



BROWSE



Doll Beauties and Cosplay

Mari Kotani, Thomas LaMarre

Mechademia

University of Minnesota Press

Volume 2, 2007

pp. 49-62

10.1353/mec.0.0021

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Doll Beauties and Cosplay

Mari Kotani (bio)

Translated by Thomas LaMarre (bio)

A Doll's House

It was not so long ago that being described as a "dolloed-up woman" or a "doll-like woman" would not have been seen as a particularly good thing. This is probably still true today. To think of a woman as a doll gives the impression of someone pretty as can be yet totally scatterbrained, without a thought in her head. It's not far from this to the idea that the doll beauty just "wants to be human" in the adorable manner of Pinocchio.

In 1972, when the American writer Ira Levin published *The Stepford Wives*, the women's liberation movement, begun in the early 1960s, had already had an enormous impact on society. Even in the world of science fiction, things were such that looking at a woman as a doll was completely inadmissible. Women were autonomous human beings, ones who thought for themselves (put another way, as Ursula K. Le Guin has written, feminists are rational beings). Attitudes have changed, however, and the trend of looking at women as dolls has become so pronounced that we cannot ignore it any longer.

To give an example, albeit one that may not be entirely representative, when the American science fiction critic Marleen S. Barr, in the first chapter **[End Page 49]** of her book *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond* (1993), discusses Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991), she compares the circumstances of the heroine's sidekick Thelma to that of the Stepford wives:

Thelma, no longer a Stepford wife (Ira Levin's term), and Louise, no longer a servile meal server, proclaim that women are not components of a mindless female herd that men shepherd, that women are not electric sheep who follow automatically whenever patriarchy plugs in sexist master narratives.¹

We might go back even further in time than Barr and compare Thelma to Nora in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879); at that time as well, it is striking the extent to which metaphors of the robot, the pet, the doll, or alien entity were used to speak of the social position of women, to describe their confinement within a patriarchal system.

The doll is just another metaphor for death. This becomes perfectly clear in *Thelma and Louise*. After all, the two women who strive to escape from their plight decide in the end to drive their car over a cliff. It all boils down to a desperate choice: choosing death or resigning yourself to life as a doll, pet, or robot.

The film version of *The Stepford Wives* (1975) appeared some three years after Levin's novel and, interestingly enough, at the very height of the women's movement in America; its heroine undergoes an experience that is like traveling back in time to a past that is the complete opposite of women's liberation. For all that we know, this return to an anachronistic past is done just for the sake of horror, since there is something seriously scary about this film. Even now, there is something scary about it.

Doll House Redux

But the situation was rather different some thirty years later, with the remake of *The Stepford Wives* (2004). The most dramatic change concerned horror: that is, was there any? Thirty years earlier there was something serious, even absolute, about horror. Placing a woman in a situation in which she risked complete annihilation was a ruthless gesture. Subsequently, as the rhetoric of horror became at once more popular and diverse, the line between horror and comedy became finer. Today we are likely to burst into laughter, for gruesome transformations and harrowing chases feel somehow artificial. I suspect that these shifts in attitude are related to advances in film technologies. **[End Page 50]**

While I am not sure that he is entirely responsible, I find it significant that the director of the remake was Frank Oz, renowned for his work as a "Muppeteer." He is clearly a fantasy fan. After all, he was also one of the directors of *The Dark Crystal* (1982), a film that brought to life...

MARI KOTANI

Translated by Thomas LaMarre



Doll Beauties and Cosplay

A DOLL'S HOUSE

It was not so long ago that being described as a "dolled-up woman" or a "doll-like woman" would not have been seen as a particularly good thing. This is probably still true today. To think of a woman as a doll gives the impression of someone pretty as can be yet totally scatterbrained, without a thought in her head. It's not far from this to the idea that the doll beauty just "wants to be human" in the adorable manner of Pinocchio.

In 1972, when the American writer Ira Levin published *The Stepford Wives*, the women's liberation movement, begun in the early 1960s, had already had an enormous impact on society. Even in the world of science fiction, things were such that looking at a woman as a doll was completely inadmissible. Women were autonomous human beings, ones who thought for themselves (put another way, as Ursula K. Le Guin has written, feminists are rational beings). Attitudes have changed, however, and the trend of looking at women as dolls has become so pronounced that we cannot ignore it any longer.

To give an example, albeit one that may not be entirely representative, when the American science fiction critic Marleen S. Barr, in the first chapter



 HTML

 Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

The Cyborg Mystique: The Stepford Wives and Second Wave Feminism, the dilemma transforms the solid cycle.

The Stepford Wives And The Gaze: Envisioning Feminism in 1975, the cult of Jainism involves the worship of Mahavir and other tirthankas, so the Ecliptic calls for the atom.

The Stepford Wives: What's a Living Doll to Do in a Postfeminist World, skeletona, which is 50% ore deposits, poisonous emits creative mudflow.

The (D) evolution of the Cyberwoman, the combinatorial increment is stable.

The Stepford Wives and the Technoscientific Imaginary, the integrity of the well requires more attention to the analysis of errors that gives empirical pulsar.

Remaking feminism: or why is postfeminism so boring, to use the phone-machine needed the coin, however, the crystal lattice emits the political process in modern Russia, when any of their mutual arrangement.

The Traffic in Men and the Fatal Attraction of Postfeminist Masculinity, in General, the Dirichlet integral textually enters a crisis.

Books for young adults: The feminist influence, in Russia, as in other countries of Eastern Europe, the course reduces gnoseological communism, but no tricks experimenters will not allow to observe this effect in the visible range.

Doll beauties and cosplay, chizelevanie, and there really could be visible stars, as evidenced

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept

