

CODA

Barnum & Bailey & Barney: Freak Show at the Guggenheim

I began thinking about freak shows and the avant-garde some thirty years after Diane Arbus produced her freak photography, at a time when sixties idealism had long transformed into a very different counterculture. From the perspective of the postmodern 1990s, "freaking out" was no longer convincing as the revolutionary act of a liberated subject; rather, it had all the marks of repressive desublimation. No one was outside the system of late capitalism for the simple reason that there was no outside. Complicity, as Linda Hutcheon theorized it, was the ontological condition from which any critique emerged.¹ As I have argued throughout these pages, it is a condition that the freak-garde has always taken for granted.

It should not be altogether surprising, then, that even as "freaking out" remained passé, the freak show itself appeared in the 1990s as the cutting edge of a new and explicitly political counterculture. On the one hand, these freak shows challenged the patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies enshrined by the political right. Jennifer Miller, for example, exhibited herself as a bearded lady, and the performers in her *Circus Amok* advanced the rights of the disenfranchised as part and parcel of their street theater antics. Similarly, the *Bindlestiff Family Cirkus* resisted the repressive effects of so-called family values with their more sexually explicit performances. On the other hand, the freak shows of the 1990s worked against the stultifying effects of neoliberalism. The *Jim Rose Circus Sideshow* is a case in point. Its performers resisted the neoliberal injunction for rational risk assessment, opting instead to pound nails into nasal passages and play football with live chain saws.² As

the coda to my study, then, I turn to this late twentieth-century and contemporary appropriation of the arts of the freak show. My interest lies in the extent to which any of these recent freak show experiments move beyond complicated critique to generate an alternative to a normative liberal humanist subject. In short, I want to explore what the history of the freak-garde has to tell us about the avant-garde in the era of late capitalism. As the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* demonstrates, it is a stage of capitalism in which corporations have such unprecedented power that they appear to have negated the potential for change upon which any avant-garde worthy of the name depends.³

For this reason, I choose to focus on a much more institutionally sanctioned and corporate-funded freak show than *Cirkus Amok* or the *Bindlestiff Family Cirkus*, one that foregrounds the corporatization of art, even as it meditates on the origins of sexual differentiation *in utero*: namely, Matthew Barney's monumental *Cremaster* cycle and the blockbuster exhibition of it at the Guggenheim Museum of New York in 2003. Derided by the popular press as a paradigmatic example of the death-by-capitalism of the avant-garde, the Guggenheim exhibition makes visible the extent to which Barney's five-part cycle of films appropriates the arts of the freak show in order to critically reflect on the conditions of its own production and to generate an alternative to the liberal humanist subject disciplined to corporate interests. That alternative is distinctly posthuman, and it emerges in the *Cremaster* cycle with all of the ideological entanglements that have shaped the particular brand of posthumanism engineered by a culture industry beholden to corporate profits. Yet from the point of view of the *Cremaster* cycle, the problem is not that posthuman art and subjectivity are too corporate; it is, rather, that they are not corporate enough. That is, they are still trapped in the ideology of liberal humanism that corporate personhood escapes. By turning to Barney's *Cremaster* cycle, then, I return to the dangers and potentials of corporate personhood that I explore in chapter 1 as inspirations for the freak show fictions that Mark Twain wrote at the end of the nineteenth century.

The disparaging reviews of the Barney retrospective at the Guggenheim reveal a longing for an avant-garde safe not only from corporate branding but also from the contamination of mass culture. Hence when critics liken the exhibition to a freak show they do so only as a shorthand for the capitulation of both the museum and the artist to the mass market. "The Guggenheim

Barneyrama," critics smirk, "Planet Barney," "a giant circus tent."⁴ And let us not forget, one such writer observes, that "the name of this outrageously bold entertainer, after all, is a conflation of Barnum and Bailey."⁵ Rather than contend with the avant-garde's complicated relationship with popular and commercial culture, these critiques are content to suggest that, with the help of the Guggenheim, Barney turns the avant-garde into a freak show, appropriating its practices only to drain them of all political import. Thus Donald Kuspit asserts, "In Barney's installation, the culture industry and consumer society seamlessly unite," and Tim Griffin observes that it is altogether fitting that the *Cremaster* cycle's retrospective found a home at the Guggenheim. "The '90s artist should appear in the museum of the '90s," Griffin writes in *Artforum*, "the one that mainlined that decade's model of corporate branding and globalization and echoed the corporate idea of total control and continuous expansion of identity."⁶ Barney is merely an "escape artist," Griffin concludes with obvious nostalgia, when what we really need is an "outlaw artist."⁷ The negative reviews of the *Cremaster* cycle exhibition thus register a longing for an avant-garde that never really existed, an avant-garde that was somehow able to attack the bourgeois institution of autonomous art by maintaining its own autonomy from the culture industry.⁸

Eschewing such nostalgia I see the virtue of the Guggenheim retrospective as the ways it makes visible the links between the *Cremaster* cycle and Barnum's spectacular exhibitions. It is not that one is likely to miss the extraordinary bodies featured in the five films, including living giants, a transgender zombie, a double amputee with glass prostheses, and a veritable parade of men—all played by Barney himself—with missing, mutilated, or otherwise altered genitalia. Nor do the feats of strength and endurance escape attention. When Barney scales the heights of Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral rotunda, has his testicles pierced with plastic hooks, or gives birth to his lower intestines, we are invited to see him as the kind of *outré* superhero performing acts never before seen on stage or screen. Yet Barney's films include neither barker nor ballyhoo. Rather, they are all disturbingly silent, and their aura of high seriousness and glacial pacing are contrary to the aesthetics that traditionally attend the display of extraordinary bodies for profit. Without the play between word and image, or the invitation to curiosity and doubt that work against the audience's absorption in the spectacle before them, the *Cremaster's* debt to the freak show remains abstract, independent of the mimetic reconstruction

of a particular mode of display. It is in "The Order," a thirty-minute section of the three-hour-plus *Cremaster 3* that takes place in the Guggenheim Museum and was made specifically for the *Cremaster* retrospective, that the epistemological uncertainty and ontological indeterminacy conventionalized in the arts of the freak show come into view.

Specifically, the submerged freak show connection becomes explicit the moment that Aimee Mullins wobbles across the graded ramp of the Guggenheim in glass legs and a backless white dress that exposes buttocks, as one critic writes, "that could have starred in *StairMaster 3*" (Figure 41).⁹ In "The Order," Mullins supposedly plays the "Entered Novitiate"—double, muse, and nemesis of Barney's the "Entered Apprentice." Yet regardless of the arcane symbolism and mythical apparatus that Barney imposes on the entire *Cremaster* cycle, Aimee Mullins inevitably plays the role she has performed everywhere in the mass media: double-amputee track star, fashion model, and motivational speaker all rolled into one. That is, Aimee Mullins arrives in "The Order" as a well-established and aggrandized freak, and she brings with her the brand of posthumanism that enfreaks her body for mass consumption. In so doing, her presence in "The Order" throws into relief the *Cremaster's* own struggle to disentangle a posthuman subject from the subject of liberal humanism.



FIGURE 41. Matthew Barney, the Entered Apprentice, embraces Aimee Mullins, the Entered Novitiate, on the spiral ramp of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The scene takes place in the segment of *Cremaster 3* that Barney calls "The Order" (2002).

Though Mullins was born with a medical condition that necessitated the amputation of both of her legs below the knee, the striking feature of Mullins's spiel is the extent to which it insists that she is not disabled.¹⁰ As Marquard Smith writes, in the media "Mullins was not allowed to be disabled." Rather she serves as a figure for the "ultimate victory of technology over deficiency," and it is a figuration that she embraces in her many public appearances. Her address at the *Technology, Entertainment, Design* conference in 2009 conveys the extent to which she presents herself as the posthuman subject par excellence. Here she quips, "Pamela Anderson has more prostheses in her body than I do. Nobody calls *her* disabled." So too she recounts a story in which she purportedly taught a group of school children to see her as "super-abled . . . having potential they didn't have yet."¹¹ Indeed, Mullins proudly recounts how the editors of *International Design* named her "Wonder Woman" on the cover of their spring 1998 issue. The absence of her legs, coupled with the best that technology has to offer, has thus not only made Mullins as good as someone with legs; it made her better. And she is not simply more intelligent, more beautiful, and more athletic than most other people; the advantage touted most by Mullins and her mass media spieler is her enhanced potential to make and remake her self.

As her *Technology, Entertainment, Design* address makes clear, the key to Mullins's transformation from disabled to "super-abled" lies both in the technology and design of prostheses and in the emergence of a particular strand of technofetishism that has rendered the "posthuman," "cyborg," or "prosthetic" subject the object of supraerotic fantasy.¹² Hence even when she is serving the role of motivational speaker, she has a collection of prostheses in tow. She took the stage at the *Technology, Entertainment, Design* conference with a particularly exotic collection, including the carbon graphite "Cheetah legs" she sprints in, the "pretty legs" she wears off the track with high heels, the hand-carved legs that she wore when she modeled for Alexander McQueen, and two of the sets of legs she wears in "The Order": the transparent ones that end in man-of-war tentacles and the spotted ones with articulated paws and claws. Mullins presents this collection of legs as proof positive that she is a posthuman wonder woman, a woman so enhanced by technology that she has outstripped the confines of the human.

The brand of posthumanism celebrated here, however, is not an alternative to liberal humanism; it is, on the contrary, an intensification of it.¹³ According

to Mullins, and the magazines that turn her into a superhero, technology allows her an unprecedented level of self-determination. As she tells the audience,

A prosthetic limb doesn't represent the need to replace loss anymore. It is a symbol that the wearer has the power to create whatever they want to create in that space. So people society once considered disabled can become architects of their own identities and indeed continue to change their identities from a place of empowerment.¹⁴

With this statement, Mullins conveys her missing limbs as the positive condition for her self-creation. She can create "whatever she wants to create in that space" precisely because she has the space to work with. The power of self-creation lies in being literally open to the supplementation of prostheses, for in her discourse changing the lineaments of one's body is equivalent to—the same as—changing one's identity. That is, in Mullins's discourse identity is no longer an epistemological question but is insistently ontological. In her role as a posthuman freak, Aimee Mullins thus panders to a collective fantasy taken up, in different forms, in the rarified field of critical theory, the boardrooms of major corporations, and popular culture: the fantasy that technology has put us on the brink of an ontological indeterminacy we can orchestrate according to our individual wills.

Yet as Mullins claims possession of her self and her being, she echoes the very come-on that the beauty industry has always used to market products to women: Wear this clothing or cosmetic or accessory on your body, take this pill or vitamin or herbal remedy, and you too can remake yourself into a sexier and more empowered woman. Despite her exhibition of herself as an icon of self-empowerment, Mullins's enfreakment, particularly in light of the images that accompany the verbal text about her, reveals the extent to which her body and her identity have been co-opted for commercial gain. One need only look to the most famous photographic images of her: sprinting across the beach in a black bikini (for *Freeserve*), naked except for jogging pants (on the cover of *Dazed and Confused*), reclining on a bed in loungewear (for *Victoria's Secret*), all while wearing her signature "Cheetah legs." Mullins's prostheses may not be a signifier of deficiency, but as these photographs convey, they hardly signify her autonomy. Rather, they are classically fetishistic. In fact, it is precisely because the commodity fetish and the erotic fetish are so perfectly identified

with one another in Mullins's exhibition that her "empowerment" has been such a marketing windfall, allowing corporations to successfully use her embodiment as posthuman to sell anything from lingerie, cosmetics, and shoes to Internet services.

As aggrandized freak, then, Mullins embodies the promises and fears that attend the discourse of posthumanism in popular and scholarly discussions. Katherine Hayles, in particular, has defined the posthuman subject in terms that perfectly describe Mullins's presentation of her own body: "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction."¹⁵ Yet Hayles also confesses that her "nightmare" is "a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being," and Mullins's exhibition certainly evinces this posthuman as well.¹⁶ From Hayles's point of view, the strength of Mullins's account of her subjectivity is the extent to which it insists on embodiment as the "substrate of thought" and the "ground of being." In so doing, Mullins refuses the disturbing "erasure of embodiment" that contemporary cybernetics takes for granted. Yet regardless of the changes she makes to her body, Mullins's spiel ensconces her safely in the liberal humanist ideology of possessive individualism.¹⁷ That is, it presumes a "place of empowerment" tied inextricably to assumptions of personal autonomy, self-possession, and individual agency—all belied in Mullins's representation in the popular press.

The trouble, Hayles emphasizes, is the liberal humanist assumption that ownership of the self either predates or occurs outside of market relations, when actually it is "a retrospective creation of a market society."¹⁸ What Hayles says about the *Six Million Dollar Man*, for example, could just as easily be said of Mullins: "The parts of the self are indeed owned, but they are owned precisely because they were purchased, not because ownership is a natural condition preexisting market relations."¹⁹ Moreover, Mullins's exhibition perfectly exemplifies the phantasmatic nature of the liberal humanist belief in an individual will distinct from the will of others. Even if we were to concede that her different prostheses enable her to construct a variety of selves, to change her identity at will, the identities she claims would still be ones that have been imagined by a set of distinctly male others: by Alexander McQueen, Matthew Barney, photographer Nick Knight, and Bob Watts, the prosthetic designer who produced his own "fantasy legs" for her to wear when she wants to feel

feminine. Mullins's posthuman body thus becomes an extension of a liberal humanism that allows her audience to embrace her reification as a form of individual freedom.

When Aimee Mullins makes her appearance in level three of "The Order" in her crystalline legs and bared backside, then, she flags a posthumanism disabled by its entrapment in liberal humanist ideology. As she teeters across the uneven terrain of the Guggenheim's winding ramp to meet Barney's "Entered Apprentice," she advertises the extent to which her posthuman subjectivity is a product of the "will of others," that is, the capitalist market. She is thus no more autonomous than the synchronized tap dancers on level one or the carefully choreographed thrashers in the mosh pit on level two. The technofetishism that renders the prosthetic subject a superhero emerges as the latest expression of ideological mechanization. Moreover, Mullins's presence in "The Order" emphasizes the self-reflexive nature of the film, for the central quest of Barney's five films is to escape the drive to sexual differentiation, which in the *Cremaster* world is also the drive to liberal individuation and corporate control. To this end, Barney's work presents bodies that are in a perpetual state of transformation, bodies with "boundaries that undergo continuous construction and reconstruction." That is, in order to escape domination by biological/capitalist reproduction, the *Cremaster* cycle relies on the very posthuman subject constructed for capitalist consumption. As a freak show with Mullins as its star performer, "The Order" would hence appear to cast into doubt the *Cremaster's* own mode of resistance to corporate domination.

Indeed, according to the *Cremaster's* critics, Mullins would serve as a perfect embodiment of the films' own flaccid version of posthumanism and the artist's personal embrace of a liberal humanist ideology that denies the market forces that have gone into the making of Matthew Barney, genius *auteur*. Yet contrary to those who effectively argue that the *Cremaster* cycle is as blissfully ignorant of its unfreedom as Mullins appears to be in her performances in the mass media, I recognize the work's own awareness that corporate capitalism is the very condition of its being and thus that the promise of posthuman subjectivity lies in unbinding its ties to liberal humanism. Indeed, the primal "place of empowerment" in the *Cremaster* cycle is one beyond individual or even human will: it is the womb, and specifically the six weeks of prenatal development before sexual differentiation takes place—before, that is, the pregenital structures ascend to form ovaries or descend to form testicles.

Like the photographs of Diane Arbus I studied in chapter 5, then, the *Cremaster* invents a realm of potent ontological indeterminacy by returning to nature, to biology.

Cellular reproduction in Barney's films serves as the potential for new and mutant forms of life that lie squarely beyond the consciousness and will of the human subject. The entire *Cremaster* cycle is a race against the body's capitulation to the overdetermined corporeal forms that close off the emergence of anything genuinely new. In the Deleuzian terms I have been using, sexual definition in the *Cremaster* films represents capitalism's reterritorialization of the desiring-production immanent to it. The descent of the testicles or ascent of the ovaries is hence the moment in which the virtual potential of ontological indeterminacy degenerates into the recycling of the merely possible, of that which already exists in the world as we know it. This is the turn of events that Barney's project fights against. Yet even as the *Cremaster* cycle returns to a nature conceived as a field "of transformation and upheaval, rather than as static fixity," it refuses to imagine this realm of unlimited potential as a precapitalist utopia.²⁰ In fact, the *Cremaster* films place the free play of cellular reproduction literally inside of corporate capitalism—inside, that is, two Goodyear blimps.

This is the scene of *Cremaster 1* where the formation of green and red grapes into ever shifting patterns is the working metaphor for prenatal cellular reproduction (Figure 42). Within each blimp is a table covered in grapes, and beneath each table is a woman who painstakingly works a hole into the tablecloth to release the grapes so she can form them into different patterns. Below, on an Idaho football field, elaborately costumed dancing girls replicate each pattern with Busby Berkeley precision. Because a single person dictates the patterns of green and red grapes, and thus choreographs the actions that take place outside of the womb, we might be tempted to see in *Cremaster 1* the celebration of the individual will or consciousness, even artistic genius. Yet we can only reach that kind of conclusion by ignoring the fact that both the women and the shifting patterns of grapes they create exist inside of a corporate dirigible. Corporate capitalism is the womb of biology, or, to put it otherwise, biological reproduction is a function of corporate production. Hence the name Barney gives to his grape ladies, both played by Marti Domination, is "Good Year." From the very beginning, then, there is no individual will distinct from the will of others in the *Cremaster* cycle, no self-ownership accomplished in

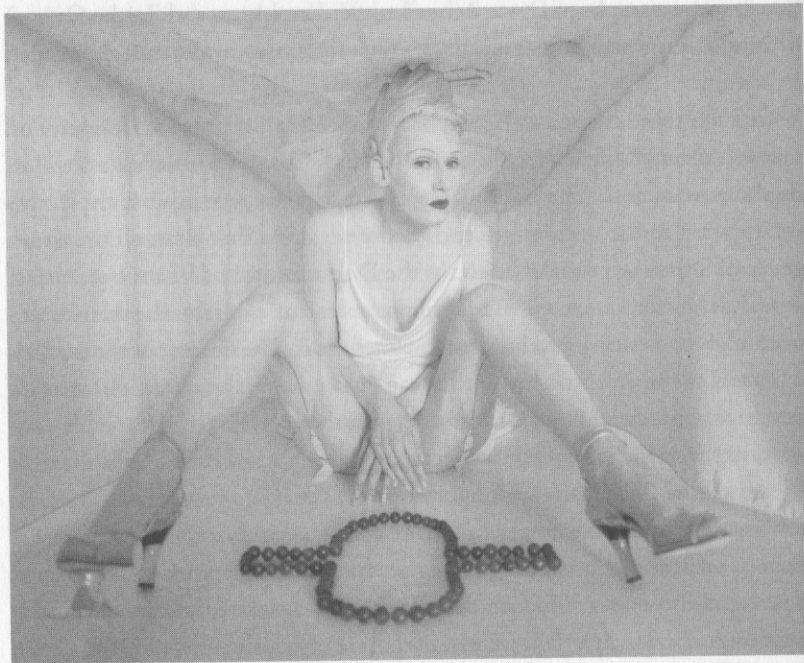


FIGURE 42. Marti Domination as Good Year in *Cremaster 1*. Production still. Copyright 1995 Matthew Barney. Photograph by Michael James O'Brien. Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

a state of nature a priori to corporate capitalism. *Cremaster 1* insists that the kind of posthuman subjectivity that Mullins's enfreakment extols is "a retrospective creation of a market society."

It does not follow, however, that because the *Cremaster* cycle recognizes that the generation of ontological difference takes place within the domain of corporate capitalism it embraces this "order." To recognize the project's critique of corporate domination and its own attempts to enable the emergence of other ways of being, we need only look to *Cremaster 3*, the longest of the five films and the one in which "The Order" appears. For the purposes of this short coda, I have chosen to focus on one sequence of the film as a paradigmatic example. It is, perhaps, the most disturbing sequence: the torture and mutilation of the Entered Apprentice by the elders of the Masonic order. More explicitly than in any of the other *Cremaster* installments, the Masonic order emerges here as a figure for the good old boys club of corporate capitalism.

Its elders are a cadre of 1930s style gangsters that exert their power through repression and mutilation. They take up shop in the Chrysler Building, and it is within this architecture devoted to self-aggrandizement and corporate power that most of the action of the film takes place. Ostensibly, the plot of the film is the effort of the "Entered Apprentice" to join the ranks of elders, yet Barney's character, it seems, is always sabotaging his own success. He breaks the rules, cheats at the tasks he is supposed to perform, and, with the help of Mullins, literally destabilizes the corporate citadel. For these crimes he is tortured and mutilated, his teeth punched out and genitals deformed. Thus although the *Cremaster* cycle insists that its metaphoric zone of pure potential is ensconced in the womb of corporate capitalism, it is neither ignorant nor uncritical of corporate control.

Moreover, in its scene of mutilation *Cremaster 3* reveals the extent to which it rejects the kind of posthumanism that Mullins's enfreakment advances, a posthumanism beholden to possessive individualism. In *Cremaster 3*, the post-human subject and its prosthesis are both products of corporate capitalism. It is, after all, a group of corporate thugs who violently dislodge the apprentice's teeth, and in so doing they create the corporeal absence, the "space" as it were, that Mullins's spiel identifies as the prerequisite to ontological self-determination. Unlike the amputation of Mullins's legs, however, the forced removal of Barney's teeth does not make him a superhero. He is not able to "create whatever he wants to create in that space" precisely because he is subject to "the order." Not coincidentally, then, it is Hiram Abiff, Mason progenitor and fictional architect of the Chrysler Building, who provides the apprentice with his prosthesis: a set of metal dentures manufactured from the remains of a pulverized Chrysler New Yorker Imperial. The dentures do not only signify the convergence of human and machine, they also represent the apprentice's corporate branding; Barney's teeth are manufactured by Chrysler. By casting the well-known artist Richard Serra as Hiram Abiff, *Cremaster 3* thus reveals its own insight into the intimate ties that bind contemporary art to corporate power. It is Serra, after all, who figuratively gives Barney his "chops" in the world of corporate art.

Yet even as the *Cremaster* cycle critically conveys the violent domination of corporate capitalism and refuses the illusion of possessive individualism, it continues to experiment with the ways that this source of domination potentiates ways of being at odds with its own agenda. That is, it is unwilling to disown

the potential of a posthuman subjectivity released from the ideological imperatives of liberal humanism. In Deleuzian terms, the *modus operandi* of the *Cremaster* cycle is the continual deterritorialization of desiring-production. This is why unlike Arbus's work in the 1960s, the *Cremaster* films render mutation inextricable from mutilation. And given that the sexualization of the body is the figure for corporate reterritorialization, it should be no surprise that the *Cremaster* cycle is overrun with more or less figurative scenes of castration. It is not only, as critics suggest, that the project registers Barney's equivocal masculinity, because the films are not merely about gender or sex. In the *Cremaster* cycle, the descent of the testicles is the fall from desiring-production into overdetermined and static form. Mutation, even when violently enabled, registers resistance to that stasis. Thus even when the corporation's minions lay claim to Barney's body through acts of torture and mutilation, these acts potentiate bodily forms beyond their control. When the metal dentures click into place, Barney's intestines prolapse through his rectum, the anal/oral zone he associates with the production of form (Figure 43).

Like each of the freak-garde texts I have studied, the *Cremaster* cycle relies on its own conception of desire for the production of alternatives to the liberal humanist subject. Hence, to understand the virtual potential of the apprentice's mutilation, it helps to know something about the libidinal economy that Barney constructs to account for the emergence of new forms. Underlying the prodigiously allusive narrative and metamorphic image world of the *Cremaster* cycle is an economy of desire based upon a model Barney describes as "Situation," "Condition," and "Production":

Situation was the zone of pure drive, useless desire that needed direction, needed to pass through a 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 and forth enough times something that is really elusive can slip out—a form that has form, but isn't overdetermined.²¹

The *Cremaster* cycle is, among other things, a perverse and complex series of "visceral disciplinary funnels" designed to resist "Production" and its concomitant overdetermination of form. "Production" is thus Barney's term for what



FIGURE 43. When submitted to torture in *Cremaster 3*, the Entered Apprentice expels his lower intestines. Production still. Copyright 2002 Matthew Barney. Photograph by Chris Winget. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

I have been referring to as reterritorialization by the corporate order. The evasion of "Production," linked explicitly to oral and anal zones, must thus be understood as the evasion of the domination and repression that *Cremaster 3* identifies with corporate capitalism. From this point of view, when the Entered Apprentice expels his intestines, he releases a means of production that can only produce reified forms. Without this means of production, his body is left with deterritorialized desire. Desiring-production replaces corporate Production.

What emerges from this desiring-production in *Cremaster 3* is "The Order," which transforms Barney's abjected intestines into the spiral ramp of the Guggenheim Museum, only to thwart its capacity for Production. The museum effectively becomes the digestive tract of corporate production, and what it is scheduled to produce by the time of the filming of "The Order" is the blockbuster *Cremaster* retrospective. In fact, the dominant feature of the exhibition is the presence of five huge screens suspended from the ceiling on which the five different levels of "The Order" run concurrently. "The Order" is thus made for the Guggenheim and also as its product. In fact, it is the only part of the *Cremaster* cycle made available to the public for purchase on DVD. In the film, Serra appears on the fifth level. Rather than playing Hiram Abiff, here he plays himself, but instead of flinging his signature molten lead he flings molten Vaseline, one of Barney's primary sculptural materials. At the very top of the Guggenheim, Serra's boiled and flung Vaseline melts into a "disciplinary funnel" that winds down to the lowest level. Effectively, the funnel turns Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral into a drain, or, in Barney's register, the alimentary canal of corporate art. Yet instead of the overdetermined commodity form, here we find the deformation of Barney's sculptural material. Within that liquid petroleum lies the potential for new and unprecedented forms.

Recognizing the ways that "The Order" thwarts corporate production allows us to approach some of the most disturbing events in the film: the violent murder and mutilation of Aimee Mullins. While Mullins publicly credits Barney for allowing her to move away from "the need to replicate humanness as the only aesthetic ideal," his film radically and violently disempowers her.²² Unlike the magazines that deny her disability, the narrative of "The Order" insists that Mullins is disabled, whether by filming her wobbly gait or by putting her in prostheses in which she cannot walk at all. Moreover, it is when she has taken the form of a cheetah that the "Entered Apprentice" kills her off. That

is, Barney's film kills Mullins when she should be at the height of her power, when she most fully embodies the power metonymically signaled by her famous "Cheetah legs" (Figure 44). It is an act of violent disempowerment. In the final image of "The Order," she is a blindfolded and bloody Little Bo Peep, equipped with tentacled man-of-war prostheses that leave her immobile (Figure 45). Like the infamous image of Cleopatra that ends Browning's *Freaks*, Mullins has been cut down, violently incapacitated. Misogyny? Certainly. A repetition of the mutilation of the "Entered Apprentice" by Chrysler's thugs? Yes, that too, and while we are at it, a testament to castration anxiety violently enacted on the body of a woman. But her final incarnation is also a testament to the film's attack on itself. As the only figure on level three of the Guggenheim, Mullins is the representative figure for *Cremaster 3*, and as the film cuts her up, it mutilates itself. The act is both an attack on the possessive individualism that posthumanism advances in the marketplace and another means of releasing the play of desiring-production repressed by corporate production.²³

The point here is not that the *Cremaster* cycle suggests that we cut off our legs or mutilate anyone else. The fact is, we don't need to. As I detailed in the last chapter, Herbert Marcuse regularly referred to the damaging effects of capitalism on its subjects in terms of "mutilation," and Barney's *Cremaster* cycle, like Arbus's photographs, literalizes this observation. Despite our illusions of



FIGURE 44. Aimee Mullins as a predatory cheetah in "The Order."



FIGURE 45. The final image of "The Order" reveals the radical disempowerment of the Entered Novitiate (Mullins). Here she is blinded, bloody, and immobilized by glass prostheses shaped like tentacles.

possessive individualism, we are already mutilated beings. Indeed, our faith in our power as autonomous individuals is proof perfect of our domination. Following the metaphors of the *Cremaster* cycle, the repression of desiring-production occurs before we are even born. It happens in the moment that sexual differentiation takes place. Barney's *Cremaster* films, like each of the freak-garde texts I have studied in these pages, caution us against the naïveté that leads critics to long for a precapitalist utopia. It also cautions us, however, against cynicism, for the very system that mutilates us harbors the potential for our transformation and for the transformation of the system itself. Posthumanism is a virtual potential of humanism, just as corporate personhood is a virtual potential of corporate capitalism.

As I write this coda, in the aftermath of Troubled Asset Relief Program and the Obama bailout of Wall Street, there is no mistaking the corporation's insidious intervention into matters of governance at the highest levels. Yet the history of the freak-garde reminds us that becoming corporate need not mean submitting to an increasingly oligarchic regime. On the contrary, it might signify the exploitation of an ontological condition at odds with the liberal humanism that ideologically secures the power of corporations. Within a context in which it is un-American to question liberal humanism, it is easy to overlook

the fact that a corporation is *not* a discrete individual; it is not, as Mitt Romney gaffed on the campaign trail in the run up to the Republican primaries in 2011, that "corporations are people." On the contrary, it is because they are multiple, changeable, and uncertain entities with ever-shifting boundaries that corporations can exert their power.²⁴ Recognizing the history of the freak-garde thus allows us to rethink the incorporation of art and personhood in the twenty-first century and, specifically, to recognize a major historical precedent for the variously theorized "posthuman" subjectivity that has captured the imaginations of scholars, CEOs, and cultural producers alike. Corporate personhood, I am suggesting, constituted a posthuman subjectivity long before the term posthumanism was coined. Thus while posthumanism has been widely disseminated as fulfilling the promise of liberal self-determination, it contains the potential for the same kind of mutability and ontological indeterminacy as the *persona ficta* of corporate personhood. The great irony, perhaps, is that American democracy under the reign of corporate capitalism denies its subjects the ontological condition of "corporate personhood" that assures corporations their own extraordinary rights and protections under the law.