Tales of Change

Metamorphosis and Barbie

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by

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Preface

Like many young women of my generation, those born on the cusp of the new millennium, I grew up with Barbie as Odette in *Swan Lake*, Erika and Anneliese in *Princess and the Pauper*, and Elina in *Barbie: Fairytopia*. Even now, at the age of twenty-four, I have Barbie marathons during rainy weekends to dive into the magical story worlds that the movies provide.

My aim with this project was to dig deep into the matter of these movies that are so dear to me: to see what lies beneath the pink sparkles, princess dresses, fairy wings, and perfectly composed songs. Through investigating the theme of metamorphosis in Barbie movies, I hope to provide an analysis that sheds new light on the character and the entertainment products surrounding her.

Writing this thesis would not have been possible without the help of several people. Most importantly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Odile Heynders, for her enthusiasm, critical eye, and constant encouragement to put my fears aside. I thank Laura for all the *Princess and the Pauper* sing-alongs, which have undoubtedly had a hand in nourishing my love for these movies. I thank Mick for listening to my rambling explanations of the Barbie cinematic universe. And I thank Marjon for the writing sessions, WhatsApp conversations, and constant encouragement through the shape of emojis and stickers.

It is scary to research something you love because you fear that in the end, you might come to despise it. I have to admit I encountered many moments of Barbie-hate myself while writing this thesis. Ultimately, however, this research project has only increased my love for these movies. I hope you, dear reader, may experience the same newfound appreciation for Barbie after reading this thesis, and I wish you a pleasant journey.

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1. | Introduction

1.1 | Introduction

As a young child, between the ages of four and ten, I watched Barbie movies for hours on end. The most mesmerizing scenes were those in which Barbie magically transformed. In a cloud of glitter and white light, with angelic music playing in the background, her hair changed from the original straight blonde to curly or pink, and here boring outfits were replaced with over-the-top princess dresses. Sometimes Barbie would even grow wings or a mermaid tail. The scenes were beautiful but more importantly they were exciting: you never knew what Barbie would ultimately turn into when you started the movie.

It is not just within the stories of the movies that Barbie changes: both the physical representations of the doll and the media surrounding her have changed enormously since Barbie's birth in the late 1950s.

This thesis investigates the role of metamorphosis within Barbie movies. In doing this, I aim to go beyond interpreting Barbie as shallow entertainment for young girls. I will investigate Barbie movies' cultural and societal relevance for us as adults and as academics. What lies beneath the surface if we brush away the glitter and disregard the overwhelming pink and purple brightness? What can Barbie movies teach us?

1.2 | Metamorphosis

This thesis specifically focuses on sites of metamorphosis in Barbie. Firstly, the lens of metamorphosis is chosen because the idea of transformation seems to be a prominent theme in the Barbie cinematic universe. In the story of almost every Barbie movie to date, Barbie undergoes a significant, usually magical, transformation. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the Barbie story world itself has transformed as well: simply from being released on VHS tapes to

DVDs and ultimately on Netflix, for instance, but also through other media with the emergence of social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The world, in turn, is changing rapidly as well. The mainstream use of the internet has facilitated rapid online changes in the shape of platforms, means of communication, and trends that come and go with the blink of an eye, and environmental changes are prominent, to name just a few sites of transformation. Both these changes in Barbie and our world make the lens of metamorphosis an interesting starting point for this investigation.

In using metamorphosis as a conceptual lens, it is also necessary to look at earlier works that discuss the same theme since concepts are never isolated and connect the case study to preceding works surrounding the same theme. In this thesis, I will look at one of the earliest known Western works of literature that concern the subject of metamorphosis: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In this work, transformation is central to the presentation of a mythicized historical framework that can also be taken as an epistemology of change as fundamental for human life.

1.3 | Research question and case study

To carry out this research on the role of metamorphosis in Barbie, this thesis aims at answering the following question:

What can we learn from Barbie entertainment movies about change and continuity in contemporary society?

By "Barbie entertainment movies", I refer to the movies commissioned by the Mattel company, which have Barbie as the main character. With the first movie released in 2001 and the most recent movie in 2021, there are thirty-nine Barbie movies to date. In this thesis, six of these

movies will be discussed in-depth, which are in order of release: *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper* (2004), *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale* (2010), *Barbie: A Fairy Secret* (2011), *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale 2* (2012), *Barbie: The Princess & The Popstar* (2012) and *Barbie: Princess Adventure* (2020).

This research question is divided into six sub-questions, which will be explained in the section below. This section also explains the structural design of this thesis.

1.4 | Structural design

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, including this first introductory chapter. This section briefly elaborates on the content of these chapters.

In chapter two, the main theoretical framework of this thesis will be introduced. Since the theories that will be used for the analyses are linked to individual chapters, I have chosen to further elaborate on the theories of individual chapters in their own theoretical frameworks.

Chapter three will explain and contextualize the chosen methodologies for this thesis and will discuss why this thesis uses a conceptual lens as its main methodological frame.

My case study analysis will be discussed in chapters four, five, and six.

Chapter four, Metamorphosis of the body, investigates scenes of bodily metamorphosis in Barbie movies and will discuss the two following sub-questions: *How can the metamorphosis of the body in Barbie movies be understood as a postfeminist transformation?* and *How does the metamorphosis of the body in Barbie movies depict compliance to the socially shaped body?*

Chapter five, Metamorphosis of the narrative, investigates the metamorphosis of the narrative of Barbie movies through the following two sub-questions: *How can the metamorphosis of the narrative of Barbie movies be understood as a transmedial*

transformation? and *How does the increase of transmedia storytelling in Barbie movies complicate the relationship between fact and fiction?*

Chapters four and five will provide a close-up look at Barbie entertainment movies and their relationship to the concept of metamorphosis. In investigating sites of transformation, either in the movies through the depiction of bodily transformations or through the transformation of the way Barbie movies are constructed, I aim to provide insight into what Barbie movies inform us about the role of change in contemporary society.

Chapter six, From the Roman Republic to Malibu, looks at the relationship between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Barbie entertainment movies through the following two sub-questions: *How do scenes of bodily transformation in Barbie movies relate to Ovidian tales of metamorphosis?* and *How can the transmedial transformation of the narrative of Barbie movies be linked to the narrative structure of Metamorphoses by Ovid?*

This chapter compares Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and stories of metamorphosis in Barbie movies. Through this juxtaposition, the chapter investigates the relationship between these stories of change and, in turn, provides a critical view of the societal, cultural, and academic relevance of children's entertainment, such as Barbie. This chapter aims to provide a perspective on Barbie entertainment movies as closely intertwined with, or even a continuation of, Ovid's work.

Finally, chapter seven will act as the conclusion of this thesis, in which I provide an overview of my main findings to answer my research question and discuss why research projects like the one presented here are relevant to the field of Culture Studies.

2. | Theoretical framework

2.1 | Introduction

This section will briefly explain the theoretical framework of this research. The theories used in this thesis are only employed in individual chapters specifically and not throughout the entire thesis. I have thus chosen to further contextualize and explain these theories in their subsequent chapters to ensure the structure of this chapter remains uncluttered.

2.2 | Theories used in exploring Barbie's body

In the context of Barbie and the metamorphosis of the body, which will be addressed in chapter four, two main theoretical concepts will be used.

In looking at the changing female body in contemporary society, it is necessary to look at theorists and theories within postfeminism since the female body and the ways in which society requires it to change are undoubtedly linked to feminist and non-feminist themes. The tension between these feminist and non-feminist themes is given shape through this notion of postfeminism. Specifically, this thesis will use Gill's (2007) notion of "postfeminism as a sensibility".

Another critical issue is raised by looking at the changing female body: in what way do bodies transform, and why? In order to investigate this, the notion of the "socially shaped body" by Dolezal (2015) will be used.

2.3 | Theories used in exploring Barbie's narrative

In the context of Barbie and the metamorphosis of the narrative, which will be addressed in chapter five, three theoretical concepts will be used.

In examining how the stories of Barbie are structured, this thesis will look at Kukkonen's (2014) "conceptualizations of plot". These conceptualizations will enable an analysis of how Barbie's stories are structured.

Jenkins's (2009, 2017) notion of "transmedia storytelling" will be employed to investigate the Barbie movies whose plots are structured throughout several media. Through looking at several principles of transmedia storytelling, this thesis investigates in what ways Barbie movies can be considered transmedial and what the effects of this transmediality are.

In researching this transmediality, I will also use Keyes's (2004) concept of the "post-truth era" to see how the changing narrative structures of Barbie movies complicate notions of truth and fiction.

3. | Methodological framework

3.1 | Introduction

This section will explain the chosen methodology for this thesis, interdisciplinary cultural analysis, and contextualize the different forms of analysis within this method.

3.2 | Interdisciplinary Cultural Analysis

In *Travelling Concepts* (2002), Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal argues for the importance and relevance of concept-based methodologies. In Culture Studies, our subjects of analysis are often situated in-between disciplines. Concepts are ideal for analyzing these interdisciplinary case studies since they 'play a crucial part in the traffic between disciplines' (Bal, 2002, p. 34). This interdisciplinary approach is necessary in this thesis since the material of my case study operates in different disciplines as well: I will analyze literary texts, films, and online narrative structures, which all call for slightly different methodological approaches.

3.2.1 | Concepts

According to Bal, 'concepts organize a group of phenomena' (Bal, 2002, p. 31) and 'if well thought through, they offer miniature theories, and in that guise, help in the analysis of objects, situations, states, and other theories' (Bal, 2002, p. 22). However, it is essential to note that concepts are 'neither fixed nor unambiguous' (Bal, 2002, p. 23). The concept of metamorphosis, which will be used in this thesis, is also subject to transformation. Using metamorphosis to look at the changing body in Barbie movies will bring forth an analysis emphasizing visual changes and their consequences. However, looking at the narrative of Barbie movies through the lens of metamorphosis will bring forth more of a structural analysis. In the first case, metamorphosis will thus mean how a being physically changes. In contrast, in

the second case, the word is more employed as a perspective on development. The concept of metamorphosis will thus undergo a metamorphosis itself throughout this thesis.

Furthermore, 'concepts are related to a tradition' (Bal, 2002, p. 28). Using metamorphosis as a concept in this thesis will undoubtedly link the work to earlier works on metamorphosis. It is essential thus to reflect on this tradition. This thesis compares metamorphosis in Barbie to one of the earliest known works on metamorphosis in Western literature: Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

3.3 | Methods within the interdisciplinary cultural analysis

I will thus conduct my thesis as an interdisciplinary cultural analysis, in which a conceptual lens, metamorphosis, is used to analyze reflections of contemporary cultural themes and issues in popular media. Methods used include narrative analysis, close reading, media-specific (film) analysis, and visual analysis, as the material examined primarily includes moving images and the narratives proposed in these works of art. In this section, these methodologies are briefly contextualized.

3.3.1 | Narrative analysis and close reading

'Stories can be realized in media as diverse as literature, stage, ballet, and film. (Hühn et al., 2009, p. 266). A narrative analysis will be performed by looking at the stories of Barbie movies and the story of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Through this narrative analysis, I will look at what the stories in Barbie movies tell us about the metamorphosis of the body, how the narrative structures of Barbie movies have changed, and in what ways the narrative structure and stories within Ovid's *Metamorphoses* relate to Barbie.

In looking at Ovid's *Metamorphoses* specifically, I will be doing what is called "close reading": a practice that emphasizes closely reading texts and constantly switching between

interpreting the meaning of individual words, sentences, and phrases to the entirety of the work and its contexts, in this constant switch between interpretations making meaning of the work as a whole (Greenham, 2019).

3.3.2 | *Visual analysis and media-specific (film) analysis*

While films have 'storytelling capacities and thus belong to a predominantly narrative medium, their specific mode of plurimedial presentation and their peculiar blending of temporal and spatial elements set them apart from forms of narrativity that are principally language-based' (Hühn et al., 2009, p. 212). Thus, it is essential to employ other methodologies than merely a narrative analysis of the Barbie entertainment movies.

A visual analysis method enables us to look at how the subject of research, in this case a movie, is made. What is the art style, how is a visual story narrated, and in what ways are story events communicated in moving images? I will specifically conduct a film analysis, which 'can be done in a wide variety of ways, including thematic, 'auteur'- centred, psycho-analytical or symptomatic, structuralist and semiotic perspectives' (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2013, p. 186). In this thesis, I will conduct a thematic analysis, focussing on depictions of the theme of metamorphosis in Barbie movies.

Furthermore, in film analysis, it is argued that there are six levels of analysis: the frame, shot, scene, sequence, generic stage, and work as a whole (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2013, p. 189). In this thesis, I will move between analyzing specific movie frames, scenes, and the work as a whole. This is similar to the practice of close reading, since I will move back and forth from looking at individual elements to the entire body of work to make sense of the case study as a whole.

4. | Metamorphosis of the body

Transforming bodies in *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale*, *Barbie: A Fairy Secret*, and *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale 2*

4.1 | Introduction

If we consider Barbie in the context of the changing body, drastically different associations might arise. One might think of how the Barbie doll's body has faced criticism and, in recent years, has undergone transformations to become more inclusive (Dockterman, 2019), or how the unrealistic bodily proportions of the character have led many young women down the path of plastic surgery. You might even think of how girls dress Barbie up in different outfits. It is no wonder that the doll has had over two-hundred careers to date (Mattel, 2019): by changing Barbie's wardrobe, the player transforms her into a new being.

This chapter examines four scenes of transformation in *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale, Barbie: A Fairy* Secret, and *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale 2*, which will be analyzed in the context of two main theories: Gill's "postfeminism as a sensibility" and Dolezal's "socially shaped body". Two sub-questions will be used to conduct this analysis: *How can the metamorphosis of the body in Barbie movies be understood as a postfeminist transformation?* and *How does the metamorphosis of the body in Barbie movies depict compliance to the socially shaped body?*

These two sub-questions will be used in investigating how the metamorphosis of the body in Barbie movies can inform us about the role of the changing female body in contemporary society. By focusing on transformations in these Barbie movies, this chapter investigates the complexity of Barbie's changing body beyond the idea of merely playing dress-up and attempts to provide a perspective of Barbie's body beyond the discussion of unattainable beauty ideals.

4.2 | Theoretical framework

Two central theoretical notions will be used in this chapter to analyze scenes of physical transformation in Barbie movies. In this section, the notions of postfeminism as a sensibility and the socially shaped body will be contextualized and further explained.

4.2.1 | Postfeminism as a sensibility

The term postfeminism has been employed in several, sometimes contradictory, contexts. Rosalind Gill, sociologist, cultural theorist, and prominent figure in feminist studies, argues that while postfeminism might 'signal a theoretical position, a type of feminism after the second wave, or a regressive political stance' (Gill, 2007, p. 147-148), it is optimal to think of postfeminism as 'a sensibility that characterises increasing numbers of films, television shows, adverts and other media products' (Gill, 2007, p. 147). This perspective enables the researcher to use postfeminist media culture as a critical object, highlighting the 'contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes within them' (Gill, 2007, p. 149). Approaching postfeminism as a sensibility provides the researcher with features that constitute postfeminist discourse (Gill, 2007, p. 148), of which four will be discussed in this chapter, namely 1) the makeover paradigm, 2) focus upon individualism, individual choice, and empowerment, 3) self-surveillance and discipline, and 4) femininity as a bodily property.

Both Gill and Angela McRobbie, cultural theorist and prominent feminist scholar, argue that a "makeover paradigm" constitutes postfeminist media culture (Gill, 2007, p. 156). This paradigm requires a flawed person, usually a woman, to transform herself with the help of others. Both theorists discuss this paradigm in relation to so-called makeover TV shows which 'move women from one state, now deemed unacceptable, to another, which is a greatly improved state of good looks and well-being' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 124). The goal of a

makeover program is twofold. Firstly, the transformation is physical as the makeover often constitutes clothing advice, a haircut, and the application of make-up, to visually improve the person that undergoes the makeover. Secondly, the transformation is non-physical, as the mental well-being, lifestyle, or confidence of the person that receives the makeover transforms as well. The entanglement of both feminist and non-feminist ideas is omnipresent in this notion. Women are encouraged to become the best version of themselves under the guise of self-love because self-improvement proves that you care for yourself. At the same time, these makeovers also emphasize traditional conceptions of beauty and the idea that the person you currently are is flawed or not "good enough".

This idea of self-transformation, which is central to the makeover paradigm, is connected to the notion of women as autonomous and 'no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever' (Gill, 2007, p. 153). Empowerment and taking control of your own life are emphasized, and every aspect of the female life is seen as constructed through free choice. According to Gill, however, these discourses present women as autonomous agents but 'cannot account for why, if women are just pleasing themselves, and following their own autonomously generated desires, the resulting valued 'look' is so similar' (Gill, 2007, p. 154). These notions of free choice and the woman as autonomous in postfeminist discourse thus do not consider societal pressures or social, institutional, or systematic inequalities.

Closely related to this emphasis on personal choice in postfeminist media culture are the notions of self-surveillance, self-monitoring, and self-discipline. One of the ways in which these notions have become increasingly visible is through the 'focus upon the psychological – upon the requirement to transform oneself and remodel one's interior life' (Gill, 2007, p. 155). In postfeminist media culture, the mind also requires transformation: 'the self has become a project to be evaluated, advised, disciplined and improved or brought 'into recovery' (Gill,

2007, p. 156). Women are told to change to become whom others require them to be: being a good partner, friend, colleague or daughter requires changing yourself.

The final feature discussed is the notion of femininity as a bodily property. In postfeminist media culture, 'it is possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity' (Gill, 2007, p. 149). Besides the fact that the body is the source of femininity in postfeminist media culture, the feminine body is also the primary source of power for women (Gill, 2007, p. 149). Through the body, specifically the socially accepted body, women gain status and thus are deemed powerful. Lastly, an essential feature of the body in postfeminist media discourse is the fact that the body is considered 'a window to the individual's interior life' (Gill, 2007, p. 150): the emotional status of a woman is visible through her body, appearance, and habits.

4.2.2 | The socially shaped body

In *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, Luna Dolezal investigates the role of shame in modern society. She argues that 'shame can only arise within a framework of normative ideals, arising from one's social life, which instantiate binary codes around what is considered 'normal' and 'ab-normal' or 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable,' and so on' (Dolezal, 2015, p. 53-54). In investigating which bodies are deemed acceptable or unacceptable, Dolezal looks at writings on the way bodies are shaped by society. She explains Foucault's notion of power and authority shaping the body in and beyond institutional contexts (Dolezal, 2015, p. 58) and describes Elias's idea that the 'body subject is constantly vigilant, ensuring that his or her appearance and comportment are in line with prevailing socio-cultural and political norms and standards' (Dolezal, 2015, p. 70).

Through these theorists, Dolezal examines how shame and dissatisfaction with the body are not an individual matter but part of 'a systematic (and oppressive) social phenomenon'

(Dolezal, 2015, p. 107). With this, she emphasizes that not only does our socialization shape our ideas on what is normal and abnormal, but this social body is also co-created through cultural and political forces.

Furthermore, what we perceive as an ideal body is subject to change: 'this ideal body is characterized by the enduring physical features of the normate coupled with the constantly shifting variations of appearance and style based on the whims of fashion' (Dolezal, 2015, p. 109). This can be seen in our 'endless culture of restyling and self-improvement, centred on the body' (Dolezal, 2015, p. 108). This culture emphasizes that the bodies we inhabit are never "good enough" and need constant reinvention and alteration.

4.3 | Transforming bodies in Barbie

In *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale* (2010), Barbie plays the role of Merliah, a sixteen-year-old surf champion who discovers she is half-mermaid. She travels to the underwater world of Oceana on a mission to rescue her mother, Queen Calissa, and free the kingdom of its tyrannic ruler Eris. In *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale 2* (2012), Merliah once again has to defeat Eris, who threatens to disturb the ancient ritual that the royal family has to perform to ensure the prosperity of Oceana. In *Barbie: A Fairy Secret* (2011), Barbie is a successful actress. When her boyfriend Ken gets kidnapped by a group of fairies, Barbie and her friends go on a quest in the fairy kingdom of Gloss Angeles to free him.

This section will discuss four scenes of transformation within these three movies: moments in which the main character's body is transformed, either through magical intervention or through the help of others.

In *Barbie in A Mermaid Tale*, Merliah and her dolphin friend Zuma visit the store owned by mermaids Kayla and Zylie to give Merliah a mermaid tail to disguise her legs. A fake tail must cover Merliah's legs because if the evil ruler Eris discovers there is a human intruder in her kingdom, Merliah's safety is at risk. In this so-called "tail-makeover", given shape through a traditional makeover scene in which the main character tries on different outfits and her friends are judges, Merliah tries on tails with matching tops and accessories.

Figure 1: Merliah trying on a gothic-inspired outfit (26:05)

Figure 2: Merliah wearing a brightly-colored outfit (26:31)

Figure 3: Merliah wearing an evening-gown-inspired outfit (26:48)

Figure 4: Merliah's final choice of outfit: a pink, purple and blue tail with a matching top (27:05)

A similar scene is pictured in *Barbie: A Fairy Secret*. Upon entering the fairy kingdom of Gloss Angeles, Barbie and her friend Raquelle are required to obtain a set of fairy wings to blend in. They visit a wing store owned by Reena, and both receive a pair of wings.

Figure 5: Reena in her wing store (29:27)

Figure 6: Barbie with her new wings (29:45)

According to Gill, makeovers in postfeminist media culture are often given by 'relationship, design or lifestyle experts' (Gill, 2007, p. 156). Both Kayla & Zylie (the brunette and blonde mermaids depicted in the background in figures 1, 2, and 3) and Reena (pictured in figure 5) operate as these experts. They advise the main character about what she should be wearing and how she should act to be considered a successful mermaid or fairy.

While the ultimate goal of these makeovers is for the main character to blend into society, the makeover also has additional consequences. Through their transformation, both characters gain an ability: with her tail, Merliah can swim as well as the other mermaids can, and Barbie's wings enable her to fly. This power is obtained through metamorphosis: both characters did not have this ability before the makeover. Obtaining this ability aids the character in blending into society since she can now do what others around her can do. Obtaining this ability improves the well-being of our main characters as well: they are less likely to be scrutinized by others, which can give them a feeling of security, and they can do something that they were not able to do before, which can provide them with a boost in confidence and the

power to act. In a sense, this transformation turns these characters into different beings: they are now mermaids or fairies, or a hybrid of their human form and the entity they transformed into, since both the newly gained ability and the visual change amount to them being perceived differently by the outside world.

Furthermore, the makeovers are successful in improving the looks of both characters. This is most obvious in the case of Merliah: she is presented with several outfits from which she can choose, thus making the makeover a site of experimentation with personal style. In the case of Barbie, however, we can argue that her looks are also improved: a previously regular or basic outfit, she is wearing a simple purple jacket and jeans, suddenly looks very interesting because of the addition of the enormous, brightly colored pink wings.

As McRobbie (2009) argues, a makeover creates an improved state of both looks and well-being. As we see in the tail- and wing makeovers, well-being, and looks are improved. A critical point to make, however, is that both these makeovers take place out of necessity: without transforming into either a fairy or a mermaid, and thus remaining human, our main characters would face negative consequences, as the presence of their original body is not accepted in the societies they inhabit in these movies. This further establishes these two transformations as postfeminist makeovers since both characters go from a state of being *"not good enough"* to being accepted by society.

4.3.2 | Becoming your true self and serving others: transformation as a choice and duty

It is not just in these makeover sequences that Barbie's body transforms.

A crucial transformation in *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale* occurs when Merliah, while battling the antagonist Eris, is sucked into Eris's magical whirlpool and cannot escape. Her fake tail is not strong enough to swim out of the strong current of the whirlpool conjured up by Eris. Merliah employs the help of Dreamfish: a magical fish that can offer you your greatest desire.

Merliah's greatest desire is to return to Malibu and her human life. She realizes, however, that if she were to go back, the city of Oceana would still be in danger. She does not accept Dreamfish's help and says: 'Whatever else I am, I am Merliah, half-mermaid princess of Oceana. And it is my duty to protect my subjects' (Wood, 2010, 57:03-57:10). Through speaking these words, Merliah embraces her mermaid-half and unlocks an intrinsic magical power that transforms her body.

This transformation is visualized through the appearance of bright- and light-pink sparkles swirling around Merliah's body while a soft and bright-sounding melody plays in the background. The screen then goes white before cutting back to Merliah, who now has her hair down in loose waves instead of the ponytail she has worn throughout the rest of the movie, and whose legs have transformed into a pink tail with a floral pattern.

Figure 7: The process of Merliah's
transformation (57:23)
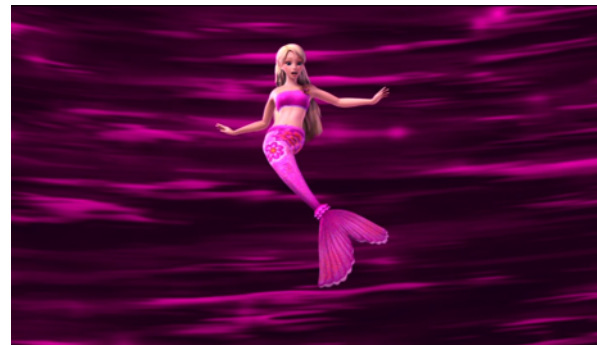
Figure 8: Merliah with her new appearance
as a mermaid (57:50)

In the scene, Merliah consciously decides to become a mermaid. While she could not anticipate that her affirmation would prompt a drastic magical transformation, she explicitly chooses to stay in Oceana to help the mermaids and embraces her mermaid-self.

This transformation contains several elements of postfeminism: there is an emphasis on the autonomous choice that Merliah makes, for instance. This choice also results in Merliah

being her 'true' self: this emphasis on autonomy and individuality is a central element of the postfeminist sensibility. Furthermore, this transformation depicts Merliah's strong sense of self-discipline and self-surveillance: she consciously monitors or disciplines her own wishes because she feels like she is being selfish. To be a good daughter to Queen Calissa and an excellent princess to her subjects, Merliah must reconsider her ideals and desires to transform into whom she needs to become.

Furthermore, this transformation contains the elements of a classical makeover as discussed in the previous two transformation scenes: Merliah changes both aesthetically (her hair, top, and tail change styles) and internally, as she is physically stronger and more confident in her own identity.

An essential feature of this transformation is what Merliah deems most remarkable about her transformed body: as soon as she has transformed, she says: 'A tail! A real mermaid tale!' (Wood, 2010, 57:43-57:46) before testing her speed and agility. She does not comment on the color, nor does she say something about the appearance of the tail. 'And it's strong!' she exclaims (Wood, 2010, 57:54-57:56). This tail is strong enough to escape Eris's whirlpool, and Merliah's impression of this transformation is primarily practical. This emphasis on power can be regarded as a message of girl power: girls can be strong too, Barbie seems to say. However, the strength that Merliah suddenly has resides in her body: it is not her resourcefulness that helps her defeat Eris, nor is it her humility or intelligence. Merliah's source of power is purely physical. This can be explained through the postfeminist idea of femininity as a bodily property. While most postfeminist media visualize this notion through sexuality as a source of female power, Barbie provides her viewers with a less sexual version that is suitable for all audiences and still portrays the idea that the power of girls lies in how they use their bodies.

Similar to this transformation is Merliah's final transformation in *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale 2*. In the movie, Eris plans to take over Oceana again by undermining the crucial "changing of the tides" ceremony that Merliah's mother, Queen Calissa, has to perform. Eris captures Calissa, which forces Merliah to perform the ceremony. This is not without danger, however. Performing the changing of the tides will change whoever performs the ceremony into their *"fullest self"*. Merliah, who currently can choose to change either into a mermaid or into a human with a magical necklace that Calissa created, will presumably permanently change into a mermaid when performing the ceremony. Nevertheless, Merliah once again chooses her royal duties over her own desires. 'The royal mermaid on the throne, her fullest merself now is known (…) I wish to become a mermaid,' (Lau, 2012, 58:25-59:09) she speaks, and with these words, Merliah activates a magical power that transforms her once more.

The transformative process is visualized through very similar imagery as the previous magical transformation: there is white light, sparkles, and light music, altogether making the process very visually pleasing and seemingly painless.

Figure 9: Merliah prompts the

transformation (59:09)

Figure 10: Merliah transforms (59:43)

Figure 11: Merliah's final mermaid form (1:02:22)

Much like the previous one, this transformation changes Merliah's appearance and increases her strength. For instance, her tail is now multicolored, and her hair is styled. The transformation has even made a crown appear on top of her head. Furthermore, through this transformation, Merliah is gifted magical abilities: she obtains the magical power to counteract Eris's curses and eradicate the antagonist, and Merliah can now change into a mermaid or human whenever she wants without the help of the magical necklace. These two features classify the transformation as a makeover.

Furthermore, the elements of the postfeminist sensibility that were present in the previous transformation are visualized in this scene. Merliah consciously chooses to transform into a mermaid: the choice now is even more consciously made than during her previous transformation, as she is aware of the magical transformative powers at work in the mermaid world. This choice is a measure of self-discipline as well. Merliah is mindful that the ceremony might permanently transform her into a mermaid, which will disable her from participating in human life again: the moment before transformation, she deems her duty as a princess more important than her desires. Lastly, Merliah's newly found powers reside in her transformed body, emphasizing that power is a physical attribute.

4.3.3 | *Adhering to the status quo: changing into an acceptable body*

Looking at these four moments of transformation, one main point can be made: all transformations are performed out of necessity. In the first two transformations, Merliah and Barbie must transform themselves to blend into society. If they were to keep their original bodies, they would endanger themselves. In this case, thus, the transformation is a matter of life-and-death, dramatically put. The other two transformations discussed are necessary as well. Merliah needs to transform into a mermaid when escaping Eris's whirlpool because she otherwise will be stuck forever. During the changing of the tides ceremony, the entirety of Oceana is at risk if Merliah does not perform the ritual and thus does not transform.

These transformations have another element in common: they grant the transformed subjects, Merliah and Barbie, a specific ability: in the case of Merliah's first transformation, it is the ability to swim like a mermaid, while Barbie's transformation enables her to fly. Merliah's second and third transformations both grant her more powers. The second transformation enables Merliah to swim even better to escape Eris's whirlpool, and her third transformation gives her the power to counteract Eris's curses and the ability to transform herself into a mermaid and a human whenever she pleases.

Through these transformations, the Barbie character transforms into a socially acceptable body: in the mermaid world, she is turned into a mermaid, while in the fairy kingdom, she is a fairy. These transformations are depicted as merely functional, and there is no reflection on the societal pressures that enable or require these transformations.

Besides the functional changes that the transformations bring forth, there are minor aesthetic changes as well through colours, hairstyles and accessoiries. How is it that, even through a drastical magical transformation, only small details of Barbie's body are aesthetically

improved, and no more drastic aesthetic bodily changes can be observed, through different body shapes or facial features, for instance?

Barbie is thin, with long legs and decently-sized breasts; her skin is not too light but not considered too dark either, her hair is blonde, voluminous but not unruly, and her teeth are white: she is the epitome of Western beauty. The fact that Barbie's body, apart from the addition of magical wings or a mermaid tail, does not change during the transformative process illustrates how Barbie's look, the Western standard, is dominant in contemporary society. Even in a magical transformation, the most drastic aesthetic change that Barbie's body can undergo (the addition of a fairy-wing or mermaid tail is considered a functional change) is a change in color, an addition of a pattern, or a slight curl in her hair. Nothing else can change because everything else about Barbie is already considered ideal.

4.4 | Conflicting forces

By using change as a central theme in the stories, the Barbie movies normalize change as a part of day-to-day life: change is good, necessary, and encouraged, and all processes of change are portrayed as pleasant and positive. While the process of change is more nuanced than how Barbie movies seem to display it, normalizing bodily change in stories catered to young girls can help construct an attitude of positivity around the changing female body. This normalization and positive attitude towards change are necessary because the consumers of this content, the young girls, will undoubtedly undergo extreme processes of bodily change within several years of watching the movies.

In these scenes of transformation, however, conflicting forces seem to be at play: the Barbie character argues that you need to be yourself while explicitly stating multiple times that she needs to change because it is her duty to others. Furthermore, the mere idea of becoming your "true self" seems to be at odds with the concept of continuous transformation. Lastly,

while these movies portray transformations as purely functional, all transformations constitute aesthetic, non-functional changes as well.

Similar conflicting attitudes are present in our society. There is a growing focus on body positivity, the idea that every body is worth being approached with kindness and positivity. Simultaneously, however, magazines, tv-shows, and medical professionals still participate in drastic narratives of both fat- and skinny-shaming, thus mistreating people for their size. This is similar to how Barbie's encouragement to change clashes with her attitude around being your authentic self. Furthermore, while uniqueness is deemed an asset, more and more people strive to look like others through surgical intervention. It is not just in regards to the physical body that these factors are at play in our day-to-day lives. Women are expected to have full-time jobs and stand up for themselves while being scrutinized for working too much when having a child, being given the label "difficult to work with" when speaking up about inequalities in the workplace. This is also present in Barbie: being yourself and choosing whom you want to be is essential, but you must simultaneously act according to what others expect of you.

What cannot be ignored, however, is the overwhelmingly positive attitude that these movies seem to have about change. Changing is always a pleasant process; the result is always positive, and when we look at what actually really changes, the transformations are also quite trivial. Yes, the characters experience an increase in power, but they were already powerful in a different way: Barbie in *A Fairy Secret* is an award-winning Hollywood actress with high social status, and Merliah is a princess loved by the entirety of Oceana. Yes, the characters become conventionally "prettier" through changes in hairstyles as well as in clothing, but as literal representations of Barbie dolls, they were already the standard of what society deems beautiful. Change is represented as pleasant, positive and comfortable because an already powerful person

becomes more powerful, an already pretty person prettier: these stories of change are stories of change for the privileged. What does it mean to have to change when you are not yet powerful, are not yet considered pretty, when you do not enjoy the privileges that the character of Barbie in the movies, as well as what Barbie represents, the ideal Western woman, have? The process might be more challenging or less successful, or more invasive and impactful on the day-to-day life of the character. The Barbie movies however cannot really explore this, simply because of the lack of diversity in their choice of main character. They are, after all, bound to the character (or a slight variation on the character) of Barbie.

All in all, we see that the metamorphosis of the body in Barbie movies is a complex issue. Through a narrative of individuality, girl power, and functional change, Barbie tries to shift the narrative of the female body from a passive and objectified entity to an active and powerful person. These stories however overlook how the main character has an enormous amount of privilege both in-narrative as well as outside of the story world and how she re-establishes pre-existing and unattainable notions of what bodies should look like. These stories also, through their conflicting attitudes, embody the complexity that having a female body entails: having a female body is both being an active agent while simultaneously being silenced; it is being told to be unique while also having to conform; it is choosing yourself while serving others.

Barbie's body thus entails more than just the full face of make-up, straight blonde hair and unattainable bodily proportions. In looking at stories of bodily change within Barbie entertainment, we see both what change means in a life of privilege, and how the contradictory feminist and non-feminist themes are omnipresent in today's society and the entertainment products it brings forth.

5. | Metamorphosis of the narrative

Transforming narratives in *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper*, *Barbie: The Princess & The Popstar*, and *Barbie: Princess Adventure*

5.1 | Introduction

With thirty-nine movies released to date, the Barbie entertainment movies are bound to have repeated story prompts at least a few times. In fact, one story, that of two girls who look identical and switch places, has been reworked three times already: in 2004, 2012, and 2020. How different are these movies if the narratives follow the same prompt, and what is the influence of modern-day media on the execution of these works?

This chapter examines how the construction of the narrative of Barbie movies has changed. The constructions of the narratives of *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper, Barbie: The Princess & The Popstar,* and *Barbie: Princess Adventure* will be analyzed in the context of three main theories and concepts: Kukkonen's plot, Jenkins's transmedia storytelling, and Keyes's post-truth era. Two sub-questions will be used to conduct this analysis, namely *How can the metamorphosis of the narrative of Barbie movies be understood as a transmedial transformation?* and *How does the increase of transmedia storytelling in Barbie movies complicate the relationship between fact and fiction?*

These two sub-questions will be used in investigating how the transformation of the narrative of Barbie movies can inform us about the increased digitalization within storytelling in contemporary society. Furthermore, this chapter will look at the problematization of the relationship between fact and fiction in contemporary media.

5.2 | Theoretical framework

Three central notions will be used in this chapter to analyze the narratological transformation of Barbie movies. In this section, I will further explain the notions of the "conceptualizations of plot", "transmedia storytelling", and the "post-truth era".

5.2.1 | Conceptualizations of plot

Karin Kukkonen, professor in Comparative Literature, explains that the term plot is used to designate how 'events and character's actions in a story are arranged' (Kukkonen, 2014, p. 706). These patterns through which events and actions are arranged can be constructed through the narrative or concluded by readers. This causes plot to lie 'between the events of a narrative on the level of story and their presentation on the level of discourse' (Kukkonen, 2014, p. 706).

Concretely, Kukkonen distinguishes between three basic conceptualizations of plot: plot as a fixed, global structure; plot as progressive structuration; and plot as part of the authorial design. In this analysis, two of these conceptualizations will be mentioned and used: plot as a "fixed structure" and plot as "progressive structuration".

Firstly, plot is conceptualized as a fixed structure in which 'the configuration of the arrangement of all story events, from beginning, middle to end, is considered' (Kukkonen, 2014, p. 706). Conceiving of plot as this fixed structure means that 'plot becomes a pattern which yields coherence to the narrative' (Kukkonen, 2014, p. 707): through the fixed structure of plot points, a narrative becomes coherent and understandable. In other words, in the case of plot being a fixed structure, the reader must encounter the plot in a certain way (usually in a particular order) to construct a coherent narrative.

Secondly, plot is conceptualized as progressive structuration, which considers 'the connections between story events, motivations and consequences as readers perceive them' (Kukkonen, 2014, p. 706). In this conceptualization, the plot 'develops dynamically'

(Kukkonen, 2014, p. 707). This conceptualization considers how the reader, or viewer, encounters plot points and constructs these points into a meaningful narrative. Plot as progressive structuration, thus, can provide a perspective on how readers construct narratives in different ways if they encounter story points in a different order or through different media.

5.2.2 | Transmedia storytelling

Media scholar Henry Jenkins describes transmedia as 'some kind of structured relationship between different media platforms and practices' (2017). In an attempt to distinguish transmedia from related concepts, like multimedia and cross-platform, Jenkins emphasizes that 'transmedial approaches are multimodal (…), intertextual (…) and dispersed' (Jenkins, 2017). For Jenkins, transmedia storytelling is 'a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience' (Jenkins, 2009b).

As a more concrete elaboration of how transmedial stories are constructed, Jenkins characterizes the storytelling practice through core principles (2009a, 2009b). Three of these principles will be examined further in the context of Barbie movies: "drillability", "immersion", and "extractability".

Drillability, Jenkins quotes Jason Mittell in explaining this principle, is 'a mode of forensic fandom that encourages viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling' (Jenkins, 2009b). Through the construction of a story through different media, viewers are prompted to 'drill' into stories, investigating all available content to find new information that adds to their experience of the narrative.

The concepts of extractability and immersion, in turn, are closely related since they both refer to 'the perceived relationship between the transmedia fiction and our everyday experiences' (Jenkins, 2009a). With immersion, it is emphasized how transmedial narratives

provide viewers with opportunities to enter into the story world, while extractability refers to how the narrative can be implemented into the daily lives of viewers. 'In immersion, then, the consumer enters into the world of the story, while in extractability, the fan takes aspects of the story away with them as resources they deploy in the spaces of their everyday life' (Jenkins, 2009a).

5.2.3 | The post-truth era

In *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, author Ralph Keyes investigates the role of lying in 21st-century society. He argues that, while lying has been a key factor in human communication since the dawn of times (Keyes, 2004, Whatever Happened to Honesty? section, para. 2), our current era is characterized by something he calls "post-truth". In a post-truth society, 'we think less about honesty and dishonesty per se and more about degrees of either one' (Keyes, 2004, Ledger-Book Morality section, para. 1).

According to Keyes, this nuanced view on truth and lies in our society is undoubtedly linked to contemporary media and finds its basis in the rise of television, through which 'viewers are inundated from earliest childhood with this medium's mistruths, half-truths, and outright deceptions' (Keyes, 2004, From Beaver to Baghdad section, para. 1). Television, according to Keyes, portrays life as coherent stories, which in turn prompt viewers to attempt to construct their own lives according to those coherent, streamlined narratives as well, encouraging them to bend the truth to achieve the desired narrative construction. Besides television, Keyes acknowledges that 'the World Wide Web is a mishmash of rumor passing as fact, press releases posted as news articles, deceptive advertising, malicious rumors, and outright scams' (Keyes, 2004, The Tangled Web section, para. 2).

Our ambivalent attitude towards honesty and dishonesty has far-reaching consequences: from the borders of fiction and non-fiction being blurred (Keyes, 2004, Narrative Truths

section, para. 2) to so-called creative journalism and a general feeling of mistrust. Keyes even argues that the post-truth era might give way to a so-called "lie bias" in which 'we'll question the veracity of anything we're told' (Keyes, 2004, Truth Bias to Lie Bias section, para. 2). To avoid this doomsday scenario, Keyes emphasizes that we must create and encourage 'a context that rewards honesty and penalizes dishonesty' (Keyes, 2004, Honesty Redux section, para. 1).

5.3 | Transforming narratives in Barbie

The three movies analyzed in this chapter offer different versions of the same story prompt, which in summary is the following: Two girls, strangers who look identical, come from drastically different backgrounds. Both girls long for different lives. Upon meeting, they decide to switch places, either through initiative or necessity.

5.3.1 | 'Enclosed' narratives: stories on discs

In *Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper* (2004), Barbie stars as princess Anneliese, a young royal forced to marry king Dominick to save her kingdom, and Erika, a poor seamstress working for a vicious woman to pay off her parents' debt. When Princess Anneliese is captured by the evil Preminger, a royal servant scheming to take over the throne, Erika and the royal tutor Julian devise a plan to rescue Anneliese. Through impersonating Anneliese, Erika meets King Dominick, who falls in love with her, and while rescuing the princess, tutor Julian acknowledges his feelings for the royal. Preminger's plan to steal the throne is ruined through resourcefulness and expert impersonation. Princess Anneliese marries her true love, Julian, while Erika chooses to marry king Dominick.

The plot of *Princess and the Pauper* is told chronologically and is presented to the viewer on a DVD. The story takes shape through a fixed structure, in which 'plot becomes a pattern which yields coherence to the narrative' (Kukkonen, 2014, p. 707). There are no other

media formats, nor any mediated extensions beyond the film, consequently not making *Princess and the Pauper* a transmedia experience.

This does not mean that the *Princess and the Pauper* DVD does not leave room for interaction. Through the DVD menu, as seen in figures 12 and 13, the viewer can choose which specific scene they would like to watch and whether they want to view the sing-along version in which all songs are subtitled in karaoke style.

Figure 12: The main DVD menu of *Princess and the Pauper*

Figure 13: The secondary DVD menu titled 'More Fun'

While there is space for interaction with elements of the narrative, the story of *Princess and the Pauper* is contained within the DVD and does not extend beyond the disc. Turning off the DVD player closes the story: Barbie will not be encountered unless the movie is played again.

5.3.2 | *Broadening the narrative: a stepping stone*

Barbie: The Princess & The Popstar (2012) shows Barbie as princess Tori of Meribella, who longs for a life of less responsibility, and popstar Keira, whose life has become so busy that she does not have time to do what she loves most: writing songs. When Keira performs at the festival celebrating Meribella's five-hundredth anniversary, the girls meet and discover that they look identical. By disguising themselves as one another, Tori and Keira trade places to

experience a life different from their own, but then, tragedy strikes. The Diamond Gardenia, a unique plant that grows diamonds without which the kingdom of Meribella will perish, is stolen by the evil Seymour Crider. Through collaboration, Keira and Tori defeat Crider, save the kingdom, and, most importantly, discover that their own lives are not that bad after all.

Similar to *Princess and the Pauper*, the story of Tori and Keira is presented to the viewers via the DVD. However, a difference between the 2004 movie and the 2012 version is that the narrative of *The Princess & The Popstar* slightly extends into another media form.

On the official Barbie website, a minute-and-a-half-long video titled "Princess and the Popstar Bloopers" can be found, as pictured in figure 14 (Mattel, n.d.). The description of this video states that the blooper reel will contain 'backstage hilarity' and shows several characters from the movie, among which Tori and Keira, dancing while one of the movie's songs, *A Perfect Day*, plays over the footage. Contrary to what the title might suggest, the video does not depict classic bloopers: no lines are being messed up by characters or scenes going wrong, for instance. This media extension acts as a backstage view, showing the characters goofing around and having fun outside the movie's narrative.
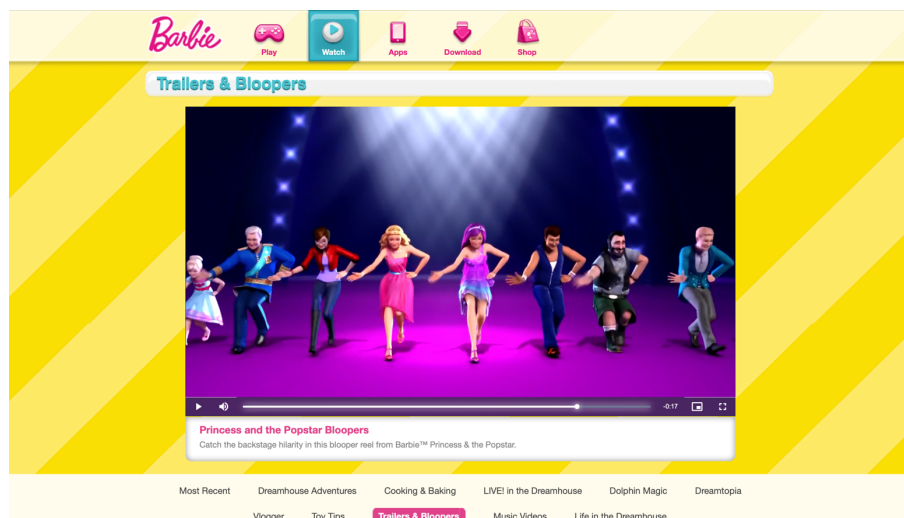

Figure 14: The video on the Barbie official website

The addition of the video on the Barbie website shows a move towards a more broadened, transmedial narrative. The video itself does not really add any substance to the narrative: we do not see new characters or new perspectives beyond the story we already have encountered in the movie, mainly because we see a bunch of characters dancing without dialogue. It is thus not an integral part of the story, something that transmedia extensions are required to be. With *The Princess & The Popstar*, the Barbie movie is taking a step toward transmediality by adding a new media outlet to the narrative construction of their story. This movie, situated between *Princess and the Pauper* and the last movie discussed in this chapter (*Princess Adventure*), is a stepping stone towards a genuinely transmedial Barbie story.

5.3.3 | *The transmedial Barbie world*

Barbie Princess Adventure (2020) tells the story of Barbie, a 17-year-old vlogger from Malibu, and Princess Amelia of Floravia, who will soon be crowned queen. When visiting the kingdom upon invitation, Barbie switches places with princess Amelia for a week so the girls can experience each other's lives since they look identical. While posing as Amelia, Barbie meets the evil prince Johan, who plans to take over Amelia's kingdom and become ruler of both Floravia and his own kingdom of Johanistan. Through creative thinking and the power of friendship, Amelia and Barbie defeat Johan. Amelia becomes queen, and Barbie goes back to Malibu, but not before filming a vlog together, celebrating their victory and newfound friendship.

While the story of Barbie and Amelia, similar to that of Anneliese & Erika and Tori & Keira, is told chronologically, a vital element of the movie is Barbie's vlog career. On several occasions, the video frame is constructed through the perspective of a vlog. We see Barbie while filming herself and her friends or get a view of a computer displaying the vlog, for

example. Barbie even mentions that she and Amelia will make a video that will be uploaded later: this, in turn, directs the viewer to the Barbie YouTube channel.

Figure 15: Barbie while vlogging in

Princess Adventure (5:09)

Figure 16: Barbie shows her YouTube

Channel on her computer screen in *Princess*

Adventure (5:30)

When searching for 'Barbie and Amelia' on YouTube, a video on Barbie's Official YouTube channel posted on September 11, 2020, ten days after the release of the movie *Princess Adventure,* pops up. In this video, which has accumulated over 1,4 million views to date and is titled *'FUN GAME VLOG WITH QUEEN AMELIA!* 👑💕*'*, Barbie introduces 'a special guest who came from really far away to visit' (Barbie, 2020, 0:05-0:08) before inviting Amelia, now titled queen, into the frame. Before participating in the vlog challenge, which consists of Barbie and Amelia describing words from a piece of paper that the other person has to guess, Amelia tells the viewer how she met Barbie. 'Did you know she [Barbie] came out to visit me in Floravia and encouraged me to be the leader that I wanted to be?' (Barbie, 2020, 0:38-0:46). The remainder of the three-minute video is spent doing the challenge while the girls simultaneously chat about their previous adventure and further establish their friendship.

In this case, the movie's plot is conceived through *progressive structuration* since the narrative as a whole is constructed throughout an unfolding narrative. Readers or viewers

'ponder the reasons for events and the motivations of characters and consider the consequences of actions in their quest to make sense of the narrative as a whole' (Kukkonen, 2014, p. 707). A crucial point of plot as progressive structuration is how the viewer encounters the different elements of the plot since this influences how they perceive the entire story. Someone might have stumbled upon the YouTube video before seeing the movie, which will affect how they perceive the story in the movie. This naturally works the other way around as well.

With this transmedial extension of the narrative presented in *Barbie Princess Adventure*, several principles of transmedia storytelling come to the foreground. The drillability principle is present because the plot is structured throughout multiple media forms, the DVD or Netflix stream and YouTube, which enable the viewer to drill into the story world and find out what happened to characters outside of the context of the narrative they first encountered. By broadening the story-world of Barbie to YouTube, Mattel gives its viewers the possibility to immerse themselves into the world of Barbie with extra content.

The extractability principle of transmedia, how viewers can extract an element from the story-world and implement it in their daily lives, is done in several ways in the Barbie Vlogs. By performing a challenge in the video, which acts as a fun game between friends, viewers are prompted to play the same game in their day-to-day lives. More importantly, however, the Barbie Vlog Channel's extractability principle lies in the way that 'the Barbie vlogs appear to have been produced with active consideration of children's psychology' (Britton, 2021, p. 4). Through encountering Barbie's vlog with Amelia, viewers are prompted to watch the other, usually three-minute-long videos on the YouTube channel, which range from the Barbie character performing funny challenges and games to in-depth talks about feminism and the need to speak up for yourself.

With this media extension, the Barbie character is transported out of the narrative of the movies she plays in and into the "real", day-to-day world as she is presented as just an ordinary 17-year-old girl from Malibu who makes YouTube videos as a hobby. What are the consequences of this added way of presenting the character?

5.4 | Questions of reality

Through being present on several forms of media, Barbie now can continuously interfere in the daily life of children: one cannot simply take the DVD out of the DVD player, put it back into the box, and call it a day: Barbie will later be seen on tv, or encountered during a scroll on YouTube. According to Smith et al. (2018), 81% of parents with children under the age of eleven let their children watch YouTube videos. Parents do not even have to monitor their child's online activities through the YouTube Kids app, because it disables the comment feature and only shows child-appropriate content. This possible continuous exposure to mediated versions of Barbie problematizes the relationship between fact and fiction for children from a young age. The fictional character operates in multiple spaces, of which one is the YouTube vlog which poses Barbie as "her real self" and is a format that relies heavily on showing your "real" life and a look "behind the scenes".

It is not only the fact that Barbie now is omnipresent on several platforms that helps construct the idea of Barbie as "real". Barbie's videos range from general content on vlog channels, such as challenges, tags, and routines, to interviews and inspirational talks. Barbie shows her day-to-day life in videos such as *Friend Tag With Renee*, in which she and her best friend Renee discuss their friendship, and *Barbie: A Day in the Life*, in which Barbie shows her daily routine. In videos such as *Celebrating Lunar New Year with Renee* and *Cooking With My Dad for Black History Month!* (in which a new character of African-American heritage, coincidentally also named Barbie Roberts, appears), the Barbie Vlogs refer to contemporary

issues and make content that coincides precisely with the daily lives of their audience, as it connects to holidays, dates, and social phenomena. Lastly, a video like *Exclusive Interview: People Magazine Catches Up With Barbie* is a way in which a non-fictional media source like People Magazine interviews a fictional figure. These videos attempt to further establish Barbie as a "real" person.

It is the question of whether these specific ways of transmedia storytelling are enriching for young viewers. In a day and age in which many fully-developed and conscious adults lack the critical digital skills to separate fact from fiction, we should wonder whether these elaborate transmedia story-worlds catered to entertain children are, at least partly, problematic.

As Keyes mentions in his work on the post-truth era, 'the borders between fiction and non-fiction have grown increasingly vague' (Keyes, 2004, Narrative Truths section, para. 2). The depiction of the Barbie character as a "real" vlogger is a way in which this border between fiction and non-fiction is blurred: a fictional, animated character interacts with real-world issues, often in real-time, and is presented as human through the encounters in the vlogs.

Mattel is a company, and 'by definition, its primary goal is to accrue capital' (Britton, 2021. p. 4). Indeed, broadening the narrative of Barbie is most possibly primarily done to capitalize off of the brand because, as Mattel explains, 'they look at what products a girl is using or interacting with, from the moment she wakes up, to when she goes to bed at night' (Rajagopal, 2021). The problem lies not only in the omnipresence of Barbie because of this capitalization, however, but also in the fact that presenting a fictional character as real in such an elaborate way might be problematic for how children construct notions of fact and fiction.

By spreading the plot of Barbie movies throughout several forms of media, viewers are encouraged to dive into the Barbie story-world, employ material of this world in their day-to-day lives and perceive Barbie as a real person.

Constructing Barbie's narrative throughout different media is a way for Mattel to provide their audience with a rich story world that the viewer can explore and increase their profits by making their audience more likely to buy or consume their products. We could thus regard this development in transmedia narratives as both positive and negative. It creates content for children that is fun, inspiring, pedagogically sound, but also damaging, as it ultimately is a capitalist tool designed to make more profit.

This increased transmediality of Barbie movies thus has two sides. On the one hand, the transmedial nature of the newer Barbie movies reflects contemporary society: stories are no longer singular and isolated but emphasize multiplicity and are spread out over various platforms. Presenting children's entertainment in this way can be seen as a way to familiarize these children with the media environments they will undoubtedly inhibit for the rest of their lives. Through the character of Barbie, children encounter a playground of media that they can safely investigate while being entertained and learning about the world they live in. Presenting the Barbie story world in a transmedial way thus is a truthful depiction of life in the 21st century – it is a blend of fact and fiction, something to be encountered in multiple spaces at once, from all over the world. Furthermore, by using the Barbie character to comment on real-world themes and issues such as feminism, racism, and mental health, the children are familiarized with complex themes through a character they already know and can interact with. With this, Barbie entertainment also acts as a site of education.

On the other hand, however, we can argue that challenging Barbie's position as a fictional character by making her appear more "real" is problematic. Many people, including adults with capable cognitive skills, struggle to determine whether the information presented is factual. Presenting young viewers with these elaborate story-worlds that create ambiguity by combining urgent, modern-day topics and established media with fictional characters

complicates notions of truth and fiction. This makes taking a critical look at the omnipresence of Barbie's narratives in different media landscapes catered to children and the increased establishment of Barbie as "real" necessary.

In a media environment that prioritizes engaging, dramatic narratives over truthful stories, we as consumers 'all feel pressure to make the stories of our lives go with the narrative flow' (Keyes, 2004, Narratives, Story Lines, and Dramatic Arcs section, para. 3). Barbie entertainment products present a fictional character as real through these predetermined narrative flows, and this might have far-reaching consequences for how children, the consumers of these videos, perceive their own lives. As Keyes states, encountering engaging, extremely polished and edited stories everywhere might prompt us to shape our lives according to those clearly-cut narratives. If we feel the need to narrate our lives instead of experiencing them, we might be more prone to lying to ensure that our lives are up to par, for instance. Furthermore, only encountering perfectly narrated stories might make us feel dissatisfied with our own, not-so-cleanly-narrated lives because real stories are becoming scarce.

Lastly, according to Keyes, this increased complication between fact and fiction might give way to a so-called "lie-bias" (Keyes, 2004, Truth Bias to Lie Bias section). Humans tend to operate according to a truth bias: we assume that what we are being presented with is truthful until proven otherwise. The post-truth era, according to Keyes, might result in a reprogramming of our brains. Because the environments we inhabit are becoming less and less truthful, we, as consumers of media, are becoming more and more wary and distrusting of the information we receive. This might cause us to, in a couple of decades, start to think that every piece of information presented to us is a lie unless we are proven otherwise.

Would children who grow up in a world where even the fictional characters they encounter in movies are being transformed into human-like persons come to distrust all the

information they encounter? What would a society that operates from a place of distrust look like, and is that a worldview we want to nurture?

All in all, this analysis of the transmedial development of Barbie movies leaves us with the question of what the most significant consequences of transmedia techniques in storytelling for children might be. Are they primarily ways to familiarize children with multiple media forms and engage with societal issues through a familiar and comfortable character? Is the complication between fact and fiction something that requires a more careful approach? Is it both, and if so, do the pros outweigh the cons?

It might be too early to tell: this analysis has attempted to prove that Barbie's increased transmediality is a multilayered matter. We can already conclude that Barbie is no longer a doll to put back into her playhouse or a character whose story we follow for sixty minutes before putting the DVD back into the box. Through multiple media forms, Mattel has managed to transform the doll's environment into a complex and multifaceted story world that, similar to our digital world, only seems to grow larger and larger exponentially.

6. | From the Roman Republic to Malibu

The relationship between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Barbie

6.1 | Introduction

It is often said that there is no such thing as originality: all stories have been told before, just in slightly different shapes. In what ways are the tales of transformation in Barbie and the transforming narrative structures of the movies reminiscent of historical narratives of metamorphosis? And what can we take away from this relationship?

This chapter examines the relationship between Barbie entertainment movies and Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The findings of the two previous chapters will be juxtaposed with Ovid's literary work and analyzed through the following two sub-questions: *How do scenes of bodily transformation in Barbie movies relate to Ovidian tales of metamorphosis?* and *How can the transmedial transformation of the narrative of Barbie movies be linked to the narrative structure of Metamorphoses by Ovid?* These questions investigate how Barbie entertainment movies can be considered a contemporary continuation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Through analyzing this relationship, I aim to provide a new perspective on the possible cultural value of children's entertainment products such as Barbie movies, revaluing these products of entertainment as insightful sources of knowledge similar to classical or "high-culture" works.

6.1.1 | Ovid's Metamorphoses

Publius Ovidius Naso, also Ovid, is a classical Roman poet who lived from 43 BC to 17/18 A.D. (Lively, 2010, p. 1-2). He is most well-known for his work *Metamorphoses,* which narrates the history of the world through tales of transformation. Ovid is considered one of the most influential classical authors whose work has had 'an enduring impact upon the literary, artistic and imaginative landscapes of Western Europe' (Liveley, 2010, p. 155). This influence

can be seen in many art forms in Western culture, since *Metamorphoses* has acted as the source of inspiration in works such as Bernini's sculpture of Apollo and Daphne (Liveley, 2010, p. 155-156) and several of Shakespeare's plays (Liveley, 2010, p. 159).

In this chapter, several tales of transformation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* will be analyzed in relation to the Barbie movies discussed in the previous two chapters. Furthermore, the narrative construction of Ovid's work will be juxtaposed with the growing transmediality of Barbie movies.

6.2 | Transforming bodies

This section compares fables of metamorphosis as described by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* to scenes of bodily transformation in Barbie. Through this comparison, I aim to demonstrate how Barbie's narratives can be regarded as contemporary, child-friendly versions of Ovidian tales.

6.2.1 | Rescuing: transformation as a disguise

In Fable XIV in Book I, Ovid writes how Io, who has been transformed into a cow by the god Jupiter to conceal her from his jealous wife Juno, is put under the watchful eye of Argus. In an attempt to save Io, Jupiter tasks his son Mercury with killing Argus. To perform this task and be able to descend to the mountain on which Argus resides, Mercury has to disguise himself.

> 'After he [Mercury] had put these things in order, the son of Jupiter leaps down from his father's high abode upon the earth, and there he takes off his cap, and lays aside his wings; his wand alone was retained.'
>
> (Ovid, 8 C.E./1893, Book I Fable XIV section, para. 6)

Mercury transforms into a shepherd by taking off his cap, putting away his wings, and playing on a flute made of oaten straws. He transforms to gain access to Argus's surroundings without revealing his true identity and intention. The disguise is successful: Argus invites Mercury onto the mountain upon hearing the flute's sounds. Mercury then plays the flute and tells stories to put Argus to sleep. When all of Argus's hundred eyes are closed, Mercury cuts off his head.

This transformation scene resembles the two so-called make-over-scenes discussed in chapter four. In *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale*, Merliah undergoes the so-called 'tail makeover' to rescue her mother, Queen Calissa, from her imprisonment by Eris. In *Barbie: A Fairy Secret,* Barbie ascends to the fairy kingdom of Gloss Angeles to rescue her boyfriend Ken, who has been kidnapped by the fairy princess Graciella.

Comparing these three scenes of transformation shows that the narratives of transformation employed are very similar. Similar situations cause these transformations: the main characters must rescue someone who has been taken away by force. The intended goal of these acts of transformation is identical: the characters want to blend into society to gain access to the capturer and person held captive. Lastly, the transformations also have similar results: they enable the character to infiltrate the community, defeat the capturer and free the abducted character.

When comparing Mercury's transformation to the transformation of Barbie in *A Fairy Secret,* an even more telling resemblance can be found. Looking at the narrative and imagery in Barbie's transformation in *A Fairy Secret* and Mercury's transformation in the fable, we see that they can be considered a reversal of each other. Barbie ascends into a different world while Mercury descends; Barbie has to put on wings while Mercury takes his wings off; and Barbie has to appear magical to blend into the society she tries to gain access to, while Mercury has to undergo a process to appear human. These two scenes are reminiscent of each other in more

than merely in the narrative. They possess similar imagery, the image of wings is very prominent in both transformations but present this in opposing directions: either putting on wings or taking them off, descending or ascending, tucking away magic or gaining magical abilities.

In these three scenes, the metamorphosis of the characters acts as a disguise that enables them to act out the required task.

6.2.2 | Surviving: transformation in the face of danger

Metamorphoses contains several descriptions of transformations that are initiated as a means of escaping from danger. Fable XII of Book I narrates the story of Daphne and Apollo. Through two vengeful arrows shot by the god Cupid (the gold arrow, which instills love, and the lead arrow, which instills hatred), Apollo falls in love with Daphne, while Daphne comes to despise Apollo. Blind with love, Apollo chases Daphne, who tries to flee from him. In a last, desperate attempt to get away from the man that follows her, Daphne pleads to her father, the river Peneus:

> 'Her [Daphne's] strength being *now* spent, she grows pale, and being quite faint, with the fatigue of so swift a flight, looking upon the waters of Peneus, she says, "Give me, my father, thy aid, if you rivers have divine power. Oh Earth, either yawn to *swallow me*, or by changing it, destroy that form, by which I have pleased too much, and which causes me to be injured (…)."'
>
> (Ovid, 8 C.E./1893, Book I Fable XII section, para. 8)

Daphne can barely finish her sentence before her chest is covered in thin bark, her hair transformed into leaves, and her arms into branches: in a matter of seconds, Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree, with not a trace left of her human form.

In the face of imminent danger, this fable depicts a character who pleads for herself to be transformed. The major transformative scene of the character of Merliah in *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale 2,* the transformation during the 'changing of the tides' ceremony, contains a similar plea.

While battling the antagonist Eris, who threatens to disturb the ceremony, Merliah takes place on the throne and calls out to the magical forces at play during the changing of the tides that she wishes to transform into a mermaid. The transformation is a necessity: not only will the livelihood of the kingdom of Oceana be at risk if Merliah does not transform; Merliah is at risk of being harmed, or even killed, by Eris and has to transform into a real mermaid to obtain enough power to defeat Eris and ensure her own safety.

In both the fable of Daphne, who wishes for herself to be transformed into anything but her human form to rid herself of Apollo's harassment, as well as in the story of Merliah, who begs to be transformed into a mermaid to save both her own life and her kingdom, higher forces are being called upon in a desperate attempt of survival.

6.2.3 | Adapting: transformation as power

Book V of *Metamorphoses* narrates the singing contest of the Muses. They sing several stories, among which one is the story of Proserpine, who descends into the underworld. Fable V of this book describes how friends of Proserpine are transformed into birds with the heads of women:

'Whence have you, daughters of Acheloüs, feathers and the feet of birds, since you have the faces of maidens? Is it because, when Proserpine was gathering the flowers of spring, you were mingled in the number of her companions? After you had sought her in vain throughout the whole world, immediately, that the waters might be sensible of your concern, you wished to be able, on the support of your wings, to hover over the waves,

and you found the Gods propitious, and saw your limbs grow yellow with feathers suddenly formed.'

(Ovid, 8 C.E./1893, Book V Fable V section, para. 7)

The fable describes how the bodies of Proserpine's friends have been transformed into the bodies of birds: their arms turned into wings, skin covered in feathers. The transformation was carried out because the women needed to gain a specific ability: they could not find Proserpine on land and needed to search the sea but could not travel the waters. In order to search the ocean, the women's bodies have been transformed, enabling them to fly over the waters to search for Proserpine. In this case, the transformation gives the subjects that change an added ability.

In all four scenes of transformation discussed in chapter four, this notion of gaining an ability or power through transformation is present as well. During the tail-makeover, Merliah gains the ability to swim like a mermaid, for instance, and in the wing store, Barbie gains the ability to fly. This power increase is seen in the other two transformations of Merliah as well. In her transformation in Eris's whirlpool, Merliah's strength increases exponentially, enabling her to swim out of the magical contraption she is stuck in. The transformation during the 'changing of the tides' ceremony gives Merliah an increase in magical abilities to defeat Eris and change her form into either a mermaid or a human whenever she pleases.

In these scenes, transformations are a means of gaining power, strength, or an ability that the person who changes did not have previously. The metamorphosis is a resource that enables the character to do something they were not able to do beforehand.

6.2.4 | Unveiling: transformation and the true self

In Fable VIII of Book XIV, Ovid describes how the ambassador Venulus encounters a cave in a forest: the residence of the god Pan. Before Pan resided in the cave, it was the shelter of the Nymphs who had to flee from a vile Apulian shepherd. The fate of this shepherd is described as follows:

> 'The shepherd abused them [the Nymphs] and imitating them with grotesque capers, he added rustic abuse in filthy language. Nor was he silent, before the growing tree closed his throat. But from this tree and its sap you may understand what were his manners. For the wild olive, by its bitter berries, indicates the infamy of his tongue; the coarseness of his words passed into them.'
>
> (Ovid, 8 C.E./1893, Book XIV Fables VII and VIII section, para. 6)

This fable depicts how the shepherd transforms into a wild olive tree as punishment for harassing the Nymphs. The tree in which the man is transformed is representative of the shepherd's true self since its berries are bitter, representing the filthiness of the shepherd's language and the bitterness of his character.

The idea of transforming into a "true self" is also a recurring theme in Barbie movies. In both major instances of transformation in *Barbie in a Mermaid Tale 1* and *2*, Merliah's transformation is explained through the idea of changing into her so-called "true self". The first transformation, when Merliah tries to escape Eris's whirlpool, is prompted by Merliah's acceptance of her mermaid side. Through accepting that she is half-mermaid and half-human, Merliah's legs are transformed into a mermaid tail. Merliah's final major transformation, which occurs during the changing of the tides-ceremony, is even explicitly connected to the idea of transforming into a true self. The major side-effect, so to say, of completing the ceremony is

that the person who undergoes it transforms into their "fullest" self: the fullest self being the person you truly are. After performing the ceremony, Merliah has been turned into a being that can transform into a mermaid or a human whenever she pleases. This transformation is representative of Merliah's 'fullest self' since she is both human and mermaid.

Through this comparison, we see that both Ovidian tales of metamorphosis and Barbie movies that contain scenes of transformation employ the act of transformation as a means of revealing a character's "true" self to the outside world. In the Ovidian tale, a bad person turns into something that represents their vileness, while in Barbie's narrative, a person changes into a shape that emphasizes their multiplicity. Nonetheless, the shape into which the person is transformed is said to be representative of their true identity.

6.3 | Transforming stories

This section compares the narrative construction of *Metamorphoses* to the construction of the narratives in Barbie movies. By looking at the form of the narrative construction and questions of truth and fiction, I aim to draw parallels between the classical work and the children's entertainment movies.

6.3.1 | Multiplicity: the structure of narratives

Providing a clear and concise description of the narrative structure of *Metamorphoses* has been attempted by many. Classicist Stephen Michael Wheeler questions whether the work can be considered an epic or a 'collection of discontinuous episodes superficially woven together' (Wheeler, 2000, p. 1). The narrative furthermore has also been described as catalog poetry or considered an anti-epic (Wheeler, 2000, p. 1). According to Solodow, a World Languages and Literature scholar, these analyses 'run aground on the uncapturable exuberance and variety of the poem' (Solodow, 2002, p. 14).

The uncapturable essence of the poem stems from the multitude of genres contained in the text: 'at one place or another it handles the themes and employs the tone of virtually every species of literature' (Solodow, 2002, p. 18), in turn causing the work to contain elements of an epic, tragedy, rhetoric, hymns, and erotica, to name a few examples (Solodow, 2002, p. 15-22).

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* can thus be considered a continuous lyrical poem: different stories are woven together into a whole narrative. On the other hand, it might also be a collection of individual stories, the Books and Fables, centered around the same theme. The work can also be perceived as a narration of history since Ovid commences *Metamorphoses* with the announcement that he will narrate a story that begins at the world's creation and will continue to his present day. These structural analyses are not mutually exclusive, either: *Metamorphoses* is all of these things simultaneously.

This structural variety, or uncapturable narratological structure, can be seen as an elaboration of the concept of metamorphosis into the structure of the work. Like the stories narrated inside the work, the work itself is a metamorphosis as well: it is ever-changing through the one that perceives it, its shape continuously transforming and containing multitudes. In constructing a story whose narrative structure was so diverse, so ungraspable, Ovid positions himself as an experimental author who challenges the literary structures that were popular and commonplace in his day and age.

What then is the relationship between this structural multiplicity of Ovid's work and the Barbie movies discussed?

Through the transmedial development of Barbie movies, the construction narrative of the presented stories becomes complex as well. Taking the story in *Barbie Princess Adventure* as an example, this complexity can be noticed. The story of Barbie and Princess Amelia is told

through several media: the movie *Barbie Princess Adventure*, Barbie's vlog on her YouTube channel, and even the musical soundtrack album on Spotify.

This dispersed narrative now enables Barbie to be present in multiple spaces simultaneously, telling elements of an overarching story, which complicates the construction of the narrative since no one knows which story element comes first and which comes second. Moreover, through this transmediality, Barbie becomes more than a fictional character. She is a creator on YouTube as well, or a singer on Spotify, and can thus be encountered through different media, just like any actress, influencer, or singer. These encounters have a humanizing effect on the character. Because of Barbie's omnipresence in the world beyond the DVD or the movie on Netflix, she starts to appear like a "real" human creating content.

Similar to the way Ovid challenged structures of storytelling in his writing of *Metamorphoses* and emphasized the ever-changing nature of life through his narrative structure, producers of Barbie movies are starting to experiment with more fluid structures of narrative that embody the multi-media nature of modern-day life. Through transmedial narrative techniques, the chronological plot of a story perishes, and the fictional character becomes omnipresent and multi-interpretable.

It can be argued that both Ovid and the cinematic team behind the Barbie movies thus experiment with constructing narratives in their own distinct, contemporary way to reflect their ideas on how society is structured. Both works (*Metamorphoses* and transmedial Barbie movies) are examples of narrative experimentation that try to go beyond rigid narratological structures, emphasize multiplicity, and are reflective of society.

6.3.2 | The 'real' world: combining fact and fiction

Another connection between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Barbie's evolving transmedial narrative is how both challenge notions of truth. As demonstrated in chapter five, it is apparent that the transmedial development of Barbie movies problematizes the relationship between fact and fiction. When analyzing the narrative of *Metamorphoses*, a related question surrounding truth arises.

The stories within *Metamorphoses* are mainly comprised of ancient Greek and Roman myths. However, Ovid does not take these myths as truth since he changes the original stories to his liking. 'He transposes it to the most familiar terms by removing that which is distant, divine, or supernatural and making the stories purely human and contemporary instead: his mythological world is very matter-of-fact' (Solodow, 2002, p. 75). This is seen through the way that Ovid's myths are situated in the human world and make little use of descriptions of magic, for instance. Furthermore, 'Ovid lays a contemporary color over his stories by references to names and institutions that belong to Roman political, social, or private life' (Solodow, 2002, p. 82). Through changing terms and omitting details that link myths to specific time periods or locations, 'the stories of the poem seem drawn from ordinary, everyday, humdrum life, not from the distant realms of mythology' (Solodow, 2002, p. 86).

However, Ovid presents these stories as a narration of history: the book commences with the announcement that *Metamorphoses* begins at the creation of the world and will continue to Ovid's present-day, starting with Chaos and ending with the death of Julius Caesar. With this presentation of fictional narratives as a narration of history and blending it with actual proven historical events such as the existence (and thus the death) of Julian Caesar, Ovid creates a blend between fact and fiction in *Metamorphoses*.

What Ovid does in his presentation of the narrative of *Metamorphoses* is similar to how Barbie's transmedial narrative incorporates stories of fiction into contemporary, factual situations. Where the Barbie character is placed into contemporary society through intermedial narratives, interacting with real-world issues in real-time, Ovid presents a literary work that places myths alongside historical events, positioning them as equally important.

Of course, how Barbie presents fictional stories as "real-world" narratives differs from how Ovid constructed his story. Due to the transmedial nature of Barbie's narratives, stories are more immersive. They can infiltrate all aspects of our media consumption, positioning themselves as a part of daily life and as the truth. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a work of literature: its narrative is encapsulated within the pages of the book and thus less omnipresent in day-to-day life. It does not complicate the notion of truth in the same way that Barbie's transmedial narrative might, merely because of its less immersive nature. Both works do however blend fact and fiction and, through this blend, position fictional narratives alongside or into factual histories, creating tension between what is real and what is not.

6.4 | Continuous stories of change

By juxtaposing Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with Barbie entertainment movies, we see that both in content and narrative construction, these works can be linked in several ways. The increased transmediality of Barbie movies can be regarded as a modern-day, multi-media translation of Ovid's combination of genres and the multiplicity of narrative structure in *Metamorphoses*, with both works in their own way challenging or experimenting with combinations of truth and fiction. Furthermore, the stories of bodily change within Barbie movies can be regarded as contemporary, audiovisual, and child-friendly translations of Ovidian tales of metamorphosis, with many of the stories bearing resemblance both in narrative and in imagery.

The parallels found in both the content of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Barbie movies show us that stories that revolve around transformation and narrative structures that embody this state of change have been present in Ovid's day and age, as well as in contemporary society. Stories of change, thus, are continuous.

Looking at Barbie entertainment movies in this light, it can be argued that they are digitalized, modern-day and child-friendly continuations of Ovid's work. This perspective enables us to go beyond Barbie as mere children's entertainment: these movies, through conceptual lenses such as metamorphosis and juxtaposed to classical works, provide space for academic inquiry that can inform us about societal issues and phenomena, as well as provide insight into how works of pop-culture build upon or are continuations of classical, "high-culture" works. Suppose we scratch away the first layer of pink glitter and dig deeper into the matter of these movies. In that case, Barbie can be given new value. These entertainment products become useful spaces for academic inquiry and can be valuable sites of knowledge for adults at least as much as for children.

7. | Conclusion

This thesis has investigated what Barbie movies can teach us about change and continuity in contemporary society. By answering this question, I aimed to show how Barbie movies can be considered insightful, complex, and layered sites of knowledge.

Through analyzing how Barbie's body is subject to change within the Barbie entertainment movies, we see complex notions of the female body are brought to the forefront. The changing body in Barbie movies reflects the contradictory attitudes around the female body in society: how women are urged to be unique and choose for themselves while simultaneously being urged to conform to society's standards and serve others through their bodies. The analysis of the changing narrative of Barbie furthermore has shown us how narratological transformations reflect the growing use of online media in society and how online media is becoming more interactive and more invasive in day-to-day life.

Analyzing sites of metamorphosis in Barbie has also brought several issues to the foreground. In looking at the changing body in Barbie, we see that while its narrative tries to emphasize girl power and positively depicts change, there is something to say about the privileged position of the character, an issue rarely reflected in the movies. Barbie depicts change as positive because it is easy and pleasant to change yourself if you want to: changing because you are not yet powerful, not yet pretty, and heavily scrutinized is a less pleasant and, most likely, a less easy process. Furthermore, in looking at the changing narrative of Barbie, we can see that the lines between fact and fiction are becoming increasingly blurry. While the transmedia narratives of Barbie create an immersive story world that acts as a space for pedagogically sound and positive content, it also complicates the notion of truth.

Furthermore, this thesis has connected stories and sites of metamorphosis in Barbie with historical works on the same theme, specifically Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* This juxtaposition

shows that Barbie movies can be considered modernized, child-appropriate variations of Ovid's work in this thematic context. Stories of change are continuous and told throughout history because change is a critical part of human life, universal and relevant in all days and ages.

What then is the main takeaway of this thesis? Why is it relevant to look at Barbie in this way?

As seen in the broad scope of themes in the analyses, we see that the Barbie entertainment movies, if looked at through an academic lens, are complex, layered entities. We cannot reduce these stories to trivial entertainment for young girls in which a character turns into a mermaid or is a vlogger because that reduction would diminish the complexity of the themes and shapes these stories take on. Through complex narrative structures and layered themes, Barbie entertainment movies can even be positioned beside classical literary artworks.

Barbie movies are not merely trivial entertainment products for little girls: through the imagery they contain and how their stories are constructed, these movies shape our society because the narratives that children grow up with undoubtedly affect how they see and approach the world. Suppose we disregard these movies as trivial, girly entertainment and do not deem them important enough for observation. In that case, we can easily miss the inconsistent, contradicting, or potentially harmful messages that the movies might propagate.

Since Barbie entertainment movies are thus changing, our attitudes towards these products also have to change. Beneath the first layer of pink glitter, these stories contain complex notions about truth and fiction and inhibiting a female body in the Western world. They are reflective of society. Furthermore, most of all, they are, in essence, not that different from classical works we see as wonderful sites of knowledge inquiry and value accordingly.

As Ovid writes in the last book of *Metamorphoses*, through the character of Pythagoras:

> 'All things are ever changing; nothing perishes. The soul wanders about and comes from that spot to this, from this to that, and takes possession of any limbs whatever; it both passes from the beasts to human bodies, and so does our soul into the beasts; and in no lapse of time does it perish. And as the pliable wax is moulded into new forms, and no longer abides as it was before, nor preserves the same shape, but yet is still the same wax, so I tell you that the soul is ever the same, but passes into different forms.'
>
> (Ovid, 8 C.E./1893, Book XV Fables II and III section, para. 6)

The pliable wax from which the Barbie doll is made has been molded and molded. Now it is our job, as researchers and as people, to mold ourselves. We need to mold how we think to recognize the impact that Barbie movies have, so we can delve into the ultra-girly and sometimes childish world to dissect the layers these movies contain. We might need to accept that our hands will be covered in glitter, but I am sure a couple of pink sparkles cannot hurt.

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