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**SOFTCORE SURREALISM: INSERTING HANS
BELLMER'S *THE DOLL* INTO THE HISTORY OF
PORNOGRAPHY, 2020**

By
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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR ARTS**

**FIRST READER: PROFESSOR MACNAUGHTON, SCRIPPS
COLLEGE
SECOND READER: PROFESSOR NAKAUE, SCRIPPS COLLEGE**

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Introduction: Finding *The Doll*

A girl is cornered with her back to the viewer—her half-bare head peers in your direction overlooking an unfinished shoulder. The sorrowful expression of her pale face gives way to the evermore mysterious condition of her body. A thin, white garment clothing her torso exposes her buttocks and two makeshift legs (one rendered realistically out of plaster; the other a simple wooden rod). Masses of black, disheveled hair protrude from her head and grace her lower back, reflecting the darkness of her shadow upon the grey wall. She is a doll, an artificial body, crudely constructed and placed in the corner of an unknown location.

The photograph in question is a small black-and-white gelatin silver print situated alongside nine other photographs of the same perplexing subject; bound in an artist's book entitled *The Doll* (*Die Puppe, La Poupée*).¹ German Surrealist photographer Hans Bellmer (1902-1975) anonymously published his first project, *The Doll*, in 1934 in the town of Karlsruhe, Germany. Two years later, in 1936, Bellmer published a revised edition of the book in Paris, France under the title *La Poupée*. Bellmer's first edition, *Die Puppe*, has been largely lost over the course of history. From the few copies that remain it appears this slim book contained a short introduction by Bellmer entitled "Memories of the Doll Theme", three illustrations, and ten black-and-white photographs of the doll in varying states of assemblage. The book, an art object in its own right, functioned as a photographic archive of the doll Bellmer modeled after his young cousin, Ursula

¹See Figures 4a and 5b. Unfortunately, personal photographs taken during study of both copies of the book, *Die Puppe* and *La Poupée*, could not be included in this thesis due to copyright regulations. The Images included are the same plates, but have been photographed from different copies of the books.

Naguschewski. However, this description fails to acknowledge the uncertainties, the mystifying elements of *The Doll* and its history.

Sitting down with a copy of the book in the 21st century requires access to a special collection or museum research library such as The Getty Center in Los Angeles, California.² In The Getty Research Institute *La Poupée* is miles away from its original home, the book is separated from its historical, geographic, and artistic context. Under the careful watch of library specialists, one can turn the pages—feel and smell the paper, look at the original photographic plates. In this setting of the Santa Monica Mountains, *La Poupée* loses the intimacy and radicality it may have possessed in 1930s France, but it allows the reader to interpret the text uninhibited by historically informed presumptions. The construction and presentation of Bellmer's *La Poupée* differs from his original publication, *Die Puppe*, primarily in its representation of the photographs as Surrealist high art as opposed to underground pornography. *Die Puppe* was straightforward and simplified in its representation of the controversial images whereas *La Poupée* was greatly influenced by Bellmer's newfound association with the French Surrealists. Often overlooked, the subtle choices of paper, jacket design, size, and editioning are crucial to the understanding of *The Doll* in all its forms. This thesis will delve into these subtleties and argue that the book's primary intention was to be pornographic and sadistic in its depiction of violence against the female body. Bellmer used visual cues resembling late 19th and early 20th century pornography alongside his photographs of the doll to draw the connection between *The Doll's* content and pornographic material of his era. The

²Copies of *Die Puppe* (in varying condition) are held in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, The New York Public Library, amongst other institutions internationally. A couple copies of *La Poupée* are held in California in the collections of The Getty and The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

following chapters will explore Bellmer's background, the construction of his doll, the publication history of the book, and the book's reception in the 20th and 21st centuries. By examining the construction and publication of the German and French editions of *The Doll*, the influence of France's international erotica trade on Bellmer's project will be revealed.

Opening the Getty's protective book cover, the reader is met with a small book bound in yellow book cloth and wrapped in waxed paper. The cover reads "*La Poupée*" along with Bellmer's name in simple black ink, boxed by a wavy, dotted outline.³ Handling the book is akin to the small, round cookies passed out on some United flights; slim, slightly pliable, and all together underwhelming until you get to the filling. The mere 30 or so pages of the book manage to create an experience so intimate it is as if the artist published his personal diary. The pages are unevenly bound, some unopened even after years sitting in this collection.⁴ A library attendant takes the book away and brings it back a few minutes later, pages freshly cut open to reveal the copy's unseen text of "Memories of the Doll Theme". Photographic prints of Bellmer's doll are collaged onto the yellowing wood pulp pages at the back of the book. Clearly, it was not made with the goal of archival quality.

The reader must first thumb through the baby pink pages containing the colophon, title pages, and French translation of "Memories of the Doll Theme", followed by pages of ink bled text and an illustration before reaching the real substance of the work.

³See Figure 11b. The photograph of SF MOMA's copy of *La Poupée* included in the figures indicates their book does not have the same wax paper covering as The Getty's copy of the same book. For reference, the waxed paper gave a slight white cast to the cover of the book.

⁴Unopened refers to the state of the leaflets intentionally being left closed by the printer along the top edge, allowing the first reader to cut them open. According to the assistants at The Getty Research Library, this is a common request by viewers of their rare books.

However, the fading paper and crude execution of the moveable type are a reminder of the book's respective time period, printed decades ago in a country stricken by financial hardship and the promise of war. If you are a French reader you may attempt Robert Valancay's translation of Bellmer's essay "Memories of the Doll Theme"; although the convoluted text is difficult enough to follow in one's native language. Bellmer meanders through his thought process and the obsession with young girls that led to the creation of the doll itself, but loses you in his obscured language. In the end, "Memories of the Doll Theme" is much like the articles accompanying the racy photographs of a *Playboy* Magazine—a justification and scapegoat for possessing pornography under prying eyes.

You flip the page and are met with a strange illustration. It has been printed upside down, but upon turning the book one can make out the form of a female torso. A single eye peers into the open cavity of the abdomen to find a panoramic viewing device. An illustrated hand presses the nipple of the torso's breast, presumably to operate the voyeuristic device. You quickly turn the page again. Then the artwork is found; yellow pages enveloped in the fleshy, girlish pink of the surrounding signatures, on which Bellmer captures the doll in a series of staged images. In some she is highlighted as the manifestation of a living girl, but others devolve into still lives of her fragmented body parts swathed in lacy fabrics, what Bellmer called "anagrams of the body".⁵

Many of Bellmer's *tableaux vivants* may read as pornographic to the typical viewer, but have largely maintained the classification of high-art amongst art historians, critics, and curators. The pornographic elements of his work have been addressed in

⁵Therese Lichtenstein. 1991. "The Psychological and Political Implications of Hans Bellmer's Dolls in the Cultural and Social Context of Germany and France in the 1930s." Dissertation. City University of New York. 6.

previous scholarly work; but are usually glossed over for the purpose of dispelling the very association with pornography. Here is where the scholarship on Bellmer splits into camps; those who excuse Bellmer's pornographic elements, those who deny their existence all together, and those that take issue with the pornographic elements, but do not study this association any further. The authors Peter Webb and Robert Short addressed pornographic claims against Bellmer in their 1985 publication, *Hans Bellmer*, by attributing the sexual imagery to Surrealist sexual exploration; acknowledging the existence of pornographic elements, but not taking issue with them.⁶ Authors Rosalind Krauss and Therese Lichtenstein have taken issue with accusations of misogyny against Bellmer's work. Krauss has refuted allegations of misogyny against Bellmer and Surrealism as a whole.⁷ Similarly, Lichtenstein claimed in her 1991 dissertation that "Bellmer's images complicate and interrupt traditional binary oppositions of gender, or more specifically of spectatorship as it is conditioned by gender", citing Krauss's as an ally in opinion.⁸ However, Krauss also received backlash for her sympathetic reading of Bellmer's dolls from Rudolf E. Keunzli.⁹ More recently, Sue Taylor has discussed Bellmer's personal appreciation for pornography and the sexually graphic nature of his later works of the 1940s through the 1960s; but does not draw the connection between pornography and his early dolls.¹⁰ These opinions will be further discussed in the following literature review. This thesis branches from these camps into a direct comparison of Bellmer's doll and *The Doll* to pornography of the early 20th century;

⁶Peter Webb, Robert Short, and Hans Bellmer. 1985. *Hans Bellmer*. London: Quartet Books. 12.

⁷Rosalind E Krauss, et al. *L'amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism*. Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985. 95.

⁸Lichtenstein (1991), 36.

⁹Rudolf E. Kuenzli "Surrealism and Misogyny." *Dada/Surrealism* 18 (1990): 17-26. 25.

¹⁰Sue Taylor. 2000. *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. "Chapter 9: The Resort to Perversion".

taking issue with how this connection has been ignored previously and discussing how the artwork can be approached with this new interpretation.

The photographs and exploitative artistic process of Bellmer's *The Doll* border on the simulation of child pornography. Furthermore, knowledge of Bellmer's extensive collection and interest in late 19th century and early 20th century pornography strengthens the argument that *The Doll* was intended to be pornographic.¹¹ This thesis will examine how *The Doll* as a whole falls in line with the aesthetics and distribution of pornography in the early 20th century. The following text will follow Bellmer's life, the documentation of Bellmer's affinity for young girls, visual pornographic cues present in the book, and his reputation for unrepressed sexual expression amongst his fellow artists. All things considered, the shock value of Bellmer's pubescent photographs has sustained their relevance, but how would people of the 1930s respond to the work? Who was Bellmer's intended audience, and how does the book itself inform this inquiry? The impenetrability of Bellmer's intention permeates through Bellmer scholarship, but the extent of visual connection between *The Doll* and the early pornography of Europe has not yet been explored.¹²

¹¹Taylor (2000), 168.

¹²Historian Therese Lichtenstein briefly notes in *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* that "Bellmer's eroticized double images replicate the poses of some contemporaneous and turn-of-the-century postcards" and notes the visual similarity between a specific drawing by the artist and a pornographic postcard from the artist's collection. She does not pursue this similarity further. (73, 74).

Critical Reception: Who has explored *The Doll*?

Opinion of Hans Bellmer's work has varied greatly since its debut in the mid-1930s. Few and far between major texts have been published on the artist in the past 85 years; however, a synopsis of this literature outlines the trajectory towards an ever more critical reading of the artist. Monographs discussing Bellmer's work in depth have been published by Sarane Alexandrian in 1975, Peter Webb and Robert Short in 1985, Sue Taylor in 2000, Therese Lichtenstein in 2001, and Michael Semff and Anthony Spira in 2006.¹³ Several exhibition catalogues of major exhibitions on Bellmer were published in the mid-to-late 20th century, particularly in the 1970s towards the end of the artist's life.¹⁴

Starting with *The Doll*'s arrival in France, the photographs were well received by the primarily male assemblage of Paris Surrealists with the support of their figurehead, André Breton (1896-1966). Bellmer's tendency towards brutality and sexual expression aligned with the Surrealists' idolization of the philosophers Marquis de Sade and Sigmund Freud. Prior to the French publication of *The Doll* in 1936, Bellmer's photographs and illustrations were featured in the December issue of French Surrealist magazine *Minotaure* in 1934. The two-page spread entitled "Doll: Variations on the Montage of an Articulated Minor" featured 18 photographs of his doll, many of which he

¹³This list may not be exhaustive, but the authors listed here have published major and respected monographs on Bellmer.

¹⁴Major exhibitions of Bellmer's work were held at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1975, The Lerner-Misrachi Gallery in 1972, The Ubu Gallery in 1974, Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts in 1990, and the Centre national d'art contemporain in 1971 to name a few.

did not include in his own publications.¹⁵ Several of the country's exhibitions presented Bellmer's work alongside his fellow Surrealists. His presence in the 1936 and 1938 International Surrealist Expositions in Paris further secured his position within the Surrealist group. Bellmer's disturbing imagery of the artificial girl illustrated Salvador Dali's "Honor to the Object!" in 1936 at the Galerie Charles Ratton and blended seamlessly into the "Corridor of Mannequins" at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in 1938.¹⁶ This precedence, however, was limited in the first quarter of the 20th century to the confines of France—only a singular drawing of Bellmer's was featured in the seminal exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1936: *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*.¹⁷

From 1939 to 1940 Bellmer was interned at Camp des Milles in the south of France, a camp dominated by controversial artists and academics, alongside fellow German artist Max Ernst.¹⁸ During the war years Bellmer maintained residence in France and his relationship with the Surrealists. In the 1940s and 1950s Bellmer was featured regularly in exhibitions at museums and galleries, including Surrealist group exhibitions. In 1942 he was featured in New York City's exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition*, in 1944 he was exhibited at a bookshop in Toulouse from October to

¹⁵The term "minor" is used here; however, it is worth noting the age of consent in Germany had been 14 since at least the 1880s by Bellmer's publication in 1934. Similarly, the age of consent had been 13 since the 1880s in France by his subsequent publication in 1936 (Stephen Robertson, "Age of Consent Laws," in *Children and Youth in History*, Item #230, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/items/show/230> (accessed March 31, 2020).); Sue Taylor. 1996. "Hans Bellmer in the Art Institute of Chicago: The Wandering Libido and the Hysterical Body." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 22 (2): 151.

¹⁶Bruce Altshuler. 1994. *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*. New York: Abrams. 120-124.; James D. Herbert. 1998. *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 124-129.

¹⁷Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), and Georges Hugnet. 1968. *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. Edited by Alfred H Barr. Reprint ed. New York: Published for the Museum of Modern Art by Arno Press. 265, 266.

¹⁸Taylor (2000), 203.; "Les Milles Camp." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/les-milles-camp>. 21 April 2020.

November, and in 1947 at an exhibition at Galerie du Luxembourg from March to April.¹⁹ After World War Two, Bellmer was included in the International Surrealist Exhibition in Saarbrücken, Germany (1951). Bellmer altered his art style drastically in post-war years, opting to depict human flesh over that of his artificial creations. Taylor argues this is Bellmer's point of departure from erotic to pornographic work, noting Bellmer's return to anonymity for his pornographic illustrations of Georges Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* in 1947.²⁰ However, this thesis will argue pornography was relevant to his work from the beginning of his career starting with his first project, *The Doll*.

Elements of sadism and torture are evident in Bellmer's portrayal of his doll as an object to be dismembered. These violent tropes continued throughout his career and amplified after his publication of *The Doll* in the 1930s. From the late 1940s to the 1960s Bellmer graphically photographed the body; bound and unbound, engaged in sexual activity.²¹ Since the era of his first doll, the 1930s, Bellmer's work had become increasingly explicit in its exploitation of the female body. Graduating from bodies of plaster and wood, Bellmer used the body of his partner, Unica Zürn (1916-1970), to articulate his sexual fantasies. Throughout their relationship, up until her eventual suicide, Bellmer photographed Zürn's body bound in string, distorted by the camera perspective into something hardly resembling the human body. One such photograph, *Unica Bound*, graced the cover of the fourth issue of the magazine *Le Surréalisme, Même* in 1958.

¹⁹This information is cited in an extensive timeline by Sue Taylor in *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*, 203-205.

²⁰Ibid., 170,171.

²¹For further discussion of this artistic period read "The Resort to Perversion" in Sue Taylor's *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*, 168-199.

Outside of the Surrealist hub of Paris Bellmer's work, whose pornographic and violent imagery was increasingly blatant, received wary praise in the mid-century. Famed art dealer Robert Fraser planned to exhibit Bellmer's engravings of the Marquis De Sade in 1966 at his London Gallery (Robert Fraser Gallery), but abandoned the project shortly before its scheduled opening for fear of prosecution.²² The erotic images of the infamous French philosopher were more prone to censorship on the grounds of obscenity in England than sexually liberated France. Bellmer was, however, represented in the New York Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage* in 1968. Three of his doll sculptures from the late 1930s were included, and he received a paragraph of recognition in art scholar William S. Rubin's exhibition catalogue for the show.²³ In his catalogue, Rubin acknowledges the violence and erotic nature of Bellmer's depiction of the disassembled doll in *The Doll*; referring to the doll itself as a "fetish-object".²⁴ Bellmer's representation in the exhibition guaranteed his exposure not only in New York City, but in Chicago and Los Angeles during the exhibition's tour from July to December of 1968. Furthermore, his involvement in the late Surrealist show suggests he maintained ties with the movement into the latter part of his career.

Despite the increasingly pornographic progression of his work, Bellmer's earlier artwork was successfully shown in a few small-scale solo shows in America after

²²Terry Southern. 'The Show That Never Was'. *Art and Artists*. vol. i. no. 8 (Nov. 1966), 11. as cited in Chris Beckett. "J. G. Ballard's 'Crash! A Science Theatre Presentation for the ICA': The Context of a Document Newly Discovered". *Electronic British Library Journal*. 2019. 21.

²³William S. Rubin, Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), Los Angeles County Museum, and Art Institute of Chicago. *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968. 151, 230.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 151.

his failed London show. For example, New York's Lerner-Misrachi Gallery showed *Hans Bellmer: 25 years of graphic work, drawings & prints 1942-1967* in 1972. Shortly after his death in February of 1975, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art showed *Hans Bellmer: Drawings and Sculpture* from May to June of that year, bringing Bellmer's reputation in America out of the group setting of Surrealist artists.²⁵ This debut of Bellmer's work on American soil in the middle of the century spurred the art historical critique of his artwork outside of a purely European context in the coming years. An English translation of French art critic Sarane Alexandrian's *Hans Bellmer* was first published in the United States in 1975, bringing his critique of the "transcendental voyeur", Alexandrian's description for Bellmer's probing of the female body, to an American audience.²⁶

Art historians in the latter half of the 20th century continued a general acceptance of Hans Bellmer's work despite his obscurity outside of Europe, but a reckoning with his content began to take form. In the years following his death in 1975 two retrospective exhibitions were held in Paris: *Hommage à Hans Bellmer* at the Galerie André Francois Petit in 1976 and *Hans Bellmer, Photographe* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1983. However, the British art historians Peter Webb and Robert Short claimed in their 1985 book, *Hans Bellmer*, that the artist had not yet received the recognition in Britain and America that he deserved. Webb and Short used this platform to increase the artist's exposure in English speaking countries, as none of Bellmer's work had yet been majorly exhibited or published in English to their liking by the 1980s.²⁷

²⁵*Hans Bellmer Drawings and Sculpture*. Museum of Contemporary Art. Chicago. May 2nd to June 22nd. 1975.

²⁶Hans Bellmer and Sarane Alexandrian. 1975. *Hans Bellmer*. New York: Rizzoli. 22.

²⁷Peter Webb, Robert Short, and Hans Bellmer. 1985. *Hans Bellmer*. London: Quartet Books. 11.

Furthermore, Webb and Short alleged that Bellmer's work had been ignored due to a misreading of his erotic images by "feminist circles".²⁸ The historians supported this claim of misreading by attributing Bellmer's pornographic images of pubescent dolls to exploration of "sexual fantasy" as opposed to nefarious depictions of pedophilia or sexual exploitation.²⁹ Webb and Short's offhand reference to "feminist circles" and their supposed ignorant critique of Bellmer's work proves particularly questionable upon further research.

Is it the case that leading scholars in the 1980s took issue with Bellmer's content? In 1985 Rosalind Krauss, prominent critic during the feminist art movement, and Jane Livingston published *L'Amour Fou Photography and Surrealism* to accompany their corresponding exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.. As Rudolf Kuenzli notes in 1990, in her essay for the book, "Corpus Delicti", Krauss mentions Bellmer's doll with no reference to misogyny.³⁰ In fact, her take on Bellmer's work, and male Surrealists as a whole, is rather indulgent. She even claims "frequent characterizations of Surrealism as antifeminist seem to [her] to be mistaken".³¹ In other words, the feminist critique Webb and Short referred to does not apply to Rosalind Krauss, one of the few female, English speaking art historians critiquing Hans Bellmer at the time. Nonetheless, Webb and Short's *Hans Bellmer* served as a much-needed biographical text on the artist—exploring his life and career from 1902 to his death in

²⁸Ibid., 11.

²⁹Ibid., 12.

³⁰For a reading of Krauss see Keunzli

³¹Rosalind E Krauss et. Al., 95.

1975, and boldly defending the controversial nature of his oeuvre. In their conclusion they touched on the reputation of the artist by stating:

Since Bellmer's death in 1975, there has hitherto been published no major study of his life and work, although he has been given his place in written surveys of surrealist art and has also been the subject of short monographs and critical evaluations....The Centre Pompidou held the most important recent exhibition...in 1983-4. This was given serious attention in French and German periodicals but largely ignored or dismissed as 'grubby mackintosh art' in the British press. Bellmer's reputation as an erotic artist is by no means universally established, and there remains a touch of condescension in much of the tribute which he has received. He is admired but with a knowing wink by many critics who wish to disassociate themselves from the artist's dubious propositions...his preference for the 'lesser' media of engraving, drawing, and photography, his choice to colour drawings rather than paint in colour, all attribute to his dismissal as a purveyor of superior erotica to a fastidious but suspect clientele, or as an obsessive at the mercy of unrealizable sexual drives.³²

This excerpt is crucial to understanding Bellmer's position in the art historical canon entering the shifting ideologies of the 21st century. Overall, Webb and Short's text reads as a vehement defense of Bellmer's work against claims of pedophilia or attempts at censorship. In their advocacy for Bellmer's relevance in America, they discredited the very themes that make the artist's work notable.

Nearing the turn of the century, the feminist critique Webb and Short referred to gained influence. In 1990 Rudolf E. Kuenzli fiercely rebutted Krauss's interpretation of Bellmer's work and "adoption of the male gaze" in his essay "Surrealism and Misogyny".³³ Kuenzli notes Krauss's blindness to the constant objectification of the female body by Bellmer and his peers and attributes her "female misogyny" to her

³²Short and Webb, 314.

³³Kuenzli, 25.

acceptance of Freudian and Surrealist theory.³⁴ More substantial criticism of Bellmer occurred more recently. American art historian Sue Taylor published *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* in 2000. The following year, 2001, fellow art historian Therese Lichtenstein completed a companion text, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*, for her curated exhibition of Bellmer's work at the International Photography Center in New York City.³⁵ The addition of two more female perspectives to the literature on Bellmer provided a departure from the predominantly male study, and two substantial ones at that. One of the reviews by Susan Rubin Suleiman on the back cover of Taylor's book reads: "...Taylor combines a balanced, generally sympathetic discussion of Bellmer's work with a feminist critical perspective; her commentaries on individual works are nuanced, never shrill or simplistic."³⁶ At this point in the critical study of Bellmer's work, the feminist critique was discreet, as initial criticisms to the status quo typically are. Taylor asserted in her introduction that her opinion of Bellmer's work differed greatly from that of Webb and other "apologists" of his art. She acknowledged the misogyny apparent in his work, but chose to write from a place of curiosity instead of disparagement.³⁷ Compared to Webb's seminal text, Taylor's explores the emotional and psychological explanations for Bellmer's pornographic artwork. Using Freudian psychoanalysis, paired with her account of Bellmer's family life and history, Taylor delved into the aspects of Bellmer's artwork that were not fueled by lust or sexual fantasy. Taylor's acknowledgment of Bellmer's apparent neuroses, and their

³⁴Ibid., 25.

³⁵Therese Lichtenstein, and International Center of Photography. *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*. The Discovery Series, 9. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

³⁶Susan Rubin Suleiman, Harvard University, as quoted in Sue Taylor. 2000. *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

³⁷Ibid., 3.

manifestation in his artwork, facilitates discussion of his work. Furthermore, it encourages a multifaceted interpretation. Castration anxiety, scopophilia, and hatred of the father figure are just a few of the concepts explored by Taylor as possible motives for Bellmer's pornographic images.

This psychoanalytic interpretation is paramount in recent study of Bellmer, overtaking direct visual analysis of the work itself. Perhaps the most prolific Bellmer-historian in recent years, is Therese Lichtenstein, whose extension of her doctoral dissertation, *Behind Closed Doors* (2001), examines the relationship between Bellmer's early work (drawings, engravings, and *The Doll*) and his home country of Germany. She finds the correlation between the rise of the Nazi Regime and the German publication of *The Doll* inherently meaningful, and claims Bellmer's photographs of a mutilated body are intentionally in direct opposition to the Aryan ideals of Nazism: white, blue-eyed, and blonde.³⁸ According to Lichtenstein, by depicting the imperfect female body he subverts the aesthetic standards imposed by the Nazi Regime. She supports this claim with Bellmer's documented Anti-Nazism and imprisonment at Camp des Milles in 1939.³⁹ Alongside this interpretation of Bellmer's career, Lichtenstein provides brief descriptions and visual analyses of an array of Bellmer's photographs and illustrations, without independently addressing the bodies of work in much detail. Lichtenstein's insistence that Bellmer's artwork is fueled by Anti-Nazism begs the question: Can Bellmer's work be viewed from a singular perspective? The photograph of Bellmer's doll described earlier evokes several responses upon first view: disgust, melancholy, and

³⁸Therese Lichtenstein, and International Center of Photography. 2001. *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*. The Discovery Series, 9. Berkeley: University of California Press. Whole book.

³⁹Ibid., 6.

intrigue among them. Furthermore, the doll's deconstructed, mutilated appearance harkens back to the butchery witnessed during World War One; missing limbs and disjointed bodies had been a trope in European art during the interwar period. Bellmer could have been referring to the mangled bodies of the first war alongside Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) and Heinrich Hoerle (1895-1936) as opposed to defying the Nazi ideal of the Third Reich, or simply exploring his sexual urges made evident in "Memories of the Doll Theme". The texts by Webb and Short, Taylor, and Lichtenstein attempt to parse through these responses and interpretations and dictate to the readers which viewpoint they should validate.

With this in mind, literature relating to Bellmer is notably lacking in direct analysis of his individual works, such as the German and French publications of *The Doll*. Webb and Short, Taylor, and Lichtenstein give in-depth analyses of Bellmer's oeuvre, but the ability for the typical reader to envision *The Doll* as a comprehensive art object in addition to the individual photographs is hindered by a lack of exhaustive visual description. Lichtenstein supplies a few pages of description of *The Doll's* German edition, but leaves the reader with unanswered questions. Who owned these books and why? What did the book feel like in their hands? What do the photographs look like on the page? In reality, an exhaustive description of *The Doll* is nearly impossible due to its multiple publications and its declaration as degenerate art by the Nazi Regime. The exact number of German editions made remains unknown and few copies have survived. Even the copies held by major institutions, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, have a murky sense of authenticity. Former chief curator of The Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Riva Castleman, claimed a majority of the surviving German copies (entitled

Die Puppe) are conglomerates of pages found after the fall of Nazi Germany since the book was declared “degenerate” and largely destroyed.⁴⁰ The original format of the book was not used in its French (entitled *La Poupée*) or English (entitled *The Doll*) publications. In fact, the format and content of the book changed so drastically through each publication in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1960s that each version is commonly referred to as a separate entity.

English readers of *The Doll* are limited to a translation based on the 1962 German publication. The translated book, accredited to the Goethe Institut Internationales translator Malcolm Green, includes heavy editing of the original copy made by Gerhardt Verlag in collaboration with Hans Bellmer. Text has been added and subtracted, the included photographs have changed along with the size and paper used.⁴¹ The stark white, digitally printed pages decontextualize the original text; echoing the effects of the White Cube aesthetic on exhibited artwork. By altering these aspects of the original book the tone is entirely changed. In this way, it is very difficult to get a sense of the book’s original artistic intention, or an understanding of the experience of reading the book itself. Viewing the photographs separately from the book itself robs the work of its coherence in the same way a performance loses its impact on a digital screen. The book is necessary in the contextualization of Bellmer’s photographic oeuvre, and is essential to form a fully informed interpretation.

In the following pages, two copies of *The Doll* will be explored in great detail in both their objectivity and content: the 54th edition of the 1936 French publication housed

⁴⁰Riva Castleman. 1994. *A Century of Artists Books*. The Museum of Modern Art: Distributed by H.N. Abrams. 186.

⁴¹Hans Bellmer, Malcolm Green, and AHRC Research Centre for Studies of Surrealism and its Legacies. 2005. *The Doll*. Atlas Anti-Classics, 14. London: Atlas Press. 9-10.

at The Getty Institute in Los Angeles and artist Yves Tanguy's copy of the 1934 German publication (rebound by Georges Leroux in 1963) housed by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.⁴² By studying these two earliest publications of the book, the content and composition of *The Doll* in both its editions will be compared to analyze the artist's artistic intention. Faithfully describing *The Doll* in both its original and current context, providing background on its creation and publication, and delineating its reception over the past 85 years will pave the way for questioning what *The Doll* is and how it should, or can, be experienced. The book and its photographs are on view and in collections at museums and galleries around the world—what do we see in them, and how do these visual clues add up and what do they say when viewed together?

⁴²To see Representations of these respective copies of *The Doll* refer to the figure sequences provided following the bibliography. Each sequence gives the photographs in their correct order and supplies an image of the edition's cover.

Chapter 1: Construction of the Doll and Creation of the Book

What are the differences between these two editions of *The Doll*, and why does this difference matter? The two editions straddle dramatically different contexts in their publication. On one hand, the 1934 German edition, *Die Puppe*, was published with little recognition in Bellmer's home country of Germany from critics and other artists. On the other, the 1936 French edition, *La Poupée*, bears a relationship with Surrealist books by André Breton, Man Ray, Paul Eluard, and others. In the two years between their respective publications, Bellmer modified the book in content and form. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's copy of the rebound German edition from 1934 is not a full expression of Bellmer's original artist's book due to its drastic alterations, but it does supply an understanding of the project's genesis in comparison to the French edition held at the Getty Institute. Both books are small in scale and simplified in their presentation; however they leave the viewer with two different impressions. Whereas *La Poupée*, at times, presents the doll as a sculptural, engineered object; *Die Puppe* asserts a humanistic, erotic intention for the reception of the doll.⁴³ This difference is achieved through slight variations in the photographs included and their ordering.⁴⁴ The root of this revision is unknown, but Bellmer's time in Paris surely had an impact on his thinking

⁴³This difference in presentation is best exemplified by the exclusion and inclusion of two photographs between the German and French editions. The German edition from 1934 excludes the photograph of the doll's parts laid out in preparation for construction (photograph 4) which is later included in the French edition from 1936. Conversely, the German edition includes another negative of the doll in a nearly complete form (photograph 5) which is excluded in the French edition.

⁴⁴This refers to Bellmer's replacement of figure 5a in *Die Puppe* with figure 4b in *La Poupée*.

during this transitional period . His appreciation for the Surrealist artists he encountered is well documented; namely, his newly developed friendship with poet Paul Eluard.⁴⁵ This alignment of his ideals with those of the Surrealists would have reinforced his interest in pornographic and sadistic content as well as the formalistic progression of *The Doll*. The Paris Surrealists idolized Freudian theory and the Marquis De Sade; two figures who promoted the male-centric sexual freedom Bellmer would be ridiculed for in Nazi Germany. The Sade's sadistic writings on sex and Freud's normalization of childhood sexuality tie strongly to Bellmer's sexual portrayal of dismembered young girls. Rape and sexual violence were normalized within the writings and life of the Sade, while pedophilia and sexual deviance were defended by Freud's controversial theories.

What prompted Bellmer to pursue these pornographic and violent themes in both editions of *The Doll*, and what does the book say about his expressive intent? Tracing back to the origins of the book, *The Doll* developed out of a highly traumatizing point in Bellmer's life. To understand the book as it exists in later editions one must recognize its source. 1933, the year before *Die Puppe*'s publication, marked the official beginning of Nazi control in Germany upon the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany by German President Paul Von Hindenburg. Polish-born Hans Bellmer lived in Berlin at this time with his wife, Margarete Schnell, and surrounded by his family. His wife had been diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1931, a disease which caused great anxiety for Bellmer and would later lead to her untimely death in 1938. The next year his young cousin, Ursula Naguschewski (birth and death unknown), moved with her mother to

⁴⁵Paul Eluard and Bellmer would later collaborate together to publish *Les Jeux de La Poupée* in 1949, a collection of Bellmer's doll photography and Eluard's prose. (Hubert Renée Riese. *Surrealism and the Book*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.).

Berlin after her father's death; forming a close attachment with the artist.⁴⁶ This cocktail of life changes coincided with a monumental shift in Bellmer's career. He worked briefly as a typographer, book jacket designer, and book illustrator before opening his own design agency, but by 1933 Bellmer renounced any work which would benefit the Regime he so strongly disagreed with and closed his agency in protest.⁴⁷ Breaking from this commercial past at the rise of the Nazi Regime, Bellmer pursued more personal art based on his own artistic sensibilities. Only a few years earlier he had begun drawing pubescent girls; some based on real young girls he made off with from a nearby orphanage while others drew heavy inspiration from toy baby dolls.⁴⁸ Albeit immensely sexually emphasized in their nudity and posing, these comparatively innocent drawings of girlish toys precluded the tactile doll he created and photographed in 1934 for *Die Puppe*. The influence of these early drawings is directly seen in the two linocut illustrations that accompany the text in both editions: an imaginative rendering of a heart, a sketch for an unrealized photo-viewing attachment for the doll, and a child's handprint.⁴⁹

Construction of Bellmer's doll can largely be attributed to his cousin Ursula's arrival in Berlin. Her influence on the project is commemorated in the 1934 German publication by a dedication alongside the title page: "Für Ursula N.". Accounts of Ursula's age at her arrival in Berlin vary from barely 15 to 17, on the border between pubescence and young adulthood; narrowly fitting into Bellmer's developing fantasy of

⁴⁶It is important to remember Bellmer would have been in his 30s during this period.

⁴⁷Krauss et. Al., 195; Taylor (2000), 201.

⁴⁸Taylor (2000), 29, 26-39.

⁴⁹ Images of these illustrations could not be included, but can be viewed on various auction websites such as Christie's and Sotheby's.

young girls.⁵⁰In 1930s Berlin, the lines between being a “minor”, the term used in Bellmer’s title of his doll photographs for *Minotaure*, and a sexually available being were blurred by the regularity of child prostitution.⁵¹ However, outside of Berlin pedophilia was not as accepted.⁵² Ursula’s status as a cousin by blood increased her unattainability for the artist; adding the taboo of incest on top of Bellmer’s pedophilic interests, not to mention extramarital attraction. Due to the discrepancies over Ursula’s age it is difficult to categorize Bellmer’s sexual interest in her as pedophilic. However, her young age by comparison to his own and her general unattainability reflect his documented attraction to pubescent girls. As to the realization of this relationship, Peter Webb flippantly remarked in *Hans Bellmer* that Ursula “took a great delight in flirting with [Bellmer]” and “had exercised a sexual fascination over him”, but there is no actual evidence of a physical relationship between the two.⁵³ It appears as though the doll functioned more as a substitute for Ursula and his pedophilic thoughts rather than a manifestation of their relationship; an outlet of accumulated sexual frustration.⁵⁴ Before her arrival in Berlin, Bellmer rendered young girls in pencil drawings, photographs, and paintings; media lacking tactility and sensory stimulation beyond sight. By comparison, the doll was tangible; an object capable of movement and physical engagement, capable of satisfying sexual fantasies.

⁵⁰The Scholar Malcom Green describes her as “aged 15, or possibly slightly older”. Peter Webb claims she was 17 upon her move to Berlin. (Bellmer and Green, 14); (Webb and Short, 2.).

⁵¹The prevalence of child prostitution in 1930s Berlin will be discussed later in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁵²Again, censorship and child protection in 1930s Germany will be discussed extensively in the following chapters.

⁵³Short and Webb, 26.

⁵⁴Sue Taylor compares Bellmer’s doll to that of fellow artist Oskar Kokoschka (b. 1886- d. 1980) in *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*. Like Bellmer, Kokoschka fashioned a doll after an unattainable love interest, his ex-girlfriend Alma Mahler, and used the doll in his artwork and sex life. (32, 57-58).

In addition to Ursula's entrance into Bellmer's life, Bellmer scholars often cite two other pivotal life events which spurred his interest in constructing an anatomical doll: a performance and a gift. In 1932 the artist attended a performance of Jacques Offenbach's opera, *The Tales of Hoffman*, with his family, including young Ursula.⁵⁵ Notably, the leading character's female love interest, Olympia, is an automated doll brought to life for him by a pair of magical glasses. By the end of Act I, Olympia has been torn apart as a result of a feud between her lover and her creator—a clear foreshadowing of Bellmer's future project noted in the writings of previously mentioned scholars.⁵⁶ Alongside this obvious influence, Bellmer received a box of his childhood toys from his beloved mother, Maria. A relic of the romanticized childhood he longed for as an adult, these toys sparked further interest in pursuing his childish fantasies.⁵⁷ The influence of these toys can be found most directly in the ninth photograph of the German publication, *Die Puppe*, in the form of a glass marble. Amongst the body parts splayed atop the striped bedsheet, a single swirled marble rests against the doll's torso. A toy's form is reflected in the bottom half of the composition by the doll's eyeball—plucked from its socket.⁵⁸

The Bellmer family that nurtured this nostalgic, fantasizing artist also aided considerably in the construction process of his first doll. Arguably a collaborative effort, Bellmer welcomed the assistance of his brother and mother for labor and funding of the project. His brother, Fitz, lent time to the doll's experimental construction outside of his

⁵⁵Taylor (1996), 201.

⁵⁶Krauss et. al., 195.; Jacques Offenbach. "Les Contes D'Hoffmann." *Metropolitan Opera | Les Contes D'Hoffmann*, Metropolitan Opera, www.metopera.org/discover/synopses/les-contes-dhoffmann.

⁵⁷Sue Taylor (1996), 151.

⁵⁸ See figure 9a and 9b.

career as an engineer.⁵⁹ Both he and his mother supported Bellmer financially, despite their father's vocal disapproval of Bellmer's controversial ideas.⁶⁰ An engineer like his son Fritz, Bellmer's father encouraged young Bellmer to follow their lead with a heavy hand, causing a great deal of resentment between the two.⁶¹ However, when Bellmer married Margarete he gained another staunch female supporter of his work. Despite her worsening case of tuberculosis, Margarete actively supported Bellmer's all-consuming project. As alluded to earlier, Ursula functioned primarily as the muse and model for the doll. Bellmer's decision to create a small frame and stature for the final doll, as evidenced by the third photograph, confirm its basis on a pubescent figure—arguably the most enigmatic reputation of the work.⁶² Although Ursula has been cited between the ages of 15 and 17, beyond the early stages of pubescence, she was an easily accessible muse, on account of her familial connection, and of a relatively young age.

Visual evidence of Bellmer's interest in pornography and its obsessive focus on sexual features appears when one takes a close look at the photographs themselves. In both editions, Bellmer deliberately chose to carefully render highly sexualized parts of the female body: nipples, genitals, and the expressionless face. By comparison, the typically less sexualized features of the body are crudely rendered (lower leg area, arms, and mid-torso); accentuating the doll's function as a fetishized object. Through the progression of the first half of the photographs in both the German and French publication, despite their slightly varied ordering, one can watch the development of the

⁵⁹Lichtenstein (1991), 6.

⁶⁰Taylor (2000), 33.

⁶¹As stated in *L'Amour Fou* "...in obedience to his father, Bellmer attended the Berlin Technische Hochschule (1923-24). The profession of engineering repelled him..." (Krauss et. al., 195).

⁶²See Figures 3a and 3b.

doll from a rough, rudimentary maquette to the smoothed, fleshy surface of the final product.⁶³ The first of the ten photographs reveals the wooden skeletal structure of the doll soon to be covered in a body of plaster.⁶⁴ The doll's bare wood frame is displayed atop a bench in a seated position, its singular arm supporting the structure from behind. Aside from the carved foot of the right leg and silhouette of facial features, the frame is rather simple. Bellmer focused primarily on the objectification of the doll instead of its faithfulness to the female body. These photographs were, after all, meant for the visual pleasure of *The Doll's* reader—not to be used for academic study.⁶⁵

Despite Bellmer's use of the doll to pursue his sexual fantasy, the doll lacked greatly in its ability to move like the agile young girls he idolized. The doll's limited mobility is made apparent by the use of nonflexible hinge joints on the shoulders, elbows, and knees. Following the fabrication of the wooden frame, Bellmer covered the skeleton in flax fiber, plaster, and glue.⁶⁶ The added material sexualizes the figure and forms the pubescent curves of the doll. Bellmer gives her small mounds for breasts and a small bulge at the base of her abdomen; the remainder of her baby fat. The nipples have been painted on by Bellmer or his brother, clearly seen in the second photograph, and a disheveled wig and glass eyes are added in the third photograph.⁶⁷ Apart from the wig, Bellmer occasionally clothed the doll in lingerie—cleverly reflected in Leroux's 1963 rebinding of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's German edition in a fleshy-pink leather

⁶³To see this progression compare figures 1a and 1b with figures 8a and 8b.

⁶⁴See figure 1a and 1b.

⁶⁵Creating nude photographs for academic study was a common defense for producers of pornography in the mid-19th century. (Nigel Sadler. *Erotic Postcards of the Early Twentieth Century*. The Postcard Collection. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2015. 42.).

⁶⁶Taylor (2000), 24.

⁶⁷See figures 2a and 2b; See figures 3a and 3b. Notice Bellmer has flipped the orientation of this photograph in the French publication.

cover embellished with black lace.⁶⁸ Arguably in order to elicit desire in the artist and viewer, the clothing never fully conceals the doll's sexual features. For example, in the third photograph she wears a beret and a single black stocking (not the white socks associated with young girls) pools around her left foot—signifying the act of undressing. This connotation is made explicit by the looming presence of Bellmer himself, crouching over the doll via double exposure in the same image.⁶⁹

Suggestions of pedophilic interests also appear in the first German publication, ruffled stockings and socks are a recurrent theme amongst Bellmer's photographs of his dolls; emphasizing his desire for the melding of adult sexuality and childish behavior. In the fifth photograph of *Die Puppe*, a thigh-high fishnet stocking has slipped down just slightly, calling attention to the doll's sole articulated hip.⁷⁰ In the fourth photograph in *Die Puppe* and fifth photograph in *La Poupée* the doll wears a thin, white camisole; again, pulled away to expose the artificial flesh of her buttocks.⁷¹ This photograph in particular is reminiscent of the highly eroticized poses of the France-based photographers Julian Mandel (1872-1935) and Jean Angélu (1878-1921) due to its unmistakable eroticism.⁷² The last photograph of both editions depicts the doll's legs and feet shrouded in a white, frilly garment and adorned with a rose; simulating a bouquet of "stems", the

⁶⁸See Figure 12a for a similar copy of *Die Puppe*. The copy pictured differs from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's in its color palette, but is very similar.

⁶⁹Surrealists used double exposure in their photography frequently; accepting the haunting, hazy quality widely regarded as unusable. The exposure of multiple images on film results in an ethereal aesthetic well suited for the Surrealist pursuit of the unconscious and dreamworld. Man Ray adopted the technique early on, most notably with his portrait of Marchesa Luisa Casati in 1922—12 years before Bellmer's publication of *Die Puppe*. (theatlas magazine@gmail.com. "The Enduring Appeal of Double Exposures in Photography." Atlas Magazine - Submissions Based Fashion Magazine, 8 Feb. 2016, theatlas magazine.com/double-exposures/).

⁷⁰See figure 5a. This photograph was not included in the French publication.

⁷¹See figures 4a and 5b.

⁷²Compare figure 4a with figures 1c and 2c.

slang term for “legs”.⁷³ The jarring juxtaposition of a black heeled shoe against the girlish, lacy background brings the viewer out of Bellmer’s childhood fantasy. The shoe, a symbol of female adulthood, further suggests the supposed mimicry of adult sexuality in young girls.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the doll’s largely naked body and immobility heighten the doll’s sense of vulnerability; echoed, once again, in the vacancy of her expression.

In both the German and French publications, Bellmer’s juxtaposition between images of the doll in human form with images of its deconstruction hints at themes of sadism; in particular, finding pleasure in the pain of others.⁷⁵ Sadism and its namesake, the Marquis de Sade, were integral to Surrealism’s disregard for “moral preoccupation” as evidenced by the movement’s tendency towards perversity.⁷⁶ Candice Black asserts in *Sadism and Surrealism: The Marquis de Sade and the Surrealists* (2013) that Breton maintained his idolization of the Sade from his time with the Dada movement, and integrated the Sade’s influence into Surrealism through his addition of the line “Sade is Surrealist in sadism” in his first Surrealist Manifesto (1924).⁷⁷ Black notes that from this early declaration, Man Ray, Salvador Dalí, and Eluard produced several works inspired by the legendary figure; for example, Man Ray’s *Hommage A Sade* (1933) and

⁷³See figures 10a and 10b.

⁷⁴According to Sigmund Freud’s essay “The Infantile Sexuality,” children experience sexual urges shortly after birth and are discouraged from acting on these urges by education and assimilation. (Sigmund Freud, James Strachey. 1975. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Harper Colophon Books, Cn 5008. New York: Basic Books. 39-72.).

⁷⁵Taylor claims Bellmer was an admirer of the Sade in the introduction of *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*. Lichtenstein also delves into the sadomasochist elements of Bellmer’s oeuvre in *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*. (Taylor (2000), 2.; Lichtenstein (2001), 80-81).

⁷⁶André Breton as quoted in James A. Steintrager. "Canonizing Sade: Eros, Democracy, and Differentiation." In *The Autonomy of Pleasure: Libertines, License, and Sexual Revolution*, 263-98. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. Accessed March 7, 2020. doi:10.7312/stei15158.11. 264.

⁷⁷Candice Black, *Sadism and Surrealism: The Marquis de Sade and the Surrealists*. Elektron Ebooks. 2013. 60.

Monument to D.A.F. De Sade (1933).⁷⁸ Bellmer would have been exposed to the Surrealists' early experimentation with sadism during his trip to Paris in the Winter of 1924-1925, and possibly later on through exposure to the early work of Man Ray barring his location in Berlin.⁷⁹ By the time of Bellmer's visit to Paris, Surrealist poet Guillaume Apollinaire had already spread praise and awareness of the Sade's philosophies through his early monograph, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade* (1909).⁸⁰

The influence of sadism on Bellmer's photography is most directly evident in these images of the doll in pieces, including four in the German edition and five in the French.⁸¹ Bellmer avoids the similarity to toy parts by placing the body parts in conversation with one another. Although physically disparate, the body parts form coherent, sensual compositions through Bellmer's clever placement—her lips rest near her breast and nipple or the rest of her body is moved to frame her genital region (see images 6 and 7). As the viewer follows the sequence of photographs the doll is constructed, culminating halfway through, and then disassembled once again. This act certainly aligns with the Sade's philosophies, and especially relates to the Sade's story *120 Days of Sodom* (unpublished until 1935) in which dozens of teenagers are sexually tortured and subsequently murdered by their male abusers.⁸² Like the Sade's story,

⁷⁸Ibid., 102.

⁷⁹Lichtenstein (1991), 4.

⁸⁰Black, 43.

⁸¹Bellmer's interest in the Marquis de Sade ultimately culminated in his publication of *A Sade*, ten etchings inspired by the Sade's work, in 1961. (Mary Ann Caws. "SADE: Artists Under the Influence." *The Brooklyn Rail*, 27 Apr. 2018, brooklynrail.org/2018/05/artseen/SADE-Artists-Under-the-Influence.)

⁸²For more detail see Marquis de Sade, Austryn Wainhouse, Richard Seaver, Simone de Beauvoir, and Pierre Klossowski. 1987. *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings* 1St Evergreen ed. New York: Grove Press.

Bellmer's sadistic visuals are meant for visual and sexual pleasure on behalf of the viewer.

The Sade himself was made infamous for his abuse of multiple prostitutes and his own sister-in-law.⁸³ Yet, the influence of *Lustmord* (sexual murder) on *The Doll* cannot be ignored. Germany of the 1930s had its own sadistic influence in the artwork of Otto Dix (1891-1969) and George Grosz (1893-1959). The German artists were notorious in the Weimar Era for their graphic, brutal paintings of murdered women. Historian Beth Irwin Lewis claims these depictions were born out of a male anxiety towards women in the 1910s due to increasing popularity in pornography and prostitution and the declining birth rates.⁸⁴ Bellmer evidently used his doll as an outlet for similar urges to the Sade and his fellow German artists; going as far as to claim, according to Taylor, that "if he did not draw young girls so much, he might have resorted to sexual murder."⁸⁵ This claim is, of course, not only relevant to his drawings, but also to his torture of an artificial girl in *The Doll*. Bellmer's decision to photograph this act of constructing and deconstructing the doll transforms the three-dimensional, tangible object into the flat reproductions that remain today. The claim also demonstrates that Bellmer viewed his artwork as a sexual outlet for his sadistic desires.

⁸³Marquis de Sade, and David Coward. 2005. *The Marquis De Sade, the Crimes of Love: Heroic and Tragic Tales; Preceded by an Essay on Novels: A Selection*. Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford University Press.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/ccl/idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=257836&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. ix-xi.

⁸⁴Beth Irwin Lewis. "Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis." In *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, edited by Haxthausen Charles W. and Suhr Heidrun, 111-40. University of Minnesota Press, 1990. Accessed April 3, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv05x.10.120.

⁸⁵Taylor (2000), 91.

The reproducibility of Bellmer's photographs allowed for distribution not only of his art, but of inherently erotic and sadistic images. Close examination of examples of the two editions of *The Doll* demonstrates that Bellmer used the materials (paper, photographs, and bookboards) both to conceal and reveal the deliberately erotic content of the small books. Both editions of *The Doll* contain these tipped-in, black-and-white photographs about the size of a modern wallet photo. In both books, the tipped in photographs are the only content present on the main pages besides small page numbers. With the photographs pasted to the simple cardstock, the pages of the book resemble *cartes de visite* albums and cabinet cards of the late 1800s.

The *carte de visite* was a small-format photograph style patented in 1854 by French photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri with the intent of superseding the comparatively inefficient Daguerreotype.⁸⁶ Collodion photographs were glued onto rectangles of cardboard, resulting in a 2 ½ by 4 inch *carte de visite* to be sent home with the customer.⁸⁷ Although the novel photographs and their successors, cabinet cards and French postcards, were used for family portraits and celebrity keepsakes, the formats were also used for erotic photography. Historian Lisa Z. Sigel notes in her article "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands: Postcards and the Expansion of Pornography in Britain and the Atlantic World, 1880-1914" that these postcards of the mid-1800s "naturalized images of women as passive, sexual objects. [The postcards] created an inherent,

⁸⁶Ronald S Coddington. "Cardomania!: How the Carte De Visite Became the Facebook of the 1860s." *Military Images* 34, no. 3 (2016): 12-17. Accessed April 7, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24865727. 14.

⁸⁷Ibid., 14.

instinctual sexuality in children”.⁸⁸Sigel describes the depiction of white women in French postcards as such:

The cards show women in a variety of poses that cemented their place in relation to the viewer; standing with one hand behind the head and elbow lifted to raise the breasts and make the figure accessible, lying down with one shoulder tilted back (to lift the breasts) and one leg tilted forward to highlight the pubic “v,” smiling up at the camera while removing stockings...Women’s specific body parts, such as breasts or buttocks, became pictorial synecdoches for female sexuality. The fixation on body parts allowed them to be separated and ritualized as the tokens of sexuality.⁸⁹

The small scale of the *carte de visite* required the photographer to focus on specific body parts to avoid a loss of detail in larger subjects. Bellmer’s photographs for *The Doll* mimic this format on several occasions; notably, in their abridgement of the female body through dismemberment.

Not only do the modest size of Bellmer’s tipped-in photographs echo the smallness and portability of some of the first instances of underground photographic erotica in Europe, but this excerpt from Sigel makes Bellmer’s inspiration for his doll’s sexualized poses from French postcards apparent.⁹⁰Sue Taylor confirmed in *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* that the artist was, in fact, an “active consumer,

⁸⁸Lisa Z. Sigel "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands: Postcards and the Expansion of Pornography in Britain and the Atlantic World, 1880-1914." *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 4 (2000): 859-85. Accessed April 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/3789168. 861.; See figure 3c for an example of an early erotic postcard depicting torture of the female body.

⁸⁹Ibid., 864.

⁹⁰John Hannavy. *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 498.; These two examples of early photography were well suited to the underground distribution of pornography due to their small size and affordability.

collector, and producer” of photographic and filmic pornography.⁹¹ However, his own doll photographs have evaded the categorization of pornography. When photographs of the doll are viewed in the modern museum setting, or published in art catalogues, the work’s contextualization within high art lessens this association with pornography. However, in the mid-1930s, the original context of the book—with its handcrafted, surreptitious aesthetic of simple cardstock and bookboards— evokes a different reading. How was this book being used by the typical collector? Who did Bellmer intend to give the few copies to? Was there a market for sadistic and pornographic material in 1930s Germany? Harkening back to the experience of viewing *La Poupée* at the Getty Center, it was only the pages of text that were left unopened by the previous owners. In other words, it was only the pages devoid of graphic material that were ignored, perhaps in favor of the more erotically stimulating images.

Bellmer’s portrayal of the doll scantily clad (if at all) in lingerie or seductively deconstructed for male pleasure reiterates this visual similarity to the female subjects of the early erotica he consumed. Furthermore, the context of the book’s production lends itself to the same need for censorship as Victorian Era pornography. Under the scrutiny of the Nazi Regime *The Doll* could be possessed with a certain amount of discreetness due to its small-scale format and unassuming cover.⁹² Glancing at either closed edition of the book does not raise suspicion in an uninformed passerby, but connoisseurs of

⁹¹Bellmer’s collection of erotic photography dates from the Victorian era to the 1920s. (Taylor, 168-9).; Taylor also addresses the graphic photographs Bellmer produced in the late 1940s which depicted female genitalia and women masturbating. Taylor claims that Bellmer’s efforts to conceal this artwork from the authorities implies he understood his artwork to be at least partially pornographic in nature. (Taylor (2000), 170-171).

⁹²The original German edition was bound in pale moiré paper bookboards with a small title on the spine (see figure 11a, although this copy’s moiré paper has deteriorated) . The original French edition was bound in a beige linen paper with the title and author printed in black on the front cover (see figure 11b). Neither edition’s cover hints directly to the content they contain.

Surrealist art or erotica may have their interest piqued. If you were in the Parisian Surrealist circle you would have recognized Bellmer's name from his publication in *Minotaur* and automatically made the association with erotic imagery. On the other hand, the German edition was produced rather sparingly, a few dozen copies at most, suggesting an elite viewership. The intended audience of the 1934 edition is unknown, but the small edition size could be a sign that Bellmer distributed the books to those he knew would have an interest in such a niche subject matter. At the very least, the small edition size and size of the book itself gives an aura of general secrecy to the project. Regardless of the original publication's intention, it was met with little acclaim in Germany by comparison to Paris where it was accepted by the like-minded Surrealists. Bellmer designed his first edition of *The Doll (Die Puppe)* in 1934 to be discreet in its publication and presentation of pornographic material. By necessity the book had to be published uncredited to Bellmer himself despite the meticulous effort he put into creating and photographing his doll. Although the simple book binding and material used in this first edition were objectively modest (small scale, few copies, and cardstock pages), they were deliberately chosen by Bellmer to mimic pornographic media of the late 19th and early 20th century. The lack of imagery or title on the cover of the German edition concealed the imagery revealed upon opening the book. Once in the fellowship of other contentious artists, the Paris Surrealists, Bellmer was able to publish the second edition of *The Doll* with less caution. His name finally graced the cover of *The Doll* in 1936 with his French publication, titled *La Poupée*.

Chapter 2: Publication in Germany and France

What encouraged Bellmer to break from anonymity in his French publication of *The Doll*? When Bellmer published the first edition of *The Doll* in his home country of Germany he did so in complete anonymity, foreshadowing the necessity of his return to anonymity for his controversial pornographic illustrations for *Histoire de l'oeil* in 1947. The book was printed by a friend, Thomas Eckstein, in Karlsruhe; a city near the French-German border in the Southwest of Germany. *The Doll*'s limited publication, supposedly somewhere between 10 and 50 copies, was paid for out-of-pocket by Bellmer himself.⁹³ It was not until his cousin and muse, Ursula Naguschewski, brought photographs of the doll to Breton in Paris later in 1934 that Bellmer received any notable recognition for the work.⁹⁴ After this encounter with the Paris Surrealists, Bellmer's 1936 French publication of *The Doll* starkly contrasted the publication process of this original edition of 1934. The edition size was doubled to 100 copies and printed by Editions G.L.M., the printer of choice for Paris Surrealists, with Bellmer's name clearly printed on the front cover.⁹⁵ The respective publication circumstances of each edition greatly reflected French and German censorship laws of the 1930s and the general acceptance of erotic content by their populations.

As stated previously, Bellmer is known to have been an avid collector and viewer of turn-of-the-century pornography; both filmic and photographic. His unabashed appreciation for sex and its depiction seems to contradict his discreet publication of *The*

⁹³Webb and Short as cited in Taylor (2000), 229.

⁹⁴Taylor (2000), 201.

⁹⁵Editions G.L.M. printed books for several of the Paris Surrealist artists and writers (discussed later in the chapter), forming an interdependence with the group.

Doll in 1934; however, it is important to note the transitional period in which he was creating and photographing his doll. 1933, the year Bellmer began constructing the doll, saw the shift between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich—two societies with vastly differing attitudes towards sexual freedom. Although little evidence and primary sources remain from Weimar-Era Germany’s sexual playground, Berlin of the 1920s was widely regarded as the sex-capital of the world; rivaled only by the streets of Paris. Kaiser Wilhelm II’s abdication after World War One left Germany with a lack of governmental regulation; the perfect breeding ground for sexual liberation.⁹⁶ Berliners blamed their sexual deviancy and drug use on the *Berliner Luft*, or “Berlin air”, that they believed stimulated “long-suppressed passions as it animated all the external tics of sexual perversity,” according to scholar Mel Gordon.⁹⁷ The Berlin Bellmer lived in, up until the Nazi takeover, catered to the diverse sexual fantasies of its inhabitants.

American scholar Mel Gordon was one of the few historians to document this mysterious and brief period of sexual liberation in Berlin with his book *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin* (2008). Though controversial, Gordon’s text paints Weimar-Berlin as a city brimming with prostitution, pornography, and hard drugs. Most notably, he details the prevalence of child-prostitution. He describes this subgenre of prostitutes eerily in the following excerpt:

MEDICINE—Child prostitutes, ages 12-16, who were “prescribed” by pimps, posing as physicians. The “patient” indicated the “length of his illness” (requested age of the girl) and color of pills (hair tint). Transaction

⁹⁶For more information on the origin of Weimar Berlin’s sexual liberation see “Berlin: Metropolis of Vice—Legendary Sin Cities.” Films Media Group, 2005, digital.films.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=278170&xtid=48861.

⁹⁷Mel Gordon. *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin*. Expanded ed. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2006. 20.

took place in Berlin West “pharmacies”. Estimated numbers: less than 100.

TELEPHONE-GIRLS—Child prostitutes, ages 12-17, who are ordered by telephone and then delivered to clients in limousines or taxis. Usually given the names of stage or film stars, like Marlene Dietrich or Lilian Harvey, that described their prepubescent physical features. Often billed as “virgins.” Extremely expensive. Estimated numbers: 3,000.⁹⁸

With this consumerism in mind, Bellmer’s *The Doll* is not a radical departure from the moral standards of Berliners at the time who were also purchasing the plethora of “French postcards”, erotic magazines, and Stag films flooding the market. Bellmer’s reasoning behind his anonymous publication most likely has more to do with the growing censorship of art and pornography under the newfound Nazi Regime than a fear of an unaccepting audience amongst his fellow Berliners. The years in which Bellmer created and photographed his doll and subsequently published *The Doll*, 1933-1934, sat right on the cusp between sexual liberation and absolute suppression. Under the new Nazi Regime, the Reich Chamber of Culture was rapidly reforming German law to prohibit the production of erotica, pornography, and other “degenerate” art by the time of Bellmer’s publication; effectively eradicating the sexually liberated culture of Berlin’s interwar period.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Ibid., 66.

⁹⁹Historian Gary D. Stark states that “After 1933, through the new Reich Cultural Chambers for film, literature, press, broadcasting, theater, music, and the fine arts, licensing was quickly extended to everyone engaged in *any* aspect of media and amusements, including production and creation. Anyone hoping to participate in public cultural life had to be licensed by one of these chambers.” (“AROUSSED AUTHORITIES: STATE EFFORTS TO REGULATE SEX AND SMUT IN THE GERMAN MASS MEDIA, 1880–1930.” In *Not Straight from Germany: Sexual Publics and Sexual Citizenship since Magnus Hirschfeld*, edited by Taylor Michael Thomas, Timm Annette F., and Herr Rainer, 110-32. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. Accessed April 15, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9238370.9.127.)

Prior to Bellmer's publication of *The Doll* in Paris, French culture and production was already impacting the artist's project. In chapter two, the influence of French pornography on Bellmer's design for his book was proposed briefly. To continue this argument one must understand the effect that France's pornographic production of the early 20th century had on the European trade of erotica as a whole. Just like Bellmer's *The Doll*, every aspect of the pornographic material produced in France took into consideration discreteness, prosecutability, and ever-changing tastes for the erotic. Pornography may have been accepted by a large portion of Europe's population, but means of production, distribution, and ownership of the controversial material still had their complications. This, of course, explains the need for portable and unassuming formatting as seen in French postcards and *The Doll*.

Similarities between Bellmer's *The Doll* and French erotica are not exclusively visual. Both editions of Bellmer's book imitate the scale, visual cues, portability, and secretive allure of prominent erotic material of the early 1900s. The aforementioned "French postcards" dominated erotic trade of the 1910s and 1920s due to their small, thin dimensions and affordable pricing. Despite their name, these erotic images were not made to be posted due to the varying degrees of Governmental censorship across Europe. Rather, they were collector items to be traded via coat-pockets and under cafe tables.¹⁰⁰ During the peak of their popularity they could be purchased at common storefronts in relatively

¹⁰⁰Sadler, "Introduction: A Brief History of the Risqué Image in Photographs".

conservative England by men, women, and even children.¹⁰¹ Outside of France and England, committed collectors in Europe and the United States could order sets of 4 or 12 postcards directly from the photography studio to be packaged covertly and sent through the mail—one of the only ways these postcards successfully evaded postal regulation.¹⁰²

A simple way to identify these sets is by looking for what Scholar Nigel Sadler calls a “risqué sequence”.¹⁰³ These particular postcard sets depicted their female subject in the stages of undressing, echoing the assemblages and disheveled stockings of Bellmer’s doll photographs.¹⁰⁴ The set would start with the subject fully clothed and possibly end with full nudity, depending on the photographer.¹⁰⁵ Bellmer’s allusion to undressing (pulled down stockings, pulled up slips, and discarded fabric) strongly resemble the visual cues of undressing in these “risqué sequence” sets. Regardless of the level of nudity in these commercial postcard sets, the postcards were heavily sexualized in the posing of their subjects and general atmosphere. Women were seen draped over tousled bed sheets, surrounded by rich fabrics, and enticingly concealed by sheer, lacy undergarments. Eventually, production of these French postcards expanded outside its namesake to neighboring Countries, including Germany. In the 1930s,

¹⁰¹Sigel, 874.

¹⁰²Sadler, “Introduction: A Brief History of the Risqué Image in Photographs”.

¹⁰³Sadler, “Chapter 1: Provocative - Clothed”.

¹⁰⁴See figures 4c and 5c for an example of an erotic postcard set.

¹⁰⁵Sadler, in reference to a “risqué sequence” postcard, notes “a latter card probably showed this woman at least topless” in “Chapter 1: Provocative - Clothed” of *Erotic Postcards of the Twentieth Century*.

the decade in which *The Doll* was published, erotic postcards were still being produced in Germany despite their waning popularity.¹⁰⁶

Although the nature of Bellmer's distribution of *The Doll* in Germany is unknown, its relatively small edition size implies it was created with an exclusive audience in mind.¹⁰⁷ Producing *The Doll* on a larger scale would have been a daring move given the restrictions regarding media under Weimar and Nazi Germany, respectively. While Berliners indulged in sexual freedom until the rise of the Nazi Regime, the rest of Germany was subjected to avid censorship efforts by the Weimar government. Though possessors of illicit material could not be prosecuted, creators and distributors of sexually explicit media often were. In the words of Historian Gary D. Stark, "Their concern was not what adults created and enjoyed in private, but rather what was accessible to potential consumers publicly or...experienced in public as a member of a heterogeneous audience."¹⁰⁸ Again, in contradiction to the activities of Weimar Berlin, many of the censorship efforts were done for the sake of child's protection; a cause not unrelated to the prepubescent imagery of Bellmer's *The Doll*.¹⁰⁹ Many of the laws aimed to prevent the corruption of young minds by pornographic material; even as children in Berlin were resorting to sex work.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., "Chapter 5: Naturism and the Outdoors".

¹⁰⁷According to a Sotheby's advert from a 2006 auction, one of the original 1934 editions of *Die Puppe* was given to the Surrealist painter Marcel Jean by Hans Bellmer within the same year. ("Collection Fred Feinsilber Itinéraire d'un collectionneur - 1460-1960". *Sotheby's*. Accessed April 24 2020. <https://sothebys.gcs-web.com/static-files/28cfec89-7b52-4f64-9670-0e8f94d525bb>).

¹⁰⁸Stark, 117.

¹⁰⁹In the 1920s and 1930s the Weimar government and subsequent Nazi Regime instituted several regulations to limit child contact with illicit imagery and media. For example, in 1926 the Law for the Protection of Youth from Trashy and Smutty Literature was passed to prevent the offering of illicit material to children under the age of 18 (Stark, 123).

The rapid advancement of the Nazi Regime in Germany was a stifling climate for non-traditional artists, whereas the pornography culture of France made Paris a suitable location for Bellmer's second publication of *The Doll*. As a result of the heightened censorship under the Nazi Regime, Lichtenstein claims Bellmer's photographs would have been declared "degenerate" if they had been openly exhibited in 1930s Germany.¹¹⁰ Given the potential censoring of his work and other illicit imagery in Germany, it is not surprising that Bellmer chose to have his work subsequently published in Paris, France in 1936. In Paris, literary, photographic, and filmic pornography were far less taboo. In fact, Paris was setting the precedence for pornographic material and marketing of the 20th and 21st centuries. Bookshops like the Vidal Bookshop and the Madeleine Bookshop began popping up around the city in the early-to-mid 1930s, peddling catalogues of erotic photographs such as photographer Albert Wyndham's *Poupées Parisiennes*.¹¹¹ These early "girlie magazines" (*revues de charme* in French) sometimes situated text alongside their nude and nearly-nude photographs of women, much like Bellmer's juxtaposition of doll photographs and "Memories of the Doll Theme" in *The Doll* and contemporary issues of *Playboy*.¹¹²

Although Bellmer's doll photographs were not featured in any *revues de charme*, they were included in the Surrealist magazine, *Minotaure*, as mentioned

¹¹⁰Lichtenstein (2001), 135.

¹¹¹Alexandre Dupouy. *Erotic Art Photography*. New York: Parkstone Press, 2004. 187, 192-201.; See figure 6c for an example of a 1930s-era erotic magazine.

¹¹²Fellow Surrealist photographer, Dora Maar, photographed for several "girlie magazines" in the 1930s. Despite their erotic, commercial context, the photographs are distinctly Surrealist; heavily contrasted, playing with perspective, and even appearing to use double negatives. (Dora Maar, Dawn Ades, J. Paul Getty Museum, Tate Modern (Gallery), and Centre Georges Pompidou. *Dora Maar*. Edited by Damarice Amao, Amanda Maddox, and Karolina Lewandowska. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2019. 42)

in the literature review. The magazine—led by Albert Skira, Bréton, and Pierre Mabille—was published in Paris from 1933 to 1939, reluctantly ceasing publication in anticipation of World War Two. *Minotaure*'s 13 issues covered everything from contemporary art and artists to developments in psychoanalysis during its short publication period.¹¹³ Bellmer's doll photographs were included in the sixth issue (December 5th, 1934) before he chose to publish a French edition of *The Doll* in 1936.

Due to this induction by the Paris Surrealists, Bellmer's second publication of *The Doll* earned a place in history amongst many Surrealist artist books and texts. His publishing house, Editions G.L.M., was headed by Turkish expat Guy Lévis Mano. In addition to publishing, Lévis Mano worked as a Spanish translator and poet; however, he is known for his innovative typography and association with the Paris Surrealists. Throughout his career he published books with Marcel Duchamp, Paul Eluard, Man Ray, Francis Picabia, Bréton, and several other prominent artists and poets of the Surrealist movement.¹¹⁴ The translation of "Memories of the Doll Theme" was done by Robert Valencay, another associate of Bellmer's fellow Surrealists.¹¹⁵ One hundred copies of Bellmer's *The Doll* (published as *La Poupée*) were released on the first of June, 1936 by Editions G.L.M., dwarfing Bellmer's German edition. According to the colophon, five copies were printed on Japanese paper, 20 on Normandy vellum,

¹¹³Irene E. Hofmann. "Documents of Dada and Surrealism: Dada and Surrealist Journals in the Mary Reynolds Collection." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 131-97. Accessed April 21, 2020. doi:10.2307/4104318. 146, 147.

¹¹⁴"Catalogue général des livres par ordre alphabétique des auteurs." *Guy Lévis Mano*. <http://www.guylevismano.com/spip.php?article11>. 21 April 2020.

¹¹⁵Riese, 108.

and the remaining 80 on the pink paper found in the Getty's copy.¹¹⁶ The relatively modest edition size and varied paper suggest this edition was a collector's item like its 1934 predecessor, but Bellmer's accreditation on the cover and recognition upon publication sets the French publication apart from the original German edition.

Original editions of *Die Puppe* are largely lost; however, the book exists in several rebound publications. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's copy of *Die Puppe* described in this thesis is one example of such rebindings. The museum's object details claim the copy dates from 1934, but the book is actually a rebound copy from 1963. The binder, Georges Leroux, sandwiched the original book within a new binding while transforming the original moiré bookboards into pages. It is unclear upon inspection whether the original pages within the new binding are of the same copy of the 1934 edition or a conglomerate of salvaged pages. Nonetheless, Leroux's decadent binding in leather, suede, and lace starkly contrasts the simplified binding of the original edition. Leroux also produced a rebinding of the French edition, *La Poupée*, the following year in 1964. This edition echoes that of Leroux's 1963 rebinding of *Die Puppe* in its use of hot pink and pale leather with black lace, creating a coordinated set of the two editions of *The Doll*.¹¹⁷ These sumptuous rebound copies done by Leroux allude to the sexual imagery contained in the books far more than the covers of the original German

¹¹⁶The discrepancy in edition count is not addressed in the colophon. The numbers given add up to 105 copies, not 100. I suspect five of the copies were considered mockups or distributed to friends.

¹¹⁷For Images of this edition see "BELLMER, Hans". *LotSearch*. Accessed 24 April 2020. <https://www.lotsearch.net/lot/bellmer-hans-la-poupee-paris-g-l-m-1936-un-des-5-exemplaires-de-tete-46568537?page=2&orderBy=lccs-score&order=DESC>.

and French publications. By the 1960s, fear of Nazi persecution and censorship by the French government were largely diminished.¹¹⁸

In contemporary study, the book's photographs of the doll themselves receive attention for their disturbing quality. This is evidenced by Taylor and Lichtenstein's focus on Bellmer's photographic oeuvre as a whole as opposed to *The Doll* as an individual art object. In current digital representation of Bellmer's work the photographs are often stripped of their context within *The Doll*; evidence of their existence in a bound book is absent save for a reference in the object description.¹¹⁹ Several of the doll images are in the collections of major institutions, such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, as individual, large-format photographs as opposed to the small-scale plates featured in the book.¹²⁰ The photographs' existence as separate entities from their original context, Bellmer's *The Doll*, subjects them to their own respective study despite their creation as a series. Viewing the photographs on the pages of *The Doll* supplies a complete portrayal of Bellmer's visual cues and aesthetic choices. That being said, how are viewers supposed to consume *The Doll* in the 21st century? Can *The Doll* ever be truly understood without access to one of the few copies left?

¹¹⁸According to the scholar Colette Colligan, France saw a resurgence in expatriate pornographic publications in the 1950s and 1960s. She cites the 1955 French publication of Russian author Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* as an example of such publications. In a similar vein to Bellmer's *The Doll*, *Lolita* contained overtly pedophilic material that could not be freely published under the totalitarian government of his native Russia. Nabokov had previously attempted to publish an origin story of *Lolita* in pre-war France and Russia, but was refused. (Colette Colligan. "LOLITA, HER RUSSIAN AMERICAN AUTHOR, AND HIS PARIS PUBLISHER, 1939–1967." In *A Publisher's Paradise: Expatriate Literary Culture in Paris, 1890-1960*, 245-78. University of Massachusetts Press, 2014. Accessed April 30, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk4k5.12. 245-250.)

¹¹⁹An example of such digital representation can be seen in the following link to The Getty's collection. (<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/34715/hans-bellmer-la-poupee-the-doll-german-1934-1936/>).

¹²⁰The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns several of these in addition to their copy of *Die Puppe*. One, simply titled *The Doll*, is roughly 7 by 11 inches and signed by Bellmer.

Of course, the exhibiting of artist books proves challenging. Viewers at a museum or gallery cannot hold the book in their hands, page through it, and handle it as the medium intends. When a rare book does make it out of its archival confines, they are typically displayed on book supports and flipped to a single set of pages to prevent wearing of the spine and to mitigate light exposure. Naturally, the viewing experience is limited. In the case of *The Doll*, viewing the photographs separately from the book due to these constraints diminishes the work's visual similarities to late 19th and early 20th century pornography—not to mention the full extent of its erotic undertones. Even seeing the individual photographs in their original succession is a rarity in institutional settings. Stephanie Buhmann made note of this in her review of the Ubu Gallery's exhibition *Petites Anatomies, Petites Images* (2006) for *The Brooklyn Rail*, one of the few examples of exhibiting Bellmer's doll photographs in completion and in their intended order.¹²¹

According to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, their copy of *Die Puppe* has been exhibited three times since its accession in 2005; twice by the museum itself in 1998 and 2015 and once by the International Center of Photography in 2001.¹²² The book's inclusion in *Fatal Attraction: Piotr Uklański Selects from the Met Collection* (2015) speaks to its controversial reputation. Alongside *Die Puppe*, *Birth of Ectoplasm During Séance with the Medium Eva C* (1919-20) by Juliette Alexandre-Bisson, *SS Captain* (1937) by August Sander, and other

¹²¹Stephanie Buhmann. "Hans Bellmer". *Brooklyn Rail*. <https://brooklynrail.org/2006/06/artseen/hans-bellmer>. June 2006. Accessed 23 April 2020.

¹²²The International Center of Photography exhibited *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* in 2001; the exhibition behind Therese Lichtenstein's book of the same name.

graphic or disturbing imagery lined the walls of the exhibition. The exhibition overview states Uklański, a Polish contemporary artist, chose items with the following qualities: “the perverse pull of the repellent, the erotic and poetic allure of the fragment, and masquerade as the artifice that allows for the dissolution of boundaries between self and other, life and death.”¹²³ “The perverse pull of the repellent” epitomizes the draw of Bellmer’s *The Doll* and begs the question: can *The Doll* be viewed as both pornography and high art? Are readers of *The Doll* meant to feel pleasure or guilt, sexual satisfaction or disgust?

Bellmer’s *The Doll* is still subject to censorship in the 21st century on the grounds of obscenity. In 2006, images by Bellmer were removed prior to the opening of a show at London’s Whitechapel Gallery. The exhibition, titled *Hans Bellmer*, was a retrospective on the artist organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou. After the exhibition’s original run in Paris from March to May of 2006, the show moved on to Munich and its last stop in London. The director of the Whitechapel Gallery, Iwona Blazwick, chose to remove twelve of Bellmer’s images from the London show for fear of offending the neighborhood’s large Muslim community. Agnès de la Beaumelle, the curator of the Paris-originated show, released a statement stating Blazwick found the pedophilic themes of Bellmer’s work worthy of “self-censorship” on her own behalf.¹²⁴ Blazwick’s

¹²³Extended label copy from the exhibitions mentioned is not easily accessible (particularly given the current circumstances of the Coronavirus Pandemic), but this would have added to the discussion of how *The Doll* is exhibited from both a physical and interpretive standpoint.; “Fatal Attraction: Piotr Uklański Selects from the Met Collection.” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. 2015. Accessed 23 April 2020. <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/piotr-uklanski-selects>.

¹²⁴Philippe Dagen, Nathaniel Herzberg, Cécile Chambraud, and Antoine Jacob. “Messieurs les autocenseurs, bonjour!”, *Le Monde*. 5 October 2006. Accessed 27 April 2020. https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2006/10/05/art-et-religion-messieurs-les-autocenseurs-bonjour_820202_3246.html.

ensorship of the show received backlash for its disrespect for the curator, the Centre Georges Pompidou, and the loaners of the removed works. Additionally, the public took issue with the work being removed for the sake of the Muslim community despite any religious references or imagery within the work.¹²⁵The work was, more accurately, removed due to Blazwick's own objection to the sexually perverse imagery. In the case of the Whitechapel Gallery, the pornographic nature of Bellmer's work was acknowledged and subsequently repudiated. Where does this leave *The Doll* in the context of viewership?

The Doll cannot be possessed by contemporary viewers as it once was by its collectors and Bellmer's fellow artists. The book, in ways, has maintained its intimacy through its very existence as a book. It is as closed off to contemporary viewers now as it was to the prying eyes of the authorities in the early 20th century. It is still concealed from the public, as exemplified by the Whitechapel Gallery. When the book, in all its varying editions, is exhibited, the context is far removed from its original consumption as a limited edition Surrealist book. When analyzed alongside examples of late 19th and early 20th century pornography, *The Doll's* situation within the booming erotica trade of the era is apparent in the book's influence, creation, and publication. Society treats the book and its photographs with the same attitude as it does pornography, with guilty pleasure by some and objection by others. There is no correct way to approach the controversial object that is *The Doll* in all its forms. Even so, understanding the

¹²⁵Ibid.

society and market in which it was created is crucial to how the book is presented to scholars and viewers alike.

Conclusion: Too Real For Comfort

Why has the association of Bellmer's *The Doll* with pornography been so ignored, and even refuted, by scholars of the recent past? This association with pornographic material is a key aspect of *The Doll*'s creation. It may be, on the

part of the scholar and viewer, a refusal to acknowledge his pornographic representation of pubescent girls specifically. However, given society's acceptance of other pedophilic artists this explanation is not exhaustive. Work of the Austrian artist Egon Schiele (1890-1918), also known for pornographic depictions of pubescent girls, was shown at The Met Breuer in 2018.¹²⁶ Paul Gauguin's (1848-1903) art has maintained an international presence despite the artist's documented relationships with young girls.¹²⁷ The list of male artists that have had relationships with minors goes on, but what makes Bellmer stand apart from the rest? Why is *The Doll* so shocking despite the art world's saturation with pedophiles? Is it really the overt violence against the female body, not the age of the subject, that repels the eye? Perhaps it is Bellmer's use of photography, as opposed to drawing or painting, and the medium's sense of reality that complicates Bellmer's *The Doll*. The subjects of Schiele and Gauguin's work are distanced from the viewer by the artist's paint brush or pencil.¹²⁸ Photography, on the other hand, is direct. When reading *The Doll*, the viewer is confronted head-on

¹²⁶Work by Schiele was included in The Met Breuer's 2018 exhibition *Obsession: Nudes by Klimt, Schiele, and Picasso*. Schiele makes the distinction between "girl" and "woman" in the titling of the lithographs included in the exhibition. ("Obsession: Nudes by Klimt, Schiele, and Picasso". *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Accessed 28 April 2020. <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/obsession>.); Robert Jensen. "TRUE CONFESSIONS?" *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 26, no. 1 (1995): 26-28. Accessed April 28, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24555917.

¹²⁷Gauguin claimed to have married a 13-year-old girl, Teha'amana, during his stay on the island of Tahiti in the 1890s. (John Anderson, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Gauguin?". *Los Angeles Times*. 9 July 2018. Accessed 27 April 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-gauguin-vincent-cassel-20180709-story.html>.); He is currently exhibited at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, London's National Gallery, and the Musée D'Orsay, amongst other institutions.

¹²⁸The French film critic André Bazin alluded to this distinction between painting and photography in his essay, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in 1960. He states, "No matter how skillful the painter, his work was always in fee to an inescapable subjectivity. The fact that a human hand intervened cast a shadow of doubt over the image" (as translated by Hugh Gray). (André Bazin and Hugh Gray. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 4-9. Accessed April 28, 2020. doi:10.2307/1210183. 7.).

with Bellmer's pornographic, sadistic intentions through the eye of his camera lens.

Bellmer's *The Doll* is shocking in the same way that photographic pornography or war photography is shocking. The French film critic André Bazin (1918-1958) eloquently described this phenomenon in his seminal essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1960):

In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space...The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it.¹²⁹

The viewer is forced to reconcile with the existence not only of the image, but of the subject captured by the camera. In the case of *The Doll*, German readers of the 1930s were met with Bellmer's gruesome reality of the scenes depicted in the work of *Lustmord* artists Dix and Grosz. Truth lies in Bellmer's photographs of a sexualized girl given the knowledge that child prostitution was a commonality in Berlin of the 1930s. Readers of the French edition were exposed to the dark-side of Surrealism's sexual freedom. All the while, the complicated content of *The Doll* is packaged like a pornographic material—to be consumed with the same sense of perverted curiosity. One does not know whether or not those that read *The*

¹²⁹Ibid., 8.

Doll in the 1930s were aware of these underlying truths. Bellmer, nonetheless, reflects them in *The Doll's* photographs.

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Figures: *Die Puppe* Sequence, 1934



Figure 1a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée* (The Doll). Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704509.



Figure 2a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée* (The Doll). Photograph. Place: San

Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704510.



Figure 3a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704767. (flipped to reflect positioning in 1934 edition, *Die Puppe*).



Figure 4a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704512.

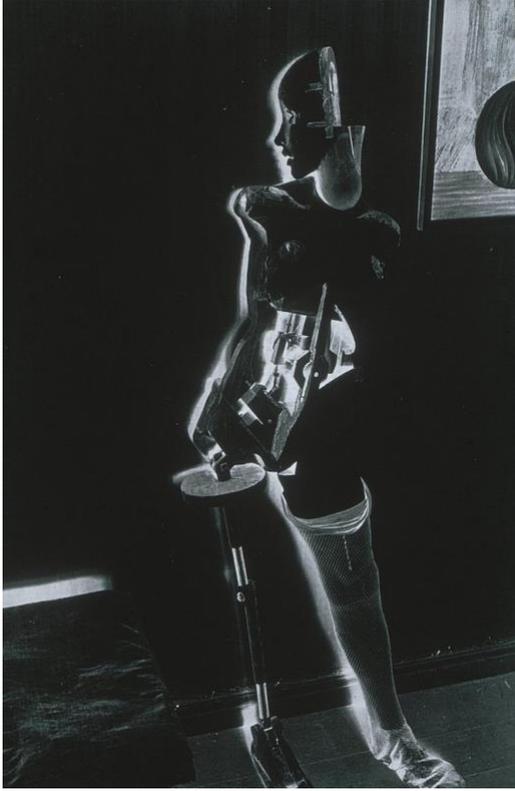


Figure 5a: Hans Bellmer, 1902-1975. 1934-5. Doll. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001202561.



Figure 6a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704513.

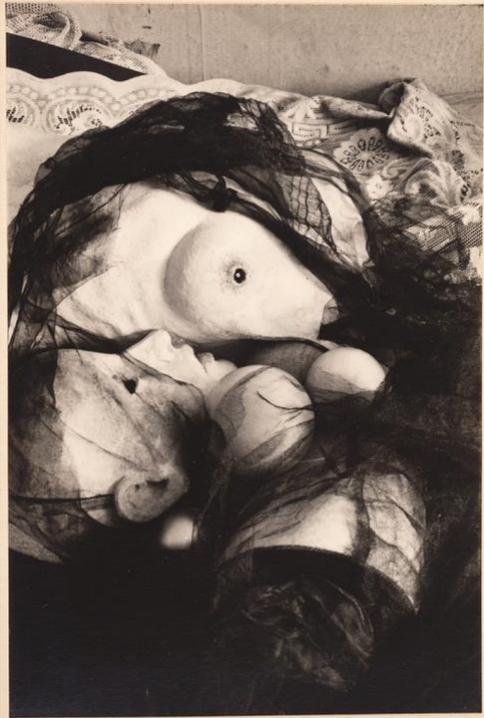


Figure 7a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704768.



Figure 8a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. From the book *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704769.

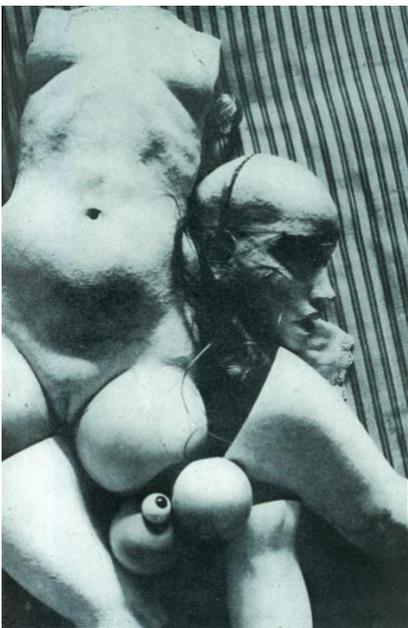


Figure 9a: Hans Bellmer, 1902-1975. 1936. Doll. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000511384.



Figure 10a: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704707.

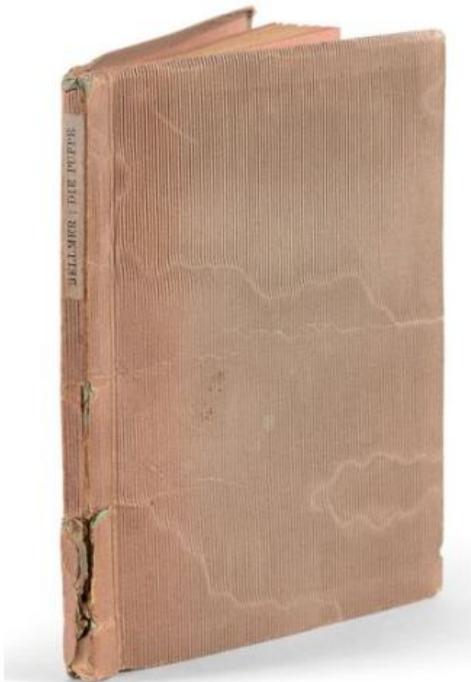


Figure 11a: Hans Bellmer, 1934, Cover of *Die Puppe (The Doll)*, book, *Drouot Estimations*, <https://www.drouot-estimations.com/lot/94791/9451451?offset=40&>.

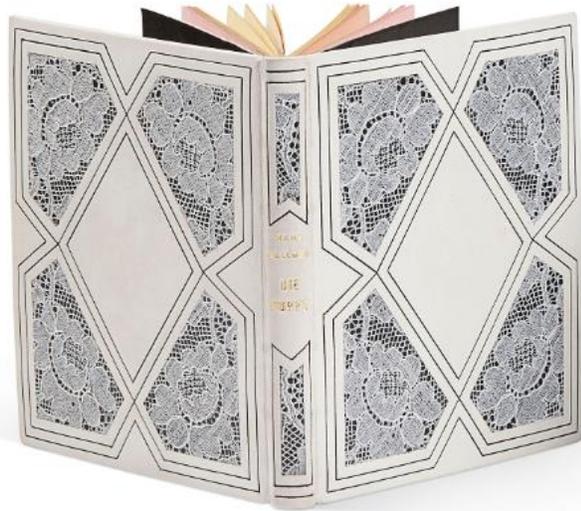


Figure 12a: Hans Bellmer and Georges Leroux, 1934 (rebound in 1963 by Leroux), Cover of *Die Puppe (The Doll)*, book, *LotSearch*, <https://www.lotsearch.de/lot/bellmer-hans-die-puppe-carlsruhe-s-n-th-eckstein-1934-rarissime-46568112>.

Figures: *La Poupée* Sequence, 1936



Figure 1b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée* (*The Doll*). Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704509.



Figure 2b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704510.



Figure 3b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704767.



Figure 4b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704511.



Figure 5b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San

Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704512.



Figure 6b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704768.



Figure 7b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704513.



Figure 8b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. From the book *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704769.

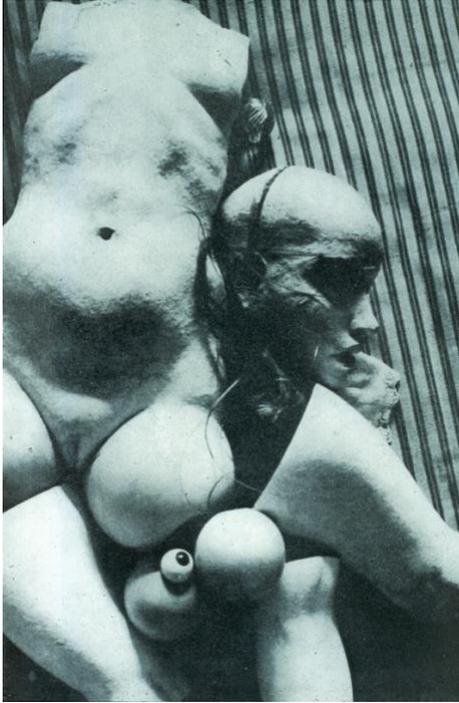


Figure 9b: Hans Bellmer, 1902-1975. 1936. Doll. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000511384.



Figure 10b: Hans Bellmer, German, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland], 1902-1975, Paris, France. 1936. Untitled from *La Poupée (The Doll)*. Photograph. Place: San

Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/ASFMOMAIG_10312704707.

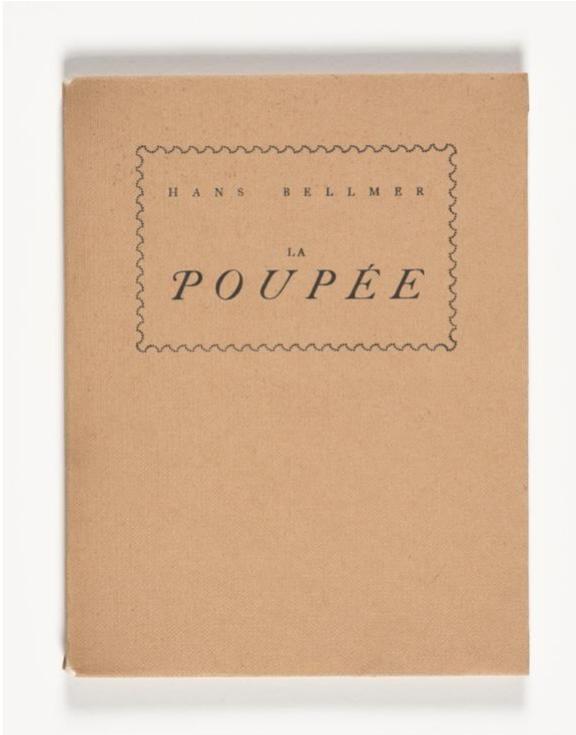


Figure 11b: Hans Bellmer (German Primary, Kattowitz, Germany [now Katowice, Poland] 1902-1975 Paris, France). 1936. Cover of *La Poupée* (*The Doll*). photograph. Place: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Purchase, <http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/112758>. https://library-artstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_37655070.

Figures: 19th and 20th Century Pornography



Figure 1c: Jean Angélou, French postcard of woman in early 20th century lingerie (black stockings and lace slip), published ca. 1910-1917, *Wikimedia*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Agelou18.jpg>.



Figure 2c: Julian Mandel, a Julian Mandel photograph issued by the Paris studio of Noyer and numbered 4406, published ca. 1920, *Wikimedia*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Julian_Mandel_9.jpg.



Figure 3c: Erotic 1900 Postcard, published ca. 1900, *Wikimedia*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Erotic_1900_Postcard.png.

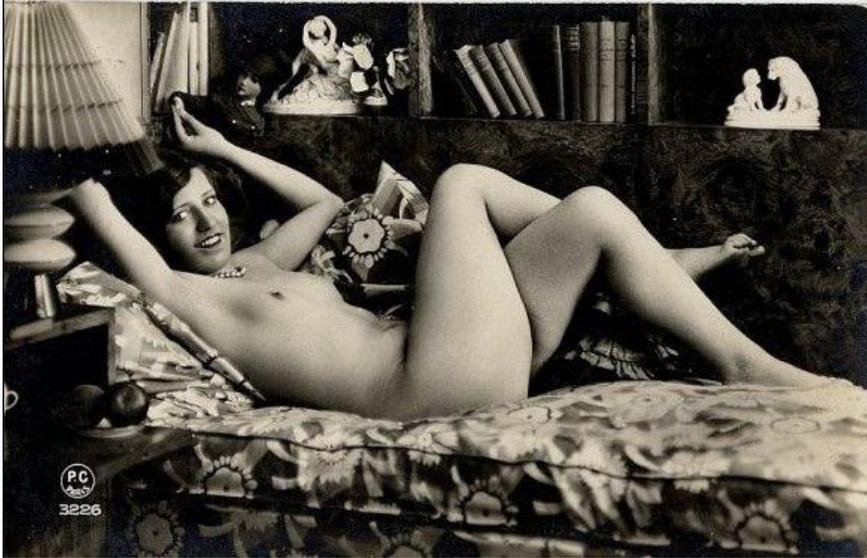


Figure 4c: Parisian Postcard, published ca. 1920, labeled with series number "PC3226", *Wikimedia*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:French-postcard-PC3226.jpg>.



Figure 5c: Parisian Postcard, published ca. 1920, labeled with series number "PC3226", *Wikimedia*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parisian_nude_woman.jpg.

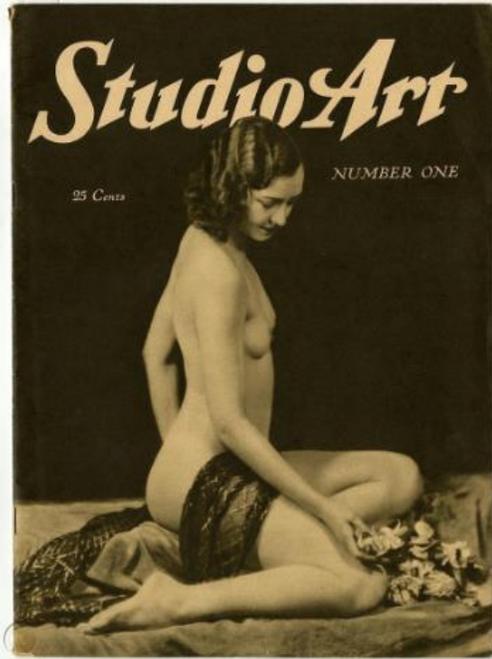


Figure 6c: Cover of Studio Art Magazine, Number One, published ca. 1930, magazine, *Worthpoint*, <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/1930s-spicy-pulp-studio-art-1912531929>.