

**PART VI**

**TOY  
POSITIONING**

## PART VI TOY POSITIONING

	<b>Introduction</b> .....	368
	<b>Toy positioning</b> .....	368
	<b>Toys as phenomenological objects</b> .....	371
	<b>Toys' positional sign, text and codes</b> .....	374
<b>Chapter 21</b>	<b><u>The Doll and the Human Being</u></b> .....	379
	<b>The text or story</b> .....	381
	<b>Dolls' stories which text play</b> .....	382
	<b>Types of dolls and their aesthetics</b> .....	383
	<b>Dolls, doll universes - gender and appeal</b> .....	385
	<b>Girls' doll and dream universes</b> .....	386
	<b>The girls' classic doll universe</b> .....	388
	<b>The older girls' dream universe</b> .....	390
	<b>The theatre/drama and fairy tale universe</b> .....	392
	<b>The pseudo, parody and utopian universes</b> .....	396
	<b>Boys' doll and dream universes</b> .....	400
	<b>The boys' classic figure and doll universe</b> .....	402
	<b>The older boys' dream universe</b> .....	404
	<b>The boys' fairy tale, fantasy and war universe</b> .....	407
	<b>The parody and the synthetic pseudo-universe</b> .....	410
	<b>Universal value systems</b> .....	413
	<b>Toys, soaps and education</b> .....	417
	<b>Barbie - soap and the synthetic pseudo-universe</b> .....	420
	<b>GI Joe - soldier and socio-ecologist</b> .....	424
<b>Chapter 22</b>	<b><u>Animal Figures</u></b> .....	428
	<b>Compensation and soft toys</b> .....	429
	<b>Transitional phenomena and toys</b> .....	431
	<b>The value and significance of things</b> .....	432
	<b>My little toy mouse - a soft animal toy</b> .....	433
	<b>Teddy - the world's best bear</b> .....	433
	<b>The animals and the farm</b> .....	436
<b>Chapter 23</b>	<b><u>Implements</u></b> .....	438
	<b>Implements and toys - a development process</b> .....	440
	<b>The tool box</b> .....	442
	<b>Weapons and implements for catching/capturing</b> .....	442
	<b>The car - the implement and the dream</b> .....	443
	<b>Bicycle - self-control, experience and horizons</b> .....	445
	<b>Jumping/(running)/rolling/hopscotch</b> .....	445
	<b>Drawing/colouring/cutting out/sticking</b> .....	446
	<b>Tape cassette player - storyteller and music box</b> .....	446
	<b>The implements of aggressive play</b> .....	447
<b>Chapter 24</b>	<b><u>Systems and Construction</u></b> .....	458
	<b>The modern system concept or system toys</b> .....	459
	<b>Construction toys</b> .....	460
	<b>A note about "construction"</b> .....	462
	<b>Girls' and boys' construction toys and play</b> .....	463
	<b>LEGO and DUPLO products - synonymous with theory and praxis concerning strategic and system constructions</b> .....	464

## **PART VI TOY POSITIONING**

### **Introduction**

#### **Toy positioning**

To any toy or toy product on offer on the toy market, there is a natural attachment in the form of a positioning strategy which has to be communicated to the market or to the target group.

Formulating a positioning strategy for any toy product can present difficulties if there are other products whose appearance or play value are very similar.

If a product is not alone on the market, the form of communication (mentioned earlier, includes TV spots, brochures, the toy's position in the toy store, etc.) must be both original and well thought out.

There are many motivations for positioning a toy brand or product. The five most important motivations are:

*1. Specific product characteristics:*

The manufacturer might elect to emphasise durability or quality of the materials used to make the product.

*2. The toy solves a problem or fulfils a need:*

Emphasising the toy's special significance for the child's play. This is achieved by focus on how the child's needs and development are stimulated through play with this particular toy in preference to other similar products.

*3. Context of play with the toy:*

Accentuating, for example, the fact that the toy is specially suitable for several children to play with together or that it is both an indoor and an outdoor toy.

*4. User category:*

Underlining e.g. the toy's special appeal to girls/boys or to children in a specified age group. For example, a toy tool box specially developed for boys, aged 3-4 years.

*5. Other product or brand:*

Pointing out that a doll is also available with brown eyes, dark hair and dark skin or that certain animal figures can also be found on jigsaw puzzles, in fold-out books or other alternative form.

For the manufacturer, it is important to choose the "correct", precise and strategically optimum motivation for positioning his product, clearly encompassing and isolating the consumer group he wishes to come into contact with.

Positioning becomes the outer structure for all the ideas which have to be communicated to the consumers in order to motivate them to purchase the product.

The manufacturer's, the toy maker's or *sender's* thoughts and ideas must be strong, special and original enough to ensure that the consumers or *recipients* are able to interpret the text of the toy in accordance with the idea of the toy.

Coming up with unique ideas for a product is a very complicated process and especially if there are other very similar products on the market because:

- the more similar two toy products are, the greater the competition between them
- the closer a product comes to fulfilling the consumer's or consumer segment's dreams and ideals relative to other similar products, the more likely it is that the consumer or segment will purchase the product in question, and
- the more unique the product, the more unique its position.

This is why - according to Poulsen (1988:218-219) - the manufacturer has to evaluate precisely *where* the toy is to be found relative to its competitors, *why* it is in that particular position and *where it may be possible* to reposition his product relative to potential new users and its user segment generally.

The manufacturer's strategic permutations are the following:

*1. Move the toy product closer to the ideals of the selected user group*

- This is achieved by repositioning the product by changing product characteristics, making it more interesting or by launching it in a new and different way (and avoiding losing the product's traditional, loyal users).

Repositioning involves making new decisions about price, advertising, distribution, etc.

*2. Introduce an entirely new product (to supplement the existing product) targeted at the selected user group or segment*

- When using this technique it is important to be aware of the risk of product cannibalisation, i.e. that a new product might "steal" position and market share from one's own existing product rather than from competitor products.

*3. Move the target group's ideal closer to the position of the existing product*

- A very difficult thing to achieve as it means bringing about a change in the general attitude of the users to the different products' relative positions on the toy market.

It also means bringing about a change to the users' often very solid overall opinion about whether a specific or special toy is either right or wrong for their children to play with.

*4. Introduce something really new and innovative to the market by adding a completely new product dimension to the product category, hereby changing the nature of the entire market.*

- Again, very difficult to achieve. Such a radical strategy in actual fact demands a general change in the user group's basic understanding of what toy products are and ought to be. In addition, the product must be a stroke of sheer genius!

Quite apart from the above, it is a fact that children and adults can have completely different ideas about what is new and interesting, which new dimensions they notice and can accept. For parents, new items are sometimes "nothing new" while children accept anything new to them with natural enthusiasm.

To quote Poulsen's (1988:219) comments on potential strategies:

*"Each of these strategies has its own advantages and disadvantages and the marketer must investigate very precisely the costs and the risk involved in the gains associated with each alternative. The marketer's considerations will differ, depending on whether his is a predominant company on the market or a small scale niche supplier. In any case, positioning and the calculation techniques connected with it are valuable strategic and tactical weapons in marketing planning."*

Seen from the point of view of the toy's semiotics - its sign, text and codes - the fundamental problem for the manufacturer (sender) lies in whether the users (recipients) are able to read and decode the primary signals of the toy in question. Which codes are associated with which toys?

This is what the following chapters are all about.

The following chapters in Part VI describe several toys individually. For each individual toy, this description is to be found in a sub-section entitled "**About the toy**" which includes an explanation of eight topics:

*The toy's positioning is based on an understanding of how the users - the persons-at-play who use the toy - comprehend and gain knowledge and information about the toy. Also how this information forms part of consumer consciousness.*

*The reason for this is that the user evaluates the toy on the basis of its (maybe) having some characteristics and qualities which both meet a need for and suggest associations to the situations in which one can imagine the toy can be used.*

*I think Wammen et al (1989:1) come closest to a definition of the real meaning of the term "a product's position" (in his context, an individual toy's position - here, any toy product's position):*

***Any toy's position can be defined as the user's understanding of the toy's image, which is formed from the objective and subjective attributes of the toy relative to his comprehension of the images of other both directly and generically competing toy items.***

### **Toys as phenomenological projects**

It is open to question *how* children's games, their play and fictive (often invisible) stories, produce all kinds of functions in the world of objects through concrete play items (in the form of toys) - thus making the games *phenomenological projects*.

The "phenomenological project" in play - i.e. the feat of maintaining curiosity and an open mind in relation to things as valuable and important (not only in childhood but also generally) - is without doubt the driving force in the content/text of play on many levels.

*"I have often wondered why we pay so little attention to the fact that the instant a child receives a strong impression, one potent enough to imprint itself permanently on the child's memory, the child is in reality a poet with his own special conditions for receiving the impression, repeating it or simply preserving it",* comments Carl Nielsen in his memoirs "Min Fynske Barndom" (My Childhood on Funen) and continues:

*"The power of poetry is basically a force, the ability to observe and comprehend things in a particular way. This means that we were all once poets, artists - each one of us in his or her own way. The careless way in which life and adults call the child away from the beautiful world of poetry and Art and into harsh, naked reality is doubtless to blame for most of us losing these faculties so the heavenly gift of fantasy with which every child is born either disintegrates into mere raving or is lost for ever."*

Nielsen's description bears witness to the deep respect he felt for the child as an intuitive, experiential, sensing and playing being.

Similarly, in Walter Benjamin's memoirs "Childhood in Berlin" (1972), (The Humpbacked Homunculus IV:304), we find a subtle account of what children see that adults don't see because children move in the zone under normal adult eye level. They spot what adults fail to spot and see what the adults see from a different perspective. They experience differently and their experiences are different. And this is why anything can appeal to them.

Anything can be picked up, held and turned around, given a soul and assigned magical powers (as Hans Christian Andersen relates in his fairy tales). Things and objects act in a subtle way, like when Astrid Lindgren's

Pippi Longstocking calls a garden pea a special name and transforms it into a very special pill which she takes so that she doesn't have to grow up.

Ritual and the magic of sound are of course part of the process. A child can also go looking for "things" which are nothing more than a name (like Winnie the Pooh looking for a "heffalump").

We might ask ourselves if we adults really know what a "thing" is. We have many names for it: thingummy, doodah, wotsit, gear, etc. Sometimes there is something magical or mystical about "things", e.g. Hans Christian Andersen's "curios".

To supplement the above, there is Ørum's (1993) critique of Nicholson Baker's novel "The Mezzanine", entitled "Down amongst the Things":

*"Under the eagle eye of the child, the artist or the phenomenologist, a humble object, even a prefabricated, shrink-wrapped cottage cheese sandwich, may become a treasure if attention is paid to the specifics of the object and its detailed combined possibilities. In other words, what is needed is a certain interest for or passionate intimacy with things. What is thrown back to the observer is pleasure. What the world gains is value. The eagle eye makes it possible to find connections, to see the common denominator despite massive differences in materials and contexts and to regard visual experiences as rewards for prior decisions."*

Anything worthless is visible to the child and within his reach - to observe and reflect upon, to use again in alternative, previously unimagined contexts.

Children's play and fictive and invisible stories are fabricated and made up of all the functions of the concrete play objects (i.e. toys) in the world of objects, thus turning play into phenomenological projects.

Daily life is in fact more decisive to the child than epoch-making or violent new or historical events. Day-to-day contact with things and with other persons-at-play is fundamental.

When children differentiate between all the many fragments which make up daily life, the text of play can reconstruct the greater perspective. Questions which are important for the child can be encompassed in the little text of play which - in spite of its obscurity - forms the basis for the large text.

For example: The following three short texts by parents tell us something about their children's world of play:

- *old fabric remnants can be put to all kinds of uses*
- *a broken car radio antenna can become: a fishing net, a whip to make the husky dogs run faster, an arrow. In fact, everything can be many things more or less all at once.*
- *They make a toy out of their fantasy, play with it and constantly make it into different things*

In this way, the text of play gains a project in common with the phenomenology and what play relates can be described as a kind of *phenomenological reduction* by which we try to place ourselves at the elementary level of human perception and interaction ahead of all the general theoretical explanations. We can therefore interpret the world - or "put interpretations to the test" - and gain meaning on the strength of all the internal and external fragments and objects which are part of our immediate surroundings.

This world of fragments and objects, the world of toys with all its junk, bits and "odds and ends" - including so-called "worthless objects" - represents everything which consciousness cannot otherwise encompass, everything which the human being cannot exonerate, i.e. the (for most of us) lost world of objects and nature attainable only through thoughts and dreams. Play as a phenomenological project is therefore an attempt to divest things of assumptions we human beings have already loaded onto them in order to let things and objects "speak for themselves".

For the adult, this form of aesthetics detaches play with toys and play with a wide variety of "worthless" things and objects from general ideological theoretical and interpretative institutions. Instead of complying with the rules for playing correctly, nicely or constructively with things (the "right" way to play and "good taste"), the person-at-play indulges an interest for trivial, "worthless and useless" things and objects; mass-produced packaging, worn-out, broken or purposeless objects which are also "ugly, tasteless and perishable".

In his portrait of the artist and "collector" John Olsen, Laursen (1993) quotes Olsen as saying:

*"Many adults know exactly what is pretty and what is ugly and especially what is valuable. Unfortunately, they are unshakeable. Children's attitude to things is far more free and flows with their fantasy."*

*One of the animals I am most fond of in my cupboard full of things is the skeleton of a dead cat. One day a class of school children came to visit me. One of the boys seemed to be very interested in the cat skeleton and then suddenly he said, "John, when I die, you are welcome to have me if I am just as beautiful as the cat you have hanging up in that cupboard."*

Strong words indeed from the little boy - but he was demonstrating enthusiasm for a piece of "natural life". He was experiencing reality from its best side. For him the dead cat wasn't unpleasant. He didn't see death. He saw beauty!

So, beauty is in the eye of the beholder - everything depends on the observer! Or what we can call the phenomenological project within play:

*Maintaining curiosity and candour about things as valuable or important (not only in childhood but also generally)*



is, doubtless and on many levels, one of the driving forces of the text of play.

However, this does not exclude the parody and irony attached to the totally banal world of objects and which makes the person-at-play seem slightly comical and naïve with his meticulous, sometimes ethical considerations (often an affected neurotic interest for detail). However, this very fact gives play a vital, fundamental and joyful - although not particularly widely recognised - function in society and in human existence, i.e.

- in phenomenological terms, play is an indication of fundamental interaction and play with even the most banal things. Play therefore also helps human beings' maintain their perception and interaction with the world around them.

### **Toys' positional sign, text and codes**

All toys are part of a reciprocal ranking which means that the individual toy can be seen in relation to other and/or similar toys.

In principle, the individual user who plays with a toy or buys it, ranks the toy on the basis of emotional, cognitive and (in particular) action-oriented attitudes to the toy as an object and as a product.

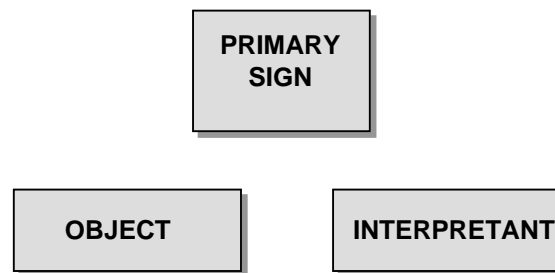
It would be bad planning on the part of the manufacturer if he neglected to ensure that his product appealed to the correct consumer segment. A product's appeal must be planned on the basis of a strategy and idea which correlates with elementary rules and natural laws (including what children can do and what they are interested in at different ages).

This means that any toy's positioning is evaluated by measuring consumer perceptions and preferences for the toy as a product relative to similar competing products.

Some of the *action-oriented attitudes to different toys* which some consumers have made are covered in the following.

With reference to previous chapters of this book, it covers the many relations which on the one hand are fundamental for any general evaluation of an individual toy. On the other hand, it contains theoretical terms relevant to the toy's sign and codes. The toys are in many cases described using users' (both adults' and children's) own words.

However, the explanations are always related to the sign triad (after Peirce):



i.e. “ a sign is something which in some way represents something for someone.”

The toy (as part of the primary sign) **is something**. Its being something is expressed through two points:

The toy refers to something original and it has a particular or special expression which the user is interested in. I call this:

1. The toy’s immediate narration, and
2. Its “nickname” (particular or special description).

The toy **represents something** on the strength of the story or case which is described - points 3 and 4 - by the toys’ precise presentation and anything else to which the toy refers.

3. How the text communicates and relates play with the toy - which involves a long list of case relations - and which **someone must interpret**.
4. Interpretation is undertaken by **someone** for whom the toy **represents something in some way**. The “**someone**” is of course:

the toy’s *sender* (manufacturer) but naturally also the *user*.

As shown in Part V, the user’s interpretation is based on many different premises. The interpretation itself is held up by two instances: the dynamic interpretation (content) and the immediate interpretation (meaning). From time to time it can be difficult to distinguish the one from the other. Interpretations include, amongst other things,:

5. The universal message
6. Research triads
7. Toys in relation to symbolic value, utility value and the eco-social environment.

The quotations are descriptions of events or texts which describe both very concrete, diffuse and abstract toys.

The above seven points will be described in the following as seven positional spheres:

### 1. The toy's immediate narrative.

The parents' and/or the children's event-oriented messages about how they play with the toy, i.e. the text of play with the toy.

These are *not* toy biographies nor are they detailed, analytical descriptions of play with the various individual toys. They are descriptions of events.

For example, some parents state that their child does not play at all with selected toys but with a wide variety of different objects:

- *The child plays with all sorts of things all the time and he is interested in the surroundings, live animals, things, movements and processes.*
- *She plays with all kinds of different things all the time and makes up fantastic stories and situations which form part of play.*
- *Talks to himself while he plays with all the things. I believe he plays that he controls all people and things. When we play with something good, we can keep on playing for ever.*
- *We move around with all kinds of things all over the house and outside in the farmyard, in the barn or in the stables. I build new things all the time which can be used in lots of ways.*
- *Sometimes she says she plays with invisible toys which I can't see. She says she hides them in a secret place. I have to respect this.*

### 2. Nicknames, descriptive name and supplementary toys

Nicknames and functional description: A toy will often be given a nickname or called something special. This applies most often to dolls and animals whose names also suggest that they have a special function or identity. In some cases, a toy's nickname is cultural or national and sometimes even international. Popular stories and fairy tales, myths and legends can be the sources of the names used.

Apart from their natural functional descriptions, tools and implements can also be given a name or description.

Supplementary toys: The person-at-play often uses other toys to supplement basic toys. Children very often use the same toys as supplements because they are best suited or because they intensify the experience of play with the basis toy.

### 3. Text's communication and case relations

The factors can be read in different ways according to how the special characteristics of the different toys are accentuated and how the toys are used and the way the game is thus texted.

The case relations of toys and play form different images of the reality of play itself, positioned in time and space and attributed relationships and qualities.

PLAY'S CASE RELATIONS	TEXT OF PLAY WITH THE TOYS describing or narrating an event	TOYS' CASE RELATIONS
RECOGNITION CONFLICT PASSION COMPETITION MASTERY ORDER/ANARCHY PRODUCTION DISCIPLINE FORMS TIME/SPACE	- where the toys and participants in the game communicate legitimately and honestly about the different expressions, content and coherent case relations of their play. Communication is systematic and takes the form of relevant messages and therefore creates contact, is honest and interesting for the persons-at-play...	STYLE PRACTICAL USE MOTIVATION STATEMENT EXPRESSION/DESIGN COMPLEXITY SIGNAL PLAY COMPREHENSION CODES

### 4. The sender (manufacturer) and the toy/product.

A matter of the relationship between the sender and the toy. We also find short descriptions of general or special attributes and signals which the toy is intended to provoke or demonstrate.

This is a natural result of the manufacturer's intentions and the inventiveness of the product developers (or lack of it). When played with, any toy product has a number of functions. These functions expose the case and communication relations in play with the toy.

### 5. The universally pragmatic message in play with the toy

This is purely and simply a matter of how far the descriptions of events can demonstrate the extent to which the toys are able (or unable) to bring about greater comprehension, truth and truthfulness about reality and real life for the person-at-play while the toys themselves are products of fantasy.

The legitimacy of the toy is measured by the integrity of its communicative form and by its texts and codes related to the following questions. Either:

- Is it what it pretends to be?
- Does it honestly cheat the person-at-play and does the person-at-play accept the deception from the beginning?

or:

Is it false, corrupt - a sham which deceives the person-at-play by pretending it can do something it cannot do?

Furthermore the universal pragmatic message of the toy is also a matter of how far the challenges presented by the toy present the user with opportunities for clear dialogue between “the toy” and the person-at-play (i.e. in relation to the dialogic parameters and communication within play - see Chapter 1.)

## 6. Research triads

Research triads raise the issue of whether descriptions of events concerning the toy demonstrate that the toy has de facto play value - including all the factors which can be connected to this term in relation to the play triad (Chapter 1). And does acquisition of the toy facilitate recognition, consciousness and the general potential for development?

Research triads also beg the question: To what extent are Peirce’s categories, especially with the weight of emphasis on the metaphysical triads - expressed in the relationship between the person(s)-at- play and the toy.

## 7. The toy in relation to its symbolic value, utility value and the eco-social environment

These relationships demonstrate how the toy’s significance for and its role within play are conditional upon the event, the personalities (persons-at-play) the reification (the strength of the toy itself), the time spent on play and the space in which play occurs. However, as mentioned, a given toy may have its own special symbolic value or utility value and its own social and concept-oriented dimensions. How are these expressed?

## (8. Additional literary texts

on which the texts of play can be based - introduced as short quoted text, poetry, statements, references, etc.)

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The following four chapters account for the mutual positions of toys within the four large main groups of the toy classification.

The fifth and final main group, i.e. natural materials, is covered implicitly by the description of the other four main groups.

## CHAPTER 21 THE DOLL AND THE HUMAN BEING

See also chapter 8 - Main groups and subgroups of the toy classification

### The Values

#### People/human beings as toy(s)

playmate  
doll  
guardian doll  
war doll  
doll accessories

#### SOCIAL VALUES

(different lifestyles - the social aspect)

##### TOYS USED BY THE PERSON-AT-PLAY IN RELATION TO:

1. himself and his immediate family
2. immediate surrounding/local environment
3. natural surroundings
4. power structures and systems
5. the universe and universal perspectives

##### FAMILY COHESION AND IDENTITY

6. social reference to a specific group
7. directional perspective for life cycle
8. security, cosiness, peace and quiet, intimacy

##### PEOPLE

playmate	1,2,3,4,6,7,8
doll	1,2,3,6,7,8
guardian doll	1,2,4,6,8
war doll	1,2,4,6,8
doll accessories	1

##### PLAY AS INTERACTION

intimate play	1,8
playmate/friends/party games	1,2,6,7,8
act out/perform/produce	1,2,6,7,8
care/nursing/childminding play	1,2,8
guessing/teasing/hide-and-seek play	1,2,4,8
catching/hunting/war play	1,2,3,4,6,8
play with dolls/dolls accessories	1,2,8

#### INDIVIDUAL VALUES

(personal differences - the individual aspect)

##### TOYS USED IN CONNECTION WITH:

1. GENERAL INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY  
- in particular:
2. social reference to a specific group
3. existential understanding of entirety

4. directional perspective for life cycle
5. independence, self-sufficiency
6. practical sense
7. mastery and control over the object

##### PEOPLE

playmate	1,2
doll	2,3,4,5,6,7
guardian doll	1,2,
war doll	1,2,3,4,5,7
doll accessories	1,2,5,6
catching/hunting/war play	1,2

##### PLAY AS INTERACTION

intimate play	1
playmate/friends/party games	1,2,3,4
act out/perform/produce	1,2
care/nursing/childminding play	1,2
guessing/teasing/hide-and-seek play	1,2
play with dolls/dolls accessories	1,2,6,7

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**VALUES CONNECTED TO POSITION AND DIMENSION**  
(different experiences - the situation aspect)

**TOYS AS:**

1. laissez-faire toys - 2. protectionist toys - 3. pluralistic toys - 4. consensual toys -	no significance for case relations principal emphasis on social-oriented dimension emphasise a concept-oriented dimension emphasise social and concept-oriented dimension
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**PEOPLE**

playmate	4
doll	4
guardian doll	4
war doll	3
doll accessories	1
catching/hunting/war play	3

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**PLAY AS INTERACTION**

intimate play	4
playmate/friends/party games	4
act out/perform/produce	4
care/nursing/childminding play	2
guessing/teasing/hide-and-seek play	4
play with dolls/dolls accessories	1

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Briefly, a doll is a toy which represents a person. A human figure is not always a doll but can be a toy. Some types of dolls are not toys.

The word “doll” used to be a very broad term which also included “figures which look like people” but we now have to differentiate between figures and dolls. The word and term “doll” is now often connected with “a decorative human object”, most often female. However, it is not much of a commendation for a girl or woman to be called “a doll” or “a Barbie doll”.

The oldest known dolls or human figures are approximately 10,000 years old. They are typically obviously female and were probably cult “goddess figures”. Some of today’s dolls are also cult goddesses of a kind.

Europe’s oldest toy doll was found in a child’s grave dating from the time of Ancient Greece and Rome.

The doll and the figure are the motivation for all play because the person-at-play uses the doll as the starting point, an entry into the fictive world and the events within play.

The fictive events are, naturally, either very concrete (a perfect reflection of reality) or very abstract, impressionistic or surrealistic - but they can also be complete parodies of any of these. In the same way as the human being is the focal point of the real world, the doll is the focal point of the world of toys. The doll is the human compensation figure.

Around the doll, there are the doll’s or the person’s animals, implements, systems and constructions, natural surroundings - i.e. for the sake of clarity, as in the toy classification.

This chapter refers *first and foremost* to the dolls’ and the figures’ texts whereas animals, implements, systems, constructions and Nature take a secondary role to the doll.

## The Night The Toys Came To Life

As it so happened, the magic moonbeam slipped through the open window of a little boy's bedroom. That is how, at the stroke of midnight, the stuffed animals in the room suddenly came to life with a great yawn. Teddy, the oldest toy and the biggest of all, read aloud from a book he had found.

"...and the balloon soared high into the sky", he read. "below them lay field and woodlands, mountains and plains. How splendid the world seemed from such a height!" However not everyone was paying attention...

"Be quiet!" shouted the elephant angrily, over the noise.

"Grr!" growled a large dog behind him. "I can't hear the story!" But how could anyone stop such confusion: kittens, bears, rabbits, tigers, mice, everybody wanted to be part of the miracle. Wasn't it fun being able to move! They chattered and sang, but most of all they played games...

The tiny rabbit, who was the smallest of them all, said, "Let's go to the amusement park." They rushed to the door and set out on a wonderful adventure in magical Toyland, where time passes differently than in our world. One short, adventurous night was to seem like many days of fun to the lucky stuffed animals.

Only big Teddy, still buried in his book, stayed sitting at the foot of the bed. "I'll wait here," he said.

From "The Night The Toys Came To Life" by Tony Wolf (1988)

### The text or story

A story connected to a doll or figure can be borrowed from all sorts of sources: fairy tales, myths, books, PC games, films, TV series, everyday events, etc.

For the doll to become interesting for the user as a figure, the story must have a clear message and an intelligible story line communicated via simple imagery. The main characters in the story are the *index*. The imagery communicates the main characters as *icons* which are in turn *symbolised* in material terms by the identical mass-produced dolls.

The individual protagonist is also a semiotic phenomenon, a *primary sign* for positive or negative personal characteristics associated with his or her personality.

As an *object* the protagonist is identical with the case or the problem presented by the story, dependent on the interpretation of the situation - or



space for interpretation - which the interpretant attributes to the relationship between sign and object.

The story includes (simple) social rituals which are characteristically based on any chosen culture's visible and central codes and conventions (sometimes on the prejudices shouldering historical conflicts). All stories and narratives seek to test out reality through fantasy, weighing them up against "real life", facts, Natural laws and demonstrable perspectives on the one hand and dreams, illusions, fantasies and play on the other.

The narrative flow of the story "mimics" episodes from real life but simultaneously facilitates fiction. The fictional narrative can be enriched with scenes from one's own life and thus reality can be observed from a distance in a playful dialogue with fiction.

The story always starts by outlining clear starting points and then paves the way for the unpredictable, chaos, dissolution and finally reconstruction. Playing out the story later, the person-at-play tests the boundaries between familiar and unfamiliar, between reality and fantasy and he reconstructs or repeats the familiar, stable cultural norms and regulations. By doing this, the person-at-play or user of the dolls is able to confirm the codes which are preconditions for the story.

A good story which is selected in order to text play has a natural emotional appeal to the person-at-play. The special appeal of a good story is, however, that it enables the person-at-play to master or control something on the border to not being able to master or control it, to be close to catastrophe or chaos without really being close to either. As mentioned, many stories contain a myriad of *primary signs* which - in pedagogical terms - mean that the person who plays with the *objects* (the dolls) is forced to interpret the dolls' (the objects') situation. And this means that the person-at-play is tempted to imagine himself in others' situations.

### **Dolls' stories which text play**

Every toy tells a story.

Toys' narratives or stories have no endings. They are endlessly varied in terms of form, narrative flow and complexity of structure and are constructed in accordance with era, location, culture and society.

The narratives naturally start with the story of Mankind and continue with the story of the individual through the ages. Each group, each class and each individual has its/his own story to tell - a fact which is in itself fascinating and unparalleled - and which means that dolls are symbolic manifestations: they are symbols for people in the stories

And as there is a constant stream of good and bad stories (in the form of novels and comic strips) and fictive pictures (films and TV series) and as a

constant stream of dolls is developed on the basis of the two theses mentioned above, the production of narrative and dolls can in no way be described as sluggish. In practise, it is often difficult to differentiate the representative and referential functions of the story from those of the dolls.

The narratives have different origins and the various narrative structures have developed separately. The doll or figure is *a material manifestation of a fantasy or fiction* which is both a model and an example for a wide variety of different narrative formulas.

1. The doll can be symbolic of a character in a fairy tale or primitive/mythical in origin. Thus dolls are examples of classical archetypes and of the stories passed on by storytelling. Alternatively,
2. The doll can be symbolic of either a fictive or well-known historical or contemporary figure which either acts or does not act in accordance with principles laid down in a legend or story written back in history, in a current story or in a story about the future.

The first group includes dolls which imitate classical fairy tales or trivial archetypes, historical figures and individuals whose (positive or negative) deeds are legendary in some way.

The second group includes dolls which are contrived as action figures. They represent some kind of realistic construction which becomes relevant for the person who play with the doll/figure on the strength of language/narrative. Dolls as fantasy or fictive figures become “almost” real because the child who plays with the doll gains an experience of reality through language.

### **Types of dolls and their aesthetics**

On the strength of their appearance, dolls carry icons, signals and *primary signs* which can be:

- interpreted collectively on the basis of general social consciousness and dominant norms and codes of the culture concerned and
- segmented and interpreted (decoded) individually in accordance with the individual user’s receptive capabilities.

In general terms, there are *six basic types of doll* - although there are a myriad of mixes and amalgamations to be found on the toy market.

- people
- animal people
- animals
- robots
- aliens
- monsters, mutations

The dolls and figures are generally produced as one of two profiles, i.e. either as:

- a functional figure or as
  - a character
- (and sometimes as a mixture of both).

These profiles are described in the following.

***The first profile: The Functional Figure.***

Named after a task or function (e.g. fireman, pilot), typically impersonal unless the child-at-play gives the toy a name or identifies himself in the figure. Usually the figure is neutral, unidentifiable and lacking in identity. It is characterised primarily by its functional characteristics. ANIMALS and/or TOOLS/IMPLEMENTS are associated with the functional figure - specifically the figure's own tools, implements and props.

Children aged 3-5/6 years are especially interested in the figure's functions and implements in connection with concrete, realistic role play. This age group is engaged in learning which functions relate to which specific roles.

Einsiedler et al (1985, 1986, 1989) indicate that 3-6 year olds are in fact only susceptible to social stimulation in connection with concrete toys and figures which have realistic functions and which replicate real functions distinctly.

***The second profile: A Character.***

A named doll (e.g. Batman, Barbie, Luke Skywalker, Lord Zedd) which has not only a personality but also an identity and charisma.

The doll's appearance indicates the doll's special characteristics with which the child is often familiar on the strength of the protagonist's significance in a story, TV programme, film or comic strip. Of course, the character also has his/her own *implements and props*. However - in contrast to the functional figure which is synonymous with its own tool/implement - animals, implements and inventory supplement the personality structure of the character doll.

***A note on the two doll profiles:***

From the age of 5-6 years, children require a doll to have an identity - without which the doll is merely a functional figure with an anonymous functional role.

Girls in this age group focus their attention on dolls in a variety of feminine dream universes or on the young adult woman's career opportunities and existence. These will be described in detail later in this chapter.

Where boys are concerned, they focus on figures and dolls which they can fit into very violent, physical games of win/lose, victory/defeat (in which the concept of masculinity can be explored and tested). Play with these dolls

usually requires the participation of several persons-at-play and a great deal of space. This too will be described in detail later in this chapter.

Again, Einsiedler et al (1985, 1986, 1989) indicate that toys, dolls and figures with a more complex structure stimulate children from the age of six upwards to play abstract fantasy play and to experiment with alternative social structures.

### **Dolls, doll universes - gender and appeal**

Most dolls are gender-specific and they have specific sex roles, functions and appeal.

Years ago, baby dolls were sexless. Resistance to baby dolls with a clear sexual reference (i.e. baby dolls with sexual organs - adult dolls seldom/never have genitalia) originates in an ethical/moral understanding of what children ought or "are allowed" to see! However, all dolls and figures which symbolise an adult bear clear gender-specific marks which also distance and distinguish between the sexes and between other types of figures of the same sex.

The gender-specific appeal is in fact often very stereotyped, sometimes even parodying specific gender-based behaviour and appearance. This is often imperative for the figure's general integrity in terms of appearance, sex and - in particular - sex function.

### **Ordinary classic doll and dolls' house universes**

There are *four classic doll universes* which appeal in different ways to modern users.

Each of the four classic universes contains its own version of the seven ordinary and most general human spheres of life and activity and there are naturally *animals - implements - constructions, strategies and models for existence etc.* associated with these - which in turn are also related to a specific era (time) and a special environment (space).

1. The gallery of persons,
  2. characters and
  3. figures in the doll's universe,
  4. the fictive universes reflected in play with the doll(s).
- The person/persons:
5. describe the sphere(s) in which events take place (time)
  6. outline the universal space in which events take place (space) and
  7. define the types of play the dolls inspire them to engage in (cause/event).

The model summarises the seven spheres of life and activity:

<p><b><u>THE PSEUDO DOLL (fantasy universe)</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. idol or compensation figure (mythical origin)</li> <li>2. famous people (alive/deceased)</li> <li>3. Barbie, Elvis or famous models, etc.</li> <li>4. reflect a world of dreaming and yearning</li> <li>5. utopia and soap</li> <li>6. Man's utopian dream universe</li> <li>7. supplementary play</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>THE GUARDIAN DOLL (fantasy universe)</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. goddess/god-like figures</li> <li>2. devil/monster/witch/elf/troll</li> <li>3. monster doll</li> <li>4. reflects the special task of guardian/protector, role/function</li> <li>5. good and evil</li> <li>6. spiritual universe</li> <li>7. classical ceremonies and demonstrations</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Border between fantasy and reality</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Border between fantasy and reality</u></b></p>
<p><b><u>THE WAR DOLL (real universe)</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. man/hunter/warrior</li> <li>2. soldier throughout the ages</li> <li>3. GI Joe, cowboys/Indians, historical heroes</li> <li>4. reflects battlefield and arenas</li> <li>5. battle for life and death</li> <li>6. the utopian war universes of the soldier</li> <li>7. aggressive play and games</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>THE CLASSICAL DOLL (real universe)</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. adult women and men</li> <li>2. boys/girls - of different ages</li> <li>3. baby dolls</li> <li>4. reflect everyday events/functions</li> <li>5. family and society</li> <li>6. the ecological and social universe</li> <li>7. classic "Mummy, Daddy and Baby" games, family games</li> </ol>

These classical universes form the background for children's fantasy and dreams and are replicated in the modern universes which all children (boys and girls alike) use as a starting point for their dreams and imaginative pictures of life/existence.

In the following we will describe *girls' and boys' doll and dream universes* respectively.

### **Girls' doll and dream universes**

Until they reach 3-4 years of age, little girls are particularly interested in functional dolls, e.g. baby, pretty lady, Mummy, little brother, etc.

The girl doll or adult female character doll begins to play a role in the girl's dream universe when she is 4-5 years old. The appeal of these dolls is to distinctly feminine concepts, such as:

- dialogue
- "the aesthetics of beauty"
- love/hate
- compound and identifiable developmental story
- invitation and mirroring

For older girls from the age of six, chat, conversation and dialogues about mutual relationships become the primary topics of play. Play with dolls gives

girls an opportunity to discuss, analyse and experiment with their mutual relationships and situation.

In a typical small girls' game, several girls play together in a small group and they play out situations and episodes from everyday life.

If the girls are 5-6 year olds, they will typically form close friendships or dyads through which they confirm each other's identities and admire each other's personal/intimate qualities.

The dolls become the girls' "friends", children, babies (see below) for whom the girls definitely feel they have social responsibility within the game which focuses in particular on mutual relationships, problems and opportunities.

The following describes the girls' four universes which in turn are divided into four universal spheres, each of which outlines the content of the girls' play and dreams.

<p><b><u>THE SYNTHETIC PSEUDO UNIVERSE</u></b> <b><u>(fantasy universe)</u></b></p> <p><i>Girls aged 6-8 years and upwards</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. modern adult woman</li> <li>2. roles of the adult woman</li> <li>3. dream of "adult career"</li> <li>4. soap realism</li> <li>5. toy example: the world of Barbie</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>THEATRE/DRAMA/FAIRY TALE UNIVERSE</u></b> <b><u>(fantasy universe)</u></b></p> <p><i>Girls aged 5-6 years and upwards</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. princess, fairy, flower fairy</li> <li>2. roles of characters in fairy tales</li> <li>3. fairy tale dreams</li> <li>4. drama, fiction and folk tales</li> <li>5. toy example: Polly Pocket</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Border between fantasy and reality</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Border between fantasy and reality</u></b></p>
<p><b><u>THE OLDER GIRL'S DREAM UNIVERSE</u></b> <b><u>(real universe)</u></b></p> <p><i>Girls aged (5)6 years and upwards</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. girls, adults and children</li> <li>2. girls' roles and functions</li> <li>3. adult dreams</li> <li>4. soap realism</li> <li>5. toy example: LEGO SYSTEM Belville</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>THE CLASSIC DOLL UNIVERSE</u></b> <b><u>(real universe)</u></b></p> <p><i>Girls aged 0-2 years and 3-6 years</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mummy, Daddy and Baby</li> <li>2. baby and mother roles</li> <li>3. dream of "the family"</li> <li>4. social realism</li> <li>5. toy example: classic dolls' house</li> </ol>

### **The girls' classic doll universe**

As shown in the model, the girls' classic doll universe can be divided into four spheres, depending on the age and stage of development of the girl(s) concerned. Through play and experimentation with these universes, girls gain experience of the social interaction they can see around them and of which they themselves are part.

## The Classic Doll Universe - based on reality -

### Approx. 4-8 years

- The classic doll's house
- Play with family *values*
- "Father-mother-child" roles and norms:  
*Family pictures*

### Approx. 2-3 years

- Baby doll
- Doll's doll
- The "primitive" function equipment connected to the doll

### Approx. 2-4 years

- The "simple" doll's house and function dolls/figures
- The "doll's corner" with micro and mini equipment/furniture

### Approx. 0-2 years

- Rag doll/small girl's doll
- Soft toy/cuddly toy
- "Security blanket"
- Mother's body!!
- The child's own body

1) 0-2 year olds: Experience of her mother's body and play with her own body form the basis of the little girl's understanding of the initial simple and primitive play with dolls and play with another person. A baby or very small child sees a soft toy, a bedtime pal, a security blanket or a rag doll as part of himself. A floppy rag doll or teddy bear is expected to do the same and to be in the same situation as the child himself, i.e. sleep, eat, take a bath, go visiting and generally go anywhere the child himself goes.

2) 2-3 year olds: The baby doll (which may well be of a certain sex and not "just" an unspecified "baby") gains special significance in the social universe and simple games played by 2-3 year old girls. This is because the many familiar everyday functions in the immediate social environment create a microcosmic social history and these *text play*. The girls often play that the dolls have dolls in order to experiment with social positions and to manipulate them within play. At this age, very primitive functional inventory items associated with the dolls (e.g. a small wardrobe, a doll's bed, the doll's doll and the doll's own mirror and hairbrush) begin to play an important role in doll play. The little girl transfers or very literally transforms her realistic day-to-day life into the doll's world in which situations and actions are imitated.

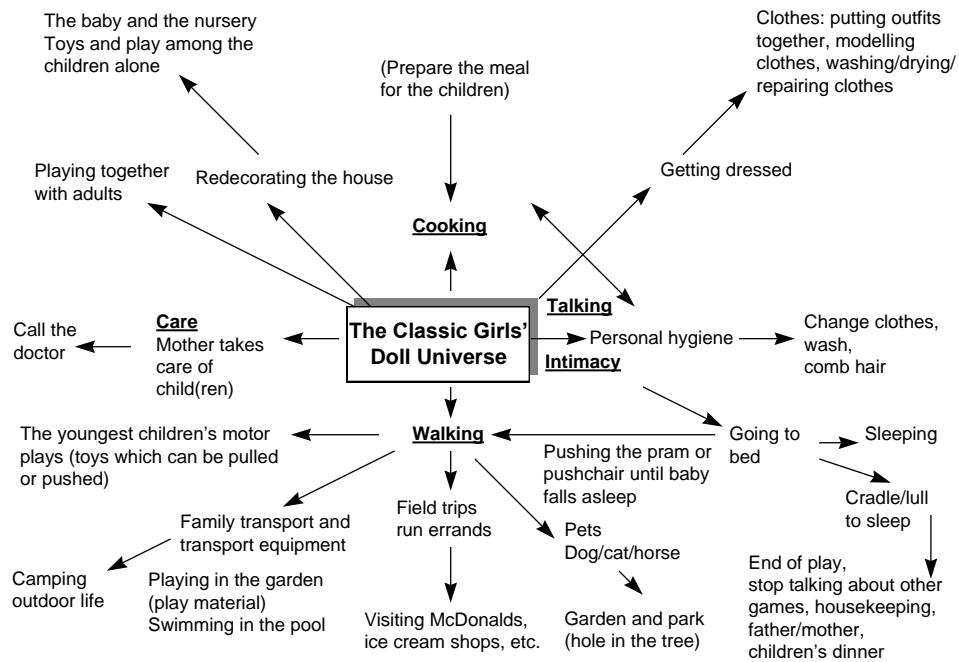
3) 2-4 year olds: During these years girls play very simple dolls' house play. The dolls are given functions as parents who have children, visitors, family pets which need to be trained, etc. The Wendy house or dolls' corner with all its accessories is popular. The girls spend a great deal of time discussing their own mutual and family relationships.

4-6 (8) year olds: At the age of 4-6 (sometimes even up to the age of 8) the classic dolls' house is central to girls' play. At this age girls play and experiment with a wide variety of family values. Roles and ethical and moral norms are tested out and discussed (see later paragraphs covering universal value systems). Many different forms and types of families and family situations and episodes are acted out almost like theatrical drama but the

universe is still motivated by everyday life and routines as they occur in the girls' social and cultural environment. The dolls are children, the girls themselves are parents, friends and grandparents and they play out life within the family unit - day-to-day events/episodes, parties and holidays, work and interactive processes in all kinds of realistic guises.

On the toy market we find these doll universes in countless different, sophisticated variations.

The following graphic model illustrates many of the text variations covered by play with baby dolls and dolls (partly after Brougère:1993).





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**Positional sign, text and codes: The Classic Doll Universe**

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Baby/nursery, toys and children playing among themselves	Get dressed
Calling the doctor	Go to bed
Camping, outdoor life	Intimate play
Care (mother takes care of her children)	Personal hygiene
Change clothes, wash, comb hair	Pets (cat, dog, horse)
Clothes: arrange them, "model" them, wash/dry/repair clothes	Play in the garden
Cooking	Play with adults
Cradle/lull to sleep	Prepare children's meals
End of play, articulate other games: housekeeping, father/mother, children's dinner	Push the pram until baby goes to sleep
Family transport, transport equipment	Redecorate the house
Field trips, run errands	Sleep
Garden, park (the hollow tree)	Swimming
	Talking
	Youngest children's motor play (pull-along/push-along toys)
	Visit McDonalds, ice cream shop, etc.
	Walking

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## **The older girls' dream universe**

The older "little girls" (5-6 year olds) have already learned the general conditions and rules of right and wrong, good and evil. The girls apply these rules verbally to each other and simultaneously experiment with rules in their role play with dolls. At this stage girls also begin to show an interest in what could or might happen to them when they grow up.

## **The Older Girl's Dream Universe - based on reality -**

### **Approx. 6 years**

- Realistic scenarios
- Community based on identity
- Cultivation of secret, personal qualities

### **Approx. 6 years**

- Independence
- "Soap" - realism - roles
- Girls' future dreams
- Feminine power as "mother", "career woman", nurse, teacher

### **Approx. 6 years**

- Girl symbiosis - conflicts
- Horses - dogs - flowers
- Small children - sweet - neat - the aesthetics of beauty

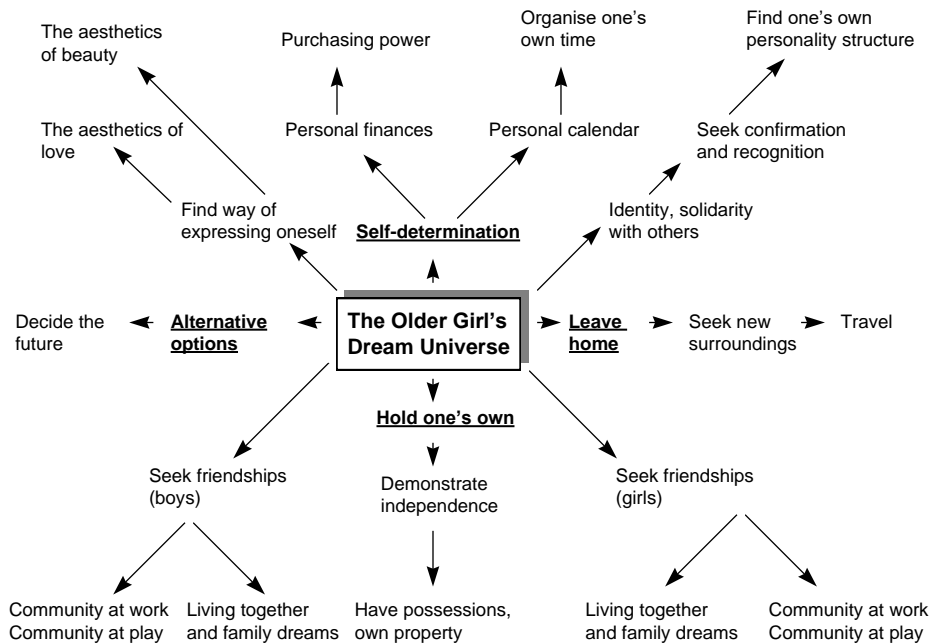
### **Approx. 5-6 years**

- Big "little girl"
- Imagination begins as to jobs and roles as adults!
- Identification with "the big, good girl"!!

The older girl's dream universe is a realistic universe. Her fantasy is built up on experience and reality. She is inspired by everyday life but often also by TV series about life at the riding school, the animal hospital, the children's hospital, etc. The dolls are important to the game as they are used as compensatory figures for real people. Girls aged 5-6 years very often enjoy making accessories/inventory and props (drawing, cutting out, painting and sticking things together). Toys are very often only a supplement to the home-made things.

- 1) The older "little girl" (5-6 year old) dreams and imagines that she has many different jobs and roles as an adult. These are the classical female roles and jobs which she tries to learn about and to understand by playing and imitating them. This kind of play is especially significant if the females with whom she identifies (and has almost certainly met) are independent, strong and attractive and if they demonstrate authority and security. Specific jobs motivate the girl's play. The game's specific characteristic is that the doll is assigned a role and a character both of which are *clever* and *original* (unique). As girls of this age are also starting to interrelate in friendship dyads or triads, they often play together and experiment with the content of job functions.
- 2) By the age of six, girls have learned a great deal about the obvious content of the various female roles. They are able to recognise and transfer these roles into play with dolls. Now the concept of *female independence* begins to gain ever greater conscious significance for them. The girls begin to see themselves as teenagers who are so "clever and grown-up" that the adults are starting to ask if they are ready to take over a more responsible role. The roles themselves are determined by reality, although the texts are often banal clichés, inspired by TV soaps. In play the girls dream of being transformed into an older, clever girl, a good mother, the teacher who can even get the boys to listen in class, a riding school manager or a successful, attractive, beautiful career woman with a good job, plenty of money to buy splendid clothes, her own mansion, pets (horses, dogs and cats), super holidays in faraway countries, a car, etc.
- 3) From about six years, girls begin to organise themselves socially in looser friendship groups and major conflicts begin to occur between them. The girls prefer to reach agreement on decisions affecting their play universe. In fact they hate conflict but are unable to avoid it. Conflicts occur when the girls discuss setting the scene of the more complex and problematic play processes where horses, dogs, small children etc. play a role together with dolls. Each individual girl wants very much to be special - to be beautiful, really clever or outstanding in some way - which is also what they demand of each other generally.
- 4) In order to accommodate the internal conflicts from the age of about six years, girls begin to cultivate secret qualities and values between themselves in their play and their dreams. They prefer to be loved and accepted and admired. They want their love, acceptance and admiration to be reciprocated. Therefore, they start "self stage management" and they

test this out in games between friends. Girls who are friends help each other, seek harmony, are honest and extremely tender with each other. By way of contrast, conflict and schisms between friends are real catastrophes - often for both parties. However, the 6-7 year olds also have a very realistic evaluation of their own situation. The girls talk a great deal within play and situations are constantly brought up for consideration and reconsideration, constantly evaluated and re-evaluated.



**Positional sign, text and codes: The Older Girl's Dream Universe**

- |                                      |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Alternative options                  | Organise one's own time           |
| Community in play                    | Personal calendar                 |
| Community at work                    | Personal finances                 |
| Decide the future (for oneself)      | Purchasing power                  |
| Demonstrate independence             | Seek confirmation and recognition |
| Find means of self-expression        | Seek friendships (boys, girls)    |
| Find one's own personality structure | Seek out new surroundings         |
| Have possessions, own property       | Self-determination                |
| Hold one's own                       | The aesthetics of beauty          |
| Identity/solidarity with others      | The aesthetics of love            |
| Leave home                           | Travel                            |
| Living together and family dreams    |                                   |

**The theatre/drama and fairy tale universe**

From the age of about six (although in some cases from 7-8 years), girls begin to be able to abstract from the experiences and routines of everyday events which have interested them hitherto. Instead of copying realistic social events (facts, natural laws, conscious connections, documentation, scenes

from “real life” and the world they are familiar with), they move on to converting and developing actions and events into dramatic and imaginative scenes which they narrate or act out as a game or as drama.

There is apparently no limit to the girls’ fascination for creative fantasy, for imagination, for creating illusions, for fantasising, for dreaming and for *narrating* what *could possibly or maybe will happen sometime* in the future and for what *probably happened* in the past. An imaginative array of roles and personalities develops. Striking and familiar kinds of personalities are imitated and copied in the girls’ dramas. Implements and props begin to have magical significance. Even though the story lines of games and theatre follow a recognisable pattern of development (i.e. comparable with classic drama), the girls also compose and invent their own new, dramatic episodes and add them to the narrative.

The girls act out grand and very serious themes, usually motivated by existential questions such as love/hate, peace/conflict, security/insecurity, harmony/discord or a *yearning* - often for something imprecise!

There are therefore four spheres within this fantasy universe and these will be described in the following.

## **The Drama and Fairy tale Universe** **- Fantasy -**

### **From 8 years**

- “Utopian stories and fantastic narratives about girls’ lives”!
- Utopia and fables
- Historical mix of women’s lives

### **From 8 years**

- Historical narrative:
- Lives and roles of girls during certain historical periods: e.g. the Middle Ages, Ancient Egypt
- Dramatic episodes in history

### **From 6-8 years**

- The futuristic fairy tale:
- Science fiction and free imagination and fantasising - extremity: “*Beauty and depth!*”
- Dreams of love and security

### **From approx. 6 years**

- The classic fairy tale:
- Princess/prince, witch/fairy, spirits/ogres: folk tales.
- “*The roles of simple fairy-tale figures!*”

### *1. The classic fairy tale*

From about six years old, girls begin to be able to understand what is going on “between the lines” in the classical fairy tales where the role list is filled with princesses, princes, kings, queens, wicked witches and good fairies, monsters, dragons, heroes and heroines, etc. The girls slowly begin to comprehend that the patterns of behaviour exhibited by characters in a fairy tale can be symbolic and that good wins over evil and justice is done. The girls retell/act out the dramas and play with the archetypal figures and the stereotype roles associated with them. They learn about new aspects of life and existence through dramatic play.

Furthermore, the girls begin to comprehend that the traditional kinds of classical fairy tales present a certain kind of train of events in contrast to the kinds of harsh, fierce, really strong themes in e.g. folk tales, which are often bloody and brutal.

Children under six also play with the figures they are familiar with from fairy tales but they do not understand fairy tale magic so they give the king and queen father and mother roles and the princes and princesses are just like boys and girls in an ordinary family.

### *2. Stories as accounts of the past and future*

Seven to eight year old girls are quite able to understand that the temporal dimension can point ahead to the future or back into the past. However, girls of this age still find it difficult to differentiate between the various historical and cultural eras but they are very interested in what happened in the past. Their interest focuses in particular on what life was like for girls of their own age at certain, specific periods in history. The girls’ understanding of historical themes can be strengthened if they are introduced to situations in history which they can easily compare to familiar situations in their own everyday lives. However, the girls can transform specially exciting, dramatic episodes, parallel vital events such as births, school, being the daughter of a well-known personality, meeting something familiar in another time and the use of implements which have not changed significantly in the interim into dramatic play and situation drama.

### *3. The futuristic fairy tale*

The futuristic fairy tale is extrovert and focuses on surroundings and external events.

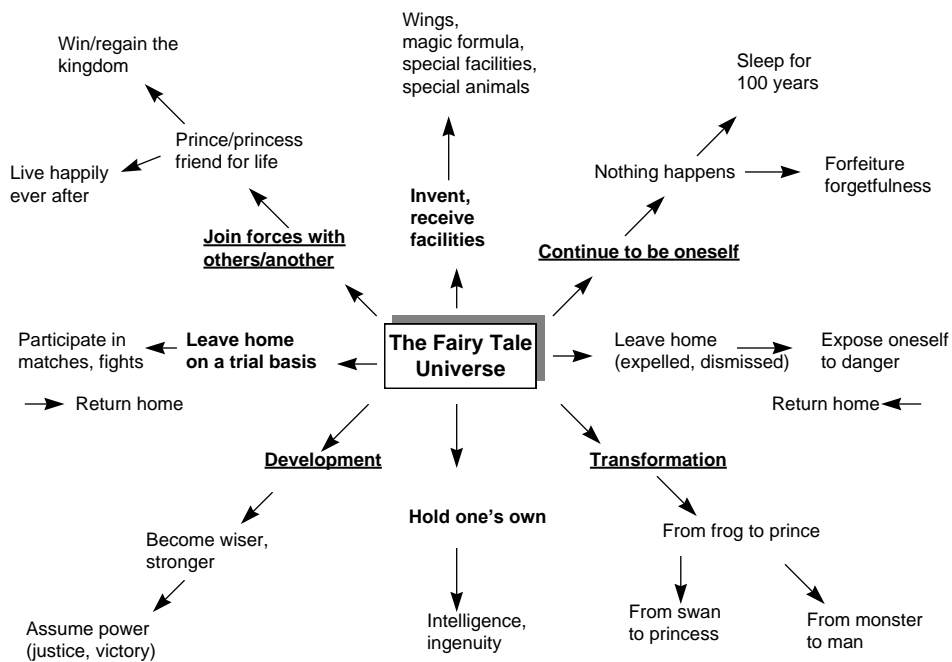
At this age (6-8 years), girls begin to dream and fantasise about how exciting things might be in the distant future. Their fantasies (from about 8-9 years old) about how life will be for a girl in strange surroundings in the distant future are full of the familiar visions of science fiction - a paradise in pastel colours and deeds well done with animals and small lonely children on far-off planets where life stands still and there is space for boundless love. (This is, incidentally, quite different from the fantasies of boys of the same age whose science fiction world is filled with battles with beastly enemies who possess an terrible arsenal of heavy weaponry.)

The futuristic fairy tale with its magic and unpredictability stimulates the girls' creative thought, urges and dreams.

#### 4. Utopia and the incredible myth

An utopian world focuses inward on Nature and the senses and especially on the existential basis for life and existence *as girls in their own world*. This universe is very abstract and requires fantasy and imaginative powers because it is the universe which is furthest removed from the familiar/reality. The girls do not begin to dream and fantasise about this until they are 8-10 years old and when they do, their fantasies take the form of a journey *into* a strange world, e.g. a world of beautiful plants and animals. It is often a journey into the middle of a beautiful flower where the girl is able to sense something fantastic and incredibly beautiful.

Girls of this age who narrate and play with these extreme universes often find it difficult to identify toys and objects which can stimulate this particular world of play and dreams. They tend to seek out things in Nature which can satisfy the needs of this form of fantasy play.



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**Positional sign, text and codes: The Drama and Fairy Tale Universes**

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Become wiser, stronger	Live happily ever after
Change	Nothing happens
Continue to be oneself	Participate in matches, fights
Development	Prince/princess, friend for life
Expose oneself to danger	Return home
Forfeiture	Sleep for 100 years
Forgetfulness	Take over power (justice, victory)
Hold one's own	Transformation from frog to prince
Intelligence, ingenuity	Transformation from monster to man
Invent, receive special faculties	Wings, magic formula, special abilities, special animals
Join with others (another)	Win/regain the kingdom
Leave home (expelled, dismissed)	
Leave home on a trial basis	

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### **The pseudo, parody and utopian universes**

The word *pseudo* expresses something invented, false, a sham, often mendacious. A pseudo event is an “invented” event which has never taken place but which presents itself as real and true.

For this reason, a pseudo universe is an unrealistic universe which is intended to claim to be something different than it passes itself off for - and makes no attempt to disguise the fact.

In its modern form, the pseudo-doll is a kind of compensation for a personality with a special or interesting universe. The person-at-play *might* be permitted to enter that universe.

The doll claims to be a familiar figure about whom the person-at-play in her play and dreams has an utopian idea of coming close to.

The universe is often a synthetic pseudo-universe or a parody of one of these. The female dolls most often symbolise invented characters or famous models or idols (e.g. Spice Girls) although a girl/woman doll can also end up becoming a myth. The Barbie phenomenon is the best example.

The term *parody* covers caricature-like imitation and ridicule of a story (often a story of a serious nature), a special event or a work of music, a song or a tune. Parody twists and distorts the original story or image behind the imitation.

The parody universe pokes fun at people, stories and content. This is intended not only to be funny but, equally importantly, also to get to the bottom of situations and perspectives in a story/narrative in order better to understand and learn how to relate to them.

*Utopia* is unrealised thought, plans and idealistic dreaming. Something utopian is a product of the fantasy, non-existent and unattainable. The book

“Utopia” by Thomas More (1516) describes an ideal state which could never exist anywhere at all.

In the world of toys, utopian dolls are dolls which are placed in invented environments and are therefore often parodies.

The utopian universe utilises many different forms of utopia, mixing times, places, events and implements.

On the toy market these doll and toy concepts are represented by fashion toys, the “five minute wonders”. Hidden in play with these dolls is cult idol worship because the dolls are copies either of protagonists in films or of idols.

## **The Parody and the Synthetic Pseudo-Universe - Fantasy -**

### **Approx. 6 years**

- Soap and parody - of the adult female pseudo-universe

### **Approx. 6 years**

- Extreme decadence
- Extreme wealth
- The woman who has everything and can do whatever she likes

### **Approx. 6 years**

- Imagination - fiction about adult career: actress, rock singer, “the star career”

### **Approx. 6 years**

- Imagination: “soap happiness”:
- Life with the animal doctor, “The Thorn Birds” etc.
- The Amazon warrior, The Pippi dream

### ***1. Utopian love and happiness (soap)***

Utopian love and happiness is motivated by concepts such as existence, peace, security, harmony, intimacy and yearning.

By the age of six, girls have gained experience with what goes on between people in a variety of familiar, well-defined environments and in situations they have seen on TV.

These include what happens within the family unit (arguments with parents, expecting a baby, sibling rivalry) and in specific familiar work/leisure environments (coast guard rescue, sick animals, dogs/horses, life at the riding school, sick children in hospital, love/hate and meetings with heroes and other famous people).

The girls are also aware of significant values which are presented in stories about these environments and personalities. The girls’ knowledge and experience of episodes/environments are especially stimulated by TV series but personal experiences of special events also count. The girls’ play and dreams steer towards the love and happiness of the stories.



These include:

- happiness, harmony within the family unit: the girl dreams of an adult life in a wonderfully harmonious family - having a handsome, generous husband and beautiful children (often a specially clever or cute baby, twins or two children - one a boy, the other a girl)
- “love at first sight” between two people who are “meant for each other”.
- A tale of fate and fortune where the attractive and desperately poor protagonist falls prey to dreadful misfortune but ends up living happily ever after.

## 2. *The fantastic (and utopian) career*

From the age of about six years, girls’ interest in pop idols and idol worship awakens. Their interest is transformed in play into episodes concerned with theatre, performance or play performances supported by music from their pop idols.

Girl groups naturally have an especially strong position in the girls’ consciousness.

The play and dream universe investigates *what it is like to be a public figure, to have fame, to be adored, to give interviews and to be blessed with unlimited success*. For most girls, success is a film or pop music career where they are awarded loads of Grammys and Oscars.

Media focus on actors and pop groups strengthens the girls’ interest. The girls dream of becoming a stand-in for their idol or his/her friend.

Pop/idol dolls, which represent the famous idols whose lives and careers can thus be played out, further amplify the girls’ dreams and play. The girls transform every facet into something very creative and extremely experimental.

The idol dolls also give the girls a feeling of the unattainable, i.e. being very close to and almost with their favourite idol.

## 3. *Decadence*

Decadence is expressed in extreme situations when something has become *exaggerated, over-refined or overexposed* to the extent that it is developed into something unreasonable on the verge of degeneracy. The girls meet a specifically feminine decadent world in the media - especially in certain TV series and women’s magazines.

The decadent feminine world is new and exciting for six year old girls because it demonstrates some of the *disadvantages* of feminine desires and dreams about security, safety, adoration and love. Decadence demonstrates what constitutes real abuse of distinct concepts, e.g. extreme wealth, ruthless abuse of power and dominating love.

Love, wealth and power are concepts and attitudes which are very easily recognisable in many TV series where the protagonist always does exactly what she wants: she can buy anything she chooses, manipulates family and friends and relentlessly abuses her friends', boyfriend's or husband's trust, etc.

From the age of six, girls take these scenes and attitudes on face value. They transform them in their role play and games, often with very dramatic content and great emotion.

Playing with decadence as such is part and parcel of the girls' learning about ethics and morals - about good and evil, right and wrong, the right way to behave under certain circumstances, etc.

Decadence is manifest in older girls' play with dolls, role play, acting/performances and in their chat and descriptions of their dreams and fantasies.

#### *4. Glamour*

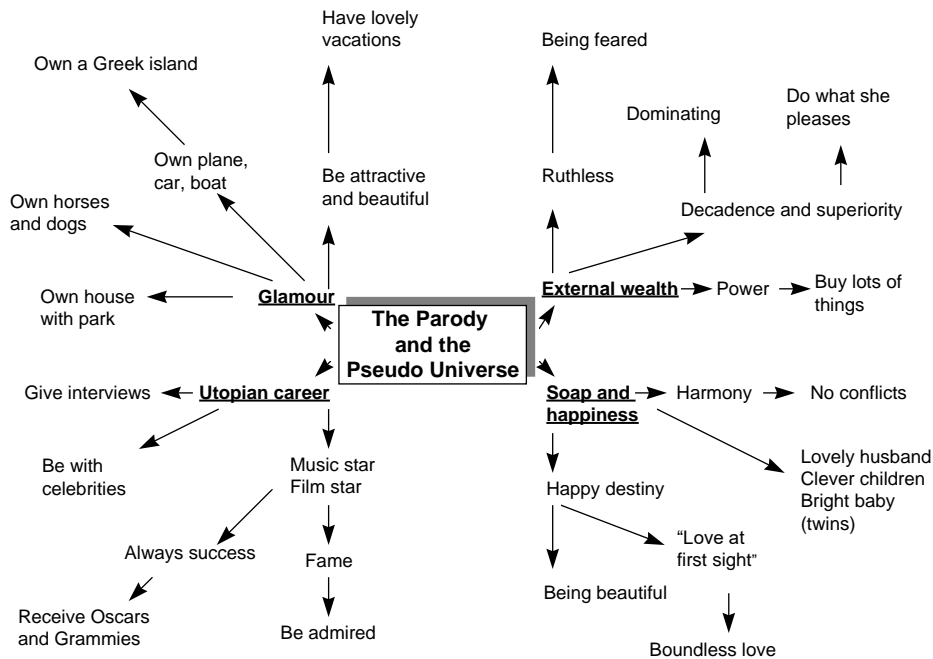
Glamour is visual and glamour dolls exhibit all kinds of forms of enchantment, sparkle and splendour. Glamour knows no conflict and everything twinkles with a sprinkling of fairy dust.

The glamour doll is a girl who works hard on her outward appearance and has undeniable sex appeal. She is dazzling and alluring, clever and tastefully dressed. She is surrounded by beautiful and exotic things. She wears gorgeous, expensive gowns and is an intelligent and independent girl. She may be a princess and is most often single.

Girls' dreams and play with the glamour doll involve her owning at least a big house with servants and a park, her own car, plane and boat, possibly her own Greek island or a castle in the mountains. Everything is beautiful and correct, although sometimes tinged with superficiality.

Of the classical glamour dolls, Barbie and some copy products (Sindy, Petra) entirely live up to the glamour ideal. Barbie remains more original and better known than her imitators.

With the glamour environment and dolls, girls move out on the exaggerated perimeters of dreams and fantasy. This is the extreme experimental sphere for the girls' pseudo, parody and utopian universes. But they present the older girls with the opportunity to dream, fantasise and experiment with an environment which is very different from their everyday lives in the real world.



**Positional sign, text and codes: The Parody and the Pseudo Universe**

Always success	Harmony
Awarded Oscars and Grammys	Love at first sight
Being attractive, beautiful	Lovely husband, clever children, bright baby (twins)
Being applauded, cheered	No conflicts
Being famous	Own aeroplane, car, boat
Being feared	Own a Greek island
Being together with celebrities	Own horses and dogs
Buying lots of things	Pop star
Decadence and superiority	Power
Domination	Ruthlessness
Do what one pleases	Soap and happiness
External wealth	Spending lovely vacations
Film star	Unbounded love
Giving interviews	Utopian career
Glamour	
Good fortune	

**Boys' doll and dream universes**

By contrast to 3-4 year old girls who are interested in the classic function dolls (baby, pretty lady, "Daddies-Mummies-and-Babies"), boys of the same age are interested in function figures or dolls which clearly represent functions in society. They are interested in the fireman, the policeman, the soldier, the car mechanic, the pilot, etc.

When small boys play solitary play or parallel play, they become absorbed in the roles connected to the familiar figures in society.

Regardless of whether the doll is a function doll for a smaller boy or a character with a personality structure for the older boy, the doll always appeal

to masculinity. The masculine concepts and aspects which are apparent in boys' play are:

- narrative events and action
- hierarchy and competition
- heroic deeds
- "the aesthetics of victory"
- strength and might
- the masculine and the ugly (role of hero and villain, respectively)
- myth or legend about heroic behaviour (what makes the hero good/strong)
- confrontation and battles (fight between villainous and heroic roles).

The boys assign dolls and figures, which include the concepts of victory/defeat, win/lose (the good heroes against the evil villains), between them in play in order to make it possible to test out the different roles and positions and to experiment *in play* with violent or aggressive themes.

For older boys (from about 6 years) to an even greater extent, it is the very distinct masculine play universe of the hierarchy of action dolls and their mutual positions in relation to strength and weaponry which are topics for discussion and experimentation through play.

In typical boys' play, older boys in particular gather in groups or "gangs" where the prominent motivation is mutual admiration and approval. Boys play with signals and messages which are interpreted identically, with orders and with informative monologues which will become evident in play and with facts and data, the durability of which they discuss and test within the group.

In the following we will describe four universes, each of which is subdivided into four spheres which describe the content of the boys' play and dreams:

<p><b><u>THE SYNTHETIC PSEUDO MONSTER UNIVERSE</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The guardian/the monster</li> <li>2. Roles of the fairy characters</li> <li>3. Fairy dreams</li> <li>4. Fiction and fairy tale</li> <li>5. Toy examples: Turtles, Masters of the Universe</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>THE FAIRY TALE AND WAR FANTASY UNIVERSE</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The warrior, the big hunter</li> <li>2. Cryptic hero roles,</li> <li>3. Dreams about power and victory</li> <li>4. Fiction/social realism</li> <li>5. Toy examples: Miniature soldiers, GI Joe, Action Man, cowboys and Indians</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Border between fantasy and reality</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Border between fantasy and reality</u></b></p>
<p><b><u>THE OLDER BOY'S DREAM UNIVERSE</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Older boys, grown ups and teenagers</li> <li>2. Clever boys' roles and functions</li> <li>3. Dreams of being strong and clever</li> <li>4. Soap realism</li> <li>5. Toy examples: pilot, fireman, policeman</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>THE CLASSIC DOLL UNIVERSE</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mummy, Daddy and Baby</li> <li>2. baby (gender) and mother roles</li> <li>3. Functions, lots of noises, motor skills</li> <li>4. social realism, everyday drama</li> <li>5. Toy examples: classic dolls' house as farm, zoo, garage, cars</li> </ol>

## The boys' classic figure and doll universe

The classic boys' doll universe will be subdivided into four spheres which are determined by the boys' age and degree of development. Through play with these universes, the boys gain experience with roles and with the social life they observe in their surroundings.

### The Boys' Classic Doll Universe - based on reality -

#### Approx. 4-8 years

- The classic garage, farm, fort, etc.
- **Play with function values** (*car, machine, plane, chip, object*) - function figures, roles and norms: *Family pictures*

#### Approx. 2-3 years

- **Animal roles** and functions
- **Realistic roles** and functions
- Testing objects and own physical capability
- "Primitive" function equipment

#### Approx. 2-4 years

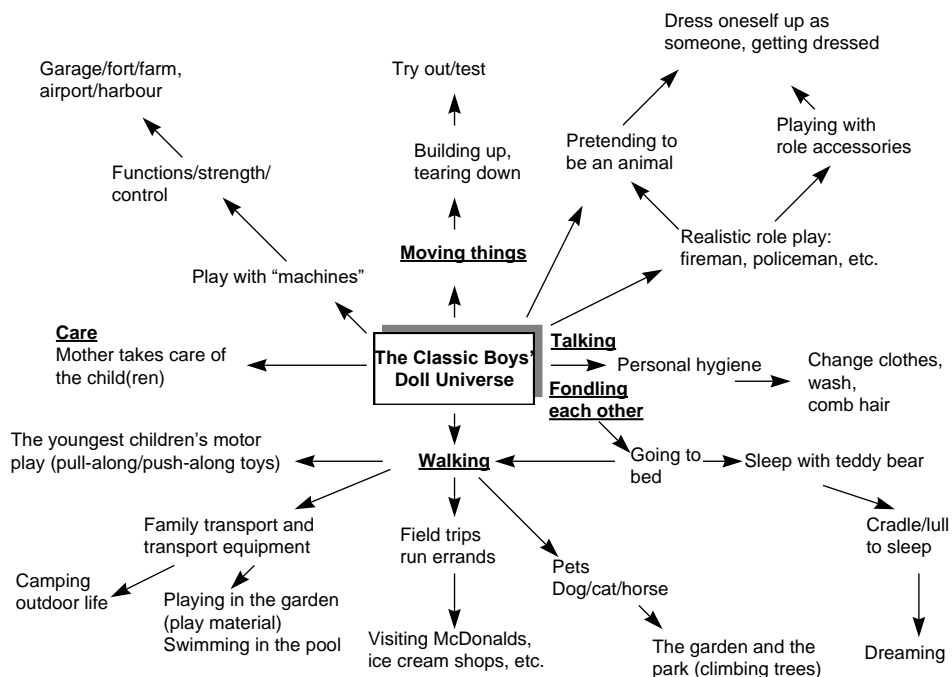
- "Simple" farmhouse, function figures and machines
- "Auto workshop" with micro and mini equipment/cars

#### Approx. 0-2 years

- Rag doll/small doll
- Soft toy/cuddly toy
- "Security blanket"
- Mother's body!!
- The child's own body

1. 0-2 years: As in the case of the small girls, baby boys play with their mother's body and with their own body. This play gives the boy a fundamental understanding of the simple, primitive forms of play with dolls and an understanding of play/interaction with another person. His first dolls and soft toys have to do exactly the same as the little boy himself: sleep, eat, take a bath, etc.
2. 2-3 years: In contrast to little girls' play with baby dolls, little boys are interested in a wide variety of different animals and animal figures. Only a minority of little boys own a baby doll but most of them have a teddy bear which follows them around everywhere they go. At a very early age, boys gain an interest in things, specially interesting objects and toys which are copies of small implements. The significance of these objects is the same as that of the rag doll or teddy bear. This means that small boys are oriented more towards objects and implements/tools than small girls. They are very attentive to how the objects or tools are used. Many small boys take their toys to bed with them and even sleep with them. Boys will often test the strength of the toys relative to their own physical strength. Toys are often treated roughly in play because boys' consciously expose them to very violent handling in order to test their durability, function and control. In boys' play, toys explode, are crashed into by cars and there is a constant stream of accidents and catastrophes, etc.

3. 2-4 years: While girls of this age play simple dolls' house games and with "family values" between Father, Mother and children, boys play realistic role play with rules and values associated with the car mechanic's workshop - mechanics, props, cars and equipment and with the farm - farm animals and many different kinds of tools and implements. Small figures like drivers, tractor drivers are named after their functions and are seldom given a real name.
  
4. 4-8 years: Apart from play with the car mechanics' workshop and the farm, by the age of four years, boys' extend their play to include airports, sea ports, railway stations and forts. In time, this kind of play with a "base" will include space stations and underwater cities too. The themes of play become systematised and the boys dream and narrate stories about many episodes and situations within these themes. TV series in particular are sources of inspiration. The heroes of these series gain special significance as they are often found as function figures/dolls on the toy market. They also become part of the boys' collections of dolls and figures.



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*Positional sing, text and codes: The Classic Boy's Doll Universe*

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Build up, tear down	Pets (dog, cat, horse)
Caring (mother cares for her children)	Playing in the garden (play materials)
Camping, outdoor life	Playing with machines
Change clothes, wash, comb hair	Playing with "role accessories"
Cradle/lull to sleep	Pretending to be an animal
Dreaming	Realistic role play: fireman, policeman
Dressing up	Sleeping with teddy bear
Family transport and transport equipment	Swimming in the pool
Field trips, run errands	Talking
Functions/strength/control	Trying out/testing
Garage, fort, farm, airport, harbour	Visit McDonalds, ice cream shop
Garden and park (climbing trees)	Walking
Going to bed	Youngest children's motor play
Intimate play	(pull-along/push-along toys)
Moving things	

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## The older boys' dream universe

The older "little boy" has learned the ordinary rules for what is right and wrong, what is good and what is evil. However, boys experiment a great deal with these principles and test out rules, regulations and boundaries through their play with toys. They pay particular attention to the elementary functional processes which they observe in everyday life outside the home: a truck backing up or manoeuvring through a narrow passage, emergency service personnel or policemen who turn out to cope with a special situation of some kind, building work with cranes and diggers, skilled workers, traffic conditions, etc.

## The Older Boys' Dream Universe - based on reality -

### Approx. 6 years

- Realistic scenarios
- **Fellow-feeling** based on cultivation of the personal performance qualities

### Approx. 6 years

- Independence
- "Soap" - realism - roles
- **Boys' future dreams**
- Man power as strong man, soldier, police, pilot, etc.

### Approx. 6 years

- Boys' universe - **the gang and the hierarchy**, cars, aeroplanes, power tools
- Powerfulness and the aesthetics of victory

### Approx. 5-6 years

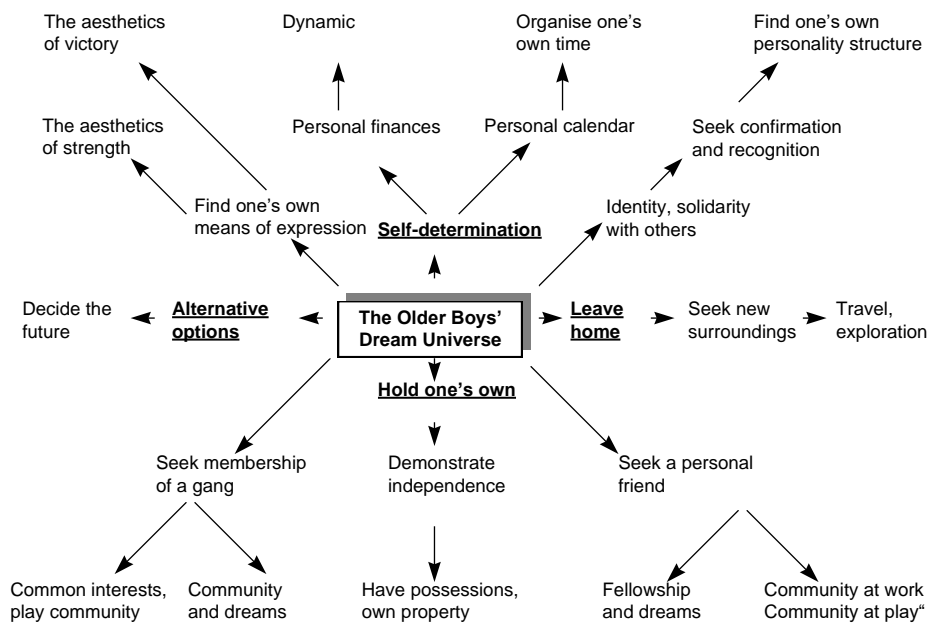
- Big "little boy"
- Imagination begins as to jobs and roles as **men**
- Identification with "the big, strong, good hero/man"

Difficult or complicated functions and processes interest the boys and they admire the men involved in them for their expertise, strength, skills and especially their jargon which is tested out and imitated in play. All the difficult situations in a working process are made even more complicated in play so that the skilled workers and drivers can act like the heroes of everyday life.

1. From 5-6 years: The boy imagines and dreams that he as an adult will have one (often several) of these jobs which will give him status and make him the object of admiration. Imitation of the everyday working processes carried out by "real men" is demonstrated in play on the floor with cars, machines and transport equipment to the extent that play approaches parody. But it is no parody. The boys identify with the "big, strong men" they meet when things happen in reality. Their play is profoundly serious and the processes in play require deep concentration. The boys discuss very difficult processes in detail and the jargon used is tested out and debated.
2. From six years boys begin to dream about the near future. The dreams are motivated by things they are familiar with and have seen. A boy will dream about what he could (possibly) be when he grows up. Of course, he has to become someone others admire. The meaning of "masculinity" is investigated, reinforced and exaggerated to the extent that narratives and dreams become "soaps" with the boy himself in the leading role. He sees himself as *strong, responsible and supportive* and, naturally, also as someone who attracts attention. Six year old boys do not yet understand the significance of the three concepts in italics but they demonstrate them in play via a variety of behavioural patterns. Sources of inspiration for the boys' play are realistic everyday life, accounts, stories and TV.
3. From about six years boys begin to organise themselves in interest groups or "hordes" where a shared interest in a particular game or hobby is the motivating factor. Games and mutual interaction between the boys often become a special mission. They are fascinated by experimenting with and exchanging different kinds of power and knowledge/know-how. Boys assign and distribute roles in their self-constituted groups and they choose a leader. (Alternatively, a strong boy will elect himself leader or be voted leader by the other boys.) The organisational and leadership structure is hierarchic and this often brings about minor skirmishes when, from time to time, the leader's authority is challenged by other boys. The boys find their motive and inspiration for organising themselves in groups in literary stories and historical accounts about groups and bands, as well as on TV. Boys tend to discuss very often how far the leader - or the boy who makes the decisions - is doing the wrong or right thing, regardless of whether the boy concerned is a good boy or a bad boy. Having and exerting power per se are sufficient cause for admiration. Power and victory are synonymous.
4. Also from about six years, boys are able to date ordinary, simple situations and episodes so that they can play with time as a concept. The boy is able to judge the past and the future on the basis of a realistic present. He is able to form an attitude to the roles and positions adopted by the



identification figures, regardless of whether these belong in the past, the present or the future. The pursuit of the qualities of personal performance are now the focal point of boys' play. When boys play in groups, they begin now to distribute and take it in turns to play the roles of hero and villain. The functional roles which were focal points in younger boys' play are now replaced by character roles where each role and person has individual characteristics and an individual personality structure. At this juncture, the character doll with its accessory utility and service animals and its implements and weapons becomes the dominant theme in the boys' play.



**Positional sign, text and codes: The Older Boys' Dream Universe**

Alternative options	Identity, solidarity with others
Common interests	Organise one's own time
Community at play	Personal finances
Community at work	Personal calendar
Decide future (for oneself)	Seek a personal friend
Demonstrate independence	Seek confirmation and recognition
Dynamic	Seek new surroundings
Fellowship and dreams	Self-determination
Find one's own personality structure	The aesthetics of strength
Find one's own means of expression	The aesthetics of victory
Have possessions, own property	Travel, exploring
Hold one's own	

## The boys' fairy tale, fantasy and war universe

This universe is vital for development of the boy's personality from the ages of 6-7 years. At this age, the boy understands the concepts of past and future and now tries to achieve a perception of self by placing ebullient, potent and violent stories and accounts of human beings in time and space.

This dream and play universe is a fantasy universe in which boys' play is NOT directly textured or stimulated by their own experiences and observations of everyday life. Fantasy controls play. Dreams and imaginary pictures flow incessantly. But the dreams represent something violent and fantastic both emotionally and physically. If they were real for the boy himself, the consequences of the episodes would be fatal and confusing.

Stimulation for this kind of play comes from classic stories of heroes in books, comic strips and TV series, including grand, timeless tales of heroes and warriors and their bravery in the face of adversity. The boys' universes are often built both on cultural myths and the gallery of persons in these myths and on the boys' own creative dreams about being permitted to be "in on the action".

Major moral and ethical themes are included in the stories and in play which take place either in the past (as historical time) or in the future.

Ethical dramatic themes in the stories include:

- life - death
- slavery - freedom
- loneliness - community spirit
- meaningless - meaningful

Moral themes tackled in the dreams and games include:

- good - evil
- right - wrong
- beauty - ugliness
- being loved (feared/hated) - being unloved (feared/hated).

1. From 5-6 years: the boys show interest in the classical fairy tales and folk tales with their role list of kings, queens, princes and princesses, wicked witches, good fairies and wizards. As described in Chapter 5, **Boy's attitudes**: *Boys' romanticism*, The classic narrative, boys' dreams and play focus on the hero's (the boy's) personal development through tests and battles which he is expected to win if he is to win the hand of the princess (his prize) and become king (employment). Folk tales with their many mystical, "underground" beings are about coping, surviving and returning home from a journey richer and wiser than at the outset. Cunning, personal courage and ingenuity are top priority characteristics. The role list is filled with classical figures which are archetypal and almost stereotype, roles which are easy to recognise and act out. Dolls and other figures used by boys in play with these themes are classical dolls whose appearance is easily comprehended so that play can quickly get off the ground.

## The Boys' Fairy Tale, Fantasy and War Universe - Fantasy -

### From 8 years

- "Utopian stories and fantastic narratives about hero roles"
- Utopia and fables
- Historical mix and **the Myth**

### From 6-8 years

- **Historical** war narrative:
- Lives and roles of boys in historical wars: the Vikings, the Middle Ages, Ancient Egypt

### From 6-8 years

- The **futuristic** fairy tale:
- **Science fiction** and free imagination and fantasising - extreme: "Victory and strength", "Technology and ecology"

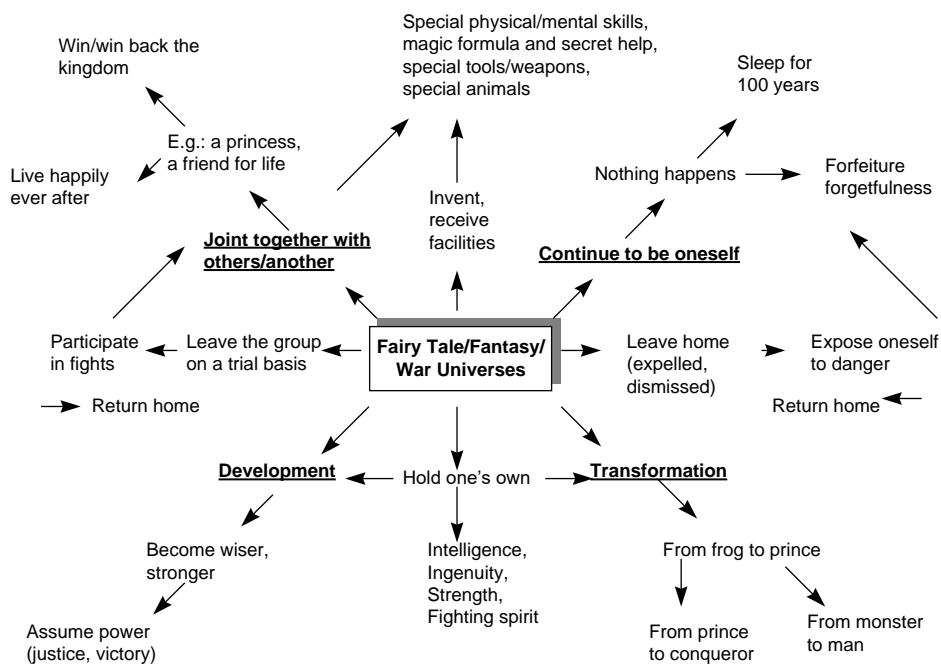
### From approx. 6 years

- The **classic fairy tale**:  
Strength, prince, princess/fairy, spirits/cleverness: folk tales.
- "*The roles of simple fairy tale figures!*"

2. From 6-8 years: At this age the boys begin to appreciate cultural differences and that culture is associated with and dependent upon geography. The boys' play with their toys deals with wars and war themes under a variety of different circumstances. The preconditions for war and its arsenal of implements differ and depend on the era and available resources, which in turn influence the way a war is fought. However, the concept of war is abstract for children of this age because, despite the fact that it is a realistic theme, it is distant from the children's everyday lives (unless of course they are living in a war zone). The war dolls found on the toy market are either copies of classical heroes or copies of recent, "invented" warriors in TV series or in books. Each warrior has a personality and charisma. The war figures are modelled on classic soldiers in different countries' army uniforms and are as much a collectors' item for children as they are for adults.
3. From 6-8 years: The futuristic tale is exclusively about the future, fear of the future, victories and defeats and fear of the unknown. It is, however, also a dream about fantastic things which could happen and which would bring beauty and peace with them. Technology has a major role to play in the futuristic universe simply because it is prerequisite for the future. The boys sense and understand the future and science fiction as challenges which they must meet and make the best of. In their dreams they see themselves either as heroes or as technocrats or "techno-nerds" who are equipped to meet the challenges of the future. 6-8 year olds do not yet understand the abstract narrative process on which narratives of the future depend. At this age, the boys begin to understand the isolated dramatic episodes and events which make up the good story. Star Wars and Star Trek are typical examples of the type of story which children of this age can more or less follow and understand. The dolls these children play with are normally

copies of the protagonists, with the weapons, props and equipment seen in the film/TV series.

- From 9-10 years, boys strive to comprehend the utopian universe in play and dreams. Totally utopian stories/narratives which in many cases demand maturity and knowledge of the child if he is to be able to understand them, are mixtures of myths, legends, fables and poetry. Furthermore, utopian stories always deal with serious philosophical and moral/ethical topics which form the backbone of the story. Strong, negative themes like death, war, violence, sabotage, attack and angst are confronted by positive themes like existence, peace, security, harmony, intimacy and yearning. The concepts of time and space often dissolve entirely so the person who watches or listens to the tale must have a sense of the concepts of Fate and belief if he is to be able to understand what is going on. The hero of these stories is most often an intelligent and active young man but can also be a woman or girl with whom the person-at-play who “dreams” the story is allied to and can identify with. On the toy market, dolls for this universe are few and far between.



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*Positional sign, text and codes: The Boys' Fairy Tale, Fantasy and War Universe*

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Become wiser, stronger	Live happily ever after
Change	Nothing happens
Continue to be oneself	Participate in fights
Development	Princess, friend for life
Expose oneself to danger	Return home
Forfeiture	Sleep for 100 years
Forgetfulness	Special physical/mental skills:
Hold one's own	- magic formula, secret help
Intelligence, ingenuity, strength, fighting spirit	- special tools and weapons
Invent, receive faculties	- special animals
Join together with others (another)	Transformation from frog to prince
Leave home (expelled, dismissed)	Transformation from monster to man
Leave the group on a trial basis	Take over power (justice, victory)
	Win, regain the kingdom

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## The parody and the synthetic pseudo-universe

Characteristic of this universe is that the stories/narratives in play are far removed from reality or exaggerated to such an extent that they verge on going “over the top” and thus becoming a lie or untruth. It is only in the most extreme case that one can imagine that these things could really happen. In order to understand this universe, boys have to have experience of the events of everyday life and otherwise be **at least 6-8 years old** if they are to be able to convert the stories in this universe to play and dreams. But the further the events are removed from reality, the greater the opportunities for manipulating with time, space, situations and concepts and for using imagination in play.

Boys are fascinated by concepts such as:

- having *control* or *power* over objects
- demonstrating *strength and vigour*
- demonstrating *independence* and *perseverance*
- *going beyond and destroying frontiers/boundaries*
- being a *hero* pure and simple (*heroic fantasies*)
- being *big, colossal* is a dominant theme and
- the *abnormal being normal* for some.

The older boys know what parody is and they know that it is possible to poke fun at or parody serious events. The fact that the stories are so utopian or so far distanced from reality means that the boys can see that the non-existent tales are artificial - synthetic - and therefore they cannot be taken (completely) seriously, even though they are exciting. The boys, are however, naturally good at “playing as if” and dreaming.

There is a plethora of stories within this sphere and a plentiful supply of dolls which symbolise people in these exciting episodes and often completely utopian accounts.

## The Boys' Parody and Synthetic Pseudo-Universe - Fantasy -

### Approx. 6-8 years

- Parody and soap - of the adult monster pseudo-universe:
- Horror, discomfort, ugliness as a parody
- The caricature of roles

### Approx. 6 years

- Imagination - fiction about adult career:
- Businessman, actor, rock singer, "star career", soldier, policeman

### Approx. 6 years

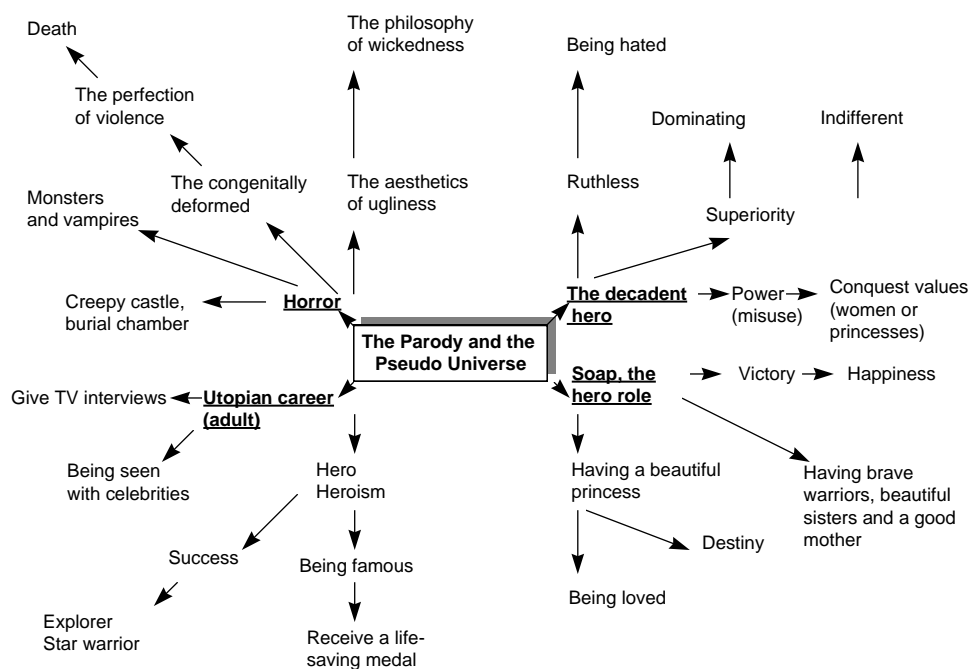
- Extreme decadence and power
- Extreme wealth and superiority - good and evil
- The man who has everything and can do anything he likes

### Approx. 6 years

- The fantasy of "soap-heroics":
- Life on the airbase, "Top Gun", "Star Wars", "Captain Cooper", "Luke Skywalker"

1. From six years: A dream or a game where the boy single-handedly - having faced many problems and fought with super-human strength against e.g. strange beings from outer space - discovers a new planet and gives it his own name, could be described as "soap heroics". The stories, novels and films which deal with life on the air base or space station, being the star of "Top Gun", being a "Star Wars" hero, Captain Cooper or Luke Skywalker. The stories deal with the experience of victory and happiness and being fortunate. The hero is loved and sometimes accompanied by a beautiful princess, brave and clever warriors or technical "nerds" - and possibly lives close to his mother and sisters. The hero dolls with their quite ordinary appearances, human face and vulnerable minds stimulate the dreams and the games.
2. From 8-10 years: Dreams and fictions concerned with an utopian, adult career in the public eye. The hero is extremely famous for the good he does and is rewarded with extremely great success. The boy in the dream is usually a rock musician in a cool band with an enthusiastic crowd of fans in his wake. A busy manager makes all the dates and takes care of business. Being an actor is an alternative and the actor has, of course, his admirers. Sometimes the dream hero is an intelligent, intellectual scientist or explorer who has a streak of genius or special talents, who has just returned from the centre of the earth or from outer space. The hero can also be a star warrior who has single-handedly fought to hold an outpost in a distant galaxy in a far-flung corner of the universe. However, in the dreams and games, the hero is seen in contact with other famous people, he gives interviews and is cheered, admired and awarded medals for his brilliant efforts and is therefore able to bathe in the glory of his victory while the whole world looks on. The hero is definitely not a policeman or a fireman because they are just "ordinary heroes".
3. From 8-10 years old, the boys are familiar with the games which go on in a group when they choose a leader. The boys' group or "horde" culture is normally visibly organised and governed by rules and a hierarchical

structure. Group membership is normally organised in such a way as to make space for open and changing relationships. The boys discuss *leadership and power* and *poor leadership and the abuse of power*. The concept of “leadership style” becomes a subject for debate and this means that the boys dream and play out the different permutations. Just as boys *play aggression*, they also play and experiment with the ugly side of life and the characteristics of the bad leader. He can be decadent, supercilious or dominating. He may abuse his power and requisition or steal things and people, including a sad princess who is also subjected to abuse. He can also be disdainful, indifferent or faithless to his loyal old retainers/friends and may deal unjustly with them. In the worst case, he is hated and his subjects seek to kill him or to bring about his fall.



4. The final sphere must be called “the extreme of the extreme”: horror. The boys engage in systematic fear, horror and ugliness - the special aesthetics of ugliness - and accompany them with intense descriptions of evil and terror. Simultaneously however, the stories become parodies of themselves. The “ugliness” in the stories which is transformed into play - and play with negative side of dreams - nightmares, can be described as obliteration and destruction, “blood and guts”, abnormality and perversity, insanity and treachery, corruption and falsity, loneliness and meaninglessness, annihilation and oblivion. The only way the boys can experiment with these concepts is through play because the reality of their description lies beyond day-to-day comprehension. Monsters and vampires, deformed animals and people who represent evil are the individual elements in a mosaic of pure violence, whose consequence is death: of the evil beings. The boys are playing out the fight between good and evil. In play, the dolls are monster dolls and guardian dolls (who look

after or guard the weak). The guardians can either be evil or good (and sometimes both). The dolls are often caricatures of persons in the stories because features of their personality and appearance are often exaggerated. The ugly ones are extremely ugly, the handsome ones extremely handsome, etc.

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***Positional sign, text and codes: The Boys' Parody and Pseudo-Universe***

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Awarded a medal for life-saving	Hero, heroism
Being famous	Horror
Being hated	Indifferent
Being loved	Monsters, vampires
Being seen with celebrities	Power (abuse)
Congenital deformity	Ruthlessness
Conquest values (women/princesses)	Soap - the hero role
Creepy castle, burial chamber	Success
Death	Superiority
Destiny	The aesthetics of ugliness
Domination	The decadent hero
Explorer, "Star warrior"	The perfection of violence
Give TV interviews	The philosophy of wickedness
Happiness	Utopian (adult) career
Having a beautiful princess	Victory
Having brave warriors, beautiful sisters and a good mother	

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### **Universal value systems**

A really good, narrative doll is one which succeeds in getting the child's comprehension of the doll to correlate perfectly with the experience of playing with it.

The mainstays of play in the classical doll universe are also found in the other doll universes. The mainstays are built on the foundation of traditional developmental and behavioural theories which focus on children's upbringing and formation (see chapter 9).

The mainstays of play in the classical doll universe are social and family values. It is vital that the child assimilates these values. Children begin to assimilate them through play from the ages of 2(3). Assimilation generally takes place between 2(3) - 5(6) years and is accomplished through play with dolls and with other children in a variety of doll universes.

#### *Family values and play*

Play is constant experimentation with values. The child tries to tie values into the doll families in their doll universes and compares the values with his own experiences from his own home and familiar situations in the family sphere.

The following is a prioritised list of values:

- \* control and mastery
- \* practical sense and sobriety



- \* independence and sobriety
- \* experience with other social reference groups and lifestyles
- \* situations in life cycles
- \* family members' mutual integration
- \* the individual family member's identity
- \* cohesion and identity of the family group

#### *Play and personal values*

Naturally, the child gains his first experience of values from the classical doll universe (playing "mothers, fathers and babies"). He will later transfer his experiences with family values to other the universes (with the exception of some few "synthetic pseudo-universes", where e.g. Barbie doesn't have a family).

Figuratively speaking, these values encompass the dolls and the doll families within the children's games but play is, in fact, simply a reflection of the child-at-play's own family circumstances. Thus the person-at-play's *own personal circumstances* are conditional upon his or her *personal and individual value systems* which are demonstrated in play at three levels. See next model.

Play and experiments with these very personal and individual capacities through traditional play with dolls/dolls' house involves all the person-at-play's capacities for learning how to play roles (role play) and for learning how to adopt and carry out the traditional roles and positions connected with the basic values of the family/group to which he belongs.

Classical, traditional play with dolls is quite "trite", e.g. "baby won't go to sleep", "the dog has run away and we are afraid he got run over" - "Daddy doesn't want to do the washing-up" - "big sister is in a bad mood and has a row with Mum" - "birthday" - "some very nice friends come to visit", etc.

Similarly "trite" situations are found in other dolls' universes (both boys' and girls').

**Personal and individual  
“Terminal Values”:**  
Play with dolls dealing with  
self respect, happiness, freedom,  
recognition, friendship, etc.

**Personal and individual  
“Instrumental Values”:**  
Play with dolls dealing with  
obedience, politeness, creativity,  
honesty, logical actions, etc.

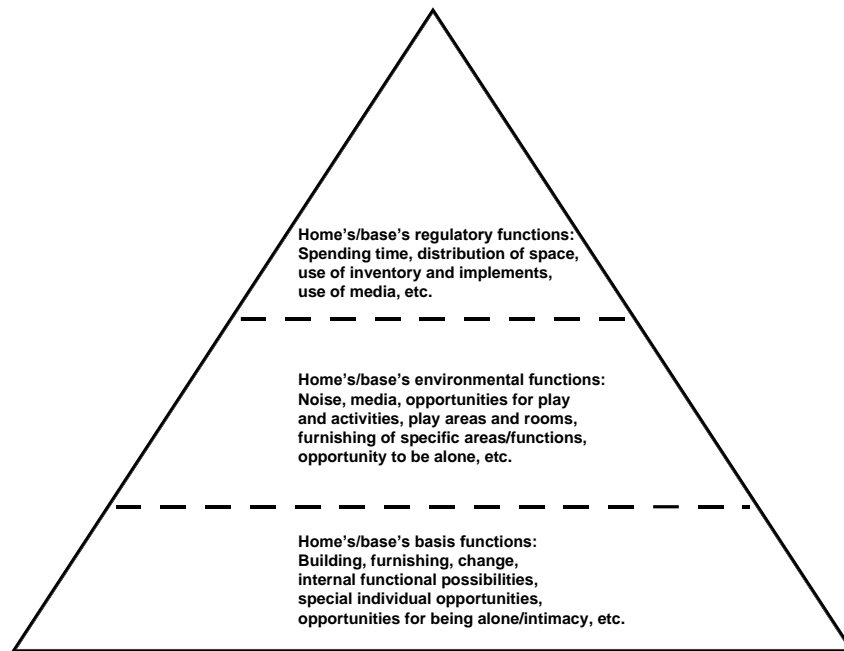
**Personal and individual  
“Basis Values”:**  
Play with dolls dealing with  
trust, candour, sympathy,  
mercy, etc.

*Play with the value systems of the immediate surroundings*

Children also play and experiment with the “dolls’ home environment” and the local environment’s value systems - and this applies to the classical dolls’ house, Barbie’s fashionable dream villa, a princess’ fairy tale castle, the tiny homes of elves and fairies, the witches kitchen and the teenage girl’s riding school or to the boy’s garage, farm, fire station, knight’s castle, fort and moon base.

The “dolls’ house” (family home) values - and play and experimentation with these - depend on the functional opportunities of the “home” or house and the rules for their use.

These functional values and opportunities include:



What we're talking about here is how far the doll's house or base is flexible enough for play - that it is easy to build (if it is made up of small pieces which have to be put together), whether it can be changed, rebuilt, etc.

Very flexible dolls' houses seem always to be the ones the children find most interesting. With the classical dolls' house, children play at "building a new house inhabited by mummy, daddy and children" or they play "we're getting new furniture" - "we're decorating the bedrooms for the girls" - "baby's room" . "big sister is happily playing on her own" and functions such as "cooking", "bathing baby", etc.

#### *Play and social/interrelation values*

##### *Relationship values*

The mutual relationships between the dolls (and therefore the mutual relationships between the persons-at-play) are determined by the relationship values, the social/interrelation values.

Play and experimentation with these values form the basis of the narrative of play, its "text", the situations and episodes, events and progress. However, some dolls' universes' texts are more static than others'.

There are, for example, limited opportunities for using the multitude of comprehensive relationship values in toy concepts in the form of "synthetic pseudo universes" (Barbie) for girls or in some of the guardian doll and monster universes for boys.

The "five minute wonder", stereotype and trivial are characteristic of these toy concepts. Naturally and fortunately children do play with these at some time in their childhood because these toy narratives are undoubtedly a precondition for the children's forming a basis for recognition and a mutual comprehension of the mutual relationships between objects and society's norms.

There are four spheres in the dolls' - and the person-at-play's - social and interrelation values:

<p><b>Communication values:</b>          conversations, dialogue,          exchange of experiences,          communicative actions, etc.</p>	<p><b>Contact values:</b>          a sense of belonging, restoration,          intimacy, care, etc.</p>
<p><b>Social learning values:</b>          Problem solving,          forming opinions,          interpreting information,          communicating opinions, etc.</p>	<p><b>Competence values:</b>          role, authority,          control, sanctions,          demands, argumentation,          negotiation, etc.</p>

Within these spheres, play is infinite and unlimited as long as the person(s)-at-play regard(s) the dolls as identical with play with them. (See chapter 15 on **Relationship values and modern childhood** - which texts the classical dolls' universe with "mummies, daddies and babies"-play).

Roles and regulations - associated with the dolls' mutual interaction and social relationships - are very limited in some play concepts and dolls' universes. There are several reasons for this lack but the most frequent cause is the stereotyped gallery of persons, dull characters with only limited scope for action in a limited, simple narrative. Another reason is simply that the figures are poorly designed.

Some guardian and monster dolls for boys are so overdone that, despite their ugliness and lack of parody, they suggest no useful patterns of action which the boys can transform into play.

Some girl dolls and fashion dolls in toy concepts targeted at girls are merely decorative or exhibition dolls - they have no character or "personality".

### **Toys, soap and education**

Education is described in detail in Part III **Play**.

Upbringing is an educational process through which the person-at-play who is subject to external social and cultural influences accepts or adopts certain *merits*. I take the liberty of pointing out that these merits are the direct result of the education process through play with toys.

However, we cannot be sure that the person-at-play is always in possession of education when he is playing because, as mentioned in Part III **PLAY (Play)**

**and education**), the following factors - selection, self-reflection, autonomy, wonder and zest of life - must be present if education is to take place at all.

In play with dolls and the dolls' universes, the person-at-play adopts some *merits* but adopting these takes place via experiments, manipulating with rules and testing out values and possibilities.

For children from the ages of 3-4 years, this process can almost be described as general education. Older children who play with more sophisticated characters have more opportunities for playing and experimenting with other forms of education, ranging from the classical, humanistic and maybe also academic or polytechnic education, depending on the type of toy and degree of difficulty.

Education is therefore a merit which the children gain through play processes and during the period of time spent on many, widely different episodes. In this way, education in play with toys is the opposite of the processes which in recent times we have called "soap".

"Soap" is the result of *an overexposure of a narrative's and a situation's meaning and value.*

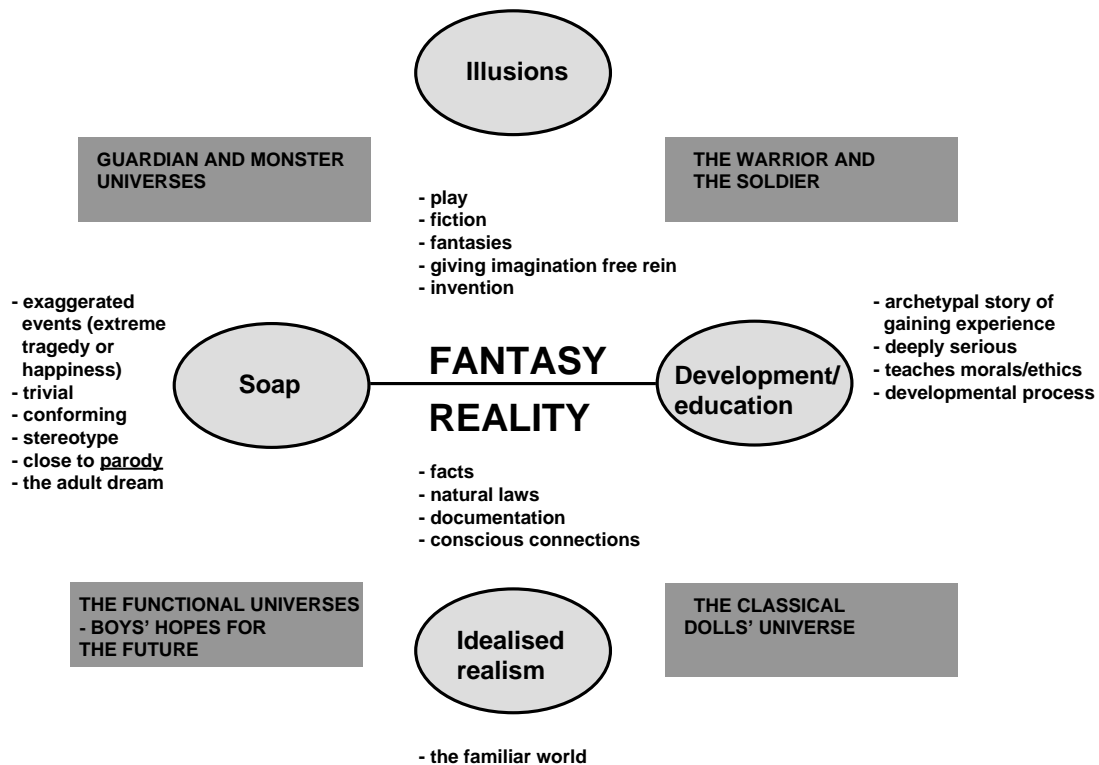
As in parts of the media, in play a child will often wade around in a morass of melodrama and sentimentality and in situations which for the protagonists and the dolls represent sweetness, cruelty and injustice. Examples include TV series for adult viewers such as "The Thorn Birds" and girls' comic books like "Penny" and, in the world of books, "The Junior Doctor" and "Anne of Green Gables" series.

In soap opera the distance between sentimental and grotesque is minimal - and soap opera very often verges on parody.

The soap genre is to be found in all cultures and in many different forms depending on culture. It is most often associated with describing people's development processes. Values and emotions are presented in a very feminine and emotional manner so that positive and negative conflicts in the events appear in a clear and unequivocal way. Soaps can therefore be quite trivial, conforming and stereotype.

And this also applies to what happens to the children's, and especially girls', play. Through play and experimentation with conformity and stereotypes in the themes of play, the children learn to understand how things really are.

Boys play trivial, conforming and stereotype war in order e.g. to try to understand the *grotesque cruelty of war* and girls play trivial, conforming and stereotype soap in order e.g. to sample *the sweetness of hopes and dreams!*

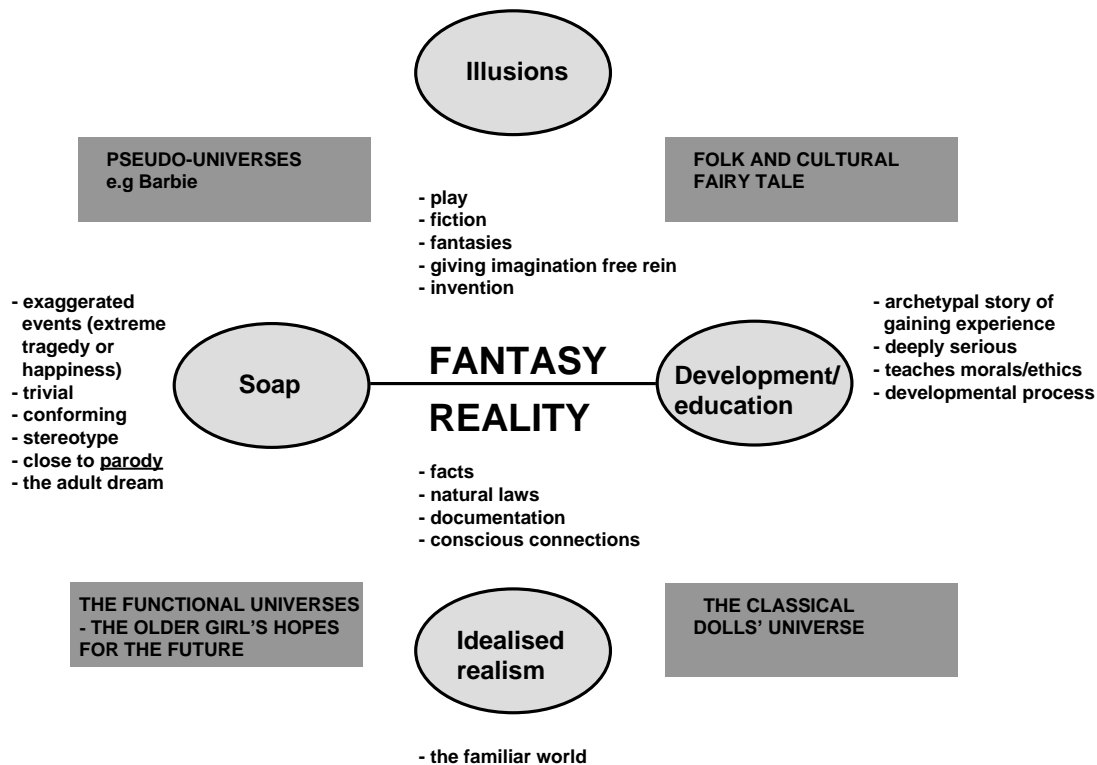


Soap as a genre is unshackled, free fantasising. *Play* is also free fantasy with unrealistic soap dreams and soap opportunities. These games enable the girls to plan, test out and experiment with roles, events and conflicts so that they play out parodies which almost make fun of the opportunities soap represents.

Play with Barbie and LEGO SYSTEM Belville is inspired by the girls' experiences with soaps because these products clearly signal the ethereal, rose-pink and eventful girls' feminine play universe.

Previous models for dolls and the dolls' house universes refer naturally to events in a realistic or fantasy world. However, play with dolls and dolls' houses can also be attributed other merits - i.e. as with the extremes of soap and education.

For some adults, seen from a cultural perspective, soap is "bad taste". For others, soap is a form of entertaining triviality. For children, soap is simply a source of communication and inspiration on the same level as so many of the things they experience, watch and discover in the various media. Where children are concerned, interpretation of quality comes in only much later.



In the following we will describe two concepts which contain the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most famous dolls: Barbie and GI Joe.

## Barbie - soap and the synthetic pseudo-universe

### *The text of play with the toy*

- *We play “mummies, daddies and babies”: I am the mummy and the big sister. We cook, listen to music and dance and jump around. Look after children (other dolls), take a bath, go for a drive in the car, change clothes, talk together.*
- *A Barbie story:*  
*One day Barbie was out in the garden and Ken was in the garage. He found a hedgehog. He told Barbie what he had found. (...) Ken gave the hedgehog some milk. When the mother was on her way out, she saw the hedgehog drinking the milk. “That was a kind thing to do, Ken”, said the mother.*
- *We put different clothes on them and brush and set their hair. Then we play pretty ladies with them and dress up and go out and visit each other until we get tired of it.*
- *Barbie gets dressed and undressed, gets washed and puts on her make up and is often put to bed (a box). On other occasions they make a hammock out of a piece of material and some string.*

- A story:
 

*There is a mummy and a daddy and three children. The father gets up first, then the mother. Then they take a bath. Get dressed. Then they wake the children, who are often already awake and get dressed. Now they are having their breakfast and then the father goes to work.*

*The big sister goes to school and the smallest children go to a childminder and then the mother goes to work. Sometimes the mother is at home and irons and cleans the house. The mother fetches the big girl and the small children at lunch time. Then they eat their lunch. Afterwards the children play. In the evening the mother makes dinner and the father comes home. Sometimes they watch TV or have visitors. Afterwards they go to bed.*
- *In my house we play with all the dolls at once in my room or in the kitchen-diner (...) We sit on the floor. We each "control" our own dolls, except for the grandfather (doll) - because we share him.*
- *If I have read a good book, my friends and I get good ideas for playing with Barbie.*
- *When my daughter plays with Barbie she identifies completely with the adult world in every way - talks like an adult, also uses a different vocabulary than usual.*
- *Barbie is out riding with her dog and she meets Ken. They get married and then have children.*
- A Barbie song:
 

*Barbie, Barbie,  
Let's go to town  
Barbie, Barbie,  
Get a move on  
Or we'll be late!  
(Girl - aged 6 years)*

### **Supplementary toys used with Barbie**

Ordinary supplements:

Other doll requisites - furniture, rag dolls, dolls' clothes, remnants of material, boxes, LEGO/DUPLO products, teddy bear, bed, household implements, recycled items

Others:

Cars, dressing up clothes, other types of dolls, symbolic animals, farm animals, horses, doctor's set, jewellery/jewel box, shop/office inventory

- 4-5 year old girls' play with adult doll and supplementary toys:



Dolls' house/furniture, worthless objects, doll's pram/pushchair, dolls' clothes, household implements, horses/transport, boxes, LEGO/DUPLO, Playmobil

- 4-5 year old girls' play with adult doll relative to girl doll's supplementary toys:  
Doll's pram/pushchair, doll's bed/cradle, changing table, dressing-up, dolls' house/furniture, dolls' clothes, household inventory
- 6-10 year old girls' play with adult doll and supplementary toys:  
Adult female doll, remnants of material, LEGO/DUPLO, rag doll, dolls' house/furniture, household inventory, dressing up, boxes, dolls, symbolic animals, teddy bear, dolls' clothes, bed, cars, recycled items, girl doll, dolls' animals, farmyard/animals, horses, doctor set, jewellery/jewel box, dolls' pram/pushchair, household implements, shop/office inventory, transport/machines, ornaments/decoration, tape cassette player, poems, worthless objects, glass objects
- 6-10 year old girls' play with adult doll relative to rag doll's supplementary toys:  
Dolls' pram/pushchair, dolls' clothes, symbolic animals, teddy bear, dolls' bed/cradle, bed, baskets, household implements, dressing-up, paper
- Relative to baby doll supplementary toys:  
Dolls' pram/pushchair, doll, rag doll, symbolic animal, teddy bear, doll's bed/cradle, changing table, household implements.

### **About the toy**

The degree of reality of the Barbie doll is a mixture of the concrete and the diffuse, its degree of complexity is uncomplicated, its degree of development is traditional, it is industrially produced and the majority of materials are plastic and synthetic.

The female Barbie doll was created by Ruth Handler in the USA in 1959. Ruth Handler is also the founder of the Mattel toy company. *Barbie* is named after her creator's daughter Barbara, Barbie's boyfriend *Ken* after her son, Kenneth. World wide Barbie sales to date total more than 800 million dolls. The adult female Barbie doll is, like copy products (Sindy, Petra, Cassy, etc.), used by girls of all ages. None of the texts are therefore an expression of Barbie being used by girls whose families have a certain life pattern. Many mothers still have their own Barbie doll. None of the boys in the research (Steenhold (1993,d)) are registered as playing with Barbie.

Ruth Handler designed the first real Barbie fashion clothes with the fashion designer Charlotte Johnson. This was to become an important part of the concept. Johnson (who still designs Barbie fashions) and Handler concentrated on the small details and this is the key to the overwhelming

success of the doll. To date Barbie has modelled more than 1500 different costumes and has had numerous jobs and interesting hobbies.

A black and a Latin Barbie were launched in 1980. In order to create play opportunities, the doll has been given friends and acquaintances. Many different types have come and gone over the years - Barbie changes her allegiances from time to time! Two of Barbie's best friends have been accepted all over the world: her boyfriend Ken (since 1961) and her little sister Skipper (1964).

Barbie is cultural history and the artist Andy Warhol made her a cult figure. Barbie's "Newsletter" has become a collector's item as, naturally, the doll herself. Adult women can become members of the "Secret Barbie Cult".

When girls play with Barbie, they enter the Barbie universe and live in Barbie's world which is more or less devoid of conflict.

As a doll with a lot of accessories in the form of toy implements, Barbie presents optimal conditions for all case relations included in both text and communication. Generally, the person-at-play creates all kinds of imaginable combinations between Barbie, the accessories and other toys.

Barbie is a universally pragmatic toy which meets the demand for comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness but only inasmuch as Barbie is simultaneously recognised as a parody of the universe she represents. She is a true and legitimate representative of a social paradox which makes reference to both the concrete and the diffuse possibilities inherent in the Western societies' universe. She is a parody of the adult female's pseudo universe, which can be played with.

Furthermore, Barbie represents a futuristic adult world - partly the older girl's dream of owning pretty things, implements and interesting inventory items (the concrete) and partly the decadence of the world of the sophisticated, financially comfortable, adult woman with her expensive wardrobe and exclusive furnishings (the diffuse).

The person-at-play experiments and creates experiences with Barbie within the psychological and metaphysical possibilities of play. However, logical possibilities are present in play on the strength of the triad "absolute term, relative term, conjugative term".

The child is forced to draw a limit between Barbie's and her own universe. Thus she recognises that Barbie's universe is both true and untrue which in no way prevents her from integrating her own and Barbie's universe in play.

Barbie is linked to strong symbol and utility values. Play with Barbie can be a directional indication of the child's future and girls' play with any doll always creates security, cosiness, peace, harmony and intimacy in the family unit.

Through play, the child is motivated to be aware of developments in Barbie's and similar universes and gains a faculty for abstraction as well as for independence, practical sense and control over many objects. Barbie is a "consensual" toy which the child and her closest friends use in their immediate environment.

### **GI Joe - soldier and socio-ecologist**

Text of play with the toy

- *My son's great games with heroes and dastardly villains*
  
- *Alone: setting up the good side and the bad side, then a fight. With others: each participant is a person and plays a role. Participants can change roles during the game.*
  
- *Good fights against evil*
  
- *Role play where the "baddies" are often adults or children of our acquaintance who my son doesn't like.*
  
- *The goodies kill the baddies even though it isn't always that easy.*
  
- *Each participant has a couple of men who fight*
  
- *The figure men are dolls, the country is the bed, the floor or the air.*
  
- *We split the men into teams and then charge each other. Then we swap men and play on our own for a while so that we are not against each other.*
  
- *There are books written and films made about it, so we play them.*
  
- *The good guys fight the bad guys and the good guys always win. During the game the child invents things from his own knowledge and the individual man's strength, personality, etc.*

Supplementary toys

- 6-10 year old boys' play with Action Force and supplementary toys: Transformers, Action force, tin soldiers, cowboys/soldiers, rope/string, bed, LEGO/DUPLO products, Playmobil, wooden bricks, natural materials

### **About the toy**

The GI Joe doll's degree of reality is concrete, its degree of complexity uncomplicated, its degree of development traditional, it is industrially

produced and materials used are mostly plastics and other synthetic materials.

The story of GI Joe is the story of the most popular war toy ever. At the same time, it is a lucid X-ray picture of the United States, exposing the neuroses of the Super Power, her defeat, self-defence and attempts to reconstruct national self-respect in the wake of the Vietnam War.

In the beginning the doll was designed by Stanley Weston who presented it to the toy company Hassenfeld Brothers, which later changed its name to HASBRO.

In the early days, nobody in the company was allowed to call GI Joe a doll so he was described as an “upright action figure for boys” - After all, everyone knew at that time that boys “don’t play with dolls”.

In the early 1950s, “Government Issue” Joe (his full name) was produced in four versions - one for each branch of the armed forces. There was no specific figure called Joe and no one Joe was given another name.

A “Negro Joe” and a “she Joe” (a nurse) were produced later. The dolls were very large, almost 30cm tall and were initially marketed without a story, without instructions and without an enemy. As the Vietnam War dragged on, GI Joe literally and symbolically shrank.

At the end of the 1960s his facial characteristics and clothing were changed because the company feared a popular boycott of “war-oriented toys”. He got short hair and a beard and by the end of the 1970s HASBRO had created a “GI Joe team of daredevils”.

Since then GI Joe began to show an interest in Nature and for fighting against non-human enemies, like tigers and sharks, rather than against people. He was no longer a warrior but in losing warrior status, he lost his personality. Joe was literally shelved at the end of the 1970s. As HASBRO put it, Joe was sent on leave.

In the mid-1980s, the company decided to market him again, this time as “Joe and a gang of good guys”, who fight “the bad guys”.

By now, Joe is only 10cm tall and fits into a Star Wars universe. HASBRO created a series of earthling fantasy figures which were not authentic soldiers.

A number of comic book series and films were produced and they gave Joe a modern story line. The company was innovative in its use of the back of the sales pack. The doll’s profile, an “intelligence dossier”, was printed as a collector card. Each individual doll now had his own, often bizarre, code name (Air Tight to Zartan) and his own life history. Each individual member of the “good side” now carried his own story “on his back” - a story closely connected to the history of the United States.

However, in this historical concept, the *enemy* has no connection to American war history nor to American Indians, Communists, Arabs, Asians or Nazis. Instead, the enemy is vague and ridiculous and his appearance conveys this. For example, the “hostile leader, the Cobra Commandant” has no face as it is more or less completely covered by a hood very similar to the hood used by the American racist organisation Ku Klux Klan. His body resembles a hangman’s with leather gloves and boots. His dossier states:

*Primary military speciality: Intelligence*

*Secondary military speciality: Artillery (weapons development)*

*The Cobra Commander’s aim is to gain total mastery of the world, the people who live there, their riches and resources. This fanatical leader rules with an iron grip. He demands blind obedience and loyalty. He aims to achieve mastery of the world through revolution and chaos. He is responsible for the kidnap of scientists, businessmen and military leaders. Once having captured them, he forces them to reveal their most important secrets. The Commandant is hate and evil personified, corrupt, a man without scruples, probably the most dangerous man alive!*

His characteristics (also as a drugs dealer) are easily recognisable and in the new concept, he tries to attack the Earth’s “vulnerable ecological system”.

Even though GI Joe as a toy is not the real world, he imitates the real world in his fight of good against evil on the realistic level and on the level of a fantastic adventure. Both good and evil are easily identified and the case relations are both comprehensible and multiple.

The texts refer to the conflicts inherent in the good versus evil dilemma, even though no person-at-play is in doubt who will win, if the integrity of the game is maintained.

“In reality no war is ever just but it is always okay that the good guys win - especially when they are guys fighting for a just cause. They are on the right side of the Law and look good too!”, is what the toy’s concept seems to tell the person-at-play. However, through its uncompromising outline of the story which is so indispensable for the play with the toy, it communicates something bordering on falsity - despite the “indisputable goodwill of the heroes”.

Maybe Joe as an environmental hero is just as false a toy as he was when he was a soldier during the Cold War or the Vietnam War. Eternal war, which will probably always pop up in new concepts, is only legitimate as long as it is accompanied by goodwill.

The metaphysical element is present in play in the speculative dimension through concrete dialogues between good and evil.

A war doll always refers to a certain social (or asocial) group, i.e. heroes and people who demonstrate the force of social justice. Idols of this kind, which

are part of play, can indicate the direction of the person-at-play's progress in life. The war doll has full control over his own strength and over the implements of war, his machinery and weapons.

In play, the person-at-play will therefore try to imitate the hero or idol and try to master the toy implements which are imitations of the real implements. The war doll is very much a "pluralistic" toy, which emphasises the concept of war and individual achievements. This presents power structures and systems in perspective so that the play scene tends to resemble a game or theatrical performance where there will always be a winner, i.e. the hero, and a loser, the villain.

## CHAPTER 22 ANIMAL FIGURES

See Chapter 8 - Main and subgroups of toy classification

### The Values

#### Animals

animal figures  
live animals  
symbolic animals  
animal series

#### SOCIAL VALUES

(different lifestyles - the social aspect)

##### TOYS USED BY THE PERSON-AT-PLAY IN RELATION TO:

1. himself and his immediate family
2. immediate surrounding/local environment
3. natural surroundings
4. power structures and systems
5. the universe and universal perspectives

##### FAMILY COHESION AND IDENTITY

6. social reference to a specific group
7. directional perspective for life cycle
8. security, cosiness, peace and quiet, intimacy

#### ANIMALS

animal figures	1,2,6,7,8
live animals	1,2,3,6,7,8
symbolic animals	1,2,3,4,5,6,8
animal series	1,2,3,6,8

#### PLAY WITH/ABOUT ANIMALS

Live animals/play with	1,2,3,6,7,8
toy animals/accessories play	1,2,3,8

#### VALUES CONNECTED TO POSITION AND DIMENSION

(different experiences - the situation aspect)

##### TOYS AS:

1. laissez-faire toys -
2. protectionist toys -
3. pluralistic toys -
4. consensual toys -

no significance for case relations  
principal emphasis on social-oriented dimension  
emphasise a concept-oriented dimension  
emphasise social and concept-oriented dimension

#### ANIMALS

animal figures	1
live animals	4
symbolic animals	1
animal series	1

#### PLAY WITH/ABOUT ANIMALS

live animals, - play with	4
toy animals/accessories play	1

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**INDIVIDUAL VALUES**  
(personal differences - the individual aspect)

**TOYS USED IN CONNECTION WITH:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. GENERAL INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY<br>- in particular:<br>2. social reference to a specific group<br>3. existential understanding of entirety | 4. directional perspective for life cycle<br>5. independence, self-sufficiency<br>6. practical sense<br>7. mastery and control over the object |
|---|--|

	*		*
<b>ANIMALS</b>		<b>PLAY WITH/ABOUT ANIMALS</b>	
animal figures	1,7	live animals, - play with	1,2
live animals	1	toy animals/accessories play	1,2,3,7
symbolic animals	1		
animal series	1		

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Animal figures drawn and scratched onto cave walls all over the world date back to between 10,000 and 20,000 years ago. Animal figures hewn in stone or formed in terracotta and clay date back to 5,000 years BC. The early animal figures represent both tame and wild animals but the most usual finds are horses, cows, sheep, goats and small pet animals like dogs, cats and rodents.

Sometimes an animal is depicted on a piece of wood attached to wheels, a pull-along animal. Pull-along (and push-along) animals are especially well-loved by children between one and two years old. The oldest extant pull-along animal dates from 1702. Excise men in Copenhagen confiscated it during the Christmas period along with other toys sold illegally by women in the city (see Sigsgaard & Varnild (1982:150)).

Among other toys confiscated, there were horses on wheels and a large number of clay figures of ordinary farm animals and birds.

Farm animal figures as part of a farmyard concept are favourites with boys especially, while wild animals in a zoo concept (in earlier times, Noah's Ark), are girls' favourites. These two kinds of concept are used particularly by the youngest children (1-6 year olds) while soft toy animals feature in all children's toy collections and are attributed great value and significance.

### **Compensation and soft toys**

One of Freud's best-known theories is the principle of pleasure and reality - and his description of the painful transition between them. Inspired by the work of Freud - and by children's preference for soft toy animals, bedtime toys and teddy bears - the American psychoanalyst D.W Winnicott (1971) developed his own theories about human *cognitive fantasy and interpretative structures*. Winnicott's psychoanalytical theories are still the most significant accounts of a child's basic need for toy ownership.



Freud's theory is that, during the earliest days of life, the child experiences an incredibly intense fulfilment of need and feeling of pleasure after which the child accustoms himself to the realities of limitation and demand.

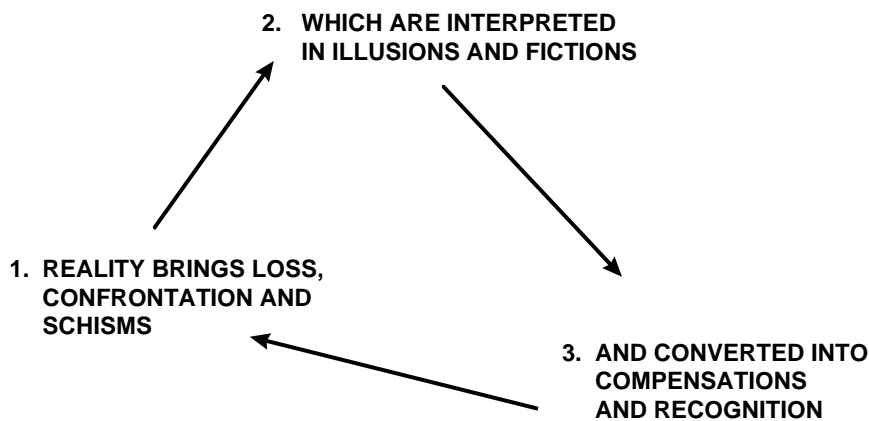
Winnicott pursues these ideas and points out that the child's emotional *loss* - and *compensations* for that loss - is a basic principle. The child has to get accustomed to the fact that things and situations change. He has to learn *to accept* the schism between himself and parts of his secure and familiar environment.

To replace these losses (of which the most important is the absence of his mother), the child compensates with material items which Winnicott calls "transition objects" or sometimes "objects of desire". The process of gradually getting used to loss, change and confrontation occurs through a *pattern of recognition* which develops in three phases:

- The "I" phase is the child's losing his initial, infantile sensing and exploration in contact with his mother.
- The "*I am*" phase is the child's recognising that schisms occur, that things and situations change, that some things are impossible and the angst and frustration which result from recognising these facts.
- The "*I am alone*" phase which is (situation) angst associated with the many problems/conflicts involved in confrontation with new objects/situations and the child's efforts to master these (mastering roles, situations, materials and implements).

The transition objects or compensations, a kind of *illusion*, can be anything from new adult contacts and playmates, new objects and toys and especially soft animal toys - but can also take the form of accepting the situation! According to Winnicott, the *child's illusion* is a kind of "omnipotence" where, by adapting his needs (with the help of the transition objects), the child can re-experience moments or picture the pleasurable experiences and situations of the earliest days of his life - which would otherwise have disappeared for ever.

In these moments, in the fantasy world of the mind's eye, in the child's dreams and stories, imagination and play with the world around him are confronted with realism and reality. Since the world around him includes the illusion of omnipotence (due to the sphere of the illusion), the child has the confidence and courage to cope with the challenges of meeting the reality of the world around him. We could say that the child is first confronted with the realities of the real world, compensates and interprets reality in his fantasy - and converts this into recognition.



DEVELOPMENT IS LIMITED ONLY BY A LACK OF IMAGINATION

## Transitional phenomena and toys

Winnicott defines transitional phenomena as “things and objects”.

Things or phenomena are the child’s first material recognition of a “*not-me substance*” or a “*not-me object*”. This recognition takes place on several levels, depending on the child’s age and stage of development. The very first phenomena can be the corner of a sheet, a security blanket, a blanket fringe or a sound e.g. a familiar tune.

Here the phenomenon is a secure element which will soon after be replaced by more specific objects, such as teddy bears, dolls or larger toys. It is interesting to note that Winnicott also philosophises about the special *functions and significance* of the transitional phenomena *for the children and their parents*. He mentions three areas which can have very great general significance for development of the child’s ability to make decisions, to recognise and master things and problems:

### 1. Value and right of disposal

- It is important that the child and his parents are aware of the value of the object and that the right of disposal over the object is exclusively the child’s. Thus the child learns how to tackle things and situations.

In time, the transitional phenomenon will be shaped and changed by the child himself. However, if the parents undertake to change the status and substance of the phenomenon by giving it a new scent, a new shape or status (possibly just washing it) or by changing the right of disposal over it, this can represent a painful breach of trust.

### 2. Representation of the transitional phenomenon

The transitional phenomenon which has its principal significance in the child’s illusion or in his fantasy world must, as far as possible represent something in

relation to the reality of the world around the child, the real world. But it must neither be completely devoid of fantasy nor synonymous with reality.

### 3. *Object permanence*

- The phenomenon must have object permanence - a characteristic of the object (later, the toy) which presents the child with some kind of guarantee that the object will remain permanently with him, permanently in his possession despite possible aggressive feelings or actions on his part against the object. The security of the phenomenon - the child's right of disposal over the phenomenon or object and the security inherent in being certain that the object continues to exist - must not disappear even if the child exerts aggression or destructive behaviour on the object. The object must be a stable support which survives!

## **The value and significance of things**

It is good to note that Winnicott gives such high priority to the value of objects and things. Furthermore, he indicates that the changing significance of different phenomena and their real significance for the child must be the child's decision and that this must be in accordance with the child's development and progressive recognition of the world around him.

Acceptance of this ensures the child security and gradual recognition of the fact that things and situations have the habit of changing in this life and are never static.

There are many traces of and hidden references to Winnicott's theory in other hypotheses and theories which are specially important sources for this book:

Winnicott's three phases of "I" are in several ways reminiscent of firstness, secondness and thirdness in play.

The transitional phenomena can be described as phenomenological projects to which the child attaches aesthetic values about beauty, truth and goodness - because a child will not just accept "any old thing" as his transitional object.

The things must have value for the child. Both fantasy (the illusion) and reality (realities) are part of his concrete reality. The line between fantasy and reality is not always clear to the very small child. Learning to draw that line is a slow process which must be learned with the help of the compensatory significance of transitional phenomena.

Some transitional phenomena are concrete and look like the real objects. Other transitional phenomena are diffuse or abstract, bearing little resemblance to real objects. Both fantasy forms are in contrast to reality - and yet they are a part of reality.

It is not easy to feel totally convinced about Winnicott's employment of Freud's theory - applied here to the significance of toys for children.

But toys must be taken seriously because children take them seriously!

Winnicott's is a typically 20<sup>th</sup> century theory concerned about changes in society and in the family unit. He is one among many. The others include de Mause (1977), Dencik (1988), Kline (1993), Philips (1986) and Postmann (1983).

There is a tendency to focus on changes away from a collective and towards a more distant relationship between parents and children on the basis of the significance of material things.

Winnicott then describes three concepts which include the 20<sup>th</sup> century's best known animal universes: soft toys and farmyard animals.

### **My little toy mouse - a soft animal toy**

In this case, the mouse is a symbolic animal made of material. The mouse has the same roles, symbols and utility values as other symbolic animals - with adaptations in relation to the story and type of animal concerned.

#### **Texts**

- *I take Minnie to bed with me and she often comes to school with me.*
- *She talks to her mouse and tells him everything. The mouse replies and they don't always agree. The mouse is often a kind of "conscience".*
- *I play that my mouse lives in a mouse hole in my room. I give him food and he rides on my bicycle or in my dolls' pram.*
- *The mouse is called Hannibal because there was once a famous mouse called that name.*
- *Sometime I teach it to jump. I sit on the floor and throw the mouse up in the air so it turns around and then I catch it. It does cartwheels and jumps over my arm, stands on its head and rolls over, runs towards me and jumps up onto a chair with me, jumps very high and then comes down again.*

#### **Nicknames**

Mickey, Mille, Minnie, Hannibal

### **"Teddy - the world's best bear"**

#### **Texts of play with the toy**

- *Teddy isn't just my bedtime pal. He looks after me.*
- *Teddy is also a baby bear (in fact he's a very strong bear).*
- *The teddies normally take part in all kinds of play and daily activities. They are dressed, are read stories and sung to, they get to take food with them when they are out in the car or the dolls' pram or on the bicycle, they go to school and to other teddies' birthday parties.*
- *Teddy is assigned different roles - a soldier, Batman, a pirate, a warrior, another child - and the rest of the time he's good old "cuddly teddy".*

- *Of all the toys (even He-Man!) Teddy always has the last word.*
- *Teddy sometimes attacks the dolls - but he only does it for fun although the dolls don't always find it funny.*
- *Teddy looks after little sister but he comes over to me when I go to bed.*
- *Teddy too has birthday parties and invites his friends.*
- *Teddy is something special.*

Nicknames and supplementary toys

Ted, Teddy, Ed, Little Ted, Jonathan, Pooh Bear, Theodore, Theodora

Ordinary supplementary toys used in play:

Dolls, dolls' pram, teddies, symbolic animals, dolls, dolls' clothes, bed, cars

- Other supplementary toys which boys and girls referred to:  
Adult female doll, sewing/weaving/knitting, playhouse/corner, doll's bed/cradle, household implements, farming, drawing/cutting out/sticking, listen/learn, dressing up, role play, Playmobil, worthless items
- 4-5 year old girls use the following supplementary toys:  
Dolls, dolls' pram/pushchair, bed, listen/learn, worthless items, natural materials.
- 6-10 year old girls use the following supplementary toys:  
Dolls' pram/pushchair, doll, symbolic animal, teddy, dolls' clothes, rag doll, adult female doll, worthless items, sewing/weaving/knitting, playhouse/corner, doll's bed/cradle, bed, household implements, farming, drawing/cutting out/sticking, dressing up, role play.

### ***About the toy***

A teddy bear is used as a toy by children of all ages, regardless of their family's life pattern and lifestyle.

There are two versions of the story of how the teddy bear was "invented" - one is German, the other American.

Around 1902, Margarete Steiff, a German polio victim, started making small hand-sewn bears in fake fur. The bears had moveable arms and legs and were designed by Margarete's nephew Reichard. The teddy was launched at the Leipzig Toy Fair in 1903 where an American buyer bought 3000. At American President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt's daughter's wedding, the Steiff bear was used as a table decoration. The President was a keen bear hunter and - according to the Steiff family - this was why the bear was named Teddy.

According to the American story, the teddy bear adventure began on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1902 when, on a bear hunt in Mississippi, President Roosevelt refused to shoot a large black bear. The episode was publicised by cartoonist

Clifford Berryman in a now-famous illustration in The Washington Post which depicted the President with a bear on a string with tears in his eyes.

The owner of a toy store in Brooklyn, Morris Mitchom, whose wife made small bears saw the illustration. It was Mitchom's idea to sell the bears under the name "Teddy Bear" and he got the president's permission to do so. The Ideal Toy Corporation was founded and a new toy created.

And ever since then loveable teddies have travelled the world with their owners - children and adults alike.

Teddies have gone to war, been destroyed in concentration camps, used as mascots and bedtime pals, accompanied children to hospital and survived in children's rooms alongside computer games and Barbie dolls. Teddies are immortalised in innumerable songs, books and pictures.

Teddies have developed parallel with children's tastes. A flat or a round nose, pointed or floppy ears, round female shape or not - real teddy collectors or teddy lovers, arctophiles, are willing to play tens of thousands of dollars at auctions for a classic Steiff or Ideal bear. It just goes to show that even a bear stuffed with wood shavings can be worth more than his weight in gold - a commercial factor which real teddy freaks don't like.

As a play object with his special and symbolic significance and value, the teddy can play all the roles and communicative parts in play. And all the toy's and the play's case relations can be part of that communication.

In terms of universal pragmatism, teddy expresses symbolic truth and legitimacy. He is assigned a secret psychological will (the child's will) to do certain things (which the child wants). The child will often say "Teddy wants to.." which means that there is something the child himself wants to do.

The teddy creates content, events and experiences in play on the strength of his psychological and metaphysical elements. The child's dialogues with the teddy can be described as existential. On the basis of the adults' own texts, the teddy also creates opportunities for experience through play via the "sensitivity-motion-growth" triad in a biological perspective.

As with other symbolic animals and bedtime pals, the teddy's symbolic value is in creating security, cosiness, peace and quiet, intimacy. Most of the time his symbolic value has no real bearing on the relationship between the child and his parents (except when teddy *goes missing or is forgotten!*).

During play the teddy is usually only used by the person-at-play because symbolic animals are generally the child's most precious possession and often symbolise the child himself. In exceptional cases others are allowed to play with the bear who, like the child, is part of the immediate surroundings, the local environment and intimate relations. Like the child, the teddy must bear in mind the power structures and systems in the local environment

The teddy is also part of the child's understanding of Nature and is a small but important piece of the child's universal comprehension.

### *The Helpful Teddy*

Teddy took me by the hand. Right enough, behind Teddy, Darth Vader sat on a LEGO brick crying with his hands in front of his mask. And when I got closer, I noticed something else: Darth Vader had only one leg. There was nothing left of his right leg but a hole in his hip where it had been fixed. (...) I thought for a second. I had not played with Darth Vader for ages. Once, before Christmas, he was an enemy soldier and I bombed him with chess pieces. He could stand up then. I wonder if his leg got loose then? But after that he went to kindergarten with me and he still had two legs then... (...) The Transformer changed into a car and drove off to comfort Darth Vader. Teddy wondered around with his paws behind his back. He cleared his throat and then he said: "Sometimes when you let me come downstairs I have seen a little dish where your mummy keeps bits and pieces. Maybe the leg is there?" "Maybe", I said. Teddy cleared his throat again: "I would appreciate if you would come downstairs with me. Several of us have never been there. And I would just like to point out that you are the owner of all us playthings." Norlin (1992)

## **The animals and the farm**

Texts of play with the toy

- *Play like reality here on the farm*
- *We set everything up as a whole farm and then get playing.*
- *Ploughing, harrowing, sowing, fetching the corn in, spreading manure, crop spraying*
- *Perfect field control, planning the running of the farm, etc., co-ordinated with looking after the farm itself, the development of both animals and crops. The children try to imitate all the noises correctly as they play.*

Supplementary toys

Cars, LEGO/DUPLO products, castle/station/fort, Playmobil, aeroplanes, worthless items, train/railway track

## **About the toy**

The toy's function is to simulate the running of a farm, regardless of whether it is small or large. The texts quoted are all from boys or their parents who live on a farm, even though children who don't live on farms also have these toys. For children living on a farm, the toy is the closest they can come to a copy of their parents' work and production.

As with all forms of traditional toys which are obvious copies (and especially for farm toys), the case relations are clear for both the toys themselves and for play with them.

Play with the toys is usually easy to understand and free of conflict as both text and context are legitimate due to the obviousness of the toys.

The persons-at-play experience the logical and psychological possibilities of the toys especially strongly. Dialogues with parents about “the right ways to do things” are naturally metaphysical.

Farmers’ children’s opportunities for immediate experiences of work processes which can then be reproduced in play are specific expressions of reference to a specific group.

For farmers’ children, there is a close correlation between play and realistic actions which also demonstrates a directional perspective for life cycle and lifestyle.

What occurs in play with farm toys is recognition and existential understanding of the idea of modern farming’s complicated work processes, education in self-reliance and practical sense and mastery/control over implements. The toys are consensual and are often seen in connection with a background of the immediate surroundings, local environment and Nature.



## CHAPTER 23 IMPLEMENTS

See also chapter 8 Main and subgroups of toy classification

### THE VALUES

### Implement Toys

tools/implements  
care  
inventory  
weapons  
transport/machinery  
special tools  
music  
drawing/collectiong  
listen/learn  
props

### VALUES CONNECTED TO POSITION AND DIMENSION

(different experiences - the situation aspect)

#### TOYS AS:

1. laissez-faire toys -
2. protectionist toys -
3. pluralistic toys -
4. consensual toys -

no significance for case relations  
principal emphasis on social-oriented dimension  
emphasise a concept-oriented dimension  
emphasise social and concept-oriented dimension

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#### IMPLEMENT

tools/implements	4
care	2
inventory	1
weapons	3
transport/machinery	1
special implements	1
music	4
drawing/painting/ cutting out/collecting	3
listen/learn	3
props	3

#### PLAY WITH IMPLEMENTS

look/listen/learn play	4
work/job play	4
play with tools/collecting/handicrafts	4
play with toys/toy implements	4

### INDIVIDUAL VALUES

(personal differences - the individual aspect)

#### TOYS USED IN CONNECTION WITH:

1. GENERAL INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY  
- in particular:
2. social reference to a specific group
3. existential understanding of entirety

4. directional perspective for life cycle
5. independence, self-sufficiency
6. practical sense
7. mastery and control over the object

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#### IMPLEMENT

tools/implements	1,2,4,5,6,7
care	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
inventory	1,2,5,6,7
weapons	1,2,7
transport/machinery	1,2,4,5,6,7
special implements	1,4,6,7
music	1,2,4,7
drawing/painting/ cutting out/collecting	1,2,4,5,6,7
listen/learn	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
props	1,2,5,6,7

#### PLAY WITH IMPLEMENTS

look/listen/learn play	1,2
work/job play	1,2
play with tools/collecting/handicrafts	1,2
play with toys/toy implements	1,2

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**SOCIAL VALUES**

(different lifestyles - the social aspect)

**TOYS USED BY THE PERSON-AT-PLAY  
IN RELATION TO:**

1. himself and his immediate family
2. immediate surrounding/local environment
3. natural surroundings
4. power structures and systems
5. the universe and universal perspectives

**FAMILY COHESION AND IDENTITY**

6. social reference to a specific group
7. directional perspective for life cycle
8. security, cosiness, peace and quiet, intimacy

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**IMPLEMENT**

tools/implements	1,2,3,6,7,8
care	1,2,4,6,7,8
inventory	1,2,6,8
weapons	1,2,4,7
transport/machinery	1,2,3,4,6,7,8
special implements	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
music	1,2,5,6,7,8
drawing/painting/ cutting out/collecting	1,2,3,6,7,8
listen/learn	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
props	1,2,3,6,7,8

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**PLAY WITH IMPLEMENTS**

look/listen/learn play	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
work/job play	1,2,3,6,7,8
play with tools/collecting/handicrafts	1,2,3,6,7,8
play with toys/toy implements	1,2,3,6,7,8

People - and, in the world of toys, dolls and figures - are surrounded by a great number of implements, tools and props. They extend and strengthen the natural, physical and mental patterns of behaviour and action. Implements create opportunities for carrying out actions, events and operations that would not be possible if they did not exist.

The multiplicity of human implements and aids is enormous and the number of them that are copied in the form of toy implements, etc. is correspondingly vast.

The current fashion and children's and adults' desire to own the newest and most modern version of things means that the market abounds with toy implements and props. At the same time nostalgia flourishes among ordinary users and collectors (adults and children alike!).

It is important to differentiate between tools and implements on the one hand and the many different kinds of props on the other.

Props are of course a kind of tool or implement but, where an implement is used generally and in a variety of functions, the use of a prop is often specific. Props most often gain significance in connection with specific functions such as sport and theatre or in connection with a ceremony of some kind.

## Implements and toys - a development process

The following points are *general abridged comments* on the development and significance of implements and toy implements (Steenhold (1990,e:12-15)):

- Man cannot live without implements. He needs them in order to solve problems.

Toy implements are smaller than (or miniature copies of) the original implements. In using them, children learn the function of the original implement by observing how they are used, by imitating their use and also by playing out the work processes in which the implements are used.

- People all over the world have access to the same general implements which are familiar to everyone in terms of appearance and function. New implements are invented to cover a human need which occurs in a given situation, dependent on time and culture. The special appearance and function of an implement are often dependent on geographical factors. The implement is redesigned, improved or refined whenever it is found to be essential for the continued existence or development of the society or culture concerned.

Toy tools do not follow the development process of the original implement. In appearance they are often several steps behind the original. However, play with a toy implement does reproduce the history of Mankind's cultural development.

- Implements are used for making things

Toys as copies of implements are used in the same way. Play is an activity for activity's sake while the use of an implement is a special kind of work process with a clear aim of producing a finished product. In using implements, it often happens that the two processes, play and work, melt together and become an activity - a hobby - which includes the qualities of both constituents.

- Both implements and toys are used to gain and communicate information and knowledge. They are included in training and education and, at the same time, they are also symbolic of certain open or hidden messages.

They are also used to reinforce the expressions in play and games, art, ceremonies and symbolism. In this connection, toy implements and props are just as important as the original implements and props.

- Everyone knows that both simple and complex implements can be dangerous. Proper use generally demands practice and experience.

Toy implements can also be dangerous but the element of danger is usually removed from the toy and what is left is therefore only an

"imaginary" danger. The use of such toy implements is therefore a pseudo process - i.e. play.

- For some people having a certain implement is a matter of life and death. They identify with the implement so that it becomes a part of the person's identity and personality.

A toy implement can have the same essential significance for a child's understanding of self.

- Every implement tells a story - the person who owned it, its significance in certain situations, trivial, interesting or fantastic stories about joy, desire and necessity.

Toy implements reflect the story (whether trivial or important) of a certain era, culture or society of which childhood history is a part.

As we reach the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both implements and toy implements represent several paradoxes.

The only being on this planet which is able to produce complex and refined implements and toys is Man. Over many thousands of years of evolution, only a few mammals, birds and fish have learned how to use certain natural materials as useful implements, as a means to an end. Only very few animals can learn to use Man's implements because an animal cannot not understand the basic idea and function of an implement. Animals need many more thousands of years' development before they can learn to use even the simplest of Man's implements.

We might be able to imagine a new, genetically engineered species (given a human gene maybe) which could be taught to use certain types of implements. However, such a project would be fraught with difficulties as both the "implements" themselves and general ethics and morals would have to adapt to the establishment of a new balance between the various species' capabilities.

Within the history of Man's development, inventing and producing certain implements has always been connected to a certain era and culture. The shape, appearance and function of some basic implements will probably never change.

In the past, the need to refine and adjust an implement was often due to circumstances beyond Man's control, circumstances in his natural surroundings. Other implements have changed in connection with the transition from one cultural pattern to another.

This applies to modern implements whose function is invisible, at least to the naked eye. This type of implement contributes to the creation of angst and myths among people who do not understand how the implement works. Man thinks in terms of function when he thinks of ordinary, manual tools and

implements. This explains why *not* being able *to see the function* itself is connected with the idea that the *function* might be *out of our control*.

Man has had many hundreds and often thousands of years to get used to using certain machines, implements and tools but he has only had a few decades to familiarise himself with the dominance of electronic implements at all levels of our society.

This means that Man not only has to think mechanically but he must now learn to think in “fractals” (Mandelbrot’s fractal theory). This is an enormous upheaval - and is facilitated by imaginative science fiction.

The following describes six toy implements and concludes with a comment on aggressive toy implements.

### **The tool box**

A tool box is a box with “real” tools that can be used by a child or by an adult. The majority of “instructions to parents” about play or use of the tools recommend that the child not only plays with the tools under adult supervision but just as often on his own.

#### **Texts**

- *My mum works at a sawmill and she gives me some wood. And when my mum is making something in her workshop, I make things on my workbench. Sometimes I go into the workshop on my own and make some gifts or just make ships, cars, shelves, mats or some imaginary things with new names.*
- *Builds and repairs “everything” and imitates what the adults do and make in all kinds of ways.*
- *Make new things for my big farm and play and repair.*
- *Find good pieces of wood which I can build something out of.*
- *Play at being at work and tidying up the tools so that everything is in the right place.*
- *When I am sawing and hammering, I do it in the garage with other children or with Dad. We make toys.*

#### **Supplementary toys**

- 4-5 year old boys use the following toys with the tools:  
Worthless objects, boxes, wood, soldier/cowboy, farmyard/animals, garden implements, home inventory, cars, bicycle, go-cart, a variety of building materials, LEGO/DUPLO products.

### **Weapons and implements for catching/capturing**

The texts are concerned with “real” weapons and implements, as well as copies and fakes.

### Texts of play with the toys

- *Bow and arrows: Carving wood and making bows and arrows*
- *Sheath knife: Play out in the den. Carve things out of twigs and branches, play boy scouts, cops and robbers and soldiers*
- *Fishing rod: go fishing and get to know the different fish*
- *Home-made weapons made of LEGO bricks: the bad guys get shot and lose. We find the treasure and shoot the bad guys dead.*
- *Home-made traps: The bad guys are meant to fall into them. Some robbers are after me and are caught in the traps. I even have traps which I catch animals in to eat.*
- *cat which fires arrows: Set things up and try to shoot them down.*
- *Machine gun: Play war and shoot the bad guys. We take turns at being the bad guys who die.*
- *Playing hunting: the hunter hunts and the animal tries to get away. So I kill the animal which lies completely still because it knows it's going to die.*
- *Shooting: I (Father) take my son and daughter to shooting because that game teaches them to have respect for a dangerous and useful implement or weapon. In addition it is training them in perseverance, endurance, concentration and strengthens their intellect.*

### Supplementary literary texts:

- *Ib'n Khaldun writes that while God gave the animals their natural limbs for their defence, he gave Man his ability to think. The power of thought made it possible for Man to produce weapons - the lance instead of horns, the sword instead of claws, the shield instead of thick skin - and to establish a society to produce them.*

*As the individual person was powerless against wild animals, especially predators, Man could only defend himself together with his fellows. During civilisation all-out war broke out using the equipment which was intended to keep the animals away.*

Chatwin (1988)

## **The car - the implement and the dream**

### Texts of play with the toys

None of the numerous texts about play with cars is an expression that the toy is played with by boys from any one lifestyle in particular. The following are therefore examples of general texts.

- *Drive around, move things, fill them up with petrol, drive them into the garage, wash the cars (in the sink), polish them.*

### Supplementary toys

Ordinary supplements to play with cars:

Cars, LEGO/DUPLO products, castle/station/fort, Playmobil farmyard/animals, road track, farming, aeroplanes. Others: worthless

items (planks and old house bricks), household inventory, train/railway track.

- 4-5 year old boys' play with cars and supplementary toys:  
Cars, castle/fort/station, LEGO/DUPLO products, farmyard/animals, road track, train/railway track, Playmobil
- 6-10 year old boys' play with cars and supplementary toys:  
Cars, castle/fort/station, LEGO/DUPLO products, farmyard/animals, road track, train/railway track, Playmobil, worthless items, household inventory, farming.

### ***About the toy***

The function of the car is both traditional and concrete. Its characteristics and specific design and function determine only the play process - as indeed they are intended to do.

Case relations in play with the car are made complex by the person-at-play because the game must demonstrate that the boy-at-play has the skill to master the fast or difficult implement and is therefore able to control the (work) process itself. Within play, this is demonstrated by the noises the boy plays to signal different situations. Complicated remote controlled or computer controlled cars demand both discipline and skill. Such toys encourage an element of competition too.

The concrete nature of the car makes it universally pragmatic.

Certain physical opportunities are experienced through play. However, the opportunities for gaining experiences within the other spheres are also present to a limited degree.

Depending on what kind of car the child is playing with, play with cars makes reference to certain groups within society. Play can, therefore, suggest direction for progress in life. In addition, play with cars also creates security, cosiness, peace and quiet, intimacy. It also helps develop the child's practical sense and the capacity to command and control objects.

Play with cars has no direct significance for relationships between family members but cars are pluralistic toys - only one person can "drive" the car. The others must be satisfied with watching.

The person-at-play uses the car in relation to himself and his immediate family, his immediate surroundings, local environment and close circle of acquaintance, Natural environment and partly in relation to power structures and systems.

Play and the home environment - See tables 8.1.18-22.

## **Bicycle - skill, experience and horizons**

Text of play with the toy

- *Bicycle rides, cycle races to see who comes first, riding bikes up and down the hill, play “tag” on bikes, making skid marks, flying off a ramp, robbers and soldiers, cowboys.*
- *The bicycle is used as a racing bicycle and a racing car, an aeroplane and a truck.*
- *When I put cardboard on it, it sounds like a truck.*
- *I go to kindergarten on my bike. I ride a little way ahead and my dad or my mum follow behind with my little sister in her pushchair. When they come and fetch me, I ride my bike home again. Sometimes I go to the car park - one which isn't used very much. I ride my bike around up there with the girls from my street. To begin with I had a big stick on the back of my bike. My Dad ran behind me and held the stick while I rode my bike.*
- *I ride my bike around on our road. There are very few cars. Either with my friend or with all the other children who live in our road. Sometimes we play cops and robbers. So we ride very fast. Other times we put our dolls into small bicycle seats. And we have a picnic on the car park. Sometimes we take food with us.*

Supplementary toys

- The bicycle is used with:
  - Teddy bear, dolls, wheelbarrow, pistol, go-cart/soapbox cart, dressing up clothes, cardboard, clothes pegs, Nature play outdoors.
- Boys' play with bicycles and tricycles and supplementary toys:
  - Playmates, wheelbarrow, go cart/soapbox cart, Nature/outdoors play, dressing up (cowboys, etc.).
- Girls' play with bicycles and tricycles and supplementary toys:
  - Doll, rag doll, teddy bear, Nature/outdoors play.

## **Jumping/(running)/rolling/hopscotch**

includes jumping with an elastic, jumping, roller skating, hopscotch stones, jumping on doll/man

Texts of play with the toys

- *Try to see how many I can get.*
- *Competition with my big brother.*
- *Mum and Dad play with us sometimes. Mum is good at it.*
- *Roll on roller skates on the pavement and on the road.*
- *Mette (girl's name) is very physically active and, amongst other things, goes to gymnastics. We practise on the lawn.*
- *On our street we have running competitions and we run when we play “What's the time, Mr Wolf?”*



## **Drawing/colouring/cutting out/sticking**

Texts of play with the toys

- *I write letters to my Granny and to other people, draw something, make masks and cut them out. I make Christmas decorations, paint pictures for hanging on the wall, paint stones and shells from the seashore, draw on the paving stones, make pictures, paint in my colouring book, paint on material, make paper food, build houses, roads, etc.*
- *Anything can be used: colourful advertisements, magazines, empty kitchen rolls, small pieces she has cut off venetian blinds and she gives everything away.*
- *Louise “hides” small reserves of crayons all around the house so that she always has a crayon close at hand.*
- *Sit at the table and sing and draw. Talk to Mum and Dad or my friends while we are drawing and cutting out.*
- *Paint pictures with water-based colours and cut them out and make new pictures.*

This form of play combined with hobby activities is particularly popular with girls aged 4-7 years, regardless of their family's lifestyle.

Supplementary toys

- 6-10 year old girls drawing/colouring/cutting out/sticking play/hobby activities in connection with supplementary toys:  
Worthless items, rag doll, teddy bear, doll/dolls' pushchair, household inventory, colouring books, compass/ruler, painting/water-based colours, books, swing/trapeze, Nature/outdoors play.

## **Tape cassette player - storyteller and music box**

Texts describing play with the toys

- *My daughter is apparently able to listen to a story, read a Donald Duck comic book, cut out dressing up dolls and eat an apple while talking to me - all of these things simultaneously.*
- *Listen to songs, tape my own songs, play that I am on the radio, sing together when we are together, listen to stories and read the book which came with the tape.*
- *Listen to stories, children's music, record stories and letters with other children and with my parents.*

Supplementary toys

Listen, tapes, drawing/cutting out/sticking at the same time.

Jessen (1986) gives the following description of children's "home-made" recordings on tape cassette recorder: *Four girls aged 7-8 years playing with a tape cassette recorder in their room.*

*They are doing "radio". On the tape it sounds like role play with a live microphone but on listening to the recording more closely, the game is a special form of media role play - with roles and scenes from the media.*

*For example, they have an announcer and they make interviews. They are familiar with these roles. Then they decide to make the radio announcer report from a "party". But a gathering of that kind sounds special - lots of people talking all at once. In order to make the programme sound realistic, the girls produce their own "party sounds", i.e. three of the girls talk across each other while the fourth girl - the announcer - talks over, starting like this, "Well, we have arrived here in the middle of the party, and ..."*

### **The implements of aggressive play**

*Aggression is a reaction to fear, suppression, excitement or stress but can also be caused by unfamiliarity or arrogance. Aggressive games are play in which children practice mastering excitement, stress and drawing the limits between aggression and non-aggression.*

In the texts describing play with toys, especially GI Joe, weapons and implements used for capturing/catching, there are examples of "reading the text of aggressive play" or "interpretation - translation". The expressions children use in connection in particular with war play (the most explicit form of aggressive play) are regarded as imitation or copying real war situations. From a relativistic perspective, however, the interpretation of play as "as if" play doesn't hold water. Although the theme of play is war, the play itself is often the opposite of aggression and violence.

Results of research into war and aggression toys, aggressive play and war games are to a certain extent dependent on the research method used. The researchers' own personal psychological condition or attitude to aggression can present a more serious problem to the complexity of the research than the principal research objects: i.e. children-at-play's play with aggression and war and the objects used in these games.

In the 4-10 year olds' toy collections (Table 5.7.1. Steenhold (1993,d)) and in the following tables, the subgroup weapons is very small. This is not due to the fact that the children do not own many toy weapons but that children are apparently not generally very conscious of toy weapons. Wegener-Spöhring (1986:797-810) came to the same conclusion.

Directly and indirectly, certain specific *dolls or figures, weapons and certain sports disciplines* encourage aggressive play and war play. (Note: TV and video films are beyond the scope of this book.)

Within the Dolls category, there are two groups: guardian dolls and war dolls:

Guardian dolls are copies of or are motivated by the role of protector or guardian (either positive or negative). The guardian doll is normally part of a

larger toy concept based on history, a story, a book or a film, e.g. Ninja Turtles or He Man from Masters of the Universe.

Dinoriders	trolls
dolls' animals	Turtles
idol dolls	guardian dolls
Masters	guardian doll animals
robot	jack-in-the-box
Transformers	

War dolls are doll copies or figures which are inspired by warlike identification figures or persons who have taken part in war action. The action can be historical but is most often a story, fairy tale or science fiction, e.g. soldier, pirate, cowboys and Indians. Modern toys include:

Action Force (GI Joe)	war doll - man
Cowboys and Indians	soldiers
Karate Kid	super hero
war doll - child	tin solders
war doll - woman	

Weapons and the implements of war (implements of capture) include toys which simulate catching quarry/prey from a distance or implements used in hand-to-hand combat (pistol, sword/shield, sabre, lance, modern armoured personnel carriers, etc.) - while other implements can be used both as hunting requisites and weapons: hunting rifle, bow and arrows, slingshot, knives.

We must differentiate between toy weapons and war machines (war toys) as weapons are defined as "hand guns" where war toys (cf. Wegener-Spöhring (1986, 1995)) are defined as "toys which present an image of war and with which children play war."

Special weapons and certain implements mentioned in old myths and adventures and the modern "Star Wars" implements and weapons also encourage aggressive play.

#### *Rough-and-tumble play and fighting for fun*

This kind of play also includes Tag/hunting/war play. They are often violent games textured by confrontation which children and adults in the research referred to as:

Action Force games	Masters of the Universe
Cowboys and Indians	girls catch the boys
dangerous animals	Cops and robbers
playing "tick - you're on"	playing "tag"
war	

In my interviews (Steenhold:1993,d), many parents pointed out that play with aggression also often occurred (openly or indirectly) in the subgroup intimate play - where participants are most often exclusively family members, parents,

children, siblings. They called this intimate, close interaction many different names:

ordinary everyday play	messing about
ordinary intimate play	fighting for fun
tickling games	cuddling and kissing play
play with parents	rough-and-tumble/being together

The very strong emotional contact which occurs between family members (and best playmates) allows play where aggression in the form of stubbornness, anger, strong, direct outbursts of feeling, “bear hugs” and actual physical contact is in many cases seen as something positive, in others (quoting one of the mothers) “elusive and stimulating”.

The majority of parents who mentioned this came from families where the pattern of communication tended to be concept oriented.

As previously mentioned, observations of children at play naturally involve both an observer and the children observed. Even so, some researchers describe violent play as if it were possible to describe it objectively. For example, Carlsson-Paige & Levis (1987,1990) describe boys’ play as bordering on violence or actually violent without taking into account how rarely real fights or actual violence in fact occur when boys play together. See Peter K. Smith (1992).

According to Pellegrini (1988:802-806) and Wegener-Spöhring (1989), the most aggressive children are often those least likely to get involved in play fights.

In 1987, the German magazine “Spielmittel” published an article on “Masters of the Universe”, the popular system of figures and individual buildings designed for role play.

The editors wondered how “Masters” had managed to achieve sales success when parents’ attitudes to “Masters” were often very negative. They asked: “What makes “Masters” so popular with children?” Considering the degree of parental disapproval, cool advertising alone couldn’t explain the toy’s popularity.

By way of introduction, the editors proposed two hypotheses:

- A. Play with “Masters” creates aggression and asocial behaviour and group play with more than two participants is either impossible or possible only to a limited extent. At the end of a relatively brief play sequence, it will be difficult for mothers/pedagogical staff to pacify the children and get them to play normally again.
- B. Play with “Masters” does not lead to anything terrible and creates neither aggression nor asocial behaviour. The play sequences are carried out over

a longer period of time. Several children concentrate and play voluntarily together.

Stuckenhoff (1987) observed children playing with “Masters” in a kindergarten over a four week period. The following is a summary of the results of Stuckenhoff’s observations/research (quote):

1. “Masters” does not overtax the children’s mental capacities. The necessary differentiation between “the good guys” and “the bad guys” took place although the youngest participants may on occasions bring a figure into the “wrong camp”.
2. The children express involvement, concentration and perseverance in play with the figures. The duration of individual play sequences was extremely high, on average 45 minutes for 5-7 year olds and 78 minutes for 8-10 year olds.
3. The strong appeal of the “Masters” figures” is due to three aspects:
  - the dramatic appearance of the figures and the accessories
  - the many functions of the accessory vehicles and buildings
  - the attractiveness of the accompanying comic books.
4. Play with “Masters” had a positive effect on the children’s mutual social behaviour. Before starting to play, the children must agree on:

what the game is about and  
who has which figure/accessory.

Furthermore, in group play with “Masters”, each participant’s play is constantly oriented towards the play of the other participants and there is therefore a great deal social interaction.

5. No unusually high level of aggression or thoughtlessness was observed at any phase of the game. All the children endeavoured to stick to the predetermined rules of the game. (End quote.)

Stuckenhoff’s research therefore confirmed hypothesis B and to such an extent that Stuckenhoff didn’t hesitate to give “Masters of the Universe” the predicate “highly recommendable”. As Stuckenhoff himself states, the divergence between the parents’ attitudes and his results is that the parents seen the figures’ warlike appearance and judge the toy on the basis of appearance alone. By contrast, the research was based on observation of “play”.

Stuckenhoff’s conclusions apply equally to other similar toy concepts which appeal to aggressive play.

However, there are some specific characteristics which have direct influence on how toys and play are viewed. There are at least three influential factors in relation to aggression in play with toys. These are:

- the child's age,
- sex and
- previous experiences of/attitudes to understanding aggression.

It can be difficult to differentiate between these three factors which will become apparent in the following paragraphs. A large number of other factors (e.g. video games and violent films but also influences ranging from comic books to daily newspapers) also exert an influence but will not be discussed here.

No studies have yet been made into the different *levels of children's aggression* and for this reason this book does not cover the subject.

### *Age*

Children and adults have very different attitudes to boisterous play. Children are very aware of the differences between aggressive behaviour and violence per se. Children make a clear differentiation between real fighting and playing fighting. Among others, Smith & Boulton (1990) have shown that English children as young as four years of age can distinguish real fights from play fights. Peter K. Smith (1980, 1990) states that more than 80% of 8-11 year olds can make a clear distinction between aggression and play.

As indicated by Buydendijk and Huizinga, playing at fighting has probably developed into a cultural phenomenon because it encourages children to practice hunting and to train suppleness, the competitive instinct, mastery, power and emotion and other survival strategies.

There are unavoidable similarities between "playing at fighting" and "real fighting" and this is demonstrated most clearly in tag/flight/hiding and war games as shown by Sutton-Smith (1971) in his theory of "order and anarchy". (Play and games are ways of practising "approach - avoid", "investigate - retreat".)

When asked, most children will tend to agree that playing fighting can develop by accident into a real fight if one of the participants gets hurt or falls awkwardly. According to Koyama & Smith (1991) and Sutton-Smith (1988), this happens only in exceptional cases.

Wegener-Spöhring observed that play fighting developed into aggression only when adults invaded the "play space" (framework of play). So we must conclude that children are in fact quite proficient at determining whether their playmates have aggressive intentions or not. What is more, it is usually adults who mistake playing fighting for real aggression because they tend to focus on the *similarities* rather than the *differences* between the two.

By contrast, children distinguish play and fighting by focusing on the special characteristics of each which - according to Fry (1990) - are:

1. *Facial and verbal expressions*: Grimaces, clenched teeth and staring eyes represent real aggressive behaviour. Smiles, shrieks and laughter are characteristic of play which parodies real aggression.
2. *Play's result*: The children are less likely to get hurt and more likely to continue to play together after aggressive play than after a display of real aggression.
3. *Frequency*: Aggressive play occurs more often than real aggression (nine times more often, according to Fry).
4. *Duration*: Aggressive play lasts longer than real fights.

Fry concludes that aggression play is relatively safe (as long as the children do not take unnecessary risks) and is characterised by camaraderie. It is also a good way for the children to try out skills which can be very useful later on in life.

Table 8.3.1.1. shows children's own information about how often they "play fighting".

The children have given information about deliberate, aggressive games which are often prepared and agreed among themselves in advance. The scenes and episodes are sometimes almost directed and produced like a film. However, we have to assume that the numbers are even higher than the table indicates because parents and children tend either to be reluctant to say that they "fight" or to deny that they demonstrate aggression and aggressive looking behaviour.

Boys play aggressive games - it is something girls only rarely do. Aggressive play is therefore primarily a phenomenon of boys' play.

Table 8.3.1.1. Often "play fighting" with other children

	All children	Boys		Girls	
Total children/	401	86	119	73	123
Age group	4-10 year olds	4-5 year olds	6-10 year olds	4-5 year olds	6-10 year olds
No	259 65%	45 54%	40 34%	69 95%	105 87%
Yes	137 35%	38 46%	79 66%	4 5%	16 13%
No data	5	3	0	0	2

Source: Steenhold (1993,d)

The differences in children's and adults' attitudes to aggressive play fits extremely well into the familiar pattern of the divergence between participants' and observers' roles.

"Fights for fun" look different from the outside than from the inside because the participants have access to better and more varied information than the observer.

The persons-at-play experience emotional solidarity which the observer cannot experience or can only experience in a very limited way. The emotional solidarity can actually be the cause of the boisterousness which Caillois calls "paidia" which is uncontrolled, free imagination, occurs in chaos, noise, laughter and is characteristically tumultuous and varies in quality. Yes, the persons-at-play are "high" on play!

### Sex

The attitude to what constitutes play or aggressive behaviour differs according to the sex of the observer. Conner's studies (1989) indicate that men and women see aggression differently:

Of a total of 14 different video recordings of children's play with "neutral toys" (cars and dolls) and "war toys" (war dolls and guardian dolls) respectively, men and women interpreted 10 episodes differently.

One of the episodes included a scene in which a "dead or shot" child was being shot once more in order to be brought back to life. The men considered this to be play while only one third of the women saw the event in the same light.

Generally, women are more likely to describe aggressive play situations as real aggression than men. (Most teachers and especially preschool teachers are female!)

Table 8.3.1.2. (Steenhold (1993,d)) shows children's "play fights" in relation to their *mother's lifestyle*. Again it is boys - and only rarely girls - who fight for fun. There is a tendency for boys whose mothers have no or other education and a repetitive job to be more likely than other boys to use boisterous play as a physical basis for contact.

### *Previous experiences of/attitudes to understanding aggression*

Many of the classical studies of aggression indicate that adults' (including parents') attitudes and behaviour are influenced by their childhood experiences, social and cultural observance and experience, etc.

With special focus on understanding aggression in play and games, we refer here only to Hastorf and Candril's (1954) classic studies and their examples of "football games". There is always the visiting team who are (of course) aggressive and play dirty tricks - seen from the point of view of the home team's supporters.



Adults' own play experiences (both in childhood and in adulthood) also influence how they judge children's play. Connor (1989) argues, for example, that women who played aggressive play and played with aggressive toys when they were children (always with brothers or boy playmates) are less inclined than other women to judge children's tumultuous or boisterous play episodes as aggression.

Boisterous play is more or less a boys' monopoly. Girls are only given the opportunity to participate if they demonstrate special courage and if the boys accept that girls participate. Girls' roles in these games are most often the least violent or aggressive attitudes and secondary to the boys' roles.

As in the case of war games, certain psychologists (Carlsson-Paige & Levis (1987,1990) and Miedzian (1991)) argue that violent games often lead to real acts of aggression - Goldstein (1972).

By contrast, Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne (1984) and Bettelheim (1987) believe that such games contribute to social and emotional development.

According to Pellegrini (1988), the confusion is simply a question of different definitions because many researchers define "violent play" as both fights and fighting for fun while others include both physical and verbal aggression.

Wegener-Spöhring (1989) observed play situations and found 62 aggressive situations in girls' play and 335 in boys' play. "Are boys therefore five times naughtier than girls?", asked Wegener-Spöhring. Hardly but boys are generally permitted to behave more aggressively than girls. Girls are expected to be docile, obedient and "sweet" and also to be ashamed of being aggressive or argumentative.

However, Bjørkqvist, Lagerspetz and Kaukiainen (1991) found that girls are also aggressive but not in the masculine way of explicit violence. Girls' aggression is verbal.

There are some studies which show that some aggressive children are far less likely to get involved in violent play because they have an unconscious fear of not having control of the situation and of possibly losing self-control. (Willner:1991)

Willner also found that violent play helps children learn the value of compromise, equality and reciprocity and that boys who are prevented from participating in aggressive exchanges miss the opportunity to learn this important lesson.

Children's aggressions as they occur in play are, unfortunately, often seen as a lack of self-control. Their aggressions can, however, result from a lack of the ability to understand other children's signals and failure to understand an invitation to play, intimacy, an attempt to make contact or simple physical touching.

Table 8.3.1.3. - Steenhold (1993,d) shows children's "play fighting" with other children relative to their fathers' lifestyle. Again boys' almost have a monopoly on violent play. Moreover, boys' play is not affected by their fathers' lifestyle. A slight tendency for boys whose fathers' are well educated (further education - long course) to fight less often than other boys must be taken with a pinch of salt.

*Children's play with toy weapons and "implements of war"*

The Transport/machinery: 8. War machines (war toys) group of toys includes war planes, warships, tanks, cannons, etc.

The Weapons category includes both toy copies and the original weapons. Copies are most often pistols, rifles and swords/shields, e.g.:

arrow	pistol
sheath knife	slingshot/catapult
air rifle/gun	sword/shield

In interviews with German children, Wegener-Spöhring (1989) found that 76% of boys owned a toy pistol while only 29% of girls owned one.

It is the boys who play with toy weapons/implements of war. They play with them for many different reasons but the majority of their games with these toys have nothing at all to do with aggression or war.

Play with any toy can have numerous and very different aims: ranging from mastery (gaining control over one's surroundings) to developing physical co-ordination and social skills.

Apart from physical activities in the form of shouting and shrieking, running and acrobatic jumping, hiding, being found, making an ambush, play with toy weapons is also motivated by an attempt to understand the concept of mortality, to stimulate the fantasy, to create tension and to imitate or parody adult behaviour.

However, in many cases, play can most definitely also be interpreted as "legitimate" aggression.

*Purchase of toy weapons*

Table 8.3.3.1. Toy weapons purchased in a toy store

	All children	Boys		Girls	
Total children/ Age group	401	86	119	73	123
	4-10 year olds	4-5 year olds	6-10 year olds	4-5 year olds	6-10 year olds
No	12 11%	3 9%	6 9%		
Yes	94 89%	29 91%	61 91%		
No data	295	54	0	71	107

Source: Steenhold (1993,d)

Table 8.3.3.1. shows that boys participate actively in the purchase of toy weapons in a toy store and no girl is registered as having bought toy weapons.

Another table (8.3.2.2.) indicates that there is a tendency for boys whose fathers are well-educated and in employment within blue-collar work/technical and contact/communication to own more toy weapons than boys whose fathers work falls into the other job categories.

This can have much to do with the “mastery” aspect. Fathers like to see their sons master and control implements from an early age and, even though the implements concerned are imitation weapons, the fathers do not seem to attach any importance to their symbolic meaning.

By contrast, boys whose fathers are well educated (further education - long course) are less likely to play with toy weapons than other boys. No specific reason for this can be read out of the research results.

Studies/research into the effects of play with toy weapons are more or less non-existent and this means that it is extremely difficult to say anything general about this.

If we elect to accept the results of the very small number of studies into children’s play with toy weapons, it would seem that play with toy weapons clearly increases the frequency of aggressive play and aggressive play behaviour. Yet, if they set these toys aside, children’s asocial behaviour returns to the same level as it was before play with toy weapons began.

The effect of children’s play with toy weapons does not therefore seem to be lasting. However, this vague generalisation probably does not hold water if the play situation with weapons is different or is transferred to another place or culture.

There *is nevertheless a connection* between the boys' preference for toy weapons and behavioural aggression, although the cause is not clear. Jukes (1991) reports that aggressive boys prefer aggressive toys.

In her research, aggression is synonymous with the boys' preference for aggressive combat toys. *If* children are motivated constantly and from an early age to play out aggressive narratives (stories or comic strips), it is all the more likely that these children will be more prone to choose toy weapons to play with than children who have been motivated by other toys.

This statement concurs with research into early imprinting, including cognitive stimulation and preference for violent entertainment, according to Goldstein (1972).

In my interviews, some parents said that they gave their aggressive children toy weapons because they hoped that they could discharge their aggressions into more acceptable, controlled fantasy play.

In the light of all the controversies provoked by children's play with toy weapons, it is strange that the subject has not as yet been properly researched. Still, maybe the polemic and the lack of research are simply due to the fact that violence in the media, toy weapons and other forms of entertainment for children and young people give parents and other adults ample opportunity for expressing personal, ethical, moral and political views and indignation!

## CHAPTER 24 SYSTEMS AND CONSTRUCTION

See chapter 8 Main and subgroups of the toy classification

### The Values

#### System Toys

recycling  
LEGO/DUPLO products  
Playmobil  
Fisher-Price  
construction

#### SOCIAL VALUES

(different lifestyles - the social aspect)

##### TOYS USED BY THE PERSON-AT-PLAY IN RELATION TO:

1. himself and his immediate family
2. immediate surrounding/local environment
3. natural surroundings
4. power structures and systems
5. the universe and universal perspectives

##### FAMILY COHESION AND IDENTITY

6. social reference to a specific group
7. directional perspective for life cycle
8. security, cosiness, peace and quiet, intimacy

#### SYSTEM

recycling	1,2,3,4,5,6
LEGO/DUPLO products	1,2,6,8
Playmobil	1,2,6,8
Fisher-Price	1,2,6,8
construction	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

#### PLAY WITH SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES

construction/accessories play	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
art/culture play	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
games	1,2,3,6,8
athletics/sport	1,2,3,4,6,8
play with props	1,2,3,6,8

#### VALUES CONNECTED TO POSITION AND DIMENSION

(different experiences - the situation aspect)

##### TOYS AS:

1. laissez-faire toys -
2. protectionist toys -
3. pluralistic toys -
4. consensual toys -

no significance for case relations  
principal emphasis on social-oriented dimension  
emphasise a concept-oriented dimension  
emphasise social and concept-oriented dimension

#### SYSTEM

recycling	4
LEGO/DUPLO products	1
Playmobil	1
Fisher-Price	1
construction	1

#### PLAY WITH SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES

construction/accessories play	4
art/culture play	4
games	1
athletics/sport	4
play with props	3

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**INDIVIDUAL VALUES**  
(personal differences - the individual aspect)

**TOYS USED IN CONNECTION WITH:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. GENERAL INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY<br>- in particular:<br>2. social reference to a specific group<br>3. existential understanding of entirety | 4. directional perspective for life cycle<br>5. independence, self-sufficiency<br>6. practical sense<br>7. mastery and control over the object |
|---|--|

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<b>SYSTEM</b>		<b>PLAY WITH SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES</b>	
recycling	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	construction/accessories play	1,2
LEGO/DUPLO products	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	art/culture play	1,2
Playmobil	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	games	1,2
Fisher-Price	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	athletics/sport	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
construction	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	play with props	1,2,3,4,5,6,7

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A system or construction toy refers to or presents a perspective of the structures in an individual toy or in an entire toy concept. The toy can therefore be:

- a individual toy which is constructed of several loose pieces or elements, e.g. a model or construction
- many different constituent parts which together form a unit or entity
- recycled materials of different kinds - from junk and garbage to packaging and ingenious things or just things other people have thrown away.

**The modern system concept or system toys**

Toys consisting of many small toy pieces, e.g. LEGO SYSTEM Town. Toys such as these have numerous individual parts which include houses, cars, functional figures or dolls, implements and workshops, etc. which can each be broken down into many constituent parts.

Other well-known systems include Playmobil, Fisher-Price and BRIO. A child can also build his own system concept often consisting of many widely differing toys which were not made to fit together.

System toys as brand names - with many individual constituent toy pieces - are popular with all children because they have a consistent style, a unified design which can help underline the system's solid image of reality - or the fragments of roles and functions in everyday life. Play with different toy pieces put together in small or larger units is the child's way of practising creating his own outlook on social and societal structures.

General systems appeal in particular to children aged 3-6 years where the child's principal demand of their toys is that they "look like something", that

they are small copies of reality, good models, small implements, obvious constructions with clear and easily understood building instructions.

Complicated systems with particularly complex models and constructions begin to interest children - and especially boys - by the age of about six years. See chapter 8 - **The toy classification**.

Both system and construction toys refer to obvious, unequivocal structures which are intended to give the child a systematic insight into the mutual relationships between things. This is why there are only a few high quality completely structured system concepts on the toy market because such concepts require extremely clever product development and advanced production methods and technology.

It is “easier” to produce toys which function in isolation or to rely on the children - and their fantasy - to put their own toys together in their own personal play and toy system, beautifully described by Stevenson in his poem: “Block City”:

What are you able to build with your blocks?  
Castles and palaces, temples and docks.  
Rain may keep raining, and others go roam,  
But I can be happy building at home.

Let the sofa be mountains, the carpet the sea.  
There I'll establish a city for me:  
A kirk and a mill and a palace beside,  
And a harbour as well where my vessels may ride.

Great is the palace with pillar and wall,  
A sort of tower on top of it all,  
And steps coming down in an orderly way  
To where my toy vessels lie safe in the bay.

This one is sailing and that one is moored:  
Hark to the song of the sailors on board!  
And see on the steps of my palace, the kings  
Coming and going with presents and things!

Now I have done with it, down let it go!  
All in a moment the town is laid low.  
Block upon block lying scattered and free,  
What is there left of my town by the sea?

Yet as I saw it, I see it again,  
The kirk and the palace, the ships and the men.  
And as long as I live and where I may be,  
I'll always remember my town by the sea.  
(Robert Louis Stevenson).

## **Construction toys**

Construction toys consist of “*many different individual elements which can be built together and taken apart*”, according to Noschka & Knerr (1986).

Construction toys are intended to realise a model. A model is quite simply an analogue of the object about which the person-at-play seeks knowledge and information. During the process of gaining information the analogue replaces the object itself.

Construction toys are motivated by the idea of putting a variety of forms together so children from about six months old can be presented with these toys in the form of geometric figures. The most common of these are six geometric categories:

*bricks, plates, rods/pipes, solids, bars/logs and moulds.*

Back in history these were always made of wood or stone. Today's construction toys are mostly lightweight plastic. Many children are also familiar with a variety of moulds for use with natural materials like clay, modelling clay, mud, pastry and especially sand.

In order to build something, the elements have to fit together in some way. There are six types of connecting principles:

*studs (as in LEGO bricks), screws and bolts, spring lock, snap lock, string or adhesive/glue.*

Through play with these shapes and materials, small children start to learn the elementary construction principles and combinations. They then progress, encountering the same principles but with a variety of degrees of difficulty, different types of models and materials and different types of complexes, dependent on the size and manufacture of the model.

The following ten points represent the kind of knowledge the child will gain about elements/geometric forms - their physical qualities and the relationships between them:

1. Geometric forms are solid, isolated, suitable for stacking, transportable and cannot be bent or broken
2. In addition to colour and pattern, geometric forms have a specific surface, they have structure and they have a certain smell (especially when they are new).
3. Geometric forms sometimes make a sound which changes when they are put together, banged together or hit with other things or when they fall on the floor.
4. Each geometric shape has angles, corners, surfaces, shape, length, width, height and volume and they can be put together to create new angles, corners, surfaces, shape, lengths, widths, heights and volumes.



5. The elements take up space according to their form, length, width and volume.
6. Geometric shapes are named after their shape, length, width and volume.
7. Any one element can be used in different connections which greatly increases the number of different forms which can be made out of a set.
8. There is equivalence between the length/volume of e.g. bricks - Four quarter units placed end to end equal the length and volume of one whole unit.
9. Elements can be arranged and rearranged.
10. Contrary to clay and water, geometric elements are discontinuous (or separate) and can be spread out and gathered together again in a conglomerate pile or they can be put together systematically to create continuity/connection.

Throughout the ages, children have played with natural materials, e.g. stone and wood. Opportunities for play and learning have naturally changed with changes in society and in the materials we use.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were Fröbel bricks. The *LEGO brick*, well-known across the globe, is an invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is based on a principal of basic 4-stud and 8-stud bricks in different colours. Other construction toys with different types of elements are also well-known, e.g. BRIO-MECH and MECCANO elements with holes, nuts and bolts, and soft plastic pegs from K'NEX.

The LEGO TECHNIC construction system is unique. There are hundreds of different units and elements, building instructions and manuals where the structural complexity of the models approaches the level of a functional technical science.

### **A note about “construction”**

There are four general active types of construction (and one passive) . Each gives the builder an insight into the general or specific structure of a model.

1. *Construction* is the act of building or constructing something, creating something new or, with the aid of directions/instructions, making a copy of an existing model.
2. *Deconstruction* is the act of tearing down or taking a model or construction apart, splitting it down so that it is ready to be rebuilt or so that the individual elements can be built into something new.
3. *Reconstruction* is rebuilding, reconstructing a familiar model or figure.

4. *Co-construction* is connecting several ready-built models or reusing model parts from different models.

As the fifth point, construction is also the act of imagining, dreaming about, observing, interpreting, making strategies or “texting” how a model could be constructed. Reading a building instruction or manual is mental construction.

The basic principles of all construction play are outlined below. There are four active and one passive form. They develop in degree of difficulty corresponding to the age and development of the child:

- *stacking/riveting*: from six months - stacking bricks vertically or putting elements together horizontally
- *authentic copying*: from three years - building an exact copy of something the child is familiar with in his surroundings using building elements
- *concrete modelling*: from 3-4 years - trying to shape or form a familiar figure or object in a readily available material: clay, modelling clay, mud, pastry, sand or with the classical wooden or LEGO bricks.
- *diffuse sampling*: from 5-6 years - construction or putting (often very different) objects or elements together in a diffuse or abstract way, resulting in a diffuse or abstract model.

Common to all four constructive play forms is that they are visible, *active processes*. Yet even here (as in the fifth form), the invisible, so-called passive mental processes (they are in fact pretty active!) are part of play as logical and/or creative thought in *imagining* the construction process.

### **Girls’ and boys’ construction toys and play**

Girls’ and boys’ construction toys and play are different (cf. Steenhold (1993,d:7.1.2. and 7.1.3.) and girls are generally nowhere near as interested in traditional construction toys as boys. The biggest difference is that boys like larger constructions and models while girls prefer “micro”-models and smaller recycled things for cutting out/sticking and drawing constructions.

Where the act of construction itself is concerned, girls prefer functional models which can be included in their own personal systems while boys’ focus is concentrated on action and function.

Boys prefer huge things while the girls prefer small, aesthetically beautiful things/models. Boys are - to a certain extent - interested in the process of building per se while girls focus more on the model itself and how it can be incorporated in play. While the boys allow the model to speak for itself, girls include their constructed models in an enormous variety of alternative connections.

*Concerning the nature of the constructions* - the way in which a model is built: Boys prefer hard elements, preferably of the same material and type, and girls use many different types of materials and objects. Boys stack in width and height and make authentic copies while girls stack and rivet in planes, make chains (threading beads) and "fence things in" in addition to shaping and sampling.

It is important to differentiate between the two general methods of building, which are dependent on the builder's talent and ability to construct, i.e.:

- *fantasising and creating freely on the basis of one's own personal fantasy image of how a model should, could or ought to look, and*
- *interpreting an illustration or building instruction and copying a model.*

These two methods are naturally combined but both demand a certain age, maturity and degree of development.

After the age of 6-7 years, few children (maybe as little as 5%) will still possess an imaginative and creative ability to imagine and create completely freely. By contrast, copying - often following instructions or directions which suit the child's level of development and which are not too difficult - will continue to appeal to everyone and any child can do it. Most children will also be satisfied with only being able to construct by copying.

### **LEGO and DUPLO products - synonymous with theory and praxis concerning strategic and system constructions.**

Texts of play with the toys

- *Most boys' play is determined by the model or models.*
- *Before they can play, the children have to build the model - without it, there is no play - and that is sometimes irritating.*
- *I build all kinds of things, sometimes something imaginary, and then I smash the whole thing as if there was an earthquake. It's fun.*
- *I get annoyed when a little tiny piece is missing because it means I can't build the model properly. So I have to borrow it from my best friend.*
- *I build houses and space stations with my LEGO which I play with together with Action Man.*
- *Build aeroplanes, cars, all kinds of things, which I take apart when I need the bricks for something else.*

Supplementary toys

- Ordinary supplementary toys:
  - Other LEGO/DUPLO toys, cars, Action Force, soldiers, cowboys, teddy bear, castle, station fort

- Others:  
Doll, guardian doll, farmyard/animals, transport, machinery, road track, farming, aeroplane/helicopter, train, dressing up, worthless items, Playmobil
- 4-5 year old boys' play with LEGO products and supplementary toys:  
Cars, castle, fort, station, road track, train, farmyard/animals, teddy bear.
- 6-10 year olds and supplementary toys:  
LEGO/DUPLO toys, cars, farmyard/animals, transport, machinery, road track, farming, castle, station, fort, aeroplane/helicopter, train, dressing up, worthless items, Playmobil, Action Force, soldiers, cowboy, guardian doll.

### ***About the toy***

Today's modern LEGO brick is an "automatic binding brick", produced in a highly technological manufacturing process. The LEGO brick is very durable.

An 8-stud LEGO brick is 4.9152 cubic centimetres in volume and measures 9.6 x 32 x 16 millimetres. The size varies by only one five thousandth of a millimetre. On the inside, the bricks have pipes which ensure "clutch power". Six 8-stud bricks of the same colour can be built together in approximately 103 million different ways.

The LEGO brick is often copied and can be found in a variety of versions - although the copies apparently lack some of the qualities of the original LEGO brick.

The original LEGO brick revolution has spread all across the globe and has given millions of children and adults incredible pleasure through play. Today the basic idea behind the brick continues to appear in the many kinds of elements which are part of the LEGO Group's system, construction and technical toys. The motivation for all the products is that the building process is an integrated part of play with the system and with construction with the elements. Many of the individual products include small dolls, figures and animals but these are not the primary factors in the play concept. The primary factor is always construction play and the construction process!

*Control* is a very important factor in many of the flexible, moving (as opposed to stationary) construction models. Through control and manipulation of an object (a model) the child experiences and senses. Naturally, the variety of different control forms increases the opportunities for play and learning. However, the principles governing the control mechanism itself can be interesting and complicated.

This is why it is important to graduate the degree of difficulty of the different control forms in line with children's development.

The following six control forms appear in LEGO models:

*MANUAL CONTROL*, a motor activity - pure motor skills with hands on the toy - children use this from the age of about 12 months.

*MOTOR CONTROL*, a motor activity - where there is a motor connection between the child's hand and the toy. Children can use motor control to control slow models from about the age of two years.

*MECHANICAL CONTROL*, a motor activity - where there is a mechanical connection between the child's hand and the toy. Children are often 4-5 years old before they completely understand the causal connection involved.

*REMOTE CONTROL*, a motor activity - where there is a physical distance between the hand and the toy. As with motor control, children can steer slow models by remote control from the age of two.

*DELAYED CONTROL*, both motor and mental activity - with the aid of a personal computer which is a planning medium between the hand and the toy. Planning control in time is something children can understand from the age of 6-7 years.

*INTERACTIVE CONTROL*, both more and mental activity - a sensor and a PC interact between hand and toy. It is a complex process which children often don't understand before they are 10-12 years old. Many adults have trouble understanding it too.

The child's mental processes involved in controlling a model as they appear in the more complex examples include:

*LOGICAL CONTROL*, where control is *calculated logically* in advance and

*STRATEGIC CONTROL*, where control is *calculated accurately and strategically* in advance.

Simple mechanical control with the model increases play opportunities but very soon becomes childish. The advanced forms of control are interesting and appeal to the children's curiosity but they are difficult for small children to handle. Furthermore, advanced control is often used in complicated models which are difficult to build. Finding the right form of control and combining it at the right time for the right age group is a very tricky business!

**PART VII**

**FUTURE  
PERSPECTIVES  
AND  
SUGGESTIONS  
FOR  
FURTHER RESEARCH**

## **PART VII FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>469</b>
<b>The pragmatic truth perspective .....</b>	<b>471</b>
<b>Research perspectives .....</b>	<b>472</b>
<b>Perspectives concerning toys .....</b>	<b>472</b>
<b>Research perspectives and questions .....</b>	<b>473</b>
<b>Global topics .....</b>	<b>473</b>
<b>Local cultural topics .....</b>	<b>474</b>
<b>Perspectives concerning play with toys .....</b>	<b>474</b>
<b>Research perspectives .....</b>	<b>476</b>
<b>Communication pragmatic perspectives .....</b>	<b>476</b>
<b>Research perspectives .....</b>	<b>477</b>
<b>Play theoretical perspectives .....</b>	<b>477</b>
<b>Reality, fiction and complexity .....</b>	<b>479</b>
<b>Development categories .....</b>	<b>480</b>
<b>Research perspectives .....</b>	<b>481</b>
<b>Perspectives concerned with the ecological approach to play .....</b>	<b>481</b>
<b>The ecology of play .....</b>	<b>483</b>
<b>Research perspectives .....</b>	<b>486</b>
<b>Perspectives concerning learning the “context of play” .....</b>	<b>487</b>
<b>Play between adaptation and resistance .....</b>	<b>488</b>
<b>Research perspectives .....</b>	<b>490</b>
<b>Good toys .....</b>	<b>491</b>
<b>Postscript .....</b>	<b>491</b>

## **PART VII FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Introduction**

Users change as society changes and they have no strong loyalties to the toy market's products!

In current society (1990-1999) on the threshold of a new millennium, the variety of consumer life situations is becoming narrower. The individual consumer has a constant need to differentiate himself from the masses, to make his mark. Individuals mark the differences between themselves and the others by having special attitudes and values which are supported by certain types of products (including toys).

Good products and good toys support this kind of social "making one's mark" expressed as family values in the form of inherited traditions and modes of good behaviour, authentic products/quality products (as opposed to "other products"), special cultural activities and the prestige that goes with having money and being in employment. (In Scandinavian society signalling wealth is widely regarded, however, as unseemly.)

Another way in which to demonstrate a difference is to distance oneself from the others.

The user's existence is motivated by significant life conditions and factors which are based on the norms of industrial society. These norms are currently undergoing drastic changes due to the explosion within communication and the electronics revolution. New conditions in IT society are making their presence felt. At the same time a fifth and very different societal structure is looming on the horizon. This will descend upon us within the next two decades. In many ways, this fifth society is in fact already upon us.

Where industrial society was built on capital, information society is built on the importance of knowledge of the written word, the use of which naturally requires fantasy. However, since much written information is outdated before it can be communicated, fantasy and creativity are required for putting it to use.

In an industrial society, work and co-operation are hierarchical but even now, whenever they receive, exchange or recreate knowledge and experience, many children and adults are already connected in a network. The network is not only a work form but also a platform for connections and interests in which exchange and use of knowledge and information takes place.

Energy is needed to keep the processes going. Industrial society uses fossil fuel - coal and oil - as its principal sources of energy. These sources are very slowly being replaced by renewable sources of energy as society thinks about which areas of society and which of its institutions need to grow or can convert to alternative forms of energy.



Electricity - the basis for electronics - is information society's energy source. The society of the future will be forced to find new sources of energy. In the future, growth and consumption will be limited.

In industrial society, the owner of capital was the key person responsible for development and innovation. In information society, the key people are those who have and can communicate knowledge. The impact of communicating knowledge is also important. The correct form - the correct medium, story or narrative - must be used.

Industrial society used sophisticated forms of special tools. Information society's most important implements are PC Internet systems and television. The implements of future society will include virtual reality and Internet communication via television.

Work as an idealised form of social intercourse was the factor which more than any other connected people in industrial society. There was no time to waste so, even for children, work and play coagulated into total institutionalisation and activation.

To a certain extent, the same applies for information society but allowing interests, occupations and indeed play to melt together with "work" is becoming increasingly apparent and accepted. This does not necessarily mean that work and play are always one and the same thing but where they do melt together, this is often in accordance with family values.

On the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, alternative time factors are materialising. This is the case not only on the labour market but also in leisure and vacation time. Vacations are being reformed into several shorter holiday periods in which people can realise their dreams. Opportunities for doing this are created by increased mobility due to ever lower transport costs. The world is getting smaller!

A belief in the utility of individual effort on the labour market combined with knowledge was a characteristic of industrial society. There is now a tendency for religion and knowledge to melt into a single entity, motivated by historical events. Many people dig around in their spiritual and religious roots (in history and heritage) hoping to find strength there for their meeting with the future - a search which is in many ways reminiscent of play.

Where consumption is concerned, this search has developed in two directions:

- political consumption - including "green", environmentally friendly trains of thought are prevalent. Consumers' own justifications for this are founded on emotional and idealistic pictures of the society of the future built on an idealistic picture of the past as a "clean" society.

- irresponsible counterpoint to the political consumer - the belief that the real thing is only worth having if it does not present too many problems
- or the belief that the consumer can carry on consuming and doing just as he likes.

This is the background for the concluding chapter and perspectives of this book.

### **The pragmatic truth perspective**

How far any given thing is true is a matter of whether there is correlation between *a statement* and the *case relations* to which the statement refers. The truth is the same as the relation between statement and case relations. Aristotle should have defined the truth as:

*Falseness is stating that a being does not exist and stating that a non-being exists.  
Truth is stating that a being exists and that a non-being does not exist.*

Habermas (1973:211-265) is not entirely convinced that this theory of the relationship between truth and untruth is correct.

A recipient who doubts a communicated statement about something real may choose to ask the sender for a new statement which better documents or confirms his meaning. New statements can then also be brought into question and this creates an opportunity for dialogue and argumentative discussion. This brings about an extension of the idea of truth which generally entails that the person who is said to be right is right. The man whose rhetoric is strong is always right while the man whose rhetoric is weaker is wrong.

This means that truth is therefore not a relationship between the sender, the statement, the recipient and reality. According to Habermas, the truth depends on how far a statement about reality can be defended (by dint of fortune or strength) against a given opponent or recipient.

Any truth therefore becomes a truth with personal modifications, affected by relative understandings. Truth must then be regarded as a “consensus phenomenon”, containing more or less of the truth. Consensus is achieved only via constructive dialogue and the idea of the “ideal conversation”. However, as neither the truth nor the ideal conversation exists, according to Habermas, the driving force for arriving at the truth must be the *ideal* of the conversation.

The truth about a statement, play, a game and a toy is therefore relative and extremely complex. The truth is relative in relation to an external limit for the environment in which the individual participant’s understanding of reality operates. This understanding is itself determined by the different roles,

personal and individual intentions and the level of communication between the participants.

As demonstrated in the three communication models, play with toys contains innumerable permutations and variations.

For the observer or audience, *play is made up of scenarios with situation images* which probably also seem sufficiently reliable in relative terms so as to present an opportunity for us to give a relative description of what is going on.

We must, therefore, conclude that:

*for the participants, play is a series of scenarios which (to the extent that these are suitable for the participants' mutual communicative relationships) may consist of a series of relative truth situations. However, the statements between the participants about the toys and the play universe must also be in agreement with the understanding of or agreements made about "fascinating distortions or legitimate, wonderful lies".*

## **Research perspectives**

Studies into the different stages of the play triads with particular focus on development and flaws.

The pragmatic maxims and the triad system seen from the point of view of a variety of spheres of research and in a research perspective related to experimental play.

A discussion of universal pragmatism's often utopian requirements as a dilemma relative to the legitimacy of corruption and deception within play and games.

## **Perspectives concerning toys**

The majority of definitions of what toys are cite a connection to one or more general definitions of play.

Toys are therefore often attributed widely varying significance and value, dependent on how the definitions of play or the person-at-play are formulated. Seeing a toy classification in an overall perspective can be difficult if the toys themselves are defined with reference to other general theories than the established theories concerning play. Alternative play theories have, as a rule, nothing at all to do with toys.

By toy classification we mean, therefore, *the distribution of toys in a specific number of co-ordinate or subordinate subgroups. The classification is presented in the form of a structure which facilitates an overall perspective.* What this book is about is *not* the stimulatory characteristics of the individual

toy for a child's general development. It is about which toys certain families with certain life styles select or deselect for play or social interaction.

Attempting to list objective criteria for assessing toys has always been a difficult thing to do. The integrity or falsity of the objective moment is formed on totally individual ideas about the characteristics of the toys the individual observer finds interesting. Furthermore, play with toys is always subject to changing conditions and takes place in different circumstances which call the objectivity of assessment into question.

Assessment research is motivated by control over toys, materials, educational aids and objects, equating these with play programmes and teaching plans. Such research takes the form of field studies of play and teaching, sometimes in the form of comprehensive research projects. Ethical and moral criteria are usually included as are criteria for advertising and marketing targeted at children.

Many industrially produced toys fail to live up to the definition "good toys". They devalue the respect accorded to the original object. The reason for this is that they are devoid of artistry and intellect.

- Good toys stimulate the user on many different levels, encouraging physical, mental and intellectual perseverance, endurance and vision.
- Good toys are not "too good" to be used and played with.
- Many good toys can also be used in several alternative ways and in several capacities at one time and can possibly be combined with - or contribute to strengthening the merits of - other toys.
- Good toys must meet one unconditional requirement: they have to be strong and durable.
- In terms of aesthetic design, toys should preferably meet the needs of the user.

## **Research perspectives and questions**

Global topics - local, cultural topics

### **Global topics**

As with so many other suggestions for toy and play research topics, there is currently almost no data material available about the main subjects and tables in this book. For this reason, Appendix 4 supplies the following data:

Summary of information and data which is intended to inspire new research within the following areas:

- *complete bibliographic surveys of toy research*
- *international toy sales statistics*
- *toy market “globalisation” - trends and consequences*
- *gender differences in play with toys and in toys*
- *the effect of play with toys on cognitive and creative development*
- *war toys and co-operative toys*
- *cultural differences in play with and utilisation of toys.*

## **Local cultural topics**

### **See appendix 4.**

Appendix 4 also includes a survey of topics which could be the subject of basic research into toys and play. Several of the topics will be researched for the very first time.

Technical production is international which means that the same products are found all over the globe. National and regional products disappear and this means that not only our world but also the children’s world of play is shrinking, becoming stereotype and limited in scope.

However, eradicating the incredible, beautiful differences in national cultures and styles also vulgarises and impoverishes the true value of objects and obliterates essential traditional, historical and local historical values. In other words, the loss of cultural differences means the end of society’s multiplicity and the death of the good story.

## **Perspectives concerning play with toys**

Play is confirmation between people. Confirmation occurs on the basis of living processes, dependent on what the persons-at-play feel, comprehend and think. Play is also a confrontation in which the persons-at-play sense new recognition and understanding.

Toys as objects and implements represent a substance connecting the many facets of relationships between the persons-at-play or between the persons-at-play and the toys. Such relationships occur in a universe which is dependent on both relativity and logic and which requires dialogue. Dialogue, conversation, play and interaction are matters of trust, openness, mutuality, immediacy and intimacy.

When play is true, the dialogic is metaphysical. The persons-at-play can experiment with the dialogic.

The dialogics of play exist in three different phases. Each of these depends on the person-at-play concluding different situations of play in three phases - firstness, secondness or thirdness (based on necessity, existence and

probability, respectively) in order to fully comprehend these terms within the dialogue.

The relationship between these terms is therefore an expression of realism. The terms must be seen as eternal logical phenomena because if, for example, we are to understand the being and value of a person or thing, we know from experience (through intimacy, dialogue and experimentation) that we must investigate how the person or thing acts and what concrete consequences we can expect their actions to have.

In play - *in firstness* - things are sensed and experienced within the perspective of the time in which play takes place. Experimentation and exploration with the things become logical *events* which exist regardless of how they are thought up by the person-at-play. The person-at play tackles events, things and implements mechanically and thinks of them as if they were subject to laws, which are real even though their causes are unknown.

The transition to *secondness* is characterised by the absence of the regularity of temporal logic. The person-at-play knows exactly what the *events* (*encounters*) are - but he never really knows *when* or in what order they will occur. Furthermore, he is not able to describe the laws governing them and cannot give a logical explanation for what is happening.

In the transition to *thirdness*, the legitimacy of the event (encounter) consists of the opportunity to predict that someone or something will act in a certain way in certain thinkable circumstances. Ego-consciousness in the way the person-at-play acts will bear the signs of self-awareness.

As in so many other cases where toys are concerned, problems and criteria associated with evaluation of *objects* are tripartite because the toy is a sign, a symbol and interprets the time in which it is produced.

Triadic areas of research within metaphysics - and construction of the play triad itself - suggest that a toy or an object used in play can be interpreted in terms of a triad:

*“A sign, or Representamen, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object.”*

Consciously or unconsciously, we attribute value to phenomena (e.g. toys) and actions (e.g. play) in our environment. In the same way, we make conscious choices between familiar norms and values - without, however, pronouncing any form of categorical judgement expressed as a positive statement!

Any thing or object, prefabricated as a toy or not, will always be emphasised in play on the strength of its own value or meaning because the person-at-

play makes his subjective choice, constructs connections, conflict structures and courses of action within the fictive framework of play.

*As long as a given toy reflects society and as long as play reflects a true problem, it is not difficult to list moral requirements for the presence of the universal pragmatic theses. However, the persons-at-play definitely do not always agree on the extent to which the toy is false, play a sham and the dialogue simply a game. Meanwhile, the question of whether a "truth" is a real truth or a real lie belongs in the realm of existentialism.*

Under any circumstances, the *idea of "deception"* in this connection can be legitimately used if we consider that we are all equally capable of testing each other's threshold for truth - or capacity for cheating convincingly.

### **Research perspectives**

1. The forms of expression and being in firstness play are unconscious but fundamental for general human development. There are avenues for exploring tragic perspectives for the individual's capacity for sensing and then recognising in cases where the imaginative forms of expression and being are not accepted as natural and human.
2. The encounters, moments and often violent confrontations leading to recognition in secondness play form the basis of understanding, openness, self reflection and social/individual consciousness.

There are avenues for exploring the tragic perspectives of the individual person's opportunities for existential experiences and confirmations in cases where a confrontation between two opposing parties and time for the individual to reflect are not accepted as being natural and human.

3. The consciousness, tolerance, harmony and mastery of situations and episodes in thirdness play are the foundation of the individual's consciousness of his own harmony and identity. There are avenues for exploring the tragic perspectives of the individual person's opportunities for attaining a position of personal strength and identity in cases where the opportunity for developing and demonstrating personal characteristics and capacities are not accepted as natural and human.

### **Communication pragmatic perspectives**

In the section of the book which discusses play as a communicator, we ask the question: "How do the different cases described by Buydendijk, Huizinga, Chateau, Caillois and Sutton-Smith relate and give messages to one another?". The question is answered by describing the communication model for play and toys.

1. Communicative consciousness (feeling and intuition for communicative and dialogue-related action) is important to the matter of the control system of the "I", of the person-at-play. (This is also described in connection with firstness, secondness and thirdness and the triad concept in Peirce's system, Buber's dialogics and Jayne's concept of "I".)
2. On the strength of spontaneous, random analysis and critique toys are attributed a number of meanings. This means that the basic meaning of toys does not always appear compositional.

The reason for this is that toys have meanings attributed to them, forced onto them - are, so to speak, "saddled with" meanings - which originate in ideological, fundamental ideas which in many cases have nothing whatever to do with the basic idea of the toy in question.

### **Research perspectives**

The communicative relationship (i.e. with reference to the sign systems, case relations and interpretation) becomes twisted and the real significance of the toy is distorted. For this reason, there are the following important research perspectives in relation to the communicative value and evaluation of play with toys:

1. *Play with toys is in no way released of an ethical or moral evaluation because play with toys is often a series of symbolic actions containing values and norms.*
2. *As play with toys does not always refer to action, it encompasses a possible situation in which values, norms and interpretations of existence are threatened.*
3. *Play with toys which questions the validity of the current understanding of existence, thus testing out norms and rules, ranks - in terms of ethical and existential criteria - higher than play which simply copies traditional norms and values.*
4. *Toys and play which ideally fulfil human needs within the framework of social justice and harmonious society will - ceteris paribus - be of higher quality than toys and play which lack this perspective.*
5. *Play with any individual toy contains existential critical-utopian perspectives but this is in itself insufficient grounds for attributing the toy high quality.*

### **Play theoretical perspectives**

Play is an action in which participants communicate honestly and legitimately and refer to the various expressions, contents and co-ordinating case relations for the toy(s) and play. In play, systematically connected



communication is converted into relevant messages and therefore creates contact, is honest and interesting for the persons-at-play.

Play and communication, which are dependent on life, are characterised by existential and pragmatic dialogics. They can be attributed both individual and cultural life forms of which transitions and schisms are characteristic.

When something plays with the person-at-play, that “something” can be other persons-at-play, a toy or the environment. Play occurs as interplay between hegemony and emotion. Two of play’s elementary forces are competition and demonstration and both are present at all levels in life, either visibly or invisibly. Play is therefore often ambiguous, totally contradictory and full of conflict.

Play contains energies which the person-at-play tries to master by means of disciplined experimentation with the norms and rules of the environment and by planning accurately where, how and for how long play will occur.

The basic form of play is determined by six different opportunities for development: free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, regulated and *fictive*.

Play always takes place somewhere between two opposing poles: tumult and concentration. It contains dynamic aspects which are competition, chance, imitation and euphoria with which the person-at-play experiments in order either to gain mastery or to submit. Play also contains three types of qualities: cultural, institutional and *corrupt*.

The person-at-play plays one or more of the six possible roles during the play process. In the play process itself, there are always reversible/irreversible processes and periodic/non-periodic processes.

As stated, Caillois (1958) was the first researcher to cast doubt on the concept of quality seen from a relativistic point of view. Just as *play* ought to be seen from a relativistic point of view, so too should the *quality of play*. The three different types of quality - cultural, institutional and corrupt - must, therefore, be regarded as unambiguous and specific and yet integrated.

According to Caillois, “corruption” must be seen as a quality of play. Both the toy and play deceive because they *pretend* to be a real instrument in a real situation which is far from true.

Both toys and play are fictive instruments in a fictive sphere, meaning that play invites legitimate deception, cheating and corruption under conditions to which the persons-at-play mutually agree and confirm between themselves. If they did not do this, then play would no longer be play.

One of the types of quality in play is object transformation. Einsiedler (1986) points out that play is dependent on the level of metacommunication between the persons-at-play because it is metacommunication which maintains,

develops and ensures order and system in play and adjusts the persons-at-play's roles in relation to one other.

Furthermore, toys' significance for play depends on their design. In well designed toys, *the degree of reality and complexity* are self-evident. Such toys create a metacommunication which determines the intensity of play and of the dialogues between the participants. Einsiedler calls this process *object transformation*.

Object transformation can of course be either positive or negative depending on the genre, relationships and play themes, the age and development of the persons-at-play, the design of the toy(s) and the way it/they are used in play. It is important to note that very few toys point "forwards" (are futuristic). The vast majority of toys point "back" to something which exists or existed in the past. For this reason, toys and play will also be determined by each other because toys and play *text* one another (on the foundation of the child's gender, age and experience).

### **Reality, fiction and complexity**

In the author's experience, a child does not have the ability to differentiate between the fictive world (fiction) and the real world (reality) before the age of three. For this reason, all the young child's descriptions of events and episodes which he has not experienced at first hand in the first 3-4 years of his life must be fiction (untrue stories or plain and simple lies!). Before the age of 4-5 years, explanations even from the child's closest friends, siblings and parents have to be taken with a pinch of salt. It is not until the age of 4-5 years old that child is capable of abstract thought (metacommunication) and object transformation - based on experimentation and fantasy - in relation to his own experiences of mastering situations and objects. Only then is the child able to connect his own experiences to informative messages.

By about the age of six, a child can differentiate between fantasy and reality but he is not capable of making a clear distinction between the world of fiction and the world of reality until he is 10 - and in some cases 12 - years old. From the very beginning, fiction is, therefore, the child's primary medium for formulating his own experiences of his environment and of play. Information from reality is therefore most definitely secondary and begins only later to gain significance.

A child's methods of communication are, however, not only determined by his individual development but also dependent on other factors, including context, culture, etc. This means that it is up to the observer to interpret/translate the child-at-play's many metaphorical, fictive expressions as they appear in play, in dialogues, in narratives and stories - because, until the age of 12, the child-at-play's way of expressing play is fictive, not informative. And because adults formulate their experiences by means of a general, informative, descriptive

and conceptual use of language, they find it difficult to understand and translate children's fiction-based modes of expression.

The various types of metaphors and fictions in children's play cannot, however, be interpreted without taking into account the way these are produced or how they are presented and communicated. Interpretation or translation of the text of play is therefore both a *relative* and a *complex* matter.

This is most clearly demonstrated in adults' focus on children's aggressive play, e.g. boys' war play filled with killing and "murderous shrieking and wailing".

These metaphors and fictions within play are all about something completely different, i.e. through play with experiments, scenarios, manipulation and parodies, children achieve and experience their way to a knowledge of justice and morality, life and death and the limits for aggressive patterns of behaviour - the very opposite of aggression, war and violence.

It is very often impossible to interpret or translate all the complex meanings in play. Besides, to a very great extent, the meanings vary according to tradition, the knowledge of the participants, their personality, experience, age, etc. and the context of play.

### **Development categories**

Despite the fact that this book clearly illustrates how play and toys have each developed, the observer will still find it difficult to interpret/translate the significance of the *immaterial categories* for play and the *material categories'* significance for toys. I believe that children make sense of the world using concepts, expectations and a comprehension of their own.

They not only see the world as it is but also as they are at a particular time. There is no "1:1 ratio" between the world and the child's impression of it.

A child's fictive picture of the world will, therefore, always be decisive for what becomes fact. For children, there is no external data they can pick up which leads to a theoretical picture of the world or a theory about life and living. Experience alone is no guarantee for adaptation and comprehension. Man has collected experience over thousands of years of daily contact with the physical world around him without having concluded anything about its simplest statutes. Previous knowledge and experience are important factors which ensure that conversations and dialogues are as alert and relevant as possible so that the relationship between "partners in dialogue" or participants in play can create a basis for experience, learning and understanding.

It was Peirce who formulated the *fundamental categories* within pragmatic maxims by creating a triad system for a variety of spheres of research and investigation - which I have taken the liberty of equating with play!

Peirce's terms firstness, secondness and thirdness are a realistic outline of a development process through which a person, by means of his recognition of the circumstances in his milieu, uses these logical phenomena to make sense of necessity, existence and environment.

It was Jaynes who described the development of the origins of consciousness and the "I" through three stages - and who also stated that for a human being to function, consciousness is not necessary and that consciousness is a relatively recent invention, dependent on history. And it was Buber who stated that the foundation of values for dialogics only exists on the strength of the will of "I" and "Thou" to act on a common desire for immediacy, mutuality and intimacy.

By comparing these outlines of developmental processes, it is my intention to show that alternative knowledge about developmental categories related to sensing and experience of real situations and fictive spheres may help to *interpret* what children play, do and say in their socio-cultural network and interactions.

What is still missing are *interpretations* and *translations* to tell us what children play, do and say really means!

### **Research perspectives**

Caillois research: What kinds of toys appear to be real instruments in real situations but are not?

Einsiedler research: Studies in object transformation with reference to different types of toys and degrees of complexity.

Research into the ability of children at different ages to differentiate between different metaphors and fictive forms of expression in play and play with toys.

Research into different methods of interpreting and translating metaphors and fictive expressions in children's play and in play with toys.

Child development processes seen from the perspective of cultural transition.

### **Perspectives concerned with the ecological approach to play**

Ecology is generally a term used to describe studies in mutual adaptation between Man and his immediate environment which is constantly changing.

Whether future or present ecological development is seen in a positive or a negative light depends on the observer. Authors such as Berg-Laase (1987), Winn (1984), Postmann (1983), Zacharias (1987) and especially Spanhel (1991) take a critical and partly pessimistic view of the future.

Their critical attitude has inspired new avenues of thought in the European ecology movements. The new ideas also include the conditions for children and for play and creative activities now and in the future.

The starting point is that modern society today unfortunately presents children with fewer and fewer opportunities for play and less and less space for play. Several tendencies indicate that this is so:

*Man in modern society lives in a symbolic milieu. Parents, pedagogues, teachers - the entire adult world gives everything an immutable meaning. Children are forced to learn these meanings and to act in accordance with them.*

*Furthermore, adults often demonstrate limited understanding and patience when faced with the fact that children must find meanings of their own and form opinions of their own through the world of play and they must learn to see things from several different angles and create fictive images of the world with which they can experiment.*

Consequentially, everyday life (the world in which the children are living) is not structured to meet children's real needs or to accommodate learning. Rational and functional principles and adult interests and opinions are given higher priority than the factors which are important and indispensable for children's development, i.e. play environments in which children can develop freely, satisfy their elementary needs and stabilise their egos.

By way of contrast, consistent commercialisation of children's needs, interests and desires is based on psychological knowledge. The toy industry, the media, organised leisure activities/systems - and consumerism - confront children with tempting supplies of games "disguised" as new types of activity. Furthermore, commercialisation seeks to encourage children to acclimatise to certain social norms and certain socially acceptable patterns of action and behaviour from an early age.

Under these circumstances, opportunities for play are therefore limited. At first and as long as they are very young, children cannot see through these "disguises" and cannot be expected to resist the temptations. Where children at risk are concerned, the burden of expectations from the outside world which is closely connected with patterns of action can cause an imbalance in structural understanding and damage the psyche.

### **The ecology of play**

The following descriptions suggest how we can view and analyse play from an ecological perspective. These points are based on:

- practical research and observations which are part of the book's project description.

- bibliographical references to ecological analyses of children's play, especially Einsiedler (1990) and Spanhel (1991).

Play must be seen as a context, not only as "a specific form of action".

As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs of Part VII, teaching in the form of control over children's play is not desirable because children need opportunities to be free to play. Freedom is a visible and optimum context consisting of *the environment, the circumstances, everything inside the external borders of the eco-social environment.*

*The environment also includes the cultural patterns* of which the children are part, also the relationships and contacts of which the children are part (as soon as they come into contact with other adults and children or with new, different and interesting objects) - trust, hatred, fear, dependence, anger, etc.

*The circumstances* present another problem in describing the context, although the circumstances are part of the environment. *What the circumstances are is a question of delimitation* and they also present problems in defining reality.

What this means is that play must be regarded as an activity at some level other than the level of ordinary, realistic and typical actions.

*Play occurs in a special environment and is subject to special circumstances.*

(The environment and circumstances do not have to be anything "special" as such but the children must be able to attribute them "imaginative and special significance".) Play is a superior form of communication which neither defines nor limits patterns of action but rather suggests or outlines them.

Play tends to suggest or outline certain circumstances for patterns of action in which some actions are more significant or influential than they would be in everyday life or living.

This explains the specific way in which children move around in play within the completely natural, social and cultural environment. By organising actions in a special form within the context of play (play creates its own circumstances and environment), children create a special form of reality which is entirely their own.

In each individual game, activity or action, children establish new models for relationships with new data and information about what is happening in the environment within the circumstances of play.

*The creation of play is therefore a unique event - and play is only played on the merits of its content of exciting, creative and unexpected elements.*

*Openness* is a fundamental characteristic of the relationship between children-at-play and the data and information about the circumstances and the objects/toys they are playing with.

As quoted, Piaget calls the fundamental implements a child uses for sensing his environment “assimilating schemes”. These schemes are the child’s thoughts, emotions, will, imagination, evaluation and patterns of action which he uses freely and unreflectively in relation to his environment. The schemes are really self-motivating but the child has to learn to tolerate and adapt to them.

This means that data and information from and about the external environment, objects and toys within the context of “play” are only used as a kind of “fodder” for the self-motivating, free and enjoyable use of the assimilation schemes. The assimilation schemes are used on all things and objects within the child’s reach. Certain special schemes are used on certain, selected objects.

The child does not concern himself with the question of whether objects and toys are attributed certain values or meanings or whether these things demand or need something of the child. The child adapts the environment and the objects to his own abilities and ideas, needs and desires, emotions and rules, dependent only on any decisions he may have made with the other participants in play.

*The context “play” as a closed system of actions always presents special opportunities for learning.*

Earlier chapters of this book have mentioned that in play the person-at-play can “enter a different world”, that a person-at-play can play “deep play”, “the total meditation of play”, euphoria, etc.

In this connection, Goffman (1973) indicates that play has “closed features” which have nothing to do with the person-at-play’s mental situation during play. The closed features are what happens within the “context of play” (play’s self-created circumstances).

He describes play as a “located activity system”. Play is thus removed from other external life contexts and gains a large number of potential meanings, actions and interpretations. Figuratively speaking, play takes place in a “crystal box”.

Specific opportunities for learning are to be found precisely under these circumstances. Due to their open relationships to other persons-at-play, objects and toys, children develop new patterns of interaction all the time. All of them become more and more integrated and continuous as play progresses.

Bateson (1972) calls this learning from the context of “deutero-learning”:

*During these learning processes the inner system of the game receives no new information from the external surroundings. The children receive no messages or commands from outside, no fragments of information about some toy or other, no references to what they must do or how they should play. The children achieve new patterns of relationships and integration for themselves, other persons-at-play, the toys and the text of play.*

*Learning from the context of play* is therefore something very different from traditional school learning systems and other methods of learning. It is based on comprehending experiences with relationships which simultaneously include physical, sensory, emotional, motivating, evaluating, symbolic and cognitive factors.

This form of learning is not only self-motivating but also self-determining and it is based on self-confirmation.

*“Self-education” and self-realisation are possible within the “play context”.*

The “play context” makes specific changes to the internal metacontext. For example, the play context can alter the overall structures of how the child organises his thoughts, emotions, will and actions.

According to Bateson, these contexts are not at the same level because there are not only contexts but there is also the metacontext which is about the context and then there is the metametacontext, etc. This is demonstrated by the following example:

1. In play, the child is first led by his unconscious instincts and needs, emotions, desires and dreams. The comprehensive experiments which the child practises in interactive processes with his environment when he plays are primarily his own experiences through which he achieves self-awareness.
2. Playmates’ reactions to the play of the individual child’s play activity and behaviour demand reflection. And through reflection, the child can create an image of himself on which he can then expand.

In creating individual play and play habits which vary from one age group to another, children develop strategies which are models for their self-realisation. They invent play suitable for satisfying specific needs and which gives them emotional experiences which enable them to tackle inner conflicts, desires and needs.

*Children use play as an unrivalled symbolic means of expression for telling others about their needs, anxieties and joys. Through play with other children they learn how to adapt their own needs relative to the other participants in play, to agreements and rules. Play guides children towards development of permanent patterns of interaction.*



*The correct **play environments** offer the opportunity to integrate play in the metacontexts of everyday life.*

From the ecological perspective and from the perspective of this book's background research, by "good play environments" we mean surroundings which offer children opportunities (commensurate with their abilities, needs, desires and interests) for *organising their everyday lives in a variety of open combinations in play and other contexts.*

Even the youngest children organise their own activities spontaneously in a variety of contexts so that "play" itself teaches the child from an early age how to differentiate between playing and not playing.

Finding out whether an action within a certain sphere is to be called "play" or "not play" entails giving a general message regarding *the classification of messages*, e.g. what is the value of certain actions with certain meanings in play and in other contexts?

Children's capacity to communicate on a metaplan is most clearly demonstrated when children leave the context (i.e. let play "rest") while they discuss the further development of the game in order to reach agreement on the rules or to adjust the existing rules.

At the same time, children learn that it is not always possible for them to play (together). Children also learn this from parents, pedagogues and teachers (their social surroundings in everyday life) who allow them to play.

Children learn how to organise different aspects of their everyday life, daily routines, homework and leisure time. They learn from their social surroundings which contexts they may use in order to form metacontexts in their daily routines and how and for how long the context "play" can be incorporated into interaction.

## **Research perspectives**

Can play's self-created circumstances be optimised and what are the communicative consequences for the persons-at-play?

Openness is a fundamental characteristic of the relationship between a child-at-play and the respective data and information about the child's surroundings, objects and toys he is playing with. What kinds of play and toys restrict opportunities for openness?

Goffman et al(1959,1967,1973) call what goes on within the "context of play" (play's own self-created sphere) the "closed characteristics of play". Which "closed characteristics" of which games create specific opportunities for learning?

The context “play” alters the inner metacontext in a specific way. I would welcome examples of the general structures in the ways in which the child organises his way of thinking, his emotions, his will and his actions.

Everything points to the need for us to be aware of what’s going on in children’s play environments in the future. I would like to see accurate descriptions of children’s play environments!

### **Perspectives concerning learning the “context of play”**

The recurring wish of many parents and pedagogues is for evident “teaching in play”. Their wish is based on the results of functional research and on the positive effects of play where play in a disciplined, controlled form has been used in teaching and learning situations.

These so-called “play processes” contain simple directions, instructions, control and evaluation of the children’s “play” - which is critical and catastrophic seen from relativistic and ecological points of view.

Since many aspects of our lives, including education and development, are subject to prior planning and functional control, free play with spontaneous and creative processes is often regarded as misplaced behaviour which some groups of adults seek to stop as soon as it starts.

Curbing free play is the opposite of the meaning of and attitude expressed by the following statement:

*Play as an original, unique and necessary part of children’s lives can only be expressed and effective if it is free and independent.*

The statement presupposes that what children need is freedom to play - not a teacher’s control over play. Let us then answer the following question which is a central tenet of the ecological approach to play:

*Which internal dispositions and external opportunities are absolutely necessary for children’s play to develop freely on both inner and external levels?*

I.e. the consequences of directed play as opposed to learning the “context of play”.

*How do you teach a child that free play is an important part of life? - especially when many groups of adults find it difficult to see any value at all in free play?*

Learning, experimenting, inventing, creating life’s contexts always represents a problem in relations between the child and his surroundings.

There is no sense in teachers' paying special attention either to:

- a child's play-learning or
- a child's desire or ability to play.

Similarly, simply offering the child a stimulating environment, play areas and good toys is insufficient.

In connection with the rationale of a research project into "Quality in Children's Lives", Dencik (1988:27-46) states that there is:

- A parallel tendency for the child to show great involvement as a person if his parents abstain from (over)nurturing.
- Increasing professionalism of child care.

Dencik indicates that, where socialising children is concerned, the way parents bring up their children and the degree of professional involvement in child care together make rearing children more "a feat of engineering" (from the parental point of view) and less a question of passing on values and attitudes to life.

In practical terms, this means the tendency is for:

- *a pedagogical approach to children's everyday lives and the environment in which they are growing up. The activities the child takes part in are intended to be "stimulating", "useful" or "developmental" - although no-one seems to know for what purpose.*
- *a pathological approach to undesirable aspects of a child's quite normal behaviour."*

Dencik (1988:42)

"Normal" behaviour tends to be defined narrowly on the basis of "functional requirements" without taking the pedagogical aspects into account.

The consequences are that the undesirable aspects of children's behaviour and actions at the level of play - which would otherwise have been healthy experiments and creative manipulations - are subjected to treatment and seen as something pathological. This also applies to children's different experimental ways of manipulating (treating) objects (toys).

This statement helps to explain the eco-pedagogical movements' pessimism where children's play in the future is concerned.

### **Play between adaptation and resistance**

Sutton-Smith (1991) does not share, however, the eco-pedagogical movements' pessimism about children's play in the future nor is he pessimistic about the future generally. He regards ecological theories and ideas about the significance of the environment as a vital summary of the

mass of positive functional experiences and activities and as a victory for humanistic-existentialist thought and philosophy.

Children's lives in modern society are affected by abstract time structures, the functional conditions of vastly different schools and institutions and "floating" social connections. This much is clear to all of us. However, throughout the history of human survival, children's capacity to adapt has always been filled with human creativity, inquisitiveness and inventiveness and has furthermore developed to such an extent that it in fact exceeds what we normally imagine a child is and can do "by nature".

Why not see these characteristics of children's and their families' lives in a positive light? Man in modern society *is* learning to understand and use modern implements of technology and communication - including new kinds of toys, games and activities.

Sutton-Smith points out that there is ongoing professional debate among psychologists and pedagogues concerning today's children's tendency to neglect solitary play vis-à-vis the exaggerated significance of social play.

*Solitary play is just as important as social play because it incorporates a more immediate way of utilising toys while social play incorporates a more immediate way of utilising play and games.*

In using the term "neglected solitary play", Sutton-Smith does not mean that children play solitary play too infrequently. He refers to the qualitative opportunities which solitary play provides for the child to develop and adapt (and thus adopt new opportunities for behaviour and activity by means of good implements and good toys). Sutton-Smith's (1991) definition (comprehensively revised by the present author in connection with the content of this book) is:

1. The ability to lower expectations re the value of interaction with others.
2. The ability to accept compensatory satisfaction from non-human things and beings (machines, e.g. PCs).
3. The ability in solitude to sustain engagement with toy or tools/implements.
4. The ability to master the characteristics and stimulating opportunities inherent in these implements.
5. The ability to resist hidden or slating anxieties from parents concerning a toy's worthless and yet fascinating characteristics.
6. The ability to use a toy flexibly - either by playing with it realistically or by using it as a realistic tool.
7. The ability to accept or respond to his friends' sub-cultural understanding of what is "in" through recognition of the interests and values spread in and by the media.
8. The ability to accept the media in our society while maintaining a qualitative personal understanding of them and a critical response to them.
9. Most importantly - the ability to promote a humorous attitude to the media phenomena surrounding us and by participating or showing an interest in children's sub-culture and developing intuition about the signals transmitted

by games through which the toys maintain their unproductive relationship to reality.

*The incentives for play must then concentrate on:*

- *openness in the relationship between the child and his environment*
- *importance of an open and safe play environment for the child everywhere and all the time in his daily life*
- *that the child's surroundings encourage and permit him to play*
- *that the child is permitted to play freely and constantly to create new patterns of relationships.*

Learning the context of play involves developing, testing, practising and consolidating the child's inner regulation strategies to ensure a balance between the different directions within habituation.

This is an absolutely indispensable precondition for the development of the child's ability to apply himself and to cope with what his surroundings demand of him, e.g. problems in school. Modern society is changing so that the pressure on future generations' ability to adapt and to learn will increase. These two functions of free play will therefore become more important to children.

In order to cope with the demands of the future, we have so far only tested the exclusive application of play to improve learning processes and make them more efficient.

In the future, we will have to be aware of the fact that, through their own free play, children will learn strategies for mastering, presentation and realisation of, knowledge of and insight into a new era with which even their parents will not always be familiar. With knowledge and insight, children will be able to cope with the new challenges and at the same time they will be able to preserve the human world.

## **Research perspectives**

Which inner dispositions and external opportunities are absolutely indispensable for free development of children's play on the inner and external levels?

Research into the entirely new complex of opportunities for learning new patterns of behaviour and activity by means of the latest electronic implements.

Research into the revised version of Sutton-Smith's nine point list.

## Good toys

Whether a toy is a good toy or a bad toy is always dependent on the person-at-play. What is required of a toy is therefore determined individually. It follows that an understanding of the extent to which a given toy has qualitative play value is therefore relative!

Based on the previous chapters of this book, what follows is the author's most abbreviated and precise summary of *the general and pivotal aesthetic theoretical and play requirements* which can be used to identify a "good" toy.

Aesthetic theoretical requirements:

- *A good toy is universal.*
- *A good toy has empirical relevance through its referring to practical examples.*
- *A good toy must facilitate deductive use in order to support the intentional aspects of the process of detection, assimilation and creation.*
- *A good toy must be defined inductively on the strength of the truth of the object's (for Man, universal) existence.*
- *The definition must be applied abductively with reference to the general utility and serviceability of the object.*

General play requirements:

- *A good implement or a good toy always appeals to the person-at-play's interest and curiosity.*
- *A good toy encourages and activates new and alternative ways of playing and interaction with other people - and may favourably end up being part of the person-at-play.*

## Postscript

The aim and intention of this book is to identify *the toys children* and their parents in the decade leading to the year 2000 *prefer to play with*. Apparently, certain things are more valuable and important for some children than for others!

In connection with children's and their parents' purchase and play with certain types of toys (on occasions where children would give their eye-teeth to have a specific toy product), I often wonder: *Do children use toys to help them to learn about life via the fictions through which they interpret it?*

There is no doubt in my mind that, from a very early age (three years old and in many cases much earlier), children demonstrate a free and very strong and independent will ("I want") to own specific things and that many children impose their will by force on astonished and frequently despairing parents.

Small children need material items and objects in the form of toys in order to gain basic knowledge about fundamental natural laws, everyday life and implements and their use.

Slightly older children (from about three years), with their fresh recognition of everyday life and life's many perspectives which they play with for all they are worth, begin to seek a wide variety of different types of material which, through play, can set dreams and fictions in perspectives which can then be interpreted in innumerable exciting ways.

Children use toys in the process of teaching themselves to be able to interpret perspectives in (everyday) life, to "translate" and in any case "to recognise" the things which happen in everyday life. Permit me, if you will, to call this *learning to translate the "text" of everyday life or maybe the "text of life" itself.*

However, behind any text, there is a sub-text and in every life scene there is more going on backstage. Children very quickly become conscious of the fact that things are often more complicated than they seem to be at first glance. Situations and episodes in everyday life do not always turn out and develop predictably.

From an early age, children recognise that situations, images in their mind's eye and dreams have to be put in perspective, interpreted and re-defined.

Some situations are interpreted in the same way by everyone - other situations are interpreted differently according to the experience, social background, heritage and environment, etc. of the individual. Meanwhile, ethics and morality also creep in where the use of certain implements and small toy copies are concerned.

If we look at perspectives such as *good/bad, right/wrong, good/evil, beautiful/ugly, heroic/cowardly, etc.*, we have to look closely at *the people who use the term and the kind of actions involved.*

Children must start by playing and experimenting with the often comprehensive concepts of action related to these perspectives. They then have to interpret, text and translate them before finally reaching recognition.

It is a generally accepted fact that consumers view and react differently to different toy products. Their response is actually different to the same products. For this reason it might be a good idea to base a survey of consumer segments on consumer elasticity.

In practise, however, it is extremely difficult to measure the very small individual differences and similarities which determine the differences between consumer groups, between consumers as individuals, between products and between different versions of the same product. (There are often only slight variations between one version and the next.)

And this is what this book is all about.