

Personal ruminations on 'Home'; and the Trojan Horse metaphor.

The suggested title of 'Home' triggered a memory of horses, escapism and transport, alongside the fleeting experience of autonomy and freedom, as a child. Horses represented hope, and seemed honest. Within an interior setting this might translate through a child's rocking horse perhaps, but immediately the image of a Trojan Horse came to mind.



*Active form rather than passive object: a symbol of defiance as well as menace, harbouring **dis**-ease. It overpowered all other objects originally tested within its vicinity.*

This object manifests greatest power within an environment/context. As the Trojan Horse is an object with such laden significance, householders might be advised against housing the effigy at all. To do so might suggest the embrace of a warning, or more likely belie a readiness to forget: a denial of its historic lineage. To house it might reveal the psychological need to re-experience, and re-write a defeat, this time taking adult ownership and control – isn't that what psychoanalysts tell us? Yet therein lies the self-deceit of the gambler, and the denial of the addict. As any child from a dysfunctional family knows, history repeats, and the same environment, with the same props and players, will never give rise to change. For the purpose of this exhibition therefore, I wish to consider the Trojan Horse not only as object, nor merely as symbol of naïve tragedy, but as metaphor for the dysfunctional familial 'home'.

First let us examine the Trojan Horse as object, representative of *tease*. At a glance it is made of traditional wooden material, offering a link to the past, with the promise of free-child energy associated with play. It is a harmless toy on wheels. But for me personally it is also a trigger for the uncanny re-release of dread. No toy is free from historical context within, or now without, the familial home. An unpleasant *déjà vu* emerges if I look at it. The same feeling is triggered if I return to the Devon countryside... to 'home': a part-remembered familiarity, back from boarding school, where I hoped to reengage with my toys. Time and again as a child I would buy into the pretence of protection/preservation offered by the 'home' environment, and let my guard down, just before the inevitable siege would commence. 'Home' itself would offer an undisclosed malign presence of narrative, with pre-rehearsed sequences ready to unfold and gather pace. The promise of rest and recuperation was never honoured, and the slow blood-letting of anguish gathered momentum during the holidays until a final pre-constructed situation triggered war, and defeat. I limped back to school depleted, not restored. The invitation and comfort of my toys now seemed a hollow, empty trick.

Unwittingly the child brings home the Trojan Horse *Trophy* into a dysfunctional family: carrying a present, a mini-monument, a symbol of achievement...which is inevitably harnessed as the catalyst for war. The benign object becomes a time-linked weapon, poised to unleash a Pandora's Box of animated discontent within the home, purely via its innocuous introduction. Ridicule and attack follows by invitation, due to naivety. The child advertises his success, or welcomes the accolades from another place as of proof of credibility, and existence, and with a little pride returns home to share. (How the Greeks revelled in their victories... but were taken down by a simple effigy to their vanity!) Unfortunately to bring home these mini-monuments, was to interrupt the mantelpiece already lined with lead, and heavy-laden with the Fate of pre-determined response. The trinkets of self-validation in reality amounted to meagre pencil shavings. As a child there is naïve trust when entering a dysfunctional environment: you blunder into the psychological games as an active participant, and unwittingly start drowning because a large trawler's nets sweep the deep, tangling your legs before you see. Now the only way out is to cut your legs off, and crawl away.

Curiously I was perceived to be a type of Trojan Horse myself, approached with the wisdom and suspicion of adult awareness. An infiltrator, and polluter of the 'home' space: a foreign body and to some extent a part-exiled, or ex-communicated entity, with anticipated return, grudgingly permitted temporary lodging, although not actively invited; or else welcomed initially and prized, then rapidly dumped with the news of last month. Somehow I was also the beetle that escaped quarantine, each time I ran back to school. Just like the material of the authentic Trojan Horse, once living, now dead wood, the threat to *native* residents appeared physical beyond psychological: if left alone I might fester and therefore had to be interrupted and interrogated at all times. In strange parallel, my Aunt was importing wooden furniture throughout my schooling, which had to be stripped and dipped, in part to annihilate worms and insects non-native to the British Isles, therefore posing a threat to the indigenous environment if left untreated. Where they couldn't be removed they had to be neutralized, their shells left hollow and intact, but their individuality and spirit killed off.

The chess pieces (below) emerged as symbols of conflict and defiance. The knight always had the greatest chance of escaping the chess-board, with his trusty steed, the friendly horse to carry him beyond the 'domestic' city walls.



If there is a conclusion to be had, I would suggest that the Trojan Horse is a manifest entity, offering metaphorical warning, symbol, and the deceitful invitation toward naïve play. It is not the simple rocking-horse toy, but rather a twisted adult reflection of this. Housed within the walls of a domestic environment, its deceit establishes a trust, before insufferable games of siege and exile are historically unleashed and enacted.

The two Exhibition pieces displayed aim to engage with a number of themes broached within this written extract, and also continue to resonate on a personal level.

Exhibition Piece 1.



This original *Life* magazine sourced for 'Home' exhibition was published in April 1939. In fact the very same year in which my father was born, and the year his father went to war for a second time (having first been in the trenches of WW1 writing poetry, age just 14). The front cover depicts a 5-year old girl with her doll: both are identical in dress, face and hairstyle, although one is animate, and the other not. The girl is not dissimilar from images of myself and my sister: we were almost identical in appearance as small children, and here the doppelganger similarity from this 1939 USA 'selected facial type' offers a peculiar reminder. In fact the portrait itself examining a lifelike 'doll' compares and contrasts with a collection of 1940s German bisque dolls I shot for Christie's and Museum of Childhood in 2005, entitled 'In Abeyance'. A key point to note is that the German bisque doll heads of this era had one dominant facial type only, used for both genders.



'Bruce' by Cinnamon Heathcote-Drury, from 'In Abeyance' 2004.

Mine was a study upon the ‘uncanny weirdness’ of the lifelike faces of these inanimates, and subsequent exhibitions monitored whether adults attending the show experienced an agitation, unearthing part-repressed memory from their childhood in relation to these dolls, even though displayed in the form of flat photographic ‘portraits’. The adult survey findings were positively in favour of disturbance, although the children who visited the shows did not differentiate between ‘real’ children or ‘doll’ portraits on display, nor did they care about the ‘truth’. (My engagement was neutral and seemed unaffected, having never played with dolls as a child).

The article emerging from this *Life* front cover states ‘ “Look-alike” dolls are made from four basic types of U.S. children. Girls like dolls, because dolls look like little girls.’ (In fact dolls are given to small girls *and boys*, with the adult males who encountered my series ‘In Abeyance’ generally far more traumatized than the women.)

It proceeds to illustrate the four physiognomic *types* that have been identified by 1930s USA:

- 1) “Germanic” type, with the classic features, softly moulded mouth, the roundest eyes;
- 2) good-natured type, with pug nose, eyes farthest apart, full lower face;
- 3) shy, sensitive “French” type, (*the girl on the cover*), with oval face, delicately pointed features;
- 4) self-confident type, with well-defined features, prominent chin.’

Yet in fact the order in which the children are depicted at the end of the article does not place the “Germanic” type first, although discussed as no.1).

Note the body-language of the children.



a) ‘good-natured type’ b) ‘self-confident’ c) ‘shy, sensitive’ and d) “Germanic” type’.

The final “Germanic” type’ is here displayed as the only child whose eyes do not meet the camera, whose shoulders are stiff and horizontal, and even depicts her look-alike doll as erect and alert. All of this is reinforced by buttons straight down the centre of the matching dresses, and very neat hair without fuzz. There is another photograph of the “Germanic” child in the article less reminiscent of Hitler youth, but here the American photographer has clearly asked her to look above and beyond the lens to a higher power.

It would be interesting to find out the sales figures upon each ‘type’. Clearly a luxury item, at the time of print the dolls were on sale at Saks, Fifth Avenue NYC for \$25. As discussed above, in Germany the bisque dolls had one dominant facial moulding for both sexes.



Looking deeper within the magazine, we arrive at the article **'Hitler follows the Nazis of his "Trojan Horse" into Czecho-Slovakia'**, dated April 3, 1939. It commences:

'Last September, Czecho-Slovakia gave Germany 3,500,000 "Germans" in the Sudetenland but it was not enough. Some German Nazis still remained in Prague and became more blatant and impudent than ever. Their "Trojan-horse" job was to use the democratic practices of free speech, free assembly, and free press to destroy the democracy. The Nazis in Prague encouraged the Slovaks in Bratislava and the Carpatho-Ukrainians in Chust to make trouble for the Czechs. With the might of the German Reich behind them, their squawkings in the Czech Parliament had a manifold authority. Thus, the federal state of Czecho-Slovakia began to fall apart.'

It continues, offering that Hitler pushed ahead into Rumania, Memel and Lithuania, with
'beyond, only Latvia and Estonia on the German road to Leningrad.

And concludes

'The best that Great Britain could think of last week was an alliance of Britain, France, Soviet Russia and Poland to "stop Hitler".'

Of course exactly 5 months later, to the very day of this publication, on September 3rd 1939 Britain and France declared war upon Germany.

Exhibition Piece 2



This is an original press photograph of “Trojan Horse” by Manuel Lopez, dated Oct 10th 1971. Note that his interpretation is of an industrial Trojan Horse, made out of metal. It is a serving horse of war, mechanised, cold, and too angular/spiny to be a ‘toy’. I find an honesty within this piece, and a transparency at its core. It was constructed and photographed within a year of my birth.

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