Methodology Flash #4
Using Biography and Psychoanalysis as Methods

Read “Games of the Doll” on the assignments page and answer the following questions.

Considering the photographer’s biography, why did Hans Bellmer construct intricate dolls and photograph them?

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What characterizes surrealist photographs? How does the psychoanalytic theories developed by Sigmund Freud at the turn of the century relate to surrealist art?

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Why are Bellmer’s photographs often described as surrealist? In other words, what surrealist characteristics do the images utilize?

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Gertrude Kasebier. Portrait of Miss N. c. 1902.
Hanah Hoch. Dada Dance. 1922.
Hans Bellmer. La Poupee. 1935 - 1938.
Compare and contrast Hans Bellmer’s *La Poupee* with Gertrude Kasebier’s *Portrait of Miss N.* and Hannah Hoch's *Dada Dance*. First, consider the artist's biographies and how their (or their subject's) individual backgrounds, identities, and historical contexts influenced the work.

Next, using a psychoanalytic approach, consider how life experience and personal struggles may have further influenced the work. When using an psychoanalytic approach, it's important to understand that Freud theorized that our behavior reflects a persistent battle between the id, the ego, and the superego. We are born with instinctual drives, but as our personalities develop, we fail to resolve conflicts at particular stages, which may cause us to develop fixations and inhibitions. While we do not have access to the personal details of these three artist's lives to directly analyze their work using psychoanalytic theory, we can generalize and propose ideas based on the elements of their photographs. Use a psychoanalytic approach to interpret meanings for the three works based on these principles.