



Edited by
Michèle Aina Barale,
Jonathan Goldberg,
Michael Moon,
and Eve Kosofsky
Sedgwick

Barbie's

Queer

Accessories

Erica Rand

Duke University Press

Durham and London

1995

H9
23

R36
1995



changing story of where Barbie comes from, cannot be seen in one product but only over time: Mattel's adaptation of Barbie's artifactual and ideological line to being competing definitions within its range so that its presentation of infinite possibility expands and changes to account for and incorporate the changing views of consumers. This feature has less place in Barbie's first five years and little place over the next fifteen years. Although many early twists and turns in the Barbie story presage Mattel's ability to embrace the definitional elasticity that hegemonic discourse requires, Mattel did little through the 1970s to adapt Barbie to changing concepts of female possibility. It hardly nodded to feminism in the ERA years. Indeed, the list "Barbie Doll's Careers" provided in "Barbie Fun Facts," a 1992 Information Release, lists only three new careers between 1986 and 1984: surgeon (1973); Olympic athlete (downhill skier, figure skater, or gymnast; 1975); and aerobics instructor (called Great Shape Barbie; 1984). Keeping Barbie up with the times entailed basically working from a relatively unchanging concept of the audience: children want to emulate teens, teens spend money, so the best way to keep Barbie current is to tap into teen consumer culture or, more precisely, a fragment of it (I couldn't have bought Barbie a McGovern T-shirt like mine). This consistent emphasis is well reflected in Mattel's 1992 Information Release "The Barbie Doll Story":

Over the years, Barbie has remained one of the most popular dolls ever created by changing with the times. Fashion and teenage customs were evolving at a startling rate. . . .

The "British Invasion" of 1964 brought hemlines way up and hair way down as teenagers adopted the "Carnaby Street" look. Mattel's design and development staff has been adept at identifying trends for Barbie doll that related to the lives of teenage America. Barbie went "Mod" with new face sculpting in 1967 that brought her current with the next generation who adored her.

In the 1970s Barbie doll wore up-to-the-minute designs reflecting the "prairie" look, the "granny" dress, the "California Girl" suntan craze, and the frantic "disco" glittery styles.

Mattel's elasticity turns hegemonic, however, in subsequent years and particularly during the 1980s, when Mattel refined Barbie's infinite possibility to incorporate, among other things, two growing ideological trends that threatened to position many consumers as Barbie opponents: feminism and "diversity." In the following sections I discuss the place of these two forces in Mattel's recent construction of Barbie meaning.

We Girls Can Do Anything, Right Barbie?

Barbie has always seemed to have more freedom than the average teenage girl. Even when novels characterized her as a middle-class small-town good girl, her plastic, cloth, and cardboard world—the world that most consumers knew best—betokened an allowance for clothing, accessories, travel, and activities far beyond what the Roberts' apparent income in the novels would support. William K. Zinsser, writing as a bemused father, recorded in 1964 that Barbie and her friends had travel costumes that enabled them to dress "like natives" in Japan, Switzerland, Mexico, and Holland: "Pity the father who comes home to learn that Barbie and Ken have decided to take the Grand Tour." He also alludes to one of the weirder implications of turning Barbie into fantasy environments into artifacts for purchase, which, he points out, give new meaning to the concept of providing for one's child's future: "Should [Barbie] want to go to college, she can buy a 'campus,' which consists of a dormitory room, soda shop (with phone booth), football stadium and drive-in movie. Should she flunk out, which seems likely, she has her own fashion shop with modeling stage, display corner and model's dressing room."⁵⁴ Artificially, Barbie seems to inhabit the "Dallas" and "Dynasty" "Daddy, I'm bored, buy me a boutique to run" world of seemingly endless cashflow more than the off-the-rack world of "The Size 10 Dress."

Zinsser put himself in Barbie's father's shoes, but Barbie's freedom must surely depend partly on the fact that Barbie ordinarily comes with neither history nor authority figures to restrict her actions. Even during the period when Barbie got a life, Barbie didn't seem to have parents unless you read Barbie literature. When Barbie acquired a plastic family, she got only a sister, Skipper. Mattel never turned Barbie's parents into dolls, and eventually made them disappear altogether, along with Barbie's age and last name. In the early 1960s, inquiring minds could go to the bookstore with Mattel's blessing; today, they must do archival research, with no help from Mattel. Mattel now has enough of a stake in reviving Barbie to devote one of twelve q-and-a questions to denying that Barbie has a last name and a policy, apparently, of denying this in other contexts. A research assistant called Mattel and asked if Barbie had a last name. A public relations person told her no. "I thought her last name was Roberts." "Oh, I guess it is." One might borrow, here, from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's characterization of the Romantic rediscovery of ancient Greece and say that Mattel's primary goal throughout was to "[clear] out—as much as [create]—a prestigious, historically underfurnished imaginative space in which relations to and among human bodies

might be newly a subject of utopian speculation."⁵⁵ Mattel sometimes aided those who preferred their imaginative spaces to come furnished but never showed the furnished spaces first.

Barbie's world has always been about "relations to and among human bodies." Her plastic body signals a sexiness that belied the chaste dates of early commercials and novels, and Mattel catered to child sexual fantasies, even while claiming attempts to forestall them, by making a boyfriend Barbie's first anthropomorphic accessory. Altogether, as Don Richard Cox noted in 1977, Barbie's sexiness, combined with her apparent lack of adult supervision and huge collection of habitats, clothing, and recreational gear, might well lead one to conclude that Barbie was a liberated female, sexually and otherwise. In his eyes, this made her a dubious role model: "Will [young girls], like Barbie, resist the responsibility of having children, or, following Barbie's lead more completely, resist the responsibility of marriage and family altogether? There is also the question of the sexual mores of today's Barbie owners. Barbie is a physically attractive woman with no visible permanent attachments. Will she produce a generation of sexually liberated playmates intent on jetting from resort to resort?"⁵⁶

Massive amounts of disposable cash, no parents, and sexpot breasts made Barbie a liberated woman of sorts from day one, although not because of any corporate-stated artistic intention. "Girls, Barbie's boyfriend is coming over, and her parents aren't home" was never on the ad copy. In the 1980s, however, Mattel went official about Barbie's liberated woman status, apart from sex. It turned Barbie into a role model for girls with career aspirations and came up with a slogan to match: "We girls can do anything, Right Barbie!" This wasn't Barbie's first exploration of careers outside modeling. In the early 1960s, remember, Mattel outfitted Barbie for a number of other ones. Granted, these careers were traditionally female (nurse, stewardess) or largely unattainable (astronaut) or both (ballerina), but they were careers nonetheless. Mattel also anticipated Barbie's feminist future in the Keys to Fame game by plugging Barbie as a catalyst for career fantasy—"It's all about the marvelous careers you might have some day." But the Keys to Fame did not initiate a sustained linkage between Barbie's possibilities and career options. For the next twenty years, Barbie got few career costumes; Barbie kept up with how teens might spend money, not with how they might later make money.

All this changed in the mid-1980s, largely through the work of Jill Barad. Barad, previously a cosmetics executive, got her start at Mattel in 1981 by pitching to her prospective employers the idea of marketing cosmetics for

children. Although Mattel didn't buy the idea at the time—it did, however, market a Barbie who comes with makeup for girls in 1992—they acquired her anyway. In 1985, Barad conceived and introduced She-Ra, Princess of Power, the first action doll for girls, as a female counterpart for the Masters of the Universe line. She-Ra was short-lived, partly, according to Barad, because "she wasn't very popular with moms" (something that never stopped Mattel from marketing Barbie).⁵⁷ In 1985, too, apparently in tandem thinking with her idea for She-Ra, and also as a result of focus-group research that revealed that little girls were playing at going to work, she introduced the Day-to-Night Barbie line.⁵⁸ The first entry was an executive whose pink suit could be transformed into evening wear by reversing the skirt and removing the jacket. Career updates in 1989 and 1990 include Doctor Barbie and Flight Time Barbie, "who doubles as a pilot and a flight attendant—with a sparkly after-hours outfit."⁵⁹

Day-to-Night Barbie came with the slogan "We Girls Can Do Anything," which became Barbie's all-purpose slogan and set the stage for many careers Barbie has undertaken since. In 1985 Barbie was also a dress designer (again), a television news reporter, a veterinarian, and a teacher. In 1986 she was an astronaut and a rock star (this was the famed Barbie and the Rockers series); in 1988 a doctor; in 1989 a UNICEF ambassador, a doctor, an army officer, and a dancer on a television dance club show; in 1990 a U.S. Air Force pilot, a rock star, a summit diplomat, and an Ice Capades star; in 1991 a music video star and a navy petty officer; in 1992 a Marine Corps sergeant, a rap musician, an in-line skater, a teacher, a chef, a businesswoman, and a doctor again.⁶⁰ Besides these careers undertaken in 3D, Barbie took up others in Barbie comics and *Barbie* magazine. In the issue of *Barbie* magazine with Day-to-Night Barbie on the cover, Barbie became the star of her own cooking show, the "Glamorous Gourmet," in the Barbie Drama—a regular comic-strip-like feature using photographs of staged doll action tableaux.⁶¹

With the help of Barad, then, Mattel expanded its language of infinite possibility to pick up on a somewhat feminist revision of the American Dream, according to which anyone, girls included, can be and earn whatever they want, if only they try hard enough. Barbie, actually, never has to try very hard. Getting a cooking show entailed merely throwing one party for friends, which led to a write-up in the paper, a subsequent invitation to appear on someone else's cooking show, and, because the ratings "went through the roof," an immediate invitation to host her own. But this magical erasure of obstacles is really quite appropriate to the feminism invoked here. It merely exaggerates, in typical Barbie exaggeration mode, silences all too common

in career-focused feminism: about the obstacles most women face in making their talents pay off so lucratively; about the inequity of any distribution of resources that enables the few to amass an inordinate proportion of the goods. Day-to-Night Barbie is feminism according to *Cosmo*: women can be happily sexy (minus *Cosmo's* permission to have sex) and get glamorous jobs.

Besides feminism, Mattel has been following the discourse, and marketing potential, of "diversity." The company, which gave Barbie a black friend in 1968, introduced "black and Hispanic" Barbies in 1980. In 1988, Mattel introduced dolls of color with other names, reversing a decision made in the early 1970s to call all the dolls "Barbie." It also changed these dolls' expressions from a pout to a smile, apparently in response to complaints from consumers of like ethnicity, and decided, for the first time, to create ethnically targeted ads.⁶² In 1991, after "black" Barbie sales rose 20 percent as a result,⁶³ Mattel introduced a new line of African American Fashion Dolls: Shani, Asha, and Nichelle. Each has a different skin tone and is "realistically sculpted from head to toe to reflect the natural beauty of African American Women," although all have long hair, which Mattel considers regrettably inauthentic but necessary for a totally fulfilling play experience.⁶⁴ A Mattel Information Release epitomizes Mattel's ability to pull the glitz out of liberation discourse and liberation discourse out of the conditions that require it:

SHANI is tomorrow's African-American woman. She's young, strong, beautiful, and fresh. She exemplifies every attribute insinuated by her Swahili name, which translates as "MARVELOUS".

. . . SHANI knows what she wants and has the self-confidence to go after it by being the best she can be.

SHANI is fun, but she is also serious. Not "just a pretty face," she has high aspirations for her future. She's also very conscious of her culture, which she views as a rich tapestry of history, custom, and family values.

With a look that moves easily across the terrains of West Africa to the sunny horizons of the Caribbean and on to the cosmopolitan metropolis [sic] of America, SHANI is equally at home in kente cloth or glittering glamour. . . .

SHANI is many things. She is light and darkness. Sweetness and courage. Committed, sincere, and inquisitive.

SHANI is what we want our little girls to be—the best of all worlds—a hope for the future which will make us proud.⁶⁵

As with Barbie feminism, Barbie diversity knows no obstacles. Mattel seems to have mastered the discourse of infinite possibility: according to Mattel, now all "we girls" can do anything.

Or has it? And can we? Well, almost, and no. Although Mattel's Information Release on Shani carefully avoids perpetuating racist stereotypes so blithely reinforced in *Barbie's Hawaiian Holiday*, the language of exotic otherness creeps into Mattel's toy catalog for 1992, once through the actual use of the word *exotic*, once through *ethnic*, more often in the coded term *outrageous*. Virtually every description of Shani products incorporates *outrageous*, which, like the words *ethnic* and *exotic*, appears nowhere in the catalog's Barbie descriptions. The dolls are "glamorous fashion dolls with an outrageous sense of style and contemporary fun" and have "an outrageous flair for exotic elegance." The boyfriend "wears an elegant golden tuxedo designed with outrageous Shani style." The clothes are "outrageously fashionable high style looks designed for Shani and her friends," which are accented "with a shimmering ethnic print."⁶⁶

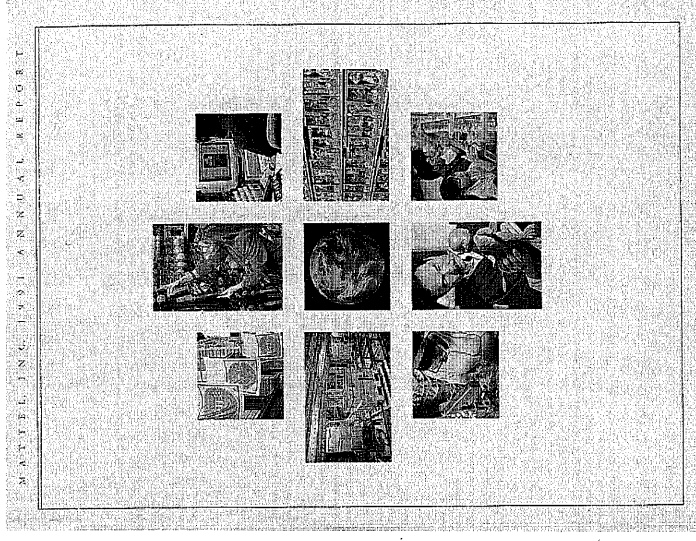
This hint of breathless thrill with the exotic occurs elsewhere, too, in texts with much wider circulation than toy catalogs such as *Barbie* and *Barbie Fashion* comics. An August 1993 story gives the overdramatic appreciation treatment to Jews (of whom I've seen no mention elsewhere) when Barbie accidentally walks in on a bar mitzvah reception. After informatively thinking, "Bar Mitzvah? That's when a Jewish boy turns 13 and becomes a man," she puts her hand to her head in a gesture of great emotion as she thinks, "That was a lovely prayer." Appropriately, the invited guests seem relatively unmoved; for them it is not the drama of the foreign (or a standard tearjerker moment like the singing of "Sunrise, Sunset").⁶⁷ One month later, in the "Letters to Barbie" column, "Barbie" told Czamira, who wrote "I think I have a weird name," that it gave her "an interesting, almost mysterious air."⁶⁸ And in December, responding to a child's query about what "it's like" in New York, Barbie added multiculturalism and multiethnicity to a list of tourist attractions: "Like any big city, [it] has good things and bad things. Homeless people, crime, dirt, overcrowding—these are some of the bad things cities try to overcome. But the good things in New York far outweigh the bad! Wonderful theater, dance, music, museums, galleries, beautiful architecture, a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic environment, many varied opportunities for employment—the list goes on!"⁶⁹ Apparently, Barbie does not make New York multiethnic; she visits multiethnicity as she visits museums. (Note also the unfortunate implication that homeless people, not homelessness, are to be "overcome.")

These are subtle goofs. Mattel sometimes goofs less subtly. "All That Jazz," in the September 1993 issue of *Barbie Fashion*, retells the popular story of parents learning to accept their child's disinclination to follow in the parents' footsteps. Here, the African American jazz greats "Dizzy" and "Sassy"—in

typical gender coding he does instrumentals and she sings scat—want their son Duke to take up jazz also, but he's really into a different kind of music. Hip hop? No, rock and roll. If this were a story about challenging dominant race-coded expectations, this might not be a goof. But "All That Jazz," which race codes the parents' tastes and nowhere addresses race issues in the music biz, is not such a story. The writers come off looking clueless about contemporary music and African Americans in general.⁷⁰

This goof reached more people and lies closer to the surface of the well-meaning text than the ad copy for Shani in toy catalogs. Even more obvious and widely circulated was Mattel's goof over Barbie's math woes. In 1992, Mattel was criticized for making "math class is tough" one of the phrases that might be uttered by Teen Talk Barbie, each of which comes programmed to utter four phrases randomly selected from a pool of 270. After much protest about Barbie reinforcing sexist stereotypes, which it couldn't quell by pointing out that Barbie also said things like "I'm studying to be a doctor,"⁷¹ Mattel took the phrase out of the mix.

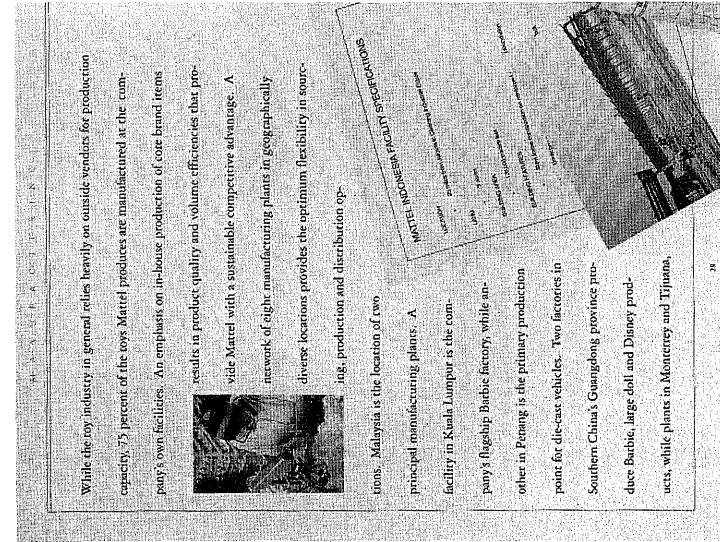
Mattel might be accused of even bigger goofs if the infinite possibility line with its feminism/diversity components were intended for all Mattel's audiences, which it isn't. Before discussing the products, narratives, and promotional material that expose the limits in this line, it is worth specifying its intended audience. Until 1993, it did not include shareholders. The cover of the annual report for 1991 (fig. 6) offers a far different spectacle of racial diversity than the one proffered in the promotion of Shani, for whom skin color was no barrier—and who, significantly, does not appear in this annual report even though Mattel had introduced her in that year. The cover features eight photographs arranged around a photograph of the Earth. Five include people. One shows a middle-class white woman in a store who might be taken for an affluent consumer reaching for a Mattel toy but whom a nametag and a description inside reveal to be one of Mattel's "retail service representatives" or "point-of-purchase experts." Another features a Japanese man at a computer apparently designing a video game. In the other three photographs are also people of color: a man crafting a mermaid-doll prototype; a woman bent over a sewing machine diligently at work on blond Barbie hair; and people working on an assembly line, people whose expressions range from diffident to weary to angry, constructing "white" Barbie heads (no multicultural Barbie here). These photographs represent the production of Mattel products in the "geographically diverse locations" that Mattel claims to have chosen for "optimum flexibility in sourcing, production and distribution operations" but that, with the possible exception of Italy, scream out cheap labor



6. Cover of Mattel's *Annual Report* for 1991.

more than anything else: Malaysia, China, Mexico, Indonesia (fig. 7).⁷² (Mattel pulled out of the Philippines in 1988, partly owing to labor unrest and several months after negotiating a new agreement with the employees' union to raise minimum pay to about \$5.00 a day, an increase forced on Mattel by a new minimum-wage law.)⁷³

We don't need mentally to add the photograph on page 6 of John W. Amerman, chairman of the board and chief executive officer, the distinguished white-skinned, white-haired gentleman sitting behind his desk (in white shirt and largely white tie), to get the full picture here. Mattel's unabashed presentation of classic exploitation scenes and race/gender stereotypes—Japanese at the computer, Malaysian at the factory, or, alternately, woman bent over the sewing machine, man at the computer—hides nothing. Different diversity for different people. This world of Mattel is as diverse as Barbie's plastic world; people come in two genders and many colors. Yet the woman at the sewing machine does not have "a look that moves easily" across continents, from "sunny horizons" to "cosmopolitan metropolises"; her look announces geographic, racial, and social fixity, not mobility. Nothing in the pictures or the text suggests any attempt by Mattel to enable her to be one of the girls



7. Mattel's geographic "diversity." *Annual Report for 1991*, p. 28.

developed in international markets around the world. Radio listeners were encouraged to call the station, and each call activated the delivery of a Mattel toy to a hospitalized child.

Mattel has established itself as a cause-related marketing leader. The Barbie Children's Summit, held in 1990, brought together 40 children from 28 countries to determine the most important issues facing children today, and Mattel committed \$500,000 to support that cause. [The children obligingly chose the uncontroversial causes of world peace, homelessness, and drug abuse, rather than, e.g., exploitation of labor in developing nations, to be the target of Mattel's largesse.] In addition, an ongoing program of the Mattel Foundation installs Computer Learning Labs in elementary schools to help children with special needs learn to read, write and speak.⁷⁴

As if this text were too subtle, two photo captions reiterate the point that image enhancement is the primary goal here.

Again, however, this is not image enhancement directed at shareholders. The photo illustrating the summit, like the factory shot, was not composed with a Shani-public-relations eye. There is no diversity in the foreground of the diplomatic corps (shades of Bella Abzug in the girl with the wide-brimmed hat notwithstanding): the five girls at the front delegate table are white. Behind them are two more white girls and a black boy. At the back of the room, another young male of color seems to be training for a position, not in the diplomatic corps, but in the diplomatic corps service staff; in white shirt, red vest, and black tie, he learns how to operate a videocamera from a similarly dressed adult.

Mattel, then, does not ordinarily strut its diversity stuff for shareholders, although it has tried a bit harder recently. The report for 1992 showed Jill Barad along with John Amerman—underneath him, actually, since she sits while he stands leaning over her shoulder. It also put Mattel's do-gooding (placed even before "Totally Hair Barbie: A \$100 Million Success") in its own category, subheaded "One week after civil unrest devastated Los Angeles . . . , the Mattel Foundation committed \$1 million to better the lives of the city's children." Nor does Mattel hide the profit motive for advertising-magazine or business-page readers in general. Articles in these forums rarely downplay sales as the primary reason behind changes in the image and color of Barbie and her friends.

I do not offer this evidence of Mattel's fundamental disinterest in the causes for which today's Barbie stands as an exposé of Mattel's profit motive. It's no news that Mattel is into Barbie for the money, which, besides being the

who can "do anything" or to camouflage a corporate lack of concern about the conditions that make her spectrum of possibility so different than Barbie's. Mattel didn't even bother to ask the assembly-line workers to smile for the camera. Happy workers and corporate do-gooding are not the point.

Unless they sell products. While Mattel might genteelly refrain from committing to print the indelicate phrase "cheap labor," annual reports before 1993 mince no words about why Mattel performs good deeds. In the 1990 report, which includes a less cropped version of the assembly-line photograph, Mattel appropriately announces its socially conscious activities under the heading "Marketing": "The job isn't done when toys reach store shelves. Innovative marketing is needed to drive retail sales, and Mattel is the industry's marketing leader." After reminding readers that Mattel led the way with toy-company television advertising and discussing new promotional tie-ins with MasterCard and Coca Cola, the text turns to "cause-related activities which enhance the company's image":

A Mattel France radio promotion of the past two years, also timed for the prime toy-selling season, is just one example of promotional efforts

nature of toy companies, is obvious even if you never pick up the business section. Just cruise the toy shelves, and shameless bucksucking gimmicks jump out. To take just one example from 1992, Rappin' Rockin' Barbie came with one of four little boom boxes, each imitating a different instrument. You couldn't buy the boom boxes separately; to get the full "rap" experience, you had to buy four dolls. This is just a minor extension of the recent career-doll strategy in general. In the early years, you could experience Barbie's many options by buying costumes alone. Now, although some costumes are still "sold separately," advertising is directed to induce you to buy additional Barbies. It's not Barbie with available Rappin' Rockin' outfit and Lights and Lace outfits; it's Rappin' Rockin' Barbie or Lights and Lace Barbie.

Nonetheless, while the profit motive of companies that sell products goes without saying, the shallowness of the corporate good-intentions rap does not. At least, the degree of shallowness needs to be specified. Mattel might have backed up the apparent politics of Day-to-Night Barbie, whether primarily for public relations or not, in the way that Ben and Jerry's backs up the apparent politics of Rainforest Crunch Ice Cream. Feminist-diversity Barbie would be proud of the Ben and Jerry's Foundation funding criteria: it funds projects that "will lead to broad social change or help ameliorate an unjust or destructive situation through empowering constituents or addressing the root cause of problems."⁷⁵ The company is also well known for fairer-than-usual workplace policies, out of which, by the way, it has gotten major public-relations mileage—I have rarely stood on a supermarket line with a pint of Ben and Jerry's ice cream without having someone I've never met before tell me about how the company provides masseurs for its packers or restricts the disparity between owner and worker salaries.

With Mattel, in contrast, the apparent politics of the Barbie line are little more than skin deep. Mattel puts some money behind them, and some projects do more than donating toys to sick children in the direction of "empowering constituents" or "addressing the root cause of problems," albeit uncontroversially; proceeds from the special Summit Barbie doll created to mark the Children's Summit went to a fund promoting education and literacy for children.⁷⁶ Mattel also set up an eight-member environmental task force after they got a petition from a group of San Antonio twelve-year-olds that asked Mattel to "make Barbie recyclable, set up a scholarship fund in environmental science, and establish rebates for returned dolls." Although Mattel probably won't change the five-plastics makeup of its big moneymaker, it did make a small environmental gesture: it announced a plan to collect old Barbies, fix them up a bit, and give them out free to poor children around

the world. According to Donna Gibbs, Mattel's media director, "We think reuse, instead of recycling, is an acceptable [read 'convenient'] alternative for now."⁷⁷ But Barbie's "we girls can do anything" politics operate primarily in the realm of Barbie meaning construction: in the dolls like Animal Lovin' Barbie or Friendship Barbie, which was produced for the German market to celebrate the tearing down of the Berlin Wall;⁷⁸ and in the narratives addressed to Barbie buyers, including both promotional material for wholesale (Information Releases) and retail (commercials, packaging) and texts like Barbie novels and comics.

So neither the fact nor the spectacle of unhappy Malaysians bent over pink Barbie heads and blond Barbie hair constitutes a goof in terms of Mattel's position on, or discourse about, the infinite possibility of all humans, as long as the spectacle appears in annual reports only. They bear little on the issue of whether Mattel has mastered the discourse of infinite possibility. They merely make it possible to define the boundaries within which it is meant to operate, the audience to whom it is addressed, and the artifacts among which the content and coherence of the infinite possibility line need to be studied. With these specified, I now return to the conclusion suggested by dolls like Day-to-Night Barbie and her multicolored friends about Mattel's message and the query I posed about it. A few goofs aside, Mattel has clearly mastered the discourse of infinite possibility; according to Mattel, now all "we girls" can do anything. Or can we?

No, not even within the limited arena of doll meaning and doll "play." Barbie can't do anything, we girls and boys can't do anything with Barbie, and, if we take Infinite Possibility Barbie, as Mattel has crafted her, to be a model for what we girls can do, we girls can't do everything either, and only a few of we girls can do what Barbie can do anyway. The most blatant signs of Mattel's desire to circumscribe Barbie's options are its lawsuits against those who would besmirch Barbie's reputation. In the past few years, for instance, Mattel forced a stripper duo to stop using the stage names Barbie and Ken; apparently Barbie, who is constantly taking off her clothes, cannot do so for money, even if, as "Ken" a.k.a. Michael Cherwenka said, she does it in "a tasteful way."⁷⁹

Nor, it seems, can Barbie be implied to have acquired her unnaturally thin figure through excessive dieting. To Mattel's credit, Barbie comics have taken up this topic several times. When readers write in for dieting advice, Barbie reminds them that Barbie is a doll, that people should not try to achieve a figure that is unrealistic for their body type, and that nutrition and exercise are the best routes to fitness.⁸⁰ (These letters suggest that some

readers expect Barbie to function as a sort of Dear Abby, although no one I talked to described wanting advice from Barbie; they wanted, if anything, information about Barbie, which readers also sometimes ask for. If readers are also asking for advice about, e.g., dating, the columns provide no evidence of this; Barbie answers only questions asking for personal advice that pertain to being thin.) And, in one story, Barbie teaches Skipper's friend Jennifer, who is dieting to be a model just like Barbie, that being too thin isn't in. Although the story is ill designed to validate other body types—Barbie herself is presented as exemplifying the healthy figure, and she admonishes Jennifer not to risk stunting her growth since models need to be tall—it does offer concrete nutritional advice.⁸¹ But explicit or graphic reference to eating disorders is out, as is any implication that Barbie herself might have splurged and purged. Mattel tried to prevent the showing of Todd Haynes's 1989 film *Superstar*, which uses Barbie dolls to portray the life and death from bulimia of Karen Carpenter (a censorship successfully pursued by Karen's brother Richard).⁸²

Mattel also sent a cease and desist letter to Barbara Bell, the woman who channels Barbie. The letter, reproduced by *Barbie Bazaar* in an article wondrously titled "Tapping the Collectible Unconscious," warns her of Mattel's intention to sue anyone who "may significantly adversely affect the whole, positive, family-oriented image of BARBIE and Mattel . . . [that] Mattel has spent considerable funds and resources to develop."⁸³ Actually, much of what Bell utters as Barbie in the *Barbie Channeling Newsletter* seems rather Mattesque in content, if new agey in vocabulary: "We all have disabilities in life. Some may have physical disabilities. Some do not know how to love or be loved. Barbie tells us that even when appearances are cosmetically flawless, as is her plastic physique, subtle cosmic limits exist to show us that we all have areas to grow into, to improve, to strive toward." But then again, Mattel would probably not let Barbie use her "deformed" feet to exemplify her own imperfect state or answer a transsexual's question about why her estrogen pills—the transsexual's, that is—are pink. The answer: "Pink is the color not only of the Divine Feminine, but also that of Universal Love, so the color choice is appropriate."⁸⁴

Stripping, dieting, channeling—these are some things Mattel won't let Barbie do. Many others Mattel won't help Barbie do. As both critics and fans have long noted, Barbie's accessories have always worked to predetermine her choices in the world of infinite possibility she purportedly inhabits. Barbie never could do anything or wear anything. Her career must be glamorous: "Barbie would never be a waitress," commented Kitty Black-Perkins, one

of her fashion designers, in 1989.⁸⁵ Her look must be antisuversive. In the same 1964 interview in which Ruth Handler stated, "These dolls become an extension of the girls. Through the dolls, each child dreams of what she would like to be," she also noted proudly that Barbie got girls out of jeans and into a dress.⁸⁶ Barbie scorned the leather-jacket look, although she, like James Dean, was, and remains, a teenager without much of a cause. Barbie is clearly meant to have no politics beyond the mild fondness for the environment and "world peace" enshrined at the Barbie Summit. In Barbie comics and novels now, Barbie occasionally engages in a bit of environmental activism and animal rescue; in *Wildlife Rescue*, a 1991 novel from the new series, she saves a baby elephant from evil poachers in Africa.⁸⁷ And one Barbie comic gives "step by step instructions on writing to public officials": "The mayor explains that public officials work for you, so even if you're a child, there's no one more important than you. It explains that you have a right to write to your public officials and tell them how you feel about anything."⁸⁸

For some people, even this level of political consciousness makes Barbie a tool of the Left. In 1990, for instance, the Oregon Loggers Group, which lobbies against much pro-environment legislation, protested ads for Mattel's Barbie Children's Summit in which children sing, "The world would be a better place if we could save the trees and the eagles," and, "We can save our world together . . . we can stop the trees from falling," claiming that the Barbie Summit might promote the "radical agenda" of preservationists.⁸⁹ But a survey of Barbie's plastic and textual artifacts suggests that this group was unduly alarmist. As presented by Mattel, Barbie's love of nature and peace seems unlikely to move her beyond letter writing to radical action. For one thing, it only goes so far. Mattel did not rush to pick up Laura Phillips's 1984 idea for "Michigan Barbie," accessorized with menstrual sponge, Barbie's new name, and Barbie's healing herbs 'n' stuff.⁹⁰ Nor does Barbie's commitment to world peace make her antimilitaristic or anti-imperialistic; Barbie even did a tour of duty in the Persian Gulf. And her political activism does not extend beyond these hardly controversial areas. Mattel accessories include no pro-choice buttons, no ANC T-shirts, no Silence = Death stickers. Barbie is just not that kind of girl.

Not any kind of girl can be Barbie either, at least not in all her glory. In many stores, it's true, Barbie comes in different colors. African American Barbie has a doctor outfit and can wear all Barbie's glamorous clothes. She also comes with her own consultant. Dr. Darlene Powell-Hopson, a "licensed clinical psychologist and certified school psychologist," was hired by Mattel in conjunction with the creation of the Shani line, to "advise the company on

issues related to positive play products for African American children." Her credentials, publicized in a Mattel Information Release, include co-authoring *Different and Wonderful: Raising Black Children in a Race Conscious Society* with her husband, Dr. Derek S. Hopson, and being "the proud parents of a four year old daughter, Dotteana Karyn Hopson, 'the beautiful Black African-American princess that God blessed us with.'"⁹¹

But Mattel's commitment to diversity does not transport Barbies of color, or even white Barbies who aren't blond, to the heights or across the breadth of the Barbie world. Many Mattel and Mattel-licensed Barbie products come in one edition only. In these, she has the same skin and hair color designated not "foreign" in 1960: "white" and blond. While children of many ethnicities people the video "Dance! Workout with Barbie," a white, blond Barbie and a young, white, blond woman lead them. In 1991, a blond, white Barbie graced the cover of the new Barbie Queen of the Prom game and also of Barbie's CD "The Look"—produced four years after Mattel hired a blond, white woman, Cana Cockrell, to impersonate Barbie in eight lip-sync concerts a day.⁹² The list of products that come in blond Caucasian only goes on and on: lunch boxes, sleeping bags, paper plates, umbrellas, children's clothing.

Barbie also appears only white and blond in the textual products that expand Barbie's options beyond those committed to three dimensions: Barbie novels and books for small children and *Barbie* and *Barbie Fashion* comics. If the diversity displayed on the toy shelves suggests that any kind of girl can be Barbie, the diversity displayed in textual products suggests something quite different: any kind of girl can be Barbie's friend. Some of Barbie's best friends are people of color, who populate the comics in appealing professions and in fair number, along with an occasional person in a wheelchair.

Yet the talents and possibilities given to people of color pale in comparison, so to speak, to Barbie's. This is partly an unfortunate side effect of characterizing Barbie as a girl who appears to be a "natural" at everything she tries, which happens every month in Barbie comic-book stories like "The Heart of Art." The story begins when Barbie's Asian American friend Chris takes Barbie along for moral support to her appointment at an art gallery where Chris hopes to exhibit her work. Alas, the gallery owner ignores Chris, going nuts instead over the painting that Barbie, on her way to the frame shop, happens to be carrying, a painting of hearts made by Barbie herself. Barbie tries to redirect the woman's attention: "But, Ms. Svenson, this painting I did for fun. Chris is the real painter." To no avail—Ms. Svenson invites Barbie to be in her next show, and Barbie rushes home to dash off a batch of heart paintings. (Notice that Barbie's concern over the injustice of it all does

not extend to questioning whether *she* belongs at the top.) Barbie is a hit, and one painting water damaged by a ceiling leak is immediately bought by a collector who screams, "Look! Live art! So bold! So daring! I *must* have that right away." Chris does eventually get her chance, but only now that the walls have a blank spot. Barbie pulls out one of Chris's paintings, to which Ms. Svenson, in desperation, will now pay attention.

"The Heart of Art" typifies Barbie comics, in which Barbie always manages to outshine her friends of any color despite some authorial intent to minimize the effect. It's the painting altered by weather that gets plucked, and by a collector parodied as an art snob. The comic makes the gallery owner, too, an object of some ridicule. She has wild hair, a funny foreign accent, and is "overweight"—too thin may not be in, but praiseworthy characters somehow always have Barbie's fat ratio. It also provides some visual and textual material to back up Barbie's contention that Chris is the "real" artist. A frame showing Chris's studio reveals her paintings to be more arty than Barbie's heart designs: abstract pieces and blue nudes, demurely cropped, allude in style and color to the work of Matisse. A subtext also contrasts Barbie, who paints for fun, for her friends, and, now, on commission, with Chris, who paints "because I *have* to paint, and not for everybody else," thus making Chris a truer artist in the Van Gogh tradition, driven to create from within with a vision that can't be bought. Yet Barbie, a natural, unschooled talent whose fame depends only on being "discovered," has the artist aura, too. And these correctives, many details of which seem too subtle for most young readers to pick up, do not outweigh the central message that in an area that Chris can conquer only with Barbie's help, Barbie has succeeded effortlessly, as she had succeeded effortlessly the month before at solving the mystery her female African American detective friend was hired to solve.⁹³ Barbie miraculously emerges at the top even of professions in which she dabbles.

Stories like "The Heart of Art" make the best of a bad set of guidelines. It's impossible to describe a world of equal opportunity while simultaneously telling the story of a white, blond girl who has the talent, destiny, and luck to triumph at anything she sets her sights on. Or merely stumbles across: Barbie merely enters the art world, suddenly she has a gallery to represent her. Similarly, in "The Memory Book, Part Two," Barbie gets flown to a Hollywood audition after an African American friend sees an ad about a movie role and sends in Barbie's picture—again, a person of color whose primary function is to be an agent, here somewhat literally, of Barbie's success. Barbie, of course, beats out the other auditioning actresses including two black women, one with dreadlocks; winning is Barbie's destiny.⁹⁴ In a just

- 23 Ruppert, "The Rise and Fall and Rise of Ruth Handler," 26.
- 24 Patricia Leighton, "The White Peril and *L'art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," *Art Bulletin* 72 (December 1990): 609-30.
- 25 A. Glenn Mandeville, "The Many Cases of Barbie," *Barbie Bazaar* 2 (January/February 1990): 12.
- 26 Quoted in Billy Boy, *Barbie*, 18.
- 27 Mandeville, "The Many Cases of Barbie," 13.
- 28 A. Glenn Mandeville, "Barbie's Vinyl Ventures," *Barbie Bazaar* 3 (January/February 1991): 29.
- 29 A. Glenn Mandeville, "And Then . . . I Met Ken," *Barbie Bazaar* 2 (March/April 1990): 24.
- 30 Schneider, *Children's Television*, 30.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 29; Mandeville, "I Met Ken," 24.
- 32 Schneider, *Children's Television*, 29-30.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 35 Thanks to Robert Branham for a conversation that triggered this connection.
- 36 Betty Lou Maybee, "Mirror Mirror, Crystal Ball," in *Here's Barbie*, Cynthia Lawrence and Betty Lou Maybee (New York: Random House, 1962), 131-53.
- 37 Cynthia Lawrence, "The Size 10 Dress," in *Here's Barbie*, 78, 96, 99-100.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 39 Betty Lou Maybee, *Barbie's Fashion Success* (New York: Random House, 1962). Cynthia Lawrence, *Barbie's New York Summer* (New York: Random House, 1962), and *Barbie Solves a Mystery* (New York: Random House, 1963).
- 40 Lawrence, *Barbie Solves a Mystery*, 16.
- 41 Maybee, *Barbie's Fashion Success*, 6.
- 42 Betty Lou Maybee, "Captain Hooten's Return," in *Here's Barbie*, 165, and "Barbie's Big Prom," in *ibid.*
- 43 Cynthia Lawrence, "Barbie, Be My Valentine," in *Here's Barbie*, 4.
- 44 Maybee, *Barbie's Fashion Success*, 38.
- 45 Lawrence, "Barbie, Be My Valentine," 8-9. Suzanne Weyn, *The Phantom of Shrieking Pond*, Adventures with Barbie, vol. 5 (Los Angeles: Price Stern Sloan, 1992), 55.
- 46 Betty Lou Maybee, *Barbie's Hawaiian Holiday* (New York: Random House, 1963), 13, 23, 19, 133-47, 66.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 63 (ellipses in original).
- 48 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 49 Much has been written on the construction of "the other" against, and as a way to define, the norm that constructors perceive themselves as occupying. See especially two groundbreaking texts, Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967) and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1965).
- 50 David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1993), 95.
- 51 For excellent studies of this multiple identity formation in the nineteenth-century United States, see *ibid.*; and Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 52 In a subplot of *Barbie's Hawaiian Holiday*, Barbie helps the Hawes' thirteen-year-old son Gerald get his parents to accept his own passion for surfing, another instance of the positive valuation of the pleasures Apaki stands for, and another suggestion that it is only Barbie, and only people of her particular class and race, who have the proper attitude toward the place of pleasure.
- 53 Letters column, *Barbie Fashion*, December 1993, 31. In response to Alison Reddington's letter, which criticized the story for glamorizing homelessness with a carpeted shelter, fashionably dressed inhabitants, and the implication of imminent job prospects, Hildy Slate, who wrote "The Volunteers," explained that Mattel had forced her to change her story so that it wouldn't "scare" very young children.
- 54 William K. Zinsser, "Barbie Is a Million-Dollar Doll," *Saturday Evening Post*, 12 December 1964, 72-73.
- 55 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 136.
- 56 Don Richard Cox, "Barbie and Her Playmates," *Journal of Popular Culture*, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 305-6.
- 57 Leah Rosch, "The Brains behind Barbie," *Working Woman*, May 1990, 90.
- 58 Kim Masters, "It's How You Play the Game," *Working Woman*, May 1990, 90. On Barad, see also Nancy Rivera Brooks, "Barbie's Doting Sister," *Los Angeles Times*, sec. D, pp. 1-2.
- 59 Rosch, "Brains behind Barbie," 90.
- 60 "Barbie Doll's Careers," Mattel Information Release, 1992.
- 61 Karen Harrison, "The Glamorous Gourmet," *Barbie* 2 (Fall 1985): 26-29.
- 62 Judith Graham, "Mattel Hopes for Help from Barbie's Friends," *Advertising Age*, 21 March 1988, 2; Kim Foltz, "Mattel's Shift on Barbie Ads," *New York Times*, 17 July 1990, sec. D.
- 63 Lisa Jones, "A Doll Is Born," *Village Voice*, 26 March 1991, 36.
- 64 "Mattel Unveils New African American Dolls," Mattel Information Release, 11 February 1991. On the hair and color of these dolls, see Jones, "A Doll Is Born," 36.
- 65 "Shani: A Character Sketch," Mattel Information Release, 1991.
- 66 Mattel, Inc., *Girls Toys*, 1992, 74-76.
- 67 *Barbie Fashion*, August 1993, 31.
- 68 "Letters to Barbie," *Barbie Fashion*, November 1993, 32.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 "All That Jazz," *Barbie Fashion*, September 1993, 2-13.
- 71 "Barbie Doesn't Like Math," *Portland Press Herald*, 1 October 1992, sec. D, p. 10.
- 72 Mattel, Inc., *1991 Annual Report*, 1992, 26, 28.
- 73 Ramon R. Isberto, "4000 Filipinos Lose Jobs after Barbie Takes a Walk," *Los Angeles Times*, sec. 5, pp. 2, 6. According to a slide show on women in the Philippines produced by the Philippine Solidarity Network (PSN), Mattel's abuses in the Philippines' Bataan Export Processing Zone were not limited to low wages. "We call our company 'Motel,'" says a worker at Mattel, "because we are often told to lay down or be laid off." According to the PSN, Mattel also offered prizes to workers for undergoing sterilization, thus avoiding the issue of maternity benefits, and expelled striking workers by force during a 1981 strike. (Annette Fuentes and Barbara Ehrenreich, *Women in the Global Factory*, INC Pamphlet no. 2 [Boston: South End, 1983], 23, 13, 46-47. Thanks to Margot Hostie and Laura Myrtels for this reference.)
- 74 Mattel, Inc., *1990 Annual Report*, 1991, 14-15.
- 75 Ben and Jerry's Foundation, description of funding criteria, 1992. The company also funds

- "Partnerships," franchises donated to nonprofit groups without initial start-up fees (*Ben and Jerry's Chunk Mail*, vol. 2, no. 1 [1993]: 1).
- 76 Karen Caviale, "Barbie Continues Goodwill Mission," *Barbie Bazaar* 2 (July/August 1990): 6.
- 77 Steve Lohr, "And See to It That Ken Composts," *New York Times*, 8 May 1992, sec. D, p. 4.
- 78 Caviale, "Goodwill Mission," 6.
- 79 "Mattel Sues Ken, Barbie," *Chicago Sun Times*, 11 May 1990, 14.
- 80 "Letters to Barbie," *Barbie Fashion*, June 1993, 31.
- 81 "Role Model, or Too Thin to Be In," *Barbie Fashion*, 27 March 1993, 2-12.
- 82 Peter Bowen, "A New Toxic Avenger," *Outweek*, 17 April 1991, 56.
- 83 Letter to Barbara Bell from Judy A. Willis, 24 March 1993, reproduced in Marsha McLaughlin, "Lapping the Collectible Unconscious: Barbie Psychic Barbara Bell," *Barbie Bazaar* 5 (September/October 1993): 45.
- 84 *Barbie Channeling Newsletter* and letter to Bell, both reproduced in *ibid.*, 43-44.
- 85 Denise Gellene, "Forever Young: After Thirty Years Barbie Has More Clothes, Friends, and Fans than Ever," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 1989, sec. 4, p. 4.
- 86 Zinsser, "Million Dollar Doll," 73.
- 87 Stephanie St. Pierre, *Wildlife Rescue*, Adventures with Barbie, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: Price Stern Sloan, 1991).
- 88 Lisa Trusiani, quoted in Marsha McLaughlin, "An Interview with the Staff of Barbie and Barbie Fashion Comics," *Barbie Bazaar* 5 (March/April 1993): 25.
- 89 Martha Groves, "Loggers Want Barbie to Play a Different Tune," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 December 1990, sec. D, p. 1, 4.
- 90 Cartoon in *Lesbian Contradiction: A Journal of Irreverent Feminism*, no. 9 (Winter 1984-85): 5.
- 91 "Dr. Darlene Powell-Hopson," Mattel Information Release, 1990.
- 92 Barbara Manning, "Cana Cockrell: She'll Be Your Barbie Doll," *Los Angeles Magazine*, June 1987, 16.
- 93 "The Heart of Art," *Barbie Fashion*, 28 April 1993, 2-29; "The Case of the Disappearing Diamonds," *Barbie*, 27 March 1993, 21-30.
- 94 Barbara Slate, "The Memory Book, Part Two," *Barbie Fashion*, 31 July 1993, 3-9.
- 95 "Letters to Barbie," *Barbie*, 27 March 1993, 31.
- 96 "The Heart of Art," 8.
- 97 Mattel did experiment with a different body and face for the Japanese market but returned to the norm in 1991 after market testing in Japan revealed that consumers were ready for the Western version and that a doll unlike other dolls sold in Japan might well garner Mattel a bigger share of the doll market than the relatively unsuccessful "Moba Barbie" (David Kilburn and Julie Skur Hill, "Western Barbie: Mattel Makes Japan Push with Revamped Doll," *Advertising Age*, 7 October 1991, 94).
- 98 Quoted in Alison Dembner, "35 and Still a Doll," *Boston Globe*, 9 March 1994, 16.
- 99 Lin Poyer, "Barbie: The Quintessential Bimbo?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 April 1989, 19.
- 100 *Ibid.*
- 101 Carol Lawson, "Stereotypes Unravel, But Not too Quickly, in New Toys for 1993," *New York Times*, 11 February 1993, sec. B, pp. 1, 4.
- 102 "Has Ken Come Out?" *People*, 11 October 1993, 66.
- 103 Dan Savage, "Ken Comes Out," *Chicago Reader*, 23 July 1993, sec. 1, p. 8.
- 104 "Making Earring Magic," *Barbie Magazine*, no. 37 (1993): 19. In an interesting plotline, Barbie and friends are distressed to discover the collection labeled "BAD" by critics. "BAD," however, turns out to be good: it's an acronym for the "Best Accessory Design" award.
- 105 Candace Irving in William E. Geist, "At 25 Barbie is Healthy, Wealthy, and Celebrated," *New York Times*, 25 February 1984, sec. B, p. 3; Jill Barad in Rosch, "Brains behind Barbie," 90.
- 106 Beverly Beyette, "A Dress-Up Job: Barbie's Principal Designer Scales Down Glamour and Plays Up Fantasy," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 February 1991, sec. E, p. 5.
- 107 Mattel also sold Midge into matrimony in 1991; Barbie was a bridesmaid.
- 108 The cards, which are sold individually and in a postcard book, each have on the back: "Barbie is a trademark owned by and used under license from Mattel, Inc."

Chapter 2. Older Heads on Younger Bodies

- 1 Gary Fisher, "Storm," 1992, typescript.
- 2 Conversation with Joleen, July 1993.
- 3 Conversation with Lise, 30 July 1993.
- 4 Sybil Dewein and Joan Ashabranner, *The Collectors Encyclopedia of Barbie Dolls* (Paducah, Ky.: Collector, 1977, 1992), 257, 301.
- 5 Conversation with Georgia, 9 August 1993.
- 6 One of the two dresses with rickrack shown by Sarah Sink Eames in *Barbie Fashion*, vol. 1, 1959-67 (Paducah, Ky.: Collector, 1990) is the 1965 Brunch Time, remarketed the next year as Coffee's On, which came with casserole dishes and a matching coffeepot (pp. 133, 170).
- 7 Carole Nicksin, "Barbie and Tammy: The Real Story!" *Semotext[el]* (1987): 286 (ellipses in original).
- 8 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Pocket, 1972), 20-22.
- 9 Nicksin, "Barbie and Tammy," 287.
- 10 Conversation with Cheryl, spring 1991.
- 11 Conversation with Elspeth, Portland, Maine, June 1991.
- 12 Telephone conversation with Teresa Ortega, from Chapel Hill, N.C., spring 1991.
- 13 Conversation with Lisa, Greene, Maine, summer 1991.
- 14 Conversation, Detroit, 13 March 1993.
- 15 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 22.
- 16 Conversation with William Pope.L, summer 1993, whom I thank for many insightful conversations on the material for this chapter.
- 17 James Clifford, introduction to *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press) 1986, 7.
- 18 Penny Lorio, "Uncloseting Barbie: Get over It, Ken, It's a New Age," *Washington Post*, 2 May 1993, sec. C, p. 5.
- 19 Conversation with Sue, Auburn, Maine, August 1993.
- 20 Lorio, "Uncloseting Barbie," 5.

times "kind of flirty," are "also innocent"; he might also have mentioned that they are nothing compared to the bisexual Skippers, drag-queen Kens, and queer sex scenes that other collectors produce. This subset also, I presume, includes some Barbie impersonators—although not Lori, who became one of Mattel's straighter accessories in the process of representing her. While retaining some doubts about Barbie's effect on girls' body image, Lori became enthusiastic enough about "the wholesome image" to take an active part in protecting it. By the time Mattel empowered her to hire her own backup models, she was willing to do some "snooping" to ensure that the applicants were really as wholesome as they claimed to be. She also rejected some outfits that she considered too immodest, thus making her a straighter accessory for Barbie than Mattel itself, which here, as on other occasions, was willing to contradict Barbie's official identity in order to sell products beyond what that identity appears to support.³

Among Barbie subvertors past and present number, too, people having other kinds of sustained adult relationships with Barbie: people within the ranks of Mattel, as I suggested in chapter 1, who slip cock rings onto the toy-store shelves and people in the ranks of reluctant bystanders who have verbally or artifactually intervened in the Barbie play of children. One is Rachel's mother, a freelance book designer who subverted Barbie's anatomical incorrectness in the late 1960s by painting nipples and pubic hair on Rachel's Barbies. Many other Barbie subvertors have no sustained adult contact with Barbie. Barbie is just one vehicle of subversion used only once or twice: today Barbie fucks Midge, tomorrow Marcia Brady fucks Laurie Partridge. Mary Patten, for instance, reproduced the Barbie-dildo photographs as one artifact among many in "My Courbet: A Beaver's Tale," her 1990 installation and video critique of lesbian invisibility in art history. This video, in turn, was one subversion among many: in 1989, she and Jeanne Kracher subverted yuppie/corporate lingo with their girl-eats-girl Power Breakfast T-shirt produced for ACT UP/Chicago; a current video in progress concerns the media coverage of Aileen Wuornos, the so-called lesbian serial killer.

In considering Barbie's subversive adult accessories, I am particularly interested in the pedagogical and political issues that arose at the beginning of my own sustained adult encounter with Barbie when I tried to imagine teaching "Gals and Dolls." Can you wrest Barbie from Mattel and refunction her to challenge rather than abet dominant ideologies? How much can Barbie subvertors subvert—to what extent does the given determine the possible in both the making and the circulation of Barbie subversions? What insights do the possibilities and limits of Barbie subversion in particular offer regard-

ing strategies of cultural activism in general? The first section discusses what might oversimplistically be termed the good news about Barbie's subvertibility and her potential as a political and pedagogical fool. Subsequent sections address what subversions, either in isolation or in circulation, often do not subvert and examines some key disjunctions between production and consumption, between intention and reception. Primary among these is the disparity between the huge number of Barbie subversions and the tendency to report them, both conversationally and in the media, as being one of a kind: how is it possible, for instance, to tout Barbie 20 million times or to report each transgenerating of Ken as if it had never happened before? From these issues larger questions emerge about outing and about deploying cultural studies pursued within academics on behalf of political/cultural activism undertaken outside academic contexts. I take these up at the end of the chapter.

Steal This Doll

Can you steal Barbie from Mattel for political and pedagogical gain? The following poem by Essex Hemphill suggests why at least part of the answer must be yes:

Soft Targets
(for Black girls)

He was arrested and detained
for nailing Barbie doll heads
to telephone poles.

He was beaten
while in custody, accused
of defacing public property.

After healing, he resumed
his irreverent campaign,
this outlawed spook terrorist
continued hammering horse nails
through Barbie heads
and setting them aflame.

Barbie never told Black girls
they are beautiful.

She never acknowledged their breathtaking Negritude.

She never told them to possess their own souls.

They were merely shadows clutching the edges of her mirror.

Barbie never told Black girls they are beautiful,

not in the ghetto evenings after double dutch,

not in the integrated suburbs, after ballet class.

"Soft Targets" displays Barbie as a great vehicle for social criticism. By juxtaposing two common race-specific occurrences—the enshrinement of white people in cultural products and institutionalized violence against blacks—Hemphill draws attention to the consequences of a racism that gives the white doll more value than black human beings. Mutilating Barbie is considered a crime; police beating black men and Mattel perpetuating white superiority is not. He also implicates sexism in police action against black men, which is often perpetuated in the name of protecting white women. The phrase "defacing public property," which refers most obviously to the crime against telephone poles but also to the de-facement of Barbie, also invokes the dual status of Barbie's human referent, white women, as overcherished and yet underempowered ("property").

"Soft Targets" shows what you can do with Barbie by what Hemphill says—and by what he doesn't. He doesn't state who Barbie is or which Barbie he is talking about. He doesn't have to. The connection between the word *Barbie* and Mattel's doll is ubiquitous. Readers do not, for instance, have to get to the seventh stanza, when Hemphill first refers to Barbie as *she*, to realize that *Barbie* doesn't refer to Klaus Barbie, even though Klaus had his image backed up by police brutality, might justifiably be nailed in effigy to a telephone pole, and never, I presume, never told black girls that they are beautiful either. This misreading seems preposterous, but the point is worth making: reading *Barbie* and getting a mental picture of the doll requires the application of acquired knowledge. Most people have it, although their mental picture might deviate from what's out there. Note that Hemphill himself is

another example of a Barbie observer who does not see, or see as significant or as successfully achieved, Barbie's recent and much-touted diversity.

People can also often call up something about Barbie's rep and the Barbie debates. Hemphill doesn't need to explain why "Barbie never taught Black girls / they are beautiful." As I argued in chapter 2, adult memories about childhood Barbie use testify to widespread familiarity with the debate over Barbie's fitness to serve as a role model: Does Barbie generate sex play in girls? Does she promote the superiority of beauty over brains or of skinny, white, blond, big-breasted women over every other female? So, too, does the widespread use of quickie references to Barbie in cultural products directed to very large audiences. Alison Sloane doesn't explain what she means by her comment in *Soap Opera Digest*, bought monthly by almost 1.5 million people, that most soap actors and actresses of the 1960s and 1970s "looked like they'd be more at home in Malibu Barbie's Beach House than in the fictional small towns where their characters lived."⁴ Frank Coffey and Joe Layden, authors of *Thin Ice: The Complete, Uncensored Story of Tonya Harding, America's Bad Girl of Ice Skating*, which I bought at the supermarket, do not explain what Harding's former agent meant when he said, "Tonya Harding proves that you don't have to be a Barbie doll to succeed in this sport."⁵

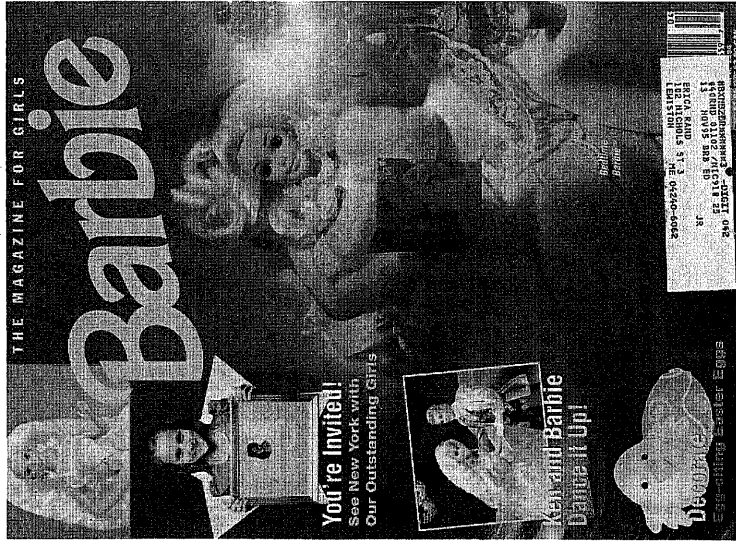
There's a lot out there about Barbie, but that doesn't mean that she's not worth picking up again. Hemphill's poem shows otherwise, and my point is just the opposite. Common knowledge makes Barbie a great vehicle for social criticism. Like the U.S. flag, Barbie calls up for many people an image, a set of issues, and an understanding of the official and dominant raps: we know Barbie is supposed to stand for a female ideal just as we know the U.S. flag is supposed to stand for a U.S. commitment to freedom, democracy, and justice. As a result, Barbie is user friendly for the critic-producer, who can begin on covered ground and move on from there.

This is what Hemphill does, as do others who use Mattel's dolls for social criticism. In *Tongues Untied*, Marlon Riggs's 1989 video on black gay men, a monologuer uses "body by Nautilus, brains by Mattel" to describe a white bouncer at a racist gay club; he doesn't need to explain that through *Mattel* he alludes to Ken or that through Ken he alludes to ignorant, cut-from-the-mold, same-old-story racism. In the novel *Travels with Diana Hunter*, Regine Sands also works from common ground when she has her formerly anorexic lesbian character refer to her parents as Barbie and Ken: "All they wanted, for god's sake, they told one another, was to make her into a beautiful, cultured, selfish, rich elitist like themselves."⁶

The cultural producers discussed above all take advantage of common

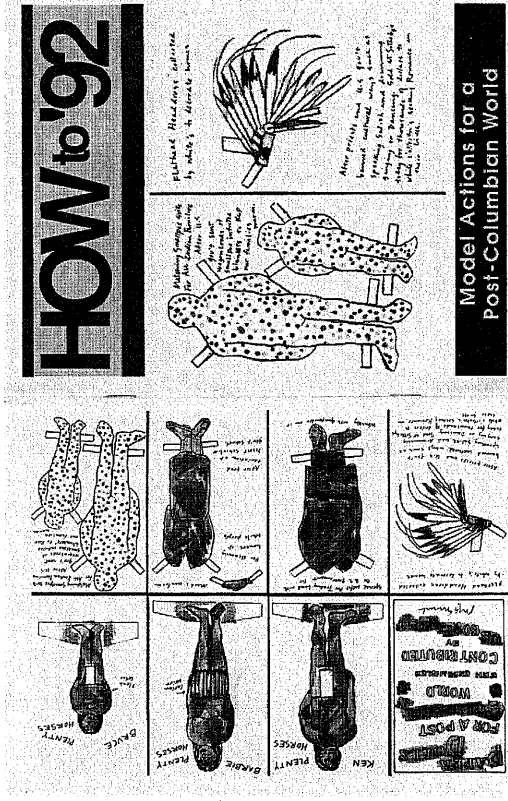
line; the 1994 Doctor Barbie, which, in a few horrible manifestations, features an infant of color as one of white, blond Barbie's accessories. Aside from repeating the suggestion of much liberal white culture that the primary function of people of color is to enhance, by accessorizing, the self-image or leisure activities of white people—some of my best friends are black and/or I love having sex to an Afro beat—this particular combination reinforces both a dubious humanitarianism, in which charitable, enlightened white people bring the fruits of progress to the less light, and a justification for white supremacy: those people need our help.)

The naming device, the names, the ad copy, and the values encoded in the name/outfit/accessories combinations all make Barbie ripe for parody, and subvertors have made great use of them. The cover of *How-To '92: Model Actions for a Post-Columbian World*, a handbook for legal and illegal political/cultural actions, shows a detail from Jaume Quick-To-See Smith's 1991 series "Paper Dolls for a Post Columbian World with Ensembles Contributed by the U.S. Government" (fig. 17).⁸ Quick-To-See Smith addresses precisely what the 1994 Doctor Barbie, continuing in Mattel's tradition of shallow diversity, would camouflage and fail to address several years later and, more important, what standard accounts of Columbus omit. In "Paper Dolls," the people who distribute the goods are not anxious to provide colonized Barbie and Ken, given the surname "Plenty Horses" in mocking imitation of white habits of stereotyping, with outfits, resources, and a power of self-determination just like theirs. Barbie comes with a maid's uniform for her, "for cleaning houses of white people after good education at Jesuit school or gov't school." There is also a "special outfit" for Ken, "for trading land with the U.S. government for whiskey with gunpowder in it." Barbie and Ken also get "matching smallpox suits for All Indian Families after U.S. gov't sent wagonloads of smallpox infected blankets to keep our families warm." Spreading the fruits of enlightenment is not the main goal here. Nor is there the benign intercultural give-and-take suggested by the world of Barbie, where white Barbie shares her doctor outfit with her friends and counterparts of color while blithely enjoying her boom box, and by the classroom tale of the first friendly Thanksgiving meal. Another accessory is a "flathead headress collected by whites to decorate homes after priests banned cultural ways such as speaking Salish and drumming, singing or dancing. Sold at Sotheby's today for thousands of dollars to white collectors seeking Romance in their lives." Here, "sharing" appears as what, historically, it has often been: forced deculturation/reculturation imposed by the colonizer on the colonized and camouflaged as progress for the primitive. Appreciation is also represented in two of its



16. Bedtime Barbie with the come-hither look on the cover of *Barbie: The Magazine for Girls*, March/April 1994.

knowledge about the Barbie debates. Many others take advantage of two even more widely known things about Barbie: clothes make the (plastic) woman, and each incarnation gets a name designating either (1) a leisure pastime (Rappin' Rockin' Barbie, Wet 'N Wild Barbie), (2) a geographic milieu called (a) home (Jamaican Barbie, "dressed in traditional Jamaican clothing . . . [that] truly captures the essence of the island, mon," to quote a Mattel Information Release from 1992), or (b) vacation hot spot (Island Fun Barbie), or (c) alternately both (*Tropical Barbie* looks either like the descendant of her colonizer-tourist *Hawaiian Holiday* self or like the colonized indigenous inhabitant depending on whether she comes in the skin color designating "white" or the skin color designating "tropical native"), (3) a play activity (Paint 'n Dazzle Barbie, which you paint on; Bedtime Barbie (fig. 16): "You'll have sweet dreams with Bedtime Barbie because she is so soft you can cuddle her all night long . . . make her eyes open or close for sleep-time fun!"); (4) a career (Doctor Barbie), (5) an event, "real" or fantasized (Wedding Fantasy Barbie), or, occasionally, (6) a vaguely referenced political stance (Animal Lovin' Barbie; Desert Storm Barbie of the Stars and Stripes

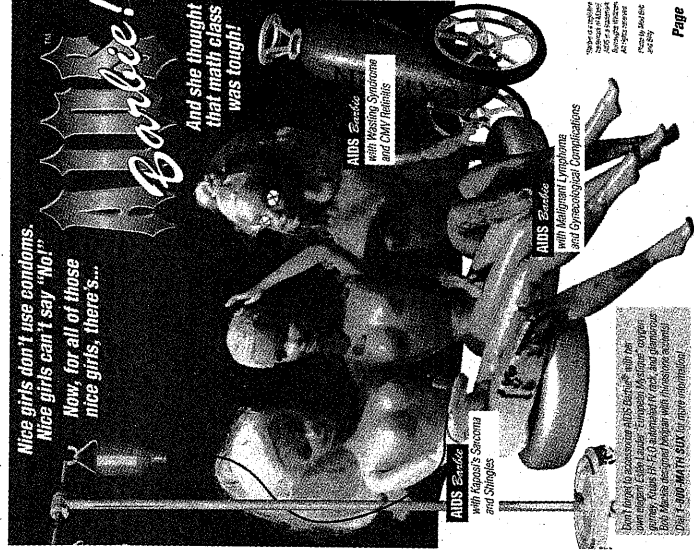


17. Cover of *How To '92: Model Actions for a Post-Columbian World*, showing a detail of "Paper Dolls for a Post-Columbian World with Ensembles Contributed by the U.S. Government" by Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, 1991. (Full series, 13 pieces, 11 x 17 in. each; watercolor and pencil on photocopy on paper.) Reproduced courtesy of Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, NYC.

most common manifestations, as theft and as its liberal descendant: appropriation undertaken without the consent of the appropriated for the benefit of the appropriator only.⁹

AIDS Barbie (fig. 18) from the 'zine *Diseased Pariah News* also addresses what Mattel never does.¹⁰ In the interest of making Barbie look wholesome, Mattel makes silence about sex the rule and doesn't give its teens condoms for the same reason that most school boards don't: to avoid appearing to have authored or authorized sexual activity. *AIDS Barbie* addresses the consequences of maintaining that "nice girls don't use condoms" by parodying Mattel's theme-with-variations trope. It shows three AIDS Barbies, each accessorized with different "complications" far beyond those Barbie ever appears to contemplate—"And she thought that math class was tough!" Note, too, the new spin on Barbie's much debated lack of body fat: the Barbie "with Wasting Syndrome" seems to have undergone virtually no weight loss.

AIDS Barbie also alludes through its parody of Mattel to two other regimes of silence and corporate self-serving. The middle Barbie has "gynecological complications," which the Center for Disease Control (CDC) long refused to



18. *AIDS Barbie*, "photos by Mod Bob and Billy," from the 'zine *Diseased Pariah News*, no. 8, 1993, p. 1.

recognize as symptoms of AIDS. As a result, the CDC underrepresented the number of women with AIDS or HIV and, in turn, contributed directly and indirectly to inadequate diagnosis, prevention, and treatment.¹¹ The trademark pseudoinformation at the bottom—"Barbie is a registered trademark of Mattel, Inc. AIDS is a trademark of Burroughs Wellcome, Inc. All rights reserved."—reminds the viewer that the "rights" that now govern the testing, prescribing, pricing, and availability of drugs for people with HIV infection belong not to them but largely to patent-holding pharmaceutical companies. Burroughs Wellcome, which manufactures AZT, has a long history of putting profit over consumer access and well-being: AZT cost the consumer \$12,000 a year before ACT UP protests forced Burroughs Wellcome to reduce prices and to reveal the information (held back for a year by Wellcome and the FDA) that half the recommended dose of this toxic, expensive drug was no less effective. The indirect reference to AZT also implicates the medical establishment and the U.S. government, which protected Burroughs Wellcome by underreporting AZT's side effects and by overfunding research on AZT, thereby neglecting other potentially more effective drugs and also alternative treatments that offer no payoff to pharmaceutical companies.¹²

Paper Dolls and *AIDS Barbie* both play off the gaps and camouflages in Mattel's Barbie line to deal with gaps and camouflages in the dominant ideological lines, the hegemonic-discourse content, from which Mattel crafts its own: the discourse of diversity that never addresses the difference between sending African American Barbie to the Gulf and sending her to med school; the deliberate eye closing to teen sexuality when attention would imply authorship; the masking of profit motive as benevolent concern (we manufacture Barbie for the benefit of girls; we sponsor medical research for the benefit of the ill; we bring you our culture and take yours in the name of cultural exchange only). Another often-filled gap in Mattel's line concerns Barbie's sexual orientation. The zine *P.C. Casualties* economically slams what's missing from Mattel's line in a list of identities that Barbie, like many other cultural characters, never gets: "LESBIAN BARBIE: Invisible." (Other dolls include "SM BARBIE—Comes with leather restraints, paddles, and three tribal tattoos. All models complete with genitals"; "NATIVE AMERICAN BARBIE—No longer available, since white Barbies have pushed her on the floor, stolen her belongings and killed her. Offensive white Barbies celebrate holiday in honor of this"; and "BATTERED BARBIE—Burdened with small children. No marketable skills and no assets. Self-esteem sold separately.")¹³

But despite, and because of, Mattel's refusal to author Lesbian Barbie, Barbie's been outed all over the place in the past few years. Since the 1989 *On Our Backs*, Barbie's been sighted in porn produced in North Carolina, the Netherlands, and Australia. In 1991, Barbie and friends got outed in Chicago in *Barbie the Fantasies*, a 1991 play produced by Poison Nut Productions that consisted of eight unrelated scenes "skewering the perfect All-American images of Barbie and her friends." As one reviewer described,

In the first scene G.I. Joe . . . does an illegal cable hook-up so that he and Ken . . . can watch the big fight on ESPN; Barbie . . . protests until she discovers the wonders of the cable home shopping network. The behavior quickly descends from slightly immoral to crude and tawdry—scene two finds a lecherous Mr. Mattel . . . proposing a three-way with Barbie and Midge . . . , and following scenes deal with adultery, stereotypical images of homosexuality (Ken's a flaming queen and Barbie's a bulldyke wearing combat boots), prostitution, oral sex between Ken and G.I. Joe, and violent homicide (lots of violent homicide).

The audience also saw video shorts: among them, footage of Barbie the actress offering a sneak preview at the Chicago gay pride march during the previous June, riding in a limo and "guzzling beer in a manner blatantly unfit for the favorite toy of millions of little girls."¹⁴

In 1993, Barbie and Ken came out a few times, and did other nonmainstream things, in *Mondo Barbie*, an anthology of Barbie fiction and poetry. Besides reprinting Ken's appearance as a sex toy for a human male in A. M. Homes's "A Real Doll," the anthology also includes Rebecca Brown's "Barbie Comes Out," in which a narrator meets Barbie (now calling herself Barbara) in a dyke bar and listens to her horrible life story of being shuttled around and abused—"She remembered having her limbs yanked out and crammed back in. . . . She tells me about the scissors and the needles and the matches, glue and dirt. The places where they put her hands. The holes they put her head in"—and of having only one constant friend. This friend, now her lover, is Ken, now the pre-op transsexual Kendra, who, as several nonfictional adults remember suspecting, turned out to be "a dyke trapped in the body of a dream boat."¹⁵

In 1993, too, Barbie appeared on a holiday card announcing Totally Out Barbie. A parody of two big sellers of that year, Totally Hair Barbie and Teen Talk Barbie, she wears a leather jacket, freedom rings, pink triangle, and a woman-symbol earring, highly visible given her short hair. She is also "makeup resistant," "comes with her own Magic Toolbox," although "Grrl-friends and Dream Hog sold separately," and is shown uttering "Cit power": "Press her button to hear more radical phrases."¹⁶ Barbie got transgendered by the Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO), which bought a bunch of Teen Talk Barbies and Talking Duke G.I. Joe dolls in late 1993 and switched their voice boxes. The result, according to a *New York Times* article that reinfoces, albeit somewhat tongue in cheek, the gender stereotyping the BLO set out to attack: "A mutant colony of Barbies-on-steroids who roar things like 'Attack! 'Vengeance is mine!' and 'Eat lead, Cobra!' The emasculated G.I. Joe's, meanwhile, twitter, 'Will we ever have enough clothes?' and 'Let's plan our dream wedding!'"¹⁷ The BLO then returned them to the shelves with the phone numbers of local television stations included in each box to encourage the unwitting purchasers to publicize what they'd picked up. It worked. The BLO got national coverage.

The examples above, which represent only a fraction of queer Barbies, have all received substantial circulation; mainstream, subcultural, or both. There are far more that haven't. Bee Bell, for instance, who had Barbie say "Goodbye fuckers, I'm going to hell" twenty years ago, dragged Barbie into transgender and genderfuck dykehood in 1993 with Passing Butch Glenn (fig. 19). A transformation of Skipper's friend Kevin, Glenn reads Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and comes with Queer Nation-inspired jacket stickers saying "MASS-PRODUCE MY FIST" (a takeoff of "Assimilate my fist" stickers, which protest against the assimilation-



19. Bee Bell, *Passing*
Butch Glenn, 1993.

Photo: Jay York.

vide the most important testimony to Barbie's ability to serve critics and subvertors. They show that, unlike its anatomically incorrect doll, Mattel's ideological line has highly visible cracks and holes. Lots of people notice the contradiction between Mattel's silence about sex and constant signaling of sexual possibilities and notice what goes unarticulated in Mattel's portrayal of diversity and of the everything we girls can do. This, along with Barbie's fame, gives cultural producers who produce for circulation an easy-access, consumer friendly vehicle to work with—a crucial feature of any cultural production designed to abet social change by challenging dominant ideologies. Simply put, a lot of people will get it, or at least part of it. At least as important, a lot of people will do it themselves or will already have done so. If we measure cultural interventions and strategies of resistance by whether they catalyze big social changes by themselves and fast, Barbie subversions, like most, will not past the test: you can't shoot down an antigay referendum by wheatpasting Subversive Barbie all over the state of Oregon, or get all the school boards in the United States to distribute condoms in schools, or get everyone to think about when so-called cultural exchange is really cultural theft or land theft. You can't use Barbie to stop making everyone who doesn't look like her feel bad; you may not even be able to make yourself stop feeling bad. But, if we measure resistance and ideological transformation in smaller increments, Barbie's subvertability and visible cracks matter a lot. It matters that lots of people recognize and think about Mattel's silences, camouflages, and dubious claims and come prepared to a Barbie subversion that uses Mattel's line to expose social injustice by drawing connections that they might not have considered before.

From this standpoint, Barbie is a great vehicle for criticism and subversion and also a great teaching tool. Barbie subversion is also worth doing simply for the pleasures of recognition, self-affirmation, and transgression that Subversive Barbies give to makers and viewers who are already anti-heterosexist, antiracist, anticapitalist, anti-imperialist, etc. But this assessment is based mostly on an assessment of production, on the meanings that you can give Barbie. As I argued in chapter 2, however, and as Subversive Barbies themselves show—since they, too, are artifacts of consumption—consumers don't necessarily take out the meanings that producers put in. Subsequent sections reconsider Barbie's subvertability from the standpoint of circulation: nonsubversive meanings that do, or seem likely to, get put into circulation alongside intended subversive meanings. First, however, I consider a counterexample that problematizes the equation theft = resistance, which the examples above seem to validate but which is actually as problem-

ist give-us-civil-rights-because-we're-just-like-you-and-we'll-be-very-polite-when-we-ask-for-them brand of activism), "YES, I KNOW IT'S THE WOMEN'S BATHROOM," "FUCK YOUR GENDER," "FUCK MY GENDER," and "QUEER GIRLS MAKE ME HARD."

Bell's subversion is just one among countless others produced for a solo audience. I've encountered many others, some produced in material form, some generated in conversation, including the many adult assessments of Barbie's effect on girls recounted in chapter 2. Sheer numbers, perhaps, pro-

atic as equating divergence from Mattel in childhood with resistance to social injustice.

Steal This Profit

Some Barbie collectors are in the business of subverting Barbie's ideological profile; others aren't. But, from one angle, Barbie collectors, both queer accessories and straight, are the biggest Mattel subvertors around. No matter what else they have done to Barbie, collectors have, in fact, embraced an alternative, Mattel-unfriendly set of criteria for Barbie's economic value, which primarily they, not Mattel, cash in on. While many collectors do stock up on future collectibles at the Walls of Pink, most collector dollars, not insubstantial in amount, pass independently of Mattel within a collector's economy with its own vocabulary, culture of knowledge, and system of value ascription: "NUMBER FOUR BARBIE: RED LIPS, S/S [swimsuit], WHAT A FACE! REALLY STUNNING, COULD EVEN BE A #3 FACE, NM [near mint] \$395."; "BLACK [hair] 1967 B.C. [bubble cut]: RED LIPS WITH TINY LIP RUB, B/W, S/S, EC [bendable waist, swimsuit, excellent condition] \$95"; "NUMBER THREE: BLONDE WITH BROWN EYELINER AND BIG RED FULL LIPS. SHE COMES IN A PINK R SILHOUETTE BOX DRESSED IN 'EVENING SPLENDOR' WITH TM STAND. SHE IS REALLY SPECIAL, MIB [mint in box, i.e., all sealed packaging remains sealed] \$3200."¹⁸

And Mattel has little control over the situation. It can't put a stop to this diversion of Barbie money. It can't really catch every copyright infringement or Barbie-image violator. Barbie collector culture is too huge to monitor, although Mattel might well want to do so since collectors' conceptions of Barbie do not always conform to Mattel's. I've already mentioned the controversy over Barbie getting straddled. Another conference organizer suggested to one of my researchers two possible conference souvenirs for a Barbie convention in Maine (suggested title "Barbie's Merry-Go-Round in Maine"): Clam Digger Barbie and Garage Sale Barbie (with the theme "Now Barbie's entering our world"), whose feet are killing her as she waits for a cab. Now, aside from the cab, these are hardly costumes that would issue from Mattel, which gives Barbie far more upscale careers and costumes and depends on her love of the new: Barbie buys every new fashion that comes along; she doesn't paw over cheap used stuff. But is scrutinizing every convention souvenir worth Mattel's time? Or worth its own image? How would Mattel look if it went after people whose infractions seem minor in comparison to the great free publicity they give Barbie?

Mattel is left with few options. It can flex its legal muscle and collect due

homage; handouts for the 1992 Barbie Nevada Round-Up, for instance, dutifully indicate "BARBIE trademark used with permission of Mattel, Inc." It can work with collectors to generate goodwill toward the corporation—thus, beginning in 1994, the new monthly *Barbie Bazaar* column "From Mattel." It can collaborate with convention hosts to ensure that convention souvenirs meet its criteria, as it did for the first time in 1993. The 650 registered participants at the annual, national scale Barbie Doll Convention received a doll with a unique head manufactured by Mattel according to the specifications of the convention hosts, the Baltimore Barbie Collectors Club of Maryland. Club members designed, produced, and attached the rest. The result, according to *Barbie Bazaar*, was "a black-haired beauty wearing a pink satin coat over a metallic silver dress, complete with hat, sunglasses, a special wrist tag and certificate of authenticity."¹⁹ But Mattel can't jump into collaborations for every Round-Up around. Nor does it; regional conference organizers often cannot even get a visit from a Mattel spokesperson.

This isn't surprising. It's hardly cost or time effective for Mattel to put resources into an edition of 650 that might otherwise be spent on a product that could be sold by the hundreds of thousands. Like legal action, conference surveillance and souvenir collaboration are poor financial investments for Mattel: they work toward protecting assets but promise virtually no financial return. Mattel's other collector-management strategy offers a bigger payoff: finding ways to tap into the market for rare Barbies. This strategy, like the infinite possibility strategy, involves both product design and rhetoric manipulation. On the low end, Mattel expanded a practice begun in the 1960s of offering some large stores product exclusives. (The Sears and J.C. Penney's 1969 catalogs both showed Talking Barbie saying, "I have a date tonight," but only Penney's had the Talking Barbie Pink Premier Gift Set.)²⁰ According to Mandeville, Mattel retooled this practice for the collector's market after discovering in 1988 that people were rushing all over to grab Happy Holidays Barbie, which Mattel had issued with some trepidation about the price, almost \$40: "Mattel got the message loud and clear. The collector, and even parents would gladly pay more money for quality. Thus began the never-ending parade of store specials that drive us all crazy today!"²¹ And it's quite a parade. In a 1993 article on these "limited edition custom Barbie dolls," *Barbie Bazaar* reported that FAO Schwartz, which was still selling its special and much-publicized Madison Avenue Barbie first issued in 1992, had a new Barbie Rockette. Toys R Us had Moonlight Magic and Police Officer Barbie, Service Merchandise had Sparkling Splendor, "various supermarket chains" had Holiday Hostess, and "wholesale clubs" had Festiva Mexican Barbie.

- over-the-counter sales, on a survey of the "Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation" notices that appear in each issue.
- 5 Frank Coffey and Joe Layden, *Thin Ice: The Complete, Uncensored Story of Tonya Harding, America's Bad Girl of Ice Skating* (New York: Pinnacle, 1994), 175.
 - 6 Essex Hemphill, "Soft Targets," in *Ceremonies* (New York: Plume, 1992), 122-23; Regine Sands, *Travels with Diana Hunter* (Denver: Lace, 1986), 72-78; Marlon Riggs, *Tongues Untied*, 1989, film.
 - 7 Blurb on the cover illustration for the March/April 1994 issue of *Barbie: The Magazine for Girls*, 3.
 - 8 *How-To '92: Model Actions for a Post-Columbian World*, produced by the Alliance for Cultural Democracy (PO Box 7591, Minneapolis, MN 55407; tel. 612-724-6795). It also has two great texts: a "Intrudictment" on Columbus and an account of linkages between his colonial offenses and later injustices.
 - 9 I'm arguing, not that intercultural exchange and appropriation are always bad, but that they need to be pursued and described with attention to relations of power between the people involved. On the issue of cultural mixing, see Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), esp. chap. 4.
 - 10 *AIDS Barbie*, ("photo by Mod Bob and Billy"), *Diseased Pariah News*, no. 8 (1993): 1.
 - 11 For a comprehensive account of the history and current situation of the cbc's classification system and its effect on women with HIV in terms of diagnosis, treatment, and access to clinical drug trials, see ACT UP's *Treatment and Research Agenda for Women with HIV Infection*, first circulated in 1990 and still in progress.
 - 12 George M. Carter, *ACT UP, the AIDS War, and Activism*, rev. ed., Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, no. 15 (Westfield, N.J., 1992). See also *Voices from the Front*, a 1991 documentary on AIDS activism produced by the Testing the Limits Collective.
 - 13 P.C. *Casualties* (Spring 1991), quoted in Bryn Austin with Pam Greer, "A Freak among Freaks: The 'Zine Scene,'" in *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation*, ed. Arlene Stein (Harmondsworth: Penguin, Plume, 1993), 93.
 - 14 Kelly Harmon, "Plastic Values and Perversity," *Windy City Times*, 29 August 1991, 19.
 - 15 *Mondo Barbie*, ed. Lucinda Ebersole and Richard Peabody (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), 160, 164.
 - 16 Produced by "E.M.R."
 - 17 David Firestone, "As Barbie Talks Tough, Ken Goes Shopping," *New York Times*, 31 December 1993, sec. A, p. 12.
 - 18 Quoted from the 1992 catalog newsletter ("39th list") of the Florida collector Marl Davidson.
 - 19 Joan Tortorici Ruppert, "You've Come a Long Way, Barbie," *Barbie Bazaar* 5 (November/December 1993): 30-32. To give a sense of the scope of collector fandom, at least five thousand more people tried to register after hearing about the conference on "Donahue," but even the waiting list had been closed, at eight hundred, eight months before the conference. These numbers, of course, represent merely the fraction of collectors who tried to attend the conference.
 - 20 *Mattel and Christmas Catalog Reprints, 1969-1972*, a special edition of *Barbie Bazaar* (1992), pp. 29, 32.
 - 21 A. Glenn Mandeville, "Barbie Gears Up for Collectors," *Barbie Bazaar* 5 (July/August 1993): 32.
 - 22 Bob Gardner, "Custom Barbies Sparkle and Shine," *Barbie Bazaar* 5 (November/December 1993): 17-18.
 - 23 Ads in *Parade Magazine*, 18 October 1992, 21; *USA Weekend*, 28-30 August 1992, 11; *USA Weekend*, 2-4 July 1993, 3.
 - 24 Mandeville, "Barbie Gears Up," 33.
 - 25 "Price Guide," *Barbie Bazaar* 6 (January/February 1994): 7, 4 (pages of this section numbered independently of the rest of the issue).
 - 26 Author's comment and photo caption in Ruppert, "You've Come a Long Way, Barbie," 32, 31.
 - 27 Scott Arend, review of *Mondo Barbie, Barbie Bazaar* 6 (March/April 1994): 51. His list of Barbie's roles is equally evasive: "victim, super-achiever, confidante, enemy, bimbo, beauty, rebel and mentor." It's certainly possible that the editors rather than the reviewer made the closet decision, and it's certainly important that *Barbie Bazaar* chose to review this book at all. In the final review product, however, Barbie's straight rep is protected.
 - 28 "Hard Copy," 13 January 1993.
 - 29 Judy Edelstein, "In the Massage Parlor," in *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, ed. Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (Pittsburgh: Cleis, 1987), 67.
 - 30 *Barbie's Dream Loft*, environment by Nadine McGam, additional accessories and repositings by Susan Hill, Karen Corrie, Laurence Kucinkas, Cheryl Daly, and Erica Rand. 1989-.
 - 31 13 March 1993. I identify Roberts as a student not to pull rank or subtly to mark her insight "preocious," thus perpetuating the descending and false notion that student insights are rare, but because her name is not uncommon—I know of one other myself—and I want acknowledge her as specifically as possible.
 - 32 See my "Doing It in Class: On the Perils and Payoffs of Teaching Sexually Explicit Queer Images," *Radical Teacher*, no. 49 (1994), 29-32.
 - 33 Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13.
 - 34 Waring Cuney, "No Images," in *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes* (1941), ed. Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses S. Lee (reprint, New York: Arno, 1969), 375.
 - 35 Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone, 1981). I refer here to their introduction, but the point is made eloquently throughout the anthology.
 - 36 Hemphill, *Ceremonies*, 144-45.
 - 37 *Shocking Pink*, no. 2 (ca. 1992) (136 Mayall Road, London, SE24 0PH, Great Britain; tel. 071-274-3150).
 - 38 Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek* (New York: Vintage, 1991).
 - 39 Conversation with the artist, May 1994.
 - 40 David Firestone, "As Barbie Talks Tough, Ken Goes Shopping," *New York Times*, 31 December 1993, sec. A, p. 12.
 - 41 Cynthia Lawrence, "The Size 10 Dress," in *Here's Barbie*, ed. Cynthia Lawrence and Betty Lou Maybee (New York: Random House, 1962), 99-100.
 - 42 "Be on Lookout for Porn in Toy Packages," *Lewisiston-Auburn* (Maine) *Sun-Journal*, 25 November 1991, 6; "Way to Go, Ken!" *Fortune*, 27 August 1990, 14.
 - 43 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).
 - 44 Arguments about the notoriginality of these artists are made by, among others, Richard Shiff, *Cezanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical*