



April 28, 1999

Pink for boys Light blue for girls

The sexualization of the girl as a woman

From *Gabrielle Werner*

Years ago, British Vogue maltreated the female adult eye with models who stared out of haute couture gowns with their half-empty children's eyes. Lolitas are now cult under the label "Natural Beauties" (Vogue, No. 1 / 99). Karl Lagerfeld drew his new "Chanel muse" from this reservoir. While Stella Tennant was already a role model for the total reductionism of female forms, Devon Aoki is now increasing the tendency towards dewomanization. She looks like an elementary school girl.

Ellen von Unwerth stages her and her peers for Wella Italia with the comment: "We appeal to a new femininity - provocative, seductive, cool. There is something of that in every woman." (Vogue, No. 1/ 99) Only there are no women in her photos, but rather young girls, some of whom are made up to look like female children.

The fact that glossy fashion magazines make their money by making adult femininity invisible has not yet led to their ruin. Women themselves bear this responsibility. But what do these images of feminine femininity mean for the image of the feminine child, and what image of the girl is created by them?

I will make a linguistic distinction between the feminine child or girl and the female child in order to make clear where images of the adult woman are imposed on the feminine child via images of the feminine. I will also use "adult" as an adjective where a distinction between a child's and an adult's world or fantasy seems necessary.

If you read Michel Foucault's "Sexuality and Truth", you get the impression that childhood as a sociological phenomenon of Western civilizations only became important when it came to the control of children's sexuality, especially masturbation and masturbation. It seems as if childhood was created in the discourse about sexuality and its surveillance and with it the adult fantasies about a child's sexuality and the fascination of adults with it.

The talk about children's sexuality that began in the 18th century has today led to feminine children in particular being given a sexuality that can be used and marketed. To do this, it is necessary to act as if they were already in full possession of this good, as if they had already acquired the ability to consciously experience sexuality as part of their identity. This view marks the redefinition of a feminine child to a female child.

MARTOS GALLERY

As if to prove otherwise, an example with a boy shows where such an assumption can lead. "The Little Helper", staged by Terry Richardson, not only conveys the adult man's fear of the sexually potent woman, but also the colonialist power relationship, not between the woman depicted and the sexualized boy, but between these two objects Fascination and the man taking photographs. "A man in uniform should not forget his privileged position. Nor should he ever seek to gain advantage from this." (The Face, No. 18 / 1998)

Here too, the image of a child, in this case a boy, is used to talk about an adult, here a man. But there is no man in these photos. He is behind the camera. Childhood sexuality is no longer under the care of adults; control no longer means prohibition, but rather controlling use to visualize a male, adult sexual fantasy. And the sexuality of female adults is childized by turning male fears around.

With fatal consequences, feminine children and girls can then be made similar to adult femininity. Comic series like Naoko Takeuchi's "Sailor Moon" from Japan work with this diminution of female identities. In everyday life, Bunny Sukino and her school friends cover a whole range of divergent girls' identities. However, when they change clothes on the fly and transform into warriors to save the earth, their external appearance acquires a typification and standardization that only exists on the street prostitution (e.g. on Berlin's Oranienburger Straße).

And only in this form can they speak of themselves as "women", and only with a view to this second and actual form can it be explained why today's appropriate linguistic precision with regard to gender constructions in fanzines is thrown overboard and "each one "Find (can) find a sailor warrior with whom he can identify".

Girls' worlds are designed with a male counterpart in mind and as a world in which the gender and sexual identity of girls cannot arise and form, but is determined from the outset by a reduced and standardized image of the feminine.

The exhibition addresses the production and use of female child sexuality in various ways, and the examples I select are read under the heading "sexualization of the girl as a woman." I will try to show in detail which forms of sexualization can be seen where, but in general these works seem to me to be effects of the identity political debates that are taking place about the body, i.e. about gender and sexuality.

Contrary to the theoretical debate, which deals with dealing with adult female identities, the artistic works show female children exercising identity practices of adult females. The latent violence that can be observed in these works results from the collision between an image of the girl and the knowledge of the sexual beyond experience imposed on her through an image of the feminine.

MARTOS GALLERY

Zbigniew Libera's "You Can Shave Your Baby" can be compared to the girl culture that is supposed to socialize feminine children into mothers and wives through playing with baby dolls and even Barbie dolls. The stultifying reduction of these female play worlds to changing diapers, undressing and dressing and combing is turned into a sexual obsession and can be turned this way because the girl's play world has the sexually connotated body as its object in different ways, her own or that of the game -"Companion". What is practiced is not how to deal with the contingent offers of what "woman" and "femininity" could be, what is practiced is how to deal with sex.

Mike Kelley and Sue Williams brutalize the effects of this socialization in their photographs based on a concept by Aura Rosenberg. Although boys and girls equally like to dress up and put on make-up, the girls' childish play with a future, adult female gender identity apparently lends itself to naming something additional.

When Kelley transforms "Carmen" into a childish whore like "Last Exit Brooklyn", then in the dual relationship between photographer and girl, he takes on the position of threatener and threatener. The additional information about the loss of virgin innocence is developed from the disguise game. The violence of the production also makes the male's view of the female appear to be always violent, to which the female can only position herself as a victim from the beginning of her creation.

Williams, on the other hand, takes the position of observer and commentator on what happens when an oversized something breaks into feminine living spaces that should actually be protected. The fact that the girl seeks support from Barbie dolls, these asexual sex bombs, exaggerates the threatened innocence, since the girl's game is shown as one that is intended to prepare for this situation. Girls have already lost the space of feminine childhood through toys, and unlike Libera, Williams does not transfer this dimension of their socialization into the sexual fantasy of an adult, but rather shows it as a real threat to the child who is portrayed as feminine.

Inez van Lamsweerde sums up what is meant by "the distrust of any definition of identity that does not face the challenge of reflecting in what it says and what it keeps silent" (Sabine Hark). "Kirsten" is a conglomerate of artificial, phantasmatic images of the feminine. The computer-processed highlights on the lower lip of this female surface made of plastic doll and death mask leave no doubt that this is supposed to be about a creature and not a portrait. This face is a product of the media, as is clearly shown by its resemblance to one of the better-known images of Marilyn Monroe. In contrast to Ellen von Unwerth's work, no girl is marketed here, but the mechanisms of marketing are revealed.

MARTOS GALLERY

This shows the different politics of aesthetic practices. Lamsweerde conceives representation as a depicting relationship, while Unwerth does not depict, in the sense of an artistically produced documentation, but rather "actually produces hierarchizations and power relationships" in the depiction (Isabell Lorey).

The two photographs by Sally Mann "Jessie as Jessie" and "Jessie as Madonna" show how confusing the oscillation between identity and identification can sometimes be when practicing adult female sexuality. Of course, Jessie as Jessie is no more authentic than the same as "Madonna." The photo of a young girl without make-up is also a representation, that is, a representation that simultaneously and inseparably creates a certain - melancholic, soft, lovable - image of the girl. But one can say that Jessie as Madonna is a collection of such distinctive signs of "Madonna" that individuality is generalized into the image "Madonna", whereby "generalized" also means sexualized.

The special transformation into a pop idol means making oneself an identifiable symbol of something that, as an icon, is by definition already a reduction to something unambiguous. The attempt to discuss possible gender identities as historical, contingent and fleeting collides with a market strategy that must rely on recognition. Identity becomes a merchandising effect.

Ginger Roberts shows a way to think identity and difference together. Hickeys are symbols of pride, romantic relics of unsupervised moments (clumsy intimacy), in front of which is written in large letters: Adults are not allowed in. But on the shoulder of a female adult, they are also melancholic, possibly sentimental memories through which one's own story is constructed in a certain way. Roberts' work shows that the aesthetic production of female childhood does not mean feminine childhood, but rather how female childhood is made in the mirror of a female and male adult reality.

In this sense, the theoretical identity policy debates of adult women naturally have an impact on childhood: "It is important to understand (...) the social production of identity as the ongoing and merciless process of hierarchizing differentiation, but at the same time always also of redefinition, of is subject to intervention and change." (Sabine Hark)

Without this understanding, "Basis" couldn't sing, "I don't want your (shitty) life," and wouldn't have so much success with it.