

# Season 1, Barbie Movie Bonus #1

## SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor

### [Upbeat interlude music plays]

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:04

Hey folks, we decided to drop a very special bonus into the main feed this week. Our Barbie X Petro-capitalism episode was so fun to record in anticipation of Greta Gerwig's blockbuster hit. But then of course, we simply had to talk about the film itself.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:23

Thanks to all of you who wrote in with your questions, as always, you blew us away with your thoughtfulness and specificity. As you're about to hear, we had an absolute ball answering you. And Marcelle coined a term I will simply never forget.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:41

Do you mean when I said "the somnambulance of the kendom"?

**Hannah McGregor** 00:47

[Hannah laughs] Yeah, yeah, that's exactly what I mean.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:52

[Marcelle laughs] Okay, well, you too can listen for it as you enjoy part one of a very long conversation between me and Hannah about Barbie the movie!

### [Material Girls Theme plays: "Shopping Mall" by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]

**Hannah McGregor** 01:32

Hello, and welcome to a special Material Girls minisode, a version of our Patreon exclusive Witch, Please Tell Me episodes. Only this time we're only answering your questions about Barbie, the Greta Gerwig film she co wrote, with Noah Baumbach. I'm Hannah McGregor.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:57

I'm Marcelle Kosman.

**Hannah McGregor** 02:00

And we're gonna take some questions. I sound like somebody's about to call in.

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:09

Listeners! **[Marcelle does a silly frog voice]** Hello, longtime listener, first time caller. **[Hannah laughs]** **[Marcelle goes back to her normal speaking voice]** Sorry, I shouldn't fuck around. Because Coach specifically asked us to record for 40 minutes max. And you know that this is serious because max is in all caps. So.

**Hannah McGregor** 02:23

Yeah, that's a serious max. Okay, so the first question is, Marcelle, Did you like the Barbie movie?

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:27

I loved the Barbie movie. I've seen it twice. Now. I went once on a hot date with my good friend Todd, where somebody asked if we wanted a picture together and I very intelligently and heteronormatively explained that we were not a couple. And then Todd had to remind me that friends were allowed to take pictures together. **[Hannah laughs]** And then the second time was today when I took my beautiful child who is currently knocking at the door.

**Hannah McGregor** 02:57

Okay, so you took that cute kid to Barbie.

**Marcelle Kosman** 03:01

Mhm. So I saw it a second time today. So it's, it's fresh. It's real fresh. Yeah, I loved it. I don't even know where to start. You tell me. Did you enjoy it? Did you enjoy the film?

**Hannah McGregor** 03:14

I really enjoyed it. First and foremost, I thought it was incredibly funny, in a way I absolutely had not anticipated. Like the joke density was much higher than I was expecting in this movie. And much more surprising. And the humor was more surprising and more subversive and more weird than I thought it was going to be. It didn't have a sort of mainstream comic humor and had a really sort of quirky, campy kind of sense of humor that was like queerer than I expected.

So that was sort of my first and foremost thing was that I thought it was beautifully campy and funny. I love the design, but that's part of the beautiful campiness of it for me is it's like no CGI. No CGI, it feels like a profoundly femme Wes Anderson kind of vibe sometimes. And I thought it

was at its strongest when it stayed in those realms. And at its weakest when it attempted to turn to face the camera and make a feminist statement. Those moments actually made me feel awkward. Like, I felt kind of embarrassed for the movie in those scenes. **[Marcelle laughs]**

I was like, Oh, honey, oh, no, no, no, don't do this. But then it would do something like the fucking all Ken dream ballet. And I would be like, this movie is brilliant. Yeah, like it's brilliant. And then there are these moments where it seems like it feels like it needs to do some kind of work that feels at odds with the rest of the film to me, and I think that's an interesting thing to dig down on. Like, what are those sort of levels at which the feminism of the film is attempting to operate? And like, where is it more and less successful or more and less interesting.

**Marcelle Kosman** 05:21

Yeah, I think that is so interesting. I have a theory for why the capital F, like overt feminism stuff is kind of uncomfortable, and maybe unsatisfying. And my theory is that that's part of the satire, that it is a film that satirizes on multiple levels. And so it's really into like, as a mainstream film, you can watch it and think like this is satirizing real life and the patriarchy, but it's also satirizing, like, mainstream feminism, and like, the type of feminism that has allowed the Barbie movie to even exist as a film.

**Hannah McGregor** 06:07

Yeah, so the way that like, when America Ferrara does the speech, and then everybody's like, wow, that single impassioned speech totally deprogrammed me. Now let's kidnap women one at a time, give them a single impassioned speech about feminism, they will be immediately deprogrammed by our effective rhetoric. And we can take back control. You're right. That is-

**Marcelle Kosman** 06:33

It's so smart. It's so smart.

**Hannah McGregor** 06:36

I mean, the other thing, and I think this will, this will come up a lot in the questions. The other thing we've got to talk about is the fact that Mattel funded this movie. I kind of want to put that to the side for the moment, because I think we're going to talk about it a lot in the questions and spend more time with it sort of like aesthetics as a work of art. One of my favorite things that it was doing was producing a sort of camp, heterosexual masculinity, through like a very deliberate evocation of these visual tropes that managed to be both, like, firmly rooted in heterosexual masculinity, while also being so fucking gay. Right? Like the fur coat with no shirt under. And the horses. The fact that in the background of every scene with the Kens, there was just a huge fucking screen with horses running on it. Like, like so so gay. So gay, and so like, just

perfectly for me, walking the line of like, when pointing out how profoundly queer and campy masculinity is.

**Marcelle Kosman** 07:59

Oh my god, totally. Okay, okay. I want, I have, I have, I have so many things that I want to say it's overwhelming. Can I just read you my screed?

**Hannah McGregor** 08:15

Yes, I want your screed.

**Marcelle Kosman** 08:19

**[Marcelle laughs]** Okay, okay. Okay, so, getting back to satire, okay? Barbie land feels good for the Barbies, because it functions in the same way that patriarchal capitalism functions. Except the Barbies are the ones with the hegemonic power. And this makes sense, because Barbie is a product of patriarchal capitalism. So her entire universe exists to make money, right, like as products so like she has many jobs because that way you can buy many Barbies. She has many cars, so you can buy many cars, she has many homes, friends, etc. All of these things, outfits. These all exist to make money for Mattel.

The Ken's do not have rich interior lives or clear senses of self. But neither do most of the Barbies. Like if we put pressure on it, they also do not have strong senses of self beyond their roles. And the movie kinda suggests that this is because Barbie's sense of self depends on who's playing with her. Right? And so then the kids who are playing with the Barbies, they also live under patriarchal capitalism. So the rich interiority of Barbie land is only ever going to be surface level. Okay? So, for example, stereotypical Barbie, our hero of the film, doesn't even have the self awareness to tell Ken that she doesn't love him. Right? It doesn't occur to her that she should.

**Hannah McGregor** 09:57

That's a level of interiority that she does not have. The moment she articulates an interior existential thought is the moment we become aware she's broken.

**Marcelle Kosman** 10:08

Exactly, exactly. And even though the version of Barbie land that we are presented with is, I would say capital D diverse. All of the Barbies are horrified by her physical transformations, right? So even the diversity, multiculturalism, et cetera of Barbie land is only what's allowed under patriarchal capitalism. And I would argue cis het, white supremacist patriarchal capitalism, right? So, the introduction of patriarchy to Barbie land only provides surface level

changes to their society, it doesn't fundamentally reorganize the social stratification of men and women. It just kind of treats every night like boys night. Right?

**Hannah McGregor** 10:58

Because before every night was girls night.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:02

Exactly, and so it's like, okay, well, it's boys night for a long weekend. That's kind of like, that's sort of it. And so this, I think, is why the Barbies can be saved from what I would like to call the "somnolence of the Kendom", because their society has barely been altered.

**Hannah McGregor** 11:21

If I didn't already love you with my entire heart, the phrase "somnolence of the Kendom" would have really sealed the deal.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:36

**[Marcelle laughs]** Oh, thank you, Hannah.

**Hannah McGregor** 11:37

I can't. Listening to you articulate that phrase in those fucking pink mesh half gloves is... this is the future liberals want. That I, a liberal, want.

**Marcelle Kosman** 11:54

**[Marcelle laughs]** So final thing I want to say and then it's and then it's all just, it's all just going to be you know, whatever comes out. The Ken's are no more able to articulate their desires and wants under the patriarchy than they were under, if you will, the Barbie-archy because patriarchy is bad for men. And so it doesn't make them any happier. Our lead Ken doesn't get what he wants. What he wants is Barbie's affection, but that's because that's what he thinks he wants. That's what he's supposed to want. He doesn't, you know, he doesn't know himself. Patriarchy is bad for men. The Barbie-archy is bad for everybody. Patriarchy is bad for everybody. And the Barbie-archy is patriarchy, except that the Barbies are the hegemonic power.

**Hannah McGregor** 12:47

Yeah, it's just reversed patriarchy, which is what white feminism often is, which is why it's not real feminism, because actual feminism is a fundamental transformation to the social order. Not a reversing of who's in power.

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:00

That's right. And so that's why I think this movie is so deeply subversive on multiple levels, even though Mattel funded it and is one of the producers, even though it's a mainstream movie, even though in the theater people were laughing at the jokes, people were laughing like, not at weird awkward times, they were laughing at the right times. But only at, you know, one level of I know, I don't know, who-

**Hannah McGregor** 13:33

I mean, this is where it gets tricky, right? As soon as we start to say, like, okay, it's profoundly subversive, for whom? Because if it's subversion, hidden under a layer of a movie that people can just sort of get on board with and laugh at all the right times. Then where happeneth the subversion? And how subversive is it ever to make a Barbie movie funded by Mattel? Right? So like there's this, like, part of what I find really evocative about thinking about this movie, is the fact that you and I had a conversation with the campers at camp about whether or not the camp aesthetic it is possible in the 21st century, under late capitalism, when we can't think about objects exclusively in terms of their surfaces because we are profoundly locked within an awareness of how things are made, where they are coming from, the ways in which we are destroying the planet with these things, right?

That like surfaces and taking ironic pleasure in the mass produced really hits different in 2023. And this is like so many aspects of this felt like camp like, ironic pleasure in the mass produced, a play of surfaces, like a complex series of mirrors, reflecting back and forth between satire and non satire in a way that like, the whole point is the play of signification, where you like, can never quite land and that's about the pleasure of surfaces, like it's so camp, but like, what do we do with camp when the ocean is choked with plastic?

**Marcelle Kosman** 15:39

My theory is that movies can't fix things. And so, there are so many pleasurable things about this film. And it is not a tool to correct anything. It's just a movie. Remember when the lady Ghostbusters came out, and people were like, really, myself included, like, you know, kind of bothered that it still fell into some like pretty tired tropes, including, like, all of the main characters, or all of the educated characters are white, and then our working class character is Black, for example.

And like, it feels unfair that movies marketed towards women need to be so much more perfect in order to be "capital G" good than movies marketed to men. And so, undeniably, undeniably and so I feel like this movie is such a solid example of like, there's no shortage of levels and at the end of the day, it's still a piece of entertainment that is paid for by Mattel.

**Hannah McGregor** 16:58

So here's the thing about that is I was reading Hope Rehak's newsletter. Subscribe now. I think it's called "Things Hope is Obsessed With".

**Marcelle Kosman** 17:11

I think that's... that sounds right. Or "Things I'm Obsessed With"? "Hope's Current Obsessions"? I'm not sure.

**Hannah McGregor** 17:23

Listen, listen.

**Marcelle Kosman** 17:24

Listen!

**Hannah McGregor** 17:27

But she had included a link in there to Anne Helen Peterson's piece about Barbie and Oppenheimer and the mass cultural event. And her basic point was like, there is an ongoing power in what constitutes a mass cultural event because we have so little monoculture left, that when we think of like, what's something that's for everybody, that then becomes one of our very few shared texts and shared cultural events. When we think about what's made as though it's for everybody, it's actually made and this is Peterson's argument, It's actually made for teenage boys.

Like she explains that it's this like four quadrant thinking that's like, men won't watch things targeted towards women, but women will watch things targeted towards men. And teenagers won't watch things targeted towards adults, but adults may watch things targeted towards teenagers. So to hit the largest possible Venn Diagram of viewers, you just target everything towards male teenagers, which is why every movie is a Marvel movie now. Because that's who you target everything at. And she was like, there's really something to be said for a movie that is so solidly fucking targeted at women to be a mass cultural event in the way that this one is.

And part of the point there is that mass cultural events, like shared texts, are a thing we collectively use to work through ideas and solve problems as people. Like it's not the text's job to fix things. It's a thing that we used to think with. Because it's our job to actually do the things. And so the things that we've had as a shared text to think with lately, have been fucking Marvel movies, over and over and over again. And right now we've got this incredible mass event that claimed its status as a mass event from the beginning. Like, I think that's part of what has made

people be like, ooh, Barbie versus Oppenheimer. It's like, daring-ness of this girl movie to position itself as on equal footing to Christopher Nolan. Like how fucking dare you, this is a serious movie.

**Marcelle Kosman** 19:49

I got it. I gotta tell you. I have seen Oppenheimer come up so much in my news feed in connection to Barbie.

**Hannah McGregor** 19:58

You don't know what it is?

**Marcelle Kosman** 19:59

I have only learned what it is by seeing people's critiques of the movie. And I just think that that is so funny and it does not speak to my worldliness in the least. It speaks entirely to my Oh fuck, what's it called when you speak into the void? The thing that Gaby said wrong. **[Hannah laughs]** My echo chamber! Yeah, I just live in my own echo chamber. sick burn, Gaby. Anyway, yeah, we love Gaby.

**Hannah McGregor** 20:32

Simply can't get enough.

**Marcelle Kosman** 20:34

But like the second Ryan Gosling was cast. Barbie showed up in my news feed because I am a basic bitch at my core. And they were like, you know who we need to cast in order to get the basic bitches? This guy.

**Hannah McGregor** 20:49

It's so funny to me because I don't think of him as the man of basic bitches, but like, I guess The Notebook really established him in that role. But I still think like, I think Ryan Gosling's kind of a little weird looking. Like a Chris.

**Marcelle Kosman** 21:09

He's not a Chris, that's true.

**Hannah McGregor** 21:12

He's not a Chris, you know, like he's not a generic white hunk. He's not a Marvel, like he wouldn't play Captain America. Like it just feels kind of campy when he does it. Whereas if Chris Pratt had done it, it wouldn't. There would have been nothing campy about it. Right? It would



have been, like, just so profoundly heterosexual. So Ryan Gosling, for me, is like not the basic choice for Ken. It's an interesting choice, whereas Margot Robbie has a basic fucking choice for Barbie.

**Marcelle Kosman** 21:47

Definitely. And the movie points that out, which I definitely enjoyed. No, you don't think so?

**Hannah McGregor** 21:56

That was another moment where I was kind of like Oh, what happened to that narrator? The narrator, Helen Merrill, almost felt like studio notes to me.

**Marcelle Kosman** 22:10

Definitely. Yeah.

**Hannah McGregor** 22:11

The narrator was giving studio notes. Yeah, I'm not sure like that is one point on which I'm like, that's what they're trying to do is stereotype Barbie but like, the actual like breaking the fourth wall to be like we get it, Margot Robbie is hot. It felt a little ham fisted to me.

**Marcelle Kosman** 22:27

I thought it was so funny. I loled! I loled, Hannah.

**Hannah McGregor** 22:34

You know what? I probably loled as well.

**[Upbeat interlude music plays]**

Okay, here's a great question from funnyfeministphilosopher: Did Gerwig just make a two hour long ironic commercial for Barbie?

**Marcelle Kosman** 22:50

I cannot speak for the author. That is my whole thing. Not interested. Nor will I speak for the auteur. But-

**Hannah McGregor** 22:59

The auteur is as dead as the author.

**Marcelle Kosman** 23:02

Indeed. I have this imaginary conversation in my head, where Gerwig is like, Oh, you want me to make a movie for you about Barbie? And it's basically just an ad? Okay. Sure. I'll do that. Give me your money. That's, that's, Yeah. So kind of Yeah. Yeah. Because why not? I think of this movie as being genre defining.

Because we just, I know, maybe a bold statement for someone who doesn't have a film degree, but I just feel like we're just at such a weird point in our society, in our place in capitalism, we are all so aware of capitalism. Like, it's not weird to bring up capitalism, like people don't roll their eyes. Maybe they do. I don't know. But in my echo chamber, nobody rolls their eyes when somebody brings up capitalism. And so it feels sort of like, like, this is the step beyond there's no ethical consumption under capitalism. It's also, there's no ethical production under capitalism. So give us your money now.

**Hannah McGregor** 24:09

Ah, well put. Marcelle, you are fucking on one tonight. **[Marcelle laughs]**

**Marcelle Kosman** 24:20

Thank you. That's so nice of you to say! OH my god! Aw jeez. Thank you. Now I'm embarrassed. I'm gonna stop talking. Hey, Hannah, what scene or moment made you laugh out loud the most?

**Hannah McGregor** 24:30

Okay. I'm trying to google it because I can't remember if I have the word right. But when Ken asks Barbie on a date, and Barbie says yes. And he gets really excited and excuses himself for a moment and goes back into the Casa-

**Marcelle Kosman** 24:55

Mojo Dojo Casa house. And he shouts "sublime!"

**Hannah McGregor** 24:59

Sublime. Sublime! That, like, broke me like I think I cried a bit when he yelled sublime. So funny. What about you?

**Marcelle Kosman** 25:14

I don't know what it was the first time. I can't remember. I just spent so much of that movie just being delighted, like laugh-out-loud delighted by everything. But when I watched it today, it was when Andrew Dinkins or whoever he is, the lower level Mattel employee, Barbie is there in the boardroom and she's trying to find a woman employee or a woman, like an important woman

head of something. And he looks up at Will Ferrell and he's like, I'm a man with no power. Does that make me a woman? And I laughed so hard. And Elliot was like, what? What's funny? You'll understand when you're older, sweetie.

**Hannah McGregor** 26:03

The scene where Barbie tells the cat callers, but she doesn't have any genitals...

**Marcelle Kosman** 26:17

**[Marcelle laughs]** it's so it's so oh my god. It's so funny. It's so funny.

**Hannah McGregor** 26:23

Really fucking really fucking good. Man. The fact that weird Barbie is always doing the splits.

**Marcelle Kosman** 26:29

Totally. And when America Ferrera is like, I had a weird Barbie. And weird Barbie like, yeah you did. **[Hannah laughs]** There's so much queer subtext in this movie.

**Hannah McGregor** 26:43

Oh, okay. Okay. All right. Well, you know what? That's a question that I think that Coach had. One sec, I've copied these questions over in truly the most chaotic way. Yeah, there's a question from Coach. Why wasn't it gayer?

**Marcelle Kosman** 27:00

Because, because of the patriarchy.

**Hannah McGregor** 27:03

So speaking of movies as mass cultural events, there are still a bunch of countries globally, where if you put any visible queer content, it will get cut out. And so when you are thinking about making a feminist film, for a global audience, or a queer film for a global audience, you've got to use a vocabulary of politics that won't get censored. Which is, you know, an interesting artistic challenge. But when I think about, like, as a work of queer cinema, for example, like, there's no way queer kids around the world are not rallying around this movie. It's unbelievably queer in its aesthetic, and sensibility with you know, as a reminder, camp is a sensibility. And that is, that allows it to become a touch point for queer youth, potentially, in countries where they couldn't see it, if it had boys kissing.

**Marcelle Kosman** 28:10

Totally, that makes so much sense. It makes me think of the fact that Beyonce's song Blow from her self titled album, Beyonce, does not have an explicit rating, even though it is explicitly about cunnilingus. The entire song is about, like, I can't wait for you gotta get home and tear that cherry out.

**Hannah McGregor** 28:39

Yeah, but if you don't use the word-

**Marcelle Kosman** 28:41

Exactly, it is impossible to miss. Yeah, except, I guess, by the sensors, because-

**Hannah McGregor** 28:47

Because they're looking for a specific language, they're not interpreting it.

**Marcelle Kosman** 28:50

It's probably AI, let's be real.

**Hannah McGregor** 28:52

It's always a really effective tactic when you're trying to spread a subversive message in a hostile environment to hide it under a layer of interpretation. Because it requires, like interpretation is like the key code that you use, that you crack to get the secret message. Yeah. That's why close reading matters.

**Marcelle Kosman** 29:22

Can you imagine listening to the song Blow and not knowing that it's about eating pussy, like I can't. My God, I can't.

**Hannah McGregor** 29:29

Oh my God. Oh, okay. The other thing that made me cry, cry, laugh, laugh, cry, laugh, like cry and laugh until I cry. The use of the Matchbox 20 song. **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]** Per-fect!

**Marcelle Kosman** 29:39

Oh my god. Oh my god. It was so funny. I know, I know. I loved it.

**[Upbeat interlude music plays]**

**Hannah McGregor** 29:53

Thanks for tuning into this special *Material Girls* bonus episode. We're hoping to do more mini episodes like this, so stay tuned.

**Marcelle Kosman** 30:02

Next week we'll release a brand new episode of *Material Girls*, a full length one. But until then, why not head over to Patreon and consider supporting us for as little as, you know, \$5 a month US \$5 USD. It's like \$7 Canadian. You'll get access to the second half of this conversation and so many other perks. Hannah, do you have a favorite perk?

**Hannah McGregor** 30:24

Yeah, I mean, my favorite perk is for sure, Witch, Please Tell Me, which we may or may not be renaming *Material Concerns*. What's your favorite?

**Marcelle Kosman** 30:35

My favorite perk is definitely the bloopers because I forget how, frankly funny we are until I get to listen to them again, just strung together. Oh, it's art.

**Hannah McGregor** 30:48

Yeah, great point. We're very funny. Go to patreon and find out for yourself! **[Marcelle laughs]**

**[*Material Girls* Theme plays: "Shopping Mall" by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]**