

Introduction

The Play World

TOYS, TEXTS, AND THE TRANSATLANTIC GERMAN CHILDHOOD

In early modern to Enlightenment Europe, discourses about play obtain for adults as well as children, frequently in shared private spaces that are, nevertheless, for public consumption. The former engage in a range of activities associated with leisure, among them cards, gambling, and flirting, with the occasional blurring of social, class, and gender boundaries.¹ In the conversation piece (fig. 1) by German-born and -trained artist Johan Zoffany (1733–1810), the family at breakfast in their estate encapsulates the intergenerationally shared play world of the privileged. Zoffany moved to London, where he enjoyed commissions, exhibitions, and success. His conversation paintings document, with a certain naturalism, intimate family moments (albeit for public display). Zoffany captured these scenes “made up from the small pleasures of life in the family or with friends.”² Art historian Mary Webster provides an expert voiceover to this painting of Lord Willoughby de Broke at breakfast, narrating the scene with a description of the objects in the room, from the Persian rug, the Chinese tea service, and the japanned tray to the Italian seascape poised above the mantel. The mother, Lady Louisa, holds their young daughter, Louisa (born 1765), while the younger son, George (1763–1773), “surreptitiously clutches the tray and seizes a piece of toast.”³ With more an appetite for play, their older son, John (1762–1820), enters the room with his red wooden horse on wheels. The father wags a finger at the toast thief while the mother casts an eye toward the child with his toy.



FIG. 1 Johann Zoffany, *John, Fourteenth Lord Willoughby de Broke, and His Family*, ca. 1766. Oil on canvas, 101.9 × 127.3 cm. The Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. 96.PA.312. Photo: The J. Paul Getty Trust. CC BY 4.0.

In its time, this painting enjoyed great popularity, admired for “its action and naturalness, seeming to catch a lively moment in the intimate life of a father and mother and their small children.”⁴ Beyond admiration for the artistry and apparent spontaneity, other dynamics are visible. The family hierarchy regulates pleasure and play, need and consumption. For my purposes, this conversation piece is emblematic of the conundrum at the center of the Atlantic play world. Zoffany’s painting instantiates the illusive logic of play: it is simultaneously reserved for the private sphere—the breakfast room—and put on display to demonstrate the intactness of the family unit. It has purpose but must be subject to regulation. Virtually all discourses about childhood and nurturing orient themselves toward a model that insists on the child as an essential subject, integral to the construction of public identities. Play of a mimetic and emulative nature takes precedence in my analysis. Humans play: this basic truth applies across temporal and geographic boundaries. That German eighteenth-century cultures continue to teach the world to play is admittedly a bold assertion, one that I hope to justify. Perhaps more audaciously, my story reveals the

ways in which a modern notion of “model” childhoods is German, with its taut dialectic of innocence and guilt, reward and punishment. My aim with this book is to increase the visibility of domestic economies in the transcultural construction of the play world.

Researchers who observe similarities between biological play drives in animal and human activities note that there is something like a play circuit in the human brain, though the scholarly community has not always been so receptive to examinations of the relationship between empirical study and the emotions, particularly with regard to the presumed innocence of the child at play.⁵ While the German term *Spielwelt* (play world) can encompass not only the actual spaces of children’s activities but also imaginative terrain, it more conventionally denotes the former. When ethnographer and historian Ingeborg Weber-Kellerman calls attention to the variation in meaning of the *Kinderzimmer* in the nineteenth century, for example, she describes the transformation from a *Schlafräum* (sleeping space) to a *Spielwelt*.⁶ Though there are hints at more connotative usage, the term signifies a physical, architectural space. Renate Gehrke-Riedlin observes that the eighteenth-century *Kinderstube*, segregated as it was from the “real world,” was transformed into the primary locus of instruction. As she argues, *Kindheit*, or childhood, became a *Schulkindheit*, or the school of childhood: the “play-room” proper manifests itself only later in the century.⁷ The play room of the domicile, as I demonstrate in this study, lays the cornerstone of the play world. Though purportedly shielded from destructive, disruptive forces, the innocent imaginary of childhood is poised on the edge between entertainment and edification, between public spectacle and private space—and always between the opposing desires of the familiar and the unknown.

Philosophies of play emerged alongside considerations of real-world spaces, and canonical German thinkers exerted considerable force over this discourse. Around 1800, adult leisure activities retained the patina of play, and there was considerable interplay between the adult imagination and the child’s play world.⁸ The family scene of instruction and breakfast in the Zoffany painting captures the oldest child entering the room, tugging the play world with him. The intersection of social forces, the encoding of bourgeois subjectivity as ensconced in the domestic realm, and the emerging institutionalization of pedagogy attracted philosophical debate. The cultivation of play practices in the eighteenth century formed the basis of deliberations about a play imperative. Developing from sustained engagement with Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), especially his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), for example, discourses about play subsume it into the cognitive

category of aesthetic judgment and the emancipatory imaginary. In 1790, Kant describes play as “an occupation that is agreeable on its own account,” in contrast to labor, “which on its own account is disagreeable.”⁹ Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), identifies the *Spieltrieb*, or play drive, as the expression of human freedom. This popularization of a play imperative, defined in opposition to work, forms the core of debates about play and games. Either they constitute a form of practice for labor or an oppositional diversion therefrom, or play enfoldes the essence of humanity and human freedom as a right and a biological drive that manifests in the realm of the aesthetic. Both positions interest me, for historically, the former is ascribed to the segregating of childhood as a discrete phase, whereas the latter remains the provenance of the adult.

Interpreting this legacy, Herbert Marcuse crafts an argument about the aesthetic as a necessary condition for negotiating and imaginatively negating the dominance of reason, the optimization of labor, and the organization of repressed instincts, in a blended lexicon of psychoanalytic and Marxist critique. In a repressive world, he writes, “the aesthetic function is conceived as a principle of governing the entire human existence, and it can do so only if it becomes ‘universal.’”¹⁰ That universality unfolds in a dialectical relationship with the particularities of history, national narratives, economies, and intersectional identities. Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* offers an example of this persistent philosophical inheritance. He foregrounds the second half of the eighteenth century as the period in which Kant’s philosophy stabilized the definition of the aesthetic.¹¹ In general terms, the aesthetic—and by extension in my reading, play—is not only connected to a feeling of pleasure and a cognitive faculty but rather, Marcuse concludes, the aesthetic dimension emerges “as its *center*, the medium through which nature becomes susceptible to freedom, necessity to autonomy” (emphasis in the original).¹² Play involves freedom, aesthetics, and autonomy. These undergo pedagogical transformation when directed at the child.

Marcuse, interpreting the legacy of play without purpose in Kant, recuperated as emancipatory in Schiller, expands the syntax of play in modernity as the necessary correlative to a hyperrational regime of labor: “Play is *unproductive* and *useless* precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitative traits of labor and leisure; it ‘just plays’ with the reality.”¹³ Whereas some aspects of Marcuse’s reading of the politically liberating dialectic of play and work obtain, my approach shifts the conditions of the discourse to the theorization and practices of teaching children to play.

Jürgen Habermas's foundational *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* posits the capacity of social institutions to participate in the construction of modernity's collapse of the hierarchies between the private and the public, in which reason, undergirded by ideals of rational thought and critical debate, exercises dominance. Although the soundness of his historical narrative is vulnerable to criticism for its exclusionary politics, the premise of blurred boundaries as constitutive of modernity remains persuasive. Mapping these blurred lines in the play world gains importance in the examination of German cultural practices beyond Europe.

CHILDHOOD STUDIES AND PLAY

In transatlantic modernity, evidence of the German cultural iconography of play abounds. Philippe Ariès's foundational work *Centuries of Childhood* persuasively locates the "discovery of childhood" in seventeenth-century France.¹⁴ The national, from an historical perspective, is always implicated. Ariès's study derives its considerable authority from the artifacts of power and privilege in which play sustains and trains the elect and elite in early modern France. In positing a play world, I contend that German instructional material of the eighteenth century invents play. Although theorists outline multiple types of play, the foremost category for my enterprise is performative. Children's play, according to Ariès's argument, was dominated by games of emulation; embedded in that model is the assumption that at play, children mimic adult behaviors.¹⁵

Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* represents one significant scholarly contribution to the categorization of the human being not only as *homo faber*, man the maker, but also man at play.¹⁶ The category of play pertinent to this study, situated at the nexus of imaginative and imitative, involves a profound, sometimes subliminal mimicry inspired by toys and texts—and child-directed. This performative play replicates not only behaviors but also objects. Ariès's work followed the publication of Roger Caillois's study of games and play, *Les jeux et les hommes*, in which the French sociologist elaborates on Johan Huizinga's opus on man and play. Caillois characterizes four major types of play: agôn (competitive), alea (chance), mimicry (imitative), and ilinx (induced vertigo, giddiness).¹⁷ Neither Huizinga nor Caillois distinguishes between children's and adults' games. The childhood Ariès delineates as a separate sphere of human existence remains only a peripheral concern in

theorizing play. Caillois, for example, observes the importance of play as innate, emphasizing that it is shared in the animal kingdom; he acknowledges, however, that his four categories cannot cover “the entire universe of play.”¹⁸ Caillois positions crossover (child-adult) play in an “imaginary universe.”¹⁹

In this study, I accept the premise that childhood is “a cultural construction and not a biologically determined period of life; its existence varies depending on country, social class, time and gender.”²⁰ Each attribute in the effort to approach childhood intersectionally factors into my analysis. There is a disjuncture between the original European practices of play and Western inventions of a modern, model childhood. With great explanatory force, the concept of “islanding” has productively framed increased attention to childhood as a discrete phase of human existence.²¹ A tension reemerges when play theories and practices enter the realm of signification for national identity and the geography of the nation-state. On the one hand, the “islanding” of play sequesters the playing subject; on the other, the assumption persists that play is performative, preparatory for engagement with adult life. The play world I elaborate derives much of its performative power from its intersection with the real, for play as a pedagogical practice, as it was theorized in certain German cultural traditions, creates a compelling connection between figurative and literal spaces and lives. The purpose of this book is to examine the generative relationship between play and pedagogy that emerged concurrent with the articulation of middle-class subjectivity and the role of model childhoods in the self-identity of modern European and European American family structures. I contend that in transatlantic modernity, toys, texts, and their production and distribution through play construct a German childhood as the model.

Play, though thought to be transhistorical, demands historicization. World events—wars, revolutions, slavery, and industrialization among them—generate a historical conscious and unconscious, the attributes of which travel with transatlantic immigration. Not only does play participate in historical identity formation, but it is further shaped by the social construction of collective or “national” characteristics impacted by a relationship to a particular ethnically envisioned geography. More specific to identity politics, Henri Lefebvre’s arguments about space being both historically and ideologically constructed connects the theory of natural space to that of the built environment. With great rigor, he delineates a science of space: “The fields we are concerned with are, first, the *physical*—nature,

the Cosmos; second, the *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and, third, the *social*. In other words, we are concerned with logical-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopia.”²²

The utopian products of the play world and the innocent imaginary coexist with eccentric, damaged, and debilitating topoi of the child as victim. These categories compete: the innocent and the uncanny. Countering a popularized notion of childhood as sacred and sequestered, Lloyd deMause, embarking on a pioneer path to study the history of childhood in a coalition of professional historians, some with a psychoanalytic frame of reference, introduces the topic forcefully: “The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused. It is our task here to see how much of this childhood history can be recaptured from the evidence that remains to us.”²³ The multiple contributors to his edited volume cover topics that include infanticide, castration, swaddling, and breastfeeding and a time span from antiquity to the late nineteenth century. However, a less expansive approach garners insights into the existence and stakes of competing discourses about childhood innocence and the inculcation of guilt prior to the sentimentalization of the young. These debates assume a moral patina about the purpose of play and the objects that accompany or regulate it. These two major cultural forces, I argue in this book, are marked with traces of German concepts and practices of play and constructions of the play world.

The narrative arc this analysis traces acknowledges the adult-child relationship as one between a dominant and a subordinate, as eloquently argued by Joseph Zornado: “The way in which the adult invents the child—and so reproduces the dominant culture—is key to understanding the history that leads from the slingshot to the megaton bomb, for the production and reproduction of our style of human culture occur first and foremost in our style of human relationships, which is first experienced by the child at the hands of the adult.”²⁴ Zornado’s insight underscores the discrepancy in the power relationship between adult agency and the structuring of childhood play. His assertion contrasts sharply with the nostalgic and frequently romanticized “invention” of childhood, a foundation for a counternarrative to the adult experience as loss-of-innocence.

THE TRANSATLANTIC

The “transatlantic” world is historically defined by the ocean and interactions among Europe, Africa, and the Americas. And yet, as D’Maris Coffman and Adrian Leonard observe, the tripartite construction contains a bias. Their work underwrites returning to a more expansive approach: world history.²⁵ Departing from models of cultural production based on the organizing principle of the nation, scholars have expanded the range of spatially specific formations to include global trends aligned with trade, travel, and exploration—synonymous with exploitation. Nonetheless, the unreflected, triumphant, and celebratory nature of the transatlantic story warrants examination for its Eurocentrism. In this study, the German American domination of the play world shapes the analysis and the selection of texts and toys for further examination. As Jan Stievermann observes of Pennsylvania Germans: “The history of this minority was, in the interpretations offered from the late nineteenth century well into the second half of the twentieth century, dominated by questions about the persistence or assimilation of specific ethnic and denominational traditions. Themes such as cross-cultural contacts and conflicts in a pluralistic environment, or transnational processes of identity formation, were largely ignored.”²⁶ The play world intersects the national, religious, and economic narratives of migration while reflecting precisely the transnational and cross-cultural contacts that Stievermann foregrounds. Moreover, the play world aggrandizes its own agency in the pedagogical mission of its construction. It functions, I argue, as a simulacrum of the specific historical and nationalist narratives emerging in a modernity dominated by the hegemonic tripartite model of the Atlantic world. In this geography of identity, play is put to work. These artifacts, too, are agents of migration.

Saskia Sassen, whose work on defining and understanding the global city, intervenes meaningfully in theorizing agents of expulsion in a phase of capitalism fueled by the mechanisms of acquisition. In the historical context of transatlantic modernity, expulsion is an extreme articulation of migration narratives about Germans outside Germany. Sassen’s discussion of accumulation related to the extraction of resources prefaces insights into inequality itself as a type of expulsion and as inflected by class, for those at both the bottom and the middle: “from a life space; among those at the top, this appears to have meant exiting from the responsibilities of membership in society via self-removal, extreme concentration of the wealth available in a society, and no inclinations to redistribute that wealth.”²⁷ The pressures

that lead to migration are evident in the texts and toys that intervene about possessions in establishing the parameters of the play world. There is a contiguous relationship between play and the world; owning and pedagogy, where childhood becomes a corollary of membership, and adult supervision and intervention function, in Freudian terms, as superego to the play world of the young id.

My preliminary argument is modest: that the German definition of the *Spielwelt* must be reimagined with the movement of Germans beyond Europe. This *Welt*, both world and globe in German, repeatedly reinvents a narrative identity of whiteness and the innocent imaginary at the expense of subjugated others. The economies of toy production, marketing, and sales lie at the nexus of pedagogically inflected, transatlantic appeals to the authenticity and superiority of German manufacture; this, too, reinforces religious, ethnic, national, and racial identities to imagine a play world that replicates a compatibility between play and privilege while preserving a moral highground, projecting it from the domicile onto the world. Examined in a transatlantic context, the paradigm persists until the decade after World War I, which coincides with the rise of American toy industry giants such as Mattel and Hasbro; they “helped transform an industry that had primarily addressed the needs and values of parents into one that appealed directly to the longings and imaginations of children.”²⁸ To make this model visible, and to reimagine it, I examine networks—including trade and economies, national affiliation, family entanglements, and cultural iconography—that develop across the Atlantic world. Such an undertaking exposes and destabilizes its Eurocentrism.

Postcolonial scholarship of past decades has paved the way, with incisive examinations of colonial discourse in the absence of colonies, analyses of the dichotomy between Enlightenment and empire, the force of radical enlightenment and transcultural critiques of European epistemologies, and the foundational historical research that illuminates the centrality of cultural identities.²⁹ Though issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and mobility emerge from these studies, rarely do these works engage with the domestic realm, with the invention of childhood as a national imperative, or with the migration of German ideologies through the agency of objects. Material and cultural forces construct imaginative play *with* the world. Susan Buck-Morss repositions the philosophical legacy of G. W. F. Hegel’s universal notion of human freedom—equally important to the defining history of the Atlantic world—by reading the paradox of Europe’s advancing autonomy and the reality of African slavery. Again, for my purposes, the following

seems to distill the complex rewriting of human history, or rather, decentering it from European whiteness: “Europeans built conceptual barriers of difference in the form of spatial distinctions between nation and colonies, a racialized distinction of *Negro* slavery, and legal distinctions as to the protection of persons, in order to segregate free Europe from colonial practices.” Key to her analysis in the framework of labor in industrializing Britain and Paul Gilroy’s work on the Atlantic world is the concept of porosity, which characterizes “ordering boundaries” of human experience around the category of the nation-state. Further, porosity gains relevance in “exposing ungovernable connections.”³⁰ The construction of a distinctly German play world in Atlantic modernity can best be understood by examining its porosity—between private and public, national and transnational, cultural and transcultural. The interrogatory approach to this material is informed by the need to expose the “ungovernable connections” between German identity and a desire for ascendancy. In each chapter, I compose a set of evidence from the visual arts, material culture, and literary texts to demonstrate the ways the domestic sphere rewrites the play world, which undergoes significant changes to reflect evolving demographics, emigration patterns, and the centrality of play in the construction of national and global imaginaries.

TROPES OF WORLDING

Beyond enacting a model childhood, play enables the foundational act of worlding, which confers agency on the child.³¹ Play as worlding empowers the subject to marshal energies that replicate, order, and understand the national in relation to ownership, entitlement, and hierarchizing intersectional attributes of identity. Though the trope of worlding can decenter literary studies productively away from the category of the national, childhood subjectivity recapitulates it as a necessary geography of the play world, which is historically contested space, the physical and imaginative nature of which defies easy relegation to either the domestic or public spheres but necessarily implicates both. In this context, worlding in some ways repeats the colonization process for which it has been justifiably critiqued, exposed for its performative capacity to execute a politics of inclusion and exclusion.³² My aim is to endorse this position and to examine the ways the German cultural enterprise directed at the production and exportation of childhood participates in the trope of worlding. The mapping of borders

and boundaries of the play world necessarily critiques the formation of childhood agency through narrating relationships to material possessions justified through national and transcultural ideologies. The contribution of German-language texts and material artifacts about play consists of a narrative about the spatial, social, and cultural construction of the play world as a safe space for some, with inevitable risks for others. This is still underexplored in scholarship, and my intent is to illuminate the role of the domestic sphere in underwriting cultural nationalism and transnational migration discourses.

CANONICAL AND MARGINAL

The German construction of the presumably universal play world begins in the early modern period and under the influence of religious separatism and persecution. It is necessary to begin before the dichotomous questioning of Enlightenment or empire. The question of play and power is inscribed into the emergence of the Moravian Brethren, the belief in universal education, and the migration of these ideas through discourse networks and refugees seeking protection. An early promoter in this context is Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670).³³ His affiliation with the Protestant sect is rarely the focus of analyses, but the mobility of play theories and practices transports a common commitment to education and play as compatible with theological principles from the early modern period of German-speaking Europe. Prior to the emergence of secular instruction and the regulation of play, Nikolaus Zinzendorf (1700–1760) invested heavily in the leavening of religious instruction toward mitigating the severity of Lutheran orthodoxy and its rigid discipline of children. His emphasis on the emotions extended to an embrace of childhood innocence and a reiteration of the child as foremost in the Christian flock. Zinzendorf founded the Moravian Brethren in the eastern Saxon village of Herrnhut, which became toponymical for the dissemination of the faith through proselytizing. Through immigration, the foundational texts and hymns were disseminated in the northeastern United States. With a stronghold in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the Moravian Brethren exerted considerable influence on the publication of childhood texts about play. Proponents of play and preserving childhood innocence, however, are frequently suffused in moral ambiguity that gets lost in migration. As Tautz points out in her observations about the Moravian Brethren, Zinzendorf proselytized proslavery positions, ascribing to the Moravian

community a “legacy of early-modern Christianity that aligned whiteness with morality and justified slavery.”³⁴ An examination of Zinzendorf’s legacy of reform religious instruction intersects with the pedagogical theorists of German-speaking Europe. Religion and play teach race.

The religious influence abates in the eighteenth century with the emergence of pedagogical theorists, the Philanthropists and their investment in human betterment, and the institutionalization of education. So much European influence is mediated by the institutions of early childhood education, the design and dissemination of which are attributed to the kindergarten of Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852). Historians, child studies scholars, and administrators have all treated Fröbel’s work in compelling ways. My intention is not to wedge an opinion into those arguments but to trace out the implications of Fröbel’s advocates as they define the importance of play and humanity. These advocates broadcast theories of play in the New World to great effect. One interlocutor, Berta von Marenholtz-Bülow (1810–1893), recalls her first encounter with the “old fool” in 1849: “When one of his pupils called him Mr. Froebel, I remembered once having heard of the name who wished to educate children by *play*, and that it had seemed to me a very perverted view, for I had only thought of *empty* play, without any serious purpose.”³⁵ In his work on the “playing child” construction, sociologist Michael Wyness writes, “Play is also seen as a part of childhood in that it is a period of time when children are free from responsibilities . . . it means not having to work.”³⁶ There is a retro quality to Wyness’s assertion. To place both aspects of the quotation in perspective, I cite Fröbel: “Play is the first means of development of the human mind, its first effort to make acquaintance with the outward world, to collect original experiences from things and facts, and to exercise the powers of body and mind. The child, indeed, recognizes no purpose in it.”³⁷ Play with purpose becomes a major German export, emanating from the “old fool’s” school in Thuringia. Philosophy and pedagogy entered an existential duel.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818),³⁸ and Fröbel (1782–1852) concerned themselves with the pedagogical purposes of childhood, but Fröbel’s regime of play constitutes the most important factor in the international discussion of childhood education, domestic practices, and public institutions.³⁹ Fröbel relaxes the religious regulation of play, focusing instead on the homology between childhood and nature and effectively secularizing the purpose of play through subliminal pedagogy.

In contemporary scholarship, much attention is devoted to innovations that enable us to process “the great unread.”⁴⁰ Reframing the question of how to rank largely forgotten texts in pursuit of understanding how what we read and do not read changes knowledge, I look not toward computational analysis, the territory of Franco Moretti,⁴¹ but to a broader cultural context. I cast a wide evidentiary net to make a case for the centrality of German material, literary, and pedagogical cultures in the construction of the “play world” as an imaginary space in which the agents of play varyingly acknowledge and incorporate historical realities. The voices of Zinzendorf, Fröbel, Campe, and Pestalozzi can be heard across temporal and geographical distances. In this book, I go beyond the canonical. The engagement of Zinzendorf’s grandmother in educating women is significant; the prescriptive handbook on how mothers should teach children to play, begun by a cookbook author, takes center stage. Goethe’s mother and her objection to violent play crosses the pond. Stories by once-popular authors whose reputations have receded from memory imagine the German childhood in an amalgamated American and African wilderness, for entertainment and edification. The women who brought Fröbelian fundamentals to American education are heard. Their progressive politics, however, are not guarantors of ethical practice. The play world is fraught with such contradictions.

A moment in sociological theory is an aperçu for my argument. Max Weber (1864–1920) provides a counternarrative to an industrialized Europe dominated by a Protestant work ethic. His ideas about work sublimate any theory of play as a condition of practice without purpose. At the turn of the twentieth century, Weber’s consideration of work is predicated on several factors that accrue significance: increasing societal secularization; the rise of an educated but disenfranchised bourgeoisie; industrialization, albeit at a slower pace than experienced elsewhere in Europe; and patterns of transatlantic immigration that model economic rationalization. In the “Protestant Ethic,” he makes connections between religious practice, professional calling, and the accumulation of wealth. From Enlightenment purposelessness to work as life’s purpose, the need to theorize play in context arises and develops commensurately with bourgeois subjectivity. Play, within reason and with purpose, relaxes the ironclad religious commitment to the tenet of work as a means of salvation. Weber, in psychologizing the motivation of labor in advanced capitalism, concludes that religious piety bores the white-collar worker:

The people filled with the spirit of capitalism to-day tend to be indifferent, if not hostile, to the Church. The thought of the pious boredom of paradise has little attraction for their active natures; religion appears to them as a means of drawing people away from labour in this world. If you ask them what is the meaning of their restless activity, why they are never satisfied with what they have, thus appearing so senseless to any purely worldly view of life, they would perhaps give the answer, if they know any at all: “to provide for my children and grandchildren.”⁴²

Indirectly, Weber incorporates the psychology of surplus into a rejection of religion and a faux dedication to family legacy. The connections between religion, work, and play vary with historical context and objects of play. Within the Protestant discourse about a work ethic, contested sites form as litanies about the cultivating of children through regulated play. In determining the parameters of the study, I accept Sharon Brookshaw’s understanding of toys, games, and some interactive books as “the material culture of childhood”—objects produced by adults for children, in contrast to the ephemeral objects children make for themselves.⁴³ Texts and toys both tell stories.

TEXTS

Texts function in plural ways, with the act of reading and imaginative constructions of a play world coexisting with books as material objects. With regard to literature, we can detect major commonalities. In “The Origins of Children’s Literature,” M. O. Grenby focuses on Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures* as a pivotal text, observing that in general there are three kinds of origins: “First, there is the historical genesis of children’s literature as a commercial product. Second, there is the idea that children’s literature has naturally developed from a culture of adult-to-child storytelling. And third, the biographical accounts surrounding the conception of individual books.”⁴⁴ This focus on the individual segues into the conclusion David Hamlin draws for the playing subjects—namely, that the telos is individualism.⁴⁵ This assertion holds true, but in transcultural play worlds, the often hidden or unarticulated networks of signification show themselves in the codes that construct class-based, ethnic, and racialized identities as the prequel to transitioning into citizenship. Therein lurks the danger.

The powerful critical tool of intersectionality—with attributes of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual identities, age, religion, citizenship status, and other elements of plural identity formation—has had an impact on the study of children’s literature.⁴⁶ In the American cultural tradition, a trenchant and uneuphemized critique of “classics,” such as *Huckleberry Finn*, as exemplifying racism and white supremacy challenges the ostensible unassailability of a national canon; others push back with a defense of reading for Mark Twain’s critique of the social norms that sanctioned slavery. Even taking both seemingly irreconcilable viewpoints into consideration, a result remains: the act of reading can contribute to a naturalization of racism. The author may encode criticism but cannot control the quality of the reading. Through the refracting lens of intersectionality, the specific national, historical, geographic, and racial characteristics of literature aimed at listening, reading, and observing youth with the goal of emulating and replicating the family and class structures of the adult world become legible.

Concurrent developments to the study of images underscore the potentially subliminal—or ideologically overt—educatory elements of literature for a young reader. Noting this evolution, Teresa Colomer and colleagues write: “Research confirms that, at its best, picturebook illustration is a subtle and complex art form that can communicate on many levels and leave a deep imprint on a child’s consciousness.”⁴⁷ Although the interaction of reading and of viewing images in children’s books can function in subversive ways, the performative force of doing so accrues increased powers of persuasion when situated in a pedagogical model that governs the leisure activities of children, from reading and indoor play to outdoor recreation and parties and holidays. Taken together, these arguments obviate any potentially exculpatory narratives about classics, canons, and the imperative to historicize their contents when representing racial, gendered, and class inequality, injustice, or violence.

Recent research into the relationship between childhood learning, images, and their connection to scientific knowledge connects visibility with the play world more explicitly in the geography of German-speaking Europe in the post-Enlightenment era. The national and linguistic cultural traditions vary across continents and oceans, and in her *Die Welt in Bildern* (The world in pictures)—a well-researched analysis of the pictorial as an epistemological category—Silvy Chakkalal identifies a connection between Friedrich Justin Bertuch’s (1747–1822) *Bilderbuch für Kinder* (Picturebook for children) and the dissemination of scientific knowledge in the considerably larger framework of visual culture in the long eighteenth century.

Published from 1790 to 1830, the *Bilderbuch für Kinder* not only popularized and disseminated scientific knowledge but also helped define childhood as a temporal, experiential, and cultural category. Chakkalaka's concern is primarily with the copperplate reproductions of nature and their ability to structure the transfer of knowledge to the German-speaking and youthful audience, though these images appeal to adults as well. However, her analysis resists any reductive notion of childhood and a visually entertaining pedagogical project.⁴⁸ Chakkalaka's study reveals the importance of unpacking the idea of images as amusement; the visual conveys knowledge, which has important implications for any understanding of early modern epistemology.⁴⁹ The centrality of sense perception for cognitive and cultural development comes to the foreground in this sustained interpretation of a homology between scientific knowledge and visual cultures. This science of seeing and knowing establishes a specifically German legacy in children's cultures within German-speaking Europe and in migration. In the European American play world, the pedagogical moment occurs in the interpreted construction of whiteness embedded in the transference between an image and an accompanying text.

MATERIALITIES OF THE PLAY WORLD

While the verbal and visual telling of stories and reading of texts elicit interpretation, explanation, and imagination, producing, purchasing, and playing with toys engages aspects of commerce, labor, family roles and finances, and often regulation and supervision.⁵⁰ Much available work on toys, from an historical perspective, is the product of collectors, yielding stunning and inviting catalogues with glossy photos of well-preserved fragments or pristine incarnations of their favorite things.

Multiple collectors and historical materialists have a voice. Walter Benjamin, the philosopher tangentially associated with Frankfurt School philosophy, drafts in his essays on toys a model of material culture; he further attends to the means of production and consumption that are adapted by sacred and secular diacritical marker. Benjamin's model further recodes the pedagogical imperatives of playing to save the soul. His filtering of play activity through a Freudian lens of repetition compulsion extends the line of thought in Weber's work ethic to a secularized play ethic. This context encompasses the "social life of things," to borrow from Arjun Appadurai's notion that objects circulate in "different *regimes of value*."⁵¹ My focus,

not exclusively economic, highlights the pedagogical, exchange value of toys that model sacrifice and gain in moral, national, and racial registers.

Historically, collectors engage in practices that intersect with natural science epistemologies. Historian Anke te Heesen defines the study of material cultures as “a subject that has increasingly penetrated the concerns of historians, has found its most important expression in the history of collecting.”⁵² In a less rigorous sense, cultural artifacts speak to the verve of enthusiasts and aficionados, but the ephemeral nature of toys, as material objects, can present insurmountable challenges to the historian. Toys bear witness to history, shape identity, and do the heavy lifting in mimetic play. In the words of Appadurai, “Contemporary Western common sense, building on various historical traditions in philosophy, law, and natural science, has a strong tendency to oppose ‘words’ and ‘things.’”⁵³ Toys as commodities figure prominently in the contouring of model childhoods, inhabiting a space between verbal and material, intersecting the commercial creation of desire and mimetic drive to reproduce hierarchies of identity. In his study of consumerism in the age of Goethe, Daniel Purdy argues that Germany developed “a vibrant and complex consumer culture” in the eighteenth century prior to its industrialization. The act of reading, in this case, of Friedrich Bertuch’s *Mode Journal*, proves to be pivotal in producing desire through “readerly imagination.”⁵⁴ In the context of the play world, the materiality of texts and toys as commodities performs desire coterminously, but with transatlantic influence. Historian Leora Auslander, in her seminal essay “Beyond Words,” makes the point that material objects are not only “the product of history, they are also active agents in history. In their communicative, performative, emotive, and expressive capacities, they act, have effects in the world.”⁵⁵ Toys not only accrue cultural and emotional capital, they migrate along with the value systems contained in the culture of emotions. As toy historian Richard O’Brien observes, “When the Europeans arrived in the New World, toys came with them. It was only natural. Toys had been a part of European life for centuries.”⁵⁶ Evidence of German toy-making skills, which straddled the line between craft and commerce, survive in products collected and displayed as folk art.⁵⁷

Toys, as material objects and signifiers in a web of human meaning, both inhabit and construct the play world. As historian Gary Cross writes of modern children and their toys, “Only in modern times have toys become primarily objects for children, props in a play world separated from adults. In the transformation of play and toys from medieval times to the mid-nineteenth century, toys gradually became specifically children’s playthings.”⁵⁸

Into this general statement about the American context, I introduce the argument that the play world structured between 1750 and 1914 was profoundly influenced by German and German American philosophers, celebrity parents, toy manufacturers, and German- and English-speaking authors; this national, historical, and linguistic cognate of modern play provides an underexamined narrative about the parameters of a model childhood that elevates the pedagogical over the pleasurable experience of play—though this theorizing and regulation do not always progress in a linear manner. The play worlds of modern, model childhoods are further contested by competing religious, ethical, and social discourses about the attributes of citizenship at home, in public, and in migratory transit.

In their work on modern childhood, Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith emphasize the contiguities in a childhood relationship to material culture, writing “that spaces and settings made for children are pivotal to the construction of modernity in global society, and that children are social actors in their own right who use and interpret material culture on their own terms.”⁵⁹ They further assert a seemingly transhistorical and transnational definition of a model childhood, based on the assumption that children differ from adults and that childhood is a discrete phase in human life warranting special circumstances: children “should have a childhood that is in at least some manner protected, nurturing, and playful; that a child’s education ought to be centered on mental, emotional, and physical development; and that a specialized material culture is needed to make possible the ‘good and happy childhood’ as lived experience.”⁶⁰ The model childhood, however, cannot be universally experienced; nor is there consensus about its qualities.

Texts and toys align in the book as a material object. The marvelous, the ungraspable contained therein evokes Susan Stewart’s discussion of the book as miniature.⁶¹ This scene of instruction enables the transmission of racialized knowledge through regions of the geographical imaginary, but in neutralized, ostensibly innocent ways. The materiality of the letter, to raise the specter of deconstruction, is the method. Late eighteenth-century letter and word games were designed to appeal to early readers. Based on the idea of ABC books, extant examples date from 1795. The *Neues Deutsches Buchstaben-Magazin* (New German letter box) takes the game of reading and writing into three dimensions. With 224 cardboard pieces of letters, numbers, and punctuation marks, the collection was available in Latin, French, and Italian.⁶² Directed at a young audience, the pieces exploit the materiality of the letter, projecting the imaginative onto the lexical, the

play onto and off the page. A direct descendant of such a letter game, the picture puzzle (*Bilderrätsel*) invites heterodox methods of reading in order to play. The seemingly neutral introduction of images, however, controls the narrative. In the example from 1889, words of wisdom, maxims such as “Probieren geht über Studieren” (roughly, the proof is in the pudding) (fig. 2) and “Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde” (roughly, the early bird catches the worm) appear to deliver brain-teasing glyphs and letters. In the first instance, letters and pictographs solve the puzzle. In the second (fig. 3), the image of the *MOHR* is noteworthy for the visual and conceptual baggage it carries. The nonchalant visual rendering of the black figure confuses the literal and figurative signification of the Moor. A later reading of blackness in this volume will articulate the associations created and cemented by the deployment of this African imaginary.

In this sense, my work explores the interplay among the physical, mental, and social spaces that contribute to a German-cultural hegemony of the play world, contiguous with the playroom, the playground, and the nation. My goal is to analyze the meaning of the playroom, the playground, and the play world as locations of material culture and social conditions of childhood from an historical and transnational perspective.⁶³ *The Play World* provides insight into the role of children prepped to become modern subjects—as consumers and producers of play, as citizens of highly contested built environments, and as human “sites” of negotiation in a long-standing debate about education, public institutions, and national identity. The study of childhood necessarily brings together disparate and sometimes contentious disciplines. Moreover, the academic inflection of that project often focuses on the realm of literature. As the editors of *Keywords for Children’s Literature* observe, “‘Children’s literature’ itself has become a kind of umbrella term encompassing a wide range of disciplines, genres, and media.”⁶⁴ The materiality of the book, however, is often overlooked in the study of texts. It is imperative, I believe, to consider the materiality of childhood in transatlantic modernity, for it is located at the nexus of play, work, and identity.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this section, I take the opportunity to introduce the lesser-known writers and their work, along with the role played by more canonical figures. While digital humanities methodologies generate metadata in the “slaughterhouse

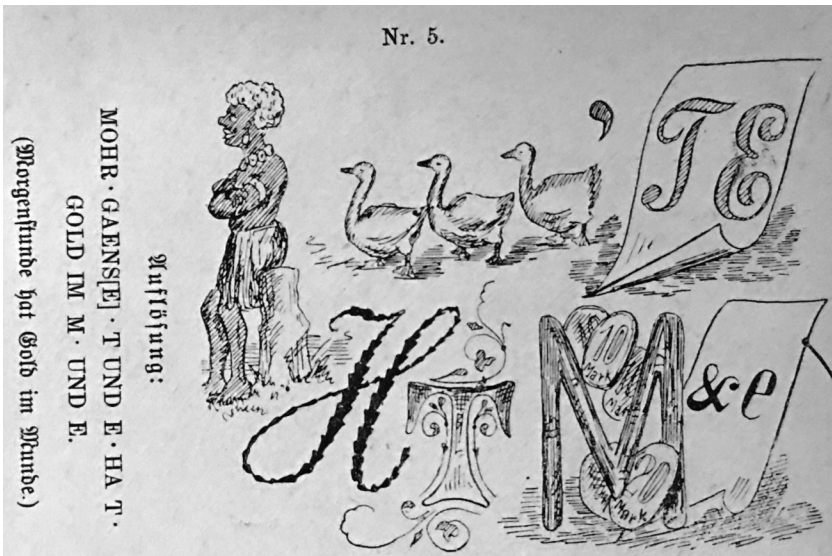
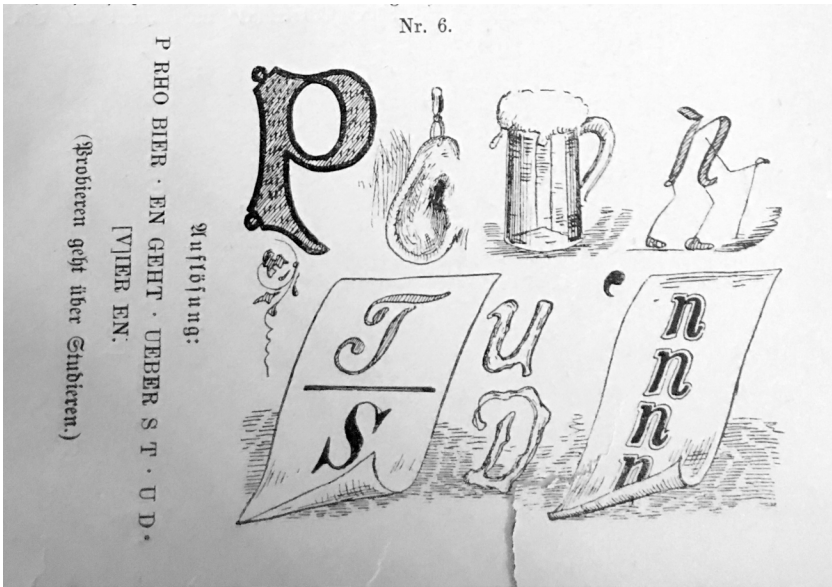


FIG. 2 "Probieren geht über Studieren."
 From Auerbach's *Deutscher Kinder-Kalender auf das Jahr 1889* (Leipzig: Fernau, 1889), 38. Joseph P. Horner Memorial Library, The German Society of Pennsylvania. Photo: author.

FIG. 3 "Morgensunde hat Gold im Munde."
 From Auerbach's *Deutscher Kinder-Kalender auf das Jahr 1889* (Leipzig: Fernau, 1889), 38. Joseph P. Horner Memorial Library, The German Society of Pennsylvania. Photo: author.

of literature,”⁶⁵ my exploration collects evidence from the margins and connects textual and material artifacts into a darkly imagined play world. The narrative arc of my argument stretches back to the early modern period and fades with the hegemony of German influence on toy production in the early twentieth century. Each chapter lays out a network of biographical, aesthetic, and material connections that extent from Europe to the Americas. Religious regulation of pleasure and play yields to an overarching natural, secularized model of childhood in which attributes of intersectional identities—from religious affiliation, economic class status, and race—feature prominently. Germanness itself, the prosperity of its immigrant communities and virtues of their linguistic and technical superiority, assumes greater importance in the export of play theories and practices—and products, especially legible in the late nineteenth century and until the onset of World War I. The German literary canon, with Goethe at its pinnacle, additionally functions as a signifier of ethnic influence and accomplishment. Within this cultural narrative, economic and political mechanisms, along with the production, consumption, and distribution of toys, propel the construction of transatlantic German childhoods as exemplary and eccentric.

Chapter 1, “The Protestant Play Ethic,” examines a network of writers and pedagogues who leave their mark on early modern religious discourses about play. In her work on seventeenth-century “marginal” women, Natalie Zemon Davis, in acknowledging an intellectual debt to Michel de Certeau, writes about the significance of dialogue in spiritual discovery.⁶⁶ My decision to begin with a cast of seemingly minor characters from seventeenth-century thought can be justified by their engagement in a transatlantic dialogue about the potential for spiritual—and other types—of discovery through prayer and play. The artifacts and discursive influence produces a communicative network that constitutes a model of play that casts a long shadow. Among these narrators of play is Henriette Catharina Freifrau von Gersdorff (1648–1726), a poet and patroness who expressed a desire for divinity, eschewing material possessions. Her work calibrated morality in ownership and thus planted the seed of the Protestant play ethic. Celebrated by contemporaries, the “Fürstin unter den deutschen Mädchen” (princess among German girls) called attention to the importance of educating across gender for the welfare and reputation of the nation.⁶⁷ Her influence is filtered through family connections, and foremost among these is her grandson and ward, Nikolaus Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf, who founded Herrnhut as the material and spiritual center of the Moravian Brethren.

A counterexample is her own son, who ignored her ministrations and proved prodigal. In their transatlantic dissemination, hymns participate in the network about childhood experience and the regulation of play. Gersdorff's oeuvre yields to an eighteenth-century Pietist. Another marginal figure, Ernst Gottlieb Woltersdorf (1725–1761), was a poet and pastor who studied in Halle and composed 218 spiritual hymns, sermons, and edifying texts. He is best known beyond Germany for his work at the Halle orphanage of August Francke, the project also endorsed by Freifrau von Gersdorff. Woltersdorf's work, popularized in the United States, continues a cycle of regulating joy and play in song about appropriate roles for children in a spiritual community. In twentieth-century America, these sentiments reverberate through theories of early childhood education. Through pedagogical theory, the Protestant play ethic impacts transatlantic secular institutions, and the chapter ends with the American reception of Zinzendorf's beliefs about childhood, community, and play. Henry H. Meyer's *Child Nature and Nurture According to Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf* captures the sense of early modern liturgical texts, the purpose of doll houses, and the didacticism of hymns, all of which he updates and collates to establish a canon of German texts that shape the construction of modern childhood. Gersdorff taught children *not* to play—not so Zinzendorf. That redemptive aspect dominated the American reception of the Protestant play ethic.

Whereas the Protestant play ethic overcomes a resistance to play, an early modern inheritance, textual and practical responses to major theories about Nature and childhood prompt the contemplation of more secular models. Zoffany's domestic scene typifies an eighteenth-century constellation of civilizing childhood and parental oversight. The second chapter, "Professional Parenting: Enlightened Play," foregrounds the gendering of supervisory roles in parental interactions with playing children. The professionalizing of parenthood in this period is evident in manuals about maternal and paternal instruction. Parental roles assume responsibility for mediating between intimate and familial spheres, on the one hand, and public and historical ones, on the other. Beginning with representations of the *Kinderstube* (children's room), this chapter identifies the host of characters in physical spaces, then moves to the analysis of a little-known manual that instructs mothers how to teach play. The fourth edition of a popular household handbook for women, the *Oekonomisches Handbuch für Frauenzimmer*, elaborates on a cookbook originally penned by Friederike Luise Löffler (1744–1805); it contains, in addition to the publication history of the volume and the previous three prefaces, an

appendix with a detailed description of contemporary mothering practices. The authorship of the *Handbuch* itself poses some authentication and attribution problems. Löffler of Stuttgart authored a cookbook that gained extreme popularity such that her name became something of a franchise, variously borrowed as “Charlotte Löffler” and “A. Löfflerin.”⁶⁸ Her daughter, Henriette Huttenlocher (1780–1848), carried on her mother’s tradition and possibly wrote the later forewords to subsequent editions (they are unsigned). As consulting the contents of handbooks of handbooks attests, this “how to” volume enjoyed enormous popularity and wide circulation around 1800. This influential volume ultimately portrays play as central to a child’s health, the provenance of the mother. In the second part of the chapter, the focus shifts to a contemporary manual model of the *Hausvater* and the anxiety driven by female-dominated spaces. An examination of Christian Friedrich Germershausen’s *Die Hausmutter in allen ihren Geschäften* and *Der Hausvater in systematischer Ordnung*, as well as a story from Johann Heinrich Campe’s *Kleine Kinderbibliothek* (Little children’s library), substantiate the claim. Finally, to offer a contemporary contestation of the paterfamilias and showcase nuances in the debates about models of fathering, I analyze the stories of a parent-writer who crafts ideal sons through the rejection of alpha-masculine play but also endorses a play space beyond evangelical control. Advancing an alternative masculinity and model of paternity, resistant to games of violence and war toys, is the fiction of Christian Friedrich Wilhelm Jacobs (1764–1847). His readers meet a loving paternal protagonist who is deeply invested in the development of his two motherless sons. His three-volume *Allwin und Theodor* was in great demand by the middle of the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ Though noncanonical, Jacobs was both popular and read. His pedagogical interventions into masculine play enlighten parenting; their legacy is evident in the transatlantic world. One example of this model’s transatlantic reach can be found in *Der deutsche Kinderfreund: Ein Lesebuch für Volksschulen* (The German children’s friend: A reader for public elementary schools). Written by Friedrich Philip Wilmsen (1770–1831), the author introduces the first American edition published in 1830. Identified as a preacher at the Parochial-Kirche zu Berlin, Wilmsen, a teacher and pastor, gained further reputation and income writing a range of pedagogical books about history, the German language, and natural and earth sciences (*Natur- und Erdkunde*). The texts written for children and young readers circulated beyond German-speaking Prussia.⁷⁰ The model of the indulgent mother, wild child, and dire consequences of unrestricted play

conveyed by Wilmsen's allegories survives in their migration to the New World, thus exporting the Protestant play ethic for the professionalizing, enlightened parent beyond Germany.

With sustained consideration of interactions between objects and texts, a dominant play paradigm becomes visible. Each chapter gathers threads of a transatlantic narrative that centers around the developing child-parent constellation as a subject of public discourse. Just as objects serving as agents of history accrue national significance outside the familiar play world, migrants and immigrants imbue artifacts, but also language and cultural patrimony, with special significance. Play influences the writing of history. In the third chapter, "Revolutions in Play," I bring together toys and texts related to the French and American revolutions to make this point. The spotlight shines on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a player, parent, and poet and on his legacy in the United States. Goethe's involvement with toys—the miniature guillotine and the yoyo—ultimately reveals a political unconscious with connections to traumatic histories and narratives of the French Revolution and Reign of Terror. Toys, I argue, provide the necessary leverage to transform destructive into creative impulses. Yet the American reception of Goethe as an exemplary cultural icon responds to the great poet's toy preferences with ambivalence, and a more eccentric figure enters the German American imaginary.

Chapter 4 explores the intersection of latent and manifest artifacts of German colonial ideology. In "Colonizing Childhoods: The African Imaginary," emulative play and engaged reading model ideal ways to think nationally and transnationally—to think "colonially." With the wide world and the cosmos encapsulated in a play room, history enters the domestic sphere. In the late nineteenth century, toys and texts awaken a desire for acquisition that maps colonizing entitlements onto the play world. Territorialization functions to map a cognitive landscape onto an emerging racial identity; it is manifest in the history of colonization, and deterritorialization certainly counts as a tool in the toolbox of postcolonial theory and the analysis of economic globalization.⁷¹ In alignment with an ideology of the appropriative mapping of ownership onto a "wilderness," the metonymy is constructed between the wild and *Naturvölker* (conventionally translated as "primitive or indigenous peoples"). The untamed nature of the child is displaced by populations in need of subjection. As I demonstrate in this chapter and the next, children's toys, texts, and play practices replicate racializations of identity that are rehearsed in the play world and inscribed onto non-European geographies—whether official colonies or not. Entering

the age of empire, German-language texts increasingly associate the child with the “wild.” I examine a novella for young readers by a once canonical, now minor writer. W. O. von Horn, the second pen name of Friedrich Wilhelm Philipp Oertel (1789–1867), was an evangelical pastor who first published *Dorfgeschichten* (village stories) under the pseudonym Friedel Lips: he found writing for a young audience more lucrative. In addition to his republications of popular works, he edited a series of “Jugend- und Volksschriften” (writings for the young and the people) for the publisher Niedner & Kreidl—he himself wrote seventy-five volumes, the themes of which encompassed adventure and the prevalence of Christian values even under dire circumstances. The novella *Ein Kongo-Neger: Eine Geschichte aus Sankt Domingo* (A Congo-negro: A story from Santo Domingo) purveys a colonial fantasy of racial difference and harmony amid the atrocities of slavery and violent uprisings; it disparages revolutionary politics within Europe while extolling them in the New World. The image of Africa in the play world informs the structure of German whiteness and colonializing identity for the child. In the almanac *Auerbach’s Deutscher Kinder-Kalender auf das Jahr 1889*, this is evident particularly in the calendar section itself. Founded in 1883 by August Bertold Auerbach, son of the well-known novelist, the almanac regularly featured a calendar, games, puzzles, stories, and letters directly addressing the readers. In the general context of Auerbach’s calendar, the optics of race depart significantly from the representation of the more conventional fairy-tale illustrations. The fate of the *Oktoberkind* (*Negerkind*), under the sign of Scorpio, reinforces assumptions about the dangers of rhapsodizing the exotic wilderness and the validity of manipulating the world through knowledge. The caricature of Africa in children’s culture is replicated in the appearance of a calendar-like pamphlet aimed at a young audience and harnessed the innocence and noblesse oblige encoded as whiteness, the expectations of Christmas, and the horror of encountering racial otherness during the colonial period. “Knecht Ruprecht in Kamerun” comprises a series of twelve frames, each with a grim caption to collate the experience of Saint Nicholas’s best-known attendant in the tropics with the German-language audience. In this artifact, we see traces of the semiotic shift between children, the influence of an unbridled landscape, and race. This caricature shares the white supremacist suppositions of so many “classics,” though it has received very little scholarly attention. The African imaginary yields to dystopian pressures of history. The shift in tone, after the 1904–6 Herero “uprising,” also known as the Nama Herero War, provides a harsh wake-up call to the romanticizing and exoticizing

impulses of the African adventure tale. By contrast, the racially harmonized Eden of Horn's novella is inscribed into the American political and aesthetic imaginary.

In chapter 5, "Ethnographic Play and the American Imaginary," I add detail to the map of the play world by projecting it across the Americas. The act of reading and the practice of play are intertwined in play manuals from the middle of the nineteenth century. One example, Julie Hirschmann's *Guckkasten-Bilder*, launches a party that revolves around simple group play—all that is needed is feather or a piece of cotton. However, these naturalized, weightless objects are embedded in a complex economic history that connects Europe and the Americas in ways that the stories and toys discussed in this chapter convey. Selected stories and images about play at home and abroad, drawn from calendars, miscellanies, and museum collections, represent the coexistence of didactic fiction and material objects. Moreover, the interactions among material objects and the narratives complicate the formation of an imperial identity—even in the absence of extensive (German) colonies. Exemplary stories of European childhood on other continents, such as "Die kleine Urwälderin" (The little jungle girl, 1902) and "Eine Indianergeschichte" (An Indian story, 1904), replicate a white-settler mentality in conflict with the Plains Indians of North America and the acquisition of indigenous cognitive and practical skills of South America. These stories, framed by a reading of travel and ethnographic literary texts, work against facile portrayals of first peoples and bring into focus other continents in the play world as viewed through the lens of German-speaking Europe. The existence of empire endorses what cultural historians have defined as the imaginary citizenship of young adult readers. The stories in this chapter instruct a particular brand of imaginary citizenship. The concept of an imaginary citizenship for children resonates with the concept of a national or imperial citizenship, redeeming possessions for the play world.

Chapter 6, "The Home and the Nation," follows the counterdiscourse about nature for constructing a play world to challenge teaching economies of possession. I reconsider the breadth and reach of Friedrich Fröbel, who laid the foundations for modern childhood education in the institution of the *Kindergarten*. In transnational debates about play, German play theory is exported to the United Kingdom and the United States. My focus is on two influential works: the first, published by Ernst Steiger (1832–1917), represents an effort to introduce Fröbel's tools into a larger discourse about the education system in the United States in the later

nineteenth century. The German American author weighs in about the role of German theory in American institutions but also provides ample commentary on the efficacy of one national theory in another context. The second text, by Emily (Anne Eliza) Shirreff (1814–1897), appeared a bit later and takes up Fröbel's cause in England. Their respective reception of Fröbel shares a concern with adult supervision of child's play. The mode of that supervision becomes increasingly institutionalized through educational practices that insist on a separate sphere of play and pedagogy. My interest in Fröbel's complex reception in England and the United States highlights the play agenda of his transatlantic proponents. Throughout the nineteenth century and industrialization in Europe and the United States, multiple factors—among them demographic shifts, increasing polarization between agrarian and urban landscapes, and intensified mechanisms of capitalism, accompanied by political and philosophical responses to widening gaps in income—exerted considerable force on the lives and representations of families and children. Together, both historical documents make a case for the national signatures of play in Anglo-American institutions. Paradoxically, in an attempt to assert the international validity of play, the authors engage in advancing the dominance of national identities.

Toys, as agents of history, cross the Atlantic literally. Chapter 7, “Empire of Toys,” traces the intricate network surrounding the production and consumption of toys and childhood accessories that capitalize on German origins combined with American energies. I begin with the German Albert Schoenhut (1849–1912), who began as a wood lather in Göppingen. As an immigrant in Philadelphia, Schoenhut would found the Schoenhut Piano Company in 1872. The enterprise expanded and became a family business. During the production period preceding World War I, Schoenhut and company manufactured and marketed toys that drew inspiration from the Bible, the circus, the faces of Schoenhut children, and the historical characters of American popular entertainment. With reference to insights from recent scholarship in disability studies, I examine the rise of ethnographic exhibits, human zoos, the Wild West Show, and their impact on the making of American toys with German origins. In particular, racialization is the process by which toys, themselves objects of history, confer agency on the child through ownership and repeated play practices. This yields insight into a family business that generated a binational legacy and exposes the imperial impulses evident in the making and marketing of transatlantic toys.

In concluding this study, I try to make visible some aspects of the cultural, communicative, and trade networks that comprise the German play world and enable its circulation. The inscription of Goethe as a player and cultural icon, the dismay about toys and trauma, the amassing of a sugar fortune in the Gilded Age, and the legacy of Fröbel in asserting play as a human right all factor into the narrative of global German identity until World War I. I open with an unsigned review of an 1896 Metropolitan Opera House gala night performance in which a critic describes a “brilliant house” bursting with mythical and human figures of the devil, ghosts, and lovers driven to distraction alongside soldiers and courtiers. Goethe’s (perhaps misconstrued) Romanticism contributes to the construction of this image. Around 1900, with German immigration still enhancing a cultural and political profile of the immigrant communities across the United States, his iconic status is a matter of celebration—in the elaborate world of the opera stage. The German “player” is poised between the highbrow and heterodox: the discourse revolves around play and his play ethic. About a decade later, on another coast, one headline in the *San Francisco Call* (7 February 1910) reads: “Guillotine as Toy for Children in 1793: Goethe’s Mother Refused to Buy Machine for Youth.” The article recapitulates a discussion of Goethe, his mother’s disapproval, and the appetite for toy trends. Noteworthy is the provenance. The *San Francisco Call* itself establishes a connection between the San Francisco publisher John Dietrich Spreckels (1853–1926) and the complex history of sugar production and consumption. German influence migrates across the expanse of the United States, from the toy manufacturing center of Philadelphia to the Midwestern homesteaders and synods to the rush toward prosperity in California. The Spreckels’s family history participates in a genealogy of cross-cultural influences. Weimar’s cultural presence in San Francisco is more than contingent; it is enabled by sugar.

PLAY AS A HUMAN RIGHT

One intended consequence of this study is to articulate connections between the brutalities of geopolitical economic realities, such as the sugar plantation economy, and the construction of an insulated, innocent island of childhood. This holistic narrative argument surreptitiously follows the spread of the connections across the Atlantic world and the Pacific; it tells of the

play world's story. At the same time, Fröbel's idealistic international disciples tout the imperative of play as a democratizing force. One advocate, Stoyan Vasil Tsanoff, is credited with the first book published in America devoted exclusively to playgrounds. Tsanoff, the author and also the general secretary of the Culture Extension League, advocates passionately for the building of playgrounds in his *Educational Value of the Children's Playground: A Novel Plan of Character Building*. Here he stakes a claim to the playground and play as a human right. Finally, to conclude the German story, I discuss the radical change in tone of the Schoenhut company's marketing. At the onset of World War I, German-language prohibitions interrupted the cultural continuity established by immigrants across the United States. By the close of the war, the Schoenhut advertising repudiated its German origins; instead, it foregrounds the persistent need to recreate the innocent imaginary through play: "Upon the happiness of little children the shadow of war should not fall. The Christmas days of childhood are all too few. We must not let even one of them be saddened."⁷²

Play, over the course of centuries, becomes a progressive force, and in its German legacy, a compensatory activity that could overcome unequal access to resources, dysfunctional family relationships, and the alienation of urban life. Play teaches mimesis; it writes adult agendas onto the hard drive of citizenship. From the built environments of early modern Nuremberg to the role of parenting, praying, and producing toys to advocating play as a human right, play becomes the master signifier for a modern childhood: spaced, gendered, and nationalized. Before World War I, Schoenhut and Company will redefine the play world in American terms: "It is our hope that the past is but a prophecy of the future and that Schoenhut Toys and Dolls—and all American-made play-products—will be an increasing element in peopling the American Children's play world."⁷³