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mentor's introduction

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A mythical name, "G.I. Joe," emerged during World War II to symbolize the U.S. soldier whose individuality was anonymous among the huge numbers mobilized in those military campaigns. In 1945 Hollywood released a film, "The Story of G.I. Joe," and in 1950 **Time** designated G.I. Joe as its Man of the Year. (Woods, 1983) However, it was 1964 before the first toy plastic G.I. Joe was marketed. The item was temporarily discontinued in 1976 -- a hiatus attributed by the manufacturer's spokesman to an increased price for plastic, precipitated by the 1973 oil crisis, and by cultural commentators to the public's disenchantment with war, due to the Vietnam conflict. After ceasing its manufacture the Hasbro Company claimed it frequently received letters from parents and children, asking for G.I. Joe's return to the market. By 1980 Hasbro, through phone surveys and interviews with groups of parents and children, discovered that "The name G.I. Joe was found to enjoy `tremendous recognition' among young parents who had played with the original as children themselves" (Wood, 1983, p. 8). Not surprisingly, the company brought G.I. Joe back on the market in 1982 and launched an advertising campaign intended to reach 95% of five to eight-year-old boys in the U.S. Their efforts were enhanced by the Marvel comic book series where G.I. Joe was a bestseller of more than 250,000 monthly copies. Some fifty manufacturers bought rights that allowed them to use the G.I. Joe logo on a variety of products: jigsaw puzzles, sunglasses, kites, shoelaces -- all mutually advancing the public's awareness of the G.I. Joe concept.

Although the eleven-year-old boy whom Patrick Fahey studied is innocent of much of the history of G.I. Joe, his interest, like his art making, is embedded in a cultural context, partly shaped by this commercial enterprise. However, his involvement in this massive capital venture is personal and particular, perhaps confirming the hopes of market researchers who conceived of blister pack file cards, supplying biographical and psychological profiles for a cast of G.I. Joe characters. Attached to the toy warriors, these profiles in a postmodernist irony attempted to personalize a symbol whose origin was anonymity. Regardless of marketers' intentions, meaningful specificity is constructed by an individual child, whether in playing or in making art.

Research interests, too, are embedded in a cultural context -- we frequently refer to this as mentoring. Mr. Fahey's attention to the relationship

between these popular cultural phenomena and children's art making is grounded in my consciousness of my niece and nephews' absorption with Pacman and Strawberry Shortcake imagery, and my subsequent research into the paradoxical tension between stereotypes and personal meaning. Like the boy he studied, Mr. Fahey finds his own meaningful specificity in the paper that follows.

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