

Bridge Isn't Falling Down

Laurence A. Rickels

Laura London is an explorer of the Teen Age, you know the age, like, you know, I don't know, the one we live in. The teen in our midst, the inner teen, is the measure and metabolism of what's most pressing right now on the edge of the time to come. That's why boredom is one bottom line only the teen can hang with: in less repressed terms, what we call boredom is the wide open space of incalculable events, advents, adventures. It's the ever new frontier in which we get an outside chance of encountering the other, the one who comes towards us, uncontrollably, unstoppably, like the future, like reality. It's in such a moment that identification exceeds itself and opens up to intervention, self invention, the advent of the other in your face. Like one moment I'm bored, then next moment I'm dressing up fit to be tied to a star.



Rock Star Moment double features the dress-up rituals of a 13-year-old imitating the likes of Shirley Manson, Marilyn Manson, and Courtney Love. But each moment is about London's relationship to her subject. She's there, two. She pays tribute to the agency or identity teens construct for themselves in the course of identifying with the stars, models, idols in our current saturation sensurround of total information. The resulting look is not the placeholder for the original nor can it be reduced to the teen's desire to be like figures recognized for being different. It is something new and passing that hangs around for a while in London's photographs.

In this work the photographer-director is a participant, a teenager at heart. London tries to capture the often overlooked aspects of teen likability. Even while becoming or making image, the teen resists objectification by attaining the crazy careful imperfection of a look at once received and reclaimed. Focus on the difference made in current teen identification rituals is one goal of London's attention to the kind of body of work that can be built by doing the stats and working the specs of a perspective at once sociological and psychological. Psychoanalytically, however, it is the same difference that comes into focus. The girl who dresses up as rock stars is also playing princess in fantasies that take off from and take her away from her present family role.

The favorite period costume for the Barbie doll is still that of medieval princess.

London is one of those names that's a place name, the name of one place in particular that has absorbed histories, even or especially histories of the recent past. Since the 1960s London has been a center stage of the Teen Age. But beneath the mini-skirting of this youth culture's origin in the in-group's murder of the primal Pop, London's Teen Age was the first to show the stretch lines of tension binding this age to the Middle Ages, both as historical or fantastic past and as phase in human development, that is, the time of crisis in which midlifers value the youth that was wasted on them back then. Teen energy is unthinkable without the fantasy resources of the Middle Ages crisis. The Middle Ages serve the time in which teens, too, imagine a fantasy past, crowded with props from the Middle Ages, to which they assign their parents, thus at once declaring them history ("so medieval!") and granting them a heroic version of their own adolescence (which, on its own, by the way, wastes away).

Fantasy, before it became a best-selling literary genre, was analyzed by Freud, in his essay on *The Poet and Day-Dreaming*, in terms of the two times you get and the one time you forget. Freud's example features a boy in his early teens, an orphan, who decides to apply for a job he has just heard about. On the way to his interview he fantasizes getting the job, rising up the ranks of employment, until he is second in command to his boss, whose daughter he marries and whose business he inherits. The past tense belongs to a time when the boy was the beloved young child of his parents. His yearning for that past animates the fantasy, which belongs to the future. It's a fiction about the time to come that is at the same time inspired by the past that saw him better off, beloved, protected. But for the fantasy to unfold the day-dreamer must precisely forget the present, his job search, his unemployed, alone-in-the-world status—he must forget the present tension that the fantasy circumvents on the past-to-future bridge. This London bridge isn't falling down, not in Star Wars, not in Rock Star Moment. Ever since the invention of mid life, which coincides with the invention of adolescence, even crisis is on one hot line to and through Middle Ages and Teen Age fantasies.