

Chapter 11

## A WORLD MADE FOR EXPLORATION

Germans and Their Toys, 1890–1914

David Hamlin



And between two wars, little Johann played. Unconscious and tranquil, with his soft curling hair and voluminous pinafore frocks, he played in the garden by the fountain, or in a little gallery portioned off for his use by a pillared railing. ... [He] played the plays of his four and a half years—those plays whose meaning and charm no grown person can possibly grasp: which need no more than a few pebbles, or a stick of wood with a dandelion for a helmet, since they command the pure, powerful, glowing, untaught and unintimidated fancy of those blissful years before life touches us, when neither duty nor remorse dares lay upon us a finger's weight.

—Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 1901

In his great novel, *Buddenbrooks*, Thomas Mann constructed play as a radical Other to adult life. Johann (Hanno) Buddenbrook was separated physically by a railing or in an Edenic garden. His play was incomprehensible to a grown person. A child at play was free, protected from a profane adult world that might not lay a “finger’s weight” on him. Childhood was a privileged moment, a separate stage of life, defined by play. Mann clearly embraced this vision; his words all but caress the angelic Hanno.

By contrast, consider the Institoris family in Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*. Helmut and Inez wanted to raise their daughters “perfectly.” Their room was stocked with “a world of well-ordered toys, teddy-bears, lambs on wheels, jumping jacks, Käthe Kruse dolls, railway trains ... in short, it was the very pattern of a children’s paradise.”<sup>21</sup> The Institoris girls were not to be left alone, shielded from life and inventing inscrutable games. Rather, they were guided toward adulthood by

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their parents and the toys that were chosen for them. In *Buddenbrooks* and *Doctor Faustus*, Mann grasped dual ends of the “double ideal” of middle-class childhood; a separate period of life distinct from adulthood marked by innocence and joy, and yet also a period of preparation and training for adulthood. Similarly, he presented play and toys as both tokens of Edenic freedom and also as tools for shaping a future *Bürger*.<sup>2</sup>

The toys shaped by this double ideal were frequent companions of German children. Sometimes they were held consolingly, other times carefully assembled into some larger whole, and yet other times wielded chaotically in some wild confrontation. The forms toys took and the games they inspired were important parts of children’s socialization into the world. Indeed, toys are a remarkably useful tool for investigating the emergence of modernity. These modest instruments of children’s happiness highlight the emergence of consumer capitalism, the transformation of structures of middle-class family life, and the arrival of discourses of gender, respectability, and modernism.

Toys in Imperial Germany responded to several tectonic shifts in Western society. These shifts interacted with each other, and in some respects the line I draw between them is arbitrary. Nonetheless, a proper understanding of toys and childhood in the *Kaiserreich* requires some analytical distinctions before we explore the toys themselves.

It is not uncommon to imagine that the sudden prominence of film and American music and fashion in the 1920s meant that Germany first became a commercialized consumer society then. In fact, as historians are starting to discover, German society was rapidly commercializing in the period before World War I.<sup>3</sup> Germans were increasingly going to market in an effort to purchase mass-produced items from department stores and to specialized retailers in an effort to elaborate and communicate a sense of their identity. Toys were one important element of that commercializing society.

As we shall see, the toy market was deeply influenced by factors outside the market, but the imperatives of the market also deeply influenced the forms of toys available to children. Toy makers were keenly aware of the need to stand out, to be noticed. This was in part a result of a crowded marketplace in which the toy itself—not advertising—was often the principle way of catching the consumers’ interest. It was also a function of the retailer’s interest in using toys to attract attention to the store.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, there were very strong incentives for toy makers to create toys that attracted attention. This could be through their novelty (*Neuheiten*). Toy makers could seek to introduce something new in a variety of ways, but perhaps the easiest way was to draw inspiration from current events. A new invention, or a new type of train, or a military conflict offered the opportunity to bring something different to market. The miniaturization of specific trains or ships was one way of differentiating one’s wares, as was the introduction of Boer soldiers

during the Boer War or polar exploration during Perry's trek to the North Pole. Such gestures toward current events also turned news stories in the daily press into advertising for toys.

Toy makers could also capture attention through the fascination intrinsic to motion. Moving toys captured the human eye. Moving toys had the additional advantage of being favored by department stores and toy stores for their store windows. Retailers saw in moving toys ideal tools with which to capture the attention of passersby, to convince them to linger a bit, to help create excitement around the store, and perhaps to persuade shoppers to enter the store. As such, they tended to be more forcefully advertised to the consuming public. Motion took a variety of forms, from climbing figures to moving dolls, but by far the most popular moving toys were toy trains.

Finally, toys could stand out through caricatures. As Jeff Bowersox has noted, "playthings needed to reflect popular understandings of the world in an engaging manner. To this end, the world of toys was populated by caricatures. . . . Toy makers emphasized those characteristics that were most recognizable and evocative."<sup>5</sup> Caricature offered a way to heighten the mundane world of popular knowledge (and prejudice) by exaggerating characteristics in often comic fashions. In this way, consumers were offered something that was clearly recognizable and familiar yet also extraordinary, standing out from average toy.

The marketplace created its own incentives that shaped the toys children could acquire. Toy makers, however, did not create the market for toys, nor did they exploit some naturally existing market for their products. Toys became essential elements of childhood as a consequence of deep social changes in Europe.

Childhood was refashioned in the wake of urbanization and the transformation of middle-class ideas of family and individuality. As Jürgen Zinnecker has argued, childhood was moved indoors from the streets and "domesticated" at this time.<sup>6</sup> This was in part a response to the process of urbanization, which removed youngsters from open fields and woodlands and put them in a social context frequently coded as dangerous. Middle-class children were at least partially removed indoors to places of "safety." This paralleled the transformation of the household. Once envisioned as an externally oriented group that provided economic subsistence, social status, and political rights, the family was increasingly imagined as a privatized social organization founded on affection, which provided refuge from a competitive social order. The transformation of the family was closely allied with the development of bourgeois norms of individuality, which emphasized greater self-control, cultivation, and imagination. This was not an accident. The necessary accumulation of social and cultural capital began in childhood under the watchful disciplinary eye of the mother. Severed from the chaotic streets, the middle-class child was increasingly oriented toward the toy as an object of play. As the individual was increasingly seen as a developmental project requiring guidance toward an optimal outcome,

control over the choice of toys gave parents the hope of shaping the future character of their children.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the reshaping of middle-class families and the process of urbanization, play was taken indoors to areas of “order and control,” and mass-produced toys took the place of makeshift playthings and local playmates.<sup>8</sup>

The discursive fields generated by pedagogues, artists, philosophers, and reformers were the third crucial factor shaping which toys entered the hands of children. This is an inchoate group, and one whose activities were not entirely separate from the structural factors sketched out above. Those caveats notwithstanding, a remarkable chorus of writers sought to explain the significance of play and toys, constructing a system of knowledge that endorsed play as essential to human development. We can identify several broad lines of thought in this developing field of professional inquiry. One camp, associated with the Enlightenment and John Locke, recommended the possibilities of playthings as sources of information, much like alphabet blocks. Locke famously argued that people are born as “blank slates,” that is, humans are not born with certain ideas or even the capacity for reason but develop reason and learn the nature of reality by interacting with and observing the world. In this tradition, play can then be seen as a means of discovery, which is why Rousseau suggested that young Emile play outside to learn to reason properly.<sup>9</sup>

This tradition had been taken up by the *Philanthropen* (Philanthropists) in Germany. Many of these educational reformers imagined they could prepare youngsters for an adult world of labor through play. We can see echoes of this concern for play as preparation for (and potentially a threat to) an adult life of labor in the later work of figures like Eduard Ackermann and Paul Natorp. Ackermann and Natorp praised toys and play as a means of preparing for labor, but both worried that too much or the wrong sort of play might damage a child. Gustav Siegert, a Leipzig gymnasium professor, went even further in pathologizing play, observing that “weak and nervous children like to play when they should be working.”<sup>10</sup> This tradition tended to emphasize childhood as a period of preparation for adulthood and, thus, was unsettled by the sort of free, undirected play of, for example, Hanno Buddenbrook.

The notion that play might educate children to proper adult roles through observation and mimesis found considerable support in the work of Friedrich Fröbel and Karl Groos. Fröbel, the founder of the Kindergarten movement, saw play as the foundation of a child’s future life and happiness. By directing play, parents could shape the character and independence of the adult.<sup>11</sup> Groos argued that play was a means for immature members of a species to learn through mimesis the skills and expectations of mature community members. The more advanced the species, he believed, the less it could rely on instinct to guide individuals’ behavior. To make up for the inadequacy of instincts, higher animals learned through play.<sup>12</sup> Much as with the *Philanthropen*, Fröbel, Groos, and their

followers cast play as a practical tool in child development, but they tended to stigmatize “wrong” play much less severely. This comparative indulgence was rooted in a more generous sense of what aspects of adulthood were being practiced; not simply labor, but also social relationships and values.

Another group built on the work of Romantics such as Jean-Paul Richter and Friedrich Schiller to argue that play and toys inspired exploration and imagination. This tradition asserted that individual freedom ultimately rested on the individual’s ability to think creatively, to imagine something different. As such, imagination and creativity were constituent elements of a good life. Inescapably, then, children had to be encouraged to play, but to play properly. “Properly” in this case was not in a way to prepare the child for labor or adulthood, but to encourage children to be creative (Richter suggested the best plaything for a child was sand, unless the child was female, in which case the best plaything was a doll).<sup>13</sup> By encouraging the development of individual creativity through cognitive immersion in an alternative reality (precisely what Siegert despised), the Romantics argued, children developed the foundations of spiritual freedom.

Whatever their mutual arguments, professional pedagogues functioned as broad legitimizers of toy consumption and play within a bourgeois value system that tended to emphasize labor, self-discipline, and thriftiness. They did so by insisting that play and toys were essential tools in the education and development of children. Toys were thereby assigned considerable cultural weight as foundation stones of civilization, tools for the education of bourgeois individuals.

The centrality of bourgeois norms to the toy market should not be taken to mean that toys were exclusively middle-class objects by the late nineteenth century. For all the profound class divisions within Imperial Germany, middle-class norms of progress and domesticity occupied a hegemonic cultural position. The vehicle for this was often the rhetoric of “respectability,” which transformed bourgeois social and cultural norms into universal aspirations. We can see the power of that rhetoric of respectability in the willingness of *Vorwärts* to criticize upper-class families because their girls did not play with dolls, which will be examined below. The cultural power of respectability, coupled with toy makers’ efforts to produce toys inexpensive enough for millions of working-class consumers and the centrality of Christmas, ensured that toys were consumed widely, if unevenly, across class boundaries. Certainly, prices acted to exclude working-class children from parts of the world of toys. Miniature dreadnoughts and electric train sets were not objects of cross-class consumption. The crude *Bodenläufer* trains, however, often were consumed across classes, as were tin soldiers, wooden figures, and some dolls.<sup>14</sup>

Taken together, these factors shaped a vast, self-contradictory world of toys. Toys had to seize the distracted gaze of passersby, but they also had to develop imagination, train young people for adulthood, impart information, and stand

in for unsupervised play in field and forest. Toys existed in a multifaceted discursive field, demanding at once enjoyment and education (itself a concept open to confusion and contest). This “double ideal” was a central fault line in the world of toys.

The toys with which German children played responded to these pressures. The specific forms they took, and the ways in which they responded to those pressures, varied enormously. To explore the world presented to children through toys, it will be easiest to address certain categories of toys, starting with military toys.

One of the more common types of toys that Wilhelmine children played with were those modeled on war and the implements of war. Military images were quite common. They ranged from helmets to tin soldiers to steam-powered dreadnoughts. The images in *Laterna Magica* (a light projector akin to the View-Master) could include representations of the triumph of German arms in the Franco–Prussian War.<sup>15</sup> The later newspaper editor Johann Baptist Gradl, for example, recalled playing with “tin soldiers, as well as fortresses with drawbridges and towers,” along with blocks and toy trains.<sup>16</sup> Tin soldiers, in particular, were a remarkably flexible vehicle for representing the world. Figures were crafted to represent the sides of the Boer War (and remained on the market long after the end of hostilities) or the Battle of Nations at Leipzig. Hans Fallada recalled receiving tin soldier versions of Roman legionnaires, German tribesmen, and a building block set for constructing a bridge. “Finally,” he exclaimed, “I will be able to let Caesar build his bridge over the Rhine.”<sup>17</sup> As soon as operations began against Denmark in 1863 and France in 1870, toy makers brought out the relevant toy soldiers.<sup>18</sup> Building blocks were modeled as means of constructing castles and fortresses (or in Fallada’s case, bridging equipment).

Tin soldiers were modeled on historical or current events. Heinrichsen Zinnfiguren advertised their soldiers as “excellent educational material.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, toy soldiers offered toy makers an opportunity to distinguish themselves by associating their products with the excitement of military conflict. Much as Andreas Weiß notes of German school textbooks, military themes were a means of instructing children about the world.<sup>20</sup> In a bid to be both educational and topical, toy makers sped figures to market for every international crisis. The Russo–Japanese War had its associated toys, as did the Italian–Ottoman conflict over Tripolitania. Even Russia’s tensions with Austria–Hungary over Bulgaria in the 1880s prompted a wave of toy soldiers.<sup>21</sup> Theodor Hampe recalled,

More than the battles of people, our few hundred soldiers expanded our imagination to a world view. . . . For the entirety of this miniature humanity maps were now sketched; special languages were invented; countless tiny books were filled with novellas, poems and plays . . . letters were exchanged; and, ultimately, with high political tension, written declarations of war were delivered.<sup>22</sup>

Children, largely boys, were surrounded by current and historical events, at least of a certain sort. Toy soldiers were carefully arranged into model armies, and bloodless battles were waged. But tin soldiers tended to present a rather decontextualized vision of history and politics. Thus, Theodor Hampe and his playmates constructed a fictionalized context that had nothing to do with current events or history. More subtly, tin soldiers as avatars of historical understanding reinforced how Germans understood war. German political and legal discourse in the *Kaiserreich* tended to see war as the foundation of states, international law, and in some circumstances, democratization.<sup>23</sup> The suggestion that tin soldiers taught history tended to reinforce the Wilhelmine identification of war with historical change. It is also noteworthy that toy soldiers largely suggested that organized armies, generally connected to a state, were the only proper type of war. Irregular warfare was often put on the margins, associated with uncivilized peoples, if shown at all. This served to naturalize European norms of war, paving the way to pathologizing non-European traditions of war.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, toy soldiers were not the only military toys. There were also toys that might be imagined as props in imaginary play: helmets, shields, swords, play guns. Young boys were outfitted with the implements of conflict and games imitating war. Herta von Schwerin recalled the play cavalry uniforms her brothers had demanded for Christmas, and Hans Wendt remembered his own helmet and wooden gun.<sup>25</sup> Much as Karl Groos asserted that play helped people and animals prepare for adult occupations, this might suggest that boys were being socialized into a military ethos. Though it is clearly difficult to separate war games from war, play did not have a unitary meaning. Toy soldiers could teach both a fascination with armies and history, just as play with swords and shields could do more than train for war.

Consider how Paul Hildebrandt addressed war games. “War and soldier play need not lead to rawness; they mostly teach manliness and chivalrous virtues. Heroism must be shown in more than just battle; one has sometimes rich opportunities to show bravery in everyday life in defending the weak or saving a life.” Similarly, Schulrat Ackermann praised toys that taught “courage and determination.”<sup>26</sup> Hildebrandt and Ackermann veered away from the explicitly military and instead emphasized the virtuous characteristics that war games could cultivate for civilian life. Hildebrandt’s invocation of “manliness” clearly had a strongly gendered component, suggesting a collection of virtues including self-reliance, courage, and decisiveness. Play with swords and shields need not be seen, then, as a version of the “feudalization” of the German middle class but rather another venue in which bourgeois ideals could be inculcated. Military games were imagined as developing virtues that middle-class Germans prized for their own reasons, while also normalizing war and conflict as essential and inescapable parts of politics and the public order.

The virtues that military toys and games allegedly cultivated were not simply the concern of parents and writers. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the state had taken an increasing interest in children's education and development. From the 1870s, the German states had emphasized that early education in (state-run) schools had a specific ethical and political purpose. Schools were to ensure, as one 1875 circular put it, that they develop "virtues that shape character." These were closely tied to patriotism and loyalty to the dynasty; over time they were also cast as decisive bulwarks against socialism. The tool to realize these goals was instruction in a militarized vision of history. The state mandated that children be educated with a particular vision of history and war in school. This vision both reflected a broad consensus on links between war and desirable personal qualities and also provided toy makers images for designing toys. Schools provided the narratives of Caesar's legions or the Franco-Prussian War that toy makers and children alike drew on.<sup>27</sup>

The extra-European world was also a frequent theme in German toys. Young people had exotic animals from around the globe, "character masks" that included many non-European figures, and tin figures of Native Americans, for example. There were board games about exploring the Arctic, one of which invited six players to fend off polar bear and Inuit attacks in their race to the North Pole.<sup>28</sup> Kurt Bittel recalled that he and his friends preferred to recreate the war against the Herero than the 1870 or 1866 wars. Determining who would play Herero and who the German *Schutztruppen*, however, always required considerable negotiation.<sup>29</sup> German children were surrounded by representations of distant places and different peoples. These representations were, as with tin soldiers, radically decontextualized. The polar exploration game, for example, referenced a real event but added fictitious elements and falsified geography. The real world presented was hemmed in by caricature in ways that were not always self-evident to children. Toys placed children into a secondhand relationship with a globalizing world, a world in which European interactions with non-Europeans were defined in terms of race, religion, and empire.

Jeff Bowersox argues that "colonial toys reflected a broad social consensus, however vague and contradictory, about Germany's place in a world defined by empire."<sup>30</sup> Children were exposed to colonial themes in a variety of contexts and venues. Much as with war and history, colonial images were integrated into school programs as well as into children's literature, perhaps most notably through the works of Karl May. Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows, which toured Germany starting in 1890, and the associated advertising campaigns, similarly foregrounded the frontiers of "civilization." Groups like Maximilian Bayer's Pathfinders organized time outside school around colonial themes, while advertising images invoking colonial themes proliferated. In effect, the state, colonial organizations, children's authors, and advertisers developed a reservoir of images and "facts" that toy makers could draw on in designing their objects and that



children could use to give shape to their play.<sup>31</sup> This was a reciprocal relationship, as the colonial themes in toys prepared children for the colonial consensus demonstrated in school, literature, and advertising, which, in turn, circulated images used by toy designers.

This consensus played out in caricature. Bowersox demonstrates this through his exploration of “character masks.” Character masks were intended to “entertain by reinforcing, exaggerating, or perhaps parodying familiar stereotypes.” These stereotypes were familiar from the pictorial encyclopedias and ABC books, which introduced children to the world outside their immediate surroundings. Children would don masks to pretend to be a “savage,” “old negro,” “Indian,” or “Chinese man,” each based on stereotypes for easy recognition and entertainment. The “savage” and “Indian” were marked as uncivilized, though the “Indian” was assigned greater dignity, as befitted a “noble savage.” The “Chinese man” was sly and subservient, while the “old negro” was designed with simian features. As Bowersox argues, these were “liminal figures who clarified the boundaries of civilization.”<sup>32</sup>

Colonial toys drew on the thrill of the exotic to stand out in the marketplace but claimed some educational utility through the presentation of information. In playing a board game like “The Colonists,” for example, children could learn the significance of communications systems and raw materials (like gold) in controlling, settling, and profiting from a nameless, abstract colonial possession.<sup>33</sup> The educational utility lay simply in the enjoyable presentation of socially approved “facts” that existed outside any but the most limited geographic, social, or historical framework.

Such games and toys were attractive because they presented the non-Western world as the margins of civilization—zones where the usual disciplinary rules, the severe expectations of personal behavior and social pressures that defined urban middle-class lives in Europe and the United States were relaxed. The colonial periphery was, consequently, portrayed as a zone of disorder, which enabled children to play the hero. German colonial toys defined the world as divided into two: the civilized and the colonial. Civilization was identified as white; uncivilized as all others. These toys went some way toward naturalizing a worldview wherein Germans and Europeans implicitly had a moral duty to colonize and civilize the non-white world.

Much as in war games, imagining a world without the usual restraints created a fantastical space in which youngsters might play at heroism and adventure, also in ways beyond straightforward mimetic play. In such games, children, particularly boys, were expected to begin to develop other virtues. Play drawing on colonial themes offered an opportunity to develop bourgeois masculinity, with its emphasis on courage, discipline, and self-mastery. As Dr. Kurt Rudolf Kreuzscher would admit, for example, a polar expedition had no “tangible, material value.” Rather, it had “only a pure, ideal importance.”<sup>34</sup> Polar exploration, like many

toys and games about the periphery of Western civilization, or indeed the books of Karl May, was about the freedom to develop male bourgeois values. Toys and board games occupied a space gendered and classed in a way similar to Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich's reading of Karl May's books, as discussed in Penny's contribution in this volume. She transformed May's words into games and preferred to assume the roles of the males.<sup>35</sup>

Young Germans also frequently played with miniatures of the modern, technological world. If the advertising in the trade journal, *Deutsche Spielwaren Zeitung* is any guide, they were more popular than military or colonial toys.<sup>36</sup> Toy trains were very common. The 1912 catalog for Hermann Kurtz's toy store included page upon page of toy trains and associated paraphernalia (far more than for military toys).<sup>37</sup> The trains varied enormously in price, and as such might be simple *Bodenläufer*, some abstract idea of a train that, as the name indicates, ran on the floor. Others operated under their own power, required rails, and were carefully crafted to reflect existing machines. The son of an engineer observed that "one can play in various ways with trains: catastrophically and conservatively, dramatically and epically." Trains could be incorporated into a variety of narratives, even woven into stories taken from the daily press.<sup>38</sup>

Other representatives of the new technological era included steam engines, ships, erector sets, optical toys, and chemistry sets. The national enthusiasm for Count Zeppelin's airships prompted a widespread interest in toy aircraft of all sorts.<sup>39</sup> In the board game "The Triumph of the Twentieth Century," players raced across Europe, one in an airship, another in an automobile, and the third in a train,<sup>40</sup> the three new modes of transportation representing the "triumph" of the young century. Young civil engineers could build bridges, castles, or cathedrals with building blocks from "Anker's Steinbaukasten." Those more insistently future-oriented would revel in Frank Hornby's Mecanno—an erector set—or Bing's Stuctator play set. Both of these used metal bars, screws, wheels, and such to permit youngsters to build buildings, machines, etc.<sup>41</sup> Through them, children could assume the role of engineer, harnessing the power of nature.

Many technology toys were attractive to retailers and consumers alike. They moved under their own power, capturing the eye through movement and wonder. They mimicked the most remarkable moments of the era. They could be both spectacular and topical in a way that few other genres of toys could. F. H. Huber, for example, associated the attraction of technological toys with their modernity. He argued that "youth today want technological toys and models. They have also become more demanding in the course of the years. They grow up surrounded by the achievements of modern technology. Electricity, telegraphs, telephones, photography, 1000 hp steam engines are to boys of today common objects."<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the *Rundschau über Spielwaren* was certain that "for boys of a certain age, wind-up toys naturally have no more attraction. Their hearts beat

for steam and such motors. ... The truly modern youngster, however, knows only electricity.”<sup>43</sup>

The turn to technology was often also explicitly didactic. Kurt Karl Doberer, the son of a Nuremberg socialist, remembered that “quite early my father steered me toward technology. By the time I was five-and-a-half I possessed a small steam engine and a toy train that was drawn by a proper, alcohol-burning, steam locomotive.”<sup>44</sup> Doberer *pere’s* concern to interest his child in technology reflected a common pattern and demonstrated the appeal of toys across class lines. In general, technology was seen as the harbinger of a new society; familiarity and comfort with technology would then lead to familiarity and comfort with the new world. As Paul Hildebrandt wrote, technology toys “in which our entire, extraordinary cultural progress is reflected” would “open to children a new, rich world.” As a result, it was a positive duty of parents to gradually introduce technology toys to children.<sup>45</sup> A toy industry journal, *Der Spiel- und Holzwaren-Markt*, added that “it would be of the greatest advantage for our progress and our entire development if the joy and interest of the older children for the little models of our greatest inventions so increased that a generation would grow up that already in its childhood games had developed an enthusiasm for valuing, improving, and perfecting our technological achievements.”<sup>46</sup> They were, as Heike Hoffmann argues, “introductions to modern culture.”<sup>47</sup>

Technology toys were, then, assigned high pedagogical value. They were credited with both sparking and sustaining interest in the specifics of science and technology. Doberer’s father, for example, clearly believed the objects his son played with as a child would shape and sustain his adult interests and capacities. But, as with military and colonial toys, there was more going on. Technology toys were overtly gendered. They were intended for boys, and the pedagogical imperative buried in such toys was likewise explicitly gendered. Bryan Ganaway has argued that engineers and intellectuals had “coded technology masculine” and linked it with the “rational and progressive values associated with the middle class.” Toy makers and parents appear to have consciously taken up this line of thought, associating technology toys with the education of “the ideal male citizen.”<sup>48</sup>

It appears that youngsters embraced technological toys in a spirit similar to that in which parents offered them. After substantial research, Ganaway found that “almost universally, diaries show that boys accepted that the ideal male was a middle-class professional at ease with technology.”<sup>49</sup> Young German males, to all appearances, accepted the technological vision of the future and the contemporary moment. Technology, the mastery over and manipulation of nature, represented a source of power for the individual and society and thus aligned closely with the cultural underpinnings of bourgeois society.

A poem appearing in *Dabeim* in 1912 called “The Wish List” speaks to those cultural underpinnings. It tells the story of young Robert, who has written

three lists of toys he wants for Christmas, only to throw each away. Now on his fourth list, he asks for all sorts of miniature versions of the modern world: “theater—books—airship—airplane/steam engine—toy car/maps.” His sister Mausi, by contrast, has only a handful of things on her list. Most of all, she wants a “new child,” a doll, which she has not asked for in years, as well as a toy sewing machine, washboard, and some roller skates.<sup>50</sup> The gendering of German society was implicit in the largely male orientation of military, colonial, and technological toys. The gendering becomes inescapable when we look at toys intended for girls.

The dominant plaything for girls was dolls; as a result, they comprised about a third of all toy sales.<sup>51</sup> Dolls were almost universally seen as ideal playthings for female children: “above all else, dolls and dollhouses are the best toys for girls.”<sup>52</sup> Paul Hildebrandt assured parents that “where all thought and feeling of the child is directed at a doll as an object of love, the educator has an easy task.”<sup>53</sup>

The peculiar link between girls and toys was obviously rooted in the same domestic ideology that opened up space for toys in the bourgeois home. Because children were increasingly brought inside the home and had become a developmental project under the watchful eye of their mothers, girls were expected to move seamlessly toward motherhood and domestic management. The maternal instinct had to be properly cultivated. It is particularly noteworthy that Hildebrandt insisted that girls love their dolls. No one asked Hans Fallada to love his Roman legionnaires or Kurt Doberer to love his toy train. Middle-class Germans (and not just Germans) saw the family as a disciplinary project but also as the foundational site of affection. The one sustained and legitimized the other. Girls, then, were expected to take to dolls immediately and affectionately.

The emphasis placed on dolls as props in the reproduction of bourgeois motherhood is perhaps shown most starkly when it was rejected. Margaret Boveri’s piano teacher, for example, gave Margaret a doll-sized tea set but was scandalized when she learned that Margaret no longer played with dolls.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, *Vorwärts* used a girl’s refusal to play with dolls as a means of attacking the moral bankruptcy of the rich in a 1910 story about Christmas gifts.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond dolls, girls received various other tokens of household management, like the miniature sewing machine Mausi requested. As Ganaway has emphasized, these functioned as gender-specific representations of technological modernity. Nonetheless, it was a sharply circumscribed modernity, one in which females might access technology to ease traditional household management tasks. We can see, then, that the toys offered to girls closely followed Karl Groos’s vision of play. Play for girls was supposed to anticipate adult behavior. Girls were expected to go through the motions of parenting small children, learning through mimetic action.

The market for toys produced an enormous variety of products only partly captured in the categories outlined here. In addition, there were toy blocks, tops,

bugles, and more. Margarete Steiff established an enduring toy company on the foundation of the playful “Teddy” bear she marketed.<sup>56</sup> Animals were common toy themes for very young children. They appear to have helped preserve the innocence of play, refusing the mimetic association with the adult world.<sup>57</sup> German toy producers were quite inventive and resourceful in their designs.

Rather than trace every category of toys, I think it would be useful to consider the Wilhelmine toy reform movement, as it reflected a contemporary assessment of the types of toys available in department and toy stores, and a commentary on the values those toys supported. To comprehend this movement, it is helpful to consider the ways that some middle-class Germans understood both the self and education. The notion of *Bildung* tied freedom of thought rooted in classical humanistic education to the proper development of the human individual. The individual had to develop the proper independence of mind to function properly in society, to avoid being overwhelmed by expectations and the constant stream of data, and instead impose a rational framework on the world. For many Germans, the products of the modern, commercial world challenged that independence of mind as consumerism and spectacle could easily leave the individual feeling isolated and alienated. Products that refused assimilation by the imagination left individuals cold and stunted in their humanity, incapable of imposing themselves and their reason on the ceaseless, chaotic flow of sensory inputs.<sup>58</sup>

This anxiety that commercialism might threaten the healthy self underlay critiques of fashion, advertising, and toys. Ferdinand Avenarius, editor of *Der Kunstwart*, was a particularly notable critic of modern toys. “The automaton with clockwork in its belly, the dollhouse with all its furniture copied in painful detail, the toy train that runs figure eights in its tracks ... they suck the blood out of the minds of children. ... That with toys the true value usually stands in inverse ratio to its dazzle makes the struggle harder for weak minds.”<sup>59</sup> The “dazzle” of the marketplace, the perfection and motion of modern toys, undermined their “true value,” which lay in the development of imaginative capabilities and this “independence and freedom.” After all, “not ‘excellent mechanics’ but the soul of the child animates a doll.”<sup>60</sup>

The arguments of Avenarius and others inspired a group of artists to craft new, less “perfect” toys. Perhaps the first major effort was from the Dresdner Werkstätte. Its wooden figures were crudely shaped, traditionally themed, and colorfully painted. *Kind und Kunst* observed of them, “The trusted old objects of childish play have been given new forms. Simplicity of lines, powerful coloring, and solidity.”<sup>61</sup> Toy makers in the Ore Mountains, or Erzgebirge, like the Kleinhempels, likewise moved to produced toys with a “simplicity of form” that spoke “to the child’s heart.”<sup>62</sup>

These simple wooden toys, very much like the toys sold today through the Verband Erzgebirgischer Kunsthandwerker und Spielzeughersteller e.V. (Art Craftsmen and Toy Makers of the Ore Mountains, Inc.), offered a clear contrast

to the mass-produced toys of the industry. The reform toys refused the “dazzle” of motion or novelty. Instead, they sought to replicate traditional forms: animals, horsemen, farms. Such toys presented resolutely pastoral images of society. They sought to educate by stimulating the imagination rather than through mimesis. Children had to use their minds to put the objects in motion and thereby construct play, and meaning, around them.

There was a similar reform movement with dolls, which Marion Kaulitz, a Munich artist, was widely credited with starting. Her products avoided the old “deadening ideal of beauty” of mass-produced dolls, observed *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, while *Dekorative Kunst* added that Kaulitz’s dolls were “individual beings” that “avoid[ed] the flashy” and had “character.”<sup>63</sup> Reform dolls also rejected the market incentives of motion or referentiality. Within the movement, toys were not to be chasing headlines, and dolls were not to be modeling the latest fashions.

The most enduring of these efforts was Käthe Kruse’s, whose dolls were found in the Institoris’s *Kinderstube*. Kruse designed her dolls as a response to the “hard, cold, stiff” dolls available in stores. She sought to make dolls a “union of primitivism and naturalism.”<sup>64</sup> *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* enthusiastically greeted Kruse’s efforts, saying that they showed a “warm understanding for the minds of children. . . . They have no hint of caricature. . . . They are not designed for the glass cabinet or the doll exhibition; one can and must play with them.”<sup>65</sup>

Kruse’s dolls, and rhetoric, distilled the arguments of toy reformers. She sought to counterbalance the moving, active, mass-produced dolls. Her primitivism allowed her dolls to be “naturalistic” without hair or moving body parts, which, of course, were common attributes of a natural child. She even insisted on handcraftsmanship.<sup>66</sup> Her dolls constituted the successful commercialization of a rhetoric of anticommmercialism, and she built a lasting company on that basis.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to this volume, Simone Lässig and Andreas Weiß observed that childhood emerges from the “historical-dialectical interplay between the discourses about children and children’s practices, and their reciprocal impact.”<sup>67</sup> The history of toys bears this out. Play was honored as a bulwark of childhood innocence, the foundation of a period separate from and unsoiled by the demands of the adult world. At the same time, however, toys and play were important parts of a pedagogical and disciplinary program for developing proper adults. The tension between these ideals was complicated further by multiple notions of what made a “proper adult.” Finally, toy makers pursued their own commercial strategies, often circulating images drawn from the popular press or school curricula. The result was a complicated, contradictory field of toys. Children, meanwhile,

took up these objects and constructed their own narratives around them. Hans Fallada's tin soldiers became Caesar's legionnaires. An engineer's son recalled the various tonal qualities to his play with trains. Toys became, particularly for boys, ways of blending fantasy with their understanding of the world around them. Many toys and games continually dragged children toward an engagement with the world, which was then fictionalized, in part by toy makers, in part by children themselves. Toys helped shape what H. Glenn Penny calls in his chapter in this volume a "pervasive intertextual subjectivity ... that coursed across generations" that Germans developed in dialogue with one another and for their own reasons.<sup>68</sup>

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## Notes

1. Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 329.
2. Budde, *Auf dem Weg*, 78.
3. Most notably, Schwartz, *The Werkbund*; also Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*.
4. Hamlin, *Work and Play*.
5. Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 22.
6. Zinnecker, "Vom Straßenkind," quoted in Hoffman, "Erziehung zur Moderne," 113.
7. Hamlin, *Work and Play*, 23–28; Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption*, 28–29. See also Budde, *Auf dem Weg*; Rosenbaum, *Formen der Familie*; Weber-Kellermann, *Die deutsche Familie*.
8. Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption*, 45. See also Weber-Kellermann, *Die Kinderstube*, 15–36; Flecken, *Arbeiterkinder*.
9. Rousseau, *Emile*.
10. Rousseau, *Emile*; Niethammer, *Der Streit*; Blankertz, *Geschichte der Pädagogik*; Ackermann, "Spiel und Arbeit"; Natorp, *Sozialpädagogik*; Siegert, "Spielerisch, Spielsucht," 725–26.
11. Fröbel, *Pedagogies of the Kindergarten*.
12. Groos, *Die Spielen der Menschen*. For similar arguments, see Schaller, *Das Spiel und die Spiele*, 128; Döring, *System der Pädagogik*, 45–46.
13. Richter, *Levana*; Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*.
14. Perhaps the most powerful exploration of the power of middle-class respectability, especially as it operated on and through women, is in Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*. See also Budde, *Auf dem Weg*. Evidence for cross-class consumption of toys can be found in *Vorwärts's* discussions of toys (in particular, they promoted sales of domestically produced toys to support

- Heimarbeiter*, or domestic industrialists), the limited memoir literature (cited above), as well as the exceptionally low prices for many toys. See “Sonneberger Spielwaren,” *Vorwärts* 27 (18 December 1910): 1, 6 suppl.; also “Die Lokomotive als Spielzeug,” *Vorwärts* 28 (20 December 1911): 1 suppl.; Kurtz, *Spielwaren und Puppen*.
15. Ganaway, “Toys, Consumption,” 76–78; Hoffmann, “Erziehung zur Moderne,” 154.
  16. Johann Baptist Gradl, “Als Kreuzberg noch kaiserlich war,” in *Kindheit im Kaiserreich*, ed. Pörtner, 236.
  17. Fallada, *Damals*, 164.
  18. Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 37; “Neuheiten die zur Messe gebracht werden,” *Deutsche Spielwaren Zeitung*, no. 22 (15 November 1911): 659; “Des Weihnachtsmanns hauptsächliche Werkstätten,” *Dabeim* 2, no. 12 (December 1865): 179; “Der Nürnberger Zinnsoldat,” *Dabeim* 27, no. 12 (20 December 1890): 185.
  19. *Dabeim* 44, no. 10 (7 December 1907): 47.
  20. See Andreas Weiß’s contribution in this volume.
  21. *Jahresbericht*, 217; “Was die deutsche Spielwaren-Industrie nicht versäumen sollte,” *Deutsche Spielwaren-Zeitung*, no. 1 (2 January 1911): 11; “Der Nürnberger Zinnsoldat,” *Dabeim* 27, no. 12 (20 December 1890), 185.
  22. Hampe, *Der Zinnsoldat*, quoted in Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 48.
  23. Neff, *War and the Law of Nations*, 161–62; Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*; Hintze, “Staatenbildung und Verfassungsentwicklung,” 34–51; idem, “Staatsverfassung und Heeresverfassung,” 52–83; Hintze, “Staaten als Mächte”; Treitschke, *Politics*, 3–96, 283–308.
  24. On the tension between European and non-European styles of war, see Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 10–11.
  25. Herta von Schwerin, “Wir feierten Kaisers Geburtstag,” in Pörtner, *Kindheit im Kaiserreich*, 169; Hans Wendt, “Als Hindenburg zum Ersatzkaiser avancierte,” in Pörtner, *Kindheit im Kaiserreich*, 189–90.
  26. Hildebrandt, *Das Spielzeug*, 265; Ackermann, “Spiel und Arbeit,” 720. For a discussion of “manliness,” see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.
  27. Becher, “Politische Erziehung,” 151–52.
  28. Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 18–53; “Ein deutsches Nordpolentdeckungsspiel,” *Deutsche Spielwaren-Zeitung*, no. 10 (15 December 1909): 151.
  29. Kurt Bittel, “Lateinunterricht bei Oberpräzeptor Ölschläger,” in Pörtner, *Kindheit im Kaiserreich*, 271.
  30. Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 22.
  31. Christadler, *Kriegserziehung*, 35–36; Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 54–80, 172–77, 199–202; Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*. On Buffalo Bill, see H. Glenn Penny’s contribution in this volume.
  32. Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 22–25. For children’s books, see Emer O’Sullivan’s contribution in this volume.
  33. Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 41–43.
  34. Kurt Rudolf Kreuzscher, “Der Kampf um den Nordpol,” *Dabeim* 43, no. 1 (1 October 1906): 14.
  35. See Penny, “Knowing Others as Selves,” in this volume.
  36. This is based on an analysis of advertising in the *Deutsche Spielwaren-Zeitung* in 1909, 1911, and 1913. Of course, technology toys were produced by more highly capitalized companies, and advertising is therefore a potentially misleading register of popularity. In the absence of sales statistics, the concrete data available for comparing the relative popularity of various toys include comparative advertising rates, the comparative presence in toy catalogs, export statistics (aggregated by the material from which toys were made), and gross sales by the small number of publically traded toy makers. All suggest that metal technology toys enjoyed large and growing popularity.



37. Kurtz, *Spielwaren und Puppen*.
38. Quoted in Budde, *Auf dem Weg*, 202.
39. For toy aircraft, see Kurtz, *Spielwaren und Puppen*. On enthusiasm for aircraft, see Fritzsche, *Nation of Fliers*; Günter Grassmann, “Man liebte russische Literatur und fürchtete die ‘russische Dampfwalze,’” in Pörtner, *Kindheit im Kaiserreich*, 152.
40. Kurtz, *Spielwaren und Puppen*, 75–78.
41. Henze, “Eisenzeit”; “Neuheiten,” *Deutsche Spielwaren-Zeitung*, no. 7 (20 March 1914): 9–11.
42. F. H. Huber, “Nürnberg’s Spielwaren-Industrie,” *Bayerns Industrie und Handel* (Nuremberg, 1906), 112.
43. “Elektrische Motoren für Knaben,” *Rundschau über Spielwaren* 4, no. 112 (10 October 1912): 1634.
44. Kurt Karl Doberer, “Der Pfennig war das Mark der Währung,” in Pörtner, *Kindheit im Kaiserreich*, 224.
45. Hildebrandt, *Spielzeug*, 124–25.
46. “Modell dampfmaschinen und Betriebsmodelle als Spielzeug,” *Der Spiel- und Holzwaren-Markt* 7, no. 9 (1 May 1911): 1. See also “Zur Entwicklung der Spielwaren-Industrie,” *Rundschau über Spielwaren* 1, no. 1 (1 September 1909): 4.
47. Hoffmann, “Erziehung zur Moderne,” 282.
48. Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption*, 123–25.
49. *Ibid.*, 141.
50. Raimond, “Der Wunschzettel,” *Dabeim* 49, no. 11 (14 December 1912): 29.
51. Alfred Leopold, “Alte und Neue Puppe,” *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung* (29 December 1910): 1249.
52. Zinn, *Kinderspiel und Spielzeug*, 22.
53. Hildebrandt, *Spielzeug*, 325.
54. Boveri, *Verzweigungen*, 28.
55. “Weihnachtsgeschenke,” *Vorwärts* 27, no. 298 (21 December 1910): 3, suppl. 1.
56. Völker-Kraemer, *Wie ich zur Teddymutter wurde*.
57. Hamlin, *Work and Play*, 34–35.
58. See, particularly, Georg Simmel, “Das Problem des Stiles,” *Dekorative Kunst* (April 1908); Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*. See also Schwartz, *The Werkbund*; Jarzombek, “Discourse of a Bourgeois Utopia.” On romantic ideas of the self, see La Volpa, *The Self*.
59. Ferdinand Avenarius, “Vor Weihnachten,” *Der Kunstwart* 16, no. 5 (December 1902): 287.
60. Avenarius, “Spielzeug,” *Der Kunstwart* 19, no. 6 (December 1905): 303–4.
61. “Dresdner Spielzeug,” *Kind und Kunst* 1, no. 1 (October 1904): 31.
62. “Neue Erzgebirgische Spiel- und Gebrauchs-Sachen: Nach Entwürfen v. Geschwister Kleinhempel,” *Kind und Kunst* 7, no. 5 (February 1904): 201–8.
63. “Münchener Künstler-Kaulitz-Puppen,” *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 27 (1911): 84; “Neue Puppen,” *Dekorative Kunst* (Feb 1909): 239–40.
64. Käthe Kruse, *Das große Puppenspiel*, 78, 86.
65. “Kruse-Puppen,” *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 29 (1911): 277.
66. Kruse, *Das große Puppenspiel*, 105.
67. See the introduction in this volume.
68. Penny, “Knowing Others as Selves,” in this volume.

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