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PHOTOGRAPHY AS AUTOMATON

Roland Barthes and Fellini's Mechanical Doll

ABSTRACT: The stated purpose of *Camera Lucida* was to champion photography over cinema; however, at a critical moment in the text Roland Barthes turns to an episode from a film, a scene involving an automaton in *Fellini's Casanova*, to expound the notion of the photograph as a type of madness, a “shared hallucination.” This essay explores the automaton as a nodal point linking the rival media of cinema and photography. Although Barthes disavows any interest in Fellini's film beyond the scene in which Casanova dances with an automaton, the film in fact shares many thematic concerns with *Camera Lucida*. When read in light of the film's metacinematic preoccupation with mechanical dolls and mannequins, the automaton passage in *Camera Lucida* may be linked to a longstanding *topos* in Western culture: a Pygmalionesque fantasy in which the artificial woman (robot, automaton, replicant) metaphorically embodies the allure of visual media.

KEYWORDS: Barthes, Fellini, Automaton, Photography, Cinema.

Although *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Barthes 1980) (hereafter referred to by its English title *Camera Lucida*) was published under the imprint of *Cahiers du cinéma*, the book had anti-cinematic origins, as Barthes reveals in the opening paragraph: “I decided I liked Photography *in opposition* to the Cinema, from which I nonetheless failed to separate it” (Barthes 1981, 3).¹ In interviews conducted prior to the book's publication, Barthes (1985, 357) explained its genesis as an expression of his preference for photography over cinema: “It's a modest book, done at the request of *Cahiers du cinéma*, which is publishing a series of books on film; they left me free to choose my own subject, however, and I chose photography.” In Barthes's quest to discover “the essential feature” whereby photography might be “distinguished from the community of images” (1981, 3),² a quest pursued through the 48 chapters that make up *Camera Lucida*, cinema figures as an inferior rival, incapable of evoking a response equivalent to the complexity and intensity provided by “certain photographs” (1981, 7). Yet if the task of the project was “to separate” photography from cinema, it seems ironic that an extended reference to a film, namely, *Fellini's Casanova* (1976), should dominate the penultimate chapter of *Camera Lucida*, a location that

¹ “Je décrétai que j'aimais la Photo *contre* le cinéma, dont je n'arrivais pas cependant à la séparer” (Barthes 1980, 13).

² “Par quel trait essentiel elle se distinguait de la communauté des images” (Barthes 1980, 14).

inherently marks the episode as a key moment in the book.³ It would appear that, in more ways than one, Barthes *needed* cinema in order to write this book.⁴

This essay attempts to make sense of Barthes's discussion of the automaton episode in *Fellini's Casanova* at a crucial moment in *Camera Lucida*. The automaton, I argue, serves as a nodal point linking the rival media of cinema and photography. Although Barthes disavows any interest in Fellini's film beyond the scene in which Casanova dances with an automaton, the film in fact shares many thematic concerns with *Camera Lucida*. When read in light of the film's metacinematic preoccupation with mechanical dolls and mannequins, the automaton passage in *Camera Lucida* may be linked to a longstanding *topos* in Western culture, a Pygmalionesque fantasy in which the artificial woman (robot, automaton, replicant) metaphorically embodies the allure of visual media.

Throughout his career, Barthes's tendency was to approach film by fragmenting it, either by extracting a detail (Garbo's face, Roman hairstyles) or by analyzing film stills. As critics have noted, *Camera Lucida's* concept of the photographic *punctum* (a detail in the image that that pricks or wounds the viewer) closely resembles the concept of the "obtuse meaning" which Barthes developed through an analysis of stills from Eisenstein's films in "The Third Meaning."⁵ The obtuse meaning is an apparently trivial detail, such as an item of clothing or a fake beard, that resonates beyond its diegetic role, "a signifier without a signified," which has "a distancing effect with regard to the referent" (Barthes 1977b, 61). In Barthes's texts, films and photographs alike are reduced to isolated details, frequently body parts, clothing, or jewelry, in other words, the classic inventory of psychoanalytic fetishes. Indeed, Barthes himself referred to the details that attracted him as fetishes in "The Third Meaning" (1977b, 58). In "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," Barthes praised Eisenstein's films precisely for their appeal to a fetishizing gaze: "the film is a contiguity of episodes [...] holding out to the fetishist, with dotted lines, the piece for him to cut out and take away to enjoy" (1977a, 72).

Barthes's fetishistic treatment of visual media, his delight in cutting out a piece to take away and enjoy, is especially conspicuous in *Camera Lucida's* discussion of the automaton episode from *Fellini's Casanova*. Expounding the notion of the photograph as a type of madness, a "shared hallucination," in the sense that the image is both false (what it depicts is not there) but also true (it was in front of the camera in the past), Barthes (1981, 115) proceeds to recall a trip to the cinema, "the same evening of a day I had again been looking at photographs of my

³ Pointing to evidence in *Mourning Diary* (Barthes 2009) that Barthes experienced some deeply moving responses to films during the months of *Camera Lucida's* gestation, Neil Badmington 2012 argues that Barthes suppressed the book's filmic origins.

⁴ On Barthes's ambivalent relationship with film over the course of his career, see Watts 2016, Ungar 2000, Gardner 2009, among others.

⁵ For a sustained discussion of the relationship between the obtuse meaning and the *punctum*, see Attridge 1997.

mother.”⁶ He was feeling sad, and the film bored him, up until the moment when a mechanical doll appeared on the screen:

when Casanova began dancing with the young automaton, my eyes were touched with a kind of painful and delicious intensity, as if I were suddenly experiencing the effects of a strange drug; each detail, which I was seeing so exactly, savoring it, so to speak, down to its last evidence, overwhelmed me: the figure’s slenderness, its tenuity—as if there were only a trifling body under the flattened gown; the frayed gloves of white floss silk; the faint (though touching) absurdity of ostrich feathers in the hair, that painted yet individual, innocent face: something desperately inert and yet available, offered, affectionate, according to an angelic impulse of “good will”...⁷ At which moment I could not help thinking about Photography: for I could say all this about the photographs which touched me (out of which I had methodically constituted Photography itself).⁸ (1981, 116).

What fascinates Barthes about the automaton and remains lodged in his memory are items of clothing and facial and physical features, precisely the sorts of elements that he tends to designate as *puncta* in photographs.⁹

As the passage continues, Barthes recalls how he tried to make sense of his intense response to the automaton:

I then realized there was a sort of link (or knot) between Photography, madness, and something whose name I did not know. I began by calling it: the pangs of love. Was I not, in fact, in love with the Fellini automaton? Is one not in love with certain photographs? [...] Yet it was not quite that. It was a broader current than a lover’s sentiment. In the love stirred by Photography (by certain photographs), another music is heard, its name oddly old-fashioned: Pity.¹⁰ (1981, 116).

⁶ “Le soir même d’un jour où j’avais encore regardé des photos de ma mère” (Barthes 1980, 177).

⁷ This is the translator’s ellipsis, possibly inserted to emphasize the peculiarity of the transition from film to photography. No ellipsis appears in this paragraph in *La Chambre claire* (1980, 178).

⁸ “Mais lorsque Casanova s’est mis à danser avec la jeune automate, mes yeux ont été touchés d’une sorte d’acuité atroce et délicate, comme si je ressentais tout d’un coup les effets d’une drogue étrange; chaque détail, que je voyais avec précision, le savourant, si je puis dire, jusqu’au bout de lui-même, me bouleversait : la minceur, la ténuité de la silhouette, comme s’il n’y avait qu’un peu de corps sous la robe aplatie; les gants fripés de filasse blanche; le léger ridicule (mais qui me touchait) du plumet de la coiffure, ce visage peint et cependant individuel, innocent : quelque chose de désespérément inerte et cependant de disponible, d’offert, d’aimant, selon un mouvement angélique de «bonne volonté». Je pensai alors irrésistiblement à la Photographie : car tout cela, je pouvais le dire des photos qui me touchaient (dont j’avais fait, par méthode, la Photographie même)” (Barthes 1980, 178).

⁹ Also typical of Barthes’s commentary on photographs is his tendency to get details wrong: the ostrich feathers that he recalls in the automaton’s hair are in fact white roses.

¹⁰ “Je crus comprendre qu’il y avait une sorte de lien (de nœud) entre la Photographie, la Folie et quelque chose dont je ne savais pas bien le nom. Je commençais par l’appeler : la souffrance d’amour. N’étais-je pas, en somme, amoureux de l’automate fellinien ? N’est-on pas amoureux de certaines photographies ? [...] Pourtant, ce n’étais pas tout à fait ça. C’était une vague plus ample que le sentiment amoureux. Dans l’amour soulevé par la Photographie (par certaines photos), une autre musique se faisait entendre, au nom bizarrement démodé : la Pitié” (Barthes 1980, 178-179).

Recalling some of the photographs which moved him, which featured the effect he named the *punctum*, “like that of the black woman with the gold necklace and the strapped pumps,” Barthes writes that he now recognized that the intensity of his engagement with those images constituted a type of madness infused with pity: “I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented, I entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die, as Nietzsche did when, as Podach tells us, on January 3, 1889, he threw himself in tears on the neck of a beaten horse: gone mad for Pity’s sake”¹¹ (1981, 116-117).

The connection that Barthes draws between viewing photographs of his mother earlier that day and his intense response to the dancing automaton verges on an acknowledgement that the doll poses as a surrogate for his lost mother. The attitude of angelic good will that he attributes to the automaton closely echoes the quality of kindness, “la bonté” (1980, 107), that for Barthes represents his mother’s essential character, a quality which, he feels, is best captured in the Winter Garden photograph of her at age five (1981, 69). In terms of the narrative structure of the book, the experience of viewing the cinematic automaton recalls and rehearses the pivotal moment (Chapter 28) when Barthes discovers the Winter Garden photograph, thereby fulfilling the more intimate level of the book’s quest, namely, to locate not only the essential nature of photography but also the essential photograph of his mother.

If the automaton stands in for his mother, then does Barthes identify with Casanova, the dancing partner and lover of the mechanical doll? Setting aside the incestuous aspect of such an identification, I would like to pause over Barthes’s ruminations on being in love with photographs as the equivalent of Casanova’s courtship of a mechanical doll. In Casanova’s self-abandonment to the simulacrum, Barthes discovers a model for his own intense engagement with the illusions of photography, what he terms photography’s alchemy or magic, and its madness. The trajectory of chapter 47, entitled “Madness, Pity,” is to explore the madness of photography, but ultimately to pair that madness with pity, rather than with love. Thus the libidinal element is raised only to be qualified and renamed as pity.

In a radio interview conducted several years prior to the composition of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes suggested that there was a necrophiliac quality to his interest in photography: “what I really find fascinating about photographs, and they do fascinate me, is something that probably has to do with death. Perhaps it’s an interest that is tinged with necrophilia, to be honest, a fascination with what has died but is represented as wanting to be alive” (Calvet 1995, 220). In Chapter 47 of *Camera Lucida*, necrophilia has been replaced by another type of forbidden desire, “Pygmalionism,” or “falling in love with statues [...] a rare form of

¹¹ “Comme celle de la négresse au mince collier, aux souliers à brides. A travers chacune d’elles, infailliblement, je passais outre l’irréalité de la chose représentée, j’entrais follement dans le spectacle, dans l’image, entourant de me bras ce qui est mort, ce qui va mourir, comme le fit Nietzsche, lorsque le 3 janvier 1889, il se jeta en pleurant au cou d’un cheval martyrisé : devenu fou pour cause de Pitié” (Barthes 1980, 179).

erotomania founded on the sense of vision,” according to Havelock Ellis, the British sexologist who is credited with naming the condition in 1905.¹² While Barthes does not specifically refer to Pygmalionism in *Camera Lucida*, the automaton passage nonetheless serves to signal the relevance of the Pygmalion myth to the story he has to tell about the affective power of photographs.

In what follows, I wish to move beyond the more intimate, personal dimensions of Barthes’s peculiar turn to a cinematic automaton in his reflections on photography. Taking seriously the notion of “shared hallucination,” I attempt to make sense of the book’s automaton passage by exploring the automaton as a more broadly shared cultural fantasy. This move involves returning *Camera Lucida*’s dancing mannequin to the context from which it was extracted, namely, *Fellini’s Casanova*. The film, I argue, draws upon and interrogates Pygmalionesque fantasies, that is, a longstanding cultural *topos* whereby visual media and creative agency are emblemized in the figure of an automaton, mannequin, or replicant.¹³ I argue that this *topos* lies behind Barthes’s automaton passage, in ways that are elided through his exclusive focus on his personal affective response to the figure. Admittedly, this task amounts to shifting the automaton from Barthes’s *punctum* into the scholar’s *stadium*.

Barthes claims to have been bored by Fellini’s film, up until the moment when Casanova begins dancing with the automaton. He implicitly dismisses the rest of the film as banal, the equivalent of the vast majority of photographs, which evoke a largely intellectual response that he names the *studium*.¹⁴ The dancing automaton, by contrast, provokes in Barthes the rare effect of pricking or wounding that he designates as the *punctum*. I would argue, however, that the automaton scenes are not as anomalous within Fellini’s film as Barthes implies; indeed, the automaton represents the culmination of the film’s thematic interests, some of which overlap with those of *Camera Lucida*.

Fellini’s Casanova is typical of much of the director’s work, most notably, *La Dolce Vita* and *8½*, in its focus on the failed artist and in its somewhat self-critical examination of the role of libidinal energies in artistic creation. Though not as overtly metacinematic as *8½*, indeed set in a period over a century prior to the invention of cinema, *Casanova* alludes to the technology and psychodynamics of cinema through the figure of the life-size automaton, the dancing mannequin which appears in two episodes. In the first episode, set at the Duke of Württemberg’s court, Casanova engages in a charming dance of courtship with the automaton, and then takes her to bed. The ensuing sex scene between the legendary lover and the

¹² *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “Pygmalionism,” accessed 5 January 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/155341.

¹³ For extensive surveys of the history of this *topos*, see Stoichita 2008, Hersey 2009, and Gross 1992.

¹⁴ In the notes for his lecture and seminar course, *The Preparation of the Novel*, Barthes (2011, 108) writes: “the whole of Fellini’s *Casanova* (which I don’t particularly like) redeems itself because the automaton sets a bell ringing—in me, of course, so taking no account of the cultural consensus.”

doll is no more absurd and mechanistic than any of the other sex scenes in this seemingly anti-erotic film. Casanova's sincere fascination with the automaton, his ability to suspend disbelief and carry on the performance of courtship and copulation with the wooden lady, recalls the spell cast by the automaton in E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story "The Sandman."¹⁵ But unlike the tragic protagonist of Hoffmann's tale, Casanova is not deceived by cunning artifice. He recognizes from the outset that the beauty is a mannequin, remarking: "Enchanting! I heard tell of something like this in Nuremberg where a general had a mechanical chess player made for himself. This exceeds the bounds of the imagination. By heaven, you'd swear that was living flesh; that skin colouring would deceive anyone" (Fellini 1976, chapter 13). The automaton's power to simulate living flesh might "deceive anyone," but it manifestly does *not* deceive Casanova.

The automaton reappears in the dream sequence at the close of the film, in which the dying Casanova imagines himself in the arms of the doll, the two of them revolving in a circular dance as though they were porcelain figurines perched atop a music box. Figuring both apotheosis and stasis, the final image of Casanova as a music box figurine offers a scathing summing up of the man whom Fellini, in interviews, dismissed as a nonentity. Reading Casanova's *History of My Life* evoked in Fellini

a profound sense of irritation, estrangement and disgust. It was this complete refusal, this total lack of the minimum of sympathy for the undertaking, it was this nausea, this aversion, that suggested to us the method of making the film, its only possible point of view. [...] A film on nothingness. (Fellini 1978, 28).

In this 1976 interview coinciding with the release of the film, Fellini claimed that his goal was to make an "anticinematic" film, "an abstract and formless film on a nonlife [...] there is no narrative either in the romantic or the psychological sense. There are no characters, there are no situations, there are neither premises nor developments nor catharses—it is a mechanical, frenetic ballet like an electrified wax museum" (Fellini 1978, 31).

As the expression "electrified wax museum" emphasizes, the figure of the automaton constitutes the aesthetics of this film. Mannequins of various kinds (dressmaker's dummies, dolls, a stuffed ape, a monumental bust of Venus) appear in frame and after frame, and Casanova himself is represented as a mannequin, dressed in ruffs and ribbons, often shot in profile, his face plastered in cosmetics. His resemblance to a sculpted portrait, a porcelain figure, an automaton, or waxwork is underlined repeatedly, sometimes through posing him alongside other mannequins. Long before Casanova encounters the dancing automaton, the mechanical nature of his eroticism is emblemized in a mechanical golden bird, which he carries in a coffin-like case and uses as a musical accompaniment to his romantic escapades. Fellini claimed that his "vision of Casanova was as a puppet":

¹⁵ Hughes 2009, 193, argues that the automaton passage in *Camera Lucida* includes a "veiled but unmistakable reference" to Freud's reading of Hoffmann's tale in his essay "The Uncanny."

“A real man would have had to have some concern for how the woman felt. He is so engrossed in his own sex act that, really, he is a mechanical man, like the mechanical bird he carries about” (Chandler 190). Making a film featuring a puppet-protagonist allowed Fellini to draw upon his childhood hobby of puppetry: “My early influence and experience as a puppetmaster in boyhood is, I think, more apparent in *Casanova* than in any of my other films” (Chandler 190).

To interpret the motif of the mannequin as nothing more than a critique of the hollow, mechanistic quality of *Casanova*'s character and his eroticism is to offer a merely banal reading of the film; it would be to take at face value Fellini's claim that the film is “anticinematic,” a “vertigo of nothingness” (Fellini 1978, 28). That is not the route that I want to pursue. Instead, taking a cue from Barthes's reading of the Fellini mannequin as emblematic of photography, I suggest a metacinematic reading of the film's preoccupation with mannequins.

The metacinematic linkage between doll and film long predates Fellini's *Casanova*. As film historians and theorists, including Annette Michelson (1984) and Andreas Huyssen (1982) among others, have observed, narratives about androids, especially female androids, and allusions to the Pygmalion myth are closely associated with the emergence of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the most peculiar instances is Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1886 novel *L'Ève future* (*The Future Eve*), in which a character named Thomas Edison invents a female android, using a technology that anticipates film projection. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam did not live to see the real Thomas Edison put a talking doll into production in 1889, nor to see Edison bring his early version of film, the kinetoscope, to Paris in 1894. *L'Ève future* was one of the inspirations for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), the film which features the most notorious of female androids. In between Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Fritz Lang, it is possible to cite a host of early films featuring the Pygmalion myth and other scenarios in which mannequins and dolls come to life.¹⁶ Among the earliest were *Le Magicien* (1898) and the now lost *Pygmalion et Galathée* (1898), by Georges Méliès, incorporating his characteristic trick photography to create the effect of the statue transforming into a real woman. Dominique Païni (2010, 335) observes:

Thanks to Georges Méliès, the movies exploited the legend of Pygmalion and Galatea right from the start, unwittingly offering a hermeneutic perspective on the medium's own birth, namely the passage from inanimate to animated. [...] It might be suggested that the invention of the movies involved a “Pygmalion complex.”

The Pygmalion myth set the parameters for this equation between cinema and android, with the filmic imagined as feminine and the filmmaker as masculine. An explicit allusion to Pygmalion occurs early in *Fellini's Casanova*, in an episode involving *Casanova*'s attraction to an anemic seamstress named Anna Maria who

¹⁶ For a list of such films, see Adriaensens and Jacobs 2015, 49. For an extended exploration of the prominence of the Pygmalion myth in nineteenth-century literature, art, popular culture, and early cinema, see Nead 2007, 45-104.

suffers from fainting spells. Her passivity only heightens his desire, and he takes her to bed during one of her fainting spells, first confessing: “That unearthly beauty of yours appeals to the artist in me. I would like to mould you like clay in my hands, like the statue I first took you to be. I would be your Pygmalion, giving life to my own creation” (Fellini 1976, chapter 3).

The Pygmalion myth is evoked again with the mechanical doll. In this instance, rather than claiming the role of artist for himself, Casanova speculates about an erotic scenario involving the automaton and its maker: “What a genius of an inventor your father must have been! Quite mad of course, but a poet, to have made you so beautiful! Did you lie with him incestuously?” (Fellini 1976, chapter 14). One of the effects of the Pygmalion narrative is to displace the autoerotic (the artist desires an inanimate object of his own creation) with incest (the artist copulates with his own creation). The automaton sequence highlights this displacement.

Many literary and cinematic treatments of the *topos* of the female automaton or android involve a *femme fatale* scenario, in which a man falls victim to the lure of a beautiful exterior, the most notorious instance being Lang’s *Metropolis* in which the angelic Maria’s likeness is stolen to create a robot-double. Underground labourers and elite playboys alike fall victim to the robot-Maria’s seductive spell; only when she is burnt at the stake as a witch do they discover her mechanical nature. The alluring woman, it turns out, has no soul; she is hollow, machinelike. Fellini’s *Casanova*, by contrast, does not mistake the automaton for a real woman. Copulating with a wooden doll poses no difficulty for the man who is himself so much a creature of artifice.

Supporting the notion that the automaton, in Fellini’s conception, was designed as a metacinematic allegory for the ambiguous power of film to simulate human life, are Fellini’s own remarks equating cinema with the feminine. For instance, in an interview coinciding with the release of *City of Women* in 1980, Fellini endorsed precisely this equation:

I think the cinema is a woman by virtue of its ritualistic nature. This uterus which is the theater, the fetal darkness, the apparitions—all create a projected relationship, we project ourselves onto it, we become involved in a series of vicarious transpositions, and we make the screen assume the character of what we expect of it, just as we do with women, upon whom we impose ourselves. Woman being a series of projections invented by man. (Fellini 1981, 8).

Fellini’s notion of the movie theater as womb-like space filled by masculine projections is literalized in his *Casanova* film in an episode set at a carnival, which features a magic lantern show, a technological precursor to cinema. The show is billed as an encounter with the eternal feminine, a maternal goddess in the shape of a whale named the Great Mouna. Audience members (exclusively male) enter the theatre through the mouth of the whale, where they are treated to a series of projected images of *vagina dentata*, the demonized obverse of the idealized woman. Casanova’s later romance with the automaton may be read as yet another encounter with a pre-cinematic technology, but one in which the feminine,

overwhelming and frightening in the gigantic Mouna, has been subdued into a compliant mechanism.

If the mechanical doll is cinema, then does the film offer a self-deprecating portrait of the filmmaker? In interviews conducted during the film's production and shortly after its completion, Fellini vehemently disassociated himself from the protagonist, claiming that he was repulsed by the impression of the man that he gained from the memoirs and that his goal was "to destroy the myth of Casanova" (Fellini 1994, 90). The director's vision of Casanova as a puppet seems to have had the effect of distancing himself from the character, and was carried over into a treatment of the actor Donald Sutherland as a type of puppet. In his biography of Fellini, Tullio Kezich (2006, 322) writes:

Fellini wants Sutherland's forehead to be seven centimeters higher; his real eyebrows are plucked and fake ones drawn at the last minute. He tries on as many as 300 noses and chins, glued on and then removed. [...] At times, the director's determination to impose physical deformities and humiliating behavior on the character verges on sadism.

Recalling the experience of being directed by Fellini, Sutherland claimed that the director "excised" his ego: "he literally surgically pulled it out and threw it off [...] I literally was there to do his bidding" (Sutherland 2005). By reducing the character and the actor playing him to a puppet, and relishing his own role as puppetmaster, Fellini apparently held at bay the discovery that he was making a film about himself. According to Kezich (2006, 321), "the recognition that the protagonist is a kind of expressionistic self-parody will come to the director" only once the filming is completed.

Sutherland (2005) claims that filming the scene in which Casanova dances with the mechanical doll had a transformative effect on Fellini "such that he found a totally new line for the film, he developed sympathy for the character Casanova." Having discovered "a very specific humanity" in the lover's wooing of the mannequin, Fellini developed a new approach to the film's ending (Sutherland 2005). Evidently, Sutherland is referring to the pathos and lyrical beauty of the final scene, in which the dying man dreams of a reunion with the automaton on Venice's frozen Grand Canal and ends up locked in an embrace with the mechanical doll. Bernardino Zapponi (1995, 101), Fellini's collaborator on the script, recalls that "even Federico had tears in his eyes" when they shot the closing ballet between Casanova and the automaton.¹⁷

It seems ironic that a scene featuring a mechanical doll should prove pivotal in eliciting sympathy for a character that the director had heretofore reviled. Rather than serving to emphasize the mechanical nature of the legendary lover, which was Fellini's stated intention, the doll instead somehow endowed Casanova with more humanity. In other words, the automaton might be identified as a *generator*, not just a *simulator*, of humanity. Of course, the mechanical nature of the doll was

¹⁷ My translation of Zapponi's text: "Al balletto finale di Casanova con l'automa, sulla laguna ghiacciata, lo stesso Federico ha le lacrime agli occhi."

itself largely an illusion, created through the ingenious performance of Angela Adele Lojodice, a trained dancer. According to Zapponi (1995, 100), Lojodice was replaced for certain shots with an actual doll, the substitution so skillfully done that it is difficult to distinguish between the woman and her replica in the finished film.

Barthes's experience on viewing the first dancing scene with the automaton oddly echoes the trajectory that Sutherland describes for Fellini: in both cases, the introduction of the mechanical doll prompts a radical shift in affective response on the viewer's part. For Barthes, the doll itself is the locus of sympathy: "that painted yet individual, innocent face: something desperately inert and yet available, offered, affectionate, according to an angelic impulse of 'good will'" (Barthes 1981, 116). In Barthes's account of his own overwhelming response to the automaton, Casanova is literally effaced. Casanova's name falls away, and we hear only about Barthes's fascination with the doll. Arguably, Casanova disappears from the account because Barthes has imaginatively occupied the protagonist's place as the automaton's lover: "Was I not, in fact, in love with the Fellini automaton?" (Barthes 1981, 116).

The notion of photography as a Pygmalionesque medium, its technology that of mannequin-production and its reception analogous to seduction by a simulacrum, is not confined to Chapter 47 of *Camera Lucida*. The *topos* of the mannequin recurs through the text. Just as the automaton sequence in *Fellini's Casanova* figures as the culmination of the film's mannequin aesthetics, so does Barthes's passage on the automaton serve as the culmination of his text's preoccupation with photography's uncanny power to transform people into reified replicas. For instance, referring to the early years of portrait photography, Barthes (1981, 13) observes that the medium "transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object."¹⁸ The effect of reification was redoubled through the use of devices to help the sitter remain still, which Barthes describes as "a kind of prosthesis invisible to the lens, which supported and maintained the body in its passage to immobility: this headrest was the pedestal of the statue I would become" (13).¹⁹ For Barthes, the experience of sitting for a photograph evokes a sense of self-alienation, as he finds himself deliberately posing, fashioning another self for the camera: "I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. [...] I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice" (10-11).²⁰ As he tries to project a certain version of himself for the camera, he experiences feelings of

¹⁸ "La Photographie transformait le sujet en objet, et même, si l'on peut dire, en objet de musée" (Barthes 1980, 29).

¹⁹ "Un appareil, nommé l'appuie-tête, sorte de prothèse, invisible à l'objectif, qui soutenait et maintenait le corps dans son passage à l'immobilité : cet appuie-tête était le socle de la statue qui j'allais devenir" (Barthes 1980, 29).

²⁰ "Je me fabrique instantanément un autre corps, je me métamorphose à l'avance en image. [...] je sens que la Photographie crée mon corps ou le mortifie, selon son bon plaisir" (Barthes 1980, 25).

inauthenticity, a loss not just of selfhood but of life itself: “I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears [...] this death in which his gesture will embalm me” (14).²¹

If photography is to escape this mortifying, embalming, or reifying effect, it needs to be animated through the mystery of the *punctum*. Barthes (1981, 20) writes: “suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it.”²² As he goes on to explain, “the photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in ‘lifelike’ photographs), but it animates me” (20).²³ This passage, early in *Camera Lucida*, anticipates the automaton image near the close of the text. What Barthes has in mind, it seems, is a deliberate and conscious submission to the illusion of the image, and an effect of reciprocal animation. Not only is the dead figure in the photograph animated, but so is the viewer of the image.

Barthes insists that the animation effect that he attributes to certain photographs is not to be confused with the medium of cinema. In the final chapter of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes maintains the polemical line introduced at the opening, whereby photography is preferred to cinema. In his final dig at cinema in the course of a paean to the madness of photography, Barthes asserts that “cinema participates in this domestication of Photography—at least the fictional cinema,” and that film “is always the very opposite of an hallucination; it is simply an illusion” (117).²⁴ What Casanova’s automaton seems to provide for Barthes is a rare third term where the dialectic pitting photography against cinema can be momentarily resolved. With its mechanical, rather than organic, animation, the automaton offers an allegory for the power of cinematic technology to lend motion to still images. The automaton is the uncanny nodal point where cinema and photography meet, not only for Barthes in *Camera Lucida* but also for filmmakers, from Méliès to Fellini and beyond.

²¹ “Je ne suis ni un sujet ni un objet, mais plutôt un sujet qui se sent devenir objet : je vis alors une micro-expérience de la mort (de la parenthèse) : je deviens vraiment spectre. Le Photographe le sait bien, et lui-même a peur [...] de cette mort dans laquelle son geste va m’embaumer” (Barthes 1980, 30).

²² “Telle photo, tout d’un coup, m’arrive ; elle m’anime et je l’anime” (Barthes 1980, 39).

²³ “La photo elle-même n’est en rien animée (je ne crois pas aux photos « vivantes ») mais elle m’anime” (Barthes 1980, 39).

²⁴ “Le cinéma participe à cette domestication de la Photographie – du moins le cinéma fictionnel [...] il est toujours le contraire même d’une hallucination; il est simplement une illusion” (Barthes 1980, 180-81).

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