

CINDERELLA'S SLIPPERS: THE DICHOTOMY OF FUR AND GLASS
– AND –
PERFORMANCE ART AND THE RE-ODORIZATION OF MODERN
CONSCIOUSNESS

by

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ABSTRACT

Essay 1: Cinderella's Slippers" revisits the argument that Charles Perrault, the first writer to publish Cinderella in print form in 1697, allegedly mistranslated the tale, which was relayed to him in French, mistaking **Vair** (fur) for **Verre** (glass). The essay inserts a feminist critique of the glass slippers by demonstrating tones of implicit misogyny and making observations that link Perrault's deliberate adaptation with the cultural and architectural history of Seventeenth century France. It also explores the metaphoric symbolism of fur and glass connecting them with Friedrich Nietzsche's dichotomy of the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

Keywords: Cinderella; Feminism; Charles Perrault

Subject Terms: Cinderella (Tale)—History and Criticism; Women—Folklore; Feminist Literary Criticism; Interpretation of Fairytales; Fairytales—Psychological Aspects

Essay 2: "Performance Art..." explores the notion that the smells used by artists in works of live Performance Art create shifts in consciousness for viewers and practitioners. The essay also addresses smell as a primal sense that evokes "feminine" or Dionysian perceptions of reality, a trigger of involuntary memory, and a device for social critique.

Keywords: Performance Art; Smell; Feminism

Subject Terms: Performance Art

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**1:
CINDERELLA'S SLIPPERS: THE DICHOTOMY OF FUR AND
GLASS**

Introduction

The fascinating notion that Cinderella's slippers were made of fur and not glass was first brought to my attention by Kurt Vonnegut's foreword to Anne Sexton's poetic adaptations of the classic fairy tales, Transformations. It was here that I read: "that in the process of translation, [from the oral to the written account of the story] the word vair was mistaken for verre so that Cinderella's fur slippers became glass".¹ Vonnegut goes on to say that he read this information "[in] an encyclopaedia, which my wife bought volume by volume from a supermarket...which was translated from Charles Perrault's telling of it in French."² Vonnegut's personal discovery occurred after a party he had attended with Sexton. He regretted that he had not been in possession of this gem of knowledge beforehand, for if he had been, he would have surely "enchanted Anne Sexton and everybody at the party with it."³ It is now, almost forty years after Vonnegut's revelation, that I find myself in turn enchanted by the news. Perrault's Cinderella was the only version read to me as a child (which is often the case with other children and adults too). Consequently, I perceived Perrault's version as being "unique" and "authentic". This association was reinforced when I saw Walt Disney's "Cinderella" movie,⁴ which is based on Perrault's adaptation of the tale. Naturally, given this experience, I had never considered that there could be an alternative to Perrault's iconic "glass slipper", or dreamed that Perrault had allegedly mistranslated from the original oral version the nature of its composition. Vonnegut had captured my imagination. I must say that I have always been intrigued by ideas that rupture or challenge popular belief systems, (upheld by "the status quo"), and the intrigue that Vonnegut's comment sparked within me now fuels this discussion.

¹ Vonnegut, Kurt, "Foreword" in Transformations, Anne Sexton, New York: Mariner Books, 2001, p. ix

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

⁴ I assert that this is also the case with other people. In many cases Disney's movie version may be the only version of Cinderella that they are aware of.

Upon further research into the alleged mistranslation of "verre and vair" with regard to Cinderella's slippers, I discovered that this is an old and ongoing literary debate. In fact the notion that Cinderella's slippers could have been made of fur (vair) instead of glass (verre) in the oral sources from which Perrault worked is widely discredited by many folklorists. Paul Delarue comments that:

One reason why the verre/vair error has been perpetuated is that it crept into such authoritative sources as the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Through successive editions, generations of readers were told: "In the English version, a translation of Perrault's Cendrillon, the glass slipper which she drops on the palace stairs is due to a mistranslation of pantoufle en vair (a fur slipper), mistaken for en verre". Could the Encyclopaedia Britannica be wrong? For decades, folklorists have been kept busy refuting the unfounded verre/vair hypothesis, but to no avail...⁵

Delarue's observation is apt if we consider that it was probably the Encyclopaedia Britannica that Vonnegut was referring to when he was noting the source of his "enchanted" information. Was Vonnegut, like the "generations of readers" Delarue refers to mis-informed? This question is symptomatic of the literary debate that has engrossed scholars and critics ever since Charles Perrault published his adaptation of Cinderella in Contes de ma Mère L'Oye in 1697.

Vair Not Verre

I have already explored the notion that Perrault's version allegedly mistakes the French word "vair" (fur) for "verre" (glass) in the oral account of the Cinderella tale he was transcribing. As a result the material that the slipper was intended to be made from "vair" (fur) and not "verre" (glass), was lost in his translation. However, the allegations are plausible given the homophonous similarity between the two French words.

Honoré de Balzac made the first documented observation of Perrault's 'error' in Études philosophiques sur Catherine de Medicis. Balzac states, "In hundreds of editions of Perrault's fairytales Cinderella's famous slipper, probably of fur, menu vair"- what is called miniver- has become a glass slipper,

⁵ Delarue, Paul "From Perrault to Walt Disney: The Slipper of Cinderella" in Cinderella: A Casebook, edited by Alan Dundes, Wildman Press: New York, 1983, p.111

pantoufle de verre.”⁶ As noted previously, many folklorists have dismissed arguments like Balzac’s that support the “mistranslation”. For example, contemporary scholar Maria Tatar comments, “Folklorists have now discredited the view that the slipper was made of fur and endorse the notion that the slipper has a magical quality to it and is made of glass.”⁷ However, I find Tatar’s dismissal of fur in favour of glass based on the “slipper [having] a magical quality”⁸ dissatisfying. How could the plausibility of a fur slipper be dismissed on the basis of glass having “a magical quality”? In my opinion both glass and fur bestow “magical qualities” on the slipper. I will comment on this aspect of Tatar’s assertion at later point in this essay. That being said, it is not my intent to oppose or discredit the view of contemporary folklorists by resurrecting and supporting the views of critics like Balzac as the basis of this essay. However, I find the contention intriguing. With over 340 oral variations of the Cinderella story it is difficult to comprehend why such a brouhaha was made over Perrault’s alleged mistranslation. In other accounts of the tale her slippers were made of gold leather, precious metals, satin and silk.⁹ In the earliest account of the Cinderella tale, Yeh-shen or Yeh-hsien (a Chinese adaptation), she wears gold shoes: “On her feet were beautiful slippers. They were woven of golden threads in a pattern of a scaled fish and the soles were made of solid gold.”¹⁰ The gold shoe motif is found in other tales too including “The Sharp(Horned) Grey Sheep” as told by John Dewar, a Scottish labourer in the nineteenth century: “But heroine slips out and receives golden shoes from prince... the prince runs after her and she loses a shoe in the mud.”¹¹ In “Sa Contanscia de Chignera” (The

⁶ Yearsley, Macleod The Folklore of Fairytale P 97 Google books:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=au0RPGI2K8QC&pg=PA57&lpg=PA57&dq=cinde>

⁷ Tatar, Maria, The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales, New York, Norton, 2002, p.28 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as: “Tatar”).

⁸ *ibid* p.28

⁹ Cox, Marian Roalfe. Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin, and Cap O’ Rushes, abstracted and tabulated. London: David Nutt for the Folklore Society, 1893. Online text: www.surlalunefairytales.com

¹⁰ Louie, Aai-Ling, Yeh-Shen, A Cinderella Story Philomel books, NY, 1982. Online text: <http://houck.salkeiz.k12.or.us/student.assignments/china.fables/cinderellastories.htm>

¹¹ Campbell, J. F., “The Sharp (Horned) Grey Sheep” (Told b John Dewar, labourer, Cowal) in Popular Tales of the West Highlands. Edinburgh, 1860-62, No. XLIII. Vol. ii, 286 ff. Online text: www.surlalunefairytales.com

Story of Cinderella), an Italian adaptation from Sardinia, her slippers are made of silver: "On the way she loses one shoe, which is found by king's son, who proclaims that whoever has lost a silver shoe shall be his wife."¹² In a Venetian adaptation, La Conza-Senare (The Cinder Wench), the slipper is made of diamonds: "Servants follow and are blinded with the sand she throws. She also throws one diamond shoe, which they take to prince."¹³ In Hanen Og Honen Der Gik Til Things" (The Cock And Hen Who Went To The Judge) an adaptation from Zealand in Denmark, the slipper is made of silk: "Boy goes to church, where he sees a lady lose her silk shoe. He wants to marry the person to whom shoe belongs...Everybody must try the shoe, and at last it is servant's turn. All at once she stands there in her silk dress just as she was in church. Boy recognises her and marries her."¹⁴ The shoe is made of satin in Rashin Coatie as told in the nineteenth century by Miss Margaret Craig of Darliston, Elgin in the dialect of Morayshire: "but she jumps over their heads, losing one satin slipper, Prince proclaims he will wed whomsoever shoe fits."¹⁵

In Jacob and Wilhelm Grimms' Aschenputtel (Ash Girl) Cinderella wears three different pairs of slippers. The first pair is described as "silk slippers embroidered with silver",¹⁶ the second are un-described, and the third pair "were of solid gold".¹⁷ The slipper in Marie Catherine, Baronne D'Aulnoy's Finette Cendron

¹² Sa Contanscia de Chignera (The Story of Cinderella) [Narrated by Maddalena Saba, aged 70, a peasant of Mores; transcribed by Stefano Chessa, also of Mores in Logredoro, Sardinia.] Archivio delle Tradizioni popolari, Palermo, 1883. ii, pp. 185-187. "Primo Saggio di novelle popolari sarde," da P. E. Guarnerio. Novella No. V., ibid

¹³ Bernoni, Dom. Giuseppe, La Conza-Senare (The Cinder Wench) Fiabe popolari Veneziane. Venezia, 1873. Story No. VIII, pp. 36-44. (In dialect.) ibid

¹⁴ Grundtvig, S., Hanen Og Honen Der Gik Til Things (The Cock and Hen Who Went To The Judge), Unpublished Collection. (From Zealand.) ibid

¹⁵ Rashin Coatie, told by Miss Margaret Craig, of Darliston, Elgin, Dialect of Morayshire.) Revue Celtique, t. iii; reprinted in Folk-Lore, Sept. 1890,i, p. 289-91.) ibid

¹⁶ Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm Aschenputtel (Ash Girl) in Cinderella:A Casebook edited by Alan Dundes, , New York, Wildman Press, 1983, p.26

¹⁷ ibid, p.27

or Cunning Cinderella¹⁸ is made of velvet. An excerpt from the story reads, “Finette...lost one of her slippers, made of red velvet and embroidered with pearls.”¹⁹ I found it interesting that D’Aulnoy’s description of the slipper reveals that she has chosen to shoe her “Cinderella” with a shoe that has been styled to represent the fashions of the time she (D’Aulnoy) was writing. An image of a shoe dated circa 1650s-60s appears in Lucy Pratt and Linda Wooley’s book, Shoes (plate 8- page 27). This image depicts a red velvet embroidered mule and the authors note that: “A [red] velvet mule...is a typical example of luxury...for women of about the 1650s to 1660s. A similar mule of embroidered velvet, which was worn by Queen Henrietta Maria...is dated between 1660 and 1665.”²⁰ D’Aulnoy’s representation of Cinderella’s slipper (unlike Perrault’s) is an authentic representation of a shoe worn by the aristocracy in late seventeenth century Europe. This is pertinent because it elucidates the absurd impracticality of Perrault’s glass slipper. Max Luthi notes that glass expresses the fairytale’s “stylistic bent” to present “the unambiguous, the extreme, and the distinct.”²¹ He goes on to say that “It was supposed to be absurd that Cinderella’s slipper could fall without breaking... Yet the fairytale provides Cinderella with glass slippers not because of its delight in the absurd, but because of its delight in the bright material. Like gold, glass [is] connected with light...glass fits superbly well into the sublimating style of the fairytale.”²²

As we can see Cinderella’s slipper appears in many different forms. However, despite the varied assortment of incarnations that the motif has appeared in, the aforementioned comments, particularly those made by Balzac and Tatar, create a sense of distinct polarity in our discussion: the slipper is either glass or fur, period.

Perhaps the “vair versus verre” debate can be attributed to the fact that Perrault’s text was the first written account of the story, published specifically for a learned, aristocratic, Christian audience.

¹⁸ D’Aulnoy’s version, like Perrault’s, was written in France circa 1690.

¹⁹ Canepa, Nancy, The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997, p.165

²⁰ Pratt, Lucy et al. Shoes, London: V&A Publications, 1999,p26

²¹ Luthi, Max, The Fairytale As Art Form And Portrait of Man, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984,p.15 (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as “Luthi”).

²² *ibid*, p.16

Consequently his version was taken “seriously” and the details he presented, specifically the glass slippers, were viewed as the “authentic” or “intended” ones. The details of Perrault’s adaptation have been viewed as the most “authentic” and this continues to be the case among mainstream audiences today. Once again, this could be attributed largely to Walt Disney basing his 1950 adaptation of Cinderella on Perrault’s version, which has further cemented details like the glass slippers as being the “authentic” or most “reliable”. Paul Delarue comments that:

One could add only that from a symbolic as opposed to a literal perspective, glass is perfectly appropriate. Glass is a standard symbol of virginity. It is fragile and can be broken only once. In Jewish wedding ritual, the groom crushes a glass under his foot- for good luck. In this light the very attempt by lexicographers and others to substitute “fur” for “glass” is itself worthy of consideration. Interpretations of folklore, like folklore, may serve as projective outlets for fantasy.²³

The closing sentence to Delarue’s remark is particularly significant with regard to this essay. For the notion that Perrault mistranslated, (deliberately or accidentally), the oral account of Cinderella he based his adaptation on, is serving as a “projective outlet” for my musings about the reasons why he chose to do so, as well as the impact that his “mistranslation” has had on the literary symbolism of the text as a whole. It is up to the reader to decide if the nature of my musings is plausible or just the work of fantasy.

The Symbolism of Fur and Glass

When Delarue speaks of interpretations of folklore, he is referring to the notion that there are many adaptations of folk and fairytales. There is no “correct” version. “Adaptation” is the key to truly appreciating the “vair versus verre” debate. Perrault’s version of Cinderella is an adaptation of the story, one of many.

²³ Delarue, Paul “From Perrault to Walt Disney: The Slipper of Cinderella” in Cinderella: A Casebook, edited by Alan Dundes, New York: Wildman Press, 1983, p.111

In their book, The Classic Fairy Tales, Iona and Peter Opie take a more neutral or diplomatic stance in the debate:

Very often [the shoe] it is made of silk or other material; and when Perrault heard the story the shoe may well have been made of variegated fur (vair) as has been suggested, rather than of glass (verre). It was his genius, nevertheless, to see how much more effective in the story would be a shoe of glass, a shoe which could not be stretched, and a shoe in which the foot could be *seen* to fit.²⁴

Bruno Bettelheim takes a similar stance and remarks that:

It was...his [Perrault's] invention that the...slipper was made of glass...There is quite a controversy about this detail. Since in French the word vair (which means variegated fur) and verre (glass) are sometimes pronounced similarly, it was assumed that Perrault...mistakenly substituted verre for vair and thus changed a fur slipper into one made of glass...there seems no doubt that the glass slipper was Perrault's deliberate invention.²⁵

My intent for the rest of this essay is to explore the notion that a fur slipper may have existed in the oral account (probably told to him by a peasant woman) of the story Perrault translated and to discuss the motivation behind Perrault's "deliberate invention" of the glass slipper.

The Deliberate Glass Slipper and the Loss of Fur

Prior to the written publications of Perrault and his cohorts in the Parisian salons of the late seventeenth century²⁶, fairy tales were dismissed as the vulgar oral tradition of the peasantry. They were "told by non literate peasants among themselves at the hearth... travelling merchants in inns and taverns, [and] told by priests in the vernacular to reach out to peasantry."²⁷ Perrault played a major part in the rise or cultural transformation of the literary fairy tale. A large part of this transformation entailed altering or adapting the tales to appeal to French nobility or "civilitéé". The "peasant- like" material and settings of the

²⁴ Opie, Iona and Peter, The Classic Fairy Tales, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974,p.121

²⁵ Bettelheim, Bruno, The Uses of Enchantment, New York: Random House, 1976, p.151 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as: "Bettelheim").

²⁶ Parisian salons: "By the 1690s the salon fairy tale became so acceptable that women and men began writing their tales down to publish them". (Jack Zipes in When Dreams Come True, New York: Routledge, 1999 p. 33) Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "Zipes".

²⁷ *ibid*, p.31

oral folk tales were altered to appeal to aristocratic and bourgeois audiences. If Perrault had created Cinderella's slipper in fur it may have encoded the tale with a system of literary symbols that would have rendered it unattractive to this market. Fur, after all, has metaphoric undertones of "savage" superstition, Paganism, impurity and "sinfulness", which would not have suited the refined tastes, and overtly Christian beliefs of Perrault's intended audience. Marina Warner associates fur with "sinfulness" in her book From the Beast to the Blonde, an important social history of the role of women in folk and fairy tales. She notes that "the pattern of sinful woman is Eve, who had carnal knowledge and was fatal to humanity, and the pattern of goodness is Mary, the Virgin."²⁸ She goes on to say that:

The figure of the fugitive girl in animal disguise [wearing fur] stood not for the rejection of sexuality but for the condition of it...Coats of skins covered the nakedness of Adam and Eve after they had eaten the fruit of knowledge and marked their fallen condition.²⁹

It is plausible that Cinderella's slippers were made of fur in the oral version that Perrault adapted. Fur 'fits' with the recurring themes of Animism suggested in many of the older versions of Cinderella. Such themes are present in the character of Cinderella's dead mother who reappears as a helpful figure in the guise of an animal in various adaptations of the tale. For example, in the Scottish version of Cinderella, Rashin Coatie, Cinderella's mother (not the fairy godmother) returns in the form of an animal (a little black lamb or red calf) to protect her. Similarly, in the Grimms' version of Cinderella, Aschenputtel, she is assisted by birds who also symbolize the spirit of her dead mother. Martin Hallet and Barbara Karasek make an important point with regard to the Grimms' adaptation of Cinderella in Folk and Fairy Tales when they state:

As a rule, Nature plays a more significant role in the Grimms' tales than in those of Perrault, and that is the case here. Ashputtel's virtue is rewarded by the natural world, manifested both in the embodied spirit of her dead mother and in the birds who complete the impossible tasks she is set by her stepmother.³⁰

It is interesting to note that the Grimm Brothers associate their Cinderella character with "Nature" (animal traits) too. They describe her behaviour as being "like a squirrel" when she runs into the garden to

²⁸ Warner, Marina, From The Beast to the Blonde, London: Chatto and Windus, 1994, p.358 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as: "Warner").

²⁹ *ibid*, p358

³⁰ Hallet , Martin et al., Folk and Fairy Tales (third edition), Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002, p.38

hide from the prince: "She climbed among the branches like a squirrel, and the king's son didn't know where she'd got to."³¹ I interpret the "squirrel" association as a whimsical coincidence with regard to this discussion, as "vair" is also thought to be the fur of a grey squirrel. It is entertaining to consider the notion that the Grimms' "squirrel" description as an inadvertent echo of the "vair" versus "verre" mistranslation and/or an encoded suggestion of its probability.

Cinderella's shoe is a symbol of her autonomy, and is key to her entry to womanhood. The shoe "defines" her, and could be perceived as a symbol of her character itself. In essence, the slipper personifies Cinderella. If the slipper was made of "vair" (grey squirrel fur) then Cinderella is like a squirrel, which fortifies the fanciful connection with the Grimm Brothers' description. The Grimms' "squirrel description" of Cinderella, coupled with their representation of her mother as a bird, bestows suggestions of animism on their adaptation of the tale. Implications of Animism would not have been attractive to Perrault's original readership; it is suggestive of antiquated or "savage" belief systems and Paganism. Undertones of Paganism, let alone Animism, would be distasteful in the Catholic court of Louis XIV, detrimental to the success of Perrault's cultural transformation of the fairy tale, and subsequent celebration in aristocratic circles. Significantly, Perrault also "invented" Cinderella's fairy godmother (who only appears in human form) for the same reasons.

However, it is plausible that Cinderella's shoe was made of fur (vair) in the accounts of the story that Perrault would have heard because it was a highly valued fashion material in seventeenth century Europe. It was a sign of luxury and extreme wealth.³² Consequently a definite social hierarchy emerged with regard to each type of fur. Vair, which has been defined as either the fur of a grey squirrel or weasel, connoted exceptional affluence: "vair [was] generally reserved for princely or court garments, while

³¹ Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm "Aschenputtel (Ash Girl)" in Cinderella: A Casebook edited by Alan Dundes, New York, Wildman Press, 1983, p.27

³² Fur: Sign of Wealth- Gustave Flaubert, Dictionary of Received Ideas (cited by Julia Emberley in The Cultural Politics of Fur, New York, Cornell University Press, 1997, p.1) Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "Emberley".

beaver...[was] worn among the lesser nobility...sheepskin [was] for the common people".³³ Sumptuary Laws (or clothing laws) were enforced to prevent people wearing furs that did not "fit" their social class. Cinderella, prior to her eventual marriage to the Prince, was not (according to Sumptuary Law) entitled to adorn herself in "vair". The idea of a common girl who spent most of her day covered in ashes wearing shoes made of vair was socially subversive. Social subversion of this nature may have been the present in the oral and probably peasant versions of the tale on which Perrault based his printable version. However, Perrault would not have shared this subversive intent (although, and I will later comment, Perrault did insert elements of social critique or subversion in his work). Perrault's intent was to successfully insert fairytales into the cultural sphere of the aristocracy. Bruno Bethlehem notes:

As with all of Perrault's stories, the trouble with his Cinderella is that he took fairy-tale material...freed it of all content he considered vulgar, and refined its other features to make the product suitable to be told at court. Being an author of great skill...he invented details and changed others to make the story conform to his aesthetic concepts.³⁴

The glass slippers and Cinderella's fairy godmother were, as I have shown, both Perrault's inventions. In Perrault's tale the "helper" or doer of magic (the fairy-godmother) is in human form and the shoe is made of glass, significantly a man-made or manufactured material.

In the introduction to this essay I cited Maria Tatar's comments that Folklorists have discredited the idea of Cinderella's shoe being made of fur on the basis that the "slipper has a magical quality to it and is made of glass".³⁵ I feel dissatisfied with Tatar's definition. Consequently, I have interpreted her notion of "magical quality" as "transformative" as an attempt to decipher the folklorists' belief. Glass is symbolic of transformation; its properties are transmutable, wavering between a liquid form and a solid state. Therefore inserting glass objects into the narrative of the fairy tale, such as Cinderella's slipper, could be perceived as a deliberate introduction of the "magical quality" Tatar describes. However, that being said, I assert that fur also, though in a different way, connotes a transformative or "magical quality". Fur is transformative when

³³ *ibid* p.47

³⁴ Bettelheim, p.150

³⁵ Tatar, p. 28

viewed through the lenses of Animism and of Jungian psychoanalysis. Through these lenses fur can be seen to connote our primitive side, “animal double” or shadow “other”. Marie- Louise von Franz notes, “the animal double is more an undeveloped aspect of the Self.”³⁶ She illustrates this through the heroine of the story Shaggy Top : “the fur cap she wears is the sign of animal traits in her.”³⁷ In Cinderella’s case the moment of wearing a fur slipper would connote an assimilation of the shadow in the personal realm. Cinderella’s slippers “identify” her at the end of the story. They symbolize her “new role” in life or her “developed self” as well as demonstrating the integration of the shadow figure (mother disguised as animal helper) into Cinderella’s consciousness.

Cinderella’s shoes, whether they be made of glass or fur, are a potent literary symbol. They can be viewed as a representation of the very core of this character’s being. This notion is discussed by Marie- Louis von Franz in The Interpretation of Fairy Tales, where she states that:

The shoe is a symbol of power, for which reason we speak of being of being “under someone’s heel” ... Clothing may represent either the persona, our outer attitude, or an inner attitude, and the changing of clothes...stood for transformation into an enlightened understanding. Shoes are the lowest part of our clothing and represent our standpoint in relation to reality- how solidly our feet are planted on the ground; how solidly the earth supports us gives the measure of our power.³⁸

If we perceive shoes as a symbol of power in the manner Franz describes, then Perrault’s choice to adorn Cinderella’s foot in a slipper of glass could be interpreted as an act of misogyny and sadism.

³⁶ Franz, Marie-Louise von, The Interpretation of Fairy Tales, Boston: Shambala Publications, 1996,p.136. (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as “Franz”).

³⁷ *ibid*, p.163

³⁸ *ibid*, p.187

Misogyny and Sadism

Claire-Lise Malarte-Feldman describes Perrault as both “a misogynist” and “a sadist” (amongst other things) in her essay “Perrault’s Contes”.³⁹ Whether this be the case or not, I assert that Perrault bestows a misogynistic tone upon the text by deliberately connecting the female protagonist (Cinderella) with an obviously fragile material. Glass suggests that her character is weak, easily broken or shattered, colloquially speaking, “she is not a force to be reckoned with”. Perrault has not provided Cinderella’s feet with a “solid base”; they (her feet) are tenuously elevated by flimsy glass slippers instead. Affiliating her character with the fragility of glass strips her character of the overt symbol of animal strength and feminine prowess that fur connotes.

The fragility of the glass slipper introduces a note of sadism into Perrault’s “Cinderella”. Sadism is implicit in the potential of foot mutilation should the glass slippers break. Bettelheim notes that:

There seems no doubt that the glass slipper was Perrault’s deliberate invention. But because of it [this invention] he had to drop an important feature of many earlier versions of Cinderella which tell how the stepsisters mutilated their feet to make them fit the slipper...This detail [blood in shoe] would have been obvious had the slipper been made of glass.⁴⁰

It is ironic that Perrault’s glass slipper actually retains the feature of foot mutilation through its very implication. Placing Cinderella in this potentially dangerous position suggests self-mutilation. If we view the glass slippers in this manner we could also interpret them as a symbol of disempowerment, or a sacrificial risk of pain in the pursuit of love, ambition and a “higher “ sense of self. The potential for the glass slippers to shatter, and for Cinderella to be left standing on painful shards of glass foreshadows the agony that the mermaid suffers in Hans Christian Anderson’s tale The Little Mermaid (who sacrifices her true identity in pursuit of a prince’s love). The agony I refer to is the sharp “knife like” sensations that Anderson describes

³⁹ Malarte-Feldman, Claire-Lise, “Perrault’s Contes: An Irregular Pearl of Classical Literature”, in The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France, edited by Nancy Canepa, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997, p.100

⁴⁰ Bettelheim, p.151

the mermaid suffering whenever she places her feet on the ground after her transformation into human form:

He took her by the hand and led her up to his castle...every step felt as though she were walking on sharp knives.⁴¹

It is worth noting that in Walt Disney's Cinderella movie (which was based on Perrault's version), the glass slipper does smash and places Cinderella in a perilous situation. The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales notes that: "Disney...put the fragility of glass to a dramatic use— the stepmother smashes the slipper into fragments before Cinderella can try it on."⁴² The image of Cinderella surrounded by shards of broken glass augments the parallel I have drawn with Andersen's The Little Mermaid.

Shoes, as noted by Franz, represent a character's centre of strength and grounding. They have also been interpreted as a symbol for femininity, specifically the vagina. Freud presents women's' shoes as vaginal symbols in his writings on Fetishism: "Thus the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish...to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below."⁴³ Bettelheim, who takes a psychoanalytic approach to the fairytale, makes specific reference to Cinderella's slipper being a symbol of her vagina. He states:

The slipper a central feature of the Cinderella story and that which decides her fate is a most complex symbol...To the conscious mind, an object such as a slipper is just that- while symbolically in the unconscious it may in this story represent the vagina.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Andersen, Hans Christian, The Little Mermaid in Folk and Fairy Tales (third edition) edited by Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002, p.231

⁴² Zipes, Jack, The Oxford Companion to Fairytales, New York:Oxford University Press, 2000, p98

⁴³ Freud, Sigmund, "Fetishism" 1927- The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, V:21, Trans. James Strachey et al. London: The Hogarth Press, 1961, p.155, (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "Freud".)

⁴⁴ Bettelheim, p.268

Joan Gould also interprets Cinderella's slipper as a vaginal symbol with specific reference to the "vair versus verre" debate. She muses that:

An oral storyteller must have described "une pantoufle de vair" meaning a fur slipper, these critics claimed, and Perrault or some scribe wrote down "une pantoufle de verre", a glass slipper, which would be impossible to dance in. If a mistake was made, Perrault's subconscious served him well. The lost slipper sparkles on the Prince's palm because it represents the owner herself... it represents her sexuality....⁴⁵

Gould also suggests that the glass slipper is a representation of Cinderella's virginity and hymen, which is "impossible to repair once shattered".⁴⁶ Her idea echoes the remark made by Paul Delarue: "Glass is a standard symbol of virginity."⁴⁷

If we interpret Cinderella's slipper as an overt reference to her sexuality (specifically her genitalia), then glass, which is a smooth material, would connote an absence of pubic hair. Therefore Perrault has presented Cinderella as either a prepubescent female or a female who has removed her pubic hair. Absence of hair or the cutting of hair is commonly associated with disempowerment; one only has to think of the Biblical character "Samson" to recognise this reference. Perrault's Cinderella was intended to entertain a Christian audience who would have been aware of such a connotation, even though it was presented on an implicit level in his narrative. This feature of Perrault's literary crafting of Cinderella also bestows the tale with misogynist undertones (which is common in societies that infantilize the female). Conversely, a fur slipper would connote the shoe of a mature, empowered woman. Fur frequently symbolizes pubic hair, as noted by Freud: "FUR [as a symbol or metaphor]...has long been suspected... [is] a fixation of the sight of the pubic hair."⁴⁸ The presence of fur on Cinderella's slipper would indicate that Cinderella's slipper (her genitals) was endowed with the pubic hair one usually expects to see on the pubis of an adult woman.

⁴⁵ Gould, Joan, Spinning Straw Into Gold, New York: Random House, 2005, p.72

⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.73

⁴⁷ Delarue, Paul "From Perrault to Walt Disney: The Slipper of Cinderella" in Cinderella: A Casebook, edited by Alan Dundes, New York: Wildman Press, 1983, p.111

⁴⁸ Freud, p.155

Laura Mullen explores the aforementioned notions in a similar vein in her essay "Wearing It Out". She muses that Perrault's choice to present us with a glass slipper in preference to a fur slipper is an indication of his misogyny and "vagina phobia". She states: "it seems obvious that the fear of the fur is the fear of the female genitalia."⁴⁹ Mullen concurs with Marina Warner's assertion in From The Beast to the Blonde, that Perrault's choice to replace Cinderella's slippers of fur with ones made of glass (whether through mistranslation or deliberate alteration) "purifies" the tale by eliminating the primal or animal associations in favour of a sterile glass slipper that she (Mullen) equates with a "test tube".⁵⁰ The notion of the "test tube" like glass slipper being a symbol of Perrault's misogyny and sadism is manifest in her amusing yet tragic passage which reads:

Try this: make a fist and wedge it into, yes, a wine glass. Doesn't your hand look like some kind of scientific exhibit? (The fragile label inked with the Latin name is all that is lacking.) But how does it feel? Aren't your knuckles starting to hurt? Would you like to (put the other hand in a matching glass) try a handstand? Nervous? The glass gets moist. Steamed up, as we may say, meaning, I've had about enough of this!⁵¹

Mullen's description echoes the potential for pain and danger (discussed at an earlier point in this essay) with regard to the glass slipper. However, according to Mullen the glass slipper does not just connote pain, it also symbolizes desensitization and strips the tale of its primal elements. Mullen quotes Warner who states that: "the glass slipper works to dematerialize the troubling aspects of her [Cinderella's] nature, her natural fleshiness, her hairy vitality, and so to give a sign of her new, socialized value...The slipper becomes glass."⁵² Mullen and Warner both argue that a fur slipper did exist and address the notion that a glass slipper may have been a more "acceptable" alternative for Perrault's audiences. Mullen states: "What got lost in translation was a much more flexible and warmer model – animal, yes but also anima- which, if less

⁴⁹ Mullen, Laura "Wearing it Out" in Footnotes On Shoes, edited by Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss, New Jersey:Rutgers University Press, 2001,p.285 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as: "Mullen").

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ *ibid*, p.286

⁵² Warner, p.362

eloquent on the subject of “socialized value”, has potentially a lot more to say about pleasure.”⁵³ Mullen views the fur slipper as a metaphor of the sensual and the erotic. Her assertion that it also speaks of “pleasure” bestows Dionysian qualities upon the fur slipper (I will discuss this at a later point in this essay). The aforementioned “warmth” of the fur slipper renders it a symbolic opposite of the glass slipper when we consider Mullen’s analysis of Perrault’s adaptation, which suggests that it is cold and detached. She states:

The cinders have no warmth, the ashes no grittiness...The tears she cries choke her speech but are neither wet nor hot; nor is the “pantoufle de verre” as cold and rigid as the smallest act of imagination insists it must be. It is though all sensation vanished with the sensuous satisfaction the fur slipper held out.⁵⁴

Mullen’s observations about Perrault’s writing style suggest that he is more concerned with the visual in his storytelling. However, this is not unique to Perrault. Max Luthi talks about the “dominance of the visual in the European fairytale”⁵⁵ and states that: “Music and sounds, scents and odours are fleeting, prototypically transitory; the visual, however, remains.”⁵⁶

The Erotic Nature of Fur

When I consider the sensuality and the erotic fetishism that fur suggests I am reminded of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s novella Venus in Furs as well as the surrealist works of the celebrated artist and photographer, Meret Oppenheim, specifically: Breakfast in Fur (1936), Fur Gloves with Wooden Fingers (1936) and Project for Sandals (1936). I shall discuss Breakfast in Fur first. Oppenheim had a penchant for covering objects in fur, including bracelets. She happened to be wearing one while sipping coffee with Pablo Picasso at the Café de Flore in Paris. Picasso admired her plush accessory and mused that you could cover anything with fur. Oppenheim candidly replied: “Even this cup and saucer”.⁵⁷ Their playful dialogue led

⁵³ *ibid* p.283

⁵⁴ *ibid* p.284

⁵⁵ Luthi, p.71

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Hafen, Ruth, “Meret Oppenheim: An Enormously Tiny Bit of A Lot”, online article: <http://emagazine.creditsuisse.com/app/article/index.cfm?fuseaction=OpenArticle&aoid=162031&coid=139&lang=EN>

to the creation of her most famous work: Breakfast in Fur. The piece is comprised of a porcelain cup and saucer, and a teaspoon, all covered in what is thought to be, the pelt of a Chinese Gazelle. The seemingly simple, whimsical object, which could be interpreted as being merely “art for art’s sake” has evoked analysis which has rendered it as a iconic work of erotica, lesbian fetishism and feminist critique. Helen Tierney describes the work as a “quasi-Freudian ironic juxtaposition of incompatibles [which] has become known as a rebellious act against clichés of femininity and fashion”.⁵⁸

Paul Mathieu comments that Breakfast in Fur “is full of sexual connotations (usually undisclosed in official readings) which force the viewer to vicarious lesbian oral sex with the otherwise banal object.”⁵⁹ These comments are indicative of the potent female sexuality connoted by fur. A slipper covered in fur would bestow this power upon Cinderella too. Nel Philips critiques Breakfast in Fur and her lesser known piece Fur Gloves with Wooden Fingers in The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity. Phillips’ remarks are perhaps the most pertinent with respect to our discussion as they consider the inherent sexuality of the two works as well as their animalistic qualities. Phillips remarks:

In fur gloves female fingers (complete with nail polish on the fingernails) emerge through the cut-off fingertips of furry gloves mingling the feminine with the bestial”. He goes onto say that: “The fur covered cup, saucer and spoon of Breakfast in Fur...links human to “furry breasts”, inviting the viewer to a breakfast in which a phallic spoon will enter the furry vessel of the cup. By connecting the civilized with the bestial and sexual, both fur objects link desires of human beings to those of beasts- a perverse challenge to conventional notions of humanness and sexuality.”⁶⁰

Phillips’ considerations echo the previous notions of primal energy and Animism (and sexuality) presented earlier in the essay with regard to the literary symbolism of fur. Finally, (and perhaps more saliently), Oppenheim’s much lesser known work Project for Sandals, presents a fur covered high-heeled shoe to the viewer. The author of the online source, “Vasalisa Electric” muses whether this piece could be “a reference

⁵⁸ Tierney, Helen , Women’s Studies Encyclopedia, online reference:
<http://gem.greenwood.com/wse/wseDisplay.jsp?id=id270&ss=romantic>

⁵⁹ Mathieu, Paul, Sexpots: Eroticism in Ceramics, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003,p.106

⁶⁰ Philip, Nel The Avant-Garde And American Postmodernity, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002, p.22

to the mistranslation of Cinderella's slipper from fur to glass?"⁶¹ The source goes on to observe that "Oppenheim's imagery is steeped in the language of fairy tales."⁶² It is interesting to note that the artist's grandmother wrote and illustrated a folk tale which is a children's classic in Switzerland. Oppenheim's father, who was a doctor, attended sessions at the Jung institute and encouraged her to record her dreams and fantasies. Marina Warner shows that "Meret Oppenheim was raised in the German Folklore tradition on the one hand and in the Jungian field of dream symbolism and archetype on the other..."⁶³ This information is relevant because it strengthens the connection between the work of Oppenheim and the fairytale with respect to our discussion. As Marina Warner writes, "These fashion accessories, conceived in high spirits, act as a reminder, in the spirit of mischievous fairytale humour, of the Beast within".⁶⁴

An overt example of fur as a literary symbol of female prowess and sexual potency is manifest in Sacher-Masoch's novella Venus in Furs. The furred figure of Wanda Von Dunajew reminds Severin, her lover, of the formidable Catherine the Great. In the introduction to the text Larry Wolff notes:

In Venus in Furs Wanda's costumes, with their fur trimmings and accessories, repeatedly bring Catherine to mind or the rapturous enthusiasm of Severin. "Russian ankle boots of violet, ermine trimmed velvet, a gown of the same material, decorated with narrow stripes and gathered up with cockades of the identical fur; a short, close-fitting paletot similarly lined and padded with ermine, a high ermine cap a la Catherine the Great."⁶⁵

It is also worth noting that on the opening page of the novella we are presented with the image of Venus (the Roman goddess of love). She appears as a marble statue wrapped in a large fur as part of Severin's dream. The fur is intended to keep her warm. Wolff observes that "Severin explains that coldness is not only meteorological but also a moral and metaphorical matter, in as much as pagan Venus requires a fur to warm

⁶¹ "Vasalisa Electric: ENCOUNTER" online reference: <http://www.rockingchair.org/ve4.html>

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ Warner, p.385

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.385

⁶⁵ Sacher-Masoch, Leopold Von, Venus in Furs, Contributors Joachin Neurgroschel, Larry Wolff, United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2000, (introduction p.x)

her in “the icy Christian World” of the north.”⁶⁶ Sacher-Masoch’s association of fur, Paganism and “warmth” as a counter to cold or “icy” Christianity further illustrates the notion that representations of a fur slipper might well have been disturbing to the overtly Christian audiences Perrault sought to entertain. His choice to replace fur with the frigidity of a glass was a more fitting adaptation. As a side note, the connotations of “warmth” that Sacher-Masoch assigns to fur echo Laura Mullen’s sentiments that equate a fur slipper with sensuality and warmth, as opposed to the cold, “test tube” like sterility implied by a glass slipper.

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⁷⁵ Sacher-Masoch, Leopold Von, Venus in Furs, Contributors Joachin Neurgroschel, Larry Wolff , United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2000, (introduction p.x)

The Dionysian and The Apollonian

Presenting the fur and glass slipper as polar opposites evokes Friedrich Nietzsche's dichotomous Dionysian and Apollonian categorization in The Birth of Tragedy. The fur slipper with its overt animalistic or bestial qualities evokes the primal, instinctual energy that is synonymous with Dionysian celebrations of the "natural world". Its sensual and erotic qualities render it a symbol of "pleasure" (as noted previously by Mullen) which also bestows Dionysian qualities upon the fur slipper. Conversely, the glass slipper brings the plastic order of the Apollonian world to mind. The rigid quality of the glass slippers construction speaks of formed boundaries, and its reflective qualities (which assimilate it with a mirror) are a celebration of appearance and illusion. Mullen's description of the glass slipper as a "test tube" also assigns it with these qualities as it evokes Apollonian "scientific rationality". Mullen also recognizes the dichotomous nature of the slippers and states that: "Replacing "the hairy animal" [the fur slipper] with the exemplary [the "pure" glass slipper], if immaterial, princess, the conversion narrative seeks to set us clearly on one side or the other of those transparent boundaries holding in place the usual series of suspect dichotomies (animal/human, nature/culture, body/mind etc)."⁷⁷ The opposing qualities of each category are often perceived as being representative of the "feminine" and the "masculine". The "feminine" like the Dionysian is understood as symbolizing the irrational, passionate or intuitive sides of our nature, while the "masculine" like the Apollonian speaks of "level headedness" and "civility". With respect to the Dionysian and Apollonian "shoe/slipper" dichotomy, it is interesting to note that Janet Lyon perceives all shoes (irrespective of their material) as Apollonian. In her essay the "Modern Foot" she states that:

The bare foot may also be...associated with ...the sensual pleasure of treading grapes... the symbolic force of a Dionysian power...If, in fact we may surmise that Dionysus is the god of bare feet...then perhaps we have Apollo to thank for the dubious gift of shoes. Shoes provide structure, protection, boundaries; shoes seal off the lower extremities from the excremental earth... What could be more Apollonian? Nietzsche himself equated Apollo with contemporary imperialism, nationalism, order- in short, with the affective

⁷⁷ Mullen p.286

implementations of instrumental modernity. In this calculus, bare feet are to Dionysian excess what shoes are to Apolline restraint.⁷⁸

The interpretation of all shoes as “Apollonian” renders the glass slipper a visual dichotomy in itself, as the translucent quality of glass enables us to see Cinderella's bare foot contained within it. The Apollonian shoe in this case acts as a window to the Dionysian, displaying rather than eliminating it from Perrault's narrative. We could interpret the “contained” foot in two ways. We could perceive the glass slipper as a window or showcase, presenting the Dionysian in a celebratory manner akin to the display of a valued art-work or museum exhibit.

This analysis leaves us wondering if, after all, the glass slipper was a symbol of Perrault's homage to the Dionysian (and the feminine). Earlier in this essay I quoted Claire-Lise Malarte Feldman referring to Perrault as a “misogynist” and a “sadist”. However, she also describes him as a “feminist”.⁷⁹ I suggest that we could interpret the “display” of Cinderella's foot in the glass slipper as Perrault's way of inserting subtle “feminist” critique of the politics at play in France at the time he was writing the story. In the late seventeenth century fairytales were a forum for women to insert subversive voices into the political and cultural milieu. Marina Warner states that fairy tales are “ a fiery protest of a whole generation of French noblewomen against the serfdom of dynastic matrimony and mental inanition.”⁸⁰ When we understand fairy tales as a genre of protest for women, they become a potent vehicle for feminist critique. As the first man to write fairy tales in France, Charles Perrault was acting as an advocate for “feminist voices”. Elizabeth W. Harris discusses the narrative style of Perrault in her essay, “Fairy Tales about Fairy Tales: Notes on Canon Formation”. She states that “Perrault and his publisher wanted to prescribe, a simulation of oral tale-

⁷⁸ Lyon, Janet, “The Modern Foot” in Footnotes On Shoes, edited by Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss, New Jersey:Rutgers University Press, 2001, p279

⁷⁹ Malarte-Feldman, Claire-Lise, “Perrault's Contes: An Irregular Pearl of Classical Literature”, in The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France, edited by Nancy Canepa, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997, p100

⁸⁰ Warner, p.169

telling...The voice that Perrault is simulating is female.”⁸¹ Yet, along with the political conditions affecting women, Perrault was also critiquing the state of the arts in France. In 1687, Perrault took the side of Modernism in the famous “Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns”. Marina Warner notes that Perrault “was interleaving partisanship in the dispute about women with another bitter intellectual wrangle, the Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes. Defending fairy tales, he was not only defending women’s tales but also promoting native ‘modern’ literature against the Anciens.”⁸² Perrault believed that a culture of Enlightenment could only be attained in France if Pagan (ergo Dionysian) beliefs and folklore (ergo “women’s writing”) were valued in the creation of art. Perhaps the image of Cinderella’s foot encased in glass is pro-feminist. However, we could also view her “contained” foot as a symbol that is detrimental to the Dionysian and “feminine”. If we view the glass slipper as a “test tube” (as described by Mullen), then the foot is offered to us as a scientific specimen ready to be dissected and analyzed like a foreign substance. This assimilation resurrects the notions of misogyny discussed earlier. Yet, it also speaks of the aforementioned political climate in late seventeenth century France. The notion of the “scientific”, as we have already noted, can be understood as being representative of the Apollonian and it also speaks of the rise of Cartesian based “scientific” thinking at the time. The disturbing image of a woman’s foot (Cinderella’s) contained in a “test tube” evokes Susan Bordo’s thinking in her essay “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the 17th Century Flight from the Feminine”. Her writing connects Cartesian rationalism with the repression of women, intuitive thinking and the natural world, which she describes as a “flight from the feminine”.⁸³ This “flight from the feminine” caused a distinct sense of separation in society’s style of thinking, Bordo notes that there became “an explicit contest between masculine and feminine principles: head versus heart, domination over versus mingling with the object, purified versus erotic

⁸¹ Harris, Elizabeth.W. “Fairy Tales about Fairy Tales: Notes on Canon Formation” in The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France, edited by Nancy Canepa, Detroit:Wayne State University Press, 1997, p.159

⁸² Warner, p.169

⁸³ Bordo, Susan “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the 17th Century Flight from the Feminine” Cahoone, Lawrence, From Modernism to Postmodernism, United Kingdom:Blackwell, 2003, p.354

orientation toward knowledge and so forth.”⁸⁴ The “contest” she speaks of echoes Nietzsche’s dichotomy between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Bordo also addresses the notion that Cartesian theories caused humankind to separate themselves from nature, which was no longer perceived as a “female” spiritual entity (mother earth) or invested with Pagan based philosophies of Animism and unity. She states: “In the seventeenth century...[the] female world-soul died- or more precisely, was murdered by the mechanist re-visioning of nature.”⁸⁵ Her notion of “female world-soul death” connects the glass slipper with an additional visual metaphor: the image of a glass coffin. This image equates the “confinement” of Cinderella’s feet with the “feminine” passivity of Snow White and Princess Aurora in the tale of Sleeping Beauty, as both characters lie in glass coffins until they are re-animated by the kiss of a “masculine” prince. Consequently, the idea a passive princess waiting for her prince — a woman who relies on a man shape her destiny (rather than herself) — was coined the “Cinderella Complex”. Cartesian theory fortified the passivity of women. Bordo discusses this notion with specific reference to the masculine domination of obstetrics and the birthing process as well as the general repression of female sexual potency during this time. She observes: “There were the witch-hunts themselves, which, aided more politely by the gradual male takeover of birthing...virtually purged the healing arts of female midwives...female sexuality was seen as voracious and insatiable, and a principle motivation behind witch-craft”.⁸⁶ In essence, Bordo (like Mullen and Warner) is also addressing masculine driven repression of female sexual potency, “vagina phobia” and “fear of the fur”.

The Symbolism of Glass and Fur

If we interpret fur as a symbol of female sexual potency, feminine eroticism, power, Pagan beliefs (Animism) and primal sensuality, then Perrault has deliberately chosen to render his version of Cinderella as a fairy-tale devoid of these traits. However, sexuality aside, I have already noted that fur was viewed as an

⁸⁴ *ibid* p.358

⁸⁵ *ibid* p.357

⁸⁶ *ibid* p.361

overt symbol of wealth and prosperity in France at the time Perrault published Cinderella. With this in mind, it would not have been out of place for her to wear shoes embellished with vair (fur) to the royal ball. In fact, vair slippers would have strengthened the credibility of her “wealthy princess” façade. Therefore I believe that the possible allusions to “undesirable” Pagan beliefs that the fur slippers may have encoded in the narrative would not have served as the sole motivation for Perrault to replace them with glass slippers. I suggest that Perrault’s “deliberate invention” of the glass slippers may have involved a reference to France’s newly won success in the European glass industry. Up until the late seventeenth century, Venice was viewed as the international “glass capital”. In 1665 the controller general of finances in Louis XIV’s government, Jean Baptiste Colbert, centralized the glass industry in Paris. Charles Perrault served as secretary to Jean Baptiste Colbert during this time and would have been directly involved in this significant cultural maneuver. The newly won centralization of the glass industry was largely due to the major improvements French artisans had made in the production of plate glass, a vital technique in the production of mirrors. This new and very expensive technology was subsequently “shown off” to the rest of the world by creating the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles.⁸⁷ The Hall of Mirrors also reflected Louis XIV’s desire to make his court the most splendid and radiant in Europe. He spared no expense in decorating Versailles, despite the dire state of the economy, deterioration of living conditions and growing poverty among the lower classes. Jack Zipes notes that “...King Louis waged costly wars...his reign... turned reason against itself to justify his desires, tastes and ambition for glory...”⁸⁸ I assert that Perrault was making an obvious reference to this aspect of French history by inserting significant glass items into his Cinderella narrative. The glass slippers, as well as the large floor length mirrors used by Cinderella’s stepsisters, can be viewed as a celebration or homage to the innovative use of glass at Versailles (which would have pleased Perrault’s aristocratic audiences). However, they can also be perceived as a subtle yet subversive critique of the lavish expenses, decadent lifestyle and corrupt behaviour of Louis XIV. The floor length mirrors used by each of Cinderella’s mean stepsisters can easily be perceived as a commentary on the latter. They symbolize the

⁸⁷ The Hall of Mirrors serves as a lasting symbol of France’s superior art and technology during this time.

⁸⁸ Zipes p.39

King's inflated ego, pride and vanity. Assimilating the stepsisters with the king in this manner might also comment on his poor treatment of those less fortunate than him (the lower classes). Perrault's construction of the Cinderella narrative enabled him to insert subversive critique into the text and appeal to French nobility at the same time. Jack Zipes discusses the institutionalization of the fairy tale in France during the 1690's (which is when Perrault published Cinderella), viewing the literary fairy tale as a subversive vehicle. He comments that:

It enabled writers to create a dialogue about norms, manners and power that evaded court censorship and freed the fantasy of the writers and the readers, while at the same time paying tribute to the French code of civilité and the majesty of the aristocracy.⁸⁹

Perrault had another reason to insert implicit critique of Louis XIV in his writing. As previously noted, he took the side of Modernism in the famous "Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns" in 1687. Perrault believed that Pagan beliefs and folklore ("women's writing") should be included in the creation of art to create a genuine culture of Enlightenment in France. Nicholas Boileau and Jean Racine opposed Perrault's defense of Modernism and argued that France had to maintain stringent classical rules by imitating the art of the great empires: Greece and Rome. The quarrel could be regarded as a debate about authority. The literary quarrel lasted until 1697 when it was ended by Louis XIV — unsurprisingly in favor of the Ancients (Boileau and Racine.) The King's decision did not prevent Perrault from adapting fairy tales to suit his own agenda. In fact, as noted previously the fairy tale acted as a vehicle for writers to insert subversive voices into the political arena. The fairy tale gave writers the freedom to criticize authority in the form of Louis XIV in an indirect way, as censorship laws prevented them from doing so directly. If we recall Franz's assertion that a shoe is "symbolic of a character's grounding" or "reality", then Cinderella's "absurd" glass slipper may have connoted Perrault's opinion of Louis XIV's political decisions and lifestyle. Perhaps he intended the glass slipper to be a metaphor connoting the King's irrationality and nonsensical decision-making; for a glass slipper would be impractical and precarious to dance in. Perrault created other possible subversive subtexts in Cinderella by suggesting that the right clothes (and of course shoes) can make a future queen out of a

⁸⁹ *ibid* p.14

common “ash dwelling” girl. This notion mocks the aristocracy’s elitism and critiques the facades of “pomp and grandeur” which Louis XIV, the Sun King and his court were notorious for. The stepsisters’ floor mirrors and the glass slipper further suggest a critique of facades and “appearances”. Cinderella’s glass slipper has reflective qualities like a mirror. Marina Warner notes that, “The slipper becomes the glass in which a princess sees her worth brightly mirrored”.⁹⁰ The glass slipper acts as the third mirror in the story; revealing Cinderella’s true identity.

Conclusion

To conclude this discussion I will re-assert the notion that Cinderella’s slippers may have been made of vair (fur) in the oral account Charles Perrault allegedly (mis) translated. As we have discussed, there are many reasons why fur slippers make “sense”. Fur connotes the superstitious beliefs of European peasantry, notably their Paganism and Animism. It is likely that the tale Perrault heard was narrated by a female peasant; consequently she would have embellished her version of the story with these “peasant” like elements. Fur represents a connection with the Natural world and acts as a link to Cinderella’s mother who appeared in animal form as her spiritual guide and helper in other accounts of the story, for example in the Grimm Brothers’ version of the tale, Aschenputtel she appears as a bird. Fur slippers “fit” the political climate of France in the seventeenth century by providing salient and subversive commentary about the Sumptuary Laws, which governed the wearing of fur among the social classes. Vair (or the fur of a grey squirrel) was assigned to the “higher classes”, which rendered it as a sign of extreme wealth and success. According to Sumptuary Law “a commoner” like Cinderella would not have been allowed to wear shoes made of this material (vair). Fur also connotes the “Dionysian”, female sexuality, eroticism, sensuality, the “sinful woman” (the fallen Eve) and the “beast within”. These elements were not appropriate material for Perrault’s overtly Christian audience which may have led to his “deliberate” creation of the glass slipper. Perrault’s glass slipper also “fits” the political and cultural climate of France in the late seventeenth century. His narrative cleverly inserts an overt celebration of the French glass artisans whose innovations,

⁹⁰ Warner, p.362

specifically in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles centralized the glass industry in Paris. Yet, on a darker note, Perrault also uses the “glass slipper” as a vehicle to insert subversive critique of French politics within his narrative. The politics he was addressing included Louis XIV’s decadence and “absurd” governance, particularly with respect to his support of the Ancients in the “Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns”. Perrault’s decision to create glass slippers rendered his adaptation of Cinderella more suitable for an aristocratic audience. The “test tube” like purity of glass effectively sterilized the tale, rendering it devoid of the “unchristian” content that a fur slipper connoted. The overtly “plastic” nature of the glass slipper aligns it with the rationality and cultured order of the “Apollonian”, which counters the overtly primal qualities of the “Dionysian” fur slipper. I assert that the dichotomous symbolism of both materials illuminates the polarity of the verre versus vair debate itself.

Both glass and fur slippers were a plausible choice for Cinderella to wear to the ball. Given this notion, it is only fitting that the debate ceases to be presented in a manner that suggests contentious polarity, that is: “Verre not Vair”. Instead, I assert that the debate ought to be presented in a manner that reflects the aforementioned plausibility of “choice”, that is: “Vair or Verre”. But that is another story.

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**2:
PERFORMANCE ART AND THE RE-ODORIZATION OF
MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS**

Introduction

Acts of performance or “live” art offer us new ways of experiencing reality. Performance artists use actions, objects, and sensorial stimuli that both intentionally and unintentionally alter the states of consciousness that we assign to any given point in space and time. These “alterations” have the power to transform mundane or familiar locations into new territory for the artist and viewer alike. Performance artists often treat their work as opportunities to “scent” us with the odor of their subversive ideas and intent, which are frequently motivated by the desire to rupture the way we view the world. Many artists and contemporary thinkers believe that modern society exists in a state of sensorial anesthesia. European performance artist Herman Nitsch staged re-enactments of ancient Dionysian rites during the 1960’s. These elaborate rituals often involved pouring the blood and entrails of disemboweled cattle over naked men and women. Nitsch’s works were motivated by the belief that “humankind’s aggressive instincts had been repressed and muted through the [modern-day] media”.⁹¹

I agree with Nitsch’s observation. However, in this essay I assert that the inception of the repression he speaks of began well before the dawn of modern-day media. I believe that our primal instincts and intuitive “ways of being” have become increasingly repressed ever since the rise of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century. The Enlightenment introduced Western Culture to new “scientific” ideas, which were heavily rooted in Cartesian philosophy. These convincing new ideas deodorized the minds of the masses with their potent rationalism and made a mockery of the “non-scientific” practices and perceptions that had flourished up until this point. However, the old “non-scientific” ways did not disappear. Instead their continued theory and practice was driven underground, which repositioned their associated belief systems within the realm of “feminine” or “Dionysian” consciousness. I will continue to make reference to terms like

⁹¹ Goldberg, Roselee, Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001, p.164

“feminine” and “Dionysian” throughout this essay. I have drawn a parallel between the two terms because they are both understood as connoting the irrational, passionate, chaotic, primal or instinctive sides of our nature and “ways of seeing” the world. I also draw a parallel between the terms “masculine” and “Apollonian”, for these terms also share similarities in definition. They are both attributed with “civilized behavior”, “rationality”, “level headedness”, the “provable”, or the “scientific”. My use of these terms is obviously drawn from⁹² Friedrich Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy (1872). This contrast is important for many writers. Contemporary writers and philosophers like Susan Bordo, Thomas Ames and William I. Thompson have all suggested that in order to move forward as a society we need to address environmental ethics and alternative “ways of being” by re-asserting “feminine”, Dionysian and/or Taoist styles of thinking into the “Cartesian-centric” or overtly rational thought patterns of the modern day. In this essay I will connect their subversive philosophies with a series of predominantly Canadian performance art works that inadvertently articulate their ideas. I will also demonstrate the “Dionysian”, “feminine”, and eastern elements of performance art and the significant role that smell plays in this regard.

“Live” or performance art is by nature a subversive discipline, deemed as a practice that invokes the Dionysian; it serves to re-define the political by posing alternative views to those being upheld by the status quo. The predominantly non-discursive interface of live performance art renders it “Dionysian” (therefore “feminine”) through its inevitable dramatic or theatrical association (for Dionysus is the Greek god of drama). The politically subversive nature of performance art also makes it a potent vehicle for artists and/or viewers to experience altered states of consciousness or shifts in their perceptions of reality. Altered states are generated or enhanced with the use of sensorial elements in the composition of each performance. The performances I will discuss place specific focus on the sense of smell both explicitly and

⁹² Several Western philosophical and literary figures have invoked the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy in critical and creative works, including Plutarch, Friedrich Nietzsche, Robert A. Heinlein [1], Ruth Benedict, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, literary critic G. Wilson Knight, Ayn Rand (who rejected it in favor of mind-body integration), Stephen King and cultural critic Camille Paglia. (source: Apollonian and Dionysian, from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysian>).

implicitly. I have chosen to focus on smell because it is one of our most primal senses, which places it within the realm of the “feminine”. Constance Classen notes in The Color of Angels, “ In accordance with the association of man with mind and woman with body, men tended to be linked with the “rational” senses of sight and hearing, and woman with the corporeal senses of smell, taste and touch.”⁹³ Performance Art and smell are duly linked through their conjoint “feminine” categorization.

As one of our most primal senses, smell acts as a powerful trigger of memories and emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant, which can generate shifts in our consciousness and perception of place and time. The concept of “involuntary memory”, which is usually triggered by smell or the related sense of taste was originally made famous by the French writer Marcel Proust, and for this reason involuntary memory is also referred to as “Proustian memory”. The most famous instance of such memory is referred to as the “episode of the madeleine,” which appears at the beginning of the first volume of Proust’s In Search of Lost Time (34-36). Other examples include the memories produced by the scent of a public lavatory on the Champs-Élysées. Involuntary memory is an important concept in this essay.

Consciousness and Smell

The highly influential Renaissance writer Michel de Montaigne also commented about the relationship between consciousness and smell:

I have often noticed that [scents] cause changes in me, and act on my spirits according to their qualities; which makes me agree with the theory that the introduction of incense and perfume into churches, so ancient and widespread a practice among all nations and religions was for the purpose of raising our spirits and of exciting and purifying our senses, the better to fit us for contemplation.⁹⁴

⁹³ Classen, Constance The Color of Angels- Cosmology, gender and the aesthetic imagination, New York: Routledge 1998, p.66 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as “Classen”).

⁹⁴ Hume, Lynne, Portals: Opening Doorways to Other Realities Through the Senses, Oxford: Berg, 2007 p.103 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as “Hume”).

In her performance Liminal Acts (2002), Sharon Alward creates a contemplative aromatic shrine for her guests using fragrant flowers and an array of delicious smelling food. The neon angel wings strapped to her back bestowed the performance with the aesthetic of a Christian place of worship that reflects de Montaigne's observation.

Figure 2.1: Sharon Alward: Liminal Acts- Western Front, Vancouver BC, 2002 (with permission of photographer Valorie Pudsey).



However, rather than emulating an overtly Christian environment or event for the sake of aesthetics or conventional religion, Alward sought to layer her performance with subversive undertones that critiqued the anaesthetized consciousness that permeates our society today by creating a liminal or “sacred space” for people to be.

In a post-performance interview Alward said:

I believe our attitudes are numbed, absolute and strange... Placing people in relation to one another in a public space gives them a way of having identities vis-à-vis one another...Mircea Eliade speaks of "sacred space". True sacred space is a place where all significant transformation happens...[it] allows an alternative consciousness to emerge...sacred space allows the appearance of the shadow... I hope the shadow appeared...⁹⁵

Alward's desire to evoke "the shadow", coupled with the decadent "banquet-like" setting she created, bestows the "scent" of Dionysian intent on her performance. In his article "Art in the Dark", Thomas McEvelley discusses the Nietzschean dichotomy between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. He places Performance art within the realm of the Dionysian as a necessary counter to Apollonian (Cartesian) thought. McEvelley views the Dionysian as necessary darkness (or shadow) and comments:

That our culture, in the age of science, should favor the Apollonian is not surprising. The value of light is beyond question; but where there is no darkness there can be no illumination. Rejection of the Dionysian does not serve the purpose of clear and total seeing.⁹⁶

Alward's invocation of the Dionysian was also indicative of "feminine" consciousness. The flowers and food served as potent sources of the "feminine"; for they were both metaphoric and literal sources of odour. The scent of the flowers and food created a welcoming and familiar ambiance in the room and often acted as a point of engagement for people who conversed about the memories or emotions that each smell inspired. Following the performance Sharon asked that I give the flowers to well known Canadian performance artist Kate Craig, who was dying of pancreatic cancer. Kate lived in an apartment above the space where Liminal Acts was performed.

⁹⁵ Singh, Victoria Ritual in Contemporary Performance, Vancouver: Western Front Publications, 2004, p.16 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "Singh").

⁹⁶ McEvelley, Thomas "Art in the Dark", Art Forum Magazine, New York: Summer 1981, p.63 (Subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "McEvelley")

The Scent of Flowers

The scents of flowers have been used throughout history for their healing and spiritually uplifting properties in periods of convalescence and grief. In an important discussion of smell Alain Corbin notes:

Apothecaries prepared scented sachets to cheer up melancholics, hypochondriac's clothing was perfumed with aromatic powders. Fumigation with cinnabar cured the pox⁹⁷

The rising popularity of alternative practices like aromatherapy today sees the continued application of these methods to assist in promoting the health and well-being. Canadian artist, Margaret Dragu, washed her hands, neck and breasts in a basin of water with lavender soap in a performance for the group show Slits in 2003. The lavender's soothing scent permeated the space, allowing the audience to feel its tranquil effects. When I asked her about the use of smell in this performance she said: "The lavender represents seeking relaxation."⁹⁸ Lavender is one of many floral scents that are reputed to both heal and ignite our psyche. Floral fragrances have fueled the imaginations of romantic poets and writers for centuries. Alain Corbin quotes the French writer Étienne Senancour who reveled in the sensorial delights of flowers. Senancour writes:

Most people could not conceive the relationships between the odor that a plant [flower] exhales and the way to happiness to the world... Spring flowers issued to the chosen soul sudden calls to the most inward life.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Corbin, Alain, The Foul and the Fragrant, New York: Harvard University Press, 1986,p.66 (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "Corbin").

⁹⁸ From an excerpt from an email interview between Margaret Dragu and Victoria Singh, March 2008.

⁹⁹ Corbin, p.189

Senancour (like Michel de Montaigne) saw odor as the source of spiritual nourishment and reflection. Literary critic, Robert Mauzi, makes more explicit reference to the mind-altering effects of floral scents, writing:

Unity between nature and man gives the illusion of a unity within man. Sensation re-establishes the thread that was broken between heart and mind. A simple perfume grows into a sudden awareness of self. This has the effect of associating the "I" with nature, until then foreign to it.¹⁰⁰

In Something From Nothing (2008), Canadian performance artist, Shannon Cochrane sat at a bus stop with an enormous bouquet of flowers. Their sweet fragrances circumnavigated her body, gently opposing the unpleasant odor of the garbage can beside her.

Figure 2.2: Shannon Cochrane, Something From Nothing, 2008, University of Santa Cruz, California (with permission of the artist).



It was unclear whether Cochrane's proximity to the tangy odor of the garbage was a deliberate or inadvertent component of the piece. When I interviewed her about the use of smell in this performance she stated:

I could smell the flowers...I always (when using flowers) choose lilies, the big pink ones (the ones we usually think of as Easter flowers), because they are so fragrant, as soon as they bloom, they have a distinct smell... I had several people at the [bus] stop smell the flowers. Weren't they lovely? All agreed... I am always charmed and never disappointed in the fact that holding a flower out to someone always gets the same response – leaning in together and breathing deeply. I have never had anyone refuse? Who could refuse?¹⁰¹

The artist just sits at the bus stop, yet never catches one, despite the fact that they stop to let others get on. Her contemplative posture and choice of location echoes the endless waiting of the characters in Samuel Beckett's play Waiting for Godot or Daniel Clowes's graphic novel Ghost World. Each story presents characters in a state of flux. They are transitioning from one world to another, the world of the living and the dead, the conscious and the unconscious or reality and dream. The notion of "reality and dream" is implicit in the optics of her performance as the overwhelming size of the bouquet (in proportion to her body) fills the work with a surreal quality that speaks of the imagery in Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. The size of the bouquet also emphasizes her corporeal presence, which causes one to question her circumstances. Was she one her way to give the flowers to someone? Perhaps they were given to her as a romantic gesture or a gift to assist her convalescence?

As an overt feminine symbol (in the traditional sense), the flowers also bestow on her performance a "feminine innocence" that echoes the sexist sentiments of French historian Jules Michelet who wrote:

Proximity to flowers, like proximity to birds, was innocent. It is a taste natural to women—the country flower opened a perfumed way to the other world of poetry...Even better, by breathing over the flower in sunlight, woman could find a cure for her nervous frailty. The plant which has no nerves, is a sweet complement to her, a sedative, a cooling influence, a comparative innocence.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Email interview between the artist (Shannon Cochrane) and Victoria Singh, June 2008

¹⁰² Corbin, p.189

The enigmatic presence of the flowers in Cochrane's work could also be interpreted as a bouquet one places on a grave to honor the dead. The grave could also be perceived as her own, for if we choose to see the artist as an invocation of a character in Clowe's Ghost World, she is already dead.

I received an E-mail from Shannon Cochrane after making this observation and discovered that she had created the performance as an homage to her dear friend and artistic collaborator André-Philippe Lemke, who took his own life in 2006. Flowers were a recurring motif in Lemke's work and Cochrane hoped to evoke his presence in Something from Nothing. The artist muses; "flowers have such beautiful scents that we love, but they are most fragrant actually, when they are dying."

Involuntary Memory

Commenting on involuntary or Proustian memory, Lynne Hume notes in her book Portals that:

Smells- both foul and fragrant- evoke memories and draw on knowledge that may be long forgotten. As olfactory signals are transmitted, via miniscule, hair-like cilia at the ends of the olfactory neurons, into the limbic region of the brain, the core of emotions and memory, it is not surprising that de Montaigne noted that scents cause changes in us. An aroma, such as a particular brand of perfume, suntan lotion, incense and so on, can trigger the memory of an event that happened long ago, especially if it is a smell that is not experienced on a daily basis.¹⁰³

The relationship between smell and our consciousness is also apparent within the colloquial adages that make reference to this sense, for example "wake up and smell the coffee!" and "take time to smell the roses".

Helen Paris, performance artist and academic, currently based in the United Kingdom, has worked extensively with smell and its potential as a generator of memory and emotional shifts in consciousness, as part of her performance theory and practice. She states, "Over the years, I have used the sense of smell in live work as a strong source to evoke memories, both as a tool with which to generate emotionally charged and viscerally engaged performances, and as a prompt to personalized interpretations senses by the

¹⁰³ Hume, p. 109

audience in response to that work."¹⁰⁴ Her first work to explore this phenomenon was a solo performance Sniffing the Marigolds (1995). The performance "was informed by the scientific fact that smell can induce instinctive, physical reactions in the body and act as a potent evocation of experience/memory."¹⁰⁵ The real presence of flowers and earth released smells that acted as a catalyst for releasing "body memory"; the body is "affected by and physically responds to smell,"¹⁰⁶ explains Paris. The artist continued her performative focus on the emotional and visceral effects of odour in later works that were produced in collaboration with artist Leslie Hill. For example in Random Acts of Memory (1998) viewers are immediately immersed in an aromatic environment, as the female audience members were handed licorice sweets as soon as they entered the performance space and the smell of pumpkin pie (cooked beforehand) was thick in the air. Paris explained that these scents were intended to arouse the viewer, as the smell of pumpkin has linked with arousing men, and for women the smell of liquorice is reputed to have the same effect.¹⁰⁷ A radio program "talking" quietly in the background about smells accompanied the delicious odours. The performance continued with dialogue and actions that captured the relationship between smell and memory. Paris picked up a piece of old cloth, inhales, and says:

This smells just like my grandparent's house... Their whole house smelt like their chairs. You could bury your face in those armchairs - deep in the crevices between the arm and the seat and smell the whole house.¹⁰⁸

The smell of the cloth triggered powerful memories that carried her to a moment in her past. Paris states, "The memories released in the piece are central to the ontology of the performance itself. In a sense the rest of the performance of Random Acts of Memory can be seen to have been triggered by smell, plunging

104 Paris, Helen, "(Re) Confirming the Conventions- An Ontology of the Olfactory", unpaginated online essay : [http:// people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/1nol2/Helen%20Paris/Helen%20Paris.htm](http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/1nol2/Helen%20Paris/Helen%20Paris.htm) (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "Paris").

¹⁰⁵ ibid

¹⁰⁶ ibid

¹⁰⁷ ibid

¹⁰⁸ ibid

performers and audiences into an environment where smell serves as a strong, emotive evoker of memory stories."¹⁰⁹

In addition to this performance, Paris and Hill collaborated with olfactory specialist Dr. Upinder Bhalla from the National Centre for Biological Sciences in Bangalore, India, in 2003 to create On The Scent. The work was performed in Toronto, Canada in 2003, and went on to tour England in 2004, also visiting Paris, Hong Kong and Australia in 2005. On The Scent was an intimate intervention staged in private homes that had been "reconfigured" with aromatic experiences by the artists. The viewer was exposed to a series of scents that were specifically designed to explore the role that scent plays in constructing our sense of identity, emotion, place and memory. The smells were also intended to provoke discourse that would reflect upon the significance of smell in our everyday lives. The artists used the intimacy of the event to video-record interviews with the participants who spoke about smells that made them think about home or feel homesick. Interviewees begin by sharing their stories in a "matter of fact" style. However, they become increasingly emotional as they recall the smell of a grandparent, a mother's cooking, or a newly mown field. "You get people being taken back to that moment, not just reminded of it,"¹¹⁰ Paris says. The artist also comments about the similarities and differences in the participants' responses depending on the location the work was performed in:

What people recall differs from place to place - the English tend to talk about freshly cut grass, Sunday dinners and bread pudding, Brazilians are more likely to remember wet earth... Everywhere people talk about their grandparents...and many talk about loss...Smell crosses boundaries that are geographical but also other kinds of boundaries...For me, at a time when boundaries seem particularly fragile, it has been extraordinary to see a communality of human remembered experience. ¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ ibid

¹¹⁰ ibid

¹¹¹ ibid

Smell Defies Documentation

I am particularly interested in the use of smell in “Live Art” because it is akin to the ephemeral nature of performance itself. Smell like performance defies accurate “documentation”— its true essence is most accurately experienced in the moment. The elusive or “un-recordable” nature of smells is investigated in Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott’s book Aroma, The Cultural History of Smell; they remark:

Smell...is a highly elusive phenomenon...[it] cannot be named. Nor can odors be recorded: 'there is no effective way of either capturing scents or storing them over time. In the realm of olfaction, we must make do with descriptions and recollections.'¹¹²

Helen Paris critiques this feature of smell with specific respect to performance art, she describes the nature of smells in relation to live work as “a distinct, and an emotive dynamic, unique to live work, it is actually like performance because of its ephemeral, un-recordable nature.”¹¹³ Paris’s observation is not unique, in fact it is one of many made by performance artists, academics and art historians alike. The most well known (in artistic circles), and most widely cited comment is made by the critic Peggy Phelan. Phelan’s “famous” comment about the un-recordable nature of performance reads:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.¹¹⁴

Our experiences of smell in place and time, like our experiences of live performance, cannot be saved or recorded for posterity or subsequent reflection.

¹¹² Classen, Howes and Synnott, Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 3 (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as “Classen, Howes and Synnott”).

¹¹³ Paris

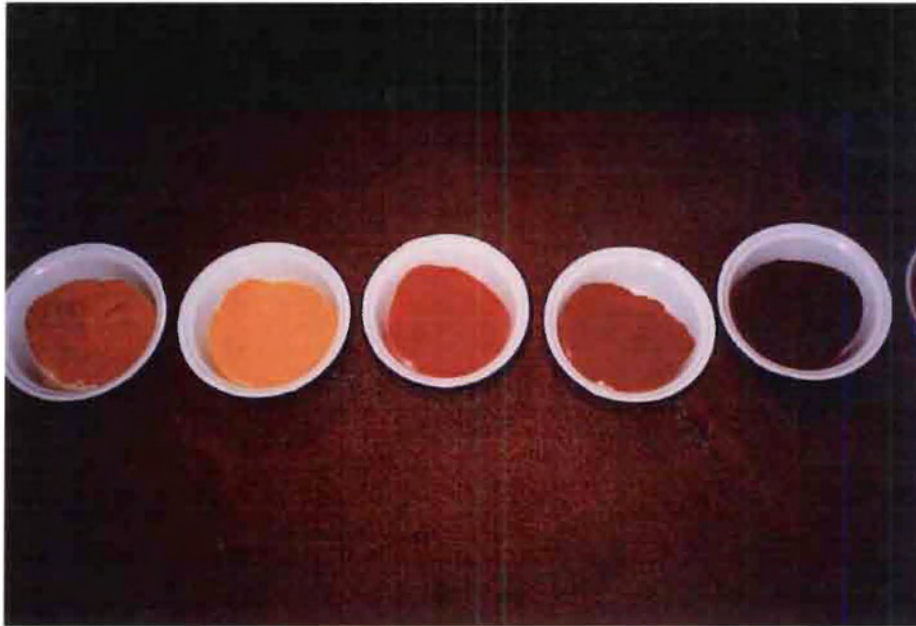
¹¹⁴ Peggy Phelan, Unmarked, The Politics of Performance, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 146

The Fragrance of Time

The intangible or “un-recordable” nature of smell as well as its “Dionysian” overtones could explain why it is not usually perceived as being as important as the visual and the verbal in Western cultures. However, this has not lessened its importance in Eastern cultures. The traditional Japanese ritual Kodo (which means ‘way of the fragrance’) pays respect to the smell of incense. The ritual involves placing incense on a plate that is placed over smouldering coals, which slowly release its fragrance. The intent of Kodo is to ‘listen’ to the smells. For the Kodo ceremony Japanese use the verb kiku (to ‘listen’), which means experiencing, or “getting to know” the fragrance spiritually in a manner that transcends the boundaries of space and time. The use of scent has been connected with the transcendence of time as well as the measurement of time. There are records of various “scent based” time keeping devices in Chinese and Japanese history. For example, incense was moulded with intricate patterns designating each hour of the day, the progress of the burning incense told the time of day. Devices that emitted a specific fragrance gave each hour an appropriate aroma, marking time in a manner that used the sense of smell alone.

The link between scent and time brings two performances to my mind. Both are by Canadian artists; Trace Elements (1999,2000) by Paul Coulliard and Burn (2001) by Reona Brass. Coulliard's Trace Elements was a durational work performed over 24 hours in Toronto (1999) and Vancouver (2000) in recognition of the new millennium. The piece was anchored in the live ritual actions of installing 2000 pieces of cloth, saturated in heavily aromatic spices like turmeric, ginger, and cardamom, in the formation of a “numerological mandala” that symbolized the coming of the year 2000.

Figure 2.3: Paul Coulliard, Trace Elements, "The Spice Bowls" (with permission of the artist).



The artist's original concern was not only with scent, but also with colour: "I chose "white," "yellow," "red," "brown," and "black" spices because I was thinking of the notion of different skin tones, looking for a hopeful message of harmony among those with different visible markers of cultural difference,"¹¹⁵ he writes. In both performances of Trace Elements the scent of the spices completely permeated the space; in Toronto people could smell "curry" as soon as they opened the door to the building. Coulliard spoke about the conceptual basis of Trace Elements in a pre-performance interview:

I see this piece as a representation of experience, how history layers and accretes, how time marks us. The whole piece is a personal time marker, both in the doing of the action and in the physical presence that is generated by the doing. It seems to me that our relationship to time - which was once more rooted in the rhythms of day, night, and the seasons - has become very shaky. We have no attention span for time; our ways of looking at it, and of representing it, are inadequate. We need new metaphors to help us envision time's workings, not to mention its scale.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Transcribed from an email sent by Paul Coulliard to Victoria Singh, May 2008.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

Figure 2.4: Paul Coulliard, Trace Elements, The Western Front, 2000, (with permission of the artist).



Coulliard goes on to say:

In part, Trace Elements is a hopeful conjuring act against the hype -and especially the boredom - of millennium frenzy. I think our boredom comes from a frustration with the lack of any real significance to attach to that flip of the zeroes. I'm willing to go to this place of boredom because of what all of my training has taught me, which is that boredom is a fantastic gateway to uncovering and creating meaning.¹¹⁷

Coulliard's comments about boredom and its potential for altering states of consciousness or perception, coupled with the performative relationship he forges with smell and time in Trace Elements, recall a passage in Soseki Natsume's book, Ten Nights of Dream. The passage comes from the second night of dream, which tells the story of a Samurai struggling to emancipate himself from the entrapment of time in order to attain enlightenment. The passage reads as follows:

I sat squarely in the full Zen posture...I will attain enlightenment. I began to pray, repeating the word Nothingness at the root of my tongue. It has to be Nothingness. Nothingness it shall be. Yet still the scent of incense-sticks persists. The insolence of incense.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Transcribed from an email sent by Paul Coulliard to Victoria Singh

¹¹⁸ Natsume, Soseki Ten Nights of Dream translated by Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson, Victoria: Trafford, 1974, p.33

Many critics have assimilated the intent or conceptual basis of Performance Art with the practices of Zen; in fact Zen Buddhism was a noted influence on the highly acclaimed Fluxus movement, incepted in the 1960's¹¹⁹ (see footnote). The influence of Zen on Fluxus has been noted with comparisons between the enigmatic and austere structure of the Zen Koan and the format of Fluxus performance. Fluxus artist Alison Knowles notes: " Zen is mentioned in terms of Fluxus event performing [because] the action is directed and precise with nothing added".¹²⁰ In addition to influencing the structure of performance, Zen permeates the Fluxus doctrines that profess that there is no division between art and life, and that everything (similarly to Zen theory) is as one. David Doris notes that:

Both Zen and Fluxus embody principles that entail ... an elimination, of the supposed boundaries between 'life' and 'art', between 'I' and 'other'.¹²¹ Thomas Mc Evilly also comments about the influence of Zen and states that " [Live] Art is not a set of objects but an attitude toward objects, or a cognitive stance (as Oscar Wilde suggested, not a thing, but a way). If one were to adopt such a stance to all life, foregrounding the value of attention rather than issues of personal gain and loss, one would presumably have rendered life a seamlessly appreciative experience. Art then functions like a kind of universal awareness practice, not unlike the mindfulness of southern Buddhism or the "Attention!" of Zen.¹²²

The articulation of the relationship between smell and time is explicit conceptually and physically in Coulliard's Trace Elements. However, Reona Brass's use of smell in Burn is more implicit. While its presence is "actual" the potency of her use of odour exists on an imagined or metaphorical level. In Burn the artist mixes white tempura paint with her urine. She then proceeds to paint white lines on the floor in a

¹¹⁹ **Fluxus:** Began in New York in the 1960s and eventually expanded into Japan and Europe, Fluxus included a fusion of several past movements, including Bauhaus, Zen, and Dada. The most famous member of this group is artist, Yoko Ono. (source: creative glossary- <http://www.creativeglossary.com/art-styles/movements/fluxus.html>)

¹²⁰ David Doris "Zen Vaudeville A Meditation on the Margins of Fluxus" in The Fluxus Reader edited by Ken Friedman, New York: Academy Editions, 1998, p.119 (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as "Doris").

¹²¹ Doris, p.104

¹²² McEvilly, p. 63

series of rows until the entire space is covered. The lines speak of “measuring time and the marking of territory”.¹²³

Figure 2.5: Reona Brass, *Burn*, Grunt Gallery, Vancouver BC, 2001 (with permission from Grunt Gallery).



The intent of her actions is suggestive of the behavior of animals who “spray” to mark their territory, and bestows on the work the invisible presence of a dog. Brass makes explicit reference to this motif in a later untitled work in Mexico City (2005) where she walked backwards barking. The performance of *Burn* concludes with the lighting of a cigarette, the artist inhales and lets the acrid fumes of her exhalation permeated the space. Cigarettes also serve as a “marker of time” and like urine, scent and “mark” territory. When I correlate these actions I am reminded of a crude but apt sign that I saw while visiting someone's home many years ago. It read; “You can smoke in my home, if you don't mind me pissing on the furniture in yours”. Brass's subtle invocation of a dog in *Burn* further demonstrates the notion that the smell is viewed as a “lesser” and/or “feminine” sense.

Constance Classen observes:

¹²³ Singh, p.23

The lower sense of smell.... [was] usually represented by animals...Smell, for instance, was represented by the dog...animals thought to have a keen sense of smell...The ideal dog, like the ideal woman, was the guardian of the home, servile, and unconditionally devoted to his master. Less ideally, dogs were promiscuous, deceitful, and scavengers, characteristics which were extended to “wanton” women.¹²⁴

The imagined presence of a dog in Burn is also suggestive of the ritual of the animal vow practiced by the Pasupatas of India. In this ritual the practitioner chooses an animal and “vows” to behave like it for periods of up to a year.¹²⁵ The purpose of the ritual is to provide an escape from human consciousness by entering into that of another species. The imagined presence of a dog in Burn is also suggestive of an enhanced state of “feminine” consciousness which fits the conceptual intent of her practice in general, as described on the Canada Council for the Arts website:

Reona Brass explores the notions of female identity, power and culture so that observers may achieve a state of consciousness that provides the feminine keys to the human universe.¹²⁶

Feminine Consciousness

The phenomenon of smell being demonstrative of “feminine” consciousness is portrayed more explicitly by the Canadian duo Shawna Dempsey and Lori Millan in their performance Scent Bar (2005). Scent Bar was a site-specific work located at a popular licensed café in Saskatoon. The participants and viewers entered the space in the same way as those who came to enjoy a drink or a meal. The venue’s regular patrons were unaware of the artists’ intervention and curiously observed from the bar, unaware that the heady clash of their perfumes and colognes were providing an immediate sensory assault and a ‘fitting’, yet unintentional, entry point to the piece. The artists had set up the area they were performing in like a chemistry laboratory. They were both dressed in white coats and sat at separate tables flanked by monitors depicting looped video footage. Millan’s table was lined with glass tubes and various potions. Dempsey’s was set up with data sheets and pens for recording information. The white coats, and “lab like” setting opened an instant

¹²⁴ Classen, p.76

¹²⁵ McEvelley, P.69

¹²⁶ Canada Council for the Arts: www.canadacouncil.ca

portal to a “feminine” state of consciousness or perspective by offering a visual critique of the notion that science is traditionally viewed as a male dominated field. Susan Bordo presents this notion in her essay “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the 17th Century Flight from the Feminine”; she says:

Science has of course a long history of discrimination against women, insisting that women cannot measure up to the rigor, persistence or clarity that science requires. It also has its share of explicitly misogynist doctrine...¹²⁷

Bordo made this comment in 2003, it is both tragic and ironic that the “long history” she describes continues to resonate when we consider the alleged misogynist remarks made by the president of Harvard University, Lawrence H. Summers, in his infamous 2005 speech. Summers was criticized by female scientists who were upset by his series of possible explanations of why women were under-represented [unsuccessful] in the upper echelons of the scientific field. He attributed the under representation to factors like genetics and time spent on child rearing.¹²⁸ Bordo’s essay goes on to argue that the female soul was drained from the natural world by the philosophies of Rene Descartes. She argues that:

For Plato...the world has a soul- a female soul-which permeates the corporeal body of the universe”. In the seventeenth century...that female world-soul died- or more precisely, was murdered- by the mechanist re-visioning of nature... Cartesian objectivism and mechanism...should be understood as a...flight from the female cosmos and “feminine” orientation towards the world¹²⁹

This aspect of Bordo’s essay is fortified by the performative elements of Scent Bar, specifically the notion that “the flight from the feminine” is also representative of “the death of nature”.¹³⁰ Millan and Dempsey articulate “the death of nature” with the aforementioned video montage that looped continuously on the monitors beside their “work” tables. The video montage depicts scenes of factories pumping

¹²⁷ Bordo, Susan “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought and the 17th Century Flight from the Feminine”, Cahoone, Lawrence, From Modernism to Postmodernism, United Kingdom: Blackwell, 2003, p.358 (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as “Bordo”).

¹²⁸ Michael Dobbs, “Harvard Chief’s Comments on Women Assailed-Academics Critical of Remarks About Lack of Gender Equality”, Washington Post, January 19, 2005; p. A02 (source <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19181-2005Jan18.html>)

¹²⁹ Bordo, p.356

¹³⁰ Bordo, p.356

industrial waste into the natural environment, car exhaust, chemical fumes, mushroom clouds rising from atomic bomb explosions and other modern day atrocities. The audio track of the video featured the stark voice over of a woman citing, "Scent Bar...fragrances for troubled times..." in a manner that recalled the sensual advertisement of perfume. Her soothing tone gave an eerie contrast to the disturbing visual images. Until this point, most viewers assumed that this work was just a performative pastiche of the "scent bars" commonly associated with the fragrance stands in malls and department stores. However, the video imagery suggested that there was more at "play" in the piece. It was also commenting on environmental issues. However, the link between the "environment " and "scent" was still enigmatic. The artists treated the "viewers" as "clients" at a regular "scent bar" and gave them the exciting opportunity of having a "special scent" created specifically for them.

Figure 2.6:Shawna Dempsey and Lori Millan, Scent Bar, 2005 (with permission of the artists)



The first step of the process involved being part of an intimate interview session with Dempsey, who asked each individual a series of multi-choice questions. The questions were evocative of consciousness and memory and asked things like "do you dream in 'real life' or cartoon imagery".

In a series of “post-performance reflections” the artists stated:

Biologists believe that the human brain evolved out of our scent receptors. That is why, it is theorized, that scent and memory are so closely linked (memory being key to cognition). It is our modest hope that the audience will take their scent with them and when they smell it, remember the Scentbar experience, remember the destabilizing questions that we asked them about their happiness, their regrets, and the future.¹³¹

Figure 2.7: Shawna Dempsey and Lori Millan, Scent Bar, 2005 (with permission of the artists)



The answers that each “client” gave during their interview with Dempsey were recorded on sheets of paper that she gave to Millan. Millan treated the information as the “scientific data” she required to concoct the special custom-made perfumes. The individualized potions were given to each client in a small glass phial for them to “try on” and take home. The resulting odors were a surprise to the participants for they did not smell nice. Instead, they instantly connected the wearer to the “stinking” imagery of environmental damage portrayed in the video footage, creating a dramatic shift in their perceptions and expectations. These were smells for “troubled times”, reflecting a world faced with environmental crisis, conflict and the potential of self-destruction.

¹³¹ Post-performance reflections sent to Victoria Singh in an email, July 2008.

Smell as Social Critique

Scent Bar serves as the most blatant articulation of the ideas discussed by the writers I cite at the beginning of this discussion. As previously noted, the conceptual intent of Scent Bar echoes the ideas of Susan Bordo pertaining to “feminist consciousness”. However, the environmental components of Scent Bar also promote “Taoist” consciousness, by indirectly articulating¹³² the ideas put forward by Roger. T Ames in his essay “Putting the Te Back into Taoism” and William I. Thompson in his essay “The Road Not Taken, Coming into Being”. Ames investigates and rethinks issues of environmental ethics within a Taoist context. He appeals to the Taoist tradition with the hope “that [it] will serve, first as an alternative perspective that illuminates our own assumptions and, second, as a conceptual resource for addressing some of the more fundamental issues of environmental ethics.”¹³³ Scent Bar also articulates and questions the notions of Po-Keung Ip cited in Ames’s essay:

How ought man, either as an individual or as a group, to behave, to act toward nature? By nature I mean the nonhuman environment man finds himself in...Any viable environmental ethics, it seems to me, should provide adequate answers to three questions: 1. What is the nature of nature? 2. What is man’s relationship to nature? 3. How should man relate himself to nature?¹³⁴

Scent Bar offers an answer to these questions, for the assimilation of the viewer with nature suggests that they are the same entity. In other words, our relationship with nature should emulate our relationship with ourselves. The act of assimilating the viewer with nature also evokes the “oceanic feeling” that Ames discusses:

¹³² The word “articulate” is usually associated with the written word or discursive discourse, however in this instance I assert its use with non-discursive discourse or performative action to support the current conversations which challenge the academic world’s propensity to treat the “written word” as the only relevant vehicle for scholarly response in an institutional setting. Unwritten or non-discursive contributions always require discursive support.

¹³³ Ames, Roger.T “Putting the Te Back into Taoism”, Callicot, J.Baird, et al. Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought, United States: Suny, 1989, p.115 (subsequent reference to this text will be cited as “Ames”.)

¹³⁴ *ibid*, p.114

An infant with his “oceanic feeling” does not distinguish himself from his environment. There is no circumscription or separation from his whole.¹³⁵

The non-distinguishable connection with the environment that Ames describes is inadvertently realized when the participants apply their personalized scent. The point of application instantly connects the human-being with the natural world, scenting their body in the same way an animal marks their territory. This “scented connection” also bestows on the viewer a sense of responsibility and ownership for the well being of our environment. Its dire predicament is repeatedly illustrated on the video monitors and acts as a “wake up” call to the viewer, who are now faced with the reality of taking steps to arrest the damage that is currently taking place.

Like Dempsey and Millan, William I. Thompson also makes a plea for environmental change in “The Road Not Taken, Coming into Being”. His essay advocates taking a Taoist approach as a necessary “road not taken” in the development of a modern-day consciousness that prioritizes the conscientious treatment of our planet. The Taoist approach is representative of the “feminine”, according to Thompson. He notes:

The Taoist vision takes us back to the prehistoric feminine and points to a post-historic feminine we are only now beginning to appreciate...In this celebration of the feminine, this recovery of the first universal religion of humanity, this celebration of anarchic decentralization and dispersed villages, we glimpse the possibilities of a world that is an alternative to the giantism of transnational cyberpunk corporations.¹³⁶

Scent Bar provides further commentary on Thompson’s assertions by exposing and critiquing the fall out of “cyberpunk corporations” within a “feminine” setting. However, more importantly, it offers a direct point of engagement to us, the viewer, and places the accountability for the health and future of the natural environment in our hands. Scent Bar acts as a vehicle for the artists to voice their concern about the environmental crisis that faces our planet today from a feminist perspective. Similarly, Fluxus artist Takako

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p.114

¹³⁶ Thompson, William. I, “The Road Not Taken”, Coming into Being, United States: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996, p.260

Saito¹³⁷ protested the unfavorable political conditions affecting “our world”, (specifically the Cold War), in her works Smell Chess (1964) and Spice Chess (1965). These games engaged the viewer by requiring them to perform actions that emulated the chess-like games played by the East and West during the war and illustrated the conflict and division between the “superpowers”. Saito replaced the traditional chess pieces in her sets with small glass jars containing either scented liquid or powdered spice which forced the participants to utilize their olfactory (“feminine”) senses in order to play. This feature of the work inserted a subversive “feminist” metaphor into a game commonly perceived as a “masculine” activity as well as a metaphor for an overtly masculine pursuit (war). Each chess piece is assigned with a specific odor, which forces the player to identify each “piece” using smell, rather than sight, as the dominant sense. Saito’s works also address the notion that we live in a “desensitized” or “deodorized” world. She comments:

Contemporary society demands that we distance ourselves from the emotions, that social structures and divisions be seen to be objective or rational and not emotional [feminine].

¹³⁸

Smell Chess (like many of the works I have discussed in this essay particularly Scent Bar) asserts that the detached and numb behavior we exhibit as a society is not healthy. It also makes the suggestion that we return to, or include feminine (Dionysian) voices to counter and balance the overtly masculine (Apollonian) influences in our lives.

Conclusion

The explicit and implicit presence of smell in live acts of performance is a potent sensorial device that can trigger altered states of consciousness and shifts in our perceptions of reality. Smell is our most primal or “feminine” sense, evoking memories, and visceral reactions that can change the way we view our immediate place in space and time. Exposure to odors is a call to our primitive side, a side that has become increasingly repressed with the rise of the “scientific” and the rational, which has deodorized our Dionysian

¹³⁷ Takako Saito was born in Japan in 1929, and is currently based in Düsseldorf, Germany.

¹³⁸ Mesch, Claudia, “Cold War Games and Post-war Art” online essay: www.reconstruction.eserver.org/061/mesch.shtml

instincts and “feminine” ways of seeing. The acts of performance I have discussed are “wake up calls”, intentionally designed to rupture the state of sensorial anesthesia that modern living has placed us in. The “smell” centric portals that each artist creates in their work open a space for people to experience the “involuntary memories” and altered perceptions that smell triggers. These experiences allow the individual to encounter and explore “feminine” or Dionysian states of consciousness. The performances also echo the subversive ideas of writers like Bordo, Ames, Thompson and McEvilley who assert that in order to move forward as a society we need to disconnect from the Cartesian (Apollonian) by redirecting the trajectory that we are currently on. This repositioning would involve resuscitating the Dionysian, the Taoist and the feminine “ways of seeing” that have been ignored or silenced for centuries. The resuscitation of the “primitive” will redefine our ways of thinking about issues like environmental ethics and “ways of being” by encouraging alternative views to those that are currently upheld by the status quo. Engaging with works of performance art, like the ones explored in this essay, will “scent” our minds with subversive “ways of seeing” which will re-odorize the state of modern consciousness.

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