

CONSOLE-ING PASSIONS

Television and Cultural Power

Edited by Lynn Spigel

Welcome to the

Dreamhouse



Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs

Lynn Spigel

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Barbies without Ken: Femininity, Feminism, and the Art-Culture System

It must be remembered that the toy moved late to the nursery, that from the beginning it was adults who made toys, and not only with regard to their other invention, the child. The fashion doll, for example, was the plaything of adult women before it was the plaything of the child.

Susan Stewart, *On Longing*¹

Mattel executive (addressing a group of Barbie doll collectors): How old do you think the average girl is who plays with Barbie?

Barbie collector: Forty.

"Barbie behind the Scenes"?

* Although Barbie recently turned forty, she is still a popular girl. In the early 1990s, Mattel estimated that two Barbie dolls are sold every second somewhere in the world, and when placed head to toe there are enough Barbies to circle the earth more than three-and-a-half times.¹ In the course of her orbit around the planet, she has evolved from a child's plaything into a subject of intense cultural interest. While one woman has paid huge sums for plastic surgery to turn herself into this living doll, another group calling itself the Barbie Liberation Organization (B.L.O.) has created mass-cultural subterfuge by performing "corrective surgery" on the voice boxes

of talking Cl Joe and Teen Talk Barbie, so that Joe now says, "Wanna go shopping?" and Barbie grunts, "Vengeance is mine." Meanwhile, a growing number of scholars, journalists, fiction writers, and poets have become riveted on this 11 1/2 inch fashion queen, so that now there is a subculture of intellectuals engaged in "Barbie studies."

In Barbie's miniature dream house there is room enough for almost anyone's fantasy. Since Barbie's introduction in 1959, this has been Mattel's credo and the reason for Barbie's success. Her plastic form is doubled by her equally plastic ability to be molded to almost anyone's desire. Clearly, part of Barbie's longevity is her plasticity—her ability to be re-appropriated and interpreted by different groups in a variety of ways. While Mattel does worry about its trademark reputation and Barbie-bashing groups like the B.L.O. (the company even sued one female occultist who channeled Barbie on a 900 number), Barbie's plastic quality has generally worked well for the toy company, which simply wants lots of people to buy the doll, but cares less about what they do with Barbie once they have her. For example, although Mattel denies that its Earring Ken doll is gay, it is clear that the company knows a lot of its consumers are, and it is also clear that Earring Ken has delighted that particular market. In fact, today Mattel markets across two distinct groups—children (its largest consumer base) and an increasingly expanding community of adult Barbie collectors, some 250,000 worldwide.

For more than ten years, I have been involved in the huge collectors' culture organized around Barbie dolls. The collectors' group is global, and although the largest group is from the United States there is a sizable Japanese following and there are numerous collectors around the world. As might be expected, collectors in the United States are predominantly white, and their venues of representation and collective experience are for the most part populated by white lower to upper middle-class publics. Despite the whiteness of the group, people of color do collect Barbies and they do express interest in making her fit their life experiences. In 1997, for example, the "International Black Barbie Doll Club" established itself in Van Nuys California. This small group of six primarily comprises African American members, although it welcomes anyone interested in black Barbies.

Beyond these demographics, the racial politics of collectors are not easy to capture. On the whole, collectors represent themselves through ideals of racial tolerance and friendship. The collectors' premier maga-

zine, *Barbie Bazaar*, often promotes and encourages collectors to embrace Mattel's multiracial product lines that include "Black," "Hispanic," and "Native American" dolls, as well as Mattel's "Dolls of the World" series. Still, as Ann Duceille argues, Mattel's racial and national diversity tends to work on the logic of commodity fetishism.⁴ As fetish objects these multicultural dolls stand in for the lack of race relations—and the disavowal of racial struggles—within the collectors' group itself. Like Barbie, the collectors' culture puts on a pretty face that masks the more difficult problems entailed in gender and racial identity. Yet despite the image of multicultural harmony that floats on the surface of most collectors' venues, the practice of collecting Barbie is always bound up with her cultural legacy as the quintessential white girl of cold war America.

Just a glance at collector price guides shows that even in her new multicultural incarnations, Barbie's "whiteness" is still taken for granted and naturalized as the norm. White Barbies are listed as just "Barbie," while the other dolls are listed by their race. As Richard Dyer argues, this assumption that white is the norm has historically been a mark of white privilege in a world where white operates as the dominant term.⁵ White people get to be just "people"—and thus stand for all of humanity—while everyone else is a specific racial or ethnic type. In this regard, even while many Barbie collectors often have very good intentions regarding racial harmony, the culture of Barbie collecting—like most forms of white culture—is based on this taken-for-granted form of white privilege.

The collectors' group is more diverse with regard to gender and sexual orientation. While the majority of collectors are women, there is a large constituency of men, some of whom are openly gay. As we shall see, the mixed composition of the group often leads to complex power dynamics. Yet, despite underlying conflicts, male and female collectors participate together in annual conventions and seasonal shows; they have their own museums, such as the Barbie Doll Hall of Fame; and they regularly meet in each other's homes where they exchange information and display collections to one another.

What interests me about the world of Barbie collectors is the way artifacts of popular culture are assigned values by the collectors and the way various groups ascribe meanings to objects that they reappropriate for purposes not originally intended by corporate giants such as Mattel. In this essay I am particularly concerned with what I see as three intertwined topics: the relationships among intellectual feminism, popu-

lar feminism, and femininity; the relationships among high, craft, and mass culture (especially concerning the gendering/queering of pop art, "women's" crafts, and mass production); and the theorization of subcultural communities that form around mass-produced goods such as Barbie. What also interests me is the fact that I am somewhat of a collector, and so I want to know about my own implications in this activity—both as participant and as academic observer.

Feminists, Fashion Dolls, and Femininity

The dual activity of playing with toys and toying with theories is by now a well-known practice in cultural studies, as so many of us try to understand the logics of those popular cultures that appeal to us but also terrorize us with their insistent commodity forms. Since the mid-1980s, feminist critics have tried to understand the dynamics of audience participation with and pleasure in mass-culture texts.⁶ Feminist work in this area has particularly concentrated on "women's genres," such as soap operas and romances. But there is also a large body of work that explores women's participation in cultures that have historically revolved around genres aimed at male audiences—including science fiction, sports, and rock and rap music.⁷

The early feminist work on audience cultures was a reaction against the patriarchal dismissal of mass forms as "feminine" and, therefore, devalued texts. It was an attempt to authenticate, or at least take seriously, genres such as the soap opera and romance novel—genres that the canons of male-centered literary and art criticism deemed unworthy of study. It was an attempt to see these forms as cultural spheres in which women could extract not only individual narrative pleasure, but also could enter into an interpretive community that operates both in terms of, but also at times against the grain of, everyday female experience in Western patriarchies. Originally, then, the studies of fan cultures and audiences were motivated in terms of a dialogue with male-centered literary and art criticism, inheriting much of their critical power from text-based feminist studies, such as Tania Modleski's work on soap operas.⁸ The polemic revolved around the sexism of institutional canons and the resulting degradation of female forms and female pleasure.

Soon, however, the internal dialogue in such studies shifted its focus to the dynamics between the intellectual studying women's fan culture

and the fan culture itself. In other words, the feminist polemic of institutional sexism turned to anthropological questions of self and other—questions about the role of the intellectual and her or his place in studying popular cultures. How, for example, could a feminist study women's fan cultures without somehow adopting an "I know better" condescending attitude toward them? How could feminists account for the potential race and class bias at the core of ethnographic audience studies generally? How could they deal with the problems of surveillance and voyeuristic pleasure that ethnographers produce for themselves and their readers at the expense of their ethnographic subjects? And how could feminists guard against becoming unwitting "informers," who provide insider information that culture industries can use for their own audience and market research? Perhaps as a way to cope with these very real problems, many scholars—including the ones described here—have turned to self-critique. That is, in the by-now classic ethnographic move, numerous mass-culture critics explore their own power relations to the cultures they study.

Barbie is herself a quintessential example of these critical trajectories. In one respect, as an object of considerable dispute, she continues to be attacked as the embodiment of American culture's willful socialization of rigid gender, racial, and nationalist hierarchies. Yet her critics have also uncovered ample evidence that Barbie has generated a more playful attitude among her many publics. In her ethnographic study *Barbie's Queer Accessories*, Erica Rand considers the way lesbians and lesbian publications like *Our Backs* have appropriated Barbie's image in ways that acknowledge the queer pleasure she evokes. By talking to women about their childhood memories and current fantasies of Barbie, Rand shows that even while Mattel promotes Barbie as the ultimate heterosexual virgin, Barbie is never just that. Like many recent ethnographies of mass culture, Rand often questions her own position vis-à-vis the women she studies, and she is particularly concerned about the ethics of being an academic insider who translates women's experience into feminist theory. Remaining critical of Mattel, while nevertheless attempting to explore women's experiences with popular culture in nondismissive terms, Rand represents current strains within feminist approaches to mass culture that preserve a negative critique of culture industries even while they attempt to understand the possible utopian (and, for some, "resistant") pleasures that women and girls find in these products.⁹

As feminist scholars continue to explore industrial culture and the female subcultures that form around it, corporate giants are also taking note of the fans and fanzines invested in their products. Companies like Paramount and Mattel see fan productions as a lucrative market for memorabilia, collectibles, and related products. But they also see various fan activities as a threat to their trademarks, and they are attempting to censor fanzines and Web sites through litigation. In 1997, Mattel filed a federal lawsuit against Miller Publications, which produces *Miller's* price guides and fanzine. Jill F. Barad, Chief Executive at Mattel (and the most powerful woman in the toy industry), claimed that *Miller's* tampered with Barbie's image by, for example, showing "Barbie with alcohol [and] pills."¹⁰ In addition to suing for copyright and trademark infringement, Mattel has made numerous efforts to institute itself as the "official" voice of the collector group. Not only has it produced Barbie lines for the collectibles market, it endorses one fanzine, *Barbie Bazaar*, as its official publication (the licensing deal gives Mattel the right to review *Barbie Bazaar* before publication).¹¹ Mattel is now even trying to persuade local collector clubs that grew up on a grassroots basis over the last fifteen years to obtain official fan club licenses from the toy company. Rage at these and other corporate practices became so intense in summer 1997 that one collector formed the "pink anger" Web site, which called for a boycott and a letter-writing campaign. The pink anger Web site was instantly translated into Japanese and German, and was joined by a "pink tidal wave" movement that further protested Mattel's anticollector practices.¹²

Yet, despite all their "pink anger," collectors don't necessarily agree with feminist intellectuals who critique Mattel's racism and sexism and generally worry about the effects Barbie has on little girls. In fact, although collectors often consider themselves feminists, and although they often agitate against Mattel, most collectors view Barbie as a positive role model for women. In this regard, Barbie has been a primary vehicle through which the strained relations between different views of feminism surface in our culture.

Take, for example, the cultural struggle that took place a few years ago when Mattel marketed a doll known as Teen Talk Barbie. The doll dabbled in a variety of girl talk, including the phrase "math class is tough." The American Association of University Women (AAUW) found this phrase to be beyond the limits of acceptable doll discourse, arguing that the doll sent the wrong message to young girls. The AAUW's efforts

to get Teen Talk Barbie off the market were widely reported in newspapers, magazines, and on television. To mediate the battle between the educators and the toy company, the mass media ushered in a third party—adults who collect Barbie dolls. Realizing that they had a natural ally in these groups, journalists and talk show hosts began to interview collectors about their take on the Teen Talk controversy.

For example, Ev Burkhalter, curator of the Barbie Doll Hall of Fame in Palo Alto, California, appeared on CBS's morning show. When the host asked her about the AAUW's attack on Barbie, Ev responded with what is a typical attitude among collectors: Barbie is, in fact, a wonderful role model for women. She has been a veterinarian, an astronaut, and a soldier—and even before real women had a chance to enter such occupations. More generally, collectors rewrite women's history from the perspective of Barbie's progress from her incarnation in 1959 through her series of brilliant careers. From this point of view, Burkhalter suggested that the claims of the AAUW were utterly misguided.

In ways such as this, the mass media's coverage of the Teen Talk controversy set up a series of narrative oppositions that pit the intellectual against the popular. The AAUW became the "Miss Crabapples" of the 1990s—dour schoolteachers who scorn the popular, but ultimately misunderstand its logic because they fail to see how ordinary people actually engage with mass culture. Meanwhile, the media positioned the collectors as heroines (albeit somewhat childlike heroines) of the popular, who resist the negative aspects of Mattel's doll and use it for their own purposes.

More generally, in a survey of print media from 1985 to the present, I found that the media continually pitted the "lowbrow" populist pleasures of Barbie enthusiasts against the elitist stance of intellectual feminists, who, reportedly, revile the pleasures of girl culture that Barbie stands for. A 1986 article on Barbie collectors in the *Wall Street Journal*, for example, starts off by quoting Ev Burkhalter, who says, "A lot of women see in Barbie what they would like to be." A few paragraphs later, the article compares this populist embrace of Barbie as a model of femininity with the academic feminist response. Quoting Robin Lakoff, a member of the Women's Studies Program at UC Berkeley, the *Wall Street Journal* tells of the dark side of Barbie collecting: "You have to look at the reasons why people consider Barbie a desirable feminine image," Prof. Lakoff says, "and that's a rather dangerous thing. . . . The role of an ideal woman is to look pretty; she encourages the superficial idea that clothing is all. The

Barbie image,' says the professor, is 'the airhead who consumes.'" The article goes on: "Professor Lakoff, who never had a Barbie, suggests a reason for adult women's attraction to the doll. 'People like to hang on to the security of childhood.'" ¹³ By pitting the collector against the intellectual, the *Journal* succeeds in making feminism seem totally antithetical to femininity. The anti-Barbie stance is coded as a feminist rejection of beauty, fashion, and those activities, such as shopping that are deemed to be feminine weaknesses in our culture. Feminism is hereby rendered as an elitist point of view that denigrates other women by claiming that their pleasures are immature and immaterial. Like so many others, the *Journal*'s piece of popular journalism makes it appear that feminism is at battle with that amorphous category "ordinary women," and it does so by portraying feminism as a narrowly conceived cultural style that is the direct opposite of the pleasures of both femininity and mass culture. As a more recent issue of *Spy* magazine succinctly put it, critical commentary on Barbie is reserved for the domain of the "oversensitive feminist," not "for most people."¹⁴

But at least in the case of Barbie culture, this opposition between ordinary people/mass culture and intellectual/high culture is ultimately misleading because these categories are precisely what is at stake in the process of collection. It is the movement between these zones that reveals some of the central dynamics involved in the collection of commodities like Barbie. That is, it is exactly the practice of playing with categories of high/intellectual culture and those consumer pleasures that get categorized as lowbrow, frivolous, and feminine fun that seems so essential to collectors.

James Clifford's essay "Collecting Art and Culture" can serve here as a useful point of departure. In what he calls the "art-culture system," Clifford shows that the meanings and values assigned to objects are socially constructed and thus open to historical redefinition. His system suggests how, for example, commodities such as souvenirs move from the realm of "inauthentic" kitsch to the sphere of authentic folk art, or how an artifact of folk art can move from the flea market to the art gallery. Such movements, Clifford argues, require semiotic revaluations that are deeply informed by a society's larger ideologies and social practices.¹⁵

While Clifford's work refers mostly to museums, I want to use the collectors' magazine *Barbie Bazaar*, as well as the various display activities that go on at collector shows and conventions, as my primary objects of

analysis. By looking at the semiotics of display within the magazine and other “shopping” and social arenas, it is my intention to analyze the way this culture self-represents, more than it is to describe the “deep structures” of need, intent, and desire that motivate individuals to participate in the culture. My choice to bypass psychological and functionalist explanations is based on my wish to avoid the cultural stereotypes about collectors—that is, the idea that collectors are obsessive-compulsive neurotics and that toy collectors in particular are merely acting out regressive personality traits. This explanation, it seems to me, leads critics away from the more interesting problems regarding the relationship between object relationships and social relationships in postmodern culture. One collector recently complained of the litany of questions posed to collectors by their critics: “WHY do you collect? WHAT trauma in your life brought you to this point? WHAT is your angle? Are you a woman jealous of Barbie’s looks, and acting out a fantasy? Maybe you are a bitter man because your family didn’t let you have the toy you wanted. Why are you collecting TODAY? We’re treated as if the hobby were so insipid that we needed to justify it by psychosis or at least neurosis.”¹⁶ To be sure, one of the things that joins collectors together as a subculture is a rejection of the “perversions” ascribed to them by mainstream culture. For that reason, any understanding of collectors’ cultures should by definition avoid the “regressive hypothesis” in favor of other forms of inquiry.

What follows, then, is not a “psychological” profile of the collectors but rather a more art historical set of questions about how collectors define and display objects. In the sense of Clifford’s formulation, I ask how Barbie has been alternatively categorized as a form of art or culture. In addition, I aim to show how the art-culture system is also a system of gender and sexuality.

Barbie as Craft

Barbie Bazaar was founded in 1988 by a group of women in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Although it began as an independently published “zine,” it had obvious promotional benefits for Mattel, so much so that now the toy company licenses it as the exclusive Barbie collectors’ magazine. With a worldwide circulation of over 110,000 it works as a major international forum for collectors, with articles and graphics culled from the collector group at large. While the magazine does not reflect directly what the



Art is the cover story of this September/October 1994 issue of *Barbie Bazaar*. Note that “sewing” is featured too. (Copyright, Murat Caviale Inc.)

collectors themselves think, it does provide a sense of how this culture organizes and displays itself. It shows us how the culture represents itself and how it wants to be regarded by others inside and outside the group.

In *Barbie Bazaar*, popular collecting always stands in relation to the more dominant art collection discourses and practices that organize objects into high, craft, and mass culture. I use the term “craft” here (as distinct from the more wide-ranging term “folk”) because I have in mind a specific range of contemporary artisan/vernacular productions typically associated with (but not limited to) women’s “local” community formations. These practices—such as sewing, curio display, baking, and diorama and knickknack making—are fostered in community centers, in national girls clubs such as the Girl Scouts or 4-H, and through mass media “how-to” discourses. It is the movement between the categories of mass, craft, and art that is at stake in the way collectors display and write about Barbie.

Barbie collecting started in the mid-1970s, when the mothers of the first generation of children who had owned Barbies began expressing their own interest in the toy. In 1979, a Barbie encyclopedia appeared;

the book was followed the next year by the first annual Barbie convention, which was organized by collector Ruth Kronk in New York. In 1981, the publication of a price guide upped the stakes of this heretofore informal collector's culture and drove the prices to new heights. Local and then national annual conventions followed, giving the collectors a shared sense of community and purpose. The growth of Barbie Web sites and chat rooms in the 1990s connected people around the globe on a daily basis.

The adult recognition of Barbie created both a new use-value and a new exchange-value for the doll—ones that weren't initially planned by Mattel. This value was predominantly located in what can be seen as an emerging craft culture based on women collectors who designed homemade costumes for the dolls, collected and restored vintage outfits, and built elaborate curio displays. While Mattel has since embraced this collectors' culture by selling high-priced lines of dolls (such as the Stars'n'Stripes collection or the Designer Classic collection), the collectors' culture began in a relatively autonomous way, largely through craft productions.¹⁷

In *Barbie Bazaar* the artisan practices of craft give way to an expression of local identities that seem to counteract the very status of Barbie as a national mass-market icon. Collectors adorn Barbie with their own local "accents," representing her in ways that speak to their particular regional identities. Issues typically feature stories on local collectors' clubs that are usually named for their geographical location. And against the idea of commodified, ready-made fashions that Mattel's Barbie so fully epitomizes, *Barbie Bazaar* displays a thriving craft culture based on homemade, one-of-a-kind dresses that serves as a representation of one's own identity politics. A particularly striking example is several women across the country who sew nun habits for Barbie.¹⁸ Women also make replica Barbie costumes for themselves and model them in club meetings, using their bodies as media on which to display their sewing talents. In ways such as this, collectors represent themselves not simply as consumers of mass culture but as cultural producers who collectively make their own artifacts and create their own stories.

The craft displays in *Barbie Bazaar* are clearly gendered—that is, they are associated with a women's culture that takes place in domestic spaces and occasionally in community centers where collectors are presented as folksy family types. Pets, cakes, and other signs of domesticity are typically pictured along with collectors in photographs they send into the

magazine. When men do appear in these photos they, too, are represented in tropes of femininity; they are shown as participants in a girl culture.

This movement from mass to craft culture might be seen in relation to Michael Thompson's study of the social construction of value in his book *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*.¹⁹ Thompson theorizes how objects change their status from, for example, "transient" or declining value (such as the used car) to "rubbish" (or an object with no value) to "durable" (such as an antique piece of furniture). Such transitions, he argues, are governed by larger systems of social power. People at the top of the social system are most able to control the value of objects and attempt, of course, to make their objects into durables. However, rather than seeing this system as completely bound to preexisting class relations, Thompson's theory is dynamic because he wants to explain how the status of objects changes over time in relation to the groups who imagine new meanings for them. For example, in his chapter on Stevenograph collectors, Thompson shows how the value of the object changes along with the gender of the people who control it. "In the early days," he claims, "Stevenograph-collecting, like knitting, was largely a feminine occupation. The great names are Mary Dunham, Mrs. Wilma Sinclair Lee Van Baker, Mrs. Therle Hughs, and Alice Lynes, but the transition proceeds so Stevenographs are transferred to male control."²⁰

Although I intend to return to Thompson's last point regarding male control, for now I want to concentrate on the "feminine" side of his equation. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Thompson likens Stevenograph collecting to knitting, a traditional female craft. Indeed, while Thompson doesn't theorize its importance, at least in the case of Barbie collecting I would argue that "craft" serves a central and gendered role in the transition from rubbish to durable. Craft accounts for that flexibility in the system in which women's groups, traditionally disempowered in the sphere of production, exert their influence on the market economies and cultural practices of late capitalism through innovation and creative pursuits. It is through the largely antiquated and anachronistic practice of artisan labor that women turn rubbish into durables and thereby affect the flows and values of objects in our postmodern global markets and cultures.

This situation recalls Susan Stewart's more general comments about the production of miniatures and the collection of them, which coincided with the invention of printing and was first witnessed in the manufacture of miniature books. According to Stewart, while the miniature is a

generation of new technologies and industrial modes of production, it contains within it a "longing" for its opposite:

We cannot separate the function of the miniature from a nostalgia for preindustrial labor, a nostalgia for craft. We see a rise in the production of miniature furniture at the same time that the plans of Adam, Chippendale, and Sheraton are becoming reproduced in mass and readily available form. Contemporary dollhouses are distinctly not contemporary. . . . Whereas industrial dollhouses are marked by the prevalence of repetition over skill and part over whole, the miniature object represents an antithetical mode of production: production by hand, a production that is unique and authentic. Today we find the miniature located at a place of origin (the childhood of the self, or even the advertising scheme whereby a miniature of a company's first product is put on display in a window or lobby) and at a place of ending (the productions of the hobbyist: knickknacks of the domestic collected by elderly women, or the model trains built by the retired engineer).²¹

The miniature, then, is premised on a desire for craft production and artisan labor. And, as Stewart's comments suggest, its "place of ending," which I am concerned with here, is connected to portions of the population traditionally outside of the public sphere of labor and in some sense "feminized" and domesticated.

These "feminine" and domestic aspects of collecting often escape the marketing plans of companies such as Mattel by inserting a kind of "unpredictability" into the more "rational" (read, masculine) practices of capitalist production. In fact, this notion of feminine unpredictability and its relationship to both women's craft and mass production serves as the central organizing principle in the story of Barbie's creation, which tells the tale of Mattel's cofounder Ruth Handler.²² As both Handler and the collectors often recall, when she first pitched her idea for Barbie, her male colleagues at Mattel were adamantly opposed to the doll because they thought she was impractical for factory production. But Handler (spurred by her daughter Barbara, who liked to play with paper dolls) challenged the boys at the top, and the rest is history. Central to this success story is (1) the domestic aspect of Barbie's creation—the fact that she was conjured up by a woman and her daughter; (2) the practice of playing with paper dolls, a children's toy that initiates little girls in the craft of sewing;

by teaching them how to cut out patterns for dressmakings and (3) the triumph of women's intuition. In this regard, Barbie's creation myth is itself founded on the notion of the domestic economics of craft, which in turn positions Handler as a "crafty" woman, able to compete, through intuitive logic, in the man's world.

To be sure, since Handler's enormous success Mattel has recognized the importance of craft and has incorporated it into techniques of mass production. Back in the late 1950s, Mattel did this by setting up operations in Japan and drawing on its cheap female labor pool of skilled sewers. Through this colonialist practice, the toy company achieved some of the detail of handmade craft while also maintaining the volume necessary for competition on the American market. Meanwhile, Mattel modeled Barbie's wardrobe on the premise of haute couture, thereby using Japanese women's sewing skills to achieve a sense of European high style. Thus, from the outset Barbie was premised on the contradictions between mass production and handiercraft production. Her outfits refer ambiguously to the factory mode of ready-made dresses, the homemade mode of domestic labor, and the more high-end/haute couture mode of handmade design. (And, obviously, the name Barbie Bazaar refers to this contradiction in terms.) On the current collector's market, Mattel exploits the contradictions between these production modes, encouraging nostalgia for craft while cutting corners on the labor-intensive frills.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Mattel began to mark out two specific, if sometimes overlapping, collectible markets—one based on geographical space (the "Dolls of the World" line) and one based on historical time (the vintage reproduction dolls). Both of these markets operate on nostalgia for craft production, although in different ways. When manufacturing the international dolls, Mattel adopts the craft aesthetic, dressing the prototypes in mass versions of "native" artistry and primitive/historical styles. Native American Barbie, for example, wears traditional beaded garb and a mock handmade leather skirt. Hawaiian Barbie wears a grass skirt and a lei. Swedish Barbie wears a calico dress and apron. These designs are exotic precisely because they refer back to craft-based cultures where modern factory production hasn't taken hold. However, because these outfits bear the signs of mass production—cheap fabric, Velcro fasteners, and plastic accessories—they contain within them the contradictions between mass and craft production.

In fact, with its vintage line, Mattel capitalizes on these contradictions.

The clothing for the vintage dolls recalls a time when mass production was still more like handicrafts. Although these dolls are fashioned after the originals, they are clearly *not* produced with the labor-intensive care and the eye for detail of their 1960s counterparts. Paradoxically, however, it is because these reproductions are a pale imitation of the "real" thing that they evoke nostalgia for craft production among collectors. Collectors often compare the shoddy 1990s dolls to the fancy fabrics, the tiny buttonholes, the precise hems, the intricate accessories, and the superior materials used for the original Barbie. Knowing this is part of the game, Mattel sometimes produces high-end versions of the reproductions (for example, when collectors complained that the reproduction of the 1959 ponytail doll did not have curly bangs, Mattel put out a limited edition of curly bang dolls that were priced at about \$350 each). In all of these ways, the collectors' craft aesthetic has helped to turn the vintage dolls into a durable good at the same time that it has been incorporated by Mattel itself and sold back to collectors in mass-produced form.

From this point of view, it would be impossible to say that craft exists in isolation from mass production. So, too, it would be impossible to say that collectors' crafts give expression to a pure form of female self-hood and social relations that exist outside of industrial culture. Instead of seeing craft as a direct expression of female subjectivity, it seems more useful to see craft as a "medium" for self-disclosure, a medium that is highly conventionalized and related to other conventional forms of women's autobiographical self-disclosure (for example, letter writing, diary writing, photo albums, and scrapbooks).

Indeed, in *Barbie Bazaar* craft production is typically related to biographical and autobiographical narratives, not only about Ruth Handler and other female Mattel executives but also about the collectors themselves. At the level of the image, the magazine often portrays collectors by printing snapshots of club meetings that readers send to the editors. Here, women appear to be representing themselves for themselves. In other words, much as in the family photograph, the snapshots are coded as being interesting primarily to the group depicted. Such snapshots are typically paired with confessional narratives in which people (usually women) discuss how they became collectors. Often the women confess to their "obsessive" relation to the doll, writing about how they can't seem to stop buying Barbies and voicing their anxieties that their husbands will seek retribution for their overconsumption.

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Although the content of these narratives is often based on being "out of control," the act of biographical and autobiographical storytelling moves in the opposite direction—that is, toward "self-control." In their transition from overconsumer to auto/biographer, the women use the miniature world of Barbie to make authoritative statements about the self. In this sense, it seems likely that these confessional narratives about their obsessive relation to Barbie paradoxically work to assert a sense of personal mastery over the cultural stereotypes that picture collectors as obsessive, hysterical, undisciplined shoppers. In addition to placing the author in a position of subjective control over the object and the cultural objections to it, these stories might be seen to provide a sense of mastery for the reader. As Stewart argues, narratives featuring miniature worlds such as *Tom Thumb* are generally "linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history" and present "a diminutive, and thereby manipulatable, version of experience."²³ In *Barbie Bazaar*, these autobiographical confessions provide a story world in which readers are able to imaginatively manipulate their relation to Barbie (and all the social relations Barbie comes to stand for) through their relative sense of size.

Yet, despite the mastery at hand in these confessional narratives, mastery is not the same thing as absolute freedom from or resistance to the more troubling ideologies and practices through which Barbie achieves her popularity. As Michel Foucault has demonstrated, the confession has historically worked to constitute people as "subjects" of disciplinary control through a number of social institutions—from religion to psychoanalysis to the law.²⁴ By extracting confessions, modern social institutions create people as "normal" or deviant types and, through various disciplinary techniques, they make people internalize these discursively produced identities. Following Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has considered the contemporary popular appeal of self-help discourses (especially those that revolve around addictions to things and codependencies to loved ones) as a most recent manifestation of this discursive/disciplinary regime. In her essay "Epidemics of the Will," Sedgwick asks why addiction has now been generalized to the point where it is attributed to all sorts of social habits—from working to eating to shopping. She asks why one's attachment to objects is pathologized as an "addiction" at exactly the moment in late capitalism where social relations have become completely dependent on commodities. Why is it abnormal to have affection for objects in a world where our experience of ourselves and others is

mediated through material forms? Addressing this, Sedgwick argues that the self-help/addiction narrative proposes an impossible fantasy of self-control. She makes us wonder why we so easily accept the idea that the healthy subject is one that needs no objects. Sedgwick additionally claims that pathologies of addiction are particularly attributed to people who are otherwise labeled out of control and are demonized as such in our culture (and she especially shows how addiction to objects is attributed to gay men). For this reason, Sedgwick argues that this epidemic of the will and the therapeutics of self-help are not simply misguided but are in fact tools of a disciplinary society that consistently pathologizes and attempts to purge those behaviors that don't fit reigning social norms.²⁵

From this point of view, the autobiographical confessions in *Barbie Bazaar* and the collectors' fantasy of mastery and "will power" are less liberating than they are symptomatic of a disciplinary social system. These confessional tales both propose and naturalize a "normal" and "deviant" relation to consumerism: the normal female consumer makes purchases that promote the gender and generational hierarchies of heterosexual family life (for example, dolls are for kids not for grown-ups). The abject, "out-of-control" woman (here depicted as both childlike and compulsive) defies the roles and routines of family life (and the techniques of market research that represent them) by shopping for objects that are not aimed at her demographic. In this regard, even while the autobiographical/confessional stories in *Barbie Bazaar* often stage scenarios of mastery over miniatures, it is difficult to celebrate them as proof of some authentic, autonomous womanhood that triumphs over mass production.

In fact, it seems to me that in *Barbie Bazaar* these stories of self-disclosure are less about female autonomy than they are about the difficulties women have achieving femininity in the first place. These stories and their accompanying craft displays provide a way for women to voice some of the contradictions entailed in actualizing the kind of ideal womanhood that the classic white Barbie so vividly embodies. In particular, they provide a vehicle through which collectors investigate the problems of growing up female in our culture.

In numerous confessional tales, Barbie becomes a token of exchange between two female selves—the girl and the woman. Barbie is a narrative figure through which the authors and readers can manipulate the problems entailed in female maturation as well as its links to mother-daughter relationships. One of the tried-and-true conventions of this genre is the

story about how a girl's mother threw away her Barbie dolls when she hit puberty (as the publisher told me, "I don't know how many times I've heard that sad story").²⁶ But there are also stories of reconciliation between mother and daughter who have overcome their differences and collectively share the joys of Barbie as adults. In this regard, the adult re-discovery of Barbie works to repair the divide between girl and woman, daughter and mother. Perhaps in this respect it is no coincidence that the largest collector group comprises female baby boomers, and the second largest is formed by the generation of women who were the mothers of baby boomers. And Barbie collecting is very much a mother-daughter experience.

Barbie also serves to spark autobiographical memories of 1960s girl culture. Stars such as Patty Duke, Twiggy, and the Beatles are typically evoked in autobiographical memories and craft displays of the doll. One photoessay, for example, portrays renderings of the cover art for the Sergeant Pepper, Yellow Submarine, and Abbey Road albums, with Barbies doubling for the Beatles.²⁷ Female bonding is also a common theme. Collector Susan Miller recalls, "I soon found out at school that every girl in my class wanted a Barbie doll," and she recounts how she and her sister played with the dolls together.²⁸ Rather than seeing such memories as a form of regression back to childhood, I would argue that these autobiographical stories create a way for adult women to hold the stages of girlhood and womanhood at a distance. As Philippe Lejeune claims, autobiography allows the speaker to simultaneously occupy the place of the child and the place of the adult remembering the child. Because autobiographical writing narrates from this double (or what Lejeune calls ironic point of view, it allows for shifting modes of identification, with the adult writer narrating the tale about her younger self remembered in the story.²⁹ In the case of Barbie culture, the reader of these autobiographical stories is encouraged to see herself as a child playing in the fantasy world of Barbie's teenage romance, and at the same time she is asked to imagine herself from the perspective of the married adult woman who remembers herself as a romantic teen. In this regard, the stories implicitly ask women to think about the difference between these adult and girlish selves. In the process, they stage a rather ambivalent transition from the homosocial communities of girlhood to the heterosexual world of adult life.

Similarly, the dress-up activities that take place at conventions and club meetings are designed to investigate the difference between girlhood and

womanliness, only here this takes place at the level of the body and the female craft of sewing. The women who sew and model replica Barbie costumes for themselves play a game of childhood dress-up in which they implicitly compare the difference between their adult bodies and their girlish ones. The most striking thing about this practice is how much fun the women have looking “wrong” in classic Barbie garb such as Solo in the Spotlight or Dinner at Eight.³⁰ Thus, rather than thinking about this as an instance of “camp” or “drag,” we might view it as analogous to the autobiographical doubling between feminine selves that takes place in collectors’ culture more generally. In fact, the only time when dress-up seems to fall in line with camp sensibilities is when women appear along with their husbands dressed as Ken. These instances, which are always marked by an implicit humiliation of the husband, typically spark nervous laughter that seems directed at the dynamics of gender inversion. That is, the laughter seems to derive from the feminization of the husband, who appears as a male model in the goofiest of Ken’s outfits (including, for example, Ken’s Bavarian lederhosen from the 1960s travel series or his Romeo tights from the theater series of the same decade).

Thus, even while Barbie collectors’ culture is complicit with the general hegemony of heterosexual marriage and coupling, collecting also provides a way for women to play with those gendered structures of everyday life. If, as I have argued, this happens implicitly through craft production and narrative constructions, it certainly also happens more explicitly through the topics addressed in *Barbie Bazaar*.

Just as Ev Barkhalter represents Barbie as a career woman and female role model, so, too, does the collectors’ magazine typically present stories that focus on Barbie’s ability to break into traditionally male professions. During the Gulf War, *Barbie Bazaar* put Mattel’s new Gulf War Barbie on the front cover, and it recommended that this doll serve as a reminder of Mattel’s marketing slogan, “we girls can do anything.”³¹ The May/June 1991 editorial stated, “Yes indeed, women in the United States have come a long way,” and praised “Barbie and all the women in uniform . . . [who] serve[d] their country along with our brave men.”³² The following year, the editor embraced Mattel’s “Barbie for President” gift set claiming, “It is time for a woman president, and Barbie had the credentials for the job.” While obviously acknowledging the humor involved, *Barbie Bazaar* did not see any conflict between Barbie’s feminine and feminist traits.³³

Drawing on the discourses of the liberal women’s movement, such



In its February 1999 photospread recounting the greatest women of the century, *Barbie Bazaar* honors Civil Rights heroine Rosa Parks by dressing an African American Barbie in her image. The text describes Parks as “demure.” (Copyright, Murar Caviale Inc.)

stories typically see progress in terms of women’s equal participation in the male world. In fact, the publisher told me that one of the reasons she loves Barbie is because Mattel probably has the largest number of women executives of any major corporation (and the magazine often publishes feature stories on these women). The magazine celebrates Barbie as an arbiter of female equality and social mobility for women of all colors and nations. Still, as is obvious from my examples, *Barbie Bazaar* doesn’t question the constituent philosophies of patriarchy—such as military aggression overseas or the failures of representational politics at home—nor does the magazine provide any critical perspective on Mattel’s hegemonic moves to incorporate ethnic and national difference by fashioning a “Barbified” world culture whose beauty standard still revolves around the all-American white-skinned Barbie.

usually, the magazine seems more interested in demonstrating to its readers that race doesn't matter in Barbie's world. Despite the fact that Barbie is often seen as an emblem of white domination, *Barbie Bazaar* ignores this critique in favor of printing success stories about women of color who have become Mattel executives or started their own ethnic fashion doll businesses. For example, in the same issue that embraces presidential Barbie, the magazine ran a feature story on Helena Lisandrello, the African American president of Hamilton Toys Inc. who produced a line of "realistically ethnically mixed high fashion" dolls. Quoting her, the magazine writes, "This isn't about competing with Mattel. I am a big Barbie doll fan, but I feel that everyone ought to be able to express themselves in a different category."³⁴ In this way, the feature suggests that Lisandrello's ethnically correct dolls were inspired by her positive feelings for Barbie, rather than any racial anger. In short, *Barbie Bazaar* deals with race, but never racism. By disavowing Barbie's historical status as an icon of white, blonde, Aryan culture, and by ignoring the fact that many people have attacked her as a racist symbol, the magazine instead promotes the idea that Barbie's world is equally available to all, and that her message of social mobility has the same meaning for everyone, regardless of race, class, creed, or nation.

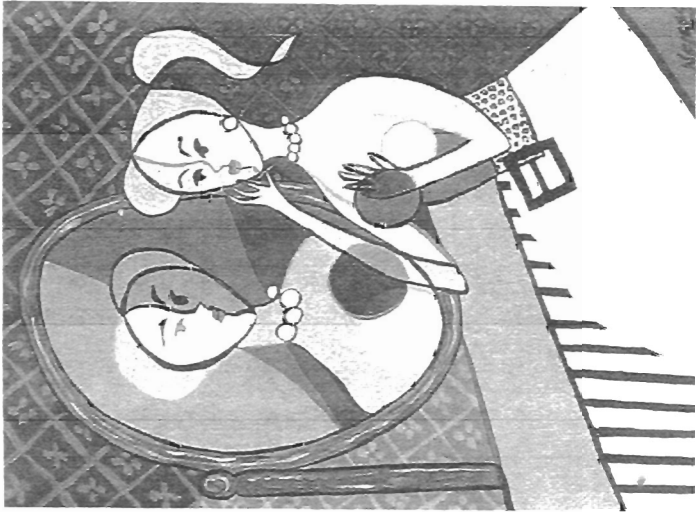
This philosophy of equality through the inclusion of all women in white society and culture emerges in craft practices promoted in the magazine. The most stunning example is a feature on how to turn a white Barbie into a black Barbie by dyeing the doll's plastic skin. Applauding *Barbie Bazaar* for running this feature, one woman wrote: "I am an African American collector and sometimes it is hard to find the dolls I want in the black version. Thanks to Julie Neises' article, I learned to make black versions of the dolls. Thanks again to *Barbie Bazaar* for yet another informative article."³⁵ The writer mailed in photos of vintage dolls she had dyed black. Whether we take this as proof of the woman's ironic reading of Barbie, or whether we assume her response is virtuous, within the context of *Barbie Bazaar* the craft of "blackface" is used to suggest that the only thing that separates whites from African Americans is skin color. The magazine assures us that Barbie, and her "we girls can do anything!" motto, stands as a symbol for all women.

In line with its interpretation of feminism as a road to social mobility for all women, *Barbie Bazaar* delights in role reversals where men are on bottom and women are on top. A cartoon from the Septem-

ber/October 1992 issue displays Barbie's airplane, and the caption reads, "In a strike for women's liberation Barbie pilots the airplane while Ken serves meals."³⁶ More generally, the magazine features stories that ridicule Ken. Collectors constantly write of how inadequate Ken is and how they remember pairing Barbie with GI Joe dolls or even slimy monster toys. Evacuating Ken from Barbie's life is thus a major narrative pleasure in the women's autobiographical stories. Discussing this, publisher Marlene Mura told me with a playful laugh, "Hardcore Barbie collectors think that Ken's really just an accessory."³⁷ A letter to the editor seconds this opinion, adding, "In Barbie's world, Barbie rules, Ken drools."³⁸ And while the magazine obsessively displays Barbie in bridal gowns and wedding scenes, it also continually reminds readers that despite all the veils, Barbie has never really been married to Ken. Always a bride, never a wife, seems to be the logic here.

Such jokes about the inadequacy of Ken spill over into the "real" world of marriage when collectors laugh about how their overvaluation of Barbie leads to an undervaluation of their husbands. An article titled "Thoughts of a Barbie Husband" recounts how one man literally suffered "a loss of living space" because of his wife's collecting hobby: "Slowly the collection grew until the smiling blonde [Barbie] needed her own room. So away went my research room and I was compelled to do what all husbands of Barbie wives must do—build shelving—lots of shelving. . . . I think my wife and Barbie now have their eyes on the den for expansion. While I wouldn't have it any other way, as the collection continues to grow I can only hope they will leave me my own room somewhere in the house."³⁹ Written in the voice of the displaced but obviously resigned husband, this tale (which is somewhat of a conventional story among collectors) plays on the female pleasure of controlling domestic space and the male movements within it. More generally, female collectors often speak of the way they control domestic space via their collections and occupy territories previously inhabited by their husbands. Whether this displacement of the husband is the intention of the collector or just a side effect of a growing collection, the fact that this tale of male evacuation is repeated so often by collectors suggests that, at least at the level of representation and fantasy, the idea of valuing Barbie over one's husband holds a certain attraction for collectors.

In all of these ways, the movement of Barbie from the realm of mass culture to the realm of craft culture is marked by ambivalence. It re-



Barbie is rendered as if painted by Picasso in this 1990 *Barbie Bazaar* photospread by Julie Neises. (Copyright, Murat Caviale Inc.)

inforces gender stereotypes about art and women's culture while it nevertheless also provides a basis on which to critique aspects of heterosexual romance and marriage. Making this situation even more contradictory is the fact that the craft/feminine uses of Barbie are accompanied by a completely different value system that operates in distinct separation from it. *Barbie Bazaar* not only displays Barbie as a craft object but also pictures her as an object of high art.

Barbie as Art

Barbie moved into the zone of authentic art via the related aesthetics of pop, camp, and haute couture. This movement took place sometime in the mid-eighties and was particularly sparked when Barbie enthusiast Billy Boy published his 1987 book *Barbie: Her Life and Times*. Billy Boy was part of Warhol's entourage and was also a Parisian fashion designer, making him the perfect figure to bring Barbie out of the world of kitsch collection and into the world of art. This logic was not lost on Billy

Boy, who began his book with a photographic still of Warhol's *Barbie*. In his introduction, Billy Boy transfers the Warhol aesthetic onto the doll by equating his childhood love for Barbie with his grown-up passion for the French fashion model Bettina. He writes, "Bettina, the legendary and extremely groovy French fashion model . . . was the archetypal fashion model, and not surprisingly she and Barbie had a lot in common."⁴⁰

Throughout the book, Billy Boy assigns value to Barbie by reading her through a "pop" aesthetic in which artifacts of high culture (particularly high fashion) are made equivalent to artifacts of mass culture. For example, he compares a 1960s Barbie comic book to a Lichtenstein canvas. More generally, Billy Boy draws comparisons between Barbie's outfits and the fashions created by European fashion designers. The last chapter displays modern-day Barbie outfits designed by the likes of fashion leaders Yves Saint Laurent and Emilio Pucci, as well as artist Keith Haring.

Billy Boy's book solidified an ongoing transformation in the gendered collection of Barbie dolls. Recall here Thompson's comments on the history of Stevengraph collecting and its gendered logics. In that case, Thompson argues that the transformation from women "knitters" to male control over the object took place over time, as men began to buy up the women's collections, set up their own shops, and write the authoritative books. He concludes, "Items controlled by women were transferred [from rubbish] to the durable category by transferring control to men. . . . Women have been excluded from durability just as they have been excluded from the Stock Exchange and from Great Art!"⁴¹ Although women collectors continue to run Barbie cottage industries (such as *Barbie Bazaar* itself), it is true that as Barbie's value increased she moved from a craft object (the domain of women knitters) and became more associated with the culturally defined "masculine" prerogatives of high finance and high art. In 1985, the voice of the nation's stock exchange, the *Wall Street Journal*, reported that "money seems to have attracted some of the men (collectors) who have begun showing up at Barbie club meetings and conventions. . . ." ⁴² As opposed to the obsessive, out-of-control female over-consumers, now collecting was being redefined as a sound investment associated with male business know-how. And as in the case of the Stevengraph, numerous men did start to corner the market by buying up women's collections (Joe Blitman of Joe's Barbies, who claims he was influenced by Billy Boy, is the most successful dealer in the country). So, too, men such as Billy Boy wrote the authoritative books, and more

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recently dealer Joe Blitman produced the authoritative "how to" collect Barbie video.

More generally, the assignment of art value to Barbie has become one of the central aspects of the collector's fascination. *Barbie Bazaar* depicts the doll through conventions of fashion photography. The magazine often includes a page of artfully posed dolls that it calls the "gallery" portrait. Moreover, following Billy Boy's Warholian example, the magazine features paintings of Barbie that play on the relation between mass culture and the painterly traditions of high art. For example, one photo-essay, titled "Barbie Meets the Masters," shows how Barbie would look if she were rendered by Picasso, Gauguin, Botticelli, and Matisse.⁴³ *Barbie Bazaar* also presents displays of Barbie standing near, for example, the *Mona Lisa*.⁴⁴ And artists working in the Warhol tradition regularly exhibit their artistic interpretations of the doll. A feature on artist Mel Odom presents his Barbie portrait and statue series, including such works as his Warhol-influenced canvas *Sissy Summer* and his surreal sculpture of Barbie with tree branches for arms.⁴⁵

As in the case of Mel Odom, most of the artists in *Barbie Bazaar* are men (and about a third of the writers are men).⁴⁶ But it is also clear that their status as "men" is complicated by their "queer" relationship to masculinity because, after all, like Odom they are "sissies" who play with dolls.⁴⁷ In a 1993 story on Barbie collectors published in the gay-oriented newspaper, the *Advocate*, *Barbie Bazaar* editor/publisher Karen Caviale states, "I don't know too many men into Barbie who are not gay."⁴⁸ But even if she is willing to say as much to the *Advocate*, her magazine never explicitly uses the word gay or talks about gay sexuality and politics.

Instead, in *Barbie Bazaar* gay culture is expressed through aesthetic sensibilities. The art values that the magazine assigns to Barbie are largely implicated in pop and camp reading codes that have historically been associated with gay men. In this case, however, pop and camp aesthetics are themselves often achieved through the more domestic/feminine craft forms of homemade clothing and diorama display. For example, collectors refashion Barbie into classic camp stars, such as Marilyn Monroe, by sewing new costumes for the doll or redesigning her hair and facial features. Or they make dioramas of camp film classics such as one that features a Joan Crawford Barbie and a Bette Davis Barbie in the classic scene from *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* where Jane feeds her invalid sister her sister's dead bird for dinner. In this regard, while pop and

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camp serve to provide a queer relation to the doll, it should be understood that we are talking about a hybrid aesthetic practice in which pop and camp are here mediated through craft production.

More generally, in Barbie culture gay collectors do not speak publicly of their sexuality, but rather represent it through their queer interpretations of the doll. For example, Billy Boy, who appeals to many gay collectors, advertises his limited edition Sexy Men dolls, who take on the body dimensions of gay stereotypes — complete with beef-cake muscles and tattoos. There are also sadomasochist Barbies, genitally correct Kens who appear in pornographic poses, films and videos with drag queen Barbies and lesbian Barbies, and a book titled *Mondo Barbie* that presents pornographic poetry and short stories featuring the doll. In *Barbie Bazaar's* less explicit imagery, numerous cartoons depict campy send-ups of the dolls, mocking Barbie and Ken's relationship. One strip called "Sister, Sister" even presents Barbie's best friend Midge in a nun habit. In the strip, Midge is a private-eye dressed in nun gear, equipped, for some mysterious reason, with a golf club, to spy on Barbie who takes the role of a glamorous bank robber dressed in babydoll pajamas. Midge is not quite the equivalent of the women's homemade craft nuns; instead, she looks like the campy "twisted sisters" of gay culture.⁴⁹

Coming-out narratives also occupy a large amount of space in the magazine. Male authors reflect on their desires to play with Barbie and Ken as kids, and they recount the heterosexual social taboos that barred them from exploring these interests. A feature on artist Mel Odom writes of his portrait *Sissy Summer*, which "represents a young boy's longing for the beautiful Barbie doll and the ridicule a young boy may have felt because this desire was not . . . accepted by the social mores of the 1960s." The feature then refers to his "dive into the Barbie underground" where he met Billy Boy.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, in articles like "And Then . . . I Met Ken" (a four-part series in 1990), male author A. Glen Mandeville is able to imagine his desire for Ken. In the first article of the series, the title appears above a photograph of Barbie and Ken. An epitaph spoken from Barbie's first-person point of view reads, "I never bothered with romance or gave any boy a second glance and then . . . I met Ken!" However, the title "And Then . . . I met Ken," takes on a kind of slippage when Barbie's first-person voice shifts to the autobiographical voice of Mandeville himself, who speaks about his own first encounter with Ken. Remembering his childhood, Mandeville writes: "I was one such boy who viewed

Ken as everything I wanted to be. I bravely bought the doll and all his outfits. . . . The early Ken dolls represented a gentility that GI Joe would lack . . . many, myself included, were not interested in 'conquering,' yet unless a boy's toy taught aggression, it was not too well received by parents."⁵¹ Thus, as the narrative agency shifts from Barbie to Mandeville, the story transforms the heterosexual meaning of its title, "And Then . . . I Met Ken," to a homosexual one. But, even while such columns follow the logic of coming-out narratives, it should be noted they don't go all the way. Instead, *Barbie Bazaar* is careful to keep any direct mention of gay politics out of the magazine.

So silent is the magazine on these issues that some gay collectors think *Barbie Bazaar* is clueless about the sexual in-joking that takes place in its pages. For example, one gay collector told the *Advocate*, "*Barbie Bazaar* is faggier than *Blueboy*," but the "editors are just too dense to realize hownelly their stories are."⁵² Still, the staff of *Barbie Bazaar* is a lot more savvy than this collector assumes. As Karen Caviale told the *Advocate*, "A lot of Barbie collectors are pretty campy people. . . . I don't think any of our suburban housewife readers are going to be offended by a gay angle to any Barbie story."⁵³

While *Barbie Bazaar* represents its suburban housewife reader as being both aware of and not bothered by references to gay male culture, the magazine rarely hints at the possibility of a lesbian relation to the doll. And when it has, lesbian innuendo has resulted in reader complaints. The publisher told me that readers thought the "Sister, Sister" feature was tasteless (although she did not say why, we may assume the homoerotic coupling of Barbie and Midge had something to do with the complaints). Even more explicitly, one letter to the editor protested a cover photo of Barbie dressed as George Washington. (This was *Barbie Bazaar*'s playful response to the first issue of *George* magazine, the cover of which showed Cindy Crawford posed as Washington.) Clearly missing the irony, the reader complained that this unpatriotic act was also sexually perverse: "I was both disgusted and angry when I saw Barbie doll dressed as George Washington," she protested. "Is she a cross-dresser now?"⁵⁴

Barbie Bazaar, then, presents an eclectic mixture of mass, craft, and high art values. It bunches these values together without any reflection on the corresponding politics at stake. The female uses of Barbie are coded as craft, the male uses as high art. Moreover, even while the actual artistic practices sometimes merge into hybrid forms (such as the craft diorama

of *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*), the feminine sphere of craft and the gay male sphere of pop and camp operate in almost complete political separation from one another, in a kind of liberal tolerance that nonetheless almost never crosses boundaries. In Barbie collector's culture, queer sexuality is the classic "open secret," a fact that everyone knows but disavows. And ironically, that disavowal is largely enacted through display.⁵⁴

Arts and Crafts and Mass Culture

In the long run, what do all these Barbie dreams accomplish? Are these collectors' activities a sign of hope—a sign of Barbie's ability to liberate people from sexual stereotypes? Or are they just proof of Mattel's ability to make Barbie everybody's dream date?

While collectors open up the possibility for people to create scenarios that exceed and sometimes oppose Barbie's dominant cultural meanings, they still work to reinforce conventional wisdom about art and culture. The collectors' playful attitude toward the categories of high, mass, and craft culture is circumscribed by the gender distinctions that also pervade our dominant ways of thinking about art and culture. Women's cultural activities are associated with folk crafts that take place in domestic spaces in low- to middle-class suburban locales. The "high" art values ascribed to Barbie are associated with male artists who live in a high-class world of fashion that takes place in exciting metropolitan areas around the globe.⁵⁵ Even while the pop and camp aesthetics disrupt these gendered categories, *Barbie Bazaar* repackages pop and camp so as to reproduce essentialist divisions between male arts and female crafts. More generally, in the world of Barbie culture the status of "artist" is typically conferred on men (stars such as Odom and Gary Mandeville are often singled out).⁵⁶

That such gendered distinctions are cultural and not natural is well indicated by the fact that our society works hard to teach women at an early age about their place in our art-culture system. Mattel's *Barbie* magazine, which is aimed at children, reinforces these distinctions by teaching little girls to reappropriate Barbie through the "feminine" crafts of baking, diorama display, and needlework. For example, the July/August 1993 issue teaches girls how to make pink frozen fruit pops and pasta necklaces.⁵⁷ Like *Barbie Bazaar*, the children's magazine typically displays snapshots sent in by little girls who appear with their collections and tell a short autobiographical story. In the children's magazine, these activi-

tics are always presented as trivial girl play associated with domesticity—not as authentic art. By advising little girls how to reappropriate Barbie through craft, Mattel also teaches them to imagine themselves in the domestic economies of homemaking, as opposed to the public economies of the art world.

Meanwhile, for its part the art world has also worked to reinscribe this distinction. In the high and low exhibits staged at museums over the last decade, high is generally defined as male artists working in the pop tradition (such as Warhol), and low is usually defined as mass culture (again produced by male-run corporations). Women's crafts (such as Barbie displays) typically have no place in such fine art museum exhibits and are generally carted off to the craft museum or the museum of science and industry as production with use values (the functional arts) but no authentic exchange value in the art world. I witnessed this exclusion several years ago when I was invited to give a talk on the vernacular arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art's high low exhibit. The show, which was mostly an homage to Larry Rivers's influence on pop art, included a sanctioned-off space—distinctly separated from the art—where television programming was displayed on monitors (apparently the low/vernacular aspect of the exhibit). When I delivered a lecture on Barbie during the exhibit, the craft dimensions of the collectors' culture were completely unassimilable into the logic of high and low being offered at the show. No one seemed to understand why I was interested in Barbie—at least until I got to the part of the paper that spoke about her pop appropriations. Clearly, at the Whitney the vernacular meant mass culture, high meant pop art (produced almost exclusively by great male painters), and craft meant nothing. Craft, and women's contemporary crafts in particular, did not have a place in this system.

Recently, however, museums have begun to take note of the new subgenre of Barbie "art."⁵⁸ Whether done by men or women artists, this work is typically defined in terms of the "high" arts of painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, video, performance art, and literature and not in terms of the "feminine" crafts of sewing, diorama display, snapshots, and baking.⁵⁹ Museums such as London's Victoria and Albert and Berlin's Martin-Gropius Bau have held Barbie exhibits. (The latter, titled "Art, Design and Barbie," was held at the Martin-Gropius Bau in 1994, and included 130 artists from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.) Similarly, marking Barbie's move from kitsch to avant-garde, New York's chic per-

formance space, the Kitchen, held a Barbie Cafe evening that featured electronic hookups with Los Angeles and Paris, where superstars Raquel Welch and Lauren Hutton, and feminist matron Betty Friedan and the postfeminist Camille Paglia, were scheduled to appear. (Welch, Hutton, and Paglia all backed out in the end and appeared only via tape and phone links.) At the Salon de Barbie, on the Kitchen's second floor, numerous examples of Barbie art were on view, including David Levinthal's Kodaklith prints *The Barbie Series 1972-73* and Maggie Robbins's sculptures *Barbie Fetish* and *Berlin Barbie*. John Hanhardt, then video curator at the Whitney, was also on hand.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this Barbie art movement has been incorporated by Mattel itself. During Mattel's 1994 Barbie Festival, held at Disney World on the occasion of Barbie's thirty-fifth birthday, the toy company presented a Barbie art gallery space that housed a series of art genres. Included was a mural-size reproduction of Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* with Barbies pasted on it, as well as a Monet reproduction with Barbies floating on lily pads. In conjunction with the festival's publicity campaign, Workman Publishing distributed a book titled *The Art of Barbie*, which shows images of Marian Jones's *Nude Barbie Descending a Staircase* (a time-lapse photograph whose title, of course, refers to Duchamp) and William Wegman's *Dream House* (which includes one of Wegman's dogs standing inside a pink plastic dollhouse).⁶⁰ These Barbie pieces give a curious twist to Thomas Crow's argument about impressionism's (and Seurat's in particular) debt to mass culture.⁶¹ Where Crow argues that the impressionist/modernist avant-garde often appropriated the low forms of mass leisure to articulate the contradictions of industrial capitalism, the Barbie/Seurat mural ingeniously turns this modernist moment around into a postmodernist vicious cycle. Here, in the Barbie/Seurat, the "low" form of mass production speaks back to its own modernist appropriation by gluing itself onto an oversized reproduction of a modernist "masterpiece." (Even more curiously, the Barbie/Seurat mural is covered by a mock-window frame, so that the spectator is positioned to look at the work of art as if she or he were in a domestic space gazing out at the grounds of an upper-class estate, rather than in the commercialized public sphere to which the painting originally referred.)⁶²

In this regard, it seems particularly important to note that Mattel's brand of corporate hegemony does not work simply by incorporating the

popular reappropriations of the collectors' subculture. Instead, in postmodern culture hegemony also works by incorporating "high" art movements (in this case the Warholian-based and haute-couture use of Barbie), which in turn are rearticulated by corporate artists (in this case the commercial artists at Mattel). In this respect, we should remember that avant-garde "art" practice has an important relationship to popular culture and hegemonic incorporation. While influential thinkers such as Dick Hebdige wrote about the significance of the avant-garde in relation to youth culture and popular music, the place of the avant-garde has been generally overlooked in more recent literature on fan subcultures.⁶³ This has resulted in a situation where the "popular" is reductively equated with mass culture in ways that work to reinforce, rather than to reinvestigate, the complex relationships among popular/artisan production, avant-garde practices, and corporate hegemony.

In more general terms, then, the case of Barbie collectors provides some relevant twists and turns for the study of subcultures and analyses of postmodern cultural production and consumption. Collectors have a central place in the market and cultural economies of postindustrial capitalism. Barbie collectors are just one group of baby boom adults fascinated with the transformation of mass marker "rubbish" into highly valued consumer "durables." Items such as comic books, GI Joes, and even cereal boxes are the objects of intense longing for numerous collectors of the baby boom generation. Like Barbie collectors, these groups often use artisan forms of labor and cottage industry sales practices that harken back to early modes of capitalist production.

In this regard, we might revise Fredric Jameson's famous definition of postmodernism in which he (following Mandel) equates different cultural styles (realism, modernism, postmodernism) with different historical modes of production (early capitalism, monopoly capitalism, postindustrial capitalism).⁶⁴ Jameson theorized postmodernism mainly through male pop artists, such as Warhol, and the retro mode of Hollywood cinema, arguing that postmodern culture is characterized by the blurring of high and low. In other words, Jameson (as so many others) evacuated "craft" from his theory, looking only at the binaries of "art" versus "mass." The third term of craft, I want to argue, complicates this binary logic, adding the "unpredictable" and "feminine" terms of artisan labor into the mix. Once we recognize the importance of craft and artisan labor in the general circulation of goods (and their uses) in postmod-

ern society, it becomes difficult to buy into the rigid divisions of historical modes of production and their equation with the cultural styles that Jameson sets up.

Instead of Jameson's rigid divisions, it might be wiser to say that postindustrial capitalism is characterized by an admixture of production practices from different historical periods. Here, the cottage industry and artisan/craft labor associated with the early phase of capitalism are taken up by relatively disempowered groups (in Barbie culture, mainly women and gay men) and mixed with the more postindustrial, global flows of late capitalism characterized by a multinational corporation such as Mattel. The fact that multinational corporations and artisan labor are mutually dependent on one another is nowhere better demonstrated than in the strange merger of Disney World, Mattel, and the collectors' cottage industry businesses that all sold goods and reaped profits at the thirty-fifth anniversary Barbie festival. For such reasons, it might be wiser to use Jameson's concept of postmodern "pastiche" (or the admixture of historical periods he locates in Hollywood nostalgia films), not only, as he does, to characterize an *expressive style of postmodern culture*. Instead, I would argue, pastiche also characterizes a *style of postmodern production* itself in which different historical modes of capitalism interact with and reinforce each other.⁶⁵ Collecting, it seems to me, is the central practice that informs this pastiche of production styles in late capitalism.

In addition to raising questions about the production process, collectors' cultures also complicate theories of cultural consumption in cultural studies, especially those theories based on ethnographies of fans. This group doesn't easily fall into the narrative oppositions we so often find in cultural studies, oppositions that pit "resistant" popular appropriations of mass-culture texts against "dominant" meanings in them. Nor does this group display the utopian aspects of community that numerous ethnographies of fans locate in these cultures. Instead, Barbie collectors often reproduce—as oppose to resist—the sexist, classist, and individualist ideologies of Western capitalism, even as they creatively reappropriate the doll for their own ends. Collectors have competitive businesses based on selling the dolls, and customers at shows are often worried that the most successful dealers are eager to rip them off with repainted dolls sold at inflated prices. At the Barbie festival, for example, the "consumer beware" ethos dominated much of the show, as collectors cautioned one another against bad deals at various booths. And, mimicking the practices of

art collectors, *Barbie Bazaar* continually warns readers against "frauds." Meanwhile, even the practice of shopping is laced with competition. Collectors eager to get the best dolls hide information from one another, and they aggressively sort through bins of vintage clothing hoping to find the hat for the "career girl" outfit before another collector does. So intense is this competition that *Barbie Bazaar* ran a feature titled "Salesroom Etiquette," describing the "hordes of crazed collectors," some of whom have taken to an "alarming trend" of stealing dolls they can't afford.⁶⁶ In this regard, the collectors reproduce cultural stereotypes about feminine and gay male consumers, even while they often also make friends with one another on the basis of their collecting interests.

Moreover, much as Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood have argued about the tribal poltatch, the exchange of goods is often marked by status relations within a culture.⁶⁷ For example, membership in local Barbie clubs is sometimes limited to people with extensive and expensive collections. In practice, then, utopian ideals of community are often compromised by the competitive and status-oriented context of the larger logic of commodity culture that collectors may at times evade, but never ultimately escape. For such reasons, we should not view the "popular" as one collective block that reads against the grain of mass culture to create a better, more authentic public sphere. Instead, the popular is a fragmented group of divided interests and divided politics. In other words, the popular is not an essential category.

By the same token, the "dominant" or "mass" is not easily read as a hegemonic block. Instead, if one were to do a sustained corporate ethnography of Mattel, my guess is that it would soon become clear that many of its employees are avid collectors who sincerely believe in the utopian values of friendship and collectivity among girls and boys that Barbie epitomizes for them. At the 1993 Barbie Round-Up held at the Hacienda Hotel in Las Vegas, Barbie executives spoke enthusiastically about the friendships that Barbie had ignited among them during their many years at Mattel. For them, Barbie's entourage of best friends and ethnic sisters constituted a model of corporate culture that posed a distinct difference from the male-dominated environments at other corporations.

At Disney World's thirty-fifth anniversary festival, this notion of corporate sisterhood was further suggested at the "gala" dinner banquet. There, Barbie's "mother" and one-time Mattel executive Ruth Handler offered a long speech on the history of her rise to power in the then male-

dominated corporation, a speech in which she mostly recalled the relations of family and women's friendship that she built during her tenure at the toy company. Handler's speech was followed by one from Mattel's contemporary and markedly postfeminist chief executive, Jill E. Barad (who was then president of domestic operations). Barad claimed to have "reposition[ed] Barbie as having substance" through such publicity/goodwill stunts as the Barbie Summit, which brought together forty children from twenty-eight countries to attend workshops on the world's problems (the event coincided with the release of the Barbie Summit doll, who came in a variety of national types). Barad's new brand of corporate multicultural feminism was still rooted in a notion of sisterhood, one that was most aptly transformed into the 1980s Barbie marketing slogan "we girls can do anything!" At the end of her dinner speech, in an attempt to rally excitement among the collectors, Barad repeated the slogan, and with a campy wink to the gay collectors, she added "and boys" to the phrase.

Barad was followed by closing remarks from yet another female employee who literally wept as she spoke of the close friendships she experienced while working at Mattel. While this outpouring of emotion seemed genuine in a personal sense, Mattel's more synthetic corporate logic soon overtook the aura of authenticity as the employee suddenly broke into song (or rather began to lip-synch). She was joined on stage by an all-female chorus of Mattel employees (as well as dancers dressed as dolls) who lip-synched "you got to have friends" to a cover of the seventies hit. This moment of staged authenticity highlights the paradox involved in the movement from mass culture to more communal forms of cultural experience. In Barbie collectors' culture it is finally impossible to separate the decidedly theatrical aspects of such sisterly corporate displays from moments of authentic female bonding because both serve (in Baudrillard's sense) to mutually produce each other.

Barbie Activism

How then are feminists to deal with objects like Barbie and the female communities they foster? Given the levels of simulation and dissimulation involved in these communities, how can feminists forge any kind of social transformation by thinking about objects like Barbie and the cultural practices that surround her? This "what's the political point?" question brings me back to my opening remarks concerning the feminist intel-

lectual's relation to mass culture and aesthetic hierarchies more generally. By accepting the term "popular" or "mass" or "high," we always buy into the idea that a culture can be essentialized as this or that "thing" that can be known and nailed down for further intellectual categorization and analysis. This line of thinking buys into the binary oppositions between the intellectual and the popular, between the high and the low, and between feminism and femininity in a way that doesn't do justice to the complex connections between and among them.

In the case of Barbie, the identity politics of mass culture resist the simple narrative oppositions between the intellectual and the popular that the media set up around the Teen Talk doll controversy. This is well demonstrated by the following two anecdotes that encapsulate some of the complexities involved.

Anecdote 1: In a conversation with *Barbie Bazaar* publisher Marlene Mura, I discovered that the opposition between intellectual and popular culture doesn't really work at all. When I asked her how she felt about Mattel's Teen Talk Barbie and the actions of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I expected her to defend the doll by telling me that Barbie was a feminist role model who had a string of important careers. She did say that, but she also told me something else: it turns out she is herself a member of the AAUW.

Anecdote 2: This story concerns the ever-changing and increasingly metacritical world of Barbie. While watching television a few years ago, I discovered that my cartoon counterpart Lisa Simpson was also engaged in serious feminist thought about her new Malibu Stacey doll. Like Barbie, Stacey said a litany of offensive phrases, boasting of her love for shopping and inability to succeed at school. Deciding that the doll is sexist, Lisa Simpson goes to her creator (played by Kathleen Turner) and begs her to make a better doll with the "wisdom of Gertrude Stein and the good looks of Eleanor Roosevelt." But ultimately Lisa's feminist doll fails because Stacey's evil toy company markets a new, improved model that quickly makes Lisa's doll obsolete.

As a popular parody of the feminist Barbie critic, *The Simpsons* episode brings me back full circle to the question of the intellectual's role in studying popular culture. It seems, in fact, that popular culture is so full of its own self-reflexive metacritique that the feminist intellectual is no longer needed, or else is at best redundant. Perhaps in this sense, the more we try to assert critical distance, the closer we are to the object itself. Like the

logic of capitalism that haunts Lisa Simpson's feminist fashion doll, the work of theory in the age of mass culture has its own planned obsolescence. Indeed, we constantly have to reinvent new ways of distinguishing ourselves from the objects we study. And while I have discussed at length cultural distinctions and the sexist hierarchies inherent in the high/low logics of art collection, I still am not quite comfortable being at one with mass culture. As an intellectual, I still don't want to be Barbie, even if as a collector I want to have her.

In addition to suggesting this intellectual dilemma, Lisa Simpson's crusade in toyland tells us something about feminist and political action. Lisa's problem—and the one that the AAUW encountered—is related to women's place in the art-culture system more generally. Lisa and the AAUW imagine that their voices will be heard if they complain to corporations and ask for reform. The reform desired is to literally have their feminism embodied in Barbie's body—a desire that seems somewhat less than revolutionary at best. Indeed, while Mattel was a bit rattled by the AAUW, in the long run the company's basic foundation wasn't disturbed. Instead, Mattel simply took it on the chin and opened up a new line of career-girl Barbies that were basically simple wardrobe revisions on a much older theme. Mattel doesn't mind equating beauty with intellect. In fact, so long as the 11 1/2 inch Barbie body remains intact, Mattel is quite willing to accessorize her with a number of fashionable perspectives—including feminism itself. Like all successful capitalists, Mattel is very good at accommodating dissent.

So, in the long run, how do feminists—intellectual or otherwise—deal with corporate giants such as Mattel? Perhaps the Barbie Liberation Organization provides a glimmer of hope. This anonymous group of concerned consumers switched the voice boxes of Talking Gil Joe and Talking Barbie, and then they planted their tampered toys in toy shops so that unwitting consumers bought these gender-bending dolls rather than the ones Mattel originally intended. It seems to me that this maneuver has some radical promise. First, unlike the reform campaigns of Lisa Simpson and the AAUW, the B.L.O. disassociates bodies from voices in a way that gets out of the bind of Barbie's essentialist feminine form. Second, the B.L.O. doesn't accept women's place in the art-culture system. Rather than the homework economy of the female collectors' culture—its baking, sewing, and diorama display—the B.L.O. takes up an interest in the male-defined domain of technology. The B.L.O. distributes literature that teaches con-



The Barbie Liberation Organization (B.L.O.) issued this flyer when it conducted its consumer activist campaign and switched the voice boxes of Teen Talk Barbie and G.I. Joe.

sumers how to use saws and circuit switchboards in order to transform the dolls. Moreover, it teaches consumers how to subvert consumerism itself by returning the tampered dolls to toy shops.

But I don't want to conclude this piece with simply a call to technological arms and consumer warfare against Barbie. These factories hold merit, but the B.L.O. should not be seen as a priori more politically pure than other collectors who embellish, sabotage, or otherwise manipulate the doll's meaning and social function. In fact, the founder of the B.L.O. clearly operates within the terms of the collector's market itself. When I asked him if I could get one of his gender-bending Barbies, he quoted me a price of \$500 and told me he was currently out of stock. The Smithsonian Institution and John Iwanhardt, then video curator at the Whitney museum, were among his clients. In this sense, the B.L.O. has conceptualized consumer sabotage not simply as activism, but as activist art. And like other forms of activist art, this one has a market.

Conclusion

The case of Barbie demonstrates that the mass market and the art market are intimately linked through collection practices that give way to their own production communities. These links are often forged by craft appropriations, many of which are in turn reevaluated and transformed into objects with both financial value and artistic worth.⁶⁸

This reassignment of value to craft, however, is not necessarily a cause for celebration. As Lucy Lippard writes:

Much has been made of the need to erase false distinctions between art and craft, "fine" art and the "minor" arts, "high" art and "low" art—distinctions that particularly affect women's art. But there are also "high" crafts and "low" ones, and although women wield more power in the crafts world than in the fine art world, the same problems plague both. The crafts need only one more step up the aesthetic and financial respectability ladder and they will be headed for the craft museums rather than people's homes.⁶⁹

The case of Barbie collectors demonstrates that distinctions of high and low do not only separate art from craft, they also operate within craft itself. Moreover, such distinctions are intimately bound up with the gendered terms of power in our culture. In the case of Barbie, art and craft are further distinguished by the relations within the fashion industry—relations between "homemade" dresses that housewives sew for their families and "haute couture" that fashion designers produce for wealthy clients who frequent their urban salons. As we have seen, this "high" end of the fashion crafts initially gave way to Barbie's reinterpretation through pop aesthetics, and by the 1990s Barbie has become a subject for numerous artists working in a number of media and genres.

Even as various groups vie for power over the collectors' market, they nevertheless share a common project of reappropriation, reinterpretation, and redecoration. Their productions have created new markets around the doll. Understanding the value of these collector markets, Mattel now has created niche product lines that incorporate collector tastes and styles into the more standardized techniques of mass production.

This, however, only summarizes the art-culture system that has formed around Barbie in the United States, and to a lesser degree in Western Europe. In fact, the art culture system in which Barbie operates is a global system, with people around the world, some living in diasporic situations, participating in collectors' culture and making their own versions of the doll. This global traffic in Barbie culture is a subject of its own.⁷⁰ But for now, we can at least assume that the activities in the United States and Western Europe should be considered in relation to art, craft, and mass production practices on a worldwide basis. The sources of influence and exchange are most likely to be as complex in this regard as those

that obtain for such global goods as world beat music, ethnic curios and souvenirs, and used clothing. In the case of Barbie—the ultimate American girl who has always been produced in Asian factories—the terms of this global exchange are imbedded in postcolonial racism, sexism, and labor exploitation. Any examination of the global collectors' market would have to assume that collecting Barbie cannot possibly mean the same things to people in places where she has been produced as well as consumed.

In the end, Barbie collecting presents a set of problems that call for an investigation of the power dynamics of art and culture within and across historical time and national space. Collectors are so varied in their tastes and distastes for Barbie, and they are so divided in their sexual, national, ethnic, and class relations, that they cannot be understood as a single communal "subculture," in the classic sense of that term. Instead, they are an eclectic group of people who compete for cultural and economic power in a world where consumption and production are increasingly intertwined.

While feminist intellectuals and activists have largely focused on Barbie's sexism, racism, and negative influence on little girls, their condemnations of Barbie have, quite paradoxically, become part of the culture industry around her. Talk show hosts and journalists are eager to incorporate the feminist "side of the story," and as in the case of the B.T.O., activists understand the market value of their own critical interpretations of the doll. While important in its own right, this kind of intellectual criticism and consumer activism does not exhaust the set of questions we need to pose about mass culture. By investigating the complex relations among mass, high, and craft productions, we might better understand the cultural dynamics of objects like Barbie—objects that, no matter how objectionable, eventually achieve a place on the wall as objects d'art.

Notes

This essay is based on my script for a video titled *Twist Barbie* that I made with the Paper Tiger collective in 1993. Thank you to Dee Dee Halleck and the collective. I am also grateful to the collectors and to the many people who sent me Barbie dolls, Barbie paraphernalia, and news of Barbie over the years.

- 1 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 57.
- 2 This discussion took place at the "Language of Objects" exhibit, "Barbie behind

- the Scenes," curated by Deidre Evans-Pritchard, California Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, 18 May 1994.
- 3 "Barbie Fun Facts," Mattel Toys press release, 1993. Mattel Corporate Communications sent me this press release in 1993. No exact date appears on the document.
- 4 Ann DuCille discusses Mattel's marketing of black, ethnic, and national dolls since the 1960s, and she considers the problems entailed in the commodification of race in her "Dyes and Dolls: Multicultural Barbie and the Merchandising of Difference," *Differences* 6:1 (1994): 46–68.
- 5 Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- 6 For some of the notable early examples of ethnographic and qualitative audience-based research on women's genres, see Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. Della Douling (London: Methuen, 1985); and Dorothy Hobson, "Housewives and the Mass Media," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1984), pp. 105–14. Since these studies, of course, a large body of work on these issues has been generated.
- 7 See, for example, Constance Penley, "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology," in *Technoculture*, ed. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 135–61; Tricia Rose, *Black Noise* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- 8 Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Methuen, 1984).
- 9 Erica Rand, *Barbie's Queer Accessories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995).
- 10 Denise Gellene, "Barbie Protesters Aren't Playing Around," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 1997, sec. A, p. 113.
- 11 In a response to collector protests, *Barbie Bazaar* published editorials meant to dispel what it called "rumors." Although this Mattel-licensed magazine claimed that Mattel doesn't censor its content, these editorials were very much in line with the way Mattel would want collectors to perceive the legal issues on trademark and copyright. See *Barbie Bazaar*, May/June 1997, p. 26, and July/August 1997, p. 26.
- 12 Collectors also protested the inferior quality of various dolls and the fact that Mattel was flooding the market with collector series (and thus driving resale values down). The toy company has agreed to address consumer complaints about product quality and distribution volume, but it refuses to change its mind about copyright and trademark infringement. Barad claims she "loves the collector," but, "What I do ~~not~~ want is a job, first and foremost, is protect Barbie." Gellene, "Barbie Protesters Aren't Playing Around," sec. A, p. 113.
- 13 Carrie Dolan, "Many Adults Are in Barbie's Corner as She Fights Lem," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 December 1986, sec. 1, p. 18.
- 14 This article was about a man who had his collection stolen by a pornographic

videomaker for whom he worked. The commentary about feminism was a "hook" paragraph that began by suggesting, "For most people, Barbie dolls and pornography wouldn't seem to go together. Oh, if you really wanted, you might find some oversensitive feminist who will point out something salacious about Barbie. . . . Well, those inclined to be critical might find Barbie more suitable to star in a sheltered youth's masturbatory fantasy than to serve as a plaything for pre-adolescent girls." See *Spy*, March 1993, p. 16.

- 15 James Clifford, "Collecting Art and Culture," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).
- 16 A. Glenn Mandeville, "The Many Faces of Barbie," *Barbie Bazaar*, January/February 1995, p. 28.
- 17 Mattel regularly advertises its collector series in *Barbie Bazaar* and, as might be expected, is generally supportive of the magazine.
- 18 In 1991, the Good Habits Collection, created by Gayle Flam and Our Mutual Friends of Oregon, was advertising eight different Barbie habits, complete with matching undergarments and religious jewelry, for sale at \$55 a costume. *Barbie Bazaar*, March/April 1991, p. 21. In a ploy for equal representation, some collectors have fashioned rabbinical outfits for Ken dolls.
- 19 Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 7.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 21 Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 68.
- 22 This is a rather bare-bones account of Barbie's creation myth. As Erica Rand points out, there are competing origin myths for Barbie. See her *Barbie's Queer Accessories*, pp. 29–38. Collectors are especially riveted on producing revisionist histories that take account of Barbie's debt to the German Lilli doll. I would speculate that this fascination with tracing Barbie's origins to the German Lilli doll serves the purpose of transforming Barbie from American kitsch into an object of high art, and thus greater "durable" value, because like all "true" art, Barbie has roots in European culture.
- 23 Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 69.
- 24 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).
- 25 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Epitaphs of the Will," in *Incorporations*, *Zone* 6, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: UrZone, 1992), pp. 382–95.
- 26 Personal interview with Marlene Mura, 12 September 1992. All subsequent references to my conversation with Mura are taken from this interview and from email correspondence on 30 October 1997.
- 27 Julie A. Neises and Charles P. Neises, "Barbie Meets the Beatles," *Barbie Bazaar*, January/February 1991, pp. 44–46.
- 28 Susan Miller, "Life with Barbie," *Barbie Bazaar*, March/April 1993, p. 18.
- 29 Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Easkin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

This sense of "looking wrong" bears interesting connections to theories of femininity and gender performance developed out of Joan Rivière's classic 1929 essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (1929; London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35–44. In this case, the festive practice of masquerade seems precisely intended (whether consciously or unconsciously) to undo the more metaphorical masquerade that Rivière sees as constitutive of femininity.

- 31 *Barbie Bazaar*, January/February 1991, cover and p. 6.
- 32 *Barbie Bazaar*, May/June 1991, p. 4.
- 33 Karen E. Caviale, "Vote for Barbie?," *Barbie Bazaar*, November/December 1992, p. 8.
- 34 Cited in Maria Toth, "Candy Girl," *Barbie Bazaar*, November/December 1992, p. 36. In success stories such as these, *Barbie Bazaar* never questions the degree to which black dolls that are modeled on the logic of the white Barbie actually present alternatives. For more concerning these issues with respect to Mattel's marketing, see Ducille, "Dyes and Dolls," and Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daddy Life* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 120.
- 35 This letter appeared in an editorial column. See "Talkin' Barbie," *Barbie Bazaar*, September/October 1997, p. 87.
- 36 *Barbie Bazaar*, September/October 1992, p. 6.
- 37 Interview with Marlene Mura, 12 September 1992.
- 38 *Barbie Bazaar*, July/August 1997, p. 30.
- 39 *Barbie Bazaar*, May/June 1994, p. 26.
- 40 Billy Boy, *Barbie: Her Life and Times* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1987), p. 10.
- 41 Thompson, *Rubbish Theory*, p. 33.
- 42 Joan Kron, "Who'll Tell Ken? His Little Barbie Is Hanging Out with Other Men?" *Wall Street Journal*, 14 March 1985, sec. 1, p. 33. In my 1992 personal interview with Joe Blitman of Joe's Barbies, he told me that most men weren't really in it for the money, but that this served as a way to explain away the stigma associated with men and women who collect Barbie.
- 43 Julie A. Neises, "Barbie Meets the Masters," part 2, *Barbie Bazaar*, March/April 1990, pp. 31–32.
- 44 *Barbie Bazaar*, March/April 1991, p. 32.
- 45 *Barbie Bazaar*, March/April 1989, p. 6.
- 46 This figure comes from publisher Karen Caviale, cited in R. L. Pela, "Malibu Whitehouse," *Advocate*, 26 January 1993, p. 48.
- 47 Symptomatically here, the *Wall Street Journal* article cited in note 42 above alludes to the "queer" nature of male collectors even as it defends against this possibility by positioning men as rational business people in it for the money. The article claims, "A few years ago Mr. Fames, 46 years old and married, came out of the toy closet, so to speak. He joined a doll collectors' club. 'The giggling has pretty much stopped now,' the magazine tells us because Mr. Fames has built a highly lucrative 'world-class' collection" (p. 31).

48 Caviale, cited in Pela, "Malibu Whitehouse."

49 "Midge in Sister, Sister 2," *Barbie Bazaar*, July/August 1992, p. 16.

50 Editorial, *Barbie Bazaar*, March/April 1989, p. 6; and Karen F. Caviale, "Mel Odomy," *Barbie Bazaar*, March/April 1989, p. 38.

51 A. Glenn Mandeville, "And Then . . . I Met Ken," *Barbie Bazaar*, January/February 1990, p. 25.

52 Pela, "Malibu Whitehouse."

53 Marcia Elliott, letter to the editor, *Barbie Bazaar*, May/June 1997, p. 26.

54 Lyne Cooke and Peter Wollen introduce their anthology *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) by reminding readers of Jacques Lacan's seminar on Edgar Allan Poe's "Parloured Letter," in which Lacan demonstrates that display can provide the best method of concealment. Using this as a paradigm for understanding museums and other exhibition venues, Cooke and Wollen argue that "it is only through display that truth is revealed—not, of course, directly, but obliquely and en travesti. It is through modes of display that regimes of all sorts reveal the truths they mean to conceal" (pp. 9–10).

55 The ideological reviling of the "domestic" is, of course, not specific to Barbie's art culture system but is generally regarded as a reigning ideology of modernism. Recent art historical work has begun to reexamine the place and function of domesticity in modern art, suggesting that even if domesticity was often seen as the "other" of art, domestic design and everyday life have played an important role in the development of modern styles. See, for example, Christopher Reed, ed., *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Griselda Pollack, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 121–35; Cecile Whiting, *The Taste for Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Penny Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (London: Pandora, 1995); and Katy Deepwell, ed., *Women Artists and Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

56 When women do take on this artist status they are often ambivalently figured as somewhere between highbrow fashion artist and lowbrow housewife/seamstress. A story on Paite Burgess, for example, depicts her as the designer of "glamorous haute couture for Barbie" but also a retired grandmother who began making Barbie dresses for her granddaughter. See "The Ultimate in Barbie Fashions," *Barbie Bazaar*, May/June 1995, pp. 47–49.

57 "Now You're Cooking," *Barbie*, July/August 1993, p. 14; and "Make Your Own Pasta Necklaces," *Barbie*, July/August 1993, p. 37.

58 This Barbie art movement was noted by a long story in the *New York Times* in 1991. See Alice Kahn, "A Onetime Bimbo Becomes a Muse," the *New York Times*, 29 September 1991, sec. 11, pp. 1, 24–25. It has also been the subject of the cover story "Art, Design, and Barbie" in *Barbie Bazaar*, September/October 1994, pp. 18–23. Note that the re-evaluation of Barbie art within fine art circles has coincided with a more general embrace—or some would say appropriation—of craft

aesthetics in the art world. During the 1990s craft was no longer cubbyholed as a "feminist" issue/aesthetic in the arts and came to be seen instead as a more pervasive postmodern aesthetic. Not only craft, but also related artifacts of thrift store venues, were increasingly brought into the purview of the "fine" arts. In September 1993 *New Art Examiner* ran a special issue entitled "Freedom, Function, and Fashion: The Craft Issue" and again in April 1996 its special issue "A Dialogue with Objects" was devoted to the topic of crafts in the fine arts.

59 When functional arts do appear they are rearticulated in the guise of modernism as with a recent ad in *Barbie Bazaar* by the Vitra Design Museum that offers miniature chairs for Barbie modeled on designs by modernist furnituremakers such as Eames and Mies Van Der Rohe. See *Barbie Bazaar*, January/February 1995, p. 11.

60 Craig Yoc, ed., *The Art of Barbie* (New York: Workman, 1994).

61 Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in his *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 3–37.

62 Mattel also installed a video art wall of Barbies and a more postpop interpretation that displayed Barbies sailing in Barbie boats on their way to the Statue of Liberty (who had a Barbie, as opposed to a torch, in her outstretched hand). After the festival, Mattel went on to market its own Water Lily Barbie inspired by Claude Monet.

63 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

64 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92.

65 Although he does not speak of craft production in the terms I do here, Edward W. Soja's analysis of Los Angeles's contradictory production economies is instructive. See his *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), chapter 8.

66 Ann Walcher, "Salesroom Etiquette," *Barbie Bazaar*, January/February 1994, pp. 10–11.

67 Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

68 In fact, craft has become so highly esteemed in this system that collectors have recently begun to reevaluate "vintage Barbie licensed" craft kits that were originally produced in the 1960s by companies like Standard Toycraft Industries. Kits like the Barbie Weaving Loom Set now go for up to \$350 on the collector's market. See Karen F. Caviale, "Barbie Vintage Crafts," *Barbie Bazaar*, September/October 1997, pp. 47–49.

69 Lucy R. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Stream: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: New Press, 1993), p. 130.

70 For relevant discussions of the anthropology of art and commodity culture in relation to global/local markets, see George F. Marcus and Fred R. Meyers, *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).