Machinic Desires: Hans Bellmer's Dolls and the Technological Uncanny in Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence.

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Machinic Desires:
Hans Bellmer's Dolls and the Technological Uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*

Steven T. Brown (bio)

> *There are no human beings in* Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence. *The characters are all human-shaped dolls.*
>
> —Oshii Mamoru

One of the most distinctive aspects of *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence,* Oshii Mamoru's 2004 sequel to the highly acclaimed feature-length animation *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), is the film's obsession with the uncanniness of *ningyō* (literally, "human-shaped figures") in the form of dolls, puppets, automata, androids, and cyborgs. In interviews, Oshii has acknowledged the importance of the concept of the uncanny (*unheimlich* in German; *bukimina* in Japanese) and its relation to *ningyō* for an understanding of *Ghost in the Shell 2.*[1] This concern is one that the sequel shares with the first movie, but *Ghost in the Shell 2* goes well beyond the earlier film in the scope of its engagement. Of particular interest is *Ghost in the Shell 2*'s repeated references to the erotic grotesque dolls constructed and photographed by German Surrealist Hans Bellmer (1902–1975). In this essay, I explore *Ghost in the Shell 2*'s intermedial play with various *ningyō* and how such engagements enter into the film's complex evocations of the uncanny at the limits of the human. **[End Page 222]**

Any study of the uncanny must acknowledge at the outset how much it owes to the pioneering efforts of not only Sigmund Freud but also Ernst Jentsch,[2] the earliest writers to analyze the variety of complex phenomena associated with the uncanny and attempt to account for it in psychological and/or psychoanalytic terms. In addition, an enormous amount of critical attention has been given to Freud's essay on "The 'Uncanny'" (1919) by contemporary philosophers, literary theorists, and cultural critics such as Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Sander Gilman, Neil Hertz, Samuel Weber, and Nicholas Royle.[3] In most cases, such post-Freudian readers of the uncanny have focused their analysis on deconstructing Freud's reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1816).[4] In what follows, I am more concerned with discussing the uncanny

as a literary and artistic motif with philosophical implications than I am in the explanatory power of Freudian discourse to account for the psychosexual etiology of the uncanny. In other words, I am less interested in rereading Freud's (mis)reading of "The Sandman," or in critiquing psychoanalytic metanarratives such as the "castration complex" or "death drive," than I am in unpacking the function of the trope of the uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2.* Indeed, I argue that engagements with the uncanny appearing in *Ghost in the Shell 2* should be regarded not so much as Freudian gestures on the part of Oshii as they are byproducts of Oshii's remediation[5] of the dolls of Hans Bellmer, which were explicitly designed to evoke the uncanny on many levels: more specifically, in terms of the repetition of déjà vu, the blurring of boundaries between life and death, animate and inanimate, and the doppelgänger. What binds together all of these instances of the uncanny is that in each case, the uncanny evokes a sense of unfamiliarity at the heart of the familiar, a feeling of unhomeliness in the home, an estrangement of the everyday. The defamiliarizations produced by the uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2* work to destabilize our assumptions about what it means to be human in a posthuman world and how we might relate to all the *ningyō* with whom we increasingly share the world.

"Once Their Strings Are Cut, They Easily Crumble"

In his essay "From Wooden Cyborgs to Celluloid Souls: Mechanical Bodies in Anime and Japanese Puppet Theater," Christopher Bolton points out the strong analogy in the first *Ghost in the Shell* movie between cyborgs and traditional Japanese puppet performance (*ningyō jōruri*) with respect to "the **[End Page 223]** divide between body and voice" that is "foregrounded by the ventriloquistic medium of animation."[6] There is no question that puppet-like characters and the division of body and voice are also important to the world of…

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