CREMASTER 5: MATTHEW BARNEY AND THE NEO-BAROQUE

by

REBECCA RAY BRANTLEY

(Under the Direction of Isabelle Wallace)

ABSTRACT

A series of five films (but also sculptures, drawings and photographs), the *Cremaster* cycle (1994-2002) by Matthew Barney (American, b. 1967) functions as an allegory of an embryo's "pre-sexual" stage of development. With visual elements that have little to do with this biological story, the films are confused also by an order of production that does not reflect the cycle's numerical order. Thus, the films seem to lack a single narrative arc. Arguably, one of the paths reflects the trajectory of Western history that is marked by its classical and baroque high and low points, though ultimately this order seems to exist so that it may be disordered. With this narrative (dis-)organization taken to be foundational, the focus of this thesis consists of a close reading of *Cremaster 5*—the cycle's numeric end but the third film to be produced—and its relationship to neo-baroque theory.

INDEX WORDS: Baroque, Neo-Baroque, Matthew Barney, *Cremaster* Cycle, *Cremaster 5*, History, Gilles Deleuze, Omar Calabrese, Angela Ndalianis, Allegory, Walter Benjamin, Cinema, Opera

CREMASTER 5: MATTHEW BARNEY AND THE NEO-BAROQUE

by

REBECCA RAY BRANTLEY

B.A., The University of Georgia, 2005

B.F.A., The University of Georgia, 2005

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2009

CREMASTER 5: MATTHEW BARNEY AND THE NEO-BAROQUE

by

REBECCA RAY BRANTLEY

Major Professor:	Isabelle Wallace
Committee:	Janice Simon
	Shelley Zuraw

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank my advisor, Dr. Isabelle Wallace for her invaluable input and guidance during the writing of this thesis. I also thank my committee, Dr. Janice Simon and Dr. Shelley Zuraw, for their assistance and contributions during the thesis-writing process. I have taken many classes with all three members of my committee and want to express my gratitude to them for their efforts over the years. Thanks also to my peers in the graduate art history program for their interest and comments regarding this thesis, especially Nathanael Roesch, Brigette Thomas, Jenny Beene Gunn and Caroline Cason Barratt. Appreciation is also due to the professor who first introduced me to Barney's work during my undergraduate education, Stephen Thompson. Finally, I thank my parents, Priscilla and David Brantley, and for creative input, I thank my brother Matthew Brantley.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Baroque, the Neo-Baroque and the *Cremaster* Cycle

Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* cycle is best known as a series of five films made between 1994 and 2002, yet the project extends its borders to include a diverse array of media such as sculpture, performance and drawing. Each *Cremaster* film is numbered, but importantly, the numerical sequence does not reflect the order of production. Barney (American, b. 1967) began to film in the mid-1990s, finishing *Cremaster 4* (1994) first and then, chronologically: *Cremaster 1* (1996), *Cremaster 5* (1997), *Cremaster 2* (1999) and *Cremaster 3* (2002). Opulent and esoteric, the productions elicit both admiration and animosity from viewers: some reveling in the films' layers of visual and conceptual richness and excess, others put-off by what seems to be little more than incomprehensible excess. An alternate world characterized by its seemingly pointless rituals and blatantly lavish visual appeal, the *Cremaster* universe wavers between the familiar and the fantastic. As its director and star, Barney features prominently in its host of strange-bodied, eccentrically costumed characters whose cryptic actions often fail to generate a conventional, cinematic plot. Seemingly bound to their game-like, Sisyphean actions and spectacular environments, they are a menagerie of synchronized dancers and tap-dancing satyrs, racecar drivers and half-human giants, death-row criminals and art-nouveau sprites culled from history and fiction. Superficially unrelated to its cacophonous montage of visual images, a biological narrative underlies the *Cremaster* cycle: the development of an embryo from a sexless mass of cells to a sexed, embodied being. Barney supposes that this early phase of maturation is a state of pre-sexual "pure potential," and the desire to halt this nascent moment is the founding desire of the cycle as it seeks a harmony between what Barney terms states of femininity and

masculinity, or respectively, "ascent" and "descent." [1] Yet, despite its conceptual importance,

this biological process only appears on-screen in the veiled guise of allegory that perhaps may be

fully understood only with the help of external texts—a wall label installed in a gallery, the

artist's website or a curator's explanation.

The *Cremaster* cycle tells a single story, and each film may be regarded as an inseparable

element of larger entity as if an act of a play, an organ of a body. Yet interdependent as the films

are, Barney constructed his cycle so that each installment functions as a discrete identity: each

film *Cremaster* cycle is set in a distinctive location and historical era, or in most cases—taking

grandiose liberties with history—an amalgamation of place, style and era. For example, an

alternate version of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition takes place not in Chicago, but

rather, for the purposes of *Cremaster 2* (2000), on the Bonneville Salt Flats. Likewise, the annual

Tourist Trophy motorcycle race on the Isle of Man, though true to its actual location,

incorporates quasi-mythological figures into its contemporary milieu. Thus, filtered though the

artist's idiosyncratic lens, the setting of each episode of the cycle becomes nearly synonymous

with the film itself and furthermore functions, on Barney's account, as if the major character in

the film.[2] To further distinguish each film, Barney also brands each with a variation of a symbol

---

[1] Barney uses the phrases "pure potential" and the binaries of "ascent" and "descent" to describe, respectively, the state of pre-sexual in-definition and the two extremes it seeks to avoid, masculinity and femininity. For example of Barney's employment of these terms, see Matthew Barney, "Synopsis: *Cremaster 1*," The *Cremaster* Cycle. http://www.cremaster.net/crem1.htm#Synopsis.

[2] To see this notion laid out explicitly by the artist, see Barney's Cremaster.net for a map-like list of the characters featured in every film. For each, the film's location is listed as a prominent "character." For example, for *Cremaster 1*, Barney lists the Bronco Stadium, the football stadium in which the film takes place as the first character alongside human characters such as the "Goodyear Chorus Girls." See Barney, "*Cremaster 1*: Characters," The *Cremaster* Cycle. http://www.cremaster.net/crem1.htm#Characters.
 Also: Barney, "*Cremaster 2*: Characters," The *Cremaster* Cycle, http://www.cremaster.net/crem2.htm#Characters.

he uses throughout his oeuvre, an ovular shape bisected by a bar that he calls a field emblem (a

geometric rendering of an oval with a rectangle bisecting its center) that is sometimes integrated

into the set of the film (Figure 1).[3] For each installment of the *Cremaster* cycle, the modified

emblem incorporates a motif from the film to which it refers.[4] This is accompanied by a stylized

typeface spelling out the film's title that, like the individualized emblem, reflects the mood and

setting. Together, they function as a logo-like emblem for each film of the *Cremaster* cycle. Yet

despite the corporate implications of Barney's ubiquitous emblem that seems to hold the promise

of mass production, the films are screened selectively and an extremely limited number of DVDs

encased in sculptural packaging are available for purchase. Thus, despite their easily

reproducible format, the films are imbued with a rarefied status.

In part because of Barney's seemingly random ordering, the films do not follow a single,

straightforward path from the cycle's ostensible beginning, *Cremaster 1* (1996), to its logical

end, *Cremaster 5* (1997). The artist's choice to confuse the ordering of his series of films is

crucial to my analysis of the *Cremaster* cycle in that it allows the films to exist in a state of flux

in which not one narrative path, but many may exist. Perhaps the most obvious path, the

numerical order of the cycle (*1,2,3,4,5*), suggests to me the organization of Western history into

eras of apex, decline and re-birth, a notion I will discuss in detail in the second chapter. As if a

mirror skeptically reflecting the movements and pattern of history, this order seems to have been

---

[3] Nancy Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," in *The* Cremaster *Cycle* (New York: The Guggenheim, 2002), 7. Spector describes the symbolism of the field emblem: it represents "orifice and its closure, the hermetic body, an arena of possibility." Yet, she also mentions its inevitable associations with a "corporate logo."
[4] The field emblem for each film is augmented for each film with the following motifs: for *Cremaster 1* (1996), a winged boot with a funnel attached to its toe, for *Cremaster 2* (2000), a beehive in front of the United States and Utah state flags, for *Cremaster 3* (2002), a Masonic symbol grafted onto the upper portion of the Chrysler Building, for *Cremaster 4* (1994), the Isle of Man's three-legged Manx triskelion and, for *Cremaster 5* (1997) a downward facing, wilting orchid. See *The* Cremaster *Cycle*, http:// http://cremaster.net/#finalState.

built up only to be distorted. Indeed, in the second chapter, I employ this interpretation of the cycle in order to consider the *Cremaster* cycle as a rumination on history that, through its pre-coded alternate narrative paths confuses, dis-orders, and finally perhaps, undermines the conventional categorization of human history in the West. Ultimately, for me, the cycle functions not merely as a performative and reflexive consideration of the narrative of history, but as a revival of an of-suppressed vantage point within this history: a manifestation of a revived "baroque" system of values and aesthetics. Furthermore, as I argue in this thesis, the cycle can be seen to oscillate between points of "classical" origin to moments of "baroque" apotheosis along its various trajectories. This play of categories and notions are indebted to and perhaps work against, the tropes of art history as they have been crafted, particularly after eighteenth-century art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann's categorization of the history of art into archaic, classical and baroque moments.

Taking into account Barney's free play with history, lavish visual components, allegorical narrative and convoluted organization of the *Cremaster* cycle, I consider the *Cremaster* cycle as "neo-baroque." Specifically, I focus on one film: the baroque-looking, operatic *Cremaster 5* (1997). Though numbered so as to represent the end of the cycle and thus expressing the cycle at its most "descended"[5] state and therefore echoing Winckelmann's notion of the baroque as a falling away of aesthetic merit, *5* was finished third, placing it at the center of the cycle in terms of production. In this thesis, I contend that *Cremaster 5* (1997) belongs to the cultural phenomenon of the neo-baroque as it has been defined by scholars of cultural and aesthetic theory at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Indeed,

---

[5] Barney's synopsis for the film states, outright, that "total descension is finally attained in *Cremaster 5* (1997)…" See: Barney, "Synopsis: *Cremaster 5*," The *Cremaster* Cycle. http://www.cremaster.net/crem5.htm#Synopsis.

for me, *Cremaster 5* (1997) acts as a mirror and microcosm within the self-reflexive cycle. It embodies and represents the baroque moment of an overall neo-baroque series of films that whether viewed together or in isolation, overflow the boundaries of narrative cinema to enfold a diversity of narratives, styles and media under Barney's multi-fold *Cremaster* banner.

Baroque and Neo-Baroque

Before proceeding to a close analysis of Barney's *Cremaster* cycle as (neo-)baroque,[6] it is first necessary to distinguish the baroque and the neo-baroque as both separate and interchangeable terms and to briefly lay out the connotations and limitations of the two signifiers. The neo-baroque is diagnosed as predominantly a late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century phenomenon by its theorists, who are scholars of cinema, art, philosophy, semiotics and popular culture. Yet its earliest inklings, as manifest in various eccentric sub-cultural trends, may be traced to the early decades of the twentieth century.[7] A pan-cultural phenomenon, theorists find traces of the neo-baroque in the visual arts (especially in its digital and new media formats), theatre, fashion, film, architecture, television shows, technology and other, often newer forms of popular entertainment media such as video games or amusement parks. Of course, like any other signifier, "neo-baroque" lacks stable meaning and connotation. This is especially true

---

[6]Throughout this thesis, I will use the term "(neo-)baroque" to signify when I am referring to both the seventeenth century and the late-twentieth and early twenty first century together, as a collective, trans-historical phenomenon. I borrow this term from Angela Ndalianis, who uses this term throughout her book *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment.* See: Angela Ndalialis, "Introduction," *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment.* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2004), 9.

[7] For example, for the first decades of the twentieth century, Stephen Calloway cites Paul Poiret's richly constructed fashion designs as well as his lavishly decorated studio or Léon Baskt's extravagant costumes for the production of the Ballet Russes as examples of a baroque taste of excess and conspicuous consumption. For the 1930s, he points to Busby Berkeley's whimsical musicals and architectural designs such as Charles de Beistegui's Le Corbusier-designed apartment on the Champs Elysées. Stephen Calloway, "1900-1920: Excess and Extravagance," *Baroque Baroque: A Culture of Excess* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 19-22.

of a term that revives the term "baroque," an intentionally pejorative, posthumously attributed label designed to describe what was (and perhaps still is) imagined to be a moment of cultural and aesthetic decline.

Because it is an unstable signifier, the designation "neo-baroque" is both useful and misleading. It can serve as shorthand to describe a set of characteristics that are perceived as indicative of a period or trend; yet, as a generic term it can also oversimplify, not giving full attention to the complexity of the phenomenon it describes. The term "neo-baroque" also implies that the term "baroque" on its own is not sufficient but requires a prefix to subtly distinguish it from its past guise. Furthermore, with its prefix "neo," the term "neo-baroque" presumes several things: first, that there was a previous period that can be diagnosed as "baroque," and secondly, that the styles, principles, and underlying ideologies of this past era are being revived to the extent that it warrants the recycling of a term from the past. It is important to note that the term "baroque" is itself complicated and its meaning far from univocal. Typically, the "baroque" refers to a cultural period following the Renaissance, yet it can also serve as an a-historical adjective that may describe eccentricity, flamboyance and exaggeration.

Like its predecessor "baroque," the term "neo-baroque" is a multi-faceted and its meaning seems to shift from context to context. For example, a popular art or fashion magazine may present a different picture than a scholarly text, just as a scholarly analysis of a videogame as neo-baroque may present a slightly different account of the neo-baroque from a philosophical account of the neo-baroque. Yet it may be generally and tentatively described by several characteristics. The neo-baroque form often espouses excess and eccentricity. It is thought to value complexity over legibility and to address its spectator's various senses and emotions, (whether by means of visual appeal or a more direct, tactile sensation). Formally and

conceptually, it is associated with the defiance of boundaries and the attempt to unify seemingly disparate phenomena as part of a larger whole. Finally, it often reveals the maker's desire to express the "infinite," or that which seems inexpressible. Of course, this cursory sketch of the neo-baroque is not exhaustive and these traits do not always neatly line up or appear simultaneously. Here, I mean only to begin to suggest the general concerns of the neo-baroque as it has been used to describe an assortment of cultural and aesthetic characteristics.

Creeping first into common discourse, the term "neo-baroque" began to emerge casually in accounts made of art and film in the late seventies, such as in descriptions of Fredrico Fellini's long, meandering films like *La Dolce Vita* (1960)*, Satyricon* (1969) or *Roma* (1972) that lacked strong plots and instead strung together a series of related sequential scenes.[8] It was not until the late eighties and early nineties that the term appeared in academic circles. In the early 1990s, two important texts on the neo-baroque were translated into English: Italian semiologist Omar Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (originally printed in Italian 1987) and French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (first appearing in French in 1988). Though both authors share an interest in the theoretical aspects of the baroque and how they reappear in new forms in the late twentieth century, their accounts diverge in terms of their areas of focus. Calabrese's semiotic account describes how various aspects of popular culture based on repetition, such as television serials or films, correspond to his notion of an "underlying baroque form," a complexly ordered system that is organized in such a way that the form may initially seem chaotic and arbitrary. Deleuze's philosophy of the baroque and neo-baroque relies on and is in response to the writings of German-born, rationalist philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716). Similar to Calabrese's "baroque form" is Deleuze's notion of the baroque "fold,"

---

[8] Ndalianis, "Introduction," 9. Ndalianis mentions Fellini as part of the (neo-)baroque.

best understood as that which expresses the border-collapsing impulse of the baroque and the push towards organic unification of elements (as opposed to order and clarity in other moments in which the "classical" has prevailed). While a classical system may seek to reduce and clarify, a baroque one seeks to express not only complexity—often verging on chaos—but also, the boundless and the infinite. A literal and visual example of Deleuze's fold is Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (1647-52, see Figure 2). Featuring Teresa and an angel at its heart, it nevertheless expends outward, merging into the architecture of its environment. As she collapses before the smiling angel and his piercing arrow, Teresa's undulating robes seem to ripple autonomously around her, both masking and expanding the boundaries of her body.[9]

Deleuze's account, like Calabrese's, is not bound only to baroque art, but rather investigates the many components of culture—both from the past and present— such as science, technology, and philosophy. Indeed, Deleuze's book is based on his dialogue with and appropriation of the work of Leibniz, and his ideas concerning nature that in turn resulted in his theory of calculus (a "baroque" math concerned with expressing the notion of infinity and systems that approach, but never reaching an endpoint). More recently in her book *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2005), Australian cinema scholar Angela Ndalianis gives a slightly updated account of the neo-baroque that draws on many theorists, including Deleuze and Calabrese, and focuses on early twenty-first-century forms of art and entertainment such as video games, blockbuster films and amusement park rides. Though working in their

---

[9] In order to differentiate the baroque fold from the "Renaissance" fold (or other classicizing folds that appear in the visual arts), Deleuze gives the example of the paintings of Italian Renaissance painter Paolo Uccello (1395-1475).Though he is preoccupied with folds in his paintings, they adhere to an overall geometry. Contrastingly, the baroque fold seems imbued with an autonomy and "freedom" that finally separates it from the body or structure underneath. Gilles Deleuze, "What is Baroque?" *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 34.

lineage, Ndalianis reconsiders concepts from Deleuze and Calabrese, updating them to more accurately reflect recent developments in art and culture.

Alongside the contemporary voices of Deleuze, Calabrese and Ndalinias, this thesis will rely strongly on a figure important to these three thinkers: German art theorist and historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945). Also, other important sources that have contributed to contemporary notions of both the seventeenth-century baroque and the neo-baroque will be cited, including Walter Benjamin, Rudolph Wittkower, Henri Focillon and Stephen Calloway. In addition, the ideas of contemporary theorists and scholars such as Michel Poizat's inquiry into opera and Julia Kristeva's well known work on the topic of abjection will be employed for the purposes of expanding upon concerns suggested by the intersection of Barney's work and the literature of the (neo-)baroque.

Before looking more closely at the baroque's second manifestation in the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first centuries, it is useful to briefly define the term "baroque" as it relates to its "original" context. First, it is necessary to sketch out the historical circumstances that gave birth to the first era to be dubbed baroque, bearing in mind that it is possible to locate a "baroque" impulse in earlier moments, such as late Hellenistic art or to find other so-called anti-classical moments such as the Gothic period in Western Europe. The period that is commonly accepted as the baroque in Western culture ranges from the late-sixteenth to early-to-mid-eighteenth centuries in its most liberal estimations, though for the sake of simplicity, it is often described as a seventeenth-century phenomenon that comes out of Counter-Reformation Italy.

Iterating the ideology of the Roman Counter-Reformation, the Council of Trent met on three occasions between 1545 and1563 to deal with the state of the ancient city in the wake of the 1527 Sack of Rome and the vexing Protestant Reformation in northern Europe. To amend the

mistakes of Mannerism, artists were commanded by the leaders of the Council to create legible, decorous paintings and sculpture that drew attention to the physical sufferings of Christ and the Christian martyrs and, importantly, eliminated the use of the classical nude in representation. Wittkower abridges the demands of the council into three broad categories: "(i) clarity, simplicity, and intelligibility, (ii) realistic interpretation, (iii) emotional stimulus to piety." [10] Immediately following the Council of Trent, Mannerist art (circa 1560-1590) failed to meet the rigid commands imposed by the council; it was considered effete, vapid and ineffectual at inspiring religious devotion. It is with the demise of Mannerism that the aesthetic later dubbed baroque is born. Indeed, it is here Wittkower's study begins, tracing the Italian baroque from artists such as Milan-born Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio; 1571-1610) and the Carracci, who were Bolognese brothers Annibale (1560-1609) and Agostino (1557-1602) and their cousin, Ludovico (1555-1610), to artists of the late baroque represented by eighteenth-century artists such as Venetian painter Giovanni Battista (Giambattista) Tiepolo (1696-1770). [11] This aesthetic spreads throughout Europe to shape the work of iconic artists such as Diego Velázquez (1599 –1660) in Spain and Peter Paul Rubens (1577 –1640) or Rembrandt van Rijn (1606 –1669) in the Netherlands.

Importantly, the practitioners of the baroque did not seek to separate themselves from the Renaissance; rather, the term "baroque" was an Enlightenment invention, an intentionally derogatory term that was meant to categorize the baroque moment as one of collapse, a falling away from the self-consciously "rational" and overtly classicizing moment of the Renaissance. It is in the archetypal writings of eighteenth-century art historian, Johann Joachim Winckelmann

---

[10] Rudolph Wittkower, "Rome: Sixtus V to Paul V (1585-1621)," in *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600-1750*, revised by Joseph Connors and Jennifer Montagu, (Yale University Press: 1999) (First published 1958), 1-2.

[11] Ibid.

(1717 -1768) that the term first appears. Winckelmann studied and praised the art of antiquity,

calling for a neo-classical style because of his disdain for the art of his own time.[12] He used the

term "baroque" pejoratively, to describe an anti-classical aesthetic that seemed stylistically

aberrant and eccentric. Linguistically, Winckelmann's term was derived from the Portuguese

word *barroco*, literally meaning pearls or teeth of differing sizes, the similar Spanish term

barreuco or the Italian word for bizarre, *baroco*. Following Winkelmann, French philosopher

Denis Diderot (1713-1784) continued to use the term "baroque" as a disparaging label that

described an organic, overly decorative trend in post-Renaissance architecture that gave, for

Diderot, ignored a building's structure and paid undue attention to façade and surface.[13] It is over

a century after Winckelmann that the term "baroque" begins to lose some of its negative

associations to become a slightly more neutral term for art of the seventeenth and early-and-mid

eighteenth centuries. To be sure, the era was largely ignored by art historians until the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it is this fin-de-siècle moment in which scholars

such as Alois Riegl (Austrian, 1858-1905), Heinrich Wölfflin (Swiss, 1864-1945) and, later,

Rudolf Wittkower (German, 1901-1971) begin to seriously attend to baroque painting and

sculpture as a stylistic, theoretical and historical subject that could contend with its classicizing

counterparts.

Reconsidering the baroque from a more distant vantage point from the seventeenth

century than Winkelmann, Heinrich Wölfflin sought a formal definition of the style that did not

situate it simply as decline or deterioration in style. Indeed, his *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888)

and *Principles of Art History: The Problem of Development of Style in Later Art* (1915), rejects a

---

[12] Donald Preziosi, "Art as History." In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziori. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 22.
[13] See Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*. (Oxford University Press, 1980).

the "bud, bloom, decay" metaphor developed by Winckelman. Rather, Wölfflin advocates for a

pendular diagram of history in which the dominant aesthetic shifts back and forth between the

two superficially opposing modes of the classical and the baroque. Seeking a broad, formal

definition of the baroque, Wölfflin famously articulated the difference between these two styles

with his five basic principles. First, he describes the classical form as linear and the baroque form

as painterly. Second, he categorizes the classical composition as flat and impenetrable, upholding

the notion of the surface of the painting as a framed barrier, while the baroque composition is

recessive, its depth inviting the viewer to feel as if he or she is included in the scene. Third, the

classical form is closed whereas the baroque form is open. Fourth, the classical image is

composed of multiple fragments, each thing a distinct unit, while the baroque image is harmonic,

all depicted objects functioning as interdependent parts of a unified whole. Fifth, the classical

image conveys absolute clarity, each form clearly legible and the baroque picture conveys

relative clarity, subjects meld into one another so that it is not always easy to distinguish

independent forms.[14] Though Wölfflin's list does seem to sketch out the two styles as

oppositional, he shies away from a perspective that defined the baroque or "painterly" as

debasement of the classical or "linear" mode. Finally, he contends that a classical moment may

have a baroque phase and vice versa—that is, inscribed in each is the same move from an early,

pre-classical phase to a baroque fruition.

Interested in outlining the way in which style seems to have an organic life of its own,

Henri Focillon (1881-1943), author of *The Life and Art of Forms* (1934), argues that a baroque

strain outlived the confinements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and continued to be

an influence on subsequent historical moments. Similar to Wölfflin, he does not believe that the

---

[14] Heinrich Wölfflin, "The Most General Representational Forms," ed. Donald Preziosi, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (1915): 116-117.

baroque can be confined to one moment, and his book outlines how the baroque form manifests itself at various moments in history.[15] Focillon's idea not only came into being in first half of the twentieth century, but as Ndalianis points out, was a text used by later authors to help trace a "baroque" subculture through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was helpful in attributing a baroque aesthetic to certain strains of modernism such as surrealism.[16]

The ideas of Wölfflin and Focillon are no doubt unavoidable and foundational for theorists of the neo-baroque. For example, Wölfflin's insistence that there should be no value judgment attached to either period is a viewpoint espoused by many contemporary scholars and theorists who align contemporary culture with the baroque. Like Wölfflin and Focillon, Calabrese argues in *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* that the baroque dominates the contemporary moment, yet he also believes that, though one may dominate, the classical and baroque always co-exist.[17] Correspondingly, Ndalianis contends that the baroque comes out of the classical, and sees it as a continuation and advancement of the classical rather than an antithesis.[18] For Ndalianis, the shift from a classical to a baroque moment is a complicated move in which the characteristics and underlying forms of the classical are absorbed and re-scripted in order to arrive at a more precise understanding of the baroque. Countering the notion of the baroque as a moment of cultural decline anathema to the classical, she contends that it relies on the classical and embraces its 'rules,' but in doing so it multiplies, complicates and plays with classical form, manipulating it with a virtuoso flair. In the baroque's deliberate establishment of a dialectic that embraces the classical in its system, the classical is finally subjected to baroque

---

[15] Ndalianis, "Introduction, 8-9.
[16] Ibid, 9.
[17] Omar Calabrese, "Taste and Method," *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, trans. Charles Lambert. Princeton University Press, NJ: 1992, 3-26.
[18] Ndalianis, "Introduction," 5.

logic.[19] Indeed, in the lineage of Wölfflin and Deleuze, Ndalianis contends the neo-baroque is an advanced, expanded form of the baroque that is in turn a reshaping of the classical. For Ndalianis, the ultimate goal of a neo-baroque system is to extract meaning and order from its dense, frenzied web of information and signs and is thus an advanced form of the classical since it is ultimately concerned with creating a complex but, importantly, ordered system. As she argues, the neo-baroque is an intensified, updated version of the baroque that is "an example of the classical in its purest and most challenging guise."[20] So, in the neo-baroque system, chaos and confusion may not prevent the transmission of information; rather they may work to express the multifaceted possibilities of a text or image as if to point to the complexity of a sign itself.

Twentieth-Century Baroque

Though it is the moment of transition from the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries that have been diagnosed as neo-baroque by scholars, the early twentieth century witnesses the first hints of what will become the full-fledged "neo-baroque." Tracing a baroque style throughout the entire twentieth century is Stephen Calloway's *Baroque Baroque: A Culture of Excess*. Albeit a predominantly formal survey of what he identifies as a baroque sub-current of twentieth-century culture and style, Calloway's heavily illustrated text no doubt bears an affinity to the concerns of more theoretically-informed texts of Deleuze, Calabrese and Ndalianis. To refer to a particularly modern manifestation of the baroque that often bears little visible resemblance to the more conventional seventeenth-century baroque, Calloway coins the repetitive "baroque baroque," perhaps doubling the term to emphasize the reflexivity and materiality of the aesthetic he wishes to define as well as the repeatable nature of the label itself.

---

[19] Ibid, 24-25.

[20] Ndalianis, "Intertextuality, Labyrinths, and the (Neo-)Baroque," 94.

Furthermore, as a doubled moniker, it seems to express anxiety regarding the fluidity and instability of the label itself. Importantly, Calloway points out that the baroque undercurrent of the twentieth century varied in its relationship to its role to dominant culture, at times representing an anti-modern faction, as in the post-World War II year, or at other moments crossing over into the mainstream. Nevertheless, Calloway dubs a plethora of phenomena "baroque baroque." He cites films like Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948) or, more recently, Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986). Fashion designs by Elsa Schiaperelli, Coco Chanel, Carl Lagerfield and Vivian Westwood as well as select paintings by artists like Salvador Dalí also become re-inscribed baroque. Yet, according to Calloway it is not until the 1980s and 1990s that the "Great Baroque Revival"—a phenomenon that corresponds to Ndalianis' and Calabrese's neo-baroque—takes place. Of course, as Ndalianis and Calabrese point out, to label the last decades of the twentieth century as baroque ultimately brings this tradition into dialogue with the postmodernism.

In the Guise of Bacchus: The Baroque, the Neo-Baroque and the Postmodern

According to Greco-Roman myth, every year the god Bacchus is killed—brutally torma apart—only to be reborn in a cycle that mimics the growth, harvest and death of the fruit used to create wine. Of course, wine is sovereign to Bacchus, as is theatre, music and irrationality. Half mortal, he is a hybrid god bound to both heaven and earth. Caught as he is in a cycle of birth, death and rebirth, Bacchus is an apt sovereign for the baroque, which is itself subject to a cycle of decline and revival whose origins lie in the classical. A subject of artistic representation from antiquity to the present, Bacchanal scenes depict scenes of revelry and excess. I now turn my focus to depictions of the god by Caravaggio and Cindy Sherman, two artists who have become icons of their respective historical moments. Indeed, both artists' treatment of Bacchus may be

regarded as emblematic of their parallel moments—epochs that, for my purposes, mark the beginning of a baroque aesthetic in the late sixteenth and the late twentieth centuries.

Caravaggio's two early paintings of Bacchus seem to reveal a complex interest in the theater, and may function as allegories of the very notion of representation. Both Caravaggio's *Self-Portrait as Bacchus* (1593-94, see Figure 3) and *Bacchus* (1598, see Figure 4) flaunt their inherent artificiality. In the self-portrait, Caravaggio represents himself in costume, a simple toga, and his unnaturally pale face suggests to me that, like an actor, he is wearing makeup.[21] Indeed, in essence he is acting: dressing up as a mythological god, but also taking on the guise of "artist" as he presents himself in the new, but already formulaic mode of self-portraiture. In Caravaggio's re-treatment of the theme in the slightly later *Bacchus*, he uses a recognizable model that appears in several of his paintings.[22] This model also seems to be wearing a subtle application of makeup, possibly even a wig, and his identity thus oscillates between model or actor and god. Reclining on a couch, this faux Bacchus wears what seems to be a classical toga,

---

[21] I believe that the possibility that Caravaggio is using cosmetics to whiten his face may also link this image to the notional founder of tragedy and theatre in Western culture, the legendary Thespis of Icaria. Credited as the first actor or "answer" (*hupokritês*) that responded to the Chorus, he drew emphasis to a single figure involved in a plot rather than the simpler recited dithyramb that was performed by the collective Chorus. He participated in Pisistratus' dramatic competition in 535 or 534 BC that Philip Freund describes in his book on the origin of theatre, and his innovative performance consisted of a speech either to the Chorus, creating the first dialogue, or addressing the crowd simply from behind an altar or table. Most notably for the comparison to Caravaggio's painting, the actor wore white lead makeup on his face to further his resemblance to the god's corpse. Though there is no current evidence that Caravaggio was familiar with this story, I believe—whether intentional or not—there is a meaningful correspondence. For a description of Thespis, see: Philip Freund, "A Realm of Dionysus," in *Stage by Stage: The Birth of Theatre*. (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2003), 45. The possibility that Caravaggio is citing this moment of course further complicates the artist's self-portrait, perhaps suggesting that Caravaggio is creating an allegory of painting as an inherently staged and artificial space.

[22] The model has been identified as Mario Minniti and is thought to appear in other paintings such as *Boy with Basket of Fruit*, *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, *and The Musicians*. For example, see: Helen Langdon, "Flowers and Fruit," in *Caravaggio: A Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (1998), 60.

but on closer inspection the scene seems to disintegrate and the couch and toga transform into

mere artist's props: a dirty mattress and dingy sheet assembled in the corner of a studio. Traces

of dirt stain the boy's fingernails and ripples mar the surface of the wine contained in the

proffered glass as if to suggest the boy's shaking hand and long-held pose in the studio. Together

these tiny details disrupt the stability of the represented space.

      Set in a shallow, dark space neither the *Self-Portrait as Bacchus* nor the later *Bacchus*

painting puts the god into an appropriate context (for example, a scene of the god's marriage to

Ariadne, such as Titian's famous *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520-23) or Annibale Carracci's

classicizing *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne* (1597-1604) in the Farnese palace, would insert

the figure into a logical setting and narrative). Looking out from this dark and empty space of

Self-Portrait as Bacchus, Caravaggio's wry, self-conscious gaze in the self-portrait seems to

confront the viewer, mirroring and returning his gaze. Indeed, he is both artist and subject.

Conflated into the single, impossible figure, he seems to push against the conventional limits of

the image's "frame," which otherwise suggest the borders of an autonomous world. Likewise,

playing off the more latent sensuality of his self-portrait, the boy of the later portrait not only

acknowledges the presence of the viewer, but seems to attempt to seduce him. Ultimately, in

both images, the illusion of the pagan god is broken and Caravaggio, undermining the Counter

Reformation's call for legibility[23] by pushing the classical artistic virtue—naturalism—to its

limit. Because every detail is painstakingly recorded, the image is exposed for what it is: a

---

[23] Caravaggio's non-Christian choice of subject matter must be taken into account. Indeed, it should be noted that subversively challenging the established format of representation (and the faith that it could convey information or provide access to a spiritual realm) was perhaps easiest to accomplish in the context of Greco-Roman myth, since the Christian culture of late-sixteenth-century Italy, though interested in the antique world, of course had no lingering faith in the pagan gods. Furthermore, though both Bacchic figures are clothed, the sensuality of their poses—especially in the case of the boy who is in the process of disrobing—pushes against the decorum demanded by the Council without actually breaking its rules.

skillful piece of theatre. Yet it is a stage-less stage, a floating arena of allegory and façade in

which form and content are inextricably linked: not only does Caravaggio depict the ancient god

of theatre, but he also makes theatricality evident in the way he depicts Bacchus.

      Cindy Sherman restages and resurrects Caravaggio's *Self-Portrait as Bacchus* in her

Untitled #224 (1990, see Figure 5), part of her *History Portrait* series.[24] For this series of

fictitious "history portraits," Sherman (American, b. 1954) sets up a tableau vivant and then

photographs herself (or, occasionally a model) in the guise of painting from the past, wearing

layers of exaggerated makeup and prosthetics. For *#224,* Sherman sets up a facsimile of

Caravaggio's shallow, theatrical space and inserts herself into the artist's self-reflexive pose,

though she directs her gaze toward the lens of camera rather than a mirror. Her makeup and

costume, including prosthetic attachments to her own body, reveal a heightened degree of artifice

that is all the more apparent in her chosen medium, photography. Indeed, using a medium often

associated with mimetic veracity, she plays up and exaggerates the trappings of theatre. Like

Caravaggio before her, she pushes at the boundaries of the image's frame—pushing not only

---

[24] The *History Portraits* come at the end of this supposed narrative: beginning with the *Untitled Film Stills*, the narrative continues with the *Horizontal* and *Fairy Tales and Disasters* series that revels in the grotesque and abject, often refusing to depict a whole body. Seemingly "resurrected," Sherman goes back to photographing the whole body in the *History Portraits.* Laura Mulvey is the first to label this series of series a narrative of disintegration." Laura Mulvey, "Cosmetics and Abjection: Cindy Sherman 1977-87," in *Fetishism and Curiosity*, (Indiana University Press, 1996), 65-76.
Following Mulvey, Rosalind Krauss argues Sherman returns to the vertical, seemingly fetishized bodies of the *History Portraits* after the progression from the whole, upright bodies of the *Untitled Film Stills* with a sense of irony and faithlessness. She contends that behind the façade of these obviously masked, prosthetically enhanced bodies lie the remnants of the abject "formless" pictured prominently in the *Fairy Tales and Disasters* series. Rosalind Krauss, "History Portraits," in *Cindy Sherman: 1977-1993,* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 173-174.

outward into the space of the viewer, but also inward toward the inaccessible past behind her uncanny tableau.[25]

Bound up in a denser web of media, allusion and appropriation than Caravaggio, Sherman plays up the complexity already present in the baroque artist's work. Literally appropriating and re-staging a fragment of the early sixteenth-century Italian baroque, Sherman's *Untitled # 224* may be used as an emblem of the neo-baroque. In a passage that may be applied to Sherman's photographic re-staging of Caravaggio, Ndalianis describes the general characteristics of contemporary entertainment: "[m]edia merge with media, genres unite to produce new hybrid forms, narratives open up and extend into new spatial and serial configurations, and special effects construct illusions that seek to collapse the frame that separates spectator from spectacle."[26] In Sherman's photograph, the distinction between media, in this case, painting, photograph and stage, fades and anticipates the full-blown mergence of media that will characterize works like Barney's *Cremaster* cycle. Sherman's blatantly staged tableau's exaggerated "special effects"—lighting, props and prosthetics—work not only to maintain its own illusion but also function to reveal the limitations of image making itself. By re-staging a work that already seeks to undermine the image's passivity, Sherman's work implicitly deals with the issue of the viewer's relationship to the represented subject, and her gaze retains the implicit sensuality of Caravaggio's self-portrait. Part of a series of quotations and references to past art, the *History Portraits*, Sherman creates art about art, self-consciously and insistently inserting herself into the Western canon and the narrative of history. Yet, her "true" identity not

---

[25] Sherman's attempt to re-make Caravaggio's painting is designed to "fail" since, despite all of her efforts and carefully constructed props, she can never truly re-create the painting. Furthermore, if Caravaggio is referencing Thespis in his early self-portrait, Sherman's portrait possesses an intertextual link to the story of Thespis.

[26] Ndalianis, "Introduction," 3.

only remains in question as it is hidden underneath a façade of cosmetic alterations, it points

back to the instability of Caravaggio's own veiled representation of himself in costume.

Using *Untitled #224* as an emblem of the neo-baroque is tricky, for Sherman's work

already belongs to the discussion of postmodernism. Indeed, the well established presence of

postmodernism looms over a discussion of the neo-baroque, informing and shaping many of its

ideologies and concerns. Critical accounts of the neo-baroque make clear the overlapping of the

two phenomena. Calabrese readily admits "our expressive field already possesses a catchall term

that has been widely used to define a contemporary trend: the much abused postmodern."[27]

Tracing the postmodern's manifestation in three contexts—the "anti-experimental" literature and

cinema of the 1960s, the philosophical outlook founded by Jean-François Lyotard and the post-

1950s architecture that mingled previously distinct styles—Calabrese contends that the term

postmodern is too broad and inclusive, uniting disparate phenomena that did not necessarily

belong together solely because of their shared anti-modern stance.[28] Calabrese wishes to isolate

some of the phenomena categorized as postmodern as well as bring in other elements of culture

under the new heading of "neo-baroque," arguing that "many important cultural phenomena of

our time are distinguished by a specific internal 'form' that recalls the baroque."[29] Most

generically, the neo-baroque comes out of a "taste for repetition" that is to be distinguished from

the postmodern copy, which denies the presence of an original. Both produce the multiple, but

with subtle differences in intent and output: the latter is based on virtuosity and variation—

reveling in the superfluous-ness and excess engendered by repetition—while the former creates

---

[27] Calabrese, "Taste and Method," 12.
[28] Ibid, 13-14.
[29] Ibid, 15.

the multiple to push against a modernist notion of authorship as sacrosanct.[30] Nevertheless, Calabrese's study does not always irrevocably separate the neo-baroque from the postmodern.

Following her predecessor Calabrese, Ndalianis locates "[a] specifically neo-baroque poetics embedded within the postmodern" as the locus of her study of the neo-baroque.[31] For her, the postmodern provides a foundational sense of "stability" that allows for her discussion of the neo-baroque.[32]It is only through variations in meaning and outlook that the two may be differentiated. As labels for a time period and ideology, the postmodern and neo-baroque parallel one another, and implicit in both is an awareness of past tradition. Postmodernism seeks to de-bunk that which modernism seems to take for granted: modernism's quest for purity and essential form (here, and perhaps reductively, I rely heavily on the Greenbergian definition of modernism in art), the faith in human reason as means of progressing culture forward and ultimately, the prospect of progress itself. In the end, postmodernism situates itself as related to and in dialogue with modernism, seeking to correct its wrongs. Though it too is predicated upon a denunciation of modernism, the neo-baroque imagines itself as a revival of a specific past moment: the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Giving birth to things such as the novel and the printing press, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe prepared Western culture for the transition into the modern, industrial world. Likewise, the neo-baroque is imagined as both end and epoch, its practitioners consciously inserting it into a continuum of history in which certain currents of style and ideology alternately submerge and re-emerge.

Adherents to postmodernism seek to deconstruct myths and texts— to expose and tear down binary oppositions as the weak pillars upon which Western culture is built. In this post-

---

[30] Calabrese, "Rhythm and Repetition," 28.
[31] Ndalianis, "Introduction," 16.
[32] Ibid, 17.

structuralist form, postmodernism is based on the notion that signs (words, symbols, images) are meaningless, floating entities that depend upon associations to one another for their tenuous meaning. The neo-baroque form shares this sentiment; that is, it seems to reveal foreknowledge of the failure of images to convey a single meaning, conclusion or authentic experience (i.e. transcendence). Just as Sherman painstakingly reconstructs Caravaggio's self-portrait, the neo-baroque—if faithlessly and laced with a reflexive anxiety—resurrects the awe of the synthetic baroque spectacle. Postmodern artists and writers seek to reveal the fragmented, irreconcilable nature of texts, identity and experience; the neo-baroque strives toward, if only in the arena of art and illusion, a sense of unity. Perhaps it is finally possible to read degrees of difference in the outlook to distinguish the postmodern and the neo-baroque. With a name that implies end and aftermath, the postmodern seems to have been constructed around nostalgia and regret while the neo-baroque seems designed to revive and celebrate the past. This seeming association of the postmodern with pessimism and the neo-baroque with optimism subtly pervades its literature.

Though perhaps a product of both the postmodern and the neo-baroque, in this thesis I argue for a neo-baroque reading a of Barney's *Cremaster* cycle. For me, Barney's commitment to bringing together conventionally separate media indicates not merely a postmodern turn away from the medium specificity of modernism, but also the baroque taste for unity made manifest by the integration of disparate media. His use of narrative, and furthermore, his use of a serialized, eccentrically structured allegory recalls the formats of the new media of the seventeenth century and the present. Finally, Barney's direct appeal to the viewer's senses (through spectacle, excess and jarring imagery) and the deferral of meaning (through complexity, the re-scripting of the conventional meaning attached to signifiers and allegory) may be aligned with baroque artistic practice. Indeed, I believe that it is through his use of strategies that I identify as (neo-)baroque

that Barney is able to merge content with form and keep—or, perhaps more precisely, attempt to keep—his own creation in a state that resists singular definition. It is a state that parallels the borderless existence belonging to the pre-sexual embryo, for, ultimately, in Barney's scripted world of artifice and spectacle "[u]nworldly voluptuousness, lost in its own fantasy, holds the floor."[33]

---

[33] Walter Benjamin, "Allegory and *Trauerspiel*," in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne. (New York: Verso, 1998), 180.

Chapter 2

Lost in Its Own Fantasy: The Neo-Baroque Narrative of the *Cremaster* Cycle

With only a loose plan for how the cycle would unfold,[34] Matthew Barney began to film his cryptically titled *Cremaster* cycle in the mid-1990s. Produced over a span of eight years, Barney began his five-part cycle with *Cremaster 4* (1994) and ends it with *Cremaster 3* (2002). Thus the order of production is as follows: *4*, *1*, *5*, *2* and *3*. Superficially, two crucial and distinguishing features of the cycle are evident. First, instead of being a single, uninterrupted narrative, Barney's *Cremaster* cycle is a series of films that were unveiled over many years to the public as they were finished. Second, all are given the same name, distinguished only by numbers and thus were made "out of order." In this chapter, I take seriously both of these structural choices. Also, I address the type of narrative that makes up the *Cremaster* cycle, taking into account the allegorical means by which its subject is conveyed. Altogether, I believe that both the cycle's serial and allegorical formats are significant factors in considering the cycle as neo-baroque. Each film functions as an episode that contributes to the overarching narrative of the cycle and, without the context of the entire cycle, a single film lacks appropriate context. So, though I will ultimately turn my focus to *Cremaster 5* (1997), I first look to the narrative structure of the entire cycle, for as I argue, its structure is reflected in the form of *5* just as *5* is an integral component of the cycle.

---

[34] "Matthew Barney: Travels in Hypertrophia." Interview by Thyrza Nichols Goodeve. In *Art Recollection: Artist's Interviews and Statements in the Nineties*. Edited by Gabrielle Detterer. Dnilo Montanari & Exit & Zona Archives Editori: 1997, 25.
 Also, see: "Artist's conceptual mapping of the CREMASTER cycle, showing locations, ca. 1994," in Nancy Spector, *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2002), 29.

It is useful to first briefly consider the subject of the films' collective story. According to Barney and his chroniclers, the cycle is an account of a biological process taking place on an infinitesimal scale: an embryo's development from a state of sexless "pure potential" to a sexed entity. This notion is of interest to Barney because for him, it is the story of an order-less, burgeoning system struggling against formation and definition—ultimately against itself. Nancy Spector, curator of the 2003 exhibition of the *Cremaster* cycle at the Guggenheim and author of a definitive catalogue essay, describes how Barney has imagined this brief and transitory period:

> Free from defining pronouns and anatomical indicators, the fetus, for one brief instant, occupies a space of possibility. It lingers before the moment of difference, the 'either-or' that shapes all future thought and action. The *Cremaster* cycle imagines the prospect of suspending this phase indefinitely, resisting the inexorable impetus toward division. Its five installments ponder this internal struggle against definition, while tracing the passage from full ascension to complete descension.[35]

A fantasy that literally re-scripts biology, Barney's narrative depends upon the idea that sex remains undetermined until the physical formation of reproductive organs; yet sex is actually encoded chromosomally and thus is present before it becomes physically manifest in the embryo's forming shape during the sixth week of development (and subsequently, it is after this point that the embryo will enter the fetal stage of development around the eighth week). The titular "cremaster" has nothing, in fact, to do with this process of sexual development. Instead, it refers to the cremaster muscle which controls the scrotum and its response to external temperatures in males.[36] Departing from biological fact, Barney imagines that the cremaster muscle controls the process by which an embryo becomes sexed, lifting the testes to define the

---

[35] Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 33.

[36] In the trailer for the upcoming documentary *I Die Daily* (Matt Walin, 2009), Barney contends that the idea for the use of the cremaster muscle as a key motif came from a conversation with a doctor who told him that the cremaster muscle might be an interesting muscle to use considering Barney's interests in the similarity of the male and female reproductive systems in their early phases.
See: *I Die Daily: The Making of Matthew Barney's* Cremaster *Cycle*, "Trailer," http://mattwalllin.com /barney/trailers.html.

still-forming body as female or causing the testes to fall to define the body as male. Ultimately, in Barney's story, it is hoped that the cremaster muscle might halt the process by which the embryo becomes sexed, allowing the pre-sexed body to remain in a state of non-definition. It should be stressed that although the films' subject is biological, the actual narratives and visual elements of each film often bear no overt relationship to this corporeal story. Just as the developing embryo is enfolded unseen within the maternal body, Barney encapsulates the biological impetus for his sprawling narrative underneath the layers of an elaborate and ornate façade of allegory. Indeed, Barney's choice to use allegory will prove a crucial factor in assessing Barney's work as neo-baroque. Additionally, it may offer insight as to why the neo-baroque is the most appropriate format for Barney's chosen story. Yet, before looking at the cycle's status as allegory, a look at the cycle's most superficial narrative trait—its serial format—is necessary.

Made up of distinct films that nevertheless coalesce into a single story, the *Cremaster* cycle does not adhere to a single narrative path. Instead, shaped by both internal and external factors, its chronologies and narrative paths are myriad. Yet, two dominant narrative orders emerge: the timeline of production (*4,1,5,2,3*) and the numerical order (*1,2,3,4,5*). On the subject of the narrative trajectory of the cycle, Spector concedes that there is more than one option, though she seems to believe that the order of production is secondary to the numerical order. Stating that the underlying notion of a developing embryo wanes in its on-screen presence as each film is completed, she explains, "the *Cremaster* cycle should certainly be viewed in its specified numerical sequence, it should also be experienced in the order it was made (*4,1,5,2,3*), for this will reveal the development of Barney's relationship to the material and of his thinking

process."[37] I believe that the order of production is not merely a means to witness the progression

of Barney's aesthetic but may function as a storyline itself, and it is to its order that I first turn

with a brief synopsis of the cycle as it was created and first witnessed. Here, it should be noted

that though I am choosing to progress from the outside in—moving from a consideration of the

entire cycle towards a single film, *Cremaster 5* (1997)—I could just have easily moved from the

inside out, moving from the void that lies at the center of the cycle to the infinite abyss towards

which it strains. Indeed, the inward-outward, folding-unfolding movement of the cycle is a

crucial aspect of the cycle's structure that puts it in dialogue with Deleuzian theories of the (neo-

)baroque. Yet, by spiraling inward, I hope to mimic the movement of the cycle itself, which, in

its attempts to thwart progress, pushes perversely backward and inward as a hermetically "self-

enclosed organism"[38] whose conflict is encoded from within rather than from an external source.

A "Visual Opera" in Five Acts: The *Cremaster* Cycle

The *Cremaster* cycle's five-part organization, visual excess and multi-media format

suggests the tropes of an operatic production. [39] Because an opera is sung in the language in

which it was written, even when performed for an audience who speaks another language, its

---

[37] Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 30.

[38] Spector uses the term "self-enclosed organism" to describe Barney work—not just the *Cremaster* cycle, but also work like his *Field Dressing (orifill)* (1989). She notes that this concept has as its predecessor Marcel Duchamp's *Bride Stripped Bare of Her Bachelors, Even* (1916-23) as well as works by Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra. Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 6-7.

[39] The works of German Romantic opera composer, Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813-1883) can be thought of as a prime example of the type of operatic production that resonates with Barney's *Cremaster* cycle. Wagner's operas often are regarded as the ultimate examples of the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or the "total work of art." For example, his massive four-opera, fourteen-hour *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (written during the years spanning 1848-1874),or as it is popularly called, the *Ring Cycle*, draws from Nordic mythology to create a sprawling, operatic account of the origins of humanity. Its length, themes, use of legend and devotion to an all-encompassing spectacle no doubt bears a relationship to the trans-media, narrative format of the multi-part *Cremaster* cycle.

storyline often is understood through a translation, its libretto, or simply through on-stage action.

Similarly, when watching Barney's films the viewer absorbs the cycle's visual elements: its

elaborate sets, sculptural props and the physically challenging, seemingly futile actions of its

characters. If understood, the cycle's narrative often is gleaned oftentimes from external,

secondary texts since there is little traditional dialogue. As is revealed by a statement by the

artist, the cycle's resonance with opera is an organizational and aesthetic choice that shaped the

cycle from its earliest conception to its final production. Barney's gallery director, Barbara

Gladstone, recalls an early conversation in which he discussed his plans for a future project that

would be a "visual opera" in five acts.[40] One of these "acts," *Cremaster 5* (1997), literally

appropriates the format of opera and later will be considered as an emblem of the entire cycle.

Functioning as the cycle's first "act," *Cremaster 4* (1994) appeared in the early nineties

as a film accompanied by related sculpture, photographs and drawings. Its film depicts two

intertwined stories: first, a motorcycle race on the Isle Mann between two opposing pairs of

riders called the Ascending Hack and the Descending Hack (Figure 6) and second, the progress

of a red-haired, tap-dancing satyr, the Loughton Candidate, played by the artist himself (Figure

7), who makes his way through the terrain of the island. Alternating between being spectators to

the race and companions to the Loughton Candidate, are a trio of androgynous Faeries: the

Ascending Faerie, the Loughton Faerie and the Descending Faerie (Figure 8). Managing to tap

his way through the floor of a blank white room overlooking the ocean, the Loughton Candidate

proceeds to dig a tunnel in the floor of an ocean and wind his way through a Vaseline-filled,

womblike tunnel (Figure 9). Surfacing at a point in the road where the racers are about to collide,

the story of the satyr and the two teams of racers come together in the film's last scenes.

---

[40] Barbara Gladstone as she appears in the documentary *No Restraint*. Alison Chernick, *No Restraint*, 2006.

Eccentric in its plot and characters the film nevertheless "adheres most closely to the project's biological model."[41]

Cremaster 4 (1994) is followed by Cremaster 1 (1995), a musical spectacular of the tradition of Busby Berkley films of the 1930s. Taking place primarily on the "blue Astroturf playing field of Bronco Stadium in Boise, Idaho—Barney's hometown,"[42] it centers on an iconic blonde female character, Goodyear, played by Marti Domination (Figures 10 and 11). Floating above the field are two Goodyear blimps, and inside each is a white table laden with grapes—in one purple, in the other green—that is attended by a group of stewardesses (Figure 12). Though physically impossible, the character Goodyear simultaneously conceals herself within each blimp, and later in the film, also stars as the central figure of the dancing women performing on the football field. Viewed from above, their synchronized movements make fluctuating, schematic designs (Figure 13): images that "shift from parallel lines to the figure of a barbell, from a large circle to an outline of splitting and multiplying cells, and from a horizontally divided field emblem (Barney's signature motif) to a rendering of an undifferentiated reproductive system (which marks the first six weeks of fetal development)."[43] Seemingly without conflict, Cremaster 1 (1996) is an unabashed spectacle staged for the visual pleasure of its viewer that is dominated by a euphoric tone suggestive of the prelapsarian calm and indulgent fantasy of paradise.

Marking the other end of the cycle numerically, Cremaster 5 (1997) appeared next. An opera, the film features a central female character, the Queen of Chain, played by Ursula Andress

---

[41] Barney, "Cremaster 4: Synopsis," The Cremaster Cycle.
http://www.cremaster.net/crem4.htm#Synopsis.
[42] Barney, "Cremaster 1: Synopsis," The Cremaster Cycle.
http://www.cremaster.net/crem1.htm#Synopsis.
[43] Ibid.

(Figure 14). Like 4's Loughton Candidate and his Faeries or 1's Goodyear and her scores of identically clad dancers, the Queen is accompanied by a pair of near-identical characters referred to as her Ushers (Figure 15). Barney appears in three roles: the Diva, the Giant and the Magician (Figures 16-18). Taking place primarily in the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest, the film also features two other locales in Budapest, the sumptuous Gellert Baths, part of a famed spa complex that opened in 1918, and the Lánchíd Bridge, the bridge that spans the Danube and connects the two sides of Budapest (Figures 19-21). As I will return to this film, I will save the details of its synopsis for the end of this chapter.

Subsequent to *Cremaster 5* (1994), Barney appropriated the biography of murderer Gary Gilmore for the cycle's fourth film, *Cremaster 2* (1999). Made famous by advocating for his own death by firing squad in the 1970s, Gilmore's life was chronicled in the lauded book *The Executioner's Song* by Norman Mailer (1923-2007) in 1979.[44] As re-imagined by Barney, the film depicts both incidents predating Gilmore's birth and significant moments from his life— ranging from Chicago in 1893, the year of the World's Columbian Exposition, to Utah in 1977 the year of Gilmore's execution. Mingling fact and fiction, the film also incorporates the motif of bees into its story, conflating the life and death of Gilmore, played by Barney (Figure 22), with their life cycle. After a depiction of one of Gilmore's crimes, the murder of a gas station attendant (Figure 23), the film turns to an allegorical account of Gilmore's trial and judgment, pictured in the film as an animated vision of the interior of the Mormon Tabernacle. Also included are other iconic moments of Gilmore's famed incarceration, such as a re-enactment of his phone conversation the night before his execution with Johnny Cash, played by a bee-covered man who, instead of speaking, lip syncs to vocals by Steve Tucker of the band Morbid

---

[44] Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979).

Angel. Instead of showing Gilmore's chosen form of death, Barney performs his execution as a

rodeo in which Gilmore rides a bull to their mutual death (Figure 24). The film ends with an

earlier moment in time, the meeting of Gilmore's alleged grandparents, Harry Houdini (played

by his biographer Norman Mailer) and Baby Fay La Foe. As described in the film's web

synopsis, the story embodies the "potential of moving backward in order to escape one's

destiny."[45]

Finally, opening and closing with a scene from Celtic myth (Figure 25), *Cremaster 3*

(2002)—the longest and most elaborately produced of Barney's films—depicts Barney's re-

telling of the building of the Chrysler Building from 1928 to 1930 (Figure 26). Yet, it includes

digressions, detouring not only to its re-enactments of British lore, but also to an approximately

half-hour segment called "The Order" in which Barney enacts a game-like re-imagining of the

five films inside the Guggenheim (Figure 27 and 28). For 3, Barney appears as the Entered

Apprentice (Figure 29). He is both subservient and foil to a character lifted from Masonic

legend, the alleged architect of the Temple of Solomon, Hiram Abiff, also referred to simply as

the Architect played by Minimalist sculptor Richard Serra (Figure 30). Propelling the film's plot

is an act of defiance on the part of the Entered Apprentice, pictured on screen in a performance

in which he fills an elevator of the Chrysler Building with wet cement. The rest of the film traces

his capture and punishment for his heedless act of "hubris." As with all of Barney's films, the

Chrysler Building functions as a character, described as a "host to inner, antagonistic forces at

play for access to the process of (spiritual) transcendence."[46]

<div style="text-align:center">The "One-Multiple": Seriality and the <i>Cremaster</i> Cycle</div>

---

[45] Barney, "*Cremaster 2*: Synopsis," The *Cremaster* Cycle,
http://www.cremaster.net/crem2.htm#Synopsis
[46] Barney, "*Cremaster 3*: Synopsis," The *Cremaster* Cycle,
http://www.cremaster.net/crem3.htm#Synopsis

In order to understand Barney's cycle as (neo-)baroque in its structure, I first look to Deleuze's description of the Leibnizian monad, or a "One-Multiple,"[47] which will provide a framework for considering of the cycle's narrative. A seventeenth-century philosopher and mathematician, Leibniz developed the notion of the monad to describe smallest unit of the physical world. Anticipating the later notion of the atom, it is an enclosed, windowless entity that both contains and brings together multivalent parts into a unified whole.

> As an individual unit, each monad includes the whole series; hence it conveys the entire world, but does not express it *without expressing more clearly a small region of the world, a 'subdivision,' a borough of the city, a finite sequence*. Two souls do not have the same order, but neither do they have same sequence or the same clear or enlightened region. It might even be stated that insofar as it is filled with folds that stretch to infinity the soul can always unfold a limited number of them inside itself, those that made up its subdivision or borough.[48]

Barney's cycle may be mapped onto this schema: a self-enclosed entity that brings together various media and narratives, each component of the cycle contributes to the overall "One-Multiple." In defining the individual and autonomous unit, Deleuze contends, "there necessarily exists an infinity of souls and an infinity of points of view, although each included soul and each point of view may grasp the infinitely infinite seriality."[49] Likewise, Barney's cycle—if not stretching quite to infinity in its possible narrative paths—does contain within its "borough" numerous, pre-destined trajectories that have the potential to unfold. Its array of narrative paths corresponds to a universe not of chaos, but of the myriad "compossibilities" as described by Leibniz.[50]

---

[47] Deleuze, "The Folds in the Soul, "24.
[48] Ibid, 25.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Deleuze states: "Chaos does not exist; it is an abstraction because it is inseparable from a screen that makes something—something rather than nothing—emerge from it." Similarly, Leibniz viewed chaos as "the sum of all possibles," but universe and its order-giving "screen" only lets "compossibles—and only the best combination of compossibles—to be sifted through."

While Deleuze uses Leibniz's philosophy to form a baroque vision of the makeup of the physical world, Omar Calabrese seeks to locate a dominant trend in popular culture that as an inherent "baroque" form. Importantly, in his discussion of seriality, Calabrese makes an important distinction regarding the postmodern and the neo-baroque. Describing the generally accepted postmodern story of how "the 1960s invented multiples" as it did away with the concept of originality, Calabrese believes that the more critical aesthetic of "citation and pastiche" that emerged at this juncture fails to describe many aspects of culture. Indeed, it keeps "us from recognizing the birth of a new aesthetic of repetition."[51] Tracing the trajectory of television serials from the mid-twentieth century to the 1980s, he outlines the progression of television serials from a format of simple, autonomous episodes to a complexly-organized structure that has an over-arching narrative: one that consists of individual episodes structured so that each is essentially a repetition of the others though there is a crucial variation that distinguishes it from the others. Ultimately, I believe that though Barney's cycle involves countless instances of "citation and pastiche," on the level of narrative structure, it operates under a rubric of self-reflexive repetition that mimics the format of the (neo-)baroque seriality Calabrese describes.

Calabrese points out that the earliest television serials—a group represented by mid-century American "classics" such as "Rin-Tin- Tin," "Tarzan" and "Lassie"—have their origins in adventure cinema. This type of serialized fiction does not maintain an overarching narrative, thus there is not a notion of the passage of time with each subsequent episode. Every episode is organized like the others, containing a plot specific to the episode, and thus there is not an overarching, culminating plot to the entire series. The second form of serial has its origins in a

---

Deleuze, "What Is an Event?," 76-77.

[51] Calabrese, "Rhythm and Repetition," 28.

specific book or film. Calabrese cites television serials such as "Ivanhoe" and "Zorro" as examples of this type. Each episode is structurally and thematically related to the one that precedes it and has a vague, slow-paced sense of progress as it follows a foundational narrative as it moves towards a conclusion.[52] The third variety Calabrese distinguishes is the type represented by "Bonanza" in which there is both a sense of the autonomy of the specific episode as well as a sense of progression towards an end. It is the fourth type represented by the series "Colombo" and marked by both a large number of invariables and a "regulated variable" that begins to develop characteristics Calabrese identifies as baroque.

> Variation on a theme or style: this is the first principle of the general baroque aesthetic of virtuosity. In every art virtuosity consists in the total flight from a central organizing principle, by means of a closely knit network of rules, toward a vast polycentric combination and a system based on its transformations.[53]

Each episode repeats the structure of the others, with a crucial alteration in the final stages of the narrative. The ability of the various directors to repeat this structure while maintaining the viewers' interest reveals a level of virtuosity.

Finally, Calabrese describes the neo-baroque serial. Using "Dallas" as his prototype, he describes the enormously complex system: invariable characters that are divided into three generations, each becoming progressively more adaptable and changeable in their "potential relationships" to one another. Calabrese notes that this complicated system "should tend toward disintegration" yet it maintains itself due to its cyclical qualities.

> This stability is founded on two main elements: any narrative development affecting any character is always circular, and each partial story (each internal cycle) is developed as if it intersected the map of fixed characters even though the entire map is simultaneously projected upon it.[54]

---

[52] Ibid, 35-37.
[53] Ibid, 40.
[54] Ibid, 41.

Tellingly, Calabrese invokes the circle to describe this final and "baroque" serial format. Certainly, Barney's *Cremaster* cycle has the most in common with these last two categories: each film exists within the cycle and relays a specific chapter of Barney's account, yet, by the necessity of its form, it also exists as an independent entity. As autonomous films, each seems distinct from the others primarily by variation of the same set of rules. Indeed, with minimal or no plot, scant dialogue and under-developed characters, each film stands out from the other via characteristics that usually are considered variable backdrop to the essential story—set, costume and time period. This is no doubt underscored by Barney's starring role in four out of the five of the films, and despite the fact that his roles change superficially, in each instance he seems bound to a series of actions that often consist of little more than a cryptic physical task based on repetition and physical endurance. Indeed, each installment of the cycle seems to function in a similar Sisyphean loop. Like the mythical Sisyphus, Barney seems bound to repeat self-imposed conflict as he appears again and again throughout the films in shifting guises that seem different only in terms of superficial variation. Indeed, repetition—the hallmark of the serial—guides the cycle just as a simultaneous sense of progression and regression seems to drive the cycle away from a definitive ending.

Like Calabrese, Angela Ndalianis also reads into to the realm of contemporary serialized entertainment evidence of a governing aesthetic of repetition. Of course, writing well over a decade after Calabrese, Ndalianis contends with an expanded realm of entertainment culture whose exponential expansion only underscores the impulse towards variation and repetition that Calabrese describes. Ndalianis explains that "seriality" implies "a copy that seeks to reproduce, multiply or allude to versions of an 'original.'" Indeed, the impulse to copy and repeat is bound

up with the "general movement of open (neo-)baroque form."[55] Founding her notion in the relationship of the first (1605) and second part (1615) parts of Miguel Cervante's *Don Quixote*—a text that must deal with the existence of other, alternate sequels by other authors—Ndalianis sees a similar logic at work in contemporary sequential narratives. Literary forms are turned into films which in turn spawn sequels and spin-offs in other media that often offer alternate and conflicting storylines. Looking to examples of "classic" comic book icons from the early twentieth century such as Superman and Batman, she describes how these comic book characters were adapted to be used in "cross-media serialization"—a process that not only set the tone for the later twentieth century, but continues to proliferate and repeat. Indeed, she points not only to the various filmic versions, but also to recent incarnations in the form of video game adaptations and amusement park rides.[56]

Turning to a more recent example than Batman and Superman, Ndalianis looks closely at the *Alien* saga and the various forms its narrative takes on. As if an inversion of the former comic book heroes, it first appeared in cinematic form, and then became the subject of video games and comic books. Within this varied and repetitious narrative, she reads evidence of variation as a means of expressing creativity. Using Wölfflin's breakdown of classical and baroque forms, she describes each film or comic book in the series as a fragment that contributes to the complete notion of the series as a whole. Though one *Alien* film or comic book can be experienced as an independent entity, each also acts as an episode of the entire story of *Alien*. Citing Calabrese, she makes clear the distinction between a detail and a fragment. While a detail cannot exist without an understanding of its context, the fragment can exist both with and without the larger whole.[57]

---

[55] Ndalianis, "Polycentrism and Seriality,"33.
[56] Ibid, 34.
[57] Ibid, 61.

Likewise, Barney's films may be viewed independently; thus they adhere to the structure of the fragment. Indeed, as an entity composed of interdependent parts, the cycle follows Wölfflin's prescription that a baroque form is composed of a harmony of unified parts, and thus it seems impossible to separate out one film of the *Cremaster* cycle for an in-depth analysis without addressing its relationship to the entire series.

The Acentric and the Polycentric

A discussion of baroque and neo-baroque form inherently involves the discussion of borders. In accordance with Wölfflin's formulations, the baroque form seems to spill over and out of its boundaries. As is hinted at in Caravaggio's *Bacchus* or full-blown in Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, formal devices such as the incorporation of many media or the attempt to simulate the perspective of the viewer's space, create a dialog with the work's own borders. Yet, instead of thinking of a breakdown or deterioration of borders, it is perhaps more productive to consider the baroque system as one that acknowledges and pushes against its borders. In his discussion of the notion of "limit and excess," Calabrese considers the ways in which borders contain a multi-part formal system. He describes the process of "stretching" a system "to the limit." In geometrical or spatial terms a border may be understood as, "a group of points belonging simultaneously to both the inner and outer space of a configuration."[58] The border is a limiting part of the system that is not necessarily solid and impassable. This means that elements can enter an impenetrable system and bring change from exterior sources. Implicit in the notion of a bordered system is its center—which can be in the literal center or not. Understanding where a form's center is located helps determine the potential for internal expansion or change of the borders. Calabrese establishes that there are two types of bordered aesthetic systems: the

---

[58] Calabrese, "Limit and Excess," 47.

"centric" and the "acentric." While the first type has a single, stable center, the second has either multiple centers or a center that is located outside of the center, close to its edge. Using fellow semiologist Yuri Lotman's model of a state's capital, Calabrese maintains that in an acentric system, when a center is placed near a border, it will grow to accommodate the center because of tension from within. [59]

Composed of a series of interrelated but autonomous fragments, the *Cremaster* cycle is a series whose order may shift. Furthermore, its "center," or its starting-, mid- and end-point changes with each sequential configuration. Of course, the two dominant narrative paths, the order of production and the numerical order, respectively situate *Cremaster 5* (1997) and *Cremaster 3* (2002) as possible centers around which the rest of the cycle configures. Thus I suggest that the *Cremaster* Cycle's structure may be thought of as an endlessly shifting narrative and thus understood as an acentric system. Indeed, Barney has described his films as maintaining a state of fluctuating "tailspin." That is, the monadic films—lacking a definitive narrative center—orbit each other, functioning as a larger monad or, to employ Spector's terminology, "hermetic organism." As I discuss in the final chapter, Barney's underlying narrative of an organism in conflict with itself in order to preserve its pre-sexual existence in which it is neither male nor female—or, delimited by any form of categorization—is itself inherently tied to the notions of limit and transgression and will prove to be inextricably bound to the form of the cycle itself.

With at least two possible narrative centers, the *Cremaster* cycle is not simply acentric, but is perhaps also understood as "polycentric." As understood by Ndalianis, the polycentric form may be defined as one that has many "originals" and myriad references to other texts. As an

---

[59] Ibid, 47-48.

accumulation of fragments, Ndalianis asserts that the network of films, games and comic books

that altogether make-up the *Alien* series is organized so as to not have single center. Using center

in this context to indicate "original" story on which other serial additions are based, Ndalianis

looks to the comic *Alien s/Predator: The Deadliest of Species*. In this twelve-part series, *Alien*

has been combined with elements of the *Predator* series in order to arrive at hybrid, but distinct

form (just as the creature itself is a half-alien, half-predator hybrid). Importantly, complete

comprehension of the new form depends somewhat on familiarity with pre-existing

manifestations of *Alien* and *Predator*, making "intertextuality and self-reflexivity" crucial

components of a neo-baroque form.[60] It shared and lifts "basic signs" with other texts— in the

case of *The Deadliest of Species*, not just *Alien* and *Predator*, but also *Blade Runner*, *Terminator*

and *Star Trek.*[61] Constantly referencing external texts both within and without the *Alien* series,

its"[b]oundaries are fluid, and each new fragment introduced into the series whole by necessity

transforms the whole."[62] Likewise, Barney's points of departure are many. To invoke only a few

of the many, he appropriates and modifies various histories and stories: Busby Berkley cinema,

Mormonism, mythological stories and the biography of individuals such as Harry Houdini and

Gary Gilmore to craft his cycle. Perhaps more importantly, the *Cremaster* cycle includes within

its own borders "spin-offs" and "re-makes." Sculptures and films stills exist that are based on a

film or moment in a film but do not appear on screen. Furthermore, within the films themselves

is a re-configured replication of the cycle's own form, *Cremaster 3*'s "The Order." The only

portion of the cycle available for mass reproduction and consumption (the DVD can be

purchased for a reasonable price), this segment re-scripts the cycle as a series of obstacles set up

---

[60] Ibid, 62-63.
[61] Ibid, 66.
[62] Ndalianis, "Polycentrism and Seriality,"64.

in the Guggenheim. In this film within a film, Barney's character, the Entered Apprentice, must move through five ascending levels, each set up to represent one of the five films. Importantly, in this sequence, the five levels are organized according to the numerical order of the cycle and possesses a video-game-like quality (one that Wayne Bremser discusses in his comparison of "The Order" to video games such as Donkey Kong and the Mario Brothers, published on-line as a blog). [63] Following the seemingly "natural" progression from film to video game spin-off of *Batman* or *Alien*, a video game version of the cycle has emerged. Based on the films but transforming them into cartoon-like copies, the games re-script the narrative of the films so as to allow the spectator to interactively participate in the unfolding narrative.[64] Finally, extending beyond the bounds of the cycle, an intertextual relationship exists between Barney's *Cremaster* cycle and his other work. The conceptual themes such as the suspension of potential and the use of self-imposed limits that appear in the *Cremaster* cycle are also present in his *Drawing Restraint* series in which Barney first explores the notion of the "hypertrophic" harnessing of creative energy.[65]

---

[63] Wayne Bremser, "Matthew Barney Versus Donkey Kong," Game Girl Advance. May 23, 2003.
http://www.gamegirladvance.com/archives/2003/05/23/matthew_barney_versus_donkey_kong.html.

[64] Seemingly "The Order" was the first to be translated to a video game. The following information appeared on the website "Cremaster Fanatic" in January 2009: " Cremaster Fanatic Paul sent us information on this level based on "The Order" sequence from *Cremaster 3* that he created for the PlayStation 3 game Little Big Planet. If you have a PS3 and the game, you can search for it on the community page and play it yourself (the level is called "The Order" and Paul's PSN username is 'fluxlasers')." "Matthew Barney News: January 16, 2009." Cremaster *Fanatic.* http://cremasterfanatic.blogspot.com/2009/01/cremaster-video-game-for-ps3.html.

[65] *Drawing Restraint* perhaps relies on the serial format and notion of variation even more than the *Cremaster* cycle. Each successive project builds upon the one that precedes it, yet each is also a variation on the theme of struggling against constriction—usually self-imposed—in order to create a work of art. Though they range from a relatively simple construction that hinders the artist's movements to a massive undertaking on a Japanese whaling ship, the motif of the artist and his physical limits is constant. It is only through varying the type of constraints, scale,

The *Cremaster* Cycle as Allegory

Essentially crafted around the notion of a developing embryo and the desire to keep this developing form suspended in this state of "pure potential," the five films of *Cremaster* Cycle seem to depict everything but this biological story. Thus as I contend at the beginning of this chapter, the films must be considered as an allegory—a form that requires the use of one story to convey another as well as the effort of its reader or viewer to make the connections between the superficial story and the one that lies beneath this outer layer of narrative. Though it appears in storytelling throughout Western culture, allegory maintains an association with the period that embraced it most, the baroque, and like the plastic arts of the seventeenth century, it experiences a revival of scholarly attention in the early twentieth century. Indeed, just as Wölfflin re-assesses the baroque at the turn of the century, Benjamin soon follows, writing a thorough and definitive analysis of baroque allegory in the 1920s. Predicated upon a distinction between symbol and allegory, Benjamin's *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1928) functions similarly to Wölfflin's studies of the baroque, working to dismantle debasing attitudes toward the baroque that are, in part, the lineage of the Enlightenment.[66]

---

setting, use of costume, and other elements that each successive installation, performance, or film differs from the others and therefore "entertains" its audience.

[66] Allegory is a type that has also been claimed by postmodern critical theory. In "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" (1980), Craig Owens stakes for the postmodern what Benjamin already claimed as baroque. Drawing heavily from the German literary critic, though Owens re-scripts allegory in "structuralist terms," defining it as "the projection of the metaphoric axis of language onto its metonymic dimension." Postmodern, contemporary art that employs allegory, claims Owens, is marked by a synthesis of previously disparate media that is mirrored by a "confusion of genre" and "hybridization."Owens looks to allegory to serve as a unifier of otherwise disparate artistic practices that have all been labeled postmodern. According to Owens, appropriation art, ephemeral site-specific work and "paratactic" work that allows for buildup or "accumulation" of objects are the three manifestations of contemporary art that are markedly different.[66] What brings them together is a re-tooling of the art object that may result in different forms and interpretations, but through the shared employment of allegory, oppose the modernist art object (again, especially the

As Gunnar Bennett shows, during the eighteenth century Winckelmann argued for the

use of a clearly decipherable allegory in which there is a literal connection between the

allegorical story or picture and that which it represents. Continuing to look for a direct relation

between text (or image) and its meaning, the subsequent generation of Romantics, lead by

Heinrich de Meyer and Goethe, argued that the symbol took precedence over allegory. "Symbol"

thus came to be understood as a literal representation of that which it visualizes, a "form," while

allegory was defined as "communicative sign" pertaining to "content."[67] Under Romanticism,

allegory was dismissed as illustrative, a secondary and indirect form of communication. Yet for

Benjamin, it is the Romantic notion of the symbol proves inadequate. As he contends, the notion

---

Greenbergian brand of modernism).Owens contends that modernism tended to privilege the romantic notion of the symbol which he explains, via Benjamin, is a sign thought to communicate meaning fully and directly. See Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October*, Vol. 12. (Spring, 1980), 69-72, 84.

Owens' use of allegory to unify disparate contemporary art practices, seems related to discussion about Barney's work and its relationship to work used by artists as a platform of critique. Barney's work no doubt bears a resemblance to genres of art in which appropriation is used as a platform for critique of popular and consumer culture. Yet, it functions differently and this difference should be taken as significant. For example, Alexandra Keller and Frazer Ward read Barney's work as lacking the spirit of protest inherent to the movements to which he seems indebted: Minimalism and performance art of the 1960s and 70s that, for the authors, can be traced back to Duchamp's readymades. Working with a medium—film—that is easy to re-produce, Barney's work nevertheless embraces an attitude antithetical to the anti-consumerist potential of cinema by denying its mass production. Indeed, though related to Duchamp because of a "mass-produced and reproduced" quality that is inherent to cinema, Keller and Ward argue that "Barney's elaborate and expensive productions can hardly be seen to participate in the critique of the commodity but rather in its celebration." Alexandra Keller and Frazer Ward, "Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 45, Issue 2, (Winter 2006): 9.

Spector relates Barney's cycle to 1980s Appropriation art, though she is careful to note that the relationship to artists like Sherman or Jeff Koons only exists "superficially." Rather than seeking to comment and critique upon culture, she interprets Barney's free borrowing of film and popular culture differently: "he inhabits genres because they supply vocabularies and aesthetics that will advance his narrative." Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 76.

[67] Gunnar Bennett. "On Symbol and Allegory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28, no. 2 (Winter, 1969): 202.

that the symbol provides unmediated access to that which it refers is false. It is with allegory that

he finds an apt description of the relationship of ideas to signs.

Though he considers allegory as a larger concept, Benjamin's study focuses on a specific

form of baroque theatrical allegory, German mourning drama, or *Trauerspiel* of the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries that pieces together disparate fragments of history in order to create a

distinct play. Deferring their conclusion to the Christian Final Judgment, these plays are

constructed so as to project their final moments into an unforeseen future, prompting Benjamin's

famous summation: "the baroque knows no eschatology and for that very reason it has no

mechanism by which it gathers all earthly things in together and exalts them before consigning

them to their end."[68] Superficially, the *Cremaster* cycle resonates with this older, baroque form

of drama as Benjamin describes it: lacking definitive ending, the cycle is comprised of

accumulation of parts—both the five films and the disparate elements that make up each film—

each referring to a moment or multiple moments in history.

Given that the allegoric structure of *Trauerspiel* lacks finality, for Benjamin its structure

accounts more accurately for the relationship between the medium of representation and that

which it represents: signifier and signified are separated by an irreparable fissure.[69] Clearly,

given Barney's chosen themes—the deferment of definition and the suspension of potential—

allegory is the most accurate form to convey his content. Like *Trauerspiel*, Barney crafts his

series so as to avoid finality and conclusion. Barney not only defers the end of his narrative by

---

[68] Benjamin, 66.

[69] Benjamin, "Allegory and *Trauerspiel*," 162. To illustrate this notion, Benjamin cites a long quote by Schopenhauer, who informs his reader that a viewer of Annibale Carracci's *Genius of Fame* could have the same experience from reading the word "fame." Though Benjamin does not fully agree with Schopenhauer's explanation of allegory, he does believe that Schopenhauer has caught on to the fact that allegory is aligned most precisely with writing. Indeed, Benjamin contends that allegory is a valid mode of expression that is not merely "illustrative," rather it is a collection of signs like speech and, even more so, like writing.

confusing the narrative order and offering various routes through the cycle, but as I discuss at the end of this chapter, also writes into the cycle's ostensible end, *Cremaster 5* (1997), two possible conclusions—one of which leads the viewer to another point in the cycle.

Benjamin's metaphor for allegory itself is the ruin. For him, it is a "significant fragment," the site where history and nature intersect. Bearing the imprints of time and decay, the ruin's crumbling antique architecture can never recover its complete and original form even though it persists without foreseeable end into the centuries. It conjures the past but can never access it, and is thus for Benjamin the quintessential baroque form. [70] Importantly, it is the fragmented forms of the antique that comprises the baroque ruin, and furthermore, it is not just the ruin, but the amassing of ruins that characterizes the baroque creation: "it is common practice…to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of goal, and, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, to take to the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification."[71] As I will discuss below, I believe that the impulse to "pile up fragments ceaselessly" describe the impetus behind Barney's cycle, but before I do so, I turn to Ndalianis' re-treatment of Benjamin's ruin. Building on Benjamin, Ndalianis offers a different, and for her, more optimistic deployment of the ruin. First, she attends to Frederic Jameson's understanding and interpretation of the ruin. Advocating a Marxist brand of postmodernism, Jameson describes the ruin as a nostalgia-laden remnant from the past that embodies the notion of fragmentation. This fragmentation serves as an emblem of the absence of originality and creativity in postmodern, consumer-driven culture. Perhaps taking liberties with Benjamin's motif, Ndalianis also locates "creativity" in the fragmented, crumbling form of the ruin: "That which has succumbed to the ordeals of time also embodies an awareness of the process of time. Likewise, that which has become a fragment may

---

[70] Benjamin, "Allegory and Trauerspiel," 180.
[71] Ibid, 178.

also be metamorphosed into a creation of its own right."[72] As is evidenced by Jameson and

Ndalianis' mutual interest, in the ruin is another place in which the neo-baroque and postmodern

overlap each other. Yet it should be stressed, Ndalianis seems to use the ruin as the source of

building blocks for a new form that though imbued with the past, takes on new connotations in

its new form—and, it seems important to note, the baroque always was built upon the re-

assembled ruins of the classical past. To invoke two artists from Chapter 1, I believe

Caravaggio's *Self-Portrait as Bacchus*, built from the ruins of classicism (since it features the

artist in the guise of a Roman god), emblematizes the baroque ruin. His image of self becomes

emblematic, deferring always the revelation of self, and when Sherman re-constructs it, she cites

not only the seventeenth century, but the origin-less myths of antiquity. It is as if they embody

Benjamin's envisioning of the roots of allegory: "The three most important impulses in the origin

of western allegory are non-antique, anti-antique: the gods project into the alien world, they

become evil, and they become creatures."[73] Likewise, populating his cinematic worlds with

satyrs and giants who at times seem jarringly out of place, Barney builds upon the ruins of the

past in order to create his own allegory. Composed of shards and remnants of past styles and

stories, the *Cremaster* cycle is in its most basic form an accumulation of discordant fragments of

history. To cite only a few instances: Masonic rituals are transformed into game-like experiences

that take place against a soundtrack of hardcore punk, a Victorian picnic interrupts a motorcycle

race and Harry Houdini's stunts are recycled as part of an operatic performance. Superficially,

Barney seems to literalize Benjamin's notion of the baroque allegory as one which "ceaselessly"

amasses fragments without specific "goal" or purpose "and, in the unremitting expectation of a

---

[72] Ndalianis, "Polycentrism and Seriality," 55-56.
[73] Benjamin, 225.

miracle, to take to the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification."[74] Indeed, it is the former notion—the recycling of stereotypes with significant purpose—to which I now turn. Just as the *Cremaster* Cycle does not have a single order, it seems unlikely that its allegory has a single story at its heart.

Allegory, History and the *Cremaster* Cycle

Just as Benjamin uses the ruin to emblematize allegory itself, I believe that Barney, in a similar gesture, uses the fragments of the past to act as an allegory of Western history that may be sketched as follows. After a rudimentary beginning, Western culture is said to enter into an idyllic period of classicism, which is associated with the society of the ancient Greco-Roman world. Following this Arcadian beginning, there is its inevitable decline—the Middle Ages in Europe—that is amended by a revival, or renaissance, of classical values that is itself followed by another falling away from these same values. Citing these foundational and stereotypical notions of Western history, Barney both follows and plays with fragments from diverse moments and eras, and ultimately mimics Wölfflin's conception of history.

Both dealing in its stereotypes and seeking a more complex notion, Wölfflin contends that a trajectory of history in which there is a simple move from the purity and idealism of classical origins to the decay of the baroque to be insufficient. Instead, he advocates an evolution of style that lacks derogatory implications (though it proves useful to keep in mind the notion of a high and low binary in relationship to Barney's narrative of ascent and descent). For Wölfflin,

---

[74] Ibid, 178.

the classical and baroque are intertwined binaries that contain miniature duplications of the same shift from the classical to baroque.

> The word classic here denotes no judgment of value, for the baroque has its classicism too. Baroque (or, let say, modern art) is neither a rise nor a decline from classic, but a totally different art. The occidental development of modern times cannot simply be reduced to a curve with rise, height, and decline: it has two culminating points.[75]

As established, I believe the entire *Cremaster* cycle functions as a neo-baroque form, yet within this form, there is an oscillation between the classical and the baroque. One way to witness this shift from classical to baroque would be to consider the increasingly expensive and spectacular nature of the productions as Barney's aesthetic matured and he generated more funding. The other would be to look at the numerical order of the films in order to locate an allegory of history itself.

Following the numerical sequence of the cycle means beginning with the second film to be created and the only one that does not include Barney as one of the film's characters, *Cremaster 1* (1996). Indeed, for my purposes it represents the classical moment within this neo-baroque cycle of films. Mimicking the forms and style of Busby Berkeley musicals of the 1930s, it is modeled after an eccentric subgenre of the first half of the twentieth century—in the context of cinema, an era often regarded as its golden years. Barney's appropriation of the early cinematic sub-genre has two important implications. First, it recalls the structure of "classic" Hollywood cinema. Ndalianis contends that Wölfflin's closed, classical form can be used to describe the "classical Hollywood narrative."[76] She points to Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's

---

[75] Heinrich Wölfflin, "The Most General Representational Forms," in *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 115.
[76] Ndalianis, "Polycentrism and Seriality," 60-61.

The Classical Hollywood Cinema (1985),[77] a study that, via Andre Bazin's *What is Cinema?* (1967), aligns cinema predating 1960 with the renaissance and classical formal structures. Ndalianis writes that "norms that reflect a closed attitude to form through centered framing, narrative progression, and resolution," result in a sense of "narrative unity and a refusal to exceed the purposes required of the story action."[78] Significantly, this is the only film in which Barney himself does not appear—despite the fact that he already featured himself prominently in the film made prior to *1* (1996), *Cremaster 4* (1994). This suggests that Barney does not wish to violate the closed border of this classical system.[79]

Barney's use of Busby Berkeley's style is also significant in the sense that Busby Berkeley can be seen as an earlier manifestation of a baroque aesthetic in the twentieth century. As discussed in the first chapter, Stephen Calloway points out that the initial decades of the twentieth century revealed an early taste for baroque style, one that remained an eccentric sub-current running alongside the rise of the modern until the end of the twentieth century when it expanded to become a dominant cultural taste.[80] Thus, Busby Berkeley musicals should be understood as part of a sub-cultural trend in the 1930s. Of course, the whimsical and extravagant

---

[77]See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. (New York: Columbia Press, 1985), 384-386.

[78] Ndalianis, "Virtuosity, Special-Effects Spectacles, and Architectures of the Senses," 159.

[79] Foucault's discussion of Velazquez's inclusion of himself in *Las Meninas* (1656) likens the artist's presence with the elision of classical boundaries. See Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas" in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (Random House, New York: 1970), 3-16.

[80] In "The *Cremaster* Glossary" (part of Spector's catalogue), Neville Wakefield uses quotations from a variety of texts to define terms related to the cycle. His entry for "excess" is a quote from Martin Rubins's book on Busby Berkeley musicals that reveals the inherent affinity of excess, spectacle, and this early Hollywood genre: "Of crucial importance to the creation of Berkeley-esque spectacle is as sense of gratuitousness, of uselessness, of extravagance, of rampant excess, of over-indulgence, of flaunting, of conspicuous consumption, of display for the sake of display, of elements drawing attention to themselves rather than serving a higher, all-encompassing concept such as the narrative." Quoted from: "Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 41."

films seemed to emerge in order to counter the harsh realties of the Depression, yet they also reveal what Calloway argues is an early proclivity in the twentieth century for the baroque.[81] Working in the context of Barney's films, their presence in *1* seems to anticipate the move toward the full-blown baroque-rococo style of *5*. Furthermore, Barney's insertion of this cinematic reference into *Cremaster 1* (1996) can be read as an inversion of history: with its references to early twentieth-century cinema, *1* predates the late-nineteenth-century opera represented in *5*.

Cremaster 1 (1996) is followed by the "Gothic western"[82] of *Cremaster 2* (1999). This designation refers to both the Gothic as historical period (situated between antiquity and the Renaissance) as well as its revived usage in the nineteenth century, though of course, in both instances it is an anti-classical style. The designation "Gothic western" also refers to the American cinematic genre of the Western, which reached its height in the 1950s. Following *1*, it can thus be understood as a style that chronologically follows the Busby Berkeley films of the thirties and thus a continuation of the move from classical to baroque. With the life and execution of Gary Gilmore as its subject, *2* includes the first portrayal of death in the *Cremaster* cycle and is the first film (numerically) in which Barney appears on screen as if to suggest the deterioration of the rigid borders of the classical. Taking as its subject the building of the Chrysler Building, *Cremaster 3* (2002) can be understood to represent innovation, humanist accomplishment, rationalism and ascent: all terms associated with the classical and the revival of

---

[81] Calloway, "Neo-Baroque Fantasy and Frivolity," 103-104. Also, see Ndalianis, "Introduction,"10-11.

[82] This categorization, is based on an explanatory section of the Guggenheim's website. "Matthew Barney—The *Cremaster* Cycle: Genre and Narrative." http://artscurriculum.guggenheim.org/lessons/cremaster_L5.php

the classical, or a renaissance. Importantly, though, it is a brief, short-lived "renaissance" since the building is completed on the eve of America's Great Depression and remains the world's tallest skyscraper for a little less than a year before the Empire State Building takes its place. The Chrysler Building also relates to the "classical" moment of the cycle, *Cremaster 1* (1997) since it comes out of the same era, and furthermore references a "baroque" classicism with its eccentric use of car motifs and art deco style as designed by "the Ziegfeld of his profession[,]" William Van Alen (1882-1954).[83] *3* is also the moment in the cycle when Barney's character for this film, the Entered Apprentice, enters into an Oedipal conflict—brought on by the Entered Apprentice's "hubris"—with the character of the Architect.

Following the numeric chronology, *Cremaster 3* (2002) represents the climatic midpoint of the cycle, and with its themes of humanist triumph and the struggle of younger generation to overtake its predecessor, it may be aligned with moments of ascent in human progress, moments such as the Renaissance or Enlightenment in Europe. Following this zenith, *Cremaster 4* (1994) hints at the theme of descension that arguably reaches its fruition with *Cremaster 5* (1997). Opening with Barney's tap dance through the floor recalls another cinematic moment, Fred Astaire's surreal performance in which he tap dances his way around the walls and ceiling or a room (from MGM's *Royal Wedding* [1951]), *Cremaster 4* (1994) draws from disparate periods: the motorcycle race belongs to the twentieth-century, the Victorian dress of the faeries refers to the nineteenth century and the satyr-like body of the Loughton candidate conjures classical myth. Placed at this juncture in the cycle, this film suggests a transitory period, such as Mannerism, that marks the shift from the "renaissance" quality of *Cremaster 3* (2002) to the "baroque"

---

[83] Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Buildings and Architects," in *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 21. The likening of Van Alen to Ziegfeld comes from a review cited by Robinson and Bletter. See Kenneth Murchison, "The Chrysler Building as I See It," *American Architect* 138 (September 1930): 24.

quality of *Cremaster 5* (1997).[84] Finally, *Cremaster 5* (1997), a film that makes overt visual and thematic references to baroque and rococo art and culture, represents the cycle—borrowing Barney's terminology—in a state of descension. Presented as an opera and therefore echoing the intentionally operatic format of the entire cycle, 5 functions as a play-within-a-play, a common device of the baroque made most famous by Shakespeare. Since this film is arguably the "baroque" moment of the *Cremaster* cycle—its own play-within-a-play moment—it will be used to explore the themes of the neo-baroque, themes that are present to some degree throughout the entire cycle. Yet, *5* may be pushed against a parallel moment. By pitting against the other dominant instance of apex-conclusion (numerically in the center but made last), *3*—which also includes an internal re-make of the cycle with the game-like re-enactment in the Guggenheim, "The Order"—it finally is made evident how Barney seems to play with history in order to reveal the deceiving and specious nature of its tropes.

Cremaster 3 (2002) adopts the construction of the Chrysler Building in the years 1928-1930 for the springboard of its narrative, while *Cremaster 5*(1997) employs the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest as the setting for its stylized version of a late nineteenth-century opera. The former evokes a moment of achievement in twentieth-century American culture, the completion of the tallest skyscraper of the day (until the completion of the Empire State Building in 1931). The latter recalls the baroque through its use of opera, an invention of the Italian early seventeenth-century theatre, and its setting, the hybridized renaissance-baroque architecture of the Hungarian State Opera House (completed in 1884).[85] As used by Barney in his cycle, these

---

[84] Focusing on *Cremaster 4* (one of two of the *Cremaster* films that existed at the time of his writing), Micheal Onfray argues for a "mannerist" reading of Matthew Barney's work. See Onfray, Michael."Mannerist Variations on Matthew Barney," *Parkett* 45 (1995): 50-57.

[85]*Time Out Budapest Guide* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 52. As quoted by Neville

structures come to signify ascent and descent—adhering not only to Barney's gendered associations with these terms, but also to the narrative of history. Yet, the associations are complicated. On the brink economic crisis, the Depression in the United States, there is accomplishment—the completion of the nation's tallest skyscraper whose unconventional, automotive and art deco motifs make it interestingly "baroque." Alternately, in a period scripted as falling away from classical values, the European baroque, there is invention—the birth of opera, a dramatic form designed to emulate what was believed to be the format of the classical, Greco-Roman stage. In Barney's cycle, ascent (coded feminine) is translated to a story that is overwhelmingly masculine: the upward rise of the phallic skyscraper that houses a father-son conflict between its two primary characters—the Entered Apprentice, played by Barney, and Hiram Abriff, played by Richard Serra. Descent (coded masculine) is expressed as an opera that consists of a single, mournful lament sung by a maternal Queen, played by Ursula Andress, who, as Barney's synopsis tells, longs for her lost lover—the Magician, a character again played by Barney.[86] Here, the stereotypes of Western history are both used and pushed against in the same gesture so as to finally invert their connotations, hinting at the floating stasis of in-definition of which Barney dreams.

Seriality, Allegory and the Labyrinth

As the baroque apex of the cycle, *Cremaster 5* (1997) functions as a culmination and a point around which the other four films may orbit, just as the camera circles the elaborate chandelier surrounded by a trompe-l'oeil ceiling at the zenith of the empty opera house as if

Wakefield, "Hungarian State Opera House," "The *Cremaster* Glossary," in *The* Cremaster *Cycle*, 102.

[86] Barney, "*Cremaster 5*: Synopsis," The *Cremaster* Cycle, http://www.cremaster.net/crem5.htm#Synopsis

seeking, but never locating a stable center point. This is a move that recalls Deleuze's account of

the baroque. The notion of an infinite, actively expanding universe is described by Deleuze as

> a universe that has lost all *center* as well as any figure that could be attributed to it; but
> the essence of the Baroque is that it is given unity, through a projection that emanates
> from a summit as a point of view. For sometimes the world has been understood on a
> theatrical basis, as a dream, an illusion – as Harlequin's costume, as Leibniz would say.[87]

Like this Leibnizian universe, the *Cremaster* cycle is both acentric and polycentric, shifting

under the weight of whichever particular viewing or interpretation seems momentarily more

appropriate. A highly personal fantasy that takes as its subject the initial moments of human

development —if only to pervert, re-shape and rob of its center as it seeks to re-script these

boundaries that we imagine are laid out in this process of becoming.

The multiple, but finally intertwined, narrative paths that the films may take suggest a

key motif of neo-baroque literature (as I outline below): the labyrinth. Indeed, the labyrinth is

perhaps the motif under which the *Cremaster* cycle's seriality and allegorical formats, its

manifold paths and meanings, come together. Deleuze describes the multi-course make-up of a

labyrinth as a baroque form. "A labyrinth is said, etymologically, to be multiple because it

contains many folds. The multiple is not only what has many parts but also what is folded in

many ways."[88] Similarly, Calabrese conceives of the labyrinth as an inherently baroque form, an

emblem of "*intelligent complexity*" that is characterized by "the pleasure of becoming lost when

confronted by its inextricability (followed by fear) and the taste for solving something by the

concentrated use of reason."[89] It is the perpetuation of mystery or "the pleasure of loss and

enigma" that is definitive of the labyrinthine form that Calabrese sees as evident in examples

---

[87] Deleuze, "The New Harmony," 121.
[88] Deleuze, "The Pleats of Matter," 3.
[89] Calabrese, "The Knot and the Labyrinth," 131.

from cinema, and finally, in the personal computers of the 1980s.[90] Accordingly, Ndalianis uses

the labyrinth as a motif to account for more recent computer and video games. Citing Calabrese

and Deleuze's deployment of the labyrinth as an inherently neo-baroque form, Ndalianis further

draws her understanding of the labyrinth from two other theorists, Penelope Doob[91] and Umbreto

Eco. Importantly for Ndalianis, Doob contends that a quality of "labyrinthicity" in a work of

literature or art makes it baroque. She further categorizes the labyrinth into two types, the

unicural (a single if roundabout path that leads to a central endpoint or exit) and the multicursal

(or maze, it has many intersecting paths lead to either an endpoint or a dead-end), and determines

that the former is most relevant to textual forms from the seventeenth century. Likewise, Eco

shows that the maze comes out of the renaissance though it reaches its zenith in the seventeenth

century.[92]

To illustrate the nature of the labyrinth in a seventeenth-century cultural product and its

relevance to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Ndalianis turns to a comparison of

a Pietro da Cortona fresco in the Palazzo Barberini, Rome, and cinema and video games from the

late twentieth century. Cortona's complex and dense *Divine Providence/The Glorification of*

Urban the VIII (1633-1639) is emblematic of Doob's multicursal type, and for Ndalianis, the

predecessor of contemporary forms such the as the *Evil Dead* series for Ndalianis. Outlining the

social and historical context of the multi-faceted ceiling, Ndalianis uses both the visual format

and narrative schema to explain the quintessential baroque principle of labyrinthicity. As she

---

[90] Calabrese believes that the culture of the 1980s reveals a profound interest in the form of the labyrinth, citing literal examples in cinema (such as Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* [1980] and Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* [1986]) and literature (such as Gore Vidal's *Duluth* [1983]), though it is finally in the form of the incredibly complex personal computer that he sees a quintessentially labyrinthine structure. (Ibid, 135,137,141-143.)

[91] Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*. (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[92] Ndalianis, "Intertextuality, Labyrinths, and the (Neo-)Baroque," 82-4.

explains, Cortona's fresco consists of five distinct but overlapping and intertwined scenarios: four mythological scenes and a central section depicting the figure of Divine Providence. Each conveys a specific story, yet altogether the fresco serves as an allegory of the pope's—and by extension, the Barberini's—divine ascent to power, and it is this predominate allegory that unites the ceiling. For Ndalianis, the multi-faceted fresco is reminiscent of "the motions of seriality," as "the work has no obvious beginnings and endings; instead, it is possible to enter the work at any of its multiple 'narrative points.'"[93] Undoubtedly, a similar logic makes up the foundation of the *Cremaster* cycle. As with the Barberini Ceiling, one can enter Barney's cycle of films at any point in the cycle (or any point in a single film) and become pleasurably lost and immersed in the various narrative paths that the five films may take. Yet, becoming absorbed in the myriad and intertwined paths of the cycle does not mean that order—that which it seems to reject—is absent.

Ndalianis contends that Cortona's Barberini ceiling's complex system of relationships and narrative initially "overwhelms," yet its complexity is not so much an expression of confusion or disorder as it is an articulation of classical order taken to its limit. That is, though it courts an aesthetic of chaos, it is on the level of form, orchestrated to the "motions of the multidirectional labyrinth." Furthermore, its structural complexity goes beyond its visual form. Cortona's fresco's conceptual framework incorporates myriad intertextual relationships that often rely on the viewer's knowledge of classical mythology of course, but also, other works of art Cortona references and seeks to out-do (namely Annibale Carracci's fresco cycle, *The Loves of the Gods* for the ceiling of the Palazzo Farnese, Rome, 1597-1601) or contemporaneous political tensions (the Barberini family's struggle for power).[94] Finally it allows for a crucial aspect of the neo-baroque form that Ndalianis lifts from Doob: the many "possibilities of

---

[93] Ibid, 84.
[94] Ibid, 86.

interpretation" engendered by the inner pandemonium of Cortona's composition. Of course, Ndalianis is careful to point out that most texts and works of art are predicated upon an inclusive variety of feasible interpretations, but that "the baroque aspects of labyrinthicity emerge when the construction of the labyrinth itself—its 'paradigmatic' level—becomes a significant source of the work's meaning." [95] So, for Ndalianis the baroque form is distinguished by its maker's commitment to keeping its narrative and meaning open-ended and, importantly, expressing this concept on the level of structure. For her, one may begin to define the neo-baroque under the same rubric, though importantly it continues to elaborate upon and extend the formal and conceptual borders of the baroque.

Ndalianis' distinguishing of the baroque and neo-baroque is not merely a matter of degree. Instead, the neo-baroque re-iterates and continues the aims of the baroque and its labrythinicity but with a willing acceptance of contradictions within the text or form. For example, in the Barberini Ceiling, a single allegory—the ascent to power of Urban VIII—weds the seemingly disparate mythological scenes and disorienting visual framework. Invoking Deleuze, Ndalianis states "it is the Urban VIII allegory that provides unity to the scene, transforming the various monadic elements and multidirectional folds into a unity—into the compossible journey."[96] For contrast, she looks to a series of films that, for her, embody the neo-baroque form: the relationship of *Evil Dead* and its sequel, *Evil Dead II*. Without going into specifics, the plot of the horror film *Evil Dead* is changed and re-filmed in the opening scenes of *Evil Dead II*. Unabashedly taking liberties with what would under conventional circumstances be a cohesive story—a sequel generally builds upon and continues the story of its predecessor—*Evil Dead II* "both accepts *and* denies the validity of its allusions, in the process creating multiple

---

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ndalianis, "Intertextuality, Labyrinths, and the (Neo-)Baroque," 93.

narratives that then co-exist."[97] Thus the spectator must contend with at least two narratives

brought together under the same title and be able to simultaneously distinguish and merge the

alternate storylines. This willingness to write tension and conflict into the very structure of a text

or image makes the complicated nature of the neo-baroque structure distinct from the complex

but ultimately reconcilable baroque form. As with the first two films of the *Evil Dead* series, the

Cremaster cycle takes liberties with its plot and inner chronology that do not always correspond

to one another. Indeed, Barney may take a step backward in time or re-iterate a moment from

another film in an unfamiliar guise. For example, *Cremaster 3* (2002) includes Gary Gilmore's

"return" in the form of an animated horrific female corpse seems to deny the fact of his death

enacted in 2 (Figure 31). Confusingly, 2 ends with the meeting of Gilmore's supposed

grandparents and 3 opens with the resurrection of a corpse that synopses explain belongs to an

"undead" Gilmore.[98] It also changes—without explanation—the place and dominant culture of

Gilmore's burial from Mormon Utah in the 1970s to Scottish-Irish New York in the 1930s.[99]

Similarly, the cycle leaves the viewer with more than one option for the film and the cycle's

seeming end at the close of *Cremaster 5* (1997).

A Baroque Film for a Neo-Baroque Cycle: *Cremaster 5*

One of the shifting centers at the heart of Barney's cinematic labyrinth is its self-reflexive

and most literally "baroque" *Cremaster 5* (1997). A five-act opera for the screen, it mimics the

---

[97] Ibid.

[98] Barney, "Synopsis: *Cremaster 3*," The *Cremaster* Cycle.
http://www.cremaster.net/crem3.htm#Synopsis.

[99] Spector refers to Barney's non-linear arrangement of history in the *Cremaster 2,* which depicts the death of Gary Gilmore as well as the events leading up to the execution. "*Cremaster 2* embodies this regressive impulse through its looping, two-step narrative and genealogical structure, moving from 1977, the year of Gilmore's execution, to 1893, when Houdini, who may have been Gilmore's grandfather, performed one of his great escapes at the World's Columbian Exhibition." Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 35.

organization of the cycle, yet it is also the point in the cycle in which "total descension is finally

attained."[100] As an "end" to the cycle, *5* reveals what is foreshadowed from *Cremaster 2 (1999)*

onward: that the dream of a sexless, limitless existence is not viable. As it is "envisioned as a

tragic love story set in the romantic dreamscape of late-nineteenth-century Budapest,"[101] it is also

the moment in which desire for and loss of another (its central character interestingly both a

maternal figurehead and a supposed love interest of the Magician) dominates the narcissistic

cycle in the doubled city of Budapest (a conflation of the once-separated Buda and Pest).

True to its operatic format, *Cremaster 5* (1997) contains fade-ins and fade-outs that

designate each "act," and making this even more explicit is the catalogue for the video, which

provides titles for each act or segment of the five-part film. Also following the conventions of

opera, it also includes a printed libretto written by Barney, included in both Hungarian, the

language in which it is sung and in English, the native language of the artist. It commences with

its first act, the "Overture,"[102] in which the visual and musical motifs of the film are previewed.

During this early sequence, much attention is given to the architectural elements of the opera

house: the camera pans past rows of empty seats and the orchestra pit before circling around an

elaborate chandelier framed against a richly decorated trompe-l'oeil ceiling. Set inside the

renaissance-baroque revival opera house completed in 1884, the setting presents an accurate and

complicated picture of the film's relationship to the historic period and styles it appropriates: the

opera house is effectively a replica of a replica (just as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century

architects copied classical, Greco-Roman forms), making clear the impossibility of accessing the

---

[100] Barney, "*Cremaster 5*: Synopsis," *The* Cremaster *Cycle.*
http://www.cremaster.net/crem5.htm#Synopsis.
[101] Ibid.
[102] The names of individual acts comes from the catalogue for *Cremaster 5*. Matthew Barney.
Cremaster 5.Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York: 1997.

bygone era, its architecture suggestive of the very type of appropriation and repetition of past style that characterizes Barney's cycle. Inside the opera house, only the musicians in the orchestra pit seem to belong to a later century, the rest of the characters belong to a clearly imagined version of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As if replicating again the classical-baroque model of Wölfflin, the "Overture" functions as a "classical" moment encapsulated within the baroque opera. Indeed, a musical montage without narration and a conflict-free zone of anticipation, it recalls the shifting dance and voiceless score of *Cremaster 1* (1996).

Queen of Chain first appears in a procession into the opera house. Assisted by her twin Ushers, she slowly climbs a series of staircases that lead her to her private box (Figure 33). Drawing attention to the constricting nature of the Queen's excessively elaborate gown, a heavy black dress whose parted princess skirt reveals an under layer of pink satiny fabric, Barney slows the pace of the film so as to allows her labored movements, along with the sculptural props and costumes, to constitute the primary action and interest of the film. Indeed, as if to contrast the graceful movements of *1*'s Goodyear, the Queen moves clumsily alongside her identical companions in the "Overture." After the Queen's entrance, she settles into her theatre box, a space decorated with phallic calla lilies which houses a sculptural throne whose fleshy hue and organic form recalls a bodily orifice. Painstakingly, she sits onto the throne that looks at once visceral and plastic, its soft form creating a subtle tension with the anachronistic architecture of opera house (Figure 35). After the Queen is seated, her Ushers bring white birds, Jacobin pigeons,[103] into the space, and using ribbons, connect them to the Queen's chair. It is here in this

---

[103] The fact that these birds are Jacobin pigeons is mentioned in Spector's text and the Cremaster.net synopsis. Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us p. 66. Also: Barney, "*Cremaster 5*: Synopsis," The *Cremaster* Cycle.

peripheral space, rather than from the stage, that the Queen will remain throughout the entire

film and from which she will sing an extended, lamenting aria sung in Hungarian (vocals by

Adrienne Gsengery)[104] that seems to drive and direct the action of the film. According to the

synopsis provided on the *Cremaster* cycle's website by the artist, the Queen's song describes the

loss of her lover, the Magician, yet it also seems to conjure the other two principal characters

also portrayed by Barney: the Diva and the Giant. Through scenes that are shown as the Queen's

flashbacks,[105] the Magician's separation and subsequent jump from the Lánchíd Bridge are

revealed in fragmentary sequences as the film progresses (Figure 34).

  Seemingly subservient to the Queen, the three characters played by Barney, the Diva, the

Magician and the Giant, correspond to the three settings of the film: the Hungarian State Opera

House, the Lánchíd Bridge and the interior of the Gellert baths. Belonging to the realm of the

stage, the Diva is the only character to literally appear within the confines of the opera house.

The Diva wears a seventeenth-century style pink satiny costume (it color echoing the pink fabric

underneath the Queen's black exterior mantle of the Queen's ornate dress). He also wears pink

shoes, white stockings and a veil, and underneath, his face is painted white (Figure 16). His

pastel, head-to-toe ensemble associates the Diva with contemporary notions of femininity that

have little to do with seventeenth-century constructions of gender or with the obscured body that

lies underneath his clothing. Indeed, his costume and eventual demise seem to indicate that he

represents the feminine possibility of the cycle (that is, the conclusion in which the developing

embryo is sexed female). As if to suggest the intertwined fact of gender—as with the Biblical

Adam and his rib, the masculine is inscribed with the feminine and vice versa—the Diva's

---

http://www.cremaster.net/crem5.htm#Synopsis.
[104] "*Cremaster 5* (1997)" in "Film Credits" in *Matthew Barney: The* Cremaster *Cycle*, 509.
[105] Barney, "*Cremaster 2*: Synopsis," The *Cremaster* Cycle.
http://www.cremaster.net/crem4.htm#Synopsis.

gender is defined by artifice that seems conflicted by contemporary standards. Though dressed in

a color indentified in contemporary Western culture as feminine and wearing both cosmetics and

a veil, the Diva also sports a drooping mustache that echoes the sagging petals of Barney's

emblem for *Cremaster 5* (1997), the inverted fleur-de-lis. It is a characteristic that links him to

the Magician and the Giant who also sport long mustaches and, like the cernuous headpiece

worn by the Queen, underscores the theme of descent.

Just as the Diva seems confined to the stage, the Magician belongs to the Lánchíd Bridge,

a passageway that links the two sides of Budapest that he crosses on horseback during these

opening moments. Seen at this juncture dressed in black like the Queen, he will later remove

long cloak to reveal a nude body whose legs transform into upward facing, petal-like forms.

During the "Overture," the viewer receives only a hint of the Giant's existence, seeing only the

cool blue interior of the Gellert baths and its strangely bodied, aquatic inhabitants, the "Füdőr"[106]

sprites (Figures 36 and 37).

A sequence titled "Proscenium Arch." follows the Queen's entrance into the opera house,

and as the orchestra begins to play, the curtain rises. The central character of this act is the Diva,

whose existence is limited to the arena of the stage, the borders of which are delineated by a

proscenium arch, a framing device situated in front of a stage that first became prevalent in

sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stage design. The Diva first unravels a ribbon onto the floor

of the otherwise empty stage and then proceeds to climb the flower-laden proscenium arch that

frames the stage (Figure 38). After watching the Diva's ascent, which seems emblematic of

deferment of sexual definition, the Queen returns to her mournful reverie, imagining again the

---

[106] This name comes from the website synopsis of *Cremaster 2*. Barney, "*Cremaster 2*:
Synopsis," The *Cremaster* Cycle. http://www.cremaster.net/crem4.htm#Synopsis.
Also, this designation is used in Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 65.

Magician. Taking place on the Lánchíd Bridge, the "Lament of the Queen of Chain" is a black-and-white dream sequence in which the Queen recalls her farewell to her lover (Figure 39).

Interrupting the Queen's sad song, her Ushers draw her attention to an opening or portal in her throne. They assist her as she moves from the throne to the floor, and as she looks, the film briefly cuts to a shot under her skirt, implying that the proceeding scene takes place within her own body. A physical connection between the two spaces is made evident when the white pigeons fly through the portal to the space of the Giant, the last of the film's main characters. Through this window, the Queen watches the Giant's entrance into the two baths. This climatic sequence, titled "A Dance for the Queen's Menagerie," takes place in a space markedly different from the warm-hued opera house—the womblike arena of the Queen's mourning. The bath is predominantly cool-toned. Its intricately tiled walls are covered in woven chains of calla lilies while the tiles of the floor incorporate the emblem for *Cremaster 5* (1997), the drooping fleur-de-lis. During this sequence, the Queen pauses in her song and the instrumental music becomes more whimsical, eliciting a smile from the otherwise somber matriarchal figure. Just as the Queen has two female, similar looking ushers in her attendance, the Giant is attended by the Füdőr sprites, a group of almost identical androgynous sprites whose blue-and-pink tinted flesh reveals jewel-like, partially-formed primary and secondary sexual traits (Figures 36 and 37) . As the Giant enters the warm water, they attach a plaited set of ribbons to his scrotum. Some of the ribbons are pulled underwater with the sprites while others are attached to Jacobin pigeons, and it is while the Giant stands in the warm water that fully formed testicles emerge from his body (Figures 40 and 41). The appearance of fully descended testicles marks him as male, though there is an instant in which the white pigeons fly upward, causing what seems to be momentary

balance between ascending and descending elements that might suggest a temporary state of balance and in-definition (Figures 42 and 43).

The Giant, now seemingly more aware of his body and surroundings, looks up to the Queen, establishing that they can see each other (Figure 44). Briefly returning his gaze (Figure 45), she turns away and returns to her lament that bemoans her separation from the Magician, but may also be read as mournful of the loss of potential. A final sequence called "Lily's Fall" focuses on the Queen who again becomes lost in her reverie as she recalls the Magician's final act of separation: his jump off of the Lánchíd Bridge. After he leaves the Queen, he puts white plastic-looking shackles on his hands and feet that are connected by chains made of the same semi-soft material. Wearing this plastic version of Houdini's shackles, he stands briefly on the bridge, allowing his statuesque pose to be captured by the camera before he allows his body to fall into the Danube (Figure 46). In this moment, the Queen believes that the Magician's act is fatal, and as she recalls his act, she collapses to the floor of her opera box (Figure 47). Yet, the Magician's act seems ambiguous. If he embodies the now gendered embryonic form, his action can be viewed as an anticipatory metaphor for birth.

As if bound by an internecine force to the actions of the Giant and Magician, the Diva mirrors the Magician's leap into the dark waters below him, falling from the proscenium arch to the stage's floor as his body transforms into an oozing, viscous substance. Lying half-supine on the floor, the Queen seems to die herself, though there is no definitive interpretation to her dormant stasis. A thin stream of fluid seeps from her half-open mouth and then, following the path of the birds, falls through the portal down into the baths' water, creating two ripples on the surface of the pool that not only re-iterates the motif of doubling and repetition of the cycle's narrative, but also embodies the possibility of dual endings. As Spector describes, it suggests

"two possible endings for *Cremaster 5* (1997), and to the cycle as a whole, deferring any single definitive reading of the project."[107] As the video itself reaches its end, the Magician too lies inactive in a lush underwater garden though he is watched over and attended by a sprite who inserts a dark pearl into his open mouth (Figure 48). The final images of the film show the inert body of the Queen and the floating mass of pearl-like globes take over the surface of the bath's water.

A formal analogy exists between Wölfflin's envisioning of the history of style and the pair of ripples that, at the films end, invite the viewer to reenter the cycle and begin the narrative again. As if mimicking Wölfflin's conception of history, time is repetitive and chronologies spiral inward and outward, containing within each itself multiple microcosms of the same shift from classical to baroque. Furthermore, like a baroque play-within-a-play—which reproduces the drama of the play that encapsulates it—*Cremaster 5* (1997) functions as a mirror held up to the cycle. Yet also within the cycle there is a pendant to *Cremaster 5* (1997), *Cremaster 3* (2002) of "The Order," which reproduces the five films as a series of obstacles within the interior space of the Guggenheim and in a sense mirrors *Cremaster 5* (1997). As if a foil to *Cremaster 5* (1997), which is based on the themes of fall and descent, "The Order" shows an opposite moment since Barney's task is to ascend the spiraling floors of the Guggenheim. Thus the two self-reflexive moments in the cycle function as dual mirrors that, if turned inward toward each other, would act as two mirrors of each other, creating the *illusion* of an infinity of involuting spaces-within-

---

[107] Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 72.

spaces. Similarly, Deleuze imagines the trajectory of a species follows a pre-determined path

that, if not infinite, suggests a cyclical movement:

> Folding-unfolding no longer simply means tension-release, contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution. The organism is defined by its ability to fold its own parts and unfold them, not to infinity, but to a degree of development assigned to each species. Thus an organism is enveloped by organisms, one within another (interlocking germinal matter), like Russian dolls. The first fly contains the seeds of all flies to come, each being called in its turn to unfold its own parts at the right time. And when an organism dies, its does not really vanish, but folds in upon itself, abruptly involuting into the again dormant seed by skipping all intermediate stages.[108]

Like Deleuze's conception of life of a species, Barney's cycle gives the viewer finite

closure with 5, but also suggests a return to an earlier moment in the cycle itself. As with the

backward chronology of *Cremaster 2* (1999), cinematic progression requires regression, finally

working against the impetus to move forward. Indeed, what seems at stake is the notion of

progress itself and faith that narratives—whether literary or cinematic, historic or stylistic—can

and should move progress.

---

[108] Deleuze, "The Pleats of Matter," in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 8.

Chapter 3
Spirit Into Matter: Space and Scenography in *Cremaster 5*

An emblem of the early baroque that I use in Chapter 1, Caravaggio's *Bacchus* (1598)

pictures a costumed boy holding up a wine glass. With his open and inviting gesture, it seems

that he acknowledges the presence and gaze of the viewer. As if an intertextual allusion to his

earlier Bacchic self-portrait, on the shiny surface of the wine glass is a reflection of the artist

himself, and inside the glass, subtle circular shapes are conventionally read as ripples in the

liquid that indicate the shaking of the boy's hand as he poses. It is a detail to help remind the

viewer that despite its pretense as an image of a divine being, it is truly an image of a mere

model surrounded by studio props. Yet, there is another way of looking at these "ripples"

suggested by Michael Fried. Reading the concentric circles in the surface of the red liquid not as

clever indicators of the model's long-held pose and the near-photographic immediacy of the

moment, but as reflections from the rim of glass, he suggests that they work as emblems of

"prolongation" that are echoed by the circular folds of the draped cloth that covers the boy.[109]

Thus, *Bacchus* can be understood as an enveloping trap that seeks to ensnare its viewer in its

intoxicating and hypnotic spell. Likewise, I believe that Barney, following in the tradition of the

baroque, works to entice the spectator into his *Cremaster* universe.

To understand how Barney seeks to enfold the spectator into *Cremaster* cycle, I first turn

to the end of *Cremaster 5* (1997). Dominated by the motif of the "fall," *5* closes with scenes of

literal collapse that underscores its theme of descent: the Diva falls from his ascended perch, the

Giant's testes descend to mark his sexual difference, the Magician jumps from the Lánchíd

Bridge and the Queen of Chain faints into a death-like stupor brought on by her despondent

---

[109] Michael Fried, "Thoughts on Caravaggio," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1. (Autumn, 1997), 44.

grief. Reiterating this motif is an image of two drops of liquid falling into the pool of the Gellert bath to create a pair of simultaneously undulating ripples. It offers an emblem of the double ending of the film and the cycle, ultimately suggesting, in Nancy Spector's words, the "looping chronology of the series."[110] So, just as Caravaggio's proffered glass of inebriating wine offers the possibility of prolongation, I believe that Barney's image of the two drops of liquid falling into the water of the Gellert bath—an image that embodies the transitory, ever-shifting nature of its cinematic medium—invites the spectator to remain ensnared in his cinematic labyrinth. Indeed, akin to the circles projected into the dark, reflective liquid surface in Caravaggio's portrait, the concentric ripples on the water of the Gellert baths would extend infinitely if unobstructed, overlapping into each others' ever-expanding rings that are not boundaries but rather direct extensions of its ephemeral center. Indeed, in this chapter I turn to the possibility that the *Cremaster* cycle's narrative flows into its internal forms, which acting reciprocally, in turn mold the narrative path from the inside out.

That Barney's medium is film is significant: time-based, it is never stable, always caught-up in its Deleuzian "unfolding" process of becoming, a notion that provides the foundation for this chapter. Indeed, except for its linearity—a limitation Barney struggles against—film holds the potential of being the ideal medium for a baroque and its investment in capturing the dynamic sensation and instantaneity of being in order to engross the spectator in its illusive realm. Yet, the cinematic medium also works to methodically unveil the significance of things in Barney's cycle. As described in the previous chapter, *Cremaster 5* (1997) opens with the Queen of Chain's procession, and Barney's methodical filming of this process is significant. Burdened by her heavy and elaborate dress, the Queen moves slowly and awkwardly through the opera

---

[110] Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 72.

house. Indeed, as with almost every scene of Barney's *Cremaster* cycle, it unfolds slowly, its character plodding through the extravagances and obstacles of Barney's scenography. It is a meandering and measured tempo are alien to conventional cinema that allows the spectator to absorb the complexity of the Queen's gown and the intricacies of the opera house's interior. Spector describes the product of Barney's lingering cinematographic style: "an abstract temporality, an intense, deliberate pacing that allows elements usually considered secondary or even tertiary—such as landscape, color, costume, and set—to come to the fore."[111] Indeed, the objects and architecture that make-up the mise-en-scène of *Cremaster 5* (1997) are imbued with significance that ultimately folds into the cycle's allegorical story and complexly (dis-)organized narrative structure as if ultimately bound to the formless and shifting core at the heart of the *Cremaster* cycle. To state what may seem obvious, the visual motifs function cryptically and meaningfully—the grandiose architecture of its readymade settings and the minute details within the costume and sets of the films re-iterating on the level of form that which Barney takes as his content. Indeed, like the relationship of a baroque building's façade to its interior, form bleeds into content if it does in fact take on an organic life of its own. Thus, a careful look at the mise-en-scène of *Cremaster 5* (1997) will allow me to begin to untangle Barney's densely woven *Cremaster* universe in order to identify the (neo-)baroque threads that run through its entire structure.

The Opera House

Though ostensibly set in fin-de-siecle Hungary, the look of the *Cremaster 5* (1997) harkens back to earlier eras. Its opera house suggests the European sixteenth- and seventeenth-century, pushed-to-the-limit classicism, and later, though the veiling of Succession-era

---

[111] Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 78.

architecture, the bathhouse conjures the eighteenth-century *fête galante*. Indeed, within

Cremaster 5 (1997), perhaps only the members of the orchestra look as if they belong to the

nineteenth century—the film's alleged setting in time.[112] Thus it seems that staged within the

operatic film (elsewhere I argue it acts as a play-within-a-play inscribed within the cycle)

contains another internal play, importantly, a play representing the European baroque.

The location selected for the majority of *Cremaster 5* (1997), the Hungarian State Opera

House is a "neo-Renaissance" building built during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Importantly, it was built as part of "Millennium celebrations" in the last quarter of the nineteenth

century, its own story mirroring Barney's creation of the cycle at the turn of the Millennium.[113]

Furthermore, like Barney's mishmash of old and new, fact and fiction, the State Opera House's

ornate architecture purposefully incorporates the architecture of the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries while including a-historical details such as "smiling sphinxes" from Masonic lore

(notably, the same mythology Barney references in 3). While establishing parallels between

---

[112] As reads the film's online synopsis: "When total descension is finally attained in *CREMASTER 5* (1997), it is envisioned as a tragic love story set in the romantic dreamscape of late-nineteenth-Century Budapest." Barney, "*Cremaster 5*: Synopsis," *The* Cremaster *Cycle*. http://www.cremaster.net/crem5.htm#Synopsis.

[113] *Time Out Budapest Guide* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 52. As quoted in Neville Wakefield, "The Cremaster Glossary," 102. Emphasizing the Hungarian character of the building as well as the impressive physical details of the elaborate interior, Wakefield includes the following description in his "The Cremaster Glossary" (a text comprised solely of quotations that, without commentary from the author, offer insight into the cycle's motifs): "'Miklós Ybl's neo-Renaissance Opera house was the most culturally significant of the monuments build to commemorate the Millennium celebrations. Completed in 1884, it was one of the few actually finished at the time…Seven kilograms of gold were used to gild the intimate auditorium and 260 bulbs light up the enormous chandelier. Its cultural importance has always been linked to Hungarian national identity. Ybl, who personally supervised every detail, subverted the implied colonialism of the Viennese-favoured neo-Renaissance style by incorporating Masonic allusions, such as the smiling sphinxes and the alchemical iconography on the wrought-iron lampposts.' No doubt this particular text was selected to highlight the importance of Masonic motifs inside the opera house since Masonic lore is an integral conceptual component of the cycle for Barney, especially in *Cremaster 3*. As an aside, though it is called a "neo-Renaissance" building, it is important to note that opera is an invention of the baroque era, the early seventeenth century.

Barney's chosen setting for his "fifth" film and his own interests, the fact that this structure

contained a jumbled, readymade mix of historic modes finally points to the fact that Barney's

seemingly shock-based technique of freely combining seemingly disparate elements is not

unprecedented—indeed, it is the norm since the nineteenth-century structure anachronistically

combines fragments from different eras and cultures.

Significantly, the opera house's interior is the only part that appears on-screen in

Cremaster 5 (1997). Its gold and scarlet tones mimic the earthy, Venetian red-infused palette of

early baroque painters, particularly those of an anti-classical affiliation: in the South, Caravaggio

and his followers' preference for dark, warm hues over light tones and blues, or in the North,

Rembrandt's muddled, flesh-toned and umber palette.[114]As if to correspond to this warm,

organic palette, Barney envisioned the interior of the opera house as a corporeal space. For him,

the space of the opera house is designed to organically augment and magnify the sound of the

voice. "It is a lot like being inside a chest, it is sympathetic to the body in the way that the curves

work in terms of acoustics. One can say that in a sort of simplified way that the works I make are

a bit like constructing a narrative within a body that would take place in an opera house."[115]

Again *Cremaster 5* (1997) emerges as emblematic of the entire cycle, if not Barney's entire

oeuvre and articulates Barney's interest in conflating the "natural" and the "artificial." In keeping

with Barney's theme of a developing embryo, the space also may be thought of as a womblike

space, especially since it is dominated by the maternal figure of the Queen of Chain.

---

[114] In contrast, notable textbook classicizing baroque painters who often used a lighter, airy palette include the Italians Annibale Caracci and Guido Reni.
[115] Matthew Barney to Hans-Ulrich Obrist. "Published in the brochure accompanying Barney's commission for the Vienna State Opera House curtain, museum in progress, Vienna, 2000." Quoted in Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us¸" 65 (Footnote 111).

Within the opera house's elaborate red and gold space, visual motifs appear in multiples as if to suggest, via repetition, the notions of excess and organic proliferation. Reminiscent of the slow-moving pan that reveals the many synchronized dancers of *Cremaster 1* (1995) in a repetitious cascade, camera shots pan past close-up views of empty theatre seats, suggesting multiplication without end. Similar shots of the interior architecture of the opera house emphasize its four successive columned levels, reveling in the repetition of the gilt architecture. Marking the apex of the opera house's space is a large, multifaceted chandelier surrounded by a rhythmic trompe l'oeil painting that depicts an open sky populated by intertwined figures cavorting amongst white and gold cumulus clouds. Like Barney's own films, they seem to occupy an alternate, heavenly realm created for the visual pleasure of the audience seated below. Captured in an orbiting pan of the camera during the cycle's "Overture," the painting's circular shape (a circle always lacking a beginning and end) reflects the structure of the cycle. Indeed, Barney's circling shot of the chandelier conjures a passage from Deleuze: the painted baroque ceiling, so often made to look like architecture opening up to an open sky or burst of light, reveals a desire on the part of its maker to express that which cannot be fully visually depicted— limitless, infinite space. With a quintessentially baroque investment in overcoming its borders, the painter seeks to burst "through the ceiling," to express the endlessness of the universe and the infinite power of the divine. To be sure, Barney's use of the circle—both in his cinematography and in the architecture that the camera captures—mimics the beginning-less and endless structure of the baroque fold. As previously noted, Deleuze's key motif is the *pli*, or the fold, and he is especially invested in the outward- and inward-undulating fold of the baroque. The fold is both spirit and matter, and furthermore, the fold is that which joins material to the immaterial.

Just as the architecture and scenography of *Cremaster 5* (1997) operates in multiples and circles, the characters of the film often appear in sets. For example, *Cremaster 5*'s secondary characters (those accompanying the Queen or Barney's triad of characters) function as repeated visual elements, seeming origin-less copies of one another. The twin maids of the Queen and their kindred, the nearly indistinguishable sprites that belong to the bathhouse, appear in the first instance as doubles, and in the latter, multiples. Likewise, the musicians in the orchestra pit wear matching nineteenth-century attire and function as an even larger set of repeated characters. All recall the growing taste for sets and multiples that reached a highpoint in the eighteenth century,[116] a predilection that seems re-invoked in the late twentieth century with Calabrese's foundational "aesthetic of repetition."[117] Finally, these proliferating sets adhere to the Deleuzian notion of Leibniz's monad as a unified form made up of multiple and complex parts, or "a unity that envelops multiplicity" that is expressed finally as "a State of One." [118]

Like her two attendants, the Queen of Chain—and especially her costume—reveals an investment in repetition and doubling. As if an artificial expression of body beneath, the gown worn by the Queen of Chain appears to be so heavy and complex that it hinders her range of movement (there are actually two dresses, one for standing and sitting, and a second, less cumbersome one for walking). Her face is framed by a black whisk collar characteristic of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods (c. 1590-1620).[119] Composed of countless, stiff folds that

---

[116] I was made aware of this by a lecture by Mimi Hellman, "The Joy of Sets: The Uses of Repetition in the Eighteenth-Century French Interior." Thursday, October 4, 2007. The Georgia Museum of Art, at The University of Georgia. For a published version of this lecture, see: Mimi Hellman, "The Joy of Sets: The Use of Seriality in the French Interior" in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell us about the European and American Past*, ed. by Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 129-154.

[117] Calabrese, "Rhythm and Repetition," 28.

[118] Deleuze, "The Folds in the Soul," 23.

[119] Baker, Georgia O' Daniel. *A Handbook of Costume Drawing: A Guide to Drawing the Period*

flare outward from her face and constructed of several layers of fabric, its form recalls the way in which the trompe l'oeil painting—indeed, the opera house itself—radiates around the crowning chandelier. A full princess-cut skirt reveals an under layer of pale pink satiny fabric. Long, drooping sleeves hang in loose ruffles beyond her hands. Reminiscent of the symmetrical heart-shaped hairstyle popular in the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, is a glass-like headpiece attached to the Queen's head by a series of tiny braids of hair—thus the organic material of her body becomes intertwined with the inorganic material of her costume (Figure 47). Visually iterating the theme of descent that dominates *Cremaster 5* (1997), the glass headpiece consists of two drooping spheres, one above each ear (its mirrored silhouette underscoring the relentlessness with which the double pervades the *Cremaster* cycle that I have noted elsewhere).

Perhaps the most literal incarnation of the fold, baroque clothing and its "decorative effects" must be taken seriously. As Deleuze describes, baroque drapery turns the body "inside out" as if "to mold its inner surfaces."[120] He imagines the quintessential attire of seventeenth century as "broad, in distending waves, billowing and flaring, surrounding the body with its independent folds, ever-multiplying, never betraying those of the body beneath…"[121] As mentioned in the first chapter, the drapery in Bernini's *St. Teresa* (1645-52) acts as if electrified by the presence of the angel. The unifying element between human and divine creature, the saint's cloak magnificently radiates away from her obscured body as if to make one the realms of physical and spiritual experience. Indeed, Deleuze describes the bliss of Teresa's apotheosis as manifest in the "infinity of folds that cannot be explained by the body, but by a spiritual

---

Figure for Costume Design Students. (Boston: Focal Press, 2000), 82.
[120] Deleuze, 122.
[121] Ibid.

adventure that can the set the body ablaze."[122] Similarly, just as St. Teresa's garment masks her physical body in order to express her presence and experience in the rippling flow of fabric, Barney's elaborate costume for the Queen of Chain conveys her presence through the heavy drapery of its folds and its elaborate artifice. Finally, designed as if to enchain her body and convey her weighty grief, the gown literally seems to drag the Queen downward, inexorably pulling her toward the fact of descent that governs *Cremaster 5* (1997).

Like the Queen of Chain, the Diva is dressed in aristocratic, seventeenth-century attire, its pink color seemingly related to the pink underskirt of the Queen's own dress. Following the pattern of the expensive dress worn by wealthy men in the period, such as the head-to-toe pink, elaborately tailored ensemble worn by Henry II (Figure 49) in Jacques Bellange's *Portrait of Henry II, Duke of Montgomery on Horseback* (c. 1602-1616), the Diva's pink sleeves and trousers are slashed, a complicated decorative device that required skill and time on the part of the maker. Popular beginning in the high Renaissance in Western Europe, and becoming especially popular in the century to follow, slashed sleeves revealed multiple layers of expensive fabric, thus indicating the wealth and status of the wearer.[123] Bellange's image shows the king with a stylized, arching billow of fabric behind him that departs from naturalistic depiction to become a crescent of self-propelled material. Similarly, Deleuze describes the fabric in Johann Joseph Christian's *Saint Jerome*: as if activated by a "supernatural breeze" the figure's cloak becomes "a billowing and sinuous ribbon that ends by forming a high crest over the saint."[124] As if translating the autonomous, spirit-infused fold of the baroque, Barney has the Diva unfurl and long ribbon into an extended, serpentine line on the stage of the opera house. Finally, recalling

---

[122] Ibid.

[123] Rachel Kemper, "The Rebirth of Style," in *Costume*, (New York: Newsweek Books, 1977), 80-81.

[124] Deleuze, "The New Harmony,122.

the costumes of the Queen and her ushers in its complexity of form and use of outward artifice to express the biological fact of the body beneath, the Diva's costume expresses the same devotion to crafting a single thing (whether it be clothing, architecture or narrative) out of multiplicitious parts. As is revealed in the opera house's space and scenography, abundance and excess come together as a unified whole that expresses the somber, baroque mood of *Cremaster 5* (1997) as if an extension of the Queen's aria seeking to engulf the viewer in its visual, aural and emotive motifs. Likewise, though they are markedly different, the other two settings are similarly orchestrated, seeking to seduce the spectator as they make material the hope of the cycle to remain in an indecisive and undefined state.

The Lánchíd Bridge

In the "Overture," the Magician rides across the Lánchíd Bridge (1849) at dusk, and it is to this space that he seems bound until his jump at the end. A liminal space, the Lánchíd Bridge stretches over the waters of Danube River and connects the two sides of Budapest, and it recalls the borderline space of the proscenium arch just as it anticipates the two-sided pool that is connected by a thin bridge in the Gellert bath. Barney's use of this in-between space throughout *Cremaster 5* (1997) makes manifest the either-or, inconclusive state toward which the cycle strives.[125]

---

[125] Wakefield's entry for "union of Buda and Pest" reads: "The Chain Bridge is, along with Parliament, the dominant symbol of Budapest. As the first permanent bridge across the Danube (1849), it paved the way for the union of Buda, Óbuda, and Pest into a single city. Prior to 1849, people relied on a pontoon bridge that had to be dismantled when ships passed and could be swept away in stormy weather. The initiative for the Chain Bridge came from the indefatigable Count István Széchenyi, the leading figure of Hungarian society during the mid-nineteenth-century Age of Reform. The Scotsman Adam Clark, for whom the square on the Buda side of the

Wearing a cloak in the early scenes of the film, the Magician sheds the garment to attach white plastic manacles to his limbs. Bound by a chain of the same material, the constrictive shackles link the Magician's arms and wrists, shaping his stance into a hunched, "willful contrapposto."[126] The chain appears as a persistent theme throughout 5, as evidenced by Queen's title, "The Queen of Chain," a name that, given the themes of the cycle, conjures the umbilical cord that connects a fetus to the body of the mother. Re-scripted, the chain appears by way of metaphor as the woven garlands of flowers in the bathhouse, the braided ribbons that the sprites attach to the Giant's testes and the ribbons linking the Jacobean pigeons that will fly upward toward the Queen's throne (as if to connect Giant's body to the realm of the Queen). Also, chains relate to the long, sinuous ribbon that the Diva unravels onto the floor of the stage during his cryptic and minimal performance.

The Magician's chain-and-shackle costume is lifted directly from Harry Houdini who, while wearing an almost identical assemblage of (metal) chains famously staged similar performances. Indeed, the Magician unambiguously conjures Houdini, whose specter pervades the entire cycle in varying degrees. As mentioned earlier, he is portrayed by Norman Mailer (Gilmore's biographer) in *Cremaster 2* (1999), and is inserted into the cycle as Gary Gilmore's grandfather. In a less literal way, he is a guiding muse throughout the project, for, as I will discuss in the fourth chapter, Barney takes his foundational notion of the artist as athlete from

---

bridge is named, came to Budapest to supervise the massive project; he remained in the city until his death many years later. The bridge was blown up the retreating Nazis in World War II, but was rebuilt immediately after the war.' Joseph S. Lieber and Christina Shea, Frommer's Budapest & the Best of Hungary (New York: Macmillan, 1996), p. 111."

[126] This descriptive term comes from the translated libretto of Barney's Hungarian aria sung by the Queen of Chain throughout the film. It may be found both in Hungarian and in English translation in the catalogue for *Cremaster 5* (1997). See Barney, *Cremaster 5*, (Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York: 1997).

Houdini. Thus, by returning to Budapest, the birthplace of Houdini in 1874, Barney plaits

another cyclical, intertextual cord into his cycle. [127]

The Gellert Bath

While the warm-hued opera house reflects the dark, red-infused palettes of the baroque

(as well as the internal body), the semi-aquatic realm of the Giant is colored by bright pastels—

greens, pinks and blues. Intricately tiled walls are adorned with countless garlands of white

flowers, and in the center of the space are two symmetrical baths adjoined by a bridge that recalls

the liminal space of the Lánchíd Bridge on a smaller scale. On the surface of the water of each

pool, pearl-like orbs gently float, limning its surface and creating a floating, penetrable ceiling

for a group of androgynous, elfin sprites that inhabit the waters beneath (Figure 40).[128] As with

the opera house, circles and repeated elements prove to be dominant motifs in the Giant's watery

---

[127] The significance of Budapest as Houdini's birthplace is stated outright in the film's online synopsis: "[The Magician's] actions recall the famed bridge jumps of Harry Houdini, who was born in Budapest in 1874." Barney, "Synopsis: *Cremaster 5*," The *Cremaster* Cycle. http://www.cremaster.net/crem5.htm#Synopsis.

[128] Barney's setting for *Cremaster 5 (1997)*, especially the bathhouse, recalls Stephen Calloway's description of Parisian high-profile figure Charles de Beistegui's Le Corbusier-designed apartment built in the 1930s on the Champs Elysées. Though unprecedented in Modern architecture, the apartment became the standard of baroque-inspired extravagance. Calloway describes its interior. "Almost all the *walls were padded and quilted in pale silks*, whilst the large expanses of window were hung with *great ruched curtains* in a sort of modernistic Second Empire style. *Vast Venetian chandeliers created a glittering play of light*, which was further enhanced by crystal candle-sconces mounted on sheets of mirror-glass framed in swirling, carved and silvered Louis XV picture frames. The furniture, including a massive suite chairs and sofas designed by Terry in a similar rococo-baroque manner and *several elephantine commodes*, was *all finished in white or pale blue and brilliant pale gold*. A rare Dresden copy of a Venetian polychromed blackamoor figure and a giant rocking-horse caparisoned with jewels completed the effect of the main drawing-room; but in addition to these extravagances, the apartment also boasted a *fully functioning private cinema*. Astonishingly, all this served only as prelude to the most extraordinary feature of the flat: a s*urrealistic* roof *garden*, in the creation of which tradition has it that Salvador Dali played a great part. This terrace, reached by climbing the original Corbusier *glass-columned stair*, was carpeted with a *faux-herbe* 'lawn'…" (Calloway, 62). Italics added to phrases that particularly correspond to Barney's spaces and sets in *Cremaster 5)*.

realm. Echoing the camera's careful pan through the opera house, a repeated element again becomes its subject as the white spheres float slowly by the lens. Implying an exponential, growing mass the image may finally suggest the multi-celled, nebulous body of an embryo. The Gellert Bath appears to be simultaneously enfolded within the body of the maternal Queen and the architecture of the opera house. Transitioning to this alternate world, the camera pans under the Queen's skirts and shows a sculptural representation of her inner thighs, suggesting that this process metaphorically takes place within her body. Yet, it is around the portal of the throne that the Queen and her attendants gather to watch the Giant's "Dance." Like a pearl resting within the fleshy interior of an oyster whose corrugated outer shell protects the developing form, the Gellert Bath is encapsulated by the vast expanse of the womblike domain of the Queen, the opera house.

As a baroque motif (the source of its name), pearls seem to have symbolic import in *Cremaster 5* (1997), and indeed, pearls appear in multitudes on the surface of the Gellert baths as if to mark the transitional zone between above and underwater. Later, a dark pearl is placed into the Magician's open mouth after he jumps from the Lánchíd Bridge. In "The *Cremaster* Glossary," Neville Wakefield includes the following citation under the term "pearls": "Dioscorides and Pliny mention the belief that pearls are formed by drops of rain falling into oyster shells while they are open, with the raindrops thus received being hardened into pearls by some secretions of the animal."[129] Wakefield's carefully selected quote offers an ancient explication of a biological process that may be put into play in *Cremaster 5* (1996): the drops falling from the Queen's mouth into the Gellert water result in the pearls on the surface of the water. The actual process echoes the radiating rings on the water, since a pearl forms after a

---

[129] *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 15th ed., rev. by Adrian Room (London: Cassel and New York HarperCollins, 1995), 810. As quoted in Neville Wakefield, "The *Cremater* Glossary," 108.

foreign object becomes lodged inside the oyster, and "concentric layers" build up to form the exterior of the pearl. [130] In addition, the pearl is the etymological root of the term "baroque." So, if the cinematic image of the drops falling into the pool is to be read as an emblem of the cycle itself, then it is appropriate to perhaps relate the shifting, circuitous form of *Cremaster 5* (1997)—and by extension the whole cycle—to the irregularly shaped, eccentric pearl of the baroque. Indeed, just as each layer of the nascent pearl flows into the next concentric layer, narrative shapes form in a continuous, flowing fold. Prolonged, the cycle attempts to sustain an ever-unfolding state of becoming, and in its shifting and prolonged form, the cycle entices, promising a loss of oneself in the labyrinth of its numerous stories.

Altogether, the florid interior invokes for me the integrated, organic spaces and soft palette of the rococo. Its name derived from the French *rocaille*, which refers to the shell-infused façades used in France during this period, the rococo has been construed as the eighteenth-century fruition of the high baroque, itself a kind of finale to the cycle begun in the early renaissance. Thus, for many, the rococo can be seen as a "baroque" moment within the baroque period more broadly defined. Thus it proves the ideal style for Barney to employ as he brings his cycle (and the discrete narrative of *Cremaster 5*) to a climatic denouement. The way in which the

---

[130] Wakefield's entry for "pearls" offers an accurate biological description of the process in which pearls are formed. "'[P]earls are the result of a morbid state within the mollusk and the tomb of a parasitic worm. When an irritant object enters its shell, the oyster tries to eject it, but failing this it isolates the intruder either by immuring it against the inner shell wall, thus forming a blister, or by encystations, i.e., in a sac, or cyst. Usually, the intruder is a parasitic worm which causes a depression on the surface of the mantle, slowly sinking in until it is in a hollow below the surface. Eventually, the hollow is sealed over, the parasite dies, and its skeletal remains receive a coating of conchiolin which hardens to form a nucleus. From the on, secreted fluids from the epithelial cells of the sac cover the nucleus with overlapping fine films of nacreous aragonite. If the oyster can move freely, the nucleus receives concentric layers which form the finest of pearls, a spherical cyst pearl.' Alexander E. Farn, *Pearls: Natural, Cultured and Imitation* (London: Buttersworths, 1986), pp. 15-16." Neville Wakefield, "The Cremaster Glossary," pp. 107-8.

Gellert Bath seems enfolded by both the opera house and the body of the Queen suggests a notion of space articulated by Leibniz that Deleuze employs. A forerunner of modern physical science, Leibniz erroneously believed that vacuums could not exist. Thus the organic world Deleuze's muse imagines is imbued with a baroque sense of harmony: a countless mass of microcosms that together makeup a larger whole. Deleuze describes his own Leibnizian envisioning of the physical world made up of autonomous monads:

> Matter thus offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns: no matter how small, each body contains a world pierced with irregular masses, surrounded and penetrated by an increasingly vaporous fluid, the totality of the universe resembling a pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves.[131]

This envisioning of the void-less world may be applied to the surreal, non-Cartesian space of *Cremaster 5* (1996). Like Shakespeare's play-within-a-play motif, the move from the larger exterior to the smaller, enclosed monad which it encases, suggests an inversion of Deleuze's baroque ceiling. Just as the trompe l'oeuil ceiling pushes outward to the sky and beyond, the internally located space of the Gellert Bath reveals a spiraling involution of space that, instead of collapsing, leads on and on to an infinity of alternate spaces. Indeed, as with the narrative structure of the cycle, its plastic forms seek to lure the viewer into its fantasy of a void-less labyrinth. This desire to pull the spectator inward into its myriad spaces offers a threat as well as a promise: to become blissfully lost in its intricate and overwhelming forms and spaces. Like the allure of Bacchus—who, caught up in his cyclical birth, death and rebirth seems bound to return with the advent of the (neo-)baroque.

Finally, with its seductive promise, Barney's decadent, organic environs of *Cremaster 5* (1997) offer a lush, cinematic alternate world. Its seeming enticement of the viewer's senses conjures the enigmatic smile of Bacchus: seeking to seduce and enfold the spectator into his

---

[131] Delueze, "The Fold," 5.

reflexive snare, the boy-god's confrontation of the viewer threatens the borders of representation from within. Yet, countering this seductive trap in the painting, the gleam on the glass of the upheld wine glass in Caravaggio's *Bacchus* perhaps works to undo the spiraling, hypnotic effect created by the concentric rings. Pushing outward, its sparkling surface re-establishes the picture's veneer as baroque façade. In the following chapter, I address the ways in which Barney both denies and acknowledges the limitations inherent to his chosen theme and medium.

Chapter 4

Transcendence and Fall in *Cremaster 5*

Throughout his oeuvre, Matthew Barney uses Hungarian-born magician Harry Houdini as

an emblem of the artist. Indeed, the physicality of Houdini's "magic" is foundational to Barney's

own methods of making art. Importantly for Barney, Houdini's performances often incorporated

physical constraints, such as chains and straight jackets, or seemingly impossible feats, such as

escaping a locked jail. Indeed, creating his illusions in part through intense physical

conditioning, Houdini crafted his marvels by setting up extreme situations from which he then

escaped, and it is this use of intense physical conditioning that seems most interesting to Barney.

From his early *Drawing Restraint* works on, he often employs an artificial constraint on his body

as part of his artistic process (for example, in *Drawing Restraint 2*, he places a piece of paper

barely out of his reach and then tethering his body so that he must struggle to make a mark on

page). Thus, in these projects, it is only through hypertrophy of certain muscles and the atrophy

of others that Barney creates. For him, it is through this process of willingly conditioning the

body to create the illusion of a marvel that paradoxically is of interest. Barney describes

Houdini's process and product as more than illusory: "In retrospect, it seems that his pursuit had

much more to do with transcendence. I think that question is, for instance, what *Cremaster 5* is

based on; the whole story is about that question."[132] Noting Barney's particular mention of *5*, I

turn to the seeming binaries, transcendence (a notion predicated upon an escape from the body

that implies ascent) and fall (a notion with various connotations that generally refers to demise

and implies literal descent) for my final analysis of *Cremaster 5* (1997). Related to this notion,

---

[132] Scott Foundas, "Self-Portraiture Meets Mythology: Matthew Barney Talks About His 'Cremaster Cycle,'" http://www.indiewire.com/people/people_03051barney.html .

the founding desire of the cycle—to defer progression—is intimately bound to this pair. These situations may be understood on a basic level as describing a relationship to a limit or border, and in Barney's world, the desire to remain in a pre-sexual state is essentially, a resistance to limits. Similarly, transcendence is a longing for escape from the restrictions inherent to having a body. So, with Barney's avowal that this notion is what *5* conveys as well as his insistence that this film reveals "total descension," I finally turn to how these seemingly opposing themes are bound to one another. First, though, it is necessary to look at these notions through a (neo-)baroque lens.

Spirit and Body

As established in the introductory chapter, the Catholic Council of Trent marks the beginning of the concerns that will shape Italian, and by extension, European baroque art. It is in this ideological setting of the stage that the conundrum of transcendence and fall finds expression, albeit in the guise of the spirit and body. Following Wittkower's account, the Council's "call to order" demanded an increased degree of accuracy and naturalism in the visual arts that would convey a clear and direct message to the viewer: a scene picturing the martyrdom of a saint should look like an actual martyrdom, showing the scene in all of it gruesome detail and awful glory. Importantly, these "correct," [133] and thus often violent and disturbing images have an emotive affect on the viewer that should inspire religious devotion. Crucially, according to the Church, images should support the religious texts from which the depicted scenes were derived and, ideally, "transcend the spoken word."[134] So, what the Council requires of the artist seems to be a counter-intuitive, dual duty. First, images should as accurately illustrate a Biblical

---

[133] Rudolph Wittkower uses this term: "'correct' images that are meant to appeal to the emotion of the faithful and support or even transcend the spoken word." See Wittkower, 1.
[134] Ibid.

story (a flawed notion from its outset since the image depicts a story from another time and culture) in order to educate a viewer. In this scenario, images are bound to and equated with the text, to the transmission of fact through (visual) symbols. Second, and perhaps paradoxically, the Council calls for something else entirely: for images to go beyond the word, to produce a feeling of spiritual transcendence in the spectator. Of course, transcendence implies an escape from the body and from the order of the symbolic, though these are, paradoxically, the medium and means by which the spectator accesses this alternate state. It is as if an inner tension pushes baroque representation into its strategies of hyper-naturalism, reflexivity and multi-media excess—all hallmarks of the baroque that lead to the illusion of a borderless, all-encompassing arena of representation that, just as it promises to subsume its spectator, threatens to expose the charlatan character of such a spectacle.[135]

The neo-baroque has its own version of the spirit-body problem, though it lacks the theological rhetoric driving the seventeenth-century baroque. Arguing for the persistence of the dichotomy between the physical sensation of looking and desire to escape one's body through this embodied experience, Ndalianis points to the desire of the spectator to become immersed in the neo-baroque spectacle. Yet accompanying this desire and willingness to believe in the fantasy created by a film, video game or amusement park ride, is the foreknowledge that the spectacle is a construct, a mere illusion. The contemporary spectator always approaches the illusion with a degree of faithlessness for unlike the baroque work of art, the neo-baroque spectacle is always secular in nature, a coded fantasy from the outset. Interestingly, with the

---

[135] Baudrillard contends that the "end of transcendence" comes also with the baroque. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), he summarizes the facile, concealing nature of (baroque) representation that seems to have always maintained an awareness of its limitations: "Behind the baroqueness of images hides the grey eminence of politics." See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Shelia Faria Glaser, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

decline of faith in images to convey the presence of the divine (or, faith in the notion of the

divine itself), it seems that the strategies by which an illusion may be fabricated increase. Indeed,

further differentiating the baroque and neo-baroque experience for Ndalianis is the means of

producing a spectacle that increases the degree to which the spectator may experience it. With

the advent of new media forms, she calls for an update of the Deleuzian "architecture of vision,"

instead offering a re-tooled "architecture of the senses" as a more precise label for the neo-

baroque experience.[136] A key example she uses is a theme park attraction, *Terminator 2: 3-D*, a

cinematic experience that employs a huge, encompassing screen, the inclusion of live actors and

effects such as shaking seats, heat and smoke that engage all of the viewer's senses.[137] For her,

Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) serves as a prototype for this type

of experience. Through special effects rather than narrative, the film famously produced a

sensation of awe. Indeed, as Ndalianis points out, Spielberg's narrative (similarly to Barney's) is

not the centerpiece of the film. Though Spielberg draws heavily on the Christian tradition, *Close

Encounters of the Third Kind* is a technologically induced cinematic experience that, with its

special effects, no longer needs "religious themes and narratives to create a sense of awe." As

she point out, in the film it is the aliens who produce a sense of wonder but in the movie theatre,

special effects generate the parallel experience of amazement. Yet there persists a dichotomous

experience for the viewers as they oscillate between the marvel of technology and its effects and

the temptation to slip into the "alternate reality" of emotive affects and fantasy.[138]

 Like the baroque and neo-baroque spectacle, the tension between spirit and body seems

foundational to Barney's cycle, propelling it toward a tentative and ambiguous end in *Cremaster*

---

[136]Ndalianis, "Virtuosity, Special-Effects Spectacles, and the Architectures of the Senses," 151-208.

[137] Ibid, 204.

[138] Ibid, 213-214.

5 (1997). Offered a seductive and excessive array of images, the spectator is tempted to become overwhelmed by the cycle's seemingly endless and overlapping boundaries. As I have suggested throughout this thesis, borders (biological, aesthetic or otherwise) and the hope of their transgression are crucial themes shared by both the *Cremaster* cycle and the (neo-)baroque. In *Cremaster 5* (1997), the theme plays out in the actions of each of the characters played by Barney—the Diva, the Magician and the Giant—who each reach a point of ascent and then succumbs to descent, or alternately, a moment of apotheosis and then a subsequent fall. Keeping in mind the issue of borders and their elision, I consider possible reasons why the (neo-)baroque mode allows Barney to aesthetically convey the deepest implications and dangers of his cinematic fantasy of a borderless existence, the "pure potential" of an entity on the brink of definition. Yet, before addressing the theme of limit and transgression as part of a (neo-)baroque reading of *Cremaster 5*(1997), it is useful to lay out relevant concepts from the existing literature devoted to Barney that will inform such a discussion.

Sensation and Art: Myth Revisited

In a discussion of *Cremaster 4* (1994), Michael Onfray points to the inhuman theme in Barney's early *Cremaster* project: "…with the help of revisited mythology and folklore, a mutant, new form should arise, a new Adam with whom one might begin to solve the Nietzscean equation of the invention of new possibilities of existence."[139] Echoing Onfray, Spector describes the host of quasi-human characters that appear throughout the *Cremaster* cycle as "perverse creatures" that "are successfully unformed."[140] She labels the entire *Cremaster* cycle a "counter-myth," contending that "it narrates the story of a subject who exists outside of language— at least outside our rationalistic language premised on the dichotomies of presence

---

[139] Michael Onfray, "Mannerist Variations on Matthew Barney," *Parkett* 45 (1995): 56.
[140] Spector, "Only the Perverse Can Still Save Us," 82.

and absence, and by extension on all bipolar thought."[141] Indeed, as Barney imagines suspending

the earliest moment of existence in which there are no limiting factors, Spector interprets the

undefined body of the embryo in this early stage as related to Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-

Oedipus, their archetypal anti-hero who displaces the dominance of Freudian-based narratives.[142]

Before the Oedipal stage there are for Freud, the earlier anal and oral phases, in which the child

exists in harmony with the maternal body and nature: a state of pure sensation in which one

exists, in Lacanian terms, without the constraints of language and the desire for the Other. If the

child is unable to successfully move onto the Oedipal stage (or enter into what Lacan will call

---

[141] Ibid. Another place in which the dominance of Western originary myth is contested are the writings of Donna Haraway, who, arguably a kindred spirit to Barney, offers a new narrative for the twenty-first century that counters the foundational stories of Western cultures. Not without a degree of irony, Haraway, aligns the human body at the end of the twentieth century with the body of a cyborg (or the genetically modified organism) in her *Cyborg Manifesto*. Her notion that the impure cyborgian body leads to the elimination of sexual difference. Indeed, Haraway believes the era of the cyborg to be a positive scenario for women, who were always already conceived of as impure manifestations of the "Other" in Western culture, thus leads to her famous dictum, "I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess." Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), 149-181. Both invested in the embrace of artific (whether cosmetic, technological or otherwise), Haraway and Barney imagine an elision of sexual difference. In some ways, Haraway's notion seems to be an inversion of Barney's. She situates the elimination of sexual difference as a product of technological process that comes in the late twentieth century while Barney imagines a perverse return or refusal to leave a prelasparian state that precedes sexual difference.
In a 2002 lecture, Thyrza Nichols Goodeve allies Barney with Haraway. After showing a clip from *Cremaster 2* in which a surreal-looking sexual encounter between Gary Gilmore's parents – whose bodies are part-human, part-bee – occurs, Goodeve contends: "Matthew Barney is producing a moment of conception where humans and bees participate in a kind of transgenic orgasm. In other words…Barney's 5-part *Cremaster*…is a story of creation and creativity, a counter myth to Freud's Oedipus, as blasphemous, and poignant as Haraway's. In sum, *Cremaster* is the founding epic of cyborg surrealism" Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, "Cyborg Surrealism," *Art Lab 23*, Spring 2002, Issue 1, Art History Department, School of the Visual Arts.
[142] The archetypical "hero" of Western myth in Freudian terms, Oedipus is the inspiration for the Freudian Oedipal stage. According to Freud, the Oedipal stage is when the (male) child achieves an awareness of his gender: the genital stage in which the child realizes that his body is different that his mother's body. The child attributes this fact to a belief that his father has castrated his mother and it at this moment that the child's fear of castration emerges.

the register of the Symbolic), he will return to an earlier phase, the anal or oral stage. The child

thus counters the forward trajectory of Oedipus and enters the territory of the perverse. Refusing

to enter into the symbolic order, the child interacts with the world through senses rather than

through the mediation of language and other symbols. So, as Spector summarizes, the state that

Deleuze and Guattari describe in *Anti-Oedipus* is one of sensuous, utter feeling that is

symbolized by Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs," a boundless body that resonates

with Barney's notion of pre-sexual embryo. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, experience is based

solely on "bands of intensity, potentials, thresholds, and gradients."[143] The perverse desire to

reject the Oedipal stage is precisely a desire to elide borders, and the fantasy of a "body without

organs" is implicitly a dream of a borderless existence. Following Spector's use of Deleuze and

Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* to explain Barney's cycle, I consider these themes in relation to the

lineage of art that belongs to baroque and its eighteenth-century progeny, the rococo. Indeed, it is

through his world of excess, spectacle and abundance that Barney appeals to the senses of the

viewers, ultimately asking him or her to cross the bordered space of representation and partake in

the momentary fantasy of the *Cremaster* cycle. Yet, making evident the inherent limitations of

his cinematic fantasy, Barney encrypts death into his cycle since the limitless existence he

concedes is an impossibility for any mortal creature.

Opera and *Cremaster 5*

As noted in Chapter 2, opera provides a structural and aesthetic framework for Barney's

cycle, indeed, his entire cycle is constructed like a five-act opera. Specifically designed so as to

---

[143] Deleuze and Guttari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 9-16. As quoted in Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 80.
Spector also points to the established origins of the aesthetic and philosophy of the perverse of which Deleuze and Guattari are a part, establishing a lineage that begins with Marquis de Sade and is carried on in the work of Nietzsche onward through the work of more contemporary authors such as J.G. Ballard.

echo this form, *Cremaster 5* (1997) mirrors the entire cycle and may thus be considered to represent in distilled form its founding notions and the complexities they engender. Opera is an ideal medium for Barney because of its inherently inter-media nature and its narrative structure. Yet, it also has connotations that relate to Barney's goals on the deepest level. Related to the anti-Oedipal narrative that Spector reads into the cycle is the Lacanian explanation French opera scholar Micheal Poizat gives for opera's appeal. Looking for an understanding of the fanaticism that opera inspires in its most devoted listeners, Poizat turns to Lacan's notion of jouissance for his explanation for the emotive and physical reactions of audience members while listening to opera.[144] Tracing the evolution of opera from its origins to the early twentieth century, he believes that opera moves from a relatively simple form in the time of Monteverdi in the seventeenth century in which word and music remain separate entities to a mergence of the two with the productions of Strauss in the early twentieth century. This progression reveals what happens in a single production: with the climatic end of an opera and its (usually tragic) story, there is usually a buildup to an unintelligible "cry." When a listener hears a singer build up to

---

[144] With the entrance into the world of language and symbols, comes knowledge, but also a desire to return to the womb. In the fantasy of a retreat to a state of oneness with the mother's body, there is the promise of an escape from the signifying order. Freud believes that this desire shapes the death drive, which compels humans to desire death, for at the advent of death comes a final falling away of the signifying order and a return to a state of meaninglessness. Mirroring and foreshadowing the escape offered by death is the alternate (if in some ways parallel) promise offered engendered in jouissance. Following in the lineage of Freud, Lacan developed the notion of jouissance to describe a moment in which one temporarily loses awareness of language. With its loss and the transient collapse of the signifying order, Lacan's jouissance recalls the experience that precedes an infant's "first cry." After this initial and primary cry, the infant realizes that his cry signifies to others a need or want. From this point onward, the cry functions as symbolic and no longer is "pure," unmediated expression. Finally, it foretells the entrance into the Mirror stage in which the infant becomes cognizant of his own body as separate from that of the mother (mother becomes Other), and that he too, may become an object of symbolic representation. See Michael Poizat, "The Objectified Voice and the Vocal Object," in *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, translated by Arthur Denner. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992 (original French publication date: 1986), 100-102.

this "cry"—one that cannot be expressed in musical notation—he or she can experience the sensation of jouissance, a moment in which one feels temporarily separation from the body and the signifying order due to an overwhelming sensation, recalling the "pure cry" of a infant. [145]

Opera is marked for Poizat by a "a tension between, on the one hand, the pursuit of gratification in an object that lies beyond the limit of absolute transgression and, on the other had, a mastery of this pursuit, a control that would impost its rule on the 'vector' so as to keep from exceeding the limit."[146] Poizat explains that during moments of extreme jouissance, the visual order dissolves. Indeed, Poizat regards the breakdown of the visual order as a definitive part of the experience for the true opera lover. Of course, this argument may seem somewhat counterintuitive, since opera has been historically associated with extravagant visual scenography. This can be traced to the moment of opera's conception in baroque Italy, a generation "with a penchant for *trompe l'oeil* and perspective effects, which the emergent lyric art immediately used to great advantage."[147] Despite the lavish costumes and props, audience members often close their eyes in order to focus exclusively on the music. To Poizat, opera fans always seek out music above all other aspects of the operatic performance. The voice becomes the "object of the fan's jouissance,"[148] and words lose their meaning whether you can comprehend them or not. Even if you understand the words, they will fail to mean anything when you are lost in the experience of the music in these moments of jouissance. Poizat's deployment of Lacan's principal to opera proves useful in considering Barney's *Cremaster 5* (1997). In order

---

[145] Poizat, "The Pure Feeling," 7.

[146] Ibid. In order to illustrate the tension between pleasure and jouissance, Poizat offers the anecdote of a 1774 debate in French court concerning Gluck's *Orfeo ed Eurdydice*: it was believed by one faction that a listener could simply have a rational, measured experience of pleasure while the other advocated the notion that a listener could – and should – experience an ecstatic reaction to music. For Poizat, this debate of 1774 is a problem emblematic of opera.

[147] Poizat, "Words and Music: Sense, the Trans-sensical, and Jouissance," 32.

[148] Ibid, 35.

to understand how, I first turn to the figure who, like an opera performer of the seventeenth century, occupies the stage within the film: its aptly named Diva.

The Diva's Song

The sole player on the empty stage, the Diva's performance consists of a few actions. Like a musical overture, the Diva first seems to lay out preliminary trajectory of his performance by unfolding the ribbon in loose folds across the stage's floor. He then climbs the proscenium, first upward in ascent, then across the upper register of the flower-laden arch. Finally, the Diva's performance ends with his fall from the apex of the proscenium to the stage's floor where he becomes transformed into oozing, semi-solid mass. Like a Shakespearean play-within-play, the performance occurs within the span of the film for a minimal audience of the Queen of Chain and her ushers. Concerned as the Diva is with ascent—literally climbing upward until his body disintegrates—the Diva seems to represent the feminine possibility of the *Cremaster* project, one that subsides as the Giant's performance unfolds and the masculine possibility of the cycle is realized. For the purposes of this thesis, the Diva's ambiguously gendered body and the space of his performance may be related to the culture and ideology of the (neo-)baroque. I now compare him to archetypal figures of the baroque stage and the notions that these figures embody. I look first to a specific example from Shakespeare that comes from the early seventeenth century, and then to the opera star that rose to a god-like stardom that reached its apex in the eighteenth century, the castrato.

Clad in a ornately cut, pink seventeenth-century costume and his bearded face cosmetically whitened, the Diva possesses a resoundingly feminine name that comes out of the Italian *bel canto* operatic tradition (Italian for "goddess," and related to "prima donna," or first lady, the title designates a leading female role.) Indeed, though the cut of the clothing is

masculine, signifiers also mark Diva as "feminine"—the color of his clothing, his use of makeup and his title—that align him with the generic stereotypes of femininity in contemporary Western culture. Yet Barney, in part by playing the character himself, simultaneously shows that beneath this gendered veneer he is sexed male, and ultimately, signs of gender and sex are muddled. Anticipating the Diva is a character from the Elizabethan stage: Rosalind, the dynamic prima donna of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (written c. 1599-1600) who delivers an epilogue in the play's fifth act that is unique within the author's oeuvre, indeed, within late Elizabethan drama. During the course of a monologue aimed at the audience, Rosalind—in part making reference to a male disguise she wears throughout much of the play (the character Rosalind spends much of the play in "male" disguise)—reveals that artifice alones creates her gender: "If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me…"[149] Like Barney's Diva, Rosalind exists both inside and outside the boundaries of the play—in its liminal epilogue—is gendered female by his name, costume and role but male by the body underneath these layers of artifice.

Akin to the obsessive wish to harness and endlessly recycle dormant "potential" that seems to drive the cryptic, process-driven and often self-defeating actions of Barney's characters (racing in circles around the Isle of Man, filling an elevator with cement or, in this case, scaling a proscenium arch), Rosalind's speech is marked by its latency of desire and deterioration of gender boundaries ("*If* I were a woman, I *would*…") that is not quite heterosexual (kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me…"). Coyly and humorously, indeed, perhaps acceptable only through its veil of humor, Rosalind toys with seduction and an all-inclusive spectrum of

---

[149] "If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths that I defied not; and, I am sure, as many as have good beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths, will, for my kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell." William Shakespeare, Lines 15-16, "Act V, Scene 7," *As You Like It*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisamin Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), 1656.

eroticism. Rosalind's speech suggests not the interaction of "opposites" (male and female), but of two of the same (male and male), and perhaps more radically, suggests that this opposition of gender is false, for Rosalind's gender is, in fact, nothing more than the product of the trappings of the theatre dependent upon a willing suspension of belief. Kindred and contemporaneous to the smiling, partially disrobed boy of Caravaggio's *Bacchus*, the half-masked Rosalind of the Epilogue breaks the illusion of the stage since the female character's identity is revealed to be false. Likewise, Barney reveals the trappings of the constructs of gender with his Diva whose body is as tenuous as the tropes it embodies.

Enfolded within *As You Like It* is a play-within-a-play that offers Shakespeare's famous soliloquy, "[a]ll the world's a stage."[150] The now clichéd adage suggests that the artifice of the play only mimics, or re-presents, the artifice of spectator's supposedly authentic experience. Also, it parallels Wölfflin's notion of the baroque image as characterized by an openness and depth of space that strains against its frame. Accordingly, the Diva's performance consists of a literal confrontation with a frame, as he physically struggles to climb—and by extension, overcome—the proscenium arch that bounds the stage. As established in the second chapter, I maintain that Barney's narrative is a center-less and "acentric" system (closed, but constantly pushing against its self-imposed borders so that it is always shifting and re-making them), suggesting a baroque awareness and engagement with its own structural framework. What the Diva's performance perhaps provides is a metaphorical account of this process from within the cycle itself, acting as its own self-reflexive moment. Indeed, if Barney's cycle is an allegory and *Cremaster 5* (1997) is a metaphorical reflection of the cycle as a whole, then the Diva's performance—which emblematizes the struggle of the cycle itself—is, complicatedly, an

---

[150] Ibid, lines 138-139, "Act II, Scene 7," 1622.

allegory within an allegory within an allegory in which the framework of the whole is reflected in the structure of the fragment. As with the film's narrative and spectacular mise-en-scène, this complex notion suggests the spiraling, inward movement of the baroque fold.

Implicit in the world-as-stage notion is the elision of borders separating spectator and spectacle. Like the promise of a desire based on sameness in Rosalind's afterword, opposition is eradicated: artifice and nature become part of the same continuum, or to invoke Deleuze, part of the same fold. As if to anxiously enclose the space of representation, the practitioners of sixteenth and century theatre invented the proscenium arch, a structure that frames the stage and marks a clear separation between the space the actors and the space of the audience. Echoing the architectural proscenium of the opera house, Barney's garlanded proscenium arch encloses the sparse, otherwise undecorated stage, as if a frame-within-a-frame. Like Shakespeare's Rosalind, the Diva is bound to the either-or space of the proscenium, and at the end of his performance will reveal his onstage existence to be bound to the illusory realm of the stage in the fifth and "final" of Barney's films.

Like Caravaggio's contemporaneous Bacchic portraits, Rosalind's seductive appeal to her audience promises to bridge the gap between spectator and spectacle and with this transgression, ensnare him in the liminal space between stage and world as finally exposing stage and world to be one. Likewise, the classical image offers an ideal, ordered space that the viewer's gaze may penetrate and comprehend while the baroque image pushes the naturalism of classicism to a disconcerting point, enticing its viewers with its images of opulence, sensuality, violence and complexity. This seductive appeal comes with a price, for as the border of representation is collapsed, it ultimately exposes its own fragility, its status as a shallow veneer behind which the falsity of all images is concealed. Finally, it threatens to upset the subjugation of the image

(passive) by the viewer (active). Just as Rosalind's appeal is to the actor's counterparts, its male members of the audience, the baroque image seemingly projects itself onto the viewer, exposing his vulnerability and passivity, and ultimately making him an object of desire in his own likeness. Barney's Diva, while pointing to the tenuousness of the boundaries that separate stage and spectator, male from female and artifice from nature can be understood as emblematically related to Caravaggio's *Bacchus* or Shakepeare's Rosalind. Yet, differently, the Diva seems to literally collapse under the weight of the borders he tries to transcend. It is with the alternate versions of the Diva's character, Giant and the Magician that alternate Leibizian "compossiblities" emerge.

Though the Diva's name implies the central singing role in an operatic production and is the only character on stage, it is the Queen—located in her peripheral box—who sings the aria that seems to guide the action of *Cremaster 5* (1997) from her de-centered vantage point. Yet, it is useful also to think about the Diva's performance in relation to opera and opera singing—or, the metaphors of singing. Like the act of singing, the Diva's mute performance is a physical act requiring training, manipulation and hypertrophy of the vocal chords. Though all opera singers—divas in particular—undergo extreme vocal training that must ultimately be considered a physical process, the most extreme example of physical manipulation is represented by the castrato. Relevant in comparison to Barney's work, the notion of ascent is essential to the castrati, for their voices were thought to reach octave heights that inspired comparisons to the divine. Furthermore, reaching their height in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, they virtually disappear by start of the twentieth century, and so their historical story may also be considered in terms of ascent and descent.

The castrati first belonged to the world of the church, appearing in Western Europe in

Italy during the fourteenth century, though it was not until later in the sixteenth century that the

Catholic Church admitted and publicly condoned the practice.[151] Castrated before he reached or

completed puberty, a castrato's hormones were unchecked by testosterone,[152] and thus bear a

literal parallel to Barney's Diva who, as the female possibility of the cycle, is notionally

"castrated." Indeed, just as the castrato's testicles were literally removed to alter the

development of the primary and secondary sexual characteristics in order to maintain his

"feminine," prepubescent soprano or alto voice, the testicles are the means of deciding (or

keeping in a state of indecision) the sex of the still-forming embryo in the *Cremaster* cycle.

Notable for this thesis, the baroque is the apex of the castrato's popularity as the castrati

became popular in the new stage art of opera. Able to span three octaves, the castriati were

thought to have unearthly voices that were the closest sound on earth to the voices of angels. In

some ways emblematic of the stereotypical linkage between the baroque and artifice, it was in

the era of the high baroque in which the castrati reached the height of their celebrity and fame in

Western Europe.[153] Like Deleuze's fold, which merges spirit and matter, the castrato's altered

---

[151] They were probably a product of the Byzantine Church's influence on the Catholic Church, though the origins of the practice are unknown. Roselli,143-146.

[152] Roselli describes the operation and the recovery period: "…the testicles might be removed, or they might be caused to wither through pressure, maceration or the cutting of the spermatic cord; none of these methods amounted to the horrific "total castration" (removal of the penis as well as the testicles) said to have been inflicted mainly in Africa on slaves intended for Turkish and Persian harems, and to have killed most of them." It took about two weeks to recover and many boys or their families actively sought finical help in order to have the procedure. John Roselli, "The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550-1850," *Acat Musiologica*, Vol. 60, Fasc. 2. (May-Aug., 1988): 151-152.

[153] It was in late seventeenth and eighteenth century that many of the most famous opera-specializing castrati emerged, such as the wildly famous Carlo Broschi (1673-1732), better known under the name of his patron, "Farinelli." Establishing his fame and divine associations for posterity, an Englishman is reported to have yelled "One God, One Farinelli!" during the singer's performance. Yet, as the seventeenth century progressed, there was a growing distinction

body reveals a "baroque" dependence on material and artifice in order to conjure a mystical

feeling. Yet, despite their popularity, the castrati were often regarded disparagingly as inhuman

creatures, or as John Roselli describes their reputation at its most infamous: "grotesque,

extravagant, inordinately vain near-monsters."[154] Indeed, their bodies bear the imprints of a

cosmetic alteration that changes the physical and biological make-up of their bodies and changes

their bodies into "grotesque" variations of the norm. Likewise, the bodies of characters in

Barney's *Cremaster* universe—the characters played by paraplegic athlete and model Amy

Mullins in *Cremaster 3* perhaps serving as the most literal example—happily merge the artificial

and the natural so as to transform their bodies as if to physically articulate the hope of reaching a

state that is in-between two binaries (i.e. male/female or natural/artificial). Instead of reading

externally-implemented manipulation of the body that results in an "unnatural" quality as a

negative phenomenon, Barney interprets physical processes, such as hypertrophy as akin to the

process by which an artist creates art, and can be here related to the notionally "sexless" body of

the castrato that achieves, or at least to some degree achieves, he longed-for state of halted

potential that drives the cycle in its seemingly senseless paths. Furthermore, the castrato's

"sexless" state is manufactured by artifice, a motif that Barney wholeheartedly embraces. Indeed,

now an inaccessible relic of the past, the castrato's artificially puerile body seems related to

---

between the church and secular culture. This shift allowed for the flourishing of opera but would also lead to the eventual near-total demise of the castrati in Western Europe. Roselli, 167-168. By end of the eighteenth century, as the church was forfeiting a degree of its commanding political and cultural presence, singing in the opera proved more lucrative and church singing became a less commanding part of the castrati's time. Earlier generations of castrati were more assured of a stable life in the church, and as these situations diminished, and despite the fact that opera was flourishing, fewer parents had their sons castrated without the promise of the church's stability in Europe's changing economy. Ibid,178-179.

[154] John Rosselli. "Castrato." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05146 (accessed January 2, 2009).

Barney's notion of a partially formed body suspended in a state of pre-sexual potential that

underlies the *Cremaster* cycle. Like Barney's characters, artifice defines and shapes the body of

the castrato,[155] and more crucially, allows him to prolong the otherwise transient voice of his

youth.[156] Ultimately, a parallel may be drawn to the perverse, anti-Oedipal impulse that Spector

reads into the cycle. So, with these correspondences in mind, I suggest that the Diva's story bears

the imprints and associations of the castrato's story. Indeed, as if indirectly conjuring the

silenced ruin of the past in his song-less spectacle, Barney's Diva acts as an emblem as Benjamin

understands it, retaining its obscured, fragmented connotations.

If Barney's Diva can be considered an allegorical representation of castrato, then Poizat's

theories concerning the castrato and the high voice in opera may be invoked to more fully

understand how the Diva's performance relates to the notions guiding *Cremaster 5* (1997)—

transcendence and fall. Reminiscent of Roselli's description of the castrato as monstrous, Poizat

likens the castrato to the other end of the same spectrum, contending that there is a "trans-

sexual" association of castrati and angels.[157] According to Poizat, in early operas, the high-

voiced castrati were often assigned very masculine roles, revealing little correlation between the

---

[155] Author Micheal Onfray observes of Barney's characters: "The artifice designates the body, determines and defines it, shows it in all its specificity and novelty." Onfray, 56.

[156] Physically, the externally manipulated body of the castrato resonates with many of the *Cremaster* characters' bodies: the androgynous bodies of the faeries in *Cremaster 4* (1994), the unformed genitals of Barney's masculine characters Gary Gilmore of *2* or the Entered Apprentice of *3*. But it is the Diva and his realm of the stage that seems to be most directly related to the castrato.

[157] Lacking the conventional markers of biological sex, the castrato's body anticipates the "artificial fate" that Baudrillard predicts in his essay "Transexuality." In this essay, Baudrillard calls Madonna, Michael Jackson and La Cicciolina "mutants, transvestites, genetically baroque beings whose erotic look conceals their generic lack of specificity."[157] Baudrillard argues that like these extreme cases, we are all in search of the "right *look*" as opposed to aspiring to be attractive. It is part of the process of becoming an image rather than being seen. See Jean Baudrillard, "Transsexuality," in *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, (New York: Verso, 1993), 20-23.

voice and the character's gender. Parallel to the process of sexual differentiation that Barney

seeks to resist in his films, operas stars begin to be divided by gender—or, more precisely, the

highest voice for each gender—into sopranos and tenors.[158] Indeed, parallel to the narrative of

Cremaster 5 (1997) and the entire cycle itself, Poizat describes the historical trajectory of opera:

"everything happens as though this proleptic action were in the service of something that tends

further and further, as the history of the genre unfolds, toward the supreme mark of the failure of

speech and the signifying order, the cry." With a similar, seemingly inevitable trajectory at play,

I look to the demise of the Diva.

Towards the end of the *Cremaster 5* (1997), the Diva's performance and existence ends

with his fall from the top of the proscenium arch to the floor of the stage, transforming into a

gooey blob. A borderless, oozing mass that recalls the melting, erotically charged bodies and

objects of Salvador Dalí, it seems to reveal the abject substance underneath the layers of artifice

that hitherto defined the Diva. Within *Cremaster 5* (1997) the Diva's performance is the first

instance in which Barney creates a metaphor for man's (failed) attempt to escape the signifying

order via art and artifice. Like the Giant and the Magician, the fate of the Diva is bound to the

notion of fall. Yet in his case, it must be considered as a falling away of meaning—precisely the

outcome produced by "pure cry" of the high voice in opera. Indeed, the Diva's body becomes

literally dissolved as if to picture the full implication of transcendence, joissance and ultimately,

death, a notion to which I will return at the end of this chapter.

The Giant's Transformation

---

[158] Poizat, "The Blue Note," 39.

Countering the somber mode that dominates the womblike opera house, the space, color and music of "A Dance for the Queen's Menagerie" provides a whimsical diversion for the Queen and her ushers, who watch through the fleshy portal in the Queen's throne. As mentioned in the third chapter, the dark, red and gold opera house recalls the earthy palette and tenebristic light of the baroque, while the pastel-hued Gellert bathhouse evokes the light rococo palette and frivolity of a *fête galante* by French painter Francois Boucher (1703-1770) or his student and compatriot, Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806).

Like Boucher's painting, *Cupid Held Captive* (1754) Barney's cinematic sequence is colored with a pastel palette of pink, green, aquamarine and white. Garlands of calla lilies adorn the intricate tiled wall of the bath, and tethered white Jacobean pigeons infuse the scene with a whimsical atmosphere and suggest frivolity and diversion (Figure 49). At the center of both Boucher's painting and Barney's "Dance" is a pale, exposed body surrounded by a set of almost identical, quasi-human characters (cherubic putti in Boucher; the sprites in Barney). A staple of the *fête galante*, as in Fragonard's icon of rococo excess and eroticism, *The Swing* (1766), a cherubic statue is present in the playful scene (Figures 50 and 51).

As the Queen watches, the Giant tentatively enters this space. On the surface of the water, pearl-like orbs gently float on its surface its surface and creating a floating, transient ceiling for a group of underwater, androgynous sprites that inhabit it. His nearly colorless body is painted white, his head adorned with a crown of clear plastic globular headpiece and pink, blue, and green leaf-like appendages take the place of his legs, forcing him into an awkward and slow gait. Stopping thigh-deep in the warm water of the bath surrounded by floating pearls as the crescendo of the music builds, the sprites attach knotted, braided ribbons to the Giant's scrotum. One of Barney's more literal moments, the Giant's testicles emerge—or descend—from his body. Yet

simultaneously, Jacobean pigeons attached to the ribbons fly upward—ascending— as if

countering, if only momentarily, the "death of potential" that haunts the *Cremaster* cycle. It is an

ephemeral instant that seems to temporarily halt the Giant's transition from a sexless to a male

entity. It is his entrance into a system of rules and order in which sex, for Barney, is the first of

many ensuing limitations placed on an individual that ultimately foreshadows one's death.

To consider how Barney translates the notion of arresting possibility into a visual system,

I turn back to Fragonard's verdant, lush world of *The Swing* for a comparison: brimming ripe,

blossoming flowers and the dense foliage of trees that seem to overwhelm limits of the painting's

borders, the lighthearted, youthful scene is threatened by a fringe of dark sky that, though on the

periphery of the florid interior of the painting, seems to foreshadow the imminent collapse of this

ephemeral instant caught in paint. The focal point of the painting is of course the young girl, who

in her moment of transitory youth, coyly kicks off her slipper as a young man gazes upward at

her open skirts. Likewise, the partially concealed figure pushing her swing eagerly and

voyeuristically watches the scene, just as the Queen and her attendants watch the Giant's

transformation from their hidden vantage point.

Like (and unlike since Barney's cinematic medium inherently involves temporality)

Fragonard, Barney is interested in what happens in the liminal zone of change and transition,

especially as it concerns the body. The rococo painter depicts the girl's notoriously phallic tiny

shoe in mid-air (its form also suggesting the female sex and its "castrated" lack of phallus at the

heart of Freud's notion of the fetish). If unfrozen, the girl's shoe would fall, descending to the

level of her admirer only seconds before she too fell to earth, and the viewer can only imagine

that the preliminary desire that seems to connect the two figures would inevitably and

irrevocably be transformed. To borrow the language of the *Cremaster* cycle, they are frozen in

state of suspended potential and desire in which the female aspect is represented by the ascended, suspended in mid-air body of the girl and the male occupies the lower, descended portion of the canvas. Though Fragonard's girl is at the highpoint of her upward arch, she is nevertheless chained to the male figure by a rope just as the swing hangs from the tree from a similar cord. Recalling the theme of the chain, these lines echo the ribbons that connect the Giant to the birds and sprites—and by extension, the Queen, who has a set of Jacobean pigeons bound to her throne.

Fragonard's painted scene is a world at its apex, precariously balanced at a crucial, in-between moment. Likewise in Barney's video, the Giant's situation is just as fragile: his undifferentiated state is nearing its end with the descent of his testes. Their fall, like the descent of Fragonard's swing and the fall of the slipper, will shatter the moment of pure sensation, and the ephemeral moment of arrested potential will dissolve. It is perhaps only able to be perpetuated in artistic representation as I believe is suggested by the ascent of the pigeons at the moment of descent. Flying upward, the pigeons ascend, and as they are connected by ribbons to the Giant's now-descending testes, there is the suggestion of an alternate possibility that exists alongside the reality of descent and its outcome: sex, the order of symbols and death.

Finally, to realize the full implications of Barney's evocation of the rococo, I now consider his choice of a bathhouse as a setting for this crucial moment in the narrative of both the film and the entire cycle. Boucher's *Birth of Venus, The Rising of the Sun* (1753) and *The Setting of the Sun* (1752) feature moments of change and transition such as birth or the change of day to night, and are importantly situated in water (Figure 52-55). In his "Transformations in Rococo Space," Norman Bryson contends that rococo space follows a different format than the perspectival notion of space developed by Alberti. Rather, cloudlike and watery substances make

up rococo environments in order to allow the space to make the space more accessible and desirable to the viewer.[159] At the center of this effervescent space is typically a body that, through its blatant eroticism, dissociates itself from symbolic significance. "The erotic body is not a place of meanings and the erotic gaze does not attend to signification; on the contrary, with the sexuality of rococo painting, the image can speak to desire so directly precisely because it is no longer distracted or exhausted by signaling work."[160] For Bryson, rococo painting, often designed to organically function as part of a room, offers to its viewers the hope of a direct, immediate experience.

Like fall of the Giant's testes—as well as the Diva's fall from the proscenium and Magician's jump from the Lánchíd Bridge—I believe that a falling away of meaning lies at the heart of the Giant's transformation and thus the reason that Barney has turned to the rococo for this sequence and to the baroque for the rest of *Cremaster 5* (1997). Like his baroque and rococo predecessors, Barney appeals to the viewer's senses, foremost with his lavish and strange mise-en-scène, but also, taking advantage of his cinematic medium, with Jonathan Bepler's score for *Cremaster 5* (1997). Indeed, one could argue that the viewer is not merely vicariously and voyeuristically watching the scene—as the Queen is doing as if to remind the viewer of his role as spectator— but is experiencing a similar sensation, one that I believe is meant to inspire a temporary feeling of jouissance that mirrors the Giant's own penultimate moment. Of course, like the ropes and cables that control Fragonard's swing produced the upward and downward movement of the girl, spectacle and sensation generated by the cinematic sequence are

---

[159] Norman Bryson, "Transformations in Rococo Space," in *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime*, (Cambridge University Press, 1983) 93.
[160] Ibid, 91.

mechanized spectacles that appeal to the body. Indeed, like the swing, the cinematic cycle is the artificial apparatus by which the illusion of transcendence is manufactured.

The Magician's Leap

Largely depicted as a vision of the Queen, the Magician's presence seems the most nebulous of the three characters played by Barney. His dreamlike actions are simple. Upon leaving the Queen, he rides to a determined point on the Lánchíd Bridge. There, he attaches rubbery, white chains and shackles to his body as he re-enacts a Houdini spectacle—jumping from a bridge enchained an miraculously escaping his self-imposed bonds. After the Magician's fall, he comes to rest on a bed of flowers in the dark waters of the Danube and a sprite places a dark pearl into his mouth, suggesting that he will become transformed into a dormant entity that embodies the baroque potential within an earlier moment in the cycle. Through this Houdini-esque act, the spectator—who will likely catch the reference—is clued in to the possibility of transcendence made possible through Barney's cinematic cycle, and for that matter, art itself.

In Barney's world, the body is the site of transcendence, and it is only through rigorous training and selective atrophy and hypertrophy that the body is able to create the illusion of transcendence—or, paradoxically, the loss of one's awareness of body and its limits. For the full implication of the motif that dominates *5*, the fall, it is necessary to look to the character of the Magician and his muse, with whom I began this chapter: Harry Houndini. Throughout his oeuvre, Barney reveals an interest in placing limits on himself in order to deliberately distort his own body. [161] Indeed, for him, it is this idea that ultimately links the artist to the athlete. [162] As

---

[161] A similar notion is present in the Barney's *Drawing Restraint* series. The condition of "bypassing Production" allows a system to revert back to a past, less developed state.

[162] Barney's *Drawing Restraint* website, includes a reproduction of a drawing under the in a section titled "Hypertrophy" and a subheading entitled "HOUDINI AND BODY INTELLIGENCE." In scrawled handwritten script appears a fragmented statement: "The

Onfray writes of the bodies of the faeries in *Cremaster 4* (1994), "artifice designates the body, determines and defines it, shows it in all its specificity and novelty."[163] Yet, in the case of Barney, artifice functions as it does with the castrato and his baroque body. Due to artificial and willful manipulation, the body seems possible of transcending its conventional biological borders. Indeed, the castrato's resonance extends beyond the body of the Diva and is echoed throughout Barney's menagerie of vaguely gendered characters whose bodies are often heavily encapsulated in layers of artifice so as to confuse conventional physical markers of sex as they maintain the hope of transcending the inevitable limits of having a body. Like the castrato's manipulation of the body for the sake of his art, Barney's strangely bodied characters seem to maintain a superhuman aura.

Houdini is of course one of Barney's emblems throughout the *Cremaster* cycle, and like the dual opportunities for ascent and descent presented by the *Cremaster* cycle as a whole, there are for Houdini two options, escape and death. After his jump from the bridge, Barney's Magician's inert body seems to be only dormant, a fact furthered by the reference to Houdini, since Houdini always escaped his self-imposed restraints through his extreme physical conditioning and training that allowed him to escape enormously difficult situations (in the context of this thesis to be considered the breaking free of boundaries and borders) in which he often appeared to be dead. As Barney references, Houdini performed various well-rehearsed acts

---

exploitation of discipline…trained contortion, a willed disfigurement, a customized physically→A BODY INTELLIGENCE." At the bottom of the page he writes: "THE ARTIST IS THE ATHLETE." See Barney, Hypertrophy" Drawing Restraint. www.drawingrestraint.net.
[163] Michel Onfray. "Mannerist Variations on Matthew Barney." *Parkett* (Zurich), no. 45 (December 1995): 42-49.
In an extreme case, such as the array of characters portrayed by paraplegic athlete and model Amy Mullins in *Cremaster 3*, artificial legs serve as an extension and replacement of her body, suggesting of the hybrid form of the cyborg as it is conceived in the late twentieth and early-twenty-first century.

in which his bound body was submersed in a tank of water or thrown off of a bridge. He was a master at escaping these self-imposed constraints and his magic a skillfully created illusion. Barney seizes upon the physicality of Houdini's tricks, which would not have been possible without intense physical conditioning on the part of Houdini. By physical training and virtuosic knowledge of systems of enchainment, Houdini is able to escape his self-imposed restraints.[164] Likewise is the hope intrinsic to the desire for transcendence—that one might escape the experience of death, or rather, temporarily escape knowledge of this inevitable fact. Of course, the realm of art and artifice—whether painting, opera or film—is where this experience may be fabricated. Yet, as is evidenced by the motif of falling that dominates *5*, even within the (neo-baroque) illusion of the *Cremaster* cycle, the prospect of death is written alongside the hope of transcendence.

The Fall

Invested in escape and transcendence, *Cremaster 5* (1997) and its characters ultimately succumb to that which may be described as the opposite of transcendence and the embryonic moment that the cycle metaphorically pictures—death and delimitation. The notions of transcendence and death, apotheosis and fall or ascent and descent may all be situated as

---

[164] As well as Houdini, Barney may also be referencing the legendary Simon Magus. A contemporary of Christ and the disciples, Simon Magus is the archetypal heretic, foil to the Christian church and foundational figure for the modern magician. Notably for this thesis, one predominant explanation of his death describes his boast that he could fly from a tower and a challenge to Saint Peter. Though he is credited with the ability to fly, Simon Magus falls to his death (due perhaps to the prayers of Peter for his demise). It was believed by some that his body might rise again, but it remained dead. Other accounts of his death tell that he requested to be buried alive so that he could rise triumphant in three days but he fails to do so. As understood by Eliza Marian Butler in her 1948 book, the account of Simon Magus brings about the beginning of the Christian era and an end to the time of the magus that dates back to ancient cultures, in some accounts predating the cults surrounding Zoroaster. See Eliza Marian Butler, "The Downfall of the Magus," in *The Myth of the Magus*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 73-86.

oppositional—binaries characterized by joy and sorrow. Yet at the heart of each is the same notion, whether by means of a momentary instant of transcendence or the permanence of death: the subject's falling away from the signifying order. The Diva's performance ends when he falls from the proscenium arch to the floor as his body is revealed to be an abject mass of translucent gooey material that melts out of his elaborate costume that transforms his body into a radically undifferentiated mass (that ultimately recalls Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs"). Likewise, the Giant's undifferentiated state comes to its end with the descent of his testes. Their fall, like the descent of Fragonard's swing and the (un-depicted) fall of the slipper, shatters the moment of pure sensation, and the ephemeral moment of arrested potential—perhaps only able to be perpetuated in artistic representation—dissolves. The Magician jumps from the Lánchíd Bridge, falling into the waters of the Danube. Finally, the Queen's collapse echoes the Diva's own fall, as she ends up lying on the floor, a saliva-like fluid emitted from her mouth. Like the Diva's soft, formless body, the liquid makes the internal external, perhaps making evident the final implication of a baroque collapse of borders. Importantly, the primary "feminine" characters in *Cremaster 5* (1997), both the Queen and the Diva's fall leads to demise (the Queen's body collapses under the weight of her anguish, and tied to the existence of the Queen, the Diva falls from the proscenium arch) while the "masculine" characters, the Giant and Magician do not seem victim to the same fate. They, like Houdini, "escape." As stated throughout this thesis, Barney maps out a system of relationships in which the feminine is associated with ascent and the masculine with descent. It is in the moment in which the masculine prevails, a moment of descension, the feminine characters are eliminated from the narrative. Though Barney is interested in maintaining a balance of masculine and feminine parts and preventing the progression of the Oedipal myth and thus dispelling Western patriarchal

narratives, the trajectory of the *Cremaster* cycle ultimately portrays emergence of a masculine

system. Thus, Barney ultimately succumbs to the tropes of gender in Western culture, aligning

the feminine body with death and abjection. Yet, Barney's relationship to stereotypes of Western

culture in complicated. As with his use of the tropes of history, on one hand, he employs them,

on the other, he seems to destabilize them. Just as his favored medium of petroleum jelly is

neither liquid nor solid, the Giant's testes seemingly caught in a borderline state between

ascension and descension, and his narrative multi-directional, it seems probable that Barney's

implementation of cultural stereotypes is similarly resistant to a single, stable interpretation.

The notional linking of death and femininity has its origins in the Biblical account of the

Fall in which Eve first accepts the fruit from the serpent and then entices Adam to do the same,

bringing the dual consequences of knowledge and death.[165] Yet, in the tropes of Western culture,

it is not only death that is categorized as feminine, but as that which conceals death. Artifice is

often associated with the feminine body (cosmetics and costume, for example), which is thought

to outwardly conceal the void of death just as the fetishized female body—necessary to counter

the castration anxiety it conjures—only veils the disturbing lack of a phallus that the female

embodies. This void is characterized as the "abject," a psychoanalytic term coined by Julia

---

[165] In Western art, this theme association becomes explicit in the prints, drawings, and paintings of late Renaissance, German Renaissance artist Hans Baldung Grien (1480-1545). In his study of Baldung, Joseph Leo Koerner cites E.M. Vetter, who attributes Baldung's representations as being the first to depict the Fall as overtly sexualized. Koerner argues that Baldung's innovation was to visualize the fact that like death, desire is a consequence of the Fall. Death is by its very nature unknown, therefore the anthropomorphization of death involves picturing the unknowable. Baldung skillfully plays with tropes of Western art, parodying Dürer's classical, optimistically humanistic Adam in his morbid figure of Death. He also often pairs this anti-classical figure with women, linking the unknown nature of death to the feminine realm of the "Other". In making apparent both consequences of the Fall – death and sex – Baldung is also illustrating the dual drives that Freud assigns to humanity in the early twentieth century: the pleasure drive and the death drive. See Joseph Leo Koerner, "The Mortification of the Image: Death as a Hermeneutic in Hans Baldung Grien." *Representations*, 10. (Spring, 1985):82.

Kristeva in 1980 which describes the grotesque, repulsive, and feminine. It is "neither liquid nor solid" and is ultimately defined as "feminine—yielding, clinging, sweet, passive, possessive." So, bodily fluids, wastes, rotten food, and especially the corpse ("the most sickening of wastes") fall into the category of the abject. Kristeva defines the abject as "radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses."[166]

Occupying the state of ultimate "Other," the abject is what the ego must reject in order to maintain itself. Specifically it is the superego—the part of the ego that is concerned with normative behavior and socialized morality—that repels the abject. Yet the ego cannot help but be confronted by it, leading to a state of convulsion. While an "object" shows us what is "opposed to 'I'," the abject is more complicated, occupying a "borderline" status in which the ego both pushes out as well as identifies with the abject. Of course the "borderline" is precisely what interests and compels Barney to create his *Cremaster* cycle, thus so his use of petroleum jelly and his interest in a perpetually in-between state of being perfectly aligns with Kristeva's understanding of the abject. Indeed, this idea may be mapped onto Barney's schema: by viewing his alternately beautiful and disarming images, the spectator is invited to feel a sensation similar to what Kristeva describes. Perhaps problematically for Barney's notion, in psychoanalytic terms, one comes in contact with the abject in order to gain autonomy from the maternal: to give birth to him- or herself. Kristeva describes it as a painful, disgusting process of confrontation or of becoming "inside-out."[167] The alignment of the period proceeding this "birth" and death in Kristeva proves relevant to Barney and *Cremaster 5* (1997), for it is with an instance of birth and death—almost conflated into a single thing—that Barney's cycle tentatively and anxiously ends.

---

[166] Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," in *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, 1-6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3.
[167] Ibid.

Important to the context of Barney's motif of falling, Kristeva establishes that etymologically, the word corpse derives from word *cadaver*, which literally means "to fall." A corpse shows what is cast out in order to live and is thus the horrifying, ultimate embodiment of abjection. She writes of one's subjective experience when confronting the abject body of the corpse that mirrors the Queen's final moments in which she lose consciousness: "in that thing that no longer mistakes and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away."[168] Ultimately, for Kristeva the female body is subjugated to the role of oppositional, serving as the dark counterpart to life and to masculine, Apolloian notions of order and clarity. Thus, the feminine abject can be understood to align with the Bacchic and the baroque.

Cremaster 5 (1997) is dominated by the Queen's sorrowful feminine presence, by her melancholic dream, yet it is also the matercal space in which a struggle between the masculine (descending) and feminine (ascending) aspects of a pre-seuxal organism takes place. When the Queen finally recalls the Magician's jump, a fall that she believes to represent his death, she collapses as if in a faint just as the Diva collapses into a mass of what appears to be petroleum jelly.[169] It recalls Kristeva's description of the abject substance as sticky, half-fluid, half-solid repulsive substance. Similarly, Barney uses sickening imagery throughout the cycle, images that produce— perhaps appropriately for a baroque aesthetic—a convulsive reaction.[170]

Finally, the breakdown of significance that is crucial to Kristeva's theory of abjection mirrors Barney's concept of a suspending life in a state prior to gender differentiation. The moment Barney imagines is typically scripted as opposite of death since it takes place before

---

[168] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

[169] Petroleum jelly is a favored medium of Barney.

[170] For example, in the "Dental Atonement" sequence in *Cremater* 3, Barney's character, the Entered Apprentice, has his teeth violently removed and replaced with a sheet of plastic.

individuation begins, in the very first weeks of the existence of an embryo. Yet in both situations

there is the dominating motif of the breakdown of the signifying order: a moment in which

meaning does not exist. Like seventeenth-century baroque artists, who sought to elicit a strong

response in the viewer with their visceral representations of violent scenes such as martyrdom,

Barney seems intent on briefly recreating these sensations. His use of abject material such as

petroleum jelly, or in films such as *Cremaster 3* (2002), substances such as blood or intestinal

matter, elicits a similar response of revolt. His relationship—ultimately a struggle— with the

sticky, formless abject substance is perhaps most literally articulated in his first installment of the

Cremaster cycle, *Cremaster 4* (1994) and Barney's character, the Loughton Candidate struggle

to squeeze his body through a orifice-like tunnel coated in petroleum.[171] As he progresses, the

space becomes increasingly smaller and as his sensation of discomfort increases, as does the

viewer's. Searching for in option other than the either/or of gender, Barney's character is caught

in a struggle with an abject substance whose physical state—neither liquid nor solid—visually

expresses the desired in-between state that Barney imagines, that when achieved, as in the case

of Diva, entails a total disintegration and loss of self.

<div align="center">**Fantasy, Endlessness and Allegory**</div>

In the end, Barney's cycle must be taken for that which is on its simplest level: a fantasy.

Indeed, the dream-like quality of *Cremaster 5* (1997) recalls Benjamin's description of the self-

reflexive aesthetic of "unworldly voluptuousness" that dominates baroque allegory.[172] Benjamin

---

[171] "Synopsis," *Cremaster 4*, http://www.cremaster.net/crem4.htm#Synopsis. In 4, Barney's Loughton Candidate allegedly seeks an option other than sexual differentiation, a pre-genital balance of masculine and feminine characteristics, represented in this film by race cars involved in a race around the Isle of Man. After a series of events, the Loughton Candidate finds himself in a constrictive, orifice-like space, which he crawls through in his search for "transcendence."
[172] Benjamin, "Allegory and *Trauerspiel*," 180.

describes the process of decay, pointing to the lack of—or artificial nature of—transcendence in

the baroque as its defining trait, pointing to the ultimate hollowness of the spectacle:[173]

> The penchant of the baroque for apotheosis is a counterpart to its own particular way of looking at things. The authorization of their allegorical designations bears the seal of the all-too-earthly. Never does their transcendence come from within. Hence their illumination by the artificial light of apotheosis. Hardly ever has there been a literature whose illusionistic virtuosity has more radically eliminated from its works that radiance which has a transcendent effect, and which was at one time, rightly, used in an attempt to define the essence of artistry. It is possible to describe the absence of this radiance as one of the most specific characteristics of the baroque lyric.[174]

As Benjamin describes, *Cremaster 5* (1997) is "lit" by a false sun, for at the opera

house's elaborate ceiling is not an opening to the light of the sun, but the ornately designed

chandelier that reflexively echoes the architecture of the space itself. Indeed, to mask its

hollowness and to avoid definition, the film creates its own looping, self-imposed spiral of

conflict and tension and ultimately fails to find the transcendence it desires. Like the fissure that

permanently distances the sign from the signified, a story—or any work of art—will be able to

access another, immaterial realm. Bainard Cowan writes of Benjamin's notion of allegory:

"[d]ifficulty, above all, witnesses to the fact that there is no continuous passage from phenomena

to the transcendent realm of ideas, that an unbridgeable gap separates them."[175] Only in the realm

of fantasy and art, then, is there a hope of transcendence .

It has been suggested that the *Cremaster 5* (1997) itself represents a dream. Spector

argues, "[d]escension—the apotheosis of the *Cremaster* project—would merely be a mirage, a

fantasy forged in the recesses of the Queen's subconscious."[176] This feeling of uncertainty

underscores the film's status as a work of fantasy. Indeed, as Spector cites, Tzvetan Todorov

attributes the feeling of vacillation over whether what the reader (and the represented character)

---

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Bainard Cowan, "Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981): 115.

[176] Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 65.

experiences is "reality" to the basic construct of the fantastic work of literature or art,[177] and for

the dream of the *Cremaster* cycle to sustain itself, this vacillation is crucial. Thus, in *Cremater* 5

(1997), two distinct possibilities for conclusion exist, both coming out of the Nietzschean notion

of "eternal return." [178] Vacillation—an indecisive, inconclusive position—reflects the either-or

body of the embryo, and so fantasy, or perhaps more specifically, the allegorical fantasy,

conveys Barney's deepest meaning. Despite this espousal of in-decision, *Cremaster 5* (1997)

finally ends with the emergence of a sexed, male creature who is subject to categorization that

shatters his cinematic dream of a borderless state of existence. Yet before his "fall," Barney

momentarily champions the irrational and the in-between using the tropes of the rococo in order

to imagine a body in state of "pure potential," eliciting in his viewers a parallel sensation that

temporarily recalls a borderless moment in which sex, language and death do not exist—indeed

it is only through the lens of a "perverse," baroque fantasy that one might momentarily escape

the delimited world.

---

[177] Spector cites Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. by Richard Howard (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), 41. See Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 65.

[178] The first option is of "eternal return" is that the cycle moves backward in order to begin again with *Cremaster 1*. "Beyond the strictly biological, this scenario alludes to the notion that conflict itself is critical to the creation of form (psychological, biographical, geographical): it is not some illusory end product." The second option is of "eternal recurrence": the Queen's collapse is her self-imposed death. "Confusing escape with death, transcendence with rejection, she betrays the true goal of the system, which is find a way to look beyond itself, to reach the other side of consciousness, form and definition." Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 64-65.

Epilogue

Within each of the two Goodyear blimps that float in harmony above the Bronco stadium

in *Cremsaster 1* (1996) is an identical tableau: each interior contains a table laden with grapes

(one green, the other purple) under which Goodyear exists and controls the actions of the

synchronized dancers on the field below. As if mirrored images of one another, the blimps and

the doubled character, Goodyear, exist in a state of self-sameness and bliss. Also inside each

blimp is a group of female attendants dressed in matching tailored suits, seemingly unaware of

Goodyear's concealed presence. Their contented idleness imbued with an Edenic and heavenly

calm, the languid attendants stand around the table, smoke cigarettes or recline in the few chairs

in the isolated and streamlined space. For the most part the women ignore and avoid the mound

of grapes, as if forbidden to touch them. Yet, during the course of the film, one of the women

plucks a grape and quickly eats it, her stealthy gesture suggesting that she does not want the

others to observe her action. A blatant reference to the Biblical story of the Temptation and Fall,

it recalls Eve's choice to eat from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. Of course, after Eve's

action, Man is condemned to be a sexed and mortal creature. So begins the trajectory of human

history.[179] But in this euphoric space of *Cremaster 1* (1996), it also pictured as a heaven-like

realm where a borderless state of being is possible.

Throughout in this thesis I have aligned the *Cremaster* cycle with history, honing my

vision to a baroque microcosm within this history that reflects overall the macrocosm of Western

culture's shifts and patterns. Here, I return to the notion that history moves in the same cyclical

---

[179] The action seems to subtly alter the course of action though brings about little substantial change in the film. For example, though the actions on the field continue, as one of the attendants looks downward to the field below, she becomes aware of and engrossed with her own image, suggesting the self-knowledge brought on by Eve's act of original sin.

patterns of Deleuzian "involution-evolution" of the life of a species. "The first fly contains the seeds of all flies to come, each being called in its turn to unfold its own parts at the right time."[180] Applied to history, an epoch is inscribed with a predestined end, and likewise, the end is shaped by its beginning. For, "when an organism dies, its does not really vanish, but folds in upon itself, abruptly involuting into the again dormant seed by skipping all intermediate stages."[181] Accordingly, Barney's inclusion of this reference to the Temptation and Fall weaves into the cycle's Arcadian and classical moment a harbinger of the themes that dominates *Cremaster 5* (1997): fall and descent. It establishes that the classical is from its outset always infiltrated by the baroque, just as, inversely, the baroque is bound to the classical, continuing rather than resisting its motifs. Perhaps it finally suggests that with each end and epoch the classical—as caught in its Bacchic "eternal return" continues the fold begun by the former baroque.

---

[180] Deleuze, "The Pleats of Matter," in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 8.
[181] Ibid.

References

Barney. Matthew. *Cremaster 5*.Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York: 1997.

----------------------. Drawing Restraint. www.drawingrestraint.net. (accessed September 20, 2009).

----------------------. The *Cremaster* Cycle. http://www.cremaster.net/crem4.htm#Synopsis (accessed March 1, 2009).

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena.* New York: Verso, 1993.

----------------------. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Shelia Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Baker, Georgia O'Daniel. *A Handbook of Costume Drawing: A Guide to Drawing the Period Figure for Costume Design Students*. Boston: Focal Press, 2000.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne. Verso: New York, 1998.

Bennett, Gunnar. "On Symbol and Allegory*." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28, no. 2 (Winter, 1969): 201-212.

Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. New York: Columbia Press, 1985.

Bremser, Wayne. "Matthew Barney Versus Donkey Kong," Game Girl Advance. May 23, 2003.http://www.gamegirladvance.com/archives/2003/05/23/matthew_barney_versus_donkey_kong.html (accessed November 10, 2008).

Bryson, Norman. *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime*. Cambridge: University Press, 1981.

Butler, Eliza Marian. *The Myth of the Magus*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Calabrese, Omar. *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*. Translated by Charles Lambert. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Calloway, Stephen. *Baroque Baroque: A Culture of Excess.* London: Phaidon Press, 1994.

Cowan, Bainard. "Benjamin's Theory of Allegory." *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981): 115.

De Lauretis, Teresa. "Desire in Narrative." In *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*.
     Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1984.

Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Translated by Tom Conley. Minneapolis
     and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Doob, Penelope Reed. *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle
Ages*. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Random House,
New York: 1970.

Foundas, Scott. "Self-Portraiture Meets Mythology: Matthew Barney Talks About His
     'Cremaster Cycle,'" http://www.indiewire.com/people/people_03051barney.html
     (accessed May 23, 2007).

Fried, Michael. "Thoughts on Caravaggio." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1. (Autumn, 1997), 13-
     56.
Freund, Philip. *Stage by Stage: The Birth of Theatre*. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2003.

I Die Daily: The Making of Matthew Barney's Cremaster *Cycle*. "Trailer." http://mattwalllin.com
/barney/trailers.html (accessed January 29, 2009).

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the
     Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*
     (New York; Routledge, 1991).149-181.

Hellman, Mimi. "The Joy of Sets: The Use of Seriality in the French Interior." In *Furnishing the
Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell us about the European and American Past*. Edited
by Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, 129-154. New Taylor & Francis, 2007.

Krauss, Rosalind. *Cindy Sherman: 1977-1993*. Essay by Norman Bryson. New York: Rizzoli,
1993.

Keller, Alexandra and Frazer Ward, "Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde
Blockbuster." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 45, Issue 2 (Winter 2006): 3-16.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia
University Press, 1989.

Langdon, Helen. "Flowers and Fruit." In *Caravaggio: A Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and
Giroux (1998), 51-76.

Lotman, Jurgi. "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology." Translated by Julian Graffy.
     Poetics Today 1, nos. 1-2 (Autumn 1979).

Mailer, Norman. *The Executioner's Song*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979.

"Matthew Barney—The *Cremaster* Cycle: Genre and Narrative."
http://artscurriculum.guggenheim.org/lessons/cremaster_L5.php (accessed September 20, 2008).

"Matthew Barney News: January 16, 2009." Cremaster *Fanatic.*
http://cremasterfanatic.blogspot.com/2009/01/cremaster-video-game-for-ps3.html (accessed January 28, 2009).

"Matthew Barney: Travels in Hypertrophia." Interview by Thyrza Nichols Goodeve. In *Art Recollection: Artist's Interviews and Statements in the Nineties*, edited by Gabrielle Detterer. New York: Exit, 1997, 25.

Mulvey, Laura. "Cosmetics and Abjection: Cindy Sherman 1977-87." In *Fetishism and Curiosity*. Indiana University Press, 1996, 65-76.

Murchison, Kenneth. "The Chrysler Building as I See It." *American Architect* 138 (September 1930): 24-33.

Ndalianis, Angela. *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment.* Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2004.

Onfray, Michael."Mannerist Variations on Matthew Barney," *Parkett* 45 (1995): 50-57.

Owens, Craig. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October*, Vol. 12. (Spring, 1980), 7-86.

Preziori, Donald. "Art as Art History." In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziori. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Poizat, Michel. *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*. Translated by Arthur Denner. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992 (original French publication date: 1986).

Robinson, Cervin and Rosemarie Haag Bletter. *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

John Rosselli. "Castrato." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*,
http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05146 (accessed January 2, 2009).

----------------. "The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550-1850," *Acat Musiologica*, Vol. 60, Fasc. 2. (May-Aug., 1988): 143–79.

Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1600-1667. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisamin Maus. New York: Norton, 1997.

Spector, Nancy and Neville Wakefield. *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*. New York: Soloman R. Guggenheim Museum, 2002.

Todorov, Tzevan. The *Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.* Translated by Richard Howard Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973.

Wittkower Rudolf. "Interpretation of Visual Symbols." In *Allegory and the Migration of the Visual Symbol*, 174-187. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.

-----------------------. *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600-1750*, *Volume 1*. Revised by Joseph Connors and Jennifer Montagu. Yale University Press: 1999. (First published 1958).

Wölfflin, Heinrich. *Principles of Art History: The Problem of Development of Style in Later Art* (1915), 115-116. In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziori. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Figures

Figure 1: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 1*. 1996.

Figure 2: Gianlorenzo Bernini. The Ecstasy of S. Teresa. 1645-52. The Cornaro Chapel, S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome.

Figure 3: Caravaggio. *Self-Portrait as Bacchus*. **1593-94.**

Figure 4: Caravaggio. *Portrait of Bacchus*. **1598.**

Figure 5: Cindy Sherman. *Untitled #224*. **1990.**

Figure 6: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 4*. **1994.**
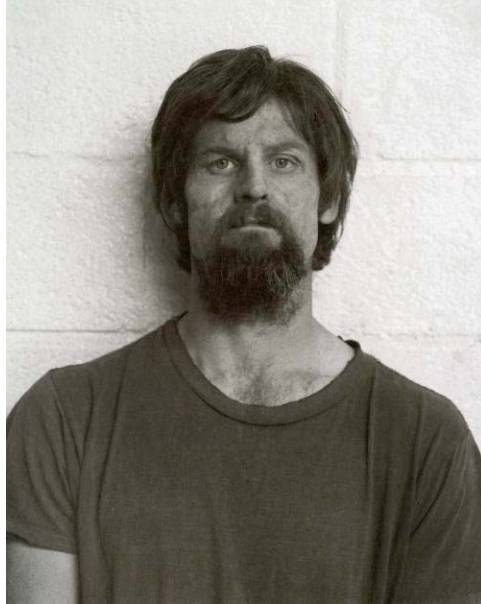
Figure 7: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 4*. 1994.

Figure 8: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 4*. 1994.

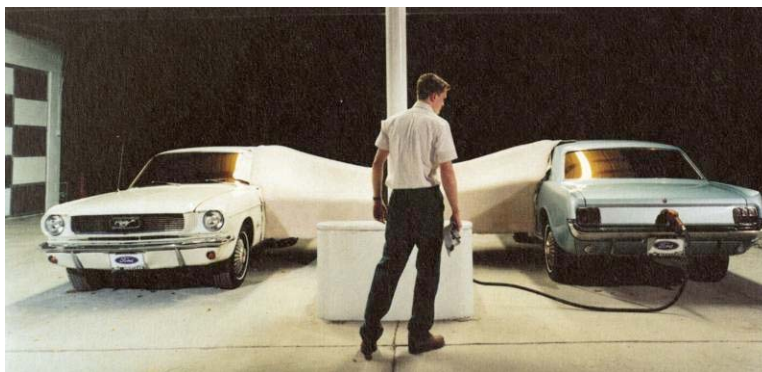**Figure 9: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 4*. 1994.**
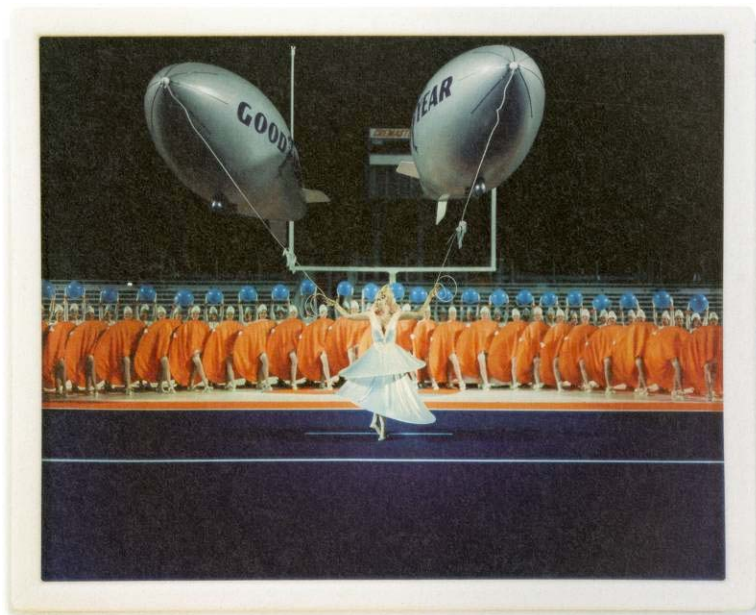
Figure 10: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 1*. 1996.

Figure 11: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 1*. 1996.

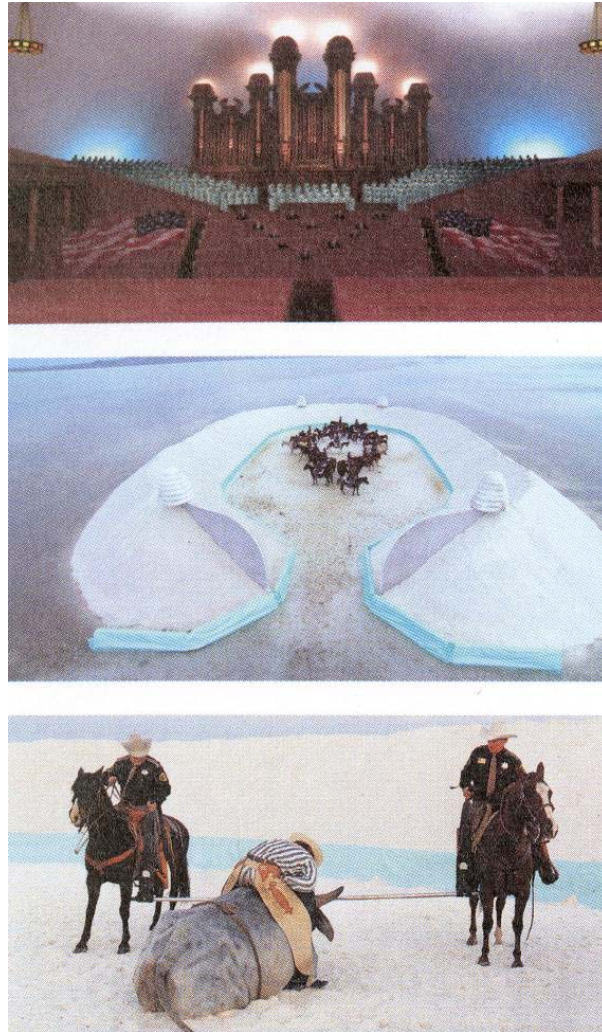**Figure 12: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 1*. 1996.**

Figure 13: Matthew Barney. Production and video stills from *Cremaster 1*. 1996.

Figure 14: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5* .1997.

Figure 15: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5* .1997.

Figure 16: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 17: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

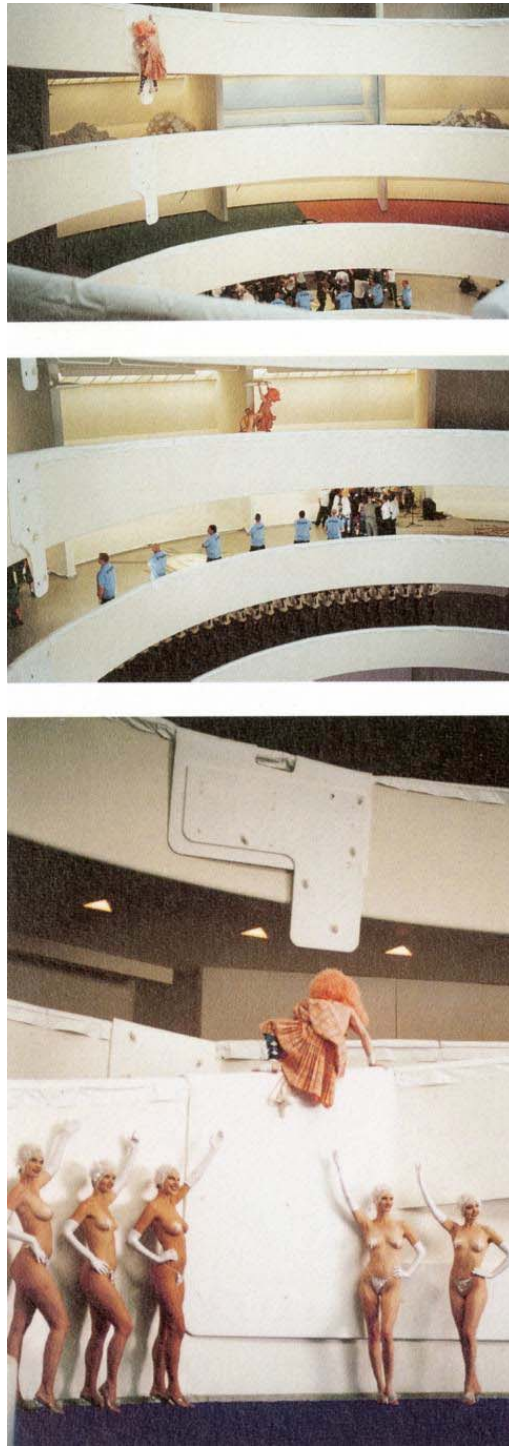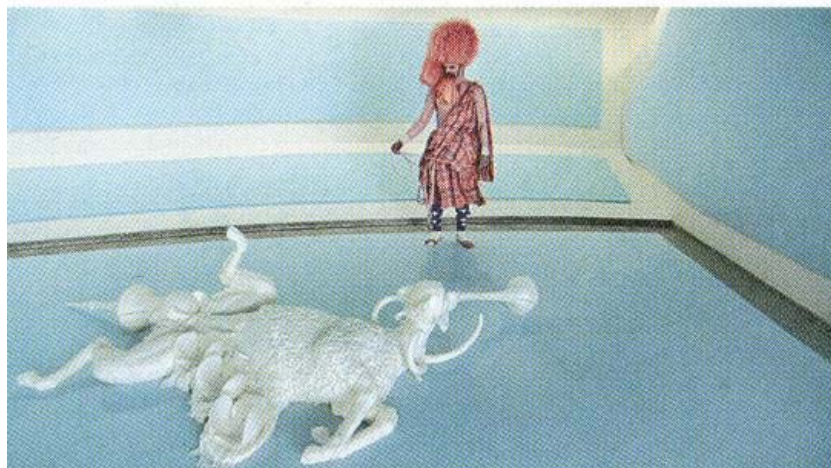**Figure 18: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.**

Figure 19: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 20: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.
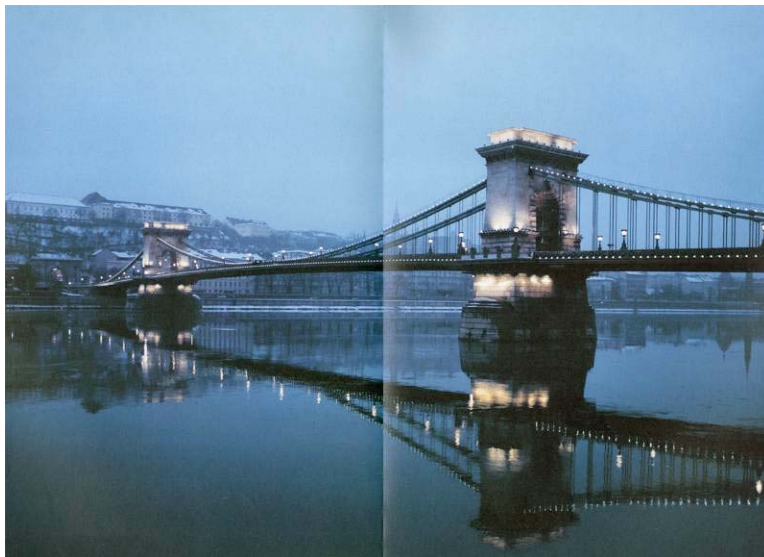
Figure 21: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 22: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 2*. 1999.

Figure 23: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 2*. 1999.

Figure 24: Matthew Barney. Video stills from *Cremaster 2*. 1999.

Figure 25: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 3*. 2002.
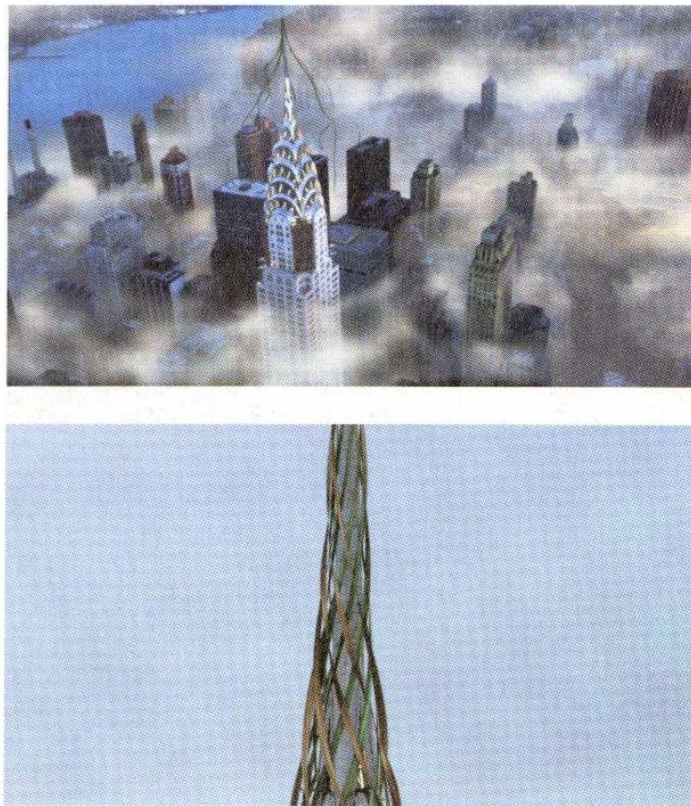
Figure 26: Matthew Barney. Video stills from *Cremaster 3*. 2002.

Figure 27: Matthew Barney. Video stills from *Cremaster 3*. 2002.

Figure 28: Matthew Barney. Video stills from *Cremaster 3*. 2002.

Figure 29: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 3*. 2002.

Figure 30: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 3*. 2002.

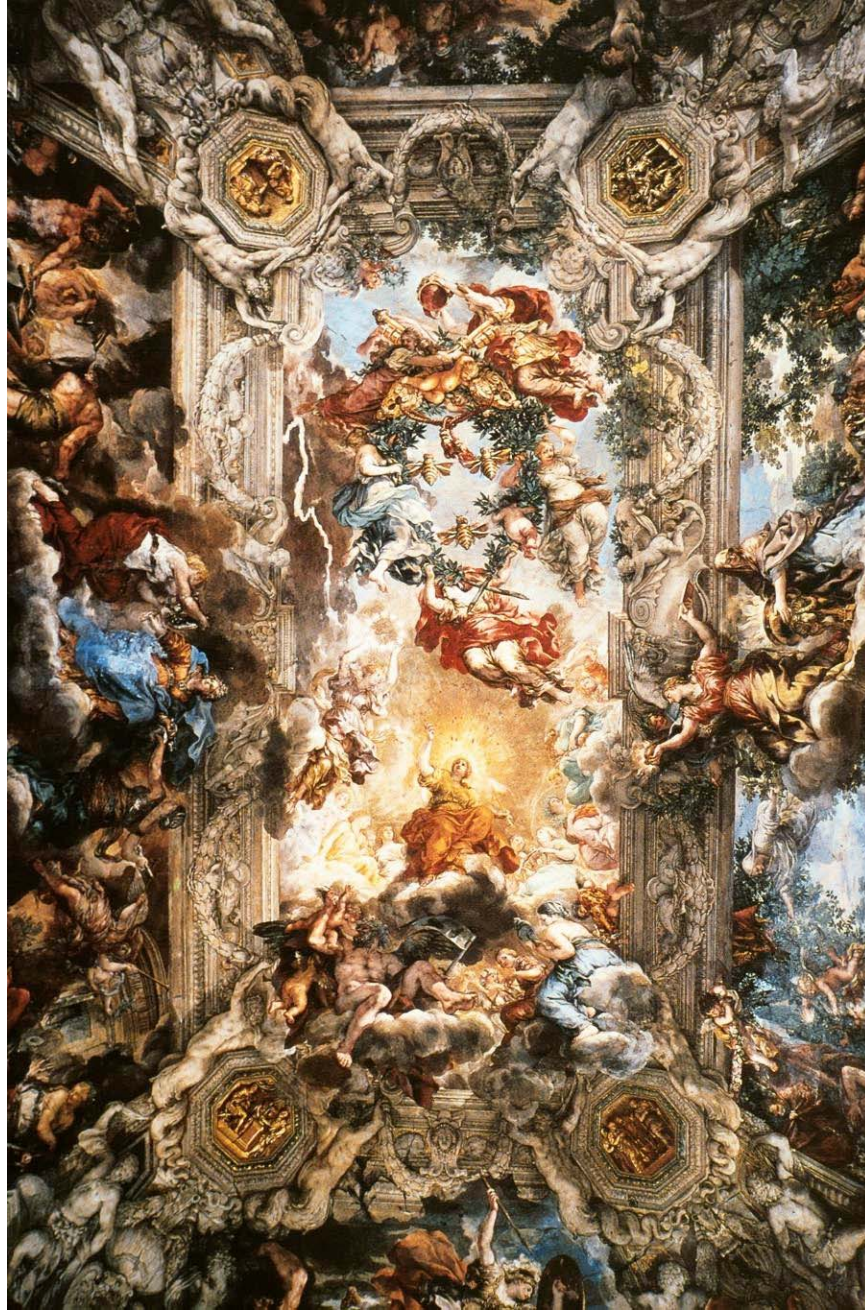**Figure 31: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 3*. 1999.**

Figure 32: Pietro da Cortona. Glorification of the Reign of Urban VIII. 1633-39. Ceiling fresco in gran salone, Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

Figure 33: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 34: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

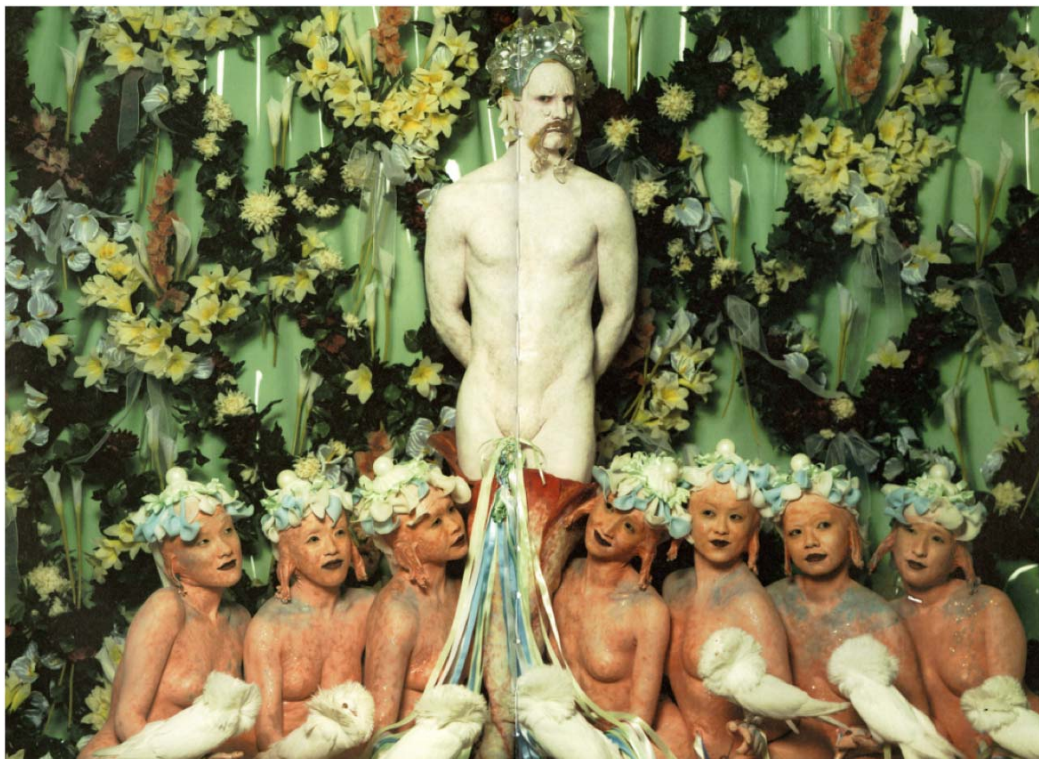**Figure 35: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.**

Figure 36: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 37: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

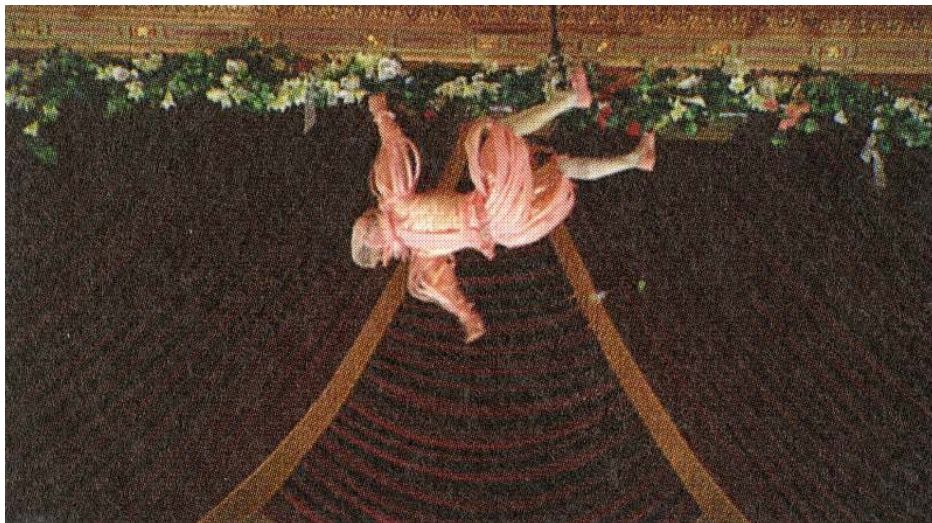**Figure 38: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.**

Figure 39: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 40: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 41: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.
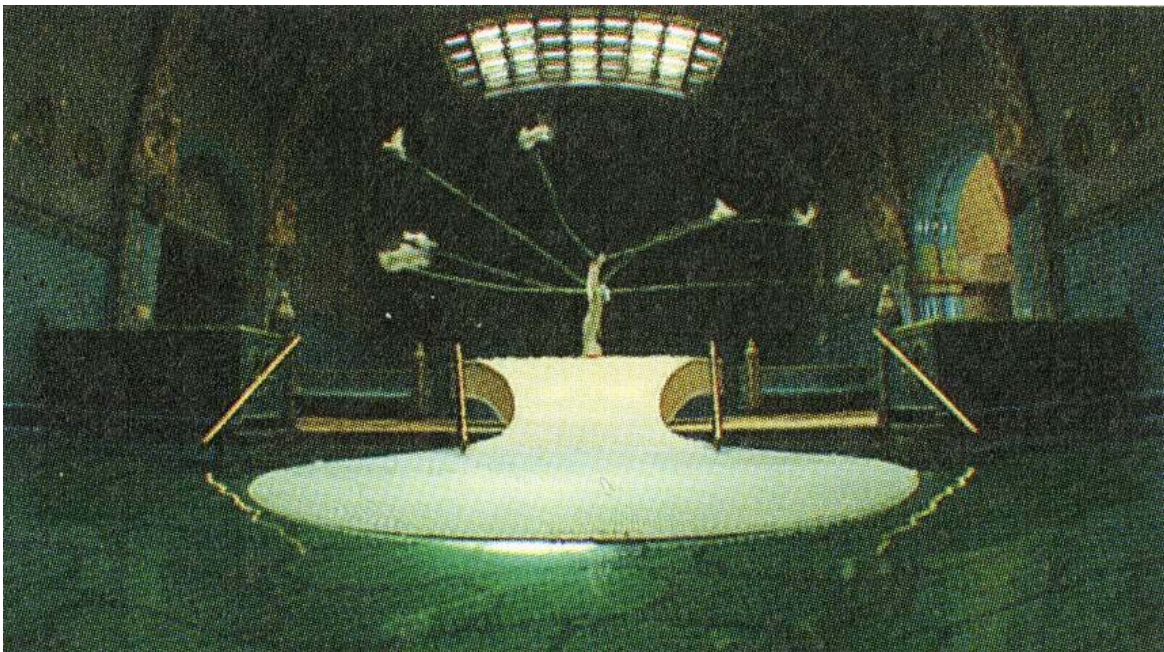

Figure 42: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 43: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 44: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 45: Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 46: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 47: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

Figure 48: Matthew Barney. Video still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.

**Figure 49: (Left) Matthew Barney. Production still from *Cremaster 5*. 1997.
(Right) Jacques Bellange. *Portrait of Henry II, Duke of Montgomery on Horseback*. c. 1602-
1616.**

Figure 50: François Boucher. *Cupid a Captive*. 1754.

Figure 51: Jean-Honore Fragonard. *The Swing*. **1767.**

Figure 52: Matthew Barney. Production still, *Cremaster 5*. **1997.**

.

Figure 53: François Boucher. *The Birth of Venus*. **1740.**

Figure 54: François Boucher. *The Setting of the Sun*. **1752.**

Figure 55: François Boucher. *The Rising of the Sun*. **1753.**