

Myths in the artworks of Matthew Barney

Mitos nas obras de Matthew Barney

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About the artist

Born on the 25th of March 1967 in San Francisco, in California. Already an eclectic, he graduated at the Capital High School of Boise, in Idaho in 1985.

From childhood, he feeds his passion for sport, leading his school's football team as Quarterback and other positions in the Boise Bronche Stadium. His athletic success can be seen throughout a range of disciplines. It leads his way into university but also as a model for Click Modeling Agency, where he worked on a variety of shoots for Ralph Lauren and J. Crew.

Soon after, he undertook medical studies at Yale (Connecticut). Throughout these years, he moved in the direction of the Arts and in 1989, finished with a thesis, *Field Dressing* that consisted of a two-piece screen at the Payne Whitney Gymnasium at Yale. He finally settled in New York where he still lives and works.

In 1990, he exposes his work in the collective gallery at Althea Viafora Gallery of New York¹. Clarrise Dalrymple, owner of the Petersburg Gallery, is touched by his work, offers him the chance to prepare an exhibition. Unfortunately, two days before its opening, the gallery closes its doors.

Mathew Barney's first personal exhibition was in the Stuart Region of Los Angeles in 1991. The next one, a few months later in Gladstone Gallery of New York. Barbara Gladstone, amazed by Barney's work suggests that they work

¹ Entitled *Matthew Barney: New Work* (Gioni, 2007, p. 102).

together. Since that moment, the artist works exclusively through the Gladstone Gallery, which produced his artistic cinematographic work and exposed it throughout the world, culminating in what is now his prodigious career.

Myths

Myth is a general source of inspiration: In Barney's work, complex scenarios, reinterpret and reinvent known myths with a baroque aesthetic. In this analysis, I will show how mythology is a source of inspiration for the artist and how he uses them as metaphors for our time.

Roland Barthes states that a pure ideological system can define a myth: in it, form is less important than concept, yet still covers the totality.

A myth is in a fact a speech, preserved through generations and time. It stands out by its poetic elaboration or a ritual representation. These are composed of situations, beings and events that escaping the realities and common experiences of our every-day society. The motivation that pushes the artist to seek mythological references is part of a very large repertory of imagery and symbols carried by these stories. During Antiquity, mythology was a key genre in literature, offering its readers a large panel of situations. Their significance becomes an important part of the world's *Universal Conscience*.

Roland Barthes writes:

Myth is a pure ideographic system, where the forms are still motivated by the concept which they represent while not yet, by a long way, covering the sum of its possibilities for representation. (Barthes, 1991, p. 125)

Again:

Myth can be defined neither by its object nor by its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning: the arrow which is brought in order to signify a challenge is also a kind of speech. True, as far as perception is concerned, writing and pictures, for instance, do not call upon the same type of consciousness; and even with pictures, one can use many kinds of reading: a diagram lends itself to signification more than a drawing, a copy more than an original, and a caricature more than a portrait. But this is the point: we are no longer dealing here with a theoretical mode of representation: we are dealing with *this* particular image, which is given for *this* particular signification. Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. This substance is not unimportant: pictures, to be sure, are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it. But this is no longer a constitutive can impose a difference. Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a *lexis*. (Barthes, 1991, pp. 108-109)

Mathew Barney uses myths with the goal of refreshing a legendary story that is part of every culture: developed from language, myths are the symbol of a culture or tradition, and become a contemporary metaphor. Barney creates

a particular metaphor by introducing characters from modern-day reality, so asserting temporal contradictions.

Contemporary myths projected by Mathew Barney started in 1993 and over the following years, become increasingly real. Barney envisions this change by introducing inserting myths into present-day realities.

Reoccurring themes appear in Mathew Barney's repertoire: the relation between life and death, the body as a battle object, the questioning of *hybris*, the violent emotions inspired by passion and pride. I will analyse these three notions as they appear in different works by Mathew Barney.

Analyse

The myth of MARSYA in Drawing Restraint 7: the satire

Marsyas is the myth in the movie *Drawing Restraint 7* (1993). In the Greek myth, the satyr challenges a divinity in a music competition; he is punished for his pride, for his *hybris* and will be tormented². The American artist finds his inspiration in this myth creating a contemporary myth, whose subject is the struggle of two satyrs driving a car in New York:

Using the tip of the ram's horn the ewe attempts to draw a ram horn in the condensation that formed over the surface of the moon roof [...]. The satyr flaying one other, and with the flaying of the upholstery beneath the tail of a kid. Both the satyrs and the vehicle are punished for an act of hubris: they attempt to produce a finished drawing in their own likeness. (Barney, 2010, p. 65)

In *Drawing Restraint 7* the characters are three satyrs. The youngest, drives the limousine while sinking in the seat and 'running' after its tail. The other two satyrs are behind the limousine and struggle with each other using wrestling holds. Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies*, describes wrestling as the first example of contemporary myth:

The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. Here we find a grandiloquence, which must have been that of ancient theatres. And in fact wrestling is an open-air spectacle, for what makes the circus or the arena what they are is not the sky (a romantic value suited rather to fashionable occasions), it is the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light. Even hidden in the most squalid Parisian halls, wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bullfights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve. (Barthes, 1991, p. 14)

² Marsyas or the assumption. Marsyas, silène musician racked by Apollo, god of the river of Phrygia, which bears its name. *Atlante della Mitologia greca*, 1997, p. 192.

And also

Wrestling is an immediate pantomime, infinitely more efficient than the dramatic pantomime, for the wrestler's gesture needs no anecdote, no decor, in short no transference in order to appear true. (Barthes, 1991, p. 17)

Wrestling presents man's suffering with all the amplification of tragic masks. The wrestler who suffers in a hold which is reputedly cruel (an arm-lock, a twisted leg) offers an excessive portrayal of Suffering; like a primitive Pieta, he exhibits for all to see his face, exaggeratedly contorted by an intolerable affliction. (Barthes, 1991, p. 17)

We are really inside a contemporary mythology. For Barney, this struggle speaks for the way he realizes his works, they are totally coherent within the logic of the restrained drawing, or constricted illustration. They need no transfer to seem real; At the beginning, two satyrs have their horns turned upward and at the certain moment, one of the two satyrs is transformed into a ram. His horns are turned down. And once this transformation has occurred, the saga in the limousine begins.

Inside the car, the ram is held down by the head by the satyr, who uses the point of its horn as a tool. The satyr, who still has vertical horns, tries to draw a horn of a ram with the point of the horn of the ram whose head he is holding. At the same moment, during this fight, the car moves through Manhattan, and more precisely through the the six entrances into the metropolis: the Brooklyn Bridge, Manhattan's bridge, the tunnel Lincoln, Queensborough's bridge, and the Midtown tunnel.

In each case, the drawing begins at the entrance of a tunnel. At the end of the bridge, the drawing consolidates and the story progresses up to the next way to enter Manhattan through a tunnel. This work has some of the same logic as a videogame because every entrance to Manhattan is as a new game scenario. So the drawing never end, in all there are six unfinished drawings³.

The obstacles are not presented in a spatial or material sense. It is the artist's body, his will that forces the two satyrs to the combat that we can see in various examples of *Drawing Restraint*. The work is about forces reacting one against another, in a state of perpetual motion, represented by the limousine that never stops.

In *Drawing Restraint 7* we can suggest the following hypothesis: Matthew Barney works on two typologies of satyr, a male and a female satyr. The male is identified in the satyr Marsyas in *Drawing Restraint 7* and is inspired by Michelangelo Buonarroti's drawings, whereas the feminine is the protagonist of *Cremaster 4*, The Loughton Candidate⁴ can be seen as a reference to the satyr played by Nijinski in Mallarmé's *The afternoon of a faun* as staged by the Russian Ballets.

The drawings in *Drawing Restraint 7* and *Cremaster 4* are created one after another. When Barney plays the role of both characters – the male satyr and

³ Barney, 2010, p. 90, for the draws by satyrs.

⁴ The Loughton Candidate is delined as a dandy by Nicola Dusi. Cf. Dusi, 2012, p. 108. "Loughton" is a typology of transformed sheep in the Isle of Man (Dusi, 2012, p. 127).

the feminine satyr – this internal duality is confirmed. Both characters have an infinite possibility for internal metamorphosis, and we can interpret these characters as a metaphor of the artist's commitment to his own male identity⁵ as expressed in the *Cremaster Cycle*⁶.

The myth of Fionn Mac Cumhaill in *Cremaster 3*: the giant

The second myth is about Fionn Mac Cumhaill⁷ and Fingal⁸ in the movie *Cremaster 3* (2002) It tells the story of a legendary warrior out of Celtic mythology, who built the *Giant's Causeway* as a rocky stairway leading to Scotland.

This Celtic story describes the unusual geology in that area. They appear as big basalt columns in the shape of geometrical polyhedrons⁹. In the movie *Cremaster 3*, these figures are brought to life with large geometric rocks thrown at the shore¹⁰.

⁵ We find this narrative figure as protagonist in *Cremaster 4* in the shape of Loughton Candidate, the dancer-satyr who is brought to change in sheep. The Loughton Candidate is also a figure inspired in Phynnoderree, the mythological satyr of the island of Man. In *Cremaster 4* he appears dressed as a dandy with the face and the ears of goat (*ndr*).

⁶ Fasolo, 2009, p. 40: "The Loughton Candidate is the symbol of the balance of the descent and the increase: in the impossibility of the stability without distinction, the movement and its obstacles are a part of a course of the fall in the direction of the sexual differentiation, whom is also obsessive protagonist of the cycle". "The Loughton Candidate è il simbolo dell'equilibrio e della risalita: nell'impossibilità di stabilità senza distinzione, il movimento e i suoi ostacoli sono parte di un percorso della discesa (o del suo contrario) in direzione della differenziazione sessuale, che è anche l'ossessiva protagonista del ciclo" (Dusi, 2012, p. 113).

⁷ Finn (Find Mac Cumail or Mac Umail-N. Davies) is anglicised as Fin Mccool, son of Cumhall, and is also present in Scottish mythology and the mythology of the Isle of Man. The story of Fionn and his disciples, the Fianna, formed the Fenian cycle, and created the most popular Irish hero (Davis, 2004, p. 104).

⁸ "Fingan/Fingal. Schottland: a fenian warrior and bard, equivalent of Finn in the 'reinvented' cycle of Ossian by Mac Pherson" (Persigout, 2009, p. 183). Cfr. "we think Fingal and his companions as great-bodied men with large movement that seem, as it were, to be following out of deep influences. They are men that have broad brows, and quiet eyes full confidence in a good luck, that proves everyday afresh that they are a portion of the strength of things. They are hardly so much individual men, as portions of universal nature itself, like the clouds that shape and reshape themselves momentarily, or like a bird between two boughs, or like the gods that have given the apples and the nusi; yet this but brings them nearer us, for we can remake them in our image as we will, and the woods are the more beautiful for thought" (Spector, 2004, p. 100, ref. Allen & Allen, 1999, p. 96).

⁹ Cfr. "Columns are always formed at right angles to the cooling surface, so the higher columns, which were cooling in contact with the sea of molten lava, a level surface, are upright; but lower columns were cooling in contact with the lithomarge of weathered lower basalt, and as weathering does not occur consistently, this surface was not level. Thus the lower columns, though more exactly formed than the upper ones, are sometimes titled slightly from the vertical". (Ivi, p. 96, texte by Mullin, 1974, p. 22).

¹⁰ At the beginning of the 20th century in his book *The magical voyage of Nils Holgersson* (Milan, Mondadori, 2005) original title: *Nils Holgerssons Underbara genom rendu Sverrige*, 1906, the Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf tells the story of a Giant in an ancient era who lifted sods of earth that

In fact, legend has it that the construction of the Giant's Causeway¹¹ happened on time for Fionn, so that he could help Fingall finally cross the Irish Sea for the battle. However, as Fingall gets closer, the earth trembles beneath his steps because he is many times bigger than Fionn.

Once Fionn picks up a 'bit' of Ireland to throw at his rival, but he misses his mark and it falls in the middle of the Irish Sea: this block of granite becomes the Isle Of Man, itself composed of rocks that become Rockfall whereas the other deserted piece becomes Lough Neagh.

Oonagh Mac Cumhair, Fionn's wife, suggests dressing as a child to hide from Fingal. However, while Fionn hides in the cradle; his wife cooks donuts, which are poisoned with bits of metal inside. In the movie *Cremaster 3*, we see that the donuts have the same shape as the rocks that were made of a soft, white substance. When Fingall enters the home, he takes a donut but cannot eat, while Fionn eats it rapidly. After noticing this demonstration of his strength, the rivalry between these two trolls comes to an end because Fingal realizes that Fionn is superior.

After affirming that Barney works on mythical conceptions of the classic world, we can understand here that the artist also uses myths that are of Nordic origin. Finally, Hellenic and Nordic giants are not that different.

In multiple different mythological cultures, giants have the same physiology as a Human being but with consistently more power and size. In multiple Indo-European cultures, as we have seen, they are creatures that go all the back to the creation of the cosmos itself and the primal chaos that the Gods used to oppose.

Beyond being creatures of great strength and age, they are also known to have great knowledge with immoral and destructive tendencies; they devour human beings, especially children, and their characteristics resemble quite closely those of an Ogre. Common ground is also found in the Bible, where the old race is called the *nephilim*¹², often interpreted as a race of Giants.

Also, Genesis explicitly cites the presence of Giants on earth, as warriors of the light of day. Post Biblical references considers King Nimroud, one of the biggest representations of this race. The first story about giants that come to mind would be David and Goliath, a mythological story about a battle between a young boy and a Giant, though Goliath has never been described as a *nephilim* but rather a 'champion over 3 meters high'¹³.

In the Greek mythology, the γίγαντες, also known as Hesiod¹⁴, was the son of Ouranos (Ουρανός) and Gaea (Γαία), creatures that ignited a war with the

formed the Värern and Vättern lakes, and then he threw them in the Baltic Sea that also became the Gotland and Oland islands.

¹¹ Giants Causeway is a volcanic rock formation situated 3 km North of Bushmills in the Antrim Country, North of Ireland. It is characterized by 40 000 vertical hexagonal stones set one on top of another. Eroded by the will of the sea, it reassembles the shape of a pavement that starts at the base of the hill and disappears into the sea. These columns are visible 28 meters high above the hills. Then it disappears into the sea, constituting the Antrim Plateau.

¹² Les *nephilim*, *nefilim* (hébreu: נפילנים), or simply giants, are supernatural personas of the Bible.

¹³ Samuele I, XVII, 1:26.

¹⁴ Esiodo, 2001, vv. 225-226.

Gods of Olympus, the Gigantomachy (Γιγαντομαχία). In the reasoning of ancient Greek culture, multiple giants have been buried since the beginning of time in the depth of the Earth, and these very burials were considered to be the source of earthquakes.

Other gigantic beings appeared throughout Greek mythologies, such as Cyclops (while the Nord had the *Jötnar* in ancient Norway, this suggests the same cosmos. Like their Indo-European fellows, the Nordic giants¹⁵ already represent the ancestral chaos that menaced the rational balance set forth by the Gods.

The myth of Osiris in *River of fundament*: the god

The 3rd and last myth is the Myth of Osiris in *The River of Fundament*. Mathew Barney cosigned this piece with the composer Jonathan Bepko. It was produced by Matthew Barney and Laurenz Foundation. Inspired by the roman novel *Ancient Evening* by Norman Mailer¹⁶, the film presents itself as an Opera film where images and the musical partition linked together to give an eclectic and stratified finish.

In this movie, Barney uses the Myth of Osiris to telling a long story of the United States. Under the rule of Osiris, one of the most powerful gods in Egyptian mythology, the prosperity of Egypt is conjured with an eloquent manner in a text inscribed on the Stone of Amenmès¹⁷ and Osiris. Osiris is described as the master of resources and elements, bringing good fortune and abundance to the whole country (Hart, 1993, p. 54).

The myth of Osiris is picked up by the artist who says that Geb (the Earth) and Nout (the Sky) have 4 sons, Osiris, Seth, Isis and Nephtys¹⁸. Osiris marries his sister, Isis and Seth the other sister, Nephtys. Osiris inherits the right to govern Egypt¹⁹. Seth, filled with jealousy, wants to kill him; he gets a coffin made exactly

¹⁵ Les *jötnar* ou *jötunn* meaning “giants” in ancient Norwich.

¹⁶ Edited 1983.

¹⁷ Stèle d'Amenmès, v. 1400 av J-C., XVIIIe dynastie, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

¹⁸ “The union of Osiris and its sister Isis supplies a divine wedding model between brothers and sisters, half brothers and half- sisters of the royal family” (“L’union d’Osiris et de sa sœur Isis fournit un modèle divin de mariage entre frères et sœurs, demi-frères et demi-sœurs de la famille royale” [Hart, 1993, pp. 53-54]).

¹⁹ “Osiris having married Isis and succeeded the throne of his father, filled the company of its benefactions. He made lose to the men the custom to be eatable between them, after Isis had discovered the use of the wheat and the barley, which grew previously unknowns, without culture and confused with the other plants. Osiris invented the culture of these fruits, and as a result of it the benefaction, the use of a new and pleasant food made abandon to the men their wild customs [...] It is also said that Isis gave laws according to which the people make mutually justice, and put an end to the abuse of the strength and the insult by the fear of the punishment” (“Osiris ayant épousé Isis et succédé au trône de son père, combla la société de ses bienfaits. Il fit perdre aux hommes la coutume de se manger entre eux, après qu’Isis eut découvert l’usage du froment et de l’orge, qui croissaient auparavant inconnus, sans culture et confondus avec les autres plantes. Osiris inventa la culture de ces fruits, et par suite de ce bienfait, l’usage d’une nourriture nouvelle et agréable fit abandonner aux hommes leurs mœurs sauvages. [...] On rap-

in the same measures of Osiris, and brings it to a banquet. He announces that he will gift it to the person who can fit in it perfectly. When it's Osiris's turn to try, Seth closes hastily the covers, nails it closed, and throws it into the sea.

Isis desperately searches for him all the way to Phenicia. She finds the coffin and brings it back to Egypt. However, Seth succeeds in seizing Osiris's body, cuts it into 14 pieces that he eventually disperses. Again, in desperation, Isis, re-assembles all the parts of her husband and thanks to the help of the god Anubis, gives him back his life. From that day on, Osiris reigns over kingdom of the dead. Later on, Horus, son of Osiris, seeks vengeance for his father: He kills Seth and becomes, in his turn, a Pharaoh²⁰.

The myth of Osiris is a complex myth about Royalty (Hart, 1993, p. 51) linked with different interpretations: In his work *"Traité d'Isis et Osiris"* Plutarch²¹ explains the fable of both Egyptian gods, and settles the divergent opinions to which the fable gives place.

porte aussi qu'Isis a donné des lois d'après lesquelles les hommes se rendent réciproquement justice, et font cesser l'abus de la force et de l'injure par la crainte du châtiement" (Diodore de Sicile, Bibliothèque historique, I.13-14. Traduction de Ferd. Hoefer).

²⁰ Horus it is ready to fight for its justifiable heritage, the throne of Egypt, a fight in which the assistant of the goddess Isis will be fundamental. Horus carries his request in front of a court established by the gods more important, among which Thot, the god of the wisdom. Seth suggests taking out of to solve the problem with a hand-to-hand fight. The conflict is very violent: both rivals injure each other themselves and Horus loses its eye, Seth its testicles. "Horus fell because of its eye, Seth suffered because of his testicles". "Horus il est prêt à lutter pour son patrimoine légitime, le trône d'Egypte, un combat dans lequel l'aide de la déesse Isis sera fondamental. Horus porte sa requête devant un tribunal constitué des dieux plus importantes, parmi le quel Thot, le dieu de la sagesse. Seth propose de sortir de de régler le problème avec un combat corps à corps. Le conflit est très violent: les deux rivales se blessent l'un l'autre et Horus perd son œil, Seth ses testicules". "Horus fell because of its eye; Seth suffered because of his testicles". "Horus symbolizes the victory on the confusion embodied by Seth, the unlimited god. In fact, Seth's testicles symbolize both aspects unchained by the cosmos (storm, gusts, thunder) and those of the social life (cruelty, anger, crisis, violence). From a ritual point of view, the Eye of Horus symbolizes the offerings offered to the gods and has for compensation Seth's testicles. So that the harmony can happen, Horus and Seth have to be in peace and decided. Once loser, Seth trains with Horus a calmed couple, a symbol of the proper functioning of the world. When the Pharaoh is identified with these two divinities, he thus embodies them as a couple of opposite in balance". "Horus est tombé à cause de son œil, Seth a souffert à cause de ses testicules. Horus symbolise la victoire sur la confusion incarné par Seth, le dieu sans limites. En fait, les testicules de Seth symbolisent tant les aspects déchaînés du cosmos (tempête, bourrasques, tonnerre) que ceux de la vie sociale (cruauté, colère, crise, violence). D'un point de vue rituel, l'Œil d'Horus symbolise les offrandes offertes aux dieux et a pour contrepartie les testicules de Seth. Pour que l'harmonie puisse advenir, Horus et Seth doivent être en paix et départagés. Une fois vaincu, Seth forme avec Horus un couple pacifié, symbole de la bonne marche du monde. Lorsque le pharaon est identifié à ces deux divinités, il les incarne donc comme un couple de contraires en équilibre" (Hart, 1993, p. 51).

²¹ Plutarque (in old Greek Πλούταρχος // *Ploutarkhos*), born in Chéronée in Boeotia towards 46 and died towards 125, is a philosopher, a biographer, a moralist, and a major thinker of Ancient Rome. Greek of origin, he was one of precursors of the philosophic current named the Neoplatonism and opposed in his treatises of morality the common Stoics and the Epicureans.

River of Fundament, metaphor of the journey of the soul in Egyptian mythology, presents a complex narrative structure. In this movie, three major sequences gravitate around the principal scene (Norman Mailer's funeral): three performances filmed by Barney – Res (Los Angeles, 2008), Khu (Detroit, 2010) et Ba (New York, 2013).

Osiris's body has to cross 3 stages in order to be re-incarnated, and Barney chooses a Chrysler car, symbol of the American industry, as a metaphor of God and the Renaissance.

The myth of Osiris is the most elaborated and influential religious story of Ancient Egypt, it relates the assassination of Osiris and its political aftermath, and Barney chooses this one in particular to bring out certain thoughts on the 'return to ones roots', a hidden interpretation behind the end of the movie. This political message unveils itself by a typological system of the 'symbolic' space and characters present in the film, more important than cultural, ethical and political metaphors. The artist decides to construct a form of 'codex' to criticize the American society.

Taking into account this cultural, geographical and temporal plurality, the artist shows us how these myths have impregnated his process of creation. Barney, enriched by stories, teachings and the metaphorical personas in these myths, constructs his works that mix past and present, ancient and modern history.

With Mathew Barney and his contemporary interpretations, a myth can be confirmed as a 'purely fictional story that interprets beings, action or supernatural events while exposing general popular beliefs, afferent to natural and historical phenomena (Page, 1993, p. 9):

Since the first philosophers of Greece till Creuzer, Schelling and Welcker, every man who has thought or writing on mythology has always admitted he needed an explanation. Many will agree by saying that a myth does not necessarily mean what it appears to suggest. This is an important statement. And it stands its ground despite multiple contradictory explanations elaborated by different geniuses, who occupied themselves by trying to find meaning in specific myths, or Greek mythology altogether. (Muller, 2002, p. 104)

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Abstract

Mathew Barney (San Francisco, 1967) is a talented, multidisciplinary, American artist who is mostly known for his cinematographic works. His very complex scenarios reinterpret and reinvent known myths with a baroque esthetic. In this analysis, I will show how mythology inspires the artist and how he uses myths as metaphors for our time.

A myth has been defined by Roland Barthes as a pure ideological system, in which form is less important than concept and by no means covers its totality. The myth is in a fact a speech, preserved through generations and time, which stands out by its poetic elaboration or ritual representation. Myths are composed of situations, beings and events escaping the common realities of every-day life. The motivation that pushes the artist to seek mythological references is linked to the very large repertory of imagery and symbols carried by these stories. During Antiquity, mythology was a key genre in literature, offering its readers a large scope of situations. Their significance becomes an important part of the world's *Universal Conscience*. Contemporary myths projected by Mathew Barney start in 1993 and within the next following years, become increasingly real. Barney envisions this change by introducing the idea of myth into present-day realities.

Recurrent themes appear in Mathew Barney's repertoire: the relation between life and death, the body as the end of the battle, the calling into question of *hybris*, and the violent emotions inspired by passion and pride. I will analyze these three notions, throughout different works of Mathew Barney.

Resumo

Mathew Barney (San Francisco, 1967) é um talentoso, multidisciplinar, artista americano que é conhecido principalmente pelas suas obras cinematográficas. Os seus cenários muito complexos reinterpretam e reinventam mitos conhecidos com uma estética barroca. Nesta análise, vou mostrar como a mitologia inspira o artista e como ele usa os mitos como metáforas para o nosso tempo.

Um mito foi definido por Roland Barthes como um sistema ideológico puro, em que a forma é menos importante do que o conceito e de modo algum abrange sua totalidade. O mito é de facto um discurso, preservado por gerações, que se destaca pela sua elaboração poética ou representação ritual. Os mitos são compostos de situações, seres e eventos que escapam das realidades comuns da vida quotidiana. A motivação que empurra o artista para buscar referências mitológicas está ligada ao repertório muito grande de imagens e símbolos carregados por essas histórias. Durante a Antiguidade, a mitologia foi um género chave na literatura, oferecendo aos seus leitores um grande número de situações. O seu significado torna-se uma parte importante da consciência universal do mundo. Os mitos contemporâneos projetados por Mathew Barney começam em 1993, e nos anos seguintes tornam-se cada vez mais reais. Barney prevê essa mudança introduzindo a ideia de mito nas realidades atuais.

Os temas recorrentes aparecem no repertório de Mathew Barney: a relação entre a vida e a morte, o corpo como fim da batalha, a questão de *hybris* e as emoções violentas inspiradas pela paixão e pelo orgulho. Eu analisarei essas três noções, em diferentes trabalhos de Mathew Barney.