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**Uncanny Capital:**
Rethinking Automata in Early Modern Japan

**Monday, May 6, 2018**

| 3-5pm | Dept. of Anthropology, 352 Haines Hall |

In this paper I propose a preliminary re-interpretation of the emergence of mechanical puppets or automata (karakuri ningyo) in early modern Japan. I give particular attention to the rise of multilayered festival floats topped by performing automata, under which were housed visible human puppeteers. My points of departure are two evocative tropes deployed by Freud. He introduces his discussion of the Uncanny with reference to a beautiful female automaton, a disturbing locus of fear and longing, who is both intensely familiar and irreducibly Other. In turn, in his analysis of dream work, he characterizes the function of the unconscious as the “capital” that drives and energizes the work of the “entrepreneur,” the fragmentary images of the day’s residue that become manifest in each dream. In certain respects, the layered dashi karakuri ritual float appears to have embodied an emerging structure of mind under conditions of early Japanese capitalism, revolving around a complex shadow play of illusion and partial representability, and highlighting a set of key cultural questions concerning commodities, labor, desire, mimesis and representation at a fraught historical moment.

Ellen Schattschneider (PhD, University of Chicago) is a sociocultural anthropologist and Associate Professor at Brandeis University, specializing in psychoanalytic, phenomenological and practice approaches to culture and society, with attention to ritual performance, gender and embodiment, spirit mediumship, sacred landscapes, visuality, and comparative capitalist cultures. Her book, *Immortal Wishes: Labor and Transcendence on a Japanese Sacred Mountain* (Duke University Press, 2003) explores healing, self-fashioning and embodied psychodynamic processes on a sacred landscape associated with a Shinto shrine founded by a rural Japanese woman in the 1920s. She is currently completing a book on the ritual dynamics of the human figurine and legacies of mass violence in wartime and postwar Japan.