

New adult is a term coined by artist Candelaria Saenz Valiente for a coming of age exhibit / ritual of passage (ritual of validation) held in Berlin in 2022.

As part of the exhibit, the artist has published this text:

“The term New Adult refers to a fully grown wise child, different to the idea of adulthood imbued with the musky odour of New Traditionalism.

Why do we (Gen X and Millennials) feel like we are forever coming of age?

During their youth, the boomer generation were still mostly subscribing, even if not ideologically, to the traditional family scheme set about by their parents. Particularly, what these two generations had in common was a

defined moment when they would become adults. Their rite of passage into adulthood was their wedding day. With marriage it was understood that they were leaving their family home (in the case of the woman at least) to, instantly after, become an adult. Weddings trumped other coming of age ceremonies such as Bar/Bat-Mitzvahs, Quinceañera, school graduation, etcetera, in terms of how instantly and tediously grown up young people would become.

The traditional marriage legacy has lost its footing now. There are a myriad of well known reasons why the institution of marriage is in decline but the more understated and intimate reason (the most truly subversive as it is secret and personal) is our disenchantment with the traditional family unit, which is the core of traditionalism. Have most of us witnessed our parents' sordid matrimonial experience? Likely.

But not only are we marrying less or not taking marriage seriously as a rite of passage, there's another reason why we don't fully feel like adults. In our youth, we (Gen X, upper Millennials) viewed adulthood as a large bulk of greyness in the far away horizon. Please

contest that. *(It is unwise to make a generalisation out of a particular and subjective experience, but I don't like the unpoetic method used by sociologists with their charts clipped down to their boards.)*

And this: there was a great divide between youth and grown ups. Adults were perceived almost as a different species, like zombies are a different species. Especially our parents' friends wearing v necked sweaters. We don't feel like adults because the term has been corrupted by our experience of them? We don't want to be those adults and it seems like we can afford not to be in this more elastic day and age. It is the memory of the staleness of adulthood that has made us weary of it, its rancid smell of existential dread. The Peter

Pan syndrome is common in cosmopolitan cities such as Berlin, where most people are unmarried and living with roommates. Adulthood here is a mirage.

But there is a cost to our way of being, something amiss felt at the height of the abdomen. The need for the New Adult term came about after recognising a certain anxiety caused by the implausibility of adulthood, especially when you are subconsciously still holding on to the established notion of the adult.

I will retrace the origin of this anxiety in me. It is believed that the adult goes through stages, young adult, middle adult, old adult. There are secular rites of passage between these stages. As Joseph Campbell said of the passage into old life: “As you pass from one stage to another, after middle age you move out of the sphere of achievement into the

sphere of enjoyment, appreciation and relaxing into the wonder of it all.” His rite of passage in this case was retiring from teaching. As well grounded as these stages may be they are no longer descriptive of actuality, the problem concerns a foundational theory of meaning. We haven’t had a proper rite of passage into adulthood, - hence we still feel like children -, and yet we are tagged as young or middle aged adults or even old adults. The fear we have is that one day we will become the new traditionalism adult version of ourselves, the lady on the back cover of Good Housekeeping magazines, the creeping horror of being called Señor, Señora; but also in general, of ageing and death.

The stage system is a ladder towards death and mythology describes this ladder beautifully with rites of passage and the hero’s journey. But as much as these mythologies are essentially true, perhaps we need a new mythology that represents our modern ageless

feelings and needs. One where we don't have many stages towards death or this current greyscale ascending towards the old notion of grown up life. Please think and propose a mythology. Perhaps one where the hero-ine jumps into a pool fully dressed? Is she at a pool party? Because we want to continue being ageless children but we also want to strive and we do want to achieve something and feel plenitude. Do we need validation of our being, our style and practice? A rite of validation? Someone or something that tells us it's ok, we are childlike and we can procure a life for ourselves and others.

A rite of validation, a sort of graduation or Bar-Mitzvah for all.

A new adult (I am still not convinced with this name since the word adult still gives me chills) is ageless, a child at heart, a person filled with natural integrity, someone who jumps into the pool early in their youth and emerges with the desire to enjoy the fruits of old age now, not later in life. This lack of

patience is very childlike and modern. These fruits being what Joseph Conrad described as “the wonder of it all”. It is a person who foresees their journey from a state of knowing to being and can imagine it almost as if they were living it. Regardless of achievements and whatever sketchy existence they may fall in and out of, a new adult is an old wise child looking to share and maintain their plenitude. The ceremony is a validation of this wish and of ourselves as legitimate and functional people.”

“Taste the biscuit. Taste the goodness of the biscuit. Taste the honey sauce. Taste the goodness of the biscuit with the honey sauce.”