

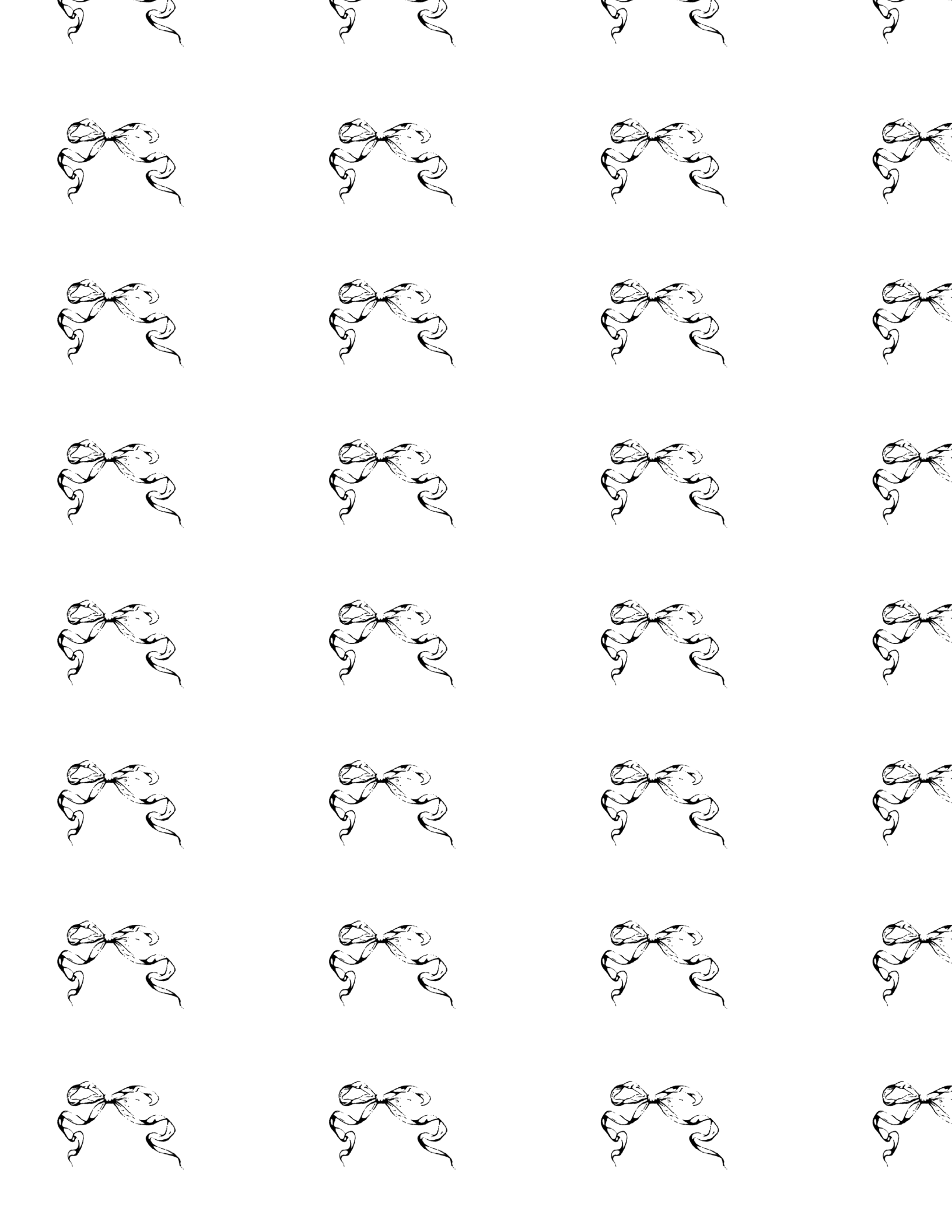
Powerless in the Face of Desire



*About girlhood, capitalism and wanting
lots of stuff.*



A zine by Victoria Fernandes





**posted my first status update
at 9,
since then i've been a prophet
<3**



Chapter One: Digital Girlhood

Things changed the summer I first got an iPad.
Goodbye developing country living, and hello world!

I spent that summer mostly inside, causing havoc in creative mode Minecraft, and reading X-rated Big-Time Rush fanfiction (Logan was my favourite).

I think that's when I figured out, I had no real interest in being myself. I was perfectly content in my room, living vicariously through a screen, taking all and full advantage of how successful and established I had become in the scenarios being constantly made up in my head.

And I think things have always been like that, even before the internet.

I hated baby dolls because I never really wanted to be a mother and pregnant women are fat. So, I only played with Barbies, because they were sexy, skinny and fun. Pretending has always been part of growing up. In my imagination I'd do and undo chaos as I pleased, the final say was always mine. I think the hopelessness of having absolutely no control over your own existence, makes the idea of curating your life kind of irresistible to a young girl. Being online made all of this so much easier, it felt like everything was catered just for me.



On the outside, I was a god-fearing, evangelical 10-year-old, who got standard grades and always told the truth. But when I'd get home after a long day at school and my vovó was busy with housework, I'd sin. Behind my locked bedroom door there was no sanctity, no heaven nor hell, just me and all the Justin Bieber music videos I could physically stomach.

He was my God, you know? And Lana Del Rey was the Madonna, propped up on the altar I'd pray in front of, on my hands and knees. Gaga was the preacher, in drag makeup and a meat dress, I never missed her sermons, even though I couldn't understand a word of English. I felt so fucking special.

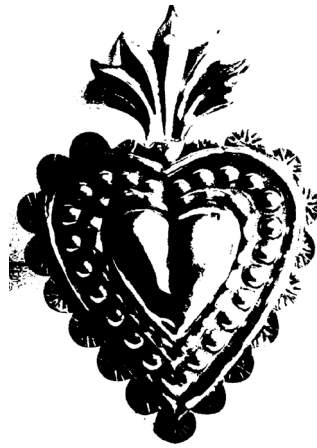




I don't think it's crazy that felt so much better than whatever else was going on. What certainties did I even have here on this earth? If the choice was given, I'd happily pick eternal dissociation. From the outside I'm sure it all looked like a waste of time, but it was honestly hurtful that nobody knew that on freegames.com, I was a dentist, a plastic surgeon and an interior decorator; completely changing 2D animated people's lives. At Habbo Hotel, I had 3 boyfriends, even though I was never allowed to speak to men in real life. On IMVU, I had a big ass and an almost invisible waist, I kissed girls at house parties and prayed to God no one could see my screen (that would have been the end of me). Hearing my own name being screamed from the kitchen, brought me back to reality every single time, and what I was met with was almost always disappointing. It's not like I hated my childhood, I'll still think about that summer I went fishing every weekend and cry, but life felt like it had zero repercussions online.



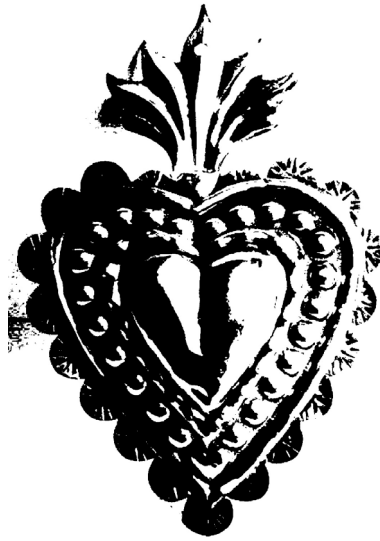
**being a woman is like. i want to
be moustrous. i want to be desired.**



Looking back, I think of my girlhood in pictures, a mixture of family ones, printed on photo paper hidden away inside a cardboard box, but also in thousands of Facebook selfies, the ones I'm both too embarrassed to look at and too sentimental to delete. At least I can put away the cardboard box. But I could never get rid of that night my cousin and I, got ready to go nowhere; end of summer tan, expired red lipstick that doubled as blush, and our denim shorts pulled up so high we could barely sit down. We posted 15 pictures that day. 9 likes. Infinite pleasure.

Around that same time, I got in trouble with my mum for watching porn for the first time. Don't think I really understood it, but it made me think about my body a lot, and how nobody would ever want to fuck me.

It wasn't linear but after that, I became obsessed with these weirdly romantic videos on YouTube, where white American girls would share their heartfelt stories of anorexia recovery, layered over sad, copyright-free music. I was happy for them and all, but I wanted that to be me so badly. From then on playing sports was no longer fun, every stomach bug felt like a small victory, and every fork full of food was filled with this feeling of guilt I haven't yet managed to shake off.



It only takes me one afternoon to meet every beautiful girl in the world. Their mannerisms cling on to me in no time, soon becoming my own. Their Western wardrobes, Hollister and H&M; trailer park chic, filthy lovely, so foreign, so exotic. The ones in mine becoming a picture-perfect copy (minus the misspellings and backwards Nike swishes of course).

Every night for 2 months, my beauty routine was set. It was a 6-minute ab workout, brush teeth, wash face, tie my hair up, go to bed, and play the 8 hour long subliminal meditation that was guaranteed to change my black eyes to the most beautiful green colour you've ever seen.

Only yesterday, I was recommended a video about Bella Hadid's alleged plastic surgeries. I heard she got her first nose job at 15. I thought this was so sad. Poor Bella! I wonder if she even did it for herself, you know? Or perhaps she was just a natural-born martyr, a real-life Joan of Arc, a rebel sacrificing their body for the ultimate struggle- my aspirational Pinterest board.



*I know i'm efficient,
Tell me i'm beautiful.*



Chapter Two: Becoming Young-Girlfied

As a young girl, the internet was my popular older sister, cool and equally mean. Late at night in her bedroom she taught me all her fun tips and tricks, and with a heartless slap in the face, she showed me the real meaning of capital, and blinded me with the sweetness of consumption.

Have you ever felt desire for everything? I think that's what it means to be truly powerless.

Tiqqun's 'Preliminary Materials for a Theory of The Young Girl', explains the phenomenon of the 'Young Girl' in modern society, as well as explaining that the term is not necessarily a "gendered concept", in fact "the young girl is simply the model citizen as redefined by consumer society". The theory also states that the position taken by a young, usually adolescent woman is a particularly vulnerable one, which only becomes exacerbated in the savageness of late-stage capitalism.



The recent changes in our consumer culture have become undeniable. As capitalism struggled to sustain its rigid regime at the beginning of the 20th century, realising that it could not survive simply out of labour exploitation, it learns to be transformative, and therefore brutally colonizes everything beyond production. With the raise in popularity of socialism, capitalism also learned to socialise- it bred culture.

(Tiqqun, 2001)

Soon, all those once cast aside by society, minorities in general, saw themselves reflected on a shiny screen, welcomed with a warm consumerist hug.





As we rapidly evolve and terms like the ‘post-internet’ seem almost archaic, so do the ways in which we buy, sell, communicate, and consume art and culture (Kholeif, 2014). The internet, however, cannot be ignored or cast aside when talking about this, as its importance was and continues to be tremendous.

Bright and fluorescent magazines mean nothing to the 2023 young girl, for we’ve become more civilized than that. Instead, I’ll scroll through my phone for hours and hours, stumbling in and out of consciousness, everywhere and anywhere. I am an expert in everything, there is no knowledge unavailable to me -- yet I’ll carelessly talk to a girlfriend about a useless shiny product I’m ‘dying’ to buy, the next day it’s the first thing that appears on my Instagram explore page. I’ll quietly exclaim “omg that’s crazy!”, and buy it, because it felt like a sign from God.



**THE YOUNG GIRL HAS
LOVE STORIES**

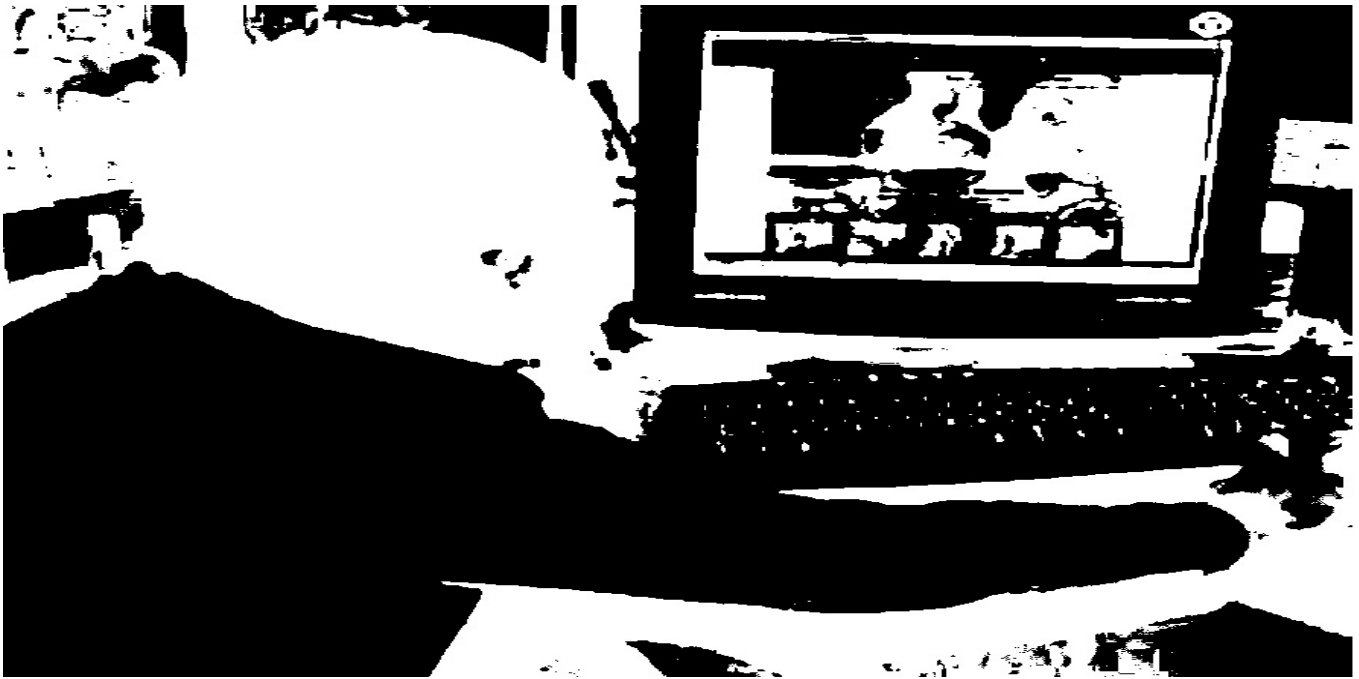


The 2023 young girl is past the need for real relationships. After all, there is someone just for you on your (para)social media of preference. With that, I've become a bohemian lover, struggling to settle for a single person, I'm looking for something fast and intense, I'm sure you understand. This becomes reflected in the modern technology surrounding us, everyday a different influencer. They are brought to us through algorithmic destiny; a trending TikTok changing the life of a suburban woman overnight, we collectively worship her, consume her, we need to know everything about her. She's perfect and kind and her style is 'unique'. She'll eventually become the face of a brand, dip her toes into mainstream fame, and start a short-lived music career, all in the space of year. To eventually be faced with the tragedy of irrelevance, all because we've found someone newer, more exciting.

Our fast-paced digital relationships, come not only in the form of digital people but of things, consumable goods. You see, the 2023 young girl (like those who preceded her), is nothing but her belongings. With her sentimentalism and materialism existing in perfect solidarity.

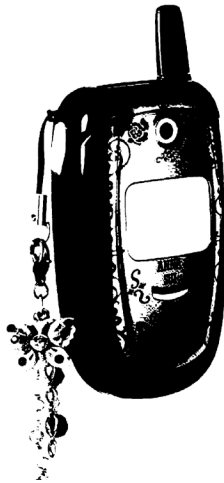


In this post digital apocalypse, the young girl does not have to worry about time consuming and exclusive subcultures, like those of the 1960s and 70s to feel part of a movement, for we've created our own (thousands of them, in fact). The 2023 young girl is a 'clean girl' on Mondays, a 'grunge' girl on Fridays and a 'furry' on the weekends. Perhaps the access of infinite knowledge, and the growth of maximalist fast fashion brands (where you can buy everything from cute crop tops to sparkly prayer mats), have changed the way in which young girls, in particular working-class girls, partake in popular trends, as they were more often than not excluded from mainstream pop culture and made to, "relinquish youth for the premature middle-age, induced by childbirth and housework". (McRobbie, 1990). But as you should know by now, positive changes and equality in Capitalism seem to only come at the price of destruction.



Due to this mass affordable consumption, and the hyper availability of goods, **the 2023 young girl becomes obsessed with authenticity, because it does not exist.**

I think this comes as a direct impact of growing up on the internet, seeing your favourite celebrities be so close yet so intangible, left a hole that needed to be filled. The rise of YouTube in the early 2010s opened a new world of entertainment, with those most popular at the time often making a living through skits and character-based content. But as the creator economy changed somewhere in the late 2010s, “consumer interests at large have shifted to prefer the façade of authenticity”. (Fisher-Quann, 2022)



Performance is out! (at least bad ones, like the silly obvious ones). We love our illusions. After all, the only authenticity worthy enough to be consumed is a perfectly curated one. Here, the young girl becomes the expert, because she understands what it's like to be perceived by everyone and everything, she understands the act of performing as she does it every day. Tiqqun states that, "the young girl never creates anything; All in all, she only recreates herself". Like the idea of the young girl, authenticity and perfection, become idolatry, simply because of their inaccessibility.

The world as we know it, has only become more commercialised, but the idea of the average commercial is ancient, and completely out of fashion. Instead, we demand an immersive, Oscar-winning, subtle performance from a 19-year-old girl, posting her 100th Instagram story, tastefully showing her sponsors on every bit of her daily routine. She says she's got a discount code, 15% off, she's so thoughtful! She's mind-blowingly charismatic! Incredibly down to earth, funny - but never ever ugly, speaks her mind, but never crosses the line.

I'd buy the world if she told
me to.



**SEDUCTION IS AN ASPECT OF SOCIAL LABOUR: THAT
OF THE YOUNG GIRL.**

WHEN THE YOUNG GIRL GIGGLES, SHE'S WORKING.



And in reality, it may all be lie, but there's mutual respect here, we are all labourers in one way or another. **The 2023 young girl understands this, she also understands that her sexuality, is the purest form of labour.**

In her book, 'Feminism and Youth Culture', Angela McRobbie explores the positions of young women in society, and the misunderstandings surrounding stereotypes of traditional female roles. McRobbie says that "within the repertoire of subcultural representations- girls and women have always been located nearer to the point of consumerism than to the 'ritual of resistance' ". Highlighting a larger sexual culture, still present to this day which continuously overshadows everyday female actions and achievements into sexual stigmatization.

It is no secret that female sexuality is, and has always been a taboo, from a young age, women are taught to suppress their natural sexuality, and that doing the opposite would be nothing short of shameful:



“THE NOTION OF WOMEN FREELY ENGAGING IN SEXUAL PRACTICES FOR THE PURPOSE OF PLEASURE, RATHER THAN REPRODUCTION, IS RADICAL WHEN POSITIONED WITHIN THE LARGER HISTORICAL CONTEXT WHEREIN WOMEN, AND IN PARTICULAR WOMEN OF COLOUR, HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO BODY POLICING AND, CONSEQUENTLY, THE DEPRIVATION OF THE RIGHT TO EXPLORE.” (AGOOS, 2020)

However harsh this suppression was and is, it has never managed to subdue the unruly desire of the male gaze. In fact, it only painted women (especially young girls) as innocent and pure, unlike their male counterparts – ready to be devoured.

Karl Marx defines commodity as “an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another” (1867). Women have in themselves become a ‘valued’ commodity. And historically, the standards in which this ‘value’ has been based on, was always the idea and the desire for the young girl. Virginity, innocence, youth, and a hairless body, continue to be a not so hidden fetish, making the women (or children) who possess these various attributes weigh higher in the consumer scale.



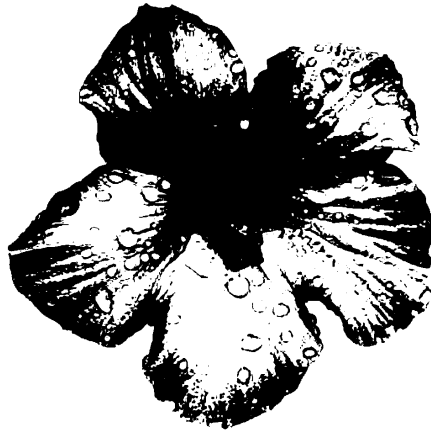
“BEAUTY IS DESIRED IN ORDER THAT IT MAY BE BEFOULED; NOT FOR ITS OWN SAKE, BUT FOR THE JOY BROUGHT BY THE CERTAINTY OF PROFANING IT.” (BATAILLE, 1957)

‘Competition’, is a familiar word to the young girl, in particular, towards other women. “The young girl doesn’t age, she decomposes.” (Tiqqun, 2001). And the race to slow down decomposition is a fierce one, with young women exchanging their childhoods for the male gaze idea of womanhood, sooner and sooner. Neo-liberal identity politics usually excuse this as ‘empowerment’, but I’m not sure if I still agree...



At 15, I felt old enough, misunderstood by women around me that conformed to patriarchal ideas. The internet sold me girls that looked just like me. I read Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and thought she was indeed 'really mature for her age', just like me. On my Tumblr account I performed, like a pre-pubescent Sasha Grey in Primark lingerie, with an audience raging from old creepy men to complimentary teenage girls, and 'incel' guys in their early 20s I would try to fix. Looking back now, I was nothing but a commodity.





Years later, not much seem to change. At 20 years old, I've gotten rid of some of the revealing clothes I'd wear at 14 and 15 (maybe as a subconscious way to regain my innocence) and tried to make peace with my own ideas of female empowerment. But the world around me is still the same.

I'm considering booking my first Botox appointment this summer, and I've purchased 'anti-wrinkle' straws from a TikTok ad, because I'm terrified of getting older. There's a mindset that comes with being a living commodity which is difficult to shake off. It's a lot to think about really.

Right now, I look too cute, I couldn't give a shit about being free. xxxxxxxx

“THE OLD AGE OF THE YOUNG GIRL IS NO LESS HIDEOUS THAN HER YOUTH. FROM ONE END TO THE OTHER, HER LIFE IS NOTHING BUT A PROGRESSIVE SHIPWRECK IN FORMLESSNESS, AND NEVER AN ERUPTION OF BECOMING. THE YOUNG GIRL WALLOWS IN THE LIMBO OF TIME”
(TIQQUN, 2001)



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