Chapter 5: Toys, Tots and Torts: the Politics and Poetics of Playthings

A Doll in the doll-maker’s house,
Looks at the cradle and bawls:
“That is an insult to us.”

~ W. B. Yeats, “The Dolls”

"Barbie proposed to G.I. Joe, and she won't take no for an answer"


...a child, depending on his age, loves apples, pears, dolls, and other little things, the most his eye can take in, and perceives wealth as the act of accumulating little pebbles, but as he grows older, he loves living dolls and accumulates the possessions necessary for human life.

~ Marguerite de Navarre, L’Heptamèron, quoted from Yassana C. Croizat, “Living Dolls: François Ith Dresses His Women”, p. 124

As for my disposition, it is of the sweetest. Possessed of matchless philosophy my placidness is unbounded. You may according to the impulse of the moment of your fancy, caress or flog me, kiss or strike me, hold me topsy turvey, or dash me to the ground; I shall smile nonetheless.


Barbie is clearly a force to contend with, eliciting over the years a combination of critique, parody and adoration. A legacy of the postwar era, she remains an incredibly resilient visual and tactile model of femininity for prepubescent girls headed straight for the twenty-first century.


We are thrilled and frightened by the mechanical toy because it presents the possibility of a self-invoking fiction, a fiction which exists independent of human signifying processes. ... The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries mark the heyday of the automaton, just as they mark the mechanization of labor.

~ Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. p. 51.
Toys, dolls and puppets are a complex set of children's texts: at one level, they are objects through which the children learn, accommodate, internalize the normatives fixed by the adult panoptica; they form a major part of the debates regarding children's healthful leisure and its utilitarian appropriation; they are also metonymies of the real objects and structures that they have to negotiate in their concrete socio-material life; at the same time, they provide the space for fantasy, including the fantasy of selfhood as the toys effectually work as objective correlatives and incremental follow-ups of the self-mythifying mechanisms of the mirror. They are also one of the most heavily consumeristic elements for the modern child-as-consumer. Dolls offer the owner/user a fetishistic substitute for the body he/she admires but cannot possess, and then actions he/she wants to build upon the fantastic object can be manually carried out on the petty object-doll.

The doll, although featuring prominently in many [mostly female] children's lives, has found little attention from the academic psychoanalyst community. In the history of psychoanalysis, as in the history of traditional psychology, the doll has not been found much worthy of examination. Freud dismissed the doll [Olimpia in “The Sand Man”] in his discussion of the uncanny because she did not symbolize Oedipal issues very well, even though initially in the essay on the uncanny, he mulls over the mechanical waxwork figures, the dolls and the automata.

On the surface, we might think of dolls and toys as innocuous items meant to neutrally accompany and amuse the children, typically girls. However, a historical exploration into the economic, social and political utterances, institutes and events that surround the birth and growth of the toy or the doll would open up the child’s plaything as a site of contestation among many discourses and praxes. G. Wayne Miller in Toy Wars: The Epic Struggle between G.I. Joe, Barbie, and the Companies That Make Them attempts a historiography of the economic evolution of the American toy industry from small, family-run businesses to Fortune 500 corporations. Miller's detailed case study quickly puts to rest all those warm-hearted versions of toy companies that have appeared in family films such as Big or Toys. The world of the toys and dolls are not only the world of child's entertainment and their invested sociogenesis of

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1 Kittie Carriker, Created in Our Image: The Miniature Body of the Doll as Subject and Object. (Bethelhem :Lehigh University Press, 1998) p.9


behavioral codes but a money-making zone within and with commercial rules and operations. The locus of production, circulation and consumption of G.I. Joe and Barbie is a setting of profit margins, strategic forecasting, corporate reshuffle, and aggressive takeovers, not to mention the peri-textual advertisemental mechanisms carried out through the trans-generic tie-ins. We have witnessed in Chapter II of this dissertation how multiplex the sale of commodities, the business of films and the dissemination of ideologies had become in Disney's exploitation of the toy-animation-goods-ideas association. Just as John Newbery realized that he could sell a ball or pincushion with copies of *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1774), publishing of children's texts, toys and utility products has become an intersection of art and commerce; similarly and synchronically the world of contemporary toys combines the world of play and the realm of corporate profit. Children's "books" compete and collaborate with toys, dolls, video games *for children's time and dollars*, and these non-bookish genres are increasingly affecting the publishing industry for children. 4 For instance, In *Playing with Power*, Marsha Kinder brings in the concept of "children's commercial supersystem" as a network of intertextual lure that is assembled around a figure or group of figures from pop-culture that cuts/cut across several modes of image production [such as photography, sculpture, plastic industry, painting, printing of logos, holograms and stickers, textile designing, animation etcetera], appeal to diverse markets, use different strategies for creating a demand, and, foster collectability through a proliferation of [inter]related products. 5 Miller's access to Hasbro archives and interviews with the core executives of the company make his analysis an important case study, disclosing the practices of the highly cagey, reticent yet intensely "gung ho" world of toy companies. Like M. G. Lord's carefully researched *Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll*, 6 Miller concentrates on a single toy company and its signature toy whose personality has come to be identified with the company that produces it. Hasbro is the main focus of Miller's book and the signature toy is G.I. Joe, while for its rival, Mattel, the "proper" is Barbie.

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4 Given the growing importance of children's culture, those working in the area of children's literature need to be aware of the increasing influence of children's toys and media on texts in print-media. Significant critical texts such as Marsha Kinder's *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games from Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley: University of CaliforniaPress, 1991), Ellen Seiter's *Sold Separately: Parents and Children in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1993), and Stephen Kline's *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing* (New York: Verso, 1993) have brilliantly examined the inductive field of toy-texts and media-texts on children's literary publishing. See also Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe [eds], *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).


6 M.G. Lord, *Op. Cit*
These two toy-figures have crossed each other’s paths more than once. One of Hasbro’s attempts to vie against Barbie in the fashion-doll category was with Sindy, an isomorphic simulation of Barbie itself. The imitation was so strikingly alike that in 1988 there was an injunction against Hasbro to stop the trading of Sindy in England due to patent infringement, which climaxed in the two dolls being undressed in court and measurements of their respective busts, waists, hips, and legs taken and compared by the judge. With more than $11.4 billion in annual sales from their flagship product, Mattel does not take clones calmly, and forced Hasbro to stop manufacturing Sindy. But unlike Mattel, which produces Barbie, the most successful toy in the world and the source of nearly half of Mattel’s profits, Hasbro has been more thriving in diversifying its toys. One of Hasbro’s first major successes was Mr. Potato Head, which was marketed in 1951. Hasbro has become the home for such classic toys as Monopoly, Scrabble, Tonka trucks, Tinker Toys, and Lincoln Logs, mostly through enthusiastic acquisitions of smaller toy companies into the folds of its “proper”.

With eleven-thousand employees and nearly three billion in annual sales, Hasbro is most celebrated as the manufacturer of G. I. Joe, which is a semiotic wonder in two ways:

1. It is the metaphor of the American Moveable Fighting Man, an unmistakably aggressive Americanist text in itself
2. It is the world’s first ever canonical “action doll” or rather boys’ doll.

[Picture 5.1: [ left] an original shape of G. I. Joe shows a masculine, hard-bodied, uniformed American soldier but without sophisticated weapons; the motility is also quite obviously clumsy, and [right] a contemporary G. I. Joe doll, with combatant gestures, an alacrity and an agility marking the presence of the doll, and noticeable are the sophisticated weapons.]
The doll has twenty-one moveable parts, a feature that apart from its name and appearance enhances its embeddedness in some assumed action-narrative. The doll-text's expectancy of a violent and masculinist locus, its implied semantic content of an energetic and agile military prowess, and its role as a miniature of the 20th century "destroyer and preserver", namely the American soldier, is undeniable in its anatomy, uniform and postures. However, the circulation and promotion of the doll has not entailed any violent image: Hasbro never allowed any brutal depiction of its consequences—no figure gets killed or injured in any of its advertising. It was not until 1991 that G.I. Joe was allowed to have a weapon that actually shoots. Hasbro also does not apparently have attempted any exploitation of the margins: it does not own cheap-labour factories in Asia, and does not use child-labour and/or prison-labour in the manufacturing of its toys.

The history of Hasbro is not that of uniform success. By 1969 with the public resistance to the Vietnam War and strong competition from other rival actions figures, G.I. Joe was diminished from nearly a foot tall to eight inches and finally, in the 1970s, to a mere three and three-quarters inches. Sales become so pitiable that amidst the diversification of the product line, Hasbro removed G.I. Joe from the market in 1978. Re-introduction of the doll was attempted, but with limited success. G.I. Joe no longer had the sizzle of other more violent and electronically fashioned actions-figures, such as X-Men, Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, or Star Wars figures. With the waning sales of G.I. Joe, and a forty-million dollar investment in an unsuccessful virtual reality game, Hasbro was forced to downsize. In 1992, Hasbro fought off a hostile takeover bid by Mattel, the second largest toy company in the world and the producer of Barbie. However, Hassenfeld managed to fend off the takeover and to forge licensing agreements with Dreamworks, Steven Spielberg's new film studio. Dreamworks produced the doll-protagonist film, Small Soldiers, whose action figures Hasbro aggressively markets, as well as Furby, the hot toy of the 1998 holiday season.

For many decades now, feminist scholars have read more into the purpose of dolls. Some have carped on the doll culture for instilling restrictive gender roles or promoting unhealthy body images for girls. Susan Willis, for instance, critiques the rigid di-morphic genders of the society which produce feminine toys like Barbie for girls and muscular, brawn figures like He-Man toys for boys. In these scholarly works, dolls lose their neutrality and ingenuity;
they become a primary way with which parents socialize girls into expected gender roles and even discipline female bodies. Most classic-feminist scholars have interpreted dolls as agents of a hegemonic patriarchal culture in which girls were passive consumers. The Barbie doll and its mass marketing in the post-WWII era have particularly caught the attention of feminist researchers (and activists).\(^8\) Ruth Handler, the owner of Mattel and arguably the first imaginer of Barbie, claimed that Barbie's body was the model of civilized, hygienic, normative American girlhood:

>Parents thank us for the educational values in the world of Barbie... They say that they could never get their daughters well-groomed before—get them out of slacks or blue jeans and into a dress...get them to scrub their necks and wash their hair. Well, that's where Barbie comes in. The doll has clean face, and she dresses fashionably, and she wears gloves and shoes that match.\(^9\)

Karen Klugman enumerates a number of norms regarding the structure and function of dolls divided along gender-lines; her study proves with ample examples that the _poetics_ of doll-texts/toy-texts embed through their rhetorical strategies the _politics_ of gender segregation.\(^10\) According to her, the major "gendered" traits in the doll-making and doll-playing practices are:

1. Toys with the trope of "nurturing" are rare among the boys while the majority among the girls

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2. The semiological field of the boys' toys is radically different from the girls' dolls. The dolls for boys, like the action hero dolls, are heavily built, uniformed and armed [like in a combat situation], and they display a "frontier" look. John Berger's dictum regarding the visual politics of gender is applicable to children's dolls as well: "men act and women appear". With heavy ammunitions and adventure gears and explosives, the action hero/male dolls for the young boys illustrate that "a man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies."11

3. The gendered Playmobil dolls for male children differ in their colours, accessories and packaging from the unisexual Playhouse dolls. The male dolls of the former series are firefighters, spaceship pilots and bikers. The Playhouse dolls, even if males, are shown in domestic or indoors gestures. The two series differs from each other in their degrees of androcratic subscription.

4. The pastel colours in which the plastic dolls are tinged and the packagings are made or done differ significantly and stereotypically between dolls for boys and dolls for girls. Those which are marked exclusively for girls bear pastel-colour codes like pink, unmistakably precluding the boys from its access or use through their peri-textual invocation to the taboo of colour. On most packages, moreover, there is a picture or photograph of a sweet little girl cuddling, petting and taking care of the doll, be it a girl-doll or a boy-doll. Although some baby dolls are males, there is a conspicuous absence of boys' photographs or illustrations in the outer package: the sight/site whereby the male human child plays with the doll in nurturing gestures in made absent from the consumption-object's spectacularized exterior surface—the very surface that pleads consume-ability of the product inside. The peritextual signifier of the doll-text, thus, is already gendered before the doll-text itself is opened up.

5. Ball-jointed in most cases, and in other cases, at least jointed at elbows [apart from the hips and the shoulders], the boys' dolls represent and emulate anthropoid or sometimes super-anthropoid mobility, operating their weapons and sometimes using even their sacrificial-military body acting as a double for the phallic weapons they use. On the contrary the pink and lavender section of dolls is equipped with self-directed accessories, and these dolls stand for what can be done to them with these

12 Ibid. 47.
accessories. They do not have any phallic protrusion or externally pointing devices, gadgets or weapons to control, operate or maneuver; and their joints being much less [mostly at the hips], do not offer the mobility and manuuality of the boys’ dolls. The dolls for girls therefore emulate a kinetic inferiority, which is also protagonistic secondarly.

6. The boys’ dolls, when emerging as a collection, or a band, of different dolls, do retain their individual differences in name, history, habits and significances of each individual in the pack. But the girls’ dolls move in a group whose members are almost identical, their bodies isomorphic and their dresses polysymmetric for all of them, making the entire plurality a homogeneous charade of one central doll. The implication is clear: a man is an individual but a woman is merely an essential and inalienable part of a group of “women”.

However, it is not that the dolls are only vectors of the imposed or given ideologies; like any other scriptible texts, they can interrogate, counter, unsettle and even challenge the ideologies that have shaped them. More recently, feminist scholars like Jeannie Banks Thomas have argued that “if media advertising invades homes and shapes consumers by pushing products such as Barbies, consumers respond by reshaping mass-produced goods.”13 Having charted the ways in which doll-play and its meaning have changed in the U.S. from 1830–1930, historian Miriam Formanek-Brunell remarks that “while some girls played house in the ways their parents hoped they would, many others . . . challenged adult prescriptions for play as they determined the meaning of dolls in their own lives.”14 This would imply that the toy-texts and the doll-texts can lead into resistant and alternative modes of growing up, away from and spilling out of the confines of their intentional fallacies. Instead of being a text with a fixed meaning being received by the child-reader, the toy or the doll is a site of the active response, making it a site of contestation among different ideologies and practices too. In my analysis of the consumerism-ideology liaison in Disney puppets and animations in Chapter 2, I have mentioned how before 1930s, the standardization of children’s ethically legitimate leisure-items in terms of being “healthful purchases” and reinforcing dominant values in

13 Jeannie Banks Thomas, Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, and Other Forms of Visible Gender (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p.6
tandem was complete, which gave Disney a threshold to totalize the *politics*, moralities and business synchronically. Formanek-Brunell analyzes the changing patterns of the doll-culture in between 1890s and 1930s to infer that for many middle-class white women, dolls had a didactic purpose. American mothers “preferred cloth dolls that taught virtue and understanding” rather than “elegantly dressed china dolls”15 from Europe. Several women designed, developed, and marketed dolls in the late nineteenth century that—in contrast to male doll producers—claimed in their patents that “children needed safe, portable, and durable dolls to teach them about relationships.”16 Many reform organizations, settlement houses, and professional associations of nurses and doctors approved this kind of doll as conducive to inculcating reformatory and integrative values among working-class children. Formanek-Brunell asserts that “Progressive Era dolls encapsulated the values of ‘scientific motherhood’ espoused by urban and middle-class professionals,” a belief that “motherhood now required the development of expertise and techniques, not the blossoming of instinct.”17 Thus, white, middle-class mothers (and teachers and missionaries) believed that dolls could help little girls acquire enhanced maternal skills and domesticative benchmarks.

It has long been an accepted, commonsensical dictum that children’s play, the *context* in which toys and dolls have meanings as texts, is a preparation for adult life. This somewhat restrictive view of play is reflected in traditional viewpoints on Barbie-play and its significance for child and adolescent culture. Many parents, teachers, and others interested in popular culture have confined their estimation of Barbie into a cultural constraint of bipolar opposition, which although *political* in nature appear to be based on a suitability criterion: whether or not this toy helps children practice positive or negative [gender] roles. Erica Rand's *Barbie's Queer Accessories* and M. G. Lord's *Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll* depart from this simplistic reading of Barbie; both these critiques argue that a cultural artifact, even if it is a toy or doll, cannot be as simple as it looks. Rand and Lord both gather a number of information regarding the making of Barbie as a best-selling doll-text, ranging from anecdotal, personal, individual, to corporate, cultural, industrial, commercial etcetera. Rand’s basic question concerns what a child’s relationship is to a toy specifically and to material culture in general. She interrogates "what Barbie play

15 Ibid., 3.
16 Ibid., 4.
17 Ibid., 86
suggests about the place of the consumer in cultural studies, about the place of queerness in relation to mainstream and margin, about the effects of cultural products on ideology, and about the limits and possibilities of cultural subversion as a strategy of political activism”.  

Mass cultural and pop-cultural re-workings of the Barbie-texts do not only situate the readers/consumers of such texts within the intended or dominant values; rather, the creative distortions and diversions of the original Barbie-text into its rewritings might generate dissident and seditious meanings. Mass cultural/ pop-cultural inter-textuality allows one to create art by using and transforming consumeristic and advertising imagery into subversive mimic. While the dominant rhetoric of the multinational companies like Disney is to appropriate, cannibalize and itemize canonical as well as local texts into packaged commodities, the pop-culture’s penchant for collage might actually dislodge and disturb the intended meanings of signs in commodities and fetish. Paul Hanson created "Barbie art" by taking the dolls and turning them into social satire such as the *Tonya Harding Barbie* and *Drag Queen Barbie*. The dispositif of the capitalist houses that had produced the image in the first place is often financial-legal: a copyright or trademark infringement suit. For Hanson, this wrath was manifested in a suit for $1.2 billion in damages, claimed by the Mattel Corporations. Withdrawing dolls from commercial sale and donating them to exclusive non-profit art galleries did not mollify Mattel. Faced with what he describes as a litigious "year from hell," Hanson settled and stopped using ten-inch fashion dolls as his medium.

Sometimes the mass cultural reconfigurations of the doll-texts are worked out more surreptitiously, such as changing the voice boxes in fashion and action toy dolls to challenge the gender stereotypes propagated by children's toy manufacturers as the Barbie Liberation Front did. Even, like the anonymous Barbie Disinformation Organization, groups and agitations might appropriate the manufacturer's very style of packaging its goods and alter its labels on goods in retail stores to replace the corporation's branding connotations with its mimics. Barbie's Styling Salon has been transformed into a Lesbian Barber Shop with instructions for Dyke Haircuts, a Barbie cheerleader becomes "Theme Hooker Barbie," and


the new "Dust Bowl Barbie and Okie Dokie Ken Migrant Farm Family" play-set comes with the caution, "Just because Barbie is penniless and moving cross-country in a desperate attempt to establish a better life for her coming child, doesn't mean she can't accessorize properly." People also spread rumors about corporate brands that create unpredictable fields of interference with commercial connotations. Such ruptures and intermissions in corporate culture made by the mass cultural re-writing of doll-texts, however, are difficult to make widely visible or widely audible; people do not have the capacity to communicate with the velocity and momentum of corporate utterances when they attempt to utter back. Anyways, these instances of Barbie's alterities being produced and circulated, however small-scale and however disputed, do generate the fact that the doll-texts do not have to necessarily entertain the private playground of corporate houses; rather, the playthings can playfully participate in their own deconstructions.

Interestingly, in spite of primarily being children's texts, the dolls do not remain within the perimeters of childishness. The derogatory, often servitudinal and misogynist connotations of the lexeme "doll", the malleability and the passivity of a doll's anatomy, the fetishistic aura of the doll, the fantasy-object doll that can dispel the abject from the doll-player's subject and also fill in the void of the self, the instrumental use of dolls in meta-performances like puppetry, advertisement, animatronics, witchcraft, fanzine and fashion industry—every utterance of the doll-text has a potential and practice that can be violently and rigidly adult. This is one excuse of the Mattel Corporation in being one of the most raucous and vigilant corporate censors in cyberspace. A Google search by Coombe and Herman for "Mattel Lawsuits and Barbie" turned up over 1,250 items, including sexual appropriations, critical commentary, and creative cultural re-workings of the most profitable cultural icon. Barbie Doll Benson, former Miss Nude Canada, has used the Barbie Doll stage name for sixteen years, but only when she launched a titillating web site [Barbie Benson's Sin Circus, http://www.barbiebenson.com/sin/ring1.html ] did Mattel complain.

24 Ibid. 930.
While the commercial and probably moral interest of the company in this type of case is clearer, the attitude of Mattel in response to the online collectors' commentary, exchanges, shows, auctions and displays is ambiguous. Mattel has tried to shut down many of the collector's sites on grounds of trademark and copyright infringement. Its actions in reference to the collectors' activities demonstrate two types of politics of circulation:

1. to usurp the collector community by creating a commercial alternative that offers officially licensed "nostalgia dolls."
2. a tendency to see their customers as a force to be tricked, bullied, or ignored

Harvey Robbins and Michael Finley describe it as biting the hand of the consumer/collector that feeds the toy-maker:

Take Barbie dolls, the world's best-selling toy. There are 250,000 people around the world who collect the dolls, as an investment hobby. In recent years these collectors have begun to grumble that Mattel, the maker of the doll, has been skimping on materials, issuing inappropriate versions of Barbie, and outfits that didn't fit. The dispute stems, in part, from a series of manufacturing goofs and marketing blunders that hurt collectors. Poodle Parade Barbie, a replica of a 1965 doll, was released with hair seemingly trimmed with a chain saw. Then came Barbie's friend, Francie, another vintage doll reissue, whose undersized shoes split when placed on her feet. Mattel also misjudged the market, underproducing some collector dolls and overproducing others, causing prices to soar, then fall. Early buyers of Star Trek Barbie who paid nearly $80 each got burned, for example, when store prices later dropped to about $30 per doll. But the final straw was when Mattel sued a family-run fanzine for trademark infringement, after the magazine satirically portrayed a Barbie with alcohol and pills. Facing the storm from faithful customers, many of whom buy 50 Barbies a year and were threatening a boycott, Mattel CEO Jill Barad vowed not to give an inch. "What I do in my job, first and foremost," Barad said, "is protect Barbie."25

In 1997, "protecting Barbie" was an especially aggressive undertaking that involved a barrage of lawsuits launched against clubs, publications, and Web sites. One site thumped with Mattel's legal rage was Mark Napier's site of innovative web-art-and-discussion dedicated to the intellectual and creative task of semiotic analysis and deconstruction of the Barbie-text.26 The site used texts and visuals, including alterations of the famous doll's face, to explore the role of the doll as an icon of American life. "Barbie says a lot about the world," Napier observed:

But I think it's about time this icon diversified a little. What about all those aspects of our society that are not represented by Barbie? Let's open up the closet doors and let out the repressed real-world Barbies; Barbie's extended family of disowned and inbred rejects; politically correct Barbies that celebrate the ignored and disenfranchised.27

Another web-journal named *Enterzone* site that included a selection of digitally manipulated images of "Alternative Barbies," including Fat and Ugly Barbie and Mentally Challenged Barbie, and also a section for discussing/confessing/narrating the fans' first person accounts of what Barbie meant to them in different phases of their life, was also issued a cease-and-desist letter by the Mattel. Controversy over Mattel's action quickly spread through interlinked Web communities, and collectors, fans and critics joined hand in scathing the monopolistic suppression of artistic/critical discussion, dispersion and devolution of the Barbie-text, culminating in the call for boycott by the fans that I have mentioned above.

These historical high and low points of two most powerful toys of the west, and in a broader sense, of the entire world, would make it clear that the texts involved in what is called the "child's play" and "child's possession" are objects produced and cut by many layers of social and international desires—the corporeal, the fiscal, the pop-cultural, the corporate. Barbie undoubtedly is an index of standardization of the desires that operate through, around and about the female bodily beauty, and thus helps in the propagation of what Naomi Wolf calls "beauty myth". Fuelled by the hugely profitable cosmetic, weight-loss, surgical and fashion industries, the beauty myth's glamorized notion of the Barbie as the ideal [if impossible] body reverberates back upon women as "a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsession, terror of aging, and dread of lost control". Barbie is majorly responsible for creating this type of conundrum of somatic femininity that the female bodies are never feminine enough, and physical beauty and its drapery are never the ultimate one—Barbie misogynically defers the actual female from the latest fashion and the most coveted anatomy.

Barbie is now on the verges of being fifty years old, and roughly one Barbie is sold every two seconds. Ten years ago, the average possession of Barbie per child in between 3 years and 11 years was seven. With each passing cross-section of the diachrony of Barbie's ascent, she takes on newer significance in relation to the changing contingencies. In the contemporary conundrum regarding the cultural fear or repulsion of the voluptuous body and

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the medical worries regarding the almost epidemic anorexic withdrawal of flesh from the body, Barbie holds a locus of significant debates. She inhabits the hyperbole of the hypervisibility of the hypo-body as the body-of-desire, a paradoxical spectacularization of the statistical exaggerations. Standards of the “average” or the “normal” American body have always been imbricated in the discourses of class, nationality and ethnicity. Barbie introduces the cusp of this standard with the replica of the impossibly gendered body, giving the signifier “blonde” a connotation that can only inhabit the place of the fantasy of the re-territorialized rhizome between the hyperspace of the consumerist society and the rhetorical/optic cannibalization of the body by the fetish. If we try to ponder what is the pleasure of her anomalous body, what [if any] alternative meanings can her corporeal paradox generate for the fantasies of self-fashioning of women/girls, and what does the text [Barbie doll] impinge back upon the contexts [the fashion industry and the fetishistic consumerism] like we expect every text to be doing, we arrive at a multiplex and a series of mutations in tandem.

The German prototype of Barbie is the “Lili doll”. From birth Barbie was implicated in the ideologies of “Cold war” and the archives of military-industrial complex of technology. Her plastic mould was designed by Jack Ryan, a well-known man of technology whose contributions in the missile development industry has become proverbial. Just as in case of Disney films, we have noticed an imperial, larger than child-lit nexus between capitalism and international relations, so is in Barbie’s genealogy. Barbie was released in the market in the same year of the notorious Nixon-Kruschev “kitchen debate”, which was the debate over the relative merits of American and Soviet consumer products! Following the debate, media hype made the American model of consumer goods the symbol of comfortable, domestic, urbane or sub-urbane life, saturated with the coziness of democracy and freedom. This discursive platform paved the way of Barbie’s success as a coveted, fantasized and cozy possession.

Barbie’s “torpedo-like” bosoms emerged into the popular imagination as an emblem of prosperity, contentment and the rigid gender roles that became a pivot in the burgeoning post-war consumer economy needing the American dream. The post-war generation of teenagers also found themselves in a distinctive teen-lifestyle, which became, like the children’s leisure in the 1930s, a sociological and industrial survey. The target group of the retailers,
industrialists, studio owners, film producers and toymakers was quickly fixed as the teenagers of the postwar America. Barbie dolls, like Disney’s *poetics*, had the strategic competence to reconcile these multifarious parameters into a totality, iconized by a singular site: the site of its beautiful body. Barbie’s body literally *embodied* the ideal teenage girl of postwar America, the good girl who is sexually attractive but coy, the oxymoronic persona of the ethical spendthrift and the fashion-conscious conservative. Barbie was the template the consumerist society would look for and the solidly middle-class values would still be re-assured by. Initially, Barbie was a bit vampy and Bradotesque as a figure but soon evolved, through the toy-bildungsroman Mattel afforded to her, evolved into an elite, affluent, well-groomed “soc”. 33 Instead of the criminologically designated but fetishistically endemic car-sex, teenage angst and raves, Barbie offered the *Plaisir* of barbeques, pajama parties and shopping as leisure.

The *plaisir* of Barbie depended upon the anthropometric realism of her objects and accessories—specific pair of sandals, handbag, bed-room sets, parasols and so on and so forth. The *poetics* of doll-naturalism contributed not only to Barbie’s charm, but also to an expansion of the retailers’ profits and the middle-class ideology of upward social mobility through the acquisition of objects of comfort. Barbie’s legendary fondness for shopping is heightened by other genres—such as the establishment of her own personal Shopping mall and the Computer-game *Game Girl Barbie*, the goal of which is to take Barbie on a shopping spree. Girls who would be playing with Barbie would learn to buy for her special accessories, and, the training of how to read packages, how to choose on the basis of brand-names and how to link fashion and taste for social status would be accomplished in the process of Barbie-shopping.

Besides the consumeristic induction, Barbie also inculcates gender norms in her readers/consumers. Barbie’s social calendar is already always saturated, and the stories in the fanzines and fan mags show her engaged in the preparation for a happy, feminine, heterosexual social life through the teenage rituals/rehearsals of dates, proms and weddings, for which she repeatedly grooms her looks, her paraphernalia and her gestures. Interestingly, the figure of Barbie has survived many ups and downs in the class, race and gender issues,

especially the 1960s and the 1970s, more steadily than many other texts for children. The ever beautiful bride-to-be figure faced the scathing criticism from feminists in these decades; during 1970s, sales waned and quality deteriorated mostly due to the shift of factory from Japan to Taiwan, and the press also scoffed at the figure repeatedly. But Barbie bounced back soon, with a more diversified wardrobe and a bit of contemporaneity. Originally, her career option was that of a fashion model; soon she has a vaster resume ranging from ballerina to stewardess in American Airlines, from candy striper to teacher, from medical doctor to aerobics trainer and more contemporarily, from corporate executive to animal rights volunteer. Barbie’s expansion of the curriculum vitae corresponds to the ever-expanding professions of Phantom, although they follow completely different logics, gender norms and political contingencies. In chapter II, we have seen that Phantoms have accompanied Shakespeare, Columbus and U.N.O. officials; Barbie has accompanied the American astronauts in their mission and during the Gulf war, she has become a Desert Storm trooper. Thus Barbie apparently encompasses the activities of an ideal model woman in all its permutations and combinations, making her a universal role-model for tomorrow’s women. Interestingly, the more gender neutral uniforms, such as the astronautical and the clinical ones have not sold well in comparison to the glitz and glamour of the draperies from which femininity exudes the pinkest.

Off late Barbie’s lily-white suburban umwelt has been updated and devolved to accommodate changing social values and emergent and/or resistant discourses. Mattel synchronized its introduction of a black Francie with the race riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, and in 1980s, Barbie appeared for the first time with African American hair styles. But these were neither advertised nor consumed to a considerable quantity. The multiculturalization of Barbie’s pre-dominantly blonde body cannot be read as an isolated événement, too—like Barbie’s blondeness, her multi-ethnic lines of flight were severely reterritorialized in terms of the trends of the fashion industry and the emergence of new

34 Jane Leavy, “Is there a Barby Doll in Your past?” Ms., September: 102. Barbie’s success in to let the little girls dream, and not the political correctness of specific dreams.


36 Amina Yaqin, “Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender and Performativity”, Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture, Volume 11, Numbers 2-3, June/September 2007, pp. 173-188(16) argues that even the creation of a Muslim Barbie-like doll Razanne is no isolated phenomena; it synchronized with the time Hijab and Jilbab have become world-wide re-emergence as markers of homogeneity, following controversial, Islam-related debates and international events.
fetishes in the eroto-consumeristic standards. The multiple ethnic and national allotropes that the doll has acquired [like Spanish Barbie, Jamaican Barbie, Far Eastern Barbie, Black Barbie etcetera] synchronized with the parallel preference for racially diverse models in fashion-shows and fashion-magazines. Her cronies now include, amongst others, Chicanna, Hispanic and Asian-American plastic girls. Two things are significant in these racial plurality of Barbie’s erstwhile monochromatic world—an economic calculus of the widening of subscription to Barbie-business, and, more importantly, the semiotics of ipseity beneath the facade of all these devolutions, since all the multi-ethnic friends’ bodies are designed to fit into her costumes, making them interchangeable with a singular Barbie-body. Thus what appears to be an end of epidermalization of feminine beauty is precisely the exact opposite—a homogenization of different racial bodies into one ideal body—the body of Barbie, and every ethnic girl’s readily homogeneous and identical complicity to Anglo-norms. Thus difference is strategically made into a monoculture, and the totalization is accomplished, as in the case of Donald’s imperial pursuits [where the other ethnic, non-Anglonormative caballeros participate in the imperial thematics] or Phantom’s mnemonic whiteness [where Rex and Tomtom both learn authentic histories at the feet of Phantom recalling his forefathers, while Tomtom is amnesiac about his forefathers’ mythological reserves.

Barbie’s female body plays the role of the constant amidst racial and professional mutations. She remains the same body whether as an astronaut or a fashion model, and whether white or brown. On the technical front, her body has been more sophisticated over the years. She has acquired flexible limbs, her hair has grown in leaps and curls, and her smile has been intensified. But the fundamental hyper-slender waistline with heavy breasts has not changed, either racially or professionally. The corporeal calibration sticks to racial purity of the white female body, excluding the other bodies from the perimeters of beauty. In case of phantom, we have witnessed that racial superiority is partly produced, ironically, by the abnormal body of Phantom—masked, costumed, and spectral. In case of Donald, the logics of American selfhood was defined against the Latin American other by bodily contrasts—the abnormal, irreal, animatronic body of Donald Duck and its comic distortions in the course of the plot somehow implicate the live-action Latino/Latina body of being and acting as a dangerous but seductive otherness as my analysis in chapter III has shown. In case of Barbie it is again the constant and striking difference of her body that makes her special, and although abnormal, her body becomes, ironically, the constant ideal.
In terms of realism, Barbie is an anatomical impossibility—an anorexic buxom, so to say. Her anthropometric statistics are given below in Table 5.1, following a 10": 5'10" scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Barbie</th>
<th>Shani [the black friend]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>5'10&quot;</td>
<td>5'10&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest</td>
<td>35&quot;</td>
<td>35&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waist</td>
<td>20&quot;</td>
<td>20&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttock circumference</td>
<td>32.50&quot;</td>
<td>Approx 32&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip Breadth</td>
<td>11.6&quot;</td>
<td>11&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thigh Circumference</td>
<td>19.25&quot;</td>
<td>20&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.1: The anthropometry of Barbie. Source: Table 1, Jacqueline Urla and Alan C. Swedlund, “The Anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling Ideals of the Feminine Body in Popular Culture”, in Londa Schiebinger [ed], Feminism and the Body, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 397-428, p 415)

The figures make it evident that Barbie’s body is a medical impossibility for being claimed as healthy body. Literally, Barbie is also a body rigorously put under self-surveillance, and relentless anatomical policing. The girls/readers/consumers of this doll do have an intimate sense of Barbie’s body in terms of bathing, combing, cleaning, dressing, moving its plastic corpus, and coupled with the social ambition to be like her, are likely to place them under what Kim Chernin has called “the tyranny of slenderness”.37

However, the body of Barbie doll cannot be taken to be a mere plaything of misogynist and patriarchal fantasies, as she is corporeally inaccessible to three patriarchal stereotypes:

1. her anorectic body curbs her body’s maternal or reproductive ideal/compulsion
2. her body is literally impenetrable, being plastic and non-vaginal/non-orificial
3. her body is the body in distinct self-control, not the unruly body of the other.

Barbie’s bodily anomalies, if read along with the fact of her financial self-independence, and affluence, would make her a differend body than the passive, normative body ready for for male gaze and feminine emulation that she apparently stands for. Actually her body is a “cultural plastic”, in a Bordo-esque sense, where all desires and discourses try to make marks and cuts, and the adult, queer, erotic, militant and other modifications that different readers may make to its surface would generate contradictory images and meanings of her body. On one hand she is the

ideal that constructs women's bodies as infinitely deferred from perfection. Implicit in the various strategies of the technologically mediated body-sculpting and surveillance, whose hermeneutic paragon is the Barbie-body, and which women might adopt as the unattainable ideal, is the conception that the female body is inherently pathological. Parallel to this, there is a market-driven motor of the desire to possess, either in one's own body or in the doll's body or in the desired woman's body, the increasingly imaginary body of implausibility, made of malleable, replicable, replaceable technologically mediated parts—the body as the raw material to work out technologized fantasies on its surface. Lacking any substrative or "natural" truth, the Barbie-body has become a simulacral ground for enacting cultural identities. On the other hand, the aporia in the Barbie-body, its radical inner fissures between opposing claims to femininity, its conceit between mammalian/mammarian profusion sans eroto-genitality and anorectic slenderness, its idealness and its imperfections do emanate resistant or unsettling discourses about the woman's body. Ebersole and Peabody as well as Rand have postulated that in Barbie's body and body-related fantasies that are circulated in the popular culture and hyperspace, sexual transgression is just around the corner.38

In the world of Barbie Noir, Barbie and her friends are regularly seen to perform, fantasize or suggest gender-bendings and sexual re-configurations; rumours and re-makings range from Barbie being a Playmate in soft-porn industry to Ken's latent homosexuality. Even Barbie's oniomania has a subversive potential—she is not merely an object to be shopped, but an active shopper herself. Although such potentials are finally couched within the consumeristic ideologies, as she does not, from the other side of the gender divide, exactly represent the homo oeconomicus, but a feminine shopaholic driven by the unconscious libidinal economy.

The doll is a paradox between the uncanny and the semblant: they are miniaturized, idealized human bodies without humanimation. The technological animation of the doll is the source of its uncanny; but Naomi Schor has pointed out that the pleasure of such uncanny lies in the taking apart of the doll-text and examining what it is made of, in other words, the pleasure of the reader-as-critic.39 A part of this breaking apart, in order to have the pleasure of the uncanny, is to deconstruct the ontic status of the doll. The doll is more perfect [as Barbie is] due to its inhumanity than the pathological human. Olimpia or Feathertop are impossibly


39 Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine. (New York: Methuen, 1987)
perfect, and so is Yeats's “golden bird” in “Byzantium”. Umberto Eco deconstructs the “material iconic” by arguing that the iconic sign is not a replication of or analogy to the material object but arbitrarily arranged/coded and therefore even the so-called “iconic” sign may transgress the original object by which it seemed to have been motivated; Barbie doll, for example, is not motivated by or analogous to the object “female body” but articulates more than the ontic object it simulates. The optic and the conventionalized correspondences between the doll and the human body do make the doll an iconic sign of humanity. But in the case of Barbie, it is to be noted, the doll is the subject or the original in certain standardizations, measurements, aesthetics and life-styles while the human female body becomes its object. This reversal is partially responsible, like Phantom’s gothicity [melan (in)cholic parricidal figure sublimated into deathless spectrality], for making the dolls uncanny [the mimetic miniature becomes the telos of the onto-corporeal object and thus occupies the place of the subject that marks and fills the void in the ontological self of the live-body or human]. Side by side, like Phantom’s spectrality realizes his resistance to the demise of colonial agent or like Donald’s animation-irreality embodies realism for the so-called Good Neighbor Policy of America in its interface with the Latin spaces, the doll realizes and gives realistic unity to the spectacularly variegated and fluid world of consumerism, teen cultures and fashion. This would be like placing the doll-text as the pivot of vanity in the unheimlich / “realism” ambivalence of the consumerist networks, synecdochal to the anatomical impossibility/ vestimentary realism dialectic of Barbie, or, for instance, the uncanny and the realism in tandem in Ann M. Martin and Laura Godwin’s Anabella Doll books where the Dolls follow a Doll Code of Honor according to which they can spring to life inside the departmental stores only after the closing time. 40 We have already witnessed Barbie’s negotiation of an anatomical perpetuity/stasis and her hyper-agile contemporaneity of good taste through the same doll-body and its accessories—a feature that can also be considered as the doll’s “realism” to the world of desire and purchase:

40 Stephan Fuchs defines realism as the externalization and attribution of a network’s outcomes not to the network but to the world itself, or that part of the world which constitutes the network’s referential niche. “Realism is operationalized as something that can vary...this includes variations in a culture over time; the consolidation of a network as it ages might produce more realistic confidence than in the beginning phases of a young network about to be formed.” See Stephan Fuchs, Against Essentialism: A Theory of Culture and Society, (London: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 296. Addressing the relations of language to experience, the body to scale, and narratives to objects, Susan Stewart looks at the “miniature” as a metaphor for interiority and at the “gigantic” as an exaggeration of aspects of the exterior. Seen in these ways, the doll is both a miniature of essence and a gigantic realism of imperatives, norms or standards vis-à-vis the human. See Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).
Realism is comparatively static and constant. It can change, but does so by contemplating itself into more and more “perfection”.41

The doll-text can be said to stride and semantically steer two different modes at the same time: it makes culture, at once, by acting liminal [betwixt and at the limits of miniature/ideal, subject/object, play/normativity and circulation/possession] and acting realist [durability, exteriority of desire, vestimentary realism, systematic closures such as “role-model”, iconicity, perfection, few uncharted territories or holes, statistics, “figure” in the sense Nancy would have used the term etcetera]. In other words, Dolls—inhuman—are models of human and models to human at the same time, the first prepositionality being the cause of its uncanny excess [measured, say, in contrast to the canny closures of the other onto-mimetic objects possessed by the child], the latter attribute functioning as its realism.

At the backdrop of this cultural unconscious, marked by a struggle between realist and luminal possibilities, doll-texts have to negotiate with those obsessions untranslatable into the themes of realism. For example, the Barbie-mania of the fans, evinced by the quantity of their per capita consumption is an obsession: an obsessive, Lacan tells us, maintains his desire in an impossibility that preserves its metonymic conditions.42 Barbie’s body, the same with the female child consumer’s yet entirely different and deferred from identification, is marked by metonymic concentrations—breasts protruding and waistline thinning out. The narcissistic desire that lies beyond the request [demande] of the consumer—since Barbie’s body is beyond any actuation of the narcissistic praxis—is fulfilled through the untranslatable petty object. Untranslatable because, at the level of the unconscious, the hyper-convex breasts of Barbie, and, her impossibility to be identified at the moment of the fantastic by the body of the same [i.e., the female/girl], in spite of being an object of the identifier’s desire to emulate, makes her a phallic object of desire to be possessed or envied, even if the object is already territorialized as the ideal of feminine beauty. A girl possessing Barbie presents herself to consumerism as “wanting to have a phallus” that would restore her erotic value. The sign of desire, the erect phallic object, is at the same time the object of desire, the object that attracts desire, and the object that hieroglyphically inscribes the desire for a presence in the place of impossibility. So the calculus comes out something like a collapse or conflation amongst the phallic object, objectification and the fantastic object at the site of the doll-body. G.I. Joe is on par with his

own phallicity, but Barbie is a more complex case. She is much like a feminine re-working of Alcibiades's demande of the Other's [Socrates'] desire for him, a phallicity that alone can serve him as sign of the other's desire. Barbie has to enact her object-status as capital Phi [the substitute phallus] as well as the gender-status of lowercase phi [the imaginary castration] through her own embodiment. And albeit like Socrates did to Alcibiades's desire, Consumerism would do to Barbie doll: a "dialecticization" of desire, liminalized in the non-vaginal surface of Barbie but realisticized in the dress-code that can clothe the anxiety of bodily castration or lack by the bounty of elegance, honour and desirability. Yet as the same time, Barbie's non-penetrable plastic surface is also the doubling of consumerism as "presence"—the real presence of the doll as a substitute penis for the girl who consumes and plays with it, and the absence of the absence of the penis [vaginality/genitality] or the absence of the lack which might otherwise act as the locus of the genito-submissive desire that the phallic object penetrate it—for the female body of the girl who plays with Barbie can never be the projection, injection or introjections of Barbie’s impossible body. This aporia is the fundamental constituent/ poetics of the Barbie-text, the place of lack being crypted in the profuse-thin body of the Barbie so that the haunt of maternal phallus is nihilated but at the same time the phallogos of consumerism is re-treated through the disappearing appearing of the densest knot that straps feminine lack unto feminine possession, like the Phantom’s freezing of the parricidal moment both in its disappearance [named by his immortality] and its appearance [traced by his library], one being the Blakean contrary of the other. At a more political level, the obsessive consumer’s object is able to excite her desire for possession of the object, as long as the association with the mother’s body is not unveiled; once this association is revealed, the contraband object [beautiful body] can no longer be desired but only idealized [Madonna maternal mammary] or abandoned [the maternal body abjected, and the anorectic function nihilating the maternal and castrating the phallic in tandem by the object-body's shrinkage]. In Disney’s The Three Caballeros, it was Donald’s animation-irreal body that deterred the epidermalized and gendered other’s desire by auto-castration, and in case in Phantom, it is his body’s erasure by polysymy, invisibility, masking and spectralization that produced the imperial and the colonial totalizations respectively. In case of Barbie doll, it is the point the capiton between desexualization and sexuation of the doll that enables the postivization or aufhebung of the consumerism: “let us aestheticize the abnormal-yet-ideal body, and, totalize the multiplex desires around it".
The wooden-doll, a rhizome of [dead] nature, the cultural craft of carpentry and the anxieties of *humanoia*, named Pinocchio, is another instance of how the apparently innocuous doll-texts interrogate and inform culture; besides, through the picaro-puppet's narratives of its experiences with the human, sub-human and the superhuman worlds, it also problematizes the human's attempts to author the mimicry of becoming. Pinocchio is a doll-text that inhabit and emanate from a page-text and gets disseminated into the other forms of representation and formation like film, puppetry and theatre, not to mention his satirical appropriation in common parlance [the doll-body's cautionary narratives of corporeal excess/deformation as a poetic justice for amorality [telling lies, or bunking schools, for instance] is swapped and warped into a greater politics of comic defense against the other's face in our social interactions.

In *Pinocchio Goes Postmodern*, analyzing over a century's worth of Pinocchios, Wunderlich and Morrissey explored the ways in which different versions reflect and respond to the ideological and historical conditions under which the doll's narratives were produced. In doing so, they find the abridged versions marketed to schoolchildren particularly disturbing. The Ginn edition of Cramp's translation (1904), for example, was hardcore didactic and majoritarian; it erased almost all references to social class, removed the inbuilt criticism of adults and was "skewed towards industrial moralism". 43 This school edition of *Pinocchio* acts as a dispositif against the growing labor unrest, "provid[ing] guidance not only for the child's future work role, but also for the way the child's parents are supposed to act towards their own employers". 44 A re-working of the text into *Pinocchio in Africa* (1903) reinforces the superiority of white people; it is a continuation by Eugenio Cherubini (also published by Ginn), which made its American appearance in 1911 and was being sold to American elementary schools through 1953—the year before *Brown vs. Board of Education*. As "an apologist for the colonial project," *Pinocchio in Africa* "is a clear example of a reactionary ideology being foisted upon children by adult authorities." 45

The "original" *Pinocchio* was a fundamentally subversive text: Pinocchio wrestles with difficult choices in his bildungsroman, must make his way in the absence of consistent and dependable adults, and learns to cope in a corrupt society. For instance, when Pinocchio goes

44 Ibid. 39.
45 Ibid. 146
to the Courts of Justice to report the Cat and the Fox for monetary theft, the Gorilla judge sends him to jail—a clear satire against the skew operations of the law. Citing this scene, Wunderlich and Morrissey write:

Collodi's critique of civil authority [...] is scathing and unsettling. There is not a single competent, compassionate or decent civil authority figure in the novel. 46

The only way for Pinocchio's re-acquisition of freedom and justice, ironically, is to lie, claiming that he is a criminal so that he can be included in the Emperor's amnesty for prisoners. Only by adopting a criminological anchorage, the incarcerated body of the doll can be made available to the visible levels of political moralities, exercised by the humans. So, far from being a tale that didactically scoffs at lying, Pinocchio "suggests that lying versus telling the truth is not as straightforward as it might appear". 47 The text's densest moments lie in its willingness to name and describe difficult and anomalous realities, and in the agency it gives its "antiauthoritarian hero" to address those realities. 48 In the process of knowing and naming the difficult and anomalous realities through language, Pinocchio is insulated from what Vygotsky would claim as a reciprocity of the sociogenetic induction, because of his doll-ness and thus his orphanhood, like Barbie [in the original version]. His humanoid, enlivened couplings with the social and the material are already-always an exercise in alterity, but for the desire to steal the other's Other's jouissance "I'm sick of always being a puppet!" cried Pinocchio, slapping his wooden head. "It's about time I became a man, like other people!" 49 He learns through slippages, his own self being a slippery signifier for ever deferred from the anthropocentric transcendental, because even after becoming a "boy" he is distanced and estranged from his prima matter, and forever split:

"I wonder where the old Pinocchio of wood has hidden himself?"

"There he is," answered Geppetto. And he pointed to a large Marionette leaning against a chair, head turned to one side, arms hanging limp, and legs twisted under him.

After a long, long look, Pinocchio said to himself with great content:

"How ridiculous I was as a Marionette! And how happy I am, now that I have become a real boy." 50

46 Ibid. 23.
47 Ibid. 18.
48 Ibid. 203.
As opposed to the celebration of doll-as-differend in the original-text, Nicolas Sammond explains, "What makes [Disney's] *Pinocchio* (1940) an apt metaphor for the metaphysics of midcentury American child-rearing" is that it is "ultimately an assimilationist fable." The film-text addresses an audience at the juncture of shifting industrial consciousnesses and promotes assimilation to a particular view of *nationhood* (especially for recent immigrants) as well as *childhood* (especially for those who were actually being replaced by adult immigrants in the workforce due to labor reforms and compulsory education). The American Dream, which finds its apt imagery in Barbie's affluent shopping spree, is recited in this film-text through the consumerist's awe and wonder at the *power of wish*. *Disney's Pinocchio* opens to Jiminy Cricket singing "If your heart is in your dream / No request is too extreme / When you wish upon a star / As dreamers do." These anthem-like phrases spell out a consumerist ideal of permitted passivity, as opposed to the more picaresque version of success through hardship, because "Like a bolt out of the blue / Fate steps in and sees you through." In the novel, Pinocchio is carved from an already "living piece of wood" that amidst its nascent body-without-organs speaks and even starts a fight between Geppetto and Mr. Antonio by shaking loose to hit his creator in the shin. The agency of Collodi's puppet is immanent from (what is later described as) his "birth":

> How it happened that Mastro Cherry, carpenter, found a piece of wood that wept and laughed like a child. 53

And,

> He set aside the hatchet and picked up the plane to make the wood smooth and even, but as he drew it to and fro, he heard the same tiny voice. This time it giggled as it spoke: "Stop it! Oh, stop it! Ha, ha, ha! You tickle my stomach." 54

Yet, in the Disney version, Pinocchio is simply an inert dummy until a proven "good" man makes a sincere wish on a star that his aesthetic output come alive and be "a real boy." The film explains Pinocchio's agency as temporary and conditioned, granted by the Blue Fairy in order to test his eligibility for reterritorialization as a human molar. Both Pinocchio's sentient

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54 Ibid..
animation and, later, his authenticity are the focal points of the plot development, whereas in the Italian original such themes are less pivotal, his agency being an immanent and his becoming human being just one of many picaresque becomings. Honeyman comments:

Disney's revision/adaptation of Collodi's Pinocchio exemplifies historical changes in American culture (from industrial to consumer capitalism), particularly in productions targeting children, wherein dependent passivity is encouraged over autonomous agency and an illusion of attainable authenticity is presented as more desirable than challenging experience, responsibility, and opportunities for independent decision making. For instance, both his recruitment into Stromboli's troop (where the doll-body is incarcerated and enslaved, reifying its immanent motility into a commodity-performance, a spectacle too) and his detour on Pleasure Island (a demonized version of Playland) are for the most part decided externally in Disney's text compared to the oft machinic volitions of Collodi's boy-puppet, who is the subject of his own difficult, though usually dire, choices to act [as he does]. Disney completely externalizes the decision-making process by relocating Pinocchio's conscience in another character, Jiminy Cricket, based on just one of the nameless [but scrupulous] hauntological voices who try to didactically guide Collodi's Pinocchio. The death of Jiminy Cricket is the disintegration of the Big Other, and Disney replaces the enlightenment ideals by the consumeristic urges—the wish-upon-a-star placation that one essentially has no culpability, aptitude or humanist action; just wishing (and somehow wishing right) will make one's dream come true. The Blue Fairy’s discourses of magical wish-making have totally occupied the site of Jiminy Cricket, as the postmodern "wish karo" imperative replacing the “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” of Americanness. Honeyman interprets this substitution of the moral superego by the external imperative to “wish or have the correct pleasure” as a political maneuver:

The tendency of postindustrial toy narratives is to idealize passivity by romanticizing the object position. Take, for instance, the Toy Story films (1995, 1999), where the toys prefer passively playing possum while being played with (“loved”) by human children over moving freely as they do when left alone. Or Leo Lionni's Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse (1969), where the real mouse would rather be a wind-up toy in the company of another like himself than be real and self-propelled. Ultimately, Alexander uses his magic pebble to wish for Willy the toy to become real, but only when there is no longer a point in being wind-ups because the child gets a new set of toys. Is the hidden lure a desire for love and conformity or, as Lacan might say, "recognition" from within a hegemonic, commodifying normative gaze? In Toy Story 2, Jessie, the cowgirl-character from the toy set based on Woody's TV shows, might provide an answer when she describes a toy's experience in being played with by a loving child-owner: "Even though you're not moving, you feel like you're alive, 'cuz that's how he sees you."
Such a aufhebung of passive-animate doll-ness, or synthesizing the petty subjectivity of the object for being attended, played or toyed with, would exteriorize the cognitive authority as well as the authority of pleasure principle, just like Phantom would exteriorize his quasi-divinity in terms of the readiness of the native and primitive mythopoeia of the jungle people to call him god, and externalize his facial concealment in terms of the mortal limits of the other’s gaze [“the he who looks into the face of the Phantom, dies” as per Old Jungle Saying]. In Phantom, such exteriorizations generate a sense of non-culpable colonial continuum amidst evanescent individual moralities, which would result in the colonial gothic. In case of the doll-texts or doll-intertexts like the several versions of Pinocchio, the marionette’s submission to the gaze of the exteriorized compulsion to wish generates a sense of consumerist good manners, i.e., the non-fraying performance of the obligation to wish surplus pleasure from the “Postmodern superego” as Žižek would call it. 57

But such externalization of the quasi-sovereignty of pleasure and rebellion is not found in Collodi’s text. As opposed to Barbie, Pinocchio is an example of what Ann Lawson Lucas calls, along with the literary character Alice, “nonmodel children”. 58 In spite of being “the pivotal nineteenth-century masterpiece of the nation’s children’s literature”, and in spite of the fact that the central character has “acquired a mythic status as iconic images[sic] of individualism in childhood”, the narrative highlights something different from the ideal of the homogenizable child and betokened a new imagination for the writing about childhood. Pinocchio is a pioneering example of the child “independent of adult control” as the protagonist of a children’s text, and is much free from homogenizable constrictions by inhabiting a nonstandard world. 59

Pinocchio breaks another generic convention of children’s texts, especially those that derive from or mimic the fairy tales. If the protagonist is a little-human, an anthropomorphic puppet, a miniature threshold to yet an oblique ipseity of the humanist telos, [then] he/ it would previously be placed in a passive role vis-à-vis the world-as-tutorial. But this does not exactly happen in Pinocchio: the word “adventure” in the title suggests that, instead of being lost in a strange world, as in a traditional fairy story, Pinocchio inquisitively go to meet new and

59 Ibid. 159.
exciting experiences; the front-picture of Pinocchio itself suggests a kind of action, volition and determination, demarcated from the surroundings by the erect, ready-to-be-motile posture overcoming the waste land of death, sloth and desolation drawn in the background [Fig. 5.2]

Both Alice and Pinocchio demonstrate their individuality on first appearance in their stories, exhibiting their most fundamental characteristic. Pinocchio's first word, which is spoken to an adult, is "Don't": a denial of being acted upon as a passive matter is expected to be by someone else's mind or manual art, taking issue with the activities and decisions of that adult. He is merely a chunk of wood when he says, "Don't hit me too hard!" and, as the carpenter starts work, "Ouch! You hurt me!" Soon the piece of wood is ridiculing the carpenter by calling out his nickname, and striking him to escape the carpenter's table—a sort of resistance to recipient status, as well as a resistance to engineering. The future puppet is already a cheeky and mischievous dissenter who asserts himself and refuses to be docile body. In this way, Pinocchio is allowed to be the immanent of the natural imperfect child who is indiscreetly audacious but frequently shocked by panic.

Like the doll's docility, the doll's intrepid rebellions also are marked and vectored by its body. Unlike Barbie's miniature crytomp of the abject-maternal and her readiness for the "ethics" of healthful consumerism, Pinocchio's corporeality is the site of mutiny against adult control, and
later, against the ideological state apparatus and the capitalist reification of manual labour. The first of his features to be carved, the puppet's eyes, impudently follow the carpenter's movements, a refusal of Oedipal tagging; the nose is next and will not submit to Geppetto's shaping, growing of its own accord out of all proportion, proleptically upsetting the anthropometry of the doll and later, mimicking the corporeal nature of the disciplinary and punitive expressions of poetic justice [ whenever he lies, the nose elongates]; the mouth laughs and teases and sticks out its tongue as a grotesque, unfriendly version of the *face of the other* to its human-adult maker. The brand new hands snatch their maker's wig, and as soon as he has legs and feet the puppet runs off into the wide world to escape the control of his kindly creator/father.

The story is a sequence of escapes, often flights from reality into fantasy realms and the arms of strange creatures. The doll’s fugitive excess is an interesting trope to note. Unlike the Disney version’s foregrounding of the doll’s will to surrender to the wish of the owner, which we have already read as an index of the consumerist injunction against the individual sense of culpability, responsibility and exertion, the original Pinocchio is defined by his absconding, breakouts, running away, departure. When he is not absconding from education, he escapes frequently from the law, and the name of the father thereof. It is all too ironical, that recurrent exposure to the perils of running away eventually integrates the truant wooden body to the patriarchy of the father-figure, but not before the father has been castrated by the storm, poverty, and the shark’s gulp, and an elusive but hospitable proximity to the Azure Fairy as the perennially available mother [that does not belong to the adult father but always comes back for Pinocchio only] has been known.

The genealogy of Pinocchio is theatrical. Geppeto has originally intended to craft a puppet for the performance show that can be commodified—something that will give him his bread as an artist. Again, in the Marionette Theatre, the puppets are too quick to recognize him as their comrade and brother. The semiotics of this recognition scene is important to analyze. Firstly, the dual role that Pinocchio has to play in the episode [Chapter 10 of the text]—he is both a puppet and so the *same* as the performing marionettes, but he has purchased an entry to the show as a spectator, as audience and hence is *different* from the other puppets in the

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60 Pinocchio is gullible and easily falls prey to the malevolent persuasion of rash and injurious "adult" acquaintances; his moral responses are all the opposite of those required by wisdom. The crooks again and again hegemonize his fugitive and rebellious ardour, but he is mostly deceived by those who take advantage of his quick amity. Unlike the elite Barbie who has the fittest of friends, and that too in select numbers, Pinocchio’s picaresque intimacies are not well-bred by class or choice but by the indiscriminating altruism most often.
economic and scopophilic *politics* even at the instance of re-union. It is the doll’s ambivalent relation to consumerism that shapes his over-determination by the economic; the doll Barbie is both a highest sold commodity and a regular purchaser of commodities from elite and special malls, and Pinocchio is both a potential on-stage spectacle and a spectator of the aesthetic/entertainment commodity. Secondly, Pinocchio, if a kinsman of the theatrical puppets, is destined to hard work, because while dolls like today’s Barbie are meant to be played with, the theatrical puppet is meant for visible work. Lucas observes:

...the Commedia dell’Arte is the origin not only of Pinocchio’s style of dress, but also of his personality, with his propensity for (slapstick) physical disaster, allied to the irrepressible and humourous resilience of his spirit, the spirit of the little Everyman who will bring trouble upon himself but will survive all forms of oppression and aggression. 61

[Fig. 5.3: Pinocchio in the puppet theater, by Carlo Chiostr, illustrator of the 1901 edition. Harlequin, Pierrot, and Pulcinella (Punch) are present.]

Thirdly, the popular entertainment within which the doll is “recognized” is a transgressive and subversive comedy, and being anticipated on the stage of the Marionette Theatre, Pinocchio embodies as much defiance against the authority and its institutions as his wooden body literally almost became timber as a punishment for disrupting the “show” by his non-performative, non-utilitarian presence. This third predicament can be read as an allegory of the *poetics* and *politics* of children’s doll-texts: the doll engages the creative and *political* tensions of entertainment as a differend between the need of conformity and the factum of dissent, and between the inhumanity of the system and the *inhumanity* of the art.