

## SHOES

## I. An Object

I have a miniature pair of shoes that my fingers put on to parade around the coffee table on weekend afternoons before I make a pot of coffee to dunk cookies. They're no bigger than my ring finger past the second knuckle and appear perhaps produced specifically for pinky toes if pinky toes were, instead, miniature feet. The shoes belong to a miniature person, no more than a foot high and probably less. In light they glimmer black, boasting cleanliness and comfort, yearning to parade around the coffee table of their own accord but, being merely the shells of feet, look to me their savior to not let them fall into the disrepair of disuse.

They're molded rubber (or perhaps latex, or perhaps something else), a distinct line running down the center of each signifying a perfect union, each shoe married unto itself but also to its other. On the inside, where the shoe size should be, the sole reads "2 INDONESIA" on one and "3 INDONESIA" on the other. I wonder where "1 INDONESIA" has trounced off to and imagine a three-legged man missing a shoe, or a dystopian future in which individual shoes are stolen much more frequently and, therefore, bought in threes to compensate. The shoes are complete in molded-on detail, including stitches and laces and heels and treads on the bottoms. They are formal shoes, dress shoes, out-on-the-town shoes, but they mostly stay in and entertain.

They smell like rubber, but only if they're in my nose; otherwise they are odorless.

## II. A Poem

Here is a list of things that shoes don't do:  
 Shoes don't talk behind your back.  
 Shoes don't laugh when you hurt.  
 Shoes don't fight about who left the towels in the sink.

Shoes don't care if you like them.  
Shoes don't make great pets.  
Shoes don't swim very well.

Here is a list of things that shoes care about:  
Where you're going.

Here is a list of things that shoes don't care about:  
Where you've been.

### III. A History

Footwear was not invented like the internal combustion engine; there was no meticulous planning or deliberate engineering, no overt science. All that came later.

Footwear was invented when someone decided to walk on something pointy and realized his feet had made a mistake in not being covered up. So he took a pelt and some leather bits and suddenly his feet were not only warm but less vulnerable, too. Later on some people became so good at making shoes that they called themselves cobblers. This name has nothing to do with pies—those people are called bakers.

Now even dolls come with footwear.

Eventually some people had things that other people wanted but weren't willing to give up and the people who were bigger got what they wanted or else.

### IV. An Example

The *Chicago Sun-Times* reports that in March of 2005 a teenager was murdered for his \$110 basketball shoes. He was shot in the lower back and left to die, shoeless, in an alley. The paper quotes the boy's mother saying, "That's what it's all about. I bought him shoes."

Wilmot and Hocker explain that conflicts are usually

about power and self-esteem, about feeling disadvantaged and unimportant. If it was about shoes, he probably would have robbed a shoe store.

I wasn't there. I don't know. But I refuse to believe anyone sees anyone as merely a walking shoe rack.

## V. A Reality

In Alvin Toffler's 1970 nonfiction bestseller *Future Shock*, he writes about Barbie:

*"Barbie," a twelve-inch plastic teen-ager, is the best-known and best-selling doll in history. Since its introduction in 1959, the Barbie doll population of the world has grown to 12,000,000—more than the human population of Los Angeles or London or Paris. Little girls adore Barbie because she is highly realistic and eminently dress-upable. Mattel, Inc., makers of Barbie, also sells a complete wardrobe for her including clothes for ordinary daytime wear, clothes for formal party wear, clothes for swimming and skiing.*

This excerpt introduces a chapter titled "The Throw-Away Society," a telling of things-to-come, including built-in obsolescence and new manufacture cheaper than repair and the general transience of the developing American culture. Coincidentally, the shoes are remnants of a Ken doll, Barbie's male counterpart—his body maimed, burnt, and disposed of—used in a presentation of Dalton Trumbo's novel *Johnny Got His Gun*, a book that warns of the throw-away-ness of people and the efficiency of war to do so.

I kept Ken's shoes, though. I can use those.