

Babylon Berlin exploits her sex work and poverty as spectacle, this ambition explicitly hinders any true movement. The harder Lotte works to alleviate her poverty, the more numerous the opportunities to project her prostitution as spectacle. Each instance is justified by the notion that her labour follows from her motivation to change her socio-economic condition. But, it is not her increased sex work, rather the conditional assistance of her male employers in the police force that ultimately lifts Lotte out of poverty and prostitution. In keeping with the conservative heterosexual coupling ideals associated with Hollywood narrative traditions, Lotte is only released from the spectacle of poverty by trading her image as an erotic object for a potential romantic interest for Gereon, the series' protagonist, and her employer. It is, after all, no coincidence that Gereon and Lotte's initial encounter in the first episode takes the form of a classic meet-cute: a workplace collision. Neither is it a coincidence that the two do not share their first romantic kiss until Lotte is no longer a sex worker, twenty-four episodes later. Across *Babylon Berlin's* first three seasons, Lotte is promised a compromised payoff that is delayed to keep her poor—or poor enough—to be sexy.

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Hayley Rose Malouin

"Gooble Gobble, One, or Several of Us": Becoming-Molecular, Becoming-Imperceptible in Tod Browning's *Freaks*

"Children? Monsters!"
"Oh, you're a circus. I understand."
— *Freaks*, 1932

The midnight procession of caravans halts. Beautiful but conniving aerialist Cleo is chased through the rain and mud by a group of sideshow 'freaks,' her shrill screams amplified in darkness as a multitude of bodies descend. Later, the camera cuts to the same Cleo, now a squawking, disfigured woman-chicken hybrid on display in a freak show of her own.

Cleo's deceptive monstrosity and her mutilation serve as the seductively horrific linchpins of Tod Browning's pre-Code box office bomb *Freaks*. The predominant—if overly moralizing—takeaway is that monstrosity is a state of mind; by comparison, the titular *freaks* are veritably normal. But this inversion of monstrosity serves to subsume difference, couching freakery in a comfortably reductive chain of cause, effect, and identification: you commit monstrous acts, you become a monster—materially, biologically, irrevocably. Freakishness, in this context, becomes what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe as a "molar aggregate," the perception of which can grasp the movement of freakery "only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form" (280-81).

Dangling just the other side of this cosily grotesque equation are the 'born freaks' who make up

1. As distinguished from other sideshow performers who augment their bodies in order to gain a freakish status and allure (tattooed painted ladies, muscular strongmen, and so on), 'born freaks' are performers whose main attraction as entertainers is their singular physicality (conjoined twins, little people, performers with missing limbs, among others). This dichotomy between born

much of the supporting cast in Browning's film. These freaks are coded, first, as children and, second, as righteous avengers in order to evade the slippery territory (or, rather, de-territorialization) produced by the film's reductive imperative. In this slippage, we find the potential for a distinctly freakish becoming-imperceptible, which can erode narratives of infantilization and vilification alike. This elusive freakery is in motion "below and above the threshold of perception" and, indeed, below and above *Freaks'* cinematic lens (Deleuze and Guattari 281).

The elucidation of such a freakish becoming-imperceptible is the purpose of this brief consideration. The freaks of *Freaks* are irreducible to the moralizing—and molarizing—ideology presented by the very narrative they inhabit. They exist, instead, in moments of suspended, freakish contemplation, and in so doing they work to unravel the neatly woven filmic tapestry that situates monstrosity as a punitive response to wrongdoing. In turn, this becoming-imperceptible acts upon *Freaks* to un-work it as a cohesive fiction and dilute its narrative linearity, enabling cinematic *lines of flight* to rupture and emerge in its place and rendering *Freaks* as rhizome—an assemblage in a constant state of de-stratification and re-stratification and overtaken by "a transversal movement that sweeps one way and the other" (Deleuze and Guattari 25). Both *Freaks* and its freaks are rhizomatic assemblages continually be-

and acquired freakishness is central to discourses on the circus as a site of both the veneration and exploitation of difference, disability, and otherness. See Fricker and Malouin (2018) and Carter (2018).

coming-imperceptible, slipping in and out of reach of the moralizing and molarizing framework to which they putatively swear fealty.

Concerning Freaks

There is much contention, in both circus and critical disability scholarship, about the use of the term ‘freak’ to denote the sometimes disabled, often ostracized, and almost always marginalized performers of many 20th century sideshows. This contention merits a brief discussion here, as I am electing to use the term ‘freak’ to refer to the titular characters of Browning’s film. While it is true that many who performed under the banner of freak fall along axes of ability, race, sexuality, and gender that place them at odds with prevailing ableist, racist, and heteronormative mores, it does not follow that *freakishness* is merely the amalgamation of deviations from the norm of these identitarian categories. ‘Freak’ is not merely an antiquated slur, though it may possess pejorative connotations because of its use alongside other derogatory language, as well as the experiences of many to whom it was and remains a willing or unwilling title. Rather, I argue that ‘freak’ constitutes a historically, culturally, and aesthetically situated mode of performance that intentionally stages difference and deviation from received categories of normative identity. While this difference can be perceived along axes of ability, sex, gender, race, and so on, it is not wholly contained, defined, or eclipsed by these categories. ‘Freak’ always points to something more than what can be perceived or received by any categorical notion of identity or subjectivity.

I base this definition of ‘freak’ on that of Rachel Adams, who in *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* claims that the label freak cannot be “neatly aligned with any particular identity or ideological position” (10). Indeed, Adams’ task of providing a history of the American freak and sideshow would be an easier one, she claims, if freak was a term “more firmly bound to a recognizable political configuration” (9). Adams claims identitarian categories like race, ability, and gender no doubt play a part in determining what counts as sufficiently freakish, exotic, or *other* enough to warrant inclusion in sideshows. For this reason, it is easy to see why the term ‘freak’ would be treated similarly to the archaic slurs so often used to describe sideshow performers—as an outdated, insulting, practically violent term that needs to be substituted for terms and labels chosen by the historically and contemporarily excluded groups

they have referred to and marginalized. The removal of derogatory slurs from linguistic circulation is a vital aspect of emancipation for historically excluded groups. Adams argues, however, that ‘freak’ is not one of these terms because it does not refer to any clearly identifiable identitarian category or group. Rather, and importantly, freak connotes “the absence of any known category of identity” (10).

As the absence of identity, ‘freak’ functions as a performative concept rather than an identitarian category. In this context, sideshow performers stage otherness—otherness that can be perceived through identitarian categories but does not belong to and is not totalized by these categories. Freakishness is thus that which is produced by the highly stylized performance of difference. Adams writes, “To characterize *freak* as a performance restores agency to the actors in the sideshow, who participate, albeit not always voluntarily, in a dramatic fantasy that the division between freak and normal is obvious, visible, and quantifiable” (6). This claim—that the putative obviousness of the freak as fundamentally different to the normative spectator is a fiction staged and performed by the freak themselves, and that the membrane between freak and non-freak is in actuality treacherously thin—is backed up by the wealth of documentation that reveals freakishness to be “a historically variable quality, derived less from particular physical attributes than the spectacle of the extraordinary body” as self-consciously performative (5). Adams makes reference to sideshow performers such as Naomi Sutherland—whose only claim to freakishness was her exceptionally long hair, but who was nevertheless exhibited as a sideshow attraction—to demonstrate “the plasticity of the category of *freak*” (ibid).

The history of the circus freak’s compelling and contradictory place in 20th-century culture is a long one, for which there is not space here to consider in any further detail. Returning, then, to Browning’s film, and following Adams’ contextualization of freakishness as a mode of performance that gauges and stages cultural attunement to difference, I elect to use the term ‘freaks’ when referring to the main characters of *Freaks*. I choose thusly, not because it is convenient shorthand, but because ‘freaks’ is both an evocative and multiplicitous notion. As the absence of identity that points to and performs this very lack of any categorical subjectivity, ‘freak’ functions in a similar fashion as Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the assemblage, to which I will momentarily turn. ‘Freak’ faces, on one hand, a *stratifying* force, in the form of the varied and diverse identities and communities dis-

played under the moniker of freak; on the other hand, it faces a *destratifying* force that points to the impossibility of capturing or stabilizing ‘freak’ in any identitarian position. Freak is thus multiplicitous, in that it resists “the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one” (Deleuze and Guattari 32). Rather than a subjective form of being, ‘freak’ is an assemblage of becoming that continually evades capture by the very identitarian categories that are used to determine and stage the fantasy of freakishness in the first place. It is thus crucial for a Deleuzo-Guattarian exploration of Browning’s *Freaks* to mobilize the titular term, evoking concepts of freakishness in order to grasp more deeply the affinity between freaks and notions of becoming and assemblage.

Assemblage, Becoming, Movement, Molecularity, & Imperceptibility

The elucidation of becoming as distinct from being is a cornerstone of Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, in their widely influential *A Thousand Plateaus* and elsewhere. For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that enables an entity, or assemblage, to exist between complete organization and subjectification and total abstraction. One side of the assemblage faces the strata, which organizes and endows the assemblage with a “signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject” (4). Meanwhile, another side of the assemblage faces what they call a *body without organs*, an intensive force that is “continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate” (ibid). The assemblage is thus always being made and unmade, deterritorialized and reterritorialized in a process of becoming; becoming is the simultaneous de- and re-stratification of the assemblage.

Importantly, becoming is not a progression or regression along a prescribed scale, upon which the assemblage either becomes a subject or organism or becomes fully undone. Rather, “[b]ecoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, lead back to, ‘appearing,’ ‘being,’ ‘equaling,’ or ‘producing’” (Deleuze and Guattari 239). In other words, becoming is process *qua* process, a verb without a subject because it necessarily involves the dismantling of the organism it putatively pertains to. As such, while the process of becoming possesses no telos in that it does not aim to produce and organize a discrete subject, all becoming nevertheless drives towards a certain always-somewhat-unattainable imperceptibility—

what Deleuze and Guattari call becoming-imperceptible. Becoming-imperceptible occurs, crucially, on a molecular level and resists the formation of molar aggregates, subjects fully realized and organized by the strata. “All becomings,” Deleuze and Guattari argue, “are already molecular” because the very process of de- and re-territorialization that is becoming entails the extraction of particles from the assemblage, “between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness” (272). In other words, becoming engages in the iterative reduction of an assemblage to the molecular level, thus rendering it imperceptible because the continual extraction of particles ensures the assemblage can never be fully organized or stratified.

The relations of speed and slowness that the process of becoming instigates occur both “below and above the threshold of perception,” continually uncatchable in their movement because this movement “continues to occur elsewhere” than the threshold of perception (Deleuze and Guattari 281). As such, movement enjoys a unique relationship with imperceptibility, being the necessary predicate for becoming-imperceptible. While the threshold of perception can only understand movement as “the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form,” true movement is always imperceptible because it occurs on the molecular level—that is, as inscrutable to the perceptible realm of molar forms (280-81). All assemblages rush towards imperceptibility through molecular movement; “[t]he imperceptible is the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula” (279).

It is this cosmic formula that is present in *Freaks*, and this becoming-imperceptible that the freaks ultimately move towards, despite the narrative’s ethical misgivings. Even as the film’s moralizing pearl-clutching begs its audience to fear the childlike fury of the freaks, its episodic nature and indulgence in long, empathetic shots of these same freaks in scenes of domestic, professional, and even criminal life betrays its own inability to neatly tuck away these extraordinary people—these assemblages becoming-imperceptible—into tidy moral-molar aggregates. What is more, the imperceptibility of the freaks works to render *Freaks* imperceptible as a linear fiction, enabling it to move rhizomatically between episodes of movement, affect, and sensation without ever congealing into an organized being of strata.

The notion of the rhizome is a crucial aspect of Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual framework, encapsulating much of the differential processes of becoming that are essential to their ontological perspective.

Deleuze and Guattari use 'rhizome' to refer to those assemblages that engage in becoming. Like the flora that is its namesake, the rhizome is vast, tentacular, and many-faced, shooting off in all directions and lacking a cohesive nucleus that serves as a point of origin. Lacking such an originating point, the rhizome does not exist as a subject or object, but rather as a multiplicity that is in motion between and beneath stratifying processes of subjectification and signification. Rhizomes are *becoming*, not being; the rhizome denies logics of being, subjectification, and total organization by continually and simultaneously facing both the strata that would organize it and the body without organs that undoes it.

Deleuze and Guattari emphasize rhizomes as distinct from 'root-books,' which follow the logic of being and possess a "noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority" (5). In contrast with the subterranean, multi-nodal, decentred image of a rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari assign the root-book the image of a tree. In this image, the tree purports to possess a kind of inevitable, inherent logic: beginning from a single seed or nucleus, the tree grows upwards and outwards from this nuclear point of origin, which always remains the central and eternal site of its subjectivity and which dictates its signification. In this way, the root-book builds on itself *arborescently*, in that it assumes a rooted nucleus that functions as a central point that grounds it as a perceivable, signifiable subject. Root-books thus follow the law of "the One that becomes two," continually expanding from a central node that serves as the locus of origin (ibid).

In contrast with this image of the tree as wholly subjectified and signified, rhizomes are both asubjective and asignifying. They do not sprout from a single seed that serves as their site of origin. Rather, rhizomes possess both an internal and external multiplicity—that is, they are irreducible to a singular subject- or object-hood, and they are instead heterogeneous and multi-nodal, with no signifiable nucleus or centre. Deleuze and Guattari write, "There is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide into a subject" (8). Rhizomes are neither subjects nor objects, but rather multiplicities that continually eschew the stratification that would assign them as such. In place of subject-hood and signification, rhizomes possess "only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions" that move, heave, and interact, but never wholly localize or stratify (ibid).

Returning to Browning's film, I argue that *Freaks* proceeds rhizomatically, as a multiplicitous filmic assemblage of asignifying and asubjective ruptures

lacking a nucleic point of origin that would cause it to congeal into a totalizing moral fiction. By invoking rhizomatic movement through its episodic, perhaps even disjointed, nature, *Freaks* succeeds in resisting the subjectification and signification that would neatly close the loop on its moral ruminations. Instead of a well-oiled cautionary tale, *Freaks* is a pastiche of asignifying movements and sensations, imperceptible in its motions and never coalescing into a cinematic organism, even as it stratifies and destratifies around its characters and plot.

Freaks: Children, Criminals, Creatures

Freaks opens with a hand ripping through the title card. The viewer alights mid-sideshow, as a carnival barker entices the crowd with a menagerie of "living, breathing monstrosities." These freaks, the barker warns his audience both onscreen and off, have a code "unto themselves. Offend one, and you offend them all." Someone screams as the crowd peers into a fenced pit housing, while the barker describes what was "once a beautiful woman."

On this ominous note, the story flashes back. The carnival shtick of the barker acts as a framing device, the film's characteristic dissonance immediately evident from the first optimistic twangs of circus music. The viewer appears to be set up for a fairly cut and dry reversal of expectations, a cautionary tale in good moral standing. Beauty becomes beast; spectacle of wonder becomes spectacle of terror; and, as always, things are never what they seem.

The first time we see the freaks themselves, however, they are idyllically situated outside of the sideshow context, on the grounds of a French estate. Their 'caretaker' explains to the estate owner that she likes "to take them into the sunshine and let them play like children." Seeing the freaks likened to children of God in an Eden-like context endears them to the estate owner and, by extension, positions the audience to also think favourably—if paternalistically—about them.

The words of the carnival barker hint at something more sinister, even as the viewer is brought onside with both the freaks and their able-bodied comrades, such as dancer Venus and clown Phroso. This sinister overhang problematizes the patronizing simplicity of the garden scene, as close-ups of the performers' faces work to distinguish them as individuals rather than freaks *en masse*.

The perception of the freaks as children, and therefore innocent of adult sin, is also problematized

in the first scene between protagonist Hans and his fiancé Frieda. Played by real-life siblings Harry and Daisy Earles, Hans and Frieda both have a form of dwarfism that results in proportionately small statures, most likely pituitary dwarfism. Unlike fellow cast member Angelo Rossitto, whose dwarfism was classified as disproportionate, Harry and Daisy resemble physio-typical children even at full adult maturity.

When we first meet Hans, he is smitten with aerialist and "big woman" Cleo and is worried that she will scoff at his attempts at gallantry. Offering Cleo her cape, Hans asks, "Are you laughing at me?" Cleo responds, "Why no monsieur [...] Why should I laugh at you?" Hans: "Most big people do. They don't realize I'm a man, with the same feelings they have." That Hans is, first, both a sexual and romantic being and, second, capable of adultery—as we see later on when he leaves Frieda and marries Cleo—contradicts the chaste, Christian imagery of the freaks in nature. Hans is a man as we conventionally and historically classify them: he's employed, owns property, is physically fit and proportionate, and is intent on procuring a wife. Yet frequent close-ups of his resoundingly boyish appearance no doubt intend to discomfit the viewer, even as they form a sense of attachment to Hans as protagonist.

Already, then, the viewer's perception of the freaks is in flux, as the film's own stance territorializes and deterritorializes around them. To this assemblage, *Freaks* adds a series of quick scenes and vignettes introducing other sideshow performers in resolutely 'adult' contexts: intersex performer Josephine/Joseph is catcalled by male acrobats, and she is herself sexually attracted to strongman Hercules; conjoined twins Daisy and Violet bicker about Daisy's fiancé Roscoe, a female impersonator who wants Violet to stop drinking so Daisy won't be hung-over in the morning; Olga Roderick, a 'bearded lady,' gives birth to a baby delivered into the capable feet of 'armless wonder' Frances O'Connor.

Freaks thus proceeds rhizomatically, as an asignifying, asubjective multiplicity "*of n dimensions*" (Deleuze and Guattari 9). Differential iteration is inherent to the film, and its disjointed nature is a result of the nullification of its overarching narrative's supremacy. Not a root-book with sedentary points, *Freaks* is "always in the middle" of its own moral and narrative considerations (25).

Asignifying Episode-ism

Other readings of the film criticize its disjointed, episodic structure as an aesthetic flaw and, even, a moral failing. In their article on benevolent exploitation and visual culture, Jay McRoy and Guy Crucianelli claim that *Freaks*' simultaneous eliciting of audience sympathy and alienation of the viewer works to "reinscribe the very binary logics through which 'normalcy' is policed and reaffirmed" (257).

McRoy and Crucianelli seem to only conceive of 'freakishness' as the dark side of normalcy, however. The binary logic they attribute to *Freaks* is in fact a logic they impose on the film, precisely because they cannot reconcile its differential episode-ism alongside their own under-interrogated notions of normality and abnormality. They seem perturbed by the very idea of freakishness, admonishing with the same fell swoop both the exploitation and fascination of *Freaks*' cinematic gaze and the ambivalent nature of the freaks it gazes upon. Aesthetically, they criticize the film for the seemingly random sequences featuring the 'actual freaks' that disrupt the main storyline. These sequences, they claim, "destabilize" the plot (McRoy and Crucianelli 260). Thematically, they criticize the film for manufacturing these sequences in order to stress the humanity of the performers in such a way that enables the viewer to cling onto their own sense of putative normality. It is the very disparate nature of these sequences, however, their asignifying episode-ism, that works to disrupt this normative chain of signification—something McRoy and Crucianelli fail to address.

Instead, McRoy and Crucianelli emphasize and rebuke these sequences as throwing "into further relief the freaks' physical differences" (McRoy and Crucianelli 260). In other words, McRoy and Crucianelli can only perceive of the freaks as stratified organisms—"hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences" (Deleuze and Guattari 159)—and not as assemblages facing bodies without organs and open to passages of intensities. Deleuze and Guattari write, "The BwO howls: 'They've made me an organism! They've wrongfully folded me! They've stolen my body!'" (ibid). I argue that McRoy and Crucianelli do a similar disservice to the freaks, wrongfully folding them, stratifying them, and suspending their difference in oppositional paralysis to a fixed notion of embodied, identitarian sameness.

McRoy and Crucianelli claim that the episodic structure of *Freaks* mirrors that of an actual sideshow, and as such it promotes, they write, "divergent

responses simultaneously refuting and reaffirming the dichotomy between ‘normal/abnormal,’ and denying explicit identification at every turn” (McRoy and Crucianelli 262). Importantly—and, I would argue, incorrectly—they intend this as a critique. But they also unintentionally demonstrate a Deleuzo-Guattarian point: that these titular freaks evade identitarian capture. They cannot be over-coded; they are multiplicities defined only by abstract lines of flight or deterritorialization.

McRoy and Crucianelli thus impose onto *Freaks* not only the binary logic of normalcy-freakishness that they criticize the film for reifying, but also the expectation of narrative linearity that they admonish it for lacking. Reading *Freaks* as instead self-consciously and intentionally episodic helps elucidate the formal ways in which the film un-works itself as a cohesive fiction and actively resists the very binary logic McRoy and Crucianelli accuse it of possessing. In particular, scenes that showcase the ‘freak’ performers act as asignifying ruptures, “lines of deterritorialization down which [the film] constantly flees” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). These vignettes, as Rachel Adams writes, demonstrate the performers’ “talents and personalities but make little effort to unify the characters through a common storyline” (Adams 65).

In one such scene, the Human Worm, played by performer Prince Randian, rolls and lights a cigarette using only his teeth. Randian, who was born with tetra-amelia syndrome, characterized by the absence of all four limbs, also performed the cigarette trick as part of his sideshow routine outside the diegesis of the film.

The scene occurs just before the halfway point and constitutes a more or less complete narrative break. As Randian lights a cigarette, another character—Rollo, an able-bodied acrobat—is speaking at length about his own act. While the contents of Rollo’s speech are essentially unimportant—in that they are a non sequitur and wholly unrelated to the main plot—the monologue creates an auditory backdrop, against which the viewer both watches Randian’s trick and watches him listening, establishing a certain temporary subjectivity.

Randian is positioned stomach-down on an elevated stage floor so that his face is level with Rollo’s. Beginning the trick, he makes brief direct eye contact with the camera, just before the shot switches to a close-up of his face and mouth. In the close-up, Randian again makes eye contact with the camera, this time for a more sustained period. As

he manipulates the cigarette and match, the closely trained shot creates a sense of physical intimacy and conspiratorial camaraderie. Randian lights the cigarette and finishes the trick, and the shot switches back to its previous, wider vantage point. Rollo the acrobat exits, and we are left with a solo shot of Randian smoking his lit cigarette. The intimacy of the close-up is disrupted somewhat by this final shot, in which the viewer is reminded of Randian’s corporeality and its perceived alterity. This intimacy is never fully extinguished, however, reinforced by the camera lingering on Randian’s solo form.

The oscillation between close-up and wide shot has a destabilizing effect, in which the viewer is left uncertain of their own positionality—and, by extension, their own corporeality. Movement is emphasized on a number of levels: on the micro, in the minute re-positionings of Randian’s mouth and lips as he manipulates the cigarette and matchbox; on the macro, in the seeming ‘immobility’ of Randian’s body in relation to the fast-talking, fast-walking Rollo; and on the cinematic, in the camera’s vacillating relationship to subject and viewer.

“Movement has an essential relation to the imperceptible,” Deleuze and Guattari write; it is “always in relation to a given threshold of perception” (280-81). The thresholds of perception in this scene are in flux, in such a way that *what* they perceive is never pinned down for long. Randian’s movements, even in conspiratorial close-up, continue to “occur elsewhere” than the viewer’s fixed gaze (281). Thus, our perception—that which we can view and describe—does not, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, “reside between a subject and object, but rather in the movement serving as the limit of that relation” (282). We can look “only at the movements,” which remain consistently below and above the threshold of cinematic perception (ibid).

Vignettes such as this invite the viewer to peek and pass *between* scenes, *between* points on a line of becoming, constituting “a zone of proximity and indiscernibility” (Deleuze and Guattari 293). Existing intermezzo as such, they not only trouble the film’s narrative cohesion, but they also work to unravel the closed-circuit moralism of its main plot.

In perhaps *Freaks*’ most infamous scene, the freaks welcome Cleo as one of their own at the reception following her marriage to Hans. The feast marks the first time the viewer sees the freaks together as a collective, having previously only been featured solo or in small groups. It is also the only scene in the film demarcated by its own title card.

The narrative flow is thus held in suspense for a brief moment, even as the scene constitutes a significant turning point in the plot. By this point, the audience is well aware of both Cleo’s hatred of the freaks she is being invited to join and her plot to poison Hans, inherit his massive fortune, and marry her lover, the strongman Hercules. As the night goes on, Cleo gets increasingly drunk, and her ability to mask her true disgust and contempt for her new husband is compromised.

During the feast, the visibly disabled are entertained by more seemingly able-bodied comrades, such as a sword swallower and fire-eater. Johnny Eck the Half Boy jokingly calls out for KooKoo the Bird Girl to stop dancing on the table and give someone else a chance. The consumption of sideshow entertainment by the freaks themselves troubles received notions of exploitation and spectacle, as well as the assumption that displays of freakery and alterity serve primarily to reassure spectators of their own normality. When freaks perform for fellow freaks, whose normality is on the line?

“We’ll make her one of us—a loving cup!” cries dwarf Angeleno. The freaks begin to chant, as Angeleno passes around a communal goblet: “We accept her, we accept her. One of us, one of us.”

“They’re going to make you one of them, my peacock,” Cleo’s illicit lover Hercules croons, using her stage name—The Peacock of the Air—as a pejorative. In doing so, the boundary between Circassian and freakish moniker is eroded. Cleo, as an organized organism and a subject, is destabilized. The becoming of the wedding feast—a becoming-one-of-us, a becoming-made-one-of-them—threatens her sense of identitarian cohesion. Cleo clings to her subjectivity, screaming “Freaks! You filth! Make me one of you, will you!”

The freaks invite Cleo to form rhizomes with them; as multiplicities, they invite her to increase their dimensions, to “change in nature and connect with other multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). This invitation horrifies Cleo and offends her subjectivity because, in the “relative deterritorialization” of being accepted by the freaks, the “perpetual immanence of absolute deterritorialization” comes into view (56). It is a “fearsome involution calling [her] toward unheard-of becomings” and freakish alliances (240). In rejecting this alliance, Cleo rejects a becoming-molecular that has the potential to undermine “the great moral powers of family, career, and conjugality” (233). In other words, Cleo denies the process

of becoming that would enable her to become-imperceptible, and in so doing she makes her own villainy painfully clear.

Later, as Cleo carries a sick, poisoned Hans to his caravan, the freaks watch her closely. Rejecting their alliance, clinging to her own subjectivity, to the strata of organism and signification, Cleo and her murderous plot are most assuredly perceived. The veil is lifted, and Cleo the molar aggregate—the molar *aggressor*—becomes all too perceptible. The remainder of the film, up to the murder of Hercules and Cleo’s mutilation, is peppered with sustained shots of the freaks watching from variously concealed locations, intently focused on the middle distance just beyond the camera’s filmic grasp.

The tense, silent montage is immediately juxtaposed by the film’s climax. The freaks (who, throughout the film, have been featured in mostly static or closely trained shots) move rapidly, surreptitiously, and stealthily through a storm that has rendered the circus caravan procession motionless. Movement is again emphasized and ‘enfreaked.’² The camera tracks Johnny Eck as he ducks beneath caravan wheels, barely keeping pace with him. Jerry Austin hurls a switchblade into Hercules’ side too fast for the camera to catch.

As both Cleo and Hercules frantically cast around for a glimpse of their attackers, the freaks remain undetectable—imperceptible. They are a swarming, a freaking, a becoming of freakish imperceptibility.

The camera fades to black, and the specificities of Cleo’s torture are left uncertain.³ When the audience next sees her, it is as she was at the film’s opening—a bloated, monstrous chicken with a woman’s head, squawking limply in a sideshow cage. On one level, therefore, justice plays out in *Freaks* as the inversion of freakishness as a moral category. Cleo is undoubtedly the most monstrously evil of *Freaks*’ cast of characters, her outer beauty masking a cruel, sadistic nature. By rendering her a freak, Cleo’s monstrosity of character is revealed and externalized as a monstrosity of form. What is more, she is made the most

2. From David Fancy’s “Affirmative Freakery, Freaky Methodologies” (2018).

3. Significant modifications were made to the final cut of *Freaks* following overwhelmingly negative test screening scores, including the conclusion of the chase scene, Cleo’s mutilation, and the original epilogue depicting a castrated Hercules. The cut footage is considered lost (Mank 2005, Matthews 2009, Smith 2012).

freakish of all the freaks, matching her profound villainy. Nevertheless, chicken-Cleo is categorically different than the freaks whom she despises. While these freaks are continually undergoing a process of becoming-imperceptible, chicken-Cleo is unable to follow suit. Instead, she is hyper-perceptible as an object of disgust, fear, disdain, and pity by spectators both within and outside of the film's diegesis. She is not a body without organs, despite her literal mutilation, but rather an organism that has been totally stratified, made visible, rendered perceptible as a subject, and closed off from rhizomatic processes of becoming. In this light, Cleo's punishment is not so much being made into a freak as it is being made a molar aggregate, a wholly stratified organism that cannot move imperceptibly and cannot proceed rhizomatically. Indeed, the hyper-perceptibility of chicken-Cleo's monstrosity demonstrates her to not be a freak at all. Thus, despite the superficial moralism of Cleo's fate, 'freak' as a formal classification remains imperceptible in *Freaks*, as the very absence or deterritorialization of the category to which it purports to refer.

Immobility & Imperceptibility

My own personal affective response to the film makes it difficult for me to perceive the freaks in this instance as cold-blooded killers; the terror this scene might incite is instead felt as a judicious thrill. As the freaks descend on Cleo and Hercules, I feel a swell of anticipatory satisfaction. But the peace that comes with the delivery of justice is troubled by the film's final scene, in which we see Hans—now retired and living in opulence—genuinely remorseful for his part in Cleo's demise. He stammers to his former lover Frieda, who has come to console him, "Please, go away. I can't see no one." Just as Cleo's punishment can be seen as not so much being made a freak as being rendered a molar aggregate, Hans' remorse pertains not so much to his hand in her mutilation as to his role in stratifying her, in making her an organism and robbing her once and for all of her chance of becoming assemblage, of becoming-imperceptible, of becoming *one of them*. Chicken-Cleo is hyper-perceptible, and Hans "can't see no one;" perhaps Hans' role in Cleo's stratification also robs him of his own freakishness, his own imperceptibility, rendering him unable to perceive the freaks' movement as anything other than the creation of monstrous, molar forms.

The freakishness of *Freaks*' is thus also imperceptible because it does not graft easily onto

the moral equation that it itself establishes, in which the simple inversion of exterior beauty and interior monstrosity can absolve the world of evil. The mutilation of Cleo is not merely retribution for her hoodwinking and poisoning of Hans, although a certain amount of justice is no doubt at play. More than this: Cleo is not made into a freak among freaks. She is not a freak like them; she is not accepted; she is not 'one of us.' Cleo does not become imperceptible, but on the contrary, she becomes resoundingly perceptible—becomes spectacle. Despite her seeming otherness, chicken-Cleo is not a dismantled body without organs. She is a subject, "nailed down as one" and bound by the great strata of significance and subjectification (Deleuze and Guattari 159). The freaks, in other words, have made Cleo an organism; they have folded her; they have stolen her body. As such, and despite the undoubted monstrosity of chicken-Cleo, she remains welded to the strata, unable to become-imperceptible despite her new freakish status. She is a stranger to the cosmic formula of imperceptibility and becoming—and everyone can see it.

Thus *Freaks/freaks*, both the film and the multitude, move imperceptibly down lines of deterritorialization. The film's disjointed, episodic structure—far from detracting from its overall aesthetic value—is a formal dismantling of film-artefact-as-organism, perhaps even the production of a filmic body without organs. This drive towards absolute deterritorialization destabilizes the main narrative's moralistic foundation, denying a simple inversion of monstrosity and instead enabling a proliferation of freakish difference. What becomes momentarily visible, intermezzo through the rain, lightning, and muddy caravan wheels, is a vacillating, rupturing, asignifying multiplicity of molecular freaks; a *freaking*, proliferating and picking up speed so as to undermine the great molar—and moral—powers at play.

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Aaron Tucker

Against the Deterministic Moving Images of Facial Recognition Software

The moving images of facial recognition technologies (FRTs) is a biopolitical tactic that targets the bodily site of the face, operating as a mode of deterministic control by translating moving images of the face into calculable material that are adapted into contemporary governmentality.¹ While much of the current critiques of FRT are focused on privacy and surveillance, in particular as they relate to ubiquitous State and corporate big data practices, FRT's most effective form of biopolitical control is as a gatekeeper to the resources of citizenship wherein the moving images generated by FRT acts to identify, verify, and sort access to a hierarchy of resources such as wealth, health care, and education (to name only three).² As an example, *The New York Times* article "How It Feels When Software Watches You Take Tests" details the use of FRT to identify and track individu-

1. I am using the definition that the authors of the white paper "Face Technologies in the Wild" do in defining what an FRT is: "we use the term 'facial recognition technologies' as a catch all phrase to describe a set of technologies that process imaging data to perform a range of tasks on human faces, including detecting a face, identifying a unique individual, and estimating demographic attributes" (3). Erik Learned-Miller, Vicente Ordóñez, Jamie Morgenstern, and Joy Buolamwini. "Face Technologies in the Wild." Algorithmic Justice League. May 29, 2020.
2. My understanding of the concept of citizenship resources is formed in conversation with Btihaj Ajana who argues that the notion includes actual resources, such as wealth, health care, and education, but must also incorporate the fact that citizenship is "more about issues of access to resources, services, spaces and privileges" (12). In this way, biopolitical tactics like FRT can be deployed to restrict individuals and populations from even being considered for resources, to say nothing of direct access to the resources themselves. Btihaj Ajana. *Governing Through Biometrics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

als within virtual testing environments. Such a case showcases how FRT operates as a moving image technology: the camera records the face within the testing environment; the software then slices that recording into still digital images which are then individually processed by the detection mechanisms of the software, which allows for the more basic facial tracking described in the article; if there are "abnormalities" the recorded moving images are then watched for suspicious behavior under the rationales of academic integrity. However, in the example of Sergine Beaubrun's experiences, her dark-skinned face was unable to be detected by the software; without a detected face, an FRT cannot progress to the identification and verification stages and hence she was unable to be "recognized" by the technology. As the article exemplifies, the test-monitoring versions of the technology struggles when operating on individuals with darker skin and/or disabilities, thereby locking entire populations by labelling such faces as abnormal or simply unrecognizable (Patil and Bromwich, 2020). Similar issues have been found when FRT is used to monitor public housing, advise on loans and mortgages, assist in job interviews, and medically diagnose skin conditions.³

The reporting from *The New York Times* adds to the abundance of research showing the varied and widespread problematics of FRT. Yet, the "errors" and lapses in recognition and malfunctioning of FRT

3. Ginia Bellafante. "The Landlord Wants Facial Recognition in Its Rent-Stabilized Buildings. Why?" *New York Times*. March 28, 2019; "What Your Face May Tell Lenders About Whether You're Creditworthy." *The Wall Street Journal*. June 10, 2019; Charles Hymas. "AI used for first time in job interviews in UK to find best applicants." *The Telegraph*. September 27, 2019; Rimmer, Abi. "Presenting Clinical Features on Darker Skin: Five Minutes with ... Malone Mukwende." *Bmj*, vol. 369, 2020, pp. 2578.

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Simona Schneider

Invocation by Proxy: Ali Cherri's "My Pain is Real"

It is entirely conceivable that life's splendor forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. *If you invoke it with the right word, by its right name, it will come. This is the essence of magic, which does not create but invokes.*

... *Ruft man sie mit dem richtigen Wort, beim richtigen Namen, dann kommt sie. Das ist das Wesen der Zauberei, die nicht schafft, sondern ruft.*
— Franz Kafka, October 18, 1921¹

One large monitor roughly 60cm x 32cm hangs adjacent to two abutting 9" screens (19cm x 14cm) like the ones used in cars. The displays engage in an oblique crossfire, issuing indirect addresses to the viewer standing at their intersection, who turns towards and away and wears the headphones attached to the small screens. Lebanese artist Ali Cherri first showed his three-channel video installation "My Pain is Real" (2010) at Galerie Iman Farès in 2010 in Paris as part of the inaugural exhibition "Co-incidences" in this configuration. The scale bookends the human. The larger shows a man's face more tightly cropped than a talking head and closer to an intimate interlocutor skyping from a relaxed position, but its size moves the visitor back. Conversely, the two smaller monitors bring the viewer closer and accommodate the interval between the eyes, recalling viewfinders. As his visage progressively becomes bruised, battered, and wounded, he looks both on and out without saying a word and with muted emotions.

Meanwhile, the diptych alternates between identical and slightly overlapping, contiguous images, including idyllic, long takes of a sun-drenched, still room and a more tumultuous sea interspersed with flickering, fast-paced montages of war media footage and everyday scenes. All three videos run on a loop, but the video on the main display runs more than twice as long as that of the two mini consoles and consists of one long take (that form often championed for its veracity) internally cut as a collage through special effects.

When I first saw the piece, Cherri, who was present, projected this channel—his own countenance—on a cinema screen, and his gigantic, imposing face stared down towards the spectators into a middle distance.² In its original installation, two people watching the adjacent screens must occupy nearly the same position in intimate proximity. Otherwise, it is possible to revisit the piece through Cherri's website (alicherri.com) on a personal computer. The mouse inter-

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1. Translation modified and italics added. Kafka, Franz. *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1914-1923*. Translated by Martin Greenberg, vol. 2, Schocken Books, 1948, 195; Kafka, Franz. *Tagebücher*. Edited by Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002, 866.
 2. This first viewing occurred on the occasion of the 2013 *Unfixed Itineraries: Film and Visual Culture from Arab Worlds* conference at UCSC Digital Arts Research Center organized by Peter Limbrick.