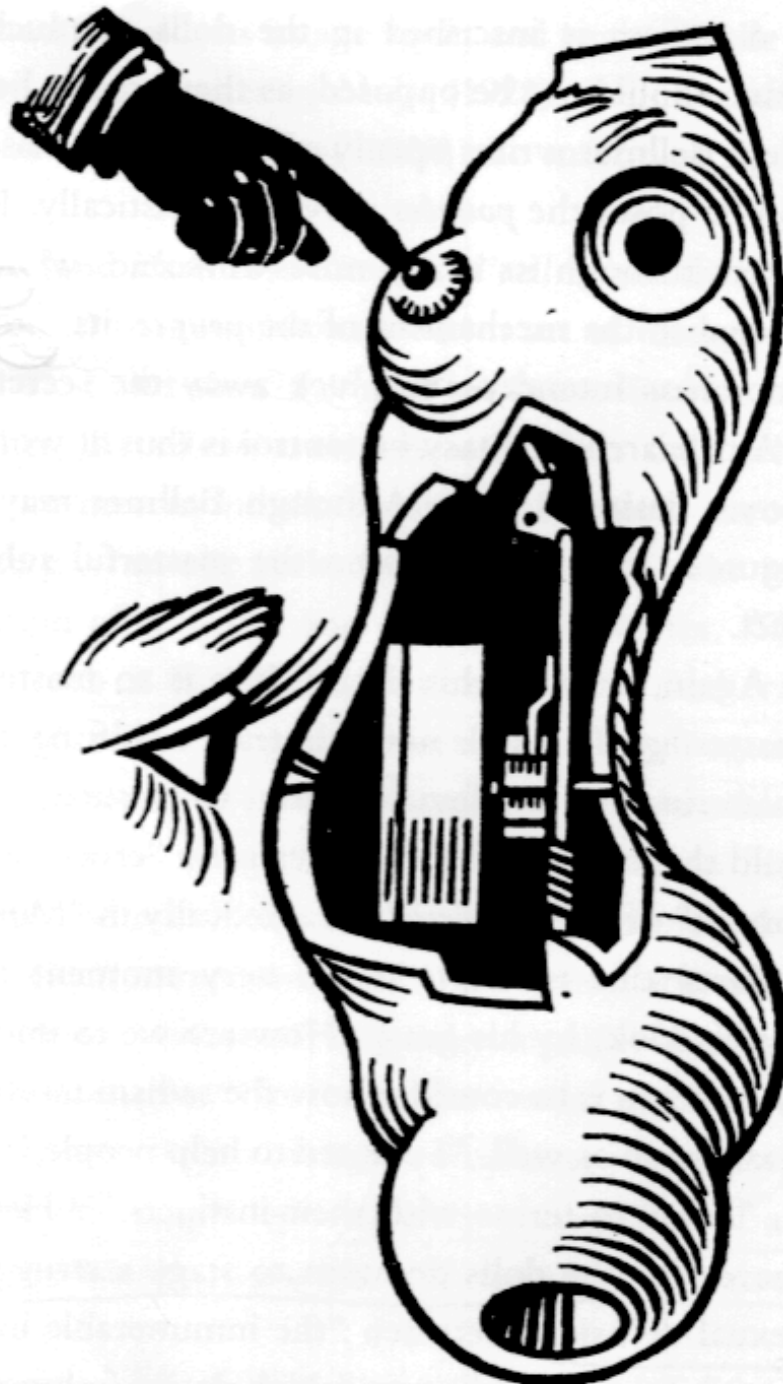


Figure 26. Peep-show diagram for the first doll

set of interchangeable and multiplied limbs and breasts. Unlike the first doll, the second was less a construction than what Rosalind Krauss has called “construction *as* dismemberment,” an endlessly transformable configuration of discombobulated body parts, which Bellmer photographed in more naturalistic settings, both domestic and outdoors. Some of the more provocative images involve two sets of thighs and legs attached to the same torso, from which the upper body and head is missing (see figure 27). The uncanny doubling of limbs that are often contorted or flailing convey both the disarticulation and convulsive visuality of hysteria, in which Bellmer like many Surrealists was fascinated.

Bellmer elaborates on the connection between the dolls and hysteria in his *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious* or *The Anatomy of the Image*, a book of essays that serves as a theoretical and poetic counterpart to his work. The book translates the Freudian interpretation of hysteria as the physical migration of displaced psychic trauma into a theory of desire, particularly as expressed and transformed through the kinds of physical disarticulations made possible by the image, which he compares to such word games as anagrams and palindromes (in an oft-quoted comment about the analogy between what he calls the “doll games” and word games, he states: “the body is comparable to a

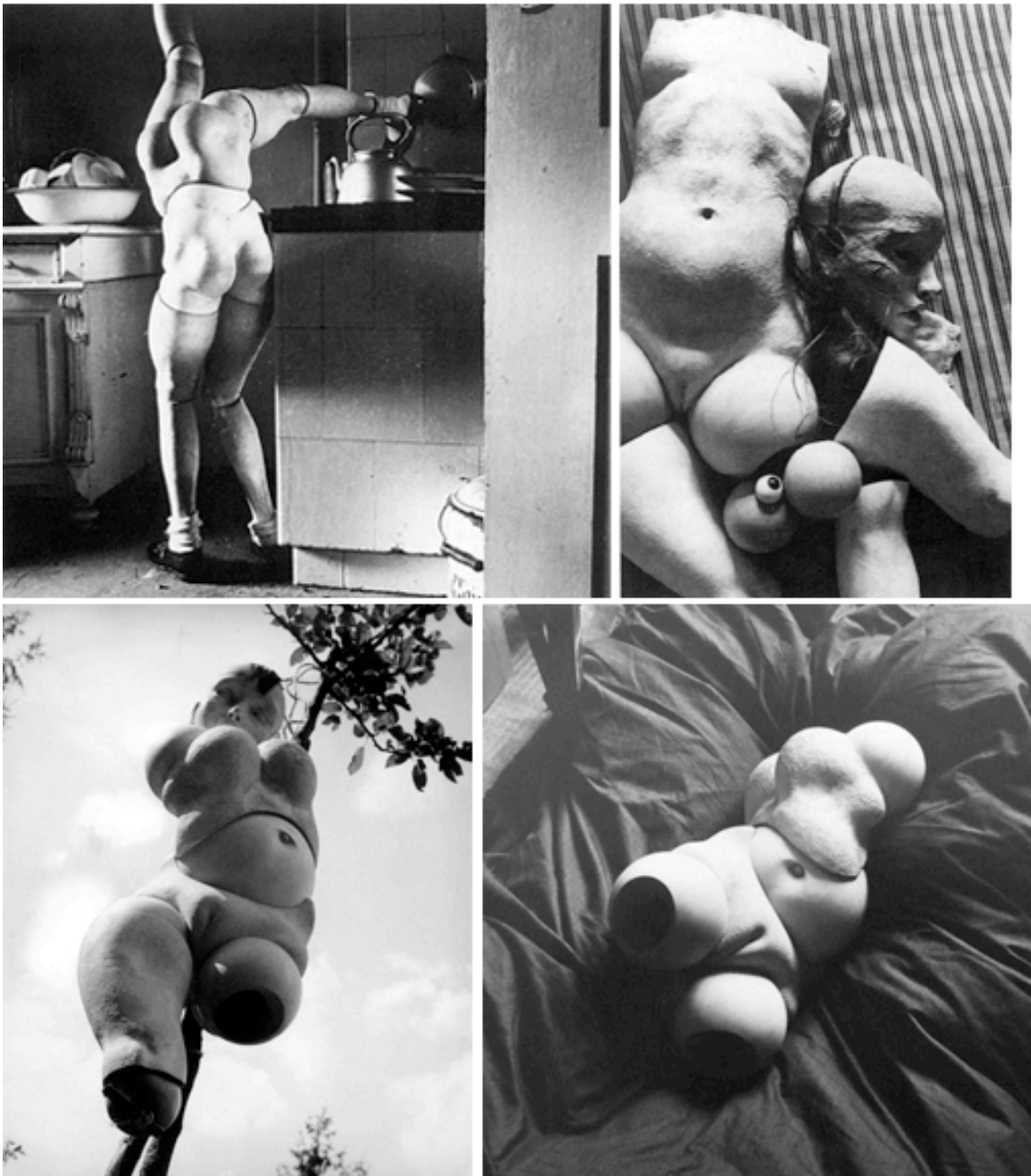


Figure 27. Ball-jointed Doll

sentence that invites you to disarticulate it.”¹⁸²) In a lengthy passage worth quoting for the way in which it eroticizes the shock associated with the uncanny, as well as the psychic bruising of Barthes’s photographic punctum, Bellmer suggests that:

... desire takes its point of departure, when concerning the intensity of its images, not from a perceptive whole but from details. If a naked hand unexpectedly emerges from a pair of pants in place of a foot, it is provocative of quite another degree of reality and—like an embarrassing stain on the edge of one’s underwear—ininitely more powerful than an entirely visible woman, it hardly matters, for the moment, whether this efficacy can be attributed to the surprise of discovering a deceptive aspect of desire, anticipated souvenirs, or even some reference to dark knowledge. The main thing is to retain from the monstrous dictionary of analogies/ antagonisms, which constitute the dictionary of the image, is that any given detail, such as a leg, is perceptible, accessible to memory, and available, (in short is REAL), only if desire does not fatally take it for a leg. The object identical to itself remains devoid of reality.¹⁸³

In locating the REAL within visual deformation and substitution, Bellmer is asserting the Reality of what Lacan calls the “fragmented body” over the Ideal-*I* of the subject constituted through the “mirror stage.” The mirror stage is, according to Lacan, precipitated when the infant, who has yet to gain full mastery of its body, identifies its “self” within a mirror image through which it appears whole, integrated, and individual. The exteriorized double represented in the mirror becomes the misplaced site

¹⁸² Hans Bellmer, *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious or The Anatomy of the Image*, translated by Jon Graham (Waterbury Center: Dominion Press, 2004), 37-38.

¹⁸³ Bellmer, 31

of “self” identification, whose Gestalt opposes the heterogeneous flux of the body, launching:

... the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the *automaton* in which, in an ambiguous relation the world of his own making tends to find completion (emphasis added).¹⁸⁴

Bellmer’s dolls both reflect and reverse the process by which the “automaton” of the “mirror stage” is constructed through an uncanny doubling that invokes the “fragmented body,” retained, according to Lacan, in dreams, as well as “the lines of ‘fragilization’ that define the anatomy of phantasy, as exhibited in the schizoid and spasmodic symptoms of hysteria.”¹⁸⁵ This gesture of derealization is made manifest in one of Bellmer’s photographs (see figure 28) in which the doll, appearing as two sets of legs inversed and attached to the same torso, each outfitted like a young girl in mary janes and bobby socks, lies sprawled in front of a mirror, one set of legs braced against the wall and mirror, the other seemingly in the midst of kicking as if in a temper tantrum or epileptic fit. Visible in the mirror against which the doll is leaning is an amorphous jumble of parts that has no correspondence to the body it is reflecting. Played out within the conflicted doubling of the

¹⁸⁴ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage” in *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 2-3.

¹⁸⁵ Lacan, 5.

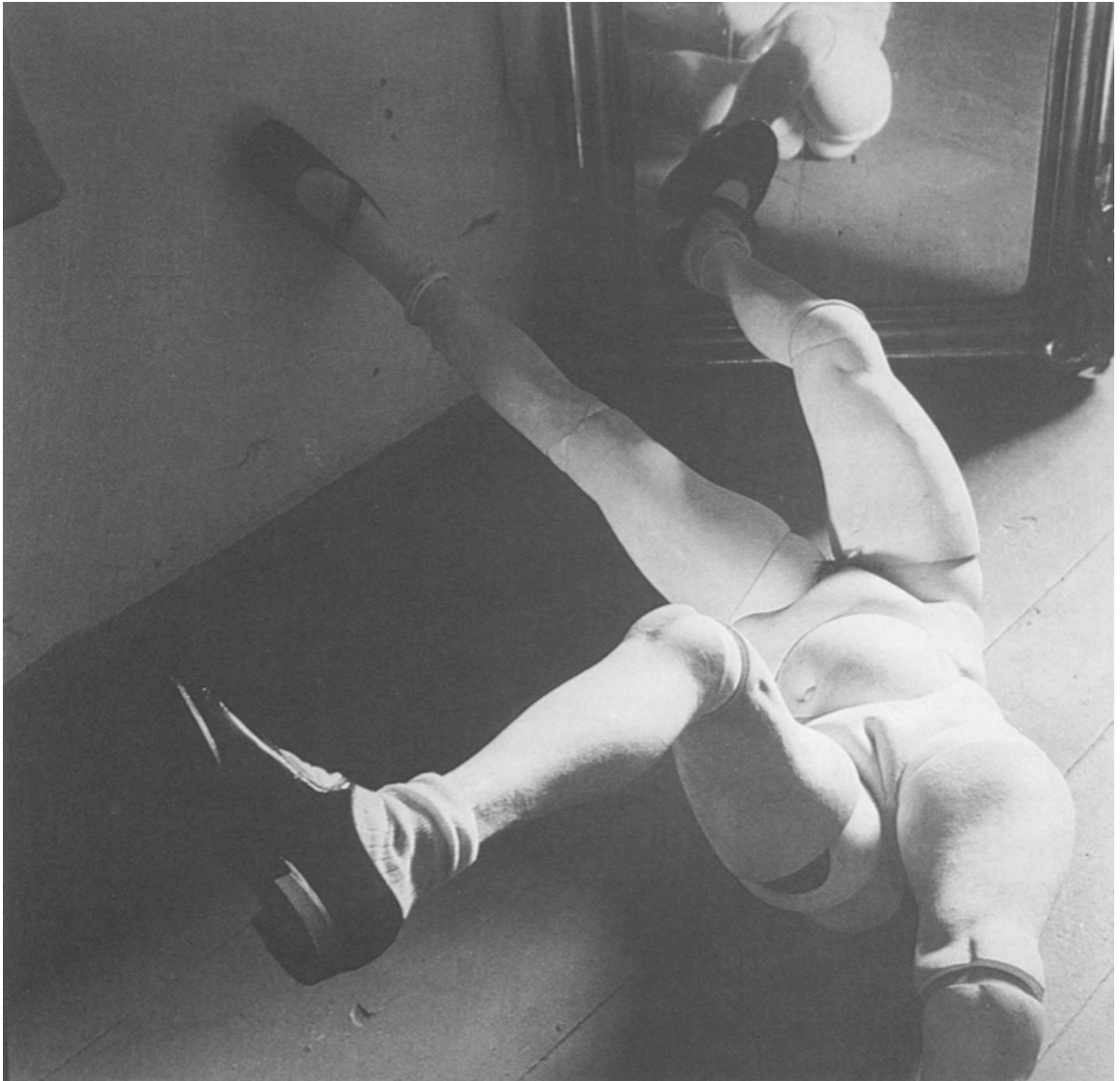


Figure 28. The Mirror Stage

doll and its disjointed reflection is an attempt at acknowledging and reincorporating what Julia Kristeva has called the “abject,” that which opposes the *I*, whose amputation results simultaneously in the subject’s constitution and expulsion. If the self is launched through the process of a projection that serves as a unified, if alienated, front for a lost somatic experience, Bellmer attempts to recuperate that which has been lost through the visceral assault of the fractured image, an act of effacement whose aim is recognition.

Bellmer’s relentless mapping of his own “physical unconscious,” enacted in defiance of a symbolic order that draws distinctions between self and other, as well as inside and outside, complicates any understanding of the dolls as autonomous objects. Nevertheless, there remains the nagging question of how to read the (often sadistic) manipulation of the female figure, a question that has garnered intense psychological scrutiny.¹⁸⁶ For example, Andrew Brink, who reads Bellmer’s work through the lens of attachment theory, concludes that “it represents a “false solution to his troubles, arising from gynocentric combined with gynophobic fantasies generated unawares in childhood and made manifest with acquired artistic skills”¹⁸⁷ and that its

¹⁸⁶ See in particular Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Desire* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000).

¹⁸⁷ Andrew Brink, “Hans Bellmer’s Sacrificial Dolls” in *Desire and Avoidance in Art* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 78.

unmitigated display of pathology overwhelms whatever artistic value it might otherwise have. Although others echo Brink's views, it is difficult to trace a definitive line from Bellmer's imagery to his views of women. While he had a series of ill-fated marriages (his first wife died young of tuberculosis, his marriage to his second wife ended in a bitter divorce, and his third wife, the artist and writer Unica Zurn, committed suicide), there is, in fact, little circumstantial evidence of gynophobia or misogyny outside of his artwork (Bellmer was a devoted partner to his first and third wives and a loving son to his mother). On the other hand, Bellmer had ongoing difficulties throughout his life with patriarchal authority, starting with his abusive engineer father who was a Nazi sympathizer and whose tyrannical authority Bellmer would associate with the Third Reich. Bellmer himself suggests that there is a connection between his early hatred of the patriarchal order and his assault on the symbolic via the dolls.

Both Therese Lichtenstein and Hal Foster insist that the cultural and historical context of fascism is necessary to any reading of Bellmer's work. Bellmer's first doll was constructed in 1933, the year that the Nazis came to power in Germany. At the time, Bellmer owned an advertising and design agency. However, he closed down shop, in the fear of inadvertently creating work that would in some way benefit the

government and devoted himself entirely to artwork that, according to Lichtenstein, was produced, in large part, as a protest against the cult of the perfect body within fascism, as well as the more general appearance of a mechanized, spectacularized, and “feminized” mass culture.”¹⁸⁸

Indeed, the endless recombinatory partiality of a doll that is a stand-in for a mass-produced mannequin becomes a transgressive act towards a cultural imaginary that, at the time, gravitated not only towards the classical nude, but also the kind of choreographed displays of live bodies dubbed by Siegfried Kracauer as “the mass ornament,” typified by the regimented parades of S.S. guards at Nazi Party rallies. Against the idealized and stereotyped body, Bellmer pits a convulsively mutating figure that breaches the boundaries between internal and external policed by the Nazis. Like the *Exquisite Corpse*, Bellmer’s dolls defied the rational and social order with an anatomical projection of internal processes, a physical map of the convolutions of the psyche and the rhizomatic workings of desire, free from outside control. However, they also embodied the psychological tensions and displacements experienced under the social constraints of the Nazi party. Indeed, Bellmer suggests in his *Little Anatomy* that, as in hysteria, the greater the repression, the more convoluted the expression, and thus the dolls not only represent the promiscuity or “flow” of desire, but also the psychic distortions of a

¹⁸⁸Lichtenstein, 13.

desire caught between inner longing and external forces. As Bellmer would state, “The origin of that part of my work that scandalizes is the fact that for me the world is a scandal.”¹⁸⁹ There is, then, both a self-reflexivity and social critique at work in Bellmer’s *poupees*; indeed, he seems to pose an unflinching self-reflexivity *as* a form of social critique. Thus, as Rosalind Krauss suggests, to the extent that the dolls are fetishistic, an artificial monument erected in place of an absence, they are also a reflection (and shattering) of the “automaton” in the mirror, the monument that we erect in place of the amputated self, through which the world is constructed:

Surrealist photography does not admit of the natural, as opposed to the cultural or made. And so all of what it looks at is seen as if already, and always, constructed, through a strange transposition of this thing into a different register. We see the object by means of an act of displacement, defined through a gesture of substitution. The object, “straight” or manipulated, is always manipulated, and thus always appears as a fetish.¹⁹⁰

Foster, on the other hand, suggests that something more than fetishism is at work in the *poupees*. As he notes, unlike the fetish object (or at least the way in which it has been interpreted), they don’t disguise sexual difference, but explore it obsessively, and they don’t hide the effects of their own production, as in the Marxist account of fetishism, but flaunt it

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Constantin Jelenski, “Introduction” to *Hans Bellmer*, edited by Alex Grall (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966).

¹⁹⁰ Rosalind Krauss, “Corpus Delicti” in *October*, Vol. 33, (Summer, 1985), 69.

repetitively. “Moreover, the notion of a ‘dictionary of analogues-antagonisms’ does not imply a fixing of desire (as in the Freudian account of fetishism); rather its shifting drives the many recombinations of the dolls.”¹⁹¹ To put it another way, while the fetishistic relationship requires a subject and an object of visual fascination, the dolls undermine the stability of the object and attempt to expose the mechanisms by which it is constituted as separate from the subject.

For those who cannot help but see the dolls as sadistic, Hal Foster suggests that a distinction should be made between sadism and the representation of sadism. In similar fashion, I would suggest that the dolls not be viewed as the amputation of the female body so much as the recognition of amputation. Such a distinction is, hopefully, clarified by drawing a comparison between the work of Bellmer (or the fantasies of ASFR) and the classical nude in western art and, in particular, to the presentation of the Venus de Milo, a statue discussed by prominent disability studies scholar Lennerd J. Davis in relation to physical difference. Davis comments on the way in which the amputated and disfigured state of the Venus is ignored or repressed by art historians in order to maintain its status as an object of desire. Moreover, Davis suggests that the contingency of desire on the object’s wholeness is based on the way in which the subject is constituted in relation to the

¹⁹¹ Foster, 103.

fragmentary nature of his own body. Davis reads the subject's encounter with the mutilated statue through Lacan's "mirror stage." As Davis puts it:

... the specular moment between the armored, unified self and its repressed double—the fragmented body—is characterized by a kind of death work, a repetition compulsion in which the unified self continuously sees itself undone—castrated, mutilated, perforated, made partial.¹⁹²

It is, indeed, this sort of death work in which Bellmer peddles, according to Hal Foster. His dolls "go beyond (or is it inside?) sadistic mastery to the point where the masculine subject confronts his greatest fear: his own fragmentation, disintegration, and dissolution. And yet this is also his greatest wish."¹⁹³ As Bellmer stated, "all dreams return again to the only remaining instinct, to escape from the outline of the self."¹⁹⁴ This is neither the wish nor the traditional function of classical aesthetics, in which the sexual drives are sublimated and pleasure is courted through "the reconciliation of contrary modes of experience." Bellmer's dolls are a desublimatory assault on the normative, stable and cohesive subject, and in particular the psychic armoring of the fascist body by which the fragmentary, fluid, and chaotic drives are repressed, abjected, and mapped onto the OTHER, represented in the case of the Nazis by women,

¹⁹² Lennerd J. Davis, "Nude Venuses, Medusa's Body and Phantom Limbs" in *The Disability Studies Reader*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2006) 61.

¹⁹³ Foster, 109.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 109.

Jews, homosexuals, and Communists. In other words, this is not the curious gaze of the spectator, who aestheticizes the abject in order to keep it at a distance, a gaze courted by both Charcot and Barnum. It is the curious gaze of Pandora who opens the box and experiences the vertigo of her own true nature (as does Nathanael when the automaton is revealed as not just a mechanical object, but an extension of the mechanical compulsions of his own psyche).

I Robot

When I asked the ASFRians that I interviewed which movies or television shows spoke most directly to their fetish, many mentioned an episode from the first season of the *Twilight Zone* called “The Lonely” (1959). The story takes place in the year 2046 on a barren and desolate asteroid nine million miles from earth, which serves as solitary confinement for a convicted criminal named James A. Corry. When the episode opens, a supply ship, which makes occasional visits to the planet, is arriving and the captain, who has taken pity on the isolated prisoner, has left behind a box that he instructs Corry not to open until after the ship has departed. When Corry does open it, he finds a lifelike female android named Alicia, programmed to keep him company. He is at first appalled and wants nothing to do with her, but (in similar fashion to Tom Hanks’s character in the film *Castaway*, who becomes intimately involved with a

volleyball), his need for companionship prevails and he starts to forget her mechanical nature and eventually to fall in love with her. The next time the supply ship arrives, the captain informs Corry that he has been pardoned and can return home immediately. But as the prisoner rushes excitedly towards the ship with his companion, the captain informs him that there is not enough room for the robot. Corry argues with him, insisting that Alicia is not a robot but a woman, HIS woman, and in order to wake him up to reality, the captain pulls out his gun and shoots her in the face. In the final scene, Alicia breaks down; her calls for Corry get slower and s-l-o-w-e-r, like a record on the wrong speed, as broken circuitry and loose wiring shoot off a few last sparks of life through the hole where her face once was (see figure 29).

“The Lonely” is one of the few media examples with which I’m familiar that appeals to ASFRians not just visually, but narratively. As in “The Sandman,” the revelation of the female robot’s mechanical nature is simultaneously a revelation of the central protagonist’s psychological programming, i.e., the need for love and companionship that made him forget that his lover was not human. It is, in fact, the reminder or awakening to the programmatic nature of human need and sociality that lays at the core of ASFRian fantasy, which is ultimately, I would argue, less grounded in female objectification and the hypostasis of normative



Figure 29. "The Lonely"

gender ideals, than the subversion of normative desire. After all, if normative gender roles are typified by women acting like Stepford Wives who cheerfully and mindlessly engage in sexual and domestic servitude towards men, then the ultimate rebellion would be to short-circuit one of them so that she malfunctions. Indeed, in the film *Stepford Wives*, such moments are offered as a feminist commentary on the extent to which real women (and men) have been socially programmed, and a connection is made in particular, between the domestic scripting of women and television advertising (many of the Stepford Wives speak as though they're actresses in commercials for household products). Similarly, the robot female is, I believe, for ASFRians, a metaphor for social programming and her breakdown a symbol of resistance, as hysteria once was for the surrealists.

Most of the ASFRians that I interviewed came of age in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, and while their fetish is a product of television shows like *Star Trek*, *Outer Limits*, and the *Twilight Zone*, it is also a reaction to a historical and cultural moment in which mass consciousness was shaped by the centralizing force of television programming and advertising. Indeed, if the medium of television tends to codify normative social rules and behaviors, then science fiction stands out as a site at which the normal rules are suspended and other worlds are imagined

that, in many cases, serve as a critique of and an alternative to the conventions of our own world.

That which seems to unite many of the men I met is a highly developed internalized gaze and therefore an unusual degree of self-reflexivity combined with social awkwardness and difficulty reading social cues.¹⁹⁵ For these men, puberty was an unusually fraught time during which they felt both confused by and compelled to conform to the rules of social engagement. The female robot represents for ASFRians the promise of a simplified playing field in which the rules of the game are programmed in advance, thus sidestepping social politics and eliminating the anxiety of making social mistakes. However, within that simplified playing field, ASFRians imagine endless concatenations of possible moves, the erotic locus of which are moments of tension and rupture between opposite states—the human and the artificial, control and loss of control. And such rupture is, I would argue, a metaphor for and a condensation of the eruptive effects of adolescent desire on the socially regulated body. It is a kind of re-enactment of the tension

¹⁹⁵ It occurred to me more than once that ASFR might be related to a mild form of Asperger Syndrome. I was, therefore, not surprised when I read a passage in Katherine Gates's book in which she explains the appeal of the android Data on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (whom she claims has gotten more erotic mail than any other *Star Trek* character; Spock comes in second) for a female ASFRian that she interviewed (one of the few I've ever heard about) by referencing the autistic slaughterhouse designer and author of *Thinking in Pictures*, Temple Grandin, who also: "feels close to him [Data] in his clumsy efforts to perform like a human, and in his urge to sort out the mystifyingly inconsistent rules of human social behavior." See Gates, 228.

between biological and social programming, the chaotic flux of inner experience and the unified, controlled (and, for adolescents, “cool”) self as mandated by the social order, and it is ultimately an attempt at their reconciliation. Like Hans Bellmer, who described his continual rearranging of body parts as the “doll games,” ASFRians engage in robot play as a way of addressing an internal anxiety in relation to external dictates, as well as giving free reign to erotic impulses that threaten hierarchical and socially enforced boundaries between such categories as self and other, nature and culture, and even male and female. As Katherine Gates point out, ASFRians tend to be more interested in “robot play” in general than in “who gets to be the robot”; most are as interested in acting like robots themselves as in the idea of a robotic companion.¹⁹⁶

On a personal note

Coincidentally, while I was in the middle of writing this chapter, one of the ASFRians that I interviewed for my documentary, with whom I’ve remained close, asked if I would do him a large favor. He was living with a woman to whom he had recently gotten engaged, and from whom he had been hiding his fetish, insisting that he would eventually tell her “when the time was right.” However, she had found some of his ASFR paraphernalia in a closet and waved it in front of him yelling, “I don’t

¹⁹⁶ One might make a similar point about Bellmer, who was a cross dresser. See, in particular, Lichtenstein, “The Hermaphrodite in Me” in *Behind Closed Doors*, 47-104.

know what this is and I don't want to know!" He was scared for their relationship and deeply embarrassed, however he realized that he could no longer hide from her such a large part of himself. But before he attempted to tell her, he wondered if I would be willing to sit in private with him and have a conversation about his fetish — while we were both wearing silver PVC.¹⁹⁷ Although the idea made me uncomfortable, I decided that it was an opportunity to get off the armchair in which I had been thinking about ASFR and get a different perspective. So I agreed and we did; we sat in chairs facing one other, each in the gleaming silver outfits that he had bought for the occasion. The first thing he said to me, almost apologetically was, "this is me" and then "how does that make you feel?" I tried to be as honest as I could (for what were likely gendered reasons, I felt stranger about his silver outfit than my own). We talked about his fetish for over an hour, and I ran by him some of the "theories" I had about it. And, as I began to feel more comfortable about having a largely therapeutic conversation in "costume" I began to see that the silver that we were each wearing was a reminder for him, as he listened to me describe what his fetish made me think and feel, that there was still something essential, beyond gender or any other outward markers, that made us the same (in the same way that pointy ears signify a

¹⁹⁷ Polyvinyl chloride, which has, of late, been used in a great deal of costuming and erotic wear.

distinct species on *Star Trek*) and that knowing this helped him face the fear of confronting his own difference (on many levels, but in particular, the extent to which his fetish marks him as Other). And while, even as I write this, I cannot help but imagine the many ways in which one might pathologize his need for non-differentiation and the behavior that it engenders, I came to the realization that, like Pandora, I was attempting to understand the uncanniness of ASFR because in its desire for uncovering what is essentially human beneath the mask of appearances, I see aspects of myself.

Chapter Three

The Subtle Apparatus

The most advanced “sexual android” in the world, the *Andybot*, is currently in development in Nuremberg, Germany by a man who refers to himself as, simply, *The Creator*, a moniker that gestures ironically towards Germany’s legacy of “mad scientists” while also ensuring his anonymity. What makes the Andybot unique, indeed astounding, is the way that she moves. Before visiting the Creator, I had already seen prototypes of silicone lovedolls capable of “pelvic motion” at two other doll companies in the United States; one was even hooked up to a controller box with five pre-sets for changing its speed, not unlike those found on a Stairmaster. However, in each case, the movement was a strictly forward and backward affair that was mechanical and unwavering (and in the case of the Stairmaster doll, frighteningly violent), accompanied by the distracting sound of the powering motor. Each was a long way from being ready for market. The Creator, however, was (even at the time I met him, which is now years ago) already selling dolls capable

of movement. When I visited his lab, although there was no fully assembled motion-enabled doll available, he demonstrated for me a series of motorized doll parts: a foot that moved up and down as if keeping time, a head that craned forwards and backwards (which he proudly called *das blowjob modell*), and a gyrating torso that he compared to a bellydancer. Although the net effect of these separate moving parts was both creepy and campy, less *Frankenstein* than *Frankenhooker*, it was the torso that got to me. Missing a head and limbs (but equipped with everything essential to a sex doll) it moved in silent, fluid, circular waves. It was simultaneously captivating and disturbing, for although it embodied a living impossibility, it was the most erotic humanoid object I'd ever seen. The Creator had managed, through motion, to imbue an amputated figure with a lifelike quality, the essence of something organic, that eluded the other dollmakers and this, in itself, made him deserving of his self-assigned title.

Part of the mystique of the Creator's work, to which he contributes by wearing dark sunglasses and speaking about his dolls in quasi-mystical terms, is the cultural history of Nuremberg. Two important landmarks of this quaint Bavarian town, both of which I visited while there, are the Toy Museum at its center and The Documentation Centre

Party Rally Grounds¹⁹⁸ on its outskirts. Their connection was made apparent to me in one of the displays at the toy museum, which (as I recall) was room-sized and recreated the scene of a town that included a military center with soldiers, trains, automobiles, armaments, etc., all constructed to realistic perfection. I remember thinking, “My god, it’s a miniaturized version of the Third Reich!” I would later learn that the “tin soldier” was invented in Nuremberg, a fact that conjures a range of questions about the relationship between mechanical movement and militarism, made even more pointed by the fate of many Nuremberg toymakers (particularly metal toymakers) during World War II, who were forced to shut down production in order to serve the Nazi war effort, so that (I imagine) some were helping to create life-sized versions of what they had previously produced in miniature.

Up until World War II, Germany had dominated the toy market (after which, they were supplanted by the U.S. and Japan), and Nuremberg, in particular, was the center of toymaking in Europe for hundreds of years (today, it still hosts the world’s largest international toy fair). Although it is still known for its wooden toys, a tradition that dates back to the fifteenth century, part of its reputation has always

¹⁹⁸ Opened in 2001 on the site of the unfinished remains of the Congress Hall of the former Nazi party rallies, the Documentation Center, aside from offering a chronological history of Nuremberg’s role in German National Socialism, including the post-war Nuremberg trials, includes a permanent exhibit, “Fascination and Terror,” which examines “the causes, context, and consequences” of the Nazi Party.

been its unparalleled genius for producing toys that move. Early “dockenmacher” (doll makers) fashioned figures from wood with moving parts and later incorporated clockwork mechanisms.¹⁹⁹ The first automata in human form is believed to have been built in Nuremberg in the mid-sixteenth century. The country’s proliferation of mechanical objects, as well as the more complex automata that they prefigured, served as inspiration for a generation of romantic writers, including Hoffmann, Poe, Balzac, Mérimée, and Shelley, who concocted tales around the creation of artificial life (most of it gendered female). Many of these mechanical objects are on display at the museum along with an extraordinary range of moving metal toys: carriages, animals and circus performers, as well as larger assemblages, like merry-go-rounds and ferris wheels, and proto-cinematic optical toys like the zoetrope and praxinoscope. Such a display supports the argument, made by Michelle Bloom, that the “Pygmalionesque desire” for the animation of the inanimate may be traced through the literature of the nineteenth century to its culmination in the “illusion of movement” within cinema.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ The articulated doll that inspired Hans Bellmer’s ball jointed doll, mentioned in the previous chapter, has been described as a Dürer-era wooden artist’s mannequin; Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) was a Nuremberg artist, printmaker, and theorist who, among other things, produced extraordinarily complex woodcuts that helped revolutionize the medium.

²⁰⁰ See Michelle Bloom, “Pygmalionesque Delusions and Illusions of Movement: Animation from Hoffmann to Truffaut” in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn, 2000), 291-320.

In this chapter, I follow this trajectory, albeit with an eye towards movement and the force that animates it. In particular, I attempt to trace a line from early automata to the cinematic that accounts for both the organic movement of Andybot's gyrating hips and the mechanical parades of Nazi soldiers, mapping out their point of intersection. There has, of course, long been a sexual undercurrent to Nazism, linked to its association with both slavery and mind control, as well as a series of (likely apocryphal) stories of their attempts to produce sex dolls.

According to one story, Hitler ordered the production of what would have been the world's first blow-up sex doll in 1941. The plan, which was to be carried out by S.S. commander Heinrich Himmler (whom we do know organized brothels in concentration camps as incentive for camp laborers), was to create an Aryan surrogate that would help relieve soldiers on the front lines who might otherwise cave in to temptation by prostitutes or, worse, "foreign women." However, the plan was never realized because the Dresden production factory was bombed by the Allies.²⁰¹ It is, however, not the verity or falsehood of these salacious tales that interests me, but the way in which the artificial female body (real or imaginary) becomes a conduit for what Klaus Theweleit in his book *Male*

²⁰¹ A related story claims that, under Nazi orders, a team of craftsmen from Germany's Hygiene Museum in Dresden worked on the "Borghild Project" to produce a realistic Aryan "galvanoplastical" sex doll. While the story has largely been dismissed as a hoax, the Creator claims that the bronze molds have been found and that he will use them to create another model of the Andybot.

Fantasies calls (in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari) “flows” of desire. Theweleit argues that the body of the male fascist (particularly within the Freikorps, the proto-fascist paramilitary group that helped shape, and in many instances run, the Nazi war effort) was constituted in relation to the fear of the boundary-dissolving flows, “oceans” and “floods” associated (in particular) with female sexuality, which it resisted through both psychic and physical hardening (what Wilhelm Reich, from whose work he also draws, calls “character armor”). Within such an imaginary, a female sex doll would seem to be the perfect vessel for both release and protection against the threat of contamination. However, and this is the thrust of my argument, the female android, particularly within German romantic literature and expressionist cinema leading up to the Third Reich, served as an instrument for the psychic and physical dissolution of the male ego (as well as for exploring themes that, in many ways, anticipate Hitler’s rise to power). And to help begin exploring this somewhat contradictory idea, I’m going to turn to a short, but influential, essay of which I was reminded while looking at the Creator’s swiveling torso.

Published in 1810 in the *Berliner Abendblätter* (for which its author was an editor), “On the Marionette Theater” (*Über das Marionettentheater*) by German dramatist, Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), was written at

the height of the human automaton's popularity, and it argues the case for the anti-realistic puppet over the mechanical human that attempts mimesis. The essay is comprised entirely of a conversation between a first-person narrator and Herr C _____, a one-time principal dancer in the local opera company. Herr C_____ explains to the narrator the unique pleasure of the puppets in the puppet theater at the local market, which he believes have something to teach a dancer like himself. Since puppets at that time were considered a "low" form of entertainment, geared at children and the unsophisticated populace, the narrator expresses surprise that his friend would find redeeming qualities in them. Herr C_____ explains their appeal by suggesting that the movements of the puppet each have a center of gravity that, when moved in a straight line, cause the puppet's limbs to describe curves:

In fact, the movements of [the *mechanic's*] fingers are related to the movements of the puppets attached to them somewhat like numbers to their logarithms or the asymptote to the hyperbola.²⁰²

Ultimately, what Herr C_____ will suggest with his mathematical analogies is that puppets achieve a kind of divine geometry—for the lines of their center of gravity are "something very mysterious ... nothing other

²⁰² Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater" in *ZONE: Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part One*, ed. Michel Feher, (New York: Urzone, 1989), 416

than the *path of the dancer's soul*—as well as a “grace” of which human dancers are incapable “since we have eaten of the tree of knowledge.”²⁰³

He goes on to explain that not only are puppets antigravitational, for they rarely touch the ground, but that they are unafflicted by the self-consciousness or affectation that weighs down or unbalances the movements of the human body. He ends his argument (and Kleist's essay) with a story about how once, after winning a fencing match with a skilled, if affected, fencer, he was then outmaneuvered by a bear that the fencer had trained. This leads to his and the essay's final conclusion:

We see that in the organic world, to the extent that reflection grows dimmer and weaker, the grace therein becomes more brilliant and powerful. Yet, just as the intersection of two lines on one side of a point suddenly appears again on the other side after passing through the infinite; or the image in a concave mirror, after receding into the infinite, suddenly resurfaces close before us—grace likewise reappears when knowledge has passed through the infinite, so that it appears purest simultaneously in the human body that has either none at all or else infinite consciousness—that is, in the puppet or in the god.²⁰⁴

The comparison between the puppet and the god in Kleist's essay is, as Harold Segel puts it, “a product of a cohering Romantic *Weltanschauung*,”²⁰⁵ which posits both the creative and spiritual superiority of unconscious, intuitive, and internally-motivated

²⁰³ Kleist, 416.

²⁰⁴ Kleist, 420

²⁰⁵ Harold Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automats, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 14

spontaneity over the conscious and rational mind and its attendant movements. The essay inspired many Romantic writers (including E.T.A. Hoffman, whose story involving a female automaton, “The Sandman,” was published only six years later) to draw an association between the mechanical body and a spontaneity (that drew simultaneously from the unconscious and divine inspiration) that was pitted against both the rational and social order. However, Kleist’s valorization (in this and other stories) of nature (as well as folk traditions) over culture, coupled with his nationalism, would later earn him a reputation, among some, as a proto-fascist writer, and one can detect a similarity between the geometrical sweep of Kleist’s unconscious puppet and the parades of Nazi bodies that were choreographed like toy soldiers in the formations that graced the fields of the Nazi Party Rallies.

How does the puppet or automaton—and, in particular, the mechanical female descendants of Kleist’s puppet within the German romantic imaginary—simultaneously embody the organic and mechanical, nature and culture, psychic dissolution and psychic/physical armoring, spontaneity and regimentation, freedom and control? These are some of the contradictions that I hope to address in this chapter (in which I am, admittedly, biting off more than I can chew) by

tracing historically the “flows” for which its body would serve as a conduit. And I will begin at the beginning ...

Pneumatica

The earliest humanoids were spiritual objects. In his “impressionistic survey” of the history of the automaton, Jean-Claude Beaune dubs them *mythical* automata, whose relationship “with the cosmos, with the totality of things” is the basis of a “primordial ambiguity” that serves as an undercurrent to “the whole realm of technology.” The mythical automaton is superceded, according to Beaune, by the “*mechanistic* automaton (from the Renaissance to the first machine-tools), an attempt to dissect and copy the human body and the body of other living creatures.” With the industrial revolution came the *mechanical* automaton, which “groups together concentrations of machines, workshops, and factories, in accordance with very inflexible rules.”²⁰⁶

For Beaune, the *mechanistic* automaton is an intersecting point between the speaking statues of the Egyptian temples, invested with *ka*, and the machines of the industrial revolution, emptied of humanity, which either replace human beings or force them to conform to the mechanical rhythms of industry. However Daniel Tiffany in the book *Toy Medium* complicates this basic chronology by breaking down the moment

²⁰⁶ Jean-Claude Beaune, “The Classical Age of Automata: An Impressionistic Survey from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century” in *ZONE: Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part One*, ed. Michel Feher, (New York: Urzone, 1989), 433-434.

of intersection into pre- and post-mechanistic eras, or what we might call more broadly the *philosophical toys* of the Renaissance and the *mechanistic humans* of the Enlightenment. According to Tiffany, the automata of the Renaissance must be understood within a poetic setting, in particular, that of philosophical (as opposed to scientific) materialism. They are, in fact, the primary example that he offers of the subject of his book, “*materia poetica*” or “lyric substance,” phenomena that exist somewhere between the material and immaterial, reality and the imagination.

According to Tiffany, early automata were the equivalent of the poetic trope or a visual model within physics (both of which he is, ultimately, interested in comparing to one another), a means of making the intangible tangible. Their popularity during the Renaissance was, in large part, inspired by a revival of Greek culture and philosophy, particularly the writings of Ctesibios, Philon, Epicurus and Hero (or Heron), which had been preserved in the works of the Arabs and Byzantines and translated first into Latin and then Italian and German by Renaissance humanists.²⁰⁷ These men were the builders of the first automata, a word derived from the Greek *automatos*, meaning “to act of

²⁰⁷ Silvio Bedini, “The Role of Automata in the History of Technology” in *Technology and Culture* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1964), 25.

one's own will."²⁰⁸ Their writings inspired a renewed interest in mechanical objects, as well as the Greek and Roman myths (Pygmalion, in particular, was quite popular during the Renaissance). A work that was particularly influential was Hero's *Pneumatica*, a guide to the philosophy behind and schematics of numerous machines powered by air, water, and steam, which inspired a great proliferation of mechanical objects and pleasure gardens that made use of the principles of hydraulics and pneumatics.²⁰⁹

Along with this wealth of new cultural knowledge came the philosophy of atomism—founded on the idea that all of material existence and corporeality is composed of infinitesimal and irreducible particles. It was philosophical atomism in particular—which combined a physical doctrine of invisible matter with a practice of mechanical “proofs”—for which the automaton would become the corporeal manifestation. A key element of Heronic atomism, and Hellenized Egypt in general was, according to Victoria Nelson, a micro/macrocosmic view of the world in which there was no division between organic and inorganic, or between sensible and invisible. Humans resided in the

²⁰⁸ The first recorded automaton in history was a singing blackbird built by Ctesibios of Alexandria in the third century B.C.

²⁰⁹ According to Victoria Nelson, “One Heidelberg grotto of the early seventeenth century featured an elaborate mechanism—an automated Galatea moving back and forth on the waves before the giant Polyphemus—that its creator, Salomon de Caus, had modeled after instructions provided in Hero's *Pneumatica*.” See Victoria Nelson, 50.

microcosm, the physical world that reflected the divine macrocosm, as did human-like objects:

If all things in the material world are simulacra of the true World of Forms, then statues and people alike (and especially statues if they took the shape of humans) acted not just as passive vessels but as magnets to the energies of the higher world, drawing down the gods' powers and materially embodying them.²¹⁰

These ideas would inflect those of mechanical philosophy, albeit in more mechanistic terms, giving rise to the belief that everything, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, was composed of subtle physical matter (what Newton would call “aether” and link to such forces as gravity, magnetism, and electricity). Early automata or *pneumatica* must be understood, according to Tiffany, within this context, as visual indicators of the imponderable processes of subtle matter, whose intention was less a mimetic representation of the body than an evocation of invisible forces:

...the automaton, as an emblem of mechanical philosophy, stands for a conception of matter (atomism) that is irremediably hypothetical in its dependence on unsubstantiated pictures. In the hands of science, the automaton—little more than an ingenious toy—symbolizes a conception of materiality founded on immateriality, a discourse of bodies whose sole reality is the invisible corpuscles of which they are composed.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 32-33.

²¹¹ Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium: Materialism and the Modern Lyric* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000), 49.

The doctrine of atomism or what Tiffany calls “the mechanization of nothing,” as well as its relation to early automata, was a key aspect of Cartesian mechanical philosophy as extended to the human and animal body. Indeed, it was in contemplating the pneumatic and hydraulic figures in the grottoes and fountains of Saint-Germain-en-Laye²¹² that Descartes began to compare the body to a clock, machine or, as he would later put it, an “automaton (that is, a self-moving machine) when it is wound up and contains in itself the corporeal principle of the movements for which it is designed.”²¹³ Descartes’s description of the mechanical processes of the body translate atomistic philosophy into a doctrine of bodies composed of “animal spirits,” which serve as a motivating force comparable to the flow of water or steam that drive the motion of automata. While the belief in “animal spirits” dates back to Galen’s theory of the four humours,²¹⁴ Descartes’s understanding of their impact

²¹² “The automata and waterworks of the Renaissance undoubtedly reached the highest peak of development in the gardens of the royal chateau of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which had often served as the residence of the kings of France ... The main feature was a great fountain, from the basin of which water descended by means of intricate channels and accumulated in the reservoirs placed within the vaults of the galleries beneath. By means of a multitude of secondary tubes, these reservoirs supplied the grottoes and fountains of the galleries and provided the force to motivate the various mechanisms ... Dictated by the popular style of the period, mythological subjects were featured. The first three grottoes opened from the third landing, or Doric Gallery, and featured a Dragon, an Organ Player, and Neptune. On the fourth landing the grotto of Hercules was flanked on either side by the grottoes of Perseus and Andromeda and of Orpheus.” Bedini, 27-28,

²¹³ Quoted in Tiffany, 329-30.

²¹⁴ Galen of Pergamum (ca. A.D. 129-200) stated that there were four humouric temperaments—sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic—each of which is connected to the predominance in an individual of one of the following; blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. The doctrine was disproved largely through the work of

on the body was shaped by new discoveries in the fields of anatomy and medicine, the most significant of which was English physician William Harvey's *Anatomical Essay on the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* (1628), a groundbreaking explanation of the circulatory system and the role of the heart in pumping blood through the body. Descartes extrapolates from Harvey's empirical research by not only extending his findings on circulation to the nervous system, but also imbuing the physical mechanism of circulation with the intangible effects of "animal spirits." Descartes believed that "animal spirits" had a direct influence on the "passions" through their movement between the mind and body via tubular nerves that he compares to the pipes in the figures populating the royal gardens:

The spirits have the power to change the shape of the muscles in which the nerves are embedded, and by this means to move all limbs. Similarly, you may have observed in the grottos and fountains in the royal gardens that the mere force with which the water is driven as it emerges from its source is sufficient to move various machines. One may compare the nerves of the machine I am describing [the human body] with the pipes in the works of these fountains, its muscles and tendons with the various devices and springs which serve to set them in motion, its animal spirits with the water which drives them.²¹⁵

Hermann Boerhaave, a famous physician and professor at the University of Leiden, the preeminent medical center of Europe. La Mettrie studied at the University under Boerhaave and spent six years translating his work into French.

²¹⁵ Quoted in Tiffany, 137.

The discourse around and reception of automata changed over the course of the eighteenth century, during which the human body was increasingly thought of as a machine while human automata became more life-like, as their builders moved from hydraulics and pneumatics to mechanization. While Descartes made a critical distinction between animals, which he considered entirely mechanical, and humans, who possess a “rational soul” that interfaces with the body via the pineal gland and the flow of “animal spirits,” the equivalence between humans and machines (and thus animals and humans) was declared most forcefully (if anonymously) by physician/philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709 - 1751) in his 1748 essay *L’Homme machine* (Man a Machine).²¹⁶ La Mettrie ascribes to the entirety of man a mechanical functionality; the human body is, he declares, “a self-winding machine, a living representation of perpetual motion,” like an “immense clock,” and the soul is “only a principle of movement or sensible, material part of the brain, which one can regard as the machine’s principal spring.”²¹⁷ La Mettrie grounded his theory in two recent scientific discoveries, the first

²¹⁶ La Mettrie was one of a number of atheist philosophers who argued that if Descartes had been born a century later, he too would have concluded that the entirety of man is comparable to a machine, but that his fear of theological retribution forced him to distinguish between animals and humans, and to compare humans and machines only in analogical terms. Still, however emboldened La Mettrie felt in taking Cartesian mechanical philosophy to its logical conclusion, he too experienced the wrath of the church, which seized and burned all copies of *Man A Machine*, and whose suspicion that he was its author forced him to flee to Prussia.

²¹⁷ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man A Machine* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 32 and 65.

made by Abraham Trembley about the freshwater polyp. While the polyp was originally classified as a plant, Trembley was able to prove that it was an animal, but that, like a plant, it could be split into pieces, each of which would, in a sense, sprout into a separate organism akin to the original. This discovery became the foundation of La Mettrie's claims that life was a property of matter, rather than of a soul or an imponderable force. Second, were the experiments on muscular irritability of Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), to whom La Mettrie dedicates his book. Von Haller showed that muscles could be stimulated directly and that, rather than relying on the impetus of "animal spirits" as Descartes believed, they had within themselves the properties of their own animation. La Mettrie concludes in light of this discovery that thought too is a "property of matter," much like electricity. He also begins to investigate the way in which different parts of the brain control different perceptual, cognitive, and behavioral functions, as well as how they are differentially affected by localized brain damage or hereditary abnormality.²¹⁸ Such investigations would help to give birth to the field of neurology, as well as to the view, held by the famous neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, that a behavioral disorder such as hysteria was based in physiology.

Like Descartes, La Mettrie was fascinated by automata, and he also turned to contemporary examples of mechanical animation to

²¹⁸ Justin Leiber, "Introduction" to La Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, 8

illustrate his ideas. He mentions, in particular, an automaton flute player built by doctor and engineer Jacques de Vaucanson, presented to the French Academy in 1738, which had a repertoire of twelve songs and astounded spectators not only with its mastery of a wind instrument, but one considered particularly difficult to play in tune. La Mettrie reasons that if Vaucanson, whom he calls “a new Prometheus,” can create a figure like the flute player, then it should also be possible to make a mechanical human that can talk and eventually, one infers, artificial intelligence. Indeed, the call to prove the correspondence between humans and machines through mechanical simulation would get answered over the course of the next century by a series of master craftsmen.

Mechanician Wolfgang von Kempelen constructed an automaton chess player in 1769, dubbed “The Turk” because of his sultan’s attire (see figure 30). Foreshadowing Deep Blue’s battle with Gary Kasparov, The Turk won against even the most formidable human opponents, and its touring life spanned over a hundred years (although it was eventually proven as a fake). A father and son team of Swiss clockmakers, Pierre and Henry-Louis Jaquet-Droz, produced in 1774 two male children, one a draughtsman that could draw both animals and people, the other a writer that could put pen to paper and compose a number of different

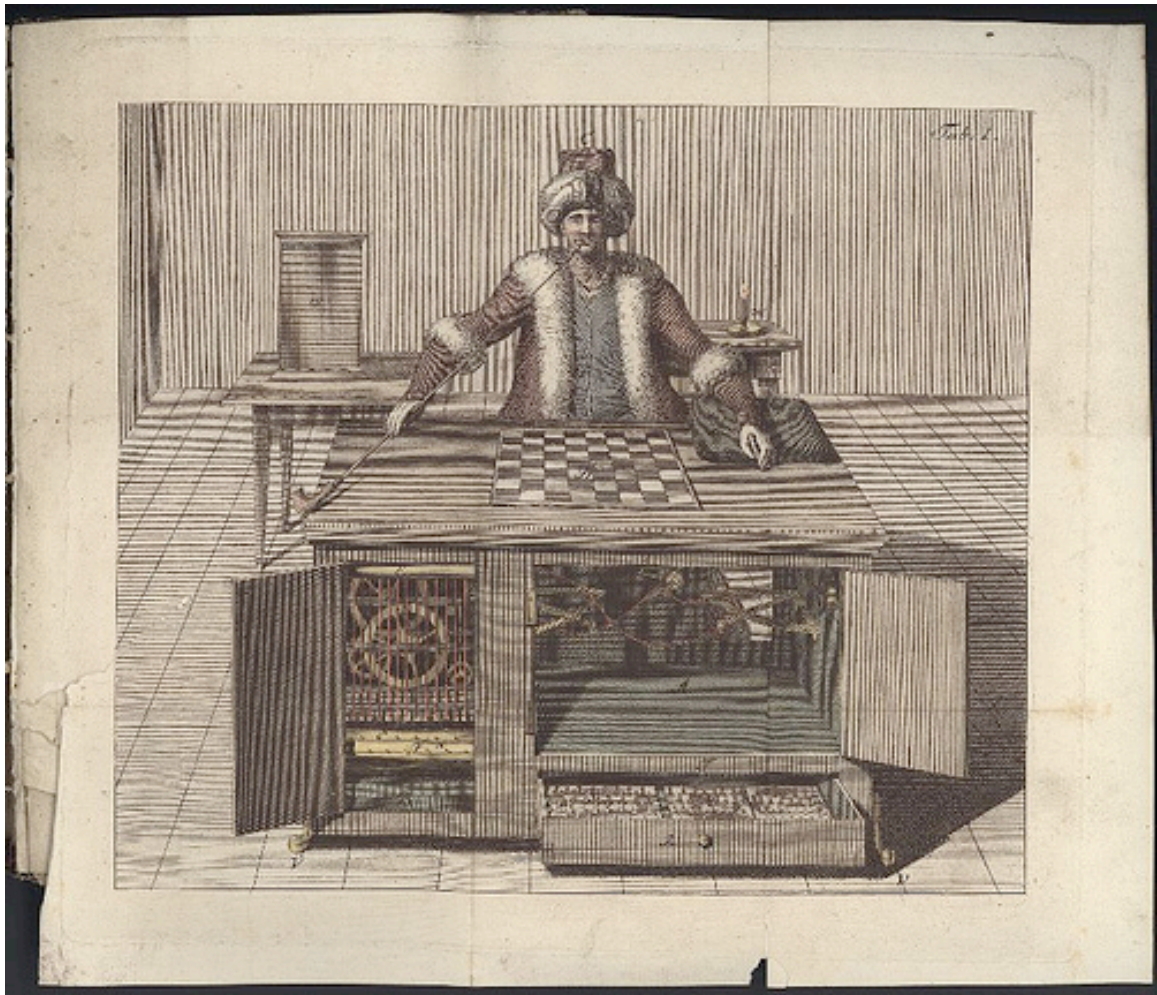


Figure 30. The Turk

messages.²¹⁹ In 1776, they premiered a female Harpsichord Player with a repertoire of five songs, whose breast heaved as she played, and who was advertised as “a vestal virgin with a heart of steel” (see figure 31). Near the end of the eighteenth century, Henri Maillardet produced a writer/draughtsman with an unusually large memory—it could draw six

²¹⁹ One of these messages, a humorous jab at Descartes, is “Je ne pense pas...ne serais-je donc point?” (I do not think...do I therefore not exist?)

different images and write three poems, two in French and one in English—as well as a magician, which answered questions printed on oval cards that were inserted into the drawer of the small stage on which it sat. And in 1823, less than a century after La Mettrie’s hypothetical talking android, Johann Nepomuk Maelzel, a musician and court mechanic credited as the inventor of the metronome, patented a doll that could say “Mama” and “Papa.” By then Maelzel was already famous, for he had purchased and reassembled The Turk after the death of von Kempelen and embarked on a tour that took him through Europe and the United States.²²⁰ By virtue of Maelzel’s mechanical genius, The Turk was also given the gift of speech—it could previously only nod its head, but it was now able to say “échec” (check)—and it was accompanied by a mechanical entourage, including “rope dancers, an automaton trumpeter, a mechanical instrument called the Orchestrion, which

²²⁰ Maelzel would, in fact, have a large impact on P.T. Barnum who met him while displaying his first “human curiosity,” a blind and crippled black woman, whom he was passing off as George Washington’s 161-year old nursemaid in an adjoining room to the Turk at Concert Hall, an exhibition space in Boston. Maelzel was a mentor to Barnum and impressed on him the importance of the press and advertising in capitalizing on his attractions, which Barnum took to heart. When, after a number of weeks, interest in and attendance at the exhibition of Heth began to die down, Barnum sent anonymous letters to local newspapers claiming that Heth was not a human being but an automaton, “made up of whalebone, india-rubber, and numberless springs ingeniously put together, and made to move at the slightest touch, according to the will of the operator.” The result, according to Barnum was renewed interest: those who hadn’t yet seen her were drawn by the controversy and those who had seen her now wanted another look in order to determine whether or not they had been duped during their initial visit. See *The Life of P.T. Barnum*, Written by Himself (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). 155-159.



Figure 31. Jaquet-Droz Automata

imitated a full military band, and a moving panorama called the Conflagration of Moscow.”²²¹

Such figures gave rise to a new term, *androïde*, first defined in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*²²² as “an automaton in human form, which, by means of certain well-positioned springs, etc. performs certain functions which externally resemble those of man,” for which Vaucanson's flute player was offered as an example. The separate definition for automaton was “an instrument which moves by itself, or machine which contains within itself the source of its own motion,” and the example offered was a mechanical duck, also built by Vaucanson in 1739, which ate food from its exhibitor's hand and then, through an intricate system of tubes and articulated parts, appeared to swallow, digest and excrete what it had eaten.²²³

While the taxonomic separation between human and non-human mechanical objects seemingly reinscribes the ontological separation made by Descartes between humans and animals, Diderot and D'Alembert make it clear that the distinction is based primarily on external appearances, and they argue explicitly against Descartes under

²²¹ See Gaby Wood, *Edison's Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 73-75.

²²² Considered the major achievement of the French Enlightenment, the *Encyclopédie* was an exhaustive scientific reference written by over 140 “men of letters” and published between 1751 and 1777.

²²³ See the *Encyclopédie* Translation Project, now available on the web for students and other scholars: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/d/did/>

the definition for “animal soul,” where they insist that “beasts or animals, have an intellectual principle united to their machines, made purposely for them, as ours is made for us.”²²⁴ The distinction between the android and automaton, however, became particularly potent within the realm of popular discourse and literature, to which mechanical humans would become increasingly confined over the course of the nineteenth century, as mechanics began to turn away from constructing curiosity pieces in order to design machines that would replace human labor.²²⁵

The “android”—an automaton that looks and acts like a human—has, since the time of the *Encyclopédie*, been a signifier of verisimilitude and used to raise philosophical questions about what it means to be human, what separates humans from machines, and what it means to make machines in the image of a human, questions that have informed literary and cinematic narratives from *Frankenstein* to *Bladerunner*. The word “automaton,” however, underwent a transformation over the course of the nineteenth century, through which two terms emerged in dialectical relation to one another. On the one hand, as humans became increasingly subject to the repetitive rhythms of an industrialized

²²⁴ Diderot and D’Alembert, *Select Essays from the Encyclopédie*, quoted by J.C. Beaune, 453. See also “Animal Soul” in the *Encyclopédie* Translation Project.

²²⁵ A notable example is Vaucanson who eventually stopped building automata and was made Inspector of Silk Manufacture in France by Louis XV. In the process of streamlining the industry with, among other things, new automated looms that became the inspiration for the better-known Jacquard loom, Vaucanson incurred the wrath of workers, many of whom were replaced by his industrial improvements. See Gaby Wood, 40-41.

workplace and public sphere, as well as mass transit and standardized time, the “automaton” came to represent a human who acts like a machine (as opposed to the machine either in the image of a human or animal). On the other hand, as Tiffany points out, as mechanical humans became more lifelike due to their mechanization, the discourse of *pneuma* shifted from automata to “automatism,” that is to “mechanical bodies animated—and indeed constituted—by a ‘climate’ of incorporeal substances and forces,”²²⁶ of which the hysterical female body became emblematic. The latter was, in large part the result of the Cartesian discourse around *pneuma* as “animal spirits” flowing through a mechanical body, through which hysteria, once attributed to either demonic possession or wandering organs, became linked to the nervous system.

The reinterpretation of hysteria according to Cartesian mechanical philosophy was argued in the *Epistolary Dissertation* of Thomas Sydenham (1624-89), a physician known as “the Hippocrates of the Enlightenment.” Sydenham considered hysteria, next to fever, the most common illness of his time (responsible for “one-sixth of all human maladies”), and he reframed the relationship between its internal and external influences by attributing its variable symptoms to nervous fluids weakened by a “disorder of animal spirits,” by which the individual was

²²⁶ Tiffany, 139.

more likely to experience the adverse affects of external stimuli. Indeed, as John P. Wright points out, he considered “emotional upsets to constitute the chief ‘remote or external causes’ of hysteria.”²²⁷

A contemporary of Sydenham who elaborated not only on the way in which external stimuli produced hysterical symptoms, but the mechanical philosophy through which the workings of the body were understood, was Robert Boyle (1627-1691). Boyle had a particular interest in the properties of “effluvia” and engaged in both chemical and alchemical experimentation. He had direct experience with the principles of *pneumatica* through his efforts in improving the Toricellian air-pump or vacuum, which produced his most famous invention, the “Pneumatical Engine.” Boyle’s interest in and experimentation in the properties of air and other gases helped give rise to his “corpuscularian hypothesis,” which served as a challenge to the atomist faction of mechanical philosophy. In place of atoms (from the Greek for ‘indivisible’), through which matter was understood as continuous, Boyle theorized matter as comprised of *corpuscles*, invisible particles of individual shapes and motions, which brought about changes in visible phenomena by interacting with one another in particular ways. Boyle’s corpuscularian theory, aside from being a precursor to modern physics,

²²⁷ John P. Wright, “Hysteria and Mechanical Man” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April-June 1980), 242.

helped to reify the Cartesian understanding of the body as a kind of clock or machine, by imagining its inner workings as composed of and made functional by the interaction of discrete “cogs.” Indeed, this view inflected his writings on hysteria, in which he described the human body as “an engine, the parts of which are so connected together, that great changes can be wrought by a ‘very weak and inconsiderable impression of adventitious matter.’”²²⁸ Thus in the hysteric, whose nervous system is the equivalent of a faulty engine, small disturbances which would have little impact on more resilient apparatuses, lead to large aberrations in the overall functioning of the machine. It is for this reason that, as many observed about the ailment, its symptoms appear contagious; if one hysterical woman witnesses another in the midst of a fit, she too will be “infected with the like strange composure.” Boyle further notes that the catalyst may be external or internal, and he comments on the cases of women who were sent into hysterical paroxysms by particular odors or sounds, as well as women who were affected by figments of their own imaginations.

While the interpretation of hysteria as the function of, in effect, faulty machinery expanded the field of inquiry, which had focused on women, to include both sexes, it did little to change the gendered nature of the illness, since women were thought not only to possess a weaker

²²⁸ Wright, 243.

and more sensitive nervous system than men, but to have less recourse to the rational soul or mind though which it might be conditioned. Moreover, it encouraged an association between women and imponderable forces since they too were considered more detectable by the delicate female sensory apparatus. The sensitive female machine even found her way into the “new science” of La Mettrie, via an exaggeratedly materialist interpretation of the connection between thought and matter that led him to conclude that physicality determined character, giving rise not only to the dubious practice of phrenology, but to the attribution of heightened impressionability to the delicacy of the female physique:

In the fair sex, the soul also follows refinements of temperament, hence that tenderness, that affection, those keen sentiments, founded more on passion than on reason, those prejudices, those superstitions whose strong imprint can hardly be erased, etc. Man, on the other hand, whose brain and nerves share the firmness of all solids, has a more sinewy mind, just like his face.²²⁹

The idea of the female as subtle apparatus lent itself to a metaphorical instrumentality that found its way into popular discourse, a telling example of which is offered by Terry Castle in the title essay of her book, *The Female Thermometer*. According to Castle, as the thermometer and barometer were developed into separate instruments and became more

²²⁹ La Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, 34.

finely calibrated through the work of Toricelli, Boyle, and others, as well as portable and therefore available for domestic use, they:

... exerted a powerful imaginative appeal. This charisma derived in part from the seemingly magical nature of mercury, that strange semiliquid medium that in the eighteenth century still preserved the evocative name of quicksilver, or “living silver.” Mercury, the celebrated volatile principle of the alchemists, lent the weatherglass some of its own elemental physical mystery, as well as ancient symbolic associations with magic, change, and metamorphosis. Mercury also established a connection with the theme of human temperament ... Women were usually considered the primary embodiments of mercuriality—witnessed by their purported fickleness, emotional variability, and susceptibility to hysteria.²³⁰

As Descartes extrapolated on Harvey’s discovery of blood circulation in describing the nervous system, so too was there an associative link created between the rising and falling liquid silver in the weatherglass and the movement of blood through the blood vessels, concretized by the addition of red tint. It was not long after that the “mercurial climate” of the female nature was underscored via a satirical and imaginary instrument that could measure female desire. This instrument made numerous appearances throughout the eighteenth century, a notable example of which was a device described in a 1712 *Spectator* essay by Joseph Addison “in which liquid from a dissected ‘coquette’s

²³⁰ Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: 18th Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 25.

Pericardium' is used to make a thermometer measuring feminine lasciviousness."²³¹

The idea behind the "female thermometer," as well as her relationship to the automaton as the human cog (usually figured as male), is writ large in the 1927 film *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang, in which men who appear as mindless worker drones and perform in repetitive sync with the machines of industry are incited to rebellion by a female android that has been animated with the electro-magnetic energy (the nineteenth and early twentieth-century equivalent of "animal spirits") of a living woman, Maria.²³² In the transformation scene (a cinematic tour-de-force that set the bar for every technological creation film to follow), Maria, who has been captured by the mad scientist Rotwang, is encased within a life-sized test tube hooked up to electrical wires that connect to the metallic android via orbs of fluid that look like cloud chambers.²³³ When Rotwang hits the main switch, vital current flows from Maria through these atmospheric conductors, which start bubbling and producing steam, which is then funneled into a vortex of spiraling energy around the body of the android. The pericardium of the android lights up, as if suddenly jolted into life, and starts pulsing through an arterial

²³¹ Castle, 16.

²³² All commentary on the film is based on the 2001 restored version.

²³³ Indeed, they may be inspired by the cloud chamber, which was invented fifteen years prior by Scottish physicist, Charles Thomson Rees Wilson.

network that transforms its outer metallic shell into the living image of Maria (see figure 32).

This new “false” Maria, however, is not the same as the old Maria. Whatever it was that was siphoned off has been distilled into a force that is both destructive and hypnotically irresistible. The visual cues that we are given to the nature of this force are first, the overt sexual behavior of the “false” Maria and second, her symptoms of hysteria. The first is most explicitly demonstrated in the erotic dance sequence at Yoshiwara’s, in which the “false” Maria dressed as “the Whore of Babylon,” whips the “Club of the Sons” into a violent frenzy with her mechanical gyrations. The second is expressed through jerky body movements and facial tics, a textbook display of hysterical symptoms, in evidence throughout her encounters with the workers, but particularly exaggerated in the final scene, during which she is burned at the stake like a witch, as she laughs hysterically (see figure 33). The film thus collapses the historical association between hysteria, demon possession, and sexual promiscuity with automatism, as a mechanical body constituted by a vital force figured as both pneumatic and electrical. As the paroxysmal, laughing image of the “false” Maria is reduced to ashes at the stake, the metallic body of the android is revealed, a visual reminder of the automatic mechanism, at once technological and occult, that had controlled her all

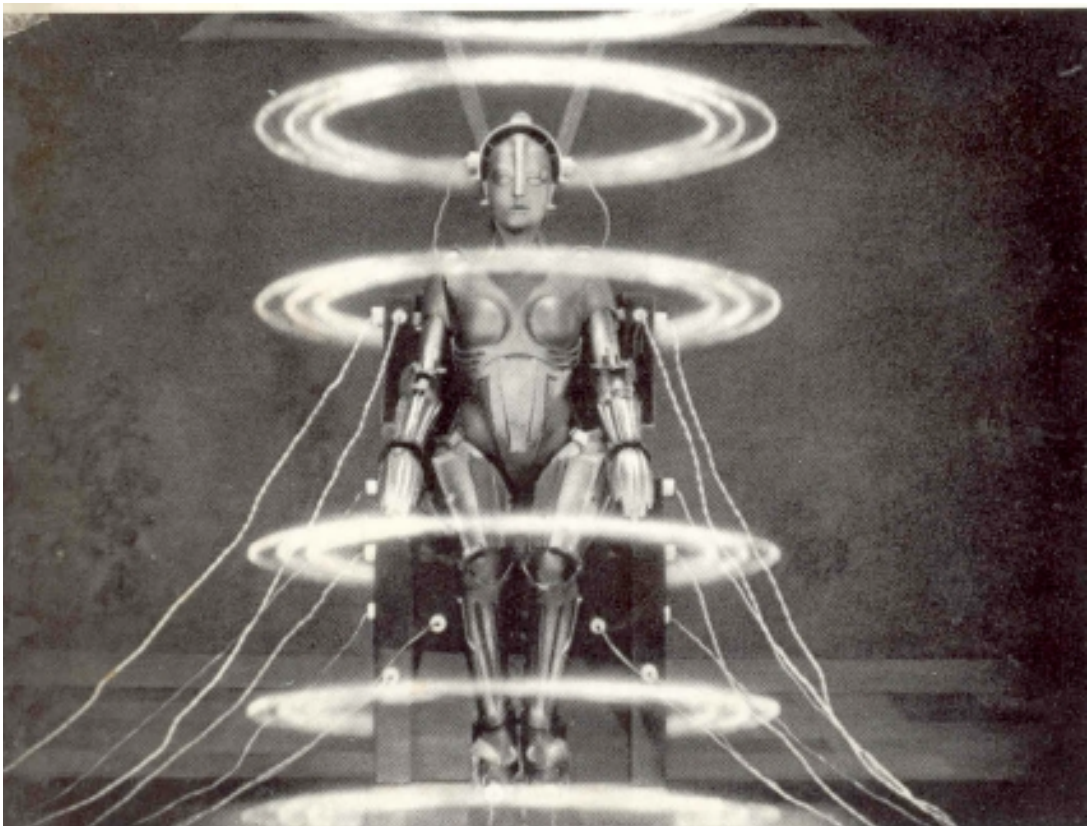


Figure 32. Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS



Figure 33. Burning the witch at the stake

along. This mechanism, is, however, powered with that which was extracted from the real Maria, suggesting, as Andreas Huyssen points out, a “threatening and explosive female sexuality which is inherently there in any woman, even the virgin.”²³⁴

In his essay, “The Vamp and the Machine,” Huyssen uses the female android in *Metropolis* to ask larger questions about the interfusion of gender and technology over the course of the nineteenth century. Why, for example, does a literary trend emerge that favors the machine-woman

²³⁴ Andreas Huyssen, “The Vamp and the Machine” in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 80

to the machine-man, when “the android builders of the 18th century did not seem to have an overriding preference for either sex?” Moreover, why are “male fantasies about women and sexuality ... interlaced with visions of technology in the film,” particularly when women are generally associated with nature?²³⁵ His answer, delivered in a brief “historical digression,” is that as technology shifted from a symbol of human innovation and progress to one of dehumanization and man-made forces run amok, it was figured as female:

Historically, then, we can conclude that as soon as the machine came to be perceived as a demonic, inexplicable threat and as a harbinger of chaos and destruction—a view which typically characterizes many 19th-century reactions to the railroad to give but one major example—writers began to imagine the *Maschinenmensch* as woman. There are grounds to suspect that we are facing here a complex process of projection and displacement. The fears and perceptual anxieties emanating from ever more powerful machines are recast and reconstructed in terms of the male fear of female sexuality, reflecting, in the Freudian account, the male’s castration anxiety.²³⁶

In answer to the question why female sexuality, often depicted as a beast of nature, becomes homologous with technology, Huyssen reminds us that since La Mettrie’s *L’Homme machine*, not only the human body, but all of nature has been viewed in mechanistic terms, laying the groundwork for the imbrication of woman, nature, and machine in “a mesh of significations which all had one thing in common: otherness; by

²³⁵ Huyssen, 70.

²³⁶ Huyssen, 70.

their very existence they raised fears and threatened male authority and control.”²³⁷

One of the visual themes of the film through which Huyssen elaborates on his argument is water and steam, with which Maria, as both virginal woman and machine-vamp, is visually associated. As the film opens, the central protagonist Freder, the son of the city’s mastermind, Joh Fredersen, is engaged in a playful chasing game with a group of young women in and around the Eternal Gardens. He catches up with one of the women in front of a large and beautiful fountain and, as he is about to kiss her, doors open and Maria appears, attempting to lead a group of the workers’ children into the gardens. Freder is instantly struck by the aura (derived from aria or air; an “invisible breath, emanation, or radiation”) surrounding Maria, and he becomes distracted from the woman he was about to kiss. Maria and the children are quickly escorted out of the gardens by the overseers, after which Freder attempts to find her. In his pursuit, he descends into the subterranean world below, where he discovers the machines whose steam power keeps the city running and the human labor that serves as their living pistons. His revelation of the inner workings of the city, and the sweat that feeds the waterworks above, is accompanied by the horror of its precarious balance, as he watches the temperature rise to dangerous levels and a

²³⁷ Huyssen, 70.

great release of steam throw several workers to their deaths. It is the electric and hydraulic power produced by the workers that Rotwang will harness to extract the vital force of Maria to animate his android. Water imagery will continue to render metaphorical the actions of the robotic evil Maria; her erotic dance is accompanied by what looks like a cauldron of steam, and her manipulation of the workers results in the destruction of the city from a flood of water exploding through the “heart machine” at its core.

Huyssen draws our attention to the sexual connotations of the film’s water imagery, suggesting that the fountains represent a “controlled, channeled and non-threatening sexuality” in contrast to the steam and floods in later sequences, which “allegorize female frenzy (the proletarian women) and threatening female sexuality (the vamp).”²³⁸ According to this reading, sexual steam is vented, literally and figuratively, as a form of catharsis, culminating in the final scene in which the machine-woman is burnt at the stake as a witch: “It is as if the destructive potential of modern technology, which the expressionists rightfully feared, had to be displaced and projected onto the machine-woman so that it could be metaphorically purged.”²³⁹

²³⁸ Huyssen, 78

²³⁹ Huyssen, 81

While Huyssen's essay goes a long way in explaining the homology between women and technology in Lang's film, the relationship between the automaton and automatism can be further elaborated. This relationship is represented in the film not only in the pneumatic flow between the Cartesian Pleasure Gardens above, associated with the electric brainpower of the city, and the working cogs below (which are analogized: the machine is a body and the bodies of the men who run it are machines), but between the various nervous disorders that mark the imbalance between the two, in particular that of Freder, who is rendered neurasthenic once he descends beneath the surface of *Metropolis*.

To help clarify this relationship, we will take a detour through the history of automatism (examining its influence on German Romanticism, to which an expressionist film like *Metropolis* is heir), in particular, the work of Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), the man considered the father of automatism, whose demonstrations, in which he put young female patients (fittingly, suffering from "vapors") into "magnetic trances," became legendary. Although the mad scientist Rotwang in *Metropolis* is often compared to Frankenstein—especially in regard to the transformation sequence—it is Mesmer to whom his characterization owes its greatest debt. Indeed, we might say that any time a fictional scientist or doctor (including Frankenstein) blurs the line

between science and the supernatural, reality and madness, the legacy of Mesmer is invoked.

The Wizard of Vienna

Despite his compromised legacy, Mesmer's work both mirrored and was an extension of the philosophical environment in which it was conducted, and he struggled over the course of his life for both scientific and medical legitimacy. Well educated and versed in the latest theories and treatments of his day, Mesmer was awarded an MD in 1766 at the Vienna School of Medicine (later called the New Vienna School, which Freud famously attended). His dissertation, *Dissertatio Physico-medica de Plantarum Influxu*, which he would later give the more concise title, *The Influence of the Planets on the Human Body*, was heavily indebted to the writings of Descartes and Newton on subtle matter and, in particular, the isotropic connection made between both cosmological and meteorological forces and the nervous system. In it, he argues the case for a "universal fluid" coursing through the earth, atmosphere, and cosmos, which gives rise to gravitation, magnetism, electricity, light, and heat; which joins and permeates all physical bodies; which ebbs and flows like the ocean; and, as the moon controls the tides and waves, which produces tidal effects in the "animal spirits" flowing through the human circulatory and nervous system.

Mesmer initially named the property of the “animal body” (those mechanical processes that Descartes distinguishes from the “rational soul”) that makes it susceptible to the cyclical changes of the universal fluid *animal gravitation*, but he later changed the name to *animal magnetism* following a groundbreaking case involving his wife’s twenty-nine year old female cousin, Francisca “Franzl” Oesterline who, as biographer Vincent Buranelli puts it, was Mesmer’s *Anna O*. Franzl had suffered for many years from a debilitating psychosomatic illness that included such hysterical symptoms as convulsions, spasms of vomiting, cataleptic trance, fainting, temporary blindness, and feelings of suffocation. In the course of her treatment, Mesmer noticed that Franzl’s symptoms ebbed and flowed in ways that corroborated his theory of animal gravitation, and, following his own line of reasoning, he attempted to direct the “volatile currents” affecting her nerves using magnets, which he placed on various parts of her body (a treatment made popular by fifteenth century alchemist and physician Paracelsus). He noticed immediate results and, over the course of a year-long treatment, was able to alleviate many of her symptoms. While he would shortly thereafter dispense with the magnets, believing that he could direct magnetic fluid equally effectively through his hands and eyes, his treatment remained grounded in the theory of “animal magnetism” and

the practice of “conducting” universal fluid through the body. *Mesmerism* was born.

In 1778, Mesmer left Vienna for Paris, where he established a clinic that drew the majority of its clientele from the aristocracy and the most fashionable of Parisian society, which thrived until the French Revolution. In its heyday, the Mesmerist cure was administered to a group of individuals in a form of ritualized theater choreographed down to the subtlest details. The group (comprised predominantly of women) would enter an opulent room, which was dim and quiet except for the sound of a pianoforte or “glass harmonica” (Mesmer believed in the healing properties of music and that animal magnetism could be “communicated, propagated, and intensified by sound”²⁴⁰). Patients were examined, given preliminary treatments, and then escorted to a *baquet*, a large basin or tub filled with water and magnetized iron fillings from which iron rods protruded, around which they would stand, touching both the metal rods and one another to set up a “current” of animal magnetism. Donning a powdered wig and a robe and breeches of purple silk, Mesmer acted as the master of ceremonies conducting the whole affair with an iron wand that he used to point at or touch his patients as he moved from baquet to baquet.

²⁴⁰ Franz Anton Mesmer, “The Philosophical Assertions of Franz Anton Mesmer” (no. 16) in *Mesmerism: The Discovery of Animal Magnetism* (1779) translated by Joseph Bouleaur (Sequim, WA: Holmes Publishing Group, 2006), 27.

Although Mesmer had earlier considered and rejected electricity as the “universal fluid” that flowed through all matter, Maria Tatar points out the extent to which his techniques were in dialogue with electrotherapeutic cures, in which patients were administered shocks using electric torpedoes and even electric eels, and his baquet reminiscent of the recently invented Leyden jar, a device that stored and discharged static electricity. Indeed, the chain of individuals holding hands around Mesmer’s baquet recalled earlier entertainments in which Leyden jars were discharged through human circuits created by either joining hands or grasping iron rods or wires:

A Polish scientist, the first to perform such experiments, delivered shocks to twenty people simultaneously. In France, Abbé Jean-Antoine Nollet administered shocks to 180 soldiers in a single instant. For the amusement of Louis XV, the inhabitants of a Carthusian monastery were convulsed; the conducting chain formed by the monks was reported to have stretched for more than a mile.²⁴¹

The similarities not only illustrate the extent to which Mesmer’s “animal magnetism” was but one of an array of subtle fluids being proposed and harnessed by natural philosophers over the course of the eighteenth century, but the spectacularization of science to which such propositions contributed. Akin to the highly visual somatic effects of electroshock treatment was the Mesmerian “crisis,” the culmination of the magnetic

²⁴¹ Maria Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 51-52.

séance, in which the patient's body was overcome by a series of uncontrollable symptoms including physical convulsions, paralysis, and wild gesticulations and verbalizations. The crisis was, Mesmer insisted, an integral part of the cure. As Buranelli states, he believed that "magnetism is to the bodily organs as the wind is to the windmill" and that a raised level of force was needed to get the apparatus back in working order:

If the universal fluid flowed from the magnetizer into the subject in doses powerful enough to start defective physiological machinery working again, then the subject had to be severely affected. The action had to be followed by a reaction just as Newton said of all mutually interacting objects. An electrical machine shakes when you start it and then settles down to its proper uniform movement. The body does the same thing when triggered into action by animal magnetism.²⁴²

The most enduring legacy of Mesmerism was not the crisis, however, but an unexpected discovery made in the course of treatment: "magnetic sleep" or trance. In his initial treatment of Franzl Oesterlin, Mesmer found his patient slipping into a state between sleep and wakefulness in which something more than ordinary consciousness seemed to be at play; her thoughts and actions were uncensored and she was highly suggestible. Having discovered this phenomenon early on, Mesmer became a master at inducing paralysis, drowsiness, sleep, and a variety

²⁴² Vincent Buranelli, *The Wizard From Vienna: Franz Anton Mesmer* (New York, Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1975), 113.

of mental and physical states within his patients. While “mesmerism” was to become synonymous with mind control and the ability to throw others into a somnambulistic state, Mesmer used it primarily to bring on the “salutary crisis.”

The trance was, however, exploited to great effect by others, most notably a student of Mesmer, the Marquis de Puységur, an aristocrat who practiced mesmerism at his family estate on anyone from the local area who asked for help. Following a remarkable experience with a simple and taciturn peasant who, in a state of trance, turned suddenly intelligent, eloquent, and even showed signs of clairvoyance, Puységur began focusing his research and practice increasingly on “magnetic sleep”—or what he called “lucid somnambulism”—to the exclusion of the crisis. The rift that subsequently developed between Puységur and Mesmer over the use of trance in treatment foreshadowed the rift that would later occur between Charcot and Bernheim over the use of hypnosis (a word coined by surgeon James Braid in 1843, after his own experiences with an itinerant mesmerist, in an attempt to rid sleep-wake phenomena once and for all of the taint of “animal magnetism”).

Puységur’s further exploration of “mesmerist sleep” and of states of awareness that were hidden from, and at times superior to, the conscious mind, not only set the stage for later medical investigations of

the unconscious mind by Breuer and Freud, but contributed to a developing “self” consciousness and interiority that became integral to the modern human subject. In her discussion of the metaphoric life of the weatherglass, Castle notes how popular medical and psychological theories began to universalize sensibility, so that over the course of the eighteenth century the weatherglass, once figured as a *femme-machine*, became increasingly associated with the psychic life of men. A “new male type” emerges, she suggests, particularly within Romantic discourse: “the man who must abide in the nonheroic realms of bourgeois existence, and whose internal ‘weather,’ so to speak, obsessively charted, has become his sole remaining source of interest. Acute self-consciousness, symbolized by barometrical fixation, displaces the world of external incident.”²⁴³ This inner sphere becomes the site at which a sense of unity not only with oneself, but all of nature, is pursued amidst a world increasingly demystified by science and regulated by industry.

This pursuit was further substantiated by the *Naturphilosophie* of Friedrich von Schelling (1775-1854), who wrote of the correspondence between nature and spirit in terms of a unifying life force and applied mesmerist notions of the rhythmic alternations of universal polarity to the topography of the nervous system. Under the influence of his work, the Romantic view, summed up in *The Symbolism of Dreams* (1814) by

²⁴³ Castle, 34.

Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert (1780-1860), a physician and advocate of Mesmer, was that the nervous system consisted of two distinct systems with opposite polarities: the cerebral system, located in the brain, which was positively charged, supervised conscious thought and voluntary activities of the body; the ganglionic system, located in the solar plexus, which was negatively charged, controlled involuntary and automatic actions of the body. The solar plexus was also identified by Schubert as the body's conduit for universal or subtle fluid, and therefore the site of intuitive knowledge analogous to animal instinct, which connected man to a natural force that transcended the bounds of spatial and temporal limitations. As Tatar explains, this view was in line with Schelling's descriptions of a sixth sense "which penetrates the barriers of time, foresees the future, and accounts for instinct in animals."²⁴⁴ The two systems were connected via a sympathetic nerve, that served as a kind of semi-conductor, inhibiting contact between upper and lower regions during waking hours, but that increased conductivity during sleep and, it was argued, other automatic states in which cerebral activity ceased, including mesmerist trance, madness, poetic inspiration, and somnambulism. Such states were courted by romantic artists and poets in an attempt to break through the barriers held in check by the rational

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Tatar, 73.

conscious mind and enter into a more harmonious relationship with the universe:

Romantic scientists, philosophers, and psychologists offered competing, yet ultimately consistent, explanations for such mental states. It mattered little whether the immense network of communication allowing instantaneous contact with the universe was powered by electricity, by a world-soul, or by animal magnetism. What Romantic thinkers considered essential was the unity of creation and the special gift of some men to apprehend that unity.²⁴⁵

To whatever extent the inner landscape intuited by mesmerism and pursued by romantic poets produced a male psyche in league with feminine sensibilities, it did little to change the instrumentality of the female body, but instead, I would argue, reframed it in relation to the male's journey inward. In other words, the "female thermometer" was no longer just an emblem of the correspondence between subtle phenomena and the sensitive female apparatus, but an instrument of male revelation. Like the iron rod in the mesmerist séance, it facilitated contact with and helped conduct the "universal fluid" linking the male soul to the cosmos.

The instrumental capacity of the female apparatus for the male psyche, as well as the theory of universal and psychic polarity that informs it, helps to explain not only the increase in female androids in the nineteenth century (many of which appeared in Romantic fiction),

²⁴⁵ Tatar, 74. See also Gordon Birrell, "Kleist's 'St. Cecilia' and the Power of Electricity," in *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Winter, 1989), 75-76.

but also the logic through which they are simultaneously a symbol of technology and nature. The work of E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) is exemplary in this regard. Hoffman ran in the same circles as Kleist, Schiller, and Schubert; indeed, Schubert introduced him to the ideas of Mesmer. The same year that Schubert published his *Symbolism of Dreams*, Hoffmann published a short story called “Automata,” which provides a literary elaboration of Schubert’s theses through a narrative (that will be repeated by Hoffman two years later in “The Sandman”) in which a central male character experiences neurasthenia in proximity to an instrumental female (who may be an automaton) under the control of a Mesmer-like figure who, like Coppola (and Rotwang), is a mechanician.

“Automata” is not a formally structured tale, but a loosely organized series of stories embedded within stories, each of which involves supernatural events for which the characters ascribe both rational (i.e., madness) and occult explanations, and none of which are resolved. The title story, “Automata” revolves around the encounter between two college friends, Lewis, and Ferdinand, the former a musician and the latter an artist, and an automaton on exhibition in their town called the Talking Turk, clearly inspired by von Kempelen’s Turk, which toured Europe with Maelzel during Hoffmann’s lifetime. The Talking Turk is not a chess player, however, but a kind of fortuneteller or seer who

answers spectator's questions. To make an inquiry of the automaton, one needed to whisper into his right ear, after which he would face his questioner directly and respond, a palpable stream of air emerging from his lips in a whisper that was often accompanied by a hand gesture. The answers provided by the Talking Turk were so variable and so strangely attuned to the questioner's inner thoughts and feelings, that it had garnered a reputation for being able to peer directly into the soul of whomever stood before it.

On the evening that the two friends attend the exhibition, Ferdinand puts a question to the Turk, and when the automaton whispers his response, Lewis watches his friend turn pale with shock. Ferdinand later confides to Lewis that the automaton devastated him by making a horrible prediction about a mysterious woman with whom he had fallen in love several years prior at a hotel where he was staying on vacation. He then recounts the story for Lewis, which he has, up until then, not told a living soul. On a particular evening, upon returning to his hotel room after a day-long excursion, Ferdinand laid on his bed in a state somewhere between dreaming and wakefulness, when he heard coming from a nearby room a woman singing in a bell-like voice to the accompaniment of a pianoforte. Under the influence of this unearthly sound, he fell into a rapturous spell as "soul and body were merged in

ear.” When he finally succumbed to sleep, a beautiful woman appeared in his dreams declaring that it was she who had sung to him so that he would recognize her as the soul mate for whom he had been longing since childhood. The next morning, as he gazed out of his room window, he saw a young woman leaving the hotel and, as she turned to look back before getting into her carriage, he recognized her as the woman from his dreams, the singer of the prior evening. He was thereafter possessed by the memory of her in a way that he could not shake. And although he wore a gold locket containing an image that he had painted of her close to his heart, he had kept the entire affair a secret until that evening, when he inquired about her to the Turk. The automaton was at first unwilling to answer and, when Ferdinand persisted, it whispered to him, “I am looking into your breast; but the glitter of gold, which is towards me, distracts me. Turn the picture around.” When Ferdinand did so, the Turk told him that the next time he saw his beloved would be the moment that he lost her forever.

Although Ferdinand is despondent over the automaton’s prophesy, Lewis believes that there is a rational explanation (albeit one that may involve occult influences), and in order to find it the two visit the Turk’s inventor, Professor X, a chemist and natural philosopher with a special gift for mechanics. An unpleasant man with the air of a mountebank, the

professor is eager to show off his mechanical talents and leads them to a furnished hall filled with automata that recollect the “philosophical toys” of the prior century. There is a male flute player and female harpsichordist, two young boys with a drum and triangle, and a full Orchestrion, which all start playing together as the professor accompanies them on the piano. Although pitch perfect, the mechanical orchestra is frighteningly disappointing, particularly to the sensitive musical ear of Lewis, and the two friends leave abruptly without learning anything more about the Turk. Afterwards, they have a discussion about automata in which Hoffmann, as he proclaimed in the letter to the editor of the musical journal to which he first submitted the story, expresses through Lewis his opinions “on everything that is called an automaton,” while paying “special attention to musical artifacts of this kind” as well as the latest efforts of technicians, nature music, and the perfect sound.²⁴⁶

Lewis begins by expressing disdain for the attempt to imitate the human body mechanically and, foreshadowing the narrative of “The Sandman,” he imagines aloud what it might be like to dance unwittingly with a mechanical partner, “fearful, unnatural, I may say terrible.” He insists that however close to verisimilitude an automaton may be or

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Emily I. Dolan in “E.T.A. Hoffmann and the Ethereal Technologies of Nature Music” in *Eighteenth-Century Music* 5/1, (2008).

however mechanically accurate its ability to play music, without an investment of “the mind, the soul, and the heart,” it cannot help but strike the spectator or the listener as anything but emotionally cold and spiritually void. Echoing the anti-realistic aesthetic of Kleist, Lewis states that:

... the more perfect that this sort of machinery is, the more I disapprove of it; and I infinitely prefer the commonest barrel-organ, in which the mechanism attempts nothing but to be mechanical, to Vaucanson’s flute player, or the harmonica girl.²⁴⁷

However, he concedes that it would be possible to produce an instrument that resonates with the soul by using such sensitive materials as metal, glass, marble, or vibrating strings to capture the “mysterious tones of nature,” since it is in “pristine holy harmony” with the natural world that man finds perfection. The instrument that seems to come closest to such an achievement is, Lewis conjectures, the glass harmonica (the instrument that, we are reminded, Mesmer used during his séances to help propagate “animal magnetism”).²⁴⁸ Ferdinand offers the Aeolian harp as an example, but Lewis counters that a more appropriate example would be the “storm harp” in which thick wires are stretched out at great

²⁴⁷ E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Automata” in *Best Tales of Hoffmann*, edited by E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 96.

²⁴⁸ The glass harmonica or “armonica” (the Italian word for harmony) is an instrument that uses glass bowls or bells of varying shapes to produce musical tones through the friction of the player’s fingers. Invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1761, it was a mechanical means of producing the kind of sound created by rubbing a wetted finger on wine glasses filled with varying amounts of water, a musical art with a longstanding history.

distances apart on an open plain, producing powerful chords as the wind strikes them. Ferdinand asks Lewis to elaborate on the connection between the kind of “nature tones” produced by such instruments and music, to which Lewis replies:

Can the music which dwells within us be any other than that which lies buried in nature as a profound mystery, comprehensible only by the inner, higher sense, uttered by instruments, as the organs of it, merely in obedience to a mighty spell, of which we are the masters? But, in the purely psychical action and operation of the spirit—that is to say, in dreams—this spell is broken; and then, in the tones of familiar instruments, we are enabled to recognize those nature tones as wondrously engendered in the air, they come floating down to us, and swell and die away.²⁴⁹

Within this explication of natural and psychical causality, are echoes of Schiller’s nature philosophy and Schubert’s theory of dream states, as well as an invocation of the “music of the spheres” in accordance with Mesmerist practice. Moreover, this passage offers the most telling, if ultimately inconclusive, clue to the mystery surrounding Ferdinand’s beloved. Indeed, just as Lewis finishes speaking, a female voice, sounding very much like a glass harmonica, begins singing the same song as the woman of Ferdinand’s dreams. And as Lewis and Ferdinand peer through the gate and into the garden from whence her voice comes, they see none other than Professor X looking heavenwards “as if he were

²⁴⁹ Hoffman, “Automata,” 98.

contemplating that world beyond the skies, of which those marvelous tones floating in the air like the breath of a zephyr, were telling.”²⁵⁰

Whatever pleasurable resonance Ferdinand first experienced in proximity to the voice is rendered sinister by the sight of the Professor, whom the two friends agree exerts a strange influence over Ferdinand and his fate. The story ends very abruptly thereafter, with the central mystery left unresolved. And while we never learn whether the singer is a real woman or an automaton constructed by Professor X, or whether Ferdinand is engaged in a paranoid fantasy or the Professor truly does have a supernatural hold on him, our lasting impression is of the instrumentality of the mysterious singer, who is able to strike sympathetic chords within Ferdinand that might be either revelatory or hallucinatory, but that nevertheless induce a state over which his conscious mind has no control, thus rendering him automatic.

There is expressed within “Automata” an ambivalence surrounding the female “subtle apparatus” and the “mighty spell” under which Ferdinand falls in relation to her. On the one hand, she is the realization of the harmonic nature instrument about which Lewis rhapsodizes and its ability to bring its listener into communion with the universe. On the other hand, its ability to bypass reason and will, rendering those under its influence puppet-like, is portrayed as potentially destructive,

²⁵⁰ Hoffmann, 99

particularly when conducted by an ill-intentioned puppetmaster.

Hoffmann will elaborate on this theme in his story “The Sandman,” in which Nathanael, another sensitive male, is brought under the sway of a female automaton through the destructive influence of another Mesmer-like figure. While the intoxication of music (Hoffmann’s first love) is featured in the story, it is vision that is the dominant thematic and, in particular, the juxtaposition (and ultimate collapse) of outer and inner vision, embodied by the character of Giuseppe Coppola, who peddles in both seeing apparatuses, such as eye-glasses and binoculars, and instruments associated with the inner psyche, such as weatherglasses and thermometers. After Nathanael’s first encounter with Coppola, when the peddler attempts to sell him a weatherglass, he begins to exhibit symptoms of possession, as if gripped by unknown entities, described by Hoffman in simultaneously mystical and atmospheric terms:

He gave himself up to gloomy reveries, and moreover acted so strangely ... His constant theme was that every man who delusively imagined himself to be free was merely the plaything of the cruel sport of mysterious powers, and it was vain for man to resist them.²⁵¹

It is in this altered state that Nathanael becomes subject to the subliminal powers of Olympia, who sits in the window of the house across the street from his flat and who becomes a source of fixation after

²⁵¹ E.T.A. Hoffman, “The Sandman” in *The Best Tales of Hoffman* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967),

Coppola conveniently sells him a pocket perspective through which to gaze upon her. It is while looking through the spyglass that her lifeless features and fixed gaze take on a mesmerizing aura; it is clear that this instrument for seeing is both blinding him to the reality of her inanimacy and putting him in touch with another realm, shaded by either narcissistic solipsism or universal communion (about which the reader will be left guessing). His fate is sealed after attending a singing performance by Olimpia, which has been arranged by her “father” Spalanzani, and which recalls both the female musician of the Jacquet-Droz and the performance of Ferdinand’s beloved in *Automata*:

Olimpia played on the piano with great skill; and sang as skillfully an *aria di bravura*, in a voice which was, if anything, almost too brilliant, but clear as glass bells. Nathanael was transported with delight; he stood in the background farthest from her So, without being observed, he took Coppola’s glass out of his pocket, and directed it upon the beautiful Olimpia. Oh! then he perceived how her yearning eyes sought him, how every note only reached its full purity in the loving glance which penetrated to and inflamed his heart. Her roulades seemed to him to be the exultant cry towards heaven of the soul refined by love.²⁵²

Looking through the spyglass, Nathanael’s gaze is turned inward. In this light, his fiancé Clara, who is, like her name, a woman of clear intellect and with whom “dreamers and visionaries had a bad time of it,” takes on the impression of a lifeless automaton, while the mechanical Olimpia,

²⁵² Hoffmann, “The Sandman,” 205

inspires the most profound passion in him.²⁵³ And while this passion seems to reach the height of Romantic ecstasy, it is at the cost of Nathanael's individuality and freedom, reducing Nathanael to a state of subjection that seems to presage the rise of German fascism, in which individuality would be subsumed within the romantically-inflected spirit of the Volk.²⁵⁴ Thus, in both "Automata" and "The Sandman," there is both a longing for and ambivalence towards the ecstatic, as represented by the female automaton, who serves as an instrument of both awakening and control. And it is this tension that, I would argue, lies at the heart of the relationship between automaton and automatism in the film *Metropolis*, in which Hoffmann's triadic scenario—between the female instrument, the mad scientist who misuses her natural abilities for evil ends, and the sensitive male—is replicated.

Maria, we should remember, is instrumental in Freder's psychic awakening even before her "vital force" is used as a weapon against his father. Huyssen interprets the "hazed iris effect" that renders Maria

²⁵³ Although I am sidestepping the uncanny in this essay (despite its relevance), it is interesting to note the extent to which Ernst Jentsch's interpretation of the uncanny (and its relation to Hoffmann's story) echoes the view, held by the mesmerists and the Romantics, of the nervous system as a sympathetic string upon which larger forces are played, whose effects are stronger, according to Jentsch, "the weaker the critical sense" and thus most frequent in "women, children and dreamers.." Indeed, Jentsch's masterwork was the two-volume *Musik und Nerven* (Music and Nerves) published between 1904 and 1911. See Ernst Jentsch, 13.

²⁵⁴ Leo Alexander, the key medical advisor during the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi War Criminals would later invoke "The Sandman" in his description of a collection of eyes stolen from prisoners of concentration camps by Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer, mentor to Josef Mengele.

auratic when she first enters the Pleasure Gardens as Freder's rush of sexual desire, which stands in contrast to the "channeled sexuality" of the fountain behind which he stands. However, one might also interpret her visual aura or air as the first whiff of a process not only of desublimation but denaturalization, in which Freder will wake up to the artificiality of the gardens and the vacuity of his former bourgeois life. As part of this process, he will discover his true nature within the subterranean world beneath the city, whose link to his own unconscious is made explicit when the rising temperature of the machines propels him into his first cataleptic fit. It is a journey that is, to a certain extent, echoed in the film *The Matrix* (which, like *Metropolis*, contains numerous biblical references), when the central protagonist Neo chooses the little red pill (also facilitated by a female love interest). And as Neo's descent is part of an awakening in which he will recognize himself as the ONE (best equipped to mediate between the virtual reality of the Matrix and the Real), so too is Freder's in accepting his role as Mediator between the upper and lower worlds, which are represented in the film as the two halves of a giant nervous system. Freder as neurasthenic is, then, Schubert's "sympathetic nerve," which connects the solar plexus or "heart machine" at the city's core whose steam power generates the electrical apparatuses above, and the brain that controls its activities

and under whose authority the hands (workers) perform. His newfound awareness, both personal and social, of which the “true” Maria is the instrument, stands in opposition both to the sexual frenzy induced in the “Club of Sons” in the city above and the revolutionary rage in the workers below by the “false” Maria.

While Huyssen calls the “montage of male eyes” (see figure 34) that stare at the “false” Maria as she performs her erotic dance (which will be repeated when she incites the workers to rebellion) an illustration of “how the male gaze actually constitutes the female body on the screen,” it can also be read in relation to a mesmeric kaleido-scopophilia in which the automaton’s spiralling gyrations put her viewers in a trance through which they are subject to the scheming will of Rotwang. This visual blindness is contrasted with the newly acquired inner vision of Freder, who is the only one who can see that the “false” Maria is an imposter and who spends much of the film in a cataleptic trance, during which he has clairvoyant visions, such as when he intuitively senses the impending destruction of the city. (And again, his horizontal acuity has parallels with that of Neo, who is most enlightened when prone; for he is the only one who is able to see the cascading code behind the simulated reality construct of the Matrix while uploaded into it.)



Figure 34. Montage of Eyes

Thus the thematizing of the “male gaze and vision” within *Metropolis* not only underscores the extent to which the female body is a “projection of male vision,” as discussed by Huyssen, but also her capacity for undermining the visual and rational order and for serving as a conduit for unseen forces through which her spectators may be controlled or enlightened. Although, as Huyssen points out, the female android in the film becomes the convenient tool of an unsatisfactory compromise between labor and capital achieved via her cathartic witch

burning, the galvanizing power that she is able to generate is marked by an ambivalence that is also evident in the disparity between the film and the novel that inspired it by Lang's then wife, Thea von Harbou. While in the film, the flooding of the "heart machine" (of which the android is the agent), is represented as apocalyptic, it serves as the triumphant finale of the novel. As Michael Cowan notes:

The narrator recounts how Fredersen, the head of Metropolis, built his city over an ancient river, which he had damned up, but which constantly threatens to flood over again. The novel then ends with liberation of this vital source in the form of a cathartic flood, which Harbou celebrates as a metaphor for the return of life to a rigidified modern body: "The stones of the dead city came to life."²⁵⁵

Cowan suggests that the tension created in the novel between the organic flow of water and the mechanical rhythms by which it is contained and rigidified is an invocation of the vitalist philosophy (*Lebensphilosophie*) at the center of a reform movement in the early twentieth century for reawakening the natural rhythms of a body subject to the increased and repetitive pacing of modern life. Particularly influential was the book *The Nature of Rhythm* (1923) by Ludwig Klages, which expressed "the irreconcilable opposition between organic and machinic rhythms—or in his terminology between *Rhythmus* and *Takt*" in terms of repetition versus variation. The latter was discussed in relation

²⁵⁵ Michael Cowan, "The Heart Machine: 'Rhythm' and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" in *MODERNISM/modernity*, 14:2 (2007), 237.

to both biological and diurnal cycles, whose fluid polarity recalls simultaneously both Mesmeric magnetism and Kleist's marionette:

The upward movement glides into the downward movement and vice versa in such a way that neither the upper nor lower turning points display any hard edges. What appears is rather a curve, which clearly shows us the unsegmented continuity [*unzergrenzte Stetigkeit*] of a movement that is nonetheless structured.²⁵⁶

Various schools of rhythmic and eurythmic dance and gymnastics were founded on these ideas, including those of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, and Rudolf Bode, all of whom appeared in Wilhelm Prager's 1925 film *Paths to Strength and Beauty*, featuring numerous performances of "flowing body movements" often "staged at the edge of a lake in front of the lapping waves."²⁵⁷

Tiffany views the body culture of the early twentieth century as an outgrowth of Mesmerism, and he draws attention to its problematic bifurcation within modernism between, on the one hand, the visual avant-garde, and on the other, the mass spectacles of fascism. As Tiffany notes, Rudolf Laban and his student Mary Wigman ran the "dance collective" of an artists colony at Monte Verita in the Swiss village of Ascona, active between about 1900 and 1920, which "served as the context for influential 'experiments' in various activities, including

²⁵⁶ Cowan, 231.

²⁵⁷ Cowan suggests that Walther Ruttmann's celebration of rhythmic modernity in the film *Berlin. Symphony of a Great City*, which was released two years after Prager's *Paths to Strength and Beauty*, may be read as, in part, a response to the filmic presentation of "body culture as an answer to modernity's neurasthenic dilemma." See Cowan, 232.

anarchist politics, feminism, pacifism, vegetarianism, natural healing (sun baths, air baths, water cures), nudism, and sexual freedom.”²⁵⁸ Many artists, writers, philosophers, and feminists lived at Monte Verita at various points, and its dance collective became central to the Dada movement, performing regularly at the Cabaret Voltaire. However, some of the core themes of Monte Verita—including communion with nature and the privileging of the emotional and intuitive over the intellect and rational—were also echoed by the National Socialist movement in Germany. And many of the figures mentioned above, in particular Bode and Wigman (and to a lesser extent Laban) became key players in the physical education program of the Third Reich.²⁵⁹ As Cowan points out, there is a distinct visual parallel between the flowing movements of the performers in *Paths to Strength and Beauty* and the choreography of divers in the filmed sequences of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin produced by Wigman’s former dance student turned filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl (see figure 35). There is, however, also a distinct, if less evident, dialogue between the flowing movement of divers (as well as some of the choreography of dancers by Wigman) in *Olympia* and the regimented and mechanical parade of male bodies captured en masse in Riefenstahl’s

²⁵⁸ Tiffany, 148.

²⁵⁹ Von Harbou too joined the National Socialist German Workers party and divorced Lang, who fled Germany, a split that perhaps casts further retrospective significance on the two interpretations of the “flood” sequence in *Metropolis*.



Figure 35. Comparison: PATHS TO STRENGTH (left)/OLYMPIA (right)

Triumph of Will (1935), which suggests a dialectical relationship between *Rhythmus* and *Takt* that complicates any reading positing the purity of one free of the other. As Klaus Theweleit demonstrates, to the extent that the hard male body that both gave rise to and was celebrated by the Nazi movement was a form of psychic and physical armoring against the erotic floods and streams associated with both the feminine and unconscious, it was, to a large extent, constituted by and represented a channeling of erotic and psychic flows in the same way that the machinery of *Metropolis* sublimates and distills the primal river beneath the city:

Fascism translates internal states into massive, external monuments or ornaments as a canalization system, which large numbers of people flow into; where their desire can flow, at least within (monumentally enlarged) preordained channels; where they can discover that they are not split off and isolated, but that they are sharing the violation of prohibitions with so many others (preferably with all others).²⁶⁰

In the opposition between the internal climate of the modern individual and the mass formation articulated by Theweleit are echoes of the tension in *Metropolis* between the psychic awakening of Freder and the entranced masses of both the city and the underworld. And while such a reading suggests (and Siegfried Kracauer proposes explicitly) that the narrative of *Metropolis* foretells the rise of Nazism, Cowan suggests that the film is

²⁶⁰ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 430

attempting to reconcile the individual and collective, inner and outer spheres, and ultimately to “imagine motion pictures as a forum for mediating between technological and organic rhythms.”²⁶¹ And while he elaborates on this idea through an examination of the metaphor of the “heart machine,” I would draw further attention to the *kaleidoscophilia* of the “montage of eyes” generated by the female automaton, and the extent to which it is paralleled by the mesmerizing performances of Loie Fuller, a female dancer who set the stage, so to speak, for the combination of *rhythmus* and *takt*, art and science, and high and low entertainment achieved by cinema ...

La Loïe

Loïe Fuller (1862-1928), was an American burlesque and vaudeville performer turned dancer who made a splash in Paris (after which she added the umlaut to her name), becoming a regular at the Folies Bergère in 1892 with her famous serpentine dance (a dance later captured by Edison in the black maria using “Annabelle” after Fuller refused his repeated requests to film her dancing). Using hooked bamboo or aluminum rods, she kept “500 yards” (so her advertisements claimed) of silky cloth moving in large circles around her body, which she would decorate with phosphorescent and radioluminescent paint, or against which she would project lights (with colored gels) or abstract designs

²⁶¹ Cowan, 239.

(painted on glass slides through which light was projected), sometimes even multiplying her image with mirrors. The effect, a spiraling, mutating whirl through which a brief glimpse of her (naked) body might materialize only to vanish again, conjured (according to various writers at the time) the evanescence of clouds or mist. Its weightless arabesques, like hyperbola to an asymptote, inspired comparisons with “curves” and “parabolas,” as though she were the human realization of Kleist’s puppet (see figure 36). Her invocation of more than the eye could see, which simultaneously invited and deflected the gaze of its spectators produced, according to Mallarmé (who dubbed her “La Loïe”), insight over sight, invoking both the inner terrain of the unconscious and the outer expanses of the soul. As Felicia McCarren explains, Mallarmé, in his poetic tribute to Fuller, ridiculed the attempt by spectators of ballet performances to get a closer look through opera glasses, which he insisted blinded them to the greater revelatory potential of what they were seeing. In contrast, Fuller’s dances enacted the effect of Coppelia’s spyglass in Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” through which Nathanael peers into his own psyche when gazing upon Olympia: “[Cette] inconsciente révelatrice ... silencieusement écrira ta vision à la façon d’un Signe,



Figure 36. Loie Fuller

qu'elle est" ("[This] unconscious revealer ... will silently write your vision in the manner of a Sign, which she is."²⁶²

Fuller, in fact, felt a great kinship with "The Sandman" and, late in life, produced two adaptations: a 1925 dance-pantomine called *L'Homme au Sable* and a 1927 film, *Les Incertitudes du docteur Coppélius*. Although the film is no longer extant, the stage production, described by Rhonda K. Garelick in some detail, omitted the second half of the story in which Nathanael falls in love with the mechanical woman, focusing instead on the figure of the Sandman who steals children's eyes, played by Fuller. In explaining the omission of the automaton, Garelick suggests that, considering the extent to which Fuller's dances were able to mesmerize (without recourse to the human body), the animate-inanimate doll would have been redundant:

After all, nearly every one of Fuller's theatrical projects featured a (partially mechanical woman (herself), a mechanical stage, special lenses, and gadgets—the mechanization of dance itself. Sometimes, like Coppélius tinkering with his doll, Fuller even played with fragmented images of human body parts, permitting hands, arms, even heads to whirl about via filmic projections, shadow trickery, or mirrored reflections. In other words, Fuller's entire *oeuvre* was devoted to the very questions addressed by Hoffmann's tale.²⁶³

²⁶² Quoted in Felicia McCarren, "The 'Symptomatic Act' circa 1900: Hysteria, Hypnosis, Electricity, Dance" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Summer, 1995), 756.

²⁶³ Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller's Performance of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 143.

Fuller's association with the kind of subtle forces—both psychic and supernatural—explored by both Hoffmann and the romantics was further encouraged by the life history that she recounted in her autobiography. She was purportedly raised in a spiritualist family and was influenced, early on, by both mesmerism and mediumistic phenomena. Her serpentine dance was conceived while performing in a theatrical parody of hypnosis, in a vaudeville play called “Quack M.D.” which premiered at the New York music hall in 1890. Fuller played a hypnotized woman in the play and, as she claimed, actually fell into a trance in the scene in which she appeared and began producing the visual effects of hypnosis by waving around her gauzy skirt (in a kind of improvisation of the “skirt dance,” which she had once performed on the burlesque circuit):

Unknowingly, she begins sculpting her costume into decorative shapes in which audience members—like sky-gazers seeing shapes in the “clouds” of her robes—discern various pleasing images. “It’s a butterfly!” “It’s an orchid!” they cry out, thus sparking an entire career.²⁶⁴

Following this initial success, Fuller both perfected the performance and its presentation, innovating configurations of electrical lighting and mirrors. Although she patented many of her inventions, the serpentine dance inspired numerous imitations, as well as sparking a trend for performances in which the female body was literally outfitted with electrical lights. The *electric goddess*, as Julie Wosk calls her, became an

²⁶⁴ Garelick, 211.

emblem of the curative and dangerous potential of the “magical fluid” of electricity, which was lighting up the world’s cities in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Some goddesses danced, as in the case of Marie Leyton, who triggered lights with her movements, as if she were “dancing in a rainbow,” as one reviewer said of her 1892 premiere at the Tivoli Music Hall in London.²⁶⁵ Others sang:

New York’s Koster & Bial music hall in 1892 featured the female entertainer Nada Beyval, billed as a “chanteuse electrique,” singing French songs in her costume studded with rows of miniature electric lights that flashed dramatically on the darkened stage.²⁶⁶

Although these performers induced a similar sense of awe as earlier experiments and spectacles using Leyden jars, they were, according to Jody Sperling,²⁶⁷ in many cases hindered by the technology from achieving full mobility.²⁶⁸ Like many early vaudeville acts, they may be seen as a precursor to cinema (indeed, Edison would premiere his Vitascope film projector at Koster & Bial only four years after Beyval’s performance), however, as Sperling suggests, they may be more analogous to video in their light-emitting capacities than film, whose

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Jody Sperling, “Sublime or Ridiculous?: Some Thoughts on Marie Leyton’s Electrical Serpentine Dance of the 1890s” in *Society of Dance History Scholars Conference Proceedings*, 2006.

²⁶⁶ Julie Wosk, *Women and the Machine: Representations from the Spinning Wheel to the Electronic Age* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 71

²⁶⁷ Jody Sperling is a contemporary dancer who recreates Fuller’s serpentine dance techniques using modern technologies.

²⁶⁸ I find an interesting parallel between the problems of these early *danseuse and chanteuse electrique*, who often attempted to hide large storage batteries in their costumes, and current-day humanoid robots, which (at present) are forced to wear their power sources like a backpack.

evanescent qualities are more akin to the weightless projections of Fuller (who steered clear of the electrical apparatuses that she used to achieve her special effects):

Fuller's costumes create a moving screen for the luminous projections, but she refrained from becoming herself the source of illumination—although she created that illusion. Fuller's art consisted in the words of one contemporary writer, the 'transformations of tissues of living light.' That lovely phrase encapsulates the visceral, diaphanous and morphic quality of her presence.²⁶⁹

Fuller's (dis)embodiment of light and motion simultaneously described the harmonious curves of nature within which were intuited psychic revelations by Symbolists such as Mallarmé, and evoked a spontaneity, speed, and "sexual electricity" that made her equally beloved by the Futurists. Her performances not only achieved a balance between *rhythmus* and *takt* but, as Tom Gunning points out, they forged a link between the aesthetic and technological, as well as between elite and popular entertainment, in a way that paralleled both the appeal and impact of cinema. When asked how she felt about performing in venues that catered to 'delicatessen dealers from Seventh Avenue,' Fuller replied:

The Delicatessen man is indeed more likely than the educated man to grasp the meaning of my dances. He *feels* them. It is a question of temperament more than culture. My

²⁶⁹ Jody Sperling, "Sublime or Ridiculous?: Some Thoughts on Marie Leyton's Electrical Serpentine Dance of the 1890s."

magnetism goes out over the footlights and seizes him so that he *must* understand—in spite of his delicatessen.²⁷⁰

A subtle apparatus for the modern age, Fuller mesmerized audiences with a dance between the organic and mechanical that achieved the spontaneity and mobility of Kleist's puppet, while heralding the age of the cinematic "art-machine." Like the female conductive medium whose magnetism, as Fuller claims, *makes* the audience understand, the cinema would inspire the same ambivalence over its induced automatism as expressed about the female automaton in Hoffmann's tales. As Walter Benjamin noted, for those who expected the contemplative and associative qualities of prior art media, the cinema was disconcerting, as it was for Duhamel who stated, "I can no longer think what I want to think."²⁷¹ For Benjamin, however, such propulsive qualities constituted the "shock effect" of cinema that, like the chain of bodies around a *baquet* or Leyden jar, had the potential to galvanize the individual as part of a collective. And while Benjamin pits the conductive force of cinema, which "politicizes art," against the fascist spectacle, which "aestheticizes politics," its successful use by such filmmakers as Eisenstein *and* Riefenstahl underscores the extent to which, like the female apparatus, it

²⁷⁰ Quoted in Gunning, "Loie Fuller and the Art of Motion: Body Light, Electricity and the Origins of Cinema" in *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 83.

²⁷¹ Quoted in Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 238.

is but an indiscriminate tool equally capable of enlightenment or propaganda.

Conclusion

In her essay “Woman as Hieroglyph” Francette Pacteau describes the aura of indecipherability that accumulates around the image of the beautiful woman (or a part of the beautiful woman), whose promise of unmediated access to a singular truth “beyond words or even life itself” is reminiscent of the hieroglyph in its use by Renaissance humanists:

Beyond the appearance of beauty, lies the unknowable presence of she who is not man. Difference is *disavowed* through the integration of woman as phallic into the man’s narcissistic system. Woman made image is the outcome of the tensions between the imaginary and the symbolic, between a subject that wants itself whole and a subject that can only exist as split. The knowledge of a ‘beyond’ the visible that marks the recognition of sexual difference, tears the smooth surface of the image to reveal an otherness, but an *excessive* otherness that takes on the status of a mystery.²⁷²

The mystery is, she suggests, the precondition for desire: “The riddle of the sphinx must not be answered, for to answer it is to destroy desire.”²⁷³

As in the parable of Pliny the Elder in which the mysterious *trompe-l’œil* curtain arouses an insatiable curiosity to see behind it, woman must

²⁷² Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 112.

²⁷³ Pacteau, 119.

remain “beyond the veil,” an accessible impossibility, whose enigmatic otherness Pacteau compares to “the nocturnal smile” of the Mona Lisa.

In her essay, “Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator,” Mary Anne Doane discusses the association between women and hieroglyphics made by Freud in his famous lecture on “Femininity” in which he recites four lines from a poem by Heinrich Heine that inscribes, or so Freud would have us believe, the riddle of femininity:

Heads in hieroglyphic bonnets,
Heads in turbans and black birettas,
Heads in wigs and thousand other
Wretched, sweating heads of humans...²⁷⁴

However, as Doane points out, Freud enacts a slight of hand by omitting the next two lines of the poem:

Tell me, what signifies Man?
Whence does he come? Whither does he go?

The “question of femininity” is thus less a riddle than “a pretense, haunted by the mirror-effect by means of which the question of the woman reflects only man’s own ontological doubts.”²⁷⁵ This displacement, as well as woman’s role as hieroglyph, is realized most pointedly in cinema, according to Doane, which projects “a writing in the images of women, but not for *her*.” The cinematic image of woman, which enables

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Mary Anne Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator” in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, edited by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 41.

²⁷⁵ Doane, 42.

the male spectator to engage his “own ontological doubts” at a safe remove, deprives the female spectator of the same interpretive distance due to its iconic resemblance to her: “for the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image—she *is* the image.”²⁷⁶ Doane then proposes “masquerade”—an excessive femininity akin to “a mask which can be worn or removed”—as a strategy for distancing the female spectator from the image of woman. As she puts it, “to masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one’s image.”²⁷⁷

The artificial female, particularly when she refuses verisimilitude, distances the image in a manner not all that dissimilar from the “mask” or the “masquerade” proposed by Doane, for she highlights the “production of femininity” and the ways in which it is perpetrated by both women and men. She also offers unique possibilities for unmasking or enacting a doubled vision or *anamorphosis* that destabilizes not only the image, but also the signifying system in which it appears. Moreover, as is made clear by the many female androids discussed in the previous chapters, to the extent that she offers a strategy for creating distance, she also enables the male spectator to collapse the distance implied by the “mirror-effect” through a self-reflexive rupture in which he recognizes

²⁷⁶ Doane, 43.

²⁷⁷ Doane, 49

himself in the image of the Other. Such an effect is the equivalent of Duchamp's parodic addition of a mustache and goatee to the "nocturnal smile" of the Mona Lisa, the production of an image whose impossible vacillation underscores the signification of the signifier in a way that is arguably more faithful to the *apophatic* tradition of the Renaissance hieroglyphic than the untouched version.

One can sense the productive possibilities of such intentional artificiality and rupture in the two films discussed in the "Introduction," which use Realdolls as characters. In both cases, the inertness of the dolls defamiliarize what are otherwise stereotypical encounters between men and women, raising uncomfortable questions about the programmatic nature of sociality and the extent to which, like the dolls, real people are used as actors and actresses in the "private theater" of projective fantasy. Unfortunately, in both *Love Object* and *Lars and the Real Girl*, the resonance of such questions is muted by the pathologization of the central male protagonist and the careful placement of his artificial encounter within the distancing frame of social aberration.

The desire to pathologize arises wherever the artificial female appears, and it is, admittedly, difficult to avoid in relation to objects that we associate with childhood. Dolls are, as D.W. Winnicott once

explained, what children use to help them transition from un-individuated dependence to autonomous selfhood, and to interact with them past childhood, especially in an erotic fashion, bespeaks regression. Moreover, it is difficult to maintain distance between the image of femininity and what it represents; if a female doll is decapitated (in the manner of Kokoschka's doll-fetish) or amputated like a Bellmer *poupee*, the violence to a female body, however artificial, serves as a reminder of a misogyny that is all too real for far too many women. However, to the extent that I had an agenda in my dissertation, it was to underscore the tension that arises in work that represents artificiality²⁷⁸ between psychoanalytic and socio-historical interpretations. Bellmer's dolls *are* readable as both a form of social critique and sadistic fetishism, a contradiction whose finer points are worth examining.

In their contradictory blasphemy, Bellmer's dolls anticipate the "partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity" of Donna Haraway's cyborg, which is, as she states, at once the realization of militarism and patriarchal capital and a site of feminist resistance. Indeed, the cyborg is the figure that lurks throughout these pages and who will shape my future research on the artificial female. The cyborg—part machine, part

²⁷⁸ However blurred the line can become, I'm making a distinction here between someone like Slade, the Realdoll doctor, who uses dolls to stage a certain kind of performance and those for whom they are girlfriends. It is the psychoanalytic interpretation of the doll as representation with which I am grappling in my work, not the doll as female surrogate.

human—embodies a chimerical hybridity that hearkens back to the allegorical and emblematic tradition discussed in the first chapter; it enacts a visual vacillation—between wholeness and partiality, outside and inside, organic and technological—that mirrors the disassembled android so admired by the ASFRians presented in the second chapter; and the theory of cybernetics, which posits a functional equivalence between humans and machines as systems of control subject to flows of data signals, is arguably the most recent update of the discourse of *pneuma* and corpuscular flows explored in the third chapter. The cyborg will also take my research back to where I initially started in the Introduction: the theory of the uncanny valley and its modern invocation of traditional Japanese aesthetics. Indeed, an example *par excellence* are the *gynoids* of Japanese erotic artist Hajime Sorayama, female cyborgs that are part metal and part flesh, illustrated in the style of Victor Vargas as high-tech pin-ups (see figure 37). I interviewed Sorayama for my documentary and he drew an interesting analogy between his gynoids and Japanese cooking, which reminded me of Tanizaki’s “praise of shadows”:

In Japanese cuisine, when we serve something sweet (there’s a dessert called oshiruko), we typically add some salt to bring out the sweetness. Just adding more and more sugar is not the professional way. When we want to emphasize cuteness or kindness, we do it by using something macho, a gorilla or a yakuza or mafia, and make them do something only slightly nice, it appears by



Figure 37. Sorayama Gynoid

contrast to be extremely nice. In the same way, by using something hard or something totally unerotic—fetish people use vinyl, PVC, or leather, but I’m saying rocks or metal—will bring the woman’s femininity to an even higher level.

Although he doesn’t like to admit it, Sorayama was hired by Sony to design their robotic dog, the AIBO (see figure 38), a fact that underscores the nuanced relationship between fantasy and material reality within the Japanese robotics industry, a relationship that Haraway describes as critical to her cyborg and “any possibility of historical transformation.”²⁷⁹

Aside from charting the cross-cultural terrain of the cyborg, I plan, in future work, to trace a line between the feminist appropriation of the cyborg imaginary and the “resistant Galateas” of the past. There are, of course, important differences between the two: the latter employs the technological as a means of invoking an organic unity tinged by a transcendently-inflected nostalgia, while the former represents an explicit disavowal of the natural order, the organic body, and the invocation of holism or unity of any kind. Both, however, blur the distinction between the organic and the machinic, enacting a contradiction that points simultaneously towards embodiment and away from it, as a form of social critique. While the “failed Galatea” of the Romantics has been the subject of a great deal of feminist critique, she

²⁷⁹ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” in *Simians, Cyborgs, Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150.



Figure 38. AIBO

also represents the philosophical (and one might argue repressed) origins of the postmodern female cyborg. As in the previous chapters, by tracing historically the (often problematic) tropes and themes that give rise to a contemporary symbol of (in the case of the cyborg) female empowerment, I hope to open a space in which boundaries are breached in a mutual celebration of vacillation.

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