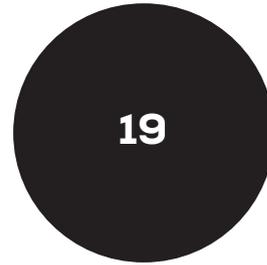




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Images for children

What if we looked at images for children as if they were a coded lesson in the current social system? About dominant class relations or about cultural gender patterns, imposed on the most impressionable subjects in the form of addictive and magical entertainment? What shall we espy when, under the guise of naïve simplicity, we see the complex combination of dependencies and contradictions that make up adult culture? From this vantage point there is nothing childish in images for children, although their childishness often

expresses something that cannot be shown directly. This may be gender inequality, structural exploitation, or the way the brain functions. Texts published in this issue of the *View* prove that all the above possibilities sometimes lie dormant in completely inconspicuous visual representations.

The focal point of this issue is a Polish translation (by Anna Warso) of an extract from Sianne Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, a book in which the author clarifies the meaning of cuteness, i.e. affectionate sweetness. According to her, the candy aesthetics of toys and commodities relates to a child's violence, which remains inexpressible within our culture, and the increasing skill with which they are made conceals the process of perfecting the capitalist apparatus of power. Thus, childhood turns out to be a sphere of peculiar socialisation in which, through seemingly simple and pleasing objects, the rules of social hierarchy and the roles they impose are forced upon the subject. Moreover, as Ngai shows, these charming objects or protagonists of the collective imaginary easily become something dangerous and aggressive, betraying a fundamental ambivalence inscribed throughout contemporary culture.

The **Close-up** consists of texts that refer in this way or another to Ngai's concepts and develop the analysis of images of childhood with the addition of aspects absent from her reflections. Natalia Sielewicz discusses the work of American artist Bunny Rogers, drawing attention to the indelible ambiguity of her charming works, which often touch on the history of violence, cruelty or self-aggression. Referring to the aesthetics of the American animated television series, *Adventure Time*, Grzegorz



Bunny Rogers, *Lady Amalthea (Mourning Mop)*, 2013. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Société Berlin.
Photo Jasper Spicero

Czemiel shows the relationship between the categories introduced by Ngai, speculative realism, and the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Justyna Szklarczyk, in turn, claims that the captivating and charming protagonists in the *Minions* films are essentially representations of the exploited and silenced working class, whose only form of expression in the contemporary capitalist system is being *cute*. This panorama of creative uses of the categories introduced by Ngai is rounded off by an article by Marcin Kluczykowski, who shows, among other things, how much violence and aggression children experience and where it comes from.

Our **Panorama** section brings together two very different texts dialoguing with one another in a rather unexpected way. Michał Herer discusses a cycle of books by Klaus Theweleit devoted to the "Pocahontas complex" in a thorough and exhaustive manner, while Marta Rakoczy, starting with her reflections on an exhibition entitled "Everything is Allowed", muses on the role of children in museum exhibitions and, more broadly, in contemporary culture. The article which singlehandedly makes up our **Perspectives** section by Aleksandra Janus, also deals with museums and, specifically, their various social functions as well as educational and entertainment programs designed for children in the museum space. This can be seen as yet more proof of the fact that today it is impossible to think about childhood, and the forms of presenting it, without considering a broad social or even institutional context.

The **Viewpoint** features a visual essay in which Katarzyna Bojarska and Paweł Mościcki - with the help of and by means of paintings, photographs, films and theatre plays - trace the symbolic transformations of the figure of the mother and motherhood.

In the closing section of the issue, **Snapshots**, we offer you a text about children's books (Paweł Mościcki reviews the Polish edition of Walter Benjamin's *A Crazy Mixed-up Day*) and another about cinema as a transnational phenomenon (Krzysztof Świrek discusses a volume titled *Polish Cinema as a Transnational Cinema*).

Reading back to childhood, shall we?

Editorial Team