

Judit Bartha*

Olimpia Revisited. Variations on a Theme by E. T. A. Hoffmann in 20th Century Avant-Garde Art

Abstract

The long reception of the doll Olimpia in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandmann* represents the change of the ideologies concerning androids. The paper focuses on three transformations of the Romantic creature in 20th century Avant-garde art, namely, in works by Max Ernst, Oskar Schlemmer, and Cindy Sherman. It is aimed at showing how the machine myth of the 18th and 19th centuries, closely related to Gothic Romanticism, could become an important part of 20th century art.

Keywords

Romanticism, Gothic Fiction, Android, Avant-Garde, Fine Arts

The production of human-shaped automata for scientific purposes became popular in the 18th century, during the First Industrial Revolution, but it was not until the 19th century that they gained ground in literature. In *The Aesthetics of Ugliness* (1853), Karl Rosenkranz names the arch-parents of the artificial humans figuring in the short stories of the age: Mary Shelley, Heinrich von Kleist, Jean Paul, Achim von Arnim, E. T. A. Hoffmann. But Rosenkranz regards the trend represented by these authors as a deformation of Romanticism, where “the most grotesque insanity counted as ingeniousness” (Rosenkranz 1990, 280). This leads him to the conclusion that their fictitious androids do not deserve a deeper inquiry.

* Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary
Email: bartha.judit@btk.elte.hu

The works of the above authors that Rosenkranz calls “spookish” (Rosenkranz 1990, 280) belong to the tradition of Gothic literature, which has emerged in England in the late 18th century. Regarding the earliest programmatic works—such as the novels of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis—the term “Gothic” refers primarily to the wild, dark, uncontrolled Middle Ages. The locations are spookish castles, abandoned monasteries, scary jails, or midnight graveyards. The plots are frequently centered around tragic mistakes, sexual aberrations, and savage crimes. A further feature of the genre is that, besides terror and horror, fate and mystics play an important role, too. But already in the most successful of the early works, the supernatural is mostly but an interlude, so that the dread overcoming man can come to the surface. The English Gothic tradition arrives in Germany, under the name of *Schauerroman*, at the end of the 18th century, brought in by the generation that grew up on *Sturm und Drang* literature, then it spread elsewhere in Europe and America (Steinecke 1988, 558-562). Over time, a tendentious change makes itself visible within the broad genre of Gothic fiction (and across the variety of sub-genres): a marked shift from “torture chambers” to “the chambers of the human heart and brain” (Spooner 2006, 18). As a result, the individual who experiences their own psychological and existential limits becomes the real source of mystique.

In Rosenkranz’s view, artificial humans (puppets, nutcrackers, automata, wax figures) are not essential to what he calls “spookish” fiction (Rosenkranz 1990, 280). He pays no attention to the profound cause of the thrill induced by the artificial humans, namely, to the belief that human beings are only mechanical puppets in the hand of God or blind fate, or to the then already existing ideology that humans will one day be replaced by these “humanoid machines” which they create in a rivalry with God (*cf.* Sauer 1990, 287-306).

The machine as an anti-human object supplanting humans was a frequent theme in Romanticism even though the actual production of androids had lost much of its popularity by the early 19th century. This happened because the technical know-how of the age was not sufficient to improve the existing devices. The more practical mentality demanded the production of artificial body parts and sense organs rather than artificial humans. It was only after World War I that the first primitive humanoid robots fulfilling the ideal android were created. The more sophisticated versions came with the turn in science and technology after World War II, with the military inventions of the Cold War. But these early robots were more work tools than artificial humans. The very word “robot” stems from Czech *robota*,

“forced labor”, which was first used as a term for artificial humans by Karel Čapek in his 1921 play *R.U.R. Rossum’s Universal Robots* (Magyar 1992, 147-151).

The high tech descendants of the Enlightenment’s androids appeared with the computing revolution of the 1970s, while the most advanced cyborgs that abolish the borders between humans and animals, living organisms and machines, body and non-body are the microelectronic and biological inventions of the 1980s, spiced with a great deal of sci-fi and ideas about gender.

It is in the light of this arc of development that the “protagonist” of my paper, the fictitious android or mechanic doll called Olimpia in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The Sandman (Der Sandmann, 1816)* and her history of reception, will be interpreted. In what follows, I will first analyze the short story by focusing on the figure of Olimpia (1). Then I will take a look at some transformations of her in the 20th-century Avant-garde, namely, in works by Max Ernst (2), Oskar Schlemmer (3), and Cindy Sherman (4), who rediscover the importance of the relationship of the human and machines. My paper is not meant as anything like a systematic approach to how the female android of the 18th and 19th centuries is represented in 20th-century art. I only would like to pinpoint a link between Romanticism and Avant-garde. I will try to show how the change of the attitude towards artificial humans is reflected in some prominent works of Avant-garde art, as well as to point out that these works still use some elements of the literary tradition of Gothic Romanticism.

I

The German writer, composer, conductor, and lawyer E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) was both a child of the Enlightenment and a key figure of Romanticism. While believing in technical progress, he also experienced the skepticism about it. *The Sandman* and his other short stories about human-shaped automata—*The Automaton (Die Automate, 1814)*, *Nutcracker and Mouse King (Nussknacker und Mausekönig, 1816)*, *The Mysterious Child (Das fremde Kind, 1817)*—owe much to this duality (Meteling 2009, 484-487).

Hoffmann was interested in the trendy automata of the age already in his youth. In 1803 he read Johann Christian Wiegleb’s *Natural Magic (Die natürliche Magie, 1789)*, a popularized version of Johann Nikolaus Martius’s *Instructions in Natural Magic (Unterricht in der natürlichen Magie)*. From this

book, he learned about the works of the Hungarian polyhistor Farkas Kempelen, *The Turkish Chess Player* (1769), and *The Speaking Machine* (around 1790). He also knew the most famous automata of the French inventor Jacques de Vaucanson, *The Flute Player* (1738) and *The Digesting Duck* (1739), the three humanoid automata created by Pierre Jaquet-Droz and Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz, *The Writer*, *The Musician*, and *The Draughtsman* (1768–1774), as well as *The Trumpet Player* (1810) by Johann Gottfried Kaufmann (Hilscher 1992, 20). Yet Hoffmann felt a kind of distrust towards these soulless machines, which was a general attitude at that time, but in his case, it was amplified by his interest in psychology.

It was during his stay in Bamberg from 1808 to 1814 that Hoffmann received the strongest impulses in this regard. There he got acquainted with Adalbert Friedrich Marcus, the founder and director of the Bamberg hospital and lunatic asylum. As an important figure of Romantic medicine, Marcus was an acknowledged authority in Germany. His broad circle of friends included Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, the Schlegel brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich, and Gottfihlf Heinrich von Schubert. Marcus introduced Hoffmann to physicians and made him acquainted with the working of the hospital, researches, and scientific works. He advised Hoffmann to read two books by Schubert, *Views from the Night Side of Natural Science* (*Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft*, 1808), and *Symbolism of Dreams* (*Die Symbolik des Traumes*, 1814). These two books revealed to Hoffmann the dark aspects of science and the relation between Mesmerian magnetism and poetic inspiration. The natural philosophy of the German Romantic medical circle gave Hoffmann a background for his Gothic short stories (Segebrecht 1996, 61-90). These include the two-volume *Night Pieces* (*Nachtstücke*, 1816–1817), beginning with *The Sandman*, a work made famous some hundred years later by Sigmund Freud's study *The Uncanny* (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919).

The very title of the collection indicates its relation to Gothic Romanticism. Up to the middle of the 18th century, the term *Nachtstück* was used in Germany almost exclusively as a category of painting: it referred to a "picture depicting a night scene." In the second half of the century, however, it becomes widespread in literature, a change which reflects the adoption of the English "night piece." This term was originally used, in connection with Gothic fiction, to denote contents related to death, thrill, dread, and threat. As night becomes a key notion of Romanticism, it assumes a wider meaning in different compounds. Hoffmann's use of the word *Nachtsück* refers back to painting, for he wants to achieve a literary translation, as it were, of the

technique of pictorial depiction, and in so doing, he draws on the Gothic novel, too. There is a crucial difference, however: whereas in early English Gothic novels the cause of the mystic-demonic events usually unravels in the end, in Hoffmann the unveiling often leads to a further thrilling mystery, and the reader gets no clue whatsoever as to how to explain it (Steinecke 1985, 951-960). We have a very important criterion here, namely, that the reader must be able to perceive, and the author must be able to make perceivable, the thrillingness of the world. H. P. Lovecraft aptly summarizes that in the notion of "atmosphere," which he identifies as the most essential feature of Gothic stories: „Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation. [...] The one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers" (Lovecraft 2009).

The Sandman, in which the career of the doll Olimpia begins, testifies to Hoffmann's enthusiasm both for Enlightenment automata and for Romantic Gothic stories. It is a Romantic machine myth in that it reveals, through the character of an android, the early 19th-century attitude towards artificial humans. And it is Gothic Romanticism in that it describes a mystic process in which a psychically unstable poet goes crazy and commits suicide in the end. The fact that it has been interpreted in so various ways is largely due to the unsettling narrative strategy that Hoffmann employs so masterfully. It leaves completely undecided whether the night sandman taking shape as Coppelius/Coppola is a real being within the fiction or just a vision of the psychically unstable poet. Likewise, it remains an open question whether Olimpia is a lifeless machine, a product of pure science, or a demonic being that has been created with the help of supernatural powers, and in which the features of man and machine are amalgamated. The intertwining of the machine myth and the Gothic shows itself as a complicated interrelation between creator and creature. Olimpia has two fathers: Coppelius/Coppola and Spalanzani. The lawyer Coppelius and the barometer vendor Coppola are two versions of the sandman, a sinister character of European folklore who steals the eyes and souls of children. It is Coppelius who inserts the eyes stolen from Nathanael into Olimpia. The mechanical structure of the doll is designed by Professor Spalanzani, who is a fictitious descendant of the Italian priest and scientist Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729–1799), a forerunner of manipulation in molecular biology, the first to perform *in vitro* fertilization. The name Spal(l)anzani does not sound good in this context, since what he achieved relates backward to the homunculus experiments of the alchemists and forwards to today's genetic engineering.

Getting involved in this demonic-mechanical world of the two creators/fathers, the flesh and blood poet goes through a process of mechanization, becoming more and more alienated from life. The first phase of this comes already in his childhood, when the lawyer Coppelius, in making alchemistic experiments together with Nathanael's father, wants to rob the boy's eyes and wriggles his body parts as if they were the faulty components of a mechanical toy (Hoffmann 1982, 188). Nathanael enters the second phase as a university student: under the influence of Coppola, who reminds him of Coppelius, he realizes that man is but a mechanical puppet, put at the mercy of higher powers both in everyday life and in art (Hoffmann 1982, 197-198). In the third phase, the living world is replaced by the lifeless (puppet-like, mechanical) world and *vice versa*. First, Nathanael's living bride, Clara, appears to him as a "lifeless automaton" (Hoffmann 1982, 200), then the lifeless automaton, Olimpia, as a living woman (Hoffmann 1982, 203-205). After the dismantling scene, he realizes that Olimpia is an "inanimate puppet" (Hoffmann 1982, 210). The peak of this phase is the tower scene, in which Nathanael, looking through the spyglass, sees his real bride, Clara, as a "wooden doll" and tries to hurl her from the steeple (Hoffmann 1982, 214). As he finds Coppola's spyglass again, the only possibility left to him is to commit suicide. In the fourth phase, Nathanael, having leaped from the tower, presumably falls apart into components and becomes thereby identical with Olimpia.

Olimpia, standing at the end of the road of mechanization (which at the same time is the path of perfection desired by Nathanael), is an artificial being, yet her design is so lifelike that her appearance matches that of a real 19th-century saloon lady:

We think she is [...] singularly statuesque and soulless. Her figure is regular, and so are her features, that can't be gainsaid; and if her eyes were not so utterly devoid of life, I may say, of the power of vision, she might pass for a beauty. She is strangely measured in her movements, they all seem as if they were dependent upon some wound-up clockwork. Her playing and singing have the disagreeably perfect, but insensitive timing of a singing machine, and her dancing is the same. We felt quite afraid of this Olimpia, and did not like to have anything to do with her; she seemed to us to be only acting like a living creature, and as if there was some secret at the bottom of it all (Hoffmann 1982, 208).

Sigmund, speaking here as an outside observer, cannot find any fault in Olimpia's look. The only things he dislikes and sharply criticizes are her empty gaze, mechanized movement, dance, and singing. Thus, the only way

to diminish the suspicious perfection of the doll is to debunk its hidden mechanism, i.e., to dismantle (mutilate) her. As Sarah Kofman aptly puts it: "Perfection is thus the sign that one is dealing with a machine which is mimicking life; an apparent perfection which both masks and reveals its connection with the powers of darkness, with the rigidity and coldness of death" (Kofman 1991, 148).

What makes Olimpia so elusive is that she has no clear identity even within the fictitious story. Due to the unsettling narration, the combination of the mechanical (lifeless) and the organic (living) can be regarded in different ways: as a manipulation of the human soul that can be explained rationally; as the result of a laboratory operation resorting to supernatural powers; as the real implantation of an organ (the eyes) into a mechanical structure; and as a mere symbolic construction. The intellectual uncertainty generated by this ambiguity—an important characteristic of Gothic fiction—opens various interpretative possibilities for the 20th-century artists to be discussed below.

II

The art movements emerging in the early 20th century (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism) transcended the Romantic fear of the machine by trying to prove that the scientifically founded alliance of humans and machines can effectively advance the development of the world. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Carlo Carrà, Giorgio de Chirico, Hannah Höch, Max Ernst, and Oskar Schlemmer are some of the artists who believed in this effort.

The German painter, graphic artist, sculptor, and poet Max Ernst (1891–1976) became acquainted with Metaphysical Painting in his Dadaist period in Cologne. It was there that he created the series of lithographs *Fiat modes pereat ars* (*Let There Be Fashion, Down with Art*, 1919). The mannequin of the stone prints resembles the works of de Chirico, Carrà, and Francis Picabia. Ernst discovered some works by them depicting mannequins in the Italian periodical *Valori Plastici* in 1919 (Reisenfeld 1997; Spies 1991, 48-49). Some motifs of *Fiat modes pereat ars* evoke the atmosphere of metaphysical paintings, such as the tennis-court-like floor of the tailor's shop, the giant prosthetic limb, the calipers, the unusual shadows, or the floating dress (Benkő 2011, 212). Yet Ernst's mannequin is not surrounded by the metaphysical mystique so characteristic of the similar figures in the paintings of de Chirico, who was his role model at that time. Werner Spies even

talks about the grotesque transformation of de Chirico's motifs by Ernst (Spies 1991, 50). This grotesque approach fundamentally changes the mood of the events in the tailor's shop, too. A male figure performs a series of mechanical operations (undressing and mutilation) on a mannequin unable to resist, a passive, reified female figure, which can arouse a bad feeling in the beholder.

In the very choice of the topic, Ernst was inspired by Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, which was one of his favorite books. The first three lithographs might evoke the scene of the short story in which Nathanael enters Spalanzani's home and realizes that Olympia, now torn by his quarreling creators, is only a void puppet or automaton. Ernst was particularly interested in the motifs of the laboratory and the artificial creatures on the verge between the human and the mechanical, which return in different forms in his collages. He also liked several Gothic works in which the creation of human beings plays a central role, such as Achim von Arnim's *Isabella of Egypt* (*Isabella von Ägypten*, 1812), Prosper Mérimée's *The Venus of Ille* (*La Venus d'Ille*, 1837), and Paul Wegener's movie *The Golem* (*Der Golem*, 1915) (Spies 1991, 228).

Ernst was largely influenced by Sigmund Freud, too. He learned Freud's theory of psychoanalysis before World War I, as a university student, when he read *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*Die Traumdeutung*, 1900) and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (*Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*, 1905) (Spies 1991, 49). *Fiat modes pereat ars* might also have been inspired by Freud's *The Uncanny*, though this is an uncertain assumption because Freud's essay was published in the autumn of the same year, 1919. The essay relies on Hoffmann's short story in explaining and justifying the notion of the uncanny, but it focusses on Nathanael rather than on Olympia. Ernst utilizes an important motif that Freud ignores when dealing with the problem. Freud claims that the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) is caused by the unexpected and frightening recurrence of something that was once familiar (*heimlich*). He relies on Schelling's definition, according to which "unheimlich nennt man alles, was im Geheimnis, im Verborgnen, in der Latenz bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist" ("everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light") (Schelling 1857, 649; Freud 1976, 623). In his exposition of the experience of the uncanny, Freud identifies two different but not separable sources thereof: repressed childhood complexes and primitive beliefs thought to be overcome. Towards the end of the essay, Freud unites these two types in a single conclusion: "Our conclusion could then be stated thus: an uncanny experience

occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" (Freud 1976, 639). In effect, Freud detects a clear example of this dual experience in Hoffmann's short story. On the one hand, Nathanael's primitive beliefs about the sandman are thought to be overcome, yet they become confirmed again, while on the other hand, his fear of losing his eyes expresses a childhood castration fear caused by the punishing father.

Much has already been written about the significance as well as the shortcomings and distortions of Freud's famous interpretation (Masschelein 2011). What is important here is that Freud deliberately pushes the figure of Olimpia into the background so that he can ignore the uncanny that stems from the intellectual uncertainty induced by wax dolls and humanoid automata. His Vienna colleague Ernst Jentsch gave a detailed analysis of this phenomenon in his 1906 paper *Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen* (Jentsch 1906, 195-198, 203-205). Freud rejects Jentsch's view at the beginning of his essay (Freud 1976, 624-625, 627), for it does not fit his universal conception of the *Unheimlich*, meant to underpin the role of the unconscious (Kofman 1991, 128-132). He disregards the fact that Hoffmann's narration indirectly questions the overall concept of the human, too, in that it generates intellectual uncertainty as to where the border lies between the real and the imaginary, as well as between the animate and the inanimate (Kofman 1991, 132-141, 141-144). Remarkably, in another passage of the essay, Freud himself mentions the blurring of the boundary between reality and imagination as one of the uncanny motifs (Freud 1976, 636).

Apart from the question of whether or not *Fiat modes pereat ars* could have been directly inspired by *The Uncanny*, Ernst's Dadaist works show the influence of some Freudian notions, which Freud develops in his earlier writings, too, such as the fear of death, the repetition compulsion, the repression of sexual desires, narcissistic love, etc. These, however, are phenomena that all appeared in early Gothic fiction, mostly as fantastic motifs. Freud was the first to remove these problems from the realm of the fantastic, to subject them to scientific investigation in his theory of psychoanalysis, and to demonstrate that they are part of everyday life (Todorov 1973, 160-161). It can be said, then, that Surrealism, Gothic fiction, and psychoanalysis each had an impact on Ernst's work.

Fiat modes pereat ars, consisting of a title page (Fig. 1) and eight plates, appeared first as a complete series at Schlömlch Verlag in Cologne (in 1920 the individual prints came out separately). Its title, which praises fashion

as against art, can only be interpreted as irony, since the prints definitely do not put mode on a pedestal, nor do they show the stereotypical ideal of a woman. On the contrary, the tailor's dismantlable mannequin destroys this ideal and deprives it of its characteristic attributes. The face, the body, and the clothing lack any plasticity, we see abstract geometric forms instead. Composed of such forms, the mannequin is a torso already in its initial state of perfection and finishes as a collection of disjointed trunk and limbs in an angular, bottomless, empty form imitating a box.

It is the first three lithographs that show the dismantling of Olympia. The strongly geometric plates depict two figures in a tailor's shop: a fully dressed tailor with his tools (yarn, calipers, clothes box) and a female-shaped mannequin and its components (clothes, shoes, detachable limbs, screws). On Plate I, the tailor removes the mannequin's right arm, destroying its abstract perfection (Fig. 2). On Plate II, he takes off the clothes, thereby annihilating the femininity of the mannequin and transforming it into an abstract, impersonal, substitutable object (Fig. 3). On Plate III, titled as *Letzte kresktion*, the completely truncated and dismembered mannequin of the already absent tailor is about to get into the box (Fig. 4).

This kind of destruction can be interpreted in different ways. First, it fits the Dadaist idea of demolishing art: the artist, appearing here in the mask of the tailor, destroys both the human and craftsmanship, but this is a creative process at the same time (Reisenfeld 1997). Second, the deprivation of the mannequin of its feminine, indeed, human, attributes can indicate the rejection of mode and the stereotypes associated with it (Benkő 2011, 212). Third, the reification and truncation of the human body might refer to aberrant sexual desires and death, and in this sense, the destruction can be linked back both to Gothic literary tradition and to Freudian psychoanalysis.

III

The German painter, sculptor, stage designer, and choreographer Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943) was a prominent member of the Bauhaus school. His mechanic "art figures" are abstract entities representing the forms of human behavior. They also express Schlemmer's own experiences of several art movements such as Futurism, Constructivism, Dadaism, and Metaphysical Painting (Benkő 2011, 223). In his attempt to create an ideal type of person, Schlemmer wants to combine these movements with German Romanticism. He draws inspiration from several authors who became important

representatives of Gothic Romanticism with their artificial human figures (among other things): Kleist, Jean Paul, Brentano, and Hoffmann (Wick 2000, 263). He develops his idea of the “art figure” in the essay *Man and Art Figure* (*Mensch und Kunstfigur*, 1925). The term itself is borrowed from Brentano’s short story *The Tale of Gockel, Hinkel, and Gackeliah* (*Märchen von Gockel, Hinkel, und Gackeleia*, 1838), in which *Kunstfigur* refers to a mechanically moved puppet (Schober 1993, 343). But the essay highlights the importance of Kleist’s marionette and Hoffmann’s automaton as well:

The endeavor to free man from his physical bondage and to heighten his freedom of movement beyond his native potential resulted in substituting for the organism the mechanical human figure (*Kunstfigur*): the automaton and the marionette. E. T. A. Hoffmann extolled the first of these, Heinrich von Kleist the second. [...] Possibilities are extraordinary in light of today’s technological advancements: precision machinery, scientific apparatus of glass and metal, the artificial limbs developed by surgery, the fantastic costumes of the deep-sea diver and the modern soldier, and so forth. [...] The artificial human figure (*Kunstfigur*) permits any kind of movement and any kind of position for as long time as desired. [...] An equally significant aspect of this is the possibility of relating the figure of natural “naked” Man to the abstract figure, both of which experience, through this confrontation, an intensification of their peculiar natures (Schlemmer 1987, 33-35).

Though the passage might suggest that Kleist’s marionette and Hoffmann’s automaton are equally significant for Schlemmer, his conception is closer to Kleist’s. In *The Sandman*, the doll strikes Sigmund, the external observer, as frightful or scary with the markedly uncanny qualities of its shape and movement: it is “statuesque,” “soulless,” “strangely measured,” “disagreeably perfect,” a “singing [and dancing] machine” (Hoffmann 1982, 208). In Kleist’s essay *On the Marionette Theatre* (*Über das Marionettentheater*, 1810), however, Herr C... finds the ideal form of human movement in that of a marionette that “would never be self-conscious” and is “antigrav”. He discovers “grace” in the dance of the lifeless puppet as well as in the dance performed by “unfortunate” people having “mechanical legs” (Kleist 2012).

Accordingly, in Schlemmer’s total theatre the actors and actresses are not characters with feelings and emotions but mechanic instruments wearing metallic masks and surrounded by a mechanically structured space with abstract, moveable scenic elements. As a result, stage action becomes an automatic process void of any narration.

Schlemmer's piece *The Figural Cabinet* (*Das figurale Kabinett*) is based on Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. First performed in 1922 (Schlemmer 1987, 48-50), it enacts an abstract metaphysical painting, a grotesque vision figuring Master Spalanzani as a tempter and the doll Olimpia in the form of a female-shaped barometer (Fig. 5). The metaphysical "laboratory" is a large, bizarre amalgam, in which various body parts living their own lives are mingled with machine components. The world presented here is of dual character: its elements are material and conceptual, concrete and abstract, natural and artificial, visual, and acoustic. As Schlemmer himself puts it in his commentary: "Half shooting gallery—half *metaphysicum abstractum*. Medley, i.e., variety of sense and nonsense, methodized by Color, Form, Nature, and Art; Man and Machine, Acoustics and Mechanics." (Schlemmer 1987, 48) Also, he makes clear references to Hoffmann's Olimpia with the motifs of the eyes and the clockwork: "the rainbow eye lights up," "an eye glows electrically," "ball becomes pendulum; pendulum swings; clock runs" (Schlemmer 1987, 48). Like in *The Sandman*, the action points towards a bad outcome, complete madness and suicide, but this version is different from the Romantic story because now it is Spalanzani who must die. The metaphysical Master commits suicide, "shooting himself in the head, and dying a thousand deaths from worry about the function of the functional" (Schlemmer 1987, 49). That is, he voluntarily kills himself as he realizes that he cannot meet the criteria of perfect mechanisticness. All in all, however, it would be wrong to evaluate the 20th-century technical activity of an automaton-maker coming from Romanticism as the triumph of mechanics. Rather, as Thomas Schober points out, it has to do with the debate between the two schools within the Bauhaus, the sacral-expressionist and the functionalist, a debate in which Schlemmer takes a middle position. With the bizarre, technicized amalgam of *The Figural Cabinet*, Schlemmer, on the one hand, gets rid of the demonic idea of the machine that belongs to Romanticism. He does not share the technical euphoria, on the other hand, since the technical miracle ends with the Master's death (Schober 1991, 348-350).

IV

American contemporary photo artist and film director Cindy Sherman (1954–) became renowned for her fictitious self-portraits in the early 1980s, as a member of the post-conceptual generation of artists. In her photo series, she poses in the most extreme female roles and characters, using different settings, makeups, wigs, prostheses, and clothes, which give the pictures an erotic, horroristic, or art historic charge.

Sherman's art can be related to the type of the late Avant-garde which draws inspiration from the tradition of Gothic fiction. According to Catherine Spooner, "contemporary artists working in what could be described as a Gothic idiom, including Cindy Sherman, Rachel Whiteread, Douglas Gordon, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Jane and Louise Wilson, and Gregory Crewdson, are concerned not with spiritual transcendence and historical nostalgia, but with the themes of haunting and imprisonment found in the Gothic novel" (Spooner 2006, 16). Specifically, to Sherman, Spooner claims that her works "play on the characteristic Gothic tension between bodily disgust and its displacement into surface 'trappings'" (Spooner 2006, 16). At the same time, it can be said that Sherman also likes to re-create the typical frightening elements of Gothic fiction grotesquely, emphasizing the plain materiality of the real or fake human body and body parts in horrifying scenarios.

In her untitled, numbered photos published from the early 1990s, Sherman increasingly disappears from the pictures and represents role plays by using various Gothic elements: deformed dolls and medical mannequins in horroristic spaces, terrifying masks, body paints, and body prostheses. She combines the image of the traditional play dolls with the drastic destruction of the conventional attributes of femininity. Her dolls express the fear of losing individuality and getting reified and have their own narratives that enable them to withstand the stereotypization generated by the media.

Sherman's grotesque dolls spectacularly mediate between the Gothic living dead doll of the Romantic tradition and the postmodern cyborg, which is a fusion of the machine and the living organism. The "Gothic mechanisms" make their gender largely uncertain. Living dead dolls always have some feminine traits, yet they cannot be unmistakably identified as girls or women, while cyborgs proclaim that gender roles are a matter of choice, interchangeable, or even completely neutral. It is not by chance that both have their backgrounds in queer theory, which, due to its transgender nature, stands against fashion, definition, and the politics of identity (Jagose 2003).

Sherman's *Untitled #302*, made in 1994, is one of her works that can be interpreted as a late Avant-garde variation on the story of Olimpia (Fig. 6). The print, which suggests biological manipulation, depicts a living dead doll with horror movie makeup, twisted limbs, and the head of another living dead woman in its empty, organless chest. *#344* from 1999 shows the very act of violence in the vision of a man with a hammer in his hand (Fig. 7). The doll is fabricated of pieces, and between its legs there lies the bloody

torso of a just-born or slain baby. This is a grotesque allusion to the parallel between womb and grave, for both dolls go down in the toilet bowl during the brutal act (Sturz 2000). #342, published in the same year, displays the result of the truncation: body parts scattered on the ground (Fig. 8). The photos raise serious moral questions, even though it is clear that, however horrifying they might be, they depict only skillfully jointed and painted medical mannequins.

Sherman's dolls, proclaiming the interchangeability or neutrality of gender roles, induce a feeling that cannot be described by the Freudian concept of the *Unheimlich*, for it is impossible to interpret it in terms of the dualisms nature/culture, male/female, living/dead, uncanny/familiar. A much more appropriate concept is the one introduced by Julia Kristeva, *abjection*. Stemming from Latin *abiectus*, it refers to everything that is socially unacceptable, to that which strikes us as disapproved, repellent, abominable, squalid. As Kristeva puts it: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." (Kristeva 1982, 4) The abject is repulsive because it is something that is on the border between being and nonbeing and whose content is so abhorrent that we try to ban it from our thoughts. Kristeva also explains the distinction between abjection and *Unheimlichkeit*: "Essentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (Kristeva 1982, 5). The abject, then, can be any phenomenon that, by its hybrid nature, evokes the experience of repugnance on the border of identity and non-identity and serves as an expression of unbearable things, ideas, and emotions that we would like to remove from ourselves. But it is not simply disgusting; it is captivating, too. We cannot bear its sight, yet we are unable to get rid of it (Kelly 2007, 144).

The anatomical mannequins in Sherman's untitled photos refer back to the *unheimlich* world of *The Sandman* only indirectly, through the clichés of the Gothic tradition. An important difference is that whereas in Hoffmann the dualities resulting from a creative and destructive process can be explained with help of demonic science or psychology, Sherman's figures are completely void of demonic magic, but they draw on the achievements of contemporary medicine (plastic surgery, implantation, genetic manipulation). Due to their hybrid, intermediate character, Sherman's dolls unsettle the dualities natural/artificial, human/machine, living/dead, and push the normative limits to the extreme. By deliberately violating the notions of

identity and social order, they are often repugnant, disgusting, abhorring. The horrifying effect of Sherman's photos cannot be explained any longer by the Freudian *Unheimlich*, which presupposes something *Heimlich*. On the contrary, the scenes represented in these pictures are shockingly unbearable and provoke abjection, for they contradict our established system of knowledge and experience.

Conclusion

My analysis has shown how Hoffmann's Olympia has inspired works of the 20th-century Avant-garde artists. All these variations of Olympia feed on the dark, thrilling atmosphere of the tradition of Gothic fiction. Max Ernst, Oskar Schlemmer, and Cindy Sherman each use in an individual, grotesque approach one of the favorite topoi of 19th-century Gothic literature, the figure of an artificially made person, whose creation leads to terrible consequences. The reason why *The Sandman* can be so important for them is that, while it successfully combines Enlightenment beliefs about androids and the Romantic ideas concerning the creation of artificial humans, it also brings up psychological problems that point way beyond the fantastic, and would first be scientifically investigated by Freudian psychoanalysis: the past as a place of terror haunting the present, the return of childhood traumas leading to madness or death, human's being imprisoned in their own fears, or the phenomena of narcissistic love and aberrant sexuality (cf. Spooner 2006, 7-30).

The questions that the artists are mostly occupied by in looking at the figure of Olympia are those of the relation between creator and creature, machine and the human, the artificial and the organic. Yet there are sharp demarcation lines between the Romantic, early Avant-garde, and late Avant-garde interpretations of Olympia. In Romanticism, the human-machine results from a manipulation of science employing devilish practices. In the early Avant-garde, it represents top mechanics that questions the idealistic image of the human. In the late Avant-garde, it is the mechanical-biological construction of self-sufficient science and as such a forerunner of the trans-human era.

It is the metaphysical laboratory of Schlemmer's *The Figural Cabinet* that refers back most clearly to German Gothic Romanticism. But, for Schlemmer, the uncanny feeling generated by automata is pushed into the background by the delight in the victory of mechanisms, a delight that is far from unmarred, however. Apparently, Schlemmer is ambivalent towards the main

figures in his work, Spalanzani, the creator, and Olimpia, the creature. In the figure of Olimpia, grotesquely stylized to a barometer, he celebrates the perfection of a mechanical structure, perceiving it as the archetype of the players of the Bauhaus theatre. But he at the same time questions the unconditional trust in technics: what Spalanzani creates is a chaotic cabinet, and the Master commits suicide in the end.

Ernst admittedly draws heavily on the tradition of Gothic fiction. His *Fiat modes pereat ars*, a work of his early Avant-garde period, evokes the dismantling scene of *The Sandman*. The mannequin in the print titled *Letzte kresktion* distorts Olimpia in a way that anticipates Sherman's horrifying medical mannequins. First, as the jubilation of mode ("fiat modes") turns into rejection, the dismantled mannequin becomes the critique of the plastic icon embodying the stereotypical ideal of womanhood. Second, the print implicitly suggests to today's beholder that not only dolls but human beings too can be reified, and the annihilation of sexual character and personal attributes leads to the destruction of human nature.

The grotesque and horrifying medical mannequins in Sherman's untitled photos evoke the figure of Olimpia through the associations offered by Gothic clichés and role-plays. Combining the organic and the mechanical, these mangled dolls are, on the one hand, reactions to the discomfort caused by media constructions mingling the natural and the artificial in the US of the early 1990s. On the other hand, they are the forerunners of transhumanism: with their hybrid character, they unsettle the well interpretable dualities and thereby trigger the Gothic experience, not of the *Unheimlich*, but abjection.

Bibliography

1. Benkő Krisztián (2011), *Bábok és automaták*, Budapest: Napkút.
2. Freud Sigmund (1976), "The Uncanny", trans. James Strachey, [in:] Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche (The Uncanny)*", *New Literary History*, spring, 7 (3), pp. 619-645.
3. Hilscher Eberhard (1992), "Hoffmanns poetische Puppenspiele und Menschmaschinen", [in:] Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Text und Kritik (E. T. A. Hoffmann)*, München: Taschenbuch, pp. 20-32.
4. Hoffmann E. T. A. (1967), "The Sand-Man", trans. J. T. Bealby, [in:] E. F. Bleiler (ed.), *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, New York: Dover Publications, pp. 183-214.
5. Jagose Annamarie (1996), *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press.

6. Jentsch Ernst (1906), "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen", *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift*, 22, 8, pp. 195-198; 23, 8, pp. 203-205.
7. Kelly Hurley (2007), "Abject and Grotesque", [in:] Catherine Spooner, Emma McEvoy (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, New York: Routledge, pp. 137-146.
8. von Kleist Heinrich (2012), "On the Marionette Theatre", trans. Kevin J. M. Keane, [online] <https://kevinjmkeane.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Kleist-On-the-Marionette-Theatre-July-2015.pdf> [accessed: 10.06.2020].
9. Kofman Sarah (1991), "The Double is / and the Devil. The Uncanniness of the Sandman (Der Sandmann)", [in:] idem, *Freud and Fiction*, trans. Sarah Wykes, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 119-162.
10. Kristeva Julia (1982), *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press.
11. Lovecraft Howard Phillips (1927), *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, [online] <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx> [accessed: 10.06.2020].
12. Magyar László András (1992), *A műember története*, Budapest: Akadémiai.
13. Masschelein Anneleen (2011), *The Unconcept. The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
14. Meteling Arno (2009), "Automaten", [in:] Detlef Kremer (ed.), *De Gruyter Lexikon. E. T. A. Hoffmann. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 484-487.
15. Reisenfeld Robin (1997), "Max Ernst: Fiat modes pereat art = Let there be fashion, down with art", [online] https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_248_300331282.pdf [accessed: 10.06.2020].
16. Rosenkranz Karl (1990), *Ästhetik des Hässlichen*, Leipzig: Reclam.
17. Sauer Lieselotte (1990), "Romantic Automata", [in:] Gerhard Hoffmeister (ed.), *European Romanticism. Literary Cross-Currents, Modes, and Models*, Detroit: Wayne State University, pp. 287-306.
18. von Schelling Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph (1857), *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Karl Friedrich Schelling, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–1861, II/2. *Philosophie der Mythologie*.
19. Schlemmer Oskar (1987), "Man and Art Figure", [in:] idem *et al.*, *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, trans. Arthur S. Wensinger, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, pp. 17-48.
20. Schober Thomas (1994), *Das Theater der Maler. Studien zur Thetermoderne anhand dramatischer Werke von Kokoschka, Kandinsky, Barlach, Beckmann, Schwitters und Schlemmer*, Stuttgart: M&P.
21. Segebrecht Wulf (1996), "Krankheit und Gesellschaft. Zu E. T. A. Hoffmanns Rezeption der Bamberger Medizin", [in:] idem, *Heterogenität und Integration. Studien zu Leben, Werk und Wirkung E. T. A. Hoffmanns*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Vienna: Peter Lang, pp. 61-90.
22. Spies Werner (1991), *Max Ernst. Collages. The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, trans. John William Gabriel, London: Thames and Hudson.
23. Spooner Catherine (2006), *Contemporary Gothic*, London: Reaktion Books.
24. Steinecke Hartmut (1988), "Kommentar", [in:] E. T. A. Hoffmann *Die Elixiere des Teufels. Werke 1814–1816*, ed. idem, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, pp. 558-562.
25. Steinecke Hartmut (1985), "Kommentar", [in:] E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke. Werke 1816–1820*, ed. idem, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, pp. 951-960.

26. Sturz János (2000), "Cindy Sherman útja szerepek és maskarák között. Ezredvégi álarcosbál", [online] http://www.fotomuveszet.net/korabbi_szamok/200056/cindy_sherman_utja_szerepek_es_maskarak_kozott?PHPSESSID=f5529b0c6e9cabe7fa5a18db5a6eec5f [accessed: 10.06.2020].
27. Wick Rainer K. (2000), *Bauhaus. Kunstschule der Moderne*, Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz.
28. Todorov Tzvetan (1973), *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard, Cleveland, London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University.

List of Figures

Fig. 1. Max Ernst (1920), Title page from *Let There Be Fashion, Down with Art (Fiat modes pereat ars)*, [online] https://www.moma.org/collection/works/100600?artist_id=1752&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist [accessed: 10.06.2020].

Fig. 2. Max Ernst (1920), Plate I from *Let There Be Fashion, Down with Art (Fiat modes pereat ars)*, [online] https://www.moma.org/collection/works/91112?artist_id=1752&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist [accessed: 10.06.2020].

Fig. 3. Max Ernst (1920), Plate II from *Let There Be Fashion, Down with Art (Fiat modes pereat ars)*, [online] https://www.moma.org/collection/works/91108?artist_id=1752&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist [accessed: 10.06.2020].

Fig. 4. Max Ernst (1919), Plate III from *Let There Be Fashion, Down with Art (Fiat modes pereat ars)*, [online] https://www.moma.org/collection/works/91110?artist_id=1752&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist [accessed: 10.06.2020].

Fig. 5. Oskar Schlemmer (1922), *The Figural Cabinet*, [online] <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/34949> [accessed: 10.06.2020].

Fig. 6. Cindy Sherman (1994), *Untitled #302*, [online] <https://greyartgallery.nyu.edu/exhibition/inverted-odysseys-111699-012900/cindy7/> [accessed: 10.06.2020].

Fig. 7. Cindy Sherman (1999), *Untitled #344*, [online] <https://www.phillips.com/detail/CINDY-SHERMAN/NY010307/271> [accessed: 10.06.2020].

Fig. 8. Cindy Sherman (1999), *Untitled #342*, [online] <https://www.phillips.com/detail/cindy-sherman/UK010317/129> [accessed: 10.06.2020].