

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI: CELEBRITY OBSESSION

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF ART AND ART HISTORY

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI: CELEBRITY OBSESSION

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ART HISTORY

By

TAYLOR ELAINE MAULDIN

Norman, Oklahoma

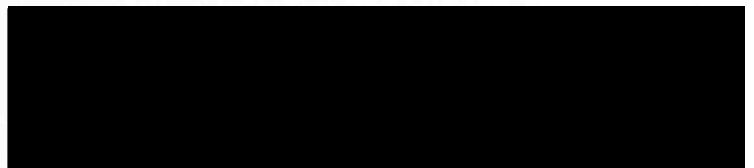
2011

ESIS
10
2

FRANCESCO VEZZOLI: CELEBRITY OBSESSION

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF ART AND ART HISTORY

BY



Dr. W. Jackson Rushing, III, Chair



Dr. Susan Caldwell



Professor Peter Froslie

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my family and friends
who celebrate in their own right.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and friends—supporters and celebrities in their own right—for their love and encouragement. I am forever grateful for their support and motivation.

Thank you to Dr. Caldwell and Professor [Name] for their guidance and encouragement.

Dr. Hardy George, my instructor for pursuing this degree, thank you for your mentorship.

Yolande Hirst, my French tutor, for your patience and encouragement. *merci beaucoup*.

Finally, I would like to thank my family—Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, Granddad, Granny and Papa, as well as my friends, [Name] and [Name]—my second family—the best fan club I could possibly have.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Jackson Rushing for his infinite wisdom and support. I am forever grateful for your scrupulous editing and kind words of motivation.

Thank you to Dr. Caldwell and Professor Froslic who have provided me with much guidance and encouragement.

Dr. Hardy George, my inspiration for pursuing the field, thank you for your mentorship.

Yolande Hirst, my French tutor, for your knowledge, kindness, and patience, *merci beaucoup*.

Finally, I would like to thank my family—Mom, Dad, Ben, Grandmother & Granddad, Granny and Papa, as well as my aunts, uncles, cousins, and *second* family—the best fan club I could possibly have. Ever.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1, "The Pop Culture Paradox"	7
Chapter 2, "Celebrity Sells"	18
Chapter 3, "Film, Fandom, Fashion, Francesco"	35
Conclusion	49
Bibliography	52
Appendix, Figures	55

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Francesco Vezzoli (Italian, 1971-), *Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli* (2009), view of exhibition area

Figure 2.2. *Greed*, view of exhibition area

Figure 2.3. Jeff Koons (American, 1955-), *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988)

Figure 2.4. Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887-1968), *Belle Haleine: Eau de Violette* (1921)

Figure 2.5. *Greed*, detail of perfume bottle

Figure 2.6. *Greed*, still image from commercial

Figure 2.7. Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917), *The Star* (1876)

Figure 2.8a. Estee Lauder advertisement for “Bronze Goddess”

Figure 2.8b. “J’adore” advertisement by Dior

Figure 2.8c. “advertisement” for *Greed*

Figure 2.9. Tom’s Restaurant, New York City

Figure 2.10. *Greed*, view of needlepoint portraits within gallery space

Figure 2.11. *Frida Kahlo for Greed*

Figure 2.12. *Georgia O’Keeffe for Greed*

Figure 2.13. Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987), *Turquoise Marilyn* (1962)

Figure 2.14. Andy Warhol, *Liz* (1964)

Figure 3.1. Francesco Vezzoli, *Trailer for Remake of Gore Vidal’s ‘Caligula’* (2005), still image from trailer

Figure 3.2. *Trailer for Remake*, still image of from trailer

Figure 3.3. *Trailer for Remake*, still image of Vezzoli (in black) from trailer

Figure 3.4. Francesco Vezzoli, *Democracy* (2007), Sharon Stone as Patricia Hill

Figure 3.5. *Democracy*, still image of Bernard-Henry Lévy as Patrick Hill

Figure 3.6. *Democracy*, detail

Figure 3.7. *Democracy*, view of exhibition space

Figure 3.8. Francesco Vezzoli, *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)* (2009), image from outside the tent

Figure 3.9. Vezzoli, *Portrait of Lady Gaga*

Figure 3.10. *Ballets Russes*, image of Lady Gaga in hat designed by Frank Gehry and Miuccia Prada

Figure 3.11. *Ballets Russes*, image of Gaga sitting at Steinway piano customized by Damien Hirst

Figure 3.12. *Ballets Russes*, image of Bolshoi dancers

Figure 3.13. *Ballets Russes*, images of posters designed by Vezzoli for the event

Figure 3.14. *Ballets Russes*, Vezzoli with Lady Gaga

Introduction

“After all, we live in a country where the ultimate competition for celebrityhood—*American Idol*—has more viewers than the nightly news on the three major networks combined.”¹

—Jake Halpern, *Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths Behind America’s Favorite Addiction*

In a society where, hypothetically speaking, the majority of young girls would opt to have dinner with Jennifer Lopez or Paris Hilton over Jesus Christ or Albert Einstein, it becomes increasingly apparent that what once may have been considered a “healthy” appetite for celebrity has evolved into full-blown obsession and astonishing fandom.² The purpose of this thesis is neither to define nor judge the moral character and value system of the general public—namely, customs of celebrity worship—rather, it is to identify and explore this phenomena as it proves integral to broader topics of pop culture, media culture, and contemporary art.

Human admiration for charismatic figures dates back millennia, as Jake Halpern suggests in his book, *Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths Behind America’s Favorite Addiction*: “Many cultural anthropologists believe that even the hunters and gatherers of the Stone Age—who are thought to have lived in a relatively egalitarian fashion—had top hunters who enjoyed

¹ Jake Halpern, *Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths Behind America’s Favorite Addiction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), xv.

² *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

a special celebrity-like status.”³ Indeed, this sort of practice has an extensive history—yet the intensity with which it is witnessed today remains unsurpassed.

So evident and curious is this concept, in fact, that it often serves as the artist’s muse. For decades, artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, and Jeff Koons have blurred the boundaries separating high-art from kitsch as their pieces often serve as both a celebration *and* critique of celebrity and pop culture.⁴ However, in recent art, one of the more significant examinations and interpretations of such themes is found in the work of the Italian-born artist Francesco Vezzoli. Vezzoli, who has a “self-admitted obsession with bold-faced names,” reveals his own infatuation with celebrities by exploiting that of others.⁵ Indeed, what better way to investigate notions of celebrity than to work with one directly? Natalie Portman, Lady Gaga, Frank Gehry—these are just a few of the drop-worthy names of stars who have been included in Vezzoli’s films, performances, and installations. Meanwhile, the artist’s work not only incorporates celebrities themselves, but includes intelligent and insightful social commentary, as well; as fashion designer Miuccia Prada stated, “I

³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁴ It should be noted that Marcel Duchamp’s work typically emphasized *material* culture, although its relevance to pop culture remains.

⁵ David Grosz, “Francesco Vezzoli,” *Artinfo.com* (February 5, 2009), <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/30308/francesco-vezzoli/?page=1> (accessed September 6, 2010).

very much appreciate Francesco's work, because of the strong political content that is generally underestimated. What people get is usually the involvement of famous people, but what is really powerful in his work is the deconstruction of the mediatic system."⁶

VeZZo Born in Brescia, Italy, in 1971, Vezzoli has since produced a substantial oeuvre.⁷ With an international exhibition history ranging from the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills to the Migros Museum in Zurich, Vezzoli's work conveys the artist's enthusiasm for a wide range of mediums, including film *and* needlework, as well as various combinations thereof. This unique fusion of materials is one that often results in environments where reality and fantasy become increasingly difficult to differentiate. Furthermore, these "mediated" or "fantastical realities" attest to the "luster and decadence of celebrity" which Vezzoli and much of the general public find so attractive.⁸ As I intend to show, close observation and analysis of *two* of Vezzoli's recent films and performances—one titled

⁶ Miuccia Prada quoted in Amy Larocca, "The Italian Rascalion: Performance artist Francesco Vezzoli has his celebrity cake and eats it, too," *New York Magazine* (October 18, 2007), <http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/39577/> (accessed September 6, 2010). While this terminology, "mediatic system," has perhaps yet to become commonplace, it nevertheless applies to discussions of various networks and methods of both visual and oral communication.

⁷ Gagosian Gallery, "Francesco Vezzoli – Gagosian Gallery," Gagosian Gallery, <http://www.gagosian.com/artists/francesco-vezzoli> (accessed September 6, 2010).

⁸ Whitney Artist Directory, "Francesco Vezzoli." The Whitney Museum of American Art, <http://whitney.org/www2006biennial/artists/php?artist=Vezzoli> (accessed September 6, 2010).

Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli (2009), the other, *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)* (2009), reveal distinctions—or the ironic lack thereof—between reality and fiction and between high art and kitsch. Meanwhile, brief discussions of Vezzoli's other projects, including *Trailer for Gore Vidal's 'Caligula'* (2005) and *Democracy* (2007), will provide further context for understanding the artist's aesthetic approach to investigating his and society's shared celebrity obsession.

As noted above, it is not my intention to condemn acts of celebrity devotion; instead, it is to offer the reader further insight into the realm of celebrity culture with which he or she is inevitably bombarded. As Vezzoli stated, "I see myself as a mirror holder, I hold up the mirror and say OK, this is the reality we live in. These are the fascinations most people have, and art should look at them the way art looks at most phenomena."⁹

Specifically, Vezzoli is acknowledging the commodification of celebrity-ness, such that it becomes a product *itself*. By translating this notion of commercialization into aesthetic language, Vezzoli is not only illustrating this trend, but also supplementing it. In other words, the fact that many of the artist's pieces are designed as television commercials or film trailers is

⁹ Francesco Vezzoli quoted in David Grosz, "Francesco Vezzoli," *Artinfo.com* (February 5, 2009), <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/30308/francesco-vezzoli/> (accessed August 27, 2010).

no coincidence. Such mediums allow the work to serve as a critique within a critique since these modes of advertising are, by definition, integral to the mediated and commercialized world in which we live.

Thus far my introduction has served as a basis for establishing Vezzoli's relevance to studies of celebrity and pop culture in general; however, other aspects of the artist's biography, theory, and methodology are significant, as well. Chapter 1 will elaborate on parallels between commodity and celebrity culture, particularly, the history of "pop" culture and how it relates to celebrities using their status as such to sell goods and services. The subsequent chapters will serve as case studies in order to provide a further understanding of Vezzoli's art as cultural critique. Chapter 2, for example, focuses on Vezzoli's 2009 project, titled *Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli*, and includes not only an in-depth formal analysis of the piece, but also highlights the key themes observed throughout. These topics include the artist's motivation and choice of medium, as well as notions of "mediated reality" and cultural appropriation. This discussion is continued in Chapter 3 as it reveals Vezzoli's Surrealist lifestyle as reflected in his *artistic* style in projects such as *Trailer for Gore Vidal's 'Caligula,'* from 2005, and *Democrazy*, from 2007. Meanwhile, observation and analysis of Vezzoli's *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)*, from 2009, proves that this

piece is the ultimate (and most recent) realization of the artist's celebrity fetish.

Heralded by *New York Magazine* as "the Italian Rapsallion," who "has his celebrity cake and eats it, too," Vezzoli reveals an edgy aesthetic that is becoming increasingly popular, as well as praiseworthy, as his projects continue to examine, interpret, and respond to celebrity obsessions such as his own.¹⁰ Satisfying his appetite for celebrity through trope, parody, and pastiche, Vezzoli deconstructs today's mediated "reality" by simultaneously challenging *and* recreating certain concepts of kitsch and high art.¹¹ Thus, much of Vezzoli's work is marked by a nostalgia not only for Hollywood's Golden Age, but also for art history, as it sheds light on the superficiality of a society seemingly wholly defined by commodity—and the celebrities who sell it.

¹⁰ Larocca, "Italian Rapsallion," np.

¹¹ J.M. Balkin, *Deconstruction*. New Haven: Yale, 1996.

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/deconessay.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2011). The term, "deconstruct," while originally referring to "techniques for reading texts developed by Jaques Derrida, Paul de Man, and others," can additionally be used "as a synonym for criticizing or demonstrating the incoherence of a position."

Chapter 1: The Pop Culture Paradox

“The art world has become such a self-promotional universe that I’ve basically grown obsessed with deconstructing the very means of promotion.”¹²

–Francesco Vezzoli

One primary focus of my thesis is that of subcultures: popular culture, commodity culture, media culture, and celebrity culture. The reciprocal nature of these topics suggests their seemingly infinite scopes, as overlap among them remains undeniable. Furthermore, culture is temporal; fleeting and ever-changing, it is a hybrid of the customs and conventions of a public whose tastes and traditions are dictated by the increasingly advanced technologies that create them—and vice versa.¹³ In other words, technology produces culture, as culture *simultaneously* produces technology. For Vezzoli, these constructs are evident in mass media, such as film and television, and their audiences. With hardly a fine line separating pop, commodity, media, and celebrity cultures, the categories are intersecting, but, of necessity, contradictory; nevertheless, it is the *consumer* who serves as the common denominator in these relationships. Thus, the focus of this chapter, which attempts to deconstruct this pop culture paradox.

¹² Francesco Vezzoli, “1000 Words: Francesco Vezzoli Talks About *Democracy*, 2007,” *Artforum International* 45 (Summer 2007), 449.

¹³ Here, “culture” refers to the concept in *general*; thus, popular, commodity, media, and celebrity cultures are to be understood as included under this umbrella term.

While “popular culture” was originally used to differentiate peasant and working class peoples from the elite, the term has since evolved to include a variety of implications.¹⁴ In “Defining Popular Culture,” Henry Jenkins and his coauthors offer jazz as an example. During the 1920s, jazz was initially received with mixed and apprehensive emotions; later, the jazz of the 1940s was dubbed a “false attempt at originality” by musicologist Theodore Adorno who claimed that “such fakery was produced by the pressure to standardize within popular or mass culture.”¹⁵ By the 1960s, however, the genre had earned its reputations as “an unquestionable art form.”¹⁶ This prestige was finally achieved not because jazz itself had changed (although obviously it had), but because its audiences’ *tastes* had changed—thus confirming the evanescence that *is* popular culture, as it transforms from one generation to the next.¹⁷

As stated previously, “popular culture” was originally associated with the lower-class majority of society. According to Jenkins, “In his *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Peter Burke argues that the term ‘popular culture’ first appeared in the late eighteenth century as

¹⁴ Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, “Defining Popular Culture,” in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁷ Although, it should be noted that jazz had much wider audience in *Europe* throughout the 1920s, ‘30s, and ‘40s.

intellectuals became interested in folk or peasant culture as an object of cultural inquiry.”¹⁸ Frequently in history there has been a desire among the elite to “package” the peasant way of life and its connotations of virtue, pride, and patriotism; furthermore, oral folklore and hand-made crafts only emphasized such notions.¹⁹ In this instance, high, popular, and commodity cultures converge—and by means as mysterious as those separating them to begin with. But this union does not last long. As anthropologist Shirley Fedorak claims, “Popular culture has often been called the voice of the people, and these same people possess a great deal of power regarding the pervasiveness and continuity of any of its elements.”²⁰ Such strength in the masses intimidated the elite by threatening their established social hierarchy; consequently, the upper class was forced to evaluate new criteria for maintaining standards of superiority. John McHale, author of *The Fine Arts in the Mass Media*, writes:

Cultural belief and dogma supplied the absolutes, ‘eternal beauty’, ‘universal truth’, etc., which accreted into the classical canons by which the arts were judged. In the main, for their cultivated appreciation, they required an education normally

¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹ For more examples, see Wendy Salmond’s *Arts and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia: Reviving the Kustar Art Industries, 1870-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Shirley Fedorak, *Pop Culture: The Culture of Everyday Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 6.

reserved for a privileged elite. The mass of 'groundings' might share in the spectacle, but the full symbolic value of a ritual drama, the complex allegory of a group of statuary or paintings, were beyond them – partially through illiteracy, perhaps also from indifference, lack of identification.²¹

“High” culture, therefore, was always considered just out of reach of the masses because these luxuries were considered incomprehensible and inaccessible.

Popular culture, nevertheless, reasserted itself as society became more industrialized during the nineteenth century. Industrialization resulted, ultimately, in improvements in working conditions and education and pop culture was transformed—again—except this time, the “peasant,” or “working class,” way of life of was something little to be desired by an anxious upper class who, once more, found their social status compromised. What the elite once interpreted as “charming” in the working class lifestyle was charming no longer, and thus no longer considered in “good taste.” During this time, “The nostalgia for a preliterate, more humble popular culture had waned under the brunt of a more moneyed and ideologically aware working and middle class,”

²¹ John McHale, “The Fine Arts in the Mass Media,” *Pop Art Redefined*, ed. John Russell and Suzi Gablik (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969), 43-44.

according to Jenkins.²² For example, in England, the working class was becoming increasingly literate due, in part, to the Education Act of 1870, but also with the assistance of advancing technologies that allowed for the manufacturing and commercialization of dime novels and tabloids. While the elite dubbed such literature “unrefined” and in “bad taste” in an effort to assert their cultural authority, the working class continued to make strides in education and social reform. In speaking about the Industrial Revolution, McHale states, “Mass production on a phenomenal scale, oriented to mass preference, not elite direction, and the multiplicity of new communicating channels, are producing a culture which bears as little relation to earlier cultural forms as the Atlas rocket does to a wheeled cart.”²³ Such was the case in the nineteenth century when peasant culture as popular culture was replaced by mass-production as popular culture. In other words, capitalism was reshaping both class *and* cultural divisions.

In Marxist theory, however, popular culture is reexamined yet again. As Jenkins explains, “Implicit in Marx’s writing was the idea that the only truly ‘popular’ culture was one produced outside the alienation of capitalism.”²⁴ Marx believed that by-products of culture, such as art, for example, were best produced from *within* the working class population. In

²² Jenkins, “Defining Popular Culture,” 29.

²³ McHale, “The Fine Arts,” 43.

²⁴ Jenkins, “Defining Popular Culture,” 30.

this way, art—and other commodities—acts as a gift *by* everyone and, most importantly, *for* everyone. Ideally, individualism and creative agency are limited under this system while a strong sense of community prevails. Mass-produced popular culture, in this sense, results from a *conscious* effort to avoid alienation. Conformity is key, as technology—specifically, mass media—plays an essential role in dictating and upholding this status quo. According to author and theorist Hans Magnus Enzensberger in his essay, “Constituents of a Theory of the Media,” such developments became especially evident during the second half of the twentieth century.

Enzensberger claims:

For the first time in history, the media are making possible mass participation in a social and socialized productive process, the practical means of which are in the hands of the masses themselves. Such a use of them would bring the communications media, which up to now have not deserved the name, into their own. In its present form, equipment like television or film does not serve communication but prevents it. It allows no reciprocal action between transmitter and receiver; technically speaking, it reduces feedback to the lowest point compatible with the system.²⁵

²⁵ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Constituents of a Theory of the Media*, ed. Nick Montfort and Noah Wardip-Fruin (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 262.

Both Marxism and Enzenberger's statement stress the idea that media acts as a source of control for the elite. Acceptance of it, however subconscious, is widespread.

According to Anglo-American critic of fine art and popular culture Lawrence Alloway, "Mass media is to act as a guide to life defined in terms of possessions and relationships."²⁶ In other words, popular culture is defined by its respective commodity culture, while media serves as the go-between. Just as pop culture was originally marked by the handicrafts and oral folklore of the peasantry, and then by the mass-production of industrialization, today, it continues to transform at the same rate as the mediatic systems that ultimately "sell" it to the public. If pop culture is characterized by the goods that comprise it, then it is no surprise that advertising and other forms of promotion play a crucial role in determining financial success in a market-driven society. However, what concerns our discussion is not the ethics of capitalism, but rather the *aesthetics* of capitalism as witnessed in television, film, and various media that currently create, confuse, and criticize the criteria for "high" and "low" art—"high" and "pop" culture.

²⁶ Lawrence Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture," *Pop Art Redefined*, ed. John Russell and Suzi Gablik (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969), 41.

In his essay, *The Fine Arts in the Mass Media*, McHale reiterates the notion that industrialization was responsible for easy-access and mass-consumption of art forms such as book and plays.²⁷ However, as media shifted, say from the printing press to television, its content did, as well. McHale states:

It is claimed, on the positive side, for 'direct' consumption of fine art, that the machine has made possible widespread appreciation of music, cheap literary classics, and enactment of dramatic performances in thousands of movie centres and millions of homes! It should be added that – it is all this, and more besides! Every other sort of product, entertainment, etc., offered by the machine. The point is co-existence of a huge number of available and unconditional choices open to the consumer.²⁸

Just as reliance on technology has increased, so has emphasis on *visual* culture and its numerous modes of delivery. Currently conveyed most often through digital media, confrontation with visual imagery and representation is both immediate and unavoidable.

In one of his other publications, *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, Jenkins states, "Most popular culture is shaped by a logic of emotional intensification. It is less interested in

²⁷ McHale, "The Fine Arts," 45.

²⁸ McHale, "The Fine Arts," 45.

making us think than it is in making us feel.”²⁹ Thus, notions and practices of selling—that, by their very nature, link popular, commodity, and media culture—are obligated to not only fulfill audience expectations, but *surpass* them. This is due to the fact that contemporary technology has generated media saturation, which, consequently, has raised the stakes for achieving any “wow” factor among consumers. What was “new” and stimulating yesterday quickly becomes passé and mundane. In other words, it takes a lot to impress a public whose obsession with materialism has made them blind to the ridiculousness of their own rather subconscious and erratic market-driven behavior. This is Vezzoli’s cup of tea, indeed, since he claims that “nothing smells like greed.”³⁰

Subsequently, celebrities seize center stage, as not only do they provide entertainment in their own right—after all, that is their “job”—but additionally, they use their statuses as such to sway public opinion. In *The Cult of Celebrities: What Our Fascinations with the Stars Reveals About Us*, Cooper Lawrence states, “Media coverage of celebrities’ glamorous, rich lives, along with celebrity advertising, put a lot of pressure on us to spend.”³¹ Hence, celebrities contribute to commodity culture, for

²⁹ Henry Jenkins, *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 3.

³⁰ Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, “Francesco Vezzoli,” np.

³¹ Cooper Lawrence, *The Cult of Celebrities: What Our Fascinations with the Stars Reveals About Us* (Guilford, Connecticut: skirt!, 2009), 39.

they endorse various goods and services—as well as engage in acts of self-promotion themselves. While this phenomenon has never been more prevalent than at the present time, the concept is nothing new. As Lawrence claims, “The majority has long had an insatiable interest in the lives of the privileged few. Kings and queens, gladiators and army commanders, Olympic athletes (as in the original Greek Olympics, 776 B.C., not Michelle Kwan and Dara Torres)—those were the stars of their day.”³² Today, the same technology that allows for mass-production is also responsible for the infiltration of mass-media—literally—everywhere. Such a system grants instantaneous and exclusive access to the stars through whom many of us live vicariously.

For purposes of my thesis, however, *how* society demonstrates their celebrity obsessions is more important than *why* they share such fascinations to begin with. Like any other object that has been manufactured, packaged, marketed, and sold, celebrities, too, experience a similar process of commodification. The notion of celebrity-ness—however intangible—acts as a product all its own in the eyes of the public, just as the “essence” of the peasant class did for the elite years ago. This is the cyclical nature of pop culture. Fads may fade only to become resurrected, reexamined, and reconfigured under new technologies.

³² Lawrence, *Cult*, 19.

Accordingly, as was the case with jazz, definitions of “high” and “low” culture are reevaluated, as well. Alloway suggests that, “The abundance of twentieth-century communications is an embarrassment to the traditionally educated custodian of culture.”³³ Vezzoli tests this theory with his own investigation of pop culture by employing media and its agents—namely, celebrities—only to exploit them. In this way, the artist reveals the ironies and clichés inherent in our celebrity-obsessed, commodity culture.

³³ Alloway, “The Long Front,” 41.

Chapter 2: Celebrity Sells

"I think that Greed smells like nothing, but nothing smells like greed."³⁴

–Francesco Vezzoli

As I noted in Chapter 1, advancing technologies spawn both new forms and thus new interpretations of contemporary pop, commodity, and celebrity culture. Such systems, underpinned by notions of buying and selling, bring with them innovative forms of visual expression. Frequently fusing certain archetypes of "high" and "low" art, Vezzoli's work simultaneously exploits and employs the power of celebrity as a means of promotion by capitalists. Through various processes of commercialization, a celebrity may attain a god-like stature that even the artist himself finds hard to resist; meanwhile, mass media transmitters—such as film, television, and other modes of advertising—both propagate and manifest these fantasies. In a work from 2009 titled *Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli*, the artist intentionally confuses signifiers of high and popular cultures in an attempt to demonstrate the ironic nature and overwhelming influence of current media culture. A project "that replicates the strategy and aesthetics of a commercial perfume launch," *Greed* critiques and undermines "traditional" modes of selling while additionally revealing and channeling the artist's own celebrity

³⁴ Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, "Francesco Vezzoli," np.

obsession.³⁵ As this chapter shows through description and formal analysis supported by theoretical evidence, *Greed* provides the perfect case study for surveying Vezzoli's signature aesthetic—one that combines art and entertainment while exploring the popular psyche.

In 2005, Vezzoli produced a trailer for the remake of Gore Vidal's *Caligula*. Two years later, he directed a "Presidential campaign" and, then, in 2009, *Greed*. The fact that all of these modes—a film trailer, political campaign, and perfume commercial—are instruments of advertising is no coincidence. Not only do they reveal the artist's fascination with media and commodity culture, namely, the notion of "selling," but they have something else in common. Each promotes a product that *does not exist*. Just as there was no *Caligula* remake but only a trailer publicizing one, and Sharon Stone did not run for President as Vezzoli's "mock" campaign might suggest, the commercial for *Greed* advertises a fragrance that, too, is fiction. Theoretically speaking, the *concept* of commodification overshadows the commodity itself—a trend that is both deliberate and obvious in Vezzoli's work as the artist believes it to be true in reality, as well.

³⁵ "GREED, A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli," Gagolian Gallery Press Release, January 7, 2009.

Debuting at the Gagosian Gallery in Rome on February 6, 2009,

Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli was:

an exhibition based on a nonexistent perfume, featuring a minute-long commercial directed by Roman Polanski and starring [Natalie] Portman and Michelle Williams, a series of billboard-like ads with images of famous Greed gals (artists ranging from Frida Kahlo to Eva Hesse), and a nifty bottle with a photograph of the artist in drag (an homage to Marcel Duchamp, also auteur of a fake perfume whose bottle has a self-portrait in drag).³⁶

The installation was comprised of two rooms. In the first, a television monitor broadcasting the 60-second commercial is mounted in an otherwise undecorated space [Figure 2.1]. The next room, however, is adorned with heavy red velvet curtains that encompassed and demarcated the main exhibition area [Figure 2.2]. Granting the space an “appropriate” sense of decadence, the curtains additionally play host to a series of needlework portraits of female artists and starlets whose “presence” serves to endorse the faux fragrance. Meanwhile, the [empty] bottle of *Greed* is showcased and spotlighted in the center of the room in a glass display. Taking cues from other artists, such as Duchamp, Dali, Warhol, and Koons, Vezzoli combines a variety of mediums, including film and needlepoint, while recreating and reinterpreting notions of kitsch and “high” art. The artist stated, “If I look at the sculpture of Jeff Koons, like

³⁶ Grosz, “Francesco Vezzoli,” np.

Michael Jackson and Bubbles [Figure 2.3], and I think that if I'm capable of putting in my videos the people that Jeff Koons uses as subjects in his sculpture—or the equivalent in terms of the amount of media curiosity they generate—I'll be making an interesting social study."³⁷ Like Koons, Vezzoli unites the sacred and profane. Through various processes of identity construction and manipulation, Vezzoli compromises many of his subjects' (ie., Portman and Williams) original integrity by re-presenting them as cheap and tacky—if not vulgar.

When asked how the idea for *Greed* came about, Vezzoli replied, "I've done a trailer for a movie that didn't exist, an election campaign for candidates who were completely fictitious, and a premiere for a play that was never going to run. A project about the launch of a perfume that didn't exist seemed like a natural next step."³⁸ Inspired by Marcel Duchamp's *Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette*, a Rigaud perfume bottle featuring a picture of the artist dressed as Rose Selavy [Figure 2.4], the label on *Greed*, similarly, features Vezzoli in drag [Figure 2.5].³⁹ (As issues of identity manipulation and gender-bending are integral to much of

³⁷ Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, "Francesco Vezzoli," np.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Linda Yablonsky, "Art Show: Francesco Vezzoli's Eau de Faux," *New York Times Style Magazine* (February 10, 2009), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/art-show-francesco-vezzolis-eau-de-faux/> (accessed August 27, 2010).

the artist's work, these topics are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.) Aesthetically speaking, Vezzoli's bottle—like Duchamp's—exudes an elegance emphasized by its graceful shape, accented by a gold ribbon. It is stunning and alluring, while the name, "Greed," intentionally points to the consumer whom it seeks to seduce. Women want it, so men want to buy it *for* them. The bottle, however, is empty.

As I suggested above, *Greed* emphasizes the notion of *selling* perfume, more than the perfume itself—therefore an actual scent is unnecessary. Vezzoli stated:

I played with the idea of *Greed* smelling like something. But then I was so happy about the video, which is made by one of the best movie directors in the world, that I thought that even if I worked on a perfume for three years with the best noses in the world I wouldn't be able to find a perfume that defines the notion of a perfume as well as this perfume commercial defines the notion of a perfume commercial.⁴⁰

Directed by Roman Polanski, the man behind such films as *Rosemary's Baby* and *Chinatown*, and additionally starring Hollywood icons Natalie Portman and Michelle Williams, the commercial for *Greed*, as I intend to demonstrate, highlights Vezzoli's *simultaneous* celebration and criticism of commodity, celebrity, and media culture. Moreover, an analysis of the commercial's formal qualities and Vezzoli's use of cultural appropriation,

⁴⁰ Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, "Francesco Vezzoli," np.

as well as a discussion of the artist's collaboration with actors, will offer further insight into commercial and celebrity obsession.

The commercial begins with Williams dramatically opening a pair of huge double doors. With its high ceilings, chandeliers, oriental rugs, and red velvet furniture and draperies, the setting is one that implies luxury and sensuality. Meanwhile, this tone is enhanced by classical music that plays throughout the length of the commercial; a medley of piano and harp, it immediately suggests a "sophistication" so often associated with "high" culture. Très chic in a black, hooded cape, Williams walks over to a vanity set where her costar, Portman, sits staring at herself in a mirror, obsessively brushing her soft brown hair **[Figure 2.6]**. A curious scent peaks Williams's interest as she leans over to smell Portman's neck in an attempt to discover the source of the aroma. Then, out of the corner of her eye, Williams notices the bottle of *Greed*. Picking up the bottle and bringing it to her nose in order to better inhale its alluring fragrance, Williams is caught off-guard as Portman selfishly snatches it from her grasp. In short order, the women are wrestling on the floor and pulling each other's hair. Meanwhile, the deliberate and utter absurdity of the episode is reinforced by a disparity between the visual and audio recordings. This is most obvious when Williams is shown repeatedly slamming Portman's face into the carpet. Clearly, the audience can see

her head hit the floor before they *hear* it, thus amplifying the ridiculousness of the entire situation, which ultimately points to the avarice that catalyzes commercialization and drives capitalism.

At this point in the “commercial,” both Williams and Portman lose possession of the bottle as it gets pushed just out of their reach in the midst of all the fighting. Neither woman attempts to reclaim the bottle, although their physical struggle continues. In this instance, the *notion* of greed, as well as the *act* of being “greedy” (as performed by Williams and Portman), obscures “Greed” the fragrance even though the product—in all its tangibility—was *theoretically* supposed to be the object of desire to begin with. As Vezzoli would have you believe, the imagined *identity* of a product—how it is “packaged,” advertised, and ultimately made attractive for the consumer by various media with the invaluable assistance of celebrities—becomes more significant than the commodity.

Finally, in the last few seconds of the commercial the bottle of *Greed* is recovered by a man dressed in a suit. Who is he? His attire suggests that he is man of wealth, while the fact that he towers over the two women who wrestle with each other on the floor metaphorically suggests his potential “Sugar-Daddy” status.⁴¹ His “mysterious” presence

⁴¹ Similarly, Edgar Degas used various tactics to allude to a male presence among females. For example, the ballerinas who served as his muse were often

intrigues the consumer and further enhances the fantasy “promised” by the fragrance. As a commercial and a “product,” *Greed* possesses both feminine *and* masculine appeal. Women desire it for its connotations of glamour, riches, and opulence; accordingly, men buy it, or rather buy *into* the *idea* of it as a means of actualizing their own—sexual—fantasies (as projected onto Portman and Williams).

Reading *Greed*, ultimately, as a work of art and not as a “genuine” perfume campaign reveals that the man in the commercial is none other than the artist himself, who picks up the bottle and observes its label. Perhaps posing as a drag queen on a product aptly named “Greed,” grants Vezzoli, in the role of his alter-ego, the freedom to participate in the indulgence and excess that defines commodity and popular culture. This, despite the fact that he is an “esteemed” artist and thus perceived, by some, at least, as a custodian of “high” culture. Taking advantage of his status as such, Vezzoli both bridges and intentionally confuses the gap between high and popular culture, as well as high and popular art, in order to illustrate the power of celebrity. Moreover, the act of inserting himself

portrayed—appropriately enough—in dance studios. As dancers *and* prostitutes, these ballerinas were viewed materially as objects of desire. This is made evident through Degas’s frequent incorporation of a voyeuristic male figure whose motives are clear (if you know the historical context), but whose identity is not [Figure 2.7]. Such ambiguity is enigmatic in the sense that it allows the content to be provocative, without becoming overtly sexual.

into the performance proves characteristically self-indulgent of Vezzoli, who channels his own celebrity obsession by casting himself as one amongst others.

A pastiche of all that is “extravagant,” the commercial for *Greed* makes a mockery of many alleged signifiers of high culture, therefore creating a *generic* sense of luxury. From the charming melody of the classical music that serves as the commercial’s soundtrack to the lavish décor that furnishes the scene, the performance parodies the “riches” that are meant to distinguish the elite from the masses. Meanwhile, it is the actresses who prove the most over-the-top. Acting as incorrigible divas, Portman and Williams additionally caricaturize notions of lust and luxury elicited not only by their costumes and performances, but also by their relentless pursuit of *Greed*. Vezzoli stated:

It’s great that a gallery like the Gagosian allowed me to play with everyone’s identity: I play with my identity since on the label I look like a woman; Roman Polanski plays with his identity by doing the job that movie director hates the most, which is being a perfume commercial director; and the actresses play with their identity, because they accept to do what most actresses hate the most, which is to be like coathangers [sic]; and the gallery allows me to play with its public identity by claiming they produce or sell perfume.⁴²

⁴² Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, “Francesco Vezzoli,” np.

All of this circles around the premise of celebrity endorsement. Just as Vezzoli included his own image on the bottle of *Greed* to help contribute to its appeal in the eyes of consumers, Portman and Williams, the actresses, similarly, exploit their statuses to help “sell.” Vezzoli claimed, “The idea is that this project is all about corrupting everyone’s image into commercial promotion.”⁴³ High and popular art forms and aesthetics converge when the “sophistication” and “taste” frequently associated with high culture are exaggerated to the point of satire, “kitsch,” and ultimate taste/essness.

According to Alloway, “The repetitive and overlapping structure of modern entertainment works in two ways: (1) it permits marginal attention to suffice for those spectators who like to talk, neck, parade; (2) it satisfies, for the absorbed spectator, the desire for intense participation which leads to a careful discrimination of nuances in the action.”⁴⁴ The second point in Alloway’s statement is significant to discussions of celebrity endorsement as it proposes that *fantasy* plays a major role in commercialization. Acting as both an inspiration and stimulus driving popular forms of entertainment, fantasy “resides in, to sample a few examples, film stars, perfume ads, beauty and beast situations, terrible deaths, sexy women.”⁴⁵ **[Figures**

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lawrence Alloway, “The Arts and The Mass Media,” in *Imagining the Present: Context, content, and the role of the critic*, ed. Richard Kalina (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

2.8(a)-(c)] Spectators form what several research psychologists refer to as “para-social” relationships with the characters they see on television, which offers “the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the performer.”⁴⁶ This instills in the audience a false sense of fellowship, which, in turn, often inspires them to physically pursue these relationships. For example, many fans of the hit TV show *Seinfeld* may find that no trip to New York City is complete without a stop by “Monk’s” café on the corner of 112th and Broadway where Jerry, Kramer, George, and Elaine would eat and discuss the trivialities of their personal lives [Figure 2.9]. The exterior of what is really Tom’s Restaurant serves as the exterior for Monk’s on the show; nevertheless, any interior scenes were not shot on location, but staged in Los Angeles on set. According to one tourist who blogged about his experience at Monk’s or, rather, Tom’s, “The restaurant is run by Greek migrants, now American citizens. I asked the guy at the counter if he’d seen any of the Seinfeld actors and he replied, ‘Seinfeld only.’ I found that quite interesting, especially when there are photos and paintings of Kramer’ around also.”⁴⁷ Meanwhile, tickets for the “Kenny

⁴⁶ Halpern, *Fame Junkies*, 113.

⁴⁷ Joseph69, comment on “Tom’s Restaurant, NYC” VirtualTourist.com website, comment posted December 29, 2006, http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/North_America/United_States_of_America/New_York_State/New_York_City-841252/Restaurants-New_York_City-Toms_Restaurant-BR-1.html (accessed April 13, 2011).

Kramer's Reality Tour"—founded and hosted by the "real" Kramer—sell for \$37.50 each and grant you access to many other "real" locations made notorious by *Seinfeld* and its characters.⁴⁸ Again, celebrity and media culture commodified.

Like Kramer's Reality Tour, the same is true for much media, including commercials such as *Greed*, which attempts to create, exaggerate, and exploit these associations in an effort to sell its "product" to a consumer who could potentially buy it or, rather, fall for it. In other words, the desire to want to affiliate and identify with our idols is an innate human trait that, consequently, can often cloud one's better judgment.

According to Halpern:

When we see [celebrities] on TV, we sense that they are at the center of a truly enormous entourage, so our conditioned "posse response" is activated, and we gravitate toward them. A few savvy operators, like [Hollywood publicist] Michael Levine, can actually find their way into the posse and become disciples or insiders. The overwhelming majority of us, however, can't. And we are the real losers in this scenario because we subconsciously attempt to ingratiate ourselves with our idols—buying Paris Hilton's jewelry and Nicole Kidman's perfume—without really gaining anything.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Kenny Kramer. "Reality Tour Reservations." Kenny Kramer. <http://www.kennykramer.com/reservations.html> (accessed April 13, 2011).

⁴⁹ Halpern, *Fame Junkies*, 123.

Like the commodities they sell, celebrities, too, are “gift-wrapped.” Lawrence states, “Advertisers aim to make a psychological connection between the product and a celebrity to create what is called a “human brand.”⁵⁰ Celebrities, by nature, possess a certain degree of recognizability that allows them to send a succinct and seemingly “honest” message. Just as centuries ago the elite had the desire to “package” popular culture as it was manifested in the peasant and working classes, a similar process of objectification continues in the creation, promotion, and admiration of the celebrity image.⁵¹ Celebrity-ness, too, is commodified.

Lawrence claims, “When a star makes a judgment from up high on their celebrity pedestal—I prefer *this* brand of cola, mascara, credit card, car insurance—it enters our consciousness, even though we may not be aware it’s happening.”⁵² While Vezzoli expresses this notion by casting Portman and Williams in his commercial, there is a third, and final, aspect of the *Greed* exhibition that served a similar purpose—that being a series of 12 individual needlepoint portraits of notable women from art history that hung along the walls of the gallery space [Figure 2.10]. Like Portman and Williams, their presence is yet another means of highlighting practices

⁵⁰ Lawrence, *Cult*, 110.

⁵¹ For example, the Brothers Grimm and their invention of what we now know as “folklore,” was a byproduct of the Romantic interest in the traditions of the peasant class.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 108.

of celebrity endorsement. As mentioned previously, the posters feature figures such as Frida Kahlo, Eva Hesse, and Georgia O'Keeffe [Figures 2.11-2.12]. Meanwhile, the portraits, a combination of serigraph and needlework, both emphatically immortalize and additionally *cheapen* the female artists depicted. Vezzoli stated, "Since we are turning an artistic structure into a perfume commercial, why not use artists as the ultimate testimonials to push the project onto a more perverse edge. I thought: What's more violent than imagining Eva Hesse wearing Greed?"⁵³ Violent, in the sense that it is ironic or even obscene, perhaps, yes. As Dana Thomas claims in her book, *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*, celebrity endorsement has made possible the democratization of products that were once considered elitist.⁵⁴ There is a celebrity product for every demographic; however, this does not necessarily mean that celebrities are buying for themselves what they "sell" to the public. Lawrence offers the following example:

With her popular Baby Phat and KLS fashion labels, the former high-fashion model and now reality-TV star and self-proclaimed "First Lady of Hip-Hop," [Kimora Lee Simmons] has built a fashion empire based on what has been termed "the urban luxury movement." She sells us lower-end but glamorous-looking fashion, jewelry,

⁵³ Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, "Francesco Vezzoli," np.

⁵⁴ Michiko Kakutani, "The Devil Wears Hermès (He Bought It at the Caesars Palace Mall in Las Vegas)," review of *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*, by Dana Thomas, *New York Times Book Review*, August 21, 2007.

cosmetics, and fragrances with her name on them—a pair of her strappy silver heels will set you back about \$80. Meanwhile, though, *her* wardrobe is filled with Manolo Blahnik and designers so exclusive most of us wouldn't even recognize the names.⁵⁵

In other words, celebrities do not always practice what they preach.

Moreover, during the process of selling, many celebrities actually “sell-out,” or hyper-exploit their images at the expense of sacrificing some of their prestige and exclusivity, while still managing to maintain most of their popularity.⁵⁶ There is a similar process at work in Vezzoli's needlework portraits. By exploiting and thus associating these archetypes of high culture (canonical artists) and “good” taste with something as materialistic and commercialized as perfume, the images, consequently, become garish.

Aside from supplementing Vezzoli's cultural commentary, these portraits serve an additional function by providing the self-proclaimed celebrity-crazed artist an outlet for his obsessions. Memorializing his idols in an aesthetic vaguely reminiscent of Warhol's **[Figures 2.13-2.14]**, Vezzoli combines screen printing *and* needlework to pay homage to iconic

⁵⁵ Lawrence, *Cult*, 116.

⁵⁶ In the process of “selling-out,” celebrities often compromise some of their original integrity in an attempt to cater to a wider audience; for example, Aretha Franklin endorsing Snickers, or Robert Downey, Jr. as the current voice of “Mr. Peanut.”

women of past and present. In her article, "Sew Business," Ali Subotnick states, "[Vezzoli] painstakingly embroiders each one himself, rather than having them fabricated, because he sees the act of making them, the manual labour, as a perverted language that mirrors his own obsessive nature."⁵⁷ Furthermore, needlepoint contrasts Vezzoli's other favorite medium, film, significantly. Vezzoli stated, "Needlework is literally the thing that occupies the smallest amount of space. The lowest budget ever. Exactly the opposite of making a video."⁵⁸ As Vezzoli uses mediums in a manner as eccentric and complex as his behavior, Chapter 3 will provide a more in-depth discussion of Vezzoli's Surrealist *lifestyle* as it is reflected throughout the entirety of his oeuvre.

Vezzoli stated, "If an artist is going to have any hope of engaging or entertaining his audience and his critics, then first he has to entertain himself."⁵⁹ From film to needlepoint, celebrity to consumer, high culture to kitsch, *Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli* stands as more than an act of the artist's own self-indulgence. The piece explores the power of celebrity as it contributes to the aesthetic intensification of a product and the commodification of its *own* celebrity-"ness" as imagined

⁵⁷ Ali Subotnick, "Sew business," *Art Review* 2 (2004): 79.

⁵⁸ Serena Davies. "My life as a diva." *The Daily Telegraph* (London) (May 31, 2006).

⁵⁹ Vezzoli, Francesco. "Francesco Vezzoli." *Artforum* 12 (September, 2010): 264.

and projected by the current mediatic system—which includes contemporary art. According to Alloway, “The mass arts orient the consumer in current styles, even when they seem purely, timelessly, erotic and fantastic.”⁶⁰ Such was the premise for Vezzoli’s “perfume” launch, as it satirized conventions of promotion while additionally mocking notions of greed that characterize capitalism.

⁶⁰ Alloway, “The Arts,” 57.

Chapter 3: Film, Fandom, Fashion, Francesco

"I'm fascinated by other people's style, and so from time to time I appropriate or travesty those styles. It's almost a form of drag."⁶¹

–Francesco Vezzoli

Through countless acts of appropriation, Vezzoli reveals a nostalgia for art history by reinventing the aesthetics of artists such as Duchamp, Warhol, and Koons who, similarly, expressed an interest in film, fandom, and fashion. As is so often the case with practices of pastiche and parody, much of Vezzoli's work contains its own critique. He states, "Many cultural events are already parodies of themselves to the degree they add layers to the original or take away layers from it."⁶² Subsequently, Vezzoli's projects are less a romantic rediscovery of the past than they are a shameless regurgitation of it—intentionally. For example, *Greed*, discussed in Chapter 2, epitomizes the conventions of commercialization. By associating the perfume with connotations of glamour and decadence, embodied and endorsed by celebrities Portman and Williams, the product is somehow "legitimized." A unique combination of film, installation, serigraph, and needlepoint, *Greed* revealed Vezzoli's aesthetic and cultural interests while additionally shedding light on his personality.

⁶¹ Vezzoli, "Francesco Vezzoli," 263.

⁶² Vezzoli quoted in Peter Goddard, "Tinseltown in all its tacky glory." *The Toronto Star* (September 8, 2007): np.

Through the discussion of a selection of some of the artist's past projects, such as *Trailer for Gore Vidal's 'Caligula'* (2005), *Democracy* (2007), and *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)* (2009), this chapter not only provides further context for *Greed*, but also takes a closer look at the artist's *lifestyle* as reflected in his artistic style, as well. Homosexual, diva, and fashionista, Vezzoli employs various methods of identity manipulation and gender-bending and combines them with the language of entertainment and spectacle in order to convey and comment upon acts of celebrity obsession.

It is clear that Vezzoli's fascination with cultural icons began in Brescia at a very young age. Subotnick writes:

Francesco Vezzoli grew up surrounded by women, summering at the seaside with his two grandmothers, two aunts and two of the aunts' friends. Each year, he tried to convince them to take him to gay nightclubs. He wanted to see Donna Summer in concert when he was five years old . . . He begged his mother to take him to see *American Gigolo* (1980) at the age of seven; at nine, he wanted his grandmother to take him to Studio 54. The young Vezzoli was drawn to anything that was decadent or homoerotic.⁶³

Since his youth, this fetish has been articulated through a variety of aforementioned mediums and has played an integral part in shaping nearly every aspect of his oeuvre. What proves fundamental in much of

⁶³ Subotnick, "Sew," 79.

Vezzoli's work is the notion of celebrity—as I noted in detail in Chapter 2. Vezzoli explains, “Because I come from a country where entertainment has become politics, I think the most political way to make my art is to study the vocabulary of entertainment.”⁶⁴ This phenomenon was made evident in *Greed*, but it also appears in several of the artist's other pieces, as well.

For example, in his 2005 work titled *Trailer for Gore Vidal's 'Caligula'* Vezzoli explores this “vocabulary of entertainment” while reaffirming his attraction to the celebrity-saturated spectacle [Figure 3.1]. He states, “For me, the art world has become a place that has turned itself, willingly or not, into some sort of entertainment industry.”⁶⁵ In other words, there is but a fine line separating the realms of high art and popular media and Vezzoli uses *each* form to critique the other. Just as *Greed* advertised a product that did not exist, *Trailer for Gore Vidal's 'Caligula'* publicizes a film that was never made. Linda Yablonsky of *The New York Times* writes:

A five-and-a-half minute, 35-millimeter video, the short ostensibly promotes a film about a mad Roman emperor (Mr. Vezzoli in a cameo) who sleeps with his sister, executes his critics and

⁶⁴ Vezzoli quoted in Davies “My life”: np. In this instance, Vezzoli is acknowledging Italian politician Silvio Berlusconi's utilization of “economy television” as a “political weapon.”

⁶⁵ Linda Yablonsky. “‘Caligula’ Gives a Toga Party (But No One's Really Invited).” *The New York Times* (February 26, 2006): np.

presides over a crowd of ambisexual extras dressed only in the occasional accessory. Let no one call it pornography. For one thing, it's too funny.⁶⁶

With actors and actresses such as Benicio Del Toro and Helen Mirren, adorned in everything from togas designed by Donatella Versace to golden dildos, the notion of spectacle never seemed so extreme [Figure 3.2]. According to William Ganis of *Border Crossings*, “Much has been made of the original film’s explicit versions—with inclusions of torture and homosexual content; this Caligula transgressed boundaries of so-called ‘straight’ pornography.”⁶⁷ Gore Vidal, who wrote the screenplay for the original, dubbed the film “utterly worthless, shameful trash” after its producer took a far less historic approach and a much more sexualized one.⁶⁸

Drawing its inspiration from this back-story behind the feature-length film, Vezzoli’s spoof trailer parodies the excess, desires, and glamour that characterize Hollywood. Furthermore, the trailer “allows” the artist to comment upon while *participating* in such acts himself by performing the role of Caligula [Figure 3.3]. Vezzoli stated, “I hate being in my work, but I think it is more meaningful if I become the subject of my

⁶⁶ Yablonsky, “Caligula,” np.

⁶⁷ William Ganis, “Francesco Vezzoli,” *Border Crossings* 27, no. 1 (2008): 91-94.

⁶⁸ Davies, “My life,” np.

own critique”—just as he did in *Greed*.⁶⁹ While we want to take this at face value, we know that it cannot be entirely true, as Vezzoli’s art often serves as a “guilty pleasure” for the self-proclaimed celebrity-obsessed artist who *simultaneously* celebrates, creates, and, ultimately critiques celebrity culture.

Two years later, in 2007, Vezzoli produced *Democrazy*, a Presidential campaign for an election that never actually occurred—just as he already “advertised” a perfume that did not exist and a movie that was never made. Vezzoli claimed, “The promotion of something and the something itself sometimes merge very dangerously, but that’s the world we live in.”⁷⁰ The artist stated, “I wanted to create a fictional campaign as close to reality as possible—with a website, posters, and TV ads—and it had to be American, because for me Washington, DC, is like the Hollywood of world-wide politics.”⁷¹ In this project, Vezzoli asked two firms, Squier Knapp Dunn and Public Strategies Inc., to create the “ideal [Presidential] candidate.”⁷² Sharon Stone was assigned the role of the female candidate, while Bernard-Henry Lévy acted as her opponent

⁶⁹ Yablonsky, “Caligula,” np.

⁷⁰ Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, “Francesco Vezzoli,” np.

⁷¹ Vezzoli, “1000 Words,” 449.

⁷² Vezzoli, “1000 Words,” 449. Squier Knapp Dunn had acted as the political PR advisers for the last four Democratic Presidential campaigns up to the time of this article’s publication; meanwhile, Public Strategies Inc. helped George W. Bush win two Presidential elections.

[Figure 3.4-3.5]. Vezzoli explains, “I tried to pick two people who, without being politicians, use their status as celebrities to be somehow political.”⁷³ After choosing his “candidates,” Vezzoli worked on constructing each of their images. Like the actresses, director, and artist in *Greed*, Stone and Lévy were forced to sacrifice much of their own identities. Hollywood costume designers, such as Julie Weiss (who also advised John Edwards), were brought in, as well as set designers, make-up artists, and hair stylists who prepared Stone and Lévy for filming in the Presidential Suite and the ballroom of the Beverly Wilshire hotel—whose settings replicated the interiors of the White House **[Figure 3.6].**⁷⁴

and p Ultimately resulting in a video installation that debuted at the 2007 Venice Biennale, *Democracy* was comprised of two 60-second TV spots (produced by Squier Knapp Dunn and Public Strategies Inc.) that were run next to each other simultaneously **[Figure 3.7].** Vezzoli claims, “The campaign is all people see. I mean, who of all the voters ever gets the chance to actually see the candidate at a political rally? What will they remember? The ads.”⁷⁵ As Patricia Hill and Patrick Hill, respectively, Stone and Lévy convey how similar strategies of publicity work for *both* movie stars *and* politicians. In other words, more emphasis and attention

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 450.

is paid to the candidates' media-manufactured identities than to their actual political parties and positions. While the artist was criticized by "some viewers [who] think it's all too surreal seeing Sharon Stone as a wannabe Hilary Clinton," Vezzoli retorted, "[not when] you consider that Arnold Schwarzenegger is running California."⁷⁶ Or that Ronald Reagan was President for that matter.

But conventional modes of entertainment—namely, television—are not the only means by which Vezzoli explores and expresses his obsessions. As Chapter 2 revealed, needlepoint, too, has served as yet another way for the openly gay artist to pay homage to celebrities past and present, while additionally supplementing his own diva-hood. In a rather Warhol-like fashion, Vezzoli creates portraits of cultural icons that reveal his own fascinations with them. Subotnick states:

Vezzoli's endeavors are tightly woven together, drawing intricate sometimes subtle connections between the film actors (extracting details from their cinematic roles and their 'real lives'), the directors, the films, the music, fashion, decoration, and of course the practice of needlepoint. His video works grew naturally out of his needleworks; they furthered his obsession with the craft by bringing out of the closet the embroiderers of Hollywood and classic Italian cinema⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Goddard, "Tinseltown," np.

⁷⁷ Subotnick, "Sew": 79 & 83.

A response to the Arte-Povera movement that developed in Italy during the 1960s, Vezzoli's interest in needlepoint only intensified his enthusiasm for film and its superstars.⁷⁸ While enrolled at Central St. Martins, the art college in London, the artist began pursuing the craft more seriously. According to Yablonsky, "It was there that [Vezzoli] became adept to blending the imaginary with the real. His first artworks were embroidered samplers of messages he found on calling cards that prostitutes left in phone booths."⁷⁹ Again, this stands as evidence of the artist's tendency towards the enigmatic convergence of high and low culture—high and low art—as we saw in *Greed*, specifically with the artist's series of needlework portraits.

According to Vezzoli (per Yablonsky), "The best way to penetrate the culture at large is to use the language most accessible to a broad audience – that is, the language of film, television, and fashion."⁸⁰ While needlepoint may prove a "dated" handicraft, the seriousness with which Vezzoli practices it reveals much about the artist's character, since the medium is most ordinarily practiced by women, *including* some of his celebrity idols such as Italian actress and superstar Silvana Mangano. Larocca claims that Vezzoli "exists at the center of the art-celebrity-fashion

⁷⁸ Goddard, "Tinseltown," np.

⁷⁹ Yablonsky, "Caligula," np.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

nexus that is, controversially, defining the art world now.”⁸¹ Consequently, the artist wears many hats as artist and fashionista—not to mention *celebrity* himself—while using film and needlepoint to both immortalize and indict his divas and diva-ness.

Politics and petit-point aside, however, perhaps the *ultimate* act of self-indulgence by Vezzoli is observed in his star-studded production of *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)* (2009). In typical Vezzoli fashion, the *Ballet Russes* is a “trailer” advertising a performance that does not exist—this time, because said performance had *already* taken place on November 14, 2009. The event itself, made possible through the collaborative efforts of *several* artists, including Vezzoli, who served as the “creative orchestrator,” marked the 30th anniversary of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; meanwhile, the trailer that followed is comprised of film shot at rehearsals, behind-the-scenes, and *during* the *live* performance.⁸² With a guest list as exclusive as the cast of performers and artists, the *Ballets Russes* seemed to make celebrity-obsessed Vezzoli’s dream-come-true.

According to one writer at the *New York Times*, inspiration for a similar endeavor began a few years ago when “Vezzoli met Dasha

⁸¹ Larocca, “Italian Rapscaillon”: np.

⁸² Mike Boehm, “Francesco Vezzoli escorts Lady Gaga to MOCA’s gala,” *Los Angeles Times* (2009), <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/11/entertainment/et-moca11> (accessed April 19, 2011).

Zhukova and fell in love with her, as well as her Art Garage and the idea of Russia's new wealth and excess. He wanted to create a mega-event in Moscow that would celebrate Diaghilev's anniversary with Bolshoi dancers and Britney Spears."⁸³ However, with the worldwide economic downturn, this undertaking was no longer pursued; until 2009, that is, when Vezzoli was sought by Zhukova to coordinate a performance for the MOCA's 30th anniversary gala and benefit. Using this opportunity as perhaps another "excuse" to work with and alongside celebrities, Vezzoli solicited the talents of such notables as artist Damien Hirst and fashion designer Miuccia Prada, whose avant-garde contributions, along with many others, enhanced the artist's original vision for the Ballet Russes. As noted above, the resulting event, titled *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)*, took place on November 14, 2009. The five-minute long production featured Lady Gaga, center-stage with the debut of her hit single "Speechless," which served as the evening's *pièce de résistance*. Like Vezzoli, Lady Gaga appreciates a good show, or "spectacle" rather, as her aesthetic, too, fuses performance, music, art, and fashion.

⁸³ "Now Installing: Francesco Vezzoli Gets Gaga to MoCA," *The New York Times Style Magazine* (2009), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/13/now-installing-francesco-vezzoli-gets-gaga-to-moca/> (accessed April 19, 2011).

The gala was hosted in the street in front of the museum in a tent covered in red satin and designed by Japanese architect Arata Isozaki **[Figure 3.8]**.⁸⁴ Inside, the ambience proved even more splendid. Vezzoli explained, "It's disco-Kremlin in the middle of the freeway. It's beyond kitsch. It's literally like a night club for the orgies of Communist plutocrats."⁸⁵ Giant crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling, while plush velvet curtains played host to a series of Vezzoli's needlepoint posters showcasing portraits of the artist and Lady Gaga (which recall those exhibited in *Greed* and fulfill a similar purpose) **[Figure 3.9]**. Among those in attendance at the event were Vogue editor Hamish Bowles, as well as pop singer Gwen Stefani, who took their seats at large, round, white-clothed tables for Vezzoli's show.⁸⁶

Adorned in a hat—a large "all-seeing eye" draped in silver material—contrived by architect Frank Gehry and fabricated by Miuccia Prada, Lady Gaga took the stage **[Figure 3.10]**.⁸⁷ After sitting down behind a pink Steinway piano painted with butterflies and customized by Damien Hirst, Gaga began her performance **[Figure 3.11]**. As the sound

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Vezzoli quoted in Dana Goodyear, "Celebromatic," *The New Yorker* (November 30, 2009), http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2009/11/30/091130ta_talk_goodyear (accessed April 19, 2011).

⁸⁶ Goodyear, "Celebromatic," np.

⁸⁷ Goodyear, "Celebromatic," np.

of her soulful ballad filled the room, Bolshoi ballerinas pirouetted across the stage. Dressed in Prada from head to toe, the dancers complemented the ever-so glamorous vibe of the performance [Figure 3.12].

Additionally, Vezzoli himself made an appearance. Hidden behind a mask designed by Australian film director Baz Luhrmann, the artist sat opposite Lady Gaga while pretending to stitch multicolored teardrops on a needlepoint portrait of her—evidence, again, of Vezzoli's falling victim to celebrity as he inserts himself among them. Even though the artist *claims* to hate participating in his own work, it seems as though he simply cannot resist the urge.

3.14] Produced by film and music director Jonas Ackerlund, the subsequent “trailer” that Vezzoli created for but *following* the event proves as enchanting as the gala was itself. A pastiche of images taken from behind-the-scenes and at the live performance, the film, like others made by Vezzoli, advertises something that does not exist, *anymore* at least, as its title already suggests that “you will never see [it] again.” The fantastical nature of the production recalls Surrealism, while the bright colors, geometric shapes, and bold lettering seen, for example, in the posters and credits that appear throughout allude to Constructivism—which seems “appropriate” for a performance that found its inspiration in Russian art

and culture [Figure 3.13].⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the trailer's "characters," playing the roles of themselves of course, prove just as fantastic offstage as they are on. Vezzoli's creative genius never ceases to shine through, while the film also reveals that Lady Gaga has much in common with the artist in terms of her own eccentric behavior and extraordinary fashion sense. Finding her inspiration in figures such as performance artist Leigh Bowery and singer Klaus Nomi, Gaga's wardrobe synthesizes glam and punk for a look that is often borderline dominatrix. She explained, "It is that moment of fashion, that moment of performance, and that moment of music, combined with art and love, that makes what Gaga is all about." [Figure 3.14].⁸⁹ When musician and producer Pharrell Williams was introduced to Gaga at the gala by television personality and gossip blogger Perez Hilton, he stated, "I was probably the last one to get it, but, now that I got it, there's no other artist. It's not whether you have blue eyes or a fat ass or can rhyme—it's about a great performance, it's about a performer willing to be theatrical beyond."⁹⁰ Such is the motivation behind most of Vezzoli's projects, including *Greed*, *Caligula*, and *Democracy*, as the artist explored the construction of the celebrity *image* as a phenomena bigger than the celebrities themselves.

⁸⁸ It is worth mentioning that these images are appropriated from Russian artist Alexander Rodchenko's Constructivist art and literature.

⁸⁹ Gaga quoted in Goodyear, "Celebromatic," np.

⁹⁰ Pharrell Williams quoted in Goodyear, "Celebromatic," np.

A compilation of high fashion and celebrity performance, with a tip-of-the-hat to art history (through its inclusion of Surrealist and Constructivist undertones), the trailer, like *Greed*, is representative of all that is Vezzoli, his interests, and aesthetic. Unlike his other trailers, however, which often criticize and condemn notions and practices of selling and celebrity, this one for the *Ballets Russes* recaptures the pomp and pageantry of the evening's performance without much of an ulterior political agenda. The *Ballets Russes*, as performance and trailer, is "Italian Style" in the sense that its components are a signature of Vezzoli in his element: surrounded by celebrity and decked out in high fashion.

Conclusion

"I am convinced that Francesco is made of white chocolate....Everyone he meets just falls in love."⁹¹

—RoseLee Goldberg, Director of Performa 07

"White chocolate," "Italian Rapsallion," "tease," "whore"—the name-calling does not stop there. While these nicknames may initially lead the reader to believe that Francesco Vezzoli is nothing short of a Hollywood playboy, some of these appellations, at least, ultimately serve as mere terms of endearment for the artist whose work has proved significant enough for divas and fashionistas, alike, to work for him for *free*. Notorious for incorporating the talents of A-list celebrities, including Natalie Portman, Sharon Stone, Damien Hirst, and Lady Gaga, Vezzoli's edgy aesthetic is one that remains popular, as well as praiseworthy, as it explores and exploits the artist's very own passion. After careful consideration of past projects including *Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli*, *Trailer for Remake of Gore Vidal's 'Caligula,' Democracy*, and *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)*, it becomes clear that the word "passion" is actually an understatement when it comes to Vezzoli's celebrity *obsession*.

⁹¹ RoseLee Goldberg, quoted in Larocca, "The Italian Rapsallion," np.

While sharing this interest with much of society, Vezzoli indicts the media as the catalyst for stimulating such cultural fascinations. Ganis states, "Vezzoli is especially adept at destabilizing positions, critical or otherwise. Even in his strategy of appropriation, his authorial voice is spoken by actors and through allusions."⁹² Because of this, it is often hard to distinguish fact from fiction in many of the artist's installations, *but* such is the mediated reality in which we live—according to Vezzoli anyway.

He claims, "My art is in discussing the role of the artist."⁹³ But what does this imply exactly? For Vezzoli, whose aesthetic is directly inspired by Hollywood, fantasy and reality might as well be one and the same, which grants him the freedom to allow his art to act as both a "guilty pleasure" and as a means to identify, understand, criticize, and celebrate celebrity-ness and the power thereof. Like Vezzoli, Guy Trebay of *The New York Times* claims, "if there's anything about celebrity culture all can agree on, it is that it's no place to go looking for sincerity."⁹⁴ Vezzoli acknowledges such notions of superficiality by reinterpreting into farce the seductive powers of celebrity propaganda as he states:

In the end it's all about making art, because making art, being an artist, is about creating an aura about things that don't have one or creating an aura

⁹² Ganis, "Francesco Vezzoli," 91.

⁹³ Goddard, "Tinseltown," np.

⁹⁴ Guy Trebay, "Where Art Meets Fashion Meets Celebrity Meets Hype," *The New York Times* (November 1, 2007), np.

around your persona that enables you to push boundaries or make different types of dreams on behalf of other people. It's very natural for me that an artist is fascinated by big stars.⁹⁵

Whether putting them on their celebrity pedestals dressed to the nines in Prada and circumstance, or stitching them into one of his own canvases, even the artist employs the power of celebrity only to exploit it.

⁹⁵ Vezzoli quoted in Grosz, "Francesco Vezzoli," np.

Bibliography

- Alloway, Lawrence. "The Arts and The Mass Media." In *Imagining the Present: Context, content, and the role of the critic*, edited by Richard Kalina. New York: Routledge, 2006. p. 55-59.
- Alloway, Lawrence. "The Long Front of Culture." In *Pop Art Redefined*, edited by John Russell and Suzi Gablik. New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969. p. 41-43.
- Balkin, J.M. *Deconstruction*. New Haven: Yale, 1996.
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/deconessay.pdf>
(accessed April 18, 2011).
- Boehm, Mike. "Francesco Vezzoli escorts Lady Gaga to MOCA's gala," *Los Angeles Times* (2009),
<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/11/entertainment/et-moca11>
(accessed April 19, 2011).
- Davies, Serena. "My life as a diva." *The Daily Telegraph (London)* (May 31, 2006).
- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. *Constituents of a Theory of the Media*. Edited by Nick Montfort and Noah Wardip-Fruin. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003.
- Fedorak, Shirley. *Pop Culture: The Culture of Everyday Life*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
- Gagosian Gallery, "Francesco Vezzoli – Gagosian Gallery," Gagosian Gallery. <http://www.gagosian.com/artists/francesco-vezzoli>
(accessed September 6, 2010).
- Ganis, William. "Francesco Vezzoli," *Border Crossings* 27, no. 1 (2008), p. 91-94.
- Goddard, Peter. "Tinseltown in all its tacky glory." *The Toronto Star* (September 8, 2007).

Goodyear, Dana. "Celebromatic," *The New Yorker* (November 30, 2009), http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2009/11/30/091130ta_talk_goodyear (accessed April 19, 2011).

"GREED, A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli," Gagosian Gallery Press Release, January 7, 2009.

Grosz, David. "Francesco Vezzoli," *Artinfo.com* (February 5, 2009), <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/30308/francesco-vezzoli/?page=1> (accessed September 6, 2010).

Halpern, Jake. *Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths Behind America's Favorite Addiction*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007.

Jenkins, Henry., Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc, "Defining Popular Culture." In *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, edited by Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. p. 26-42.

Jenkins, Henry. *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

Joseph 69. VirtualTourist.com Blog, The. http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/North_America/United_States_of_America/New_York_State/New_York_City-841252/Restaurants-New_York_City-Toms_Restaurant-BR-1.html (accessed April 13, 2011).

Kakutani, Michiko. "The Devil Wears Hermès (He Bought It at the Caesars Palace Mall in Las Vegas)." Review of *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*, by Dana Thomas. *New York Times Book Review*, August 21, 2007.

Kenny Kramer. "Reality Tour Reservations." Kenny Kramer. <http://www.kennykramer.com/reservations.html> (accessed April 13, 2011).

- Larocca, Amy, "The Italian Rascalion: Performance artist Francesco Vezzoli has his celebrity cake and eats it, too." *New York Magazine* (October 18, 2007), <http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/39577/> (accessed September 6, 2010).
- Lawrence, Cooper. *The Cult of Celebrities: What Our Fascinations with the Stars Reveals About Us*. Guilford, Connecticut: skirt!, 2009.
- McHale, John. "The Fine Arts in the Mass Media." In *Pop Art Redefined*, edited by John Russell and Suzi Gablik. New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969.
- "Now Installing: Francesco Vezzoli Gets Gaga to MoCA," *The New York Times Style Magazine* (2009), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/13/now-installing-francesco-vezzoli-gets-gaga-to-moca/> (accessed April 19, 2011).
- Subotnick, Ali "Sew business." *Art Review* 2 (2004): 78-83.
- Trebay, Guy. "Where Art Meets Fashion Meets Celebrity Meets Hype." *The New York Times* (November 1, 2007).
- Vezzoli, Francesco. "1000 Words: Francesco Vezzoli Talks About *Democracy*, 2007." *Artforum International* 45 (Summer 2007).
- Vezzoli, Francesco. "Francesco Vezzoli." *Artforum International* 12 (September, 2010).
- Whitney Artist Directory, "Francesco Vezzoli." Whitney. <http://whitney.org/www2006biennial/artists/php?artist=Vezzoli> (accessed September 6, 2010).
- Yablonsky, Linda. "Art Show: Francesco Vezzoli's Eau de Faux." *New York Times Style Magazine* (February 10, 2009), <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/art-show-francesco-vezzolis-eau-de-faux/> (accessed August 27, 2010).
- Yablonsky, Linda. "'Caligula' Gives a Toga Party (But No One's Really Invited)." *The New York Times* (February 26, 2006).

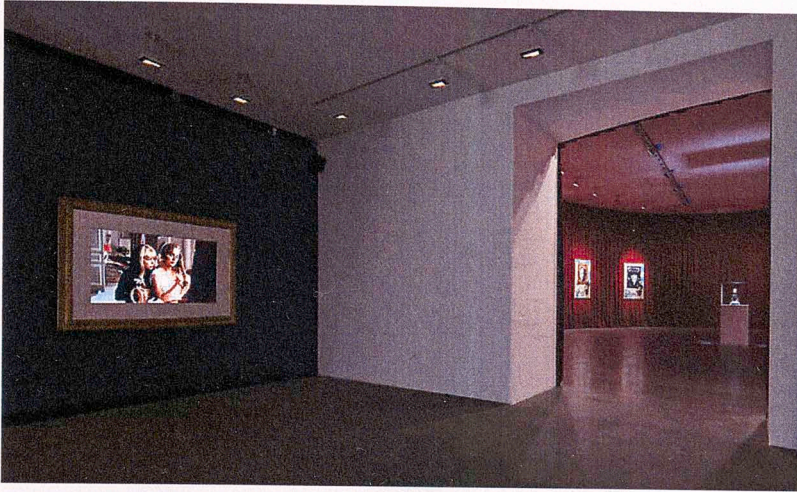


Figure 2.1. Francesco Vezzoli (Italian, 1971-), *Greed: A New Fragrance by Francesco Vezzoli* (2009), view of exhibition area.
<http://artobserved.com/artimages/2009/02/francesco-vezzoli-greed-2.jpg>.



Figure 2.2. *Greed*, view of exhibition area.
<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2009/02/13/travel/gagosian-span.jpg>.



Figure 2.3. Jeff Koons (American, 1955-), *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988). <http://mockduck.net/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/koons-michael-jackson-and-bubbles-1988.jpg>.



Figure 2.4. Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887-1968), *Belle Haleine: Eau de Violette* (1921).

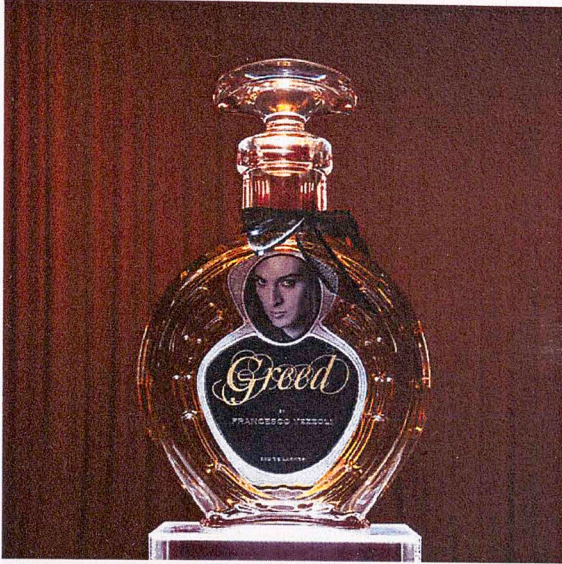


Figure 2.5. *Greed*, detail of perfume bottle.

<http://artobserved.com/artimages/2009/02/francesco-vezzoli-greed.jpg>.

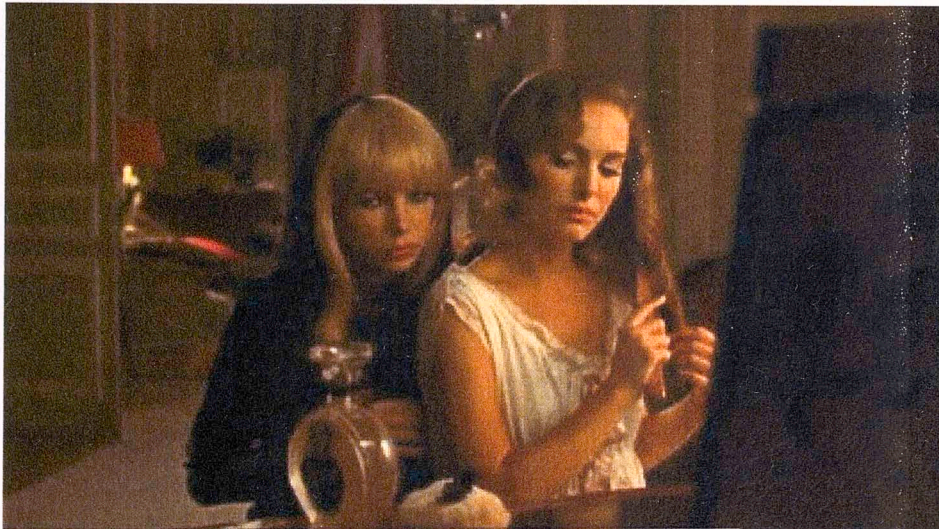


Figure 2.6. *Greed*, still image from commercial.

http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_S6Bytc4iWp0/SZCS7kniVnI/AAAAAAAAADY/u2eL-QZw2i4/s400/Greed.jpg.



Figure 2.7. Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917), *The Star* (1876).
<http://www.abcgallery.com/D/degas/degas24.JPG>.



Figure 2.8(a). Estee Lauder advertisement for “Bronze Goddess.”
<http://www.mimifroufrou.com/scentedsalamander/images/bronze-goddess-ad2.jpg>

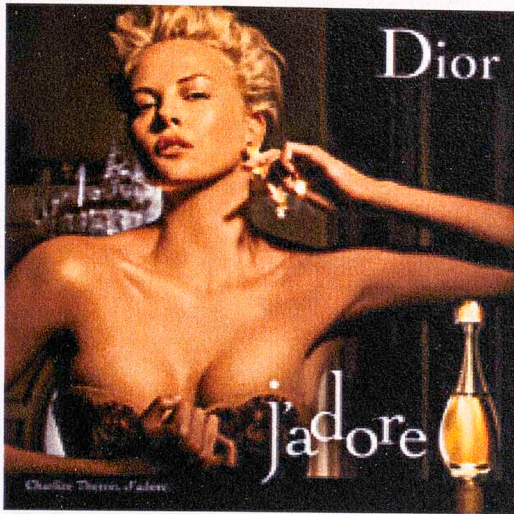


Figure 2.8(b). “J’adore” advertisement by Dior.
<http://temptingperfume.com/images/J%27adore%20by%20Dior.jpg>

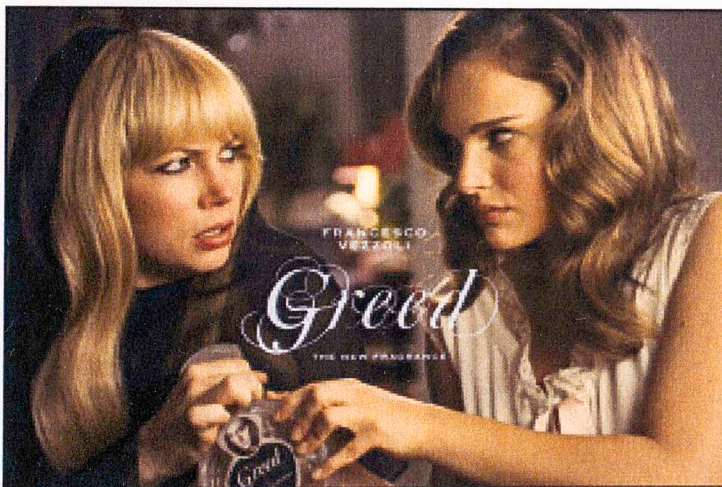


Figure 2.8(c). “advertisement” for Greed.
<http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/art-show-francesco-vezzolis-eau-de-faux/>



Figure 2.9. Tom's Restaurant, New York City. <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/images/wiki/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4b/Restaurant.jpg/300px-Restaurant.jpg>



Figure 2.10. *Greed*, view of needlepoint portraits within gallery space. <http://artobserved.com/artimages/2009/02/francesco-vezzoli-greed-3.jpg>.



Figure 2.11. *Frida Kahlo for Greed.*

http://www.artinfo.com/media/image/137362/4_VEZZO-2009.0005.jpg.



Figure 2.12. *Georgia O'Keeffe for Greed.*

http://images.artnet.com/artwork_images_425359759_481861_francesco-vezzoli.jpg.



Figure 2.13. Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987), *Turquoise Marilyn*, 1962. http://www.artquotes.net/masters/warhol_andy/turquoise-marilyn-62.jpg.



Figure 2.14. Andy Warhol, *Liz* (1964). <http://www.djtfineart.com/images/artwork/full/FS-II.7.jpg>.



Figure 3.1. Francesco Vezzoli, *Trailer for Remake of Gore Vidal's 'Caligula'* (2005), still image from trailer

Figure 3.1. Vezzoli, *Trailer for Remake of Gore Vidal's 'Caligula'* (2005), still image from trailer. [http://img.slate.com/media/1/123125/122986/2111960/2120259/2121112/050621 di Vezzoli tn.jpg](http://img.slate.com/media/1/123125/122986/2111960/2120259/2121112/050621_di_Vezzoli_tn.jpg)



Figure 3.2. *Trailer for Remake*, still image of from trailer.

[http://img.slate.com/media/1/123125/122986/2111960/2120259/2121112/050621 di Vezzoli tn.jpg](http://img.slate.com/media/1/123125/122986/2111960/2120259/2121112/050621_di_Vezzoli_tn.jpg).

Figure 3.2. Vezzoli, *Trailer for Remake* (2005), still image of from trailer. [http://img.slate.com/media/1/123125/122986/2111960/2120259/2121112/050621 di Vezzoli tn.jpg](http://img.slate.com/media/1/123125/122986/2111960/2120259/2121112/050621_di_Vezzoli_tn.jpg)

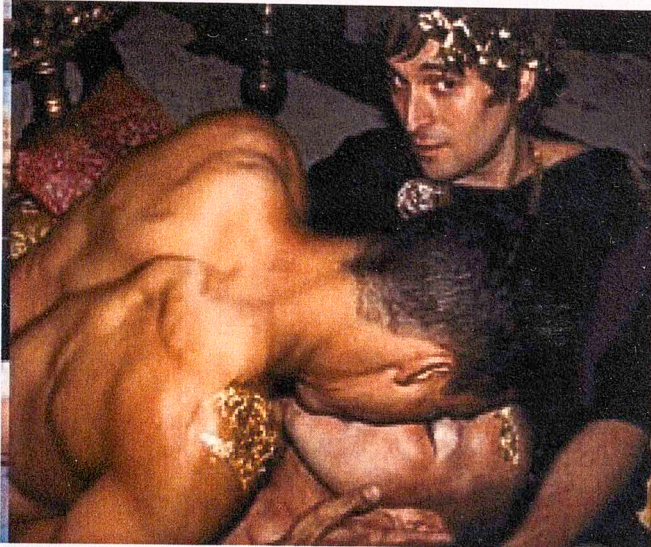


Figure 3.3. Trailer for *Remake*, still image of Vezzoli (in black) from trailer.
<http://cache.gawker.com/news/calig2.jpg>.



Figure 3.4. Francesco Vezzoli, *Democracy* (2007), Sharon Stone as Patricia Hill.
http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_5GIh8BPHH7Y/TBtSvfBrkfi/AAAAAAAAAPM/VrRtCPJsknA/s1600/FrancescoVezzoli_03.jpg.

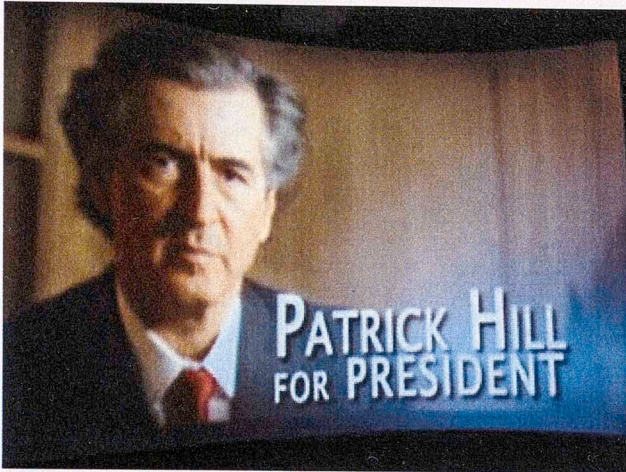


Figure 3.5. *Democracy*, still image of Bernard-Henry Lévy as Patrick Hill
http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_IzjPmEhGIYE/RpSZqn-B0I/AAAAAAAAABIE/gaqjrq56xT8/s320/IMG_37111_1.jpg

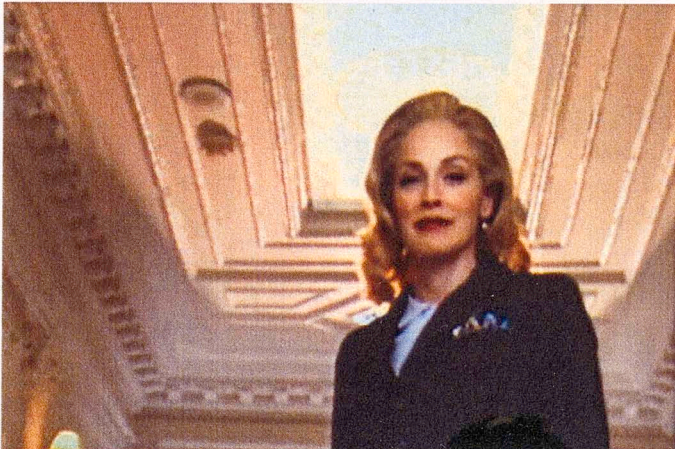


Figure 3.6. *Democracy*, detail.
<http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=vezzoli,+democracy&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

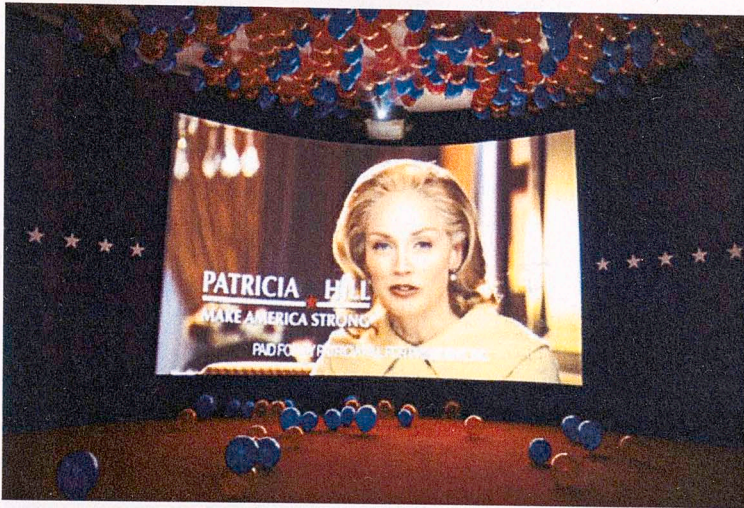


Figure 3.7. *Democracy*, view of exhibition space.

<http://murdocklondon.files.wordpress.com/2007/06/sharon-stone-venice-biennale.jpg>.



Figure 3.8. Francesco Vezzoli, *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)* (2009), image from outside the tent.

<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/zqF0q3qej2c/SxvkdAK9IZI/AAAAAABK6U/iGILCABCP8/s400/50511694.jpg>.

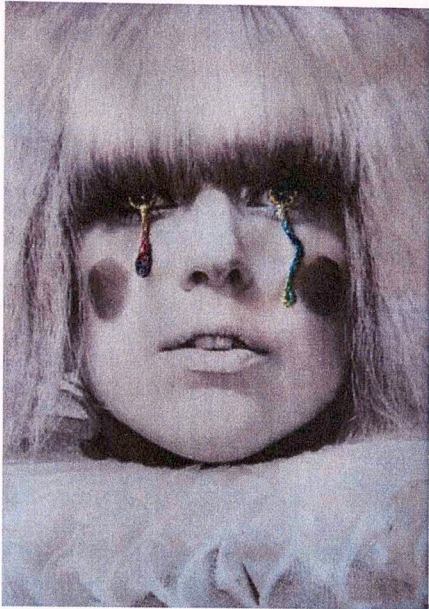


Figure 3.9. Vezzoli, *Portrait of Lady Gaga*.

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/blogs/themoment/posts/1113gaga.jpg>
g.



Figure 3.10. *Ballets Russes*, image of Lady Gaga in hat designed by Frank Gehry and Miuccia Prada.

<http://uk.reuters.com/resources/r/?m=02&d=20100107&t=2&i=42159110&w=460&fh=&fw=&ll=&pl=&r=2010-01-07T123948Z 01 BTRE6060Z6H00 RTROPTP 0 USA>.



Figure 3.11. *Ballets Russes*, image of Gaga sitting at the Steinway piano customized by Damien Hirst.
http://www2.2space.net/images/upl_newsImage/1258273256.jpg.



Figure 3.12. *Ballets Russes*, image of Bolshoi dancers.
http://www2.2space.net/images/upl_newsImage/1258271452.jpg.



Figure 3.13. *Ballets Russes*, images of posters designed by Vezzoli for the event. <http://www.yvymag.com/wp-content/uploads/moca1113.jpg>.



Figure 3.14. *Ballets Russes*, Vezzoli with Lady Gaga
http://i.usatoday.net/life/gallery/dayinlife/2009/11/l091116/07_ampas_gaga.jpg

This volume is the property of the University of Oklahoma, but the literary rights of the author are a separate property and must be respected. Passages must not be copied or closely paraphrased without the previous written consent of the author. If the reader obtains any assistance from this volume, he must give proper credit in his own work.

I grant the University of Oklahoma Libraries permission to make a copy of my thesis upon the request of individuals or libraries. This permission is granted with the understanding that a copy will be provided for _____ only, and that requestors will be informed of these restrictions.

NAME _____

DATE _____

A library which borrows this thesis for use by its patrons is expected to secure the signature of each user.

This thesis by TAYLOR ELAINE MAULDIN has been used by the following persons, whose signatures attest their acceptance of the above restrictions.

NAME AND ADDRESS

DATE