

Towards an Aesthetic of the Innards: An Introduction to Marius Presterud's Pearl Diving Project *Stahl Stenslie*

Elements of beauty and pleasure in food are usually associated with and recognized through visual appearance, smell and taste. Once our food is swallowed it is as if it has disappeared from our aesthetic horizon. How to aesthetically relate to the autonomous, hidden world of the innards? How to practically make art within the complex mechanisms of our digestive system? Can we construct viscerally noticeable pleasures and sense beauty on the inside of our bodies? The chemical components of food affects us in various ways, but our food processing is normally not somatically pronounced, rarely mapped in everyday situations or much noticed throughout the food digestive process that last the better part of our day.

In the following contribution, the Norwegian artist and clinical psychologist Marius Presterud turns this around, describing a fascinating exploration of the sensory appreciation and aesthetics of our innards. In some ways it could even be described as a living portrait of the beauty in our innards. His food is both natural, ecological, and in-edible: by swallowing freshwater pearls from oysters, he firstly repeats the process of how they are created; in the innards of an oyster, where an un-edible particle of sand over time is capsulated with layers of nacre until it acquires the iridescent visual effect attributed to precious pearls. Secondly he eats them as a food of splendor, devouring the pearls, making them a part of his body, beautifying his inner body.

From a somaesthetical perspective, how does eating pearls contribute to a sensory-aesthetic appreciation? Or a corporeal, sensual, somatic sense of beauty? Viscerally speaking, once the pearls are eaten and from the perspective of the innards, the body will hardly notice these small, round objects that simply follow the digestive system in an unharmful way until they –again hardly noticeable- leave the alimentary canal. Here Marius introduces a somaesthetical twist, or perhaps even somaesthetic sacrifice: in the attempt to explore this innermost aesthetics inside his own body, he uses gastroscopy as an instrument of discovery, revealing, tracking, exploring how the pearls are processed and even beautifying his intestines. Gastroscopy is a rather unpleasant procedure, and not without dangers. As Marius dryly comments, intestines have been ruptured before... This search for beauty is therefore neither without expense nor violence. In a melioristic perspective this raises interesting issues: how –and when- can an agonizing somatic experience turn into an interesting, rewarding somatic work of art?

Through gastroscopy, Marius uncovers an inner, somaesthetic splendor when finding 'the pearl with its radiant beauty, perfection and circular integrity.' The inner pearl caught on video as he is in uttermost discomfort exemplifies the whole procedure as a unique sensory appreciation. This is an interesting and innovative approach in itself, but as we already know, Marius goes beyond the surface. Swallowing pearls turns his innards into a 'gem-filled horn of plenty.' Although intensively his personal somatic experience, the inedible gems simultaneously comments on disturbing phenomena such as eating disorders. This furthermore concerns the mundane, every day search for *our* self, a search relevant for different academic disciplines.

Marius uses the resulting imagery (see video link) as fodder for reflections on the profession of health clinicians. This is a clear reference to the field of embedded practice.

A central part of Marius's text is his practical approach to Somaesthetics. He is actively using Shusterman's concept of Somaesthetics as his point of departure both for the production of art as well as in his analysis of his own work. It is his own live body at work, turned into a living gallery where he actively performs both as a viewer of and vessel for art.

The pearls are not unaffected by the process. The chemical reactions inside the body affect their colors. Marius's intestinal labour gives birth to new, human-colored pearls, making him 'Pater Perlum': a father of pearls.

The Video:

The work is documented on video. A preview is downloadable from:

<https://vimeo.com/123148524>

Pearl diving - Part 1 of a interdisciplinary work series by Marius Presterud.

Short Description: We find a treasure inside the artist. What's it like to have a thing of value inside of you? The idea of the minable individual - that we have this inner, unlocked potential to turn to - is in its pure form, a critique worthy internalization. Viewers are invited to ponder what ideological purpose this inward looking serves.

In this film though, we actually find "it," in contrast to everyday life spent searching. The film is a happy-ending spin-off on theories on anorexia, which claim that a lack of abstraction leads to attempts at controlling inner turmoil through the concrete/the body.

The soundtrack consists of the artist wheezing after a quick self-enhancing jog.

Material: Freshwater pearls, stomach sack (artist's own)

Technique: Gastrological examination video after swallowing pearls

Length: Approximately 2 min

When: November, 2014

Where: Ullevål Hospital, Oslo

Photo by Margit Selsjord

Short version: <https://vimeo.com/123147757>

Teaser: <https://vimeo.com/123148524>