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What is the Moral of ‘Morale du joujou’? Toys and the Interconnections Between Human and Thing

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on human-thing interconnections in Baudelaire’s 1853 essay on toys, ‘Morale du joujou’, and shows how their entanglement finds echoes in his aesthetic writing. The article shows how the essay on toys indirectly thematizes the reciprocally transformative, embodied and participatory process that can also be traced in Baudelaire’s account of artistic creativity. The human imagination is presented in Baudelaire’s essay, as in his art criticism, as entering into a kind of dialogue with the external world, which complicates the line between, and any hierarchical relationship between, subject and object.

KEYWORDS

Baudelaire; toys; entanglement; ‘Morale du joujou’; art criticism; Exposition universelle de 1855

In her essay ‘Out of an Old Toy Chest’, Warner (2009) explores the child’s impulse to bring inanimate objects to life, to make them real, through her imaginative play. As evidence of the universality of this impulse, Warner points to the discovery of toys with jointed limbs in ancient excavation sites, and references children’s stories that involve the animation of inert things, such as Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, Margery Williams’ *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and tales that feature tank engines and toasters with human faces. What Warner’s essay hints at, beyond the notion of imaginative animation, is the fact that toys have always been located, for the child’s imagination, in an intermediary space between thing and human (even when the toys also resemble animals). The sometimes disturbingly blurred line between human and thing becomes a particularly prominent theme in some well-known works of the nineteenth century, for example Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, Rachilde’s *Monsieur Vénus*, and Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Ève future*. It has been suggested, moreover (Cropper 2015–16), that the fantastic fictions of nineteenth-century authors such as Théophile Gautier, Prosper Mérimée, and Guy de Maupassant complicate human-thing hierarchies by treating human characters as things, and by projecting human characteristics onto objects. I have argued elsewhere (Scott 2021) that the verse poetry of Charles Baudelaire expresses an empathy with objects which anticipates the theorization of *Ein-fühlung* as a form of (arguably self-transforming) self-projection by the German aesthetic philosopher Robert Vischer in the early 1870s. This article will continue my reflection on

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human-thing interconnections in Baudelaire, and will attempt to situate these interconnections within his wider aesthetic thinking. It will focus on the poet's 1853 essay on toys, 'Morale du joujou' (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 581–87), building on Marguerite S. Murphy's observation that the latter 'makes clear the special role of toys as objects' for Baudelaire (Murphy 2012, 217). What is this special role?

Baudelaire's essay on the moral lesson of toys is crucially a reflection on the relationship between human and thing. A reversal of the subject-object relationship of human and thing is obliquely suggested by the title of the essay, because of the fact that the 'du' can point in two directions, so that the title designates not just a philosophy *about*, or on the subject of, toys but also a philosophy *from*, or contained within and even expressed by, toys. The essay itself focuses on how children's imaginations act upon toys; but less obviously, as if just beneath its surface, it also talks about a reciprocal action by toys upon the child's mind. In other words, while the activation of inanimate things by the human imagination plays the leading role in 'Morale du joujou', the transformative action of thing upon human is also repeatedly and insistently invoked.¹ This phrasing is not intended to suggest any vitalistic beliefs on Baudelaire's part, but rather to highlight the extent to which the human imagination is presented in this essay as entering into a kind of dialogue with the external world, which complicates the line between, and any hierarchical relationship between, subject and object.

Previous readings have revealed interesting parallels between the essay on toys and Baudelaire's aesthetic writing. Murphy (2012, 221), for example, highlights the fact that both toys and art are associated by Baudelaire with memory, abstraction, the imagination, creativity, and a *suraturel* blend of the spiritual and the material; she also likens the optical illusions created by scientific toys in the essay to the passage in the *Salon de 1846* where chromatic effects are evoked with reference to a spinning top. Bonnefis, for his part, emphasizes the primitive sexual drive that, he suggests, underpins both the child's love of splendid toys and the artist's love of painting, and suggests that the essay on toys expresses Baudelaire's famously 'double et contradictoire postulation' (Bonnefis 2016, 38), his simultaneous idealism and earthiness.

My reading of 'Morale du joujou' will, similarly, attempt to draw out a coherent philosophy or aesthetic of toys, even if the 'morale du joujou' it identifies ultimately takes the form of a kind of anti-'morale'. Following on from Giorgio Agamben's insight that 'Morale du joujou' presents play with toys as an emblem of 'the basis of artistic creation as of every relation between human and objects' (1993, 57), this article will place the entanglement of human and thing at the very centre of its reading of Baudelaire's essay, and show how the essay on toys indirectly thematizes the reciprocally transformative, embodied and participatory process that, I argue, Baudelaire associates with artistic creation.

Human-Thing Entanglement in 'Morale du joujou'

'Morale du joujou' begins with a meditation upon a particular memory, which is also a meditation upon the workings of memory (see Rosenthal 2015). The author remembers an early childhood visit with his mother to a house on the rue des Poitevins. He remembers the calmness of the setting, what the woman of the house was wearing, and what she said to him as she took his hand and led him into a bedroom full of marvellous toys. Twice, in Baudelaire's account of the event, Madame Panckoucke is reported as saying that she wishes the boy to accept a toy from her so that he will remember her:

Voici un petit garçon à qui je veux donner quelque chose, afin qu'il se souvienne de moi.
[...]

Voici, dit-elle, le trésor des enfants. J'ai un petit budget qui leur est consacré, et quand un gentil petit garçon vient me voir, je l'amène ici, afin qu'il emporte un souvenir de moi. Choisissez. (1975–76, 1: 581)

The memory that the author retains of this event is not of the particular toy that he took away with him, as a child; in fact, we learn nothing about this toy other than that it is a compromise, because his mother refused to let him have his first choice. 'Choisissez', the so-called Toy Fairy tells him. The boy chooses, but not correctly: he selects the most expensive and luxurious toy, and has to be persuaded by his mother to settle for a more modest gift. There is no account of any counter-intervention on the part of Madame Panckoucke; presumably even a Toy Fairy's 'petit budget' could not stretch to the boy's covetousness.

What is strongly conveyed by the story with which Baudelaire opens 'Morale du joujou' is a sense of the little boy having been acted upon, like a plaything, possibly violently. The autonomy he was given with the injunction to choose was, it turns out, a temporary illusion. The boy's lack of agency is not spelled out explicitly in the text, and never becomes an overt theme, but it is there in the fact that it is Madame Panckoucke's words rather than the boy's that are reported, and in the grammatical wiring of the sentences: the passive voice ('je fus emmené par ma mère'); the positioning of the child-self as object rather than subject of the action ('un petit garçon à qui je veux donner quelque chose', 'Elle me prit par la main', 'je l'amène ici'); the gaps in knowledge ('je n'en sais rien'; 'Je l'ignore'); the sense of being on the margins ('J'ai beaucoup entendu parler d'un bal masqué'); and the non-appearance of the 'je' in the initial description of the toy-filled room ('une chambre où s'offrait un spectacle extraordinaire [...] Les murs ne se voyaient pas [...] Le plafond disparaissait [...] Le planchait offrait [...] Il y avait là [...]') (581). Furthermore, Madame Panckoucke stresses (or at least Baudelaire's account of the event stresses) that her aim is to implant a memory or 'souvenir' in the boy's mind.² That the woman has achieved her goal of imprinting herself in the child's memory, and that she has in fact shaped his future fantasy life in mysterious ways, is strongly suggested by the author's commentary on the event:

Il m'a souvent pris la fantaisie de connaître tous les *gentils petits garçons* qui, ayant actuellement traversé une bonne partie de la cruelle vie, manient depuis longtemps autre chose que des joujoux, et dont l'insoucieuse enfance a puisé autrefois un souvenir dans le trésor de Mme Panckoucke.

Cette aventure est cause que je ne puis m'arrêter devant un magasin de jouets et promener mes yeux dans l'inextricable fouillis de leurs formes bizarres et de leurs couleurs disparates, sans penser à la dame habillée de velours et de fourrure, qui m'apparaît comme la Fée du joujou.

J'ai gardé d'ailleurs une affection durable et une admiration raisonnée pour cette statuariale singulière, qui, par la propreté lustrée, l'éclat aveuglant des couleurs, la violence dans le geste et la décision dans le galbe, représente si bien les idées de l'enfance sur la beauté. (1975–76, 1: 582, emphasis in original)

Three times, in the above passage, the author evokes mental legacies of the visit to the Rue des Poitevins: a persistent desire to know the other boys (now presumably men)

who once made the same visit; a lasting association of toy shops with Madame Panckoucke; and an enduring affection for beautiful toys. The fact that the above passage features the second mention of the velvet and fur worn by Madame Panckoucke suggests, alongside the repetition in the opening paragraphs of the intention to give a toy as a memento, and perhaps also the phonetic repetitions contained within the words ‘joujou’ and ‘Panckoucke’ themselves, something about the nature and structure of this memory of the visit to this house: it insists, returns, repeats. This insistence suggests the logic of trauma: a wound of some sort has been inflicted. What kind of wound could it be?

René Galand, in his reading of ‘Morale du joujou’, highlights the child’s sense of his own God-like power: ‘The world of toys offers the child the image of a world totally subjected to his will’ (1971, 14).³ However, as Galand also points out, the boy’s sense of his supreme power is squashed by the mother’s interdiction: ‘the reality principle instantly asserted itself’ (13). The child’s attempt to exercise his autonomy, thereby asserting his separateness from the inert things around him, is thwarted. Baudelaire’s essay goes on to replay and reframe this founding scene through its repeated return to the physical reality of toys, and to the formative moment that was first invited by Madame Panckoucke’s imperative: ‘Choisissez.’ The reflections on toys never ultimately cohere into the clearly delineated ‘morale’ or philosophy that the essay’s title seems to promise, and this failure suggests a repetition of the scene of frustrated agency: the author never manages to extract an easily detachable and portable moral lesson on the subject of toys (if this was ever the aim: the word ‘morale’ in the essay’s title is preceded by no definite or indefinite article), just as he never managed to take home the magnificent toy he had chosen. If the frustration of sovereign subjecthood is understood to be at the heart of this memory of childhood, then it is easy to see why Baudelaire, whose financial autonomy would be withdrawn, later, by his mother and stepfather shortly after it was granted, might find this memory returning often to his mind as a kind of founding myth.

After the initial description of the visit to the Rue des Poitevins and its enduring hold over the poet’s imagination, a paragraph is devoted to an evocative eulogy of the visual beauty of luxurious toys. This is followed by the seemingly contradictory revelation that in fact none of this beauty or luxury is at all essential to children’s play. Children are represented as breathing life into their toys, transforming them into actors in the theatre of life, albeit on a stage that exists only within their minds: ‘Tous les enfants parlent à leurs joujoux; les joujoux deviennent acteurs dans le grand drame de la vie, réduit par la chambre noire de leur petit cerveau’ (1975–76 1: 582). Because of the animating power of imaginative play, children have no need of the kind of objects that adults designate as toys, being capable of making drama out of the most rudimentary and functional physical objects. Baudelaire admires, for example, those children who can imaginatively transform corks into armies and chairs into carriages (583). Conversely, he denigrates those children who fail to perform a similar imaginative transformation, and who focus their energies, instead, on the imitation of other humans:

Les enfants témoignent par leurs jeux de leur grande faculté d’abstraction et de leur haute puissance imaginative. Ils jouent sans joujoux. Je ne veux pas parler de ces petites filles qui jouent à la madame, se rendent des visites, se présentent leurs enfants imaginaires et parlent de leurs toilettes. Les pauvres petites imitent leurs mamans: elles préludent déjà à

leur immortelle puérilité future, et aucune d'elles, à coup sûr, ne deviendra ma femme. (1975–76, 1: 582–583)

To imitate (female) humans is presented here as a paradoxically dehumanizing activity: by copying the behaviour of their mothers, the little girls described above fail to engage their innate powers of abstraction and imagination. As Alan Levinovitz points out, 'sexism apparently blinds Baudelaire to the imitative aspects of coach-riding and war-making' (2017, 272); nevertheless, as the same commentator also notes, the key distinction here is between submissive imitation and free invention. We might think of this distinction along existentialist lines, as the difference between being a quasi-immanent, object-like subject and a transcendent sovereign subject. The kind of mimetic, inauthentic behaviour that Baudelaire associates with feminine play anticipates Jean-Paul Sartre's description, in *L'Être et le Néant*, of the waiter who mechanically performs the role of waiter instead of authentically exercising his freedom as a transcendent, self-inventing subject (1943, 98–100). As with the waiter, the little girls play in a way that denies rather than affirms their human sovereignty, and that renders them thing-like, even as they imitate the behaviour of other human beings.

That the ultimate end of battlefield games is to de-animate, or produce dead (toy) soldiers, does not prevent the poet from praising the role of the animating imagination in war play, which he takes care to differentiate from the reality of the battlefield. The line that separates a child's battlefield play from actual fighting is also, however, by implication, a connecting line. It seems logical, then, that this consideration of the progression from soldier games to the battlefield should lead on to a reflection on the way in which toy play serves as an initiation to art, which can only ever offer pale reflections of the child's imaginative pleasures:

Le joujou est la première initiation de l'enfant à l'art, ou plutôt c'en est pour lui la première réalisation, et, l'âge mûr venu, les réalisations perfectionnées ne donneront pas à son esprit les mêmes chaleurs, ni les mêmes enthousiasmes, ni la même croyance. (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 583)

The verb 'donner' recalls the 'je veux donner' of Madame Panckoucke, and the scene of giving that opens the essay. Here, it is the toy that is the implied giver rather than the given, and that takes the place of the Toy Fairy as the agent of the child's initiation. The reciprocal influence of toys on children, the manner in which the former can shape the destiny of the latter, already implied by the account of the Madame Panckoucke episode, by the subsequent reference to toys as 'acteurs' (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 582), and by the discussion of war games, begins to be made more explicit. Conversations about the formative influence of toys are commonplace today; what seems unusual in this essay is the crossing of the argument that toys can shape the child's imagination with the argument that the child's imagination can animate toys.

The essay next turns to cheap, mass-produced toys, which can be just as stimulating for a child's mind, the essay argues, as expensive toys. Again, it is toys that are depicted as the active, creative agents in the child-toy relationship:

Croyez-vous que ces images simples créent une moindre réalité dans l'esprit de l'enfant que ces merveilles du jour de l'an, qui sont plutôt un hommage de la servilité parasitique à la richesse des parents qu'un cadeau à la poésie enfantine? (1975–76, 1: 584)

The toy, however basic it is, takes the form of a gift (*'un cadeau'*) offered to the child's imagination (*'la poésie enfantine'*): it creates new realities in the child's mind. The effects of the receipt of this kind of cheap toy are then described, as the author writes of distributing trinkets to poor children on the street: *'Vous verrez leurs yeux s'agrandir démesurément'* (584). A lengthy anecdote is then recounted, involving the author's memory of a scene in which a poor boy shows a rich boy his *'joujou vivant'*, namely a rat in a cage. The point of these reflections on cheap toys (reflections that would later be repurposed, like the rat, as we shall see) is not at all clear. They do not appear to illustrate the previous point that cheap toys, including those drawn from life itself (such as a rat in a cage), constitute *'un cadeau à la poésie enfantine'*. The anecdote about toy distribution suggests, indeed, that cheap toys appeal to the most basic and animalistic appetites of children, rather than to their imaginative faculties: *'leurs mains happeront avidement le cadeau, et ils s'enfuiront comme font les chats qui vont manger loin de vous le morceau que vous leur avez donné'* (584). Neither this passage nor the one about the rat that follows it make any overt reference to the imaginative faculties of children being engaged by inexpensive toys. The rich child may cast his expensive toy to the ground in favour of a caged rat that he devours with his eyes, *'avidement'* (585), but nothing about this redirection of interest points very obviously towards *'la poésie enfantine'*, however splenetically proto-Baudelairean we might imagine that childish poetic spirit to be.⁴ The essay's philosophy of toys appears to have veered off track.

Immediately after this digression, however, the essay returns to the idea that the toy acts upon the child's imagination. The artistic child is presented as particularly susceptible to the imaginative transformations effected by things:

Je crois que généralement les enfants agissent sur leurs joujoux, en d'autres termes, que leur choix est dirigé par des dispositions et des désirs, vagues, il est vrai, non pas formulés, mais très réels. Cependant, je n'affirmerais pas que le contraire n'ait pas lieu, c'est-à-dire que les joujoux n'agissent pas sur l'enfant, surtout dans le cas de prédestination littéraire ou artistique. Il ne serait pas étonnant qu'un enfant de cette sorte, à qui ses parents donneraient principalement des théâtres, pour qu'il pût continuer seul le plaisir du spectacle et des marionnettes, s'accoutumât déjà à considérer le théâtre comme la forme la plus délicieuse du beau. (585)

This is the place in the essay where the idea that toys act upon children's minds is most explicitly stated. It is interesting, then, that the ability to let one's imagination be acted upon by toys is closely associated in this passage with an (apparently male-gendered) appreciation of the arts. The reference to *'le plaisir du spectacle et des marionnettes'* returns us, furthermore, to the opening of the essay, reminding us that the same message was already contained, in seed form, in the account of the effects of that *'spectacle extraordinaire et vraiment féérique'* with which the author was presented as a boy. The vision of the *'monde de jouets'* would leave a lasting impression on, or *'souvenir'* in, the mind of the future poet and art critic, shaping his imagination so forcefully that he would remain enduringly fascinated with the artificial worlds he finds in toy shops, and which chime so closely with *'les idées de l'enfance sur la beauté'* (581–582).

After this brief discussion of art, beauty, and the pleasures of *'[le] spectacle'*, the essay goes on to talk about optical toys, such as the phenakistiscope or stereoscope. Both were devices that were popular in Baudelaire's time and that produced illusions of visual movement and depth respectively. The manner in which the essay presents these

instruments continues the idea that toys act upon the child's imagination, cultivating certain future tastes and desires: 'Le principal défaut de ces joujoux est d'être chers. Mais ils peuvent amuser longtemps, et *développer dans le cerveau de l'enfant le goût des effets merveilleux et surprenants*' (585, my emphasis).⁵ The phenakistiscope is activated by the mechanical turning of a handle, as the essay explains, but it is clear from the description above that the toy is presented as an active agent in this form of play, insofar as it acts upon the viewer's perception and imagination. For Marit Grøtta, indeed, transformation is the central principle and effect of these scientific toys: both the stereoscope and the phenakistiscope 'change our perception' by decomposing and recomposing images (2015, 83). The essay's account of children's play has therefore progressed from the imaginative transformation of simple things by children to the potentially transformative activity upon the child's mind of very complex toys, which themselves place transformation at their centre.

The essay goes on to discuss parents who, being so serious that they do not understand the value of play, either do not give toys to their children or do not allow their children to play with their toys. It then pithily assassinate the character of children who do not know how to play with their toys, calling them '*enfants-hommes*' (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 586, emphasis in the original). The final two paragraphs focus firstly on children's habit of breaking toys open to find their soul ('l'âme'), and on the sadness that can follow the discovery that there is no visible soul, and secondly on the mysterious motivations of those children who break their toys for no obvious reason. In both cases, the child's mind is described as being acted upon by forces that are external to it:

C'est la plus ou moins rapide invasion de ce désir qui fait la plus ou moins grande longévité du joujou. [...] Quand ce désir s'est fiché dans la moelle cérébrale de l'enfant, il remplit ses doigts et ses ongles d'une agilité et d'une force singulières. [...]

Il y en a d'autres qui cassent tout de suite le joujou [...] [J']avoue que j'ignore le sentiment mystérieux qui les fait agir. Sont-ils pris d'une colère superstitieuse contre ces menus objets [...]? (587)

The child is invaded by desire; this desire implants itself in the brain of the child, and from there animates the fingers; other children are driven by a mysterious feeling, or seized by anger. Not only are children represented here as being acted upon by desires that are external to them, just as the toy is acted upon by a desire external to it, the child's brain is described as a physical thing, an organic substance ('la moelle cérébrale') that can be imprinted upon. In their interaction with toys, then, children appear to take on some of the thinginess of toys.

The essay finishes upon the idea that this destructive act might be a masonic rite of initiation to 'la vie enfantine' – 'Sont-ils pris d'une colère superstitieuse contre ces menus objets [...], ou bien leur font-ils subir une espèce d'épreuve maçonnique avant de les introduire dans la vie enfantine? – *Puzzling question!*' (587, emphasis in the original) –, thereby seeming to refer back obliquely to the rite of passage with which the essay opens. The fact that the two closing words contain the two dominant consonants contained in 'Panckoucke' might also suggest an oblique return to the scene at the origin of the essay. There are further indirect connections between the essay's conclusion and its opening: the references to hands and to smallness, as well as the parallel between the implantation of destructive desire in a child's cerebral marrow and the implantation

of a memory in a child's mind. Did Madame Panckoucke perform an act of violence upon the mind of the young Charles that was just as mysterious in its motivations as the act of the destructive child, who breaks open a toy?⁶ There is certainly something ambiguous about that initial exhortation to choose, given that it follows an allusion to the giver's 'petit budget' (582) and turns out not to invite a free choice at all; it leads to a disagreement between the mother, who had understood the pecuniary allusion, and the child, who either did not understand or chose not to understand. The young Charles, who had thought himself free to choose, discovers quickly that there are limits on his agency, and that he has to settle for a '*juste-milieu*', a term usually applied to the political compromise that followed the July Revolution of 1830. At the end of the essay, an apparently different child discovers that his toy lacks a human soul and experiences a sadness comparable to that experienced by the young boy who had been obliged to compromise. As in that previous anecdote, the child's disappointment is associated with the aftermath of a revolution: 'L'enfant, comme le peuple qui assiège les Tuileries, fait un suprême effort; enfin il l'entrouvre, il est le plus fort. Mais *où est l'âme?* C'est ici que commencent l'hébétément et la tristesse' (587, emphasis in original). The significance of the various parallels between the opening and closing of the essay is unclear: both are scenes of childish desire, associated with an invasion of the mind and with disappointment, and both seem to offer an obscure initiation of sorts. We could certainly read the references to revolution and ensuing disenchantment as an expression of Baudelaire's views about political idealism: is 'Morale du joujou' essentially an allegory of political frustration? Or does the culmination of effort in failure and of illusion in disillusionment say something even more fundamental about the limits of human agency? Both the scene of toy-giving with which the essay opens and the scene of toy-breaking upon which it ends suggest that at the centre of this essay is a confrontation with what Sigmund Freud would a few years later call the reality principle: an encounter with the limitations placed on human possibility and indeed human sovereignty.⁷ This emphasis on the limits of human dominance can be detected in the repeated references, in 'Morale du joujou', to the influence of toys on a child's mind and imagination.

Things and humans are presented in this essay as acting upon one another, to the point that they begin to share each other's properties. On the one hand, things can take on the shape of humans, whether as splendid toys endowed with '*des yeux purs*' and '*des joues allumées*' (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 582), which look '*aussi frais*' as their masters (584), or in the more basic form of blacksmiths mechanically striking their anvils, riders on horse-whistles, or even in the most rudimentary shape of those small objects that play the role of soldiers in children's games. Toys are described, in the final paragraph, as objects that '*imitent l'humanité*' (587), a phrase that nods towards the anthropomorphism of some toys, as well as towards the susceptibility of things to being imaginatively transformed into human beings, and even towards the idea that certain toys (such as the phenakistiscope) can imitate what Baudelaire considered to be the quasi-magical powers of the human imagination. Moreover, it can only be because of the presumption that toys possess interiority, as humans are understood to do, that children try to break them open, and are disappointed not to find any great mystery inside. On the other hand, humans sometimes resemble things in 'Morale du joujou'. Children can be treated as toys by adults like Madame Panckoucke and by the author himself, who claims he enjoys watching them scamper away like cats with their

prizes. Further suggestive of an analogy between children and things is the author's reflection that it is hard to believe that rich and poor children can be made of the same 'pâte' (584); this is a hackneyed metaphor, but it is also one that is suggestive of the substance out of which porcelain dolls could be made in the nineteenth century. In the 1853 essay, the poor child is described in a way that objectifies and depersonalizes him: he is 'sale, assez chétif, un de ces marmots sur lesquels la morve se fraye lentement un chemin dans la crasse et la poussière' (584–585). While the word 'marmot' here appears to be used in its ordinary colloquial sense, to designate a child, according to an antiquated meaning of the term it was a grotesque ornamental feature. Reinforcing this thing-based meaning of the word 'marmot' is the description of the physical substances ('la morve', 'la crasse', 'la poussière') that coalesce upon the child's face. Indeed, in the prose poem 'Le Joujou du pauvre' (1975–76, 1: 304–305) that Baudelaire published a few years after 'Morale du joujou', but which recycles a part of the essay, the likening of children to things is even more pronounced.⁸ In the 1862 prose poem, the reduction of the child to a thing is more explicit: the impoverished boy is compared to a painting obscured by a thick grime:

[I]l y avait un autre enfant, sale, chétif, fuligineux, un de ces marmots-parias dont un œil impartial découvrirait la beauté, si, comme l'œil du connaisseur devine une peinture idéale sous un vernis de carrossier, il le nettoyait de la répugnante patine de la misère. (1975–76, 1: 304–305)

The child is here doubly a thing: he is a thing within a thing, a painting hidden beneath a thick layer of varnish. The teeth that the children flash at each other in the final lines of the text, as they peer at a caged rat, highlight their shared animality. As Murphy pithily puts it, for Baudelaire 'child's play puts in question the distinction between living creature and thing' (2019, 247).

The 1862 prose poem may not invoke a moral lesson in its title, as the 1853 essay had done, but in a text where children are compared to cats and things, and which hinges on the shocking revelation that a rat is being treated as a toy, the moral message seems pessimistic. However, a more optimistic humanist reading is possible: Murphy, for example, describes the moment of communication between the two boys as 'a sort of mini-utopia' (2012, 223), and as an instance of 'sharing across class boundaries, suggesting the potential for a more communitarian future' (2019, 247–248). What if the rich boy and the poor boy can discover a common humanity, something that differentiates them from things and from animals? What if their fraternal laughter ('les deux enfants se riaient l'un à l'autre fraternellement') and the equal whiteness of their teeth ('avec des dents d'une égale blancheur') are read as expressive not (just) of the essay's outwardly pessimistic 'morale' about the bestiality of humans but (also) of revolutionary hope (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 305, emphasis in original)? And what if the 1853 essay too contains a kind of dual message, like something that Victor Hugo and the Marquis de Sade might have dreamed up together?

Baudelaire's 'Morale du joujou' does convey a strong sense of the triumph of the human imagination over material constraints (a chair can become a carriage and a doll an interlocutor) despite its alternative and even simultaneous focus on the limitations imposed by the external world (the realities of war, the censoriousness of adults and the soullessness of toys) on the sovereignty of the imagination. Like the illusions

offered by an optical toy, however, the ‘morale’ presented to us in the essay is subject to perspectival shifts and transformations, so that the lesson can also be stated differently: the child’s ability to animate toys imaginatively always necessarily culminates in a recognition of the limits of the animating powers of the human imagination. Perhaps then the ‘morale du joujou’ is, in the end, the one contained in the closing lines of the essay: a child will always break the toy, revealing its status as a mere thing and therefore the limits of the human ability to imbue things with life. However, even this message seems mixed. On the one hand, toys eventually reveal their hollowness, the limits of the human ability to animate them, when the child’s hands seize upon, shake and break them. The child’s hands reveal the thingness of the toy, its lack of a soul, and therefore its difference from human beings. The child’s sad discovery of the soullessness of toys can be understood as the realization of the disappointing thingness of toys, their difference from human beings, or even as the recognition that humans, too, lack souls. In other words, these ‘menus objets qui imitent l’humanité’ (587) may tell us something disappointing about ourselves: we too are hollow things or, as German art historian Abi Warburg puts it, mere animals capable of handling things (‘je considère l’homme comme un animal qui manie les choses’) (cited in French in Didi-Huberman 2002, 392). The resulting ‘hébètement’ and ‘tristesse’ may signal the end of childhood dreams: ‘la vie merveilleuse s’arrête’ (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 587). The child’s disappointment may be linked to a discovery of human difference from, or alternatively similarity to, things. On the other hand, the recognition of a toy’s thingness might itself creatively trigger the child’s imagination: destruction can take the form of a ritualistic induction, the means by which children introduce toys into their play: ‘leur font-ils [les enfants] subir une espèce d’épreuve maçonnique avant de les introduire dans la vie enfantine?’ (587). Perhaps the child’s realization of the difference between human and thing is precisely what enables her to win imaginary battles and career across imaginary spaces, realizing herself as sovereign: the rich child’s toy may be ‘aussi frais que son maître’ (584), but it is not, in the end, the master. In this case, too, however, it is unclear whether it is the essential humanity of children that is evidenced, for Baudelaire, by their impulse to destroy, or alternatively their commonality with the mechanical toys with which they play, insofar as their destructive activity testifies to the operation of an invisible internal mechanism: ‘j’avoue que j’ignore le sentiment mystérieux qui les font agir’ (587).

Do toys reveal our disappointing difference from things, our sense of disconnection from a material world lacking in interiority or consciousness or soul? Or is it the sense of our own thingness that should be understood as the cause of sadness? Could either insight also be understood as a reason for celebration? No unambiguous moral message can be drawn from the exploration, in ‘Morale du joujou’, of the human–thing relationship. Indeed, apparently contradictory moral messages can legitimately be drawn from the essay, compatible with Barbara Wright’s observation that the truth, for Baudelaire, is always ‘fragmentary and partial, rather than all-encompassing and absolute’ (2006, 32). The reader who had hoped to find, in ‘Morale du joujou’, a philosophy of toys is therefore left in a similar predicament to the disappointed child looking for the toy’s soul: ‘Mais où est l’âme?’ (587) The reader’s quest ends, like the essay itself, with a puzzling question. ‘Morale du joujou’ has been described by one commentator as one of Baudelaire’s most audacious works, and as his most disconcerting, on account of ‘son caractère inclassable’ (Bonnefis 2016, 26); its lack of a clear message is another aspect

of the difficulty it poses. If the essay is difficult to resolve into unambiguous meaning, then perhaps this is because its subject, the toy, is as resistant to classification as the essay.⁹ Just as the essay is not an easily digestible piece of prose, but rather a piece that invites us to puzzle endlessly over its meaning, the toy is not a straightforward object that stands in a stable relationship to a human subject, but rather a thing with which the child enters into a potentially transformative relationship.¹⁰

The next section will argue that the relationship of child to toy, in ‘Morale du joujou’, is analogous with the relationship between artist and external world, in Baudelaire’s aesthetic writing. Both toy and external world are something other than objects, for child and artist respectively: something that points beyond itself, like an invitation.

Child’s Play as a Metaphor of Art

Henri Bergson’s 1938 essay on laughter, *Le Rire*, argues that toys remind human beings of our own resemblance to mechanical things, offering pleasure – because mechanical action is intrinsically funny, at least according to Bergson – while also playing a disciplinary role by correcting the impulse in humans to revert to mechanical, thing-like action or habits of thought.¹¹ In *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir writes about how dolls teach little girls to make themselves thing-like: passive and inert.¹² What both Bergson and Beauvoir suggest is the danger, for the child, of becoming too much like a toy, of mimetically identifying too much with a plaything, and of forgetting her human agency and freedom. While the theme of human freedom or transcendence is certainly latent in Baudelaire’s essay, not least in the opening anecdote and in the references to revolution, ‘Morale du joujou’ is more immediately interested in exploring children’s imaginative agency and its limits.

Murphy observes that ‘Morale du joujou’ ‘casts toys and child’s play as prefigures for art and artistic creativity’ (2012, 217).¹³ As is perhaps suggested by Murphy’s unusual nominal use of the word ‘prefigures’, child’s play can be understood, in Baudelaire’s essay, not just as a prelude to artistic work, but also as a figure or allegory of this work.¹⁴ The parallel between a child’s imaginative play and artistic practice is suggested explicitly at a couple of points in the essay – ‘Le joujou est la première initiation de l’enfant à l’art, ou plutôt c’en est pour lui la première réalisation’ (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 583); ‘les joujoux [agissent] sur l’enfant, surtout dans le cas de prédestination littéraire ou artistique’ (585) – but it is also suggested in an implicit and particularly telling way at one point. Of people who never give toys to their children, Baudelaire writes:

Ce sont des personnes graves, excessivement graves, qui n’ont pas étudié la nature, et qui rendent généralement malheureux tous les gens qui les entourent. Je ne sais pourquoi je me figure qu’elles puent le protestantisme. Elles ne connaissent pas et ne permettent pas les moyens poétiques de passer le temps. (586)

The reference to the study of nature seems out of place in the context of toy-giving, and suggests that what the author is thinking about here is aesthetics rather than toys. The claim that people who are too serious ‘n’ont pas étudié la nature’ anticipates the line from the 1855 *Exposition universelle* essay in which Baudelaire writes of those graced with a cosmopolitan spirit that ‘Ils ne critiquent pas, ceux-là: ils contemplent, ils *étudient*’ (Baudelaire 1975–76, 2: 576, my emphasis).¹⁵ To study nature in the manner of

Baudelaire's cosmopolitan, is presumably to apply one's full attention to it, like the convalescent or child evoked in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* of 1863: 'Le convalescent jouit au plus haut degré, comme l'enfant, de la faculté de s'intéresser vivement aux choses, même les plus triviales en apparence' (690). Not to engage in this interested, attentive way with things is to be excessively serious and un-poetic, like the adult oblivious to the poetic pleasures of play, according to 'Morale du joujou', and also like the *académicien* of the 1855 essay, stuck within 'l'aveuglante forteresse de son système' (Baudelaire 1975–76, 2: 577), or like the academic artist, described by the author of the *Salon de 1859* as belonging to 'une classe d'hommes, timides et obéissants, qui mettent tout leur orgueil à obéir à un code de fausse dignité [...] à des règles de pure convention, tout à fait arbitraires, non tirées de l'âme humaine' (628).

Indeed, academic approaches to art that centre upon obedience to convention recall the passage in 'Morale du joujou' about children who line their toys up without actually playing, or entering into conversation, with them:

[I]ls n'usent pas de leurs joujoux, ils les économisent, ils les mettent en ordre, en font des bibliothèques et des musées, et les montrent de temps à autre à leurs petits amis en les priant *de ne pas toucher*. Je me déferiais volontiers de ces *enfants-hommes*. (1975–76, 1: 586, emphasis in original)

This passage suggests that toys can take on a fetish value of the kind that Karl Marx associated with commodities: they become invested with a mysterious quality that effectively supersedes their use value, or in this context their play value ('ils n'usent pas de leurs joujoux'). That Baudelaire's essay on toys contains, at least obliquely, a reflection on fetishism – loosely defined, and compatible with the anthropological sense of the term that was available to Baudelaire, as the way in which an inanimate object can be imbued with mysterious significance – is suggested also by the allusions to Madame Panckoucke's velvet and fur, which Freud would later associate with sexual fetishism in his 1927 paper on the subject.¹⁶ Fetishism arises, according to Freud, from the moment of discovering that the mother lacks a penis; the fetish object, often a shoe, or fur or velvet, becomes a kind of protective screen that operates to defend the child against the trauma inflicted by the event, and becomes a source of perverse pleasure (Freud 1955, 21: 155). The child's decision not to play with a toy might offer a similar kind of protection; the discovery of lack, made by the child who breaks the toy in order to reveal its animating mechanism, is avoided.¹⁷ The child who avoids handling his toy, and entering into an active relationship with it, preferring instead to admire it from a distance, is like the timid artist who prefers to obey arbitrary rules and conventions than to open himself up to 'une transformation qui tient du mystère', prompted by a particular manifestation of 'la beauté universelle' (Baudelaire 1975–76, 2: 576). The fetishizing child also calls to mind the art of Dominique Ingres, which produced in the writer a feeling 'd'un ordre quasi maladi': 'ses figures ont l'air de patrons d'une forme très correcte, gonflés d'une matière molle et non vivante, étrangère à l'organisme humain' (585, 587–588).¹⁸ Baudelaire appears to be hinting here that Ingres' figures resemble inanimate dolls, so that the 1855 article refers back to the 1853 essay here just as the 1853 essay, in its comments about the importance of studying nature, had seemed to anticipate the 1855 piece. Whenever one does find glimpses of life in the paintings of Ingres, one has the feeling, according to Baudelaire, that this is because 'la nature'

has succeeded in dominating (or rather violating) the artist rather than vice versa (588). If the activity of toy-play as described by Baudelaire in ‘Morale du joujou’ can be understood as an allegory of the human-thing dynamic in artistic creation, then impoverished play, or the failure of play, can be read as a commentary about the kind of art of which the poet disapproved.

The indictment of unimaginative, insufficiently vital art is discernible not just in what ‘Morale du joujou’ implies about serious children who, in their failure to engage in imaginative play, resemble academic artists, but also in the prominent role the essay gives to non-transformative play more generally. For example, the little girls who ‘imitent leur mamans’ (583) resemble to some extent the ‘*enfants-hommes*’ who are, like them, old before their time, but whereas the latter’s fetishistic reverence of their toys calls to mind the attitudes of academic and excessively idealizing artists, the activity of the girls is more suggestive of Baudelaire’s criticisms of landscape art. In the alleged failure of their ‘grande faculté d’abstraction’ and of their ‘haute puissance imaginative’ (Baudelaire 1975–76, 2: 583), the young girls resemble landscape artists who aim simply to produce ‘une copie excellente de la nature’ (2: 619–620). As Murphy puts it, the girl at play here is ‘an artist in embryo, her mind and imagination engaged, but, like artists, she should avoid mere imitation’ (2012, 221). Children who play with rats can, similarly, be aligned with those artists who concentrate too much on ‘la nature extérieure, positive, immédiate’ (Baudelaire 1975–76, 2: 586).

The rat, as an emblem of nature in its raw state, is worth pausing over. Located at the centre of the lengthy anecdote which arguably forms the centrepiece of ‘Morale du joujou’, the rat is a thing that seems utterly resistant to imaginative or aesthetic transformation. And yet it is also an object that cannot be entirely reduced to the status of a thing. The fact that the rat is treated by the children, and referred to in the essay, as a ‘joujou’ and as ‘un objet rare et inconnu’ (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 585) certainly encourages us to think of it as a thing. However, the horror of the story resides precisely in the fact that it is also more than, or other than, a thing. Readers are encouraged to be shocked by the treatment of a living animal as a toy:

À propos du joujou du pauvre, j’ai vu quelque chose de plus simple encore, mais de plus triste que le joujou à un sou, – c’est le joujou vivant. [...] Or ce joujou que le petit souillon agaçait, agitait et secouait dans une boîte grillée, était un rat vivant! (584–585)

The rat is being presented in this passage as a special kind of toy, insofar as it is ‘vivant’. The text’s highlighting of a parallel between the rich child and the rat, to the extent that both are described within the same passage as being confined behind bars, along with the essay’s previous comparison of poor children to hungry cats, further complicate the rat’s reduction to straightforward thing-ness and indeed suggest its proximity to the human, as does the fact that the living rat toy is the preferred rival of the inert humanoid toy. In the prose poem’s rewriting of the rat anecdote, the emphasis on the children’s teeth further implies a parallel between human and rat. Also highlighting the rat’s status as a site where thing and human meet is the implied parallel between the twice-mentioned ‘fourrure’ worn by Madame Panckoucke and the rat’s appearance (Murphy 2019, 250). If the woman’s fur is suggestive of fetishistic pleasure, however, the rat’s fur is associated instead with disgust. In his reading of the caged rat passage, Bonnefis refers to ‘son obscénité d’objet malpropre, d’objet fécal’ (Bonnefis 2016, 35). In her reading, Marilyn

R. Brown (2002, 10) writes about the rat as a symbol of Kristevan abjection, being situated as it is on the side of filth and horror. However, the rat is abject also in the sense that it suggests a blurring of boundaries between human and non-human, self and non-self. As Julia Kristeva puts it, 'l'*abject*, objet chu, est radicalement un exclu et me tire vers là où le sens s'effondre' (1980, 9). Like the fetish object, the abject object, in psychoanalysis, is situated on the border between the self and non-self: if the abject object is the disgust-inducing thing from which the human being necessarily detaches itself in order to assert itself as a subject, but which always threatens to remind the subject of the place from whence it comes, the fetish object serves as a pleasure-inducing defence against this reminder. Both the fetish object and the abject object stand between the subject and the intolerable real, but they produce different kinds of affective response. The abject object, more directly than the fetish object, serves as an emblem of a wounding confrontation with the real which has the potential to challenge the subject's sense of her own sovereignty, the failure of all metaphor and transcendence and imagination: it returns a glimpse of the human subject as thing-like, wholly lacking in interiority. The strange affinity between abject object and fetish object, rat and fur clothing, might illuminate the parallel that Baudelaire detected between the art of the Realist painter Gustave Courbet and that of the Neoclassical painter Dominique Ingres, despite their obvious differences: the poet's 1855 *Exposition universelle* essay refers to their paradoxically shared 'guerre à l'imagination' (1975–76, 2: 586). In the work of these painters, the imagination is subjugated to form (Ingres) or physicality (Courbet) in a process that Baudelaire mock-admiringly describes as 'un sacrifice héroïque' (586).

The kind of art appreciated by Baudelaire involves no subordination of the human imagination, but neither does it neglect the material dimension of things. It requires a studious attention to the material world that never becomes excessively worshipful of it. Baudelaire's aesthetic writing repeatedly emphasizes the transformative role of the imagination, as the favoured metaphor of digestion tacitly suggests. In his *Salon de 1859*, for example, he writes that 'Tout l'univers visible n'est qu'un magasin d'images et de signes auxquels l'imagination donnera une place et une valeur relative; c'est une espèce de pâture que l'imagination doit digérer et transformer' (627; see also 699). In an essay on Eugène Delacroix, one of Baudelaire's exemplary good artists, the latter describes '[l]a nature extérieure' as 'un amas incohérent de matériaux que l'artiste est invité à associer et à mettre en ordre' (752). The fact that the artist is represented here as responding to an invitation that comes from the visible world suggests something of the strange subject-object or rather human-thing dynamic that occurs in the act of painting, as in the activity of playing with a toy.¹⁹ The idea that the world offers an invitation to the artist's imagination recalls the notion that children enter into dialogue with their toys, becoming alternately subjects and addressees of speech as happens in any conversation.²⁰ Transformational play, like transformational artistic practice, involves a kind of active physical engagement and dialogue with things that avoids the failures associated by Baudelaire with unimaginative play and art. The imaginative artist differs crucially from the convention-bound, fetishizing, mimetic or positivist painter, just as the inventive child is set apart, by Baudelaire, from the child who fails to play with toys in the creative, participatory manner valued by the poet.²¹

Interestingly, 'Morale du joujou' does not talk about the kind of toy that involves skill or game play (hoops or marbles for example). The kind of toy admired by Baudelaire in

the essay seems always to engage the imagination in some way, and seems always to involve a reciprocal transformation of some sort. The child's imaginative transformation of the toy into a quasi-human interlocutor ('Tous les enfants parlent à leur joujoux') necessarily transforms, in return, the child into an interlocutor, an object of the toy's address: 'les joujoux deviennent acteurs' (1975–76, 1: 582). Similarly, the imaginative transformation of things, in play, has the reverse effect of changing the child, for example into a coach driver: 'Mais la diligence, l'éternel drame de la diligence joué avec des chaises: la diligence-chaise, les chevaux-chaises, les voyageurs-chaises; il n'y a que le postillon de vivant!' (583)²² Analogously, again, the boy who transforms dominoes into soldiers becomes, in his own mind, a general, 'qui gouverne et mène à lui seul au combat deux armées' (583). Finally, the mechanical gesture that turns the handle of the phenakistiscope ultimately has the effect of transforming the child's mind, developing in it 'le goût des effets merveilleux et surprenants' (585). Toys would seem, therefore, for Baudelaire at least, to invite a form of play that is reciprocally transformative, suggesting that the artist too enters into a mutually transforming dialogue with the physical world.

Nikolaj Lübecker has recently written persuasively about the emphasis that Baudelaire's writing on aesthetics places on the active participation of the painter and spectator. Lübecker pays particular attention to the way in which 'the human subject is intricately caught up in the world' (2022, 103) in Baudelaire's art writing, and specifically in his writing on colour, arguing that the poet thereby anticipates Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writing about Paul Cézanne's art in *L'Œil et l'esprit*. For Lübecker, aspects of Baudelaire's writing about colour suggest a move beyond 'the subject-object dialectic' (113), or subject-centred and object-centred representational conceptions of artistic invention, pointing instead to an 'interactive and dynamic world-painter relation' (111), and to the notion of 'Painting as an act of mutual specification' (112).²³ Lübecker associates this conception of participation with a 'vitalistic dimension' (124) in Baudelaire's aesthetic writing which challenges 'our anthropocentric habits' (134), and finds in that writing suggestions of an essential life force that would animate both humans and the natural world. I would suggest instead, on the basis of the argument outlined in this article, that the animating force that interests Baudelaire is that of the human imagination alone, the external world being able to act upon that imagination not because of any life force internal to it but because of the life given to it by the imagination.

Baudelaire lamented, for example in his reflections on photography (1975–76, 2: 614–619), the materialism of his contemporaries, and insisted on the life of the spirit and imagination as a kind of antidote to the apotheosis of matter.²⁴ However, Baudelaire's particular inscription of the human-thing relationship, in his writing more generally, is distinctive insofar as even while insisting upon the immaterial dimension of human experience, and therefore on human difference from things, he also emphasizes the embodied, material aspect of human experience, and therefore our commonality with things. He was keenly conscious, in other words, of human duality, that is, of man's 'grandeur infinie relativement aux animaux', 'la supériorité de l'homme sur la nature', and his 'misère infinie relativement à l'Être absolu dont il possède la conception', as he puts it in his essay on laughter (532, 543). As this last phrase suggests, it is the imagination that conceives of the absolute and divine; the latter has no necessary prior existence. As a quintessentially modern poet Baudelaire was convinced, as few before him were convinced, of an irrecoverable split between human and world, the spiritual and the

material, the imaginative and the mechanistic. But his specific historical, cultural and temperamental positioning meant that he brought together, in an unusual way, a demystified modern awareness of human alienation, and the limits of human agency, and an idealist belief in the transformative Romantic imagination. Repeatedly, when Baudelaire describes the relationship between human beings and the world of things, whether in 'Morale du joujou', his art writing, or elsewhere, he evokes a kind of reciprocal dialogue, not founded, I would argue, on any vitalist belief but rather, as this essay has suggested, on a belief in the power of the imagination to animate, if not things themselves, then at least the human imagination itself, by way of things.

For Baudelaire, it is by acting upon things imaginatively, and by allowing oneself to be acted upon by things, as part of a participatory and reciprocally transformational process of play, that one engages in creative activity. By allowing oneself to enter into a kind of dialogue with (or through) things, whereby the positions of subject and object are complicated and even reversed, one keeps the imagination alive and avoids becoming thing-like in the excessively rigid way of unimaginative children and certain painters. This dialogue with, or rather via, things is what children engage in through their play, according to Baudelaire, and it is central to his conception of aesthetic practice. At every level, and at every turn, 'Morale du joujou' points to the interconnectedness of human beings and things. The philosophy or moral to be drawn from this interconnectedness is one that points in two opposing directions at once: towards the limits of the human and the possibilities of the human, on account of our similarity with and our difference from things.²⁵

Notes

1. The idea of transformation, as well as the idea of active, embodied participation, are central too to Marit Grøtta's analysis of 'Morale du joujou'. Grøtta points to the fact that 'the influence goes both ways, and the child may find himself transformed by the process of playing with toys' (2015, 82), and is generally interested in how nineteenth-century media participate in and help to construct 'a new perceptual regime' (144).
2. The word 'souvenir' itself mediates between thing and human; as Adam R. Rosenthal has pointed out, the word 'souvenir' can designate either a physical memento or a memory, either a thing or a feature of human consciousness (2015, 132).
3. The 'child' referred to here is the child in general, and not just the particular child described by Baudelaire. This article will use the pronouns 'him' and 'his' for this child, given the explicit gendering of toy-play in 'Morale du joujou'.
4. Grøtta highlights the failure of play in this text, going so far as to propose that 'The prose poem can be seen as illustration of the decline in play in the age of high capitalism' (2015, 138).
5. In fact, Baudelaire himself had been the recipient of a phenakistiscope in 1833, at the age of twelve. In a letter to his older brother Alphonse, he describes his new toy in loving detail, and even draws three pictures of it in the margins of the letter (1973, 1: 22).
6. The phrase with which the essay closes, and which refers to the destructive child's motivations, can be translated, as Claude Pichois reminds us, by 'Un vrai casse-tête!' (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 1432). Among the features of toys that the author continues to admire, on account of that first initiation, are 'l'éclat aveuglant des couleurs, la violence dans le geste et la décision dans le galbe' (582). Violence is suggested overtly, here, by the words 'aveuglant' and 'violence', more implicitly by the words 'éclat' and 'décision'; the latter harks back, etymologically, to the idea of cutting, and semantically to the child's forced decision.

7. For Galand, who as already mentioned refers to the operation of the ‘reality principle’ in this essay, ‘the first theme of *Morale du joujou* stands clearly defined: the conflict of reality and desire’ (1971, 14). On the reality principle, whose relationship to the pleasure principle and the repetition compulsion was illustrated by Freud using the description of a child’s play with a wooden reel, see ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (Freud 1955).
8. I have made a similar point elsewhere (Scott 2005, 104): ‘If the [rich boy’s toy] is a thing that resembles a person, the narrator effectively transforms people into things, reifying the poor boy through his aesthetic description of him, and objectifying the other poor children by treating them as cats. The end of the text associates the caged rat with malevolent pleasures, but the narrator’s own game is far more sinister. His reification of poor children is of a piece with “ces barreaux symboliques séparant deux mondes, la grande route et le château”.’
9. Something of this idea is suggested in Rosenthal’s observation that the essay, which ‘multiplies its approaches to the “joujou”’ (2015, 129), presents the toy as ‘irreducible to either purely subjective or objective points of view’, indeed as a ‘perspective-defying “object”’ (130). On ambiguity and ‘in-significance’ as a key feature of toys, which distinguishes them from games, see Levinovitz 2017 (271).
10. Agamben makes a similar suggestion, loosely in relation to Baudelaire’s essay, drawing on Donald Winnicott’s theory of the transitional object and on the Heideggerian distinction between objects and things: ‘Like the fetish, like the toy, things are not properly anywhere, because their place is found on this side of objects and beyond the human in a zone that is no longer objective or subjective, neither personal nor impersonal, neither material nor immaterial, but where we find ourselves suddenly facing these apparently so simple unknowns: the human, the thing’ (1993, 59).
11. ‘Le comique est ce côté de la personne par lequel elle ressemble à une chose, cet aspect des événements humains qui imite, par sa raideur d’un genre tout particulier, le mécanisme pur et simple, l’automatisme, enfin le mouvement sans la vie. Il exprime donc une imperfection individuelle ou collective qui appelle la correction immédiate. Le rire est cette correction même.’ (Bergson 1938, 88)
12. The little girl effectively becomes, for Beauvoir, ‘une poupée vivante’: ‘il faut chercher à plaire, il faut se faire objet’ (1976, 2: 21).
13. Various commentators have highlighted the connections between the essay on toys and Baudelaire’s writings about art. For example, Bonnefis (2016, 26) notes that ‘*La Morale du joujou* fait partie intégrante du discours esthétique’, and was placed, presumably on Baudelaire’s instructions, between the essays *L’Art philosophique* and *Théophile Gautier* in the first posthumous collection of his writings, in 1869. Fabrice Wilhelm studies the essay for its ‘enjeux esthétiques’ (2014, 175).
14. The collision of work and play in this implied parallel is perhaps suggested by the latent double meaning of the word ‘diligence’, in the phrase ‘l’éternel drame de la diligence joué avec des chaises’ (Baudelaire 1975–76, 1: 583). This double meaning becomes a focus of Cynthia Chase’s reading of the essay (1981, 44).
15. For Sartre, seriousness is antithetical to human freedom or agency, and is associated with an identification with things: ‘l’homme est sérieux quand il se prend pour un objet’ (1943, 669).
16. On fetishism in ‘*Morale du joujou*’, see Grøtta 2015 (126–131), Agamben (1993) and Bonnefis 2016 (28–29). The latter focuses on the possible masochism implied by the reference to fur, despite noting that Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* was published only after Baudelaire’s death. On the logic of sexual fetishism in Baudelaire, see Stephens 2012. Linking fetishism to the episode involving Madame Panckoucke, Grøtta hints at the possibility that something about the scene with the so-called toy fairy was ‘traumatic’ (2015, 129), a reading that is compatible with my own emphasis on the episode as a founding scene productive of repetition effects.
17. Grøtta (2015, 131–132) suggests that the word ‘âme’, as it is used in Baudelaire’s essay, could imply the idea of an animating principle or mechanism.
18. By emphasizing the defensive aspect of fetishism, here and elsewhere in this article, I am using the idea in a different way from Chambers (2008; 2015, 1–40), for whom the fetish

object in Baudelaire opens the subject up to strangeness and beauty, and to the possibility of the dissolution of self-hood. I am arguing, by contrast, that Baudelaire's description of the effects produced by Ingres' paintings is suggestive of the self-protective logic of fixation, disavowal, and substitution that Freud (1955) associates with fetishism.

19. A similar complication of the subject-object relation is suggested by other formulations by Baudelaire, such as: 'la première affaire d'un artiste est de substituer l'homme à la nature et de protester contre elle' (1975–76, 2: 473).
20. Levinovitz describes toys as 'a unique form of speech act', which takes the form of the invitation to play: 'toys invite players to define them' (2017, 278). This involves a reversal of normal subject-object relations insofar as it means that the toy effectively becomes the subject and the player is 'the object of the invitation', which the player then chooses to accept or reject (279). On Baudelairean 'poetic dialogism', understood as a kind of unstable 'double-voicing' rather than as a subject-thing interaction, see Yee 2018.
21. Levinovitz (2017, 275–76) suggests that the preposition 'with' is crucial – one plays *with* a toy, which is what differentiates this kind of free play from a game, which one plays.
22. Interestingly, the masculine noun 'postillon' can, in addition to designating a human agent, designate different kinds of object associated metonymically with coach drivers (the ribboned hat worn by coach drivers, for example), which obliquely suggests that the child is transformed by Baudelaire's description not just into another kind of human being but also into a kind of thing.
23. The term 'mutual specification' is borrowed from Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (2016). Lubecker also applies the term to a key passage in 'Morale du joujou' (131).
24. On the transformation of the relationship of people to material things in nineteenth-century France, particularly from 1830 onwards, see Charpy 2007.
25. Thanks to Therese Dolan, Claire Moran, Mary Orr, Nigel Saint and Jennifer Yee for offering valuable insights that fed into this article at various points. All errors are, however, my own.

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