SOMETHING LOST, SOMETHING FOUND IN THE WORK OF SCOTT EADY

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For want of a nail the shoe was lost;
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;
For want of a horse, the rider was lost;
For want of a rider, the battle was lost;
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost …

Proverb

In the last ten years, the work of Scott Eady has undergone a complex transition which saw a movement from a simple engagement with masculine identity politics and female masquerade to a series of works that examine the provisional nature of such identities in relation to marriage, fatherhood, nationalism and late capitalism. What is lost in the works from 2001-11 is the bravado and self-confidence of youth, as in works such as *BIG TIME.* In his article "Big Time: Major Works by Scott Eady," Richard Lummis suggested that this impulse is replaced in a series of exhibitions whereby Eady literally tries on different masculine stereotypes such as John Wayne, a pathetic clown, a metro-sexual, a barbequing bloke, and a rugby-playing thug.[1] This response will examine a selection of Eady's exhibitions in relation to the notion of the fallible masculine, which I have defined elsewhere as the masculine response to the demands of a politicised feminism.[2]

THERE WAS NOTHING TO SEE

For "Sculpture on the Gulf" at Waiheke Island in 2010, Eady buried a treasure, *Booty*, and as a result there was nothing to see.[3] The visitors – those out for a nice stroll in the sun – became frustrated, followed instructions and tried to figure out where the sculpture/booty was buried, but no-one succeeded.

For children the game of 'pirates' is exciting, replete with buried treasure, swordplay, and X marking the spot. It was played long before Johnny Depp taught a new generation of moviegoers that pirates were a little bit daring, a little bit stupid, a little bit cunning, a little bit camp, a little bit tipsy and a little bit schizophrenic. Our treasures and swordplay though were imaginary, our violence benign, constituting ourselves through roleplay and games.

Eady's treasure was there alright, for anyone to find; the map indicated a depression in the earth, X indeed marked the spot. A bronze cross-bone with a clue as to the whereabouts of the 'booty' was cast into the ground and was designed to frustrate the expectations of the art-loving public who gather at such events. Those who expected to see something – enticed by the prize at the end, entertained by the thrill of treasure – caused fences to be erected, not to keep the viewers from their treasure, but to ensure the safety of those who thought that the treasure may have slipped off the island and into the sea.

In these big "Sculpture by the Sea" and "Sculpture on Shore" events, the work on offer seems entirely predictable, and giant metal palm fronds and seed pods abound. Eady's practice lies entirely outside of the parameters of such

Figure 1. *Stupid Daddy*, 2010. Mixed Media, Photographed by Scott Eady.

a show, which has more to do with the expectations of an audience ready to be entertained than primed for an encounter with art of a serious or critical kind. In the already picturesque setting of the island, plonking down any old piece of coloured tin or timber take the place of the idea of site specificity as it fades into history. It has been 42 years since Robert Smithson strode around in the deserts of Utah, after all. Eady's work dealt directly and in a novel way with both the site of Waiheke Island and the conspicuous consumption that such an event entails.

The "Sculpture on the Gulf" website asks us to "make a summer's day out of it, see the sculptures, then explore Waiheke's seaside cafés, beaches, vineyard restaurants and cellar doors." This website, and the curation that tags along with it, equates the viewing of art with the leisure activities of fine wine and fine dining. Eady's work both comments on and sidesteps these issues, for Eady never gives away just what the 'booty' is (it could after all be a child's booty or a set of plastic boobs or any number of absurdities). Is there any booty at all? You really don't know. The artist may never have buried the treasure in the first place, and that's why no one could find it. Some people

were angry. This denial of expectations is a perfect foil to the greedy, ready to consume the next best thing – art as entertainment.

This is also the kind of thinking that led to Jeff Koons's *Locomotive* (proposed for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art), a commission with a $25 million price tag. Contemplating Koons's train, there is nothing left for the audience to think but 'WOW, that is a lot of money to spend on art.' What has been traded for gold, and what is at stake in works like this, is any kind of critical engagement. No one has stopped to consider if it's worth the trade. Art is reduced to the status of every other commodity, fulfilling its investment potential. Art is entertainment, culture is reduced to capital.

Money as well as 'booty' is at stake, too, in Eady's work. The show "Lost at the Bottom of the World," at the Sargent Gallery in Whanganui, featured a *Money Train* which is literally made of recast, obselete New Zealand currency. Resembling a cat or dog chasing its own tail, the tiny nickel train (in N scale) is connected at front and rear, a never-ending loop of coming and going, and going nowhere ….[4] Frustration is again employed as a strategy to undermine viewer expectations in the work *HANNAH*, a double-ended rowing skiff. A push-me-pull-you, this work demands that the viewer imagines being both rowers, facing off against one's opposite number, again going nowhere as each rower rows against his or her other self – a self that is constituted through a mirror image. One can imagine the outcome as both rowers are completely spent or torn apart in a violent manner. Within the same exhibition, two pieces, *the grass is green* and *the grass is greener* (photographs of two perfectly green lawns, with a great white inflatable cloud hanging overhead) lead the viewer to believe that in suburbia everything is rosy, each day a perfect day. On one level, these works represent the blue-sky optimism inherent in nationalistic sports advertising. The other, more pessimistic viewpoint suggests that the Land of the Long White Cloud and the facile optimism of suburbia have given birth to relationships where both sides are working hard at going nowhere.

In modernism, pictorial space disappeared, the figure gave way to pure ground, and the masculine subject of modernity – the hero, the adventurer and explorer of past centuries – was replaced by the idea of the anti-hero, the tragic figure of a James Dean. John Wayne was replaced by the image of Clint Eastwood, doing the wrong thing for the right reasons. (Eady's version of Wayne in the exhibition at Mary Newton Gallery, "As the World Turns," is a more domesticated one.) After waves of feminism and the onslaught of postmodern thinking in response to the effects of colonial power, the europhallologocentric subject of modernism gave way to a more provisional and fallible masculinity. Soon there was no room to stand, with all the partial bodies and part-objects around.

If there once seemed to be a clear transition from boy to man, the myth of a happy, uninhibited childhood has been superseded by its representation in the media as a place of lurking dangers and controlled play. In *Stupid Daddy*, Eady plays with the possibility of the subject as defeated, as a tragic clown consumed by grief at a world he cannot control. He sits with a cloud of grey balloons amidst bronze monuments to the lost innocence of childhood, blobby bits of high-key colour. These small bronze works cannot reference anything other than the abject nature of childhood and the scatological bent of schoolyard jokes – the objects on display resemble something that has been extruded from the body; tarted up to look like lollies and desirable designer fluff, they leave one with a sinking, slightly sick feeling in the presence of that sad clown.

The search for an impossible masculine subjectivity, defined against stereotypes as distinct as the sad clown and John Wayne (from the exhibition "The World Keeps Turning"), becomes a futile grasping at straws as the idea of subjectivity itself proves equally ill-fitting. For what now stands for the subject is a mass of posturing, like Johnny Depp's portrait of the fictional Jack Sparrow. Representations of the 'nearly whole' conflict with multiple viewpoints, the subject in motion, a blur, a hybrid: one whose identity is casual, an identity in infinite flux. Eady's early work raised some interesting questions about the shifting masculine subject; the labourer of *Big Time* gave way to the fetishist car painter of *Posy Pony*, moving to the just-married man of *Honeymoon on the Pigroot*. But while these works hinted at the shifting identity necessary to maintain the status quo, they also hint at some cracks in the image of the perfectly controlled ego (and repressed subject) of modernism.[5]

Figure 2. *Dickkopf*, 2006. Plastic skeletons, wood. Photographed by Scott Eady.

Cracks begin to appear in the image of the perfect man because, along with the kind of masculinity portrayed by John Wayne goes a conservative, jingoistic nationalism; along with the image of the clown as happy and fun is the clown who can't hide the tracks of his tears. The Perfect Man as advertising imagines him – for example, in the campaign for Perfect Italianio Cheese – blatantly illustrates that such a notion is completely farcical, while also challenging notions of the masculine as a definition of what women want. In the ad, a handsome man tells a largely female audience that he "is practicing listening," or that "I love to listen to the problems of your friends," or "I'm listening and painting."

The cheese ad plays on an idea about the kind of ideal masculinity that undermines feminism. The masculine subject becomes pro-feminist, defined through a stereotyped notion of what he should be, how he should behave. Sensitive to the point of nausea, he becomes another stereotype (straight off the cover of a Mills and Boon novel), one set against the overt masculinity of the Speight's ad: "It's a hard road finding the perfect woman, boy." This former image is equally impossible to imagine, and requires repression of all aberrant desires. Just as the stereotypical perfect woman has nothing to do with real women, the perfect man is a shell, a construction. Eady's version of perfection is parody. In Eady's version of the Speight's ad, *She's a Hard Road*, masculinity and new-found feminist skills clash. In this billboard work, Eady dons a plastic apron (featuring false boobs and a French maid's garter belt), barbeques the sausages, beer in hand, to the same tune – "She's a hard road finding the perfect woman, boy," about as hard

as it is to define the perfect man. In fact, to find the perfect woman, a man has to walk a mile in her shoes, literally scrambling together in an ill-fitting amalgam with homoerotic undertones.

WHAT IS A WOMAN/ BOY, AFTER ALL?

What is lost on advertising is found in the works that deal with play and imagination – candy-coated niceties with surprising overtones of violence.

Boy #1, *Boy #2* and *Boy #3* – three children/mannequins in camouflage pyjamas – hold onto the leg of a monster which is a maquette for the sculpture *Dickopf* of 2006 – the same monster that recurs in the bronze works from that show. Depicting monsters engaged in scenarios such as a rape scene, death (a recurring motif throughout the show, down to the whitewashed plinths that resemble funeral caskets) and a rugby scrum-cum-war zone, these works reflect the violence implicit in childhood games (such as pirates, war games and cowboys and Indians) and offer a version of where this kind of 'role play as conditioning' can lead. In *Beautiful Terrors,* Eady assembles a video work together with *Boy #3*. The video work recreates the Travis Bicknel role from *Taxi Driver* – "Are you looking at me? What are you looking at? … bang, bang, bang," as he aims his gun at the screen. But it is a child who is repeating these lines – a cute, cherubic but somewhat disgruntled child, and the effect is chilling.

Children use drawing as play to discover the world. Eady's children are the inspiration for nearly all his works of the past decade, helping by doing what they do best – playing at making stuff. Eady faces a moral dilemma by using his children in this manner, having to discern the difference between fun and exploitation. The bronze works in *Stupid Daddy* were inspired by a session of fimo sculpture made by the children. The bronze sculptures, which are painted in highly toxic oranges and blues, both hide the monumental nature of traditional sculpture and bring it down to the level of child's play.

In another work, *Ian's Castle*, sports mats surround an exploding castle. Like a mouse trap, it waits until someone opens the door, then springs apart; the audience is more than slightly dismayed by the fact that they have destroyed the work. In the last of these works, *IVAN*, a note is crudely taped to an orange blob sculpture the size of a small boulder or a large leather medicine ball – but the ball is bronze and the note says 'kick me.' Like so many schoolyard pranks, you only find out its true character when you kick it and it bites back. Eady's work recalls the seemingly uninhibited spaces of childhood as the sole occupier of the imaginary, a time when it was easier than now to slip between play identities as pirates and cowboys. He offers us a new source for the imagination; by re-enacting childhood play, a temporary and partial subjectivity is formed where once the illusion of a whole subjectivity was to be found, presenting us with new and old frontiers to plunder.

What is at stake in the recent work of Scott Eady is not so much the idea of a unified subject constructed out of the stereotypes of masculinity, but a subjectivity that is partial, fleeting and temporary. Through various encounters with feminist discourse, the idea of the perfect man is defined as what women want. Eady remakes his own image according to the expectations of others; no wonder that the clown is sad, or the rugby scrum is reduced to bare bones. In a last defiant and wilful act, his persona ruts about in a duel to the death. Eady's work examines the dark places where displays of masculine posturing lead to the humiliations of Abu Ghraib and to the constant threat of annihilation and war. *Boy #1*, *Boy #2* and *Boy #3* play out this reminder: "from little things, big things grow."

In work after work, expectations of masculine subjectivity are examined and are found to be flawed. From the billboard work, *She's a Hard Road Finding the Perfect Woman/ Boy*, to *Dickopf*, *Lost at the Bottom of the World*, *Boy #1, 2* and *3* and *The World Keeps Turning,* role play is a recurring motif. It is through a parody of such stereotypes that Eady proceeds to unpack the baggage of consumerist culture and address the advertising industry directly – for it is through advertising that these stereotypes are perpetuated, until the values they represent are normalised.

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1 Richard Lummis, "Big Time: Major Works by Scott Eady," *Art New Zealand*, 99 (Winter 2001), 74-7. Lummis celebrates Eady's use of masculine tropes and stereotypes and links these to homoerotic content borrowed from stereotypes of femininity – "pink equal girls." I would disagree with Lummis that the toolshed is feminised (because the internal fit-out, it seems to me, is a display of a clearly feminine masquerade – what some men might imagine femininity to be), while the clearly phallic form of the car in *The Desert Fox* becomes another example of a tool (albeit a pink one). Lummis mistakes this as feminine – but since it has no opening, no windows and doors, its rigidity can equally be described as auto(erotic) or resigned to self-pleasure, rather than the coupling Lummis desires for the work.

2 M Beevors, "Mamma Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys," *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics: Art 1* (November 2006).

3 'Bootilicious' is a slang term which signifies a male desire for an overripe version of female sexuality. While not evident in this work, this idea it is at the heart of a work like *Scotty's Place*.

4 N scale is 1:160 in the United States and 1:144 in the United Kingdom.

5 Eady's examination of identity through playing pirates, clown and cowboys, and the notion of men at war and at play echo the early work of Cindy Sherman, who exposes images of feminine masquerade caught in the headlights of an all-too-male gaze. Eady's work, focused as it is on the self as constituted by the necessities of family, shows us just how equally damaging these stereotypes are, and how difficult they are to live up to – just as much a masquerade for the camera as Sherman's versions.