

Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle and the Ordeal of Value

Nina Papazoglou

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abstract

The following thesis makes a critical attempt for approaching the concept of artistic value based on case-study of a unique in its kind contemporary artwork. A cultural production that peculiarly illustrates a paradoxical process of pre-consecration as high art, within the both the aesthetic and art professional fields it is hosted within. The Cremaster Cycle of Matthew Barney, a notorious and at the same time, enigmatic production of contemporary art, illustrates a process of contemporaneous art historical indexing and to the creation of cultural capital. Such processes, facilitated by private and institutional patronage, are understood as integral to the art production from the 1990s and onwards, making the professional field of art equally important as the aesthetic one. Within this particular frame, we will see the faithful coming together of various agents, in support of an aesthetic idea or else, a cultural product, whose form seems intrinsically bound to both a social and an economical agenda, while at the same time it expresses a very particular aesthetic one. Due to such characteristics the research and analysis of the case study was carried out against the background of Pierre Bourdieu's 'field theory', echoing therefore the aesthetic 'field of the Cremaster Cycle'. Using as disciplinary pillars from one side, the abstract and idiosyncratic realm of art theory and on the other the practical world and language of commerce, the thesis will attempt to look into the specific conditions that contributed to the Cremaster Cycle's immediate valorization as high art. In this route the question of artistic value is one of great importance and yet, it is not one that could be sufficiently answered. Though, what becomes definite through this research project, brought forward in such times when the notions of both, artistic production and value are so expanded and malleable, is an intense urgency for new definitions. Somehow, it seems that the core problematic of this necessity for reconfiguration evolves around the notion of autonomy. This time not of the artwork but of the ones that attribute its value, namely the field; And this is exactly what the Cremaster Cycle offers us in perspective. Is there the possibility of objective or autonomous artistic value within a knowingly non-autonomous art?

Chapter One:

Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Explaining the Idea Behind this Study

This thesis focuses upon a particular issue, which is situated within the theoretical space as drafted by the relationship between contemporary artistic production and its value, both in terms of cultural and of financial context. By employing Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle as the main case study of the thesis, I will try to show how this work of art, as a contemporary version of the Wagnerian 'total artwork', may offer through its resistance and ambiguity, towards presenting a definite 'meaning', a critical perspective upon the 'contemporary art field', showcasing it through its epic formulas and neo-mythological characters, as an elite institution and artists as solitary agents harshly competing for their ascent. Within this system, the establishment of value in artistic production is being disconnected from the function of aesthetic judgment while being connected to certain processes that are subject, from one hand, to social junctures and on the other, to faith and fate.

One of the most important things to be made clear in this introduction is that in this thesis the Cremaster Cycle is being tagged as a novel version of the Wagnerian genre not only because it was critically categorized by the artistic field as such - thus due to its formal properties and characteristics- but also, because it owes its existence to a distinctively institutional framing, funding and celebration of its production event. So just like Wagner's operas and their existential and practical interdependency to King Ludwig's court and likewise to many contemporary art productions, the Cremaster Cycle could not exist without an immediate, constant and close relationship to a powerful patronage scheme. Seeing this as the essence of contemporary high art production,

namely its relationship to capital, as far as its aesthetic autonomy is concerned, and we are reminded of pre-modern times that lead us into thinking about a systemic regression. To think of this relationship as a structuring element of contemporary art history and we may rightfully ask what kind of art is historicized in it, or what “successful art” means, in the face of such interdependencies with the field of power and its active and well anchored agents.

To work towards such an argumentation, that connects the aesthetic to the socio- economic, political and ethical regimes, the thesis found a fertile connection with the ideas and terminology of Pierre Bourdieu’s study of the artistic field vis-a-vis the field of power that sustains it. His analytical perspective on the structures and mechanisms of the field of art and the greater one of culture, that explain its interactive relationship to the field of power and its effects upon the greater field of class relations, has been the main focus of three of his books *The Love of Art*¹, *The Field of Cultural Production*² and *The Rules of Art*³ but has been also part of his larger argument on explaining the notion of symbolic violence; a mode of undercurrent domination of the elites, for maintaining social hierarchies through patterns of culture and education. In effect, Bourdieu’s epistemological method offers us a sociology of culture and consequently of art, that attributes and defines specific roles and behavioral patterns for all agents involved, and which ultimately argues that culture and consequently art are to be understood as products of pre-determined and unequivocal social drives, structurally directed from within the

¹ Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991)

² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993)

³ Pierre, Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, (Cambridge, Maldon: Polity Press, 1996) or. p. 1992

field of power and manifesting as activity and production within the cultural and the artistic fractions of the social field.⁴ So the thesis takes as its basic hypothesis that this particular instance of artistic production, the Cremaster Cycle, is a typical case of this phenomenon, in which we may observe how the connection of the artistic field to that of power affects directly the aesthetic object and its historical indexing within academic disciplines.

At the same time though, by working from an alternate position to that of Bourdieu's social polemics, the work will also be placed within a suggested art historical context that may well explain its peculiar aesthetic properties and how these properties reflect a certain sociopolitical positioning and a critical treatment of the idea of aesthetic autonomy in contemporary art. To animate such an argument we will be looking at the Cremaster Cycle through the sieve of two art historical categories: as a Total Artwork and as part of the Decadent Style from the end of the nineteenth century. These, categories were chosen in order to explain the work's evident neo-mythological deliberateness, as well as a concealed decadent self-destructive attitude against its own aesthetic system. One that is overly structured and yet chaotic, auto-perpetuating and at the same time autoimmune. Thus the main difficulty in the following analysis is how to go through the maze of ideas and forms in identifying the substantial and the inductive for the enquiry we seek to pursue throughout the thesis: What is the meaning of artistic value in contemporary art and how is this affected by its interconnections to the field of power.

Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art* has drawn one possible and suited entry point or introductory basis to the discussion we are introduced to here, *in the*

⁴ Michael Grenfell, 'Biography of Bourdieu', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell ed. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 23

*Age of Mechanical Reproduction*⁵. Through his perspective, we see the art-object in its transubstantiation, from a ritual, otherwise religious and social fetish of the feudal hierarchy, to an ideological force of social and aesthetic revolt against monarchy, or as the imagined 'autonomous object-fetish' of the bourgeois emancipation. What appears to take place in the post-modern time when continuing on Benjamin's line of thought, is a kind of cynical evolution. The artwork acquiring the agency of a demand driven aesthetic commodity, becoming the core of a contemporary creative industry, is also regressing towards an older position of power. One that combines the avant-garde with both the bourgeois and religious function. Thus art today can be at the same time popular, transgressive and commercial and at the same time this new turn ultimately asks for a redefinition of the concept of artistic value.

Both the sociological and art-historical understanding of the Cremaster Cycle may therefore be facilitated by the use of Bourdieu's analytical perspectives, as primarily, it opens up a way for an approach that leaps over the labyrinth of the work's interpretation through its obscure narrative and multilayered aesthetic heredity. Yet also, it allows for an implication of the aesthetic elements of the production to be interrelated to the social conditions and mechanisms that protruded their effects into the sphere of aesthetic representations. As the French sociologist-philosopher notes, it is the description of the artistic field as both 'a field of positions and a field of position takings' that allows us to be free of performing either a 'tautegorical reading', thinking in terms of pure art, or an 'allegorical analysis' in terms of the

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, J. A. Underwood trans. (London: Penguin, 2008). or.p. 1936

social conditions of production, that would produce either a naïve-romantic or a 'reductionist' perspective⁶.

Though the critical point of the thesis starts coming into full perspective as one clearly observes how the Cremaster Cycle, as an aesthetic event, is largely characterized by numerous visual, conceptual and pragmatic oxymoronic elements. For example, the use of hermetic, and at the same time, stereotypical allegories and symbolic forms or of a narrative that is based on the psychographic autobiography of a young artist that yet is presented to the spectator as a heroic mythological epic. Or even when a semiotic constant of commonplace conspiracy theories is mixed together with sublime scientific concepts such as entropy or sexual differentiation. Moreover, this critical detail becomes more interesting when the oxymoronic character manifests itself with Matthew Barney continuing on the neo avant-garde American tradition of art making. Such position argues for artistic value residing in the process of creation rather than in the finished artwork as the object that embodies it. Yet, at the same time Barney created a drama of mythical narrative of such proportions and art- historical references that the field in which this was produced and the audience to which it was addressed, could perhaps only receive it as an "art-historical artwork" as its value was endowed with a large cultural capital. An artwork that was referent to and of, a specific cultural field as projected upon the greater field of power.

Thus from one hand, we may look at the conditions of that particular art field at the time, the agents involved in the production, dissemination and the work's critical reception, as well as in its immediate art historical indexing, as a basis

⁶ Michael Grenfell, 'Biography of Bourdieu', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell ed. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 34

of the analytical task we are attempting here, and from the other, we may look directly at the work itself. Indeed, as we will explain later in the thesis, in Bourdieu's system the symbolic existence of an artwork is subject to a foundational belief and recognition of its value as art by a particular group of agents. This is a production procedure parallel to the material one. No matter how many people are involved in the actual production of an artwork, its symbolic presence is always an outcome of an extended group activity and so in such analysis one:

...has to take into account not only, as the social history of art usually does, the social conditions of the production of artists, art critics, dealers, patrons, etc., as revealed by indices such as social origin, education or qualifications, but also the social conditions of the production of a set of objects socially constituted as works of art, i.e. the conditions of production of the field of social agents (e.g. museums, galleries, academies, etc) which help to define and produce the value of works of art. In short, it is a question of understanding works of art as a manifestation of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinism inherent in its structure and functioning are concentrated.⁷

What we will be arguing therefore, is that there is a reflective affinity between these two levels of artistic presence, the social and the aesthetic. The most evident instance of this function was the involvement of the Guggenheim Museum in New York which acted, together with other private agents, as the main host of this project. Yet, the critical issue in this relationship comes when we see a museum acting not only as a 'parent' institution but as a narrative character of the Cremaster Cycle project. In such a peculiar instance of institutional entanglement within the production and dissemination of an art project, one can by all means speak of the decisive aesthetic effects it corresponded with in Barney's creative principles. Making the Guggenheim Museum or the Chrysler Building⁸ characters of his epic narrative, he incorporated them in an art historical event, which highlighted

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), pg.37

their roles and visibility as symbols of his patron's capital. Such an instance, obviously created a biased environment or else an impediment for a substantial critical capturing of the Cremaster Cycle. Yet, at the same time it offered a way into questioning the stereotype of the iconic artistic status, the creative genius of the 90s and its relationship to the creation of both financial and cultural capital. So this points towards the idea, especially for explaining certain choices that formed the methodology of the thesis, that perhaps the most fundamental turning point was the idea that the value of the art object appears in the conjunction of its aesthetic and social characteristics. Addressing this comprehensive potential the thesis examined the Cremaster Cycle as a visual narrative that can be seen not only as mere fantasy but also as a representation of a subjective reality.

Another perspective that informs us of the conditions of the field and the behavior of its agents in the event of the Cremaster Cycle's production, comes through the relationship between merit or artistic value on one hand and financial value on the other. This point of view presents us with the opportunity to examine the contemporary art field as a rather oxymoronic, yet at the same time normative, market based industry. And the word oxymoronic here is used because it is more than obvious that an artwork today is behaving like a free market commodity while at the same time it is also behaving like a civilizing code or as the canon towards a humanitarian view of society. As the center pole of the art field and its agents, that also seem to be operating as a rather comprehensive creative industry, closely interdependent to other bordering fields of private or national economies or social institutions such as for example education, fashion, design, architecture,

cinema and capital investment, the artwork is challenged in discussing its heteronomy.

It is clear that when we speak of 'contemporary artistic value', we basically refer to a distinctively vague notion whose main characteristic is that it is argued through undefined aesthetic traits and categories, that are institutionally hosted and disseminated. Interestingly, this indeterminate situation has been coherently described by Bourdieu, as the 'institutionalization of anomie'⁸, a condition in which artistic value is institutionally established as an unregulated field of competing aesthetic objects and active agents. What this effectively creates from one side, is an opening towards other fields, to for participation in the aesthetic realm and on the other, an opportunity for extreme subjectivity as well as profitable capitalization in both financial and cultural terms, through the realm of aesthetic ideas.

Another way to talk about this "anomie", as the functional principle of the value system in art, is to understand it as an outcome of a particular faith and of a historical representation of aesthetic evolution rather than as a reality in itself as of being a form of evolved, contemporary aesthetic judgment. Through this perspective we could look at the contemporary expression of the term "value of art" as the result of a centuries long faith in the ethical primacy of the aesthetic act as a civilizing process within the social field. And it is exactly this ethical statute that is being sought after by all other interconnected fields and most importantly by the field of power that contains all of them as the dominant pole of the field of class relations. What can be therefore deducted here is that through this long process and

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) pp. 238-253

establishment of “anomie”, novel categories of functions were generated and embodied by the art-object which was clearly facilitated to argue its value through many different agencies, as for example the conceptual, the economical, the formal, the cultural, the entertaining and perhaps the cultic. So under this perspective and through this case study, we may look at what this polymorphous capacity tells us about what contemporary artistic value may be. Foregrounding such enquiries, we may say at this introductory stage that the cultivation of this faith in the artistic/aesthetic object or realm looks as if it is intrinsically connected to the shifts and forms of sociopolitical structure, and closely attuned with Bourdieu’s symbolic violence. However, even though this faith evolves and transubstantiates in the coming of epochs, it has been constant in affirming a gravitational tilt towards a particular sociopolitical power or ‘lock in’, namely the elite, both in cultural and economic terms. Thus, when we look at the contemporary artistic-field it is in some way like looking at the particular sociopolitical group, which is most devoted to the aesthetic faith and by which artistic production is sponsored by. In taking this perspective into the particular context of the thesis we may identify the specific group of agents and institutions that were responsible for the existence of the Cremaster Cycle and its dissemination and valorization as high art. And what comes into ones scope after examining such issues, is pointing to a particular, North American, sociopolitical field or *milieu*, that strikingly features, through specific human, architectural and geographical characters, in the Cremaster Cycle films. Though, what makes the issue even more intricate is that this particular aspect of the term ‘artistic value’, is not only generated but also challenged by the Cremaster Cycle with a bipolar

behavior of manic embodiment and subterranean banishment. Because within this special art production, artistic skills, art-historical and cultural references as well as high art institutional distinction and patronage are amalgamated through a form of stylistic excess, a post modern and rather cynical mode of mannerism that points towards a decadent position. One side, manifesting substantiality and relevance towards a certain artistic ideal and the other exhibiting a fashionable and marketable art object, characterized by the power of hype. The peculiar key connection of this case, as I will be showing in the thesis, is that despite the obvious it is the latter side that hosts the artistic or else creative principle of the work and it is through this decadent aspect that the Cremaster Cycle is able to speak in a sharp critical language, indeed without being noticed.

1.2 Narrative as Form: Five Stories One Idea

The analysis of the story's complete narrative, as it unfolds in the five movies, or else the explanation of cultural subject-matter of the work, was in fact introduced as part of the project with the publication of the exhibition catalogue *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*⁹ as well as with the five individual publications for each movie. Though, in the concise volume from 2002, curator-writers Nancy Spector, Neville Wakefield and Matthew Barney himself through his visual reference presentations, provided all interested individuals with a complete and analytical exegesis of the narrative plot and of the symbolic

⁹ Nancy Spector, *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002)

allusions, somehow relieving us of a great effort and risk in assuming possibilities and making hypothetical links upon which to base a cultural analysis or better said, to locate the whole project. This condensed source of information became also a generic mold for art criticism, meaning that most critical capturing of the Cycle followed a repetitive and notably unoriginal framework taking the exact path that was indicated by the information of the exhibition catalogue. In a way, these documents provide us also with a map of the field, as they addressed themselves to particular types of readers as well as they originated from particular types of writers and in this way we may shift to the other voice or perspective from which we can examine the Cremaster Cycle. These consecrated agents as we understand in Bourdieu's analysis are not directly connected to the financial system that animates the artworld, yet they act as the prime opinion makers, exegetists, believers and disbelievers of the importance and value of this particular artistic event. But what is most interesting within this body of writing, and relevant to the way the thesis explores its argument, is how vividly they hint towards the Cycle's cultural significance as an American Gesamtkunstwerk without though getting into such analyses.

And it is for this reason, that one needs to devise a different critical frame and place the artwork outside this very explicit - and yet at the same time very ambiguous- analytical frame it suggested for own its own itself. For example, the Cycle was explained in many occasions by Matthew Barney as a sculptural project,¹⁰ and peculiarly he also made it clear that sculpture was

¹⁰ Brandon Stosuy, 'On the Structure of the CREMASTER Cycle - A Conversation with Matthew Barney, New York, August 2007', in Matthew Barney: Sammlung Goetz, (München: Kunstverlag Ingvild Goetz,

not inscribed on the actual sculptural pieces that were exhibited within the project's exhibitions - dismissed by the artist as 'docu-fragments' - but on the cinematic forms. Thus by defying the sculptural value of its material objects, and at the same time evading a serious cinematic statement on the celluloid by claiming sculptural abstraction, Barney made it very difficult for critics to perform substantial criticism. For almost seventeen years, the project gathered two opposed yet mutually bewildered critical tendencies within both popular and avant-guard media of the international art field. Ranging from complete dismissal to devoted celebration both critical streams admitted how an in depth reading of the work was perhaps an impossible, unnecessary or even ridiculous task. So even though a large number of documents have been devoted in the critical reference of the Cycle, when one researches through this vast area it feels like having read the same text repeatedly. There are very few instances in which art criticism did not make use of a safe way out of confusion, either an ironic dismissal or a mere repetition of the critical context and narrative as offered by the work itself. So what we will be attempting in this thesis is to find a way out of this specified mold and thus connect the subject matter to a different kind of story that resonates well with the Bourdieuan scope. In order to do that we will focus on two aesthetic categories/realms that generate meaning and connect the artistic to the social: Myth and decadence, seen through the cinematic/ sculptural narratives and images of the five movies within the Cycle.

Nevertheless, most reviews and analytical perspectives, made it clear that the Cremaster Cycle had a real impact on the minds of those who dealt

with it critically by creating questions and a sense of disorientation as to what one may expect of a contemporary revival of an older art genre. While Barney's earlier video art and sculptural installations were seen as a grotesque, symbolic and sensational specimen of contemporary art, as they focused on revealing a perverse side of popular culture, they were also received by most critics with reverence as somewhat emblematic of their contemporaneity - if we can talk about emblematic video art. Of course, given the opportunity for the production of his operatic vision, Barney produced an opus using those same representational methods but on a much larger scale, thus moving from the emblematic towards the monumental by augmenting production scales in both conceptual and material levels. Thus to call the Cremaster Cycle, monumental video art or even cinema, is to say that it belongs to a greater category of artworks which explore and exploit the realm of the epic, understood both as purely visual but also as a psychological condition, of making big statements that surpass their material/ aesthetic horizon towards the ethic or the metaphysical. In this category we could also include variable artists like Bill Viola, Shirin Neshat, Robert Smithson and even Sergei Eisenstein and D. W. Griffith all of which played with myth and sublime epic narratives and particular ethical agendas. In this sense, what we may understand as fundamental in the work we will be addressing is an almost didactic tendency, a support of moral maxims, hidden under layers and layers of stylistic excess. In the final scenes of the last movie in production, Cremaster 3, the Chrysler Building collapses together with all of those who built and sabotage it. And at exactly that moment we are taken back to a mythological space and time where the romantic hope of a creative kind of

conflict is still possible.

In general, the most distinctive characteristic of this work is its spectacular and hyperbolic nature, akin to the 'popular' and 'cultic' realms of the bourgeois operatic. On the other side, its intentional disconnection from forms of blatant irony makes the viewer weary of a certain missing fact. Mixing popular and fetishistic elements with esoteric, indecipherable ones, the Cremaster Cycle presented its viewer with a cultic phenomenon that aspired more to a simple minded curiosity for meaning, rather than to a deep aesthetic enquiry. And as this curiosity was left unsatisfied, the missing fact unexplained, it established a fetishized relationship to the ideas and images invested with a promise of initiation. Therefore, to enhance such relationships was perhaps what a large proportion of the critical response was doing in insisting in the reproduction of specific themes and exegetic comments throughout the years.

Yet, before entering this kind of argumentation, we will first go through a description of the artwork with which the thesis will later present its argument regarding the contemporary status of artistic value. Even though this artwork, the Cremaster Cycle, extends beyond the limits of film, and proposes an intermedial visual presentation involving, sculpture, painting, photography and critical text, what we will be considering as our main object in the thesis, are the five movies of the Cycle. This particular synopsis is therefore necessary and largely differs from the official one, as it does not include the exegetic points of reference that make the narrative comprehensible yet nonetheless its meaning particularly decipherable. The movies are thus described as they appear on screen, in their rather incomprehensible form which nevertheless makes sense in its pace and rhythm not less than the

exegetic official synopsis. Though, in no way does this document substitute for an actual viewing of the work by this thesis' reader, but it rather compliments it, for a deeper perspective upon the issues, both aesthetic and sociopolitical that will be argued in the following chapters.

1.2.1 CREMASTER 4, 1994, 35-mm film (color video transferred to film with Dolby SR sound) 00:42:16

The first movie of the Cremaster Cycle was produced by Artangel, James Linwood (co-director of Artangel), and Matthew Barney himself in association with Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York City, and with support from The Arts Council of England. The movie begins with a prelude, during which we are introduced to the initial conditions and characters of the situation: motor race banners, a long sea pier, the calm white interior of the pier hall. A red haired, goat faced man dressed in a white suit checking himself in a large mirror. He combs his greasy hair apart to reveal four orifices where his horns are about to grow. As the frame in the room changes direction we see that he is held high up from his feet by three body builder looking Fairies, also with red hair held up in buns. They are naked and their pinkish skin is made to look as if they have a skin condition. While constantly holding the goat-man up, they fix tap-dancing prosthetic devices on his shoes with great care, by inserting and un-inserting long pearl-headed needles. Then we see two double seated race motors, Blue and Yellow, a typical racing vehicle for the Isle of Man yearly race trophy. The carts are preparing for entering the race, though facing

different directions while marching their engines. The goat-man is let down by the fairies and he starts tap-dancing in the middle of the room. The race kicks off. With a travelling aerial shot we are shown the location of the pier and then some fake geographical image of the Isle of Man appears on screen. The prelude finishes with an image of the Field emblem in striking yellow upon a blue background upon which appears a spinning approaching symbol, the three legs of Man.

The main part of the movie begins with contrasted shots, one taken from within the race motors and the other showing the three fairies comfortably situated at the roof of the pier, all three covered in blue Manx tartan blankets. The scenery around them, a romantic seaside, with a late sun and colorful clouds ranging from pale blues and pink to dark greys. They seem to be listening to the motor engines sound but we can also hear seagulls. It seems to be a late evening. This scene is intercepted by wide angle shots of the passing motor cars in equally serene and colorful, seaside backgrounds. This duet is then followed by interior views of the pier where the satyr is continuously tap-dancing in front of the large mirrored wall. The fairies are also there crouching in front of him against the wall, hiding in a way and enabling him to have an uninterrupted view of himself.

The next development in the scenes is that now we get views of the motor riders torsos from whose pockets emerge some kind of jelly blobs that seem to be moving, downwards for the blue rider and upwards for the yellow. At the same time in the pier space the fairies approach the satyr and start pulling his pockets inside out and place inside of them balls that look like big pearls while he continues his tap-dancing without any distraction off his

focus. The weather on the island has also changed and it seems to be a foggy morning, as we see the motors pass by in great speed. There is also some kind of rough shot of the carts, from their front as they are racing during which the screen trembles from the speed effects. At one point we see the floor underneath the dancing feet of the goat man to have eroded, seemingly from his long tapping against the surface. These two processes go on for some time, the fairies filling the pockets with balls and the motors driving fast in different sides of the island. The satyr, whose dancing appears to have become increasingly confident has managed to open a hole on the floor upon which he taps with greater strength. At one point the yellow team takes a wrong turn and falls upon a water stream, losing time in their race but eventually going back to it.

A new sequence is introduced when we see one of the fairies in a baby blue leather outfit standing on the asphalt of the road holding a map notebook. Another one carries a hydraulic jack and they place it in a hole in the ground of the road. They are obviously responsible for the pit service of the race and the third one holding two white blocking sleds gestures to the vehicle that is approaching for the stop. Then three events seem to be happening simultaneously: at the pier, the satyr manages to create a large hole and falls through it in the sea underneath, the yellow team crashes upon a rocky slope and the blue one stops at the fairy pits. This climax is followed by three new sequences, one is an underwater shot of the goat man reaching the bottom of the sea walking and still somehow tap dancing, the other is the fairies attending the blue team at their pit stop, and the third is again the fairies having a picturesque picnic upon a hill by the cliffs, wearing extravagant yellow Victorian

crinolines. In an intersecting shot we also see them looking down to the sea from the hole, with big smiles upon their faces. At the pit stop they take out one of the motor tires and replace it with a pink one that has a pair of testicles, making it impossible for the wheel to spin, and so they replace it again with a normal one. At the picnic site an invisible force drags the white tablecloth and the fairies and their gear is turned up side down, only the yellow mat remains. Upon it they start playing something like football catch with their hydraulic jack as the ball.

Both teams are then back in the race. The satyr starts digging the bottom of the sea and he enters a white, subterranean claustrophobic space. As he crawls in this slimy luminous cave we see his route projected upon the sea shore with a stop motion video of a sand tunnel progressing underneath the pier and towards the land. His movements are accompanied by a discreet yet characteristic sound of stickiness and sliminess in motion and it is contrasted to the loud and direct sound of the motor engines that accompanies the shots of the race. He is moving towards the inland and his route is continuously inscribed on the surface. At one point he reaches a tunnel passing that has the appearance of something between a trachea and a vagina. Before going for the tunnel he finds a spot in the ceiling of the cave. He lights a zippo lighter and reaches out on the surface, touching a nearby large rock, and immediately going back into his tunnel traversing ordeal. The passing is quite difficult, and he squeezes through narrow openings, assisted by the glistening effects of petroleum jelly. Suddenly, we see the fairies again on their reset picnic ringing a bell, which the satyr is very excited to hear and rushes to accelerate his movements. Though the tunnel becomes increasingly

difficult with very narrow spots and containing bigger quantities of petroleum jelly that coat him entirely and restrain his movement. Though he passes on to another part and suddenly he seems to be climbing upwards. On the surface the tunnel seems to be a vertical formation, a reverse shape of the inside space, covered in soil. He climbs fast and knocks his head underneath the asphalt. On this spot, upon the ground, a Loughton ram is standing, decorated with ribbons. The race is still on but we see that both motors are approaching this spot where the ram is standing in great speed. It goes away last minute and the screen turns light green as if blue and yellow are combined.

The postlude of the movie starts with an aerial view of the motors and their riders displayed on the pier upon elevated, inclined ramps in the shape of a pair of testicles. We hear the wind and the seagulls and the camera rounds and approaches the architectural landmark. A bagpipe begins its drone. With a fast cut we see the opening of a corded curtain that reveals a pair of almost asphyxiated testicles submerged in a thick layer of Petroleum Jelly and adorned with blue and yellow ribbons. Suddenly, everything is quiet and peculiar surgical instruments enter the scene while blue and yellow thread is pulled out of the testes. As the bagpipe starts again, this time playing 'Amazing Grace', the scene is a very grotesque shot in which no action takes place so we might be looking at a tableau vivant. The camera is placed in a close up frontal view of a crotch, which most likely belongs to the satyr, whose testes are pierced by seven white pegs, which in their own turn are attached to green and white interlaced ribbons that are held by the motor riders and attached to the motors, while their engines remain on

standby. The end comes with a graphic screen of a yellow field emblem upon a blue background and a spinning away Manx symbol.

1.2.2 CREMASTER 1, 1995, 35-mm film (color digital video transferred to film with Dolby SR sound) 00:40:30

The second film of the Cycle, produced by Matthew Barney and Barbara Gladstone, starts with a prelude that fades in from a bright pink screen to a row of girls, dressed up like precision dancers in pink and orange. The camera passes through scanning the lower parts of the bodies as they display their legs, lifting their skirts and revealing stockings and suspenders. After that a moving shot shows us the bright blue Astroturf and its white lines. As the shot opens up, we progressively see the whole of the stadium, and the two blimps hovering on top of the goal post. The interlude finishes with a shot of two balloons changing color from blue to orange upon a black background and then two girls appearing with great smiles, blowing bubbles at each other. The main movie begins with a shot of an empty cabin which we can assume belongs to the blimps. A white 'sci-fi' interior with four art-deco metal chairs and a large dining table in the middle covered in a white tablecloth, with grapes and some weird looking sculpture on top of it. Slowly, it becomes evident how the cabin is actually two, one with green grapes and the other with red. Also the sculpture is seen facing opposite directions as if it were a mirror image. After a cut we see the cabin occupied by four airhostesses, dressed in grey military outfits. They stand up from their chairs move towards the table and shake hands with their opposite counterpart across the other side. Then they go back to sitting. There are some exterior shots of the blimps

focusing on the big logo inscription on their side which is an almost identical reproduction of the original *Goodyear*, winged-foot with the addition of a cone underneath Hermes' sandal. Back inside the women stand up and look outside the small oval windows as they are shot from their legs going up, and with overviews that center the table in the middle of four pairs of female legs. On various instances they get up and attend the installation on the table and as now the sculpture is clearly visible we may see how it reminds one of a pair of ovaries. The camera then slips underneath the table.

In a pristine, white hideaway sits rather uncomfortably the main character of the film. She is immaculately blond and pale and wears white lingerie and stockings. She balances herself on the small surface that surrounds the base of the table as if trying to find some comfortable position. Her moves are controlled and somewhat sexy, especially in the way that they are filmed focusing on her legs and the space between them. The women outside in the cabin smoke cigarillos and look outside the window down to the empty football field seemingly rather bored. It looks as if they are waiting for something to happen. It is rather clear that they are not aware of the existence of the sexy-woman, hidden underneath the tables. Goodyear picks a hairpin from her head and pierces a hole through the tablecloth in order to get hold of the grapes arranged on the table from underneath. As she gets hold of them with her hands she places them on her chest. The grapes seem to be traversing her body as they drop on the floor through a cone on the sole of her glass high-heeled sandals. As soon as the grapes drop a digitalized version of them shows the formation of a pattern of two parallel lines and

immediately we are taken down to the field where the dancers start marching in a two line formation. The next pattern is a dumbbell and the dancers follow the grapes. Then a circle is formed and as Goodyear takes to the floor she surrounds the grapes with her arms and pushes them towards the center. The dancers contract all together. Some exterior shots show the blimps travelling on top of the stadium and in the cabin the women continue to hang around while smoking. At one point one of them steals a grape and puts it in her mouth, making sure to cover the signs of her action. Under the table Goodyear scrapes off with her nail a thin layer around the hole of the white table and she pulls out more grapes. When they touch her body it seems as if she becomes sexually aroused. A couple of more patterns are performed and then suddenly Goodyear appears with a shiny outfit on the Astroturf among the other dancing girls. The camera captures her bust and she is smiling at us in a playful manner. Then again we are in the blimps and Goodyear pulls more grapes. This time they form a Field Emblem and Goodyear sits on the floor with her legs open towards us and studies the formation. Then she is on the Astroturf walking and holding two ropes on her hands attached to the blimps. As she approaches towards the camera the dancers pull up their skirts and we see a travelling shot passing underneath their open legs. In the next scene Goodyear is walking and running, while holding the blimps in her hands in the now empty stadium.

Back again up in the blimps she starts arranging the grapes with her hands into a half field emblem. Then she lets her hand slip through the tablecloth from the side of the table and turns the sculpture around. When she brings her

arm back in it is covered in petroleum jelly. The next formation she initiates is a pair of ovaries and then she again appears on the field among the dancers sitting on a moving white 'cake'. Next we see again the two girls upon a black background holding two black balloons in front of their heads. The movie ends with a shot of the football goal post on top of which hover the two blimps.

1.2.3 CREMASTER 5, 1997, 35-mm film (color digital video transferred to film with Dolby SR sound), 00:54:30

Cremaster 5, the third movie of the cycle to be produced-again by Matthew Barney and Barbara Gladstone, was filmed in Budapest. Three of the city's most well-known architectural sites feature prominently in this operatic film. Its libretto was written by Matthew Barney and translated into Hungarian, while its music was composed by Jonathan Bepler and performed by the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra. It starts with a long orchestral prelude during which we initially see a night shot of the back of a rider with a black cape upon a black horse, traversing the Bridge of Chain. In the next shot we see also three figures from the back, two of them identically dressed while the middle one appearing in a large, black and imposing outfit. They are climbing up the stairs and the central one is being helped by the other two. The rider appears one more time, shot from his side and then the three figures enter a room. Then the screen is filled with bubble like, transparent, floating spheres upon a light green fluid in which there is something moving. Next we are shown the two figures in their frontal appearance: two women of Asian origin dressed in colorful outfits help the third, heavily dressed, person to sit down on large cushioned throne and then fetch seven white pigeons. The birds, attached to

ribbons on their feet, are placed at the front side of the cushion and are attached by their existing fetters to some other ribbons that seem to be coming out of some holes on the foot cushion. Then we see the ceiling of the Opera house with its drawings and large chandelier and the same shot moves down to reveal the proscenium and the orchestra within its box, as the musicians are tuning their instruments. The curtain is drawn up and we are taken back to the room where we now can see the third person's frontal view: a regal woman, all dressed in black, apart from a front flesh colored piece of satin on her dress, with her face covered under a veil. The stage is all lightened up but empty, and it seems as if the opera is about to begin. The queen figure stands up from her throne and as she walks forth the birds are pulled through the holes while struggling with their wings to stay above them. They pass through into the lower ground where there is a pool with emerald waters upon which they fly attached to their ribbons. The prelude finishes with a last view of the empty seated opera house after which a graphic digital image of the Cremaster 5 logo appears, all in a black shiny look, a gothic Lilly superimposed upon a field emblem.

The main part of the film begins with a view of the orchestra. As the camera moves upwards we see a man dressed in a pink outfit with his face covered up with a veil. He peculiarly walks backwards, laying a bright ribbon on the stage from side to side. He finishes and runs towards the proscenium wall and starts climbing up. Then we are taken to the royal box from which the seated queen begins her singing. She is still veiled and engaged in between the two female ushers who also take part in the singing. Then the queen is unveiled to reveal Ursula Andress, wearing a crown made of crystal blown

glass in the shape of testicles. She looks sad and gazes at the climbing man whose shots are intercepted by shots of the orchestra, of the opera house and of the queen in her box. This goes on for quite a while and at one point she is helped to stand up and walk at the edge of the box balcony looking down the opera house. Then her singing, as well as the music builds up to a more intense composition expressing a rather aggressive or hysteric mode. Her face registers anger. The climbing man has almost reached the top of the proscenium and the queen is helped back and arranged in her seat, as her singing tone calms down. The man is now traversing the top of the stage with acrobatic maneuvers, as he is holding onto a light and moving structure decorated with flowers. Suddenly we see the ushers up on stage singing and picking up the ribbon left by the man. The screen goes green blue and in the new shot there is the man in between the ushers (Matthew Barney). They lift his veil and we can see his very pale face and some strange things coming out of his mouth. He is looking at the camera. The screen goes black.

The next sequence starts with a darkened view of the Bridge of Chain over the frozen waters of the Danube. The rider with the black cape is traversing it. The queen starts another song. Suddenly, we are taken to a new place for a few seconds, it is day in a snowy forest and the queen with her pigeons on her shoulders attaches spurs on the riders boots as he is mounted on his horse. We go back to the bridge and we now can see clearly the rider (Matthew Barney) taking off his cloak and remaining naked. On his lap he has a restraining device, made out of a bright white plastic material, which he immediately starts to attach on himself. He also wears a pair of casted hands and places some balls in their palms, as well as in between his toes, all from

the same white material. The queen goes on with her singing and after an aerial shot of the snowy forest we see her and the rider kissing. Then back to the bridge the black horse is walking by itself and as it passes out of the frame it reveals its rider standing in his restraining device on a column by the edge of the bridge. As the queen's aria is climaxing to an end, we look at aerial shots of the frozen landscape and the ice travelling on the surface of the river. The screen goes black. The music stops.

In silence, a hand opens this blackness like a curtain revealing a glistering hole like the ones that were situated on the cushion of the queen's throne. Then we have an ambivalent view of something that could be the inner side of the queen's dress, as she is assuming a seated position. This image looks very peculiar, as if the body was somewhat plastic with some Plexiglas device upon her vagina. She sits and the ushers look into the hole in front of her and curtsy. They help her up again and place her on the floor next to the hole in which she looks into. An interlude begins inside this space underneath the opera. It is a beautifully decorated bathhouse and some underwater shots reveal a group of female looking but devoid of genitals amphibious creatures. They look like water sprites and they play joyfully with each other. The sound of running water is mixed together with a hypnotic, fairytale like melody. Abruptly, the music changes and we see a shimmery pale naked man with a pair of legs that look like lilies, holding the pigeons on his arms. The queen shows excitement and points at him to the ushers. He starts walking towards a strangely shaped pool as the music has developed into a more oriental sounding melody. He enters it and looks around with a wondrous gaze. The water sprites start to gather around him and they interlace colorful

ribbons in a structure that they attach on the man's grotesquely formed testicles. Then this is attached to the ribbons of the birds that fly on top. He looks as if he does not know what is happening to him. The pigeons start flying higher and higher and the interlace structure of the ribbons pull his testes down into the water. He looks up at the queen's hole and raises his arm. She looks back at him somewhat hidden behind the top of her dress. The screen turns burgundy.

We return to the opera house and its libretto sung by the ushers. The camera descends the empty opera staircase. The queen resumes her singing while standing in her box and the man in pink is now descending the proscenium, head down. We are once more taken to the Bridge with the manacled man and to the forest where a sad scene of separation is taking place between the rider and the queen... They kiss again. Suddenly she faints in her box and the ushers catch her, though her singing goes on into a high pitched aria. The man by the bridge falls into the river. The Queen lays on her back and continues to sing with her eyes closed and a beautiful travelling shot takes us from her down to edge of the proscenium stage passing through the empty seats and the orchestra. There we see the man in pink, fallen on the ground, his head transformed into a flattened pink opaque, slimy jelly forming a two-dimensional testicle shape. Then we are taken into a watery environment, with flowers and green plants and see the manacled man, with closed eyes dropping to the bottom. As he lays there dead, the sprites approach him and put a black ball in his mouth. The queen still lying on her back is shown drooling from her mouth, her saliva falling through the hole on her cushion into the pool. As we look at the pool many little floating bubble balls

fill the screen and this is how the film ends.

1.2.4 CREMASTER 2, 1999, 35-mm film (color digital video transferred to film with Dolby SR sound), 1:19:00

The prelude of this film begins by showing a mirrored saddle¹², hanging up side down and rotating against a completely black background. The object is shot in a way similar to that of the monolith sequence in Kubrick's *Space Odyssey*, as a humming soundtrack builds up tension in the face of an unknown but eminent danger, as well as by framing an object of mystery and significance on a pure black background. In the climax of the sequence the reversed saddle ends its appearance with a definite impression of a V that can also be likened to an ovarian shape. Then the screen is taken over by images of a glacial-field, continuing into another one of the Rocky Mountains, as they are mirrored over the serene Great Salt Lake. Then we are shown a desert flat landscape where the horizon marks a single point of reference between the sky and the ground. Then the image turns vertical, moving through the length of doubled mountains and clouds. From their middle axis the Cremaster Cycle symbol appears, a shiny and sharp metal logo, dripping digital blood and accompanied by two fat digital bees, most probably drones. This is a distinctively kitsch image of gothic splatter horror, especially as it is superimposed upon a rather romanticized yet quite realistic view of the mountain landscape the main part of the film begins in an immaculately designed interior, a pentagonal, brownish room. The furniture, a table and three chairs are designed upon certain organic forms, evidently inspired by bee-cluster architecture. They seem particularly uncomfortable. The

atmosphere, light conditions and sound seem to be definitely inspired by the dark, casual and at the same time uncomfortable environments of David Lynch's interior spaces. The design of the room on the other hand, seems to be inspired by a David Cronenberg design. In complete silence and after the empty room view we are showed the back side of a dark, corseted female figure; then appears a corseted pair, woman and man. The older woman brings in a chair and then kisses the man. They all sit uncomfortably around the table. The older greets the younger woman with a handshake, grabs her hand firmly and places it to hold a bar underneath the table through a gap in the middle of the table. The atmosphere and body expressions of the characters leave no doubt to the viewer that what is about to happen is of a metaphysical, transcendental nature. As the séance participants seem to be immersed in a deep spiritual sensation, we are suddenly taken to another space where only the two women reside. This is most probably a space existing within the women's minds, as they are the main inter-actors of a transcendental act. As they sit at the table facing each other, they join hands and a strange ritual takes place underneath the table whose legs from the side of the older woman are missing. On the other side, as the legs are disjoint a kind symbolic sexual act is performed while the old woman passes a silver instrument that looks like a bell with her foot to the young one. In the background of the room there is a long and tall cabinet stashed with barbells made out of salt.

Back to the 'real room', we see the couple resting on each other side, the mother casting a spell, and the younger woman, reciting a vow of universality, love and interdependence:

Old woman:

'And so...Let every bond be loosed

*Every force failed
Let all iron be broken
Every rope or every strap
Let every knot every chain be opened
And let none compel me
For I am Baby Fay'*

*Young woman:
'Now we have put into verse
The secret of the universe
Inter-invigoration and inter-control
And Inter-dependency within the whole of forms, of truth and love and light
All to Masterpoint then held tight'*

Suddenly, the shot is cut and we see a man folding up his white shirtsleeves.

The scene changes and we see bees on a honeycomb that is breaking in the middle it reveals a woman's torso with her legs spread open, her mutant genitalia resembling a moth. The shot is then cut and it turns into a sexual act performed by this woman, wearing a corset made out of glass and a man who stands behind her, holding his penis into the woman's vagina. They do not face each other and we cannot see their faces as it is shot as a close up of their torsos and thighs. They move in a controlled and unemotional manner. There is a strange mixture of horror film imagery with a pornographic video-scope that exhibits a fetishistic approach to pleasure.

The scene is interrupted by another one in which an old man, who is actually played by Norman Mailer is being helped by a few men in uniform to enclose himself into a cocoon-like cabinet. We are again taken back to the room where the old woman goes on with her séance; she takes some kind of sticky pollen-looking substance from underneath the table and smears it on her thigh. While opening her skirt between her legs she reveals her stockings and suspenders. She then starts breathing heavily and goes into a deeper trance that results in the production of ectoplasm, coming out of her mouth and nose. The younger woman is also taken into a deeper hypnotic status and as we are taken back to the sexual act scene we see how the man's

torso goes through monstrous metamorphosis, his penis, as taken out of the woman, seems to become a beehive and his body becomes swollen, almost dead-looking and oozing a transparent liquid from some tiny holes around the navel. He then literally ejaculates bees. The soundtrack during this scene is a bee humming that by escalating in its volume and density takes us to the next scene.

It starts with a surface in a dark space fully covered with bees and as the camera moves backwards opening its frame it reveals a microphone and a recording studio room. Again the influence of David Lynch's aesthetic is very present. The camera moves further out, in kind of spectral subjective view, and exits this space through the window entering the one next to it, where a death metal drummer is playing an intense sequence, jamming with the bee humming sound. There is a great contrast from the previous, slow, hypnotic almost silent scenes. The camera keeps on moving outwards looking in and enters the next space, the production room where another musician, a death metal vocalist joins in the jam. Sitting on a black leather couch, dressed in black and covered in bees he sings, in a typical death metal voice into a phone.

Then starts another scene intertwined with the one in the recording studio. It is set in a Sinclair gas station, nighttime, a typical 'somewhere in Mid West America' setting, where two bizarrely interconnected Ford Mustangs are parked in front of the gas tanks. In the cars there is a man wearing the white Utah prison outfit, lying down but being restless within this confined space. The station attendant walks out and looks curiously at the two cars, trying to peep through the dark glass windows. Here we see how the cars are

connected with a combination between honeycomb-like materials and plastic, as an installation that forms a tunnel between them. The man gives up his peeping enquiry and starts to fill up the tank of one of the Ford's. He checks the engine oil and cleans the car with a grin on his face as if he feels satisfied with his work. Now inside the cars and the tunnel, whose interior is a hexagonal space, the man gets more and more frustrated. He gets particularly anxious in his efforts to form some kind of structure that seems to be failing consistently. At one point, and while the gas station attendant performs all possible checks on the cars he manages to almost create what he wants (a structure of two metal circles connected with a string) up to the point when he attempts to place a column of petroleum jelly in the middle of the string. It does not stay there solidly.

Another scene starts here and we see a woman in a dark environment filmed upside down. She starts singing a lullaby but it is quite difficult to make out that this is an upside down head. Once more again, we are at the gas station and inside the car where the man's appearance has started to change. His eyes are slimy, swollen and red all around as if he was dead or has some serious eye infection. At some point he starts taking his prison outfit off, and in the background soundtrack we here a hysteric cartoonish laughter. As he is getting undressed and puts on a pair of jeans he reveals to the camera a baby penis. He opens the car locker and takes out a gun. As the attendant is trying this time to clean the side window, the man opens it just a bit surprising him. He opens the door suddenly and walks out holding the gun pointed at the man. He takes him inside asks him for the cash and then takes him into the next room. A toilet with a big glass door on the side, where the

attendant at gunpoint is asked to lay on the floor head down and is immediately shot twice behind the head. We look at this event both from inside the room and from outside, through the glass door, and over a pile of rubber tires. In contrast to the general imaginary outlook of the movie this is a most realistic representation of an execution style murder. As we are left looking at the oozing blood and the dead body, and while listening to a fantastic combination of country lament singing with death metal groaning, a new scene begins. Accompanied by an aggressive choral humming that later builds up to a libretto for men's choir, we enter a vast, dark ceremonial space with an amphitheater stage and a very large ecclesiastical organ. The previous scene is still re-emerging in the cuts; the dead body within a pool of blood and its last sequence is one that has the glass door on its background. There we see the logo of *Goodyear* ironically tagging the murder scene.

The huge imposing and multiply phallic organ is playing and there is a choir on the podium in front of it. Also, on the podium in front of the choir and in between two big American flags, stand twelve suited men, placed in a triangle formation. This seems to be a judgment scene for the crime just committed and the soundtrack, during this scene, a male choir piece, has a frantic, almost predatory sensation to it. It would not be surprising if Barney or Bepler had in mind the *Omen* trilogy soundtrack when developing this part. The whole composition has a dark and sinister character and this sequence is very long. At one point this scene is interrupted by fast, travelling helicopter shots of what we may recognize as the flooded Utah Salt Flats, leading towards a new architectural site, a petal shaped arena made out of salt. The

chanting calms down and the camera seems to be leaving the temple. Stalked flags with the Field Emblem and Jewish writing on them are grabbed from the salty floor. Then we see three cowboy rangers on their horses dragging along a bull. Then something else, an older man with white hair and 'all American' wide face, is walking in front of the camera. Then a man gives a silver plate with inscriptions and the CC logo to the man from the car that now wears prison stripe cowboy outfit and holds him with both hands in a seemingly compassionate mode. Riding rangers arrive at the salt structure, galloping on their horses and holding the flags but also an American one that is ceremonially dropped on the field. The older man is still in the white corridor and is now leading the prisoner, all dressed up in prison rodeo outfit and three police guards with a rifle. Back at the salt arena, that has four big hives on top of it, a ranger blows a whistle and the whole group of them enters a rider formation performance. The soundtrack here is very interesting as there is a calm and very cinematographic background music framing the peculiar sound of the horse hooves on the salty surface. For a short moment we see the bull walking in a long and narrow, white tunnel. Some intense drumming announces progress and thus the animal is prepared by the rangers for rodeo mounting in a typical way. Then the rodeo rider is helped to establish himself on the bull and he prepares for his ride. Giving the signal of his readiness in the exact words 'Lets do it!' and the ride begins. Beautifully filmed in slow motion the sequence presents the rodeo as a heroic ride to death of both the animal and the man. This violent event is therefore staged as a harmonious one rather than one that embodies conflict. As the bull begins to stumble, the American and the Canadian flags are waved and some rodeo attendants

come in to handle the dying beast. We are also momentarily taken to the scene of the old man's preparations and we see two Canadian Rangers locking him in a box. Then in the arena the death of the man and the bull is verified with a weird ritual. As they lay on the salt grounds, ten Brahman bulls surround them walking backwards. An interesting almost ceremonial music accompanies this scene. The sun is setting and aerial shots are moving around and away the arena in the middle of the plane.

A new sequence begins with reflected landscape views, country musical theme and a couple dancing a Two Step in a round room with golden walls. In the middle the mirrored saddle is rotating from the ceiling. Vertical reflected landscapes and the woman who is singing the lament intercept the dance. Then, the camera flies over the plain, parallel to the Rocky Mountains, making a journey upwards into the Canadian Rockies and the Columbian Ice Field. The mountains are dark, frozen and foggy and their views are combined with a shot of the interior of the old man's box. With a trick he starts to unlock it. Once he is out he raises his hands in triumph. Then we see a building in the middle of the mountain woods. Another weird scene, a sort of back in time lapse, is taking place. A bouncer throws a Victorian woman out of the building and two Canadian rangers handle her. The scene is happening in front of three large flags, a British an American and a Canadian. Right after, the camera enters the building through a big door and we see again the flags hanging in the interior. The space looks like some kind of grotesque museum with curious objects such as stuffed animals and a large model of a glacier. A poster informs us that actually this is supposed to be the 1893 Columbian Exhibition, in which Houdini presented his famous *Metamorphosis* escape show. The camera

passes through a doorway to another space, a very big hangar perhaps. Again, flags are hanging from the ceiling and the space is filled with huge POLARIS snowmobiles, trees and ice sculpture. A corseted Victorian woman is walking inside slowly, dragging along a small dog. The scene is extremely slow and combined with views of the mountains and the glacier. At one point, the woman whispers something to the dog and pets him. Then she reaches the stage where the old man - that we now may recognize as Houdini- had just finished his performance and now is tidying up his stuff. She approaches and the following dialogue takes place:

F: Hallo! Sir?

H: Yes! Who is it?

F: And how did you fair tonight with your metamorphoses? H: You didn't see it?

F: Sir...Would you not find it more rewarding to transcend your position within the hive? To truly metamorphose? Rather than this exercise of mere physicality....

H: Physicality mam.....I can assure you the each time I challenge myself to escape from a locked trunk, a real transformation does takes place. Within metamorphoses Houdini becomes part of the cage that contains him. He enters the lock that seals his bonds. He digests the lock. It becomes a part of him. The walls that imprison his body come open. Tonight the metamorphoses was a count slower.....but no less effective.

F: Would this drone wish to end his life as drone? H: Madam....What exactly is your discipline?

F: I am Queen. As Queen I preside over a society of drones. I would not wish for you to become a candidate for my throne.....and so Mr. Houdini I have come here for you.....I am Fay.

They join hands in a handshake and she drops the dog from her arms that runs frantically away. The camera follows a track out of the building and travels over the frozen wilderness of the mountains. It follows the glacier downwards towards its melting into a river. But as one would expect to end up somewhere warmer the route somehow returns to glacial environment through a frozen lake. The movie ends with a camera taken down to the dark and endless depths of a glacial rift. Out of the darkness appears the mirrored saddle.

1.2.5 CREMASTER 3, 2002, 35-mm film (color video transferred to film with Dolby Digital sound), 3:01:59

Cremaster 3 is the longest movie in the cycle and according to Barney it works as the center piece of the whole series, reflecting all the other movies in its narrative. The prelude of this movie has two parts and the first begins with a romantic image of the Irish seaside and cliffs. We see a fairytale figure, a man-like creature sleeping on the earth covered with long grass. Then the camera flies over to an island whose rocky basis is made by hexagon columns. Then another fairytale figure appears, a big fat man. He is dressed in sheepskin and is picking through bones and raw meat. One of his fingers is made out of brass. He eats and seems to be resting. A different camera perspective reveals two mini sheep on a rock next to him, and thus giving us an impression of his enormous size. He is a giant. Both characters have soundtrack leitmotifs of gibberish singing in high pitch and baritone both accompanied by bagpipe drones. Then we see the smaller character on the rocky seaside carrying two hexagonal columns on his shoulders, and actually building this peculiar land site. The giant goes out of his cave and makes a gesture by putting his fist up. Then he points with his brass finger to a seemingly iron object that hangs in front of his torso inside a fury case. He pulls it out and holds it up in the air. It is a phallic figure and as he exhibits it he bangs his feet on the ground creating small earthquakes. Simultaneously, the other character seems to be aware of these actions, stops his constructions and attentively observes the situation as if danger is eminent. He then enters a stone hut. The giant is seen walking in the sea and we assume he is heading towards the land of the other man. Inside the dark hut we see another

character, a woman. She is dressed in blue and green tartan. She is a weaver and definitely seems to be a mother figure. The man looks at her in a serene and respectful manner. Then, as she is weaving a cord with blue, green and white thread, he starts creating some objects out of white plastic material and petroleum jelly; wedges and balls. The giant has now approached their land, through the sea and he attempts to enter their hut, banging on the door and the walls. Here this scene is cut.

The second part of the prelude begins with a text on screen, a quote by NFLCoach, Vince Lombardi:

Character is an integration of habits of conduct superimposed on temperament.

It is the will exercised on disposition, thought, emotion and action. Will is the character in action.

In this part two different scenes are slowly developing with a musical background of Theremins that immediately remind one of the horror genre. Visually these two parts are based on a contrast of earthly slimy gore to shiny, silver and sharp objects. First, we see moving soil in a dark space and a short shot of a monstrous hand holding a silver carved Masonic trowel. A female zombie is digging its way out of its grave with slow shivery movements while another male character, whose face we cannot see is confidently applying cement with the masonic trowel on the fuel tanks in the rear end of Chrysler automobiles. The she-zombie manages to come out, into a dark, cavernous and humid space, stands up for a moment only to immediately collapse. Her body is very wet and dripping flesh. The other character continues cementing the car fuel tanks, we can see his back and recognize that he is dressed in a 1930s fashion with vest and fedora. In the subterranean cavern a group of children, all dressed in black school uniforms enter, pick up the she zombie and carry her out and upwards a dark, art deco

stair case. This scene is interrupted by views of an art-deco marble mural. The kids pass through a rotating doorway and arrive into a lobby space. A woman, also dressed in a 1930s manner is seen seated behind a reception booth observing the action. The body of the zombie drips some parts and the youngest of the boys picks them up and puts them in a little bag. She is then, with slow and ritualistic movements, placed and fettered into a black shiny car with plastic covered seats that stand in the middle of the lobby. It is a Chrysler Imperial from 1938. In the next view of the car interior we see that it is also host to a big black eagle who is locked in the vehicle together with the zombie. The children finish their job and depart. With another shot of the mural we realize that it depicts the Chrysler Building and thus we understand that all of this is taking place in this architectural site. After a last shot of the car's interior and the fettered she zombie, we see five 1967 Chrysler Imperials, the ones previously cemented by the man. They appear in different colors and circle the old car in reverse gear. They reproach and wait with their lights on. At this point we are introduced to Barney's first character, as he passes through the lobby where the cars are waiting in position. He is the man who was cementing them dressed in brown colors and wearing a thick leather apron with six large pockets. Inside of them there are carved marble masonic corner stones. He looks at the scene and walks away. Then in a digital graphic scene, the Cremaster 3 emblem appears in silver design adorned with Masonic symbols in front of the top part of the Chrysler Building.

The main movie starts with a few different scenes that introduce the sites and the action within them. It begins with a view of the receptionist sitting on the reception desk holding a flag in green and orange with the Chrysler logo on it.

Then there are some external views of the Chrysler Building whose top part is covered with scaffolds and seems to be in construction. The other scene shows Barney's character as he is trying to force his way into the elevator shaft by using the marble cornerstones. He enters the shaft and starts climbing towards the elevator cabin. In the lobby, the receptionist climbs on the black car and signals the beginning of action. Then she leaves and hides behind the reception desk. The five cars approach the one in the middle with a kind of aggressive movement. It is obvious that a demolition derby is about to take place, during which the five others attack the antique car. While Barney's character keeps on climbing the elevator shaft, the five 1968s start to crash violently upon the old car. Skillfully the man reaches the cabin and enters it. He lights up a cigarette with a match and holds it near the fire extinguishing device which immediately starts to spill water. He then exits the cabin and fetches some equipment for making cement. The derby still goes on. Then we are shown the exterior of the Chrysler and workers climbing on scaffolding and cranes. The elevator is moving while the man on its top outer side fetches a sac of cement and mixes it with water. He fills up a bucket and throws it in the elevator cabin. These scenes, as they happen simultaneously in three different levels of the building, develop in the following way. The old Chrysler is being squashed violently until its size and shape are reduced to a formless, 'almost nothing' in the lobby level. The elevator is been filled up with cement in the building. And the worker's on the top of the tower seem to be doing their work undisturbed. At one point, and after the man is again climbing in the shaft the cabin is overloaded with tones of cement and cuts away from the cords it is suspended from. It falls towards the bottom of the

building causing a mini earthquake. Barney's character stops in one of the floors and pushes some kind of metal strings through the shaft doors and then he comes into the floor. Here we enter a new scene, into an art deco restaurant interior where he comes face to face with the Maître and presents him with his wedged marble stones. He then begins to create a harp and the Maitre uses the stones to create sounds by opening gaps in the elevator doors, letting the wind produce a whisper, as it comes through.

A new scene is introduced as we see from top down a horseshoe bar and its impeccably dressed bartender. Another scene is showing the back of a woman that is dressed in a 1930s silver metallic dress, her head covered with some kind of metal veil that looks like a knight's chain mail. And a third one shows three men with masonic aprons performing a ritual handshake. The bartender who is shown to be tied on his back with some strings, seems to be largely pre-occupied with keeping an extreme order and cleanness in his workplace, which is filled with Masonic insignia. In the space that hosts the female character there is also a cat and a large pile of potatoes. The woman prepares herself to perform a specific task, by applying on her feet some kind of special cutting frame that cuts the potatoes in wedges. Then she piles them in a hole on the wall next to her. Once Barney's character has finished building the harp he enters the bar space and is seen by the masons who are actually four, through the open door of their room. They do not seem to be surprised by the intruder and close the door. He walks into the lounge sits comfortably in an armchair, lights a cigarette. The bartender goes around his business, having a sip of alcohol on the way. The Masons order three drinks through a little window to the bar. The bartender with great care

prepares their order, three pints of Guinness, and he also offers them cigars, which they accept. In the meantime, we see again the woman who is taking out her veil. While waiting for the Guinness to settle the bartender also slides open the window of her room and asks her by nodding if she needs anything. On the way to this side he notices a funny noise coming from a metal object. The sexy laborer nods no to him and goes on with her potato cutting production which is seen to be placed under the floor of the bar, creating a tilt to the structure. One of its sides is made out of petroleum jelly and it is shown inclining in its base. The Guinness is served and consumed. Back in the entrance of the Cloud Club the Maître begins singing a Gaelic ballad, and creating music by playing the harp and opening the elevator shafts, letting the wind whisper. Barney's character wanders in the bar and finds the woman in the small room. They look at each other with sympathy and he gives her a helping hand with her potato work. He sits and looks at her working. Then he walks out, sits at the bar and orders a Guinness while giving out a very dirty hand to the bartender for handshake. The man responds but immediately looks at the dirt on his white glove and changes into a new one, before starting to prepare serving the beer. In the meantime the Mason's pull out their measuring ceremonial instruments and realize how the conditions are tilted...As the music sifts to a jazzy piano, played by the Maître, the bartender's efforts to serve the Guinness turn into a slapstick sequence during which the order and cleanness of the bar give their turn to a chaotic, messy and hysteric situation. The scene aimed perhaps to be a comical one creates rather a sense of the ridiculous, a man struggling with vast amounts of foam in an audio background of bagpipe drones played by Guinness barrels and a

Theremin played by a wondering cat. Suddenly the droning disappears from the soundscape and a beautiful aria is 'sang' by the Theremin on a piano ballad, things seem to be calming down and the Bar tender manages to serve the Apprentice his large ceremonial pint of Guinness. A new scene begins here and man in a red coat, white tights and black boots trumpeting in a beautiful garden announces it. After that comes a view of some hanging satin garments with the Cremaster Cycle logos sewn on them. Then we see a horse race track where Barney's character and his girlfriend are hugging and are about to watch a race. It is perhaps early morning and the track is covered in mist, the race begins and we see ten chariots competing. Their riders wear the satin garments with the Cremaster Cycle logos on them. We also see one of the Chrysler Masons arriving at the site and carrying in his hand a bright silver instrument. He meets with another man, and gives him the thing and they part. As the sequence evolves we slowly become aware of the fact that the race horses are in fact rotting carcasses, and thus zombie horses. As the chariots pass in front of the couple, an obvious sense of fear overwhelms them and they flee from the track, the man dragging the woman from the hand. In the meantime the race is finished and the winner is about to be announced through the results of the photo finish. As the camera approaches the winning horses of Cremaster 3, while they receive their victory credentials, we are able to see their rotting flesh, dripping from the bones. This comes as a great contrast to the white satin costumes of the riders. Unable to manage his escape, the man is captured by three mobsters and a Master Mason. In a hidden underpass the three men subject him to a torture while the forth keeps check of the area. In the sequence we realize that the

silver thing is a Masonic craft harness, used to keep ones mouth open. The man's teeth are fractured as the mobsters push his open mouth and head against a rectangular pole. This is a very violent and realistic scene. Momentarily we are taken back to the Chrysler Building lobby where the Imperial is now crashed into a small formless piece of metal. Back to the racetrack, the woman is seen leaving the site devastated and drooling from her mouth, instead of crying perhaps. Then we are taken back to the Cloud Club, where the Masons exit their little room and Barney's character is still sitting at the bar his mouth bloody and swollen. They approach and ask him to follow them with a gesture and they all move to the elevators. The sequence finishes with an aerial view of the Chrysler Building without its spire erected yet. This is the end of the first part.

The second part begins with the erection of this spire as it is carried upwards by a crane from the interior top of the building, an architect's office. Downstairs in the lobby the demolition derby has finished and the receptionist picks up the tiny remainders of the Imperial and unravels a silvery part, which she places in some kind of Masonic Tupperware and then takes the elevator up. In another elevator cabin we see Barney's character and the three Masons as they exchange conspicuous side gazes. In the Architect's office the spire is almost up and he, who is played obviously by Richard Serra, turns attentively to his sculpted phallic models of towers, made out of rock salt and starts drawing them with charcoal on a piece of paper. One of them looks like the Chrysler and the others have more abstract crystalline forms. In the meantime the man and the Masons arrive in some room that looks like a dentist surgery, he takes his clothes off and, and they seem to be preparing some kind of

thermoplastic material with an orifice, placing it in boiling water to soften. The receptionist arrives at the Architect's office and stands for a moment behind the door showing signs of hesitant anxiety. She enters leaves the container on the desk waits for a moment for a response from the man and as she gets none exits the space. Just before the woman's arrival, we see Serra looking at his three towers on the drawing desk and they seem to be three different variations of the Chrysler. In the surgery the man, dressed now only with the ceremonial Masonic undergarment that leaves exposed his half torso, pubic area and back side, is placed and adjusted onto the chair, his legs spread open as if he was at the gynecologist's. We see his mutant sexual organs being observed and handled by the Masons. The triangular clear thermoplastic is placed onto his face, the orifice adjusted on his mouth and as it cools it becomes milky white and keeps its form like a mask, leaving a toothless bloody mouth wide open. One Mason sprays the orifice with water splashing blood all over the white surface. The architect takes the container and arrives at the surgery. He greets with a Masonic handshake and then goes on to the masked man and places the silver piece into his mouth and in a way pushing the metal open. As he does that we see the lower intestine exit the man's body and pouring out teeth in a pinkish slimy liquid that pours down and gathered into a curved space underneath the surgical chair. The Architect and the Masons leave the surgery. He returns to his office and starts building two columns out of metal plates, with the help of a chain crane. One is made out of pentagons and the other out of halved Field Emblems. There is silence and the metallic sounds of these tools and materials make for an industrial audio background. In the surgery we see how Barney's character has now grown a

kilt made out of flesh and the teeth have dissolved and reconstructed into a smooth cylindrical stick, like the one carried by the giant in the prelude. The metamorphosis is almost complete. Suddenly we are taken again back down in the lobby, where the 1967 Chrysler's begin attacking the building and each other with great force. As the battle goes on, Barney's character gets up from his chair gets dressed and leaves the surgery by climbing up a closet, entering the airway and disappearing into the ceiling. His mask and fleshy skirt have also disappeared.

A new sequence begins and the Architect has already lifted his columns high up. In the exterior the builders are still working and with various aerial shots of the building we see it adorned with flowing very long satin ribbons in green and orange. They spring out the spire's top and the workers pull them back into the building through the openings. The Architect having finished his work ascends up through the to columns into the space underneath the spire. Suddenly the soundtrack becomes a joyful Irish flute and violin song and we see the space under the spire as a cavernous, temple covered in flowers and earthly matter in great contrast to the metal and glass of the Architect's office. Young men in suits who are getting ready to begin a maypole ritual occupy the space. The Architect reaches this space from underneath, puts on his Masonic apron and is adorned by the men with five large balls made out various kinds of flowers. He stands in a ceremonial position in the middle of the maypole, and the young men start their dance around him. In one side of this space we suddenly see Barney's character climbing his way around the room towards the top of the maypole and towards the spire. We see him standing in the last triangular window of the building looking up. The maypole

is in the meantime finished and the Architect hangs his flower balls on the entwined ribbons. During the whole ritual the Maître d'hôtel is singing a hymn about an untruthful tower. As he finishes he distinguishes all the candles in the restaurant signaling the end of this sequence.

With a fade out fade in we are looking at a huge bubble bathtub or Jacuzzi, within a white space, occupied by some extravagantly made up women with glittering swimming caps, having great smiles, blowing the bubbles around and looking very jolly. As the camera frame opens and one of the women steps out of the pool we see the characteristic ramps of the Guggenheim museum spiraling upwards behind her. She stands on the edge and helps all the other girls out of their foamy retreat. They are topless, wearing pasties silver g-strings and Plexiglas mules, walking with care and trying to be graceful. TV like titles inform us that we are watching The Order, The showgirls walk on a bright blue carpet with their arms raised and another much bigger group of women appears. They are Rockettes, dressed in lamb costumes, marching around on a central axis holding each other side-to-side. Titles again inform us that they are the 1st degree, 'The Order of the Rainbow for Girls'. Then the camera shows the showgirls holding on to a kind of stage and rotating it. Upon it appear in sculpturally immobile poses two punk music groups, one after the other. They are the 2nd Degree 'Agnostic Front and Murphy Law'. Then a woman appears on the stage, dressed in a white long dress, that looks like an apron, leaving her backside exposed. Her legs are 'see-through', made out of a glassy material. She is the 3rd Degree, Aimee Mullins. Next appears a white sculpture that looks like an abstracted form of a ram turned into a bagpipe. It is the 4th

Degree, 'The Five Points of Fellowship'. Richard Serra is the next one up dressed up in a metal worker's outfit and he is obviously the 5th Degree. Last but not least it is the turn of the Barney's character, the Entered Apprentice to go on the stage dressed in a Scottish grand-kilt and hat in an intense pink color. The showgirls finish their presentation of characters and walk towards a spot on the white wall indicating where action begins for the Entered Apprentice. He rushes and starts climbing the ramps of the Guggenheim. The girls go back into their bubble bath.

The Entered Apprentice reaches the ramp where the chorus girls with the lamb costumes reside. They are performing their line dance and he observes them. This scene is combined with another one, in which we see Richard Serra setting up steel panels and wearing a mask for performing some kind of action. The camera also visits different sites of the Guggenheim ramp. A place where some masonic tools, made out of plastic, lay in a case and another where two simultaneous concerts are taking place in front of young punk and skinhead audiences that dance and jump around to a rough music. The Entered Apprentice appears on this level, in between the two stages and kneels down in front of a cross, made out of removable squares. He opens them revealing a crypt underneath. He then tries to balance a cube out of these square pieces while bouncers are trying to control the frantic audiences and keep them away from the edge of the ramp. While Barney's character manages to create the cube, we see Serra scooping out a big shovel of petroleum jelly out of a large container throwing it in a hot pot. Then the Apprentice tries without success to pull out some tools that are placed in the little crypt underneath the cross. He leaves in a rush and climbs upwards.

Serra takes a scoop of molten jelly and throws it on a piece of steel he had balanced on the ramp.

In the next level we see the woman with the transparent legs and white apron. She is standing on an x-marked spot where orange and green colors meet on the floor. She walks back and forth like on a catwalk and looks around from the edge of the ramp. As the Apprentice appears in her level, they join on the x-point and form a strange embrace. Barney's character now appears with an identical costume to the one of the woman and she is seen whispering something to him. She then bites him on the shoulder and scratches his back. Immediately she is turned into a cat-woman and Barney is again wearing his pink kilt. They start to fight each other in a kind of superhero manner, where they fight in flight from one side of the museum to the other. Simultaneously we see the action going on in the concerts and Serra's levels. The Apprentice manages to flee upwards to another floor where we see a pristine white sculpture of a sheep like form and an installation of some stalked white column like objects. He approaches the sculpture and we can now see that it looks like a big bagpipe instrument and the stalked columns are actually drones for a bagpipe. He then starts to try out the drones on the bagpipe presumably to find the right ones that fit on it. He throws them on the sculpture in order for them to fall exactly on the right spot. Then he climbs again upwards to Serra's level and closely observes the formation of the molten petroleum jelly on the steel plate. Serra seems not to notice him at all and continues his repetitive action. He then descends again to the bagpipe level and finishes the drone placement, descending further down to the cat-woman level. She is sitting on a high podium and he climbs through a pipe

on the ceiling towards her and then sits also on a high podium opposite her and they stare at each other in a hostile manner. At the same time, we are shown molten petroleum jelly descending down from Serra's level towards the ground floor in a trail on the museum ramp floor. Suddenly the woman is transformed again in her original state with the white apron and stands calmly on the x-marked spot. The Apprentice descends at the concert level for a moment and then to the chorus line dancers' one, where he crawls through a tunnel made by the dancer's legs and the wall of the ramp. He sits there as if to rest and as the dancers move away from him, a baby- sheepskin and a pendant is presented and worn onto him by one of the dancers who also blindfolds him with a matching pink satin ribbon. Then they lift him up and throw him over the ramp and into the Jacuzzi with the showgirls. As he comes out of it we can see the pendant, actually being a silver bell with a pentagram carved on it. The Apprentice then gets rid of the foam and rushes back up to the concert level, pushing himself through the dancing crowd to the cross site. In between the two bands that sing at each other, he studies the way in which to extract the masonic tools from the little crypt.

At this point we are taken again back to the Chrysler Building spire and its flowery temple, where the Architect-Serra stands in full masonic attire. The old Barney character appears again face to face with him holding and observing the Architect's Apron and then pulling him around with it. Next we see the Apprentice managing to get hold of the tools. In the next few scenes Barney's characters perform two simultaneous killings of Serra as Architect under the Chrysler spire and the cat woman on the x-spot both hit on the head with the masonic tools. Still we see the demolition derby going on in the lobby

and it seems that the dark purple car has won it. A man in the spire temple is dancing a fast Irish dance. Suddenly we are taken outside the Chrysler Building and we see it -with a rather unrealistic digital effect- peeling out and through this action the spire going through the roof and into the head of Barney's character, killing him also. After a shot of him dripping in blood as well as the cat woman as she lays dead on the x-spot the next scene shows the woman blind folded wearing a white masonic undergarment made out of plastic, sitting on a sledge and holding four ribbons attached to baby lambs. Her legs are made by transparent material and resemble jellyfish tentacles.

The epilogue of the movie begins showing us again the Irish coast with the hexagonal rock formations, the sea flushing onto them. We are again taken into the hut where the man, dressed like a baby in blue satin lays down on a baby bed and plays with the white balls that he was making in the prelude. Then the Giant enters and approaches the little bed. He fetches some of the wedge-like objects and feeds it to the baby-man. He takes one to eat for himself and looses his teeth into it. Then seeing the baby eat one of the balls he tries one only to loose more teeth. Upset he reaches with his brass finger to check out the teeth of the baby-man. As soon as he does that the baby bites the finger off leaving him with a bloody wound and visibly weaker to be wrestled by the baby-man. He flees from the cabin in fright and behind him also exits the other man who throws a pentagon stone towards the sea. The next scene shows this stone land in the bottom of the sea immediately causing the creation of an island and this is where this long movie ends.

1.3 How Bourdieu's System meets Barney's World: The Field as Emblem as Social Structure

Perhaps the most essential term in Bourdieu's analytical system is the notion of the 'field' or else *le champ*, a conceptual basis upon which he built his sociological theory. The same term was also used by Matthew Barney as a foundational subject matter for, not only the Cremaster Cycle but also for his entire artistic practice. Interestingly both men were inspired in engaging with the term through their athletic agencies. Bourdieu, being a rugby player during his early youth, found great relevancy in seeing the expression and functionality of positioning and of boundaries as a metaphor for social fields.¹¹ Similarly, Barney's biographical entanglement with the American Football field, an equivalent of rugby as a space of extreme athletic competition and synergy, makes "the field" the most important term in this study. The notion thus, can be understood as both a conceptual, and at the same time real space of interactive and competitive relationships, a field of interconnected positions and actions, reflected through many levels of social interaction, be it professional, national or idiosyncratic and biographical. An interactive space that anchors and affects the social structure like a playing field would host a game's outcome.

As far as the sociological aspect of the term is concerned, Bourdieu produced many definitions of the notion, for explaining particular case studies and events such as, for example, the following which he used to define the professional field of television, but which could also be employed for

¹¹ Patricia Thomson, 'Field', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell ed. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 69

comprehending other relative fields of cultural production:

'a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in the universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field, and as a result, their strategies.'¹²

The process of social structures is explained by Bourdieu as following: There is the greater field of class relations, which has two poles, the dominant and the dominated one, corresponding to what he calls the field of power as the positive pole and the other, the negative, which is most likely the field of the "powerless" within society. This power or powerlessness is understood as the availability or unavailability of capital in economical, cultural and social terms. Contained within the field of power, the field of art due to its aesthetic and not clearly economic or political agendas is therefore corresponding to the negative pole, the dominated position.¹³ What assigns this minus is the winning over of what Bourdieu calls the 'heteronomous principle of hierarchization'¹⁴ against the 'autonomous' one. The first speaks of the laws of the market as the rules of the game played within the fields, namely accumulation of economical capital seen as success, and the other speaks of a competition played out as a battle of prestige and recognition within the field and its 'criterion of legitimacy'.¹⁵ The game within the field of art is therefore one that bases its existence and specificity upon the autonomous principle of hierarchization, and yet it is in fact never purely autonomous for it 'continues to be affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television and Journalism*, (London: Pluto, 1998) pg. 40-41, quoted in Patricia Thomson, 'Field', in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, Michael Grenfell ed. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 74

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 37- 38

¹⁴ *ibid*, pg. 38

¹⁵ *ibid*, pp. 37-39

of economic and political profit', no matter how autonomous it might get.¹⁶ So what is very clear in Bourdieu's position regarding the field of art and its products, is that its aesthetic agenda is nonetheless intrinsically and existentially connected to a logic of capital profit.

In this competition, Bourdieu underlines the role of the hierarchy of the political field of power as the structural catalyst for all the other fields as he refers to the concept of symbolic violence, -a form of domination and control waged through cultural means such as art and education - as a sole prerogative of the state. This hierarchy, being his main polemic target throughout his theory and critique of the social function, produces specific effects that perpetuate the means for domination for an elite group of agents. As the field of power is intrinsically connected to all others as their dominating pole, all agents become complicit, and the dominating actions become both obscured and legitimate.

Hierarchy is also a theme which Barney clearly stages in his films, particularly in the last episode of the Cycle, *Cremaster 3*. Let us see how the aesthetic take on hierarchy reproduces traditional models of domination. Taking as his main structural element, an interpretation of Masonic initiation ritual, Barney weaves in other narrative elements to create a literal representation of a vertical hierarchy, symbolized by the Chrysler Building. At its bottom, in the muddy foundations, he places a female zombie. This is, according to Spector's interpretation, the undead corpse of Garry Gilmore, metamorphosed into a woman,¹⁷ and led to a second ritual death by a group of young kids. This foundation of Barney's hierarchy presents us with a supernatural

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), pg. 39

¹⁷ Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002) pg. 45

principle as the root of what lays above. A mythical construct upon a real story whose main hero represents a kind of societal evil or scapegoat who is repeatedly sacrificed at the foundations of the social structure. At the next level, in the Chrysler Building lobby, a public space, open to anyone, Barney presents us with this ritual killing grounds, staged as a demolition derby between cars, a modern symbol of American lower class freedom. Once the 1930s New Yorker Imperial, is completely demolished by the five newer cars from 1967, leaving it a small lump of hyper-condensed metal, they turn against each other. At this low level in the hierarchy, when the mania against the scapegoat finds no object, aggression continues against all angles. Up the next level, the artist presents us with the Cloud Club, its restaurant and bar, a space traditionally connected to American capitalist industrialists as their social meeting point in New York City. This is where Barney places his Irish Masons collaborating with Irish mobsters, framed by three attending individuals a singing maître d'hôtel, a mysterious laboring female and a comically nervous and clumsy bartender. On top of that there is the office of the Architect- Hiram Abiff, who builds two columns inside it that can bring him up to a higher point: the space just underneath the building's spire, a temple of worship, where Masons dance in the Irish tradition and perform a pagan ritual, and where the Architect is being heralded as sacred. Yet Barney, builds this hierarchical model only to destroy it in the end, by staging a demolition of the Chrysler Building as the result of the heroic achievement of his character, the Entered Apprentice.

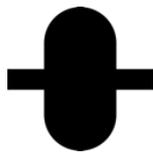
Therefore, taking from this aesthetic paradigm and moving again towards Bourdieu's theory, we may also define the field as a concept that was created

to stand in as an alternative to the traditional Marxist representation of society as a system of class relations. He focused in underlining how the combined effects of professional and social positions affect the social network, and how these positions are interdependent. As embodied by singular or group agents (institutions or businesses), these positions are subjected to certain constraints field or that depend on the specific subfield they operate within, such as the fields of education, culture, science, media, religion, economics, politics or the sub-fields of art, journalism, academia, or advertising. Each of these social arenas functions on a basis of specific 'beliefs' and 'interests' and their agents can be understood as 'stakeholders' of the various forms of competition they engage in. The goal of these actions and interactions is to sustain or enhance these positions against others within a particular field or the position of the whole field against others. The means and ends of this competition are for Bourdieu the four distinct forms of capital, which have the capacity to convert into each other, as well as to transcend lifetimes: economic as in pure financial sums, cultural as in a volume of sanctioned knowledge and practice, social as in the amount and 'quality' of relationships and connections and symbolic as in a more abstract, yet quantifiable measure of statute. The agents of these actions are relatively free to deploy strategies for gain and expansion yet, their behavior is also contained by their habituses and the individual field or subfield they operate within.

What makes this more intelligible is to understand the Bourdieuan field as a football field,¹⁸ where players or agents have specific positions and action

¹⁸ Patricia Thomson, 'Field', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell ed. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pp. 68-75

plans¹⁹. This view creates an immediate link to the Cremaster Cycle, as we can directly relate it to the way in which this notion was aestheticized and symbolized by Matthew Barney. It was also emblemized with a logo that appeared in his work from the very beginning and from then and on it has been ubiquitous throughout the artist's works. Taking its visually active role as the dominant background for all the individual symbolic signatures of the five series, it served as the basis of the project's visual communication. The '*Field Emblem*' is a symbol or perhaps an ideogram consisting of a 'curved rectangular' shape intersected by a line through its middle.



EMBLEM

THE FIELD

Barney explains that he had developed this idiosyncratic emblem with the intention to project a certain 'duality' in meaning that could be transcribed from the symbol to the actions it stood for.²⁰ Thus from one side, the Field Emblem stood for an 'areal plan of an arena where these activities could take place'²¹, following in a rather exact graphic manner, from Barney's training experience as an American Football player.²² From the other, it was also a 'flat graphic representation of his artistic method concept; the body

¹⁹Patricia Thomson, 'Field', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell ed. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 68

²⁰ 'The name of "emblems" is usually given to simple allegorical designs accompanied by an explanatory motto and destined to teach in an intuitive form a moral truth. [...] They form a transition to poetical allegory. [...] Since in poetical allegory a datum always results in a concept which one tries to make apprehensible by intuition through an image, one can well allow that a painted figure may sometimes be introduced either to accompany or support the expression; but such an image should not be considered as a work of representational art, but rather as a hieroglyphic sign.'

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* Vol 1, § 50, quoted in Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth Century Imagery*. (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964), pg.15

²¹ Matthew Barney interview in <http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/videos/315> (15/06/2010)

²² During a coaching session the players would be instructed a study of their game, as a team and as an individual role through areal graphic plans.

contained by self imposed restraints as an enhancer of the creative act.²³ Of course, one may add that apart from being a conceptual symbol it also contributed to the aesthetic recognition and dissemination or else visual marketing of Barney's art, as it became a popular logo, that helped form the field of the Cremaster Cycle, and create an array of easily recognizable collectibles. Apart from its symbolic and aesthetic functions the field concept, became also a plan for examining the Cremaster Cycle as a synergy of various forms of patronage, be it financial, intellectual or cultural. This synergy, that drafted the field of the Cremaster Cycle, has some very indicative characteristics so as to how this artwork was realized. A rough sketch of this field includes agents such as Nancy Spector, the blue chip curator of the Guggenheim, chairwoman of the Hugo Boss Prize,²⁴ and chief curator of the Cremaster Cycle exhibition, the museum itself, Hugo Boss, the fashion colossus and main patron of Matthew Barney's project and exhibition, Barbara Gladstone as blue chip patron gallery of the artist, Adam D. Sender, hedge-fund manager, owner of Exis Capital company and close patron of the young artist, Norman Mailer, iconic American writer, philosopher Arthur C. Danto, who wrote extensively on the Cremaster Cycle. The list could go on. But not at this point as what we want to make clear here is how the thesis approaches Bourdieu's directives towards his method.

So in understanding this event as a sum of social conditions or perhaps variables which were reflected within the aesthetic form of the artwork, we can explain the process through Bourdieu's theory. Combining his ideas with

²³ Matthew Barney interview in <http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/videos/315> (15/06/2010)

²⁴ Carol Vogel, 'Six Named as Finalists for Hugo Boss Prize', in The New York Times, (November 25, 2001)

those of Becker ²⁵ , who primarily suggested that an artwork is to be seen as a 'co-operative' productive activity, Bourdieu insisted that any analytical inquiry upon an artwork should take into account all of the contributors, from the conceiver of the idea to the last receiver, meaning an extended version of its audience. Yet still, the theory of the field, Bourdieu notes 'is not reducible to a population' even though issues of *who* and *how many* should be taken into account²⁶. This is made possible by adding to the analytical process the examination of the field in which the artwork belongs to, namely 'all agents involved - critics, collectors, curators - and the social space they occupy, both material and otherwise.'²⁷ This professional field describes a synergy which had paradoxically begun much earlier than the actual production of this work. As Francesco Bonami noted in 1992, Barney had the blind support of a particular group of agents from the very beginning of his career:

"The artist's coming has been sufficiently heralded over many months and without any concrete references to his actual work, to give 'epiphanic' clout to his art. Barney deals in the (suitably) unpredictable suspension of statements on his work that might thwart the development of his surprising and dynamic output. The running of it all is left to a team which analyzes and boosts the results. We are dealing with a sporting event just like the ones lived out in real time. Consequently, Barney's work and the phenomenon it represents (stirring up what is only apparently conventional attention in the art world) demands immediate analysis, just like a sports event."²⁸

1.4 Matthew Barney's Habitus as an Entry Point to the Cycle/Field

Another point of connection between the production of the Cremaster Cycle and Bourdieu's theory is the term *Habitus*, as coined by the French theorist. As habitus is a rather complex and multi-semantic term what we will merely be attempting here is to present it through the description of a specific habitus,

²⁵ H. S. Becker, 'Art Worlds and Social Types', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 19:6 (1976), pp. 703-19

²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 34-5

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Francesco Bonami, 'Matthew Barney', in *FlashArt International* , no 162, July-September 1992, pp. 100-103

explored through certain biographical events as given by two different sources. One is the actual biography of Matthew Barney, mainly his life as a student and an artist and the other is through the symbolic language of the Cremaster Cycle. What this actually comes down to is a kind of analysis that is offered by the work itself, in the way that Bourdieu has explained it regarding his approach on Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*.

'Sentimental Education, that book on which a thousand commentaries have been written, but which has undoubtedly never been truly read, supplies all the tools necessary for its own sociological analysis: the structure of the book, which a *strictly internal* reading brings to light, that is, the structure of the social space in which the adventures of Frederic unfold, proves to be at the same time the structure of the social space in which its author himself was situated.'²⁹

So from one hand, we will start by going into a contextual reading of the Cycle and move towards an internal and external one for describing the field in which this work was born into and through which it acquired its artistic value status. Thus, we will be using habitus as a research format for understanding the forms, laws and structures that create, propagate and sustain art works and determine their historical positioning within the field of art and culture.

Bourdieu developed and remodeled the concept of habitus within his theory, in order to explain a certain behavioral aspect of our social agency, for describing those actions which are dependent on our unique but also common placement within social structures, and identify certain dispositions that this placement has casted upon us. So through family lineages, class, geography, education and professional fields, within and towards which we operate, the habitus is for Bourdieu a "structured and structuring structure"³⁰. Perhaps the following description of the term may be suited to understand how we can approach

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, (Cambridge, Maldon: Polity Press, 1996) or. p. 1992, pg. 3

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, M. Adamson (trans). (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pg. 170

an 'artistic habitus' as a most autonomous version of such a structure.

'The *habitus* - embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history- on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within the world. The *habitus* is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects 'without inertia' in rationalist theories.'³¹

In this short biography given in a fan site dedicated to the artist,³² we may identify the origins and structural matter of Barney's habitus that give us the information for a contextual reading of the Cremaster Cycle.

'Matthew Barney was born on March 25, 1967 in San Francisco, California. He has one sibling, an older sister named Tracy. When Barney was 6, his father Robert got a job running the food services at Boise State University and the family moved to Idaho. When Barney was 12, his parents divorced and his mother Marsha Gibney (an abstract painter) moved to New York. Barney and his sister remained with his father in Boise, but he frequently visited his mother in New York, where he was exposed to contemporary art.

In high school, Barney played on the wrestling and football teams (the football team played their games at Bronco Stadium, the setting of Cremaster 1). He gave the graduation speech (drawing parallels between the travels of life and the path of the sperm) for the class of 1985 at Capital High School. The summer after graduation, Barney answered an ad for a modeling job. He was spotted by a model scout and paid his way through college working for the Click modeling agency. Modeling meant that he had to abandon football, but he frequently references athletics in his artwork. Barney left Boise to attend college at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. He entered as a premed student, thinking he would go into plastic surgery. However, after two semesters he switched from premed to the art department. Barney's dedication and originality were recognized by other students at Yale, who convinced the school to allow Barney to participate in the program of its highly-regarded graduate School of Art while still an undergraduate.

His senior thesis at Yale was a video called "Field Dressing", which he shot and exhibited in two rooms of the Payne Whitney Gymnasium at Yale. This Vaseline-slicked video contained the seeds of ideas that would later be explored in the Cremaster Cycle. Barney graduated from Yale in 1989 and moved to New York. His first studio was in Brooklyn, but he soon moved into a studio on Leroy street that he shared with Michael Rees, an artist he had met at Yale. In 1990, his "Field Dressing" video was included in a group exhibition at the Althea Viafora gallery in New York. Clarissa Dalrymple, director of the Petersburg Galley, saw the show and offered Barney a solo exhibition. Unfortunately, the gallery closed before Barney's show opened. However, Barney met his first wife, Mary Farley, at the Petersburg Gallery. The gallery-less Dalrymple recommended Barney to her friend art dealer Barbara Gladstone. Gladstone visited Barney's studio and was

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, R. Nice (trans), (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pg. 56

³² Using a fan site in a phd thesis makes for an uncomfortable occasion. Yet there is certain information to which access is denied from official sources and still it can be critical for explaining certain aspects of the case study. Considering this website an academically valid source is to confirm in the absence of contrary evidence that the information it provides is accurate and relevant. Bourdieu explains that in continuing his thought from Weber's point, on the existence of a self fulfilling aspect in the activities of 'specialist professional groups', he was interested in looking at the particular structures and laws that determine 'social microcosms'. In this attempt though, there had been a major difficulty in presenting within an analytical task the information of 'self evident' elements, critical in reading the work in a zeitgeist context yet officially unreferenced, 'information about institutions and about persons, their relationships, liaisons and quarrels, information about the ideas and problems which are in the air and circulate orally in gossip and rumor'. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) pg.181, 32

impressed by the drawings and sculpture she saw there. She was unable to schedule an exhibition for Barney until the fall of 1991, but her son Stuart Regen, an art dealer in Los Angeles, held a show of Barney's work at his Regen Projects gallery in May 1991. The show attracted a lot of attention in the art world, and Artforum put Barney on the cover of their summer issue.³³

An offspring of a working class father and of a bohemian artist mother, he begun his life in America's most liberal city, San Francisco but moved soon to a state and city that must had been a quite different environment. A traditionally republican area, Idaho and its capital Boise, is also the second highest proportionate U.S state for the Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or else Mormon Church, whose values and ways of life could be regarded as sanctioning the radically conservative fraction within the political and ethical spectrum of the United States of America and Congress. Perhaps, as a kind of outsider to such cultural contexts Barney the adolescent, took the path of athletic competition for becoming a visible and accepted member of a social structure that was not inscribed in his family's habitus but which he had to conquer for moving onto college and university. And it was his excellent athletic performance in competition, in both wrestling and American Football, namely his corporeal capabilities that made it possible for him to move towards a certain goal in life. His first career choice towards medicine indicates also his obsession with the body's form and mechanics. And in a more practical perspective, his corporeal facility, as in being suitable to model for fashion catalogues, became also the critical factor that made it possible for him to enter into a high end college and university such as Yale. Thus we may easily understand how his Cycle and habitus is somehow based both visually and conceptually on the theme of the 'body'. And of course the body that functions under restraint and towards a continuous development, a

³³ <http://www.cremasterfanatic.com/Biography.html>

body in exhibition, in pain and in its limits.

Once in Yale Fine Art School, Barney was free to develop his aesthetic ideas through his study of art as a history of practices and by taking as a central axis or theme the actual matter of his life's story. It is also possible that he was influenced in his later art making and sculptural practices by sculptor and the time fellow student Michael Rees, with whom Barney shared a workspace, and whose work evolved around organic forms and peculiar materials. Yet, the core of his early and later work seems to be stemming directly from his life experiences. For example, this habitus-driven art is visible as he comments on the way he came up with the first and longest ongoing project of his career, *Drawing Restraint*:

'The first works that I made as a student were the first *Drawing Restraint* apparatuses and the time it was a very natural segue out of the only thing that I knew, which was the training ritual of athletics. Those first pieces were a manifestation of the stage of athletics that meant the most to me - everything that leads up to the moment of competition - and how internal that space of preparation and the rehearsal is. On the level of art education, I was just starting to understand what it meant to make a drawing, and that it was a rehearsal for something else. That primal mark making and the rehearsal made a lot of sense to me in terms of where I was as an athlete. I think those two things joined hands right away and the *Drawing Restraint* apparatuses were manifestations of that. They were about creating a place where I could re-enact the form of rehearsal that I already knew. I didn't really know what I was doing as an artist.'³⁴

Though for his final dissertation work, called *Field Dressing (Orifill)*³⁵, in New Haven, Payne Whitney Athletic Complex³⁶, Barney exhibited a more internal and hermetic space of autobiographical subject matter. The work consisted of two videos shown in small monitors, placed within a sculptural installation, that was also the plane of action as appearing on screen.

'A piece of curved, perforated foam-rubber attached to the wall, a glass tube filled with cream-colored gunk - going from floor to ceiling, a weight-rack with glistening, slightly

³⁴ 'Adam Phillips and Matthew Barney: A Conversation', in *Matthew Barney: Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail*, (12 June - 3 October 2010)(Basel: Schaulager & Swabe Verlag, 2010), pg. 24

³⁵ Matthew Barney, *Field Dressing*, 1989-90, Teflon, cast leaded optical crystal, latex foam, nylon, Pyrex, petroleum jelly, speculum, aluminium, stainless steel, freezer, cast microcrystalline wax, magnesium carbonate and two channel video, (dimensions variable)

³⁶ The gym of Yale University, famous for being called the Cathedral of Sweat

slimy, clearish round weights, and two small video monitors mounted on the wall above our heads make up the "docufragment" that is *Field Dressing*.³⁷

In those videos the artist featured himself while engaging in two different ritualistic actions, characterized by their direct references to athletics, fetishistic sexuality, and the slimy and slippery effects of petroleum jelly as a material for making sculpture. In the first video, the single protagonist was performing an incomprehensible liturgy, using weightlifting gadgets, dressed in a white bridal gown, that looked very much like a ritual attire. In the other video, that followed the first with a narrative continuity, he was suspended naked with ropes from the ceiling of a small room, and kept on descending and ascending with the help of a harness, over a petroleum jelly sculpture, dolloping the stuff into his various body orifices. One might say, that the work emitted an incomprehensible and yet viscerally captivating presence, that most likely provided its audience a with a perceptible transgressive context of ambiguous but definitely male sexual ritual and subjecting them to a rather voyeuristic and uncanny position due to the installation arrangement.

The title of this work had two different meanings and a third one that was created by the work itself. *Field dressing* is a wound bandage used in a battle field, which every soldier carries with as a first aid help for serious injuries such as shot wounds. It comprises of an absorbent pad to be applied directly on the wound attached to a longer fabric strip that is tied up around to keep the dressing in place and seal of the body from loosing blood or getting an infection. The other meaning of *field dressing* belongs to a hunters vocabulary, used to describe the process in which a hunted and killed animal is immediately treated as to remove the vital organs and lower orifices

³⁷ Jerry Saltz, 'Notes on a Sculpture: Wilder Shore of Art: Matthew Barney's Field Dressing (orifill), 1989', Arts Magazine, May 1991, pp. 29-31

from its dead body. This is an action that has to take place right after death occurs in order to prevent any bacterial infections affecting the flesh. Thus, it is one of the most important as well a recurrent act in the life of a hunter. The definitions of this term exemplify a definite paradoxical character. The wound that is closed up in order to keep the body functional and vital and the wound that is made on the dead body of an animal in order to fight the chemistry of death and making the meat edible for the human consumer. Yet, the video does not make reference to such connotations. Though, by adding the word *orifill* Barney gave reference to the act of filling his orifices with petroleum jelly as the material that was to become his gimmick and whose polysemous meaning creates conceptual layers in all the pieces it was used. Now going back to the habitus and field theory, the graduation show of Yale Art School, being the most well connected and elite academic institution in the art field in the United States, obviously attracted high end art-field agents. Reading Jerry Saltz's review³⁸ on the piece from a later show, makes it possible to imagine that *Field Dressing(Orifill)* created almost immediately, substantial discourse around its lineage, hybridity and potential artistic value. It must have been difficult to place this graduation work under an existing trend yet, it could not have been considered avant-guard in its essence, as it was a well aestheticized idea developed methodologically through clear precedents of avantgardist traditions such as actionism, experimental film, ritual and of course body art. Faithful to its ancestry it used practical everyday objects and the human body as its aesthetic tools, yet due to the ambiguously positioned though obvious subject matter it covered, namely athletics and

³⁸ Jerry Saltz, 'Notes on a Sculpture: Wilder Shore of Art: Matthew Barney's Field Dressing (orifill), 1989', Arts Magazine, May 1991

their locker room, it was able to come across not as banal and art-referential but as something really new and exciting.

Later in 1990, at the *Althea Viafora Gallery* group exhibition in New York³⁹ Barney was spotted by the influential curator, art-trend setter within the art and fashion fields and gallery director, Mrs. Clarissa Dalrymple. This was the critical event that evolved towards Barney's introduction and gallery patronage by blue chip art dealers Barbara Gladstone and her son Stuart Regen, both holding high ranking commercial galleries in New York and Los Angeles, respectively. Barbara Gladstone, has described her introduction to Matthew Barney as a random 'discovery' by which she came to the immediate decision to take the young artist under her aegis, being largely impressed by his work that 'was this ghostly, beautiful, amazing thing that I had never seen or ever thought of!'⁴⁰ From then and on the artist's career moved steadily and on a fast track on a trajectory assigned to blue chip art making and distinction.

Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic of the New York Times and a follower of Barney's career from its very beginning, commented on the artist's rapid ascent to prominence and the ways it lead towards a Wagnerian 'hubristic' follow up, as epitomized by the Cremaster Cycle project. He explains that it was a 'lucky success' owing to a particular point in time during which the American commerce of art was going through a transitional phase. After indulging into the high-pitch art sales of neo-expressionist painting that ended badly with a crash in the late 80s, everyone, even high-end galleries, were

³⁹ Althea Viafora Gallery, New York, *Body as Metaphor*, September 2-29, 1990. This gallery, today no longer existing, was at the time a small 'innovator' type, rather than 'gatekeeper' gallery and was specializing in exhibiting young, Avant guard artists.

⁴⁰ Barbara Gladstone in documentary interview talking about the refrigerated sculpture *Transexualis*(1991) - Matthew Barney: *No Restraint*, Alison Chernick (dir.) Voyeur Film, 2007, 71 mins, (15:26- 16:45)

struggling with their finances and had to be cautious and sure of their choices in order to safeguard their survival in the field. Also, this economic downfall indicated that the field had to refurbish its 'aesthetic values' and taste in order to avoid the long term instabilities that would come with prices driven by demand style-manias.⁴¹ In entering the new decade, a novel commercial policy was introduced, according to which galleries acted also as dealers and collectors. In that way, they could also profit with sales in the secondary art-market if they dealt with artworks that could fetch rising prices.⁴² Many of them, through their new agency, decided they should take the chance in showing young, completely unknown artists that worked within experimental mediums and new concepts in order to attract new collectors or challenge their existing clients with the 'shock of the new'.⁴³ These artists and their artworks were therefore to be championed within a network of liaisons of professional agents, between commercial galleries, public institutions and private collections in order to generate new aesthetic values and of course new income for the field. In seeing the follow up of this through Bourdieu's logic we may say that the more powerful a gallery was within the field and that of power, the more valuable became the works it hosted both culturally and economically. In that sense, placing young and un-exhibited Barney into an elite blue chip positioning was on behalf of Barbara Gladstone, a big risk and a big investment to be taken, at the same time.

In that flux and competitive environment of the early nineties it is obvious

⁴¹ Michael Kimmelman talking about Barney's early career in *Matthew Barney: No Restraint*, Alison Chernick (dir.) *Voyeur Film*, 2007, 71 mins,

⁴² Friedrich Petzel, 'Infantilism: Something like an internal view of the New York art market', *Texte Zur Kunst*: "Escape to New York", Issue Nr. 54, June 2004, pp. 111-116

⁴³ See Derrick Chong, 'Marketing in art business: Exchange relationships by commercial galleries and art museums' in *The Art Business*, Ian Robertson and Derrick Chong (eds.), (Oxon & NewYork: Routledge: 2008), pg. 115

why, from a very early point in Barney's career, many art critics expressed the view that, in terms of competition 'it helped that Barney was marketable apart from his art, with Yale connections and model good looks'⁴⁴. Art schooling is of grave importance in the habitus and the career of an artist as well as in the recognition of artistic value and cultural capital in his work. For example, *New York Times* art columnist Sandra Salmans writes in April 2005, about the effects of Yale art school in regards to artistic value⁴⁵. She quotes Chicago University economist David Galenson who argued, despite the common opinion that there is no guaranty for increase of value in artworks bought by collectors, how is possible that artworks made specifically by Yale art school graduates would certainly increase in value. Galenson, a scholar of economics specializing in modern art as investment capital, presented this argument by giving examples of artists like Robert Mangold, Matthew Barney, Chuck Close, Eva Hesse, Brice Marden and Richard Serra, all Yale graduates, that fetched prices with such upward escalation that proved their work as an excellent investment. The journalist gives also reference to specific advice, given by Galenson, on how to 'beat the market' by choosing the right young artist from Yale. Didrich Diderichsen also lays a parallel argument in his book *On (Surplus) Value in Art*, where he also explained the 'investment logic' of the art student and the art-school⁴⁶ in terms of generating surplus value in aesthetic and financial capital. This type of argument is also supported by critic Arthur C. Danto who explains how Yale, as the top ranking art-school in

⁴⁴ Michael Kimmelman, 'The Importance of Matthew Barney', *The New York Times Magazine*, 10.10.1998 pg. 63

⁴⁵ See Sandra Salmans, 'The Fine Art of Yale', *The New York Times*, April 24, 2005

⁴⁶ Diedrich Diederichsen, *On (Surplus) Value in Art*, (Rotterdam & Berlin: Witte de With & SternbergPress, 2008) pp. 32-35

the United States, is able to pick out the 'best' candidates and offer them powerful connections within the art field as it is customary for young artists that they enter the market through a Master of Arts university program. Salmans ends her article by quoting the Dean of Yale art school: 'We don't consider success in the market place has anything to do with being a successful artist' he says, without explaining what does success in art come down to. And still Yale must not have been the most critical factor that shaped Barney's trajectory towards the Cremaster Cycle.

In terms of what decisively shaped Barney's artistic debut, or perhaps we could say his systemic cultural capitalization, the most critical factor, during that early stage must have been the role Clarissa Dalrymple played as a talent hunter and gatekeeper of the field. Facilitating his entry into a blue chip gallery as soon as the young artist came out of Yale she practically consecrated Barney and his artistic vision as high art matter. Distinguished by her taste for 'good art' and her tight connections to collectors and the extended field of capital and power, Dalrymple is a field agent with a powerful position through which she could practically order a successful career to happen. It is interesting perhaps to describe the kind of agent that Mrs. Dalrymple is, so I am quoting here two slightly different perspectives on what she does.

Clarissa Dalrymple is a private art dealer and curator. She began her career in the arts in 1983 as the assistant to Nicole Klagsbrun - the then-Director of the Paul Olden Gallery in New York. In early 1984, Dalrymple and Klagsbrun opened the Cable Gallery, where they represented acclaimed artists such as James Nares, Haim Steinbach, Clog & Guttman, Karl Apfelschnitt, Chris Wool, Ashley Bickerton, Barbara Ess, Dan Graham and many more. Ms. Dalrymple has curated shows at Stein/Gladstone Gallery, Marc Selwyn Fine Art and Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, to name a few. In 1992, at Stein/Gladstone, Dalrymple curated an illustrious 12-person group show of the Young Brits featuring Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas and Rachel Whiteread. In addition, she curated a 3-person exhibition at Stein/Gladstone that featured Nancy Rubin, Sam Reveles, and Matthew Barney. Having dedicated her professional life to discovering and supporting emerging artists and their work, Ms. Dalrymple is a constant monitor for the next great presence in the art world. Her ideas and opinions are widely respected among other prominent curators, dealers and collectors. Ms. Dalrymple was born and educated in England and has lived in

New York since 1968.⁴⁷

'Discovery is what she is all about. As either a dealer or a freelance curator, she has figured in the early careers of Matthew Barney and Damien Hirst, as well as Nancy Rubins, Gary Hume and Sarah Lucas. She was among the first in the United States to recognize the talents of the German painter Neo Rauch (who currently has a solo show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and has arranged American gallery debuts for a host of others: Christopher Wool, Ashley Bickerton and Nayland Blake, to name a few. As Marianne Boesky, whose Chelsea gallery now retains her as a consultant charged with helping to identify new talent, explains: "Clarissa is one of the most open-minded people I've ever met. She understands artists in their mid-20s better than their own colleagues." Lowman concurs: "It's a lot more interesting to hang out with someone like her, who's way more radical in her thinking than many in my generation."⁴⁸

Such agents perform a very interesting activity in the art field. They are able to make rabbit holes for 'new' art to pass on the other side and be fostered by the high art establishment. Practically, their hybrid habituses and positionings give them the capacity to create cultural capital for the dominated bohemian pole of the artistic field and transform it into economic capital for the bourgeois dominating pole while at the same time giving the opportunity for artists to gain the means to life. And their capacity lays solely with their connoisseurship and which in Dalrymple's case was not focused on one particular style or artist or even genre but on what we call 'the new' in art and their network which they supply with 'discoveries'. They are 'scouts' but at the same time they perhaps act as the prime consecrators of artistic value. And thus as the notion of artistic value confers a combined value of both financial and cultural capital, this type of agent stands in between the exchanges of the field and the artists and through that position is able to capitalize aesthetic value in units of finance or culture. Moving on with the story of how we ended up watching the Cremaster Cycle in museums, we reach the point where Regen Projects and Barbara Gladstone Gallery

⁴⁷ Biographic note taken from the Artist Pension Trust Website <http://www.apglobal.org/view/curator.asp?ID=13>

⁴⁸ Linda Yablonsky, 'Eye Spy', The New York Times, August 26 2007 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/26/t-magazine/culture/26eye.html>

organized Barney's first solo exhibitions, held in both galleries in the summer and fall of 1991. The works in these exhibitions were equally haunting and ambiguous as his debut ones. Even from their titles we can confer a lot on their context:

Anabol [A]: PACE CAR for the HUBRIS PILL (1991)⁴⁹, case BOLUS (1989-1991)⁵⁰, DELAY OF GAME (manual A)(1991)⁵¹, HYPOTHERMAL PENETRATOR(dorsal)(1991), MILE HIGH Threshold: FLIGHT with the ANAL SADISTIC WARRIOR (1991)⁵², REPRESSIA (1991)⁵³, TRANSEXUALIS (1991)⁵⁴, BLIND PERINEUM (1991)⁵⁵, CONSTIPATOR BLOCK: shim BOLUS (1991)⁵⁶, RADIAL DRILL (1991)⁵⁷.

The pieces, whether single sculptures, videos, drawings or installations, were quite literal to their titles as the language of both the materials used and of the aesthetic ideas they were exploring was coming from the same place. This, being again sourced from the realm of sports, and by seeing the body as a means to prevail. A place where competition, anal eroticism, bodybuilding and biotechnology came together as art installations. The visual aesthetic of the work sought to generate a function that triggered an inner experience of the work by abstracting meaning through symbolism, metaphors

⁴⁹ Matthew Barney, Anabol [A]: PACE CAR for the HUBRIS PILL (1991) - A. P. B. ! 00, internally lubricated plastic, cast sucrose capsule, 48 x 56 x 40 in.

⁵⁰ Matthew Barney, case BOLUS (1989-91), -A value (swetloaf) : O value (sweetloaf) -JIM BLIND (andro.) - rec. majora -rec minora, cast petroleum jelly Olympic weights and 8-lb. dumbbells, speculum, mouthguards, glass case, cast sucrose, foam and nylon pads, binding belts, installation dimensions variable

⁵¹ Matthew Barney, DELAY OF GAME (manual A)(1991) -diagram: double reverse: cadence ! motion ! audible ! DELAY OF GAME...(HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR), wardrobe, sucrose, skeet, 3/4- inch video (color, black and white, 2:59 mins.)

⁵² Matthew Barney, MILE HIGH Threshold: FLIGHT with the ANAL SADISTIC WARRIOR (1991), -Elevated Heavy Petting ~~CONCENT~~> Fornication with the Fabric of Space [2 1/2], internally lubricated self-threading flight blocks, titanium ice screws, carabiners, full body harness, 3/4 inch video (color, 41:42)

⁵³ Matthew Barney, REPRESSIA (1991), -pre-snap site -cadence ! motion ! audible ! DELAY OF GAME ! (HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR) -JIM BLIND (fem.) - warm down|Summer Collection '91, wrestling mat, Pyrex, cast petroleum wax and petroleum jelly Olympic curl bar, cotton socks, sternal retractor, skeet, salt water pearl, petroleum jelly 14 x 18 x 12 1/2 ft.

⁵⁴ Matthew Barney, Transexualis (1991) -HYPERTROPHY (pectoralis minora) H.C. G -JIM BLIND (m.) - hypothermal penetrator OTTO: Body Temp. 77°, walk-in cooler, formed and cast petroleum jelly decline bench, human chorionic gonadotropin, speculum, 12 x 14 x 8 1/2 ft.

⁵⁵ Matthew Barney, BLIND PERINEUM (1991) -Elevated Heavy Petting ~~CONCENT~~> Fornication with the Fabric of Space [2 1/2] DESCENT Field Dressing, internally lubricated self threading flight blocks, titanium ice screws, carabiners, full body harness, 3/4 inch video (color, 87:05 mins.)

⁵⁶ Matthew Barney, CONSTIPATOR BLOCK: shim BOLUS (1991), -OTTO shaft - (transverse) TFE squat - HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR (2), cast large-pearl tapioca, Teflon, socks, thermal gel pack, 8 3/4 x 144 x 24 in

⁵⁷ Matthew Barney, RADIAL DRILL (1991), - square hip ! engorged iris ! stroke -SUBLIMATOR (reentry): ! ! OC! 1. p. TAP - HEMORRHOIDAL DISTRACTOR (2), cultured costume pearl, skeet, large-pearl tapioca, Teflon, Pyrex, cast sucrose, 3/4-inch video (color, black and white, 4:59 mins.)

and allegoric contexts. Within this kind of art-making more dimensions would be opened and the viewer could experience esoteric turbulence and perhaps subjective insights. Evidently, one may argue, Barney's art was being consecrated by the art field because it proposed an intensive mixture of the popular mainstream and of the arcane subjective. A visually provocative approach through layers of multimedial symbolization, of favorite and seductive subjects, abstracted it to the point where the only thing that was left from the popular was its uncanny presence. In this way it was seen as a kind of work that was encapsulating the 'art-world Zeitgeist of the 90's'⁵⁸.

Art critics were immediately mystified and treated the work with great interest and expectation, though in effect they were mainly trying to locate the genre and the critical point the young artist engaged with. New York art critic Jerry Saltz, in an article on the Cremaster Cycle explains that since 1990, when he came across *Field Dressing(Orifill)* in *Althea Viafora* group show, he felt as if something new and important was happening in art despite the fact that such art was never akin to his taste.⁵⁹ Though at the time, he happily reviewed the exhibition in a long panegyric account, that highlighted exactly the level of bafflement that resides in the art-critical mind examining Barney's work: there was a lot to be discussed over the piece, *Field Dressing(Orifill)*, and 'in the end you may not know what you've seen - but you know you've never seen it before'⁶⁰. Though, quite knowingly in the beginning of his article he located the young artist within specific art historical moments by

⁵⁸ Michael Kimmelman, 'The Importance of Matthew Barney', *The New York Times Magazine*, 10.10.1999 pg. 64

⁵⁹ Jerry Saltz, 'Swept Away', *Seeing out loud: the Village Voice art columns, fall 1998 - winter 2003*, (Berkeley: The Figures, 2003) p. 33

⁶⁰ Jerry Saltz, 'Notes on a Sculpture: Wilder Shore of Art: Matthew Barney's *Field Dressing(orifill)*, 1989', *Arts Magazine*, May 1991, pg. 31

stating that he:

'...redefines the idea of "process" - of what it takes to make a piece of sculpture - and reconfigures and subverts the role of the tools of the artist. He puts his body on the line and bets the house on the unlikely hand of performance art, installation art, process art, psychosexual ritualistic metaphysics, and pure *will* and comes up with a rampaging aesthetic "royal flush."⁶¹

Saltz, with this long early review set up a wide angled art-historical and subject matter context for those who reviewed Barney during the prime of his career, dressing it with a specific vocabulary that was to shadow Barney's art as the basis for most art critical responses positive or negative, within the field for the years to come.

A different treatment of Barney's artistic debut was given by Lane Relya in *Artforum* magazine,⁶² reviewing his first museum solo exhibition, held in San Francisco Museum of Modern Art⁶³. Even though the art magazine had placed Barney as the cover image of that issue, the actual review was rather small, yet tried to place the work within a cultural point of criticism. This critical point was the relationship of artworks to the culture that produces them, and it was in that way that Relya put Barney on an epicenter of contemporary artistic production that worked with the use of 'spare parts left over from an exhausted search for artistic truth.'⁶⁴ Though, Relya's point of view, was not as influential as Saltz's in the criticism to come, and his argument over the cultural relativity of Barney's art to a problematic condition within the field, was won over by an exegetic or one could say in Bourdieu's language, almost internal treatment, which focused mainly on the artwork's form and the relationships that could be drawn amongst its parts.

Speaking of field connections and Barney's critical treatment within it, and we

⁶¹ *ibid*, pg. 29

⁶² Lane Relya, 'Openings: Matthew Barney' *Artforum*, Vol. 30, No. 1, September 1991, pg. 124

⁶³ See Matthew Barney: *New Work*, (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1991)

⁶⁴ Lane Relya, 'Openings: Matthew Barney' *Artforum*, Vol. 30, No. 1, September 1991, pg. 124

may look at a review that appeared in October 1991 by Roberta Smith, senior critic of New York Times ⁶⁵ and wife of Jerry Saltz. Its style was the art-historical referent type, where the artist and his work were contextualized against a vast art-historical spectrum. It covered Barney's first New York show in *Barbara Gladstone Gallery*, which the critic deemed as an 'anticipated event', due to the *Artforum* magazine cover article and the artist's successful Los Angeles exhibition in May. Smith explained how this exhibition created immediate dichotomy of opinion amongst the invited audience at the opening. There was the point of view which welcomed a 'new art' and understood it as a Jeff Koons influenced, Kitsch style that was unique in its pertinence to a high art abstraction. And there was the other point of view, that saw a Yale educated 70s art replica, made by an exhibitionistic young artist. Though, for Smith this was 'an extraordinary first show' and she described Matthew Barney's style by using the blueprint of Jerry Saltz's article. She referred to Joseph Beuys' sculptural concepts of physical transformation, preparation and revelation as well as on the role of the two 'modern hero' figures, Harry Houdini and Jimmy Otto in terms of narrative. Also she confirmed the art-historical lineage of Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman by adding Robert Mapplethorpe to the list of artists that may have influenced Barney's art. Despite these influences she concluded, the exhibition revealed 'a fully dimensional quality to the interaction of video, object and actual space'. In that sense she saw the work as progressive rather than mannerist, and while existing aesthetically between the obscure and the sensational it succeeded in blueprinting a vast plane of artistic action.

⁶⁵ Roberta Smith, 'Matthew Barney's Objects and Actions', *The New York Times*, Friday, October 25, 1991, p. 28

Though there is one thing that comes out of such critical approaches and that is how Barney's artworks figured among other artworks of that time, considering the aesthetic reconstruction of the art-world in the early nineties. The work caught the field's attention and in a way, this meant that its taste or even distaste was being embodied by an artwork. While many young artists at the time, were creating obvious, abject art which was much more influenced by post- feminist and post-marxist theory, in their direct critical positioning or politics, they came across as far less controversial and slippery than what Barney had produced. While they had a preachy political attitude, that borrowed images from a fashionable spectrum of Body Politics and queer culture, Barney took a similar visual material,⁶⁶ and turned it into something that did not shout for its rights to transgression, but rather made use of transgression as if it was already a culturally congested reality. And perhaps that was the key of his successful conceptualism; thinking of provocation as an integral part of popular aesthetic consumption that included the consumption of the field, rather than creating a means for cynical political debates. This was an intriguingly sharp aspect, that fed the imagination and fascination of the art-world, particularly writers and institutions who could delve into a dialogue with an agenda that opened the doors to certain extremities within popular culture, science and psychoanalysis. Such ambiguous yet familiar issues would bring in new audiences and help in exploring the possibilities of art critical writing on subjects that were a challenge in deciphering.

What also came as a great advantage was that Barney was working mainly

⁶⁶ Kimmelman describes it as Identity Politics, see Matthew Barney: No Restraint, Alison Cherrick (dir.) Voyer Film, 2007, 71mins

with video installation which was a versatile, spectacular and fashionable medium at the time. The genre, making a powerful and trendy comeback from the sixties and seventies avant-garde practices, brought along a concept of narrative, influenced more by fringe filmmakers of the past generation, like Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger or Charles Atlas, who due to their stylistic and narrative approaches, remained consciously underground within the commercial art world of their time. While video art, seen as an avant-garde tradition was being re-introduced in the area of high art in the nineties, it dragged along with it a big, colorful apparatus. Its new face had a more cinematic approach, creating new ways of installation that projected an immersive ambience to its audience. And it took the chance to tell a story,⁶⁷ of something extraordinary happening on the screen, rather than a 'Hand Catching Lead'.⁶⁸

1.5 The Cremaster Cycle and the Field of Power

Once Barney had entered the powerful center of the New York art-world which could provide him with sufficient economic and social capital in terms of institutional connections, he immediately begun realizing his epic artwork, the Cremaster Cycle.⁶⁹ It is though interesting to note how its conception had much preceded its completion. Barbara Gladstone, tells the story of how she got to know about the Cycle:

'At the very beginning of our conversations I had said to him at one point: "What do you think you will be doing in five years? I mean, do you have any plans?" And he said, that he wanted to do a work, and he said: "Please don't think I 'm pretentious by calling it a visual opera". But he wanted it to have five acts.'⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Michael Kimmelman, 'The Importance of Matthew Barney', The New York Times Magazine, 10.10.1999 pg. 63

⁶⁸ Richard Serra: "Hand Catching Lead", 1968, 16 mm black-and-white film, no sound, 3 mins

⁶⁹ Michael Kimmelman in Matthew Barney: No Restraint, Alison Chernick (dir.) Voyeur Film, 2007, 71mins

⁷⁰ Matthew Barney: No Restraint, Alison Chernick (dir.) Voyeur Film, 2007, 71mins, (36:22-36:46)

And in the light of this detail we can assume that most of the artworks that Barney produced from the beginning of his career up to the filming of the first Cremaster movie, were actually studies on the way that the greater work would be created and exhibited. Nevertheless, those initial projects brought him awards and important commissions⁷¹ that raised even more his status and visibility as an artist and thus his eligibility for patronage and institutional support. And so we may observe during that time an intense institutionalization of Barney's projects, that could also be seen as an investment, by patrons and institutions. For example, Cremaster 4, first presented in 1994 by Regen Projects in Los Angeles, was funded by Gladstone Gallery and Artangel, a London-based, art patronage scheme, operating since 1985 for commissioning solo artist's site specific projects. British art critic, Mark Sladen, in a review of the film commented on the involvement of Artangel and the Tate Gallery in the production and dissemination of the first episode of the cycle, making an argument over institution publicity stands through Barney's allure:

'Barney's first major British showings were consequently the subject of some media interest - magazines were full of his sexy video stills of trussed-up athletes, as well as exquisite publicity shots of the artist in Patrick Cox shoes and prosthetic make-up. The buzz around Barney demonstrated once again Artangel's nose for publicity (its most famous commission to date being Rachel Whiteread's *House*) and vindicated TATE's choice of the artist to launch the Art Now room, which the Gallery hopes will raise the profile of contemporary art within its program. However, at the center of this circus the artist and his art maintained an enigmatic aspect.'⁷²

Sladen therefore outlined how the art of Barney was a great occasion for institutional opportunism in terms of museum publicity and cultural promotion. Indeed, the artist explained how the production of Cremaster 4, came to be through Artangel's patronage initiative, and how Barney took the

⁷¹ Matthew Barney participated in Documenta IX (Kassel, Germany) in 1992 with his work OTTOshaft and in the Whitney Museum Biennial Exhibition (1993) with Drawing Restraint 7. In 1993 he received the Europa 2000 Prize of the XLV Venice Biennale (Venice, Aperto, Italy) for Drawing Restraint 7.

⁷² Mark Sladen, 'Assault Course', Art Monthly, No. 187, pp. 8-9

opportunity to start his cycle's filming:

'I started to diagram the general structure of Cremaster and to identify the locations while the Otto/Houdini pieces were being made in 1990-1992. Around that time, Artangel approached me and asked if I'd be interested in coming to Britain to do a project. I knew I wanted to use a Celtic site for the fourth Chapter, but was still unsure of a specific location. The project with Artangel ended up being the Isle of Man chapter.'⁷³

What is important to understand here is a subtle sense of how the aesthetic form of an artwork can be influenced by institutional involvement.

This may happen either in an indirect manner, such as the above situation with Cremaster4, where a British institution offered funding for a British site specific video work (perhaps Barney could have worked in Scotland or Ireland) or in a direct way such as the Guggenheim initiative that made the museum an active character within the cycle, and somehow identifying the museum with the epic saga. And why not? At a time for seeking new artistic idols this was more of a safe choice to make. With its credible and exciting public image, the 'Matthew Barney' phenomenon was one of the best vehicles to ride on during the time. Greater institutional involvement occurred in December 1996, when thirty year old Matthew Barney won the inaugural Hugo Boss Prize, an international award founded by Hugo Boss and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and chaired by his close collaborator Nancy Spector. The other artists running for the award were Laurie Anderson, Janin Antoni, Cai Guo Qiang, Yasumasa Morimura and Stan Douglas. The prize of 100.000\$ was an award give in order 'to recognize an artist whose recent body of work represents a major achievement or a significant development in contemporary art'.⁷⁴ Of course, there is a certain question regarding the issues that run in favor of choosing Matthew Barney as the winner of the prize,

⁷³ Brandon Stosuy, 'On the Structure of the CREMASTER Cycle - A Conversation with Matthew Barney, New York, August 2007', in Matthew Barney: Sammlung Goetz, (München: Kunstverlag Ingvild Goetz, 2007), pg. 181

⁷⁴ 'Installation Artist wins First Hugo Boss Award', The New York Times, Wednesday, December 11, 1996, p.19

as he had been a model for Hugo Boss during the period of his studies, and Nancy Spector was obviously personally interested in the artist's projects. Yet, since such issues cannot really be discussed further here, what remains of this event is that it resulted in an intensive involvement of the Guggenheim Museum, through its patrons and Trustees - who later became also some of Barney's most important collectors and thus donors to the museum collection ⁷⁵ - its curators and art-historical collaborators such as Nancy Spector and Thyrsa Nichols Goodeve, and finally the hosting of the Cremaster 3 production and the completed Cycle exhibition in 2003. Thus, Barney's work had reached a status whose importance and value was shared and celebrated by the field that hosted it while at the same time it was vividly disseminated throughout the international art-field.

Within this logic in September 2002 Roberta Smith ⁷⁶ published a short article in the anticipation of the CC upcoming exhibition at the Guggenheim, where she expressed a rather critical position towards the opportunistic policies followed by the director of the landmark institution. 'If Matthew Barney didn't exist, Thomas Krens, the director of the Guggenheim Museum, would have invented him' she writes, as this artwork, represents everything that the Guggenheim needed but did not have yet, 'spectacle with substance, brought together in the form of radical new art'. Smith, by giving a very short but comprehensive overview of the whole project, made the point that the

⁷⁵ For example Chrysler Imperial, 2002, Cast concrete, cast petroleum jelly, cast thermoplastic, stainless steel, marble, and internally lubricated plastic. Four units, approximately 24 x 60 x 90 inches each; one unit, approximately 66 x 156 x 168 inches, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Partial gift of Dimitris Daskalopoulos; Purchased with funds contributed by the International Director's Council and Executive Committee Members: Ruth Baum, Edythe Broad, Elaine Turner Cooper, Dimitris Daskalopoulos, Harry David, Gail May Engelberg, Shirley Fiterman, Nicki Harris, Dakis Joannou, Rachel Lehmann, Linds Masklowe, Peter Norton, Tonino Perna, Elizabeth Richeboug Rea, Mortimer Sackler, Jr., Simonetta Seragnoli, David Teiger, and Elliot K. Wolk 2003.⁸⁸ sourced from, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Annual Report 2003

⁷⁶ Roberta Smith, 'Mythic and Radically New', The New York Times, Sunday, September 8, 2002, pg. 78

Cremaster Cycle exhibition in the Guggenheim would be 'a bit like witnessing the "Ring" cycle in Bayreuth', as it 'realizes a fabulist, obsessive vision' in which when meaning and substance are lost the artist rescues the work by investing in his stylistic virtuosity and sense. This is why, she concluded, invoking the grandiosity of the event, the work is not only akin to Wagner's Ring Cycle but also to King Ludwig's palace. The question of course here is who King Ludwig stands for in this metaphor, especially if we see that the eccentric Bavarian as a decadent art loving monarch, and this question becomes even more curious but also revealing of the way that the exhibition was seen by conservative and main stream art critics such as Smith.

Krens, an agent whose power and prominence in the artistic field was the result of a long career trajectory in the economic and institutional realm of the artistic field⁷⁷ is also to be understood as a key collaborator to the artistic project. As director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for twenty years, from 1988 to 2008 the powerful agent, established a novel expansion model for art museums that became a global trend. He was able to move rather fast in establishing for his museum the new concept of the change of century and the millennia. It all started during the beginning of the 90s with an international trend within political and governmental agendas to provide greater support for public art institutions and artists in general, after the neoliberal aversion to cultural funding was over. Therefore, places such as

⁷⁷ Thomas Krens' habitus is described by Nancy Einreinhofer as following:

'With an undergraduate degree in political economics (Williams College, 1969) and a Master's degree in studio art (State University of New York at Albany, 1971), Krens returned to Williams College as an assistant professor to teach print-making. In 1980 he became the director of the Williams College Museum of Art and in 1984 received a master's degree in public and private management from the Yale School of Management. Obviously Krens' knowledge of art history was largely self-taught. His appointment as director of the Guggenheim was based on his skills in management and development.' in *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pg. 145

the Guggenheim Museum, the Tate Gallery, the Pompidou Center, the MOMA and many others, were starting to re-interpret and reconstruct their positions and capacities both culturally and economically within the international field. This meant also, that they were going into a novel competitive mode against each other, on both national and international level, for audiences, collections, funding, architectural landmarks. In a way, they abandoned their cultural inertia towards the past of art history for embracing a fast paced conquer of the contemporary zeitgeist.⁷⁸

During those times another phenomenon augmented the focus of the elite on art and that was the development of a new kind of art gallery dedicated solely to the creation, consecration and marketing of young unknown artists. A marketing that involved not only the disseminating power of art critical texts by young art professionals but also the involvement of established art world agents and institutions that supported and celebrated those artists handpicked by those powerful galleries. The most vivid example of this process had been the one of Saatchi Gallery in London and its production of a whole new art historical category of style, the Young British Artists. Even though we will look at this process analytically in a later chapter in the thesis, it is perhaps interesting at this point to note that a big part of Saatchi's success in generating his own 'art market' could be explained by his connections to the field of power that enabled him to turn his art collecting hobby into an industrious enterprise that affected the art world to its whole while making the Tate Gallery and the Royal Academy of Arts his somehow business partners.

⁷⁸ Derrick Chong, 'Marketing in art business: Exchange relationships by commercial galleries and art museums' in *The Art Business*, Ian Robertson and Derrick Chong (eds.), (Oxon & NewYork: Routledge: 2008), pp. 115-138

The museums became also key players in this expansion agenda. Krens led the way in this route. Starting with the first institutional expansion in 1990, for a Venice branch in Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, where the Foundation hosted the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Krens went on with a franchising frenzy, by commissioning and establishing Guggenheim Museums through local institution partnerships, in Bilbao, Berlin, Las Vegas and Abu Dhabi. His grand vision can be perhaps summarized in the following public statement:

'It will be truly global, representing art from the Middle East, Russia, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, as well as Europe and America. It will change the model of the art museum.'⁷⁹

While multiplying the Foundation's endowment and its permanent collection acquisitions, he at the same time focused during this directorship in bringing in bigger audiences. To which he succeeded, by commissioning blockbuster exhibitions that in some cases were not at all about art an issue that brought negative public criticism. It seems though that the whole character of Krens' directorship created a great debate within the art professional field, as for example we can understand in the following article by Jerry Saltz. Acknowledging how the grand event of the Cremaster Cycle exhibition produced a positive feedback and panegyric atmosphere around the waning artistic credibility of the institution, he describes the situation as following:

'It is time for Guggenheim director Thomas Krens to go. The trustees and board members who helped him twist this institution into a kind of GuggEnron should go as well. When they have all gone, and after we breathe a sigh of relief and survey the damage they've done, someone will have to put the Guggenheim back together again. Krens & Co. have turned this already fragile museum into a rogue institution, broken faith with art, and stripped it of the reputation won for it by generations of artists and curators. Krens set out to reach more people, and make more money. Unlike many European institutions, our museums aren't primarily government funded, which leaves the back door to business permanently and invitingly ajar. In a shrewd piece of entrepreneurial prestidigitation, Krens converted the Guggenheim's back door into its main entrance. The most literal manifestation of this flip-flop—or flimflam—was how viewers had to pass through the museum store in order to enter the Soho Guggenheim. Shadier examples include BMW underwriting "Motorcycle," Giorgio Armani reportedly donating \$15 million to the Guggenheim around the time of his exhibition there, and the Norman Rockwell Estate

⁷⁹ Carol Vogel, "Guggenheim's provocative director steps down", The New York Times (February 28, 2008), http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/28/arts/design/28muse.html?_r=0

Licensing Company providing funds for that illustrator's current show.'⁸⁰

Mark Van Proyen outlined another important aspect of the exhibition and the effects it had on its host institution, in terms of its audience, in 2006. The event, he noted, attracted a very new type of visitors for the Guggenheim, a 'large population of youthful hipsters'⁸¹ that had not before queued up to pay the expensive entrance fee of the Guggenheim. This, for Van Proyen was the sole outcome of the attractive character of the Cremaster Cycle as it combined oxymoron elements being 'at once post-populist and perversely traditionalist' and combining 'obscure historicism and rock 'n' roll charisma.'⁸² Of course, as these attributes were also hailed by Guggenheim's standard audiences and its corresponding media and the project was recognized as a spectacular success, and one that was in tune with the long efforts towards the political goal of the 'democratization' of the American museum. The Cycle meant somehow contemporary art for everyone! Of course, it also meant that this exhibition was a new way of marketing and visibility for the museum's corporate connections such as the main sponsors of the event Hugo Boss. The case of the German fashion colossus taking Barney under its wing, is a typical case about how corporate patronage of art exhibitions are not acts of altruism or driven by the love for art. Such cultural events are seen by big corporations as the best way to spend shareholders funds for marketing and advertisement, while at the same time enhancing the social and cultural face of the firm.

'It's their money and we are trying to use it in a way that helps our business. We can't be

⁸⁰Jerry Saltz, 'Downward Spiral: The Guggenheim Touches Bottom', Village Voice (Tuesday, Feb 12 2002), <http://www.villagevoice.com/2002-02-12/art/downward-spiral/>

⁸¹ Mark Van Proyen, 'On Point', Artweek 37, No 8, October 2006, pg. 5

⁸² ibid

totally altruistic without being irresponsible with somebody else's money.⁸³

As artist Hans Haacke describes the inevitability of this exchange relationship, the Guggenheim and its involvement in Matthew Barney's artistic production can be seen as clearly systemic and self-serving:

'The museums have taught the lay public to look for excitement. They have dressed up the notion of art and now the public at large expects something sexy. So the museum has to create extravaganzas, which are expensive. They're under pressure to deliver in order to attract the people. It's like an addiction. You start small and you need more, you need bigger doses. In order to attract the crowds and also to attract the corporate support, blockbusters have become necessary.'⁸⁴

In Bourdieu's context, this exchange of cultural capital with the financial one is a critical reason in favor of the institutionalization of contemporary works of art. They become the currency of these art field agents, whether museums or galleries, in their exchanges with the field of power and capital. Thus the capacity to attract audiences and even mystify them is an important perquisite for gaining the support of the field.

This is put similarly by controversial scholar Donald Kuspit, who sees the Cremaster Cycle and its systemic development, as the clearest example of the transformation of avant-garde art into avant-garde entertainment, in the sense that in approaching its audience 'spectacle has become a substitute for intimate communication.'⁸⁵ Moreover, because advanced art has turned the function of self-criticism into a narcissistic self-awareness, or else 'intellectual arrogance' that disconnects it with any transcendental aims towards reaching the audience's unconscious realm.⁸⁶ In the effort to attract audiences there exists therefore a systemic tendency towards the application of avant-guard aesthetics onto 'everyday entertainment' formulas. Exactly this is the type of

⁸³ The CEO of Philip Morris Corporation talking about art exhibition patronage in Loraine Glennon, 'The Museum and the Corporation: New Realities', *Museum News*, January-February, 1988, pg. 39, quoted in Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pg. 136

⁸⁴ Hans Haacke interviewed by Nancy Einreinhofer and quoted in Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pg. 137

⁸⁵ Donald Kuspit, 'A Critical History of 20th Century Art', in *Art Criticism* Vol. 23, No. 1/2, 2008, pg. 334

⁸⁶ *ibid* pp. 332-334

art-making that the Cremaster Cycle comes down to and is, for Kuspit, an instance of ironic artificiality that places Barney within a group of popular American artists such as Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Jason Rhodes, Charles Long and Tony Oursler who:

‘..cynically mix a media journalistic manner and dadaistic shock techniques in an obsolete *epater le bourgeois* offensiveness. They are all satirists, wittingly or unwittingly. They satirize and exploit the public’s fascination with sensationalized information, entertaining spectacle, and its art gullibility.’⁸⁷

Another factor that contributed in Matthew Barney’s high visibility, was the way he was received in mainstream media. The most explicit description or critical acclaim of him and his projects, was given by Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic for the New York Times. Since 1999 he portrayed Barney, as someone who was creating an art that took a brave step towards a direction of aesthetic totality, even though it remained conscious of its closeness to failure. Kimmelman seemed convinced that Barney did for post-modern America what Wagner had done for Germany in the last century.⁸⁸ With the famous statement, ‘Now, 32, Barney is the most important American artist of his generation’⁸⁹, the artist was turned into a kind of national cultural capital. The critic did not rush into an explanation of his statement, by claiming that this art is difficult to be explained when its artistic concept feeds from the notion of ‘ambiguity’ and whose deciphering ranges from the quality of the incomprehensible to that of the intricate, depending on ones intellectual disposition. Yet, the artist was presented, in the mainstream media as the leading artistic figure in the United States of America. Kimmelman, even more explicitly described and tagged the ‘Matthew Barney’ persona as

⁸⁷ *ibid*, pg. 340

⁸⁸ Michael Kimmelman, ‘The Importance of Matthew Barney’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 10.10.1998 pg. 64

⁸⁹ *ibid*, pg. 62

someone worthwhile of national admiration:

'all-American, (...) honest and likable, smart, intense just underneath the surface, charismatic in a soft spoken way and not the least ironic.'⁹⁰

The critic, revealing to his readers that through regular visits to the artist's studio, he came to realize that Barney is actually an enigmatic, private, lost in his own world and most importantly extremely hard working man, he accentuated even more the extraordinary status of his public persona, a quality that was also transmitted upon the value of his art in terms of popularity. But he also exhibits through such capturing, how close sympathy or admiration and art appreciation may reside. For example in explaining the 'Importance of Matthew Barney', he concluded that the young artist was:

'a paradigm of the American art star in the 90s. He shows little and says less, which enhances his allure. He has no public profile, no social ambition or interest in money as far as anyone can see. His cachet has partly to do with his mystery. When his films are screened at the Film Forum in Manhattan, they play to a young art crowd that doesn't necessarily have any idea what it is looking at but reveres him from afar. He earns back the cost of his films (the money for them being put up in the first place by his dealer, Barbara Gladstone) through sales of limited editions of his sculptures, photographs and laser disks. There are private buyers for his work, but it is the big museums that compete for his installations, which is clearly how a 90's star like him thrives: not by the grace of rich collectors but as a cult figure with institutional support, if that is not a contradiction in terms.'⁹¹

In deciphering Kimmelman remarks we may argue that he actually presents his subject as someone de-touched from an evident intentionality towards economic profit and yet one who is totally devoted to his art with an intense blue collar ethic, that aims in a working class manner, towards the attainment of a higher status and a more powerful positioning in the field of art. Thus we could perhaps suggest that in Bourdieu's structure Barney's artistic status is located by Kimmelman in the bohemian fraction of the art field, and not in the bourgeois pole, yet, he is one who keeps a fair deal and progressively reaches the point of keeping appearances for the bourgeoisie as an elite artist:

⁹⁰ *ibid*, pg. 65

⁹¹ *ibid*

"This is the real-deal art world," said Todd Eberle, scanning a crowd that included Cindy Sherman, Matthew Ritchie, Marina Abramovic, Barbara Gladstone, and Clarissa Dalrymple on Monday night. Photographers, performance artists, painters, gallerists, and curators had gathered at the grand Prince George Ballroom to toast Artists Space, one of the oldest nonprofits in New York City, and the career of sculptor, filmmaker, and Björk babydaddy Matthew Barney. And as befits the honoree, it was no ordinary benefit dinner. Superstar chefs Iacopo Falai, Brad Farmerie of Public, Akhtar Nawab of EU, and Pichet Ong of P*Ong commanded stations in every corner of the room, and soaking up the lounge-like atmosphere were actress Jena Malone, designer Adam Kimmel, and model Hana Soukupova. "Matthew went to Yale with my husband, so we joined on to support him," said co-chair Yvonne Force Villareal, in a flowing gray Dolce & Gabbana dress with patent leather corset that she described as "the most 'Matthew Barney' dress I could find." Nearby, Leo Villareal and his old pal kidded around. "So you're hosting tonight?" asked Barney. "And you're being honored," responded Force. "My, we've come a long way," said the blue-chip artist drily. Then he made his way to the stage, where he announced that this was "the beginning of a new chapter" in his career.⁹²

By keeping such appearances within the field of power, artists and here in particular Barney, managed to gather financial capital in order to produce art. Likewise to a capitalist investment this art is then bought by the same milieu, and constitutes units of cultural and financial capital. Thus through this procedure, the art object is created not only in terms of its material existence but also in terms of its artistic value, through the consecration of the field. Whatsoever, in this case the commodity had been somewhat in-effective in generating economic capital whilst its cultural one was seen as a concrete reality by the field⁹³.

'Matthew Barney, purveyor of the macabre neo-Baroque, has never had sold at auction a single edition of *The Cremaster Cycle* for which he is known. At auction, one finds innumerable still images from the moving picture cycle, stills and other works identified as "prints," "Cibachromes," "silkscreens," "photo- engravings," "serigraphs," "lithographs," etc. In 2004, there was even a hearty soul hope not his gallerist, Barbara Gladstone—who paid \$400,000 for a C-Print still from *The Cremaster Cycle*, the sort of image that went unsold a few months later, and continued to sell several times thereafter at prices about 40

⁹² In such 'society gatherings', typical and most likely necessary to the art-field as a way to exchange its cultural capital for financial one, the effect of glamour is a necessary ingredient for expressing value, and one that effectively kitschifies even the most intellectual and elegant aesthetic productions. Perhaps it is exactly this aspect that art needs to come to terms with as it is an integral part of its contemporary reality and role. Can we really think of a world were the 'rich and famous' will not dominate the 'poor and infamous' through economy and culture? Yes we can but in that world, there would be no history of art, and perhaps no history at all. Madhu Puri, 'Barney & Friends: David Byrne and Co Fete d' Artist', <http://www.style.com/peopleparties/parties/scoop/newyork-050207ARTY/> (27.07.2010)

⁹³ In 2009 David W. Galenson, presented a statistic model after reviewing twenty one volumes of 20th century art history. In this he counted the number of illustration references of modern and contemporary artworks made from 1975 and onwards. In this study Barney figures in position 8 together with Richard Serra, out of a sum of 14 artists. See David W. Galenson, 'The State of Advanced Art: The Late Twentieth Century and Beyond', in *Conceptual Revolutions in Twentieth-Century Art*, (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

percent lower than their anomalous high, but no signed and certified original *Cremaster* DVDs or screen installations have turned up at auction.⁹⁴

And so at this point it is perhaps interesting to look at the Cremaster Cycle project and think about financial profit versus a cultural one. From one hand, there is its budget, rumored to range from \$150,000 to \$8 million from Cremaster 4 to Cremaster 3. From the other, the group of people that was needed for the production, had been an immense number of professionals of all kinds of skills. For example in Cremaster 3, with its alleged \$8 million budget,⁹⁵ ⁹⁶ more than 300 individuals participated with tasks varying from animal handling, to performing, to set and costume production, security, camera work and many other fields that were needed, in a production that took place both in Europe and New York and had an equally grand post-production scheme. Not having access to the actual numbers of the budget we may assume that if fair wages were given, including post-production costs, the budget vis-a-vis the possible revenues seems to be a tight and rather unprofitable investment scheme. While expenses bordered the costs of making cinema, this film production made no commercial sense due its limited screening policy that would bring in no worthwhile box-office revenues. On the other hand, if we think of it as solely a collectible art-object, as a decorated vitrine, containing a signed copy of the dvd and certain objects that characterize each film, produced in limited editions of ten with a price that amounts to one-tenth of the project's budget⁹⁶ and again comes across as an economically irrational commodity or investment.⁹⁷ Therefore, we

⁹⁴ Drew Hammond, 'Philip Lachenmann and the Spaces Between', *The Art Economist*, Vol. 1, Issue 4, 2011, pg. 50

⁹⁵ Alexandra Keller & Frazer Ward, 'Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster', *Cinema Journal* 45, No. 2 Winter 2006, pg. 9

⁹⁶ Alexandra Keller and Frazer Ward, 'Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster', *Cinema Journal* 45, No. 2, Winter 2006, pg. 10

⁹⁷ As for its box office revenues, particularly for Cremaster 3 they are said to be \$ 515, 000. See www.the-

could suggest that it was due to the cultural profits that this work 'promised' to the field that its creation was supported so intensively.

Examining this phenomenon Linda Weintraub, described the Cremaster Cycle project as being the epitome of a 'cathedral capitalism' trend, that during the 90s created large capacities for capital investment not only through commercial activities in the art field but also in the art-making process. She observes how during that particular decade a new indicator of success in contemporary art was becoming apparent, namely the volume of its budget. In this logic an artist's importance, and thus cultural capital, could be measured not only by the price tag of his work but also by its capital 'output'. Many would agree, she says, that an 'extravagant expenditure for production is an irrefutable sign of clout. But as Barney demonstrates, output can also refer to the magnitude of the artist's ambition, vision and inspiration.'⁹⁸ So Weintraub describes Barney as a low key persona with great expectations in terms of his artistic production. As a man whose desire and capacity for artistic success was established through an unbridled imagination, an all American hard work ethic and a marketing strategy based - contrary to the project itself - on the philosophy that less is more.⁹⁹ Thus, 'production not consumption,

numbers.com/movies/2003/OCRM3.php referenced in Alexandra Keller & Frazer Ward, 'Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster', *Cinema Journal* 45, No. 2 Winter 2006, pg. 9

⁹⁸ Linda Weintraub, *Making Contemporary Art: How Today's Artists Think and Work*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003) pp. 392-394

⁹⁹ "Barney rode in on a number of interlocking trends in the culture," says Danto. "The celebration of the athlete and of the body, gender ambiguity, as a consequence of late feminism, and a readiness to display oneself in performance." He adds, "The world was also ready for an artist of great ambition." Elkins agrees with the ambition theory. "His films are not low budget experimental films," he says. "They've always been as high budget as he could possibly make them. The other thing is that he markets things. When he first appeared on the scene, almost immediately I had students [at the Art Institute of Chicago] interested in him for that reason. They wanted to figure out how you make an object and then have spin-offs that you can market. The marketing is awesome." in Susan Kruglinsky, 'The Road to Art Fame: An examination of two artists, how they got where they got, and whether that's a good thing', <http://susankruglinski.com/SusanKruglinski/ArtFame.html>, 2009

output not input, cost not price' ¹⁰⁰ is the economical logic behind the Cremaster Cycle and perhaps that can be also understood as a socio-cultural understatement.

So to sum up to this point, we can understand how with a strong support by the international high art establishment and patronage, materialized through Barbara Gladstone's Gallery consecration and management of the project through the gallery's art field positioning, the route evolved towards an immediate institutionalization of the project by the Guggenheim Museum. This also resulted in an immediate creation of cultural capital for all agents involved, though paradoxically the economic capitalist principle of profit was not effectively served by the production. Though given the amount and quality of collaborative field support and patronage for the Cremaster Cycle, we could perhaps suggest that it indicates a greater interest for involvement that extends beyond a plain scope of art patronage towards a conscious act of creation of an art historical event. And one may pose a fair question here once more again: why was the Cremaster Cycle project chosen to become such a visible part of art history?

¹⁰⁰ Linda Weintraub, *Making Contemporary Art: How Today's Artists Think and Work*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003) pg. 399

Chapter Two:

The Cremaster Cycle in Perspective: The Contemporary Total Work of Art and its American Male Hero

*'This specific energy of Love will therefore show itself most strenuously in that unit who, by reason of his general character, or in this particular period of his life, feels drawn by the closest bond of affinity toward this particular Hero; who by his sympathy makes the nature of this hero the most especially his own, and trains his artistic faculties the fittest to re-quicken by his impersonation this hero, of all others, for the living memory of himself, his fellows, and the whole community. The might of individuality will never assert itself more positively than in the free artistic fellowship; since the incitation to resolves in common can only issue from precisely that unit in whom the individuality speaks out so strongly that it determines the free voices of the rest. The might of Individuality, however, will only be able to operate thus upon the fellowship in those specific cases where it has the wit to bring itself to real, and not to merely artificial, currency. Should an art-comrade proclaim his purpose to represent this one particular Hero, and thereto crave that mutual co-operation of the fellowship which alone can bring this to effect: he will not see his wish fulfilled until he has succeeded in arousing for his project the same love and enthusiasm which inspire himself, and which he can only impart to others when his individuality stands possessed of a force in complete accord with the specific object.'*¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Richard Wagner, 'The Artwork of the Future', in William Ashton Ellis, (trans.) Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol 1, (1895), pp. 199-200

2.1 A Hero's Journey in the Field of Mythical Production

In this chapter we will be looking at a possible answer to the question with which the last chapter concluded by, as to why the Cremaster Cycle was chosen by the art field as a project in which to invest so heavily upon in terms of financial capital. The idea here is to locate this reason within the project's tendency to mythologize, encapsulate and aestheticize a set of specific ideals about the human condition. A set of ethics. And this was done by Matthew Barney in the form of a visual opera of five acts. Due to this formal characteristic of the work there was a general trend within the field, of making reference to Wagner's operas in various critical contexts regarding Barney's creation. This resulted in the art historical indexing of the Cremaster Cycle as a contemporary version of the Wagnerian 'total artwork' form. Yet when we refer to a total artwork we speak of a genre, distinguished by the combination and orchestration of multiple mediums, forms and styles, whose narrative subject matter alludes towards a grand morale illustrated by a mythic structure. Indeed, in this particular production, through a compulsively stylistic treatment of forms, materials, ideas and characters, Barney worked with themes that came from an intersection between specific collective narratives and his own habitus. With all this material the artist developed an idiosyncratic mythologem, a pattern of his own social and psychological ordeal, in the form of a Cycle, a typical hero's journey pattern. Within the next two chapters we will look for this set of ethics and aesthetics that established it as hard cultural capital.

Putting this in a more general context within the contemporary art field and we

may speak of a larger trend within art production prone to intricate narrative and spectacular forms as a result of Barney's project. For example, as Mark Van Proyen observed how Barney's *neo-Gesamtkunstwerk* triggered a certain trend among artists to go into large, technology steeped, almost baroque creations of 'production-value intensive' art. He gives the examples of Pipilotti Rist's *Homo Sapien Sapien*, produced for the Venice Biennial in 2005 and Paul McCarthy's *Pirate Project*, of the same year. The first being a 'highly mythologized vision of erotic femininity' with extensive use of symbols within the actual ground of Baroque architecture, and the second a comic interpretation of cruelty, a animatronic and video pirate debauchery, that suggested big metaphors on political and historical realities. Thus he placed such artistic practices within a greater cultural category, a very post modern group indeed, that after the Wagnerian dream of the merging between Life and Science (Technology), presents an art that may exist together with big open air festival productions such as the Burning Man and High Desert Test Sites. In that sense, he found an exciting new aesthetic category whose characteristic examples share some radical futuristic promise:

'Not only do all of the aforementioned practices make use of advanced technology, they are also imaginatively responsive to it, teasing out its furthest-reaching implications and deploying them for artistic purposes beyond its obvious instrumental service to the accumulation of capital.'¹⁰²

In that sense, the thesis can move into a confident perspective from which the issue of 'artistic value' connects to cultural significance as well as to the kind of aesthetic taste it adheres to. Under a Bourdieuan scope we might see the case of the Cycle pulling through a cunning and ambiguous maneuver , where elite businesses and bourgeois institutions collaborated into consecrating a contemporary art work for a mass audience, and somehow

¹⁰² Mark Van Proyen, 'On Point', *Artweek* 37, No 8, October 2006, pg. 5

demolishing the Boudieuan categories of taste class. What we need to explore in effect within the narrative is the cultural domain it drafts, not so much as an art-historical one but rather as an narrative testimony of a successful habitus within the contemporary art field. This narrative, constructed upon a tentative relationship between the 'specific' as autobiographical and the 'collective' as the mythic, exposes the cultural elements that are significant in two ways: because of their presence or their absence. Those that impressed and motivated the art field, and the ones that remained unnoticed or unspoken. In this respect, we may examine the type of narrative used, here being clearly the epic saga. This in particular, indicates clearly that the project's intention was to address in a visceral manner, extended and composite audiences, overarching outside the limits of the artworld.

'It excites me that my work can be understood in different ways by different audiences. What operates as an abstract notion for one audience can function as a more charged cultural icon for another. I want both readings to be simultaneously possible, but I am more concerned with preserving the former (because that quality is much more elusive and fragile'.¹⁰³

Based upon a subjective habitus, an unfolding narrative was symbolized and stylized through particular visual algorithms and breeched onto existing mythological patterns into creating a neo-mythical space. These pre-existent collective narratives, were not strictly mythical but also tilted towards cultic realms. For example in *Cremaster 3*, Barney brings in certain esoteric and mystical traditions and plays around their symbolic treatment of life, creativity, death and the will to power. In *Cremaster 4* he works around Manx mythology and ancient Greek models and in *Cremaster 2* he develops a pattern of religion, politics, spiritualism and magic. While in *Cremaster 1* he works with

¹⁰³ Matthew Barney in personal correspondence with the author comments on his intentions towards reaching large audiences. in Henry Jenkins, 'Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre', in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, (New York & London: New York University Press, 2007), pg. 42

concepts of biology, sport and spectacle, in *Cremaster 5* he uses the form of tragic romance within an actual operatic frame.

Thus despite its cryptic language and enclosed conceptual core the cycle became immediately a popular art work among both European and American audiences and institutions. By choosing to have a story of a 'hero's' journey Barney utilized a standard aesthetic device of the cinematic experience, such as the viewer's identification with the main character (himself), while at the same time lead this 'hero character' towards uncomfortable zones of aesthetic and narrative existence. From one side displaying masculinity, conflict and achievement, as embodied in various stereotypical yet disparate symbols that ultimately connect to each other through an autobiographical map of the artist's life, work and fascination; on the other, its failure into chaotic deconstruction of such stereotypes.

2.2 Rounding Things up with Myth: Barney as a new Wagner

'Consider Matthew Barney in this regard: even more than Jeff Koons, he has articulated, that is to say exploited, those tendencies. In that sense he is a proto-totalitarian artist for me, a small-time American Wagner who mythifies the catastrophic conditions of existence in late capitalism'.¹⁰⁴

Myths have always sprung out the collective experience of certain unresolved tensions within societal structures. So if there is something in the *Cremaster Cycle* that points to the creation or re-invention of mythological structures, then it must be connected to the experience of its creator as part of a collective awareness. Throughout the work of Matthew Barney we find the repetitive

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Buchloch, *Art Since 1900, 'The Predicament of Contemporary Art: Roundtable'*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pg. 673

feature of the action hero, and thus every piece of narrative relies on the ordeal of an individual framed within a particular group. And this is exactly why the Cremaster Cycle allows us to see it as an epic tale of some kind of neo-heroic deed.

Most epic narratives, as their basis comes from traditional mythological tales, are born out of a people's traditional culture. For Jung, a 'folk's mythology' and its symbols, is mainly a projection of a people's passion and these passions are always present in a form of binary cultural equilibrium; where 'the good and reasonable ruling the world wisely is threatened by the chaotic, primitive power of passion'¹⁰⁵. The latter, expelled by the socio-cultural forms that express reason and civilization, are then re-introduced as mythological structures, effectively establishing an equilibrium valve for all irrational and socially destructive passions. Coming directly from within, and addressing the psychic constitution of a particular people, mythical stories of heroes in action manifest at all times a distinct symbolic ethos expressed within a narrative that may address the understanding of a very wide audience. The hero of such narratives is one that creates or proceeds, driven by a spark or faith, one that dedicates him to an ideal and its pursuit, regardless the cost. Even if the goal is unintelligible or vain, it is his blind dedication that makes him a hero.¹⁰⁶ And as this character drives the mythic story to its conclusion, he is for Jung, a symbol of the libido.¹⁰⁷ While he sees the libido as a psychic force that combines sin with love¹⁰⁸, the hero's

¹⁰⁵ C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Beatrice M. Hinkle (trans.) (Mineola&New York: Dover Publications, 2002), or.p. 1916, pg. 120

¹⁰⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, (Princeton, NJ : Princeton Univ. Press, 2001) pg. 13

¹⁰⁷ C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Beatrice M. Hinkle (trans.) (Mineola&New York: Dover Publications, 2002), or.p. 1916, pg. 126

¹⁰⁸ 'The libido is God and Devil. With the destruction of the sinfulness of the libido an essential portion of the libido would be destroyed. Through the loss of the Devil, God himself suffered a considerable loss,

actions are also understood as an embodiment of a twofold tension between a 'good' and a 'bad', a 'logical' and 'passionate'. In myths the victory of the ideal means the destruction of life, and this detail explains the typical pattern according to which mythic heroes suffer from spiritual confusion after achieving their greatest deeds ¹⁰⁹.

Joseph Cambell, describes three general functions for the traditional mythological narrative. The first, is to counter the desperation of our consciousness in view of the mystery of the universe, the second is to transfer an interpretation of life to each contemporary stage and the last is to enforce a particular moral order 'in the shaping of the individual to the requirements of a geographically conditioned social group.'¹¹⁰ Therefore, mythological patterns emerge from such goals and their particular cultural context. Though, when modern artists and writers work with mythological narratives such functions even though may remain by definition within the artworks as internal traditional principles, they also must be somewhat transformed if not destroyed in order to be able to articulate a contemporary mythological function.

Another area of the mythic function is examined by Hal Foster when describing the effects of this binary mythical-hero dynamic, through the analysis of a contemporary curatorial example. He comments on the way in which the Metropolitan Museum of Art had displayed two works of art in its entrance hallway, Antonio Canova's marble neoclassical statue, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, (1804-06) and the historical painting *The Triumph of Marius*, (1729) by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, depicting Roman general Marius's

somewhat like an amputation upon the body of the divinity.'C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Beatrice M. Hinkle (trans.) (Mineola&New York: Dover Publications, 2002), or.p. 1916, pp. 120-121

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, pg. 506

¹¹⁰ Joseph Cambell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, (London: Penguin, 1991), or. p. 1968, pg. 5

triumphant capture of Jugurtha, an African King.

'The museum made its introduction, then, by way of a passage not only in aesthetic types, from a neoclassical sculpture of a Greek hero to a late baroque painting of a Roman general, but also in moral exempla, from the mythical subjugation of a supernatural kind of otherness in Medusa to the historical subjugation of a cultural kind in Jugurtha. This subjugation of the monstrous and the barbarous is celebrated explicitly as a heroic event and implicitly as an artistic task - as the touchstone of this museum in particular and perhaps of Western civilization in general. The legendary price of this civilization - the sacrificial cost of any symbolic order, the surrender of the instinctual to the rational - is also figured in the decapitated Medusa and the manacled Jugurtha. Yet the uncivilized is not eradicated here - neither in Greek myth nor in the Roman story, nor in the art works that depict them - because the symbolic order also requires the power of the uncivilized, or the power that is projected there. What is celebrated is the strategic taming of these uncivilized forces to civilizational ends, the 'apotropaic' transformation of a deadly enemy into a prized trophy, of the evil eye of Medusa into the wise vision of Athena (*apo-tropaïos* is to turn or to trope away).'¹¹¹

In his analysis, Foster,¹¹² explains how the mythological function is one that allows for a cultural taming process, by aestheticizing in infinite ways a rationalization of the primordial conflict, without of course resolving it.¹¹³ In that way, as the tension is fully aestheticized and kept as a 'tropaion' there is no loss, like the one referred to by Jung, on behalf of the good and the ordered, when the opposite pole is conquered by being kept alive as a prized trophy, a fetishized and loved enemy. And for Foster such choices are seen as a characteristic trait of Western or perhaps could say Eurocentric cultures.¹¹⁴ Thus, it would be interesting to ask whether there is an equivalent to the Medusa-Athena polarity within the Cremaster Cycle.

Katy Siegel touches upon this issue of mythic re-invention, in her article, from 1998, and gives an interpretation of how mythic tension and polarity are generated in the work. Her main argument is that there is a 'real life' psychic conflict of Matthew Barney, a clash between 'reticence and self-

¹¹¹ Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, (Cambridge Mass & London: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 258-260

¹¹² Foster, gains his perspective on mythology from Levi-Strauss, and thus his ideas about the function of mythology seem to be a structural re-formulation of what is said in Jung.

¹¹³ Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth' (1955), in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pg. 229, quoted in Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, (Cambridge Mass & London: MIT Press, 2004), pg. 420

¹¹⁴ Further down though Foster gives us also the Lacanian and syncopated formulation and moral of Medusa's myth: 'submit to Medusa-Athena, undergo the penile castration necessary for access to the symbolic order, and be rewarded with the phallic shield of signification, of civilization, for doing so.' Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, (Cambridge Mass & London: MIT Press, 2004), pg. 272

assertion' that becomes an art form as it is ingeniously masked under layers and layers of dramatic, conceptual ornamentation.¹¹⁵ Within the metaphoric device of sexual differentiation there exists a more complicated and obscure image of the process of social differentiation, portrayed in the way that Barney combines his characters, dividing them strictly between groups and individuals. The author argues that elements such as the chorus lines, the football field, the prison, the church, the beehive or the riding-rangers are obvious examples of the mass ego societal character: arenas of social conditioning. The friction point comes in the existence of the individual ego, as embodied by the various solitary characters in action. If Cremaster 1 is the point in which this differentiated ego exists in a state of equilibrium within the group - even though Goodyear remains well hidden in her sabotaging activities - then, Siegel argues, the first point of conflict 'between the one the many' comes with Cremaster 2 and its treatment of the family and the restraint of progeny, a conflict that is traditionally but seemingly resolved with a sacrificial crisis.¹¹⁶

Mark C. Taylor making a connection between Joseph Beuys and Matthew Barney in terms of their spiritual/mythological, and artistic agendas sees the tradition of philosophical romanticism -coming from writers such as Friedrich and Wilhelm von Schlegel, Hegel and Fichte- extending towards post-modernism and still commenting on 'the culmination of the Western theological and philosophical tradition.'¹¹⁷ And in western philosophy, he argues, there

¹¹⁵ Katy Siegel, 'Nurture Boy', *Artforum*, Vol. 37, No. 10, Summer 1999, pg. 133

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, pg. 134

¹¹⁷ Mark C. Taylor / *FORGERY* in Barney, Beuys: All in the present must be transformed, (New York: Deutsche Museum Publications, 2006), p. 107

is only one key issue: 'the relation of the one to the many'¹¹⁸ as manifested in the existential value of the individual being that has, since historical times, been 'privileged' over the value of a collective existence.

Though, as we move forward in time, away from those primal myths, and into their modernized re-inventions, these heroes seem to divert from such primordial libidinal patterns. For example, Wagner's Siegfried stops at the point where the mortal hero achieves his greatest challenge and does not go on into the perplexed and troubled patterns of the original Norse epic saga. Yet, in place of the archaic pattern Wagner installs his own modern moral maxim. The greatest deed of Siegfried has nothing to do with his killing range and will to power but his heroic climax comes when he experiences fear. And, that is to say that fear and the challenge it poses as heroic transgression, comes for Siegfried in the image of a woman with whom he falls in love with. Thus, the heroic deed enters a more ambiguous scheme, where the good and the bad become one and thus more humanistic and psychological in their origin as they exit the realm of the ideal at all cost.

Primarily, there exists a very legitimate question as to why the connection between Wagner and Barney was made so explicit. There are a few obvious ways to answer this and perhaps one that is not so widely disseminated is to say that the name Richard Wagner carries a heavy cultural capital, thus making it an obviously good choice for creating the art historical context that would promote and explain the Cremaster Cycle project as an art-historical event. Of course, there were many common characteristics that made this relationship possible. For example, in an article about the notorious

¹¹⁸ Mark C. Taylor / FORGERY in Barney, Beuys: All in the present must be transformed, (New York: Deutsche Museum Publications, 2006), p. 107

Guggenheim exhibition,¹¹⁹ Arthur C. Danto introduces the Cremaster Cycle films by placing them next to the four series of Wagner's operatic Ring Cycle, making it clear that the genre they belong to is that of the Gesamtkunstwerk, where artworks make large cultural claims through equally large artistic productions, and are subjects to grand patronage schemes. The author first goes into the issue of Guggenheim museum's relationship to the artwork as the architectural 'host' of the finished project. When Wagner's move was to design the perfect matching theater that would host his art, having found for himself the perfect patron, King Ludwig, Barney reversely decides or perhaps has to incorporate the landmark of his patronage guarantor, in the work itself. It is important to keep in mind Danto's position, as a prominent philosopher, critic and theorist of the international art field but most importantly the North American field of artistic production, in understanding his critical stand towards the Cremaster Cycle, especially in relation to his 'institutional' theory of art. From this perspective an art work 'is' when an 'artworld' recognizes it as such. Yet, in his review it is very clear how he dismisses every object, installation and film still from the characterization art, by coming back to this specific issue in three instances the last being part of the essay's concluding remarks. Nevertheless, his introductory section ends with a somewhat confusing epigram; certain north European correspondents asked him 'whether Matthew Barney is the Picasso of our time, or the Leonardo.' 'No, the philosopher answers, Matthew Barney is distinct and contemporary, in expressing the artistic zeitgeist of our epoch and some of its main

¹¹⁹ Arthur C. Danto, 'Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle', in *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 234-241, or.p. in *The Nation*, (May 5, 2003)

obsessions.¹²⁰

But what is this zeitgeist of our epoch about? For example Benjamin Buchloch expresses a very specific view about Matthew Barney's art and mythologizing intentionality, in the quote introducing this section. He speaks of the artistic field, after the 1980s steeped in neoliberal epitomes, and being totally subsumed by the culture industry. In this perspective Barney is for Buchloch mythologizing exactly these procedures through which art becomes 'commodity production, investment portfolio and entertainment'¹²¹. In the same way, Buchloch also criticized the use of idiosyncratic mythologems, in the practices of Joseph Beuys as he suggested that the German artist was unique in embodying a sinister aestheticization process in order to promote his art and his crave for a cult of personality.

'No other artist (with the possible exception of Andy Warhol, who certainly generated a totally different kind of myth) managed - or probably ever intended- to puzzle and scandalize his primarily bourgeois art audience to the extent that he would become a figure of social worship. No other artist succeeded so systematically in aligning himself at a given time with artistic and political currents, absorbing them into his myth and work and thereby neutralizing and aestheticizing them.'¹²²

Perhaps a similar treatment to the one Adorno made for Wagner's Cycle. 'The basic idea is that of totality: The Ring attempts, without much ado, nothing less than the encapsulation of the world process as a whole.'¹²³ Adorno thus observed how in such a narrative the opacity and omnipotence of the social process is being projected and celebrated as a metaphysical mystery while being presented seductively to the modern consciousness

¹²⁰ Arthur C. Danto, 'Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle', in *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 234- 236, 241

¹²¹ Benjamin Buchloch, *Art Since 1900*, 'The Predicament of Contemporary Art: Roundtable', (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pg. 673

¹²² Benjamin Buchloch, 'Beuys: Twilight of the Idol', in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, (Cambridge&London: MIT Press, 2003), pg. 43

¹²³ Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, (London: Verso, 1981) pg. 90

through its operatic extravagance.¹²⁴ Wagner's epic productions were for Adorno a mixture of phantasmagoria and a 'rhythm of dissolution' whose 'poetic aim', had to capture the artist's intentions in every separate element and moment while at the same time such absolutist intentions should be hidden in their own realization¹²⁵ and that would have much to do with a conversion of the audience to one's world view. The totality of these operas was able to create for Adorno erotic ties with its viewer, overwhelming, and one-sided total immersion.¹²⁶ Though Wagner, was like Beuys and unlike Barney, very literal about his didactic intentions towards his contemporary, newly industrialized Europe in which he functioned as an artist.

'Beginning in the 1840s and evolving confusedly for the rest of his life, Wagner's social critique had nothing particularly original about it within a broader field of nineteenth-century indictments of the effects of social and economic modernization. What remains singular about Wagner was the relative specificity of his cultural program for social reintegration and his belief in the transformative effects of the collective experience of music drama performed and produced as a ritual communal event.'¹²⁷

In his essay 'The Artwork of the Future', from 1849, he describes at one point the perils of industrialism as reflected upon artistic production, theater in particular, in the form of profit speculation and how this highest of all art should give the example of an emancipated principle to lead and renew an ill spirited people. Wagner's romantic aspirations for a 'noble Manhood' were put clearly into his mythological, epic narratives as an antithetical ethos to that of the newly established capitalist industrialism. Perceiving himself both as a

¹²⁴ *ibid*, pg. 119

¹²⁵ *ibid*, pg. 97

¹²⁶ 'This technological hostility to consciousness is the very foundation of the music drama. It combines the arts in order to create an intoxicating brew. Wagner's language, a synthesis of idealism and lust formulates it in a metaphor of sexual congress.' Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, (London: Verso, 1981) pg. 100

¹²⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass & London: MIT Press, 2000), pg. 248

revolutionary and as a great artist he drove his art with the dynamics of such ideological intentions transforming it to a didactic instrument. His 'lessons', given in the grand operatic form, the most fashionable genre of high art at the time, were directed towards the reform of the newly rich, bourgeois audience¹²⁸ that enthusiastically flocked the opera houses. So there was a simple trick involved, bourgeois visual aesthetics transferring romantic revolutionary ideals, a strike on capitalist industrialism.

In this sense it is certain romantic ideals that connect the two artists in their didactic goals towards their contemporary audience. Massimiliano Gioni, who located the core meaning of Barney's art upon a *post-human* condition, in referencing the homonymous exhibition curated by Jeffrey Deitch in 1994¹²⁹, describes also the genre of the Cycle as a revival of Wagner's desire for a total art work, fabricated in a contemporary art context that delivered 'a new futurist and para- scientific approach'¹³⁰. This, perspective contextualizes the Cremaster Cycle as a total post-human/prosthetic allusion, an idealist, romantic hope for a technological resolution in humanity's biological and ontological struggle; a hope that sustains the dreams of transcendental resolution through technological progress. This sense of post-humanism is also evident in the way in which Matthew Barney speaks of the world, both natural and technological as a prosthetic extension for the human body.¹³¹ Thus for

¹²⁸ In a letter to his friend Franz Liszt he confesses that what he longs to do mostly in his life is to commit 'acts of artistic terrorism' and so we may suppose that it is towards this specific audience that he defines himself as a terrorist armed with the power of art.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_and_Revolution

¹²⁹ FAE Musée d' Art Contemporain, Pully/Lausanne, Switzerland, Post Human, June 14- Sept. 13, Catalogue with essay by Jeffrey Deitch. Traveled to Castello Rivoli, Turin Oct. 1 - Nov. 22; DESTE Foundation Centre for Contemporary Art, Athens, Dec. 3, 1992 - Feb. 14, 1993; and Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, March 12- May, 9, 1993

¹³⁰ Massimiliano Gioni, *Supercontemporary: Matthew Barney*, (Milan: Electa, 2007), p.9

¹³¹ For example, talking about the setting of Cremaster 5, the Hungarian State Opera in Budapest, he proposes that we look at the architectural form of the opera-house as if it were an extension of a

Barney's myth-making process the human principle as creativity is legible only if understood as a kind of prosthetic evolution. In this sense, when architecture is presented as a prosthetic device built around the human body, it becomes an inorganic yet symbiotic part of this same body, which in its own turn becomes a sensual receptor and an intellectual processor. Though, given that the artist's insistence on a centrality of entropic functions, inherent and unavoidable in such bio-mechanical systems, we also can read a certainty of failure to transcend such limits. Then this romantic, essential hope becomes the carrot and stick of civilization. A meaningless, cynical and yet functional drive for technological progress. And this is a didactic concept.

Apart from such connections, the Cremaster Cycle is evidently a kind of art, that like Wagner's operas, makes no distinction in terms of its potential audiences or of variable deciphering capacities. Everyone can, and at the same time cannot understand it.¹³² It is perhaps in its totality, as confusing to an art educated or analytical mind, as it is to someone who has not spend any time looking at and analyzing art, while at the same time both would find some kind of recognizable and comprehensible sequence. An American football field, ornamental chorus girls, a psychopathic killer, the Rocky Mountains and the Salt flats, the Great Houdini, Mormons, mediums, an opera House, Ursula Andress, Norman Mailer, Keltic mythology, fairies and

soprano's torso; a device that enables sound to surround and overwhelm us with such intensity as if we were sitting inside the body of the singer.'Matthew Barney: The Church of The Cremaster', in Art Safari with Ben Lewis, TV Program, BBC 4 (Broadcasted on Thursday 29 July 2004 midnight-12.30am)

¹³² During my research years I have had the opportunity to watch the Cycle with many people of many national, educational, professional, age-group backgrounds and the most striking thing was that it made no sense the way that people reacted against these movies. No pattern could come out of such enquiry, though it was interesting to realize how the movies were not art-world codified and thus could draw the assumptions that they were made for a wide audience despite their slow pace and incomprehensible story-lines.

sprites, the Isle of Man, race motors, the Chrysler Building, the Freemasons, Irish builders, New York in the 1930s. All of these examples indicate how the films were designed upon an explicitly popular culture with whose elements everyone could identify with. On the other hand its biological, mystical and aesthetic references are intelligible only to a specific milieu. And so it is in this way that it attacks the Bourdieuan notion of class categories in terms of taste distinction, as it homogenizes them.

One thing we can review regarding the Cremaster Cycle and its subject materials, is whether they stand as somehow ornamental, being the surface perhaps of something else, that would probably be closer to the meaning of this colossal production. As the artist has stated many times, the Cycle is ultimately an allegory of the life of an aesthetic idea, one that cannot but collapse under its own weight, die under its own will to be realized.

'I've begun to see them in terms of having an idea in '1', rejecting it in '2', experiencing a kind of narcissistic interlude in '3', panicking in '4' and resolving the idea in '5', which ultimately kills the thing. After I understand something completely, I'm not interested anymore (....) Being in fashion was useful to me because I know how people can be used up, how they're hot and then they become yesterday's news. I find this curious, the way energy dissipates from a source through that kind of exploitation and I want to figure out how to make it into art'.¹³³

So it might be that the basis of this neo-mythological structure speaks of an ideal artistic failure and that Barney's intentions as the creator of the Cremaster Cycle was to encapsulate this as a total concept:

'The individual has had an experience of his own - of order, horror, beauty, or even mere exhilaration - which he seeks to communicate through signs; and if his realization has been of a certain depth and import, his communication will have the value and force of living myth - for those, that is to say, who receive and respond to it of themselves with recognition, un-coerced'.¹³⁴

The artist himself speaks of his intense need to communicate his ideas through the moving image and its sculptural possibilities.¹³⁵ Yet, in no

¹³³ ' Matthew Barney quoted in Michael Kimmelman, 'The Importance of Matthew Barney', The New York Times Magazine, 10.10. 1998 pg. 69

¹³⁴ Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Creative Mythology, (London: Penguin, 1991), or. p. 1968, pg. 4

¹³⁵ Public interview with Matthew Barney in the Goslar Museum for the occasion of awarding the artist the Kaiser

occasion does he speak, like Wagner, about the relationship of his work to existing societal conditions but refers only to the condition of an individual organism, evidently himself. It could therefore just be random, egocentric, megalomaniac, neurotic aestheticism, obsessed with stylistic excess, celebrity personas, and teasing the audience. Nevertheless, it is certain formal and narrative choices that make us see the work as something that probably seeks to communicate a total view upon a collective psychosocial condition of a specific and expanded culture.

2.3 Genealogy: form, identity and abstraction

By exploring the work that Barney produced before his major epic project, perceiving them as experimentations for his 'visual opera', we may approach the core that drove his neo-mythology, a conceptual basis informed by 'the young artist's critical, almost painfully acute, self consciousness.'¹³⁶

These early art practices functioned as autobiographical abstractions, in introducing or else symbolizing a particular state of the artist in various forms of existence. But there were also certain conceptual frames that came out of a collective cultural basis through which Barney had emerged as an individual, for becoming in a quite traditional sense, its epic-story teller.

Barney's first major project was *Drawing Restraint* and this has been the artist's longest series of works¹³⁷. The main idea behind it was to

Ring 2007, 05.10. 2007, http://www.moechenhaus.de/traeger/barney/PDF/Matthew_Barney_Interview.pdf

¹³⁶ Roger D. Hodge, 'Onan the Magnificent: The Triumph of the Testicle in Contemporary Art', Harper's Magazine, May 2000, pg. 7

¹³⁷ Matthew Barney has made 18 pieces in total from 1987 up to 2010 and while this chapter is being written a grand retrospective exhibition of Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraint* project is being held in the city of Basel, Switzerland by the art institution 'Schaulager'. This hybrid art-store holds one large exhibition per year and this particular one marked the acquisition of the project's archives together with certain artworks that were created especially for the 'Schaulager' collection. Notably, the opening

investigate and document the potential of artistic creation under restraint, by following an athletic-biological model of muscle development through the application of resistance. The pieces were video-documented performances exhibited as installation, in small monitors suspended from the ceiling in spaces that recreated the architecture and ambience of the space, in which the original actions took place. Even though *Drawing Restraint* began with a pure anti-narrative form, taking from neo-avant guard video art, much attention was given to the use of specific materials and props as well as the staging of the action, that were all inspired by biotechnology, sports and prosthetics. Even though, content as meaning and form seemed to be in a symmetrical relationship, it was these pieces that created a stage waiting for a narrative to be enacted. For example, after 1993, with the addition of mythic and iconic characters, belonging both perhaps to an extended psycho-cultural category of social identification models, *Drawing Restraint*, reached a point where narrative grew to the extent of making its initial creative principles look epigrammatic; a headline or perhaps punch line: 'Form cannot be developed or transformed if it does not strive against some sort of restraint'. Based upon this bio-philosophical principle, Barney designed a first tripartite cyclical model of *Situation, Condition, Production* or in different words desire, discipline, productivity, as an abstract narrative that was later applied onto many different contexts. We could look into this pseudo-philosophical logic, through *The Path*, described as the polysemous diagram *Situation - Condition - Production*:

'Situation is raw drive. It is sexual energy without discipline or direction. It is described by a

of the exhibition (as well as of other big exhibitions at time) was held 5 days before the 'Art Basel' fair, one of the most 'commercial' annual events of the art field globally.

diagram of the male and female reproductive system in the six weeks old developing fetus. the sex of the fetus remains undefined for the first seven weeks. 'Situation' is undifferentiated sexual energy, and is characterized by hunger and indiscriminate consumption.

Condition is the visceral funnel. 'Condition' disciplines the oral intake of Situation. In 'Condition', the undifferentiated field of sexual energy begins to take form. 'Condition' functions like the stomach systematically breaking down the bolus ingested by 'Situation', nourishing it and encouraging growth.

Production is the anal output of the path. 'Production' is described by the form of the two-headed dumbbell called unit BOLUS. The unit BOLUS has the potential to close the three-phase PATH, joining the mouth of 'Situation' with the anus of 'Production', enabling a meditation on an endless loop between desire and discipline.¹³⁸

Thus, his main artistic ideal within these series, was to accomplish a shortcut that would reconfigure this process into a double bind. As an action that would endlessly loop between desire and discipline, excluding production until this happens unintentionally.¹³⁹ So we may say that the first neo-mythological morale we come across in Barney's artistic concept is the goal of escaping intentional production.

In *Drawing Restraint*, Barney treated the issue of medium in a rather similar way to that of the Cremaster Cycle, and from the very beginning he developed a synergy of video, sculpture, drawing and photography, which was then progressively expanded and refined. In the first phase of the project - from number 1 to number 6 - Barney, as the sole character in the videos, engaged in repetitive athletic actions, filmed in enclosed spaces with no viewers present that were exhibited as video installations, incorporating the sculptural/architectural elements of the set in which the action of the videos was taking place and which embodied the concept of restraint. *Drawing Restraint 1*, from 1987 was performed and documented in the artist's studio while Matthew Barney was still a student in Yale Art School:

¹³⁸ quoted in Matthew Barney: *Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail*, (12 June - 3 October 2010) (Basel: Schaulager & Swabe Verlag, 2010), pg. 58

¹³⁹ I used to think about a three-phase diagram: Situation, Condition, Production. Situation was a zone of pure drive, useless desire that needed direction, needed to be passed through the visceral disciplinary funnel, which was the second zone - condition. The third zone, production was a kind of anal/oral production of form. It gets more interesting if production is bypassed: at that point the head goes into the ass, and the cycle flickers between situation and condition, between discipline and desire. If it goes back

'In Drawing Restraint 1 two mild inclines were constructed on either end of the studio. An elastic line from the floor was strapped to the thighs. As the body moved up the incline, resistance increased. Drawings were generated at the top of the slope and along the walls.'¹⁴⁰

Drawing Restraint 2, from 1988 also a student project, was a more complex design of the previous installation performance. Here we have the first appearance of the Field Emblem:

'In Drawing Restraint 2, was an elaboration on Drawing Restraint 2. Longer and heavier tools were used to generate the drawings on more challenging ramps. A variation was performed on hockey skates. Drawing Restraint 2 was a mediation on the desire to make a mark and the discipline imposed on that. Finished drawings were never produced.'¹⁴¹

Drawing Restraint 3, also from 1988 introduced a different idea of making a mark within restraints, by using unstable materials and a particular weightlifting technique as a way to indicate a different psychological approach to action:

'Drawing Restraint 3 uses an Olympic barbell cast in petroleum jelly. The hands of the artist were chalked with calcium carbonate. The bar was grabbed for the clean and jerk. The grip was then released and the chalk that had fallen from the hand was documented on the plate beneath the weight. This was the first piece in the series that rendered a character of refusal. Drawing Restraint 3 was the beginning of a more narrative approach to the Drawing Restraint Series.'¹⁴²

Drawing Restraint 4, also from 1988 presented again a variation on the subject by working on resistance as inertia, and this time Barney introduced himself in a woman's dress and a wig:

'In Drawing Restraint 4 the artist's shoes were cleaned and taped to eliminate marking on the white floor. The cast plates were placed onto a blocking sled, which trains the legs and the explosive strength of the athlete. A drawing tool was clamped onto the base of the blocking sled, and the sled was pushed through a corridor attempting to make a linear drawing on the floor.'¹⁴³

With the fifth of the series, *Drawing Restraint 5* (1989), Barney went back to the initial form of the project with ramps and elastic leg harnesses yet engaged a with a conceptual experimentation upon the diagram of *Situation, Condition, Production*, during which he produced drawings of the *Path*:

'Drawing Restraint 5 was the only piece in the series performed for an audience. Using a

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.drawingrestraint.net/>

¹⁴¹ <http://www.drawingrestraint.net/>

¹⁴² ibid

¹⁴³ ibid

ceramic skeet thrower, three marks were made on the wall. These marks were used to organize the three phase of the path: Situation, Condition, Production. As before the artist's thighs were strapped with an elastic band tied back to the floor.¹⁴⁴

Later on the same year, Barney produced *Drawing Restraint 6* (1989):

'In *Drawing Restraint 6*, a mini trampoline was fixed onto a base with fifteen degree angle. Using the trampoline a single mark was made on the ceiling of the studio with each jump. Over the course of the day, a self portrait was drawn onto the ceiling. *Drawing Restraint 6* was re-performed in 2004.¹⁴⁵

In the second phase of the project, exemplified by *Drawing Restraint 7* (1993), the concept of restraint acquired its narrative/mythic character, contextualizing the act of 'drawing restraint' through a particular narrative and thus bringing the artist closer to his later visual, operatic style. In an interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist from 2003, Barney analyses the way in which mythological narrative emerged within his work and speaks of a personal interest he had in telling stories to his audience. It had been the mini-cycle *OTTOshaft* (1992) the initial point where mythology hit the work in a visual narrative manner. Specifically in that piece, he enquired into the myths about the ancient deity Pan and thus his Pan Pipe, - which most likely led him to concept of hubris through the Marsyas myth, that was portrayed in *Drawing Restraint 7*- and such an endeavor was taken up in an experimental attempt to use known mythological narratives within an abstract context and see what comes out of it. What came out were the five locations in which each of the cycle episodes would take place. And with this expansion, not only into space but also into time, more mythic and mythologized characters and notions appeared and unfolded within the project, stashed upon the minimal central idea of either sexual differentiation or the life of the idea itself.¹⁴⁶ The piece marked a total aesthetic shift from the previous form of the project, in

¹⁴⁴ ibid

¹⁴⁵ ibid

¹⁴⁶ Hans-Ulrich Obrist, 'Barney, Matthew', Interviews, Vol 1, ed. Thomas Boutoux, (Milan: Charta, 2003), also in <http://www.tate.org.uk/magazine/issue2/barney.htm>

terms of its visual qualities.

'Drawing Restraint 7 continued to render the character of refusal that emerged in the weightlifter in Drawing Restraint 3. In a limousine entering Manhattan, a hairless kid satyr chases his tail in the front seat while in the back seat, two developed satyrs - one ram and one ewe - wrestle. Using the tip of the ram's horn the ewe attempts to draw a ram horn in the condensation that has formed over the surface of the moon roof. Drawing Restraint 7 ends with the satyrs flaying one another, and with the laying of the upholstery beneath the tail of the kid. Both the satyrs and the vehicle are punished for an act of hubris: their attempt to produce a finished drawing in their own likeness.'¹⁴⁷

This 'new look' introduced, 'the artist's cold aesthetics, his clinical approach to new mythologies inspired both by classical literature and horror movies.'¹⁴⁸ Another way of looking at this piece is to say that it epitomized Barney's typical character treatment: supernatural creatures or personas devoid of voice, psychological depths and reproductive organs, whose lack somehow connected them to an immanent reality. Yet, it is only through their bodies that they become overwhelmingly present as sculptural yet moving forms and perverse sexual objects. Likewise to anime heroes and villains they are emotionally flat, color coded and attempt the re-birth or installation of an archetypal character, the ram or satyr as part of a contemporary art discourse.¹⁴⁹ As inspired by the ancient Greek god of the forest Pan, this archetype confers the instinctual male that is satisfied by enforcing his unprejudiced force and sexuality upon others and Barney's video presents us with castrated satyrs fighting each other in a limousine with plastic seat covers that wanders around the streets and tunnels of Manhattan. Oxymoron or a cynically evolutive neo-mythological and symbolic scheme? Or perhaps, an issue of double frustration implied and embodied most evidently by the younger solitary faun character. The adults, can somehow overcome

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.drawingrestraint.net/>

¹⁴⁸ Massimiliano Gioni, *Supercontemporary: Matthew Barney*, Francesco Bonami ed. (New York: Electa, 2007), p. 32

¹⁴⁹ Brandon Stosuy, 'On the Structure of the CREMASTER Cycle - A Conversation with Matthew Barney, New York, August 2007', in *Matthew Barney: Sammlung Goetz*, (München: Kunstverlag Ingvild Goetz, 2007), pg. 182

their sexual depravity and frustration finding refuge in an endless flaying competition among each other, the young one though can only attack his own self.

In the third phase, that begun short after the Cremaster Cycle production was finished, *Drawing Restraint 8-18* (2003-2010), the project entered its most versatile form, incorporating equally larger proportions of narrative and abstraction, the first moving from a specific to grand and less autobiographic model and the latter by exploring the potentials of restrained artistic performance within larger and more complicated structures. Thus it is important to point out how all phases of the project designated a spatial domain; Barney begun by using art studio spaces and galleries and went on to use vehicles, ships and very large museum spaces. In a way, these containers of 'confinement and restraint' performed a trajectory taking from biographical foundations such as 'upbringing and education, the gymnasium and artist's studio'¹⁵⁰ and continued in a less auto-suggestive mode incorporating wider cultural themes such as sexuality, war and death .

Though, going back to our main focus on the early *Drawing Restraint* in order to relate them to the foundations of the Cremaster Cycle, a good way to describe them would be to that they were body and process based video experimentations, staged within an installation environment that aimed to confront the viewer with a series of questions around certain bio-mechanical, psycho-sexual and athletic conditions. This idea was dedicated solely to the realm of the individual, seen as a solitary agent of achievement and its enhancement through self imposed restraints. In more technical terms its early

¹⁵⁰ Neville Wakefield, 'Matthew Barney. Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail', in Matthew Barney. *Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail*, Schaulager-Laurenz Foundation (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2010), (12 June-3 October 2010), pp. 10-11

formal-stylistic character, the project could be described as a kinetic interaction between flux and mechanical systems, interacting towards and against the production of drawings and resulting in the production of graphic marks, as the elemental substance of drawing.¹⁵¹ From one hand, a flux system understood through its chaotic conditions of momentum and entropy, is embodied by the 'action man', who despite his restrained capabilities is free to devise new routes towards his goal. In terms of sculpture, this flux system exists through materials like petroleum jelly, talcum powder, elastic bands broken ceramics and chalk, as they are sculpturally indefinite, unstable and random. The mechanical system is present as the fixed installation setting of restraints and objects. In its agency it constitutes a 'drive less' structure of control applied upon the flux drive, constituting the sovereign sculptural-architectural environment or confining order settings, in which the efforts of the flux system for action takes place.

Yet, to understand the Drawing Restraint project in its essence we should also consider the artist's explanation about its initial invention and how it evolved. In an interview with Richard Flood, Barney reveals that the primary problem he tried to deal with, by devising Drawing Restraint, had been the fact that as a trained athlete he was used in having a field or a frame upon which he could 'play' or as a matter of fact draw. In that sense, he says, he found it hard to engage in a studio activity without having such frames and therefore devised these 'game- like' environments that created a drive not so much in attaining

¹⁵¹The body movements and drawings produced under those conditions were somewhat anti-aesthetic, rough and physical, representing vividly an intense struggle for form. This physicality was inspired, as most art critics pointed out, from the explorations of 1970s body art. Richard Serra in particular, as explained by the artist himself was the embodiment of such practices that highlighted a hyper-masculine hands on character in art-making. In watching video pieces like the Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift (1969/1995), Barney found 'a way of thinking about this sublimation of violence, of the crystallization of beautiful form coming out of sort of singular quite violent action.' see <http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/videos/316>

an image as in focusing on the activity of making drawings. And in a second level it was a way to produce drawings that were not over determined or perhaps finished. Though, these drives were exhausted at some point and that was when Barney entered the realm of narrative. As he explains, the project drafted an actual creativity map for his practices based upon his tripartite frame of Situation, Condition, Production and thus the second level was to condition the drive through various narratives. As he explains analytically:

'The situation would be to a way of locating the initial, a somewhat sexual impulse to initiate something, to begin to draw; condition would be the conditioning of that desire, essentially the discipline. That was visualized as internal, almost like the stomach, a kind of visceral funneling of desire. And the production would be the output. And so I think that there was already the structure for a narrative in that, and became very fixated on these notions of creating a sub-circuit between the impulse and the discipline....and not allowing that third production phase to be in the equation, rather to set up a kind of loop between desire and discipline. In fact to never make a work that had the pretension of being a complete, autonomous thing. Rather than existing in the space of process.'¹⁵²

So it is rather evident that there exist a pattern of a productive conflict between solid structures and flimsy, entropic systems and perhaps it is this binary unresolved dynamic that is being mythologized by Barney. The heroes he employs into the narrative also inhabit such undetermined planes. For example the Great Houdini, who in his times stood as an icon of the triumphant body that overcomes compulsively every mechanical confinement and death- trap box, is seen through Barney's understanding as a hero whose struggle against fetters is a self imposed one, and thus ultimately hubristic. From one side his acts are understood as purely aesthetic, creating pure spectacle whether it is art or entertainment¹⁵³ and offering a performance that bridges the reality of a suffering body with the hyper-reality of a heroic union between the mechanical and the human substances. For example, in regards

¹⁵² Richard Flood, 'A conversation. Richard Flood and Matthew Barney', *Matthew Barney: Mitologie Contemporanee*, (Torino: Fondazione Merz, 2009) pp. 186-187

¹⁵³ Neville Wakefield, 'Matthew Barney. Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail', in *Matthew Barney. Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail*, Schaulager-Laurenz Foundation (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2010), (12 June- 3 October 2010), pg. 11

to *Drawing Restraint 1*, a piece made during art school years, curator and project literary collaborator Neville Wakefield comments on the similarities of Barney's 'environments' to the restraining devices used by Harry Houdini while describing them as:

'Environmental constraints for which the drawing becomes the external manifestation of internal resistance, they invoke a world in which the body and apparatus are unified through a decisive action and the power of the will.'¹⁵⁴

Wakefield then argues that there exists a shortcut relationship between action and desire, in sports, art-making and in the art of escaping - such as Houdini's - which results in a rather instinctual performance of the task. In this way, he explains, Matthew Barney uses the restraints of athletic training for engaging into 'a purer inquiry into drawing and desire'. On the other hand, the artist himself had a somewhat more direct explanation regarding his initial artistic drives that seems to have been a discovery of an abstract conceptual apparatus that helped the young artist break down all that he knew and all that he was learning through his art education. In this way, he created a series of works that looked similar and made no use at all, of the element that Barney would eventually thrive upon in his later creations namely, stylistic excess. On the contrary, it seems as if such possibilities or creative desires were much restrained and brought into his work slowly and progressively:

'Those first pieces were a manifestation of the stage of athletics that meant most to me - everything that leads up to the moment of competition - and how internal that space of preparation and the rehearsal is. On the level of art education, I was just starting to understand what it meant to make a drawing, and that it was a rehearsal for something else. That primal mark making and the rehearsal made a lot of sense to me in terms of when I was an athlete. I think those two things joined hands right away and DRAWING RESTRAINT apparatuses were manifestations of that. They were about creating a place where I could re-enact the form of rehearsal that I already knew. I didn't really know what I was doing as an artist.'¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Neville Wakefield, *Matthew Barney: Drawing Restraint, Vol V, 1987-2007*, (London & Vienna: Walter König, 2007), pg. 31

¹⁵⁵ 'Adam Philips and Matthew Barney: A Conversation', in *Matthew Barney: Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail*, (12 June - 3 October 2010)(Basel: Schaulager & Swabe Verlag, 2010), pg. 24

For Barney, Houdini had been a psychological alter ego character through which he was able to visualize his own hubristic tendencies in competing against the self.¹⁵⁶ ¹⁵⁷ It had been Houdini's compulsion to excess and transgress his internal and external horizons, that led him to become not only an extremely famous and lovable character but also one that was rather un-knowable and thus he is definitely a neo-mythic hero. And it was this hubristic compulsion and perhaps pride that also led him to early death. This character therefore champions the central drive of Drawing Restraint, that aestheticizes his potentials as an illustrated idea or analysis of certain auto-suggestive and auto-catalytic psychic procedures. The whole thing tends towards pseudo-philosophical abstraction as it alludes to a kind of totality of conditions. For example Mark Sladen, finds that the artist has insisted in presenting his mythological subject matter as a metaphoric realm drafted by 'bodily functions (whether metabolic or genital), instinctual drives (whether associated with mouth, anus or genitals) and the creative process (whether in sport or the arts).' Though, for Sladen perspectives, such as the ones expressed by the artist, encompass a danger of 'a blanket determinism'; in taking biology as what signifies artistic production 'we risk naturalizing historical forces and erasing difference.'¹⁵⁷ Yet, one also may argue, by taking things less rationally but more aesthetically in terms of their potentiality, that the ideas behind these works had not been philosophical, but rather a formal conceptual narrative that contained a mystic factor, an esoteric

¹⁵⁶ We may read in a set of the artist's notes from 17.7.1990 published in the artist's book Drawing Restraint Vol. V: "HOUDINI AND BODY INTELLIGENCE Houdini thoroughly researches the lock- the police forces of Europe commission locksmiths to constrain Houdini - Houdini has pre-invented any locking mechanism they can produce to incarcerate him. The exploitation of discipline, trained contortionist, a willed disfigurement, a customized physicality > A BODY INTELLIGENCE." Matthew Barney: Drawing Restraint Vol. V, 1987-2007, (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2007), pg. 20

¹⁵⁷ Mark Sladen, 'Assault Course', Art Monthly, No. 187, pg. 10

desire, and thus a call for the viewer to complete the work within his own imagination. And it is exactly in this context that the symbolism of *metamorphosis* is superimposed on a generic concept of life ¹⁵⁸, all matters which evade our consciousness but draft our actions.

The other heroic figure that was developed by Barney, Otto, was the central character of Barney's most enigmatic piece *OTTOshaft, that* premiered in Documenta IX in Kassel in June 1992, presented as a three channel video installation in an underground car park. The piece was part of an early attempt of the artist to compose a cycle in the genre of video art,¹⁵⁹ and thus a clear exploration of the possibilities that were later realized with the Cremaster Cycle, both in terms of artistic methodology and in the way that such pieces would be received within the artworld. *OTTOshaft* was the last of the cycle's pieces to be produced while its narrative order was the middle. Therefore likewise to the Cremaster 3 it was the piece in which everything was put into interaction. It was staged and filmed in the car park where it was later exhibited; a very peculiar space indeed with low ceilings, cyclical corridors, tiled walls and elevator shafts that provided the project with an architectural/ spatial vessel.

The story follows an internal conflict of an 'organism' torn between two antagonistic tendencies of different, yet equally excessive athletic capacities. One is represented by Jimmy Otto, the legendary American Football player from the Oakland Raiders and the other, the Character of

¹⁵⁸ Massimiliano Gioni, *Supercontemporary: Matthew Barney*, (Milan: Electa, 2007), p. 12

¹⁵⁹ The works in this cycle were in narrative order, *The Jimmy Otto Suite* (1991), [facility of INCLINE] (1991), *OTTOshaft* (1992), [facility of INCLINE] (1991), *RADIAL DRILL* (1991), in Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002), pg. 11

Positive Restraint, by the Great Houdini. Being a football player himself, the artist seemed particularly fascinated by the will and capacities of Otto who despite his prosthetic knees was able to play American Football at his outmost capability until his retirement. But perhaps another way in which Barney became captive of this persona, as Steve Kaplan observes, was through his sporting uniform, that fashioned a double zero '00' on it and was his personal leitmotif and symbolism:

'I remember watching the Raiders on Sunday TV and seeing Otto's famous, autographic, double zero jersey. It made quite an impression, let me tell you, those two naughts on a field of Raiders black, a double blast of nihilism that cut right through the steady drone of beer commercials and nasal, midwestern sports announcers. For Barney, it was, dare I say the origin of pigskin conceptualism.'¹⁶⁰

The narrative evolves around a quest for an ambiguous Holy Grail, interestingly called the Hubris Pill. The two protagonists-antagonists, agree to merge their forces in order to get hold of the elusive object, which goes constantly through protean metabolic transformations into different nutrient substances. Its final form, if Otto-Houdini were to succeed in this quest, is a bag-pipe that can play the anthem 'Amazing Grace' allowing the organism at last to communicate with God, gaining equilibrium, as its two sides merged into one. The goal though is not achieved.¹⁶¹ Houdini, the effeminate introvert, cannot come to terms with the extroverted, team player and heavily coached, masculine Otto. The latter is guided by coach Al Davies, played in the video by Barney's mother, and during his ordeal splits also into three Black Watch bag-pipers.

Starting with a schizoid, hybrid and athletic hero the 'Otto-Houdini' character, new and more resilient character types emerged into Barney's

¹⁶⁰ Steven Kaplan, 'New York: Matthew Barney, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, October 19 - November 16, 1991', ETC, No. 19, 1992, pg. 66

¹⁶¹ Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002), pg. 17

imagination, none of them purely original but all inspired by popular narratives. Torn apart by the binary antagonistic tension between an extroverted and explosive Otto-side and a mysterious and esoteric Houdini-side, Barney's first hero was an embodiment of heroic failure.

'The outward-looking Otto seeks to consume or incorporate what is separate from him in a mad fusion with the universe. His foil, the introspective Houdini, strives for omnipotence through the exercise of sheer will. They enter into combat over which direction the organism will take. Struggle ensues and the narrative unfolds. These characters, as two mutations of the will, function like a system of checks and balances. Their internal struggle maintains the system by holding it taut between implosion and explosion.'¹⁶²

Seen as mythic heroes these characters are constructed as such as they were the artist's role models of his formative years.¹⁶³ One is a hero that develops body strength or else hypertrophy, and the other is one that dedicates his body to a practice that demands a kind of transformation seeking the disappearance of this body through the application of restraint. Nancy Spector, provides us with a further insight on the nature of the main character developed in *Drawing Restraint*, as she speaks of libidinal economy in terms of producing art that 'contemplates the potential of "creative repression" to define new "internal thresholds" new inner processes by which force may be harnessed and form generated.' This, she says, originates in the thought of the Marquis de Sade, according to whom desire becomes only greater under restraints.¹⁶⁴

Hypertrophy, is a reoccurring important term for the project. Spector, introduces her curatorial essay of the *Cremaster Cycle* project, by explaining

¹⁶² Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002), pg. 12

¹⁶³ Richard Flood, 'Notes on Digestion and Cinema', in *Matthew Barney. Pace Car for the Hubris Pill*, (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen/Bordeaux: capc Musee d'art Contemporain/Bern: Kunsthalle, 1995), pg. 31

¹⁶⁴ Spector references Matthew Barney in an interview with Glen Helfand 'Matthew Barney', *Shift* 14 6, no. 2 (1992) p. 38 Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002) p. 5

the cultural and psychological drive towards *Hypertrophy*.¹⁶⁵ Barney himself starts his conceptualization, as a student with the following notes:

'Hypertrophy: an excessive growth or development of an organ or tissue within the body; the alchemy of the body. The athlete in training tears down isolated groups of muscle fiber which in turn become engorged with blood and lactic acid. The muscle groups heal on a next day cycle with an increased mass and strength. Over time the extended training program graphs into an increasing mass/strength line curve with intermittent plateaus of suspended development. THE ATHLETE IS THE ALCHEMIST'¹⁶⁶

Olga Gambari comments on the cultural meaning of the term, seen as a compulsive race and competition towards entropic dispersal:

'A position of absolute dominion and total self-control from which there is no return except by submitting to irremediable decay which drags down the brain with the flesh. A return to unity and harmony is nevertheless impossible, because every element already contains its opposite within itself, as in the figure of the oxymoron.'¹⁶⁷

And Massimiliano Gioni in a very literal yet metaphoric scheme, writes:

'sport becomes a metaphor for a world governed by competition and exhibitionism, mass idolatry and narcissism, while the continuing struggle between strength and limitation becomes an allegory of the creative process.'¹⁶⁸

Both characters Otto and Houdini are also steeped into a distinctive queerness that Barney explores throughout his work and particularly within the CC. It originates in his own psychological memories as an athlete, and the way these were directly transformed into aesthetic ideas.

'An experienced athlete and avid football player, Barney recognized the potential in hypertrophic training – the lust for greater strength, power, and muscle definition that drives the bodybuilder to deny his or her corporeal limits, whatever the physical and psychic risks. This quest for an unattainable omnipotence is pure hubris, the tragic flaw that can bring the most ambitious, creative and inquisitive souls to ruin.'¹⁶⁹

The intimate and at the same time emblematic narrative forms, that the artist creates, present the outcome as touching heavily on a reality that seems to characterize also collective forms of experience. On the football field, masculinity assumes a performative and at the same time physical challenge

¹⁶⁵ Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002) p. 4-25

¹⁶⁶ Neville Wakefield, *Matthew Barney: Drawing Restraint Vol. V, 1987-2007*, (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2007), pg. 19

¹⁶⁷ Olga Gambari, 'The Contemporary Mythology of Matthew Barney', *Matthew Barney: Mitologie Contemporanee*, (Torino: Fondazione Merz, 2009) p. 153

¹⁶⁸ Massimiliano Gioni, *Supercontemporary: Matthew Barney*, Francesco Bonami ed. (New York: Electa, 2007), p. 12

¹⁶⁹ in Nancy Spector, 'in potentia: Matthew Barney and Joseph Beuys', in *Barney, Beuys: All in the present must be transformed*, (New York: Deutsche Museum Publications, 2006), pg.19

of skill and endurance, becoming one of the most fundamental stages of that role within North American culture.

But then again this is only one part of the athletic experience. Barney's critical representations of the psychosexual realm of sporting 'investigates how the mainstays of masculinity present literal obstacles to the achievement of gender identity'¹⁷⁰ and is therefore in its essence a narrative critical conflict of the subject that may be understood also as parody. The football player is thus seen as a dominated or else infantilized subject, castrated by paternal/maternal sadistic coaches and locker-room bulging biceps exhibitionism. Houdini on the other hand, a founding role model of Barney's artistic career¹⁷¹ suggested a continuous development through constant and narcissistic containment and focus of one's capacity in achieving a single task in competing against the self.

Houdini is for Barney, but perhaps for most of us a hermetic hero, his mastery being so unlike the visible and extroverted athletic skills of Otto. As magician and escape artist, his art depended on the concealment of his actual virtuosity, his tricks. Though, in "spectacularizing" and compulsively competing their ordeals, both of these characters are consciously driven towards a status of Hubris.^{172/173} In that sense, we discover that the critical morale behind

¹⁷⁰ Joel Sanders, (ed.) *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pg. 21

¹⁷¹ Adam Philips and Matthew Barney, 'A Conversation', in *Matthew Barney: Prayer Sheet with the Wound and the Nail*, (Basel: Schaulager & Schwabe Verlag, 2010), pg. 39

¹⁷² 'Hybris is Insolence, mother of Pan by Zeus. Hybris is translated as wantonness or insolence, and also as outrage or serious damage. Hybris is not seldom related to the arrogance that usually derives from success. This temporary and apparently happy condition is believed to lead to boasts, disregard, and forms of self-adoration, which are considered to offend the gods. Therefore Hybris, traditionally speaking, invites the arrival of Nemesis, who punishes excessive pride and reestablishes balance: 'If one neglects the laws of proportion and gives something too big to something too small to carry it—too big sails to too small a ship, too big meals to too small a body, too big powers to too small a soul—the result is bound to be a complete upset. In an outburst of hybris the over-fed body will rush into sickness, while the jack-in-office will rush into the unrighteousness which hybris always

these narratives, is similarly to Wagner's a teleological one. Unlike though, the German composer, Barney frames his destructive resolutions with a repetitive irony, a dog endlessly chasing its tail, that deems the whole thing as a sort of Aristofanic satire instead of tragic drama.

'The videos show Barney, wearing only a harness, subjecting his naked flesh to an excruciating and bizarre set of physical endurance testes. Scaling an elevator shaft, dropping from the ceiling, and even submitting to anal probes, Barney's contemporary rite of heroic self fashioning parodies what it seeks to impersonate, intentionally implicating himself, in his role as male performance artist, in the very rituals of masculine display he aims to unmask.'¹⁷³

Thus we may observe that Barney's pre-Cremaster projects research and give specific descriptions on the condition of his mythological subject. Basically, they introduce it while the Cremaster Cycle brings forth a wider context of this subject's history. Yet what is particularly evident is that the new mythopoeic principle is attuned, in its own complex way with the traditional one. Given his unique eccentric sensibility, a product of a peculiar habitus informed by two opposite cultural tendencies within America, a *mid-western* and a *neo-Avant-guard* one, the artist put forth a project, most likely based on this innate controversy. Yet, the most striking controversy of the Cycle is the disproportion between conceptual content and formal volume. Jerry Saltz, comments on this perplexity between the core meaning and the adjacent narrative stories, the latter being extravagantly complicated and expanded while the other 'nonetheless tiny: the moment of sexual differentiation within the womb'.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, despite of their post-modern identities the heroes of Barney's mythology seem to be rather typical, traditionally conflicted between double bind opposites in search for immortality.

breeds.'(Plato, Laws 691c) in [http:// www.maicar.com/GML/PERSONIFICATIONS.html](http://www.maicar.com/GML/PERSONIFICATIONS.html)

¹⁷³ Joel Sanders, (ed.) Stud: Architectures of Masculinity, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pg. 21

¹⁷⁴ Jerry Saltz, 'Swept Away', Seeing out loud: the Village Voice art columns, fall 1998 - winter 2003, (Berkeley: The Figures, 2003) p. 32

David Joselit, argues that Barney's narratives and characters do not follow typical mythological formulas of structural binaries. According to his view, if the myth exists as a societal structural medium, incorporating 'desire and destruction' in their cyclical modes, then Barney is there to demolish such a function and create a chaotic spill over in which a happy resolution is not to be found for anyone in the stories.¹⁷⁵ Death as absolute entropy, in that sense, is the only 'happy' resolution one gets in the Cremaster Cycle, the only possibility for freedom. All the characters that appear in the work, and which are in effect 'ready-mades', function only as restraints, giving the stories and their heroes a reason to fight and persevere ordeals before they collapse. Though apart from the elasticity of the body as form, another aspect of its usage in the Cremaster Cycle is that of entering an 'ordeal', through a physical task to be conquered by the hero's body. Jerry Saltz comments on this matter:

'In Cremaster 4 ordeal takes various forms: First he tap-dances - a highly structured, prescribed form of movement with room for expression and improvisation- for a very long time; later he tunnels - this section of the work is a more pronounced version of endurance, will, hope and fear. There is a purgative, redemptive side to ordeal too, like the hermit in the desert or the pilgrim journeying to Mecca. In a sense, Barney goes through a "mortification of the flesh." This ordeal transforms him and endears him to us. You start to root for and care about him; he is "our hero." Finally, ordeal unifies the narrative structure while allowing it to be quite supple and open-ended.'¹⁷⁶

In a sculptural language, these characters are molds, that confine an infinite array of fluid possibilities. And as these energies and substances start to follow the patterns of their confinement they are abruptly destroyed by an 'entropic dispersal'. If the whole project is seen as it is, namely sculptural, then we could say, in understanding Joselit's point that the molds Barney makes for casting his mythical forms are intentionally removed too early.

Such a perspective is expressed in the exhibition catalogue that connected

¹⁷⁵ David Joselit, 'Mathew Barney's Darwin Restaraint' in Eckhard Schneider (ed.) *Mythos: Joseph Beuys, Mathew Barney, Douglas Gordon, Cy Twombly*, (Bregenz: Kunsthau Bregenz, 2007), pp. 158-159

¹⁷⁶ Jerry Saltz, 'The Next Sex', *Art in America*, No. 10, October 1996, pg. 90

Matthew Barney with Joseph Beuys in the context of addressing and processing mythological material in aesthetic systems. Beuys made it clear that in his aesthetic system, myths and symbols were ways to portray and cultivate the possibility of resolution, through a continuing evolutionary process in as represented by the eternal movement and metamorphosis of the natural forms and substances.

'In Beuys' shamanistic, restorative worldview, the unity he seeks to induce through his art- which is inseparable from his political and pedagogical activities- imagines the coming together of perceived opposites, the reconstitution of a shattered, originary whole.'¹⁷⁷

Sculpture and matter were for Beuys a projection of the social condition.¹⁷⁸ Barney though, while he borrowed Beuys' methodological approaches and aesthetic concepts, shared no such belief with him. As Spector notes, the young artist understood the mythic unity or oneness that Beuys aspired to, to be not only uncertain but also unattainable and hubristic. And this focus on hubris is what makes all his mythological formulas collapse. Nevertheless, the Cremaster Cycle as an artwork clearly manifests how a genuinely creative act draws its energy from playing around such illusions of unity and totality.¹⁷⁹

A good example of this mythological pattern contrast between the two artists, is visible in the way they treated their large sculptural molding of thermoplastic materials. Christian Scheidemann, observed how Beuys in his production of the piece *Unschlitt/Tallow* in 1977, (a very large wedge made of twenty tons of unstable materials such as stearin, paraffin and sheep tallow), became particularly cautious and thus with various interventions, prevented the piece of

¹⁷⁷ Nancy Spector, 'in potentia: Matthew Barney and Joseph Beuys', in Barney, Beuys: All in the present must be transformed, (New York: Deutsche Museum Publications, 2006), pg. 32

¹⁷⁸ Volker Harlan & Joseph Beuys, What is Art: Conversation with Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barton and Shelley Sacks trans. (Forest Row: Clairview, 2004), or. p.1986, pg. 9

¹⁷⁹ Nancy Spector, 'in potentia: Matthew Barney and Joseph Beuys', in Barney, Beuys: All in the present must be transformed, (New York: Deutsche Museum Publications, 2006), pg. 32

falling apart after its mold was removed, four months after the material was poured into it.¹⁸⁰ Barney on the other hand, removed the mold of his petroleum jelly and microcrystalline wax cube (*The Department of the Host*, 2006) early enough so that it would definitely collapse. He then waited for the substance to finish its sliding movement and cool down, and that was the sculptural form he intended for, carrying remnants of its structural confinement and realizing a unique chaotic possibility. This entropic formation was then cast and re-molded in a more stable plastic and thus the aforementioned sculpture was produced.¹⁸¹ In terms of the core meaning of such sculptural methods in relation to the mythological treatment in CC movies, Barney explains that:

‘These pieces are always about landscape for me. Also to do with making a deliberately entropic piece, especially at the end of the Cremaster Cycle where I think these chapter ended up being more understood as, you know stories that have a dramatic arc with a resolve at the end. And I think that for me when they are all put together it comes together as a system that can’t, it can’t overcome its condition. It’s trying to ad there are moments in each chapter where it seems it succeeds but I think overall it can’t overcome it’s condition. And in that way, these pieces I think are important in admitting that.’¹⁸²

What is said here is basically, that in his epic he intended to represent a cycle that fails in achieving its renewal and thus ceases to be a cycle.¹⁸³ Therefore, we can observe that the mythic aspect of this work is likely to be rooted in a deep disbelief for all organized, and structured creative processes.

Barney has repeatedly explained that his initial drive for the Cremaster Cycle was a geographical one, in thinking about five locations from Mid-West, United States to Eastern Europe, and the quest of the narrative design was to find a link between these lands. As Spector names it a ‘topographical

¹⁸⁰ Christian Scheidemann, ‘Notes from the Laboratory’, in Barney, Beuys: All in the present must be transformed, (New York: Deutsche Museum Publications, 2006), pg. 128

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, pg. 125

¹⁸² Matthew Barney: No Restraint, Alison Chernick (dir.), DVD, Voyeur Film (2007), (32:30-33:30)

¹⁸³ There is something pessimistic and cynical in this idea that perhaps cultural context that the artist is interested in representing

metaphor'¹⁸⁴ was produced in defining this trajectory. The initial criterion for the choice of these geographic regions was an autobiographical route that included not only the lands that Barney had lived in, such as the Mormon Basin, the Rockies and New York City but also places that drew his ethnic connections as well as his spiritual-artistic ancestry.¹⁸⁵ In such a movement of space and time the outcome was for Barney a continuation of 'the tradition of Earthworks'¹⁸⁶, an art practice whose intentions were perhaps akin to the great American artist- hero of the genre, Robert Smithson with whom Barney also shares an interest in the notion of entropy. In this way, whether differentiated by disorder or unified under order, every element and idea is doomed to entropic dispersal. It seems as if Barney's contemporary folklore meditates and eventually gives an idiosyncratic answer to a contemporary dilemma. As Rudolf Arnheim observes in his influential essay on art and entropy from the early seventies:

"Modern science, then maintains on the one hand that nature, both organic and inorganic, strives towards a state of order and that man's actions are governed by the same tendency. It maintains on the other hand that physical systems move towards a state of maximum disorder. This contradiction in theory calls for clarification. Is one of the two assertions wrong? Are the two parties talking about different things or they attach different meanings to the same words?"¹⁸⁷

Seen from a cinematic perspective, the sculptural character of the work gains perhaps a more optimistic outlook. Simon O'Sullivan comments on the mythopoeic aspect of the Cremaster Cycle seeing it as a case of reactionary 'mythography' in which the appropriation of existing mythological patterns in their connection to novel ones, produces a new experience for the collective

¹⁸⁴ Nancy Spector, 'Matthew Barney and Joseph Beuys: in potentia', in *All in the Present Must Be Transformed: Matthew Barney and Joseph Beuys*, (Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim, 2006), pg.21

¹⁸⁵ Richard Flood, 'A conversation. Richard Flood and Matthew Barney', in *Matthew Barney: Mitologie Contemporanee*, (Torino: Fondazione Merz, 2009), pg. 190

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*, pg. 188

¹⁸⁷ Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: an Essay on Disorder and Order*, (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1971), pg. 5

imagination. Crediting the Cycle therefore, with the presentation of a critical perspective, he draws a corresponding line between Matthew Barney and Robert Smithson, on the basis of their mutual capacity to design hybrid mythologies and enact modern rituals through the use of sculptural/cinematic perspectives. For O'Sullivan it is exactly the sculptural character of Barney's films and characters that links them tightly to the mythological function. Thus he connects the films to Deleuze's theory of opsigns and sonsigns, cinematic moments of a 'pure optical and sound image', or 'as blocks of signifying and unsignifying matter'¹⁸⁸. Not unlikely to the collapsing forms of the petroleum jelly sculpture, as freedom or release from cinematic action/, such aesthetic behavior denotes a shift beyond a 'movement-image', towards a 'time-image'. This causes following effects:

'the rise of situations to which one can no longer react, of environments with which there are now only chance relations, of empty or disconnected any-space-whatevers replacing qualified extended space. It is here that situations no longer extend into action or reaction in accordance with the requirements of the movement-image. These are pure optical and sound situations, in which the character does not know how to respond, abandoned spaces in which he ceases to experience and to act so that he enters into flight, goes on a trip, comes and goes, vaguely indifferent to what happens to him, undecided to what must be done.'¹⁸⁹

Deleuze explains his argument by analyzing neo-realist European filmmakers, like Antonioni and Goddard but finds his most vivid example in the Japanese cinema of Ozu, whose use of the mundane conditions and objects of everydayness, are shot and cut with an 'astonishingly modern style', that incorporates in the cinematic narrative 'idle periods', -for example shots of household objects- which impose their banal and ordinary existence onto the whole cinematic perspective.¹⁹⁰ It is perhaps far-fetched to speak

¹⁸⁸ Simon O' Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guatari: Thought beyond representation*, (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pg. 150

¹⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, (London & New York: Continuum, 2010), or. p. 1985, pg. 261 quoted in Simon O' Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guatari: Thought beyond representation*, (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pp. 208-209

¹⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, (London & New York: Continuum, 2010), or. p. 1985,

about Barney's cinematic oeuvre as of such because what Ozu deducts from the action of his characters he adds it to their sentimentality, while the Cremaster Cycle makes movement and action the focus of his artistic sentimentality.¹⁹¹ Yet O'Sullivan makes a clear point that Barney's saga presents the combination of this 'time-image' with an almost nonsensical 'movement-image' that drives the whole narrative scheme. The main characters of the film, such as Richard Serra, playing the Master Architect/Hiram Abiff, as well the landscapes belong to this 'time-image' and are understood as 'myth-machines', acting as catalysts for the amalgamation of Barney's imagination and the ready-made patterns and characters he appropriates. And he also points to the fact that all of them are in their own turn pre-appropriated forms.¹⁹²

For example seeing Serra as Hiram Abiff in Cremaster 3, is to see him as a 'revolutionary' master sculptor of the equally 'revolutionary' 1960s, specifically his 1969 'Corner Splash' works, throwing molten lead on the corner between the wall and the floor of a studio. Danto, suggests that what Serra did at the time can be understood 'as inaugurating a new moment in the history of sculpture.'¹⁹³¹⁹⁴ Now as the piece, figures in the Cremaster 3, instead of lead, Richard Serra is throwing molten petroleum jelly on an inclined oxidized steel plate that stands against the internal wall of the Guggenheim spiral. Some of the material stays in place and some is flowing down the descending corridor towards the ground floor, somehow

pp. 13-14

¹⁹¹ Many scenes testify to such a characteristic some of them are: Aimee Mullins chopping her potatoes, the satyr's underground journey, all of Barney's characters in C5, the chorus girls of C1, the demolition of the Chrysler Imperial, Gary Gilmore's murder and execution, the Order.

¹⁹² Simon O' Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guatari: Thought beyond representation*, (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pg. 150

¹⁹³ Arthur C. Danto, 'Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle', in *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 240

signaling the passing of time through its movement. And this appropriation is for Danto a symbolic metaphor, performed through the 'demotion' of material for the 'degradation of that heroic moment of sculpture to the present moment of contemporary art.'¹⁹⁴ Perhaps one way that we can make sense of this statement is by thinking of contemporary art as process of trivialization of 'heroic moments', as Danto deems them; revolution, as a commodity and commonplace the same way that the Hiram Abiff ritual became a social commodity and thus a means to an end. Referencing the institutionalization of the American neo-avant-garde of the 60s and 70s, Serra's steel and lead works, anti-aesthetic and rough as they are, were revolutionary in arguing against their surface, in favor of process and towards conceptualism and aura. Of course this revolutionary approach soon became mainstream and established as bourgeois art. Long story short, when Barney's hero attacks and sieges the status of a predecessor it is only a temporary victory. It is the museum that has the power of resurrection. Danto points to such a logic when he argues that this is the reason why both the Master Mason and the Entered Apprentice are killed in the end of the Cremaster Cycle.¹⁹⁵ In the way that artists become prominent, influential and immortal there is a role-play of life and death and resurrection, like the one that is enacted by the Masons as initiation ritual. Though in this case it is not performed in memory of something or as fraternal faith declaration but rather as an inevitable and practical part of the making of art history and its subjects.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁹⁵ Arthur C. Danto, 'Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle', in *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 241

2.4 An American Century

*'America is a country built on contradictions. Imperial in origin, it has remained such ever since, yet seldom if ever confesses as much. It is a secular state suffused with religion, a puritan culture in love with pornography (all expensive hotels will have a Gideon Bible – 112 of which were placed in them every minute in 2004) and pornographic movies, the one free, the other being discretely labeled on hotel checks so as to keep a guilty secret. Fifty percent of hotel guests pay for pornographic films while, in 2004, Godfrey Hodgson tells us, 11,000 "adult films" were released. America gave the world Playboy magazine, its first "Playmate" featuring Marilyn Monroe.'*¹⁹⁶

In Barney's narrative it is rather evident and intriguing how the mythological content and drive of the epic cycle is clearly realized by a 'white-male-American' hero of Celtic descent. By no means, do I want to employ here any racial argument though; one cannot but indicate that in mythology one may take account of ethnic cultural references. Also, as the Cycle's narrative peaks and focuses, in *Cremaster 3*, on the modernist ordeal of a dominant elite social group vis-a-vis its basis - a working class and a demimonde- while is being explained as an autobiographical aesthetic system, one is puzzled over the question of whether the centrality of such ethnic reference was an intentional trait or an unconscious outcome.

There is a general pattern in this mythological narrative: A base matter, a background, an active principle as well as an ending of the cycle, that denotes a kind of 'American sense for things' throughout the project. Then comes of course, the point regarding groups, how people tend to distinguish by aligning themselves with a particular group ideology or faith. And there is also the universal idea of a singular man-champion as going through many stages

¹⁹⁶ Christopher Bigsby, 'Introduction: What, then, is the American?', in Christopher Bigsby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pg. 9

within the different episodes, framed by symbolic arenas such as landscapes, architectures and stereotypical female types. The ordeals are completed but the hero fails due to his hubristic desire that corrupts his sensible will. An analytical aesthetic representation of the drive for achievement of an emancipated yet bound to succeed at all costs, action agent. Intended or not, it is likely that through this scheme one may be looking at the ways in which the conventions, mechanisms and idealism that make up the American modern, progress-minded collective sensibility, are manifested within an artistic narrative.

Seeing the relationship of his art to the cultural tactic of North American tradition, of understanding sexuality as a means rather than ends Lane Relya was very accurate, in reviewing Barney's early work, in identifying the cultural symptom of an extreme sense of individualism upon which the attainment of profit as the ideal of capitalism is based upon,

'for promoting ideology (the battle of the sexes), for affirming missionary-style hierarchies, for expounding the moral advantage of competition over sharing, defining the taking of pleasure as winning, winning as finishing first, climax as closure.'¹⁹⁷

Another early hint was given by Ken Johnson in the periodical publication *Art in America*. The critic concludes his article as following:

'Barney's work suggest that in the soul of the pumped-up man -emblemized most potently in the collective American psyche by the football player- lurks sexual confusion, polymorphous eroticism, and infantilism. (There is interesting socio-political implications to consider here in light of America's resurgent militarism and worship of Norman Schwarzkopf.) That Barney, himself a former college football player, arrives at this not through cerebral analysis but by channeling his own intuitive impulses into shamanistic ritual and surrealist metaphor gives his vision an uncanny authenticity.'¹⁹⁸

Also, in the San Francisco MOMA exhibition catalogue, curator Robert R. Riley insisted in indicating, for the general body of Barney's work, the existence of a psycho- cultural meaning/context. Sexuality as a psychological

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁹⁸ Ken Johnson, 'Matthew Barney at Barbara Gladstone', *Art in America*, No. 1, January 1992, pp. 111-117

condition, being the point of the aesthetic vantage for two cultural phenomena, the curator connects them to an American territory per se. Broadcast television, particularly televised sports, as a distinctively penetrating medium into the body and the psychic conditions of athletes from one side, and the turn towards anthropomorphic mechanical monsters of the American horror genre, on the other, alludes to a threatening reality driven by a desire for continuous 'aestheticization' of the human form and psyche, understood as a sole way to human evolutionary functions.¹⁹⁹

Jonathan Jones compares the CC to T.S Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*, in terms of how it mythologizes the *zeitgeist* of the artist's generation and origins, one that was raised under the post-human yet intrinsically traditionalist and oedipal, in its binary conflicts and totalitarian resolutions, mythology of Star Wars. Placing the project within the genre of avant-garde cinema and characterizing Barney's oeuvre as a poetic and lyrical perspective, oxymoronicly formed by 'death metal and Vaseline' Jones writes,

'OK, it's weird. But The Cremaster Cycle is much more than a pose or a series of eye-popping images. It is beautiful, disturbing, of our time, aspiring to be eternal, sensually in love with the textures of modernity - plastics, synthetics, nylon - yet longing for the ancient mythic resonance of honey, beeswax, salt and ice. It is cinema, sculpture and performance, and it is a significant work of art.'²⁰⁰

Likewise Eliot's intentions and success in transmitting with his poem a sense of a cultural expression of a higher condensed order, Jones points out that the Cremaster Cycle is in the same way a genuine descendant of modern American cinema, art and literature by exhibiting a characteristic insistence towards mythological and ritualistic situations similar to those of Moby Dick or of The Godfather sequel. This, the author says, denotes a tendency on behalf

¹⁹⁹ Robert R. Riley, 'Matthew Barney: The Expense of Energy', in Matthew Barney: New Work, (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1991), un-paginated

²⁰⁰ Jonathan Jones, 'The Myth-maker', The Guardian, Wednesday 16 October 2002

of Matthew Barney, 'to find pattern in chaos' and thus being able to construct a mythological narration for an American generation that became reactionary and increasingly alienated from any sense of its traditional lineage. Even though the artist uses up much autobiographical material, the sum comes from commonly shared American cultural material and stories, turning popular culture into universal, timeless art. As Paul Van Allen puts it to demonstrate ' a new development of a new traffic in transformation at the border between gallery exhibition and fairground entertainment.'²⁰¹

Robert Storr, who describes Barney, in *Art 21*, also underlines such a possibility in, *art in the 21st century*, as 'the most widely discussed figure in the current generation of young artists'. In the overall he sees the Cremaster Cycle as a combination of, 'American cultural myths' and 'personal interests' that in some way are interconnected and reflect upon each other each other. The products are more or less recognizable: The football field, car racing, romantic opera, rodeo, traditional Hollywood genres - musical, gangster, sci-fi, romance- and popular music such as heavy metal, country, punk or even opera, professional icons of fields like modeling, sport, magic, rodeo, crime, literature and art, sublime land and cityscapes and certain 'American obsessions -cars, football, horses, Mormons, Masons, showgirls, stewardesses.'²⁰² Moreover, in reading the metaphor of the 'cremaster' muscle, Storr speaks of the way in which this stands not only for sexual differentiation but also most importantly for the social one:

'the moment when the male becomes most aggressively, fully himself. The fight to individuate from the group (represented by the football team, the Church and in the fifth

²⁰¹ Paul Allen Anderson, 'Escape Artistry and Entrapment: Matthew Barney, Mary Kelly and the moment that defines our lives', *Art Papers*, Vol. 27, No. 6, November-December 2003, pg. 35

²⁰² Robert Storr, *Art 21: art in the 21st Century*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 2001), pp. 194-197

CREMASTER the Rockettes) frames the series narrative.’²⁰³
In Cremaster 3 Barney depicts his own individuation struggle, in becoming a prominent New York artist.²⁰⁴ In this ordeal, Storr notes, there are demands for a great ego, for perfectionism and Oedipal clash all represented within an omnipotent frame of mass entertainment.²⁰⁵ Exactly there, lays the twist that pervades all the grand narratives that are represented in the Cremaster Cycle. As it seems to be more ironic than dead serious to depict a mythological apotheosis of high-art as if it was televised reality TV or sports broadcast. Jonathan Jones is also troubled by such a controversy, observing how the narrative layering does not ‘add up’²⁰⁶ to a coherent whole. One could perhaps sketch a comprehensible story line, but in reality the amount of elements and compulsive symbolism that emerge renders this possible coherence as superficial. In fact, he continues, the volume and type of the references makes one aware of a possible undercurrent cynicism at play:

‘The very title of his gesamtkunstwerk is comically deflationary. If "Cycle" sounds Wagnerian, imposing, the fact that it is named after the cremaster muscle implies that this might just be a great big act of masturbation.’²⁰⁷

Considering the ways in which Barney deals with the ‘realities’ he represents in his work as for example in the case of sports, a subject which he worked on the first years of his career this is not an unlikely chance. The athlete, was stripped bare and his autoerotic queerness revealed in contrasting the popular ‘masculine imperative’ that the American footballer represents in his culture. Ken Johnson, commented on this important feature quite early, since the artist’s first solo exhibition at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery,

²⁰³ *ibid*, pg. 197

²⁰⁴ It is obvious how contest derives from testes in English, see Simon J. Bronner (ed.) *The meaning of Folklore: The Analytical essays of Alan Dundes*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2007), pg. 24

²⁰⁵ Robert Storr, *Art 21: art in the 21st Century*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 2001), pg. 201

²⁰⁶ Jonathan Jones, ‘The Myth-maker’, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 16 October 2002

²⁰⁷ *ibid*

Matthew Barney: 00, (Oct.19-Nov. 16, 1992):

'Barney's work suggests that in the soul of the pumped up man - emblemized most potently in the collective American psyche by the football player - lurks sexual confusion, polymorphous eroticism and infantilism. (There are interesting sociopolitical implications to consider here in light of America's resurgent militarism and worship of Norman Schwarzkopf.) That Barney, himself a former college football player, arrives at this not through cerebral analysis but by channeling his own intuitive impulses into shamanistic ritual and surrealist metaphor gives his vision an uncanny authenticity.²⁰⁸

This undercurrent cynicism is not to say that there is a complete lack of meaning in the work, but more that the meaning has a stickiness and a gooeyness to it, likewise to certain materials that Barney uses or alludes to in his movies. And on such slippery surfaces a joke might be at play.

For example Jones, speaks of Guinness and how images and ideas can be stitched around it producing a sense of relativity and of a slippery essence. The Irish national and symbolic of working class, drink is served as the only beverage in Chrysler's Building, Cloud Club which is depicted as a place detached from the world, a room that is reached with much struggle on behalf of the character that Barney embodies, the Entered Apprentice. There is a narrative connection between New York, Ireland and a group of Freemasons that drink Guinness on a backbone of Celtic myths and traditions, like the battle of the Irish and Scottish Giants, the formation of the Isle of Man or the spring maypole. The mythical horizon of Cremaster 3 extends all the way across the Atlantic, to the legendary Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland. The way this background is presented indicates a clustering of North American culture with the Irish immigration and thus it is as if the Celtic mythological is somehow related to modernist New York culture of the 1930s, as a migrated cultural context. As for example in the scene where Aimee

²⁰⁸ Ken Johnson, 'Matthew Barney at Barbara Gladstone', *Art in America*, January 1992, pp. 115-116

Mullins is cutting polygon potato chunks, in an Irish pub snug-room, is most likely referring to the Irish Potato Blight of 1845, that created a big immigration of Irish people to the United States, that furnished the economy's labor force for modernist development. Though her action is what eventually tilts the foundations and initiates the destruction of the Chrysler tower. Iconic Irish representations are also put into interaction with Hebrew legends, particularly that of King Solomon and his master builder Hiram Abiff as appropriated by the Masonic rituals and rites of passage enacted within the film. Basically, what we see is an Order of Irish Freemasons as they are entwined with a builder's Syndicate and Irish mobsters. Their leader is Hiram Abiff-Richard Serra an artist famous for his hyper masculine minimalist steel sculptures who is ritually killed by Barney the Entered Apprentice.

Jones also points out in how the Guggenheim Museum is also relative to this sequence of connections as it was built by Welsh origins Frank Lloyd Wright. Barney, he says, climbs it symbolically in a 'straight, vertical' manner instead of going around the building's spiral way.²⁰⁹ Ultimately the Cremaster Cycle is an 'American myth.'²¹⁰ Henry Jenkins also sees Cremaster 3 as a film that operates as a purely American cultural representation from the 1930s. He speaks of the pictorial 'monumentalism' of Lewis Hine referenced in Barney's depiction of the building of the Chrysler tower. Edward Hopper's colors for painting New York, Busby Berkeley's scenography, the Rockettes and Rube Goldberg's comically multitasking machines and the slapstick sequences of the Trio Stooges. Hollywood is also embodied in scenes that

²⁰⁹ Jonathan Jones, 'The Myth-maker', The Guardian, Wednesday 16 October 2002

²¹⁰ *ibid*

remind the author of Universal Studios monster movies, as well gangster films and romantic comedies. The film invests heavily on its interest in classic cars portrayed as action characters as well as in the aesthetic effects of Art Deco architecture and interior design as it touches on its more gothic sides throughout the Chrysler Building.²¹¹

In *Cremaster 1*, action takes place within the 'all American' football field and the central protagonist, Goodyear, a sexy female character appearing as both the leader and secret orchestrator of a chorus precision dance ensemble, initiates all actions upon this hyper-masculine field.

'On the site of this strictly regulated sporting event between two groups of males in martial armature, the camera repeatedly returns to peep below the swishing skirts of the girls, celebrating its gaze at their 'armature' of underwear and stockings.'²¹²

In the blimps she contrasts the restrained femininity and passivity of the outfitted stewardesses, following from a conservative female role model of responsibility, duty and service, attacking it as an undercover agent of promiscuity. Down on the field seeing the smiling girl-dancers move around the space creating schematic sequences and despite of the central reference of this being Berkeley's musicals, one cannot but also think about cheerleaders, as a transfiguration of the same stereotyped desires: women in pleasant uniformity and abundance with an intensive visual focus on legs. When Goodyear joins them as the central chorus girl she becomes the 'all-American' prom-queen; the typical, conditioned and socially accepted sexual fascination of American adolescence. But we should also understand the cultural significance of Busby Berkeley in view of an 'American Culture' and its

²¹¹ Henry Jenkins, 'Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre', in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, (New York & London: New York University Press, 2007), pg. 43

²¹² Ronald Schumacher & Matthias Winzen (eds.), *Just Love Me: Post/Feminist Positions of the 1990s from the Goetz Collection*, (Berlin: Walter König, 2002), pg. 43

affinities to the massive and the total. For Richard Flood there is something unnerving in the work as it connects the triumph of mass entertainment with Riefenstahl's totalitarian aesthetics.

'The mesh between the madcap musicals (at the height of the American Depression) and the Fascist Follies (at the height of the German recession) is dauntingly seamless. Both Leni Riefenstahl and Busby Berkeley were animating enormous machines made up of flesh and blood, chorus girls and world-class athletes were all being deployed to create a syncopated engine moving to the will of their masters.'²¹³

Yet, this idea is incorporated in the *Cremaster Cycle* exhibition volume by Neville Wakefield, in his 'glossary' index of the Cycle²¹⁴, where under the phrase 'orgasmic fusion' he gives the following passage:

'In Berkeley's numbers, the experience of losing oneself in the group, in the big ensemble, is presented as primarily ecstatic. It is a moment of transcendence and sublimation, analogous to orgasm, but erupting beyond the confines of the ego to fuse the self and society, sexuality and politics, emotion and ideology.'²¹⁵

And under the phrase 'symphony of the will':

'Whatever the new theater is, it is not an industry, but rather a sometimes-subliminal and a sometimes-conscious protest against the bigification of art forms into industrial organizations, organizations that can create an orchestra of fifty assembly-line violinists all playing the same note at the same time. And maybe it was the visual symmetry of a symphony orchestra that primarily influenced Busby Berkeley. Where Berkeley's over-choreographed film spectacles of the 1930s originally entertained, they now enlighten: For we are finally aware of the degree to which Berkeley was satisfying a Depression-induced mass-audience craving for abundance and order, a desire for over supply fulfilled by having a hundred happy chorus girls lifting a hundred right legs in snappy military precision. Hollywood during the Depression was America's triumph of the will.'²¹⁶

Thus a clear example becomes evident of how a historically and thus politically specific aesthetic phenomenon is incorporated within a post-modern artwork which even though is framed by its creator and critics as apolitical it still pulls us back towards its sociopolitical understanding and context. Women as

²¹³ Richard Flood, 'Notes on Digestion and Cinema', in Matthew Barney. *Pace Car for the Hubris Pill*, (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen/Bordeaux: capc Musee d'art Contemporain/Bern: Kunsthalle, 1995), pg. 34

²¹⁴ Neville Wakefield, 'The Cremaster Glossary' in Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pp. 93-114

²¹⁵ Martin Rubin, 'The Crowd, the Collective, and the Chorus: Busby Berkeley and the New Deal' in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick, N. J: Rutgers University Press, 1996) p. 78 quoted in Neville Wakefield, 'The Cremaster Glossary' in Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, p. 107

²¹⁶ Dan Isaac, 'The Death of the Proscenium Stage', *The Antioch Review* 31, no. 2 (summer 1971), unpaginated quoted in Neville Wakefield, 'The Cremaster Glossary' in Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, p. 112

ornaments or the group of women as an ornamental formation and athletes, super-humans as mortal heroes all fusing identification with a particular 'social order' as shaped by its definitions of 'sexuality and politics, emotion and ideology'. Or else as a mass-conviction for persistence to a faith that places material abundance or superiority as its core objective. Is it the male fantasy that looks at both women and men as resource for their psychic energy or fetishistic symbol of their compliant drives? Perhaps the simplest explanation can be drawn through Gilles Deleuze's reference on Berkeley's visual innovation:

'Musical comedy is the supreme depersonalized and pronominalized movement, the dance which outlines a dreamlike world as it goes. In Berkeley, the multiplied and reflected girls form an enchanted proletariat whose bodies, legs, and faces are the parts of a great transformational machine: the 'shapes' are like kaleidoscopic views which contract and dilate in an earthly or watery space, usually shot from above, turning around the vertical axis and changing into each other to end up as pure abstractions. Of course, even in Berkeley, and all the more in musical comedy in general, the dancer or couple retain an individuality as creative source of movement. But what counts is the way in which the dancer's individual genius, his subjectivity, moves from a personal motivity to a supra-personal element, to a movement of world that the dance will outline.'²¹⁷

In that sense what Barney has represented in *Cremaster 1* is this exact successful transformation or dispersal of motive and movement from the individual to the collective. Perhaps in the sense that an idea in the individual subjective genius becomes established as form or pattern.

Let us bring on another example of how this work becomes nationally endowed. In the second episode, *Cremaster 2*, we are in the Midwest, going through and over the Bonneville Salt flats and the Great Salt Lake of Utah, the Rocky Mountains and the Columbian Ice Field, and seeing them as iconic landscapes of American geography, the plane and the vertical, becoming the host of a tragic biographical narrative. The film is placed within the cultural and geographical domain of the Mormons in Utah. Portraying their

²¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), or. p. 1985, pg.58

houses as beehives with enclosed cells and their Tabernacle as a patriarchal temple of divine judgment or perhaps a conservative political fraction of American politics, as signified by the American Flags and the suited men arranged on its large podium in a triangular setting, Barney comments on a realistic condition. Within this setting the narrative follows Gary Gilmore's progeny and fate,²¹⁸ a man who is perhaps one of America's best known convicted criminals. His ordeal for a 'dignified death' in the absence of a dignified life, was literary mythologized by Norman Mailer in *The Executioners Song*, a novel from which Barney gained insight in developing his own Gilmore as character of the Cremaster Cycle. The villain, impersonated by Matthew Barney, is the protagonist of Cremaster 2, framed by other iconic human characters, dominating landscapes, claustrophobic cars and the religious architecture of the Mormon Tabernacle. In that sense, we may say that in creating his hero, Barney merges himself with Gilmore's

²¹⁸ According to the Norman Mailer novel as well as various journalistic covers on the subject, Gilmore, was one of the three sons of alcoholic father, Frank Gilmore, who allegedly was the illegitimate offspring of Harry Houdini. Thus developing certain forms of reactionary, psychotic and violent behaviour he spent his late adolescence going in and out of corrective institutions. As an adult Gilmore continued to lead a life of petty crime and compulsiveness for violent behaviour. As a result he spent most of it in a prison cell as well as in mental institutions that prescribed him with anti-psychotic drugs with seriously damaging side-effects. Once his state was uncontrollable he was put in solitary confinement where he began writing poetry and producing paintings. His obvious artistic talent and high intelligence allowed him to get out of prison again and register in art school, where he exhibited great merit. But again Gilmore through his innate reaction and provocation to authority and institutions found his way again into the penitentiary. This time though he started communicating with his cousin in Utah, who managed to arrange a parole for him and so he moved in with her and her husband and starting working with his uncle as a shoemaker. During this time, and after a lifetime spent outside society's mainstream and the experience of love he fell for a girl that equally fell for him. They approached a certain wholeness and happiness together but Gilmore started drinking heavily and again went into the habit of committing petty crimes. The woman, Nicol Baker, left him and in his distress and anger he then committed two murders, in the form of executions, for which he was convicted to death penalty by the State of Utah. His case suddenly became 'hot-news' in the USA and despite the efforts of human rights organizations, clergymen and lawyers to help him appeal for his sentence, Gilmore was completely convinced that he ought to be executed for his crimes, cause if not he would do it again. Or perhaps in this way, according to the Mormon blood atonement dogma, he would be saved and set free in the Kingdom of Heaven. The media found their gold-mine in this story and a whole Garry Gilmore memorabilia industry grew parallel to the last months of his life. As his sentence was continuously postponed due to human rights organization interventions, Gilmore unsuccessfully attempted suicide two times. Eventually the execution was set to happen. According to his close relatives and lawyer he went calm and happy to meet his death and his last words were 'lets do it'. Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979)

personage, particularly from the perspective of Norman Mailer's account in which the death row murderer is depicted as a man able to own his tragic fate, arousing therefore the respect and admiration of the American people.²¹⁹²²⁰ Though for Barney it seems as if Gilmore, the tragic hero, was not at all a literary construct but an actual historical yet mythopoeic event:

'JJ: Did Mailer make Gilmore a mythic figure, or was he one already?

MB: It was a huge story in America; it was in the news everyday and it was on the cover of *Newsweek* and *Time*. This was the first execution in ten years; happening at a time when it looked like execution would be no more. It happened in Utah and it probably happened because the Mormons controlled the government there. And because they believed in blood atonement, they were happy to kill him. He wanted to die - they were very happy to help him. Somehow it got past the federal stage and it happened, and then there was a landslide of executions after that. 300 people were executed in America last year.²²⁰

Barney must have been 10 years old at the time Gary Gilmore was executed by the state of Utah, and most likely he was exposed to the event through its overwhelming media coverage that turned Gilmore into popular icon and sex- symbol for many adolescents. And perhaps later in reading Mailer's novel what he saw was a psychopathic killer, who also happened to be a talented artist, with a witty capacity for language, an autonomous will and crave for love and compassion, that he finally earned, only though by restraining his possibility for life. This man therefore became Barney's antihero. Around his tragic, local antihero Barney, the neo-mythologist, entwined polymorphous characters such as Houdini-Mailer-Baby Fay la Foe, Johnny Cash-Lombardo-Tucker,²²¹ Bessie-Frank Gilmore, and choral ones such as the Texas two-step dancers, the riding rangers, the suited austere

²¹⁹ 'From Mailer's point of view, it is fair to surmise, Gary earns his tragic status by saying yes to his own death.' in Mark Edmundson, 'Romantic Self-Creations: Mailer and Gilmore in "The Executioner's Song"', in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pg. 441

²²⁰ Matthew Barney in interview with Jonathan Jones, 'Lonesome Cowboys- Matthew Barney', *Untitled*, No. 21, Spring 2000, <http://www.postmedia.net>

²²¹ Dave Lombardo, former Slayer drummer and Steve Tucker vocalist of Morbid Angel. Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pg. 36

executioners. And as it is evident from his response to the question the main conflict comes from the Mormon element in the story. Mailer even though tried to give through his novel the Mormon atmosphere of the land he placed the importance of the event elsewhere. For him this was something that happened within a distinctively 'American' context and was mythologized because it somehow reversed the roles between citizen and state, the Will and the Law. For example, Mark Edmundson argues how Gilmore's denial of escaping his sacrificial fate projects him onto a superego position arching 'over the cultural standard of the law, making of it a helpless child, temporarily.'²²² Barney in that sense successfully interprets his hero's execution as a bull rodeo, granting his scape goat with an active hyper-masculine status, depicting him as one with a powerful bull rather than a helpless victim.²²³ What is profoundly neo-mythic in this situation is how it perplexes the universal sacrificial pattern as described by Rene Girard to be primordially structured and constant within societies:

'There is a unity that underlies not only all mythologies and rituals but the whole of human culture, and this unity of unities depends on a single mechanism, continually functioning because perpetually misunderstood - the mechanism that assures the communities spontaneous and unanimous outburst of opposition to the surrogate victim.'²²⁴

Gilmore's death was in its practical analysis more of self-sacrifice than an execution, as the modern secular Law of the United States, would have allowed him to retain his life. Though, for him it was the Mormon law of 'Blood Atonement', that would offer him a real chance to life, allowing for catharsis in coming to terms with his own evilness and gaining his right to an after life.

²²² Mark Edmundson, 'Romantic Self-Creations: Mailer and Gilmore in "The Executioner's Song"', in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pg. 439

²²³ Barney notes how this choice was made in order to depict the paternal reflection of Gilmore. see Matthew Barney in interview with Jonathan Jones, 'Lonesome Cowboys- Matthew Barney', *Untitled*, No. 21, Spring 2000, <http://www.postmedia.net>

²²⁴ Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, (London: Continuum, 2005), or. p. 1972, pg. 315

In this case, the scapegoat function was questioned by a sense of justice that was not a blind avenger but developed more of an empathetic stance towards a double murderer, while the man himself believed that his death would be an act of sanctification. And on the other hand, if we are really looking for sacrificial patterns within this episode, then there is definitely a more realistic sacrifice at play. We can understand the murder of Max Jensen, Gilmore's first victim, to be a sacrifice performed on behalf of a different societal structure, the demimonde in which Gary Gilmore and Nicole Baker belong to. There, the 'good Mormon' young man is charged with the sins of the 'respectable' society that lies outside the correctional or mental institution system. Even Mailer presents the characters of Gilmore's victims and their spouses as of a lesser human quality in comparison to that of Gilmore and Baker.

'The couples are middle-class Americans, expectant, ambitious, un-worldly, and perhaps a little smug. They live without a sense of the tragic possibilities in life, the sense that Nicole Baker seems to have from childhood and that Gilmore supposedly develops over time. The Executioner's Song, I would argue, is a violent polemic on behalf of the position that Gilmore (as Mailer represents him) eventually achieves. For Mailer, if I understand him correctly, attempts to write his book from a state akin to the one he attributes to Gilmore, one that acknowledges the awareness of death as the condition for every just perception.'²²⁵

So it is clear that Barney depicts the deaths of Gilmore and Jensen in notably distinct manners. The first one is depicted as a typical murder scene, during which an irrational yet definite drive to kill is satisfied and portrayed with an acutely realistic and brute manner both in terms of special effects as well as of set design. Jensen's murder scene is composed in a way in which we the viewers are waiting for a long time for something to happen. It comes forth as the climactic moment of the film's slowest sequence, during which we experience viewer's frustration, sadness and anger as they built up to the

²²⁵ Mark Edmundson, 'Romantic Self-Creations: Mailer and Gilmore in "The Executioner's Song"', in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pg. 443

moment of the shooting which in effect gives us deliverance from the torture of boredom. The soundtrack of this sequence, ranging from Death Metal to country lament and to a humming roadway silence, is the most affecting element for the viewer's relationship to the narrative and during the murder scene it follows the climactic image with a chaotic simultaneity of all these elements. We are also left with a good long chance to observe the wounded head of Max Jensen, as he lies in the lavatory and the blood is flowing out of his head. This room has a glass window and through it we witness or spectate this execution. On the other hand, the second killing in the episode, taking from the Utah State execution of Gary Gilmore, and thus being violence in the name of the law, is portrayed as a heroic act of rodeo riding. Taming a bull, becoming one with it and eventually sharing death with the beast, is the scenario that Barney chooses to engage with in this allegory.

A very Hollywood-like trait of the cycle is how it renders conflict and violent images with traditionalist epic 'weight' and most interestingly with a moral progression of the way these instances appear in terms of its production sequence. In *Cremaster 4*, 1 and 5 violence is not directly represented but more preconceived or completely denied as is the case for *Cremaster 1* that in a way depicts a primordial paradise of female positivity situated on a Football Astroturf. In this way, it references its opposite, a solely masculine context of a situation in which violence is 'played', becomes a game and symbolizes athletic might.²²⁶

In *Cremaster 4* the concept takes also a position of indirect centrality. The

²²⁶ In American Football, to knock someone out means to be successful in the game. A whole range of fake injury prosthetics was devised by coaches and players in order to attain hard shelled arms that could be used for getting or maintain the ball in the team

goat-man battles with his environment, be it architectural or natural in two ways: either by destroying the floor under his feet by tap-dancing or by struggling to traverse within the claustrophobic earthly tunnels. The character is actually a mythical incarnation of natural violence. Yet, the movie ends with a scene that brings in mind a disciplinary type of violence; a peculiar shot the goat-man's testes pierced and perhaps painfully contracted they and potentially in danger of being disembodied by the two motors if set in motion in the background. As the exegesis suggests that such a scene is a reference to a corrective procedure that may bring the testes into one level, by applying an unnatural conditioning on the male body,²²⁷ violence can be understood in this context as an aesthetic intervention. At the same time, the image along with many of Barney's narrative *tableaux vivants*, alludes to sadomasochistic practices. The epic treatment of the scene though comes with its soundtrack, a bagpipe ensemble playing Amazing Grace.

In C5, we have the continuation of this process, the same model of testicular conditioning in which we also can add the self-restraining process taken up by Houdini and the transcendental jump it initiates, thus understanding violence, therefore, as a spectacular ordeal against the self. Ursula Andress is also somewhat epic sex symbol and is used by Barney in an obscure way.²²⁸ She becomes a tragic queen that loses her lover due to his

²²⁷ Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us', in Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002), pg. 63

²²⁸ 'Barney says he recalls thinking that Andress's wide shoulders rising out of the water added violence to her sexiness, something suddenly he likened to the pieces that Richard Serra made in the late 60s by throwing hot lead into the corners of a room, where the lead hardened, which he said in a similar way added violence to Minimalism.' Michael Kimmelman, 'The Importance of Matthew Barney', The New York Times Magazine, 10.10. 1998 pg. 65

self destructive drive, a maternal figure not a counterpart and so in this last episode in the narrative order violence becomes a psychological concept in view of separation and the pain inflicted by love.

Though the Oscar for epic violence goes to *Cremaster 3*, depicting it as inevitable, hubristic, liberating and even as aesthetic. There is the epic battle of the Irish and the Scottish Giants, that includes finger biting and rock throwing; the demolition derby where Gary Gilmore's reincarnated female zombie corpse is re-executed by being squashed inside a Chrysler imperial; there is the scene where Barney as Entered Apprentice is captured and punished by a breaking of his teeth against a block followed by a dental torture scene enacted by Richard Serra and his fellow Masons. Keith B. Wagner speaks of the Hiram Abiff- Serra and Entered Apprentice- Barney characters as they embody the bipolar notion of pain and pleasure while at the same time their bodies are used by the artist as the key commodity fetishes within *Cremaster 3*. The focus is shed upon the 'torture scene' in which Barney as the Entered Apprentice is the victim, a group of Masons, whose leader seems to be Hiram Abiff, are his tormentors. He suggests therefore that in this scene pain is particularly described as 'exertion', in a decadent and masochistic intend while at the same time body and set design are mingled up to form a vague sculptural-cinematic body that gives proof of the Marxist understanding of the 'perceptible-imperceptible' binary explained earlier. In addition to that, he argues that the way that the camera is used in *Cremaster 3* reveals an architectural dominance over human forms and that the excessive craftiness in the mise-en-scene renders the two

protagonists as 'ornamental' and 'secondary' in terms of the visual narrative.²²⁹

And then again, as we enter the Order section violence becomes even more significant and epic. The protagonist becomes a man inscribed by the abuse he was subjected to and is the most obvious epic hero of the cycle. Even though dressed in a highlander suit and hat he is a man in pink and his blood dripping mouth is shut. He cannot talk but what he can do is fight his ordeal prescribed for him in the Order, in order to be incorporated within its ranks. Apart from some other less violent tasks, he has to perform two murders, one is to kill his lower self and the other is to kill the father inside of him. Both killings are performed in a direct and highly aestheticized form. His lower self is represented by Aimme Mullins, transformed into a woman-cheetah and his father image is Richard Serra, as Hiram Abiff the top ranking Mason. His lower narcissistic self, challenges him to a battle and the father image ceremonially awaits and accepts his execution. This killing row ends with the death of the Entered Apprentice as an act performed by the Chrysler building itself. Typical and yet so unlike any other work of contemporary art. Is this a reason to celebrate or a way to understand the adulteration of the artistic realm? Or perhaps in seeing the Cremaster Cycle as a deeply American narrative we may agree with the following:

'Sealed off in a seductive phantasmagoria of self-transformation, Barney's Cremaster Cycle offers an escape artist's seductive and untethered simulacrum of what getting and being free might look like. In the present context, it meets a broader admonition. Our only freedom, our national leaders gravely inform us, will come from more restriction.'²³⁰

²²⁹ Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's Cremaster', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 39

²³⁰ *ibid*

2.5 Against or Towards the gender principle?

The title of the movies as it combines the word 'cremaster'²³¹ with the word 'cycle'²³², mathematics and physiology, comes across as arcane and at the same time it teases us towards satiric understatements. So through its title, the work is immediately implicit of its ambiguity and explicit of its narrative theme, a somewhat 'gender existentialism', about a man and his testes. But one may ask rightfully, what kind of cycle do the testicles perform? For Danto it is drafted between the conceptual pillar of the 'metaphysics of gender'²³³ and of 'the poetics of ascent and descent'²³⁴²³⁵. Indeed, it seems that the cycle's narrative bounces in between these two areas and their intersections that leave us with a sense of religion, psychology and politics. Religion, as obviously connoted in the word 'metaphysics' but also by the terms 'ascent and descent', is relevant to the ways that one approaches the eternal mode of existence according to the Judeo-Christian dogmas. The psychological aspect of these pillars is also very evident; to truly understand the psyche of the opposite gender can only be a metaphysical act of transcending a particular gender psychology that comes together with our physical bodies. And there, in the imperfect communion between the two or three or four genders, politics is born in order to make it possible: desire and necessity administered.

One of the most evident and acknowledged issues in Barney's work had been

²³¹ The word derives from the Greek word κρεμάννυμι = 'I hang', and refers to the muscle that automatically lowers and raises the testicles in response to temperature and psychological conditions as well as is responsible for the gonadal development of the embryo

²³² A cycle is a geometrical circle or a sort of a periodical course, an algebraic permutation in which the first and the last elements are equated not necessarily along the time course. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cycle_%28mathematics%29

²³³ Arthur C. Danto, 'Matthew Barney's Cremaster Cycle', in *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 235

²³⁴ *ibid*, pg. 236

the centrality of the masculine psyche and body in action and in question. And from this perspective the Cremaster Cycle mythologizes specifically the context of contemporary or postmodern masculinity by using a custom made hero, whose cyclical ordeal of becoming does not lead to completeness, but to failure. Being self conscious and weary of the hubristic tasks he has to perform, Barney's man pursues and receives his high status with anxiety. Within his fragmented and polarized existence, the hubristic endeavor of overcoming this prescribed Alpha male status is met with his nemesis, a loss of all order or rank; an entropic catabolism caused by the transgression of the limits of ordering structures. Even though he starts his journey as a romantic hero, driven compulsively by his desire for unrestrained action, he knows at the same time, that such a quest will only lead to his dissolution, and thus we can see him also a romantic realist. As Van Proyen addressed the issue, Barney's aesthetic universe suggests,

'a tragic-comic pilgrim's progress of masculinity that, as it tries to hypertrophically adopt itself to even more unnatural regimes of circumstantial conditioning, has alchemically devolved from an idealized priapic potency to Teflon-coated cryogenesis.'²³⁵

The man-hero as the center point of this epic narrative, embodies a symbolization of the male identity as it evolved during the twentieth century and is now being questioned in the twenty-first. Thus, van Proyen asks in his review if the work points towards a post-modern reality of a 'highly perverse and over-objectified maleness'²³⁶ as a definition of the masculine within contemporary art. Because in Barney's art, he finds a great divide and thus an impossibility for conjunction, between the self as an artistic subject, and the self as a narcissistic object. He suggests that this rift manifests itself through

²³⁵ Mark Van Proyen, 'On Point', *Artweek* 37, No 8, October 2006, pg. 5

²³⁶ Mark Van Proyen, 'Matthew Barney's Blarney: Sartoriosis and Self-Spectacle in Contemporary Art', *Bad Subjects*, No. 38, May 1998, <http://bad.eserver.org/issues/1998/38/vanproyen.html> (21.02.2011)

the extravagance of the Cremaster Cycle project which seems in his view to reflect 'a psychic confusion that is particular to our post-modern culture'²³⁷. Cremaster 5, the closing of the cycle is seen as 'the sentimentalization of maleness'²³⁸. For Van Proyen, Barney has depicted the causality and contemporary impossibility of a truly male existence as he depicts a 'maleness' that relies on the effects of ritualistic practice, rather than upon an inner clear principle of gender specificity. This, from Barney's perspective, has become impossible in its essence.

Therefore masculinity seen in this way is perhaps a sign that the culture that constructed it and as such is already in a post-gender politics state, aware, and perhaps proud of a new kind of sexual difference that does not reproduce the stereotypes of its past. And exactly in this sense, Barney's work crystalizes the quest for sexual individuation and specificity as a liberal and humanitarian political expansion, set against older and conservative sexual regimes that inform the socio-political praxis. These forms of categorization, between the one or the other, as expressed by Judith Butler and in her book *Gender Trouble*, are far from being natural categories and much closer in being convenient ones.

'The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls "outside", gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently.'²³⁹

Sladen reads Barney's artworks as containers and generators of chaotic and cruel processes in which masculinity is defined and yet questioned at the same time. He employs Judith Butler's concept of 'gender melancholia' to explain

²³⁷ ibid

²³⁸ ibid

²³⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1999) pg. 140

how Barney comes up with his oxymoronic visual representations such as a suited satyr, or a weight lifter's bench made out of petroleum jelly:

'Freud describes melancholia as mourning but a kind of mourning for the subject's own soul. The loved object has been lost, but rather than give it up the psyche internalizes it - resulting ambivalent feelings being acted out against both the lost object and the self. Butler describes gender melancholia as the result of remnants of homosexual desire in normative gender identities, producing a love-hate relationship with masculinity in even the straightest of men.'²⁴⁰

Helen Molesworth speaks also of this 'body' in Barney's earlier works, as an abject and anxious entity 'pushed through the erotic sieve of football'²⁴¹.

While the representation of masculinity is being sketched by the artist and despite his 'media friendly' use of popular male icons, the work of Barney molds a 'cultural model' that is said to offer us a deep insight on the polymorphous perverse and thus regressed infantile according to Freud,²⁴² of the male psyche.²⁴³

From another perspective, perhaps the most 'interested account' of the Cremaster Cycle, literally attached to the work, Nancy Spector, sees it evolving around a 'biological-ontological struggle' that manifests itself in various 'symptoms', visually expressed through the five movies: juxtaposing a self-immersed to a lost in a multitude being, the male character is drawn as an expression of passage-achievement. The philosophically imagined but unrealized potential of an anti-oedipal, soft maleness as a post-modern but also traditionally Romantic ideal, whose roots lay within this thing called 'a return to innocence'. In this imagined paradise, on Barney's extravagant stage, desire is completely self-immersed, narcissistic, death-blind and

²⁴⁰ See, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), pg. 57-65, referenced in Mark Sladen, 'Assault Course', *Art Monthly*, No. 187, pg. 11

²⁴¹ Helen Molesworth, Hal Foster, Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Dennis Hollier, 'The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the 'Informe' and the Object', *October*, Vol. 67, Winter, 1994, pg. 10

²⁴² Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. A.A. Brill, (New York & Washington: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co, 1920), retrieved by Project Gutenberg EBooks

²⁴³ Mark Sladen, 'Assault Course', *Art Monthly*, No. 187, pg. 11

ignorant of the 'other'²⁴⁴. The apotheosis and at the same time destructive failure of this ideal as depicted in the epic, signifies perhaps the advent of a post-romantic agony. Or is it a 'post' post-modern irony which actually negates what it depicts?

As Barney's polymorphic hero is definitely a man, what he particularly dislikes is having to enter the realm of adult manhood as an agent of will and action destined to be in conflict among other such agents of male idiosyncrasy. Thus he invents, according to Siegel, a utopia in which form is not gendered and desire not sexually specific and where the human merges existentially with the instinctual animal; a true manifestation of Freud's polymorphous perversity.²⁴⁵ In this sense the first move of this hero is to merge with a collective will in which the fear of competition is annulled. Though, this is only an illusionary solution. Character cannot be repressed. Not through family, education, work, sport, not even through love. Siegel concludes in her article that Barney ultimately makes an honest and sharp comment on the equally oppressive realities of individuality and collectivity as realms of conflict that may exhibit such extravagance that can render the human condition as a utopia.²⁴⁶

The focus of Barney's art on divergent sexual identities has been a key subject matter since his initial projects, that experimented with concepts taken from the realms of sport, ritual and biology. Only by reading the titles of these works²⁴⁷ one can have some idea of what they were engaged with, 'reminders

²⁴⁴ Roger D. Hodge, 'Onan the Magnificent: The Triumph of the Testicle in Contemporary Art', Harper's Magazine, May 2000, pg. 7

²⁴⁵ Katy Siegel, 'Nurture Boy', Artforum, Vol. 37, No. 10, Summer 1999, pg. 134

²⁴⁶ *ibid* pg. 135

²⁴⁷ For example titles such as FIELD DRESSING(orifill), 1989, BLIND PERINEUM, 1991, TRANSEXUALIS(decline), 1991, HYPOTHERMAL PENETRATOR, 1991, MILE HIGH Threshold: FLIGHT

of the body as a metabolic site and a sexual entity, a set of orifices available for filling, emptying, penetration and retraction.²⁴⁸ At the same time though, all of these pieces, including the Cremaster Cycle seem to be based on, or at least talking with a language of a typically macho male identity. Glenn O' Brian for example describes his visit at the Whitney Biennial in New York as a generally uninteresting occasion lighten up by a surprising experience of cultural inclusion:

'... as a studly, womanizing, ofay, honkey, mick dude, I did feel somewhat underrepresented. And only at Matthew Barney's video installation did I, me and myself feel any genuine excitement.'²⁴⁹

Indeed much of the subject matter in Barney's work seem to be part of this stereotyped macho maleness: American Football, wrestling, body building and climbing, cowboys, rodeo, murder, escape artistry, Masonry, architects, speeding cars, Black Watch bag pipers, construction workers, horse races and a constant framing of women as sexual or dominating matriarchal icons. How do we get from this to the other side, in Butler's gender ideology where sexual identity is fluid and individualized?

A possible answer comes from an unlikely source, a popular American magazine article by Roger D. Hodge. It is entitled 'Onan the Magnificent: The triumph of the testicle in contemporary art' and it proposes the establishment of a new genre, an art category he names *onanism*. 'The 1990s, in the arts as in politics, were the decade of the genital, and Barney falls squarely within this strain of recent art'²⁵⁰. Not only part of but more an insurmountable maxim

with the ANAL SADISTIC WARIOR, 1991, REPRESSIA, 1991, DELAY OF GAME(manual A), 1991, RADIAL DRILL, 1991, OTTOshaft, 1992

²⁴⁸ Steve Kaplan, 'New York: Matthew Barney, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, October 19 - November 16, 1991', ETC, No. 19, 1992, pg. 65

²⁴⁹ Glenn O' Brian, 'Dividing the Sheep from the Goats', Artforum, Vol. 31, No. 9, May 1993, pg. 8

²⁵⁰ Roger D. Hodge, 'Onan the Magnificent: The Triumph of the Testicle in Contemporary Art', Harper's Magazine, May 2000, pg. 6

of the genre and its development from the 1970s and on, is what his art is about, testifying a mannerist, magnificent ending of the genre. In a footnote the author makes the following observation:

'The great challenge facing each genital artist is one of visual discrimination: penises with the exception of cases involving deformity tend to look very much alike. The same goes for vaginas. After viewing a few thousand photographs or videos or sculptures or paintings or performances or installations featuring genitalia (and their excrement) in various poses and states of mutilation, whether real or simulated and means of piercing, binding or some other technique, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish among works of different artists. Barney's stroke of genius was to push through the barrier of genital literalism into the rarified realm of mythology - a mythology not just of genitalia in general, or of the obvious and overexposed phallus, but of the testicles, those most vulnerable and delicate reproductive organs.'²⁵¹

By finding an early expression of the genre of onanism in Vito Acconci and several contemporary ones in artists such as Mapplethorpe, Koons and many 'Saatchi' collectibles, Hodge argues that the latter are both reactionary and literal or 'primitive' occasions within the genre that have not escaped their shock value, Dadaist past. Thus Barney was able to exit the stereotyped representation in genital art as for him even an opera house has an anus and mountains may express a narcissistic sexual drive towards their own reflections. Narcissistic, autoerotic libido is perhaps a key in understanding the liberated approach that Barney projects through his work and symbolism. As Jung has underlined the key is the close relationship between 'onanism' and 'excessive activity of phantasy'.²⁵² Therefore, 'onanism is all about the self, Barney's self, which he understands solely as an epiphenomenon, a by product, of his sexual identity.'²⁵³

Thus going back to the question of how such 'manly' subject matter turns out to express deconstructed and individually customized sexual identities the answer might start to be visible. But there is one more thing that Hodge brings

²⁵¹ *ibid*

²⁵² C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, Beatrice M. Hinkle (trans.) (Mineola&New York: Dover Publications, 2002), or.p. 1916, pg. 175

²⁵³ Roger D. Hodge, 'Onan the Magnificent: The Triumph of the Testicle in Contemporary Art', *Harper's Magazine*, May 2000, pg. 7

into perspective and that is that the American artist embodies the new concept of gender because he does not follow a sexual model of a 'traditional heterosexual breadwinner' neither one of a homosexual but merges the whole range of possibilities in male sexuality into one big desire hotspot in which the clearest assumption one can make about the subject is its proneness to a queer sadomasochistic understanding of pleasure.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, for Hodge, Barney's art makes less sense as a manifestation of queer theory rather than as an inspiring tale for the Men's Movement that since the 1990s has been in search of an 'essential, metaphysical manliness.' As a counterfeit to the extreme polemics of feminism or even a manly narcissism- both of which are rejected by Hodge as sources of the Men's Movement- he argues that the point of the men's movement ideology comes in rescue of a somewhat contained, feminized and wife-dominated male. Barney's work is thus a manifesto against such hardships!²⁵⁵

Ronald Schumacher, observes how Barney's project was evidently influenced by the critical trend of the nineties, led by Judith Butler, that had been largely based on the field of gender studies in looking at the ways in which the body signifies the 'construction and deconstruction of sexuality'²⁵⁶. As Butler, explains,

'The re-description of intra-psychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences. But what determines the manifest and latent text of the body politic? What is the prohibitive law that generates the corporeal stylization of gender, the fantasied and fantastic figuration of the body?'^{257,258}

Finding the primary conditioning and formation of gender as a reaction to

²⁵⁴ Ibid, pg. 180

²⁵⁵ Ibid, pg. 180

²⁵⁶ Ronald Schumacher & Matthias Winzen (eds.), *Just Love Me: Post/Feminist Positions of the 1990s* from the Goetz Collection, (Berlin: Walter König, 2002), pg. 42

²⁵⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1990). pg.172

the incest and homosexuality taboos, Butler speaks about this cultural process as being one that is based on a series of prohibitions that eventually produce a rigid social world of 'idealized and compulsory heterosexuality'²⁵⁸. Though, in this established scheme, whose margins are defined by the principle of reproduction, there are too many things that do not quite fit in. The physical or else formal reality of the body's gender does not correspond to a reality of gender. Therefore, Barney's performative or else aesthetic manifestations, where the body becomes creatively dis-gendered, might be an occurrence of the following idea in Butler's critique:

'When the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe.'²⁵⁹

In *Cremaster 4*, the first movie produced, the hero is the Loughton Candidate, a dandy or else a metrosexual satyr, an ancient symbol of male sexuality, that is presented as a well-dressed man with dirty fingers and bright red greasy hair, performing a graceful tap dancing number. The 'story' is nothing but a symbolic narrative of certain conditions, actions and forms... 'this penultimate episode describes the organism's onward rush toward descend despite its persistent resistance to division and the panic this tension induces'²⁶⁰. Descend means a fetus becoming male from a previous state of sexual flux, basically acquiring testes instead of ovaries. Of course, seeing *Cremaster 4* without knowing its symbolic and rather minimalist meaning, one is presented with another story as given through the visual narratives of the movie. The Satyr as

²⁵⁸ *ibid*

²⁵⁹ *ibid*, pg. 173

²⁶⁰ Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us, Part II: Cycle', in Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pg. 59

the hero in action is framed by the secondary characters: three androgynous, body-built fairies and the four slender motorcycle riders, in teams of two: the yellow and the blue.

Also the Candidate has its double, an animal symbolizing the satyr's desire for undifferentiating from a state of nature. A Loughton Ram, that carries on its head two pairs of horns, ascending and descending. He is also framed by parallel activities and situations which in a way enhance the dynamics of his protagonism. The fairies for example, make up a uniform group of masculine women, yet they are all slightly different and attend all the male characters of the film apart from the Ram. They admire, prepare and then monitor with feelings of anxiety and joy the progress made by the Candidate, while at the same time they supervise the motorcycle race, offering the pit stop services. Therefore, these curious characters act as nannies and on looking admirers of the whole process. At the same time, they are the most evident feminine representation in the movie as shown by their hairstyles and voluptuous crinolines. Of course they look much more like drag queens than women and so we could say that the artist uses gender in an ironic way. Women who want to look as muscular as men that are dressed as women that look like men who want to look like women. Spector, points out that Barney deals with gender mutability as a sculptural matter rather than a subject. Thus he does not critically address the issue but rather uses its given plasticity for representing characters. Spector quotes Barney from an interview with Glen Hefland,

'the ratios of sexuality seem to be changing (and) that's where I think it entered my work. There's a proposed organism....that at certain points has a gender, but it's not necessarily a human gender. It has a ratio that fluctuates, 1:10, 2:9, wherever it ends up. Obviously

there are articulations that are specifically masculine and feminine, but I think there's a lot of space in between that has to do with other points on the graph.²⁶¹

The symbolic narrative of the movie ends with the Candidate's failure to merge the two gender principles and his compulsory acceptance of a definite male status:

'The Loughton Candidate's dream of transcending his biology to dwell in the space of pure symmetry embodied by the Loughton Ram is shattered. His campaign to turn the blue and yellow of his destiny into green is defeated, and revealed, perhaps, to have been little more than a delusion. He has glimpsed the seductive realm of the anal-sadistic universe, where all difference is abolished, where man and ram and island and motor form one continuous flow of desire. For the hubris of his aspirations he must be punished.'²⁶²

The punishment is one that centers the testes in two different visual frames. One being a surgical scene in which stitched thin cords are removed from the testicles drenched in petroleum jelly and the other as we have seen earlier is the one in which we see the testes pierced with seven plastic hooks attached with ribbons to the two racing motors.²⁶³

What is very interesting to consider though in terms of Barney's iconology of the male subject, are his intentions and critical standing in terms of the male icons he utilizes in his narratives. An enigmatic and at the same time critical point of reference comes for example with the characters of Serra and Barney in *Cremaster 3*. One way to look at them would be to assume that they are displayed on the cinematic plane as symbols of 'the art market's idea of genius and beauty' a model which, according to Keith B. Wagner, is intentionally projected in the movie. It might be a case of 'fetishization' and commodification of male sexual identity, as both Barney and Serra, recognized as individual auteurs but also as celebrity personas of the New York art world, are in fact human forms of an expanded or perhaps exploded form of 'social and economic commodity'. Wagner's argument pointing towards

²⁶¹ Glen Hefland, in 'Matthew Barney', *Shift 14* (San Francisco) 6, no. 2, (1992), pp 36-41

²⁶² Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us, Part II: Cycle', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pg. 63

²⁶³ *Cremaster 4* (37:20-39:19)

the fact that they both (as well as most characters in Barney's film) exist in two distinct forms of such a commodified agency: a real-life one and an imaginary.

Both or perhaps all four of them aspire...And they are very much alike:

'...both are world-famous American sculptors, both 'postmodern visionaries', both born in San Francisco, both corporatized icons, both Yale Alumni, both touting their legitimacy and narcissism, both demoted to the level of commodity fetish. Most interestingly, however, is that that they have self consciously commodified themselves.'²⁶⁴

Thus he concludes by quoting Bill Nichols from *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*²⁶⁵, that the uniqueness and distinct identity of the work and its author -as a main neo-liberal market trait - is able to grant an aesthetic project, lacking any practical 'use value', with an excessive volume of 'exchange value'.²⁶⁶ Seeing the question of masculinity in Barney's work under such a perspective it is perhaps to reduce it to popular, commodified culture and such a view does not resonate well with the thesis. Even so, the choice of Barney's male characters suggests a tendency to utilize cults of personality. But still one should treat this as a cultural symptom manifested within the *Gesamtkunstwerk* rather than an artistic deficiency of the whole.

Paul Allen Anderson points at two central issues in regards to the Cremaster Cycle and Barney's art in total. One is about the artist's extensive symbolic use of manacles within the general conceptual frame of restraint and escape. Worn by death row convict Garry Gilmore and escape artist Harry Houdini, the object plays a very important role within the whole narrative. Both 'heroes' are figures of a certain modern grandeur; one is America's favorite

²⁶⁴ Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's Cremaster', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 40

²⁶⁵ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pg. 36 in Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's Cremaster', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 40

²⁶⁶ Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's Cremaster', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 40

criminal, a man that became a fascinating icon of raw masculinity and a tragic anti-hero seen as a societal surrogate and the other is the Hungarian Jewish immigrant who thought of himself as the 'American Self-Liberator'²⁶⁷. These two characters chart a region of identity that is far from conventional or typical standards, though both appealed to the popular need for fascinating icons. As they go their ways to realize their potentials for escape and freedom, they subject themselves to manacles that get only tighter and tighter likewise to the metaphoric labyrinth of the movies. As Anderson observes the model that Barney sculpts upon these personas, whether it is the escape artist as magician or con man finishes with a negation of their ideal image, as conversely to their paradigm he 'directed the vast energies of the Cremaster Cycle towards failure, or at least a depiction of failure.'²⁶⁸ In view of such a creation, the author concludes, failure becomes a source of productivity.²⁶⁹

The second point of importance, according to Anderson's text, is the one regarding the narcissistic drives of this epic work. Seen in relation to, Mary Kelly's feminist video art pieces, *Antepartum* (1973) and *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79) the ending of the cycle, of the sad Giant descending in the warm pool, seems to Anderson to be a 'post-partum coronation of the archetypal primary narcissist whom Freud famously labeled "his Majesty the Baby."²⁷⁰ As the Jacobin pigeons pull his testes with colorful ribbons he becomes a man losing the hope for realizing an undifferentiated gender state. If Kelly's imagination produces the feminist or else matriarchal view of the transition between the powerful position of a pregnant mother to the dominated

²⁶⁷ Paul Allen Anderson, 'Escape Artistry and Entrapment: Matthew Barney, Mary Kelly and the moment that defines our lives', *Art Papers*, Vol. 27, No. 6, November-December 2003, pg. 37

²⁶⁸ *ibid*

²⁶⁹ *ibid*, pg. 38

²⁷⁰ *ibid*,

one of a mother-woman that loses not only control of her child but also of her privacy and individuality then Barney, says Anderson imagines an escape from patriarchal reality to antisocial utopia of a pre-oedipal thus apolitical 'oceanic feeling'²⁷¹.

Yet it is exactly this oceanic feeling that brings the release of the hero that makes us think of a female background to the whole thing as water in mythological symbolic language has a definite feminine connotation. And Barney is obsessed with liquids of all kinds and their formal properties. Warm water pools in *Cremaster 5* and a freezing river, the Irish Sea in both *Cremaster 4* and *Cremaster 3*, glacial ice and flooded salt flats in *Cremaster 2*, steam, clouds, various liquids. Spector has pointed out in regards to *Cremaster 5*, and as the Cycle enters, according to its exegesis, its full male potential²⁷² that this state comes to us primarily as a female fantasy, as opposed to all the other episodes that stem from the artist's own reflection upon the self:

'While the differentiation conceived of in the *Cremaster Cycle* results in the formation of a man, the tenor of this final chapter is decidedly female. The opera issues from the Queen's memories and the open wound in her heart. Barney's characters are defined in relation to the mirror of her imagination. There is even the possibility that they only exist as shadows of her desire, fragments of a forlorn mind.'²⁷³

Another way of looking at the female principle within the movies is to understand the various characters of Aimee Mullins in *Cremaster 3*, a double amputee runner. In the prologue of the film, when we are taken back to the mythical times of the Celts and the heroic epic of Fionn McCumhail and Fingal, Mullins is Fionn's mother, Oonagh McCumhail. She is depicted as a

²⁷¹ Paul Allen Anderson, 'Escape Artistry and Entrapment: Matthew Barney, Mary Kelly and the moment that defines our lives', *Art Papers*, Vol. 27, No. 6, November-December 2003, pg. 39

²⁷² Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us, Part II: Cycle', in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pg. 65

²⁷³ *ibid*

weaver of Tartan, a primordial mother with legs made out of soil, residing in the humble family hut. Her face shows that she can see but does not look, as she knows everything. According to the myth she is the one who plans on how to defeat the approaching giant from Scotland. In the film we see Fionn looking at her and being immediately reassured and inspired to prepare for his fight. The next character played by Mullins is a woman that is placed inside a private room²⁷⁴ of the Cloud Club, an existing bar at the top of the Chrysler Building, where she uses her fake legs as a tool to cut potato wedges. She is wearing chain armor on her head, legs and hands and a sexy silver metal dress of the thirties fashion. Her body is shown as having an enhanced sexual allure and she sits in a graceful manner within her humble 'work' space, characterized by piles of potatoes. She looks sad and yet very focused on her task.²⁷⁵ In the scene that comes immediately after the Bar sequence we are taken in an exterior architectural setting, the Saratoga Race Tracks where a harness race track is taking place. In this sequence Mullins seemingly plays the Apprentice's girlfriend as they watch the race together exchanging caresses. Yet the catalogue describes her part as a prostitute.²⁷⁶ As the

²⁷⁴ As the bar is transformed into a typical Irish Pub for the Masonic Lodge, the private room as well as the other private room that hosts the Freemasons is according to the exhibition catalogue a slug. A slug was a room in which women were allowed to sit and drink as the rest of the Pub's space was off limits for them but which was later used by secret Irish brotherhoods and the IRA as secret meeting spots. Spector provides certain references of this custom such as 'Conor O'Neill's Traditional Irish Tour, www.conoroneills.com/co/tour5.htm, Elisabeth Malcolm, 'The Rise of the Pub: A study in the Disciplining of Popular Culture', *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850*, eds. James S. Donnelly, Jr and Kerby A. Miller (Dublin & Portland: Irish Academic Press, 1998), pp. 50-77, Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin Pub Life and Lore: An Oral History* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), p.38, in Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us, Part II: Cycle', in Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pg. 47

²⁷⁵ According to Spector, this woman is, '... like some hybrid Celtic archetype of agriculture and warfare, she seems to be the Chrysler Tower's unconscious. Sitting silently in her white cubicle of a room, ritualistically slicing potatoes to set the bar and, by extension, the tower off center, she signals that all is not well with the building. The result of her actions is registered by the Masons in the other snug who use a plumb line and level to assess the evenness of the situation.' Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us, Part II: Cycle', in Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pg. 48

²⁷⁶ Nancy Spector, 'Only the perverse fantasy can still save us, Part II: Cycle', in Matthew Barney: *The*

Masonic mobsters capture the Apprentice the woman flees. In her next appearance in the part of *Cremaster 3* called 'The Order', Mullins is transformed into a 'femme fatal' and Cheetah hybrid character, something like a female cat satyr.²⁷⁷ She is the Third Degree keeper and Barney as the Entered Apprentice has to kill her in order to move on to the next level as she symbolizes the Entered Apprentice's lower self. This character incorporates within its two facets two rather opposite expressions of the feminine. One, standing and carefully walking on stiff clear Plexiglas legs is a reserved almost frigid display of beauty and posture and the other, a cat woman moving around the space in physical intensity showing her animosity and readiness for all. Though the Cycle exegesis makes it explicit that this female double being is nonetheless Matthew Barney's narcissistic alter ego,²⁷⁸ an athlete, a model and a satyr himself a connoisseur in the application of discipline, the exhibition of beauty and the embodiment of sexuality. Near the end of the film this character is ritualistically murdered with Masonic tools by the Entered Apprentice as part of a tripartite killing sequence in which Hiram Abiff is also murdered at the same time with the same method and from the same character while the Apprentice himself is murdered by the spire of a self-destructive Chrysler Tower. The Order ends with a short display of Mullins's last character, the Entered Novitiate. Baring the wounds of her previously executed murder she is: 'seated on a sleigh drawn by five baby lambs. She is dressed in the costume of the First Degree Masonic initiate.

Cremaster Cycle, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pp. 48-49

²⁷⁷ *ibid*, pg. 56

²⁷⁸ *ibid*

Blindfolded, she wears a noose around her neck.²⁷⁹ Barney, according to the Masonic but also generally esoteric tradition has now killed his lower self in order to achieve a Master Status. Mullins as a woman without legs embodies such a metaphor. Even though Barney's plan for this scene was to show the actress without any sort of legs, she found the idea too intimate and thus they agreed on having her with a kind of jellyfish looking pair, that were not exactly legs but something to occupy the space under her knees.²⁸⁰

In the opening sequence of *The Order*, we see five naked women, their nipples covered with Band-Aids and trinkets, wearing intense make up, shimmering bath caps, bathing in a Jacuzzi tub, while playing with the foam bubbles. The frame opens up to reveal the Guggenheim Museum Rotunda. The women, with a big smile on their faces, exit the pool, carefully stepping out on their high-heeled sandals and G-string bikinis. They walk across the space with their arms raised and in an exhibitionistic manner in regards to their naked bodies, bringing in mind the style of the ladies that walk around the ring in boxing and wrestling matches, announcing the runs. In the middle of the lower space of the museum, the ladies hold and rotate a pentagon platform upon which we see the agents of each Degree appearing as well as the Entered Apprentice in his pink outfit. The camera goes back and forth and in some way scans their naked bodies and their continuous repetitive movement, showing all flows and individual differences of form and movement. Once the turning of the platform finishes they show Barney's character the point where he has to start his ascending climbing. They appear one last time, when close to the end of the film the Apprentice is

²⁷⁹ *ibid*, pg. 57

²⁸⁰ Aimee Mullins, 'Personal Perspectives', in Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pg. 492

thrown into the Jacuzzi tub in a rather obvious symbolic act of baptism. So through such examples, we may acknowledge that Barney even though brings forth a desire for a new gender identity basis his evolved sexual model on a clearly masculine mold while women are represented in traditional and typical gender roles. With the sole exception of the fairies in Cremaster 4, and the sprites in Cremaster 5, as supernatural beings that perhaps do not need much of gender identity. Yet the women of Barney are definitely feminine, sexualized and maternal while the men are supermen.

Chapter Three:

The Safety of Order and the Fascination for Entropic

Dissolution: The Cremaster Cycle as Sociopolitical Critique

*'Man's striving for order, of which art is but one manifestation, derives from a similar universal tendency throughout the organic world; it is also paralleled by, and perhaps derived from, the striving towards the state of simplest structure in physical systems. This cosmic tendency towards order, if maintained, must be carefully distinguished from catabolic erosion, which afflicts all material things and leads to disorder or more generally to the eventual destruction of all organized shape.'*²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Rudolf Arheim, *Entropy and Art: an Essay on Disorder and Order*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: UCLA Press, 1971), pg. 26

3.1 Ordered subversion as style: Conceptualcore decadence

So far in the thesis we were able to acknowledge that the Cremaster Cycle is a high art conceit embodying an unusual combination of prosaic subjects, both in terms of style and conceptual design within the frame of contemporary art production that it belongs to. Also we acknowledged that this sum corresponded to the field's demand or taste, for it was steadily and faithfully supported by a large number of highly positioned agents and institutions. By using traditional genre structures such as the epic cycle and Hollywood cinema, the artist's method approached the creative act with an antithetical position to Duchampian avant-gardism or artistic irony. A detailed and heavily 'made up', collaborative project makes no sense as a critique of the contemporary sources for capital for artistic production but in the contrary it seems to be making the most out of them. But is it so?

Alexandra Keller and Frazer Ward interpret the Cremaster Cycle as an artwork that lacks completely any self-reflexive critique within the frame of the contemporary art field. Though as they connect it to both, neo-avant guard and Hollywood blockbuster aesthetics, as two oppositely entwined positions within the Bourdieuan thought, they wonder about the possibility of an undercover institutional critique at play directed towards the American film industry. This could explain the work's high capital expenditure -both economic and cultural- and its minimal revenue profits. Nevertheless, the authors believe that such an aesthetic controversy and high expenditure, was much more of a marketing scheme for Barney's sculptural objects, available within art market, rather

than a conscious protest against American style blockbusters.²⁸² And this strikes them as peculiar because Barney's art is an offspring of the neo avant-garde performance and filmmaking, a genre that based its conceptual and visual style mainly on the critique of the art-object. Exemplifying the work of Janine Antoni, Chris Burden and Vito Acconci, as artists who apart from utilizing and exhibiting their bodies as sculptural matter, used ready-made, everyday objects as props in their shows, the author's make a case about the actual quality of these props as a critique of fetishistic objecthood in art. Post-performance or film relics were exhibited within museum galleries 'without obviating their potential utility'²⁸³ but gaining context by the reconfiguration of their everyday, commodity object use-value into an aesthetic one. And this was seen as an act of questioning the art field and the values it invests in aesthetic objects. The critique therefore of such neo-avant-guard tactics was to re-use the Duchampian model of irony and somehow dramatize it through the medium of performance or film.

'In an anti-Duchampian gesture, Barney's props, and thus his relics, are no longer everyday items; they are custom-made - there is nothing remotely humble about these commodities. Even Barney's version of the everyday object has had its use-value stripped away by the attention he puts on two things: luxury (which is to say the utter and ostentatious waste of surplus capital) and the ebullient addition of something to the object that literally stops it in its tracks. Two particularly effective (which is to say ineffective) prop-relics will do as examples: the pink spare tire in *Cremaster 4*, which cannot run because there is a scrotal attachment, and the stiletto heels from *Cremaster 1*, which cannot be used for walking because, one of them has a spout from where dancing grapes come out from.'²⁸⁴

From this perspective we may agree that Barney's artistic tactic, is evolving from the neo avant-garde one as a reversal of the Duchampian irony. The tire with testes and the unwearable pair of stilettos though, belong definitely to a typically surrealist understanding of an art object. And in that

²⁸² Alexandra Keller & Frazer Ward, 'Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster', *Cinema Journal* 45, No. 2 Winter 2006, pg. 11

²⁸³ *ibid*, pg. 8

²⁸⁴ *ibid*, pg. 9

sense any critique they embody is to be subliminally and not literally expressed.

If luxury and uselessness is the issue here for Frazer and Ward, as it is understood to be preventing the critical function in the Cremaster Cycle, then it would be perhaps honest to also admit that no matter how lush or rough or 'useful' an art-object is, Duchamp has made it clear that every single one of them is in effect a luxury product. As an artwork's use value is purely aesthetic and thus inflated, both in terms of financial and cultural capital. There is not much difference in terms of effectiveness between a pink tire with testicles and a bunch of used nails (performatively hammered in Burden's hands, to fix him on a VW) when exhibited in a museum and exchanged as luxurious expensive commodities. They both belong to a set of objects that have solely aesthetic or else symbolic value that is translated equally to an expenditure of surplus capital in the same way any luxurious commodity would do. So what is particularly interesting about Barney's objects and films is that they reject to recycle this critical pretext. Instead of symbolizing aesthetic value they try to materialize it with their production. In this process they utilize all the possible surplus capital they are able to attract in performing their luxurious, surrealist aura.

It might be that the type of critique that the Cremaster Cycle brings forth, is very different to the one discussed in innumerable volumes of post-modern surplus intellectual capital. It has much more to do with treating the field as the field treats the artwork, as source of vital capital. In utilizing all possible aspects, of its financial, cultural and social benefits the artwork/artist, instead of capitalizing through the work a critical resistance, it devises a different

aesthetic strategy for ensuring both its creative survival as well as a more self-reflexive understanding of artistic value. Namely that this value, together with its immanent critique, both draft a conflict between an elitist-dominant perspective and several oppositional utopias, a conflict which has always been won over by the former, who is in effect the provider of the 'bread and butter' for art. So Barney's work ethic adheres to a logic that consciously seeks to resist a reactionary behavior towards this pragmatic fact and thus negate the Oedipal compulsion of posing a critique against the systemic genealogy that sustains his artistic agency.

Now considering the surrealist tactics and 'lush aesthetic' of the work we may think of the Cremaster Cycle as an intentionally seductive work of art. And it uses adornment to seduce us. We can analyze the purpose of this seductive character by observing the process of 'aesthetization' it proposes,²⁸⁵ as a way to create, exhibit and even theorize contemporary art. Baudrillard, argues that there is a close link between seduction and a type of self-reflection, which by behaving as a matrix is able to destroy ones subjectivity and lead one towards an immersed state of existence. One is seduced by something not because of the presence of some special quality that sweeps one away, but precisely because of seduction functioning as a mirror of ones fascinations, played out for the one to be seduced.²⁸⁶ The seducer knows how to create these reflective conditions. Therefore, what I would like to argue is that within the Cremaster Cycle this dynamic function of seduction becomes part of an aesthetic technique and thus in practical terms had been largely responsible

²⁸⁵ What I mean here by to aesthetize something, is to give it immanence in its meaning within itself and only, a worthwhileness and singularity of a beauty that is outlined as is created; or else an interiority that is inscribed almost fully on the exterior.

²⁸⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, Brian Singer (trans.), (New York: St. Martins Press: 1990) or. p. 1979, pp. 67-71

for the work's high artistic status.

In Barney's Cycle, the genre approaches something that we could re-name in terms of its contemporary character as either baroque conceptualism or as we noted earlier in the thesis, emblematic art film. One of the ways to enquire on its reflective function is to re-animate the early idea of this thesis in understanding the Cycle as a peculiar form of conceptual art, based both on its self-definition as 'cinematic sculpture' and its art critical definition as 'baroque conceptualism'²⁸⁷. The challenge of such an idea comes down to the way in which we can connect the terms 'aestheticization' and 'conceptual'. Aestheticization, as an obsession with the presence of surface, of turning things inside out, locates its intellectual game primarily within a sensory aesthetic experience. And in this mode it goes on towards the opposite way than that of conceptualism, as the latter is preoccupied with its freedom of depth that needs at all cost be unfettered by the surface.

Though, it seems as if it is the term baroque that makes this relationship possible for the Cremaster Cycle in particular. It becomes a bridge between two opposing principles, the iconolatric and the iconoclastic in the sense that it dictates an elemental fragmentation and conflict, continuously unfolding upon a single structural canon, a single idea. It is perhaps useful to point out within this chapter, the highly detailed, vague and ornamented scenography as well as narrative and the ways in which the artist uses layering as concealment through the techniques of allegory and metaphor both in materials and ideas. The work is also color specific and each film is dedicated to a particular palette that enhances the activity of layering and

²⁸⁷ Barbara Gladstone interviewed by Ben Lewis in ART SAFARI 'Matthew Barney: The Church of Cremaster', Thursday 29 July 2004 midnight-12.30am, BBC 4

symbolism. In addition to that there is also the technique of material contrasting, like soft and hard, natural and synthetic, transparent and opaque, shiny and matte. So from this perspective, the Cremaster Cycle can be understood, as we have seen earlier, as an artwork that is structured in layers around a minimal concept. These layers, as exterior surfaces of visual and narrative matter, give it a baroque volume in a repetitive contextualization of its central conceptual-core. Therefore, if the Cremaster Cycle has anything to do with conceptualism, as an art-work that provokes questions and proposes a critique, then it is through the realm of sensation that such functions could be perceived, considering its likely relationship to the baroque style.

Yet, going back to the issue of aestheticization we can argue how this artwork brings in mind the 19th century Symbolist aesthetic system through which abstraction was embodied into specific objects and gestures. As the representations of the Symbolists were disengaged from their reality for reflecting some impalpable essence, they acted as sepulchers of the artist's and the beholder's subconscious, and became symbols of internal conditions and signs of the transcendental possibilities of art. For Walter Benjamin symbols became important in understanding artworks through the aesthetics of romanticism and its obsession for an ultimate goal, a totality. Though he argued, that the use of the term symbol, within the philosophy and study of art, has nothing to do with its actual meaning that stems from a much older theological tradition. The convenient transformation of its content towards a more sentimental definition by the romantics, gave the term an impenetrable, transcendental domain which allowed from one hand for,

'the examination of every artistic form "in depth"' and the on the other to have

'an immeasurably comforting effect on the practice of investigation into the arts'.²⁸⁸ Despite this reminiscence in artistic method, the amount of symbols-objects arrayed in the wordless and specific story line of the Cremaster Cycle, suggests a quite different aesthetic system. The work seems to be much more of a controlled and self conscious creation; both an analytical and highly aestheticized representation of cultural and psychological awareness that uses its symbols for making specific statements of epic dimensions. Jerry Saltz commented particularly on this issue of scale, in terms of the various thematic subjects. These seem to inflate through inward and outward 'digressions', reminding the critic of Rabelais' philosophical satyr and grotesqueness and Melville's *Moby Dick* psychological, political, ethic symbolism. The epic presentation of the characters is contrasted by the theme of spatial and psychological seclusion and isolation. As Saltz accurately observes, Barney's heroes are most of the times anti-social, performing actions in isolation or unable to share the psychological state they may embody. To explain this narrative trait, the critic connects Barney's perspective to that of Huysmans in *A Rebours*, the most obvious literary example of end of century Dandyism and Aestheticism. As Barney's narrative characters remind Saltz of Jean Des Esseintes, a decadent anti-hero a 'sapped, isolated protagonist, and his visions of the female genitalia as a Venus Flytrap'. Though he draws another connection between Matthew Barney and Andy Warhol.²⁸⁹ Both thriving on an 'opportunistic' intermediality, use undeveloped, flat 'androgynous' characters who are acting out eccentric story lines. The viewing experience of the Cremaster Cycle, as with Warhol,

²⁸⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London & New York: Verso, 2003), or. p. 1963, p. 160

²⁸⁹ A view shared with Arthur C. Danto who found a profound similarity between Barney's characters and the Warhol's Brillo boxes, see Arthur C. Danto, 'Arte Metaphysica in New York' in *Matthew Barney: Mitologie Contemporanee*, (Torino: Fondazione Merz, 2009), pp. 179-180

is for Saltz lapsing between otherworldly immersion and ennui.²⁹⁰

Another critic that underlines the aspect of a post-modern and anxious dandyism inscribed throughout Barney's work is Mark Van Proyen. In his review of Cremaster 5, he attempts to explain the problematic features of contemporary art understood as self-spectacle, while at the same time he paints a portrait of Matthew Barney as part of the continuation of tradition that draws a line between him and Beau Brummel, Oscar Wilde and Charles Baudelaire. Though for Van Proyen this is not a case of genuine decadent art but rather an instance of 'Baudlerism'.

'Barney's work presents the decoration of self-as-decoration, yet another calculated and ingratiating appeal for "special" attention from the parents of the world, carrying with it a refusal to act in reality or fantasy as a parent of the world. Like other variants of the narcissistic position, dandyism, whether in the form of modernist elegance or post-modern freak show, is essentially a display of the dandy's investment in his own infantilism and his eager availability for cynical, administrative manipulation and exploitation.'²⁹¹

In addition to that, forms of literary dandyism accompany the work. For example the author finds particularly distasteful the way in which Neville Wakefield - curator and close literary collaborator of the Cremaster Cycle and of other Barney's projects- has used the analytical language as a means of signifying the ways in which the work's extravagance offers a transgressive peep into an almost mythical ego of 'unbounded desire'. Yet, it might simply be a case of decoration. Thus he polemically states that:

'Wakefield's oxymoronic playing with the words "psychological" and "unbounded" reveals the naiveté that underlies the artworld's epidemic of Barney-mania, and it speaks well of the suspension of disbelief that Barney's work achieves.'²⁹²

This is perhaps said in the sense that there is no such thing as unbounded desire...

'Who could actually believe that desire could be unbounded — that is, unframed by the

²⁹⁰ Jerry Saltz, 'Swept Away', *Seeing out loud: the Village Voice art columns, fall 1998 - winter 2003*, (Berkeley: The Figures, 2003) pp. 33 34

²⁹¹ Mark Van Proyen, 'Matthew Barney's Blarney: Sartoriosis and Self-Spectacle in Contemporary art', *Bad Subjects*, No. 38, May 1998, <http://bad.eserver.org/issues/1998/38/vanproyen.html>

²⁹² *ibid*

objects of desire as well as the uncontrollable motives of those objects and the complex conditions in which they are encountered? Only one whose object choice was limited to him or herself, for that is the only object that knows itself well enough to trust itself even as it experiences itself in a state of self-inflicted isolation.’²⁹³

Nevertheless, he places Barney among a group of modern and contemporary artists who also practice the same type of self-objectification, an iconography of identity perhaps, in creating spectacles through a process of literal or conceptual self-ornamentation. This ought to be a rather big group ranging for Van Proyen from ‘Marcel Duchamp to Cindy Sherman, and from Andy Warhol to Orlan’, and one that seeks social profundity through an ornamented, auto- suggestive aesthetic display.²⁹⁴ Otherwise such dandies cannot live, he says, they die a living death as described by Des Esseintes, Huysman’s decadent hero. So given that these artists have become ‘important’ public figures as experts of the aesthetic articulation of the post modern, Van Proyen observes that such forms of ‘narcissistic objectification expressed by the ‘institutional avant-garde’, make up not a transgressive route but rather a normative psychosocial pattern for popular identification.

‘No doubt, the popular fascination with these artists’ images attests to a vicarious identification with the position of the *aristocrat manqué*, which is the shadow side of that other great modernist caricature, the *enfant terrible*. Either way, the figure of the artist demands indulgence as compensation for our own sins of social accommodation, and we render up our attention to that figure as an attribute for our guilty self-sacrifice. Like working- class supporters of an exploitative monarchy, we seem to be glad that, even though we ourselves cannot live in a world of sumptuous self-spectacle, we are comforted by the thought of somebody else being able to do so.’²⁹⁵

And of course, as we have seen earlier, Matthew Barney becomes himself an icon for identification.²⁹⁶ Therefore, Van Proyen’s observations take us back to where we started at the possibility of a seductive function at play in the way that the Cremaster Cycle attains its notorious statute as art. Given that its obvious tendencies towards auto-suggestive artifice and dandyism, are seen

²⁹³ *ibid*

²⁹⁴ *ibid*

²⁹⁵ *ibid*

²⁹⁶ The model he fashions is one of a slow maturation process controlled by a tendency for immaturity and in-differentiation and which ultimately leads to a oxymoronic world view that is juvenile yet cynical, deified yet imperfect, Aristofanic yet earnest

on the background of its institutional monumentalism, as an artwork adopted to become a contemporary masterpiece/blockbuster, we cannot but again stumble upon a paradoxical controversy that confusingly merges the aesthetic taste of distinction and elitism with that of popular spectacle.

Let us simply describe what this looks like. As we have seen before, the Cremaster Cycle was stately created by Matthew Barney both for a broad, inclusive audience as well as for an elitist, restrictive artworld.²⁹⁷ In fact, a lot of contemporary art, following a practical path of the art-market demand is made with such intentions, which is to occupy both the dominated - avant-garde end and the dominating- high art one: Popular conceptualism, avant-garde techniques, sensational images, big analytical, academic theories to go with them. The Cremaster Cycle though being a cinematic opera, in five acts, moves a big step deeper into this trend from all directions. As a total-artwork it reaches far into the pot of all contemporary yet established artistic traditions, and uses them with a great skill as fragmented patches, forming various possible combinations that work together towards a wholesome epic cycle. And this is also the way it sabotages them as -not in an obvious way- following a pattern of entropic self -destruction. This is a hard characteristic to describe here yet it is perhaps connected somehow to a cynical position that may be evident in Barney's art, but one that is not as legible as in the way that we may read cynicism in Damien Hirst, Paul McCarthy, and Gilbert and George or in Peter Greenway's cinema, all of which perform through their art making an obvious act of cultural critique. But this cynicism comes for example when one is watching the Cremaster Cycle and

²⁹⁷ Practically, this means that Barney was able to devise a artistic project that was able to juggle a combination capable of rendering the work as a popular-blockbuster art, while at the same time retaining an Avant guard position within the artworld

wonders in numerous occasions if the narrative is to be taken seriously or if it is a joke.... And perhaps wondering only to come to a conclusion that it must be serious and that any joke or paradoxical whim that may be played out on the screen is a serious joke.

The potential of a serious joke is legible by the very form of the work. In the Cremaster Cycle we are presented with an array of fantastic creatures, palaces, horse riders and queens, magicians femmes fatal, and action heroes, real personas, masonic orders and mobs. Color is made to match and shapes follow particular patterns that enclose symbolic meaning and meaninglessness at the same time. On top of the visual narrative lay seductive musical and sound colors, with character leitmotifs and chaotic simultaneous layers. On the visual background, there is always a romanticized sense of geographical location and architecture, whether indoors or outdoors, with the light being very accurate in giving testimony of its particular location. The dramas staged within these fantastic worlds are ambiguously represented due to the lack of dialogue yet still obvious. One cannot miss them: ancestry, religious dogma including occult practices, the death penalty as societal catharsis, suicide, murder, achievement, order and hierarchy, passage into manhood as ordeal, hubris and nemesis, the woman as an orchestrator, attendant and mourner of life. Big issues indeed and the most important common characteristic they all demonstrate is that they belong to a primal category of factors that determine our psychosocial structures. Thus, it would not be implausible to deduct from such clues that the Cycle, despite its aesthetic fairy-tale queerness and psychological self spectacle, denotes a certain socio-political context. What does the artist intend in creating such fairy-

tales around deeply rooted issues within the North American political idiom? Is it a critique or a panegyric statement? As the cycle's hyperbolic maze of narrative and formal representations forces its way towards us, do we experience a neo-baroque totality of exterior and interior unity or the sweet seductive scent of a decomposing Baudleaurian substance underneath an aestheticized and pleaded surface?

3.2 Traditional Ambiguity

'It may well be the case that alongside the concept of the technical work of art, Wagner's works mark the introduction of the "will to style"(Stilwille).'²⁹⁸

Continuing on our attempt to understand the character of the Cremaster Cycle and considering its relationship to the techniques of aestheticism the argument moves into finding a deeper connection to a more specific art historical category, the '*style de decadence*', the end of the 19th century. We can start this explanation by bearing in mind that it is almost impossible to be objective and exact in approaching the artistic concept of Decadence, as it is a notion that can only be studied in subjective or else relative terms. Its meaning is obscure, multi-levelled, always adversative and still by being a fundamental concept, in both science and the humanities, it should be and actually is completely open to our interpretations. So the argument comes forth from the question of what *style de decadence* can be only in terms of its aesthetic characteristics. Yet, as degeneracy, decline and decay are only a

²⁹⁸ Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, (London: Verso, 1981), pg. 100

few of the words that may replace the word decadence in the study of both civilization and nature, it is certain that one cannot turn a blind eye to the philosophical, cultural, socio- political, psychoanalytical and scientific definitions, descriptions and relationships of decadence. By all means, it is this extended lot that becomes the medium that informs the decadent image, the representation or the abstracted ornamental *façade* of the *style de decadence*.

Matei Calinescu, in his book *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*²⁹⁹, attempts a holistic approach to the style³⁰⁰. Giving a detailed historical and philosophical overview of the notion, arching from the ancient appearance of the term -attributed to Plato³⁰¹- through its use in describing the Christian concept of 'Fall' and its apocalyptic route towards a dooms-day, Calinescu reaches the modern interpretation of the term via Renaissance and the avant-guard yet full of teleological premonitions, ideas of Leonardo da Vinci. A key position in this framing of Decadence as aesthetic concept is made by the scholar as he explains how the concept of modernity, defined as a definite progress, is internally connected with decadence as they share the same dynamic in terms of time. They both describe a mode of direction and movement from a past to a contemporary situation³⁰². So when in the 19th century the idea of modernity starts to become an object of criticism, decadence arises also in this critique as a

²⁹⁹ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987)

³⁰⁰ *ibid* pp. 151-155

³⁰¹ The greek word for decadence is παρακμή and its etymology describes a situation that comes instead of a prime.

³⁰² Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 155

phenomenon that seemed to be profoundly modern³⁰³.

It is commonly agreed among scholars of the field that it was Symbolism that nurtured the this artistic current into the middle 19th century even though its conceptual origins are traced within the philosophical explorations of extreme Romanticism.³⁰⁴ Yet, as the concept of Decadence existed within the philosophical and theological regimes since ancient times, one might its later significance as an artistic style of the 19th century had been more than just of aesthetic importance. Somehow it framed, cultural and political issues in an interestingly indirect or ambiguous and stirring manner. In this sense, as suggested by Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff & Matthew Potolsky, decadence disturbs the 'boundaries and borders' of cultural, political, sexual and aesthetic definition³⁰⁵. This process though does not come through as a loud and direct confrontation of thresholds, as perhaps in the case of Dadaist art, but much more as an undercurrent, veiled critique that was brought forth with sensational means, which violated the beholder's consciousness like radiation.

When artists begun to formulate the first characteristics of the decadent style, their initial maxims did not come down to specific visual or formal categories or innovations but were rather manifested as conceptual trends, initiated through and ultimately against the dominant aesthetic techniques or the 19th century, Neo-classicism, Romanticism and Realism. By 1834 the art historical term 'style de decadence' was born out of the anti-romantic polemic criticism of

³⁰³ *ibid*, pg. 156

³⁰⁴ John R. Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985)

³⁰⁵ Constable Liz, Dennis Denisoff & Matthew Potolsky, (eds) *On the aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pg. 11

neo- classicist Désiré Nisard. The style, which for Calinescu originates in romantic aesthetics, was defined by Nisard - in a piece showcasing the decadent historical period of late Roman Empire and its poetry³⁰⁶ - as 'an excessively meticulous kind of art in which the elemental totality of the artwork is lost in favor of its heavy parts'. Two years later, in an another critical polemic article against his old literary favorite, Victor Hugo, Nisard produced an even clearer definition of the 'style de decadence'. 'Elaborate use of description and imagination to the point of escaping reason and creating a deceptive and seductive kind of art'³⁰⁷.

John Reed, in his book *Decadent Style*, from 1985 describes the style of Decadence³⁰⁸ as a combination between fin de Siècle Aestheticism, Pre-Raphaelitism and Naturalism, as it used a certain aesthetic idealism to represent crude facts of life, from a perspective that had no evident social directive. In this sense, Reed renders the style as a 'self-conscious, artificial design' that even though was stemming from a similar point with Symbolism, it had a very different conceptual approach. Thus this combination of Aestheticism and Naturalism as opposed to the one of Aestheticism and Art for Art's Sake that produced Symbolism, gave birth to an anti-romantic art, an 'inner vacuum'. Precision painting and an intent to innovate, portrayed the affection for the corrupt, the closeness of vice to virtue and of beauty to ugliness. Thus Decadence is for Reed, the least Romantic in its intentions even though it acknowledges the spiritual desire but deems it as an

³⁰⁶ Désiré Nisard, *Etudes des Moeurs et de critique sur les poètes Latins de la Decadence*, 1834

³⁰⁷ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 157, 161

³⁰⁸ John Reed, *Decadent Style*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985)

impossible, unresolved condition. The central visual characteristic of decadent art is that it embodies narrative rather than abstraction, though the way in which this narrative is presented, comes through a fragmented composition of independent, and in most cases conflicting parts that may only be assessed by the individual viewer as a whole, after a thorough process of analysis and re-arrangement of their order.

There is another issue though that must be addressed with emphasis: in terms of its development as style, cultural history and significance, *La Decadence* referred not only to a certain type or types of creation but also one particular type of taste. One that followed from a lineage that was established through 18th century Libertine culture and 19th century Dandyism, both popular trends linked to cults of sexuality and identity. Though, in terms of its art historical significance, in 19th fin de siècle Europe, the style became one of the stages upon which many of the issues of transformation of forms and ideas that heralded modernism, were being enacted. It is from then and onwards, that the newly emancipated artist begun expressing a societal critique, and in decadence this goal was articulated through a commercially successful and self-conscious sensationalism for the conquering of an equally decadent art market.

Particularly, it was through Baudelaire's successful necrophiliac poetic imagination that such articulations approached their critical potential in the goal of attacking classical, valuable and respected forms.³⁰⁹ As of that time, decadent art begins to reflect on its characteristics not as distinctly formal traits

³⁰⁹ Theodor Adorno, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, argues that Baudelaire was the artist that 'first theoretically articulated' the modern Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London: Continuum, 2004), pg. 27

but rather as emancipatory conceptual techniques. Indeed, one easily understands that Baudelaire sits on a seriously critical crossroad between his agency as a professional artist/poet and his beliefs and ideals when he writes in 'Fleurs du Mal' verses like the following addressed to his reader, the cultured and bored bourgeois:

*There's one more damned than all. He never
gambols, Nor crawls, nor roars, but, from the
rest withdrawn, Gladly of this whole earth
would make a shambles
And swallow up existence with a yawn...*

*Boredom! He smokes his hookah, while he dreams
Of gibbets, weeping tears he cannot
smother. You know this dainty monster, too,
it seems — Hypocrite reader! — You! — My
twin! — My brother!*

Adorno, thus finds that the power of Baudelaire's work is to be found within the objectivity of its position that becomes one with the objectivity of the work of art as a commodity producing a critical yet self-destructive cynicism.³¹⁰

Translating this in Bourdieu's terms would be to say that the artist, being conscious of his position within the field of power that sustains him, understands his creation as an articulation and at the same time commodity of that field both in cultural and financial meaning. Accepting this fate and at the same time expressing its critique through the object that grants the artist with the power of his position within the field, makes for a genuinely self-reflexive attitude that ultimately sabotages ones positioning.

On the other hand Jennifer Birkett refers to this phenomenon as 'the selling of imaginary solutions to real problems'³¹¹³¹² and finds the decadent style as an elitist formulation of certain artists solely for conquering the art market that they seemingly despised, with something that was presented as new but kept an

³¹⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1970, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 27-28

³¹¹ Birkett, Jennifer, *The Sins of the Fathers : Decadence in France 1870-1914*, (London; New York: Quartet Books, 1986), pg. 93

undercover and close relationship to tradition. Either being the case, what is clearly expressed from either perspective, is that the decadent artist of the 19th century used the sensational effects of contradiction and confusing detail, both as conceptual and visual contents, in mirroring or perhaps echoing the vague art field environment of the period. Therefore, this 'Baudelairian modernism', understood as a way in which the decadent seeded the modern^{312 313}, is no other than an awareness of a vain negation and reaction towards an established order, whether aesthetic or social, that cannot be altered but must be challenged.

Taking from that initial point of self-consciousness and moving on to the next, the style achieved a fashionable eminence and high art market demand after the 1870s. It began being used by more and more artists that needed to decipher a wordless text, a cryptic allegory but it was used also without any content as an ornamental part of popular culture. Artists worked with symbolic subversion of traditional forms as in Wagner's operas, Baudelaire's sonnets and Gustave Moreau's academic painting or devised a novel and straightforward communication of their romantic irony as in Paul Bourget, Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. But particularly in the visual arts it was painters like Gustave Moreau, Jan Toorop, Gustave Klimt, Aubrey Beardsley, Felicien Rops and James Ensor that give us an idea of the unique and diverse visual vocabulary of the style. They borrowed, reinterpreted and evolved from earlier and dominant techniques of representation while remaining faithful in expressing the multiple inter-conflicted aesthetics of decadence. Favorite decadent subjects carried

³¹² Antoine Compagnon, *The Five Paradoxes of Modernity*, trans. Franklin Philip, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990)

always sensations such as ‘morbidly, a cult of artificiality, exoticism or sexual non-conformism’ as well as ‘the combination of sexuality, violence and esoteric thought’³¹³. Of course, such ideas and images were not something radically new in art yet it was the first time that such a subject matter, issues of the demimonde, developed a definite popular representation. Therefore, in seeing *la decadence* as a style that ‘poses serious social, political, and historical questions’³¹⁴ and in that sense, having had a cultural and artistic influence during the end of nineteenth century,³¹⁵ we cannot but understand as the core of decadent art and literature, this masqueraded critique it wanted to inflict upon the social and political realms, rather than on the aesthetic one. Though there is an important distinction to be made between a truly decadent style and the fashionable style de decadence, between Baudelaire and ‘Baudlerism’³¹⁶. From one side, we find the artwork which through decadent, transgressive characteristics poses an acute critique and on the other, we find the one that looks like a decadent work of art but it is nothing more rather than the imitation of the style. Though, interestingly even in this case of ‘fakeness’ the decadent artwork may remain adjacent to its ultimate and radical aesthetic manifestation. Let us think of the vacant conceptual space within it as a nihilistic metaphor for all artistic production. After all:

‘Decadent art is contained by nothing. Although it employs existing conventions, it usually negates at the same time, denying the normal grounds of interpretation and reception. Its subject matter often concerns a violation of codes. It utilizes systems or

³¹³ Constable Liz, Dennis Denisoff & Matthew Potolsky, (eds) *On the aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 2-3

³¹⁴ *ibid*, pg.1

³¹⁵ *ibid*, pg.2

³¹⁶ Barbara Spackman, “Recycling Baudelaire: The Decadence of Catulle Mendès (1841-1909)” in *The Decadent Reader* (New York: Zone, 1998), cited in Constable Liz, Dennis Denisoff & Matthew Potolsky, (eds) *On the aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pg 25

mythologies to oppose what is, without accepting those systems and mythologies. Decadence drives towards non-containment and disconnectedness through the paradoxical act of self – imposed restraint.³¹⁷

What Reed says here is that the decadent artist is not radical in inventing new forms but rather the opposite. Decadent art works like a stomach; having congested the aesthetic and cultural system and its valorized apotheosis as history or myth that has conditioned and commodified its potentials, it produces its heredity and somehow concludes it, by adding a last and well hidden characteristic; the insanity and excess inherent in all those powerful artistic traditions. One may also observe such a phenomenon within contemporary art as there exists a trend in art-making since the 1980s that performed this “digestive” technique of art production. Taking the avant-guard tradition and re-interpreting it as a self conscious spectacle of a new end of century. Artists like Gilbert and George, Chiho Aoshima, Matt Colishaw, Paul McCarthy, Orlan, Damien Hirst, Jane Alexander, Cindy Sherman, Chapman Brothers, Nobuyoshi Araki, Peter Greenaway, Louise Bourgeois, Cai Guo-Qiang, Jean Michel Basquiat, Ashley Bickerton, Forced Entertainment, Peter Vitkin, Chris Offili, Mauricio Catelan, Mike Kelley, Mariko Mori, Yinka Shonibare, Yasumasa Morimura, Jason Rhoades, Georgina Starr, Bill Viola, Chris Cunningham, can also be linked directly to the specific techniques and themes of ‘decadent’ art as established in the previous end of century.

Though our focus here is to argue over the decadent aspect of Matthew Barney’s Cremaster Cycle. So going back to this analytical process we may start by pointing out the fact that it is an artwork that primarily sabotages the genres and categories of contemporary art by being involved with all of them at the same time. Another point of connection to the decadent

³¹⁷ Reed, John R., *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985)

style comes in the immense and yet fragmented visual and conceptual references used as content and form, offering a chaotic potential for its reception. And if we look closer into those images and ideas we may understand the Cycle's eagerness in expressing a decadent kind of critique. As the narrative of the work focuses on issues concerning the male psyche of western modernity, one cannot but perceive these issues in their aesthetic representation as clearly problematic and thus the whole opus as critical in its thesis.

Convinced to the opposite of this case is Keith B. Wagner who argues that the work is devoid of a critical perspective vis-a-vis its subjects. He perceives its decadent aesthetics, through a strictly Marxist view, as referencing the fetishistic character of contemporary art and its ties to the neo-liberal capitalist market. Though, the Marxist film critic, goes into questioning the possibility of irony, that the sumptuous and clearly decadent aesthetics of the films may be expressing. Focusing on *Cremaster 3*, Wagner argues, that the movie establishes a form of visual communication 'based on relations between objects 'oozing and visceral sculptures, lush and extravagantly detailed interiors and major architectural sites themselves and the male body in its various guises and morphed forms'.³¹⁸ Placing such elements in the category of 'fetish',³¹⁹ he sees 'decadence',³²⁰ as corporatism, embodied by the architecture of the Chrysler building, a space that exists both in and outside the film as an ambiguous symbol of corporate capitalism. Using the Marxist

³¹⁸ Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster*', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 35

³¹⁹ *ibid*, pp. 37-40

³²⁰ Decadence, is used in this analysis through David Weir's understanding of this complex and ambiguous term as signifying both an 'excess' and a 'discipline' a Dionysian and at the same time anti-Dionysian principle. David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, (Amhurst: Massachusetts University Press, 1996), pg. 2 quoted in Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster*', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 38

definition of the 'fetish' or 'commodity' as a perceptible and imperceptible object at the same time, Wagner explains that this work clearly exemplifies this vague agency, as the movie and its various artistic objects can be seen as both the creation of a 'perceptible' artistic output and the 'imperceptible human commodity' of the artist. And that is a fetish that secures a significant 'use value' within the art field, precious to both 'elite and bourgeois' taste and senses of artistic value. Given that this type of 'use value' is an ambiguous notion itself that makes cultural criticism a hard task due to the social and economic complexities inherent in grand artistic projects, Wagner points to the more 'transparent' link of the object's 'exchange value' as regarded through its relationship to the New York art world. Basically he argues over a non self-reflexive awareness of the commodity character of the artwork.

His argument goes as such: The skyscraper is seen as a 'consumable artifact' and the general set design and specific location as a 'symbol of un-theorized auteurist energy' attuned with the 90s trend for American film productions to be apolitical yet visually provocative. So in refraining from a claim that the *Cremaster 3* is a 'decadent' and critical art film in terms of its social significance, Wagner proposes that we may take the opportunity to 'conceptualize' the characteristics of this 'uncommitted space on celluloid'. He suggests therefore, to look at this work, as it takes us through all its decadent themes and images, as a sign and consequence of the reality in 'consuming American culture', as nurtured and evolved through the capitalist ideal of the individual agent as laborer and consumer. As this process was aesthetically expressed in modernism, especially in its architectural sense, the Chrysler

Building and the city of New York cannot do other than stand in the film as symbols of capitalism and of its aesthetic decadence.³²¹ Though, in its post-modern definition, such symbols are devoid of any grand narratives, and that is for Wagner a sign of the times, epitomized by Barney's work and characterized by an 'uncompromised ambiguity' and of dry 'market initiatives'.³²²

Even though the Marxist Film critic refuses to attribute to the Cremaster Cycle's agency a critical awareness of its commodified positioning with the art field his analysis is helpful towards our specific argument here in how he connects post-modern art to decadence by understanding it as the decadence of modernism. John Reed in *Decadent Style*, who argues that the decadent style shared many similar characteristics with Mannerism as what preceded baroque, gives a parallel idea. Rather variable in terms of its formal characteristics. Mannerism embodied the tendency to create a post-renaissance style and it is exactly within this agency that such artistic innovations could be observed as a reoccurring pattern within the Western artistic tradition³²³. For Reed, in particular, both Decadence and Mannerism shared a tendency towards excess, while at the same time both seemed to be aestheticizing certain unresolved situations³²⁴. Philip Julian, underlines this relationship in *Dreamers of Decadence*, by presenting certain formal common characteristics. In his book he compares Symbolist art – and amongst it Decadent art- to Italian 16th century Mannerism. The

³²¹ Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's Cremaster', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 41

³²² *ibid*, pg. 42

³²³ Sypher, Wylie, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style* (Garden City; New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1955) pp. 106-107

³²⁴ Reed, John R., *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), pg. 222

elongation and artificiality of figures, as arabesque, a tendency towards perverted psychological states of characters, an insistence in the depiction of monsters and androgynous figures are elements that are to be found in both eras.³²⁵ Bobbio Norberto also speaks of the connection between Mannerism and Decadentism by arguing that they both indicated an affected cultural condition. In the first, the problems were hidden behind vacuous aesthetic formulas that come forth as the most artificial and perhaps cynical forms. The latter, manifested the crisis as a statement of bliss whether coming from an aspiring pompousness or a death drive of hopelessness.³²⁶

From the other hand, thinking of 19th century decadence as visual style, it would be also important to observe the stylistic heritage it left to the modernist avant-guards -particularly for Dadaism and Surrealism - and perhaps acknowledge that it did not cease to exist through the times of mature modernism until today.³²⁷ It remains both as decadent technique and as theme ,while at the same time it is also being formatted by what we call the *aesthetics of difference*: the post-Kantian perspective that follows from Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger, in order to touch on how one finds aesthetic pleasure in experiences that are as disquieting and transgressive³²⁸ as the themes and images of decadence.³²⁹

³²⁵ Julian, Philippe, *Dreamers of Decadence: Symbolist Painters of the 1890s* (London: Phaidon, 1971), pp. 217-218

³²⁶ Bobbio Norberto, *The Philosophy of Decadentism: A study in Existentialism* (Oxford: B.Blackwell, 1948)

³²⁷ A few of the artists that can be related to Barney's art and who share decadent style characteristics are the Viennese Actionists Herman Nitzsch and Otto Muhl, Carolee Schneemann, Yayoi Kusama, Genessis P-Orridge, Jack Smith, Luchino Visconti, Peter Greenaway, Alexander Jodorowsky, Keneth Anger.

³²⁸ For John Reed Decadence can be described as an artistic style with both formal and thematic or narrative characteristics that generally suggest cultural decay. For example he speaks of issues such as sexual irregularity, sadomasochism, diabolism, occultism, exoticism, decorative and artificial designs as embodiments of meaning or an exhausting fixation on detail that is there to create a fragmentation that would ideally promote an intellectuality of the unresolved kind, ending only in the negation of the idea. John R. Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985)

³²⁹ Perniola, Mario, *Art and its Shadow*, trans. Massimo Verdicchio (New York; London: Continuum, 2004)

Particularly in relation to Matthew Barney's aesthetic genre, Michel Onfray presents also an argument over its mannerist character, placing it within the post-modern genre of 'Conceptism', the mainstream contemporary art genre during the 90s. Mannerism, he says, is perhaps an ancestor of conceptual art and moreover, an art historical category in which the Cremaster Cycle can be placed in order for one to gain a good analytical perspective:

'Those artists between the Renaissance and the Baroque are typified by a cerebral dandyism taken to the limit, an immoderate use of complex metaphors, a deliberate will to dress up the real in a panoply of rhetorical figures, a concern for the marvelous and the esoteric, a language stylized and refined to the point of excess, a radical subjectivism despite a smooth integration into the social realities of the moment.'³³⁰

Indeed such a thesis looks very likely when we look at the imagery that we are presented with in the Cycle.

When Barney creates his early 'masterpiece' in a post-Warholian time, and when one can really grasp the essence and logic of 'artistic production', as obliged to respond to the expansion of its market demands, the style of decadence finds itself reinforced with a new kind of dynamic. This force maybe carried through as an impudent temperament of double irony. As the artwork presents itself in such a forceful manner within the resilient systemic field of contemporary art market, perhaps what is reactionary by principle within it - as opposed to reaction itself- becomes cynical towards its own content, rendering it either comic or ideologically vacant, though effectively joining in the game of irony. Thus, if we want to look at Decadence from the 90s and onwards, we experience its comeback most probably, as a fundamentally visual style, a kind of sexualized, narcissistic death chic that finds close ties with the inner drives of the style as a whole.³³¹ At the same

³³⁰ Michel Onfray, 'Mannerist Variations on Matthew Barney', Parkett, No. 45, 1995, pg. 50

³³¹ Charles Bernheimer in his book *Decadent Subjects* studies Nietzsche, Flaubert, Wilde, Moreau, Beardsley, Lombroso and Freud and argues that the style, its concepts and ornamental elements

time, it is this visually transgressive, yet ironic model which seems to enjoy a firm patronage and consecration of the high art establishment, both in commercial galleries and in contemporary art museums. And this double irony is not easy to detect as there is always a firm layer of meaning standing in the way. A caption made out of conceptual pretexts as provided by contemporary art theory. Yet, what becomes rather clear with the Cremaster Cycle as an important representative of this contemporary art production is how it invests its artistic value on underground and transgressive images for which there exists intense art-world demand.³³²

One way to look at the Cremaster Cycle as an artwork that is rooted into decadent aesthetics is to recognize the peculiar and contradictory companionships it portrays, that highlight its decadent character. Combining the old decadent sensibility with a contemporary sense of decadence we may look at certain examples that stand out among other more subtle ones. As rotten flesh is contrasted to immaculate, crisp garments, flags of national and somewhat nationalistic character are waved against big multinational corporate logos and 'manly' tools are used within a conceptual frame of butt-plugged masculinity, the messages come somewhat convoluted. Parody but also cultural uncanny, is Barney's way of using aestheticism towards a symbolic meaning.

For example the issue of the body and its garments retains an interesting

originate from primarily an intense psychological death instinct. Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature Philosophy and Culture of the Fin de Siecle in Europe*, (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002)

³³² For example journalist Carol Vogel notes in an article from 1997, that an artwork 'in the form of a body part or an alien creature or even a pig' would be a much sought of acquisition of the spring auction sale of contemporary art by Sotheby's. And thus such a taste has established a market for artists like Matthew Barney, Kiki Smith, Robert Gober, and Rachel Whiteread. Carol Vogel 'Grabbing life and limb at the Contemporary Art Auction', *The New York Times*, Wednesday, May 7, 1997, p. 8

contrast in many scenes of the work. While the former ones are presented as dirty and discolored- even baring signs of skin disease - the latter are impeccable and almost unworn. In Cremaster 4, in particular, the fairies and the satyr share this attribute and it is their hands especially, with dirty fingernails and rough skin that contrasts the white dandy suit and the colorful crinolines. Though we find it again in Cremaster 2 with Gilmore's character and in Cremaster 3 with the Entered Apprentice's hands. In this film all other characters wear white spotless gloves, exactly like the ones used for handling artworks, making also a big metaphor for the artworld or artistic field. The viewer of the Cremaster Cycle is bombarded with different kind of flags and banners of conceptual symbols as well as of existing brands. Cremaster 1 is of course dominated by the Goodyear brand, both as a logo presence as well as of its famous product being the two Goodyear air blimps that create the mise en scene of the movie. In Cremaster 2 we see again the Goodyear logo in a particularly morbid scene, as its banner figures predominantly on the background of the murder scene of Max Jensen, ironically wishing him or us a 'Goodyear'. The cigarette brand Marlboro also figures in the Sinclair gas station as well as the snow-mobile brand POLARIS takes great part in the final act of the movie, that stages the Columbian Exhibition and Houdini's metamorphosis. In this scene we also see many and quite peculiar flags. There is the American, the Australian, the Canadian and the seven flags of the Lost Tribes of Israel, an emblematic representation of the Mormon faith. In Cremaster 3 the flags that appear are not real ones but they are still flags and stand for the five episodes of the Cycle, bearing the insignia of each. Though this episode is dominated by the Chrysler brand. In Cremaster 4, an

omnipotent presence of the Manx Triskelion, the local emblem of the Isle of Man as well as Goodyear branding for tires and shoes. And so we may rightfully ask are these meaningful or just ornamental figures for the conceptual narrative?

As we have already seen, a very confident attempt to decode the artwork's symbolic riddle comes from Keith B. Wagner³³³ who attempted to deduce the logic and symbolic language of neoliberalism out of the visual narratives and by doing that, to point at the artist and his work, *Cremaster 3* in particular, as a clear case or 'yardstick' of the ties between contemporary cultural production and the ideology of the neoliberal market. In his introduction to the subject, he stated how ambiguous it seems that this work intended to be 'apolitical' yet at the same time experimental, and thus in demand of an edgy politicized perspective it introduced its own interpretation of 'body politics' as a radical position. This was an aesthetic compound that operated as an impressive, extravagant surface, which is deemed by Wagner as symptomatic of a conscious promotional effort, on behalf of Matthew Barney who despite his radicalism is committed to the marketing ideals of neoliberal markets. Thus elements such as the contrasted body-garment relationships or the use of flags, banners and brands could be understood as such gimmicks of ironic politics that confront the viewer with an air of avant-guard, aesthetic politicization.

As an explanation of this process Wagner goes on to draw a parallel mode of practice between the *Cremaster Cycle* and the cultural terrain that he broadly calls 'Hollywood'. This field, he argues, is able to enact superficial critiques

³³³ Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster*', *Film International*, issue 33, pp. 34-42

of the capitalist system - giving the example of Oliver Stone's Wall Street- while at the same time it disseminates the same neoliberal values it seemingly attacks. Likewise to the appearance of the Chrysler Building as a dark but celebrated cathedral of corporate capitalism in Cremaster 3, makes Wagner weary of the same intentions. Of course, with art of such kind one can never be sure.... Yet, by finding capitalist fetishism and decadence in Barney's films, Wagner draws the hypothesis that their visual narratives must be originating from a specific socio-economic reality and thus wonders why were such obvious signs explained and read in mainstream art criticism as purely aesthetic and visual narratives. Indeed such context or reading of the Cremaster Cycle was an area largely and gracefully avoided by all main intellectual collaborators of the project, namely Nancy Spector of the Guggenheim museum and curator Neville Wakefield. But what is even more interesting is that such analyses were also avoided by mainstream media art critics such as Michael Kimmelman and Roberta Smith of the New York Times or Jerry Saltz of the Village Voice all of which followed a close track of the artists and his work. In this line of thinking there is an enigma he explains, about the work's character and the artist's intentions. Adorned and empty surface or layered meaning? A message to the world or the artist's self commodification?³³⁴

Another author, Henry Jenkins, writes about how Barney 'appropriates and synthesizes'³³⁵ elements of popular culture, particularly the ones belonging to the horror genre, in a technique that pushes them to another level of

³³⁴ Keith B. Wagner, 'The Neo-Liberal Auteur: Commodity fetishism and decadence in the mise-en-scene of Matthew Barney's Cremaster', *Film International*, issue 33, pg. 38

³³⁵ Henry Jenkins, 'Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre', in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, (New York & London: New York University Press, 2007), pg. 43

audience engagement. This comes, he says, into effect in a twofold relationship: from one side, the artist adopts the tendency of the American avant-guard horror cinema, to encourage the viewer's fondness of the 'monstrous', while creating a kind of repulsiveness for the 'normal' characters, that are seen as embodying a more actual threat. As for example, in the beginning of *Cremaster 3*, where we see the female zombie-Garry Gilmore character played by Nesrin Karanouh³³⁶. It digs its way out of a grave, tries to stand up but falls down on the soil again due to weakness. Shivering and powerless the abject body is being carried away by a group of beautiful white, blond boys in black school uniforms and pristine white gloves to a second more definite death. Its body is wet and unstable thus dripping its parts while being carried away and into the Chrysler Building lobby. A boy fetches the pieces and puts them in a black bag. The zombie is taken and placed into an old Chrysler Imperial New Yorker from the 1930s, her hands tied in one of the sides of the car. The car's seats are covered in clear plastic. There is another passenger in the vehicle; a black eagle and they are then squashed together by five Chryslers 1967. Thus the execution of the Gilmore character is re-performed in a very long ongoing and violent car demolition derby. What is the aesthetic or even conceptual purpose of this sequence, of children handling zombie corpses inside the Chrysler Building? Or the idea of such an execution method? What kind of subject is treated with such aesthetic representations? How can we decipher meaning?

'While creating a completely different effect to that of an actual scare, this pattern is most probably introducing a critique of 'institutions', like the family or the state, as systems that

³³⁶ The exhibition catalogue shows certain images of this woman most probably suffering from anorexia nervosa. Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002, pp. 262-263

seek to regulate sexuality and eradicate difference.³³⁷ This tendency is a very important one in terms of the history of the genre, as in its early origins, traced in late Romanticism, the monster was a character upon which the artists would manifest 'metaphors for their own uneasy relationship with bourgeois society'³³⁸ and the de-humanizing effects of the industrial revolution. In the most popular examples of this attitude, Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stoker's *Dracula*, it is obvious how the villain-monstrous characters are seen to be the most 'innocent' ones, as opposed to the hubristic tendencies of the 'human' characters in the stories. Thus following this sub textual pattern of its progeny, contemporary horror cinema evolved as a genre that demanded from its audience a capacity for 'reading' the film rather than just passively watching it.³³⁹ So the author argues that the main objective of most popular American artists within the genre, like Cronenberg, Lynch, Barker, Yuzna and Burns is to effectively breakdown common perspectives on the human existence, sensuality and imagination. So he sees, Barney sharing with these filmmakers an interest 'in reconfiguring core cultural myths from an alien or mutant perspective' that claims its legibility by establishing a sympathy for perverse and mutant entities³⁴⁰ through which, perversity is normalized rather than presented as a

³³⁷ Henry Jenkins, 'Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre', in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, (New York & London: New York University Press, 2007), pg. 45

³³⁸ *ibid*, pg. 46

³³⁹ *ibid*, pg. 47

³⁴⁰ Robert Smithson writes:

'Some artists see an infinite number of movies. Hutchinson, for instance, instead of going to the country to study nature, will go to see a movie on 42nd Street, like "Horror at Party Beach" two or three times and contemplate it for weeks on end. The movies give a ritual pattern to the lives of many artists, and this induces a kind of "low-budget" mysticism, which keeps them in a perpetual trance. The "blood and guts" of horror movies provides for their "organic needs." Serious movies are too heavy on "values," and so are dismissed by the more perceptive artists. Such artists have X-ray eyes, and can see through all of that cloddish substance that passes for "the deep and profound" these days.' Robert Smithson, 'Unpublished Writings' in Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam, (ed.), (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996) or see http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/entropy_and.htm

contrasted otherness. Though, the key question for this author is why does Barney choose to make art and not horror films to explore such fascinations? His answer is that the American artist wants to make use of the capacity for abstraction that the genre of contemporary art allows him for. Within this field he is able to make movies and create characters and narratives that completely escape any norm, creating ambivalent multilayered symbolic regimes that provide for an interplay between the abstract of contemporary art and the subtextual of the horror genre.³⁴¹

Another example of this 'evolutionary' function of aesthetic horror in Barney's oeuvre, comes in observing the 'controlled' behavior of the characters and their bodies as opposed to other 'images of bodily excess'³⁴²³⁴³ where things tend to go out of control. Jenkins, describes three instances from *Cremaster 2* in which this attitude is very evident. One, in the scene of Garry Gilmore's execution, filmed as a bull rodeo, second the one in which Gilmore's parents are having sex and third the one where Gilmore commits the murder. The author suggests that in all these sequences, a situation that would normally be a moment of uncontrolled action is presented as a highly restrained one, affecting the viewer's reactions to what he is looking at. When in the horror cinema genre, the audience is, in a way, assisted towards an excited emotional state, Barney creates an atmosphere in which one is not guided towards a particular emotion. Through a very slow cinematic pace, off key colors and the demise of surprise, he creates a

³⁴¹ Henry Jenkins, *Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre*, in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, (New York & London: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 52-53

³⁴² *ibid*, pg. 53

disinterested spectator of grotesque, violent, sexual and disgusting images.³⁴³

Thus for Jenkins, Barney's attitude towards the concept of horror, attempts a step further from its previous vantage. This, being a point of contrast between the norm and the freakish, that created the tension and horror sensation in most artists of the genre, is being surpassed in the Cremaster series. Barney does not give us any such polarity rather than the sense that everything has rightfully passed on the 'other' side where the monster is in a way the way to perceive the norm. Jenkins, concludes this artist comes closer to a tradition of science fiction writing rather than the horror cinema genre, from which it borrows lots of visual techniques and special effects. Conceptually, he finds the Cremaster Cycle much more inclined towards the post-human universes of Cordwainer Smith's sci-fi stories from the 50s, in which a self made mythology was introduced through a revisionist perspective of a mankind already in the post-human state. The same exact point is underlined by Simon O' Sullivan in regards the to Cremaster Cycle:

'Indeed, we might say that the films are addressed less to an already existing audience, who is familiar with an already existing narrative, but to a future audience, a people-yet-to- come, who as such require specifically new narratives, specifically contemporary myths.'³⁴⁴

In this sense, he ascribes both Smith and Barney as artists whose audience had to make serious efforts for deciphering meaning as their main subject, the post-human hybrid, is yet to come.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ *ibid*, pp. 53-54

³⁴⁴ Simon O' Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guatari: Thought beyond representation*, (Hampshire & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pg. 150

³⁴⁵ Henry Jenkins, 'Monstrous Beauty and Mutant Aesthetics: Rethinking Matthew Barney's Relationship to the Horror Genre', in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, (New York & London: New York University Press, 2007), pg. 56

3.3 A Decadent Point: the Freemasons in the Cremaster Cycle and the System of Corporate Patronage

*To state things briefly, Masonry offers us, in dramatic form and by means of dramatic ceremonial a philosophy of the spiritual life of man and a diagram of the process of regeneration.*³⁴⁶

There is something very fringe about placing Freemasonry within a frame of contemporary art, even if the work is not a typical case of the genre. Though, considering the subject as one of the many popular culture themes that are used by Barney for his narratives, this reference becomes rather suited to the whole. Seeing the Cremaster Cycle as an American artwork though, and understanding the United States of America as a country that cultivated a profound relationship between its societal cultural idiom and the Masonic traditions, the use of the Order by Barney as a neo-mythological structure of patriarchal rule makes perfect sense.³⁴⁷

We can understand how close the Order was to the political ideal of the United States by noting that George Washington was evidently the first elected American Grand Master Mason. In the following quote we can read about the identification of American Freemasons with their national identity and the celebration of their lineage and power within the state:

'The most forceful demonstration of Masonic prosperity and patriotism came with the erection of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial. Beginning in 1910, members of Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 in Alexandria Virginia, established an association to create a memorial for the memory of their first elected Master and to safely care for the Washington memorabilia in their possession. Through the association and under the leadership of Joseph W. Eggleston, grand Master of Virginia, and later Louis A. Watres, a Past Grand Master of Pennsylvania, every recognized grand lodge in the country was solicited for funds. So successful were these efforts that by 1922 ground was broken for a building on Alexandria's Shooters Hill. In 1923, Watres

³⁴⁶ W. L. Wilsnhurst, *The Meaning of Masonry*, (ebook: NuVision Publications, 2004), or. p. 1927, pg. 18

³⁴⁷ Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: three Centuries of Building Communities*, (Lexington Mass & London: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 173-174

proclaimed: *The two and a half million Masons in the United States, prompted by a deep reverence for his memory and a undying love of country, as well as by enduring ties of brotherhood, are erecting this monument to Washington as Mason. Were our memorial to him as enduring as the pyramids, it could not exceed the esteem in which we hold him in our hearts as one whose name has glorified our land for all time.*

On November 1, 1923, President Calvin Coolidge laid the cornerstone with the aid of the same trowel that President George Washington had used to lay the cornerstone of the U.S Capitol in 1873. The trowel was then passed to every U.S Grand Master present to symbolize the cement of brotherhood among all people. Despite the onset of the Great Depression, the 8\$ million construction project continued until the work was completed. On May 12, 1932, President Herbert Hoover, although not a Mason himself, dedicated the memorial before a gathering of several thousand Freemasons.³⁴⁸

Masonry was one of the societal institutions that helped form a multitude of colonial immigrants, into the American nation, cultivating a tradition of 'brotherhood', lending a mythological narrative and a kind of ritual that could bring together in reverence people from different religions. The Order, enhancing a multicultural sense of belonging and a metaphysical heredity of 'men of a higher order' transplanted through its membership connecting tissues that ranged from a sense of individual morality and achievement to broader societal and professional goals.³⁴⁹ By the end of 19th century it was represented in 300 regional groups within North America, counted six million members and granted 'about 1,000 degrees on 200,000 novitiates annually'³⁵⁰ making Barney's staged initiation rites, an interesting take upon a real social phenomenon.³⁵¹ So one of the things that are certain about the

³⁴⁸ Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: three Centuries of Building Communities*, (Lexington Mass & London: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 174

³⁴⁹ 'By the late 1920s, lodge membership virtually was a prerequisite for a middle management position for some employers. Success in reciting the ritual was perceived as a sign of intelligence, poise and dedication. Serving as a Master of a lodge gave men valuable managerial experience. Employees within a corporation formed initiation degree teams that traveled to various lodges to initiate their fellow employees into the fraternity. This allowed men who worked together but lived in different suburbs to spend the evening together as co-workers and brothers. Sharing the Masonic experience developed teamwork among executives and greater loyalty to both the corporation and the craft.' in Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: three Centuries of Building Communities*, (Lexington Mass & London: New York University Press, 2005), pg. 167. Also see Bruno Bertuccioli, *The Level Club: A New York Story of the Twenties: Splendor, Decadence and Resurgence of a Monument to Human Ambition*, (Owings Mills, MD: Watermark Press, 1991) and also Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, pg. 225

³⁵⁰ A. C. Stevens, *The Cyclopaedia of Fraternities*, (1907) quoted in Jeanne Halgren Kilde, 'The Spectacle of Freemasonry', *American Quarterly* 50.2 (1998), pp. 377-378

³⁵¹ 'By 1930, Freemasonry reached a new level when its 3.3 million members equaled 12 percent of the native white adult male population.' Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: three Centuries of Building Communities*, (Lexington Mass & London: New York University Press, 2005), pg. 168, see Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, pg. 225

cultural effects of the Order was that it implanted the ideals and rites of 'fraternity' deeply into the societal structures of the U.S since its birth and constitution.

From there, we can perhaps deduct that in using the Order as a character in his films *Barney*, was very aware, and thus interested and eager to comment on this cultural-historical issue. At the same time, it seems as if most critics have evaded commenting on such an obvious sociopolitical relationship. Not that the reference was not included within reviews but even though the issue shouted for a direct connection to the reality from which the narrative was designed, the Order was seen as a purely metaphorical narrative element. For example, philosopher Arthur Danto, gives an account on the issue in his review of the whole *Cycle*, and touches on the topic of Freemasonry in a reference to the 'Guggenheim Museum'. He finds, the treatment of the architectural site, a New York trademark, presented as the Temple of Solomon as a 'genuine piece of wit'³⁵² and informs his reader that he is a special connoisseur on the subject of Freemasonry through his male progeny- both father and grandfather – were 'dedicated Masons', coloring his childhood with a Masonic hue. Thus we may assume that Danto's knowledge of the Order exceeds the boundaries of a common opinion. Though, despite this familiarity with all the objects and rites of the Order, it was not possible for him to follow the family tradition in such beliefs and practices that he personally deemed as occult. Nevertheless, due to his extensive knowledge on the subject he embarks towards an explanation of the Masonic action in *Barney's* film. In fact, what he actually does is nothing

³⁵² Arthur C. Danto, 'Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle*', in *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 239

more than to re-produce the 'masonic' narrative myths, as included in the exhibition catalogue, and to try to sketch out an artworld mythic metaphor. Thus he places the direct reference of the Order into either a fairy-tale scheme, whose reality dissolves into the occult, or into an allegoric representation, as for example in the case of the importance of Petroleum jelly in Barney's work seen in relation to the Masonic theme:

'Its cultural meaning is that of a lubricant, which can perhaps relate to the two phallic columns erected by Hiram Abiff in the courtyard of the Temple.'³⁵³

From a rather opposite perspective Lynn Brunet, an art historian and critic that specializes in the connection of art to occult practices, tried to investigate such references by deploying a 'forensic' style of research. And that was put forth as a clear negation of all incorporated and critical explanations given to this material. She was one of the few authors³⁵⁴ who tried to give a more pragmatic interpretation on the extensive use of Masonic symbolism and lore in Barney's work. What she basically argues is that to the extent in which the artist used such strong references about this subject they can do no other than strongly indicate that the Cremaster Cycle can be perceived only as:

'a strong and convoluted struggle with a profound sense of trauma, even an aesthetically expressed accusation of a serious crime, enacted on a large scale, which can tell us something about systems of control in the contemporary Western World.'³⁵⁵

In her argument, she indicates the various masonic references within the entire series, from those that are most evident, to those that seem to be quite far fetched at least for a non specialist on the subject. In Cremaster 3, apart

³⁵³ Ibid , pg. 241

³⁵⁴ Another text on this issue is by Monika Keska and David Martin Lopez, 'La Simbología Masonica en Cremaster 3 de Matthew Barney', *Anales de Historia del Arte*, No 19, 2009, pp. 289-304. This text as it was written in Spanish was not possible for me to reference here but its content is a detailed semiological analysis of the Masonic references in the C3.

³⁵⁵ Lynn Brunet, 'Homage to Freemasonry or Indictment? The Cremaster Cycle', *PAJ* 91, 2009, pg. 98

from the whole relevant narrative, one has to keep in mind for example that Walter Chrysler's masonic identity is a basic reference that led the Cremaster Cycle in placing such narrative within the Chrysler building. Also that photographer Harold Edgerton's, image *Coronet* - another well known American Freemason- featuring the formation of liquid as a drop of milk falls on a surface, appears in the form of the mutant penis of the Entered Apprentice. The relevant scene is the one in which the protagonist is taken by a group of Freemasons in a dentist surgery where a strange torture ritual takes place resulting in the metamorphosis of the Entered Apprentice into a Celtic warrior in a pink kilt. It begins in the Saratoga racetrack where the candidate's teeth are violently damaged by a few hit men, as a punishment for cheating in the initiation process. After taken into the dentist surgery he is tied onto the chair, legs open as if he was in a gynecologist's chair. Serra, as Hiram Abiff, comes in the room and puts into Barney's toothless mouth a formless metallic mouth piece which actually consists of the hyper crushed remains of the Chrysler New Yorker and its passengers, Gilmore's zombie corps and an eagle. During this process the Apprentice swallows his teeth and this for Brunet translates into swallowing his rage. The digested teeth come out of his anus as a pinkish smooth slimy liquid together with the anus intestine itself. The teeth and the slime dissolve and merge into forming a smooth off white phallic object. Brunet translates this as a 'socialization scene'.³⁵⁶

Houdini, a main character in two of the films (Cremaster 2 and Cremaster 5), and referred to often by Barney as his alter ego, was according to Brunet also

³⁵⁶ Lynn Brunet, 'Homage to Freemasonry or Indictment? The Cremaster Cycle', PAJ 91, 2009, pg. 109

a famous Freemason and in both of those films the references to Mormonism and the Hungarian State Opera allude to clearly Masonic contexts. Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism was a prominent figure of the Order in the United States of America and thus incorporated many of its features in the Mormon practice and dogma. The opera house of Budapest staged numerous productions of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, the most famous musical piece of masonic influenced art. The author points out also that the choice of Jacobin pigeons in Cremaster 5 point directly to the connection of masonic initiates to the French Revolution, particularly the extreme Parisian fraction of Jacobins and their leader Francois Joseph Westerman. Then she also goes into more cryptic and hypothetical revelations such as in Cremaster 4 where the tire with testicles is seen by the author as symbolic of 'a man of Tyre', Hiram Abiff that is, and his Phoenician ethnic background. The Isle of Man is also seen as closely related to the practice of Freemasonry through two Lodges, the Masonic Lodge and the Independent Order of Oddfellows and the three fairies come to symbolize the three principles of this Manx order, Faith, Hope and Charity.³⁵⁷ Such references cannot be of course bypassed as random or purely aesthetic even though the extent to which they are used as ornamental devices seems to underline an aesthetic infatuation on behalf of Matthew Barney, in creating a Masonic 'look total'.³⁵⁸

Thus such objects, procedures and vocabulary can be understood as decadent

³⁵⁷ *ibid*, pg. 99

³⁵⁸ Brunet believes that the artist was able to get inspiration and source many of the ideas that figure in the Cycle, from a Masonic Institution in New York, situated nearby the Guggenheim Museum, called the Frick Collection. It is a private museum hosted in the house of one of the protagonists of industrialization in the United States, Henry Clay Frick, who was obviously a Freemason himself. Lynn Brunet, 'Homage to Freemasonry or Indictment? The Cremaster Cycle', PAJ 91, 2009, pg. 101

aesthetics in the way they are scattered across an ambiguous visual domain of the occult, the fraternal and the psychosexual. Though the main narrative upon which the whole cycle develops upon, leaves not much doubt that Barney's obsession with the order is not purely aesthetic.

Brunnet argues, that these references appear in the series according to the order the films were produced, and that there exists a temporal escalation of revelations around the subject of Freemasonry, ranging from adulation, critique most vividly portrayed in the last of the series, *Cremaster 3*. Therefore, she suggests that this aspect brings up the issue of 'regular' and 'irregular' practice of the initiation rituals performed in the Order, an issue that has been long a problem and long debate among scholars and Freemasons themselves. In Barney's representations of Masonic rituals and symbolism (especially in the last three episodes) the focus is rather on the second 'spurious' forms of practice that connected the Order to occult and pagan practices, diverting its purposes as a moral fraternity of free men.

'Clearly Barney researches meticulously in order to include so many references of Freemasonry, but is he simply discussing the theme of Freemasonry and its misuse as an informed observer, or is he in fact undergoing a deeply cathartic process, one that not only plumbs the depths of his individual psyche but also the collectively repressed experience of those who have been subjected to the "irregular" or cultic practices associated with this institution?'³⁵⁹

In view of such context there is a story about one of Barney's favorite and most influential films told by Richard Flood³⁶⁰ and through which we may understand the kind of motives that drove Barney's narrative and cinematography, concepts and aesthetics towards these grotesque shores. The movie is Brian Yuzna's *Society* from 1989, a cult horror film. The plot

³⁵⁹ *ibid*, pg. 106

³⁶⁰ Richard Flood, 'Notes on Digestion and Film', in Matthew Barney. *Pace Car for the Hubris Pill*, (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen / Bordeaux: capc Musee d'art Contemporain / Bern: Kunsthalle, 1995), pg. 30

evolves around a young man who finds himself to be a victim of a conspiracy theory, orchestrated by a circle of rich Los Angeles families who constitute 'Society'. A cult of social belonging in which his whole family is a member (but he is not because he is adopted and thus not good enough). Once the young man is informed about this secret, by a friend that researched on the issue and who is in effect murdered by the 'society' for 'knowing too much', he begins to realize certain abnormalities in his environment, only to erupt in a paranoid delusion and be sent to a psychiatrist who is actually one of the principle members of the 'society'. The movie reaches its peak with the scene in which the 'society' gathers at the family's house to ceremonially celebrate the protagonist's sister 'coming out' (or going in perhaps) with an orgy that turns into a merging of flesh into a moving, breathing slimy mass. This is where we see the famous scene of the son reaching into his father's arse and pulling back through it his head, creating an Oedipal 'butthead'³⁶¹. The movie ends with the protagonist managing to escape the 'dirty orgy' together with his latino girlfriend, another reactionary of the 'society'.

Similarly, in *Cremaster 3*, the Order is understood to be an 'un-squared' and 'untruthful tower' as heard in the Gaelic masonic hymn, performed by the Maitre of the Cloud Club. Beltane, on the other hand, a Celtic pagan sacrificial spring ritual, consisting of a maypole dance and a sacrifice for the coming of summer, is enacted in the spire of the Chrysler Building³⁶², which is shown to be a cavernous earthly place outside the metallic modernist reality of the skyscraper. Thus Brunet enters the main point of her argument, by

³⁶¹ Neville Wakefield, *Matthew Barney: Drawing Restraint*, Vol v, 1987-2007 (London & Vienna: Walter Koenig, 2007), pg. 75

³⁶² Lynn Brunet, 'Homage to Freemasonry or Indictment? The *Cremaster Cycle*', *PAJ* 91, 2009, pp.101-102

exploring the Cycle's iconology vis-a-vis the notion of 'ritual abuse'.³⁶³ The Order of the Freemasons in the United States has been suspect of such incidents in which children were allegedly subjected to terrorizing acts within the context of a ritual, that left them traumatized with an overwhelming sense of guilt and fear.³⁶⁴ It is interesting also to know how these crimes cannot really be traced back by these children as they grow up, due to a torture technique called 'spin programming' during which 'the child is placed in a device that spins him around at high speed until he falls unconscious and effectively forgets the experience that has just taken place.'³⁶⁵

What is interesting to this note is that Brunet connects such practices to the actual content and form of the Cremaster Cycle. The use of little children in the first part of Cremaster 3, where they are filmed carrying a decomposed corpse from the lower ground of the Chrysler Building to the Lobby, connects with a practice which is a common technique of ritual abuse, namely the handling of corpses. Also, the argument insists, that throughout the cycle there exist numerous references to 'spinning' and its results on the body and psyche.³⁶⁶ So reading Brunet entering such deep connections and 'revelations' (that could be taken also as a conspiracy theory scenario) and knowing how autobiographical the Cremaster Cycle is said to be, the

³⁶³ Despite the edgy analysis the author sent her text to Matthew Barney and his gallery and received a positive and endorsing feedback for her arguments and thoughts. Though her questions were largely left unanswered and so she wonders what is really at play in Barney's epic.

³⁶⁴ Brunet gives reference to the following publications regarding this issue: Sakheim & Devine, *Out of Darkness: Exploring Satanism and Ritual Abuse*, (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), Noblitt & Perskin, *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000) Fonkelhor, Williams & Burns, *Nursery Crimes: Sexual Abuse in Daycare* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), Tim Tate, *Children for the Devil, ritual Abuse and Satanic Crime*, (London: Methuen, 1991)

³⁶⁵ Lynn Brunet, 'Homage to Freemasonry or Indictment? The Cremaster Cycle', PAJ 91, 2009, pg. 103, the author references John D. Lovern, *Spin Programming : A Newly Uncovered Technique of Systematic Mind Control*, paper presented at The 6th Western Clinical Conference on Multiple Personality and Dissociation, Irvine, CA, 1993, <<http://home.mchi.com/~ftio/mc-spin-prog.htm>>

³⁶⁶ *ibid*, pg. 104

question that is formed in ones mind is: 'What kind of art is this after all?' The answer for Brunet lies in seeing Barney as someone whose work is an artistic research and exploration of the concept of initiation. In representing esoteric, social and psychological conditioning, he is using his own traumatic yet blurred experiences of initiatory practice and combining them with other kinds of relevant references, in re-inventing a 'self-initiation' scheme. Through this formula the artist is going through a 'ritualistic aesthetic process' that brings him closer not only to his own oppressed consciousness but also in reflecting the general 'impact of cultic practices within the contemporary American context.'³⁶⁷ If we may agree with Brunet that somehow the Cremaster Cycle is an artwork made for coping with a certain traumatic experience³⁶⁸ we may therefore wonder whether these are signs of a personal or a general social statement upon "'irregular" fraternal practices' and 'issues of control operating within Western contemporary culture'.³⁶⁹ Is there a point in Barney's epic cycle, where the metaphor becomes more sociological rather than aesthetic?

One of the things that could be discussed in terms of the previous connections we reviewed within the context of decadent aesthetics and critical positioning is the relationship of the Cremaster cycle as concept and production to the

³⁶⁷ *ibid*, pg. 106

³⁶⁸ Usually the initial urge to create such kind of art is driven by an unidentifiable feeling of friction in regards to a particular bodily sensation that had been part of the initial 'unspeakable act'. Basically, by considering Barney's artistic compulsions with his anus, vaseline, aerial views of bodies and climbing walls as well as the figure of Pan, known as the ancient Greek god of sexual transgression connected with the notion of rape, Brunet suggests that what he is trying to represent is a childhood trauma of sexual abuse. The interiors of cars covered in plastic, stirrups and medical chairs testify possible sites for the crime. She also brings up the stories that emerged in the State of Utah, regarding sexual abuse of children by Mormon doctors. She sites the following references in regards to these stories, Gustav Niebuhr, 'Sex Abuse Lawsuit Is Settled By Mormons for \$3 Million', *New York Times*, 5.09.2001, Jerrald and Sandra Tanner, 'Mormonism's Problem with Child Sexual Abuse', *The Salt Lake City Messenger*, 91, November 1996

³⁶⁹ Lynn Brunet, 'Homage to Freemasonry or Indictment? The Cremaster Cycle', *PAJ* 91, 2009, pg. 111

aesthetic and ideological maxims of corporate marketing. It is a peculiar relationship that exceeds and most likely exits the realm of art, coming closer to practicalities or praxis. There are two streams of this corporate energy pouring within the project and there is a third which pours out of it. The incoming parts originate from the institutional involvement and the creative method of the artist while the out coming one is contained and disseminated by the form of the artwork. Though all of these streams exist in ambiguous terms. The central argument regarding the Cremaster Cycle has to do with how the work embraces, and at the same time posits a critique on corporate culture, by superimposing it on an artistic paradigm but not in the way it has been done before. It is a critique that does not believe in the reactionary and polemic aesthetics of the past. What one finds in the direct and literal, conceptual and political art of Hans Haacke, is completely lost in the art of Matthew Barney. Yet, somehow both aesthetic systems seem to be pointing towards the same cultural sickness. An insatiable will to power.

In her book *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, Nancy Einreinhofer presents a strong chapter on the relationship of American art museums to the corporate business world. She concludes that the former party in this interactive system of patronage, most likely possesses a dominated position. In this sense, it goes without saying, that the cultural and artistic societal offering of the museum is doomed to be a compromised operation that initiates elitist benefits of corporate visibility and censorship of conflicting artistic ideas.³⁷⁰ Her argument, covers the development of this partnership between culture and capital as it evolved in New York since the

³⁷⁰ Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pg. 149

late 1960s by studying the turn towards corporatism of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Though, the center point of her study is based in the research and artistic output of Hans Haacke whose main artistic goal was to aesthetically represent the pretentious and almost inhumane foundations of institutionalized culture.³⁷¹

Haacke was, like Barney, a young genius that worked in various mediums with a key interest in systems theory and its methodological application on social systems, the artworld in particular and the ways in which its values would be appropriate within groups of people. As a young artist he was awarded with fellowships by Fulbright, Guggenheim and the National Endowment for the Arts and again similarly to Barney by the age of 34 he had already exhibited in important art institutions such as the MOMA, the Milwaukee Art Center, the Museum of Modern Art Chicago and SF MOMA amongst many.³⁷² Thus during a time when politics were the fashionable subject matter in artistic production, Haacke was understood by those institutions to be a 'hot' contemporary artist. It is probably under this logic that the Guggenheim Museum decided to invite him in for a solo show that was cancelled short before its opening in 1971. The reason for that was that some of Haacke's works contained information about individuals and organizations that 'posed a direct threat to the museum's functioning within its stated and accepted premises'³⁷³. As we read in Einreinhofer's account the case had been that the work entitled *Manhattan Project*:

³⁷¹ *ibid*, pp. 129-130

³⁷² *ibid*, pg. 130

³⁷³ Thomas Messer director of the Guggenheim Museum in 1971, from 'Great Editorial', *New York Times Arts Magazine*, 45 (8), Summer, pg. 4, quoted in Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pg. 131

Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, dealing with the New York slum real estate business of the Shapolsky group in Harlem and the Lower East side, revealed its connections to 70 different corporations, family ties and systemic manipulations for profit to which many social, commercial and religious institutions were attached to. Even though there had been no proof of a direct connection between the Guggenheim Museum board of Trustees and the Shapolsky group, Einreinhofer believes that the museum did not wish to host such art because it would 'not only precipitate an inspection of Shapolsky's real estate maneuvers, but also call in mind the museum's physical space, social position, and ideological tenets.'³⁷⁴

This might have been a clear case of censorship but it gave the artist the initiative to explore and to a great extent, prove the obvious yet obscured close relationship between high profile art museums, powerful families and international corporate business. And in some way his conflicting artistic politics were what cosigned his own success in the art-world. Yet, if the art-world, as a field of art professionals, evolves around the artist and his creations, the institutionalization of art creates a systemic order of its own. It is a simple way in which this system of interdependency works: The museum, seen as a bank of culture, wants to get bigger and bigger and always needs more money, the companies want visibility and 'a social face' that find a unbeatable combination in the face of exhibition sponsoring, and the families want to maintain and augment their social, financial and cultural capital. And of course here lays the paradox of the art system as Bourdieu describes

³⁷⁴ Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pg. 130

it, as its constitutional existence seems to be a social and democratic pillar especially as it is understood in north America. On the contrary, it is most certain that what this system produces, apart from art and culture that does not annoy it, is hierarchical stability.

And here we may return to Matthew Barney as his last film indicates, a great interest in this idea. Three decades after Haacke's unfruitful invitation to exhibit, the young American artist set up his own solo exhibition which, not only epitomized the ideology and elements of a blockbuster exhibition IN contemporary art but also portrayed the huge potential of expenditure in artistic production. If Haacke's work of art named *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees*, from 1974, explained how the institution was based on a family business, exclusive system of power, then Barney's *Cremaster 3* from 2002 staged the Guggenheim family pageant. Taking as his central metaphor the Masonic ideals of ascension, hierarchy and sworn secrecy, the young artist designed a neo-mythological universe of immortalized characters occupying architectural landmarks of corporate and cultural power. Though as we have seen the cycle ends in two ways: one is the collapse of the Chrysler building, that in its destruction takes with it all those immortal heroes, who like the gods in Wagner's cycle find a definite death, and the second, which is a romantic - symbolic death of an artist in action.

Chapter Four:

Ordeal or Deal in Contemporary Art: The Cremaster Cycle as Cultural Capita/Investment or the Value of Art as a Form of Collective Faith

4.1 Aesthetic Wars, Legitimacy and Social Groups: From Pierre Bourdieu to Ernst Gombrich

“Thus we find three competing principles of legitimacy. First, there is the specific principle of legitimacy, i.e., the recognition granted by the set of producers who produce for other producers, their competitors, i.e. by the autonomous self-sufficient world of ‘art for art’s sake’, meaning art for artists. Secondly, there is the principle of legitimacy corresponding to ‘bourgeois’ taste and to the consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class and by private tribunals, such as salons, or public, state-guaranteed ones, such as academies, which sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant. Finally, there is the principle of legitimacy which its advocates call ‘popular’, i.e. the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the ‘mass audience’.”³⁷⁵

In this last chapter of the thesis, we will be entering a different kind of argumentation on the subject of the Cremaster Cycle’s, field prominence and dissemination as high contemporary art, by developing a wider view upon the concept of artistic value and its constituents. Approaching from far out towards its target this line of thought begins with Bourdieu’s “second principle of legitimacy”, as presented in the introductory quotation, and seeks to enquire upon the definition and nature of artistic value as a structural systemic element. In describing the structural relationships that make up the field of cultural production - ironically tagging it on his chapter title as ‘The Economic World Reversed’³⁷⁶ - Bourdieu identifies three sources for generating value within the cultural domain and the art field particularly: an avant-garde, a bourgeois and a popular, all three corresponding to an analogous scale of disavowal in terms of their economical drives. Effectively, in terms of this

³⁷⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) pp. 50-51

³⁷⁶ *ibid*, pg. 29

scheme of disavowal, the first and the last domains of legitimacy are the two extreme poles of the purely aesthetic and the purely economical or else the totally disavowed economical character and the stately economic one. In the middle, bourgeois artistic production which clearly confers the legitimation of the dominant position of “high art”, by mixing the power of the aesthetic to that of the ethical, deals with the idea of economic value or profit in a rather playful manner. It portrays the concept of artistic value as something which is established through a historical and definite institutionalized justification³⁷⁷ of a particular aesthetic taste and the objects it confers, while at the same time this consecrated art operates within the art market with the means of blue chip economic value. Bourdieu’s critical point regarding this function, comes down to the way in which the academic discipline of art history, understood as a sum out of a series of subjective art histories, creates a sense of universality and heaviness of artistic value by nonetheless, relying on paradoxically idiosyncratic measures. As the discipline provides the scholar with a variety of specific measures and perspectives, for appreciating, acknowledging and ultimately historicizing the importance of meaning and value of a particular art object, Bourdieu observes how such measures as genre, form, period, style and artistic movements, can be also easily seen as concepts, which are ‘characterized by the most extreme indeterminacy.’³⁷⁸ And it is the basis of such measures, Bourdieu notes, that exemplify the lightness of subjective interpretation which decisively attributes the heaviness of

³⁷⁷ Within this production system of legitimacy and artistic value, Bourdieu designates special responsibility to the academic field, which, by working together with all other institutions and businesses of the field makes a significant contribution in establishing the artistic value of aesthetic objects as well as ideas.

³⁷⁸ Bourdieu makes reference to Wittgenstein here but does not give exact comment, Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 261

institutionalized knowledge; as many of these concepts are described with the use of adjectives like beautiful, ugly, natural, clear, deep, heavy, light and as these simple every day words, essential to the language of art, are notions that are fundamentally subjective, it is more than obvious that they probably do not result in the constitution of clearly analytical or universal statements but occupy opinionated domains of meaning³⁷⁹

'This is probably because the use that is made of these terms and the meaning that is given to them depend upon the specific, historically and socially situated points of view of their users - points of view which are quite often perfectly irreconcilable.'³⁸⁰

Thus we may see that it is not unlikely, that the core of such mechanisms of distinction or classification³⁸¹ in art, rest upon a particular type of ideological disposition that insists in seeing art history and theory as the most integral generator of value in art. Such, basic yet perhaps subjective characterizations are thus the initial point, from which an art theoretician embarks into developing intellectual systems of subjective abstraction, namely theories, that can in their own turn generate concepts and decode other creative systems of art. Through these concepts, we may represent a logic of artistic value, that for Bourdieu, in specific, is neither objective, nor empirically self-evident, and, most importantly, as he goes on to argue, not at all given 'a priori'³⁸². Nevertheless, they were able to establish themselves through time as dominant axioms, responsible for the making of various art historical perspectives and academic disciplines, as well as for the initiation of aesthetic and social events, as they become 'historically produced and

³⁷⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 261

³⁸⁰ Bourdieu here references Ludwig Wittgenstein investigations on the subject of language and critical categories, through R. Shusterman's essay 'Wittgenstein and Critical Reasoning' in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 47 (1986), pp. 91-110, Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 261

³⁸¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 261

³⁸² *ibid*, p. 264

reproduced' ³⁸³.

Also we may observe among these intellectual worlds an interesting element of historical conflict or competition, as it goes without saying that, all aesthetic theories similarly insist upon the 'truth' of their significance and validity, and interact or perhaps are created through confrontational relations towards each other. This, evident behavior testifies how the chaotic realm of ideas and hence 'the ideological' is largely defined by its effort and power to win over, to convince. So in a way the artistic field and its history, likewise to the extended social field, has been and still is a product of continuous 'wars' of an aesthetic kind. A typical example of this belligerent tendency is given by Hans Richter in his historical account of Dadaism. Describing the movement's relationship to the upcoming Surrealist one he writes:

'The word Surrealism, invented by Apollinaire, was first of all used as a weapon to destroy Dada. When Breton states that he was a Surrealist even when he was a Dadaist, this is perfectly true, as far as he personally is concerned. His right to the word 'Surrealism' was disputed first by Paul Dermée and Ivan Goll, who had started another kind of Surrealism, but with Breton's first Surrealist Manifesto (1924), signed by all those who until a short time before had been Dadaists, such questions were finally settled. Or were they?(.....) Surrealism devoured and digested Dada. Similar cannibalistic methods are by no means rare in history and as Surrealism had a string digestion, the qualities of the devoured were transferred to the invigorated body of the survivor. So be it!' ³⁸⁴³⁸⁴

The vocabulary used here gives out a politicized almost militant sensation of the situation in the artistic avant-garde field of early 20th century. It is more than obvious how artistic movements and theories defined themselves and claimed artistic value not only through the positive exhibition of their innovations but also by expressing their opposition and hostility towards another contemporary or passing current. The curious question though is, what is an aesthetic battle given for? Is it an automatic, psychologically

³⁸³ *ibid*, p. 264

³⁸⁴ in Hans Richter, *dada: art and anti art*, trans. David Britt, (London: Thames&Hudson, 2001) or.p. 1965, pg. 194

subconscious mechanism that operates on a collective mode for instigating aesthetic evolution? Or as Bourdieu would say, it is a rhetoric discourse, ultimately based on an economical logic, that exists to sustain the continuous systemic reproduction of the artistic field as 'the' official barer of the 'new', produced within the aesthetic realm and only?

If we slide over towards a political mode of thinking, we could make out the following example: The establishment of power over a specific domain, as in what signifies also the establishment of an agent's dominance and validity within that domain, produces certain benefits one of them being the embodiment or transubstantiation of value that is considered objective within that domain. This value though, is not and cannot be in its definition or truth an objective one; it is created through a set of choices, informed by the desired characteristics of the domain of power, as established and promoted by the particular agents that support this typo-logical validity. Bourdieu's sociology of professional fields develops from within such politically philosophical principle in the ways it perceives its subject of study. Influenced by Bachelard, he is convinced that:

'truth is not so much an absolute expression of things in themselves or science as a systematized knowledge, as sets of relations which are partly determined by the conditions of their realization.'³⁸⁵

So in this respect the sovereign 'truth' embedded within such typifications of value, regarding the artistic qualities of art objects, is in reality not only incarnated through different and incomparable qualities or conditions of their production, e.g historical, economical, cultural, anthropological, formal, literary, psychological, material but also these qualities are interpreted and ranked on a

³⁸⁵ Michael Grenfell, 'Biography of Bourdieu', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell ed. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 23

purely subjective basis or intellect. Thus it is very likely that the thing called artistic value might in its essence be something rather perceptual.

Looking inside out of this matter we cannot but recognize that the logic of practice that produces the theoretical articulations of the artistic field has been largely characterized throughout the modernist/bourgeois era, by an intensive effort towards building a sense of philosophical necessity and objectivity in a revolutionary contrast to the aesthetic objectivity of the previous era (feudal aesthetic canon) regarding artistic value. This process, finding its prime application in the conceptualization of the 'autonomous artwork', and facing its practical failure in the downfall of the modernist avant-garde period, became instinctively aware of its problematic condition regarding the concept of artistic value. Thus the artistic field, as a professional domain, ventured to introduce the necessary new conditions that could re-establish a universal system of validity, this time one based upon the inception of subjectivity as the primary tool of aesthetic judgment. The turn into post-modernism opened up a new and exciting way to establish a valid aesthetic domain for meaning and form that presented artistic value in an even more ambiguous sense. Through an 'all-mighty' sensibility of the individual gaze, and as the beauty of an object rests within the eye of the beholder and not with the object itself, the beholder becomes the one who names value. And this value exists in an analogous measure to the beholder's position within the field of art and in the extended field of power.

Let us insist at this point, in describing the conditions of subjective judgment in the field of contemporary art by employing a paradoxical theoretical relationship. From a distinctively opposed territory to that of Bourdieu, Ernst

Gombrich, an established prominent figure of the art historical discipline, tries to answer a question on the issues of subjectivity and competition through his idea of the *Vanity Fair*: A competition for gratification in the 'polarization of opinion'. Surprisingly, for him, the system for producing value in art is a lot like creating and establishing fashions, as invented and championed by different taste- groups that have the innate tendency, in support of their beliefs to 'create self- confirming aesthetic theories'³⁸⁶, competing for the dominance of their beliefs. Any art-production, is thus put to a test of whether it converges with the theory of the dominant group or not. Then, depending on the relationship of this group during that given time, to the dominant part of the field of power, an artwork and its producer can be or will not be introduced to the system that can attribute the aesthetic object, its artistic and socio-economical value. It is striking how close is Gombrich's thesis to what Bourdieu says in the following passage:

'Thus, as the field is constituted as such, it becomes clear that the 'subject' of the production of the art-work - of its value but also of its meaning - is not the producer who actually creates the object in its materiality, but rather the entire set of agents engaged in the field. Among these are producers of works classified as artistic (great or minor, famous or unknown), critics of all persuasions (who themselves are established within the field), collectors, middlemen, curators, etc. in short, all who have ties with art, who live for art and, to varying degrees, from it, and who confront each other in struggles where the imposition of not only a world view but also a vision of the artworld is at stake, and who, through these struggles, participate in the production of the value of the artist and of art.'³⁸⁷

Is it not the same idea that runs through the mind of the two thinkers, even though they come from two oppositional intellectual positions? Both the traditional art historian and the polemic sociologist recognize that it is a group of agents and not the art object that establishes value. And it is in this sense that the issue of subjectivity takes a different function as it gains its post-modern perspective on value. As Bourdieu observes, this subjectivity results

³⁸⁶ E. H. Gombrich, 'The Logic of Vanity Fair: Alternatives to Historicism in the Study of Fashions, Styles and Taste, (or. ed. 1974) in *Ideals and Idols: Essays on values in history and in art*, (Phaidon: Oxford & New York, 1979) p. 88

³⁸⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), pg. 261

in the institution of a more general rule of competition for 'artistic legitimacy' in which 'no one can claim to be the absolute holder of *nomos*, even if everyone has the claims to the title.'³⁸⁸

So, to make rather simple statement in order to move forwards from this point is to say that the fundamental issue that comes up as a condition for the situation we are trying to understand, is the urgency and power of the *group*. The validity of an aesthetic idea or theory as well as its value, develop and are established *by* and *within* a group and perhaps we could also add *for* a group, whether that means in favor or against. So to combine Bourdieu and Gombrich it is to say that a coherence of the 'aesthetic' field exists definitely in conditional terms to the theoretical manifestation of a corresponding 'social' field, which hosts the political, the economical and the ethical regimes.

4.2 From Peter Bürger' s Autonomous Artwork towards a Malleable Notion of Artistic Value

So how does the dominant status of high art legitimates its existence, standing as an aesthetic ideal that operates within both the economical and ethical societal regimes? While the art-object was romanticized through the avant-garde revolution, and assigned an emancipated and all encompassing aesthetic-philosophical-psychoanalytical role, what occurred as a parallel effect was an emancipating process of all the regimes that operated within the artistic field. A useful perspective on this process, can be taken from Peter Bürger's social history of art, in which he explains how we came up with 'a systematic aesthetics as a philosophical principle' as well as 'a new

³⁸⁸ *ibid* pg. 252

concept of autonomous art'³⁸⁹. Such objectives are seen by the German art historian as the ramifications of particular social events that emerged out of the shifting structures of the European political power system during the eighteenth century. That was a time during which the newly invented class of the 'bourgeois', self-defined and positioned as the anti-feudal, thus revolutionary social class, began a systematic brooding of its idiosyncrasy as well as its claims to power, which was expressed not only through political but also in aesthetic forms of contradiction against the corrupt and unfair imperial establishment of the time. As part of this proliferation of the bourgeois rights to power, the art object acted as an icon of the concept of autonomy, not only through its formal transformation but most dynamically by developing a unique economical character. Becoming an object of a peculiar and exciting form of free commerce, and thus emancipating within its agency as a commodity fetich, which until that moment belonged only to a ruling elite as a sign of ethical dominion.

Thus Bürger, interestingly argues that the term *autonomy* cannot be used to describe neither modern nor contemporary art. For him the term corresponds only to the short historical period within the early 19th century, of the 'bourgeois emancipation', that terminates with the advent of Aestheticism and the 'Art for Art's sake' movement. In fact, this short lived *autonomy*, says Bürger, found its ultimate enemy in the face of the 20th century European avant-gardes through which it was expressed as a form of negation. While the concept was built around a pre-established axiom - according to which art is an independent realm from that of life - and thus its function should have no social

³⁸⁹Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pg. 41

or individual effects apart from those embodied by the art object - in entering the 20th century, the avant-garde artist marched with a strong belief in revolutionizing the praxis of life with art practices. This could ideally be achieved through a utopian act of its reinvention through the artistic ideal: by assimilating art as an emancipated creative force that may enable in its turn the emancipation of social life, from the 'means-ends rationality of bourgeois everyday'³⁹⁰. By bringing art as a catalyst in the center of human society, the society itself could perhaps evolve towards an alternative and less mundane model as imagined by Dadaism, Futurism, Constructivism, or Surrealism. So in this second phase of emancipatory process it had been the turn of the political and ethical regimes to be set free within the aesthetic realm. Bürger then goes on to argue that even though the avant-guard negation of autonomy was not successful in re-modeling the context and value of art, according to its revolutionary social purposes, or the freedom it aspired to, it nevertheless challenged the art-object towards three processes within the aesthetic field, in its effort to re-form the concept of artistic value: 'purpose or function, production, reception'³⁹¹. While bourgeois autonomy, enabled a contraction of purpose towards a 'pure' aesthetic state of the arts, - particularly self-focused and self-perpetuating within a distinct self-determinate aesthetic realm- the avant-garde project re-invented the function or purpose of art as an expanded notion: a conjunction of the practical and aesthetic realms. Basically, with this move the function of the art-object was transformed into a vague and 'exploded' concept.³⁹² . Production, the other pillar of artistic

³⁹⁰ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 48-49

³⁹¹ *ibid.*, pg. 50

³⁹² *ibid.*, pg. 51

value, in terms of the signature of the individual artist, was also contested and critically interpreted as a social construct.³⁹³ The third condition of art, reception, was again deconstructed through a negation of its consumerist aspect. The audience became part of the work: 'producers and recipients no longer existed. All that remained was the individual, who uses the poetry as an instrument for living one's life as best as one can.'³⁹⁴ Any 'real' transformation, therefore, occurred only on the level of theoretical discourse, a subfield of art which incorporated the avant-gardist ideology at its core and developed it towards many directions. Yet, it is possible that the notion of artistic value, despite its ambiguity, still continues to manifest itself within contemporary art production as an equation of the old bourgeois triad of 'objecthood, signature and connoisseurship.' What this practically means is that even though most post-modern art theory, and art production takes as its perquisites the theoretical transformations of the avant-garde, contemporary artistic production, functions most likely on a system of different order regarding the value of the art object, that is much better understood through the previous bourgeois model.

Evidence of this situation comes when the art object's value is introduced merely as a commodity value, one that is suggested by its price, exclaiming that such an indicator may also confer its artistic quality.

'There is a network of accepted values and conventions underpinning a painting or print as a tradable commodity. For a painting, that includes the artist's empowered position in a league table (Picasso equals the US; Pissaro, Germany; and Marquet, Argentina); the quantity of his work in circulation (art monetarism), the existence of similar works in public collections (the national reserve banks.)³⁹⁵

³⁹³ *ibid*, pp. 51-53

³⁹⁴ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pg. 53

³⁹⁵ Andrew Marr, 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bath Water?' *The Guardian Saturday Review* (Sat. Oct. 24th, 1998), pg. 3, quoted in Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pg. 164

This definition is at its most utilitarian function within the world of art auctions, galleries, private dealers and collectors, eventually finding its way into the institutionalized realms of art, in the museum and the university. Therefore, the contemporary definition of artistic value, may be based still on the bourgeois concept of autonomy and as seen through the Bourdieuan scope, it seems to have evolved towards a clearly defined system of production which intelligently appropriated certain new ideas, as presented by avant-garde intervention while it retained its old utilitarian status quo. Unfortunately, within this new frame the 'art-object' as provocation or protest became 'inauthentic' while at the same time it was fully institutionalized.³⁹⁶ As Bürger argues in his critique for 'a false sublation' of art into life, realized through the 'cultural industry' as a 'disvalue'³⁹⁷, one could also add that such a situation truly represents a contemporary recipe for artistic legitimacy. One needs to acknowledge and keep in mind that through this partial transformation the contemporary artwork enjoys a privileged status of a double heredity,(a marriage between the capitalist and the anti-capitalist ideologies) that renders its value as an ambiguous, formless yet malleable concept which can be argued and applied in most convenient ways.

³⁹⁶ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pg. 53

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 54

4.3 The Cremaster Cycle as a Bourdieuan Paradox and the Autocatalytic System of Artistic Value

At this point, having located the basis upon which the definition of contemporary art value can be understood, we may bring up again our case study by turning back to the introductory quote from Bourdieu that addresses one of the critical points of the thesis main argument. As a consecrated and fully institutionalized contemporary art work, a true disciple of this oppositional progeny, the Cremaster Cycle seems to be tuned in and playing along with all three competing principles of legitimacy, as they are described by Bourdieu. This is a rather paradoxical situation as these principles, corresponding to the three levels of the artistic field, the experimental, the bourgeois and the popular, are positioned for Bourdieu in competition to each other within the artistic field. For example, the first two levels ³⁹⁸ relate through an interdependent power play, drawn between the poles of cultural and economic capital and the field's capacity for autonomy as a whole or else its means of resistance against forms of 'demand'.³⁹⁹ As far as the third type of legitimacy is concerned, the popular, even though it occupies the most 'dominated' position of the three within the artistic field, it is still powerful enough to the extent that it forms a 'homologous opposition (...) through the size of the audience, which is partly responsible for the volume of profit, and its recognized social quality, which determines the value of the consecration it can bestow'⁴⁰⁰. This capacity becomes a functioning element in its competitive relationship to the bourgeois 'higher' aesthetic taste.

³⁹⁸ For which Bourdieu assigns the characterizations 'autonomous' and 'heteronomous' principles to the art field's fractions that correspond to the types of 'art for art's sake' and 'bourgeois' production respectively.

³⁹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 40-41

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid*, p. 50

To the point where 'heteronomous' artistic production can be perceived as commercial, there comes the third category of 'industrial art' to be understood as 'both mercantile and "popular"'⁴⁰¹. Set against this analytical frame, our case study artwork suggests the possibility of a simultaneous and rather harmonic inhabitation of the three realms of legitimacy. And what is very interesting and unique in the case of the Cremaster Cycle, is how fast Matthew Barney was able to conquer those three realms with this particular artwork. Starting his early career with highly subversive and experimental video installations since 1989, his work was almost simultaneously institutionalized and what followed with the Cremaster Cycle project culminated with the art-blockbuster exhibition phenomenon, that brought in the museum and the cinema, a socially wider public from what is considered to be a 'typical' one, belonging to the first two levels. Could this perhaps challenge Bourdieu's well established rationale regarding the class pallet of taste?

Perhaps the contemporary definition of taste, likewise to the concept of value is indeed, a formless and fully unrestricted realm, something to be understood in different terms than strictly those of class distinction. Yet, as it is almost certain that the process of production, is adjacent to someone's mode of acquiring the means to life - whether that comes from creating the work, selling it or intellectualizing it- the great significance of Bourdieu's theory comes down to his concrete description of the normative 'professional' character of the artistic field whether that means art practice, curatorial or theoretical endeavors. As much as the theoretical grounds - or in Bürger's words

⁴⁰¹ ibid

'systematic aesthetics' - upon which the contemporary scheme of legitimacy and valuation, seem to depart, in their 'postmodern' attitude, from a canonical or stable structure towards the intangible and protean models, the more consolidated becomes their economic significance and character.

We can understand how this paradoxical scheme works by looking into the ideas and examples of Francis Halsall, who in an attempt to merge *system theory*, as postulated by German sociologist Niklas Luhman⁴⁰² and Danto's *institutional theory of art*,⁴⁰³ animates the possibility that social and in our perspective professional systems such as the artistic one are:

"complex systems and thus display behavior common to complex systems such as being auto-catalytic (that is self perpetuating). They do this by being financially and socially self-determining and self-justified",⁴⁰⁴.

Halsall, takes as main reference point for his argument the case of collector Charles Saatchi, examining his behavior as a key agent within the 'contemporary British art world system of galleries, dealerships and criticism'.⁴⁰⁵ The famous collector/dealer/gallerist, coming from the advertising and public relations/image-making industry, set up his gallery in 1985 and begun collecting contemporary British art. The commercial logic behind the gallery was to buy cheap artworks in great numbers, as they were coming from unknown young British art-school graduates and then sell them on a high profit by raising the artistic value status of these young artists through his connections in the media and various public art institutions. Halsall here references the importance of Saatchi's funding schemes for art - schools such

⁴⁰² See, Niklas Luhman, *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

⁴⁰³ See, Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983) and 'The Artworld', (1964) in Steven Madoff (ed.) *Pop Art: A Critical Anthology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)

⁴⁰⁴ Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pg. 161

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.* 162

as Chelsea, Goldsmiths, Royal College and Slade, namely the 'Young Artist's Sponsoring Bursaries'. Used in support of artistic projects, this private patronage schemes boosted the production of British contemporary art, which was then selected and channeled in the market through the Saatchi gallery.

This move had two important consequences: one that the whole system was able to finance itself and second that it was able to create an art school or style, thus develop also an academic background in establishing 'the conditions for its own critical and social legitimacy'⁴⁰⁶ At the same time, as Saatchi provided art-school patronage, he was continuously supporting or else investing into his incoming commercial product as more and more young artists would continuously emerge within the Young British Artists style. With such policies he established a way to influence the stream of contemporary art production as well as to establish a key business specializing in commerce and investment. All that of course, given two important and pre-existing conditions: the high potency of his professional network of relationships, linking closely to the Bourdieuan field of power, and the situation surrounding the notion of artistic value, which at that time was at its most 'contemporary' condition, exploring the inherited potentials and privileges of a 'bourgeois-avant-garde' status. Basically, Saatchi designed an exquisite enterprise.

Yet, the critical conditions that allowed for such a development towards success were established during the 1980s, in a flourishing international art market that was particularly centered around the New York art world. Halsall, sees Thatcherism and the neoconservative market principle in Britain, as the

⁴⁰⁶ Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 162-163

force behind the spill over of this sense of potent opportunity from the North American to the British art market.⁴⁰⁷ He points to the significance of the stock market recession of 1987 (October 19, the 'Black Monday') as a clause that made artworks a favorable and a less risky alternative in investment, vis a vis the stock and share market.

'While I was (at a sale by Jeffrey Archer of 111 works by Warhol and 71 by Hockney at the Peter Gwyther Gallery, off Bond Street in October 1998) a buyer phoned in to say that he was taking 50,000 pounds out of shares: he'd rather have paintings. At (another sale of contemporary art at) Sotheby's the place is thronging with South Americans, Italians and Japanese who also feel the, for the time being, art is safer than equities.....So art-works become units of value like coffee options.'⁴⁰⁸

Though Halsall's main argument evolves around how this optimistic environment created conditions of 'positive feedback' that were able to enhance the weight or leverage of economic value in contemporary art.

'Positive feedback' is a condition in which a particular situation or system is set in motion and empowered through a collective form of optimism and belief.

If for example a great majority believes in a particular thesis then this becomes an ideological basis, thus functioning as a positive environment for a specific action. Therefore, Halsall suggests that it is through 'positive feedback' that the art-object acquired prominent and established value as a potent financial investment. Though, here one should not forget that it also hosts another form of value, the cultural one and thus the art-object is a point within the system where economic and cultural investment come together in such a close relationship that in effect it blurs and corrupts the contextual

⁴⁰⁷ Charles Saatchi, in a New York Times interview reveals his point of view regarding the British art field boom: 'Margaret Thatcher.....She created an environment in Britain where people could escape the role they had been pushed into. They no longer had to be dropouts and failures. Students like Damien Hirst felt they could do absolutely anything.' Roger Cook, 'The mediated manufacture of an 'avant garde': a Bourdieusian analysis of the field of contemporary art in London, 1997-9', in Bridget Fowler (ed.), *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture* (Blackwell Publishers/ The Sociological Review:) pg. 170

⁴⁰⁸ Andrew Marr, 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bath Water?' *The Guardian Saturday Review* (Sat. Oct. 24th, 1998), pg. 3, quoted in Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pg. 164

margins of the two. This, results mostly to the advantages of the professional field as it self- perpetuates and expands, through a compound of agents and clients. But we ought to remind one self that we are talking still about the aesthetic or artistic field, a concept that comes to exist through collectively endorsed and decisive expressions of belief in the value of the aesthetic object. Thus, to conceive that the autocatalytic pattern of its expansion escapes completely the realm of art, while is being characterized in most instances by a social and economic behavior (originating in belief and interest), it makes us skeptical about the intentions and goals of the system we are describing here. For example, art historian Ernst Gombrich - even though coming from a completely different position of belief than that of social critics like Bourdieu or Bürger - in an effort to articulate the function of collective belief in the art field, writes:

‘The objectivity of science does not rest on scientists being free of preconceived views and theories, but on their readiness to test them and to listen to arguments leading to their refutation. But, if I am right that, as far as the testing of artistic excellence is concerned, such a critical attitude may impede the test, it becomes clearer why dogmatism and subjectivism are so prevalent in artistic matters. In this respect artistic creeds are indeed closer to religion than to science. The awe and consolation connected with religious experience also depends on such initial readiness on the part of the worshipper and this readiness he most derives from tradition. In growing into the group he learns what to revere and what to abhor, and, whenever he is doubtful, he will anxiously look to other members to see whether he adores the right thing and performs the right ritual. The places of worship of rival sects may not leave him cold, but appear to him as abominations. But the only test he has to distinguish between the holy and the unholy is the reaction of the group.’⁴⁰⁹

Gombrich, perhaps romantic about the ways in which science ensures its progress, intends here to underline the primarily social character of the aesthetic realm. Thus he calls the process, through which opinions and beliefs are regulated by reactions in the group in which the individual belongs to, ‘social testing’. He therefore argues that a more general innate tendency for

⁴⁰⁹ E. H. Gombrich, ‘The Logic of Vanity Fair: Alternatives to Historicism in the Study of Fashions, Styles and Taste, (or. ed. 1974) in *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art*, (Phaidon: Oxford & New York, 1979) pp. 84-85

confirmation of validity, finds its most active capacity in the aesthetic realm due to the lack of objective axioms within it.⁴¹⁰ In many instances majority and tradition can verify a status or action yet at the same time there is always the way to bring in something new through conflict. Perhaps this is an analogous but much more fatalistic view to that of Bourdieu's notion of 'practice', which results from an 'unconscious relationship' of two interacting principles within the social agent, the habitus and the field.⁴¹¹ In Gombrich's mind, operating in terms of art history and criticism, this practice reminds him of the religious one, as it is predisposed by social grouping and tradition rather than individual intellect. For Bourdieu this is a more open game:

'On the one side it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus....On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world.'⁴¹²

Perhaps if we were to combine the ideas of 'social testing', 'positive feedback', and Bourdieu's logic of practice for understanding the conditions that run through the contemporary art field as well as the historical contingencies out of which it was formed, we may come up with a good view of this particular professional consciousness. It clearly accepts art practices and their value as a conjunction of economic and aesthetic goals, understood both as belonging to the field and the individual agent within that field. Nevertheless, this rational scheme is based in effect upon a

⁴¹⁰ Ibid

⁴¹¹ Bourdieu describes this relationship with the equation [(habitus)(capital)]+field = practice, thus explaining that there is an unconscious interplay that directs the practice of social agents consisting of their disposition as habitus and their position as capital within a particular field, in our case the artistic one. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, R. Nice (trans.), (London: Sage, 1993), or. p. 1980, pg. 76, quoted in Karl Maton 'Habitus', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell (ed.), (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 51

⁴¹² Pierre Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, L. Wacquant (trans.), (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pg. 127, quoted in Karl Maton 'Habitus', in Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts, Michael Grenfell (ed.), (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pg. 52

tradition of theory and academic practice, that constantly unfolds the red carpet of significant value in front of consecrated artworks. The point that becomes visible here, therefore is that that in the field of aesthetics, likewise to that of metaphysics or religion, belief and most importantly a collective form of belief and its 'religious' practice is the basis for the establishment of both aesthetic and financial value. As no fact a certain aesthetic 'truth' of value, it looks more like a fundamental void of knowledge, both in epistemological and ontological sense.⁴¹³ Thus the value of the contemporary artwork, through its conflicted yet matching progeny acquires the virility of being and not being real at the same time resembling somehow a mythological pattern.

4.4 Disavowed Economies or Value in Numbers? From Bourdieu and into the Field Practice

Continuing the line of thought on the connection between belief and artistic value, we may look at Bourdieu's text 'The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods' where he, while observing the early modernist art field, describes the art work's status explicitly in the terms of its value. This value, he argues, is unique and composite yet at the same time, it is utterly problematic. He explains how the artwork, despite the status supremacy that it claims among all other objects, cannot in fact express its full existence in an unrestrained manner. This is due to the bifurcated yet partially obscured position it occupies within its host social field:

⁴¹³ In effect, for establishing the possibility of a sincere academic analysis of art, it can only be done by the postulation of a constitutional avowal; a certain founding principal which is in fact based upon a non-knowledge, a belief.

'The art business, a trade in things that have no price, belongs to the class of practices in which the logic of the pre-capitalist economy lives on (as it does, in another sphere the economy of exchanges between the generations). These practices, functioning as practical negations, can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing. Defying ordinary logic, they lend themselves to two opposed readings, both equally false, which each undo their essential duality and duplicity by reducing them either to the disavowal or to what is disavowed - to disinterestedness or self-interest. The challenge which economies based on disavowal of the 'economic' present to all forms of economism lies precisely in the fact that they function, and can function, in practice - and not merely in the agents' representations - only by virtue of a constant, collective repression of narrowly 'economic' interest and of the real nature of the practices revealed by 'economic analysis.'⁴¹⁴

Bourdieu describes here a form of collective belief which is organized as a form of collective repression in undermining the economic character of the art work, or in seeing the art field as a commercial field. In a way he implies that this 'repression' is realized through a specific habitus conditioning that produces two kinds of understandings. From one side a collective and superfluous denial of the existence of an effective relationship to a logic of economic interest, invested in the art objects by art-field agents like artists, curators, art critics as well as academic and art institutions. This is strengthened with a sublimation process through an intensively cultivated argument, over the great importance and collective benefits of art as a creative act and as vital cultural reserve for a society. And it is exactly this that makes the rationale of this collective belief come across as a pre-modern guild mentality.

On the other hand, this logic is also realized as a deduction; the denial of economic interest cannot be earnestly expressed by agencies such as dealers, collectors and commercial gallerists, who are situated by definition at the core of the artwork's economic character. Despite the general argument according to which gallerists are primarily interested in 'taking care' of their artists, assisting them to advance their practices by granting them freedom from a mundane economic strife, they are also agents who, as we have seen in the

⁴¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) p. 74

example of Saatchi, can effectively reduce these artworks to 'what is disavowed' namely 'self-interest'. Nevertheless, they have to perform their task in a way in which they will be avoiding the 'sordidly commercial'⁴¹⁵ attitudes and actions, while at the same time employing 'receptions, society gatherings and judiciously placed confidences'⁴¹⁶. In fact, there is a common tendency among writers within the field, in describing from various perspectives the disavowed economic character of the art work. For example Diane Crane argues that the oddity of such businesses rests within the elusive character of the commodity it deals with as it:

'is expected to succeed on its own merits - to sell itself - so that attempts to rationalize business practices or to engage in any type of promotion other than display itself is considered suspect.'⁴¹⁷

On a similar mode Julian Stallabrass, writing on the contemporary British art field in the book *High Art Lite*, echoes Bourdieu's position:

'Money is the necessary and often the sole raison d'être of the gallery system; yet, at least in terms of presentation, the galleries have a prissiness about it, carrying the conventions of mercantile display to such a rarefied level that the visible signs of commerce (price tags, special offers) tend to disappear. Money must simultaneously be gestured at and concealed, since it is both essential to aesthetic aura and what threatens to taint it.'⁴¹⁸

From a different position within the field, gallerist Friedrich Petzel reveals how, due to this disavowal, the practical side of buying and selling art is a very unregulated financial domain operating on the main principal of profit with a turnover that far exceeds all other investment options. Plus there is a ludicrous air of velocity and of informality in the whole process.

'We should remember here that we sell works for hundreds of thousands of dollars every month without needing any lawyers to work out complicated contracts. Just a telephone call, and the title changes hands. If the collector keeps to the often unspoken agreement to sell back one work or another to the original gallery for a profit, the gallerist can also earn more money on resale than the first time. In this way, some works change owners two to

⁴¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) p. 77

⁴¹⁶ *ibid*

⁴¹⁷ Diane Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985*, (Chicago&London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pg. 111

⁴¹⁸ Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite* (London & New York: Verso, 1999), p. 80, also quoted in Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 165

three times within five years, and only the artists see nothing of the profits. Only when a new public price record is achieved at an auction house can the artist demand to be included in resale profits.⁴¹⁹

Thus the point is that there is definitely an understated importance in the ways that the economic function is handled among field agents, even though apart from rational economic benefits it might also adhere to some kind of psychological benefit similar to the ones that come with gambling on horses. Yet, the argument regarding the 'economic disavowal', seen from another perspective, against the reality of a contemporary art fair, may seem rather unrealistic. Within these purely commercial institutions, it becomes rather obvious that the artwork, the artist and all the commercial agents of this system are rather comfortable in expressing the 'economic character' of the position they occupy, even though the discourse on aesthetic value has not reached and most likely will not reach any concrete points. The art fair, designed as all other commercial fairs, is nothing more than a clearly stated market place where sales and the expansion of professional connections are performed openly. Petzel, tells how the art fair as a commercial phenomenon was introduced in the first place, in order to bring a dispersed, international art market in a more concentrated and regulated form regarding pricing and quality, as well as for facilitating all agents in their commercial activities. Though, the idea grew towards a different direction to the extend of creating an even more confusing environment of abundance and unregulated competition among artists, galleries and the Art Fairs themselves.⁴²⁰

Also by looking at how art auctions are communicated as art field events, we

⁴¹⁹ Friedrich Petzel, 'Infantilism: Something like an internal view of the New York art market, Texte Zur Kunst', "Escape to New York", Issue Nr. 54, June 2004, pp. 111-116

⁴²⁰ Friedrich Petzel, 'Infantilism: Something like an internal view of the New York art market, Texte Zur Kunst', "Escape to New York", Issue Nr. 54, June 2004, pp. 111-116

may also exemplify how the economic principle becomes even more evident than the aesthetic, as for example in the following passage:

'...the sensation of the sale was undoubtedly lot 14, Jeff Koons' Hanging Heart (Magenta / Gold) (1994- 2006), a dark red stainless steel valentine with a golden metal ribbon, suspended in the air by a pair of wires. Meyer opened the bidding at \$10 million, and the contest seesawed back and forth between the telephones and Manhattan dealer Larry Gagosian, sitting in his usual place on the aisle and bidding with a quick nod of his head. At \$19 million, Gagosian made a grimace and hesitated a moment, but persevered and won the lot, which went for \$21 million at the hammer, or \$23,561,000 with premium (est. \$15 million-\$20 million). The price is an auction record for Koons and a record for any living artist at auction. The work had been the subject of an intensive marketing campaign, according to Sotheby's expert Alex Rotter, which helped lure bidders and convince them that "they could own the work." As was widely reported before the sale, the sculpture had been purchased by collector Adam Lindemann for around \$4 million from Gagosian Gallery only last year. Veteran auction observer Josh Baer speculated that Gagosian's client might be hedge- fund billionaire Steven A. Cohen. Other members of the eight-figure club included Andy Warhol, whose Self Portrait (Green Camouflage) (1986) sold for \$12,361,000; Mark Rothko, whose untitled black-and-gray abstraction from 1969 went for \$12,081,000; and Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose *Untitled (Electric Chair)* (1982) sold for \$11,801,000. The sale set auction records for another dozen artists, including Ellsworth Kelly (\$5,193,000), Zhang Xiaogang (\$4,969,000), John Chamberlain (\$4,633,000), Fang Lijun (\$4,073,000), Anish Kapoor (\$2,841,000), Ad Reinhardt (\$2,617,000), Yan Pei Ming (\$1,609,000), Richard Serra (\$1,497,000), Josef Albers (\$1,497,000), Sol LeWitt (\$881,000), Walter De Maria (\$577,000) and Matthew Barney (\$571,000). One winning bidder was Louis Vuitton artistic director Marc Jacobs, sitting in the front row, who won Warhol's classic 1962 Campbell's Soup Can (*Pepper Pot*) painting for \$8,441,000 (est. \$7 million-\$9 million). The other fashion designer in the front row, Valentino, who sat with his partner and business manager Giancarlo Giammetti, was also a winning bidder. They purchased Damien Hirst's 81 x 80 in. dot painting from 1994, *Apolopoprotein A-1*, for \$2,841,000 (and were underbidders on a few other lots). Valentino has long maintained his own museum next to his palazzo atelier near the Piazza di Spagna in Rome.⁴²¹

In this report we read about the prices that works may fetch and about the agents that compete on these kind of purchases. In the auction room there is no disavowal of capital in financial, cultural and social terms. The strong ties of art production to the dominant part of the field of power are consummated. Perhaps one could argue that the present situation is not very similar to the condition that established it and in this sense Bourdieu's argument of pure economic disavowal was designed to explain only the route towards the current state of the art field. There is great evidence that such a rationale is not anymore central to the behavior of the contemporary

⁴²¹ W. Robinson, 'Art Market Watch: Sotheby's Catches Fire', Artnet, 15.10.2007 http://www.artnet.de/content/DesktopModules/PackFlashPublish/Arti...ilPrint.aspx?ArticleID=2966&Template=Article_Print.ascx&siteID=0

artistic field. On the contrary, there seems to be a disclosed co-operation of the economic and the aesthetic drives of the field towards a more realistic or in Bourdieu's language 'self-reflexive' understanding.⁴²²

An interesting study of the contemporary situation is presented by Roger Cook who deals again with the case of Saatchi's patronage and commercial success. The context settles around 'Sensation', the posthumous blockbuster exhibition of Saatchi's newly collected Young British Artists, that similarly to the Cremaster Cycle one, traveled from London, to Berlin, to New York, to Sydney and Tokyo during the late nineties.⁴²³ This event stands in the middle of a somewhat common benefit between a 'venerable institution', such as the Royal Academy of Arts and an entrepreneur. According to Cook the show was set up incidentally, yet proved to be indispensable for both sides: as the Academy failed to ensure loans for another exhibition that was planned, and in the midst of panic, Saatchi came as a *deus ex machina* offering a 'sensational' show of works from his collection. The benefits were twofold for the Academy as it gave an immediate solution for its exhibition planning schedule and a 'big success' that came with the exhibition.

'By the time the show closed at the end of December it had had 284,734 visitors, a weekly average of 2,800, making it one of the Academy's most popular shows in the last 10 years. The full price admission was 7,50 pounds. Prior to this exhibition, the Academy, England's oldest art institution, had a public image of being out of touch, and had amassed a deficit of two million pounds plus, thanks in part to embezzlement on the part of its former Treasurer.'⁴²³

As far as Saatchi is concerned, Cook explains, this exhibition together with his contemporary art patronage gave him the opportunity to expand an already established economic capital, part of the 'large-scale field of cultural

⁴²² This new practice is clearly exemplified by the closeness of public presence between art institutions and their corporate partners but we will go into this later in the paper.

⁴²³ Roger Cook, 'The mediated manufacture of an 'avant garde': a Bourdieusian analysis of the field of contemporary art in London, 1997-9', in Bridget Fowler (ed.), *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture* (Blackwell Publishers/ The Sociological Review:) pg. 169

production' with his advertising corporation, as well as a way to project himself among the elite group of connoisseur art collectors. In this way his cultural capital would also likewise expand, though the author finds this to be an unlikely possibility.⁴²⁴ Yet the main point that come out of this event is the tendency of high art institutions such as the Royal Academy to embrace a more competitive and market oriented policies created and offered by the character of the contemporary art object.

Another way of looking at how the economical aspect of value is slowly disclosed within the commercial practices of the art field, is by understanding how prices represent a work of art. In his ethnographic study with gallerists and dealers from the New York and Amsterdam art worlds, sociologist Olav Velthuis extracts certain interesting points. What he regards as the most evident conclusion after a series of interviews he conducted with key agents of the field, was that prices for artworks 'have a symbolic dimension, the economic actors attach cognitive and cultural meanings to prices, and that they communicate these meanings to others.'⁴²⁵ He unfolds his argument towards two directions, one by asking how these prices signify artistic value and second how they 'behave' within the economy they sustain. Thus, contemporary art prices, through Velthuis research results, seem to be a 'commensuration of value'⁴²⁶ of a commodity that has an incalculable kind of quality attached to it. Thus the mere number, the price tag of an artwork:

'becomes a *signifier* that refers to non-economic *signifiers* such as the quality of an artwork or the status of the artist; prices come to signal quality or status, in other words.'⁴²⁷

Though, he notes, it is not only the price tag that is a signifier of such

⁴²⁴ *ibid*

⁴²⁵ Olav Velthuis, 'Symbolic meanings of prices: Constructing the value of contemporary art in Amsterdam and New York Galleries', *Theory and Society*, No. 32, 2003, pg. 191

⁴²⁶ *ibid*, pg. 193

⁴²⁷ *ibid*

signifiers, whilst there are other modes of expression through which the sense of artistic value may be prompted. Through a deciphering of characteristics that are connected to but not coming from the art object itself, such as the type and range of gallery that represents or sells it or its institutional exhibition records. Nevertheless, the clear numerical articulation of a price that needs no further deciphering is handy in the communications about artistic value within the field of art. Its use, according to Velthuis conclusions, has many modes like for example when a high price is understood as a signification of a high aesthetic quality or when the pricing of works is analogous to their size.⁴²⁸ Also, as contemporary art prices are not subject to decrease (such a behavior would make collectors skeptical about the artistic value of their purchase) the sales tactic for galleries and dealers has a very distinct orientation, very different to any other commodity market. The profit is not calculated in terms of the amount of goods sold but in the figure of the prices. Meaning simply that a gallery would prefer to sell one work of higher price than two works of lower prices, even if the combined amount of the two would surmounts the sale price of the one.⁴²⁹ So the point here is that it might be possible to say that the contemporary art work is not at all offended, as suggested by Bourdieu, by its commercial potential, but on the contrary as the price of an artwork becomes a signifier of its aesthetic value the goal of attaining value becomes synonymous with the augmentation of this price.

⁴²⁸ *ibid*, pg. 194

⁴²⁹ Olav Velthuis, 'Symbolic meanings of prices: Constructing the value of contemporary art in Amsterdam and New York Galleries', *Theory and Society*, No. 32, 2003, pg. 195

4.5 The Puzzle of Surplus Value

We may also look at the economical character of artistic value from a different perspective, the one of the professional artist as articulated by an art theorist. This takes us back to some earlier points, and in this thesis it takes from Diedrich Diederichsen and his small book/essay *On (Surplus) Value in Art*. The author tackles the notion of 'Mehrwert' in art production, by playing around its double meaning in the German language, translated in English as either 'payoff' or 'value added' and contrasted to the Marxist term in English 'surplus value'. Diederichsen, begins with the thesis that the artwork's unique status within society is legitimated by the three premises, established by modern bourgeois society; namely 'autonomy, desire and authorship'⁴³⁰. Autonomy, as the act of distinguishing art as exceptional among other types of cultural production, desire as art defines a domain that is so free in its aesthetic and intellectual capacity that can truly embody the principle of unbridled desire, and authorship as its creations originate from a specific intellect and intend to form a meaningful virtual cosmos within an existentially unsure real one. Through these notions, the author argues, that one may rationalize on the existence of a positive artistic 'use value' whatever that may be in various specific contexts, and which is therefore entitled to generate Mehrwert as part of the capitalist system of exchange that we live in. Though, the problem for Diederichsen is understood as the failure of the possibility that the artistic field had towards becoming an unbiased establishment: Despite the great necessary extend of institutional legitimization or of 'self confirming' aesthetic theories, the contemporary public has been

⁴³⁰ Diedrich Diederichsen, *On (Surplus) Value in Art*, (Rotterdam & Berlin: Witte de With & Sternberg Press, 2008) pg. 23

conditioned to believe that the main factor of artistic legitimization and Mehrwert in an artwork comes surprisingly in the premise of a 'punch line'

'A coalition of the vulgar avant-garde, museum educators, and witty artists has brought into the world the idea (which is not entirely new) that, since Duchamp, the goal of art has been to deliver a punch line, that one crucial maneuver, that little extra inspiration. This 'extra inspiration' is made up of a number of different elements. First, it involves the communicative strategies of advertising, for which it is important that a brand, a product, and a campaign be organized around a single, identifiable, but surprising 'claim', as it is termed in the industry. It also involves a conceit - itself a result of modern art's need for legitimization - that every work must create its own justification, indeed that it must at one and the same time be both a genre and a single existing instance in the genre.'⁴³¹

What Diederichsen argues basically is that there has been a tendency to popularize the kind of art that relies more on obvious conceptual traits rather than skill or abstractions of vague contexts. Nevertheless, in addition to such marketing-oriented art-making there exist also two other types of contemporary artworks that even though less popular, may claim value through their *Mehrwert*. One is a general category in which artistic *Mehrwert* exists within the function of immersion: an artistic mode that cannot and should not be formulated or defined in words. It is their overwhelming aesthetic effect that establishes their value. Diederichsen argues that both the 'punch-line' and this 'art-plunge' ideologies of artistic value are somewhat products of a systemic necessity to establish common grounds among agents -acting within the chaotic regime of aesthetic 'anomie' - in distinguishing and thus justifying the existence, importance and value of contemporary art or perpetuating the equal necessity for 'legitimizing' aesthetic theories. Thus once more we stumble upon the importance of belief.

The writer points towards a third, more traditional category of agents and artworks to which legitimization of the contemporary context is not an issue. He points towards the art specialist professional for whom art is part of who he or

⁴³¹ Diederich Diederichsen, *On (Surplus) Value in Art*, (Rotterdam & Berlin: Witte de With & Sternberg Press, 2008) pp. 24-25

she is and in no occasion this agent would question or try to make agreements about his or her vital professional-ontological conditions. Corresponding to this third model, there exist similarly behaving artworks that:

‘...are able to forgo external justifications and thus give off the heavy scent of immanence, in which the business of art is so fond of steeping. It is works of this kind that finance the everyday operations of the art industry. They circulate throughout the world, and images of them fill the catalogues and art magazines. Yet it is only works of the first type - those that are openly in need of legitimization - that keep the discourse alive.’⁴³²

This type of artwork is illustrated with the example of contemporary German painting as it comes into perspective as an art-historical contingency, by making use of established traditions⁴³³ in matters of medium and form with the outcome of their immediate and unjustified recognition as art. The author finds that the appearances of novelty in contemporary art do not transform into financial capital rather than into networking opportunities and discourses. In fact, for acquiring ‘real success’ an artwork should for Diederichsen:

‘...show up fresh like a debutante with something very familiar, and in that case the measure of one’s success is precisely the fact that it generates no discourse, or else reduces existing discourse to silence. Neither Lichtenstein nor Twombly, neither the German nor the American ‘best sellers’ of the moment, sparked much discourse when they were successful.’⁴³⁴

Though, despite his in deep analysis of the contemporary art object and its claims to economic and cultural value the German author does not come up with a description of how this value is attributed or else into the issue of the legitimizing authority.

Reassessing an earlier point in the essay, we may say that this is a process in which a certain ‘authorized’ agent or a group of agents attribute an object with a status of artistic value, which is then immediately translated in terms of financial value. In this respect, Bourdieu brings forth a polemic argument by

⁴³² Ibid, pg. 29

⁴³³ And in the case of German painting Diederich Diederichsen refers to Max Ernst, magical realism, German neo-expressionism, wild painting, hippie surrealism and GDR art.

⁴³⁴ Diederich Diederichsen, *On (Surplus) Value in Art*, (Rotterdam & Berlin: Witte de With & Sternberg Press, 2008) pg. 30

attacking a dominant - in terms of its bourgeois origins ⁴³⁵ - idea: Seeing the artist as a charismatic creator, who through the act of creation and the application of his signature transmits his own value onto an artwork. The sociologist argues that the actual procedure for establishing value in art is of another kind, merely hiding behind the 'charisma ideology'. ⁴³⁶ For the issue to be clearly comprehended he suggests that we sincerely and realistically try to answer a simple question: 'who is the true producer of the work's value - the painter or the dealer, the writer or the publisher, the playwright or the theatre manager?'⁴³⁷

In his view -informed mainly by his study of the Parisian *Fin de Siecle* literary and artistic field - it becomes clear that the person who discovers the artist and places his artwork into the market system is the one who also names the value of the work and its Mehrwert potential, both in artistic and economic terms.⁴³⁸ Obviously, in such an arbitrary process it goes without saying that '...the more consecrated he is, the more strongly he consecrates the work'.⁴³⁹ Of course what this consecration, ultimately aspires to is to produce a twofold surplus of capital , drawn respectively from the financial and cultural fractions of the dominant field.

This is a view that resonates with the typical showcase of the Young British Artists and Saatchi. Bourdieu's point comes across in seeing how those artists were 'discovered' and placed in the market by field agents Charles Saatchi and Mark Rosenthal of the Royal Academy. Most off them with very few

⁴³⁵ See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pg. 51

⁴³⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) pp. 76-77

⁴³⁷ *ibid*

⁴³⁸ *ibid*

⁴³⁹ *ibid*

exceptions, saw their work acquire high market prices and institutional recognition within a very short period of their debuts⁴⁴⁰. And it was the synergy these two agents that clearly marked the combined consecration of cultural and financial capital, necessary for such developments to be recognized as art historical events, rather than seen as phenomena of 'field self-perpetuation'. Francis Halsall, also in tune with this viewpoint, brings up another relevant example from an earlier era: Jackson Pollock and his decisive connection to collector and patron Peggy Guggenheim, an agent that bore both types of capital. Halsall's argument challenges Pollock's outstanding value status as a painter by arguing that this may be a consequence of a random systemic choice and 'lock in' phenomena caused by Peggy Guggenheim's authority within the American artworld as well as within the already established, Surrealist group. In addition to that, under these particular circumstances, Pollock managed to become a leading figure within an art historical group 'lock in', perhaps similar to that of the YBA's in contemporary Britain.⁴⁴¹ Yet, when the public media was asking in 1949, 'Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?'⁴⁴², they were expressing a view that was much more representative of the field that had instigated those drip paintings than of Pollock himself as a bohemian avant-gardist.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ This point is argued vividly by Stallabrass throughout his book *High Art Lite* (London & New York: Verso, 1999)

⁴⁴¹ Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 168

⁴⁴² *Life Magazine*, 8.8.1949, see <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-pollock-jackson.htm>

⁴⁴³ 'The rise to prominence of a new style or of work by an unknown artist used to be preceded by much critical discussion and evaluation. Today, the process often operates in reverse; first comes the popular attention, then the discussion and assessment. Novelties in painting and sculpture receive notice in the press as new facts long before they have qualified as new art. The public presence of images that demand elucidation exerts pressure upon art institutions and educators to exhibit and comment upon them. If the work continues to hold the spotlight, this comment takes place within a heavy drift toward approval. Dealers, curators, collectors become committed to the new art; critics eager to keep up with, and even ahead of, the flux of innovation discover features that link it to admired precedents. To deny the significance of the new product begins to seem futile, since whatever is much seen and talked

Another critical perspective, that takes us towards our specific case study, is given by feminist art critic Laura Cottingham who argues that the artistic value of Pollock's paintings cannot by all means be disjoint by a greater frame of American modernist cultural values. His value as a painter was 'nationalized, racialized and gendered'⁴⁴⁴ as part of a triumphal shift of high art production from Europe to America and which was performed by male, white American artists. In terms of contemporary art production this model of 'added value' through such cultural agencies is for Cottingham an ongoing process. In Barney, she argues, 'this construction of "the male" as a sign of value reaches dizzying heights' and his emergence and panegyric reception in the begging of the 1990s in New York was somehow a revitalizing yet somewhat desperate event for the downward, depressive art community and market of the time. A situation that even though can be seen as similar to the case of Pollock, in regards to a gallery-art critic coalition for boosting the 'importance' of artistic achievement, yet ultimately a desperate repetition of an old and tested method, that comes down to capitalizing on white maleness.⁴⁴⁵

Albeit it seems rather possible that in its essence, artistic value is something to be mainly argued and established by someone other than the artist we ought to pragmatically recognize two things in seeing artistic value as a

about is already on its way to becoming a fait accompli of taste. By the mere quantity of interest aroused by its novelty, the painting is nudged into art history. Once there, its goodness or badness may still be debated, but unless the whole culture is under attack its status as art is secure. Having a place in art history is the value; through attaining this place, the work's own qualities become part of the standards by which the work is judged.' Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object: Art Today and its Audience*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964), p. 227

⁴⁴⁴ Laura Cottingham, 'The Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Post Modern', in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, Joanna Früh, Cassandra L. Langer & Arlene Raven eds. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994)

⁴⁴⁵ Laura Cottingham, 'The Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Post Modern', in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, Joanna Früh, Cassandra L. Langer & Arlene Raven eds. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994)

heterogeneous function to the artwork itself. One is that the art-field as a field of production similar to most others is allowing and providing for particularly specific roles, that agents are called to enact as specialists. Effectively, this organizational mode prevents, with various structure mechanisms, the artist, the specialist for art production, from communicating the artistic merit of his product with his or her own voice ⁴⁴⁶. He or she in order to become a professional producer of art, has to enter the art market, the competition and receive payments for his or her work by going through a 'gatekeeper', who in return for his services makes profit over sale percentages.

'The fact that art dealers refuse to price according to quality is not just related to the signaling effect of prices. They also refuse to do so in order to enact their role as gatekeepers of the art market. This gate-keeping role not only implies that dealers function as a selection mechanism for new artists entering the market, it also means that art dealers perceive the gallery as the main screening device for every individual artwork that enters the market. This role requires setting prices according to size. By accepting price differences, dealers would implicitly admit that differences in quality exist in the works for sale. Thus, their gate-keeping role would be undermined.'⁴⁴⁷

Yet, still it may be that the artistic 'discovery' of an artist, occurs most likely before the 'consecrated' discovery that places his within the art financial system. There is always some kind of recognition occurring within an artistic group, perhaps as early as university or later depending on the case. Within these rather closed circles, artists and curators with connections to a market, 'discover' an interesting work or distinguish an artist and then it is handed over to a 'gatekeeper'⁴⁴⁸. Again in the example of Pollock, Hallsal quotes Tom Wolfe saying that it was through Baziotés and Motherwell that the painter came to meet Peggy Guggenheim, who basically

⁴⁴⁶ Even though there is always the case of the artist knowingly positioning himself in the place where he can easily be discovered by 'consecrated' agents of the field.

⁴⁴⁷ Olav Velthuis, 'Symbolic meanings of prices: Constructing the value of contemporary art in Amsterdam and New York galleries', *Theory and Society*, No. 32 (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003) pg. 18

⁴⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) pp. 77-78

launched his career⁴⁴⁹. Diane Crane, also points out how strong was the Neo-Expressionists social network established and expanded from the mid forties to the mid sixties, in comparison to all the other style groups that operated in the New York art world in that time:

'In fact, they were highly successful in creating a vital social network that included not only themselves but artists working in other styles and other art forms, as well as influential critics, dealers and curators. This social network became the center of the dialogues concerning the nature of the avant-garde during this period and assured the access of these artists to this title(.....)At the end of the period, the Neo-Expressionists were able to establish themselves in an extremely competitive environment by creating a social network that was closely related to galleries created by themselves and their friends and identified with a new art neighborhood, the East Village. Their skill at dramatizing themselves and their work succeeded in attracting the attention of the artistic establishment'⁴⁵⁰

The point to be made here is that despite the heterogeneous factors that position an artist or a group of artists in a prominent line from where their work is made correspondent to high value status, there is always the possibility that some kind of form of quality in the work makes the artist distinguishable. Bourdieu, in his polemic determination against the system of production to which the artwork exists as its basis, seems to negate the option of an art that has in a sense a certain innate value of existence.

The second objection one can posit here is that with the view of the artist being almost irrelevant to the value of the art-object, Bourdieu fails to express the fact that any artwork made - even the most cynical form of 'ready-made' - is a product of labor, combining a physical and intellectual effort in which one or more individuals are involved. Thus, as a product of labor and time, the artwork has perhaps a natural or intrinsic value attached to it and it is exactly this that creates the potential or the opportunity of systemic capitalization and *mehrwert* in both financial and cultural senses.

⁴⁴⁹ Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word* (London: Black Swan, 1989), p. 56 quoted in Francis Halsall, *Systems of Art: Art, History and Systems Theory*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 169

⁴⁵⁰ Diane Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985*, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 41-42

The way that this value becomes instrumental to society is perhaps the issue that Bourdieu is focused upon. He seems to be preoccupied by the way that the aesthetic realm may reflect traditional behavioral schemes adjacent to the social functions and conditions that allow for political domination and class inequalities to be perpetuated. Though, I suggest that one ought to make a distinction between this function and the one that could ideally express the concept of intrinsic value embodied by an art object. Whether this 'natural' value is or not a transubstantiated artist 'charisma' is a very ambiguous and perspectival issue whose investigation cannot help us here. What is more important is to point out that when Bourdieu expresses the view in which the 'charismatic creator' is a mere ideological construction in the service of a 'cultural business', operating within the ideological frame of capitalism and the concretization of financial profit, he gives perhaps a description of the artist being an 'exploited laborer'⁴⁵¹. Though this idea is in the same way part of an ideological construction, seeing art as solely a commodity and a fetich. Built upon this idea, a logic of an unstoppable vicious circle is produced that leads to a dead-end in which the human capacity and privilege for artistic expression ceases to exist. Diederichsen, analyzes the relationship between the artist as laborer, to the art-object value formation process, in the purpose of indicating 'how the exceptionalist economy of art is based, to a certain degree, on a rather regular economy'⁴⁵². Even though this might be set in

⁴⁵¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993) pg. 76

⁴⁵² Diederichsen, goes into an analysis of the artist's 'daily life' by identifying two different procedures within artistic production and value formation. First, we can look at 'the everyday value of the art commodity and its price' as an artwork like all normal economy commodities, is made by labor and thus we could try to figure out its actual value by adding up working hours... Yet, this would lead us to a nonsensical outcome considering the price levels of contemporary

a parallel direction to that of Bourdieu's, it is not at all coming from same idea: one sees the insincere 'disavowal' of the economy and the other the inauthentic 'exceptionalism'. One speaks of the negation of essence and the other of the acceptance of a privileged statute. Yet, it is interesting that both writers agree that the art-world economy as a field of production, behaves as if there exists an underlying truth or an invisible factor that disorientates analytical perspectives, with the distortions it causes while at the same time preserves the unique efficacy of this system in generating and perpetuating artistic value. Adding to this the idea of an 'adoption' of aesthetic objects by a greater cultural and political context, to be championed as part of what makes them superior, we cannot but make out the possibility of how artworks and artists are largely dependent on an evident or perhaps sometimes less evident 'parenting' that ultimately takes us back in thinking about the issue of faith in the aesthetic realm.

'commercial artworks'. Thus Diederichsen proposes to: '...take the investment in training and other activities that are necessary part of becoming an artist into account and include them in the calculation of the socially necessary artistic labor as well. Then, many more results would collect in the middle, for the hours of the socially necessary labor would drastically increase. The differences between the prices currently being paid would no longer seem so preposterous, because the overall return on the individual hour of artistic labor would drop precipitously.' In these calculations he points out two factors such as the 'social life' investment, needed for becoming an artist (which he argues to have fallen considerably as opposed to the education investment) and the issue of university years finance which would be either a state sponsorship or personal investments like a loan for example. In the first case Diederichsen attributes the artist with a civil servant status while in the latter with that of an entrepreneur and thus draws the conclusion that both instances allow us to see contemporary art as very different from a former impression of enjoying a 'romantic exceptionalism' in terms of the economic sense of its value. Even so, the issue remains still open and ambiguous regarding the aesthetic value of these artworks, seen as commodified objects around which the artworld operates. see, Diederichsen, On (Surplus) Value in Art, (Rotterdam & Berlin: Witte de With & SternbergPress, 2008) pp. 32-35

4.6 Kantian Disinterestedness and Contemporary Artistic Value

In an essay by Anthony Downey⁴⁵³ included in the book, *The Art Business*, from 2008 we may read a confessional anecdote about an occasion in which he was called by a student in a public lecture to answer the following question: 'So what is the difference between selling contemporary art and carpets - or for that matter used cars?'

'...although the art-world exists and operates to all intents and purposes like any other economic system or business, art itself could not be, and indeed should not be, treated as commodity. In this response, I was expressing an obviously idealistic belief: artistic practice and financial worth should not answer to the same ideals insofar as aesthetic and economic value are of necessity two different things. The words, even as I uttered them - and perhaps more so now in the current 'boom' environment of the contemporary art market - felt compromised from the outset. In the first instance, not only does the art-world operate in a manner similar to a conventional consumeristic system of commodification, but also that most contentious of aesthetic terms - value - would appear to be increasingly answerable to an economic system based upon a crude supply and demand model.'⁴⁵⁴

Downey's 'glibly' response (according to his own words) to the unexpected question testifies an automated form of rhetoric that ultimately fails to appeal to the author's own sense of logic and yet it is spoken out as a formal response. The ghostly 'idealistic belief' that makes Downey speak 'out of his mind' in a public university lecture, can be related to the conditioning he had been subjected to through his own student and working years within the field as well as through his social habitus. It is also something that takes us back to the relationship between artistic value and the conditioned faith in the aesthetic ideal, in showing that even though such conviction may be lost in its essence, its practice is reverently followed due to the effective social potentials it entails. The faith in the aesthetic ideal is based on an old axiom created by the Western mind, according to which the creation of art is a distinct action and the artwork a distinct object among all others.

⁴⁵³ Anthony Downey is currently a professor and Program Director of MA in Contemporary Art, Sotheby's Institute of Art London.

⁴⁵⁴ Anthony Downey, 'Selling used cars, carpets and art: Aesthetic and financial value in contemporary art', in Iain Robertson & Derrick Chong (eds.) *The art Business*, (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2008) pp. 55-56

Thus, *poiesis* was with Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics, established as non-praxis, as something unique within human activity. The artwork, as the product of *poiesis*, has its value and ends only in itself; the product of *praxis* though, as well as its action stems its value and ends in the action it performs and the agent who is involved in these actions⁴⁵⁵. As we have seen in a previous part, this point of separating praxis and art was the both the key objective for an 'autonomous' art and the point which the avant guard projects were created against, annihilating this separation. Two millennia later this 'state of exception' axiom manifests itself through the spontaneous response of an art-field agent, interestingly employed in the service of Sotheby's, a commercial institution founded within the aims of conservation and commodification of the value of art-objects. Though, what the author presents most clearly in his essay is that by no means are these beliefs any more vital or at least necessary within the articulation and constitution of the field's ideology (or logic) of practice. We are experiencing a time of demand driven art, he says, and supports his view by pointing at 'history's' most expensive artwork: Damien Hirst's diamond skull *For the Love of God*, whose production cost 12 million pounds and its price was given to be 50 million. Why this object was categorized as art and not as an expensive home-ware jewel?

Bourdieu treats another similar philosophical axiom of this faith in the most polemical manner; the Kantian *a priori*, the 'pure gaze' of art appreciation. This is argued by the French writer to be a kind of philosophical position which even though was intended to be and seemingly is trans-historical, it is

⁴⁵⁵ M. Hunter & R. Shusterman, 'Value and the Valuation of art in Economic and Aesthetic Theory' in Victor A. Ginsburgh & David Throsby (eds.) *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, Vol. 1, (Elsevier & New Holland: Amsterdam, Boston, Heidelberg, London, New York, Oxford, Paris, San Diego, San Francisco, Singapore, Sydney, Tokyo, 2006) p. 174

actually a genuine product of historical circumstance. It confers clearly its relationship with the birth and development of a bourgeois establishment during the 18th century in both economic and cultural terms. In this frame Immanuel Kant captured within his philosophical studies the *zeitgeist* of his time as well as formed a basis of aesthetic judgment for the times to come, namely modernism. His philosophy develops through a need to articulate the 'logically universal' as opposed to the 'despotically universal' of the aristocracy and the 'popular' of the masses. A middle way for the middle class, that is. Ernst Gombrich, also questioning the validity of the Kantian 'disinterested aesthetic gaze', doubts the philosopher's centrality to the study of art and aesthetics by expressing again a rather Bourdieuan scope on Kant's habitus:

'One wonders whether that was true even for the Sage of Königsberg. Whether not even he was influenced in his preferences by his group and by its ideas of 'good taste'. He probably never observed the nexus between aesthetic and social appeal, because he lived in a relatively closed milieu and because he was not very much involved in artistic matters.'⁴⁵⁶

Nevertheless, by the extensive use of the axiom of disinterestedness it was the power of Kantian philosophy as a whole, that was appropriated by the artistic field, granting it with a language and analytical capacity that accentuated even more the belief in the aesthetic realm. Could we ever talk about generating 'philosophical capital' in the same way we may talk about generating the artistic one? If yes then this is it. For example, Mark A. Cheetham in the third chapter of his book *Kant, Art and Art History: Moments of Discipline*⁴⁵⁷ investigates the validity or 'authority' and the 'effects' that Kantian aesthetic theory had on modern art history, art practice and art criticism. He looks into the this relationship by interrogating

⁴⁵⁶ E. H. Gombrich, 'The Logic of Vanity Fair: Alternatives to Historicism in the Study of Fashions, Styles and Taste, (or. ed. 1974) in *Ideals and Idols: Essays on values in history and in art*, (Phaidon: Oxford & New York, 1979) pg. 86

⁴⁵⁷ Mark A. Cheetham, *Kant, Art, and Art History: Moments of Discipline*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 67-100

Irwin Panofsky's art history, certain art theorists of cubism -like Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Christopher Gray, Lynn Gamwell, Edward F. Fry, Paul Crowther- as well as Greenberg's art criticism. What he observes is that there exists a common ground among these uses of Kant's philosophy. What Bourdieu noted as the bourgeois principle of universalism, is understood from another perspective by Cheetham, as a 'cosmopolitan humanism'. Expressed through a disinterested philosophical disposition, borrowed from Kantian thought and brought into the twentieth century art field, it was able to help form its domain with necessary 'boundaries and regimens'⁴⁵⁸. Yet on the introductory chapter of his book Cheetham makes an extensive reference to Bourdieu's theory particularly underlining the connection drawn between the development of aesthetic theory and that of the institutions that were to host the autonomous art object. Both theory and institution acted for Bourdieu as 'contributions' to the 'social construction' of the reality of the art object and its field as a domain of privilege to the middle class bourgeois.⁴⁵⁹

This relationship between institution and the value of the art object, that ultimately falls into the market pot, is well described by Diane Crane in the book, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985*. In the introductory chapter, while setting the background for her study of the 'American avant-guard' she presents us with facts and conclusions regarding the historical process of the vivid expansion of the American art world since World War II up to 1985. Crane provides with various factors that contributed in the expansion and categorizes them into two

⁴⁵⁸ *ibid*, pg. 100

⁴⁵⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Trans. Susan Emanuel (CA: Stanford University Press, 1996) pg. 294

periods before and after the 1960s when the development of the arts became a sort of national policy for the United States and thus subject to federal and corporate funding. Prior to that, the process was initiated in the field of education both in undergraduate and graduate institutions as well as through the institution of city 'Art Centers' during the 1930s. The effects of such an institutionalization allowed for a twofold development in regards to the art object and its value. The sub-field of the 'avant-guard' artistic production, particularly the groups of neo-expressionism and minimalism, became increasingly mainstream, and felt the ripping of advantages from the new structural environment of the field. While these older artistic groups bordered externally the desires of 'popular culture and middle-class values', thus keeping their work intact *vis-a-vis* a demand, new artistic trends such as Pop Art and Photorealism, developed from within the shift and essentially incorporated the aesthetic elements of consensus towards the American mainstream middle class.⁴⁶⁰

So within this logic, of a taste and value in art that is reflected upon and projected by a particular class, Bourdieu argues over an issue that he finds particularly unrevised, within the domain of aesthetics and the study of art. It is the core divide between the bourgeois and the working class mind⁴⁶¹, in his own words expressed as the question of 'the form of relationship with the work of art'⁴⁶² in terms of class. Thus, he identifies this issue with the essential analytical lack within the contemporary philosophical establishment,

⁴⁶⁰ Diane Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985*, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 2-11

⁴⁶¹ Michael Grenfell & Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2007), p. 41

⁴⁶² Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic' in *The field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 256

as it had always felt valid in its subjective perceptions, grounded in Kantian reason.

'The pure thinker, by taking as the subject of reflection his or her own experience - the experience of a cultured person from a certain social milieu - but without focusing on the historicity of that reflection and the historicity of the object to which it is applied (and by considering it a pure experience on the work of art), unwittingly establishes the singular experience as a transhistorical norm for every historical perception.'⁴⁶³⁴⁶⁴

This division in matters of appreciation or taste is not to be considered though as merely a structural or even obvious division, serving and perpetuating the discourse of social class struggle. The essential point comes by understanding that certain unclear and under-theorized complexities that characterize the agents that occupy positions within these structures⁴⁶⁴, gaining their dynamic through the process of institutionalization, have resulted to a definition of a 'common value currency'⁴⁶⁵ within the aesthetic domain. Such an idea was constructed with the intention 'of opposing social classificatory forms'⁴⁶⁶, while at the same time asserting a dominance - by claiming cultural necessity - of the 'bourgeois' for the articulation of the 'aesthetic aura' and the faith in the aesthetic ideal.

In Crane we find the development of this situation as reference to the way in which Abstract Expressionism rose to prominence and established itself as high value art. The validity of judgment ascribed to 'a professional subculture devoted to the appreciation of art'⁴⁶⁷ as embodied by critics like Clement Greenberg, who by their academic background in art history and aesthetics were able to establish their views as closer to the abstraction and clarity of science as possible. Their formal analyses and critical reviews were somewhat

⁴⁶³ibid, p. 256

⁴⁶⁴Such complexities, in my view are most likely a subject of psychological research

⁴⁶⁵Michael Grenfell & Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2007), pg. 42

⁴⁶⁶ibid

⁴⁶⁷Diane Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985*, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pg. 263

put forth as the most disinterested and pure takes on art in opposition to other 'interested positions', coming from non-academic backgrounds that were considered opinionated and impartial. Though in effect, as Crane notes, what these critics were doing, consciously or unconsciously in their effort to universalize the mode of apprehension for artistic value through their theories, was to promote the establishment of a specific artistic current that was very much to their taste.⁴⁶⁸ The same happened with the other prominent artistic current in North America, Minimalism. When Abstract Expressionism was hosted as style by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), Minimalism was promoted through the Jewish Museum and the Guggenheim Museum yet prior to any such exhibitions the Minimalist work of art received great critical attention by another group of art critics that on many occasions could be considered as collaborators to the movement⁴⁶⁹.

This is an odd yet functional process and one that we can see reflected upon the perceptions and meanings of value in contemporary art. The critic as an art discourse collaborator. Whether this discourse is played out within popular media, institutional amphitheatres, or the gallery space there is always an intriguing combination of an authoritative *a priori* perfume covering the sweaty smell of a days work. While disinterestedness from desire, and freedom of thought are pre-supposed in the artistic field it is the endorsement of the field's rationale that gives one the opportunity to occupy a position within its economy. And then again self-reflexivity when exercised is rather fragile and creates an effect of 'positive feedback' to the conditions it reflects upon. Perhaps this is what stirs up Bourdieu's polemic force as his research

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid*, pg. 264

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid*, pg. 36

showed that the art world is a system that neither functions on a level of disinterestedness nor of a freedom of thought. And what he brings into our perspective are the issues of market and capital logic, celebrity, and compromise that dominate the action of agents within the greater professional field of art.

Peter Bürger, provides us with two useful insights regarding this point. First, in relation to the philosophical capitalization of aesthetics as an authoritative basis, he makes clear that Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* was looking into the act of aesthetic judgment and not the actual art object. So in a way, he tried to establish a formula of art evaluation that had one core principle: disinterestedness, as in detachment from desire:

'If the faculty of desire is that human capability which makes possible on the side of the subject a society based on the principle of the maximization of profit, then Kant's axiom also defines the freedom of art from the constraints of the developing bourgeois-capitalist society. The aesthetic is conceived as a sphere that does not fall under the principle of maximization of profit prevailing in all spheres of life. In Kant this element does not yet come to the fore. On the contrary, he makes clear what is meant (the detachment of the aesthetic from all practical life contexts) by emphasizing the universality of aesthetic judgment as compared with the particularity of the judgment to which bourgeois social critic subjects the feudal life style.'⁴⁷⁰

And second he explains that the issue of universality refers much more to a unifying principle rather than to an elitist trait of qualification:

'The logical peculiarity of the judgement of taste is that whereas it claims universal validity, it is not "a logical universality according to concepts" (§ 31) because in that case the "necessary and universal approval would be capable of being enforced by proofs" (§ 35). For Kant, the universality of the aesthetic judgement is thus grounded in the agreement of an idea with the subjective conditions of the use of judgement that apply to all, concretely, in the agreement of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and understanding (*Verstand*).'⁴⁷¹

So if we find there the universal grounding of Kant's aesthetic judgment, when imagination agrees with understanding, which is indeed a very abstract grounding, the field has most likely developed a type of elaboration, that arrives to the crucial and rather obscure point where: 'what is at stake is the

⁴⁷⁰ Peter Bürger, *Theorie of the Avant Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 42-43

⁴⁷¹ *ibid*, pg.43

opposition between the refined, or tasteful, and the vulgar'⁴⁷² , as for example in the following quote from Clement Greenberg:

'Quality in art is not just a matter of private experience. There is a consensus of taste. The best taste is that of the people who, in each generation, spend the most time and trouble on art, and this best taste has always turned out to be unanimous, within certain limits.'⁴⁷³

Or as the same idea is expressed from a polemic point of view:

'To appreciate a painting, a poem, or a symphony presupposes mastery of the specialized symbolic code of which it is a materialization, which in turn requires possession of the proper kind of cultural capital. Mastery of this code can be acquired by osmosis in one's milieu of origin or by explicit teaching. When it comes through native familiarity (as with the children of cultured upper-class families), this trained capacity is experienced as an individual gift, an innate inclination testifying to spiritual worth. The Kantian theory of "pure aesthetic," which philosophy presents as universal, is but a stylized --and mystifying--account of this particular experience of the "love of art" that the bourgeoisie owes to its privileged social position and condition.'⁴⁷⁴

Now if we consider that perhaps one of the quasi canonical measures in contemporary art is the Duchampian style of material conceptualism, and understand how it operates in this division between a good and a bad taste, we may see the workings of a digestive system or as Grenfell puts it: 'a double play, where not only is rarified taste opposed to everyday taste(.....), but those common everyday objects and actions of taste⁴⁷⁵ are also appropriated and aestheticized'⁴⁷⁶. Thus the point that that could be made here is that in contextualizing an artwork, is a lot like contextualizing the values of the field in which it exists.

Of course, this is not a one-way street as the one who does not succumb or

⁴⁷² Michael Grenfell & Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2007), pg. 42

⁴⁷³ Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pg. 118

⁴⁷⁴ Loïc Wacquant, 'Pierre Bourdieu', in *Key Thinkers: Review 2006*, pg. 9

⁴⁷⁵ At 28, Dan Colen is a budding star who was featured in the 2006 Whitney Biennial and whose paintings sell for around \$50,000 each, according to his dealer, Javier Peres of Peres Projects, in Los Angeles. Lately, these works have been colorful abstractions that Colen calls "bird shit" paintings—an accurate description of their appearance. "He made the first couple of them and gave us directions," says Theo Rosenblum, one of five \$15-an-hour part-time workers in Colen's New York studio. "A lot of the work involves developing our own ways of painting them. That is what's interesting: There are different styles of bird shit. The way these paintings are, it's almost better to have different hands on them." in Linda Yablonsky, 'The Studio System', *Art + Auction*, 17 November 2007, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/25912/the-studio-system/>

⁴⁷⁶ Michael Grenfell & Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2007), pg. 42

react to the 'faith' we have been describing here, may see things differently. With a really disinterested eye that makes for the most fertile ground for the aesthetic function and the cultivation not of a collective faith but of individual awareness. Though the question about how to understand artistic value today still remains almost intact. Perhaps, we can take Walter Benjamin's understanding as a possible answer and focus on the fact that the artistic function draws its value from the fact that a work of art is subject to display or else exhibition. Of course what is important in Benjamin's observation is that he sees this work of art as having more functions than solely the artistic one which he characterizes as incidental.⁴⁷⁷ Thus he quotes Brecht in the following passage, expressing a view that is parallel to his:

'If the term "work of art" is no longer suitable for the thing that emerges when a work of art becomes commodity, we must carefully and discreetly (yet without trepidation) drop the term if we do not wish simultaneously to abolish the function of that commodity, because this is a phase it must go through, and I mean that quite literally, this is no casual deviation from the correct path, what happens to it here is going to change it profoundly, eradicating its past to an extent that, were the old term to be resumed (and it will be, why not?), it will have ceased to evoke any reminder of what it once described.'⁴⁷⁸

Moreover, this novel, multifunctional status of the artwork and its value is best embodied in film, a genre that for Benjamin creates both analytical opportunities⁴⁷⁹ and brings into effect a 'reception in a state of distraction that to an increasing extent is becoming apparent in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in appreciation'⁴⁸⁰. Bringing this thought to the contemporary situation we are looking into, within the crowded gallery spaces of the big international institutions, in the art fair market places and the

⁴⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, J. A Underwood (trans.), (Penguin: London, 2008) or. p. 1936, pg. 13

⁴⁷⁸ Brecht quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, J. A Underwood (trans.), (Penguin: London, 2008) or. p. 1936, pg. 43

⁴⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, J. A Underwood (trans.), (Penguin: London, 2008) or. p. 1936, pp. 28-29

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid*, pg. 35

blockbuster exhibitions we cannot but confirm that such shift in appreciation has occurred. The artwork whether an object, an image, a film or a performance is not only addressed to a 'distracted audience' but is itself in a distracted condition. Intensively analyzed and yet still misunderstood, its aesthetic function seems to be obscured and diverted by a narcissistic restraint to its past as the value of the contemporary artwork can only be thought through its history.

Concluding remarks

This thesis is a product of an unexpected and rather mysterious negative feeling, created in me during the years of studying in an otherwise pleasant, field of academic practice and research, the cultural field. Coming from another, definitely more daunting branch in academia, political studies, I was driven towards the realm of culture and art as a psychotherapeutic way to deal with the fright one may receive by researching the political principles and practices of our society. Entering new area of research full of excitement my ideological basis was an informed by an immense 'philosophical' faith that art in all its forms, is good and protects us humans from the nightmare of our socio-political behavior. Though fast came the time when my enthusiasm as a believer, was curved by a growing sense of discontent within, both my academic environment and peers as well as many art professionals of my network.

There was a common assertion amongst many, of an art-world in existential crisis and yet one that could not really be put clearly forth in analytical manner. Of course the writing gave evidence of a general feeling of unpleasant inflation and degeneracy of the field. Artworks were becoming exceedingly less original and at the same time more and more cynical in their wearing their invisible aesthetic auras. At the same time academic studying of the arts entered a kind of new-Renaissance era, where art and culture related university departments were blooming around the world, creating young art professionals. The Museums took it large to the big wide audiences. Consumerism, industrialism and corporatism taking over in the field of the

Muses and of the free human imagination. Most romantic believers of art were convinced that there were something wrong happening to it. Of course, the most evident instigator of this situation, financial capital profit, was largely and publicly blamed for investing in this problematic, obese and prostituted art. Yet it is a rather obvious fact that the accumulation of wealth and the creation of culture are not exactly competing actions but rather interdependent ones. Taking a very cliché example from my own cultural heritage to tackle a very cliché polemic, I would point one towards the Parthenon and all mighty Athenian capitalist and slave labor based democracy. An artwork made to be admired for thousands of years and yet one that would not be possible without a huge capital expenditure by elite patrons.

Thus it was mainly upon this upsetting background that I took the decision to study the existential crisis in the field of contemporary art, as both a social and an aesthetic issue. Nevertheless, it would be important to state at this point that the very first research plan was about a study regarding a series of works which shared a main characteristic, for arguing that one of the things going wrong in the field of art was that it was increasingly becoming a heteronomous, fashionable field, driven by a popular taste for empty and yet transgressive images. Artworks inspired by violent images were aesthetic creations that were ruled by the same supply and demand rule of the common goods markets. Following a global cultural trend for visual transgression, violence became a very 'marketable' aesthetic form, from the early nineties and onwards. Thus the initial research plan was to focus on the phenomenon in which many contemporary art producers were using this 'trendy' subject matter for precisely targeting the blooming art market while at the same time

proliferating a tactic of aesthetic or artistic pointlessness in favor of good sales. On the other hand, one could also argue extensively how such works were symptomatic of the social and ethical conditions of the global society the artists were creating within and for. Under such purposes the research plan included Matthew Barney and his magnificent violent scenes of Cremaster 3 and 2 as one of the case studies of the phenomenon.

Luckily during the process of contextualizing the issue of 'demand' as taste in aesthetics, Pierre Bourdieu's theory came in to play and stirred up a whole new issue within the study as well as a much larger perspective on the phenomenon. Widening the theoretical plane it was at that point that the research plan took its final form in settling for only one work of art, the Cremaster Cycle, which was nevertheless inexhaustible in terms of analytical potentials. Looking back one could say luckily, violent aesthetics were dropped as a main focus and instead the emphasis was invested in understanding the nature of artistic value in contemporary art as a means for articulating issues such as demand and supply or of the generative source for art history.

This area was very complicated and therefore very complicating. And perhaps at this point one has to be apologetic to the reader of this thesis who has been, throughout the length of the text, exposed to a rather unorthodox, somewhat confusing argumentation format. Yet, it was not so much the nature of the research object but more the concept of artistic value that made this idiosyncratic mode somewhat necessary. Especially, when the thesis had to find one way to describe certain phenomena that cannot be clearly put or portrayed as traditional academic discourse. Thus starting from

the Cremaster Cycle as an art historical event, an aesthetic creation of immense and layered textures, in which art is entwined with all possible interacting fields within the field of power, we moved towards a very general point of theory as diverse pathways led us to the same question: How can we recognize understand the type of relationship between contemporary art's aesthetic and economic value? The thesis followed a straightforward methodological question for navigating into the labyrinth that makes up the general aporia of the contemporary artistic field: What kind of value did the Cremaster Cycle claim as a contemporary art work and how was this expressed as aesthetic and economic capital? Though as expected, it was immediately evident that the development of a critical perspective through such an investigation was being affected by a problematic condition: having to operate in two very complex and most importantly entwined analytical levels.

On the aesthetic one, in terms of the particular artwork the study focused upon, one had to solve the issue of its complexity by compromising with the exclusion of many elements, as the Cremaster Cycle is an artwork of innumerable aesthetic and narrative points of reference. Admitting to a definite insufficiency, in capturing the whole aspect of this colossal production and yet not agreeing in looking only in one of its series, the thesis had to find a way to navigate analytically. This issue was treated by creating a research focus upon two very obvious aesthetic categories in which we could place Barney's films, the total work of art and the style of decadence. This focus was a decision taken for two reasons: one was that through these wide scopes we could explore a wide range of issues, make therefore good use of the subjective nature of a thesis while at the same time arguing

an academic category format for this work. The other reason was that through these categories and the type of literature they are invested with, we could reach towards the other analytical level, the non-aesthetic one, whose complexity was even more problematic, vertically affecting the project from root to top. From its disciplinary choices and epistemological method to the theoretical research drive and argumentation over the case study. And the problem was still that in order to describe the conditions that create the system of artistic validity and value one had to combine many dissimilar enquiries: from a philosophical viewpoint of the aesthetic function to a cynically pragmatic perspective of a 'society' column or from a psychoanalytical game of objecthood, desire and fetishism to a mundane everydayness of a professional field earning its bread and butter. In view of such multiplicity of sources the thesis was largely helped and inspired by the study of the cultural and artistic field of production, by Pierre Bourdieu.

The thesis was presented as following: We begun by introducing the two basic starting points of this enquiry: the Cremaster Cycle films, through a detailed narration of their scripts and short introduction to their subject matter, and by looking at Bourdieu's basic concepts of the 'field' and 'habitus', explained upon the basis of the case study. This part finished by pointing out the way in which Matthew Barney's art and persona were intrinsically connected to the field of power in which they were nurtured and capitalized. How the private, institutional and media support created the right circumstances for his project to be realized. This, coupled with the shifting contingencies of the art field momentum during the nineties, resulted in the Cremaster Cycle being almost immediately featured as an art historical event within

American high art. To such facts, the first chapter addressed a simple question as to why was this specific work chosen to play an important role in the field of artistic production. The thesis then suggested two possible ways to approach an answer to this question. In the second chapter, the Cremaster Cycle was examined as a contemporary version of the Wagnerian genre, the total work of art, which through Barney's intervention was turned into an epic narrative with novel, as well as existing mythological characters. By combining his own biographical events with ideas, mythologies and personas that structured his habitual universe, the artist created a conceptual platform, as the basis for the creation of a large series of artworks in multiple mediums. The critical factor of his success in realizing this production was the seductive magnitude of its design. What we examined in this respect was how the Cremaster Cycle movies, through this spectacular design of visual and narrative themes suggested to its contemporary audience, likewise to Wagner's didactic opera's, a very specific morale. One that came out of a self-reflexive, psychosexual condition, a state which Barney explored from his earliest more rough works, and which through the Cycle it attained an epic baroque form. This condition is reflected by a highly aesthetic version of the masculine psyche and its route towards hubris, an iconic version of the dominant and narcissistic male of modernity, in terms of physicality or intelligence. Different personas, real or imaginary performing hubristic actions within complex narrative structures, were utilized by the artist in order to mythologize the findings of his introspective research, and carry through an amalgamated sense of tragic irony. Yet, the issue at hand was

that as this conceptual depth was matched with the grandest artistic glamour that the patrons could buy, making these films suitable for a blockbuster event, it managed to dissolve the Bourdieuan argument regarding the divisions of taste in terms of class. Avant guard, bourgeois and popular aesthetics merged into one project that addressed a much larger audience than the typical contemporary art one. And this characteristic provided us with an answer as to the question regarding the intensive patronage and institutional support that not only fostered but actually enabled the production of the Cremaster Cycle. Seeing the logic of financial profit as a logical explanation for such behavior on behalf of the field, we may conclude that Barney's ideas were consecrated for being a medium through which the Guggenheim Museum and its extended field gained valuable cultural capital as well as a seemingly panegyric aesthetic representation of the system that sustains the power of elites within the social field and their sole right to generate aesthetic value.

In the third chapter the argument follows an art historical period paradigm by looking at the ways in which the aesthetic characteristics of the decadent style of the end of the nineteenth century, was referent to a specific socio-political phenomenon and critique. By recognizing the aesthetic traits of the style within the Cremaster Cycle, both in terms of conceptual subject matter and of visual characteristics, the thesis showed how the artwork may have suggested a very different position than the one that was celebrated by the field as a victory of the creative imagination. Particularly in Barney's use of the horror genre technics and aesthetics we find the clues that direct us towards a sociopolitical understanding of his symbolic narratives and

characters. Moreover, the Cycle's infatuation with occult and metaphysical subjects and symbolic appearances especially in their entanglement within historical narratives and architectures of significant power, makes for an even more suggestive case of decadent social critique. And as the last movie of the cycle makes this critique explicit in its focus upon the corporate nature of the production of contemporary art and its value, the Masonic rite metaphor frames ideally the nature and form of elite power as a structuring condition of social antagonistic drives.

In the last chapter, the thesis reached the point in which we could argue directly about the concept of artistic value, for getting involved in those endless debates, that started in ancient times and are still entirely unresolved. A chaotic black hole of theory where aesthetics and politics melt into one and remind us of metaphysical realms out of which no structured conclusion can emerge. Though, there was always a way in which artistic value could be claimed and understood, not at all without adversary arguments but mainly because it features as an issue of strong belief among agents of the extended cultural field. Of course, it is the definition of what exactly is the artistic that drove most of these anxious debates throughout the centuries, making art-history like any other kind of history, a story with many discoveries, conflicts, conquests and long periods of peace.

Not only there has been no conclusion, but the puzzle regarding the elusive nature of artistic value becomes progressively more problematic and obscure when analyzed. For example the art-historical masterpiece is a sign not only of its special artistic value under the gaze of its spectators, but also of one that triggers the opportunity of capitalizing on its commerce and status, and offer a

medium for the display of capital and power. The value of the art object is thus rendered as a characteristic of social as well as national distinction and dominance and still after the passing of many centuries it holds firm as a perquisite for those with the will to power. Practically, Bourdieu has shown through his long study of the phenomenon, that the acquisition of cultural capital is a complementary action to the one of accumulating financial capital, in terms of establishing power. On the other hand, there is always the issue of a different sense of artistic value, when the art-object is seen as an emancipated entity. In the modernist agenda we can clearly understand what the value of the Avant- guard object meant. The 'non-obvious' masterpiece created to perform a revolutionary sabotage against conservative aesthetic representations. Out of all innovations of the early and late Avant-guards, the most provoking and at the same time generative one, had been the removal of the technically artistic skill in place of a conceptual game or even one could say an anti-aesthetic form. And is it not true that the baseline of most contemporary art theories is built around the definition of Duchamp's urinal artistic value? And furthermore is it not true that most of them suggest that we name or even culturally invent this value through a diverse process of intellectualization and exhibition within the field? And for Bourdieu it is exactly this naming process or better said the prerogative to this process that is the critical point in the puzzling notion of artistic value and its internal connection to the field of power.

Seeing the Cremaster Cycle as a cynical evolution of this story is what this thesis has come to a conclusion with. And this evolution has a tragic sense to it. Cynical because it unwillingly exemplified how the problematic condition of

contemporary art is something that haunts the field from the past with an insecurity that drives art production to superfluous creativity and also that not much is evolving in the field of the new per se. Tragic, because the conscious masterpiece is aware of its fate and of the fact that what we can regard as the true power or value of art is inscribed within an elusive moment of aesthetic contemplation and not within an unattainable immortality sustained by institutional framing. Consciously or not Matthew Barney created a confessing masterpiece that above all urges us to pay more attention to this extremely fragile and yet most powerful realm of human expression as a way to move truly into the study and creation of our contemporary and future art.

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