

ToyUtopiA

ToyUtopiA

**Incorporating
The Toytakeova**

**September 8th – 25th
Yarra Sculpture Gallery,
Melbourne.**

toyutopia@gcom.net.au

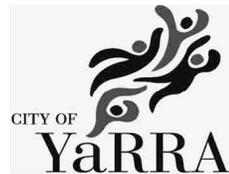
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2.
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Introduction

Andrew Goodman

Wicked wooden eyes, why do you look at me? (Geppetto to Pinocchio.)

Make no mistake; a toy can be a dangerous thing.

The first thing the puppet Pinocchio does as his maker Geppetto carves him is to mock his master. As his mouth is carved, he laughs at the puppeteer; when his tongue is made, he pokes it out in defiance; he snatches the wig off Geppetto's head with his just finished hands, kicks his nose and runs out the door on his newly made feet.

Pinocchio's animation and defiance are what we all secretly suspect lies under the inanimate surface of our toys – albeit those children often long for this interaction while adults shudder at the thought.

Oh, I am sick of being a puppet!...It is time that I became a man!
(Pinocchio to the Blue Fairy.)

My own two-year old daughter is quite passionate about her Teddy – I often think she would gladly sacrifice a parent to keep her Teddy with her. He shares meals and bedtime; she lovingly changes his nappy, feeds him tea and sings him to sleep. Lately she has embarked on an ambitious project to teach him to talk –

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having just acquired this skill herself she sees no reason why the same technique would not have equal success with her bear. So she patiently points things out to him, repeats their names and asks him to say the words back to her. While I go along with it all I have to admit to certain doubts as to the chances of success. I am not quite child-like enough to believe in teddy as she does, but my pessimism is mingled with a degree of interest into what will make her finally give up and accept his muteness.

A child's ability to prescribe feelings, thoughts and intentions to their toys is, child psychologist Adam Gopnik says:

a way of protecting [the child's] own right to have feelings... the essential condition of youth [is to be] mind-visionary: to see everything as though it might have a mind... small children [imagine] that everything could have a consciousness – fish, dolls, toys and soldiers, even parents – and spend the rest of [their] lives paring down the list.

But what are we to make of the adult to whom toys still project this magic? There is something disturbing, something infantile, something not quite right about the adult bedroom covered in dolls, about the possessive and secretive collector of Matchbox cars, the obsessive builder of toy railways. This is something that cannot be explained away entirely by either a longing for childhood memories or a love of popular culture. While toys

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may be seen in childhood, as toy historian John Brewster says, to perform socializing functions and may stress industry, morality and endeavour (Lego, building blocks and trucks training future developers, dolls instructing in the art of parenting), an adult interest is more socially subversive. It seemingly points towards the anti social, the alienated, indolent, these toys overwhelm life rather than instruct it. At a certain point in life we are all expected to just discard our toys and move on.

Of course a child can also prescribe forbidden emotions to their dolls - stuffing them full of the frustrations, terrors and anxieties of childhood – acting out retribution for the wrongs of the world on Barbie or Teddy; rehearsing death scenarios or exploring plain, unadulterated violence in the privacy and safety of the bedroom. Toys can make great substitutes and obliging partners in forbidden activities. Just ask your local Voodoo practitioner, or one of the many expectant buyers of ‘lifelike’ sex dolls waiting an impatient six months for delivery of their doll from Us companies despite the five thousand dollar plus price tag, or the disgruntled toddler who, banished from the parental bed seeks solace in the dark with a soft toy (Freud’s ‘transitional object’, that soothes journey of separation from the mother that every child must make).

I will not die! I will not die! (Pinocchio to the Puppeteer.)

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For the adult, toys may always retain a certain quantity of their childhood magic. This is not a good thing. The utopia of the toy filled life of childhood can quickly become a dystopia in adulthood.

The toy that threatens to answer back, to come alive, to do its own thing is, inevitably, the toy that will sneak up behind us with the kitchen knife. Is there anything more terrifying than a ventriloquist’s doll –it sits at the crossroads between life and death, that blending the real and unreal - or perhaps between the Symbolic and the Real in Lacanian terms - the embodiment of Freud’s uncanny (Freud’s famous essay on the uncanny itself originates from Hoffman’s opera on the doll Olympia and her human admirer).

Who has not as a child checked furtively, discreetly that their dolls have not moved, that the toy box lid is firmly shut, that the errant toy banished to the garden has not snuck back in to hide under the bed until midnight...

Wicked wooden eyes, why do you look at me?

Andrew Goodman is an artist and occasional art writer who spends his days playing with toys under the somewhat tyrannical directions of a two year old.

8. **[im]mortal mortal**

Pauline Lavoipierre

Little Nan had a sewing room. She was a dressmaker, and many strangers would come to her house to have garments made or altered. One lady visited frequently. When she arrived or after she left, Little Nan would make a twirling, circling motion at her temple. I didn't know what she meant but enjoyed watching her hands flutter about as she spoke, half French half English. The gestures were a device to clarify the communication between us, an inherited trait.

The lady arrived with a pram. She looked far too old to be a mother; perhaps she was the baby's grandmother. She came with orders for some tiny garments to be made. She asked little Nan to smock a gown, with intricate fine lace detail and a bonnet to boot. Little Nan needed new measurements of the baby. She always measured from shoulder to shoulder, nape to butt, around the waist, leg, arm, hips, length of arm and leg and sometimes the circumference of the head.

The lady untucked the baby with the utmost of care, folding a quilt Nan had made after a previous visit. She lifted the bub from the pram. That's all I recall of that day but the lady grew familiar. She returned many times to make sure the garments fitted just so. The baby was always quiet and only blinked when bobbed up and down. The baby's nappy was always changed

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before trying on a new outfit but the nappy was always dry. Despite this a new one replaced the old in a flash.

It was at about this time that I began to realize what my Little Nan's gestures were all about. The baby was plastic. It was a child that never grew old, never cried, never shat because she never ate, but her nappy was changed after her mother's every meal. She had a morning, afternoon and evening outfit and was put to bed with tender care and bathed in the morning and at night. After this I didn't see her again but heard that she had a dog. Perhaps the child grew up after all.

Pauline Lavoipierre is a Melbourne based artist.

10.

Divie, divie, dive Dolly

Justine Khamara

My earliest memory is of heat, oppressive stifling heat. We were in Greece; Mum was heavily pregnant with my brother. There is a picture in the family album, both of us head down to avoid the harsh glare of that unforgiving Grecian sun, Mum's big belly bulging beneath her paisley cotton dress and me clutching Zaggy, my first and favourite doll, by the neck.

Some time later we are in Scotland with red-faced baby brother. He howled a lot and didn't like me cuddling him. Dolls were much easier to handle, Zaggy *never* complained.

On our return trip to Australia, a tea chest carrying our toys got lost in transit. Jack and Pink Teddy were gone forever, forever sailing the world. Someone must have wanted them, of that we were certain. They grew in our memories, developing qualities they most certainly did not possess - Pink Teddy bigger, softer more lifelike than any of our toys and Jack... In truth Jack was barely remembered, which served only to magnify the aura of mystery and magic surrounding his disappearance.

*Riddle me, riddle me, riddle me re,
Teddy and Jack got lost at sea,
What are we, what are we, what are we...*

Mum - ever pragmatic - was quite matter of fact about it. No, they had not run away, nor had they been kidnapped by pirates

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nor spirited away by sea nymphs; they had simply become lost, perhaps delivered to the wrong address, or may still be languishing in a portside warehouse somewhere. The banality and meaninglessness of this version of events was intolerable to us, this was after all our first experience of real loss - a loss that was palpable, tangible, comprehensible. It was our first peek at the unspeakable. Something was poking out from the other side of the curtain and should we have faced it squarely, directly, we would have seen the outline of a bony finger... pointed at us.

*As Tommy Snooks and Bessie Brooks
Were walking out one Sunday;*

*Says Tommy Snooks to Bessie Brooks,
'Tomorrow will be Monday'.
(Anon)*

I didn't grow up with Barbie, I had a Cindi Doll. She was shaped a little like Barbie - HUGE breasts, big head - but unlike Barbie she had fully articulated neck, wrists, thighs, knee and leg joints, and no tan. My brother and I fought over what to play. He was losing his enthusiasm for playing with dolls. 'They're all girls,' he observed and remedied this by adding male genitals to one of our baby 'twins' in permanent marker. But Cindi couldn't play with a *baby*, she needed a *man*, or at least something she could contrast her oh-so-perfect prettiness against. My brother settled for Panda. At least Panda wasn't a girl; Panda was Panda - black and white and furry.

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Panda was eventually badly mauled by an overly friendly red setter and was never quite the same afterwards. His seams kept popping open and stuffing would fall out, and besides, my brother had enough. Someone had given him a plastic semi-automatic rifle for his birthday and a Dick Smith electronic set.

*There was a little maid,
And she was afraid
That her sweetheart would come unto her;
So she went to bed,
And covered up her head,
And fastened the door with a skewer.
(Anon)*

Panda came to live in my room but he and Cindi did not play together much. She was (quite frankly) becoming annoying, eyes always beseeching and that perfect red petal mouth... I was playing with her roughly now. One day one of her fully articulated wrists snapped off. This made me suddenly furious, furious at her. What good was she - she with her impossibly blonde hair, her always surprised blue eyes and delicate chin. It was a cold, hard unquenchable fury. I found one of Mum's old stockings in the dress-up box and wrapped it around her head, tight. I tried to pull her legs off but only succeeded in making her look like one of Hans Belmer's *poupée* pictures. I found another stocking, bound her arms and legs and stuffed her into a toy suitcase, which I then buried under the house. 'That'll fix her', I

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thought, before embarking on an exciting brand new project, breeding snails.

'Poupée', my father murmured watching me feed my infant son, 'Poupée... he is your little doll...' and I marvelled at his perfect smallness and I remember wishing that he would stay small forever. But of course he didn't.

*For I mean to grow as little as the dolly at the helm,
And the dolly I intend to come alive;
And with him beside to help me, it's a-sailing I shall go,
It's a-sailing on the water where the jolly breezes blow
And the vessel goes a divie-divie-dive.
(R.L Stevenson)*

One day, years later, my son developed an eye infection. The doctor prescribed eye drops, to be administered three times daily. 'Hell!' I remember thinking. My son HATED eye drops and I would have to administer them on my own. We sat together on his bed but no amount of explaining, coaxing, bribing, pleading or even threatening was going to work. I grimly conceded the inevitable and pounced on him, hoping to get the drops in as quickly as possible and be done with it. I had not realized how strong he had become and he fought me 14. fiercely. Drops went everywhere. He was screaming now like a wounded animal and I was feeling close to tears myself. He *needed* those drops! We battled on, I/mother thwarted in my maternal role by a writhing, yowling, not so little beast – both of

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us fighting to dominate his body. The hot prickle of frustration grew; we were hurting each other now. A well-aimed fist connected with my nose and suddenly I was furious, filled with that same cold, hard fury I had buried Cindi with a lifetime ago.

Freed of emotion I pinned my son down with my chest, squeezing the air out of his lungs. His face fell watching mine as I mentally devised a strategy. If I could hold his arms firmly enough I would be able to use them to make a kind of wedge that might hold his head still. We struggled some more, smearing drops, tears, sweat and saliva, but I had the upper hand now. The more he wriggled the more air I could push out of him. He stared at me in utter horror and disbelief, aware that I had erased 'him' out of the equation. 'He' had become merely an unruly set of limbs and body parts that needed to be brought under my control. He was desperate now, but my weight on his chest was making it impossible for him to breathe. I pushed harder until he finally stopped moving.

I got the drops in, three in each eye plus one for good measure -- just because I could -- then rolled off and tidied myself up.

He lay there gasping, watching me warily. *'I thought you were going to kill me'*, he said finally.

Justine Khamara is a Melbourne based artist and mother of one remarkably well adjusted teenager.

Toying with the (Un)Real

Chris van Rompaey

15.

To name something is, in an important sense, to bring it into existence, to wrest from the flux of the unknown a tangible fragment of meaning. So it is with this project. Without the title, there could be no concept of a *ToyUtopia*; and without the concept, no exhibition. What, then, is the relation between the words that name and the works that give what is named tangible form?

Titles are deceptive. In a bid to define and demarcate the thematic terrain, they project an unfounded impression of authority over that terrain in ways that have little to do with denotative transparency. If anything, the relation is an inverse one: a title, typically, is memorable because of a metaphoric intensity that is linked directly to its opacity, or, more precisely, to an illusory surface clarity that when scrutinised dissolves into unfathomable connotative complexities.

The name *ToyUtopia* clearly works in this way. The suturing of abruptly disparate terms to form a neologism may be more characteristic of German than of English linguistic invention, but the result is seemingly self-explanatory. Its constituent elements are words that are both in common use, and whose meanings are not overtly problematic. So where, then, do its multiple ambiguities lie?

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The first difficulty derives from the absence of connectives. To establish the interrelation, the reader must supply a preposition, but there is no way of determining which one. Does the title refer, for example, to a utopia *with* toys, a utopia *of* toys or a utopia *for* toys? The answer is, potentially at least, to *all* of these and more. The differences may appear minor, but their implications are far-reaching: in one instance the toys are a mere adjunct to an unstated subject's utopian vision, in another they are constitutive of it; and in the third reading the vision of utopia is experienced by the toys themselves.

Nor do the complexities end there, since neither toys nor utopias are as conceptually straightforward as they first appear. Literally, *utopia* means a *non*-place, somewhere that exists only in the imagination and, as anthologist John Carey points out,ⁱ carries no connotation of either good or evil. Yet, the notion of a utopia as somewhere *desirable* has become so prevalent that a second term—dystopia—has arisen to describe the only kind of imaginary world that in the postmodern era seems plausible. If the meaning of *utopia* has become artificially constricted, it is on the basis of usage rather than etymology; the supplement of its excluded negativity inevitably returns to haunt it.

Similarly ambivalent are the connotations of the word *toy*. Again, popular usage posits a clear-cut if spurious demarcation: toys belong to the world of *play* as opposed to the serious world of *work*. Further, this world is a *childhood* domain; maturity implies that one has 'grown out of' the need for toys (if not for

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the kind of play that is channelled into legitimate 'games'). At the same time, popular usage destabilises the divisions it imposes. Take the expression 'toys for the boys'. Here, work and play, childhood and adulthood, become curiously entangled; no longer are the toys in question—the new office computer system, for example—purpose-built for play, but are integral to the functioning of the workplace. Yet, far from being erased, the distinction between work and play survives as a basis for censure: grown men in responsible positions—and it seems that this *is* a predominantly male phenomenon—have no business using new technologies for their own amusement ahead of the corporate good.

Further instances of blurred boundaries can readily be cited. When a young child discovers the saucepan cupboard, its contents quickly become playthings. Once again, though, distinctions are to some extent maintained. A parent may observe that the saucepans provide more entertainment than the child's toys, but they are still not referred to *as* toys. And, just as saucepans and office computers can *function* as toys, there are actual toys, such as Lego models of trucks and dolls dressed as nurses, that reproduce the world of work. If work reinvents itself as play, then play responds by pretending to be work.

But if play, particularly as it is represented by the spectrum of commercially produced toys, masquerades as work, its interest in work is by no means all-consuming. More generally, its concern is to project itself as *reality*, a condition that has nothing to do

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with what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan calls the *Real*, but, rather, is a fantasy linked to the psycho-social ‘desiring-machines’ of the dominant culture and inscribed within the limits of that culture’s materiality.ⁱⁱ In short, toys are a microcosm of social and technological change. Further, both these elements are not only irreducibly entwined but are inseparable from the desire that the production of toys seeks to perpetuate.

One or two examples will help to clarify this relationship. By the early 1970s Meccano-type construction sets had all but disappeared from toyshops, their place taken by plastic clip-together systems such as Lego.ⁱⁱⁱ Explanations based on technological developments, however, account for only part of Lego’s success. Certainly, without the capacity to calibrate plastic components with unprecedented accuracy, Lego’s clip-together technology would not have been possible. Additionally, Meccano’s obsolescence was accelerated by its increasing remoteness from the ‘real’ world of technological innovation; it celebrated the triumph of steel with its labour-intensive, lock-step construction methods at a time when the prefabrication of modular components was transforming everything from the manufacture of furniture to space exploration. In such an environment Meccano was, quite simply, no longer ‘sexy’. Not only could Lego offer a more convincing representation of a domestic interior or a rocket; it opened up a new frontier of imaginative possibilities. And, as an added attraction, ease of assembly went a long way towards satisfying the consumerist

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economy’s demand for instant gratification.

More recently, the survival of the conventional doll, even in such updated forms as Barbie, has been threatened by the advent of a phenomenon that is typified by the Bratz Pack. Here, the changes relate less to technological innovation than to style, image and packaging; what is marketed is not so much a product in the usual material sense as an entire consumerist fantasy. Underpinning the Bratz enterprise is an appeal to desire, the object of which, once created, must be given modular, material form to maximise consumption. The dolls themselves, while they gesture towards racial inclusivity, depend for their identity on globalised and thoroughly homogenised emblems of popular culture. Interchangeable clothes constitute part of this identity, but more particularly it is constructed through association with specific sites of consumption, for example, the fashion mall or the sushi bar. Interestingly, the dolls’ bodies are reduced to little more than stick figures that serve simply to hold the various items of clothing in position.

If, by foregrounding desire, the ‘real’ world of work is distanced, the *Real*, in the Lacanian sense, is dramatically privileged. The shift, however, is not as radical as it may seem, given that all play arguably involves the simultaneous engagement of Lacan’s three experiential registers, the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. To picture this interaction, it should be understood that for Lacan every element of what is normally regarded as

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reality—the social and material world, for example, or the sense of self as constructed by the ego—belongs not to the Real but to either the Symbolic or the Imaginary order; the Real, in contrast, is that which has no identity, that which eludes all attempts to name it and accordingly lies outside language. The inclusiveness for which language strives is *always* an illusion.

The domain of language is unequivocally the Symbolic order. Not only that, but it is language that underpins and *structures* the Symbolic, fragments of which in turn are reconstituted as the Imaginary. The *other* to all of this is the Real, which remains unacknowledged and unacknowledgeable. Play, however, destabilises any rigid demarcation of the Real. This becomes clear when the word *play* is understood not so much as the opposite of *work* but as *movement* or *slippage*.^{iv} It is in the unpredictability of its movement between elements of the Symbolic order, in its relation to the space that separates as well as to the symbols themselves, that play engages with the Real, promising, for example, to satisfy the *Real* of desire. And while, through play's unbounded capacity to disrupt the rigidities of signification, that promise can be endlessly sustained, it can never be satisfied, since what is offered merely *symbolises* satisfaction.

By minimising the need for the physical manipulation of its material components, the Bratz Pack radically foregrounds its interaction with the three Lacanian registers. It is as if desire itself were unmasked, and the Symbolic fused with the

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Imaginary in a gesture that all but collapses the distinction between play and consumption. Yet the desire that is so blatantly targeted is doubly thwarted by the *non-presence* of what is purportedly delivered. What the Bratz Pack offers is an instance of what cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard calls the 'third order' of *simulacra*: an imitation of worlds that are no longer 'real', but are themselves nothing but simulacra.^v

The Bratz Pack might promise a consumerist utopia, but the hollowness of that promise renders the actuality eerily dystopian: once again, the historical inclusivity of the term *utopia* asserts itself. Inevitably, the works in this exhibition, in their relation to the culture that spawns phenomena like the Bratz Pack, will show a similar ambivalence. Inevitably, too, there will be exhibits that demonstrate the inadequacy of any attempt to 'explain' the possibilities inherent in their collective title. Ultimately, though, *ToyUtopia* means precisely what the works assembled here represent it as meaning, no more and no less.

ⁱ John Carey, ed., *The Faber Book of Utopias* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. xi.

ⁱⁱ For a discussion of the concept of 'desiring-machines' see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), Part 1.

22.

ⁱⁱⁱ Not entirely, though. Interestingly, Meccano has attempted to reinvent itself by emulating Lego's marketing strategies. The parts now come in bright colours and are packaged in sets that are model-specific.

^{iv} For a discussion of the impact of play in this sense on the processes of signification, see Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 278-293.

^v For a discussion of the link between simulacra and 'reality' see Jean Baudrillard's essay, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (Boston: Godine, 1984). A useful summary of Baudrillard's orders of simulacra is available on-line. See Doug Mann, 'Jean Baudrillard: A Very Short Introduction', <http://publish.uwo.ca/~dmann/ baudrillard1.htm> (accessed 19 August, 2005).

Chris van Rompaey has research interests that include literature, cultural theory and aesthetics. He teaches in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University.

THE CAR WE KILLED

Sally MccCredie

23.

My parents were Australian but were posted to The Hague when I was six.

My oldest brother and sister were 12 and 10 respectively and left behind in Melbourne to go to boarding school. This left my brother, 8 and younger sister, 2, me, and my parents. We were a bunch of dislocated fish out of water. After our previous posting, Manila, The Hague was cold, bleak and hostile. Literally every time someone apprehended that we were foreigners we were abused. My brother and I were sent to The American International School of The Hague and, as Australians, we were outsiders. Naturally everyone thought we were Austrian; in the mid-sixties Australia was virtually unheard of outside of Australia, New Zealand and England.

We lived in a large five storey (if you include the basement and attic) terrace house in Riouwstraat just up from the Peace Palace. A result of our isolation and dislocation was that we developed an advanced system of make believe with our toys which we called 'the midgets'. The toy world was divided up into sub-groups with teddy bears and dolls in one and Matchbox cars in another and Lego in another. The dolls had enterprising names such as Shrimpy Sheila, Little Lucy, Tiny Tina and Angelique the Pipsqueak. My brother's teddy bear 'Toad' was the undisputed ruler of this kingdom.

24.

It was the Matchbox cars that got out of control. I don't remember them all but there was a cherry red Saab, very glamorous, a blue Ferrari, a yellow Maserati, a blue Mercedes and a beige Ford Taunus and his unfortunate wife whose name I have forgotten. She was custard yellow with a white roof and very daggy. Somehow her personality got the better of us. When she spoke it was in an absurdly exaggerated, nasal American accent, dripping with spite and sarcasm. She became utterly impossible and was always scheming against the other cars and ruining the game. Her anti-social behavior began to dominate our play and she thwarted all our attempts to modify her behavior. The other cars were unable to bring her into line.

She became so frustrating that in the end we felt that she had to be removed for the good of the game.

Our playroom was on the first floor and near where we played there was an old hydronic radiator panel. There was a gap where the pipe disappeared under the floorboards and we 'posted' the car down this hole, never to be retrieved, because we hated her so much.

Sally McCredie was born in Karachi, Pakistan and also grew up in Australia, The Philippines, Holland, Indonesia and California. Lately she has been investigating time, place and memory.

25.

[im] mortal mortal (II)

Pauline Lavoipierre

I never had a desire to see my dolls as animate. In fact before I went to sleep I would check they were not. A ritual of shaking and close inspection of their limbs and particularly their eyes would take place. I was always on the alert for the tell tale sign of the living doll. All eye movements had to be accounted for. Once I was convinced they were in fact inanimate, the dolls would be put in order. The most threatening doll, the one with the most potential to come alive would be placed at the bottom of the pile. If it came alive it would either be suffocated or kept immobile under the sheer weight of other doll bodies.

It was the night, darkness, and lack of natural light that activated my superstitious mind. However my fear was never fixed and the dolls would be my protectors, particularly if we were staying the night in an unfamiliar place. During the daylight hours I never anticipated any evil or untoward actions from them. My dolls were my quiet playmates and real life situations were enacted through them. They were animate only through my action; at least that is what I hoped.

Dolls, little human facsimiles can exist as simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar and possess the ability to both repel and attract. Love, hate, distrust and intrigue all describe reactions to the doll. The body, especially when life has left it, human

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facsimiles and dolls are reminders of mortality. These doubles - human duplicates - will continue to live on long after we are dead.

Baudelaire speculated:

The overriding desire of most children is to get at and *see the soul* of their toys.... The child twists and turns his toy, scratches it, shakes it, bumps it against the walls, throws it on the ground. From time to time he makes it re-start its mechanical motions, sometimes in the opposite direction. Its marvellous life comes to a stop... [A]t last he opens it up, he is the stronger. *But where is the soul?* This is the beginning of melancholy and gloom.ⁱ

Human facsimiles test the potential the inanimate have in becoming animate. Permitting such a thought, as an adult, can be viewed as a suspension of disbelief or an invitation into delusional thinking. Jean Piaget suggests in *The Child's Conception of The World*, that an object may or may not be capable of possessing a soul. In his discussion on animism he uses the word 'merely to describe the tendency to regard objects as living and endowed with will'.ⁱⁱ

Automata, machines that mimic human movements, do not have a soul. They are made of matter and energy, of wood or plastic, or saw dust and glue. We categorize them through memory and logic, forming an identity. This can be disrupted by a double

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take or second glance of disbelief. According to Freud children do not readily make distinctions between living and inanimate objects. He asserts that they enjoy interacting with their dolls as if they are little people.ⁱⁱⁱ 'The idea of a "living doll" excites no fear at all; children have no fear of their dolls coming to life, they may even desire it'.^{iv} The 'uncanny' according to Freud is not based in an 'infantile fear', (admitting his argument to be contradictory) but connected to an 'infantile wish' or belief.^v

Arguably dolls do offer children an opportunity to explore their feelings and desires as Freud suggests in terms of wish fulfilment. Dolls engage the child in the testing of reality and in the defining of boundaries. Engagement with the doll provides the child with the means of articulating their own journey, experience and investigation of the self and the world around them.^v

Baudelaire states that children are very engaged in an exploratory process of discovery. They want to know whether or not their toys are alive. He even suggests that their disappointment in discovering the absence of life is their introduction to 'melancholy and gloom',^{vi} And as such, this encounter is regarded as the child's first encounter with death. Children sit between the two propositions, on testing ground. They discover what reality is and repress it in favor of an alternate reality. It is a world where plastic playmates may already be alive or may come to life.^{vii}

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Freud's opinion on the 'dead doll' is that it does not evoke fear in the child. It is argued that the dolls lack of response, her inability to engage with the child and ultimately her inanimate, lifeless, corpse-like body may in fact arouse fear or terror.^{viii} Eva-Maria Simms suggests: 'nothingness glares at the child through the doll's glassy eyes.... The doll is a dead body, an inanimate child, an unresponsive, rigid corpse'.^{ix}

Rainer Maria Rilke reflects on the doll, in a rather sombre mood, reinforcing Simms's notion of the doll as corpse. He suggests the child hates their relationship with the doll. Interactions with the doll are described as empty, hollow and devoid of receptive warmth:

Pulling it out from a pile of more responsive things – it would almost anger us with its frightful obese forgetfulness, the hatred, which undoubtedly has always been a part of our relationship to it unconsciously, would break out, it would lie before us unmasked as the horrible foreign body on which we had wasted our purest ardour; as the externally painted watery corpse, which floated and swam on the flood-tides of our affection, until we were on dry land again and left it lying forgotten in some undergrowth.^x

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- i/ Baudelaire, 'A Philosophy of Toys', in J. Mayne (ed.) *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. New York: Phaidon Press, 1964, p.199.)
- ii/ Baudelaire, 1964, p. 202-203.
- iii/Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of The World*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 1929, p.170.
- iv/Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'", in Strachey, James, (ed.) and trans. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol 17, London: Hogarth Press, 1955, p. 233.
- v/ Freud, 1955, p. 233.
- vi/ Freud, 1955, p. 233.
- vii/ Eva-Maria Simms, "Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death in Rilke and Freud", *New Literary History*, vol 27: 663-677, 1996, p. 664.
- viii/ Baudelaire, 1964, p. 202-203.
- ix/ Although Freud makes mention of the doll in his discussion on the "uncanny" and briefly in relation to Olympia (the automaton in Hoffman's story *The Sandman*) he is quite dismissive of the dolls role and its potential for evoking the 'uncanny'. Helene Cixous suggests he relegates Olympia to the sidelines. She asserts he approached the doll in such a frivolous manner "because she did not symbolize Oedipal issues very well." (Simms, 1996, p. 663.)
- x/ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Some Reflections on Dolls", *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces*, London: Quartet Books, 1986, p.121.

Play collecting – collecting toys as art

Rozzy Middleton

The world of collecting is a widespread and infinitely varied one. From surfboards to sculpture, Pez dispensers to Pop Art, the definition of what constitutes a collection is ultimately only limited by the imagination and desire of the collector, to the artificial constraints which are put upon an assemblage of objects by the individual collector. Forming a collection is as much an act of what isn't collected as what is.

A person interested in collecting toys may collect thematically (collecting only Barbie dolls and associated paraphernalia), by era (only 19th-century dolls), by manufacturer (only toys made by Mattel), by region (only German tin toys), or by material (only tin vehicles). This still affords the collector many alternatives while limiting the collection in scope and size—often necessary for those with limited space or money.

A frequently noted trait of collectors is that they tend to pursue items that have personal meaning to them. For this reason, toy collecting constitutes a large part of the spectrum and culture of collecting - items that relate to childhood often hold a personal and nostalgic meaning for the collector. Of the fifty or so categories of “Collectibles” on the popular online auction website, eBay, 20 of these categories are either defined by toys or include toys within the group. These can range from century

old antique tin toys to contemporary manufactured toys that have been specifically produced and marketed as a collectible item.

In terms of motivation to collect toys, nostalgia is often cited as a prime motivation. Encarta¹ gives the example of cast-iron vehicle toys, which were extremely popular in the early 20th century. Adults who grew up during that era have typically made up the majority of collectors of these items. Likewise, collectors who grew up in the 1960s often collect action figures, superhero comic books, space memorabilia, robots, Beatles paraphernalia, or other popular items from their childhood past. Robert Covarrubias, a toy collector from Ridgewood, New York, has been a serious collector of Batman memorabilia for five years now. When asked ‘Why collect Batman’ in an interview,¹¹ Covarrubias stated that he grew up with Batman, and his childhood love at first converted into gag gift buying on behalf of his friends that then grew into an active collection.

But Toy Collectibles can also include newly made items, specifically manufactured for collection. Sometimes called limited editions or collector's editions, these items are numbered or signed to add to their aura as a ‘collectible’. These items are manufactured in limited quantities, in essence creating ‘instant demand’ to sell more collectibles. One such example of this is the 1990s craze for Beanie Babies; a craze that dominated the collecting world due to carefully limited distribution and the analogous demand that this distribution created. These \$5 plush

animals became instant collectibles, selling for far more than their original purchase price within days due to the clever marketing tool used by their maker Ty where selected animals were 'retired' periodically, driving up their value because buyers believed that no more would be made.ⁱⁱⁱ

An area of in, which the limited edition toy has been growing, recently is in the field of the vinyl artist's toy. Many artists are utilising the medium of the vinyl toy and disseminating these toys through art collecting channels rather more traditional routes of toy collecting such as auctions and toy stores. Instead these toys are sold through specialist shops, in art galleries and on the Internet. Named 'Urban Vinyl' this movement bridges a gap between art and toys by blending the two. As Jager^{iv} points out, vinyl toys are elevated to the status of art because they are original from the start – whereas a Barbie doll or Hot Wheels car are part of a larger pre-existing marketing idea, vinyl art toys are not based on pre-existing ideas or visual forms and are therefore not concerned with the replication of a preconceived form.

Urban Vinyl represent a marriage between Art as a collectible and the collectible toy – the toy collector can appreciate the vinyl toy on a new level because they are purchasing a unique, artist-made product while the art lover can appreciate the medium on many levels of artistic representation – as a new artistic canvas, as a statement on our plastic throw away society, modern humanity as a mould or shell, street art and graffiti becoming

realised in a three-dimensional, permanent form – just to name a few.

Melbourne artist Nathan Jurevicius, creator of the Scarygirl comic and toy series, had an exhibition at Melbourne's Outré Gallery in 2004 entitled "Girls and Other Scary Things". This was the artist's first solo exhibition, and the first exhibition of its kind in Australia combining vinyl figures and original artwork. Jurevicius creates vinyl toys that sell from anywhere between \$15 for a miniature figurine up to \$660 for a limited edition 2 foot, vinyl sculpture, limited edition of 5 each colour worldwide. His regular sized vinyl toys will typically sell for \$150-\$200 a piece and are limited to editions of between 40 and 200 pieces. Jurevicius has said that having children automatically makes you a toy buyer and by default a collector and 'maintenance man' of toys. It is his belief that the vinyl art toy movement bridges a gap between popular culture and artistic merit.

Indeed the Designer Toy represents an interesting, new hybrid for the collecting of art and toys. The range of vinyl toys available is huge within itself in terms of subject matter, form and taste. This means that in terms of collecting, the collector will need to impose limits in terms of subject matter and artist as opposed to more traditional routes such as theme, region or manufacturer.

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And what of the future for these toys? In future generations, will they be viewed as historical art forms placed in a museum for eternity or will they become items of nostalgia, found beneath the house or in a 'Vinyl Toy' collectible category on eBay?

ⁱhttp://ca.encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_701610435_2/Collectibles_and_Collecting.html

ⁱⁱ<http://www.eternalcollector.com/robertcoll.html>

ⁱⁱⁱhttp://ca.encarta.msn.com/media_701702451_701610435_1_1/Beanie_Babies.html

^{iv} Jager at MillionairePlayboy.com has an article: "[A Look at Urban Vinyl and Where it Came From](#)." He explains how the trend began, why the prices are so high, and points you in the right direction to learn more.

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In search of play

Laura Krikke

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We live in a society with capitalism as its driving force, which has altered behaviour to be dictated by a sense of worth associated with profit. Capitalism has successfully outdone itself by creating a non-stop cycle of consumer culture. It has produced such an effective system where we have become dependent upon this cycle for our needs and survival. The more that we are pushed to work and to achieve, the more it seems the need for play has become necessary within our daily life. As consumerism has accelerated the need for the unique (sifting through the millions of choices that all look vaguely similar), it seems that we are more in search of a comfort defined by what gave us solace as a child.

When SanRio first launched 'Hello Kitty' in 1974, the world would not have imagined the manifestations of a cute little character that would finally become a theme park and a chain of cafes around Asia. Designed originally for young women who wanted to hold onto a part of their childhood, 'Hello Kitty' was merely the first character to accommodate a growing phenomenon. All over the world, cute has become a commodity. Toys and characters have become mascots to millions, showing that several generations beyond childhood are still holding on to what they can.

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So why is it that now more than ever before, we are carrying our childhood with us throughout our lives instead of settling into adulthood like our parents and their parents before? Is it because of the relative affluence of our generation? Does this somehow infantilise all of us? Is the resurgence of toys in an adult market reflecting the need for a childhood no longer existent? Or do we just use toys as a means for us to escape the everyday?

Toys are our first experience with play; they represent our initial understanding of how the world works. They manifest the qualities we originally imbued the world with, paying no heed to the 'reality' that we are taught to live by. They are part of our original translation of the world. They embody the imagination like nothing else, allowing us the moment to consider the possibility of a world purely sculpted by whatever takes our fancy.

Creativity and the use of imagination are key elements of human nature, and in the world today we are increasingly using toys as a tool for our imagination. Maybe this is an act of rebellion. Maybe we are looking for something to instil a reality that makes more sense to us; something that doesn't directly challenge the dominant structure of our lives. Perhaps we just want to escape to a place without consequences.

Whatever the reason, toys provide escapism from everyday life. A journey not marked by any roads but the ones we choose to take. Whether or not we decide to follow that journey

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permanently or for only a short jaunt is entirely up to us. What is important is that we are slowly realising how essential the nature of play is within our lives.

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List of artists.

ToyUtopiA: Michelle Morcos, Marc Alperstein, Mitch Ovens, Rebekah Webster & Andrew Keall, Fiona Dalwood, Narinda Cook, Irianna Kanellopoulou, Sally McCredie, Sherry Paddon, Kristen Benson, Justine Khamara, Simone Ewenson and Pauline Lavoipierre.

The Toytakeova: Laura Krikke, Van Sowerwine, Alice Lang, Simon Scheurle, Kirsty Boyle, Karina Averlon Thomas, Anita Johnston, Troy John Emery, Alicia King and Michael Swifte.

The best toy will... be the one that knows nothing of the support of a predetermined function, the one that [is] rich in applications and accidental probabilities like the most worthless of rag dolls.

Hans Bellmer

'Notes on the subject of the Ball Joint', 1938.