

Introduction

Toys accompany people from the very beginning, both in general and individual sense. Children used to play using toys during all the epochs, even in the most difficult moments is the history of manhood, and they still play with toys in various cultures, environments, geographical and social spheres. A toy is a specific cultural phenomenon: on one hand, it reflects the times in which it had its start, on the other hand, you can notice its timeless and over-cultural character. It has a specific preservative, conservative, and visionary “tone”, it captures the most modern trends, sometimes running into future.

The functions of a toy have been changing – apart from those which appear eternal (ludic, magical, educational, socializing), it has gained some new dimensions: a toy may be therapeutic, physiotherapeutic, or it may be an object used by collectors. There are a lot of definitions of toys, from the simplest ones: the item used by children for playing¹, the item that the child plays with, e.g. a rattle, doll, or a toy car²; to the complicated, sometimes very intricate ones³. One of the best-known, the most often cited, is the definition by Jan Bujak, who claims that it is a material thing, made particularly for playing purposes, which comprises the cultural contents specific for the appropriate epoch or the past epochs covering the scope of material, spiritual or social culture, and which transfers them in a way that induces specific ludic attitudes through which it shapes physical, psychological, and emotional development⁴.

The toy and its role and meaning in the child’s life is the subject of the research conducted by researchers of different scientific disciplines – pedagogues, psychologists,

¹ <http://sjp.pwn.pl/doroszewski/zabawka;5523664.html> (dostęp: 1.12.2016).

² *Inny słownik języka polskiego*, red. M. Bańko, Warszawa 2000, s. 1188.

³ Przegląd definicji por. D. Żołądź-Strzelczyk, I. Gomułka, K. Kabacińska-Łuczak, M. Nawrot-Borowska, *Dzieje zabawek dziecięcych na ziemiach polskich do początku XX wieku*, Wrocław 2016.

⁴ J. Bujak, *Zabawki w Europie. Zarys dziejów – rozwój zainteresowań*, Kraków 1988, s. 24.

culture experts, art historians, archeologists, ethnographers, and upbringing historians. They carry out research upon the toy as a masterpiece, the material artifact made by human hands or machine, accessory of play, the collector's artifact, and alike. They reconstruct its beginnings, development, manufacture, distribution, storage, dissemination, presentation, collection, renovation, etc. However, first of all, they deal with the toy in the child's hands, with the meaning of it for the child's development, its positive and sometimes negative impact, as well as therapeutic, healing influence on the development of a child with special needs.

Usually, the toy is not analyzed separately, but in a tight connection with play – J. Bujak states that there is no toy without play. Only through play we can understand the toy and its various functions⁵. From this point of view, the classifications of toys emerge. One of such classifications distinguishes natural and proper toys. The first group covers any item used by the child in play, the second one comprises toys used especially for the purpose of play dedicated and appropriately constructed by an adult⁶. Other classifications are more specific and have references to the plays which accompany the toys.

A toy seems to be a trivial, ephemeral thing, which is underestimated, associated with low value, easily broken or destroyed, often thrown away, given to someone else, forgotten... Nevertheless, it turns out that toys are very significant and important in the history of mankind and in the life of every human being.

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⁵ J. Bujak, B. Pilichowska, *Zabawki – potrzeby badawcze, problemy teoretyczne, propozycje muzeologiczne*, „Studia i Materiały”, 1986, z. 1, s. 19.

⁶ S. Szuman, *Zabawka z punktu widzenia psychologii*, „Tęcza”, 1930, nr 11 (bns).