

SWEETWATER,

Hanna Stiegeler

Infinite Library

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I bought a pair of capri pants at C&A last week, in the Ring Center at Schönhauser Allee, which was the first time I'd engaged with the chain since I started shopping for my own clothes. It was me and a bunch of retired ladies in there and for a second I had serious doubts about my fashion choices. Later that evening, however, I saw an influencer on Instagram wearing a similar pair and felt somewhat reassured. A little smug even at my cute little fashion hack, an act of détournement as trend cycles become so accelerated that out and in is purely a matter of who's wearing it.

I've recently learned that in the right light, nearly anything can become a vintage gem, or that is at least what the rise and proliferation of online resale platforms seem to promise, as they overflow with shreds of jersey reemerging as Y2K relics. I've bought in and am on the lookout for the perfect pair of kitten heels to match my new pants. The difference between infinite and nearly infinite may seem boundless in itself, but scrolling through this ocean of stuff, such a distinction hardly matters. A stream of headless mannequins, performing carefully studied poses in ill-lit bedrooms, all trying to sell me something they no longer desire.

Hanna Stiegeler's latest series of screenprints delve deep into the semiotics of online thrifting. By appropriating photos uploaded by users modelling their items, she exposes ubiquitous visual tropes as they trickle down from high-fashion advertising into people's bedrooms. I linger on one particular image: shellac nails protrude from a perfectly manicured hand, which rests on a tilted thigh with such gentle but assured precision it becomes a gesture that demands a response. Another hand disappears behind a hip that curves upwards, tilting the torso into a diagonal that becomes the middle part in a perfect S curve: contrapposto. She mimics the glossy billboard images nobody can escape, but the messy bedroom in the background breaks the illusion. To acquire an item of clothing is to ask yourself: *who do I want to be?* And of course, the fashion industry provides a variety of answers, all mirages of shiny perfection just a click away. Inversely, this imitation of highly stylized composure that collides with such blatant realism creates an uncanny dissonance and makes me think that this is definitely not the kind of person I want to be. Yet, Stiegeler manages to tease out the accidental beauty in the randomness of the snapshots, where intention and effect so drastically diverge.

Throughout both her images and those she appropriates, a game of hide and seek plays out. During the printing process, Stiegeler obscures the source material in a way that enhances the ambiguity of what is shown and what disappears. Drawing attention to the negative space a body leaves behind, the anonymous figures become ethereal apparitions. The body that hides behind the flash is no more than a silhouette. There's the ubiquitous mirror selfie, the box frame of the webcam that resembles a zoom call or a round of Chatroulette. Some of these images could have just as well been extracted from shadier parts of the internet, where the game of veil and reveal is not primarily about the clothes. Scarcity creates value, distance makes the heart grow fonder. Eros, bittersweet. The marketplace is governed by libidinal forces, but there is nothing libidinal about these images.

I thought it might be refreshing to indulge in such an insipid pocket of the web, yet somehow I find myself yearning for the delusion, the brief moment of aspiration when I wait for the DHL person to ring my bell and hand me the package that will sort out my life. So I log off, thinking maybe I don't need material goods to live a fulfilled life, maybe that's not where my happiness truly lies. Maybe I should get a facial instead.

Text by Dara Jochum

Hanna Stiegeler (*1985, Konstanz) lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *piloto pardo*, London (2022), *The Tail*, Brussels (2021), *Sweetwater*, Berlin (2020), and the *Gewölbekeller*, Konstanz (2019). Stiegeler's work is included in the *Bundeskunstsammlung*, the *Kunstfonds der staatlichen Kunstsammlung Dresden*, and the collection of the *Lindenau Museum, Altenburg*. She studied at the *Universität der Künste, Berlin* and the *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst, Leipzig*.