Games of the Doll

This is an outtake from ***Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century****. I had intended it to close Chapter 5, "Body Politic," but cut it from the final version because the book was already getting too long.*

Dumped by Alma Mahler in 1915 and twice wounded in the war, Oskar Kokoschka famously sought to cauterize his various griefs by commissioning the Stuttgart puppet-maker Hermine Moos to fabricate an exact life-size replica of his lost lover. "The point of all this for me," he told Moos, "is an experience which I must be able to embrace."[1] Kokoschka was not the only artist in interwar Central Europe who took refuge from the paucity of reality[2]—the truth, as it then was—by playing with dolls. The case of the German surrealist Hans Bellmer is both more notorious and less easy to fit into a sentimental narrative of shellshock and lost love. Having dropped out of the Berlin engineering school to which his domineering father had sent him, the young man was taken on as an apprentice typographer in 1924 by Wieland Herzfelde's socialist publishing house Malik-Verlag. There he formed close friendships with John Heartfield, Rudolf Schlichter, and George Grosz. Grosz encouraged Bellmer to employ his extraordinary talents as a draughtsman in political caricature, but Hans chose to expend his creative energies elsewhere. He set up his own graphic design agency in 1926, where he succeeded in obtaining advertising commissions from the electric company AEG, the refrigerator manufacturer Santo, and others. He concurrently produced a number of photomontage covers for pulp novels—one of them, composed out of cut-up bits and pieces of female torsos, was for Paul Althaus's *Jack the Ripper*—but his artistic aspirations went largely unfulfilled. Most of his output from the nineteen-twenties, including numerous drawings and paintings of little girls from a local orphanage, has not survived. These were years, he later wrote, of "unavowed inner revolt and repressed despair."[3]

Bellmer may have read Kokoschka's correspondence with Hermine Moos when the letters were published as "The Fetish" in 1925. Certainly he knew the story of Oskar's effigy of Alma Mahler. But it was a performance at the Berlin Opera in the fall of 1932 of Jacques Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*, whose hero catastrophically falls for the beautiful automaton Olympia, that provided the stimulus for Hans to make a doll of his own—or so, at least, legend has it.[4] Sigmund Freud, too, had been struck by Hoffmann's story "The Sandman" upon which Act I of Offenbach's opera is based, using it in his 1919 essay on "The Uncanny" (*Das Unheimliche*), a category dear to the surrealists.[5] In fact, Bellmer's first sketches for his doll preceded his night at the opera. His fascination with the subject reached back deep into his childhood, of which he was powerfully reminded when a couple of boxes of his old toys surfaced during a family move in 1931. He was also familiar with the Dada-dolls of Emmy Hennings and Hannah Höch, and in 1925 became a close friend of Lotte Pritzel, a wax-doll maker whom Kokoschka had approached over his Alma look-alike before finally settling upon Moos. Whatever the origins of Bellmer's doll, the occasion for his retreat into his studio was Adolf Hitler's accession to power in January 1933. It was not coincidence. Hans resolved (in his own words) to cease "all socially useful activity" as "a gesture of rejection of German fascism and the prospect of war," and began working on his "artificial girl," as he called her, soon after.[6]

Bellmer's doll was a condensation of both his decision to commit himself fully to his art and his rejection of the Nazis' *neue Ordnung*. She also presided over his final rupture with his father, an active member of the National Socialist party with whom Hans had never seen eye to eye. Bellmer scathingly recalled his childhood in a brief text written in 1936 called simply "The Father" (*Der Vater*). Its reference might be generic as well as specific, political as well as personal; his target is the *nom du pére*. The artist shudders at "the cold shadow of 'he' who rendered hateful the radiance of our [Hans and his brother's] perhaps hermetic games" as well as at "the pretexts of education, the principles of

obedience and supervised work" that "all reinforced his attitude." "We vaguely questioned ourselves," he says, "about the inadequacies of the entire class that [their father] represented and that hindered him from understanding that the abolition of play is not beneficial to goodness and a sense of equilibrium." Metamorphosis became a means of resistance:

We learned quite early on how to protect ourselves, and, in fact, even more. What we thought of while our teeth chattered persisted until the onset of sleep: rebellion, defense, attack. On his side of the scale were the heavy fat of a dead heart and the full guts of the "arriviste" class; on our side were the inviolate instincts and infallible strategies of unsullied children … We knew how to become anything: rubber, filth or glass, iron and copper wires. In fact, we were probably rather adorable, more like little girls than the formidable boys we would have preferred to be. Yet, it seemed to be more fitting than anything else to lure the brute out of his place in order to confuse him … [7]

Bellmer's first doll, which he constructed with the help of his brother Fritz, his wife Marguerite, and Lotte Pritzel in 1933, stood around four-and-a-half feet tall. She was made in the image of an adolescent girl. His young cousin Ursula Naguschewski, to whom he had developed a strong attachment, was one inspiration for the figure. Ursula was allowed to look at the doll from a distance but not to cross the threshold of the studio. The doll was fabricated out of glue-hardened towand plaster of Paris over a metal and wooden armature, hand-carved with a rasp and wood-chisel. Her body parts, which included two torsos, two legs, and one arm, could be freely disassembled and interchanged. "I tried to rearrange the sexual elements of a girl's body like a sort of plastic anagram," Bellmer explained later. "I remember describing it thus: the body is like a sentence that invites us to rearrange it, so that its real nature becomes clear through a series of anagrams."[8] Initially he had also intended to "display a girl's thoughts and dreams" in a miniature diorama viewed through the doll's navel controlled by a button concealed in her nipple, but he abandoned the idea

because of its technical difficulties. This "panorama" would have shown "small objects, materials and color pictures distinguished by bad taste,"[9] including "a boat sinking amid the ice-floes of the North Pole, a handkerchief 'embellished' with little girl's spittle, sweets and kitsch prints for children."[10]

Like Kokoschka, Bellmer used his artificial girl as a means for the production of images. He took around thirty photographs of the doll in various settings and poses, eventually publishing ten of them at his own expense in *Die Puppe* (The Doll), which came out in a limited edition in Karlsruhe in 1934. Pocket-sized, printed on pink paper and dedicated to "Ursula N." the book was a precious little memento, fit for discreet and private consumption—not unlike the gallant erotica of *fin de siècle* Vienna. Along with a diagram of the mechanism of the unrealized internal panorama, Bellmer attached a poetic text by way of preface to his "ten construction documents" (as he called the photographs). Like all his writings it is difficult, multi-layered, and less than transparent in its meaning. "Memories of the Doll Theme" may illuminate—or sometimes darken—Bellmer's images, but it cannot be said to *explain* them. It is suffused with dreams, desires, and nostalgias. He writes longingly of "black Easter eggs with their doves and pink sugary curlicues," the "frozen ecstasy" of the spirals within a glass marble, "games of doctors and nurses and something like a raspberry cordial enema," and—above all—of "the young girls" whose "minxes' legs … with impudent playfulness tested their elasticity by chasing runaway hoops, and then lolled naked amid broderie anglaise and loose pleats while idly savoring the aftertaste of their game."

Not all is sugar and spice. "There was something uncanny about these girls," Bellmer muses. They "could transform you into a perfectly nondescript youth wearing dowdy trousers and dowdy shoes" with "but a casual flutter of a pink pleat." He asks whether his doll "didn't … amount to the final triumph over those young girls—with their wide eyes and averted looks—when a conscious gaze plundered its charms, when aggressive fingers searching for

something malleable allowed the distillates of mind and senses slowly to take form, limb by limb?" There is a whiff of exorcism here—a settling of scores with the ghosts of longings past—reminiscent of Kokoschka's Alma-doll, who ended up, after all that love and attention had been lavished on her, decapitated and drenched in red wine at the bottom of the garden. "Fit one joint to the other, swivel the ball-joints full circle and test them for childlike poses," Bellmer ends:

Gently trace the hollows, savor the pleasures of the curves, stray into the opening of an ear, do pretty things while simultaneously scattering the salt of deformation with a hint of vengeance. Above all, one must not stop short of the interior, of stripping away coy girlish thoughts so that their foundations become visible, best of all through the navel, deep within the belly in the form of a panorama electrically illuminated by colored lights. Isn't that the solution?[11]

To what problem, he doesn't say.

The first photograph in *Die Puppe* shows just the doll's armature, the second adds a breast and part of the stomach, the third the head, a still unfinished torso, and one leg—together with the image of the artist himself, joining his creation in a spectral double exposure. Disrupting any incipient biographical narrative, the fourth photograph shows the doll parts completely disassembled and pinned against a wall. The sixth is one of the most commonly reproduced of all Bellmer's images. The doll leans against a wall looking back over her shoulder at the viewer, her chemise lifted to expose her naked buttocks. She "appears to be a violated vamp," writes Therese Lichtenstein, "passive and vulnerable yet flirtatious and active."[12] *Really?* It is only the viewer that animates her, for this vamp lacks arms, and has armatures in place of legs. "And didn't the doll, which lived solely through the thoughts projected onto it, and which despite its unlimited pliancy could be maddeningly stand-offish, didn't the very creation of its dollishness contain the desire and intensity sought in it by the imagination?" Bellmer maliciously asks his readers.[13] All but one of the

remaining pictures show doll parts, variously disassembled and rearranged. The exception is the seventh, where the naked, armless, and in this case bald doll is shown against a backdrop of lacy Victorian wallpaper kissing a rose. The fifth photograph severs the thighs from the pelvis, revealing the ball-joint; the ninth places the detached head beside the torso. The last tableau in the book shows just a pair of legs, cut off at the thighs, nestled in lace, like the Australian apples snuggling in tissue-paper in Jan Paukert's delicatessen on Národní třída. Between the legs rests a rose; beneath them a shoe thrusts its stiletto heel toward the viewer. Freudians could have a field day here, but I shall resist the temptation to dissect and discipline the image by analyzing it.[14] Who can say what these "anagrams" *mean*? What is difficult to deny is their beauty: a beauty that profoundly unsettles, because we instinctively know that these are not the sorts of deformations in which we *ought* to find any pleasure.

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Bellmer was much taken with *Minotaure,* whose first issue, containing among other articles Jacques Lacan's "The Problem of Style and the Psychiatric Conception of Paranoiac Forms of Experience," Maurice Heine's "Sade's Theatre," and Maurice Reyal's "Variety of the Human Body" was sent to him from Paris. Reyal's article was illustrated by Brassaï's photographs of headless, limbless, and unmistakably penile female nudes.[15] Issue 3, which carried André Breton's "Beauty Will Be Convulsive" and René Crevel's "The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Body," equally excited Hans and he endeavored to make contact with the French surrealists. He asked Ursula, who was now studying at the Sorbonne, to show some of his photographs to Breton. The surrealist leader was so enthused that he published eighteen of them in *Minotaure* in December 1934 under the title "Variations on a Montage of an Articulated Minor."[16] Bellmer visited Paris two months later—on the eve of Breton and Éluard's departure for Prague—and was introduced into the surrealists' evening get-togethers at the Café de la place Blanche. He soon became a

regular fixture of surrealist exhibitions, showing his work at Tenerife in 1935, London in 1936, Tokyo and New York (in Alfred Barr's *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at MoMA) in 1937, and the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* in Paris in 1938.

Paul Éluard's prose poem "*Appliquée,*" which was inspired by Bellmer's doll, appeared in *Minotaure* 7, illustrated with photographs by Bellmer and Man Ray. Hans also supplied "a picture-postcard … of seven pubescent girls seated on a tree branch over a stream in the Third Reich spirit of life in the open air."[17] All of them are naked. The juxtaposition is pregnant with productive dissonances—then and now. This was the same issue of *Minotaure* in which Breton first published his "Night of the Sunflower" beneath a photograph of Jacqueline Lamba, also naked, performing at the Coliséum. Éluard was so captivated by *Die Puppe* that he arranged to have it translated into French and it appeared as *La Poupée* in a limited edition of 100 in 1936. Bellmer expressed his gratitude to the poet with *La Poupée, Seconde partie,* a hand-made book containing twelve further photographs of the doll. There was only one copy, which bore the dedication "*exemplaire destiné à Paul Éluard.* HB. 31.XII.35."[18] Photographs of Bellmer's second doll, which he made in 1935, would also find their way into *Minotaure*.[19] Éluard chose fourteen of them in 1938 to accompany his own poems, which he had written to "illustrate" Bellmer's images rather than the other way around. The war intervened and the book did not appear until 1949, when it was published in Paris under the title *Jeux de la poupée* (Games of the Doll). Bellmer's introductory essay "Notes on the Ball-Joint" was more technical, but no less enigmatic, than "Memories of the Doll Theme."[20] At Éluard's suggestion he lovingly hand-tinted his black-and-white photographs with aniline dyes in the manner of the turn-of-the-century postcards of which both men were avid collectors.[21]

A little smaller than her predecessor—she stands about four feet tall, or at least *would* do if her components were put together in the shape of a real human body, which they seldom are—and very

much more flexible, Bellmer's second doll was made of glue and tissue paper, her parts carved and painted to simulate flesh. She revolved around a large central ball that formed the stomach while smaller wooden ball-joints were used to articulate the limbs. Though Bellmer retained the head, hands, and legs from his first doll, he made additional components for her successor, which he combined in ever more imaginative scenarios, photographing them clothed and unclothed, indoors and out, in the kitchen, sitting on the stairs, hanging from doorframes, spread-eagled on the floor (in what some commentators have taken to be a pastiche of the Nazis' swastika), bisected by trees and sprawled over beds, contorting and twisting his creation so that she at one moment consists (only) of opposed pairs of legs and pelvises pivoting around the central ball and at another boasts buttocks (or ball-joints) in place of breasts. This latter interchange was an "axis of reversibility" between "the real and the virtual" which especially fascinated the artist, as he explains in his *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique, ou l'anatomie de l'image* (Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious, or the Anatomy of the Image), a text he had worked on since 1941 that was eventually published in 1957.[22]

Bellmer snapped his doll amid an assortment of props, many of which hark back to childhood—a hoop, a bamboo carpet beater, a spinning top. That carpet beater, which "looms ominously" in the foreground of one of the tableaux in *Jeux de la poupée,* "anticipat[es] a whipping"—says Therese Lichtenstein, once again projecting onto the image a meaning that derives from *her* thoughts.[23] Paul Éluard's accompanying poem has a quite different emphasis: "It's a girl!—Where are her eyes?—It's a girl!—Where are her breasts?—It's a girl!—What is she saying?—It's a girl!—What is she playing?—It's a girl, it is my desire!"[24] But the prominence of the doll's buttocks—two sets of them in this case, both positioned to face the viewer—together with the lurid boudoir pink with which Bellmer has tinted the picture *suggest* Sadean possibilities, even though they are nowhere explicitly portrayed. And suggest—hint, gesture, allude—is exactly what this little minx does, leading us on down this, that or the other slippery

slope of signification but never quite laying her cards on the table. She is nothing if not a flirt. The ensemble of her feminine bits and pieces is often disconcertingly phallic; a not uncommon surrealist device that is taken to poetic heights in the photographs of Brassaï and Man Ray—not to mention Lee Miller and Dora Maar—in which the curves of female backs, necks, and buttocks are staged, lit, and shot to suggest the image of an erect penis.[25]

But Bellmer pushes the envelope further than most, confounding the hard and fast distinctions of *sexe* that undergird the grammar of our subjectivities. One drawing in *Petite anatomie* intertwines a penis with the naked body of a girl in such a way that its head molds itself into the contours of her behind while her breasts double as hanging testicles. "The masculine and the feminine have become interchangeable images," explains Bellmer, "both gravitating toward their amalgamation in the hermaphrodite." This *fillephallus* accompanies a dizzying discussion of a passage in the surrealist poet Joë Bousquet's *Le mal d'enfance*, in which, according to Bellmer, the narrator internally "became the woman he was preparing to possess":

She had allowed him to take obscene photos of her. The sight of these prints and the coincidental provocation supplied by an overly strong dose of cocaine caused the young woman's buttocks to become the predominant image, which became increasingly confused with the image of her heavenly face until the most fleeting expressions on that face became identical with the blind smile of the two immense eyes that were the hemispheres of her rectum opening on her anus. This is where his desire carried him exclusively, confusing the masculine and the feminine, and the self and the Other, and then sodomizing the self in the Other.[26]

Agnès de la Beaumelle and Laure de Buzon-Vallet offer no explanation for their insertion of part of this passage, *without quotation marks*, into their "Chronology" of Bellmer's life and work alongside a mention of the "intimate photographs" Bellmer took of his lover Nora Mitrani on a French beach during "quite an intense week" in July 1947. Maybe it is just a typographical error, but such

a blurring of events and images, dreams and realities does not seem out of place where either the artist or his times are concerned.[27]

More outrageously yet, Belmer's second doll, whose (hairless) vulva is modeled as realistically as Adolf Ziegler might wish, frequently wears nothing but white knee-length socks, which have fallen down around her ankles, and Mary Jane shoes. An obscene compound of innocence and experience, she conjures up the specter of Nabokov's Lolita—or Bataille's unruly Simone, the fifteen-year-old heroine of *The Story of the Eye*. Bellmer was later to illustrate Bataille's text, following in the pornographic footsteps of André Masson (who supplied the illustrations for the first edition of 1928). The book's opening scene inspired one of the German artist's most infamous photographs—a vagina dripping with milk, poised above a plate. "Milk is for the pussy, isn't it?" Simone coyly asks. "Do you dare me to sit in the saucer?" "Then I lay down at her feet without her stirring" the equally young narrator relates, "and for the first time, I saw her 'pink and dark flesh,' cooling in the white milk. We remained motionless, on and on, both of us equally overwhelmed …"[28] Bellmer's babe teases—and transgresses—in exactly the way that Roland Barthes argues Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* does: by yanking our signifying chains.[29] There is nothing intrinsically sexual, after all, about a saucer of milk for the cat; it is only when the milk comes into contact with Simone's "pink and dark flesh" in the linguistic space of Bataille's text that it comes to function as a signifier for semen—a metaphorical equivalence that Bellmer's photograph makes violently graphic.

Even Meret Oppenheim, who achieved equal notoriety in the nineteen-thirties as the author and the subject of erotically charged surrealist art, found Bellmer's doll too much to take. Oppenheim is best known for the vaginal fur-lined cup and saucer that so obsessed T. S. Eliot at the London Surrealist Exhibition in 1936, but three years earlier she had modeled for Man Ray's series *Veiled Erotic.* In the most famous of these

photographs the young Swiss artist poses naked behind the wheel of a printing press whose handle is positioned as if to give her an erect penis. Interrogated on her part in *Veiled Erotic* by an interviewer in *Surrealism and Women*, the 1978 collection that for a while turned the dubious contention that "surrealism … was deeply misogynist" into "a truth universally acknowledged,"[30]Meret agreed that yes, *her* nudity *was* Man Ray's statement, and went on to say, in effect, "But so what?" "It was Man Ray's work," she insisted:[31] *it*—the image—not *she,* the woman,adifferenceon whichshe was as clear as is René Magritte's *Treachery of Images* (which portrays a meticulously painted pipe with the accompanying warning *"Ceci n'est-pas une pipe"*). It says much for the power of Bellmer's art that his images caused even Oppenheim to lose sight of this elementary distinction between signifier and signified. She told Robert Belton in the same interview that Bellmer and Pierre Molinier—another favorite of the surrealists, who liked to photograph himself *en guise de femme,* (un)dressed in fishnet stockings, garters, and stiletto heels, then collage and multiply the resultant images[32]—"mistreated the bodies of their women. But they are cases, psychological cases, perverts. Crazies, you know."[33] What *bodies*, we might well ask—and which *women*?[34]

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It is all too easy to dismiss Bellmer's work as nothing but "female bodies reified, mutated, sodomized, bound, eviscerated,"[35] as many a feminist critic has done. We would do better to ponder the opening line of Paul Éluard's first poem in *Jeux de la poupée,* which goes to the heart of the doll's paradox and power: "Bound, because all that can be said of her confines her, limits her."[36] Nobody could mistake Bellmer's "artificial girl" for anything other than a pure product of the imagination, which expresses and portrays nothing but itself. She is *transparently* constructed. Unlike Oskar Kokoschka, who on opening Hermine Moos's package was "shocked" at his love-doll's "distance from reality"—or Adolf Ziegler, the master of every last straying strand

of pubic hair—Bellmer never sought to produce an artistic facsimile of a real human female. To criticize him for what his images *represent* is to collapse the signifier into the signified—which was exactly what the Nazis did in *Entartete Kunst*. It is also, I would argue, to underestimate Bellmer's art, for his true offense is much more radical. Abandoning all pretense of representation, he reveals the components of his images to be nothing but signifiers—elements, as he says, of a language, which are subject to infinite permutation. The doll's power derives not from her *resemblance* to any body, but from what Jacques Derrida would call her *différance*.[37] She wreaks her havoc by *not* representing us as we imagine ourselves to be, suggesting instead that who we like to think we are is but one possible "anagram" among infinite others.[38] It is not the human body that Bellmer disassembles, deranges, disfigures, and deforms, but the meanings we conventionally ascribe to it.

His doll does not lead us back to any singular signified—least of all a real body—but entices us ever onward into André Breton's "forest of symbols"[39] where the signifiers frolic only with one another, setting up any number of *glissades* to trap the wandering mind. Bellmer frees his signifiers to gambol in hermetic games of unsupervised play and tests their elasticity to the limit. The resulting "sentences," which his camera documents with scrupulous realism, bear no resemblance to anything we ordinarily think of as reality. But this is not to say that they have no connection with it. Because, exactly as happens in dreams, the elements of his "construction documents" continue to carry with them traces of the everyday world from which they are drawn, the outcome is a thoroughly subversive scrambling of meaning in which (to invoke Bataille) "the universe *resembles* nothing and is only formless [*informe*] … something like a spider or spit."[40] This is the same operation of "systematic bewildering" that is at work as in Max Ernst's or Hannah Höch's collages—or, come to that, in Arcimboldo's paintings.[41] But in Bellmer's case the stakes are considerably higher, because the signifiers with which he so wantonly toys are the *points de capiton* of our very identities,

differentiating man and woman, adult and child, buttoning down the most elemental of social classifications in biological differences of *sexe*. This little girl plays ducks and drakes with the law of the father, turning that mythical colossus into a nondescript youth wearing dowdy trousers with a casual flutter of a pink pleat.

Small wonder that she has not always been a welcome guest at dinner parties, least of all in a Europe over which a procession of wannabe primal fathers were bent on stamping their manly authority. Did Bellmer's doll succeed in luring the brute out of his place, in order to confuse him? Maybe. Therese Lichtenstein and Hal Foster both read her plasticity as providing a deliberate challenge to the Nazis' mobilization of hard, neoclassical, and supremely disciplined bodies, both male and female, to construct an Aryan normativity—the "type of a new age" of which Hitler spoke so rapturously at the opening of the *Great German Art Exhibition* in 1938, to whose bright white certainties Otto Mueller's androgynous gypsy girls were as much of an affront as any pornographic caricature by Georg Grosz or Otto Dix.[42] Whatever else Bellmer's "artificial girl" might be, she is the antithesis of the kitsch so beloved of the National Socialist regime, whether in Clement Greenberg's sense of the term ("the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture … vicarious experience and faked sensations")[43] or, perhaps more pertinently here, Milan Kundera's: "the need to gaze into the mirror of the beautifying lie and be moved to tears of gratification at one's own reflection."[44] ""In the realm of kitsch," Kundera writes elsewhere, "the dictatorship of the heart reigns supreme":

Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass!

The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass!

It is the second tear that makes the kitsch kitsch.[45]

Bellmer's doll certainly does not portray our humanity as we

generally like it to be seen. But she does provide a mirror, of a kind, for her times, which is no less revealing than that held up by the unacceptably naked young woman in Klimt's *Nuda Veritas*. Looking into that glass may well provoke tears. Certainly it did when I saw the doll, taken apart and serially reassembled in image after image, in the darkened rooms of the Centre Pompidou in 2006 in a long overdue retrospective of Hans Bellmer's *oeuvre*. My response was, of course, entirely subjective—as is anybody else's. A mere assemblage of wood, paint, and plaster, Bellmer's "artificial girl" *has* no meaning: she can only suggest it, in much the same way as the shapes of the letters of the alphabet provided pretexts for the poems in Vítězslav Nezval's *Abeceda*. What she suggested to me*,* in her infinite variety*,* was the eternal fragility of the human condition; the abject mortality of the flesh we all inhabit, men and women alike, which will always in the end undo and all too often be prematurely undone by the dreams in which we live our lives. Beautiful ideas that kill were at their luminous apogee in the nineteen-thirties, and their beauty was truly convulsive. The doll's endless metamorphoses, which echo those of Hans and his brother when they flitted from being rubber, filth or glass, iron and copper wires to adorable little girls, are the antithesis of Marinetti's "dreamed-of metallization of the human body"—and a suitable riposte to all the boys' own fantasies of Man conquering nature and nurture, selves and circumstances, in which modernity so catastrophically abounds. This is an art for grown-ups who would rather walk by night than pretend they are walking by daylight. Gazing into this mirror will not reassure us that we are the fairest of them all.

For whatever it is worth—and whatever dubious purchase such categories might have on what it is to be human—Hans Bellmer was a masochist transvestite heterosexual who loved his wife Margarete dearly. "I had asked her to marry me," he later said, "because I could not bear her unhappiness the day a doctor found out that her lung was infected."[46] The tuberculosis that was ravaging *her* body was the only reason he stayed on in Germany after 1933. Margarete was admitted to the Birkenhags sanatorium,

terminally ill, in December 1937. To cheer her up Hans wrote a long "Letter for my sick Piü" (his pet-name for her) in a dark blue notebook on whose cover he had pasted a red paper rose. He plied her with collages, using whatever materials were to hand—leaves, chocolate wrappers, sticky labels—found objects distinguished by bad taste, just like those he had intended to display in his first doll's internal panorama. *You and Me* (*Du und Ich*) weaves together a pistol, another red rose, a kitten, and that eternal symbol of the promise of the modern—or maybe it was just a passing dream of *la ville-lumière*—the Eiffel Tower.[47] Margarete died on 16 February 1938. Sometime during the next two weeks Hans made another collage, which he entitled *In Memory of My Wife Margarete*. In its center is a yet another plastic rose above a pearl-handled penknife with one blade open. Surrounding the rose and the knife are eight half-opened matchboxes, filled with the most banal of Proustian mementos: nails, dried grasses, a seashell, a cigarette butt, a dead fly, a glass marble.[48] Then Bellmer finally left for Paris, as his surrealist friends had been urging him to do for years. He took with him nothing but doll parts. By the time he married again in 1942, he was putting his graphic skills at the service of the French resistance as a forger of documents. His second wife Marcelle gave birth to twin daughters, Beatrice and Doriane, a year later. "Doriane totally fulfils the dream I always had of being reincarnated as a little girl," Hans wrote. "*She is me.*"[49]

[1] Kokoschka to Hermine Moos, 20 August 1918, quoted in Frank Whitford, *Oskar Kokoschka: A Life*, London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson 1986, 119-20.

[2] Breton

[3] Ditto, 232

[4] See The Doll, editor's intro. List "influences".

[5] Refs Freud, Hal Foster.

[6] Hans Bellmer (Eng. Cat.), 233.

[7] Bellmer, The Father, in Lichtenstein, 176-7.

[8] Hans Bellmer, interview with Peter Webb, Paris, 15 Jan. 1972, quoted in Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History,* Vol. 1, New York: Phaidon, 106. Compare Little Anatomy, 37-8.

[9] Bellmer, The Doll, 42.

[10] Hand Bellmer (Eng, cat.), 234

[11] Hans Bellmer, the Doll, 40.

[12] Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors,* 29.

[13] Bellmer, The Doll, 40.

[14] I do not believe *any* work of art—or indeed any text—is reducible to any singular "meaning" that can be uncovered by psycho- or any other sort of analysis. For that reason I cannot accept Sue Taylor's premise (she is speaking of Bellmer's images) "like all other representations of the body in our culture, they serve to affirm or legitimate what they describe" (*Hans Bellmer,* 2). The case against analysing art in terms of *representation* or *meaning* (or in my terms, as a signified rather than a signifier) was argued long ago in Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation" (1964), in her *Against Interpretation andOther Essays,* New York: Picador, 2001, 3-14, which ends with the words "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."

[15] Hans Bellmer (Eng. Cat.) 235. <check orig.>

[16] See note 38.

[17] Hans bellmer, Eng, cat., 236 <give Minotaure ref>

[18] Pompidou 2005 show, cat. #234, p. 251.

[19] *Minotaure,* 8 (1936) and 10 (1937). Photos of the second doll

also appeared in *Cahiers d'Art*, 11, 1936, a special number devoted to the surrealist object.

[20] For details see Taylor, *Hans Bellmer*, pp. 212-219. Eluard's accompanying poems may be found in his *Oeuvres complètes,* tome 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, 1005-10.

[21] Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors,* 53. Nostalgia is equally evident in Bellmer's text "Memories of the Doll Theme," the introduction to *Die Puppe* (1934), translated in Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors,* 169-174.

[22] Hans Bellmer, *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image,* Paris: Allia, 2002, 18.

[23] Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors,* 87.

[24] The Doll, 98.

[25] For examples see Foster, "Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography"; Krauss, *Bachelors,* ch. 1.

[26] Bellmer, *Little Anatomy,* 25 (drawing), 28-30 (text).

[27] Pompidou cat, 230.

[28] Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, San Francisco: City Lights, 3-4. While not literal—Simone puns "Les assiettes, c'est fait pour s'asseoir … Je m'assois dans l'assiette"—this translation's play on the double meaning of "pussy" in English perfectly captures the spirit of Bataille's text perfectly. For the original see Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, in Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes,* tome 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1970: 14. Bellmer's photograph is reproduced in Pierre Dourthe, *Bellmer: le principe de perversion,* Paris: Jean-Pierre Faur, 1999, 187, along with many of his other photographs and drawings for *Story of the Eye.*

[29] Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye," in his *Critical Essays,* Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

[30] Krauss, *Bachelors*, 1. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg, *Women and Surrealism,* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991. See especially Kuenzli's essay "Surrealism and Misogyny," 17-26.

[31] Robert J. Belton, "Androgeny: Interview with Méret Oppenheim," in *Women and Surrealism,* 69.

[32] Molinier is discussed and his work illustrated extensively in *féminimasculin: Le sexe de l'art*. André Breton had a large collection of his photographs, which were auctioned along with the rest of Breton's effects in Paris in 2004. The photographs are reproduced in *André Breton: 42 rue Fontaine,* auction catalog, Paris: Calmelscohen, 2004.

[33] Oppenheim interviewed in Belton, "Androgeny," 66.

[34] Krauss.

[35] ref

[36] Bellmer, The Doll, 74.

[37] The pertinent point being that the signifier (word, image) not only *differs* from the signified (idea, concept) but also "*defers*" to other signifiers, so that meaning is never singular or unequivocal. See my "Incognito Ergo Sum: Language, Memory and the Subject," *Theory, Culture and Society,* vol. 21, no. 6, December 2004, 67-89.

[38] For this reason, Krauss has argued, Bellmer's and other surrealists' polymorphous plays with body images might justly be seen as "proto-feminist" in their queering of the authoritative orderings of sexual identities upon which what we take to be "normal" rests.Corpus Delicti, Bachelors.

[39] André Breton, *Mad Love,* Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 87.

[40] Georges Bataille, "Formless," in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind

Krauss, *Formless: a User's Guide,* (New York, Zone, 1997) 5, emphasis added. The original French text, which was first published in *Documents,* is given here also.

[41] Which also fascinated HB.

[42] Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors*; Foster, *Convulsive Beauty*.

[43] Clement Greenberg, "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Collected Essays and Criticism,* ed. John O'Brian, vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 12.

[44] Art of the Novel, 135.

[45] Milan Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 250-1.

[46] Eng. cat. 2006, 232.

[47] ref

[48] ref

[49] Eng cat 2006, 244.