

Abstract: Our expanded cinema piece, *Granted: From Glory to Grandeur*, explores the materiality of light in the shadow of Schreber's *Memoirs*. Through a smattering of Sufi texts—from the Islamic Mystic Shihaboddin Sohrawardi—and an experimental 16mm piece, centered on film's capacity to both catch *and* throw light, I hope to substantiate Schreber's account, which is to say, to emphasize the fact of light's substance, not its function as metaphor, or abstraction. The 12th century Syrian Sufi, Sohrawardi, is notable precisely for his articulation of light as an intelligence, manifesting a variety of forms, colors, and initiations. 16mm, given the mechanism of film, exhibits the material quality of light's existence, the chemicals or even "nerves" essential to the production of an image, and the psychological—however mystical or mystifying—aspects of this production. Additionally, the character of Judge Schreber will be represented in costume, encouraging spectators to play with the film itself, to refract and reflect the projector's rays of light.

INSTALLATION

Setting: Schreber at his Asylum Window

Soundtrack: The soundtrack to which Schreber responds is primarily a semblance of bird sounds and the mechanics of a 16mm editing flatbed, or moviola. The bird sounds were recorded in between our breaks from making the costume and the film in Rochester NY, and from the lovely garden next to the Jefferson Market Library. The moviola sounds reflect the actual production of the film we are projecting. One can hear cutting of film, splicing, taping, rewinding and the general motor vibrations from the device. In terms of meaning, we are setting up a paradoxical situation, the sentiment being that Schreber is disturbed into action by the sound of the making of his own visions, by their *production*, not their *projection*, so what he experiences is somehow delayed, or perhaps sort of après coup.

In addition to the two primary tracks, there are whispered 3 verses from the Koran in Arabic, and two Sufi Prayers in English about light. I wanted to explore the possibility that the whispering and messaging that constitute his hallucinations might be softened or contiguous with another tradition that is devoted to the cultivation of light. These prayers and verses are a part of my daily practice, and so the idea was to, through the figure of Schreber, address some of my own, and my collaborators' difficult experiences with a variety of pertinent psycho-spiritual effects.

Film: The notion of substantiating Schreber's experience by working with the substantial nature of light occurs in the installation, through the actual projection of film across the 30 feet of space where it is caught on the screen, or interrupted by the objects one of the glass objects on hand (a mirror, a lense, a crystal etc.), and of course through the shooting of the film too. For the film, content wise we considered roughly four realms: earth, where one can see fairly traditional objects of the world, though accented with light; earth hallucinated, where these still common objects, are turned upside down, and blurred by

the light itself, from the sun, for example, or bent by the surface through which we are shooting. The third realm is that of space, the planets and spheres, where the gods and their courts preside. The scenes for this realm were constructed by us in a variety of ways... the planets are actually pieces of candy that we lit up and hung from the ceiling, or set on a certain papers to defamiliarize them. The fourth realm is that of pure light, and much of these shots were done by blasting various crystals with sunlight, or the light from an old fashioned mag-lite. Interestingly the way that Schreber describes light, the parabolas etc. was reproduced, which is to say that he is often describing the actual physics of light.

Costume: The primary goal of the costume was display the shape and movement of nerves, in the overall context of an illumined body. The hands, neck (back and front), were fashioned with gold filaments that responded to “Schreber’s” movement. The nerves that clung to the arms and legs were made from a variety of materials each sparkly string, and fragmented textile were sewn together and then onto the morph suit, which itself was dyed. Most of the materials also received a mix of expired copper paint, and gold green metallic, and gold red metallic paints. The culminating piece of the costume was a silvery, green and gold womb studded with rhinestones that we wanted to somehow indicate the purpose of Schreber’s mission, to birth a new world.

Sufi Prayers: ...a prayer of supplication that can be heard to this day in mosques from the Maghreb to Java (Pir Zia):

O God, place light in my heart, and light in my soul, light upon my tongue, light in my eyes and light in my ears, place light at my right, light at my left, light behind me and light before me, light above me and light beneath me. Place light in my nerves, and light in my flesh, light in my blood, light in my hair and light in my skin! Give me light, increase my light, make me light!

Source of Sufi aspect: The young Iranian Shihaboddin Yahya Sohrawardi (1155–1191) was a Sufi saint who founded a “school” of illumination, and suffered a martyr’s death in 12th century Syrian. His most lauded project perhaps, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, was a magnificent metaphysics of light, combining the sun worship and arch-angelic system of planetary intelligences developed by the ancient Persian sages, the Zoroastrians. This knowledge was weaved tightly with practices of his more contemporary Sufi lineages, in rather daring attempts to not only directly experience realms *extimate* to common reality, but indeed to transfer the coordinates of such “places” and the methods of their access.

There are lights which ascend and lights which descend. The ascending lights are the lights of the heart; the descending lights are those of the Throne. Creatural being is the veil between the Throne and the heart. When this veil is rent and a door to the Throne opens in the heart, like springs toward like. Light rises toward light and light comes

down upon light, and it is light upon light. (from Sohrawardi in Henry Corbin's *The Man of Light*)

