

Amanda Leigh Davis

First off, I want to thank you for taking the time to delve into what amounts to a very rough and very early-stage paper. One area of improvement that would benefit from group discussion is the clarification of the “third category” I am really seeking—the category beyond intersubjectivity and interobjectivity that depends on both states. I would also really appreciate feedback on developing a detailed conceptual understanding of the still life (heretofore completely absent, I know), particularly in photography. I could also use some assistance in clearing up my larger conceptual problem. I am *trying* to deal with a form of relationality, how that form is constituted as it is, and then how that form fits into and shapes its representation, but I definitely have not satisfactorily worked out exactly what my question about representation is here. Finally, I have no doubt that I make multiple gross errors in my use of terms, so please don’t hesitate to point them out.

“Still Lives: the Interobjectivity of Real Dolls and iDollaters”

Her over-sized breasts look as though they should be stiff and hard as plastic, but this impression may have risen from their juxtaposition with her utterly still face—the lips frozen in a seductive pout, enormous eyes fixed in a vacant gaze that will never waver. When he reaches out, however, to poke, prod, and lift her breasts for the camera, her latex flesh becomes eerily life-like, soft and supple-looking, giving and resisting under the pressure of his touch. Her name is Stacy and she is a Real Doll, an Abyss creation, the property of Mike, and one of the stars of *Guys and Dolls*, a documentary that traces the stories of a few of the thousands of RealDoll owners. These life-sized sex dolls retail beginning at \$6,000 and come with three very realistic anatomical sexual orifices. Mike and other iDollaters in the documentary relate tales of selves that are broken in some way and descriptions of a world with no place for them—as Mike says, his Doll is a “constant,” while Davecat loves Sidore and other Dolls because “there’s no variables [sic], there’s no bizarreness that may or may not occur. There’s always a constant. I like things constant and you can’t get much more constant than a doll” (*Guys and Dolls*). The Dolls are not a mere escape in these cases; their presence allows a restructuring of no less than the every day.

The world made possible by the Real Doll is best illustrated by the documentary’s opening shot: a slow pan over several eyes and ears of Dolls. Organs of relation, eyes and ears primarily take

in information from the other. The focus on these two organ-orifices emphasizes the passivity of relating to others, dramatizing passive penetration (both figurative and otherwise) of doll *and* human by another in a relationship. Thinking about relationality along these lines steers this discussion of statue love toward interpassivity. One of the most important characteristics of this form of relationality is the stillness borrowed from the dolls as objects: by turning to their Dolls as “constants,” iDollaters still themselves into object-like subjects who can inhabit a “stilled” life; the life or world of the subject was once unmanageably contingent and possibly broken, but through the Doll is reconstructed into a world in which contingency is simulated and controllable, is safe for even traumatized or jaded subjects—this is a world in which shame has no force, for a stilled world will not reject. I read this relationship of Doll in much the same way I would read a reader’s relationship to modern novels—the Doll is not a transparent sign for a “real” human relationship or a “real” life, but rather as Susan Stewart explains of modernist literature, points to the arbitrariness of such “signs” and shows the world to be a direct construction of signs related to one another (5). The unique form of the iDollater relationship has transformative capacity for subject, object, and world: the stilled world binds Doll and human in a relation of interobjectivity but the simulated contingency of the stilled world also simultaneously binds human and object into an intersubjective relationship.

The states of interobjectivity and intersubjectivity are not separate states but are intertwined and both required in this particular form of *objectum-sexualite*. In the admittedly limited case studies I have selected, their partners animate the Dolls into lovers who not only answer their needs, but who also make demands of their own. Such fantasy takes, on the part of the iDollaters, a perhaps unique act of will. The stronger the iDollater fantasizes the Doll’s subjectivity, the stronger his will and subjectivity must be. iDollaters gain godlike power, by customizing their dolls in tangible parts—

from their nipple colors to their jaw lines and pubic hair styles—and in intangible personalities—from Dolls who aspire to be models to those who are laid back homebodies who love dark chocolate and “The Wire.” Real Doll owners picture a world in which owners animate their Dolls and ask them to reciprocate by “thingifying” their world, by lending the world a sense of noncontingency, or perhaps more appropriately, controllable and foreseen contingency.

My discussion is split across these three specific depictions of RealDolls in order to both gain an open understanding of this relational phenomenon as well as to situate it within a broader context, to see where Real Doll owners fit into a larger understanding of what it means to relate to another being. As Stanley Cavell has explored at length, recognition of another human is an uncannily uncertain task burdened by skepticism of the possibility of ever recognizing the interiority of the other. A subtle reworking of the psychoanalytic presumption that the possibility of misrecognition is the source of extraordinary anxiety, Cavell’s skepticism and uncertainty is constitutive of daily and ordinary life. Real Doll relationships might then pose a Cavellian question to human relationships in general: “Since we each can only imagine the other’s imagination, what is the difference, really, between your romantic relationships and mine?”

While constructing an ordinary life around an inert object may seem bizarre to some, Bill Brown has asserted that consumer subjectivities are constantly constituted in and through intimacy with things, and hence things deserve more attention than as merely fetishizations of the labor that brought them into being. Barbara Johnson notes that the fear of fetishizing things reflects and is paired with the more urgent fear of thingifying people. Johnson asserts that both processes are ordinary and historical transformations. Things are made human-like through recognizable rhetorical figures like anthropomorphism and apostrophe, and though “the parallel processes of turning persons into things does not offer itself in the form of a figure,” the “figures that increase

humanness are by nature working against a *decline of humanness* and a thingification that go on all the time and have only accelerated with commodity capitalism [my emphasis] (Johnson 23). Citing Benjamin, she notes that “A memory in the mind hardens into a memento; a trip to the Eiffel Tower becomes a plastic image of it. The comforter that begins by designating the Holy Ghost ends up as an item of bedding . . . Perhaps this is why turning to stone is so dire: the process of being hardened, externalized, mass produced, and sold is the *normal* story” (23).

The Online Lives of RealDolls and Their Owners

One of the things I found most fascinating about studying iDollaters and their Dolls was their ability to affect even non-iDollaters. As Elena Dorfman notes in *Still Lovers*, “The dolls became real to me, too. If I stepped on CJ’s foot, I winced. If I moved too close to her face or breast while shooting, I said I was sorry. I came to believe, as many owners do, that the silicon lovers can communicate, and even offer a sublime, sustained sort-of passion” (Dorfman 5). Dorfman and her assistant Elizabeth Alexandre attribute the infectious animation to the peculiar relationship between the Doll and owner, whose lives are “plain to the extreme” (12). Bracketing out Dorfman’s use of “sublime” to describe these ordinary and plain relationship (a bracketing I think is justified, due to Dorfman’s own subdued photographic representations of her subjects), I hope to explore the roles Dolls play in constructing forms of ordinariness.

As vehicles for constructing alternative ordinaries, internet forums, blogs, and Twitter communities will clarify fantasy’s role in constructing an everyday world to which one can remain attached. On a Doll twitter feed around Valentine’s Day, I found dozens of Dolls excitedly musing about what their owners would get them and wishing all their plastic girlfriends a wonderful V-Day and waxing philosophical about love. Margaret Realdoll quoted Victor Hugo, saying that “Life’s greatest happiness is to be convinced we are loved”, while Angie Realdoll (a Doll I feel I know quite

well, as she has a very active online presence) uses Thoreau to admonish her friends that “there is no remedy for love but to love more” (@leahtype/doll-friends). Through creating for their sex dolls highly detailed and active online personalities, many of these owners focus almost obsessively on the idea of mutual and sustained romantic love. Though the owners often rely on stereotypes of femininity to “flesh out” their dolls’ personalities (most, I found, enjoyed shopping and eating chocolate), they were often also very specific and detailed. Their objects are paradoxically singular: familiar and conventional forms are the basis for constructing a “unique” doll.

One of the iDollaters most active in fleshing out his doll’s singular personality online and in numerous interviews and photo shoots is Davecat; his doll, Sidore (pronounced Shee-Do-Ray), has her own webpage, email address, and twitter feed. Through her online life, we learn that she was born in Tokyo, raised in London, fought with her parents, and consequently moved to the states where she became a dedicated “Goth.” Sidore-chan also enjoys Mecha-based videogames and footrubs (“Gracing the Glossies”). She refers to Davecat as “my lad,” and often pokes fun at him, *playing* with him, as it were: “Right; now he's giggling incessantly cos I'd said 'abreast'. Do you see what I have to work with?” (“Kitten”). Though Davecat is not delusional—he notes that having a “synthetic” companion makes the difference between “being lonely and being alone” (*Guys and Dolls*)—he often refers tenderly to “the Missus” and her inner life. Once, when they had to use inferior sushi for a photo shoot, Davecat confides that “Sweetie [Sidore] even has this look of partial disgust in one of the shots, and you really can’t blame her” (“Gracing the Glossies”). For Davecat, Sidore constitutes an ordinary life of constancy (“There's no risk involved”), though one that he recognizes is not ordinary for most people. Synthetic partners are a direction for ordinary life to take, a resignation from “organic” relationships and the vehicle for working out the terms of a new present: “The idea of Synthetiks in society, whether coworkers, life partners, or what have you,”

the iDollater muses, “is just something that people will eventually grow accustomed to over time; it’s simply a matter dispelling peoples’ preconceived notions. Freaks today, pioneers tomorrow” (“Shouting”). His attitudes toward Sidore and other “Synthetiks” is, for Davecat, an ethical issue, for the Dolls have their own lives, personalities, and demands to be met, but those “lives” depend absolutely on him for animation and realization and well as for fulfillment.

Davecat, like many iDollaters, spends hours each day dressing and caring for Sidore—she likes him to change her hair. For many iDollaters, the Dolls demand to be dressed up and made up in order to be photographed and displayed “as the beautiful art I am . . . the art I was meant to be” (@AngieRealdoll). The e-Zine *Coverdoll*, features amateur photography of and profiles for different Dolls every month, with side articles dedicated to “Coverdoll Hopefulls”—Dolls who hope to get to know and join their Dollfriends in Dollstardom. This month’s issue spotlights Breanna, a “home loving girl who dreams of being a top model” (“Breanna”). Jeffrey is her “photographer and companion,” and he attempts to capture her personality in his lovingly and meticulously posed amateur photo shoot: the still life captures *both* the owner’s fetishistic animation and the factual stillness of the doll, thus encapsulating relationality, an interaction, within a single subject. His camera-eye captures his animated desires and imagination as well as her thing-like stillness in one image, as illustrated by the focus on her meticulously madeup eyes and her profile’s assertion that “*my* best qualities” are “*my* eyes and understanding of others’ feelings.” Jeffrey animates Breanna to compliment and build his amateur skills and hobby—she is the object of his photography and fantasies as well as a specific subject who encourages its continuation and gives paths of development, such as focus on her lovely eyes.

The overwhelmingly recurring theme of Coverdolls like Breanna is the effort to show them as “just a regular babe” with “ordinary” obsessions like chocolate (“Kaori”). Their demands allow

iDollaters to keep a certain domestic scene. Of Mahtek, an iDollater who keeps up a doll forum in honor of “his girls,” Anne Senges writes that he “comes home from work a bit tense. The economy is tanking, the automotive industry that employs him is on death watch, and his company has just announced another round of layoffs” (Senges 1). He confesses, “I started feeling better only when I saw the girls,” who, he continues, have not only personalities but jobs, stable jobs to counteract his own tenuous position in the auto industry (1). Mahtek is a particularly vivid example of one imagining another’s imagination, since their “jobs” make a portion of their lives inaccessible to him. This feat of imagination leads to a sense of ordinary life, and such ordinary domesticity between iDollaters and their Dolls is a source of fascination to outsiders. Stephen Gladieu in his *Reportage* story, Rock Schroeter in *Guys and Dolls*, and Elena Dorfman each focus on a surprising lack of spectacularity in what apparently should be flamboyant or eccentric. I now turn to Elena Dorfman’s photographic study as an example of how outsiders take lessons from iDollaters and fit them into their own lives or sense of ordinariness.

Elena Dorfman’s Study Still Lovers

Elena Dorfman originally approached her subject with some trepidation over the objectification of the female body that she saw in the Dolls, but “over the course of the years in which [she] photographed the dolls and their owners, the encounters challenged [her] to examine [her] own beliefs about love, attachment, beauty, and desire” (Dorfman 4 – 5). The Dolls’ animation not only, for Dorfman, animated their owners into something more than desperate misogynists, but also served as a pedagogical tool for shaping Dorfman’s knowledge of the world and relationships.

Dorfman goes on to note that as she “chronicled these love affairs and watched the scenes of domestic life unfold,” her photographs became still lives of “couples—they eat and watch TV together, play games and have tea parties, and read books aloud; they are intimate and playful—

though only one of them is human” (5). The stills often also capture an almost tender longing to be part of such a still world, and indeed are never composed as “tableaux vivants orchestrated by the artist. The scenes—of boudoir intimacy, transfixed television viewing, cemetery visits—are generated from the daily lives of the subjects” (Morgan). In other words, Dorfman’s photographs serve as a veritable cinema of stillness—they are points of entry into a particular form of ongoing everyday living.

In her study Dorfman at times enters, with surreal transfixion, some of the more disturbing elements of this intimate and private life—creation scenes in which, like so many animal carcasses, the dolls hang headless from hooks on a line, waiting for quality inspection; a scene of domestic “abuse,” in which a Doll lies bent and twisted and broken by her owner; and a later-life clinical scene where a Doll lies on her stomach, her spine protruding from her back, a penknife at the ready to open her skin and make repairs. Dorfman’s photos meditate on both the plastic, manufactured quality of the vulvas and nipples as well as the small imperfections in their skin, the loving, but inept makeup application, and the aging, sagging silicon of some of the older dolls. In the cover photograph, the ridge of Rebecca’s residual flash line on her arm and the small casting pockmarks in her face silicone echo the deep age lines of her owner’s eyes and the wrinkles on his knuckles. Dorfman’s colors are muted and the scenes mundane and intimate: one doll rests on the grass next to her typing companion, another sits at the breakfast table with a family in a sunhat and overalls.

While the Dolls themselves are created, age, are repaired, make faces, ponder menus in restaurants, and pray in church, Dorfman’s depicts these Dolls as animating the owners into the tender and still counterparts to the highly animated Dolls. In two studies, Dorfman pictures noncontextualized Dolls with widely varying faces and vastly differing facial expressions. In contrast,

the owners are pictured with near-neutral facial expressions, often sitting still near their Dolls gazing at them or a screen or newspaper. Even in the few pictures of intercourse, the camera freezes the human and captures the Dolls as seemingly active participants—in a picture of Davecat and Sidore, Sidore’s hand seems to reach toward her vulva even as Davecat’s hand does. In her still lives, Dorfman animates the dolls through fantasy and stills the owners through the photo’s literal stillness. Rarely does she depict action—these iDollaters seem to be quiet, they sit, read, type, pose and steadily gaze.

Alexandre best describes the life pulsing within the Doll when she relates a typical scene of receiving it: “Watching for indiscreet gazes from the neighbors, he drags the enormous parcel into his home, tears it open, and discovers, throbbing, the revealed beauty lying strapped in the packing material” (Dorfman 12). Their owner has been waiting for this Doll for weeks, and “he is ready to give everything . . . a personality--sweet, nagging, dreaming, intellectual, jealous, tolerant; a social being.” The giving is part of establishing a new possibility for an everyday life: “a life plain to the extreme, a parody of a marital life, dull and reassuring: watching TV, minimal conversation—“Honey, I fixed the car”—breakfast and attentive caring” (12), and, for Elena Dorfman, the use of things to create such a life is a model for learning about, probing, and rethinking what life with people means. An outsider’s fascination with the iDollater’s relationship, then, is a sincere attempt to enter the iDollater’s fantasy and share in an ordinary attempt to cope with the difficulty of relating to others or even to the environment.

Lars and the Real Girl

Elena Dorfman responds to the iDollater relationship with a sort of stilled cinema—an entrance for the viewer into sharing the ongoing everyday intersubjectivity and interobjectivity—and her response, which takes the form of seeking ordinariness in the extraordinary-to-oneself, becomes

a tool for learning something about herself and her world. In another response to iDollatry, Craig Gillespie's film *Lars and the Real Girl*, the relationship's animation actually *depends* on being shared by a community, and, once shared, the fantasy allows the healing of trauma and the production of normative citizens. In the film, Lars and his fellow citizens learn through interobjectivity with a Real Doll how to relate intersubjectively, and consequently how to become an adult citizen of a community. The Doll is animated by each member of the town, and in return she forms a stilled space for Lars and other characters in which they can safely simulate the contingency of human relationships and learn to cope with the ordinariness of loss and trauma.

The film initiates the viewer into Lars's broken or unformed citizenship with its opening shot. Standing behind a filmy glass window, Lars is tightly framed and broken up by the window's panes. When his sister-in-law, Karin, comes to the house to invite him for breakfast (she is worried about him being alone), he retains the glass between for a suspended moment before finally opening the door. He declines her invitation in order to go to church, where an older woman asks him where his girlfriend is. When he tells her he doesn't have one, she asks if he is gay: "my grandson is gay" she tells him knowingly, "I know all about the gays" (*Lars*). Lars quickly denies being a homosexual. "Well," she responds, "don't leave it too long. *It's not good for you*" and encourages him to give a flower to "someone nice, for a start."

Lars, of course, does not initiate contact with any girl or boy. In fact, human contact is profoundly upsetting for him because of his haphophobia: human touch feels like a "burn." He wears "layers and that helps," but Lars is clearly a case of broken citizenship in need of reparation. One day his answer arrives: Bianca. She is a disturbing vision, a heavily made-up hunk of silicone from Abyss Creations dressed in a sequin miniskirt and transparent mesh top. In light of her appearance, Lars's description of Bianca is outlandish: she is a religious missionary from Brazil—

well, she's half Danish and half Brazilian, Lars corrects himself, looking to Bianca apologetically. His fear of touch, he later explains to the local doctor, Dagmar, is not a problem with Bianca.

“Bianca is in town for a reason” Dagmar tells Gus and Karin “[what] we call mental illness isn't always an illness, it can be a communication, a way to work something out,” and so the doctor encourages the couple to go along with his relationship with Bianca. “You mean, pretend she's real?” Gus asks incredulously, “she *is* real,” Dagmar responds, “she's right out there.” *Discussion of doll dissociation therapy. Through the doll, Lars ventriloquizes the doll's ventriloquization of the trauma he alone cannot narrate: he is simultaneously protected from direct re-exposure to past trauma and initiated into a realm of uncertain intimacy, one in which he and Bianca and Dagmar share the burden of knowledge and reaction.*

****Michele White on ebay and virtual spectator/communities of “reborn doll” makers. Working through trauma, producing *scenes to enable love after loss.*** White, Michelle. ‘Babies Who Touch You: Reborn Dolls, Artists, and the Emotive Display of Bodies on eBay’, in *Political Emotions*, edited by Janet Staiger, Anne Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds. New York and London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 66-89.

The next step in therapy, according to Dagmar, is to ask the community to participate in Lars' fantasy; eventually, the entire town enters this collective fantasy. They greet her in the street, give her haircuts and a job as a window model, they ask her to volunteer at the hospital. As the town embraces Bianca and Lars, Bianca's faces literally change—she has some six faces throughout the film, and her makeup disappears, her clothes become more modest, and her poses and contexts frame the doll as becoming more and more alive and even natural. As Karin reminds Lars when he asserts that no one cares, “We push her wheelchair. We drive her to work. We drive her home. We wash her. We dress her. We get her up. We put her to bed. We carry her. And she is not petite Lars. Bianca is a big, big girl. None of it is easy, but we do it for you.”

Lars's animation of Bianca is contagious, and the people around him also work through Bianca to work out their own relational problems. Karin turns to Bianca on a car ride to voice her

own wish to go back to work (she left because of pregnancy and “the house”), all the while under the warning and perturbed glance of her husband. Gus we learn, also has his own demons—he is haunted with guilt for leaving Lars alone with their father, who was broken by the mother’s death while giving birth to Lars. “He’s going to love that thing his whole life” Gus states, “and it’s my fault.” While Gus remains resistant to treating Bianca as animate, toward the end of the film, he opens the door on a “sleeping” Bianca, and then respectfully closes it, as though to give her privacy—as his respect for Bianca grows, his relationship with Lars and even his wife improves.

Lars’ learning to imagine Bianca’s imagination and her desires as a safe and still practice for “real” relationships. Lars simulates increasing levels of contingency in Bianca in order to animate himself into one who can cope.

Bianca, then, acts as a mediator: Lars animates her in order for her to filter human contingency into a safer, more thinglike contingency with which he can safely train himself to learn to cope.

Lars sees Margo flirting with another worker, and his next move is to simulate drama with Bianca. He comes home expecting to find her there, but she is getting ready to leave for the hospital volunteer banquet with Mrs. Gruner. He begins yelling at Bianca. “They never fight” says Karin, “I don’t like his tone” adds Mrs. Gruner. “Now you listen to me” Gruner admonishes Lars, “Bianca has a life of her own. No self-respecting woman is going to be at your beck and call and *the sooner you learn that the better* [my emphasis].” Though Bianca is an effective tool for Lars to educate himself, the Doll is a temporary safe site which he eventually must leave or bury. When he shakes Margo’s hand after a date, Lars’s hand remains rigid for a moment, allowing the camera to frame Lars as the silicone being learning to take the next step in animation.

Lars has outgrown Bianca, and it is time to bury her, but he must first learn one last lesson in the still, safe space that the Doll provides. After he finds her unconscious one morning, Lars rushes Bianca to the hospital. When Dagmar lets Karin and Gus know that Bianca is “very sick,” Karin worries about effect this will have on Lars: “How could you let this happen?” she demands. Dagmar reminds Karin that she is “not letting it happen. It’s Lars. It’s *always* been Lars. He’s making the decisions.” Lars brings Bianca home from the hospital for one more night with her. The shot of Lars with Bianca captures how the Doll’s role has shaped in the film: the room itself has changed from what it was at the beginning of the film. In the room’s first appearance, Bianca sits on the bed in her flashy hooker’s outfit while the room glows with a sultry low red light; in this shot, however, the room is baby pink and Bianca wears childlike pink pajamas. Her face is now completely makeup-free, and her skin has a weak pallor. Though she lies in bed with Lars, her image has been cleansed—she has taken on all of his childish fears and qualities and is now something that he is ready to part with, ready to bury and move into adulthood. Bianca is his rite of passage into manhood

Members of the town bring multiple gifts and get well cards for Bianca, including framed photographs of Bianca posing with members of the town and with Lars. The camera pans over these still lives and then pans up to his current situation, to Lars sitting quietly with Bianca, learning to cope with loss. Three older women from the town bring casseroles and sit in Lars’ living room, knitting. “Um is there something I should be doing right now?” “We came over to sit. That’s what people do when tragedy strikes. They come over and sit.” This scene of loss is a scene of community stillness, and the film responds to it as not an extraordinary, but a very ordinary part of ongoing life.

The film ends with Lars asking Margo to take a walk with him. Though this is certainly the film's resolution, Lars' graduation into adult citizen, the camera frames him and Margo standing apart and looking into the distance, avoiding each other's eyes. The camera allows the parallel, asks whether the two relationships are really so very different, asks whether the blissful resolution of "guy meets girl" is so fragile that it *requires* the stillness of relationships with things to make it tenable: "one day I'll find a man of my own, and we'll be happy too" Margo told Lars when he was still with Bianca, "Yeah, that's the way it works, I guess," he uncertainly responds.

At Bianca's funeral, the priest reminds us of her pedagogical role: "We are here to celebrate Bianca's extraordinary life. From her wheelchair, Bianca reached out and touched us all, in ways we could never have imagined. She was a teacher. She was a lesson in courage. And Bianca loved us all. Especially Lars." The Doll here "teaches" the community to enter into a collective fantasy that in turn allows multiple members to repair their own brokenness or shame while inhabiting the interstitial world that Bianca's still thingness allows. The basic unit of the film's reparative fantasy, then, is not merely Lars-and-Bianca, but is located rather at the level of the entire small town.

Conclusion

Through the Doll, then, the self becomes an open stage, in which the subject becomes part of a scene of relationality, one that is sealed and "individual" and yet necessarily penetrated the doll and in turn by the other relationships (\interpersonal, virtual, and fantastical) the doll enables the individual to enter into. "I" becomes "we" *because* of the thing world—both within the individual subject and within broader communities—whether it be other iDollaters, or an entire town.

According to Bruno Latour, the stickiness and duration of "the social" is attributable uniquely to the object world and the relationships between humans it engenders. Maybe the RealDolls show us that relationships with objects is a way to condition oneself as an ongoing and durational relation so that

one can simulate and participate in a sense of ongoing relationships in an ordinary way. Through the dolls, their owners create a sense of the possibility for and duration of the social, and because of this world-making, representations such as photography and film tend to emphasize the ordinariness of the relationships and put them into everyday *scenes* in which a drama of both interobjectivity and intersubjectivity takes shape between animate and inanimate.

***New meaning for the *object a*: it is not the thing within another, but the *thing and thingness itself* which they seek. The thing mediates the contingency and frightening unreliability of interpersonal relationships and allows owner to continue in world, though that world has been reshaped.

Hence, things and their lives must be a crucial consideration in what constitutes a sense of the ordinary, a sense of a social world to which one can attach oneself. *Lars and the Real Girl* pointedly addresses non-dollaters in a scene where Lars's coworkers bicker. Margo has hidden Russell's beloved action figures, and so Russell retaliated by hanging her bear with a noose. "You're too old for that thing anyway," he coldly tells her when she confronts him about the cruel act: "Face it, Margo, the bear is dead." We learn that she is so upset by the hanging because she has just broken up with her boyfriend: the teddy bear is the site for her to work through her loss. Though Lars is the one with the "delusion," Russell and Margo have special relational dramas around their special objects as well. Objects are an ordinary and perhaps essential site for simulating and mediating more serious interpersonal dramas, a means for lending stillness to the radical contingency and skepticism haunting ordinary relationships. Though the teddy bear's inanimate reality means that a hanging should not affect it, Margo simulates in the teddy bear the inconvenience of loss, for the toy mediates such a problem of the social, allowing her to cope with her recent breakup and hence an uncertain sense of relationships paradoxically through the firm and reliable stillness of her teddy

bear. Object relationships may be a crucial site for coping with what Cavell recognized as the potentially paralyzing skepticism about the other's interiority.

The RealDoll allows its owner to literalize the social aspect of things by taking on human form, by taking on a face and sex. Another paper might certainly contextualize and explore the oppressive aspects of the RealDoll—the effects the Dolls have on norms of female beauty—but I think the question this paper raises is about our responsibility *to* such things. Because RealDolls can be so tied to and constitutive of the worlds people create and inhabit and the relationships they have with other people, might an ethical stance toward things like RealDolls (and towards the people who have relationships with them) treat the world-making things as precisely that?

Works Cited

- “@leahtype/doll-friends.” *Twitter*, <http://twitter.com/leahtype/doll-friends>, February 14, 2010.
- “@leahtype/idollators” *Twitter*, <http://twitter.com/leahtype/idollators>. March 4, 2010.
- “Sexuality as a Spectrum” *Synthetically Yours Blog*. <http://www.syntheticallyyours.com/blog/>, January 10, 2010.
- “Any Synthetiks-News, Davecat?” *Shouting to Hear the Echoes: Contra Naturum Now and Forever*. <http://www.kuroneko-chan.com/echoes/?p=467#comment-860> March 23, 2007.
- Davecat. “Gracing the Glossies” *Shouting to Hear the Echoes: Contra Naturam, Now and Forever*. <http://www.kuroneko-chan.com/echoes/?p=797> January 28, 2009.
- Dorfman, Elena. *Still Lovers*. Text by Elisabeth Alexandre, New York: Channel Photographics 2005.
- Gnys and Dolls*, Dir. Nick Holt. TV program. Producers, North One Television. Distrubuter, Five. Release date: 17 January 2007
- Hersey, George L. *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmailion to the Present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Johnson, Barbara. *Persons and Things*. MA: Harvard University Press, 2008
- Lars and the Real Girl*. Dir. Craig Gillespie. Perfs Ryan Gosling, Emily Mortimer. MGM Productions, 2007.
- Sidore by Davecat. “Kitten with a Whip” *Deafening Silence Plus*. <http://www.kuroneko-chan.com/>, 2006.