

Tiqqun's Tits: Preliminary Materials for Exposing the Young-Girl

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Tiqqun, an anonymous collective of anarchist political philosophers situated in France (“Tiqqun”), suggests that we are in an invisible war with capitalism and commodification (11). My artwork, *Foreign Bodies/Tits Uncensored* is a response to and extension of Tiqqun’s book, *Preliminary Materials for Theories of a Young-Girl*, first released in 1999. In the sections of the book titled “Young-Girl as Commodity” and “Preliminaries,” Tiqqun targets the Young-Girl as a metaphor for the emptiness at the heart of commodification. My artwork preserves their motivation, to make visible the *invisible war* (11). Via artistic and performative strategies, I reimagine Tiqqun's theoretical strategies by exposing my nude body pulling a fragile sculptured idealization of women's breasts in front of the Victoria’s Secret store in downtown Vancouver. I am aware that this attempt to reclaim the Young-Girl as a real body that calls attention to the unreal ideals and abstractions of commodified bodies risks feeding the very spectacle of commodification that I'm resisting. While Tiqqun’s theory and my artwork both operate within the exact system they criticize, we both resist that system by presenting non-commodifiable work, while exposing the invisible world of omnipotent capitalism and our constantly commodified subjectivity.

Functioning first as an installation, large, sculpted breasts made of plaster and burlap are attached to chains and a yoke, materials that prompt reflection on the ways that we are connected to or disconnected from these parts of the body. The breasts will then be moved from the gallery space to the public sphere, where they will be indelicately pulled along the sidewalk outside of Victoria’s Secret (on Robson street in downtown Vancouver) until they break apart. The leftover fragments will function again as an installation piece along with photographic documentation from the performance. This artwork questions and targets sexualized ideals of bodily perfection within mainstream visual culture. If Victoria's Secret sells the antidote to insecurities that it helps to create, then this installation/performance/installation is meant to strip away that facade and remind us of the strength of bodies and the fragility of manufactured/commodified objects (which is what women's bodies have become).

While Tiqqun is based in France, their book, *Preliminary Materials for Theories of a YoungGirl*, targets omnipotent capitalism and its invisible, universal stranglehold on the consumer. Tiqqun argues that, like the Young-Girl archetype, we are commodities, products and agents of capital caught in an

invisible war in which we are our own oppressors: “The Young-Girl is an absolute: She is bought because she has value, she has value because she is bought” (Tiqqun 75). Tiqqun’s idea of self bought oppression can be better understood by a quotation from Emory Douglas’ essay “Art for the People’s Sake.” Even though Douglas’ essay is written to the Black Panther Party in 1972, its ideas are applicable to all contemporary artists:

..we have a greater enemy in relation to art. We have a greater enemy, I would say, in commercial art. What is commercial art? It is a method of persuasion, mind control; it oppresses...If we look around our community, what do we see? We see billboards, with advertising, that tell us what to buy, and how to buy. And we go out and buy...our own oppression. (Douglas 171)

To resist the ubiquitous power, oppression and resulting hollowness of commodification, Tiqqun anonymize the names of their members of their collective and make their work freely accessible, thus avoiding any sort of product regulation/distribution because (almost) anyone can access it.

While my motivations are similar to Tiqqun’s philosophical and textual attempt to make invisible forces visible, my methods are different. My work makes use of ephemeral performance (which cannot be bought or sold), disintegrating materials (my sculpture is made to physically break down during the performance), fragile icons (the sculpted, crumbling breasts), and strength of the physical body against the yoke of commercial oppression (via my pulling the breasts along the sidewalk). This artwork embodies my affirmation of, response to and extension of Tiqqun’s concerns and strategies. Whereas their publication is like a political pamphlet handed out to make people aware of the invisible war through the lens of scholarship and rhetoric, my work makes cultural battlefields visible through the lens of performance art.

Art historian and writer, Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, quotes Herbert Marcuse who states “...art...can give form to a utopian dimension; it can create images of another world, although it is a product of this world” (230). Both Tiqqun and myself are using (abusing) the system of Capital to exploit its

autonomous reign on consumer culture. However, Tiqqun and I are mere oil smudges on the pristine glass of capitalism; neither of us offer a solution or necessarily create images of an alternative world to capitalist/commodity culture, but how can there be any answers to a global problem so ubiquitous and discernible as excessive commodification? We have to prime the glass with our oil smudges before we can repaint a solution. In the same way that Tiqqun is aware that asserting their idea of the Young-Girl is more a critique than a solution, my performance piece while not as powerful as capitalism's commodifying power, like Tiqqun, is still an artistic political response and movement away from commodification, offering a brief wrinkle in capitalism's mirage. Perhaps with enough wrinkles, it will tear.

Works Cited

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