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**MUTILATED BODIES IN SEARH FOR PERFECTION: A
PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS OF DARREN ARONOFSKY'S *PI*,
BLACK SWAN and *MOTHER!***

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MÜKEMMELLİK ARAYIŞINDAKİ TAHRİP EDİLMİŞ BEDENLER: DARREN ARONOFSKY'NİN
PI, *BLACK SWAN* ve *MOTHER!* FİMLERİNİN PSIKANALİTİK ANALİZİ

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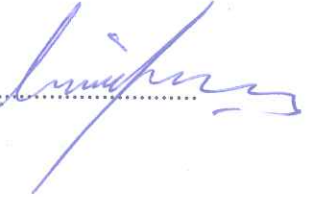
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ABSTRACT

Darren Aronofsky as an *auteur* uses recurring themes and narrations in all his films. He prefers to deal with themes such as obsession, perfection, social isolation, anxiety and body in all his films. Among his filmography, three films (*Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!*) differ from others with their portrayal of perfection, madness and body issue. Unlike in his other films, the search for perfection has a compensatory function for the characters against psychotic breakdowns in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!*. However, although three specific types of perfection provide stability to a certain degree, body mutilation acts are seen in all three films. As all three films show examples of three types of perfection and body destruction I group *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!* under the title of ‘Perfection and Body Trilogy’.

Aronofsky portrays the mental processes of perfectionist characters with subjective narration in his ‘Perfection and Body Trilogy’. Unlike his other films, firstly in these three films Aronofsky describes the paths to madness one by one, using the same narrative pattern. In the second place, he is tackling the issue of perfection in all these three films as an Imaginary compensation. Thirdly, he shows different body mutilation acts ending with self-annihilation. Therefore, the main aim of this thesis is to investigate the same patterns that Aronofsky uses to portray the struggle for perfection and the path of madness of protagonists that end with body mutilation in *Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!* from a psychoanalytic paradigm. In the light of Lacan’s three order (Symbolic, Imaginary, real), Lacan’s version of Oedipus complex and Lacanian term ‘foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father’ I will try to explain the issue of perfectionism as an Imaginary compensation against madness and its bodily effects.

ÖZET

Darren Aronofsky, bir *auteur* yönetmen olarak tüm filmlerinde tekrar eden temalar ve anlatılar kullanır. Yönetmen, tüm filmlerinde saplantı, mükemmellik, sosyal tecrit, kaygı ve beden gibi temaları işlemeyi tercih eder. Tüm filmleri arasında üç filmi (*Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!*) mükemmellik, delilik ve beden tasvirleri ile diğerlerinden farklıdır. Diğer filmlerinden farklı olarak, *Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!* da ‘mükemmellik arayışı’ karakterler için psikotik çöküntülere karşı bir dengeleyici unsur olarak işlev görür. Ancak bu üç farklı mükemmellik çabaları, bir ölçüye kadar dengeleme sağlasa da üç filmde de beden tahribi görülür. Her üç filmde de üç tür mükemmellik ve beden tahribi örnekleri görüldüğü için *Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!* filmlerini “Mükemmellik ve Beden Üçlemesi” başlığı altında gruptadım.

Aronofsky, “Mükemmellik ve Beden Üçlemesi”nde mükemmeliyetçi karakterlerin zihinsel süreçlerini öznel anlatımlarla anlatır. Diğer filmlerinden farklı olarak, Aronofsky, bu üç filmde öncelikle aynı anlatı kalıbını kullanarak deliliğe varan yolları tek tek betimler. İkinci olarak mükemmellik konusunu, üç filmde de imgesel telafi, sanrısız metafor ve ikame olarak ele alır. Üçüncü olarak öz kısımla sonuçlanan farklı beden tahribatları aktarır. Bu nedenle, bu tezin asıl amacı; Aronofsky’nin *Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!* filmlerindeki ana karakterlerin mükemmellik çabalarını ve kendilerini yaralama ile biten deliliklerini anlatırken kullandığı benzer kalıpları psikanalitik bir paradigma ile incelemektir. Lacan’ın üç düzeni (simgesel, imgesel ve gerçek), Odiplus Kompleksinin Lacancı yorumu ve Lacancı bir terim olan ‘Baba’nın Adı’nın Men Edilmesi’ kavramı yardımı ile delilik ve bedensel etkilerine karşı imgesel bir telafi olarak mükemmeliyetçilik konusunu irdelemeye çalışacağım.

INTRODUCTION

Darren Aronofsky as an *auteur*, deals with the same themes such as obsession, perfection, social isolation, anxiety and body in all his films from his first film *Pi* (1998) to *Mother!* (2017). However, among the filmography of Aronofsky, three films (*Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother*) are mainly related to madness in addition to these issues. These three films which I will analyse in detail in this thesis tackle the perfection struggle of characters as a compensatory mechanism to stay away from madness and the body mutilation as a result of madness.

The characters of *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!* struggle to be perfect in different fields to the degree of madness. In terms of perfection and body, I group *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother* under the title of 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' because three types of perfection and body mutilation acts are seen in these films. In *Pi* a mathematician who wants to achieve scientific perfection makes a self-lobotomy. In *Black Swan*, a ballerina who wants to achieve transcendence through artistic perfection commits suicide. In *Mother!* the main character who wants domestic perfection burns her house as a mutilation of her body. In addition to these, the search for perfection has a reparative function for the characters against psychotic breakdowns in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!* unlike the other films of Aronofsky.

Aronofsky portrays the mental processes and unconscious minds of three perfectionist protagonists in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!*. Unlike his other films, in these three films he describes the paths to madness one by one and shows the delusional lives resulting with body mutilation and suicide. The common crucial point is that Aronofsky uses the same narrative path in all three films. Therefore, the main aim of this thesis is to investigate the same patterns that Aronofsky uses in the path of madness of protagonists. In this path, three protagonists refer to perfection in order to be able to stay away from psychotic breakdowns, however when they confront threats that they cannot handle, they become unbalanced and resort to body mutilation.

The perfection issue and psychotic breakdowns resulting with body mutilation that are seen in *Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!* will be analysed from a psychoanalytic paradigm for three reasons. The first reason that I refer to psychoanalytical method in this thesis is that the psychoanalysis gives the opportunity to analyse the unconscious psychic drives of protagonists behind their perfection obsessions, psychotic breakdowns and hallucinations. Throughout the 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' Aronofsky uses different subjective narration (depth without pointers, point of view shots, subjective sound use, aural point of view) in order to enable the spectators to watch and hear the characters' hallucinations, psychotic fantasies. After giving some hints of psychotic structures, Aronofsky cinematographically portrays the unconscious projections of characters that rise to the surface of their conscious minds.

The second reason of using the psychoanalytical method is that the theme of all three films are about madness and the characters suffer from psychotic structures. According to the psychoanalytic paradigm there are three categories of psychoanalytic subjects: Neurosis, psychosis and perversity. What we call madness corresponds to psychosis according the categories of psychoanalytic subjects and psychosis can be explained by Lacanian key concepts of Imaginary, Symbolic and real order.

The third reason of using the psychoanalytical method is the portrayal of characters' unconscious minds and hallucinations by Aronofsky show similarities with the Lacanian concept of 'foreclosure' which means rejection, repudiation of some elements to the unconscious. The characters experience their hallucinations as reality coming outside and they reject their unconscious anxieties. Laplanche and Pontalis explain the Lacanian term 'foreclosure' as "specific mechanism held to lie at the origin of psychotic phenomenon" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974: 166). This phenomenon is different from repression as "foreclosed signifiers are not integrated into subject's unconscious" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974: 166). Therefore the subject who has a psychotic structure sees his/her unconscious thoughts as if

coming from outside just like in the case of protagonist's hallucinations. Lacan says in his third seminar that "in psychosis the unconscious is present but not functioning" (Lacan, 1997: 92). As in the case films the unconscious-like thought processes can be easily seen and the fact that characters live their hallucinations as if they were real, resembles the Schreber case that Lacan interprets as an example of psychosis in his third seminar of psychosis.

Because of these reasons, I will discuss Aronofsky's three films in a Lacanian perspective by using some of the key ideas of Lacan like three orders (Symbolic, Imaginary, real) which are the crucial concepts that formulate the psychic positions of subjects and also enable the Lacanian reading of Oedipus complex that is fundamental in analysing the psychotic inclinations of characters that refer to perfection and body mutilation. In addition, the interpretation of films that will focus on filmic texts based on a psychoanalytical reading needs some questions to be asked in order not to make conclusive judgments. Although the diagnosis of a psychotic state is behind the scope of this thesis, the psychoanalytic interpretation of psychotic states based on filmic texts of *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!* can explain the perfection and body mutilation acts and this is the ultimate purpose of this thesis. That's why the probable psychic dynamics that dig the characters into psychotic structure will be explicated with reference to Lacan before starting to analyse the filmic texts.

My starting points are several questions that require the psychoanalytical paradigm indispensable: In which ways are the protagonists of 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' and Schreber whose case is examined throughout the third seminar of Lacan resemble? Is there a relation between the psychic structure of characters in Aronofsky's films and the psychotic structures described in Lacan's third seminar of psychosis? Are all the conflicts of characters situated at the Imaginary level or Symbolic level? What's the reason of the predominance of Imaginary relations in all films? In case of losing sight of the Symbolic dimension what will be the possible consequences? What role/function does perfection have in all three films?

What are the reasons of body mutilation acts in 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' of Lacan? What are the connections with perfection and body mutilation with Imaginary and Symbolic orders? Which images does Aronofsky equalize the characters as Imaginary phallus? Why does the libido in other words *jouissance* comes back and attacks the body?

In search for answers to these questions and others, Lacanian psychoanalysis will be utilized as a theoretical approach in this thesis. But before the psychoanalytical analysis, in the first chapter my goal is to explain the general characteristics of Darren Aronofsky's films as he uses recurring themes and narrational tools as an *auteur*.

In second chapter the theoretical frame that will be used are some key concepts of Lacan and operates on two planes. On the first plane Lacan's three orders (Symbolic, Imaginary and real) will be the first conceptual framework. They are known as three stages or three orders in subject's lives. In order to introduce the diegetic worlds of films and explain the reasons of possible psychotic structures of characters who seek for perfection and refer to self-mutilation these three registers are very essential. In this part also the importance of primordial signifier and the results that may arise in absence of it will be explained.

On the second plane I will focus on the mechanism of psychotic structure again referring to Lacan and psychotic inclinations of characters of Aronofsky in the light of Lacan's version of Oedipus complex and Lacanian term 'foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father'. Besides in this second plane I will try to explain the issue of perfectionism as an Imaginary compensation against the Symbolic inefficacy. In other words, I will claim that Aronofsky's psychotic inclined characters apply to perfection to hold onto the Symbolic order with reference of Lacan's examples that are given in his third seminar of psychosis and his articles in *Ecrits*. My last theoretical frame in this part is the body as a terrain of *jouissance* during a psychotic breakdown. I will use the Lacanian term '*jouissance*' in the same sense with libido while focusing on the reasons of body mutilations.

The third chapter which is the final part of my thesis will be the film analysis part under the light of the key concepts put forth in the previous chapters. Therefore the characters' psychic drives behind their acts of perfection, their full-blown psychotic breaks, hallucinations and body mutilations will be my main focus in the third chapter. As Aronofsky uses the same pattern in each narrative of the 'Perfection and Body Trilogy', I will analyse some crucial sequences with taking notice of same titles to show the close resemblances of films.

Related to the pattern that Aronofsky uses in each film, there are three essential periods. Firstly, Aronofsky in each film portrays his characters in a calm period owing to perfection, identification with their role models and their idealized jobs. Psychoanalytically speaking this is un-triggered, stabilized periods in which prosthesis Symbolic order that characters construct by themselves is at work. Scientific perfection in *Pi*, artistic perfection in *Black Swan* and domestic perfection in *Mother!* procure a kind of compensatory mechanism besides the Imaginary identifications and sublime responsibilities. However, Aronofsky gives some hints of psychotic structures that accompany these quiet periods. As the characters that function as the primordial signifier/ the Name-of-the-Father (such as Thomas in *Black Swan* and poet in *Mother!* as will be discussed in the following chapters) are ignored by the protagonists, psychotic structures come to mind according to the definition of psychosis in Lacan's theory.

Secondly Aronofsky begins to describe the irreversible psychotic path that the protagonists enter as soon as they confront strangers that belongs to Symbolic order. In all three films certain triggering factors coming from the Symbolic order disrupt the stability that protagonists construct with perfectionism and the help of Imaginary tools. As the triggering factors coming from Symbolic order cannot be symbolized and interpreted by the protagonists, these triggering factors dig the characters into psychotic breakdowns. The third and the last period is the period of hallucinations, body mutilations and suicide.

CHAPTER 1

RECURRING NARRATIVE AND NARRATIONAL ELEMENTS IN ARONOFSKY'S FILMS

1.1. RECURRING NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

1.1.1. Obsession, Perfection and Social Isolation

Darren Aronofsky as an *auteur* deals with themes such as obsession, perfection, social isolation, anxiety, madness and body mutilation in all his films. From his first feature film *Pi* (1998) to *Mother!* (2017) he describes obsessive, perfectionist characters and their social isolated lives. According to Tarja Laine, Darren Aronofsky takes an eager interest in intellectual issues and mental procedures. She says that “Aronofsky as a filmmaker could be also considered ‘cerebral’, insofar as his films often explore such topics as mathematics, madness, hallucinations, obsessions, social anxiety, addiction, psychosis, schizophrenia and neuroscience” (Laine, 2015: 2).

The idea of reaching perfection can be found in all Aronofsky’s films and despite of their limitedness, all characters in each Aronofsky film are obsessive about being perfect in different fields. In *Pi*, Max as an obsessive mathematician seeks to acquire a perfect pattern in pi number through his mathematical calculations. He thinks this pattern will be the perfect equation for understanding many aspects like God, Judaism, and stock market. His obsession with pi number resembles the pursuit of Tommy in *The Fountain*, an obsessive scientist who searches a perfect cure for his wife with cancer.

In *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), the spectators watch the delusions of a television addicted mom, his drug addicted son and his friends. They are all obsessively pursuing an empty ‘American Dream’. Harry and his friends want to be rich and attain a ‘perfect life’. In a similar way, Sara aims to lose weight for Tabby Tibbons show. Indeed she wants to have a perfect status –which is to be known by everybody and become ‘somebody’. But as ‘narcissistic perfectionists’, they tend to

procrastinate and begin to use chemicals, in fear for the dreaded consequence of less than perfect performance. Their overambitious and wrong program make it difficult to self-regulate themselves in the areas of diet and drug use. In the end their fantasies turn into nightmares and their perfection ideals collapsed totally.

In *The Wrestler* (2008), a washed up wrestler Randy strives to have a perfect body image and performance despite his advanced age. As he wants recognition of audiences and reputation in the wrestling community, he strives to be in perfect shape and performance. In a similar manner in *Black Swan* (2010) an obsessive ballerina Nina struggles to be perfect and perpetually says that she wants to be 'perfect'.¹ She models prima ballerina Beth Macintyre who is a perfect and successful ballerina.

In *Noah* (2014) as an obsessive prophet Noah seeks to fulfil the duties of God in a perfect way. In *Mother!* which is a film based completely on metaphors unlike his other films Aronofsky tells an apocalyptic story about earth and nature through an obsessive woman who cannot cope with his anxieties and delusions.² She sees her husband as a perfect poet and wants to be a perfect wife and a perfect muse for him. Therefore it can be said that 'obsession of perfection' issue provides thematic continuity in Aronofsky's films.

¹ In an interview Aronofsky explains that how *The Wrestler* and *Black Swan* are originated: "At one point, way before I made *The Wrestler*, I was actually developing a project that was about a love affair between a ballet dancer and a wrestler, and then it kind of split off into two movies. I realized pretty quickly that taking two worlds like wrestling and ballet was much too much for one movie. So I guess my dream is that some art theatre will play the films as a double feature someday." Aronofsky claims they are still thematically linked: "I've always considered the two films companion pieces. They are really connected and people will see the connections. It's funny, because wrestling some consider the lowest art — if they would even call it art — and ballet some people consider the highest art. But what was amazing to me was how similar the performers in both of these worlds are. They both make incredible use of their bodies to express themselves."

<https://www.slashfilm.com/darren-aronofskys-black-swan-and-the-wrestler-started-as-one-movie/>
² "But it was always about mother. That was always the goal," the filmmaker continued. "To tell the story of not your mother, not my mother, but our mother, a mother that has given us all life, and to tell the history of humanity with mother in an allegory."
<https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/film/97239892/mother-darren-aronofsky-decodes-his-movie-so-you-dont-have-to>

Although the characters have extremely different stories and different problems, what they have in common is also their isolated worlds in addition to their obsession for perfection. The characters are all alienated from the outside world and imprisoned in their own private worlds. Because of their self-absorption they cannot contact with other people. They are stuck in their minds.

In *Pi*, Max sends away everybody who comes near him except his mentor Sol. In *Requiem for a Dream*, the mother Sara confesses that she feels so lonely and stuck in her apartment. In *The Fountain*, Thomas -as Adam who loses his Eve- doesn't accept anyone's friendship. In *The Wrestler*, Randy has nobody from his family including his daughter, only superficial wrestling acquaintances. In *Black Swan* Nina is too obsessed with being perfect and therefore has no friends. Noah as a religious iconographic figure acts like that he isn't in need of others. In *Mother!* the poet's wife is all alone in his big isolated house like the wife in Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). As they cut off all communication with everyone and lose relationship with the world, in the end they confront devastating consequences.

1.1.2. Stability, Clarity and Repetition

In Aronofsky's films, the characters frequently try to protect a certain stability, clarity and repetition in their struggle for a perfect way of life. For example in *Pi*, Max is in the pursuit of mathematical unity, golden ratio, a perfect mathematical pattern in everything. He says continually: "Mathematics is the language of nature. Everything around us can be represented and understood through numbers." According to Laine, "the way in which Max attempts to know the whole world mathematically could be seen as a desire to objectify the world, to view it in a strictly analytical, numerical way" (Laine, 2015: 25-26).

In terms of repetition in *Requiem for a Dream*, Sara, his son Harry and other drug addicted characters are very stable in their chemical dependent lives. All characters repetitively take their daily doses and Aronofsky shows us the drug use that is rooted in repetition with hip hop montages that stand for rapidly cut scenes with

extreme close-ups and a number of zippy sounds. Tyrer says that hip hop montage is a technique Aronofsky had developed from his very first short films. He adds that “through the hip hop montages the spectators see the rapid succession of images edited together to give a sense, through the film’s form, of the insistent, habitual, even ritual recurrence of drug use” (Tyrer, 2015: 3- 4). There is a consensus that hip hop montage is Darren Aronofsky's trademark. “It’s a short sequence of clipped images or actions shown in fast motion, accompanied by sound effects. It is used to show the process and sometimes result of a certain action, most commonly (in Aronofsky's case) taking drugs.” (Urban Dictionary, 2005) According to Tyrer “A fundamental feature of *Requiem for a Dream* is repetition. We can find the function of repetition at just about every level in the film: from content, to form, to extra-textual factors” (Tyrer, 2015: 3).

In *The Fountain*, the spectators watch repetitive, constant work of Tommy who spends his days and nights in his laboratory in order to find a cure for his wife. Besides, Tommy is seen grieving repetitively in three interwoven stories with different temporal and spatial settings in a nonlinear narrative style. “Martha Nussbaum has defined such grief as repeatedly experienced affective frustration, thoroughly intertwined with the grieving person’s bodily and cognitive fabric. It is this reverberating, repetitive logic of grief that is embedded in the visual style of *The Fountain*” (Laine, 2015: 25).

Other protagonists Randy and Nina, as stage performers, have to repeat same rituals and Noah and mother –as representatives of God and Nature- have to repeat same kind of duties. In sum, all protagonists restrain their worlds with repetitive acts for the sake of a stable life with full control.

1.1.3. Inability to Cope With Change

The characters in Aronofsky films usually can’t cope with change and they want to continue their lives the way they are used to. For example, Harry and Marion immediately take a pinch of drugs when it comes to taking some responsibility in

Requiem for a Dream. Other protagonists also in *The Fountain*, *The Wrestler* and *Noah* lose their adaptation to social life when they encounter something different from their daily routines. But more seriously in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!* -the films which I classify as 'Perfection and Body Trilogy'- the protagonists suffer from psychotic triggering when there is a change in Symbolic order and daily life. In *Pi*, Max's thumb starts to tremble and his migraine attacks begin when someone with high status asks something from him. In Nina's case, a new flirtatious dancer and a new 'black swan' role lead to a psychotic breakdown. In *Mother!* the woman can't cope with guests, she begins to see them as 'intruders' and film turns into an apocalyptic war zone as an allegory of her psychotic breakdown.

1.1.4. Denial of All Kinds of Limitedness

In Aronofsky's films all characters deny all kinds of limitedness; including the limits of reason, body, life, talent, divine privilege, self-sufficiency, nature and consciousness. For example, Max thinks he is the chosen one to solve the secret pattern in pi number. In *Requiem for a Dream*, Sara thinks that she will be as beautiful as in her past golden days. In a similar way Harry and his friends deny the limits of their bodies against drugs and use it recklessly. *The Fountain* brings another perspective to body and the protagonist Tommy denies the finitude of body and wants to achieve eternal life. In *The Wrestler* Randy is in deep nostalgia for his good old times. He keeps up wrestling in taught matches and ignores the limits of his aging body. According to Laine, "Randy fails to accept his facticity in all its potentially humiliating limitedness" (Laine, 2015: 115).

In a similar way, Nina in *Black Swan* wants to be able to perform both as white and black swan. But her artistic director Thomas Leroy says that Nina has only technical ability to dance like white swan and hasn't got enough passion and ability to be a black swan. In *Noah*, the main character denies his divine role limited to constructing a ship, doesn't try to save innocent people and punish them in the name of God. And finally Aronofsky shows us the limitedness of conscious mind and at the same time the limitedness of Nature in *Mother!*

1.1.5. Body and Body Mutilation

Other recurring theme in Aronofsky's films is body. The body issue is very important in his films; firstly for the reason that the body is an instrumental agency for artistic expression, receiving appreciation and earning a living as it could be seen in *Black Swan*, *The Wrestler* and also *Requiem for a Dream*. Secondly it's a protective case for a holy numerical pattern as in *Pi*, a means to take pleasure as in *Requiem for a Dream* and a channel for eternity as in *The Fountain*. Thirdly and more crucially the body is a warning site for anxiety, oncoming panic attacks, heart attacks and migraine attacks as in *Pi*, *The Wrestler*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!*. In other words, the bodies of protagonists are like an interface; they reflect the protagonist's inner anxieties and fears to the outer world. Aronofsky reflects the unconscious of characters through their bodies and the spectators are mediated to approach those bodies as the characters' unconscious reflections.

The spectators also see bodily transformations of characters due to different reasons like aging, drug use and illness. In addition, all characters are self-mutilating in Aronofsky's world. In all films, bodies are subjected to various effects: they are pierced, raped, numbed, stapled, skin peeled and burned. Because the characters see the vulnerability of their psyches and harm their bodies as a true source of self. They try to control their bodies in the name of controlling themselves. So mutilating the body becomes a way of controlling their psyche. According to Himber, "self-mutilation is considered a coping mechanism for overwhelmingly negative and intolerable affects that lead to feelings of depersonalization" (Himber, 1994 in Laine, 2015: 134).

As a reflection of this description, in *The Wrestler* when a customer recognizes Randy in the 'wrong name' he takes offense and deliberately injures his hand in the cold cuts machine which reminds him the pain of wrestling and his old glory days. In *Requiem for a Dream*, in the name of having control over their bodies all four characters use drugs that have dreadful effects on their bodies. In *Black Swan*, Nina

scratches herself unconsciously to maintain a sense of identity against her dominant mother.

In *Pi*, *Requiem for a Dream*, *The Wrestler* and *Mother!* self-mutilation acts appear as increasingly destructive, painful and lethal. In reference to Karen Suyemoto and Marian Macdonald, Laine states that self-mutilation confirms the sense of identity, because the skin is the most essential frontier of self (Laine, 2015: 134). As the skin is torn, Aronofsky enables the spectators to see both figuratively and literally the dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside. In all his films, an open wound or visceral organ is seen: In *Pi*, it is a brain which is pulsating like a heart; in *Requiem for a Dream* it is Harry's open wound in his arm; in *The Fountain* it is the cut in Tommy's tattooed ring finger; in *The Wrestler* it is Randy's stapled and slashed skin, in *Black Swan* it is Nina's stabbed abdomen, in *Mother!* bleeding parquet floor appears as an allegory of mother's skin.

Zeiler asserts that under normal conditions, the body is the vehicle where one engages his/her attention to the world, but in pain the same body becomes an object (Zeiler 2010: 337). At the end of Aronofsky's films the distinction between 'having a body' and 'being a body' becomes less apparent and the characters become whole with their bodies. In other words, the characters are fantasizing to become the image which represents "perfection" for them. For Max this image is the brain that can solve the mystery of the pi number. For Sara, this is a fit and young body just like for Randy while this is an eternal and transcendent body for Tommy. For Nina this is a voluptuous black swan, which she incessantly tries to embody within herself. For Noah, this is just as a piece of flesh to be dedicated to God. For mother this is 'house' through which she feels the slightest external change.

1.1.6. Repetitive Themes

In regard to recurring themes in Aronofsky's filmography; firstly it can be said that Aronofsky has an affinity in religious themes which can especially be noticed in *Pi*,

The Fountain, The Wrestler, Noah and *Mother!*³ He also points out nihilistic themes as well as religious themes. Besides, he is obsessed with psychotic universes and psychotic structures. Especially in *Pi, Black Swan* and *Mother!*, Aronofsky portrays protagonists suffering from psychotic breakdowns.

Other recurrent theme that Aronofsky uses mostly is the theme of cyclic lives. In all films the nightmarish life of protagonists collapses after a dramatic climax and then a new life re-emerges. Indeed a cyclic tempo of everyday life is seen in every film. All the protagonists start over and over every day to achieve their goal. But in the end Aronofsky ensures the spectator that a new life will begin at the end. In all films the characters begin new lives and cycles.

In *Pi*, it is clear that Max starts a new life when he refuses to multiply the multi-digit numbers and watches the trees in the park with pleasure. In *Requiem for a Dream*, four characters go round in circles without making any progress. In *the Fountain*, the same man tries to save the same woman. In *The Wrestler*, Randy makes the same mistakes and begins wrestling over and over. In *Black Swan*, after the retirement of Beth, Nina becomes the lead dancer and Thomas' little princess like Beth. After Nina, it is evident that there will be another soloist and little princess. In *Noah* and *Mother!*, the protagonists—as representatives of God and Nature—witness recurrent cycle of disasters. In *Mother!*, cyclic lives begin and end continuously in a row.

In conclusion, Aronofsky's films don't provide any pleasure, enjoyment, catharsis and discharge for the spectators. Rather, all of his films seem deliberately anti-

³ Aronofsky provides some insight into his thought process when he says in lazy, "post-modernist" fashion: "When I was trying to tell the history or the story of people on Mother Earth, I was like, 'Oh, the Bible could be a really kind of good blueprint to sort of hang all these stories.'" (**Darren Aronofsky's Mother!: Entirely misconceived By Kevin Martinez 27 September 2017** <http://intsse.com/wswspdf/en/articles/2017/09/27/moth-s27.pdf>)

cathartic, essentially lacking any transformative power that would cancel out the spectator's negative emotions. Because Aronofsky's characters are troubled, socially isolated and agonized. Therefore, it's difficult to identify with these anti-hero characters. In sum, they are neither cathartic characters nor the typical characters of Hollywood who live happily forever in the end.

1.2. RECURRING NARRATIONAL ELEMENTS:

As well as repetitive narrative elements, Aronofsky utilizes recurring narrational elements in all his films. In order to accentuate the importance of body he mostly uses extreme close up shots, SnorriCam, hip-hop montage and mobile camera. For example, the bodies of characters that are torn off, cut, peeled, stapled are often framed in close-up. Besides, Aronofsky prefers to use extreme close-ups in order to augment the effects of brutal scenes that aren't easy to watch. Tarja Laine explains this use of close ups as, "Close up creates uncanny intimacies and shows us the body as we rarely dare to - look at it – as an organic mass bearing the marks of decomposition that is barely visible to the naked eye" (Laine, 2015: 104).

Besides, in Aronofsky's films, the spectators are urged to follow the characters very closely due to Snorricam; a camera equipment that is attached to the body of characters so that can show their each corporeal gesticulation. Apart from the use of Snorricam, hip hop montage is also another distinctive narrational technique of Aronofsky that shows his auteurship. One can easily distinguish a film of his when s/he sees a hip hop montage that becomes his cinematic signature. According to Tarja Laine, "He is fond of cinematic techniques that aim at sensorial and bodily engagement. There are hip-hop montages with accompanying sound effects. (scratching, sampling). He often uses extremely tight framing, lengthy follow shots and SnorriCam. He also alternates between extreme close-ups and extreme long shots to create a sense of isolation" (Laine, 2015: 2).

Aronofsky is also in the habit of using point-of-view technique, distorted sounds, jarring camera movements, mobile frames. These recurring narrational techniques

enable the spectator to witness the protagonists' hallucinations 'from the inside'. Laine cites from Mark Fisher as "in *Black Swan*, we are always inside Nina's paranoid schizophrenia" (Fisher 2011: 59 in Laine, 2015: 156) by means of camera movements. In his other films, Aronofsky likes to make the audiences observe characters' minds via these techniques. Besides, the subjective sounds get louder towards the final scenes of each film as if showing protagonist's growing hallucinations.

At the level of form, the other recurring technique is 'fade to white' which is seen in *Pi*, *Requiem for a Dream*, *The Fountain*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!*. For instance in *Mother!* this technique is used four times in the film. The last characteristic technique of Aronofsky is 'time lapse' shots which is used mostly in drug use scenes in *Requiem for a Dream*, in 'plants erupting into bloom' scenes in *The Fountain*, in "world creation" sequence in *Noah* and in 'house renovation' sequences in *Mother!*

As an auteur Aronofsky has an individual style and his films can be easily identifiable owing to the recurring narrative and narrational elements. By using the same themes and narrational tools in his each film Aronofsky strengthens his auteurship.

CHAPTER 2
THE PSYCHOANALYTICAL INVESTIGATION OF ARONOFSKY'S
'PERFECTION AND BODY TRILOGY' (*PI, BLACK SWAN AND*
***MOTHER!*)**

In terms of perfection and body, I group three films of Aronofsky (*Pi, Black Swan* and *Mother*) under the title of "Perfection and Body Trilogy" because three types of perfection and body mutilation acts are seen in these films. In *Pi* a mathematician who wants to achieve scientific perfection makes a self-lobotomy. In *Black Swan*, a ballerina who wants to achieve transcendence through artistic perfection commits suicide. In *Mother!* the main character who wants domestic perfection burns her house as a representation of her body. In addition, all protagonists of these three films suffer from psychotic breakdowns for different reasons although they map out a rout of perfection to a certain extent.

Before exploring the reasons for referring to perfection and body mutilation, Lacan's three order (Symbolic, Imaginary and real) will be tackled in the first part of this chapter because Lacan's three registers are the key turning points in subjects' lives. "Lacan thought that these three dimensions are bound together to give our lives a sense of stability and indeed, establish our basic sense of reality. When they become undone, each dimension can disrupt and ravage the person's life" (Leader, 2012: 45). Indeed, in *Pi, Black Swan* and *Mother* the predominance of Imaginary dimension over Symbolic dimension is very remarkable which has crucial effects. In addition, the conflicts of characters are mainly situated at the Imaginary level instead of Symbolic level. In order to interpret this predominance of Imaginary order over Symbolic order I will give examples of Lacan's three orders in diegetic worlds of films and then try to show the effects of this predominance of Imaginary order on characters.

In the second part of second chapter, in order to explore the function and the reasons of pursuing perfection by all characters who have psychotic structures, firstly Lacanian version of Oedipus Complex and the Lacanian term of 'foreclosure of the

Name-of-the-Father” will be explained. Afterwards the perfection struggle will be positioned as an Imaginary compensation against the Symbolic holes. Before beginning to analyse the films, the mechanism of psychotic structure will be sketched out to be able to discern the psychotic inclinations of Aronofsky’s characters. In addition, to understand the characters’ recourse to body mutilation, the term ‘*jouissance*’ and the importance of limiting it will be explicated.

2.1. FROM SYMBOLIC ORDER TO REAL ORDER

Lacan uses three categories to classify the experience of the subject. These categories are the Symbolic, Imaginary and the Real. The first order is the Symbolic and it is the order of language. Second one is the Imaginary and it is the order of the image. The third order is the Real which resists symbolization absolutely. These orders are also the turning points of essential transitions of human psyche like mirror stage and Oedipus complex and have crucial functions as it is seen in protagonists’ lives.

2.1.1. Symbolic Order

The Symbolic order is the order of language and “as an order of language it provides the background of signification for the subject’s action” (McGowan, 2015: 30). In other words, the world in which the subjects live is laid hold of by the signification process obtained via language. Fink explicates this situation by stating that “... the word has wrought him or her from nothingness, and he or she can be spoken of, and discoursed upon...” (1995, 51). As the subjects are in the Realm of language and it’s the Symbolic order that associates subjects with signification process, this world can be designated as the Symbolic.

2.1.1.1. System of Signifiers

The Symbolic order consists of system of signifiers; in other words it is composed of ‘signifiers’ and ‘signifieds’. Signifier means “a symbol, sound, or image that represents an underlying concept or meaning” and signified means “a concept or

meaning as distinguished from the sign through which it is communicated.” (Merriam Webster, 2019) Saussure indicates that “signification arises not through a direct relationship between the signifier and signified and there is a divide that separates signification from meaning” (McGowan, 2015: 30). Homer also explicates this situation as follows:

The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and is determined by social convention. But if language does not correspond to objects in the world then how does it become meaningful? According to Saussure, meaning does not reside in individual signs but in the relationship between signs and in the language system itself. Language creates a differential system whereby any given sign acquires its meaning by virtue of its difference from other signs. (Homer, 2004: 38)

In other words, the signifiers don't have an inherent and significant meaning. They are constructed to create a meaning. That is to say, the Symbolic order is like a social set up or a cultural configuration. Language, laws, institutions and the signifiers are the tools which allow to create meaning in this social set up. According to Lacan, what a signifier refers to is not a signified, as there is always a barrier between them, but to another signifier. For that reason one signifier is dependant to another signifier. As Homer says “Rather each signifier insists on a meaning, it presses forward to the next signifier” (Homer, 2005: 42). In addition to this, signification always refers to other significations so this is an endless process. As a consequence “signification is always a process, a chain. None of its elements actually ‘consist’ of the meaning. Meaning is not fixed, or as Lacan puts it, there is ‘an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier’ (1977c (1957): 154)” (Homer, 2004: 41).

The subjects are called as ‘subjects’ insofar as they are submitted to the Symbolic order which is the order of language. Lacan summarizes this situation as;

Man exists in the Symbolic order due to the fact that a symbol gives meaning to man. He is affected by the chain of signifiers. He is the product of the signifier because of the fact that as being a subject, it is submitted to a specific signifier. Without the symbol, it cannot be possible to talk about the formation of man; he is meaningful only through the light of the signifier. (1999, 65)

Therefore, as there is no home for humans other than Symbolic order, they have to be submitted to language and interiorize the logic of language. Only by entering within the border of language, they become the subject of the Symbolic. But for the ones like Aronofsky's characters in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother* who have a limited access to the Symbolic order, the danger of getting out of the Symbolic order and having psychotic breakdown come to the fore if no Symbolic substitution is found.

In addition, the Symbolic order is the Realm of not only language but also culture and law. "It includes official institutions such as schools, political parties, and churches." (Vacuous Savor, 2009). This is because the Symbolic order continues to work without minding its inhabitants. "Lacan saw the Symbolic order as a machine that functioned perfectly that determined the existence of subjects so thoroughly that they were often unable even to recognize this" (McGowan and Kunkle, 2004: xv).

Aronofsky creates worlds as representations of Symbolic order in each of his films. The math universe, the stock market, Hasidic world in *Pi*, the ballet company in *Black Swan* and the family house as a domestic space in *Mother!* are the places that represent Symbolic orders. As a sort of Symbolic systems they have their own rules and specific ways of capturing reality.

Aronofsky also creates cyclic lives that function independently likewise the logic of Symbolic structure in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother* as in other movies. He emphasizes the Symbolic order which functions autonomously without paying attention to the individuals living in it. Aronofsky establishes dual dynamics repeating itself over and over like 'construction-deconstruction', 'retirements-new career beginnings', 'birth-death' or 'death-rebirth' in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!* as if to tell each character must take her/his position in the Symbolic order in order to be part of the system.

At the beginning of *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother*, each character is involved in well-functioning systems as if they had no problems. Max who used to work at university

is now working on a pattern in pi number. Hasidic Jews and stock brokers see him as a decoder for their secret works. Nina as a professional ballerina shares the tasks of her ballet company. Mother as a landlady is struggling very hard to take care and manage the house. They all try to do their jobs in a perfect way and their struggle for perfection enables them to stay in Symbolic order. But after a certain point, the characters start to have problems in the way they relate to new signifiers in the Symbolic order that they belong to. Because they seem to mimic their role models on the Imaginary level and they are accustomed to give specific clear meanings to the signifiers they use. But, the essence of the matter is that the signifiers don't have specific and clear meanings. "As the Symbolic is the structure of signifiers, one must follow the path of the signifier knowing the truth that signifiers are meaningless codes in itself" (Homer, 2005: 42). Therefore when they confront new signifiers that they are not familiar with they start to have difficulties that leads them to a worsening state of mind.

As it is stated that Aronofsky's characters have difficulty to cope with change, the protagonists of 'Perfection and Body' trilogy seems to have much deeper problem relating to Symbolic order. In order to understand their difficulty it may be better to look at the logic and beginning of language.

2.1.1.2. Primordial Signifier and Master Signifier

The primordial signifier provides the first substitution in language as it is the substitution of the mother's desire in infant's early life. This issue will be explained in the second part of this chapter under the title of the Name-of-the-Father which means paternal law, in other words paternal metaphor. In this first part, this concept will be examined regarding to language issue.

As for the master signifier; it stands for the putative power –that is to say phallus– that the Name-of-the-Father is thought to possess; but indeed the Name-of-the-Father is only a function which is the limitation of chain of signification, therefore possesses nothing. "The master-signifier which is a Lacanian concept derived from

Saussurean structural linguistics is a signifier that points to itself instead of other signifiers.” (No Subject - Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis, 2019) This concept of master signifier is summarized by Giuseppe Iurato as follows:

For a subject to can communicate and, hence, in order to the Symbolic order can to run or function, it is necessary ‘to freeze’ the shifting of the unending chain of the signifiers, albeit contingently and temporarily. A way to do this is, according to Lacan, through the adoption of a master signifier (or a significant-maître) stopping the chain of signification of above. These last signifiers are the keys that give meaning to the other signifiers, and are absolutely necessary because a chain of signification stand for nothing but itself. In such a chain, signifier and signified are one and the same, so that it therefore can serve as the period that momentarily ends the run-on sentence of signification. Hence, it is crucial that a Symbolic order have master signifiers: in the Lacanian theory, it is assumed as main master signifier that of the Name-of-the-Father (in turn, referring to the Phallus symbol) (Iurato, 2016: 4).

What Iurato tries to depict here is that the master signifier is the signifier that regulates the signification in the Symbolic order. Besides, the endless chain of signifiers is halted by the master-signifier. Žižek also explains this concept as “Master signifier will therefore be the signifier which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers do not represent anything” (Žižek, 1996: 21). Hence the master signifier creates a situation in which all other signifiers are articulated with it.

What is important to be kept in mind here is that the primordial/pure signifier indicates the Name-of-the-Father while the master signifier points to phallus which is thought to be owned by the father/ Name-of-the-Father. Therefore, master signifier is used in many articles same with primordial signifier because the primordial signifier is the signifier of lack/phallus. It will be explained in detail in the second part of this chapter.

The signifiers are changeable and incomplete in Symbolic realm and the subjects are in an unstable environment. In this regard the function of primordial signifier is very crucial. Eisenstein cites from Lacan explains this function very clearly: “the primordial signifier has simply a function: a formal gesture to carry out whose

importance lies not in the content of its signification, but rather in the fact that it is signifying. Strategy to drain all meaning” (Eisenstein, 2004: 1, 2). So the general rule of Symbolic order is being signifying without being significant as Eisenstein points out “the inability to be inscribed in any meaningful way within the order of understanding and knowledge” (Eisenstein, 2004:4).

What is important here is that this general rule of Symbolic order is at the same time its contradiction. For whom who cannot interiorize the function of ‘being signifying without being significant’ confront the danger of expulsion from the Symbolic order. Hence the subjects are always on the shaky ground because of this contradictory function. Eisenstein explicates this situation as follows:

The psychoanalytic account of human and cultural development lies here-in the notion that a sign *acknowledged but not understood* is the only way to account for the passage from nature to culture, from the animal world of instinct and appetite to the human world of language and desire. This sign acknowledged but not understood (i.e., the signifier) literally effects the subject- that is, it brings a subject about out of nothing (Eisenstein, 2004: 4).

2.1.1.3. Fixity of Meaning versus Subjectivity:

The function of ‘being signifying without being significant’ is also the source of subjectivity of human beings as Lacan puts into words that “primordial signifier is our very conceptualization of the structure of subjectivity” (Lacan, 1993: 188). So, the subjectivity comes from this contradictive point of primordial signifier. “‘Subjectivity’ in psychoanalysis does not imply a relativism but rather an ontology and it is equated with a lack of rigour or specificity” (Lacan Online, 2013). Besides the subjects are, as Eisenstein cites from Lacan suggests, “not yet a human being when every signifier is understood to bear a meaningful and intelligible message” (Eisenstein, 2004: 4).

However, the ‘meaningful and intelligible message’ and ‘the rigour of the meaning’ that is to say the fixity of meaning is the ultimate purpose of Aronofsky’s characters. Max tries to understand the meaning of pi pattern. Nina fights to death with herself to feel and be a ‘black swan’ and mother strives to penetrate the poet’s brain and

plumb the depths of his house. They all attribute fixed meanings to the primordial signifiers and all the other signifiers that are dependent to it. Besides, they think the meaning in their minds means the same to everyone else. So, subjectivity cannot be of concern for the characters. Besides, the function of primordial signifier which is 'relieve itself from the order of meaning' isn't undertaken by Max, Nina and mother. On the contrary, they try to understand the primordial signifier. As a consequence, their rejection of the obligation of signifying function of the primordial signifier without being significant prevent the characters to be able to stay in the Symbolic order and psychotic position inevitably becomes a current issue for them.

Psychotics fail to observe the Lacanian distinction between a signifier that signifies without being significant. In short, for the psychotic, every word is significant; no word merely signifies. Psychoanalysis, however, stakes our equilibrium on the non-sensical dimension of the pure signifier. (Lacan, 1993: 184 in Eisenstein, 2004: 10). Therefore one's acceptance of the non-sensical dimension of the pure signifier can be considered as a proof that s/he enters into the area of Symbolic.

2.1.1.4. Symbolic Order in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother*!

Aronofsky as an auteur, introduces his characters' worlds as representations of Symbolic order. But in parallel he conceives some disruptions against the functioning of the Symbolic order and shows the psychotic positions that the characters take. One of the difference between "Perfection and Body Trilogy" films and the other Aronofsky films is that the characters in this three films have psychotic inclinations who cannot regard Symbolic interdictions. Instead of having subjectivity, they attribute specific meanings to certain things. It can be said that Max, Nina and mother gradually adopt psychotic positions because they begin to attempt to uncover the veil behind the pi pattern, black swan and godship/divinity and give fixed, absolute meanings to them while they are trying to achieve perfection in their fields. At this point, what is to be kept in mind here having a psychotic structure and having psychotic attacks are different issues. A person who

has psychotic inclination may have no attacks; in other words stay un-triggered during his/her life. However, in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!*, Aronofsky portrays both triggered psychotic structures and psychotic breakdowns.

In *Pi*, which is Aronofsky's first portrayal of psychosis according to Eisenstein⁴, Aronofsky depicts a world which is indeed made up off chaos and pi number actually represents the chaos in the world. In the beginning of the film, Max thinks that there are patterns everywhere in nature, and also in stock market. After a while he tries to find a meaningful and perfect pattern in pi number which can be counted as the master signifier/primordial signifier. What is important here is that Max is very sure about that the pi pattern is the explanation of everything. He has no interpretative problem. In the end, he is completely sure that the 216 digit number is the key to the thorniest of social and cosmological enigmas apart from the work system of stock market, reasons of epidemic diseases, etc. Finally he makes an inference that it is the revelation and sign of God. In the end he is sure that this pi number is the true name of the God.

What makes to think that Max has a psychotic structure is his disavowal of The Name-of-the-Father which is the fundamental prohibition. Indeed the first sign of Max's psychotic inclination is given in the beginning of the film. When he was a kid, Max ignored his mother's interdiction not to stare at the sun. Hence "the institution of the primordial signifier in the form of a fundamental prohibition never took hold" (Eisenstein, 2004: 13). In addition to this, while he is searching the meaning in pi number, he disregards Symbolic interdictions, including the warnings of Sol who is Max's mentor.

However, the reason that takes Max from scientific pursuit to full-blown psychosis is not his struggle for searching a perfect pattern in pi number. That's the Hasidic Jews' and the Wall Street firm's insistence to find out the pattern and meaning in pi number which initiate the symptomatology of his psychosis. As a trigger of

⁴ Eisenstein says that Darren Aronofsky's *Pi* (1998) is a film that takes its viewer on the path from scientific pursuit to full-blown psychosis. (Eisenstein, 2004: 10)

psychosis, the Tefillin constitutes a threat to Max because it's a reminder of a fundamental obligation in Hasidic world which is one of the representations of Symbolic order in *Pi*. As an indicator of psychosis his thumb twitching, his head is invaded by sounds that he can't control. Furthermore, the insistence of the Wall Street firm Lancet-Percy about access to Max's computer Euclid's predictive abilities triggers in Max other series of psychotic breaks like hallucinating 'intruders' who break the chains of his door. In the end, the Symbolic order collapses and he completely sticks out from this order.

Aronofsky extends this insight into psychosis in his films *Black Swan* and *Mother!*. While depicting professional worlds and family house as representations of Symbolic order, he constructs unstable environments with changing signs as well. In *Black Swan*, the role 'black swan' given by the ballet director Thomas can be seen as a primordial signifier.

Indeed at the beginning, Nina is shown as an ordinary and timid ballerina dancing in New York Ballet Academy. She is known as 'perfectionist' and frigid but she hasn't got any psychological problems until she takes the role of Queen Swan which embodies both white and black swan at the same time. Nina's first hallucination occurs immediately after the announcement of acceptance of the role. At first the meaning of 'black swan' seems to be enigmatic for Nina and also she wants to secure the recognition of the Big Other⁵/Symbolic order (her director Thomas and audience). Therefore she seems to fulfil the conditions of staying in the Symbolic order. In order to be a perfect black swan she practices night and day. But due to triggering conditions (Beth's accident, Lily's rivalry, Thomas' harsh recommendations) in Symbolic order she gradually slides into a psychotic state and her Symbolic order collapses gradually. As it is stated below, Symbolic order requires a submittal of subjects to a master signifier and acknowledgement of its meaningless. But Nina attributes a fixed meaning to primordial signifier (being

⁵ In Lacan's work, the term "Other" with a capital "O" generally refers to a person or institution serving a Symbolic function (legislating, prohibiting, putting forward ideals, and so on) though it often designates the mother in a real or imaginary capacity. (Fink, 1997: 232)

black swan) so the non-sensical dimension of black swan as a primordial signifier wither away. Being a black swan becomes the condition of all other signifiers that are meaningful.

In Mother! Aronofsky tells a story of a woman who wants to be a perfect muse for her poet husband. Their house is depicted as the 'body' of the woman because it's like a screen that projects the anxieties and psychotic splits of her. Besides it reacts at the same way with woman.

As stated previously, the master signifier has a mission of eliminating all meaning but as opposed to this, the woman attributes a lot of signification to poet who functions as the primordial signifier in this film. She thinks the poet is perfect, complete and signifies everything for the woman. Indeed, the poet is both signifying and signification for her at the same time. After a certain time she starts to believe that the poet is God and creates everything. Therefore, she never really gets to the question of subjectivity and she has no interpretative problem about him. That is to say "the general rule of Symbolic order based on the fact that primordial signifier is bereft of meaning" (Eisenstein, 2004: 9) is violated by her. As it is stated above, the primordial signifier must be meaningless. Eisenstein explains this as:

Indeed as Lacan points out, what is most distinctive about the existence of the signifier - the possibility of it being used not to *inform* but to *lure* - is precisely what does not belong to the psychic economy of the psychotic. For the psychotic, every exchange of words is informational. (...) As Lacan puts it, 'to extract a natural law is to extract a meaningless formula. The less it signifies anything, the happier we are' (Lacan, 1993: 184 in Eisenstein, 2004: 10).

In Symbolic order the subjects find some roles that they try to fulfil, as daughter, or mother, or sister, or wealthy, or poor, or religious etc. But the woman in *Mother!* doesn't have any Symbolic identity like a name or a professional status that attached to a structure that derives from the society. In addition to that, in *Mother!*, there isn't any institution as an indicator of Symbolic order unlike other Aronofsky films. She doesn't even have a family life with her husband inasmuch as everything depends on the needs and comfort of her husband. As the woman isn't inscribed in

any other meaningful structure except the house within the order of understanding and knowledge, she has a symbiotic liaison with the house: She can feel, hear the house and conceive it as a living organism. The house is the only place as a *mis-en-scene* in the film and its rules are determined only by the woman. In the beginning, the house seems to function perfectly as a machine by virtue of woman. But as her psychotic attacks increase, the house becomes a danger of getting out of the Symbolic order.

In 'Perfection and Body Trilogy', Aronofsky depicts the dramatic and harmful consequences that can spring out if it is not followed the interdiction of Symbolic order as if to lay emphasis on the importance of Symbolic order. He portrays characters having difficulties in staying in Symbolic order and encounter some triggering factors that cause regressions into the Imaginary and the Real. What is important here is the superiority of the Symbolic Order (that is to say, the priority of the Signifier chains) as Metz stated: "...it is man who makes the symbol, it is also clear that the symbol makes man..." (Metz, 1982: 20). But to function properly the Symbolic order needs the Imaginary and the Real order as they are totally intertwined with each other.

2.1.2. The Imaginary Order:

The Imaginary order is the order of images. In response to the fact that the Symbolic order is fictional, the subjects take refuge in the illusions of the Imaginary. McGowan explains the reason of this refuge as follows:

The Symbolic order does supply signification, but this signification doesn't support us as subjects in any substantial way. This is why we have recourse to the Imaginary. The Imaginary hides the incompleteness of the Symbolic and thereby gives us a sense that our identity has a substantial foundation. (...) Lacan always insists that the Imaginary plays a supplementary role to the Symbolic order. The Imaginary doesn't have an independent status; it instead works to secure the rickety construction of the Symbolic by giving it an image of wholeness that it doesn't have on its own. The Imaginary is the illusion of plenitude. (McGowan, 2015: 39)

So, the function of the Imaginary register in Lacan's system of thought is to create an illusory of wholeness and a complete identity. But what is important here is that the Imaginary register doesn't have an independent status as it is a complementary order for the Symbolic and the Real. It helps the subjects to forget temporarily their own lack. Because its mission is to fill the voids of Symbolic and conceal its cracks. In that case, if the mechanisms of Imaginary to fill the voids of Symbolic are looked at, images and identification process could be seen. "The subjects identify with an image that they idealize. This is how Imaginary identification functions" (McGowan, 2015: 41).

2.1.2.1. The Mirror Stage

The human beings are fascinated with images very firstly from the mirror stage which is "a phase in the constitution of the human individual located between the ages of six and eighteen months" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974: 250). Lacan suggests that every human goes through this universal development phase called mirror stage which is completely based on images. Homer explicates this situation as follows:

The child for the first time becomes aware, through seeing its image in the mirror, that his/her body has a total form. This sense of completeness and mastery, however, is in contrast to the child's experience of its own body, over which it does not yet have full motor control. (...) it is the image that provides him/her with a sense of unification and wholeness (Homer, 2005: 24-25).

This is the first part of the mirror stage. The part that the infant's fascination and capturing properties of the image as a Gestalt is on the front burner. "Though still in a state of powerlessness and motor coordination, the infant anticipates on an Imaginary plane the apprehension and mastery of its bodily unity" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974: 251). Lacan refers to this moment of interplay between child and image as a 'striking spectacle' and a 'flutter of jubilant activity' (Lacan 2002, 94-95). What is important here is that the Imaginary order is closely related with the identification which occurs when individuals first see a mirror image of themselves. This identification process will occur lifetime as Barrett puts into words "[For

Lacan], the 'Imaginary order' is a key register of the ego and its identifications, evolving from the mirror stage image but continuing in adult relationships" (Barret, 1993: 175).

Thus that's the image of the body which gives the awareness of its own body and the external environment to the infant. The reason that the images always hold a particular power and fascination for the subjects comes from the Gestalt image coming from the first part of the mirror stage. When the infant realises for the first time his/her reflected image s/he experience a sense of unification and wholeness. But it's important to note that this recognition of wholeness is a misrecognition as Cowie cites from Lacan "the child's recognition is a misrecognition in so far as its narcissistic identification is with its mirror image, and this appear to present a unified, whole and coherent image" (Cowie, 1997: 87-88).

However, there is a second part of mirror stage in which the infant understands that the image which is whole and complete; is not him/herself. It's an image that is formed outside of his/her body. S/he feels his/her body to be in parts, as fragmented and not yet unified because s/he hasn't got full motor control. So, the anxiety starts. Lacan states that the mirror stage is where we will encounter the very essence of anxiety: "This illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entails a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started; it hangs over the abyss of a dizzy ascent in which one can perhaps see the very essence of anxiety" (Lacan, 1953: 15). So, in the second part of the mirror stage the image of the infant is alienating owing to the fact that the individual identifies with his image outside of the self.

As a summary of the mirror stage; Lacan qualifies this universal development phase as a 'drama' due to consecutive moments of fascination and alienation with one's own image. He says:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for all the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that

extends from a fragmented body image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic- and lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity which will mark with its rigid structure the infants entire mental development.” (Lacan, 1977a (1949): 4)

The importance of mirror stage is undeniable, especially in the matter of mental development of the infant. Besides that’s the mirror stage which enables the passage from the Real order to Imaginary order.

2.1.2.2. Imaginary Order in *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!* :

Since the subject’s self-identity is based on a reflective image, the mirror reflections that appear in films can be counted as part of the Imaginary world. For example, Max in *Pi* and Nina in *Black Swan* initially conceive themselves through their images seen from mirrors. Especially in *Black Swan*, mirrors are seen not only in the dance studio, but also in bathrooms, changing rooms, restaurants and offices as a part of the *mise-en-scene*. But in *Mother!*, there isn’t any presence of mirror; in fact no mirror is seen in the house because the Imaginary mechanism is different in this film. The woman is identified with the house so all the changes occurring in the house are coded visually as the reflections of the woman’s Imaginary world. In other words, the house mirrors the woman’s inner world and her unconscious instead of mirrors.

Malcolm Bowie describes identification as an example of an Imaginary world with reference to Lacan: “According to Lacan the Imaginary is the order of mirror images, identifications and reciprocities” (Malcolm, 1991: 30). In addition, Barrett assumes ‘fantasies’ as examples of Imaginary worlds again referring to Lacan: “For Lacan, the Imaginary order includes images and fantasies, both conscious and unconscious (...) evolving from the mirror stage image” (Barret, 1993: 175).

In each film, Aronofsky shows characters’ fantasies with subjective narration techniques. Besides mirror images, identifications and fantasies, the insert of senses and perceptions are seen very commonly. For example, in *Pi*, “when the Law triggers in Max the first of a series of psychotic breaks Aronofsky ushers his viewer

entirely into the domain of the Imaginary, besieging us with a rapidly cut chaos of perceptions, sensations, visual images, and auditory impressions (Eisenstein, 2004: 16). Besides, Max is seen in front of his bathroom mirror mostly before his psychotic attacks as if to find a substance or unity there.

But Aronofsky doesn't make use of the Imaginary as specular images of wholeness. According to Eisenstein, "it is this side of the Imaginary-and not the one that borders on the Symbolic, which reduces the Imaginary entirely to the domain of specular images of wholeness-that marks the Imaginary's point of failure, the point at which it breaks into pieces" (Eisenstein, 2004: 22). For example, Max does the self-lobotomy act just in front of his bathroom mirror. So "rather than realistic, coherent mirror images offered up for our easy identification" this film helps us to glimpse "the Imaginary bereft of the fantasy frame that makes it seem so appealing, even if this means bringing Max's world too close to us and making the film, in places, difficult to endure" (Eisenstein, 2004: 22).

In addition; hallucinations can be counted as the representations of the characters' movement to the Imaginary order. According to Stephenson, "Nina's psychosis is articulated by the onset of a series of hallucinations, which take place in front of mirrors, signalling the disruptive regression to her infantile mirror phase where she has no unified sense of self" (Stephenson, 2016: 65). In *Mother!*, the whole diegetic world seems to function as an Imaginary world with the fantasies and hallucinations of the mother.

Besides in all three films there is a predominance of Imaginary relations; the conflicts are between rivals, competitors or lovers. For example, the people with whom Max is in conflict are not the Symbolic Other. His first rival is Lenny; a Hasidic Jew who is at same age and has the same purpose with Max. Also the woman from Wall Street is another rival as she has the same intentions and purpose with Max. Nina is in conflict with Lily, whom she considers to be her rival. *Mother!* is in conflict with her lover.

In addition to these rival figures there are also hallucinatory rivals and adversaries as evil twins called doppelgängers. The abundance of doppelgängers in Aronofsky's "Perfection and Body Trilogy" shows the predominance of Imaginary order over the Symbolic order and also the failure of Symbolic order to overwrite the Imaginary order whose effects will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

2.1.2.3. Doppelgängers: The Evil Twins

In Aronofsky's "Perfection and Body Trilogy" the doppelgänger motif indicates the evil twins as an example of Imaginary order. The emergence of a lot of doppelgängers reveals the truth of predominance of Imaginary order and also the fact that Symbolic is assimilated and 'imagarized' in all three films.

The term "doppelgänger" can be interpreted from a Freudian paradigm as a case of alter ego or split personality. All the characters of 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' perceive their doppelgängers as alter egos, split personalities. Besides when referencing Freud's influential analysis of the doppelgänger as 'the return of the repressed', it is important to note that he meant specifically the repressed self-love of primary narcissism, which returns in the uncanny shape of an identical alter ego as a symptom of the failure to invest one's libido in 'proper' object-love (Freud, 1919).

The doppelgängers -the dark double or evil twins- are seen in each of three films of "Perfection and Body Trilogy" in significantly two different ways. However, the function of each doppelgänger is to show split identities⁶ who lost a sense of

⁶ At this point one should remember that the mirrors are also "the devices to denote fragmentary identity and the use of the mirror reflection emphasizes the fact that the character's identity is being split into two" (Ruddell, 2013: 13). In Aronofsky's films, the divided subjects are among the main issues. However, the phenomenon that Ruddell mentions is different from Lacan's split subject. According to Lacan, "The subject is split between ego and unconscious, between conscious and unconscious" (Fink, 1995: 44). But what Ruddell means here is the character's identity split which means that they see events or people as either black or white. As for Aronofsky's characters, even though they have identity split, they are not Lacanian split subjects. Because they start to have difficulties to split up their unconscious from their conscious and

wholeness and autonomy. According to Faurholt, “doppelgänger narratives involve a duality of the main character who is either duplicated in the figure of an identical second self or divided into polar opposite selves” (Faurholt, 2009). In *Pi* and *Black Swan* doppelgängers as ‘the divided into polar opposite selves’ are seen, while in *Mother!* two doppelgängers as ‘duplicated mother selves’ are seen; one at the beginning and one at the end of the film.

In *Pi*, the doppelgänger of Max is seen in the subway as a Hasidic Jewish priest; extremely opposite of Max's scientist personality. In *Black Swan*, there are a lot of doppelgänger characters as rivals to Nina: her mother Erica, retiring ballerina Beth and lastly new rival Lily. The rivalry with Lily becomes the central point of the film. “According to Lacan, from the moment the image of unity is posited in opposition to the experience of fragmentation, the subject is established as a rival to itself. (...) The same rivalry established between the subject and him/herself is also established between the subject and others” (Homer, 2005: 26). Indeed Lily is not only established as rival but also model and obstacle for Nina. Aronofsky formulates Nina and Lily's characters as the exact opposite characters. “For Lily to defeat Nina, she must acquire Nina's flawless technique; for Nina to defeat Lily, she must acquire Lily's animal sexuality, something she has already attempted to do in her sexual fantasy of the previous night” (Collins, 2013: 18). In addition to these, double role of Odette and Odile are also doppelgänger of each other as both literal and metaphorical doubles.

In *Mother*, three women who are extremely resemble each other -although they are different actresses⁷- are seen as Mothers of Nature and doppelgängers. They are representatives of nature in the cyclic lives of human beings in planet Earth. Therefore, while the logic of two doppelgängers in *Pi* and *Black Swan* is to show

Aronofsky shows the unconscious of the characters as if conscious states for them. Doppelgänger issue thus serve as an example of this state.

⁷ The other mothers are casted by Sarah-Jeanne Labrosse as foremother and Laurence Leboeuf as successor mother.

the contrast in the form of uncanny dark double, in *Mother*, the logic of doppelgängers is to represent complete likeness and repetition.

According to Faurholt “the doppelgänger poses a threat to his existence, because his unique identity is imperilled either by the indistinguishable sameness of the identical alter ego or by the antithesis of the split personality” (Faurholt, 2009) and he declares that the inevitable end is that one of the two has to die in the end by giving an example from Dostoyevsky: “The doppelgänger is indeed a harbinger of death, because its presence threatens to annul the identity of its host; as Mr. Golyadkin tells his doppelgänger in Dostoevsky’s *The Double*: ‘Either you or I, but both together is out of the question!’” (Dostoevsky, 1846, 97 in Faurholt, 2009).

This is the fate of all characters in three case films. Max chooses to remain a sceptical scientist rather than a priest or God who is a defender of absolute truth. Nina puts an end to her Doppelgänger by killing herself. Because “Once unleashed, this monster-self cannot be controlled, and its murderous rampage can only be terminated in the final fatal confrontation” (Faurholt, 2009).

However, in *Mother!* which has a different narrative from other two films in terms of split personalities, there is no threat of identification with a doppelgänger because every mother has to give her place to the next one without seeing or knowing each other. Hence, in *Mother!*, “identification and othering as two means of identity formation” (Faurholt, 2009) are not materialized through rival characters but via the house whereas in *Black Swan* and *Pi* the identity formation is endangered by doppelgängers. Max and Nina try to resist against the identification with doppelgängers (priest, God, Beth, Lily) who seem to be taking over or merging with their identity.

In *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother!*, Aronofsky’s characters who have split personalities confuse their own mirror images with evil doppelgängers. As the ego is the result of the infant’s identification with his own mirror image according to Lacanian theory the *doppelgängers* as identical alter egos appear ‘from outside’ the main

character and proceeds to take over his identity as in the case of Max and Nina. In a similar way, mother is replaced by her *doppelgängers* and this process will never end as the world returns.

In conclusion, what is crucial and remarkable in the matter of Imaginary order in Aronofsky's "Perfection and Body Trilogy" is that Aronofsky doesn't approach the Imaginary as a lure or as a paradise that is the representation of wholeness for the characters. On the contrary of heaven, the Imaginary functions as hell for them. In all three films, the characters can't take refuge in the illusions of the Imaginary and the Imaginary can't give the image of wholeness to them. Instead of feeling as a Gestalt, they all feel fractured and also they don't feel that their identity has a substance. As a consequence; the trauma of the 'real' disrupts the Symbolic order because of the lack of an Imaginary plenitude.

2.1.3. The Real Order:

The Real is one of the orders, together with the Imaginary and the Symbolic, in Lacanian trilogy. The Symbolic and the Imaginary are totally intertwined and work together with the Real. The significance of the Real is that it resists the Symbolic. Indeed, the Real is one of Lacan's most difficult concepts. As Homer explains:

The difficulty of understanding the Real is partly due to the fact that it is not a "thing"; it is not a material object in the world or the human body or even "reality". The Real is the unknown that exists at the limit of this socio-Symbolic universe and is in constant tension with it. The Real is also a very paradoxical concept; it supports our social reality –the social world cannot exist without it- but it also undermines that reality. A further difficulty with understanding the Real is that Lacan's conception of it changed radically throughout his career (Homer, 2005; 81).

To sum up the transformations in Lacan's thinking, from the 1950s until the early 1960s, Homer explains that for Lacan, the Real is "that which resists symbolization absolutely" (Homer, 2005; 83). From 1964 onwards the Real is associated with the concept of trauma which remains unsymbolizable. The main idea here is that "the experience of trauma also reveals how the Real can never be completely absorbed

into the Symbolic” (Homer, 2005; 83). Lacan makes another explication of real in seminar VII. He argues that there is a repressed element called *Das Ding* (The Thing) which is again beyond interpretation and impenetrable. Lacan says that ‘The Thing’ is the cause of the most fundamental human passion; the desire of the subject. “It is the desire to fill the emptiness or void at the core of subjectivity and the Symbolic that creates the Thing.” (Lacan, 1992 (1986): 97, in Homer, 2005: 85)

The concept of *das Ding* completely disappeared from Lacan’s work and it was replaced in 1964 by the idea of the *objet petit a*. According to Homer “this is one sense in which we can understand the Lacanian real as the void or abyss at the core of our being that we constantly try to fill out. *The objet a* is both the void, the gap and whatever object momentarily comes to fill that gap in our Symbolic reality” (Homer, 2005; 87). So, what can be drawn from this sentence is that the Real functions as both a hole and a hole cover/sealer as Parveen Adams writes: “The object is a hole in the field of representation, but it does not simply ruin representation. It mends it as it ruins” (Adams, 1966: 151, in Homer, 2005; 88). In the 1970s, Lacan finally uses the term *jouissance* related to death drive to explain the impossibility of the Real.

In this thesis, the Real is regarded as ‘the order which resists signification’. What has to be kept in mind here is the connection between the Symbolic and real. Because while the Real order interrupts the flow of Symbolic order, it is also the order needed by Symbolic order to function appropriately. Lacan insists that the Symbolic order is always incomplete, hereby it needs the supplement of the Imaginary and the Real.

In all three films (*Pi*, *Black Swan*, *Mother!*), Aronofsky portrays psychotic characters falling into the void of the Real; in other words, sorting out the Symbolic order they create for themselves and entering the Real where the Imaginary loses its influence to help the individual. The characters don’t experience the Imaginary plenitude and confront the trauma of the Real as they sort from the Symbolic order.

The characters' hallucinations stemming from their psychotic breaks are the examples of real order and they will be analysed in the next chapter. But briefly it can be said that "hallucinations exist within the Realm of the Real but appear as if in reality to the psychotic subject" (Grigg, 1999: 53, in Stephenson, 2016: 76).

In *Pi*, besides hallucinations "the blinding white voids beyond and beneath the primordial signifier" can be counted as an example of real order (2004: 19). Eisenstein says that "*Pi* attempts to break Imaginary's privileged link to the Symbolic so as to illuminate the terror of the Real" and he defines the Imaginary in *Pi* as "Imaginary that borders on the Real, not borders on Symbolic" (Eisenstein, 2004: 22). Also in *Black Swan and Mother!*, 'fade to white' which is a recurring technique of Aronofsky can be considered as Real due to its ambiguity and unsymbolisation. For Žižek, "the Lacanian Real [...] haunts things as the excess perpetually escaping symbolisation, arises from its tendency to disrupt and confute the discontinuities that stabilise the 'order of things', both social and familial." (Žižek, 1992: 151) So representations that escape symbolisation in films can be counted as glimpses of the Real.

In *Black Swan*, "hallucination scenes symbolise Nina's entrance into psychosis" (Stephenson, 2016: 70). Likewise Laine says that "Nina's reality is interrupted by the emergence of the Real during a series of hallucinations and this is represented onscreen by horrific bodily malfunctions" (Laine 2015, 127-131). Stephenson claims the same thing by saying "Nina's psychotic hallucinations exist through trauma, in the domain of the Real – she doesn't have the linguistic resources for these unspeakable symptoms to manifest within the Symbolic" (Stephenson, 2016: 71, 72).

According to Bonner, "Lacan introduced the category of 'the Real' to designate the undifferentiated and unsymbolized dimensions of bodily existence" (Bonner, 1999: 238). At that point it can be assumed that the mirror stage is a period that takes the infant from the Real to the Imaginary. As it is known that during the mirror stage, the infant feels a bodily unity for the first time. So, before the mirror stage, the

infant experience a fragmented body that Lacan refers as ‘body in bits and pieces’. Allen says “The image of the body in bits and pieces is fabricated retrospectively from the mirror stage” (Allen, 1995: 27). Therefore, the fragmented body images – which Lacan calls body in bits and pieces- in all three films can be assumed as Real.

Therefore, the images of body breaking apart (especially in the baby murder scene) in *Mother!* glimpse the emergence of the Real. In *Black Swan*, “Nina’s psychosis initially manifests in the form of her body encountering monstrous phenomena such as her skin peeling back from her nail, the emergence of black feathers through her skin and eventually the snapping of her shin bone which reforms into a swan’s leg” (Laine, 127-131). These grotesque events are the horrific Real piercing through into Nina’s reality, pushing at the seams of her conscious (Stephenson, 2016: 77). In *Pi*, the pulsating brain in the railway is the most significant body breaking scene. In sum, in all three films the psychotic attacks are the flight from the Symbolic system to the Real.

Besides there are some scenes that reveal no knowledge for the spectators; for instance in *Mother!* the heart-like organ that is beating behind the walls of the poet’s house or the lungs which mother finds in the closet can be counted as implications of Real. Besides, the bleeding parquet floor function as the indicator of mother’s aggravating psychosis and the Real.

In the second part of this chapter, Lacanian version of Oedipus Complex, the Lacanian term of ‘foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father” and ‘*jouissance*’ will be explained as a basis for the mechanism of psychotic structure and the psychotic inclinations of Aronofsky’s characters. After these theoretical explanations, the perfection issue will be discussed as an Imaginary compensation. Body mutilation acts will be argued referring to Lacanian term *jouissance* that is in the same sense as libido.

2.2. FROM PERFECTIONISM TO SELF-MUTILATION

You'll use anything to fill that hole. And when you feed the hole, [. . .] it'll grow and grow and grow, until eventually, it'll devour you.

Darren Aronofsky

In all three films of 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' there are literal holes which represent figurative holes in the psyches of the characters. In *Mother*, there is a hole in the baby's room floor which is time to time bleeding and getting bigger and bigger. In *Pi*, the main character Max bores a hole in his brain and in *Black Swan* Nina punched a hole in her abdomen.

What do these holes represent? When everything goes well in their search for scientific, artistic and domestic perfection, what are the triggering factors that make the characters slide into psychotic breakdown and refer to self-mutilation? In order to answer these questions in the third chapter, in this second part of the second chapter I will refer to Lacan's version of Oedipus complex, Lacanian term 'foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father', 'phallus' and the mechanism of psychotic structure one by one in order to clarify the path accompanied with obsessive struggle for gaining perfection and ends with body mutilation for psychotic inclined subjects. After the theoretical framework, this second part also focus on two crucial questions: How does perfection function in a psychotic structure? Why and when does libido or *jouissance* attack the body?

As it was stated in the first part of this chapter; it's the mirror stage which ensures the passage from the Real order to the Imaginary order. In this second part, the transition from Imaginary order to Symbolic order via the resolution of Oedipus Complex will be explained.

2.2.1. Oedipus Complex:

Oedipus complex has a central role by enabling to start the first substitution and signifying chain. To be able to get access to Symbolic order, one must get cross the Oedipus complex. At this point it should be noted that the Oedipus complex is a Freudian term that Lacan adopted. According to Lacan the pre-Oedipal stage corresponds to real and the Imaginary order and with the resolution of the Oedipus complex, post-oedipal stage and Lacanian Symbolic order starts.

As the Oedipus complex is a very crucial transition point, anyone who fails in this process can't have an access to the Symbolic circuit of social meanings and moreover is in danger of adopting a psychotic position. There is a strong relation between Lacan's three order and psychotic structure. In general, Oedipus complex that is interpreted by Freud, is known as a period that represents a "triangular structure that breaks the binary relationship established between the mother and the child in the Imaginary" (Homer, 2005, 53). Hence it should be noted that Lacan's version of oedipal journey is different from Freud. The difference is summarized by Leader as below:

The process of weakening the mother's power is how Lacan reformulated Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. For Freud, the first sexual object for both the boy and the girl is the mother. Their demands for physical closeness and love are directed at her. (...) Lacan's version is very different. He sees the initial relation with the mother as problematic and uneasy. Closeness to her may be valued, but it is also a source of anxiety. She has the power to dispense love and care at her will. This gives her a real domination, echoed in her delivery of nourishment. As provider of food, she is not simply the one who gives, but the one who is felt *to decide* to give. Everything, in a sense, depends on her (Leader, 2012: 58-59).

To draw a conclusion from Leader's statements; the actions of mother depend on her will and Lacan finds it very dangerous. Leader enumerates some extreme examples of tyrannical mothers that tortures their children and give the example of schizophrenic Renée whose mother saying to her "I have an absolute power over you; if I wanted to, I could kill you"; 'I know everything you are thinking; it is my

right to know, even what you dream. Your body, your mind, your soul is mine” (Leader, 2012: 59).

These sentences are very similar to the words and acts of Nina’s domineering mother who is a former ballerina and whose mediocre career ended when she became pregnant with Nina. She calls her daughter ‘sweet girl’ and dresses her every day even though she is a grown up woman. As Collins points out “instead of truly helping her, Nina’s mother consistently thwarts her success, telling her she is not ready for the pressure, dropping hints that her talent is lacking” (Collins, 2013: 14).

In a similar vein, Max also constantly recalls and repeats his mother’s warnings not to look at the sun. As Leader elaborates “it is difficult not to link the experience of things being ‘up to’ someone else to the kind of thinking we find in psychosis where things happen *because* of someone else’s will” (Leader, 2012: 59). ‘Wall Street firm is chasing me’, ‘Lily is after my role’ or ‘people try to kill my baby’ are some of the conspiracies of Max, Nina and mother “as if the basic situation with the caregiver had become generalized to the whole of one’s reality” (Leader, 2012: 59).

In Lacanian definition of Oedipus complex, in response to the mother’s mortgage upon him/her, the child begins helplessly question his/her place in relation to the mother. S/he asks: ‘Why is she present at one moment and absent at another?’, ‘What is it that she wants?’ and tries to formulate the mother’s behaviour. Therefore, the task of interpreting the mother’s desire begins for the child. “Lacan saw the oedipal complex as a way of answering questions, creating an order in an initial situation fused with both love and terror” (Leader, 2012: 60).

2.2.2. The Phases of Oedipus Complex:

According to Lacan “there are three phases in the oedipal process” (Jacobsen and Brick, 2014: 267). The first phase is the recognition and creating meaning phase. Leader says that “first of all, the child recognizes that the mother is interested in something that isn’t him or herself: her desire is directed beyond her baby” and he

names this process as “the first basic symbolization of the mother’s behaviour” (Leader, 2012: 60). This phase is very crucial in the matter of interpreting ability. Besides the child’s reality has changed for the first time and a question of meaning arises. “If this first symbolization does take place, the child seeks an answer to the question of the mother’s desire (...) and this means that she is not omnipotent, that she is lacking: otherwise, why would she be so pulled?” (Leader, 2012: 60).

This first phase of Oedipus complex is related with establishing a meaning. All Aronofsky’s characters are in the search for meaning in their lives. Therefore, it can be said that the first phase of Oedipus complex is dissolved for the characters.

In the second phase of Oedipus complex, the child tries to be the focus and source of seduction for his/her mother. “The child becomes like a little lover here, trying to ‘be’ something for the mother, to satisfy and complete her” (Leader, 2012: 60). As s/he comes to understand that s/he is not the only love object of her mother’s desire, s/he wants to become an object of her desire. Therefore the child struggles to “return to the initial state of blissful union” (Homer, 2005: 55) with the mother. But this time, a third term which is the object of mother’s desire is added to the dyadic relationship between the mother and child; therefore a kind of triangular relationship is formed.

Indeed trying to ‘be’ something for the mother means to ‘be Imaginary phallus’ which is a Lacanian term. “The phallus is Imaginary in the sense that it is associated in the child’s mind with an actual object that has been lost and can be recovered” (Homer, 2005: 55). According to Homer again “the child attempts to seduce the mother by becoming that object of desire” (Homer, 2005: 55). Indeed the image that is thought desirable can be a brilliant and perfect brain like in the case of Max in *Pi* or a perfect body image of a ballerina like in the case of Nina in *Black Swan* or a perfect house like in the case of mother in *Mother!*

Darian Leader likens this second phase of Oedipus complex to the mirror stage. He asserts that “just as in the mirror phase there was a movement towards a false image

of wholeness, so these efforts follow the same Imaginary template: the child aims to become an image it is not” (Leader, 2012: 60). Despite this futile effort, the second phase of Oedipus complex has an advantage: “localize the body’s libido, the strength of our sexual attachments and interests, making of the prohibited image of the mother –or parts of her- the horizon of sexual desire” (Leader, 2012: 66). Therefore, the whole libido of the child can be localized outside his/her body. This libido issue will be a good hint to understand that whether the dissolution of second phase of Oedipus complex take place or not. Aronofsky’s characters seem not to pass this second phase as the libido issue is the source of their body mutilation acts.

In the third phase of Oedipus complex the child understands that the desire of the mother is not linked with him/herself. “The father is assumed to possess something that the child lacks and it is this that the mother desires” (Homer, 2005: 55). Thereupon the child starts to search other ways for him/herself and it’s the dissolution of Oedipus complex. However, on the contrary s/he can decide to stay in the world of mother instead of choosing other pathways. At this point Homer explains that it’s the paternal function that makes possible the dissolution of Oedipus complex:

It is through the intervention of the Name-of-the-Father that the Imaginary unity between child and mother is broken. The Name-of-the-Father is a Symbolic function that intrudes into the illusory world of the child and breaks the Imaginary dyad of the mother and child. The child assumes that the father is one that satisfies the mother’s desire (Homer, 2005:55-56).

As it is stated below Lacan finds mother’s desire for her child very dangerous, “threatening to engulf it or swallow it up” (Fink, 1995: 74). Fink cites from Lacan’s Seminar XVII:

The mother is a big crocodile, and you find yourself in her mouth. You never know what may set her off suddenly, making those jaws clamp down. That is the mother's desire. So I tried to explain that there was something reassuring. I am telling you simple things—indeed, I am improvising. There is a roller, made of stone, of course, which is potentially there at the level of the trap and which holds and jams it open. That is what we call the phallus. It is a roller which protects you, should the jaws suddenly close (p. 129, in Fink, 1995: 74-75).

Therefore, the function of the father here reject that the child does not have a unique object of the mother, put some limits to her leanings upon the child (Leader, 2012: 60). As a matter of fact, for the dissolution of the third phase of the Oedipus complex, the child must learn to give up to seduce her mother and be the object of her desire (be the Imaginary phallus for her). Instead of this s/he must admit the Name-of-the-Father that provides the first substitution in the Symbolic order.

2.2.3. The Name-of-the-Father and its Function:

Homer cites from Lacan that “the Oedipus complex involves an element of substitution, that is to say, the substitution of one signifier, the desire of the mother, for another, the Name-of-the-Father” (Homer, 2005, 56). The Name-of-the-Father, here amounts to paternal law, in other words, paternal metaphor. Besides, it is known as primordial signifier as previously explained. Provided the imposition of paternal law can function for the child, the first substitution actualizes in child’s life and the first substitution is the substitution of the desire of the mother by the Name-of-the-Father. That’s why the primordial signifier which is known as the Name-of-the-Father is meaningless as it is only a substitution which starts signification chain in language, in other words, in Symbolic order. That’s why it is the resolution of Oedipus complex that ensures the transition from the Imaginary order to Symbolic order. The subject who admits the Name-of-the-Father, can take place in the Symbolic order and dissolution of Oedipus complex occurs.

According to Leader, “the father’s function here is to make sense of things: it allows an interpretation of the mother’s desire. It gathers the thoughts about her into a set that is constructed around the father” (Leader, 2012: 61-62). Bruce Fink, also stresses that

This first moment/ the paternal metaphor ties word to meaning. Meaning is determined after the fact and the child’s relationship with its mother is given meaning by the father’s prohibition; that meaning is, we might say, the ‘first meaning’ (...) and the first meaning, the fundamental meaning brought into being by the paternal metaphor, is that my longing for my mother is wrong (Fink, 1997: 93).

Therefore the Name-of-the-Father as a paternal metaphor opens the world to the child. Because “the child generally does not stop there, but wonders (...) about other men, other people, other activities, and other things that lead mom to desire them” (Fink, 1997: 248). At this point, it is important to emphasize that the Name-of-the-Father does not have to be a real father. “Anything could count as a Name-of-the-Father as long as it worked to introduce limits and to bind together the registers of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. It could be a professional endeavour, a lifestyle, an activity” (Leader, 2012: 62). Briefly, it’s the third party or the third term that breaks the dyad relation between mother and child.

Due to the fact that the Name-of-the-Father involves interpretation, it cannot be reduced to one tangible element or a single point; indeed it’s rather a process which enables the child to progressively move beyond the world of the mother.

In addition to construct the first meaning, the Name-of-the-Father/ the paternal metaphor also has a second function: delimitation. At this point Bruce Fink connects the topic to *jouissance*⁸ as:

The child is forced to give up a certain *jouissance*, a certain relationship with the mother, due to a demand made or a threat issued by the father. In a word, this corresponds to what Freud calls ‘primal repression’, or we might term the ‘first repression’. The father separates the child from the primary source of its satisfactions. He thus functions as the one who prohibits *jouissance*. (...) The first repression, thus, for both male and female children, involves the forgetting of one’s desire to achieve certain satisfaction with one’s mother (Fink, 1997: 91, 92).

2.2.4. Limitation of *Jouissance*/ Libido:

The Oedipal process is a turning point for the child as “it establishes both a meaning and a limitation to meaning” (Leader, 2012: 64). This limitation of meaning goes

⁸ It is impossible to define *jouissance* because it is what escapes from the Symbolic order due to the existence of the very lack in the order. Therefore, the *jouissance*, cannot be interpreted with the tools that are provided by the Symbolic. Even though *jouissance* is equated with pleasure, it also includes the pain at the same time. Sometimes it is equated with libido as will be done in this thesis. According to Verhaeghe, “the influence of *jouissance* on subjects can be described as *jouissance* takes place in the body, through invasions.” (Verhaeghe, 2006: 31)

parallel with the limitation of the libido. Owing to the dissolution of the third phase of Oedipus complex, the libido of the child which was focused on the mother “channelled towards the elements of the world around the child that remind him/her unconsciously of the mother” (Leader, 2012: 62). In this way, the mother is emptied out, in other words, “she becomes less a real, physical presence than the pole of unconscious desire” (Leader, 2012: 62).

Once the substitution of the desire of the mother by the Name-of-the-Father is established the child begins to generate it to the other signifiers. S/he begins to correlate the signifiers and signifieds and create temporary and ambiguous meanings. In his/her whole life s/he comes by from one signifier to another to create meanings. So the child uses most of his/her libido in this journey to have a Symbolic phallus.

The evacuation of libido from the body towards the external world is very crucial as will be seen in the cases of Max, Nina and mother. When the stabilization and the fixed meanings they create for themselves in their untriggered Symbolic worlds are collapsed, the libido destructively returns again to their bodies and devastates them all.

2.2.5. Creating Meaning and the Phallus:

According to Darian Leader, “we inhabit a world of meaning and that events and changes in our lives are mediated by Symbolic processes. We must be able to symbolize the things that happen to us, the new roles we find ourselves occupying, the new positions we may be called to take on, the proximities to the Other that life will at times involve” (Leader, 2012: 193-194). The construction of meaning for a child starts in the Oedipus process. As mentioned above the child who learns that s/he cannot be everything for her mother and therefore renounces to complete or fulfil her, supposes that the father (or anything that has a status of father metaphor, for instance a profession) possesses something that his/her mother desires. But the struggle of the child to attain an exact explanation for the mother’s desire is in vain.

Because the thing/the power that child assumes which the father possesses that causes the mother's desire is null due to the desire isn't something that can be satisfied.

No one can possess the phallus, even the father can. That's why the phallus is the signifier of lack. "The phallus here is a signification, an indicator of what is lacking, an index of the impossibility of completion or fulfilment. (...) a Symbolic framework that will allow the child to progressively move beyond the world of the mother" (Leader, 2012:61, 62). Therefore, the phallus has no signified; it is the null signifier; one which is the emptiest. This idea is summarized by Homer as:

The phallus is the original lost object, but only insofar as no one possessed it in the first place. The phallus, therefore, is not like any other signifier, it is the signifier of absence and does not exist in its own right as a thing, an object or a bodily organ. (...) The phallus is the ultimate object of desire that we have lost and always search for but never had in the first place (Homer, 2005; 56-57).

As the phallus is the thing which is assumed to be owned by the father (or the agent as a Name-of-the-Father) it is named also as master signifier. The phallus/master signifier does not have an inherent value and "its value is accepted on trust" (Žižek, 2006: 250). According to Zupančič, "it is impotent outside of its Symbolic function" (Zupančič, 2006: 157). However, the potency of phallus comes from the fact that it can tie the signifiers. As other signifiers are combined with it, phallus as a master signifier modulates the signification in the Symbolic order which necessitates a submittal of subjects to it. Therefore, all subjects are submitted to the phallic function. By entering into the world of Symbolic order, the infant enters the domination of phallus.

Although the phallus is thought in terms of power and authority in daily life, indeed it is the signifier of lack for neurotics who can reach the Symbolic order. As the child enters the world of signifiers and language, his/her world is exposed to this logic of 'lack' in the Symbolic order. According to Leader "the most important part of the Oedipus process is the establishment of lack" (Leader, 2012: 64). The master

signifier marks indeed what is lacking in the Symbolic order, “the structural lack of the discourse itself” (Glynos, 2000: 102). Besides, Žižek likens the functioning of the signifiers to “black hole around which the signifying network is interlaced” (Žižek, 1992:27). To put it another way, as the phallus amounts to absence and lack, it places itself in the hole. At this point the notion of hole reminds the holes that is linked to Aronofsky’s films as it is mentioned in the beginning of the second part of this chapter.

On condition that the child has entered the Symbolic order, it can be said that the hole accounts to the lack that is inherent in phallus. But if the child cannot enter to Symbolic order and the psychotic structure comes to the agenda, these holes have completely different meaning and point the Symbolic holes. In case of psychotic structure, “the psychotic subject does not give up his position of being the maternal phallus” (Sultana, 2018: 50). According to Sultana as there is no place for doubt, no emergence of questions in psychosis, but only the statement “it is because it is”.

For German judge Schreber⁹ who suffers from psychosis, his phantasy was a matter of certainty, a matter of believing that the body is feminine, a body with a real orifice capable of giving birth (Sultana, 2018: 50). Schreber’s certainty about his phantasy is very similar the certainty of Aronofsky’s characters: Max is very sure the perfect pattern in pi number can explain everything in nature and stock market.

⁹ Daniel Paul Schreber (25 July 1842 – 14 April 1911) was a German judge who suffered from Paranoid schizophrenia, generally known as psychosis. He described his second mental illness (1893–1902), making also a brief reference to the first disorder (1884–1885) in his book *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*. Schreber was a successful and highly respected judge until middle age when the onset of his psychosis occurred. He woke up one morning with the thought that it would be pleasant to “succumb” to sexual intercourse as a woman. He was alarmed and felt that this thought had come from somewhere else, not from himself. He believed that hundreds of people's souls took special interest in him, and contacted his nerves by using “divine rays”, telling him special information, or requesting things of him. As his psychosis progressed, he believed that God was turning him into a woman, sending rays down to enact ‘miracles’ upon him, including little men to torture him. Schreber was released from psychiatric hospitals around 1902, shortly before the publication of his book. He resumed his private activities, which he conducted very well up until 1907, when his mother died. He then went through a final hospitalisation. Schreber died in 1911, in an asylum.

Nina is sure that perfection can be possible with harsh practicing. Mother is sure, the poet is the Creator of the world.

The Aronofsky's characters in 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' suffer from the Symbolic holes which lead them in the end to self-mutilation. After setting up the theoretical background to understand the psychic drives of Aronofsky's characters in the light of Lacanian key concepts, the psychotic structure in general and characters' psychotic structures can be explained.

2.2.6. The Mechanism of Psychotic Structure and Psychotic Inclinations of Aronofsky's Characters:

Before analysing in detail Aronofsky's characters' psychotic structures and their relation with perfection and body in the next chapter, I first focus on briefly what psychosis is and the parallelism between psychotic positions of characters and the general traits of psychosis. The Name-of-the-Father as one of the most important outcomes of the Oedipus complex breaks the mother/child dyad and introduces the child into the Symbolic order of lack. However, if the paternal function -which is the metaphor of third phase of Oedipus complex- fails to operate for the child; then the phenomena of psychosis comes to mind.

As Homer states, "it is through the intervention of the father that the child is precipitated out of Imaginary world of infantile plenitude into the Symbolic universe of lack" (Homer, 2005, 57). One's acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father can be considered as a proof that s/he enters into the area of Symbolic. However, "if the appeal to the Symbolic framework fails then a psychosis can trigger" (Leader, 2012: 194).

Lacan explicates the notion of psychosis in the article "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" in *Ecrits* as follows:

It is in an accident in this register (register of signifiers) and in what takes place in it, namely, the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father in the place of the Other, and in the failure of the paternal metaphor, that I designate the

defect that gives psychosis its essential condition, and the structure that separates it from neurosis (Lacan, 1977: 238).

Lacan here uses for the first time the term foreclosure (repudiation) which “denotes a specific mechanism held to lie at the origin of psychotic phenomenon” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974: 166). This phenomenon is different from repression. While regressed things are imbedded in unconscious, the foreclosed elements cannot be engraved in subjects’ unconscious. Lacan forges a link between unconscious and foreclosure as “For the psychosis to be triggered off, the Name-of-the-Father, *verworfen*, foreclosed, that is to say, never having attained the place of the Other, must be called into the Symbolic opposition to the subject” (Lacan, 1977: 240).

As it is explained above the Name-of-the-Father is the primordial signifier in the Symbolic order of subjects, it is the anchoring point of the entire Symbolic order, related to every other signifier. Fink establishes a connection between psychosis and primordial signifier as below:

Psychosis, according to Lacan, results from a child's failure to assimilate a primordial signifier which would otherwise structure the child's Symbolic universe, that failure leaving the child unanchored in language, without a compass reading on the basis of which to adopt an orientation. A psychotic child may very well assimilate language, but cannot come to be in language in the same way as a neurotic child. Lacking that fundamental anchoring point, the remainder of the signifiers assimilated are condemned to drift (Fink, 1995: 55).

Fink also accentuates the certainty of absence of the primordial signifier/the Name-of-the-Father in psychosis. He says “Lacan postulates a primordial signifier that either is there or is not. If it is not, we speak of foreclosure and thus of psychosis, there being no possibility for the existence of a subject as such” (Fink, 1995: 74). Elsewhere Fink claims that “the absence of the paternal function is the single most important criterion to consider an individual as psychotic” (Fink, 1997:79).

The subject who has a psychotic structure has some meaning/interpretation problems as there is a foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. Because it is the indispensable element for the Symbolic order. Therefore, the black hole for the ones

who have psychotic structure is the lack of Symbolic order. Fink explains that “The fact that the essential structure of language is not assimilated by psychotics” (Fink, 1997: 90) and adds “The psychotic is characterized by the lack of movement or dialectic in his or her thoughts and interests” (Fink, 1997: 101). For psychotics, the signifiers have fixed and rigid meanings in opposition to neurotics. They are far away from the Symbolic order in which there is a smooth functioning of the signifier; put it another way, one signifier isn’t permanently bound to another signified.

In all three films of Aronofsky, the characters have absolute, certain beliefs. To give an example, in *Pi*, Max has a psychotic belief that Pi number is the source of everything in the world reality which other numbers don’t have this power. So, he is driven to this psychotic thought. As the film unfolds it is seen that he is gradually convinced that pi number is “the One” which can explain everything. In the end he is sure that God had chosen him as his messenger. In *Black Swan*, Nina has also a psychotic belief that being a black swan can solve every problem both in the performance and in life. She thinks this certainty makes her identity perfect. Her desire to be a black swan is so strong that ‘black swan’ starts to ‘appear’ to her in her phantasies. In *Mother!*, the woman reaches a psychotic position because she thinks the poet is the God that creates everything. In sum, they don’t face interpretative problems.

In connection with fixity and certainty issue, according to Fink, the psychotics cannot create new metaphors. He says: “They are quite capable of employing the new metaphors used by those around them. (...) They are incapable of, however, of forging new metaphors” (Fink, 1997: 90). For instance, Max cannot understand the metaphor of Icarus-Daedalus that his mentor told him in *Pi*. Nina cannot understand the metaphor of black swan as she grows up under the protection of his mother without a paternal metaphor in *Black Swan*. In *Mother!*, which contains lots of metaphors, mother seems to devoid of the Name-of-the-Father as she cannot make sense of any of change in the house. They are all stuck in perfection ideals and

cannot perceive anything else. In sum, they cannot interiorize the metaphors “according to Lacan, due to the failure of the *essential metaphor: the paternal metaphor*” (Fink, 1997: 91).

In addition to these, “psychotic reiterates again and again the same phrases; repetition replaces explanation” (Fink, 1997: 101). Max instantly repeats the mathematics is the language of everything as Nina and the mother constantly state that they want to be perfect.

As the certainty is characteristic of psychosis, there is no room for the mentor’s advices and suggestions. In the face of Max’s psychotic certainty about “the meaningful intelligence of the Other's *jouissance* Max's belief that there is an answer in that number -Sol keeps insisting that the truth of our universe is that there is no meaningful pattern prior to the institution of a Symbolic network of meanings in which a universe appears” (Eisenstein, 2004: 24). For Sol, the only pattern is the self-referential one people impose on it, which is why he refuses to allow the number to signify anything.

In a similar vein, as long as her director Thomas insists that she needs to relax, Nina more and more makes equalization between being an evil and being a black swan. Even in the end of the ballet performance she cannot have a recognition of the world as a Symbolic structure and supposes that she saw the meaning/perfection behind the black swan. In *Mother!*, the mother similarly believes that the house is alive and tries to connect with her through the walls. Because she is in deep psychotic belief that the world is ruled by the poet and there isn’t any sign of her recognition of the world as a Symbolic structure.

Lacan says in his *Seminar III* that “It is insofar as (the patient) has not acquired (...) the Symbolic Other (language with its underlying structure) that he encounters the purely Imaginary others” (Lacan, 1997: 236). As they cannot pass the third phase of Oedipus complex and enter the Symbolic order, the psychotics are stuck in the Imaginary order. Fink asserts that in psychosis, the rewriting of the Imaginary by

the Symbolic does not occur after explaining the relationship between the Imaginary order and Symbolic order as:

The Imaginary order is restructured, rewritten, or overwritten by the Symbolic, by the words and phrases the parents use to express their view of their child. (Fink, 1997: 88) While images also play an important role in our field (that of human beings), this role is entirely reworked, recast, and reanimated by the Symbolic order. (Fink, 1997: 247) The new Symbolic or linguistic order supersedes the former Imaginary order, which is why Lacan talks about the dominance and determinant nature of language. The overwriting of the Imaginary by the Symbolic (the “normal” or “ordinary neurotic” path) leads to the suppression or at least the subordination of Imaginary relations characterized by rivalry and aggressivity to Symbolic relations dominated by concerns with ideals, authority figures, the law, performance, achievement, guilt, and so on. The point here is that the Imaginary continues to predominate in psychosis and the Symbolic is assimilated and “imaginarized”, simply by imitation of other people (Fink, 1997: 89).

In all the films of ‘Perfection and Body Trilogy’, there is predominance of Imaginary relations over Symbolic order. The spectators witness a lot of examples of Imaginary order like visual images, auditory, olfactory, and other sense perceptions of all kinds, fantasy and also the doppelgängers and hallucinations. Because of the abundance of Imaginary relations, the characters are shown in conflict with rivals, competitors or lovers. Therefore, all the conflicts of characters are situated at the Imaginary level.

In all films, there isn’t any oedipal triangle which is the guarantee of Symbolic order and the characters seem to live in the Imaginary order. The characters either live in pairs as in the case of Nina and mother or live alone as in the case of Max. Therefore, oedipal scenario doesn’t take place. They are living and communicating with their Imaginary equals. In *Pi*, Max only keeps in touch with Sol who once was after the same pi pattern. Max never speaks to anyone only Sol. He is like the copy of Sol; as they search the same pi pattern. In *Black Swan*, Nina lives with her mother. She is also like the copy of her mother and other dancers. In the dyadic relationship between Nina and her mother, the father figure is completely absent and the mother is the sole parent. In a similar vein it is understood that Max was

raised only by his mother as there is no mention of father or father metaphor. In *Mother*, the woman pursues a dyadic relation with her husband and she cannot tolerate even a third party. She wants to be the source of inspiration of her husband and also recreate the house while her husband is writing his new book.

The characters can pursue their lives by mimicking. They model the life styles and behaviours and indeed professions of people nearby: directors, mentors, mothers, colleagues and partners. They act the same, try the same. Besides, they construct a safety area that is based on Imaginary resemblances. There isn't a third party; in other words a Symbolic third. Not even a person or not even a success to form a Symbolic third. Because they don't have any Symbolic mapping of the father.

At this point, it is important to remember that the Imaginary order is the area of rivalry, hostility as much as is the register that of visual images, auditory, olfactory, and other sense perceptions of all kinds and fantasy. Bruce Fink puts forward this idea as:

The overwriting of the Imaginary by the Symbolic leads to the suppression or at least the subordination of the Imaginary relations characterized by rivalry and aggressivity to Symbolic relations dominated by concerns with ideals, authority figures, the law, performance, achievement, guilt, and so on (Fink, 1997:89).

As their triggering aggravates the characters of Aronofsky all see the people around them as rivals or enemies and their sense of reality disintegrate including their bodies. In addition, they are indifferent to Symbolic system. They don't want any recognition of the third parties; they only want to achieve perfection that they are obsessed with.

2.2.7. Perfection as an Imaginary Compensation against the Symbolic Hole:

As mentioned above, the Name-of-the-Father which is the signifier that regulates all signifiers has been foreclosed in psychosis. The foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father means that there has not been a paternal metaphor and, therefore, the desire of the mother has not been confined by the normative action of the Name-of-

the-Father. In other words, the Name-of-the-Father has not been symbolically inscribed in the subject's unconscious; instead of it there is a Symbolic hole.

The hole that Aronofsky constructs for the characters of 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' is the hole that has opened up in the world of meaning, in other words, a hole of Symbolic order. As the Symbolic order failed for them, in other words, the Symbolic order isn't internationalized, it doesn't provide a network of meaning.

Rather than meaning, there would be an acute experience of a hole. As a consequence when the subjects with psychotic dimensions come across a Symbolic change which requires a meaning that cannot be interpreted by psychotics, a hole opens up for them. What is important to be kept in mind here is that the holes are not opened between the signifiers and signified like in neurosis, instead they are opened at the level of meaning in the Symbolic order because of the missing signifier that is the Name-of-the-Father. Darian Leader explains this extreme mechanism of foreclosure as:

The rejected element has never been admitted into the person's mental universe, as if there were no possibility of symbolization. It is like an unassimilable signification, something that cannot be thought. With no place in the unconscious, it will remain as a blank spot in the person's thought process (Leader, 2012: 41).

Paul Eisenstein says that Max Cohen who is a "brilliant mathematician confronts the absence of a master signifier (father metaphor) in today's society and bears the possible consequence of a full-fledged psychotic break" (Eisenstein, 2004: xxiii in McGowan and Kunkle, 2004). Nina and mother also suffer from the same absence and psychotic breaks. They are not able to internalize and assimilate the paternal codification that would make their passage into the Symbolic order and appropriation of a Symbolic identity possible. The paternal metaphor, which would instigate the law, functions inadequately. Therefore, they are confined to the Imaginary universe. At this point it should be noted that someone who has a psychotic structure may not have problems and stays in an un-triggered condition. This is what Darian Leader calls 'quiet madness'. According to Leader, "the

psychotic subject could be adapted to his/her milieu, showing no confusion or intellectual impairment, no hallucinations, no euphorias, no depressions” (Leader, 2012: 12). He explains these quiet mad people as:

Such psychotic subjects were like ‘specialists’ who saw the world in terms of their primary preoccupation. They could function perfectly well in everyday life, and those around them might never suspect that anything were remotely out of the ordinary. (...) The person might complain of some injustice from their superiors, someone of humble birth might try to prove their connection to a titled family. (...) Generally, everything could be made to fit one fixed idea, based on a false premise. But, after this, the person’s reasoning was watertight (Leader, 2012: 12).

Lacan names this psychotic position as ‘compensated psychoses’ in his Seminar III and he openly addresses the question of compensated psychoses in a chapter, aptly titled by Jacques-Alain Miller, “On Primordial Signifiers and the Lack of One.” The reason of psychotic’s adaptation to the outside world is that they can construct some Imaginary compensations. In his Seminar III Lacan says that “The subject will have to bear the weight of this real, primitive dispossession of the signifier promoted by *Verwerfung*, Imaginary crutches enable the subject to compensate for the absence of the signifier” (Lacan, 1993, 205). In addition he gives an example of the metaphor of the stool in order to explain the issue of compensation and Massimo Recalcati comments it in his article as follows:

What gives stability to a stool is a point of support external to the two legs (that is the Imaginary couple): a third leg that assures the stability of the other two. There is not a stool with two legs since the two does not allow an orderly distribution of weight. In psychoses, then, we assume the absence of the third leg, the Symbolic leg. However, as noted by Miller un-triggered psychosis, the stool lacking the Symbolic leg (the Name-of-the-Father) could find its balance anyway. This is precisely the function assigned by Lacan to the identifying compensation: a kind of Imaginary prosthesis of the Symbolic leg that produces the desired effect of stabilizing the situation of the subject-stool. (Recalcati, https://www.lacan.com/essays/?page_id=393)

Darian Leader also mentions this prosthetic Symbolic as a compensation method. He says that “the creation of prosthetic Symbolic order is another common mechanism in psychosis (...) as if to plug oneself into the Symbolic system that one had never incorporated” (Leader, 2012: 204). As a third leg and a prosthesis

Symbolic, Aronofsky's characters refer to the acts of perfectionism in mathematics, ballet and house works. These acts are the way of compensation and substitution of the third register. Like Schreber¹⁰ – Lacan's third seminar of psychosis touches mostly on his psychotic structure- who was a very successful lawyer and suffering from psychosis, Max, Nina and mother create prosthetic Symbolic orders and compensations via perfection in their professions or daily work in the beginning of the films. They try to achieve perfection in mathematics, ballet and house decoration.

In order to achieve perfection, they construct certain rules for themselves to feel safe as they don't have access to the Symbolic Law. And they obsessively try to obey these set of rules that substitute the Law. As it is seen throughout the film, when they search for perfection they follow definitive rules in performing each step and work like a cautious technicians. For instance, Max constructs a perfect computer system to be able to make perfect calculations, Nina follows a complicated procedure full of repetitions and Mother works systematically in the house. Therefore, psychoanalytically speaking, they aim to substitute the Law with elaborately set up, self-imposed rules.

These perfection efforts are also their ideals. Darian Leader remarks that one of stabilization that is found "in psychosis is linked to the creation of ideals and involves the establishment of formulae to live by" (Leader, 2012: 201). Leader also says that for a psychotic "the construction of ideal can help to give the person a

¹⁰ Lacan summarizes the case of Schreber as: "We are also assured that the initial determinants of Schreber's psychosis are to be sought in the moment of onset of the different phases of his illness. You know that around 1886 he had his first crisis, whose co-ordinates people try to show us by means of his Memoirs - at that time he had nominated for the Reichstag, we are told. Between this crisis and the second, which covers a period of eight years, Magistrate Schreber was normal, with the exception that his hope of paternity was unfulfilled. At the end of this period he happened to accede, in a way that up to a point was premature and certainly at an age at which it could not have been foreseen, to a very high function, that of Presiding Judge of the Leipzig Court of Appeal. This function, which was in the nature of an eminent distinction, conferred authority on him, so it's said, that elevated him to responsibility that, though not quite total, was at least greater and heavier than any he could have hoped for, which gives the impression that there was a relation between his promotion and the onset of the crisis" (Lacan, 1997: 30).

place as a subject rather than merely an object” (Leader, 2012: 197). Their ideals are to be perfect in the fields of mathematics, ballet and house work/decoration.

In order to achieve these ideals they refer to idealized identifications. Lacan defines as “a series of purely conformist identifications with characters who will give the subject the feeling of what one has to do to be a man” (Lacan, 1993: 205). Max, Nina and mother identify with perfect characters in the Imaginary level and imitate them. The ultimate aim of all protagonists are achieving perfection like their role models. They identify with their role models (Sol, Beth, poet) who are perfect in their jobs. Therefore, the characters try to do the same perfect things in their lives as their relations are based on Imaginary.

Leader points out that “the Imaginary –the register of our capture in visual images- can provide support mechanisms in psychosis” (Leader, 2012:200). In order to fill the Symbolic hole the subject also inhabits an Imaginary compensations that enable the subject some stability. It is very obvious that Max mirrors his mentor Sol who found the same 216 digit number when he was young. In a similar vein, Nina imitates the prima ballerina Beth and mother tries to mirror his poet husband as a creator while decorating the house.

Briefly this perfection based upon the Imaginary is a strategy to hold on to the Symbolic order in which the third party is necessary. So, the characters rediscover a new form of Symbolic mediation to be able to stay away from the Real dimension. As long as the characters have scientific, artistic and domestic tools and don't encounter Symbolic threats that they cannot interpret, they can stay out from the Symbolic holes and pursue an un-triggered life.

2.2.8. Body as the Terrain of *Jouissance*/ Libido:

It is stated above that the whole libido of the child is localized outside his/her body with the resolution of Oedipus complex that starts the Symbolic register. “Through language, the Symbolic enters the Real of our bodies and organize them for us”

(Leader, 2012: 52). As Lacan claims that it is “the signifier what brings *jouissance*¹¹ to a halt” (Lacan, 1998: 24). Eisenstein explains this sentence as “functioning as a sign that strikes the subject as a kind of address, the signifier interrupts the apparent (but in fact engulfing) idyll of pre-symbolic enjoyment” (Eisenstein, 2004: 4). Put it another way, the *jouissance* flow over the signifier from the body. Bruce Fink explicates this as:

Lacan asserts that the body, in neurosis, is essentially dead. It is written with signifiers; in other words, it has been overwritten or codified by the Symbolic. The body as a biological organism is what Lacan calls the “real” and it is progressively socialized or “domesticated” to such an extent that libido retreats from all but a very few zones: the erogenous zones. Only in these zones is the body still alive, in some sense, or real. Here libido (or *jouissance*) is channelled and contained (Fink, 1997: 97).

Fink explains the status of the body in psychosis as follows: “as the father figure does not succeed in limiting the child's access to the mother; the signifier is not able to neutralize the child's *jouissance*, and (...) *jouissance* invades the body” (Fink, 1995: 74-75). In addition, Fink gives other details elsewhere as follows:

In psychosis, just as the Imaginary is not overwritten by the Symbolic, so the drives are never hierarchized in the body except by imitation. (...) The hierarchy of drives achieved imaginarily can collapse when the Imaginary order that supports it falters. The body, which has been for the most rid of *jouissance*, is suddenly inundated with it, invaded by it. It comes back in vengeance, we might say, for the psychotic may well experience as attack, an invasion, or forcibly entry (Fink, 1997: 96-97).

That's exactly what happens to the characters in ‘Perfection and Body Trilogy’. While they are pursuing un-triggered lives as they have scientific, artistic and domestic tools, they encounter some Symbolic threats that they cannot interpret. After the threats coming from the Symbolic order and as the characters cannot interpret and symbolize them, their psychotic attacks start. In the process of triggering of psychosis the whole libido which was once localized outside the body returns.

¹¹ Enjoyment and *jouissance* are used as the same concepts.

Indeed in the initial phase of triggering they again try to construct new set of meanings. But as the Name-of-the-Father isn't established, the stabilization and fixed meanings in their un-triggered worlds are collapsed. The limitation of meaning goes parallel to the limitation of libido. As their psychotic attacks increase and aggravate, their bodies are all invaded by libido/*jouissance*. The libido cannot be evacuated towards the external world. The characters all suffer from bodily attacks like migraine attacks just in the case of Max, or anorexia-bulimia just in case of Nina, or like the invasion of the body via the house which is a symbol of the body of mother. In addition, they feel that their body isn't held together. Aronofsky shows this instability of bodily boundary as 'body in bits and pieces'. They cut part of their body as if to it their own. To summarize; another hole has opened up for them from the beginning of triggering until the mutilation of bodies.

All characters in the midst of a psychotic attacks feel the libido/*jouissance* inside their bodies as the libido returns aggressively to the bodies and devastates the characters. Aronofsky shows in detail in all three films how difficult it becomes to move from one point to another at the time of attack as the bodies are disintegrating and the sense of self seems to dissipate. In brief, the *jouissance* that has not been isolated from the body has devastating effects. They suffer from the corporeal attacks like excruciating headaches, twitching hands, loss of motor coordination and lingering panic attacks. In the end, as the hallucinations and bodily sensations became unrelenting and torturous all characters refer to self- mutilation acts as they cannot withstand. In conclusion, these self-mutilation acts and the lack of bodily consistency of characters suggest that the Imaginary and real dimensions have not been connected securely to the Symbolic.

For human psyche, there are three developmental stages (Real, Imaginary, Symbolic) and two transition periods (mirror stage and dissolution of Oedipus Complex) according to Lacan. During the third phase of Oedipus complex, if the Name-of-the-Father is foreclosed, a psychotic structure is taken root. A psychotic inclined people can live without any psychotic breakdowns owing to some

compensatory tools. Among these tools ‘search for perfection’ is referred by all the characters of ‘Perfection and Body’ trilogy as an imaginary compensation. Search for perfection can serve very well for Max, Nina and mother against any psychotic attack and invasion of *jouissance* towards their body until the triggering factors disrupt their psychic stability and bodily unity.



CHAPTER 3

ARONOFSKY'S 'PERFECTION AND BODY TRILOGY'

In the third chapter, the characters' psychic drives behind their acts of perfection, their full-blown psychotic breaks, hallucinations and body mutilations will be my main focus. Among all Aronofsky films; *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother* are different from the rest of his films by the reason of characters of these three films try to attain perfection and resort to body mutilation. Besides, these three films pursue the same pattern in their narratives. Firstly, in each film, Aronofsky portrays his characters in a calm period owing to perfection, identification with their role models, doing their ideal jobs.

However, Aronofsky gives some hints of psychotic structure that accompanies these quiet periods. As the characters that function as the primordial signifier/ the Name-of-the-Father are ignored by the protagonists, psychotic structures come to mind according to the definition of psychosis in Lacan's theory. Secondly Aronofsky begins to describe the irreversible psychotic path that the protagonists enter as soon as they confront strangers that belongs to Symbolic order. In all three films, certain triggering factors coming from the Symbolic order disrupt the order that protagonists construct with the help of Imaginary tools and lead the characters into psychotic structure. The third and the last period is the period of hallucinations, unavoidable psychotic breakdowns, body mutilations and suicide. As these three periods in all three films follow the same pattern, the films will be examined in chronological order and under the same titles.

At this point it should be noted that "for Lacan, as for Freud, psychoanalysis is a project of interpretation that has nothing to do with empirical research. Just as clinical psychoanalytic interpretation must focus on the psychic text, filmic psychoanalytic interpretation must focus on the filmic text" (McGowan and Kunkle, 2004: xvii). Indeed "there is a difference between being psychotic and going psychotic. For the triggering of a psychosis, other factors must come into play" (Leader, 2012: 137). That's why in this film analysis chapter the probable

factors that lead the characters to psychotic breakdowns will be explicated with reference to the framework explained in the previous chapters.

3.1. *PI* (1998): SCIENTIFIC PERFECTION AND ‘BRAIN’ AS BODY

Everything around us can be represented and understood through numbers. If you graph the numbers of any system, patterns emerge. Therefore, there are patterns everywhere in nature.

Max Cohen

These are the words of Max Cohen, the protagonist of Aronofsky’s first film *Pi*, Max is a troubled but brilliant mathematician living alone in a drab apartment in Chinatown, Manhattan. He is unemployed and pursues an isolated life in a symbiotic liaison with his computer Euclid. Euclid is a very special and perfect computer that consists of “monstrous, homemade assemblage of monitors, hard drives, modems and cables that Max has retrieved from an electric mega dump, that exceeds in power and speed the entire Columbia University computer science department and is on the verge of being able to predict with 100 percent accuracy the daily vicissitudes of the market” (Eisenstein, 2004: 15).

Apart Euclid, Max is socially isolated; there is nobody that he is in relation with, except his neighbours and his mentor Sol who was a brilliant mathematician too. It is clear from the first moments that there is no triangulation, no third party in Max’s life.

Aronofsky portrays Max from the very first moments of the film as a problematic character. He is only working in his house day and night. He is in the search of a perfect mathematical pattern which explains nature and stock market. The door of his house has many locks and he has no social interactions except his neighbours Jenna, Debi and Sol. But later two strangers come and meet Max to whom they ask for help to explain the meaning of pi pattern; one is Lenny Mayer from Hasidic Jew

Group and the other is Marcy Dawson who is a partner at the predictive strategy firm Lancet Percy from Wall Street.

Max as an obsessive mathematician seeks to acquire a perfect pattern in pi number through his mathematical calculations. He thinks this pattern will be the perfect equation for understanding many aspects like God, Judaism, and stock market.

3.1.1. Predominance of Imaginary Order, Glimpses of Real Order and Deficiency of Symbolic Order

Max seems to be stuck in the Imaginary order from the very first beginning of film. Film starts with a techno-kinetic music and chaotic images of mathematical symbols, equations, stock market numbers, rhizomes, diagrams and flowing down digits. These images could all be approached as pointing at the Imaginary order and will continue to emerge throughout the film. The last symbol dissolves into bright white, accompanied by a sudden silence and this is the first fade to white. This incomprehensible white brightness can be counted as the representation of a Symbolic hole or a glimpse of real order.

The film doesn't have a prologue; therefore it is understood that Aronofsky links these two parts: chaotic generic part and the white void. So, it can be concluded that the reason of the white void is the chaotic world of numbers that represent the Real order which is the order of unrepresentable things. Max seems to be lost his way in this chaos and crash to the floor. At this point, the question that comes to mind is whether Max looks for a perfect pattern in order to get rid of this chaos. After the first fade to white, the unconscious face of Max is seen in close-up. He looks like a little child with a bleeding nose. Indeed this scene serves as an establishing shot and Aronofsky introduces Max as a helpless child looking for help.

He seems to not have an access to the Symbolic order. Because Max doesn't believe in materialistic world of Wall Street. Indeed he cannot interpret the Symbolic order embodied by stock market. Because the stock market and finance world are the examples of Symbolic order. As for Max "the stock market stands not as the

exemplary signifier without signified of late capitalist social relations, on the contrary, he sees it, as a universe of numbers” (Eisenstein, 2004: 14-15).

In addition except the voice-over coming from Max’s mind, there isn’t much talk during the film as a representative of language. Besides, as an example of Symbolic order Aronofsky doesn’t portray any parental Other, institution, social expectation, law and authority figure of society. In opposition, Max is stuck in numbers, images, and fantasies. It can be said there is a failure of the Symbolic to overwrite the Imaginary order because of the predominance of Imaginary order over Symbolic order.

The spectators can feel the social isolation and loneliness of Max by means of framing, camera movements and editing. For instance, Aronofsky uses Snorricam to make the audience feel the same desperate feelings of Max. Besides, while Max is wandering around the streets the use of Snorricam gives the meaning of isolation of him from the society.

3.1.2. Images, Dreams, Fantasies:

Although *Pi* is a black and white film, Aronofsky seems to form powerful images by using light. For instance, in the sequence that Max is seen in darkness while he is on the way to bathroom, the only thing left in the light is the part of the room that Max’s computer Euclid occupies most of it. Max thinks Euclid will find the perfect pattern that regulates the nature and stock market. However, the brightly lit room is like an upright coffin and Max is seen to be inside in that coffin-like luminosity just as he is stuck in the Imaginary order. Aronofsky implies that the light coming from the computer-lined room is the light of knowledge that is supposed to be the meaning of pi pattern will be a coffin for Max. The use of contrast and brightness is also so remarkable as if to emphasize the power of images.

Because he is stuck in his mind and believes that everything around him is related with numbers, Max has no friendship or love affair with anyone. It seems that Max doesn't need anything or anyone except mathematics. However, in her dreams he

sees and hears his neighbour Debi. Indeed the visual and aural images, fantasies and hallucinations are indeed the trademark of the film from the beginning to the end. Therefore, it can be said that the rewriting of the Imaginary by the Symbolic does not occur.

3.1.3. Identifications with Perfect Ideal Role Models and Imitation:

In order to be able to attain his aim he stays at the level of a simple binary structure; Max and his computer Euclid. Max seems to identify with Euclid. He wants to do perfect mathematical calculations as his giant computer Euclid.

Finding the pattern behind the numbers give Max a direction of life, even if it brings a certain isolation as well. For Max, there is no place for others except his advanced and giant computer Euclid which is the single point of consistency that he can rely on. Working non-stop with Euclid becomes his style of living.

Apart from Euclid, Sol who has a same background with Max and tried to solve the pattern in pi number in his youth is Max's second identification figure. Indeed Max seems to imitate what Sol did in the past. When Max seems to feel lost and something is missing, he refers to his identification figure Sol. Because listening to Sol's early brilliant achievements in mathematics stabilizes him. Especially Sol's work about the pattern in pi number enthrals him.

Max has difficulties to attach to Symbolic order because of his psychotic inclinations. But his identification with his mentor Sol and his Imaginary and dual relation with his profession pin him up to the Symbolic order; therefore, he can stay stabilized and un-triggered for a while.

As a mentor who gives up trying to find a perfect pattern in pi number, Sol tries to explain every time that there is no pattern in pi number by saying that life isn't just mathematics. He instantly tries to convince Max to relax and have a break. For Sol, the only pattern is the self-referential one people impose on it, which is why he refuses to allow the number to signify anything. What is interesting to be kept in

mind here is that Sol's mentioning of Hamlet. He asks Max whether he has read Hamlet, as he wants his student to take a lesson. Because Hamlet also denies his father's law, in other words, the Name-of-the-Father isn't accepted by Hamlet, hence he faces a terrible ending.

After arguing about Marcy Dawson about capitalist greed, Max seems to stand closer to the religious (Hasidic Jews) than the capitalists (Wall Street firms). Because Max has his own perfection ideals and Lenny Mayer explains the perfect equation system of Torah. As it is known that scientific perfection enthralls Max and is the only salvation to keep away from psychotic attacks, it's not surprising that he takes refuge in Lenny Mayer's car while escaping from Marcy Dawson. As he once mirrors his mentor Sol who has a perfect success in the past, he now begins to follow the Hasidic Jews who are in the search for perfect pattern.

3.1.4. Imaginary Phallus:

After his third attack Max hallucinates his doppelgänger dripping blood from hand. What is worthy of consideration here is the 'brain' that Max encounters after following the bloodstains. This is Max's own brain. Apart from his thumb twitching and his head invaded by sounds because of his migraine, this out-of-body experience exemplifies the Imaginary order that borders the Real order. This scene also is an emphasis that the brain as an organ is Max's Imaginary phallus. Indeed Max is fantasizing to become the image which represents "perfection" for him. For Max this brain image is very crucial on the subject of understanding the world's enigmas.

As Max becomes regressed from the Imaginary order to real order there is a correlation between the image of 'brain' and the Real order. Besides, this out-of-body experience reminds 'the body in bits and pieces' which is a Lacanian term. Lacan says that after the jubilant part of the mirror space there is a sense bodily fragmentation that cause anxiety for the child. This means during the mirror stage the child retrospectively remembers that his body is like in bits and pieces before

the mirror phase which is a period that corresponds the Real. Therefore, this image of the 'brain' which is the Imaginary phallus for Max can be regarded as the image of the body in the Real found in the hallucination. Max hallucinates his own brain and tries to deactivate some part of it by piercing it with a pen in order to find the perfect pattern of everything and retains its Imaginary phallus status.

3.1.5. Perfection as Imaginary Compensation and Prosthesis Symbolic Order

Max dedicates his life to mathematics and he wants to find a perfect pattern in nature and in stock market through mathematics as an anchoring point that pins him up the Symbolic order. The world of numbers and patterns function as an Imaginary compensation for the Symbolic hole.

In a similar vein with mathematics he sees the stock market as a vast network and as a universe of numbers that represents the global economy and have a pattern as well. In this sense, he seems to create a prosthesis Symbolic order for himself by referring to mathematics as an attachment of Symbolic order. Because having their own rules and equations, mathematics enables to fill the Symbolic gap in Max's life.

Max's sole field of interest in life is to reach perfect predictions in stock market and he tries to program his computer, Euclid, to make perfect stock market predictions. Max forms his identity around the idea of finding the perfect pattern behind the numbers and establishing a formulae to live by. Therefore, his compensatory mechanism is compromised via scientific perfection.

Briefly, mathematics allows a certain stabilization and function as a prosthesis Symbolic order which fills the hole of the Symbolic order for him. To put it in different, the search for scientific perfection in mathematics plug Max in to the Symbolic register that he had never incorporated.

3.1.6. Doppelgänger

In one scene, in the subway Max sees his doppelgänger dressing like a Hasidic Jew. This scene can be interpreted that Max is still in the struggle of sorting out his psychotic state by hallucinating an Imaginary doppelgänger as a way of protection for not to be devoured by the Symbolic hole. According to Darian Leader, hallucinations and delusions can allow certain stabilization. This idea is summarized by Leader as:

Psychotic subjects often find ways make their suffering more bearable. (...) the most obvious way of defending against the primary phenomena of psychosis is the creation of a delusion: this can have the effect, if it is successful, of re-establishing meaning, pinning the signifier and the signified together again and limiting and framing the libido (Leader, 2012: 195).

3.1.7. Fixity of Meaning versus Subjectivity

Meaning is fixed for Max, he doesn't face interpretative problems. Because he thinks perfection in mathematics determinates an absolute meaning instead of chaos. He has a clear purpose which is to put forward a basic explanation of the universe. According to Darian Leader, "although neurotics are all confronted with the question of how to make sense of their lives, it is usually easy and very clear for psychotic subjects" (Leader, 2012: 72). The only meaning of life for Max is mathematics and he works like a system builder.

In the end, Max becomes sure that he is the chosen one by God to solve the secret pattern in pi number. He is so stuck with this psychotic belief that he decides to do a self-lobotomy in order to pull the numbers out of his brain.

3.1.8. Primordial Signifier /the Name-Of-The-Father

Although the primordial signifier which is known as the Name-of-the-Father is meaningless as it is only a substitution which starts signification chain in language, for Max "there is a sense of meaningfulness in the world around him, as if he is somehow aware that things are significant, but not in any defined way" (Leader,

2012: 171). After the encounter with Lenny Mayer and Marcy Dawson as representatives of Symbolic order, the need for finding meaning becomes more crucial than ever because these triggering factors open a hole in prosthesis Symbolic order of Max.

Therefore, Max desperately begins to search in everywhere a source of perfection. After talking with Sol about the pi pattern, Max takes the pi number into his focus as a primordial signifier. He feels that there is some kind of meaning in the pi pattern although it remains imprecise and elusive at first. “The encounter with something that is impossible to symbolize, due to the failing of the Symbolic, tends to push the psychotic subject in the direction of creation” (Leader, 2012: 192). This creation for Max is to find a perfect pattern in this special mathematical signifier against the Symbolic hole that stock market and religion open.

From this moment on, every encounter in Max’s life, starts to have a meaning in the scope of pi pattern. Therefore, Max’s general search for perfection in mathematics particularly takes the shape of naming the pattern in pi number. In this particular area, Max is eager to literalize the meaning of pi as a primordial signifier, because “in psychosis the Oedipus complex doesn’t succeed in naming the desire of the mother; therefore the psychotic subject has to invent it” (Leader, 2012: 87). In order to structure his world after confronting the triggering factors, the naming function becomes crucial. What is important here is the coincidence in the decision-making process of Max. If he had spoken to someone other than Sol, maybe he would have found another solution. But pi number has attracted the attention of many mathematicians since around 250 BC try to solve its enigma, as well as Max.

As he has a psychotic structure, Max becomes sure that there is a certain meaning beyond or beneath the veil of pi number and he wants to name it. At such a time, Max again encounters Lenny Meyer, who demonstrates the correspondence of the Hebrew alphabet to numbers. Max is very interested and realizes that some of the concepts in Torah are similar to the Fibonacci sequence. Indeed Max combines the idea of pi pattern that once Sol was working on and the Hebrew number system that

Lenny explains. It's just like a psychotic enlightenment for Max when he explains the golden ratio and Lenny responds by saying that math is everywhere. Because Max thinks golden ratio is a perfect ratio and he is eager to find another perfect pattern in pi number.

Max is gradually becomes convinced that pi is a perfect number and it is "the One" which can explain everything. As Leader says, "If there is a rejection of the special signifier of the father, so the psychotic may be drawn to create another one" (Leader, 2012: 217). What is interesting is that Sol dies from a heart attack after he starts again to study with pi pattern. Because like Max, Sol also wanted to find a perfect pattern and Max finds a piece of paper that 216 digit number written on it. This literal death is a response to the struggle of finding a meaning for the primordial signifier.

3.1.9. Triggering Factors Coming From Symbolic Order and Psychotic Attacks

Max seems to live un-triggered in his own world as long as no one interferes as a third party from Symbolic order. However, when two Symbolic characters come and ask for scientific work from him, he is triggered by these Symbolic tasks. Because for him, it is impossible to interpret their goals. The first triggering factor is the phone call from Marcy Dawson who works for Wall Street.

Besides, until the Marcy Dawson's call, the music is not threatening during the un-triggered periods. But after the phone call, Max became uneasy and anxious and the score composed by Clint Mansell reflects very well the tense atmosphere and Max's anxiety. Because Marcy Dawson as a representative of Wall Street belongs to the Symbolic order that Max is unable to interpret. As any change in the psychotic's organized world affect the whole set, the person's equilibrium is challenged by the appearance of a third party. Especially a figure who represents authority or a situation in which the person had to take on Symbolic place, is a triggering factor. Max can manage this pre-triggering moment by turning off the phone. But the

encounter with Lenny Mayer who is a Hasidic Jew and does mathematical research on the Torah and also the second encounter with Marcy Dawson cannot be manageable for him.

The religion is also an example of Symbolic order and the responsibilities of religion can be triggering for a person who has psychoanalytic inclinations. One day when Max is comparing stock quotes at the coffee shop, Lenny Mayer comes and introduces himself to Max. When Lenny understands that Max is also Jewish and he asks whether Max practices Tefillin which is a “small cube-shaped boxes worn on the forehead and arm, containing the four textual sources for the practice” (Eisenstein, 2004: 15).

Although Max answers that he isn't interested in religion, Lenny Mayer as a dedicated religious man starts to tell that it is now an important moment in the history of Judaism and explain the tradition of Tefillin. Just as Lenny says that Jewish man should do this practice, Max's hands begin to tremble and Aronofsky shows his twitching fingers in close up in order to accentuate this frame. In addition, an electrical noise coming from Max's brain functions as an alarm that shows the stabilization of his brain is in danger. The idea of God's obligation in the sight of Tefillin constitutes a threat for Max. Therefore as a reminder of a fundamental obligation and as a sign of Law of God, Tefillin starts Max's first triggering.

According to Leader, “the triggering may occur (...) when the solution they have created hits an obstacle. The mechanism of stabilization or compensation that they have spent years or even decades constructing is suddenly challenged” (Leader, 2012: 191). Max's compensatory mechanism based on dual relation with his computer Euclid and his dedication to mathematics is challenged by the intrusion of Wall Street employee Marcy Dawson and Lenny Mayer as a representative of God. Max cannot symbolize the new Symbolic order representatives and bear the intrusion of real order and loses his consciousness and faints. As Leader states, “At the moment of triggering, the Symbolic network had been broken, and the person senses that something is missing” (Leader: 2012: 176).

3.1.10. Hallucinations

After the first triggering following the talk with Hasidic Jew Lenny Mayer in the café Aronofsky cuts café scene to the drug use scene with hip hop montage and then quickly cuts to the bathroom scene. Extreme close-ups of Max taking his pills are rapidly cut in succession, accompanied by amplified sounds of slicking. In his claustrophobic bathroom, suffering from migraine pain which seems to be an indicator of psychotic attack, Max is begging for this crisis to be small. Max's migraine attack is accompanied with a hallucination in which the door is forcibly opened.

At this point it should be noted that all the hallucination scenes are shown from Max's point of view. As Darren Aronofsky narrates mental states and character's mind especially hallucinations in *Pi*, he prefers subjective narration. For this, he often uses point of view shots. Laine similarly says that "the spectator is frequently positioned inside his head by means of point of view shots, sharing his actual or hallucinatory perceptions" (Laine, 2015: 36). In addition Aronofsky uses a very high level distorted sound in this hallucination scene in order to accentuate mental subjectivity. For instance, the sound of unlocking doors and the voices that are thought to come from his brain give the spectator perceptual subjectivity.

In his hallucination, Max screams 'leave me alone' to the ones that he supposes are intruders. However, there is nobody behind the door. That's the Real order as a white void he sees. The Name-of-the-Father that comes back because it isn't accepted by the subject. This problem is summarized by Darian Leader as below:

Lacan's theory is more rigorous, linking the triggering clearly to the encounter with an idea that has no Symbolic place in the person's world. When the chain is broken, the element that has never been symbolized may then impose itself from the outside. In Lacan's formula, what's foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real (Leader, 2012: 178)

The prohibitions of God that have no Symbolic place in Max's world returns in the Real and the white void is the calls of the Real order. The white void, in other words

'fade to white' is another narrational repetition in the film. Because once the triggering factors have occurred, the Real will often penetrate Max's life in the form of 'white voids'.

Before the apparition of second white void – just like the first one- there is a sudden silence and after the white void, unconscious Max is seen lying on the floor with a bleeding nose like a child. The function of this narrational repetition of white holes is to concretize the Symbolic hole opened again in Max's psyche and return of the Real order.

As soon as Max counts the pi number as the primordial signifier, his psychotic attacks and hallucinations start again immediately. For example, after talking with Sol about the pi number and after deducing that Pi number has a certain meaning, he hallucinates in the subway an old man singing and peeping Max. It is the second hallucination apart from the one he sees the door is opened by intruders after talking with Lenny about the obligation of God. Thus, the second hallucination shows that his psychotic breakdown begins because he is now hallucinating without the need for a trigger.

Apart from visual hallucinations he starts suffering from auditory hallucinations just on the eve of finding the 216 digits of pi number. Aronofsky uses subjective internal sounds in order to emphasize psychotic attack Max has been through. It is sometimes orgasm screams of Devi or a horn of a train as a sign of Max's hallucination. "Soon, Euclid accurately predicts a series of stock quotes –in the process of spitting out a 216 digit number at the very instant that it crashes- and Aronofsky's film arrives at the primordial signifier whose meaning the psychotic is desperate to literalize" (Eisenstein, 2004:17).

As he is driven more and more to the psychotic thought, every word gain a literal meaning. For instance, when he takes apart Euclid to discover the cause for the crash he finds a living insect. Apart from a visual hallucination, as he touches the ooze, it's also a tactile hallucination. The whole reality starts to harbour a meaning

for Max; even if its message is opaque. Euclid seems to be sending warnings to Max by crushing. Everything around him has become a sign, communicating to him, addressing him.

Throughout the film after triggering phase, Max's brain which has a psychotic kernel never gives a break to project psychotic delusions. From this moment, the perfection issue cannot function to attach him to the Symbolic order, Imaginary hallucinations and real glimpses surrender him. Since then it will be always unclear that Max sees are real or hallucinatory. Because his unconscious is now on the surface. For instance, when he reads that Euclid's pick was accurate from the same hallucinatory old man's newspaper, his hallucinations and paranoia increase very quickly and he starts to think everyone is watching him. It seems that reality decomposes in Max's psychotic universe.

3.1.11. *Jouissance* Attacks and Body Mutilation

After the encounter with Marcy Dawson who offers Max a perfect computer chip called 'Ming Mecca' in exchange for the results of his work, Max has his third triggering and migraine attack. Although he wants this chip eagerly and thinks that it will be very useful for perfect calculations, the stock market's Symbolic demands trigger him. Hence, Max's psychotic belief that Pi number can be the source of everything in the world cause libido attacks via migraine attacks in addition to hallucinations. Invaded by the excess of libido, Max begins to have more frequent migraine attacks just as he is more exposed to Real in the form of white voids in the ends of attacks.

After the Sol's death, Max has his last attack while examining Sol's paper. But this time he doesn't take his pills as if to bear the incredible pain and confront the white void coming from the Real order. Eisenstein interprets this scene as "Aronofsky finally leaves it to Max to grasp the stupidity of the number" (Eisenstein, 2004: 25) Max starts to destroy his computer Euclid before the white void appears. But this time Max's own image appears in the void differently from the other examples of

fade to whites. While he is enunciating some numbers, the voice of Debi is heard. The white void in which Max is standing ends with Max hugging Devi, who turns out to be a hallucination. Finally, Max burns the paper with the number and there is one more thing left to be done. As he has a psychotic structure Max still believes that the numbers remain in his head. Therefore, Max makes a self-lobotomy as a body mutilation in order to subtract the pi pattern from his head.

The film ends open-ended as it isn't clear whether Max makes a self-lobotomy or not although he wears black bruise covering his head. According to Eisenstein, "the status of his brain is left purposely veiled" (Eisenstein, 2004:26) in order to point out the importance of non-knowledge. In the last sequence Max seems to gain perspective and seems to notice it's impossible to reach a perfect pattern in nature and world. He seems to walk and sit in public places where he can meet with other people that are representatives of Symbolic order but without necessarily interacting with them at a safe distance. So, Max doesn't answer Gina's multiplication question. As a stabilization; the distance from the primordial signifier is required. "Perhaps the finale of the film enacts itself a kind of antidote for the psychosis that it has dramatized" (Eisenstein, 2004: 27). And maybe this open-ending may be an antidote for the spectators as well because it doesn't create so much desire to get to know what happened to Max. Because Aronofsky makes the audience not to think whether Max again can construct a point of consistency that he could rely on as he once succeeded with the help of scientific perfection.

3.2. *BLACK SWAN* (2010): ARTISTIC PERFECTION AND 'OTHER' AS BODY

"I just want to be perfect..."

Nina

Darren Aronofsky's fifth feature film *Black Swan* portrays the process of transformation of a young, devoted, perfectionist and vulnerable ballerina Nina into the Swan Queen. In this film based on Pyotr Iliyc Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (1897),

Aronofsky shows Nina's slow descent into self-destructive psychosis. Laine suggests that "what is expressed in the film's cinematic aesthetic is a psychic-corporeal experience of self-destructive psychosis" (Laine, 2015: 130). While plunging into a schizoid world, Nina's each step of mental and bodily transformation is shown. Although the plot of the film is modelled on the ballet, Aronofsky only uses the mimetic elements of the narrative and prefers to portray the mental processes of Nina while she is step by step approaching self-mutilation.

Nina dances as a soloist in a prestigious New York ballet company and lives with her domineering mother. Her mother Erica was a former ballerina with a mediocre career which ended when she became pregnant with Nina. In the film, there is no mention of Nina's father. According to Collins "Nina and her mother live in a perfect *pas de deux* (or perhaps *a folie a deux*), a mimetic relation" (Collins, 2013: 219). In their symbiotic and dyadic relationship, the father figure is completely absent and the mother is the sole omnipotent parent. Just like Max's life, there is no triangulation, no third party in Nina's life.

The director of New York Ballet Company's director is Thomas. He is a very passionate and ambitious man. He announces to put on the stage a new version of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake in which the Swan Queen embodies both white and black swan.

As he retires Beth who is a very successful and passionate prima ballerina because of her advanced age, now he needs a soloist/ new prima ballerina who can embody both swans; black and white swan at the same time. This means the one who takes the role must dance both Odette that is the gentle and beautiful White Swan, and also Odile that is the dangerous, deceptive Black Swan. Nina wants this role eagerly and sees Lily who is the new, beautiful and flirty ballerina from San Francisco as a rival. "While Nina's technical ability and gentle nature make her an ideal White Swan dancer, she has to fight extremely hard to convince the company choreographer, Thomas, that she is capable of also playing the dangerous and seductive Black Swan" (Stephenson, 2016). When Nina gets the role, her balanced

psyche owing to her perfection struggle as an Imaginary compensation collapse and she begins to have psychotic breakdowns which ends with self-mutilation.

3.2.1. Predominance of Imaginary Order and Deficiency of Symbolic Order:

Black Swan is a film full of elements that could be associated with Imaginary order like mirror images, Imaginary identifications, dreams, fantasies, doppelgängers, rivals, perfection struggles as Imaginary compensation and hallucinations. In opposition, the elements that could be associated with the Symbolic order like schools, media, society at large, grades, diplomas, status symbols, the Law, social ideas aren't seen. Indeed the ballet company and the director as an authority are the only things that could be related to the Symbolic order. Therefore, it can be said that there is a distinctive predominance of Imaginary order over the Symbolic order in *Black Swan*.

While Imaginary identifications, Imaginary compensatory tools, dreams and fantasies play an important role for the psychic balance for Nina, Imaginary relations characterized by rivalry, hostility that can be seen as Imaginary others pose danger. Besides, there is no Symbolic importance in Nina's world. As the ideals, authority figures, the law aren't important issues for Nina, the Imaginary continues to predominate and Nina is stuck in the Imaginary order. Because of the abundance of Imaginary relations, Nina has to be in conflict with opponents in Ballet Company that she counts as rivals.

As the ideals, authority figures, the law aren't important issues for Nina the Imaginary continues to predominate. At this point, it is important to remember that the Imaginary order is the area of rivalry, hostility as much as is the register that of visual images, auditory, olfactory, and other sense perceptions of all kinds and fantasy. As the rewriting of the Imaginary by the Symbolic does not occur, the images of dreams, fantasies, and doppelgängers of Nina cannot be restructured, rewritten, or overwritten by the Symbolic. Briefly, the Symbolic is assimilated for Nina and she is stuck in Imaginary order.

3.2.2. Images, Dreams, Fantasies:

The film starts with opening credits appearing on a black screen and with a music by Clint Mansell. Before the title of the film appears on the screen, the music is as sad, naïve and melodramatic as the original music by Tchaikovsky. However, as soon as the title of the film appears, the tone of the music changes towards distorted laughter. This use of music implies that the role of Black Swan is destructive and fatal for naïve and fragile Nina. Besides, the distorted laughter that accompanies to this music will be the sign of Nina's psychotic attacks. This laughter will function as auditory hallucination and Nina will hear her uncanny inner voice as if coming from outside on the eve of each attack.

The music slows down and the black screen gradually brightens when Nina is seen on the stage dancing the role of Odette. In this opening scene, Aronofsky shows Nina's body with flowing movements in close up as if to accentuate 'the body' is the basic instrumental vehicle for a ballerina. Therefore, in the stage only Nina is shown in the spotlight whereas Von Rothbart remains in dark while he is cursing her to be a swan maiden.

This opening scene which is indeed the dream of Nina is a very good example of an Imaginary world and also a summary of whole film as well: Everything goes well until a threatening factor comes and ruins the tranquil life of white swan and cause her to get into panic and desperately falter. Aronofsky enlarges this narrative and focuses on "the interconnectedness of bodily transformation and the dissolution of self in a state of insanity" (Laine, 2015: 130). In addition, Aronofsky draws a parallelism between the transformation of Rothbart into a monstrous bird and Nina's becoming of a black swan in the end. These two scenes are indeed the symmetric of each other. While the opening scene ends with a fade to black, the last scene ends with a fade to white. Both of the fades means death but the latter is like falling into a real order/white Symbolic hole.

3.2.3. Mirror Images:

In her Imaginary world, Nina initially conceives herself through her images seen from mirrors. Mirrors are seen not only in the dance studio, but also her bathroom, changing rooms and Nina's dining room where she is practicing as a part of the *mise-en-scene*. Nina has a profession that she has to practice in front of the mirror most of her time and there are a lot of mirror reflection scenes. In front of the mirrors, Nina attempts to find the ideal self that she has fantasied and the reason that Nina regularly studies her reflection in the mirror is her need for reaffirmation of self. According to Stephenson, "Nina's ego is actually rooted in her ability to perform herself as bodily image, which means that the mirrors in the dance studio are not only reflections of her athletic skill but visual depictions of 'her' as an identity based overwhelmingly on her aesthetic" (Stephenson, 2016: 68).

After the fade to black that finishes the *Swan Lake* sequence, there is a fade-in into the bedroom of Nina. As an establishing shot which begins in set up, Nina is shown waking up in her pinkish room full of plush toys as if she is a little girl and loosening up her feet. Her feet are shown in extreme close up with emphatic cracks on the sound track. So, from the first moment the body issue is also on the front burner. While her mother is preparing the breakfast she is doing warm-up exercises in front of the mirror like a child doing her daily homework. She is stuck in the mirrors and so in the Imaginary order while she is telling her dream to her mother. The mirrors have a very crucial role as a part of the *mise-en-scene* because Nina can exist only as a bodily image both because of her profession and due to its psychotic structure. Christiansen explains the function of mirrors for ballerinas as:

The world of ballet is set up as a world of reflection; mirrors proliferate and are everywhere. The dancers need mirrors to constitute their selves; they need the mirrors for make-up but they also need them for their dance routines, where only the mirror can reveal if their moves are correct. Mirrors are thus the ground of the image for the ballerinas, and perfection for Nina is at first achieved through the mirror (Christiansen, 2011: 309)

Laine says that “Reaffirmation of self is indeed the reason why Nina regularly studies her reflection in the mirror” (Laine, 2015: 134). That’s why Nina watches her own reflection in the very same subway window. In other words, with the help of mirrors and reflective surfaces she procures confirmation of her sense of self and she can identify with her image that she idealizes. And that’s the function of Imaginary identification. However, in the following scenes, the mirrors function in the opposite direction by multiplying Nina’s reflection as a sign of her mental breakdown.

3.2.4. Identifications with Perfect Ideal Role Models and Imitation:

As it is explained in the second chapter that people that are prone to psychosis/have psychotic structure, are embedded in Imaginary and dual relations. In Nina’s case she is embedded in dual relation with her mother, her profession, her role model and idol Beth and finally with the new dancer Lily. Indeed except these people there is nobody that she keeps in touch with because of her self-absorption and perfectionism. She is alienated from the outside world, just commuting from home to work. However, she lives in an un-triggered way because the Imaginary order that she takes refuge in and her struggle for perfection hide the Symbolic holes caused by psychotic structure.

Apart from mirror images, identifications and idols can be counted as examples of the Imaginary order. Nina’s first identification figure is her mother Erica. Because of not having a father figure/paternal metaphor/third party that separate them, Nina is obliged to incorporate with her devouring mother. As a grown up young woman Nina doesn’t seem to hold any mastery over her life. Her mother prepares the meals, dresses her, controls her skin, winds up a pink ballerina music box every night in order to help Nina fall asleep, calls her ‘sweet girl’ and wants to accompany her on the way to Ballet Company. She seems doing everything that her mother desires. She seems to live her youth in Nina as her younger copy.

Psychoanalytically speaking, Nina is like an infantile at the pre-Oedipal stage of development in which the distinction between me and not-me is not constituted yet. She is in a state of complete dependency on her mother from whom she is not separated yet. Her mother is like a devouring mother/maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal phase. She seems to engulf Nina as an oral-sadistic mother. For example, in the breakfast sequence, when Nina tells her mother that the director has promised to feature her more this season, she responds, 'He certainly should; you've been there long enough.'

It is also very clear that her mother doesn't have an independent life. All she has in life is Nina after she quits her job because of her pregnancy. So, she is obsessed with her daughter, filling the house with paintings and photos of Nina. It seems that "Erica seeks personal validation through Nina on the one hand, and perceives her as an improved version of herself on the other" (Laine, 2015: 141). There is a symbiotic relation between the mother and daughter as there is no father figure/the Name-of-the-Father to separate them. Even though she appears that she wants her daughter to play the leading role, indeed she feels her daughter as a rival. Collins explains the rivalry between Nina and mother as:

Nina and her mother act as models and obstacles for each other, like one mirror reflecting another. Nina wants to be a ballerina because her mother wants to be one and her mother wants Nina to be a ballerina so that, in her secretly sabotaging stage-mother role, she can rivalize with Nina (Collins, 2013: 220).

Rivalry is indeed one of the outcomes of Imaginary order and shows the hidden part of the Imaginary order bereft of the fantasy frame. It can be understood from Erica's constant veiled criticism that she doesn't want her daughter elected to the role Swan Queen. "The mother projects all her frustrated ambition, jealousy and disappointment onto Nina" (Laine, 2015: 127). Indeed Nina feels her mother's hostile feelings. For that reason, she dedicates herself to her work and tries to do it perfectly. Besides, she makes other identifications in the Ballet Company.

The New York Ballet Company is the example of Symbolic order in the film. It has its own rules, own functioning as a system. Aronofsky depicts the compelling and thorny atmosphere of professional ballet just like he describes the challenges in the field of wrestling in *The Wrestler*. In both professions there are always replacements where younger ones are more advantageous than the older ones. This shows the vulnerability of the lived-body. For instance, a star who has a bright reputation is quickly replaced by new, like in the case of Beth who is being forced to retire. As a dedicated and perfectionist ballerina, Nina is aware of this truth and listens every technic detail that her instructors give her and tries to it perfectly to be able to stay in the company.

In this cruel milieu to be able to stay sane Nina choses another identification and role model instead of her mother. Referring to a role model is important for two reasons in psychotic structures. Firstly the identification process and the Imaginary order will continue to effect the subject lifetime; not only in childhood but also in adult relationships. Secondly for the ones who have psychotic inclination, these identifications plays a crucial role to form a compensatory system against the Symbolic holes.

As Collins explains, “Nina idolizes Beth and relates her as a child imitating her mother” (Collins, 2013: 224). The word ‘imitation’ is crucial for someone who has a psychotic structure because as they are stuck in the Imaginary order, they have to imitate others around him/her in order to stay in Symbolic order. Therefore, for Nina who has been in a ballet company since her childhood, there is no way to imitate the ballerinas as she is surrounded by them. Her prosthesis Symbolic order can be easily formed and indeed imaginized in a milieu full of mirrors and perfect bodies. Besides, her role model is Beth who has long danced perfectly as muse and lover to the company’s director, Thomas. Although her advanced age she is beautiful and challenging. Nina thinks Beth is perfect, she imitates Beth’s desires too. So, in her every move she tries to be perfect like Beth. Finally, when Beth's retirement comes up Nina desperately tries to achieve prima ballerina status.

As Beth retires, Nina needs to find a new role model. In fact, Beth was not her role model since “Nina witnesses the breakdown of her model Beth, who is screaming and tearing apart her dressing room, evidently reacting to the news that she is being replaced. At this moment, Beth is no longer the model for Nina” (Collins, 2013: 221). Now the best ballerina that Nina makes identification is Lily who is seen at first in film all dressed in black. Collins describes the process that Lily becomes the new role model for Nina as:

Nina dances without passion because she has no one from whom to borrow it. Nina is desperately reaching inside herself for the desire that is not there when suddenly Lily arrives to dramatically fill the empty position of her model-obstacle. (...) Nina only has technical ability; all her desire is an imitation. She is only the White Swan, forced to watch powerlessly through the window while the Black Swan seduces her beloved prince. To dance the Black Swan, she must find a model. And that model, as the film has been telling us from the beginning, is Lily (Collins, 2013: 221, 222).

Nina can pursue her profession by mimicking because she doesn't have passion, artistic intuition and spontaneity. Therefore, she copies the prima ballerina and other dancers. As she identifies with her role models (Beth, Lily) who are perfect in their jobs she tries to practice as possible as she can to reach up a perfectionism in her body gestures. As she has a clear and strict purpose she follows a complicated procedure full of repetitions every day except studio classes at the company. Therefore she elaborately substitutes the Law/Symbolic order with her self-imposed rules.

3.2.5. Imaginary Phallus:

As the psychotic inclined characters cannot have an access to the Symbolic order, they can't have a Symbolic phallus which accounts Symbolic recognition by Big Other/society/parental Other. Throughout the film Nina is seen indifferent to Symbolic system. She doesn't want any recognition of the third parties; she only wants to achieve perfection that she is obsessed with. However, she strives to have an Imaginary phallus instead of striving to have Symbolic phallus. That's why she wants to interiorize the black swan image and become an Imaginary black swan.

She succeeds it in the end and dies as Real Swan Queen who embodies both black swan and white swan images.

3.2.6. Perfection as Imaginary Compensation

The struggle for perfection based upon the Imaginary is a strategy to hold on to the Symbolic order in which the third party, authority or profession are necessary. For Nina, perfection in ballet function as a form of Symbolic mediation to be able to stay away from the Real dimension.

Nina's efforts and imitation of her role models for attaining perfection procure a kind of stabilization and Imaginary compensation. Her ideal to be perfect in her ballet profession constitutes the fourth leg of chair that Lacan gave as an example in his third seminar of psychosis. Therefore by struggling too hard to be perfect in her profession compensate the Symbolic deficiency and makes Nina feel a subject rather than merely an object.

At this point it is important to state that, just like in *Pi*, there is no prologue that functions as a separation in *Black Swan*. It means that Nina will share the same fate of desperate white swan. However, while describing the periods that Nina passes through towards a full-blown psychotic break, Aronofsky focuses on her obsession of perfection and bodily transformation that goes parallel with her psychosis. Her struggle to achieve perfection isn't the Real source of her psychotic attacks; indeed for Nina, perfection is a compensatory mechanism like that of Max in *Pi*.

In spite of Symbolic hole in her life, Nina saves herself from going mad owing to achieving perfection in her profession which procures her an Imaginary compensation.

3.2.7. Doppelgänger

In her path to achieving perfection, Nina is obliged to fight against the feelings of rivalry and hostility which are the side effects of Imaginary order. Doppelgängers

as evil twins can be counted as one of the examples of Imaginary enemies. In *Black Swan* even though there are a lot of doppelgänger characters like Erica, Beth and Lily, the rivalry with Lily becomes the central point of the film.

Lily as the biggest Doppelgängers of Nina, functions also as “mirror image of Nina’s unstable psyche. Lily is what Nina sees as the opposite of herself” (Christiansen, 2011: 309). Indeed Lily is not only established as rival but also model and obstacle for Nina. Aronofsky formulates Nina and Lily’s characters as the exact opposite characters.

Apart from these doppelgängers, there is one who has a very specific function. Indeed this first Doppelgänger is the fantasy of Nina: the Doppelgänger in the metro in the evening of audition day. Nina is very surprised seeing her black side but not dwell on it. The day after the audition day, she dolls up; puts on Beth’s lipstick, wears her hair loose just like her Doppelgänger in order to convince Thomas. But it’s clear that she doesn’t deliberately do such these things; seemingly just mirroring the casual movements of her Doppelgänger she hallucinated last night. Because when Thomas asks the reason of all her discipline and obsession for perfection, she says in her usual shy mood that she wants to be perfect. Indeed throughout the film she reiterates again and again the same ‘perfection’ phrase. However, thanks to biting Thomas with an impulse coming from the Real order accompanied with distorted sound and imitating of her Doppelgänger, –even though she is hallucinatory- she gets the role.

As the performance time approaches Nina hallucinates her black side many times as a Doppelgänger. Because in order to be able to understand the black swan role, Nina has to find identification model for herself or create a dark character in her mind.

3.2.8. Fixity of Meaning versus Subjectivity

As it is stated in the second chapter that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and is determined by social convention. Therefore, meaning is not fixed. However, the meaning is fixed and absolute for Nina. Indeed every issue has a fixed position for Nina. She attributes fixed meanings to the signifiers. While she is trying to achieve perfection, she gives fixed, absolute meanings to the role 'black swan'. Indeed Nina picked a fixed role for herself; naïve, dedicated, perfectionist ballerina of the company because of the infantilization of her mother and growing up with ballet. For Nina, the meaning of life is being perfect like Beth in Ballet Company. Therefore, the meaning is fixed and pinned up for Nina because the aim of perfection in ballet creates a symbolic compensation against the Symbolic hole.

Leader says about people with psychotic structure that everything could be made to fit one fixed idea, based on a false premise. (Leader, 2012: 12) In *Black Swan*, Nina's psychotic belief is being a black swan can solve every problem both in the performance and in life. She thinks this certainty makes her identity perfect. Her desire to be a black swan is so strong that 'black swan' starts to 'appear' to her in her phantasies. Nina as psychotic inclined ballerina is far away from the Symbolic order in which there is a smooth functioning of the signifier; put it another way one signifier isn't permanently bound to another signified for her. There is a lack of dialect and contextualization for Nina. She thinks her certainty makes her identity perfect. But as she can't have an access to Symbolic, the logic of her new role cannot be admitted into her mental universe. In other words there is no possibility of symbolization of this role.

3.2.9. Primordial Signifier /The Name-of-The-Father And Foreclosure of The Name-of-The-Father

In *Black Swan*, the role 'black swan' given to Nina by the ballet director Thomas can be seen as a primordial signifier. However, Stephenson claims that Thomas is the primordial signifier for Nina. He says that "If we view Thomas as a belated primordial signifier for Nina, perhaps this is why he has even more effect on her than her mother during the timeframe of *Black Swan*" (Stephenson, 2016: 73). But I think the role of Black Swan is also the "primordial signifier" for Nina.

However, I confer on Stephenson right because that's Thomas who gives this role to Nina. Although Thomas and Nina have known each other for years and Thomas talks behind her back and claims that she is 'frigid' he seems to have a God status in Nina's eyes. Therefore, he can be named as primordial signifier. But indeed he has no power on her unconscious as the Name-of-the-Father has been foreclosed for Nina. That's why she cannot obey his orders. For that reason, having no place in her unconscious, Thomas will come back as a monster to Nina's thought process just like at the time that Aronofsky shows him as a black stain in the beginning of the film for the first time.

Besides, its importance comes from its function, indeed the primordial signifier signifies nothing. However, Nina has also a psychotic belief that being a black swan can solve every problem both in the company and in life. For her being a black swan becomes the condition of all other signifiers that are meaningful. Besides, by the time progress she begins to attempt to uncover the veil behind the role black swan and wants to literalize the meaning of this primordial signifier which starts her triggering period.

At that point as long as the hallucinations about being an evil murderer augments, the meaning of 'black swan' becomes clearer for her. In the end she reaches the moment of pure understanding and direct access to the deepest sources of the black swan's secret.

If the role of black swan is accounted as a primordial signifier, then the uncanny laughter that belongs to the black swan but seems to emerge out of nowhere is the sign of foreclosure mechanism of Nina. Because she cannot interiorize the things in the Symbolic order unless she makes identifications.

If Thomas is accounted as a primordial signifier, then it is understandable that he has the God status. But indeed throughout the film Aronofsky shows Thomas' impotence over Nina in order to prove that there is nothing under the veil of being a director of the company. Similarly as there is nothing beyond and beneath the primordial signifier, Thomas is indeed only a Symbolic function for the dancers. He is indeed impotent in spite of his God status because he can't do anything if the dancers do wrong in the performance.

In addition to this, there is no room for Thomas' instructions in the eyes of Nina. Because her psychotic belief causes the foreclosure of this primordial signifier. For instance, instead of listening to the advices of Thomas (who becomes the-Name-of-the-Father and therefore primordial signifier for her) Nina practices day and night without a break and starts to imagine herself as an evil person. Another foreclosure example is where Thomas tries to attempt to loosen up Nina in a private training session. "Thomas instructs her to feel his touch and to respond to this touch" (Laine, 2015: 151). No matter how hard he tries, Nina refuses to respond to Thomas's touch because of the absence of the primordial signifier/the Name-of-the-Father in her psyche. "Thomas experiences his powerlessness as a choreographer (...) and the scene is about the untouchability of one subject (Nina) confronting the touching subject Thomas with his failure to touch" (Laine: 2015: 152). Once again it is seen that there is nothing behind the primordial signifier. It has neither power nor any meaning; it is only a function.

3.2.10. Triggering Factors Coming From Symbolic Order and Psychotic Attacks

As it is explained in the second chapter that psychotics cannot have an access to Symbolic order; because of the foreclosure of the-Name-of-the-Father, there is a Symbolic hole in decision making mechanism. Therefore, the unknown, inimitable things coming from the Symbolic order interrupt the steady and calm periods that the subject reaches owing to perfectionism. When the triggering factors cannot be deciphered, a series of psychotic breakdowns start.

The role black swan is the factor for Nina that starts her triggering period. As her mother doesn't treat her like a mature woman, infantilize her all the time, Nina doesn't know the outside world and cannot conceptualise the black swan metaphor. Just like the Schreber's promotion is the source of his psychotic breakdown, the role black swan also is her source of triggering and psychotic breakdowns. Because there is a change of status, she has to understand this new Symbolic task which is impossible for her because the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and lack of Symbolic interpretation ability.

As she gives fixed meanings to the signifiers, firstly she equates being a whore and being a black swan as it is seen from the text written in lipstick in the toilet mirror. As soon as she takes the role of black swan, her hallucinations slowly begin to increase. For example, when she gets home, she sees the girl's eyes are moving in one of her mother's paintings, she hallucinates her mother as a murderer, she fantasizes having sex with Lily and starts to go mad. Stephenson describes the irreversible path that Nina enters as:

Though she does get the role, there is the additional challenge of keeping it, and performing it to a nearly impossible standard. This situation results in Nina entering into an acute psychotic episode where she experiences the delusions, hallucinations and paranoia typical of a person who has an impaired connection with reality (Stephenson, 2016: 66).

In the triggering period Nina feels that there is some kind of meaning in everywhere relating to black swan although it remains imprecise and she isn't sure in what way. At the fundraising ball, when Thomas announces the departure of Beth and the arrival of Nina, her great moment is interrupted by laughter of Lily, who is not paying attention and flirting with a man. At that moment Nina codes Lily as an obstacle and her laughter as mocking. She will hear this mocking laughter voice in every psychotic breakdown. Besides, as her psychotic triggering aggravates, she perceives all people around her as enemies and the feeling of hostility that Nina has in mind becomes the central point of the film.

3.2.11. Hallucinations, *Jouissance* Attacks and Body Mutilation

As her triggering augments and aggravates, her hallucinations also increase. The reason of her hallucinations comes from her foreclosure mechanism. As long as she rejects the role black swan and being a bad woman, these thoughts come outside to her as hallucinations. While she is fantastically transforming into a black swan, her body becomes the locus of self-mutilation. "Nina basically lives her own body, and the viewer can exactly through the body understand her actions, thoughts, emotions, traumas" (Žigo and Tkalec, 2016: 298).

For instance, before the celebration with her mother, in the bathroom scene, Nina is seen looking at herself in the mirror and suddenly sees her back bleeding. She seems to be confused but indeed she has a habit of scratching herself. To be able to bear the dominance of her mother she mutilates her body as a sign of self-dominance. In addition to self-mutilating scratching, her habit of bulimia can be seen as a self-mutilation act in order to stay in perfect shape. That's the sole solution for Nina, to gain a little mastery in her life except struggling for perfection.

In addition to this, the perfection mechanism, in other words her Imaginary compensatory mechanism collapses. Besides, the stabilization and the fixed meanings she creates for herself in her un-triggered prosthesis Symbolic world are collapsed too by the role black swan. Therefore, the libido/*jouissance* that once

places outside her body and attach to the signifiers of her prosthesis Symbolic order destructively returns to the body and begins to harm it.

Nina's small self-mutilation acts in order to master her body, gradually get serious and fatal. "Eventually Nina's self-mutilating scratching appears to be merely the beginning of a more fundamentally destructive bodily conversion" (Laine, 2015: 135). For instance, on the evening before the premiere she hallucinates black feathers sprout out from her shoulder.

Beth's accident is the turning point for Nina because it causes her hallucinations to get serious. Although Nina is very sorry about Beth and feels still guilty for replacing her place in one hand, Thomas behaves pragmatically and uses Beth's accident for her own purposes. He deliberately accentuates Beth's perfectionism to impress Nina and implies her what to desire. However, Nina is struggling with feelings of guilt about Beth. She goes to hospital to visit Beth and give back her belongings. As Nina pulls back a blanket hiding Beth's wounds, she views her injured legs, dark stitches and bloody rags. This scene reminds Lacanian body in bits and pieces and also brings to mind the same fate that Nina will face.

Nina's desire to be a perfect black swan is so strong that the body and image of 'black swan' starts to 'appear' to her in every incident. For instance in the bathroom, in the disco, in her bed she hallucinates her fearsome Black Swan Doppelgänger.

As long as the meaning of 'black swan' becomes clearer for her, her hallucinations become more acute and she can't recognize her body as her own. She loses totally her body coordination the night before the show. For instance, she can't hold together her arms, legs and her neck. Besides she hallucinates webbed feet as well as bird-like legs. The most severe bodily transformation takes place in the end of performance, when Nina's arms turns out to be giant swan wings. In Nina's final moments of the Swan Lake performance a deep self-inflicted wound is seen in Nina's abdomen getting bigger and bigger with each movement. As the wound expands, it resembles like a hole that takes all life out of Nina. Indeed, that's the

literalization of Symbolic hole which is at the core of Nina's psyche that is impossible to fill; a black destiny sealed for her. In the end, she falls into the white void as an example of real order like Max in *Pi* where there is nothingness but only of the primordial signifier exists.

3.3. *MOTHER!* (2017): DOMESTIC PERFECTION AND 'HOUSE' AS BODY

"I want to make a paradise"

Mother

Aronofsky told the New York Times about his film *Mother!* that "I really wanted to make this kind of allegory about Mother Nature and our place and our connection to our home." (Film Independent, 2017) Jennifer Lawrence also says that the film is an 'environmental cautionary tale' and the house in the film 'represents Earth'. (Elahe Izadi, Washingtonpost.com, Sept. 16, 2017) The nature-house analogy is very clear in the film, but there are other dimensions that can be included. For example, the house can be seen as a representation of a woman's body who has a perfection obsession and psychotic structure. Throughout the film, Aronofsky portrays the woman's psychotic breakdowns and psychotic hallucinations through the house. At the beginning, the house is in perfect condition – like the Garden of Eden- and also reflects the un-triggered situation of the woman. However, as the woman's psychotic structure begins to trigger due to the intrusions of people, the house is also affected in the same way and gives the same reactions as the woman against external changes.

The house seems to feel the woman's anxiety, fear, pleasure, anger and psychotic attacks. For instance, when the woman has a psychotic attack the house starts to darken. When she has an orgasm it violently trembles. When she gives birth it blows up the objects. In the end, when the woman dies the house falls apart to pieces. As

a living creature, Aronofsky shows the beating heart of the house behind the walls and the woman often touches the walls in order to feel the condition of its heart. Therefore, it can be concluded that the woman and the house have a symbiotic relation and the house is also an allegory for the woman. In one of his interviews Aronofsky says that the whole idea of the movie is that the woman is the house, there is no escape. (Film Independent, 2017) In sum, Aronofsky depicts the house as an interface to reflect the woman's bodily reactions.

In the film, in this big country house which is located in the middle of nature, the woman lives with her poet husband. One day, a stranger known as doctor arrives at their home. Afterwards the doctor's wife, two sons and their friends come one after another. Although the poet is pleased with these visits, the woman feels disrupted and starts to have psychotic breakdowns and hallucinations. As her attacks aggravate, the house starts to fall apart to pieces.

The couple have no children, no neighbours, no friends, even no names. But the woman is designated as 'mother' in the credits. It's very important that there's no name in the film as if showing the naming process in the Oedipus complex hasn't take place. Therefore, the possibility of pre-oedipal stage and also psychotic structure comes to mind. Because the pre-Oedipal stage which is a Freudian concept corresponds to Imaginary and real order which are Lacan's orders.

The husband is a writer-poet who has a continuous writer's block. But there is no mention of mother's profession. However, she is restoring the house completely by herself, out of the ashes. In that big house only two live; there is no third party, no triangulation which is indispensable for Symbolic register. Besides, the woman who is called mother is also doing every domestic work like cooking, washing up, laundering by herself without receiving any help. Therefore, she is like the maternal element dominating the house without being in dual relationship with her husband. There is no meaningful conversation between wife and husband. They seem to be two strangers that only share a house, but have no love affair.

3.3.1. Predominance of Imaginary Order and Deficiency of Symbolic Order:

From the very beginning to the last scene of the film, that's the images which dominates the whole film. First of all, in the prologue, in the film proper and in the epilogue, three different women images are seen. Again they don't have any name, any profession. The spectator isn't allowed to learn anything about them. Only thing that is known about them is that they all are different actresses.¹²

Although throughout the film there is a predominance of Imaginary order, in the prologue and in the epilogue there isn't anything to be associated with the Symbolic order. Aronofsky emphasizes the logic of Symbolic order by showing different life cycles. The people don't have any importance for the Symbolic order. The systems and the cycles are the important issues. The prologue of the film points to a turning point because it ends one era, a life cycle of a woman. After the generic, another era, another woman's (Jennifer Lawrence) life time starts all over. Besides, in the epilogue a third era, third woman's life span, will begin. The only thing that these different eras have in common is that they all tell the same fate of different mothers. This fate is their body mutilation after a psychotic attack and the initiation of a new life by the creator poet. Indeed by showing a film full of elements which could be linked to the Imaginary order and by correlating them with a psychotic structure, Aronofsky seems to show the danger of Imaginary order and the importance of the Symbolic order in order to stay sane.

The predominance of the Imaginary order starts from the beginning of film proper. In the first sequence of the film proper, a man/poet/creator/God is seen with blackened hands placing a crystal formation on a burnt shelf. He closes his eyes and seems to make a wish. Then time-lapse cinematography permits the spectator to see the burnt house gradually returning to an un-burnt state. After this time lapse, something in the bed is shown gradually swelling like a growing embryo. At the end of this sequence a woman appears sleeping in the foetus position in bed and

¹² The other women/mothers are casted by Sarah-Jeanne Labrosse as foremother and Laurence Leboeuf as successor mother.

this sequence represents the moment of a birth; a birth of a young woman. While successively showing these images Aronofsky uses no voice-over or subtitle that explain the meaning of these images and this sequence. The spectators are left alone with images bereft of language/Symbolic order.

After this first sequence the predominance of the Imaginary order over the Symbolic order continues. The woman who awakens like a new born, sits up and looks around for someone. She starts to wander the rooms of the house. She is both looking for someone and also trying to get to know her new world. As the camera moves and shows the rooms from the woman's point of view, her body contours are shown to the spectators at the same time. Aronofsky cinematographically supports the connection between the house and the woman's body. In fact, throughout the whole film, woman's body and the house are alternately depicted.

After a while, through the view that is seen from the windows it is understood that the house is a very large detached house in the middle of nature. It is also a very isolated place far from any civilization; parallel to the woman's social isolation. Besides, the camera shows the woman frame in frame as if she is stuck between the door sills and trapped in the house. The spectators are stuck in the Imaginary order and obliged to make inferences from the images.

In *Mother!* Aronofsky shows everything from the point of view of mother who is embedded in Imaginary order that borders the Real order in this film which means the Real order is implied much more than *Pi* and *Black Swan*.

3.3.2. Images, Dreams, Fantasies:

Although there are a lot of examples of images that could be associated with the Imaginary order but the most distinctive example is the images that are shown to spectators while the mother reads the poem of her husband. Again the spectators aren't permitted to hear and understand the writings.

While the woman is reading the poem, the images from outside the house are shown: The poet is standing in a desolated field with the remnants of his burnt home. Then mother emerges and takes his hand. As they hold hands, the charred ground and the burnt house begin to rejuvenate with new life.

The rejuvenated house is shown in bird's eye view. Immediately after, the mother is also shown in bird's eye view while she is sitting on the stairs. Aronofsky again draws an analogy between house and mother by using bird's eye view angle which can be commented as the God's look and fate. The house is obliged to regenerate as each new mother (nature) comes after fire and each mother has to give her place to her successor. This is a never ending cycle. All these inferences can be made owing to the images.

The poem's content - the rebuilding of the burnt house- is shown through mother's point of view based on the Imaginary order. It is very meaningful that Aronofsky conveys the poet's poem through images, not sentence as if to accentuate the lack of the Symbolic order within the woman's psyche.

In the end of the film when the fans of the poet come to his house to see him the house invasion turns into a violent, infernal chaos. The crazy fans first plunder the food that mother prepares for poet. Indeed these scenes represent the allegory of the looting of nature by humans. Finally the intruders tear the house apart, dismember all its parts. When the mother touches the walls she feels the heart like organ totally darkens and shrinks as if signifying its end.

3.3.3. Identifications with Perfect Ideal Role Models and Imitation:

The house is both her ideal and identification object. She identifies with the house which she thinks has a very sensitive heart. Besides she tries to be creative while restoring the house and be a muse for the poet and also she imitates the poet's erstwhile creativity.

The mother wants to be the poet's inspiration in her whole life. She relies so much on the poet's work to live the sense of integrity. Therefore, she makes every sacrifice for her husband to finish his work. She is looking forward to seeing poet's work that she thinks will be complementary for her. It is as if the most important thing in her life. In sum, she makes an identification with his poem. When the poet finishes his writing and lets her read it she loves it and becomes so happy as if she is in the jubilation phase of the mirror stage.

3.3.4. Imaginary Phallus:

The house is the Imaginary phallus of mother. The house is as perfect as it can be, so does the mother. The shape-liked heart behind the walls is the literalization of the mother's heart and the walls function as the skin of the woman. After the first murder committed in the house, the heart gets darker and darker just like the mood of mother. The house seems to feel this murder and the woman also feels the spirit of the house because they have a symbiotic relationship.

Therefore, the house functions as the body and unconscious of the woman. It can be said that the woman is becoming the house and the house is becoming the woman. After various triggering factors, everything in the house has become a sign that communicating to the mother, whispering to her, addressing her: if reality was once silent, now it can't stop talking. The mother thinks that the house is her body: not like her body, but simply her body. The intrusion of third parties to the house literalize the destruction that her body encounters. The division between inside and outside of her body collapses and she feels that her body has been dismembered as the house is splintering/ fragmentizing.

3.3.5. Perfection as Imaginary Compensation

Domestic perfection in *Mother* procures a kind of Imaginary compensatory mechanism against the Symbolic hole. The mother devotes her life to the ideal of perfect order of the house. She is such a perfectionist that she cares for the smallest detail. She is obsessed with renovating and tidying the house in the most perfect

way. For instance, in the drawing room sequence, she mixes the colours to find the perfect tone. But the tone seems not exactly right to her. So, she decided to make a connection with the house through the wall by touching it. First she puts her hands on the wall and makes a connection with the heart of the house and ‘feels’ the perfect colour tone through her hands. With the idea that she has reached the house’s senses, she adds some coloured powder, mixes it and she is convinced that has achieved the right tone. Therefore, it can be seen that the mother is in deep relationship with the house. Without referring to any Symbolic signifiers she has reached the other’s information. It is clear that the mother is embedded in an Imaginary, dual relation with the house through her body.

In order to fill the Symbolic hole, she forms a prosthesis Symbolic order through her perfection obsession. She dedicates herself to domestic works and ensuring the perfect order of the house as a Symbolic compensation. She creates her own rules of order that enables her to fill the Symbolic gap stemming from her psychotic structure. Therefore, perfectionism functions as the anchoring point that enables her to attach herself to the Symbolic order which is absent in her life. Perfection in domestic works determinates a fixed and pinned meaning for her. She has a clear purpose which is the restoring the house, including the perfect order and perfect interior design. Indeed she has a difficult task because the house was burnt for some reason the spectators don't know why. Therefore, she needs to renovate and decorate it from the beginning. In brief, as an Imaginary compensation the mother stays in the dual relationship with the house. However once the prosthesis Symbolic order and Imaginary compensation mechanisms that the psychotic subject constructs get harmed, the Symbolic hole appears and paranoia starts.

3.3.6. Fixity of Meaning versus Subjectivity

The mother has a fixed idea that the perfect order of the house and herself as a muse are the sole condition of the poet’s inspiration. Besides, she dictates him not to worry about the inspiration and she is sure that the inspiration will come very soon as long as the house is tidy and in perfect condition. That’s why the writing issue is

always a problem between them. For example, when the man says that he wanted to be alone for ideas to come, the woman feels sorry. Because she never even thinks that inspiration will come in any other way and she cannot understand the poet's efforts to be alone. So, it can be said that she has a meaning problem. In brief the meaning is fixed for her.

3.3.7. Primordial Signifier / The Name-of-The-Father And Foreclosure of The Name-Of-The-Father

For mother, her poet husband can be counted as the primordial signifier/ the Name-of-the-Father. Because he seems to have a creator/god status in her eyes. The woman attributes a great significance and fixed meaning to him; hence she wants to construct a perfect milieu for him and his inspiration. However, the primordial signifier/the Name-of-the-Father is meaningless as it is only a substitution which starts the signification chain in language/Symbolic order. In a similar vein the poet only has the power to create, he starts the creation but he has no power to control over what he creates. Because he cannot prevent the people that he creates from killing each other and their vandalism over nature. He only has the power to create over and over again. Therefore, like the other primordial signifiers (pi number which is seen as the true name of God by Max in *Pi*; Thomas and the role black swan in *Black Swan*) the poet doesn't have an inherent meaning, only has a function. Besides although his the primordial signifier/ paternal metaphor/ paternal function, the mother never listens to the poet. For instance, under the pretext of creating a perfect milieu for writing she dominates the house without asking her husband. Because she thinks she can feel the house's needs. When the man wants to help her with the house works, she never lets him to help her. Therefore, it seems that there is a foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father/primordial signifier which entails a psychotic structure. "Foreclosure means the paternal metaphor fails and entrance to the Symbolic order is prohibited. This in turn means that the child remains stuck in the Imaginary register" (Leader, 2012: 71).

Aronofsky implies in some sequences that the reason of the psychotic breakdown of mother is the exclusion of poet that functions as the paternal metaphor/primordial signifier. For instance, when mother is left all alone at home after the murder she is shown with rapid editing, jump cuts and uncanny sounds moving room to room. After noticing that the back door is open, she comes to the kitchen and finds a photo of the poet which is ripped into pieces in a cross-shaped. The poet's ripped photo is shown from mother's point of view as if to cinematographically accentuate the foreclosure of him. Suddenly the oldest boy appears behind her and she runs to call the police. The effort of calling 911 can be seen as a recourse of Symbolic order; however when the police asks what her emergency is, she cannot talk and explain her fearful problem. Again the Symbolic order cannot function within her psyche. Suddenly the poet appears immediately. The juxtaposition of the image of the poet and the 911 voice-over implies that the reason for the woman being in an emergency situation is her husband. In other words, the source of mother's nightmarish psychotic attacks and delusions is the foreclosure of the paternal metaphor.

3.3.8. Strangers as Imaginary Rivals and Triggering Factors

In her days struggling for being an inspiration for her husband to write his next book, mother stays un-triggered as she is fully engaged in renovating their house and doing the housework in a perfect manner. In her idyllic life everything seems fine; she has neither hallucinations nor any sign of psychotic decline until the interference of a third person.

The idyllic life of mother and poet is disturbed by an unexpected appearance of a stranger. One night while they are sitting in the study room, an uninvited visitor who claims to be a doctor rings their bell. The poet welcomes the doctor with pleasure because he is so bored of looking at a blank page. However the mother is upset because she doesn't want anybody in her life except her husband.

Indeed this first stranger starts the mother's first psychological disturbance in a manner that propels her back into the pre-mirror stage. Because she loses her mastery of her body. First her hands tremble, her eyes darken, she staggers and almost faints while preparing the tea in the kitchen whereas her husband is laughing and chatting with the doctor. In parallel to her bodily reactions, the house shifts slightly, everything around her seems to be blackening. The bodily effects and the changes of house is shown from mother's point of view. She cannot explicate, talk and give meaning to these changes as she can't have an access to Symbolic order.

The next morning another uninvited visitor appears at the door as the second triggering factor. She is the wife of the doctor. When the bell rings, the mother doesn't let her husband open the door, as if to stop further intervention in her house. As soon as the second stranger enters the house the oven alarm goes off at that moment, the omelette in the pan burns. This alarm actually functions like a warning for future events both for the spectators and for the mother who is on the verge of a new psychotic attack.

With the arrival of two strangers, the divide between unconscious and conscious of mother has been broken, and the visual construction of her Imaginary is being pierced by the Real. Besides, her paranoia triggers and the mother starts thinking that the doctor is not an ordinary visitor; but a crazy fan of her husband. In this triggering period she has two more attacks and the house darkens more than ever from her point of view.

Then two brothers –the sons of the intruder couple- come to the house and they start quarrelling. Finally the first murder – the first fratricidal murder in the Earth- is committed in one of the rooms of the house. As a consequence, an indelible blood stain resulting from the blood rushes out from the head of younger brother, makes a stain in the parquet of the house. This blood stain on the floor will turn into a hole when mother's psychosis triggers. Therefore, it will represent the Symbolic hole of mother and will be the barometer of her psychosis against upcoming intrusions.

The fratricidal murder resulting from the fight over their father's will is the turning point for mother. It seems that she is like entering into an acute psychotic episode where she will be experiencing delusions, hallucinations and paranoia that impair her connection with reality.

After the death of the younger brother, a great number of various people is shown coming for condolence. After a while, a lot of people flood into the house and start to destruct and invade the house. The mother has another psychotic attack because of the intruders and the house darkens than ever before. In the end, their invasion ends with water splashing from a torn apart sink and the frustrated mother kicks them out of the house.

Finally when the poet's work suddenly gains a major success and all copies are sold out in one day, a growing crowd of fans starts appearing at the house. This is the last triggering factor in mother's life. After a while another group of people start to gather on the lawn and the poet is pleased with their appreciation and welcomes all of them. The woman who feels excluded tells the poet to send them away. This is the same pattern known from the first part of the film; poet accepts the people with arrogance and mother desperately begging for sending the intruders away.

3.3.9. Real Order:

As the first encounter with real order; black hole and an unobjectionable heart shaped organ behind the wall can be given. Because there is no explanation or symbolization of this 'heart-shaped thing' and its deep rhythmic beat behind the wall. The heart-shaped thing is indeed a non-Symbolic thing; not a real heart. In sum, she seems to be stuck in the Imaginary order that border the Real order and doesn't have an access to the Symbolic order.

The second real order example is the fleshy, bony mass poking out from the bottom of the bowl in the bathroom. It is again unrepresentable and non-Symbolic thing like the heart behind the walls and functions as a glimpse of the Real order. This body part that the mother finds in bathroom is an example of Lacanian 'body in bits

and pieces' and reflects the split between the inside and outside of the body. Besides, parallel to the woman's Symbolic hole, Aronofsky shows that some parts of the house is lacking; for instance the sinks aren't installed yet.

The third real order example is again darkening heart of the house and also the bleeding parquet floor. They both cannot be symbolized.

After the death of one brother, the mother cleans the bloody floor. But no matter how hard she tries, the blood on the parquet is not completely cleared. As soon as she closes her eyes, the sound of the running faucet fades away and the darkening heart of the house is seen. The woman shudders with fear. From that moment everything will be shown through the psychotic dimension of her. For instance, after a while the mother sees that the blood on the floor has increased and melts the parquet. When she touches the floor, she sees that the wooden parquet is rotten, crumples apart. She confusedly grabs a lamp and notices that there is a hole on the floor. As she digs the hole, it is getting bigger and blood pools on the back of the basement ceiling. These incidents all represent the mother's irreversible psychotic decline.

This hole on the floor is the literalization of the mother's Symbolic hole. Her prosthesis Symbolic order and imaginary compensation mechanism based on her perfection struggles collapse totally after triggering phase. In other words, she suffers a gradual banishment from the Imaginary order and has also been prevented from entering the Symbolic order, she is theoretically left nowhere to exist besides Lacan's third register – the Real.

The bleeding parquet and also the increasing flames of the boiler in the basement as an examples of real order show the degree of psychosis of mother. As the mother pokes the hole, it becomes bigger and from the hole the basement - which can be counted as the unconscious of woman- is seen. So it can be said that the mother's unconscious is trying to come to the surface and be visible. After realizing the blood on the parquet pools on the back of the basement ceiling the mother goes down to

the basement to check it out. When she turns on the light, the bulb bursts because of the blood filling up the bare bulb. Then, she illumines again with lantern she sees the walls are melting because of the blood. This is another sign that she is completely disconnected from reality. She carves the wall, a large mold breaks off the wall as if accentuating the collapsing of reality. Behind the walls there is an outward-opening door as if it is the door of Real that opens to nothing but darkness.

After the people coming for poet's garden to celebrate his last success Nina feels rejected again. However, this time unlike the first intrusion, the traces of blood stain function as a barometer of her psychosis. The mother goes and check the wooden parquet when she suspects her aggravating psychotic state. For instance, as the crowd grows outside the house, she lifts up the carpet and sees again the blood stain is back. In fact this time the hole becomes a smouldering fire -wetter and bloodier than before- as the intruders begins to come inside the house.

The people start to pose for a photo next to the bloody hole by naming the hole 'so organic'. Indeed the flames comes from the boiler in the basement which represents the unconscious of mother. It is as if the outside world is invading the inside existence of mother. But in reality it is the opposite.

3.3.10. Hallucinations, *Jouissance* Attacks and Body Mutilation

As there is a foreclosure of the primordial signifier and no repression mechanism, the mother experiences her hallucinations as if they are coming from outside world. As Aronofsky has opened the doors of the Imaginary order that borders the Real order, Symbolic cause and effect relationship has suspended and hallucinations start. Therefore, the unconscious fears of mother, her psychotic perceptions, psychotic sensitivities and irrelevant visual images are shown.

Towards the end of the film, there is nothing left of the Symbolic order. Mother's psychotic hallucinations erupt her reality how hard she fights against them. Despite her struggles of perfection, the Name-of-the-Father which is foreclosed from the Symbolic order turns back as hallucinations manifest in real order, where they are

untouched by language and structure. As an example of her hallucinations Aronofsky shows the inside of the house in which some people start to hit each other. The others continue to slice off the jamb on the doors, and yank them away. Others strip the fixtures off the walls to prove their existence on there. After a while someone tosses a Molotov cocktail and two policemen explode in flames. The mother's reality totally collapses with the intrusion of Imaginary strangers and Aronofsky shows cinematographically her full-fledged psychotic collapse and psychotic universe.

After the scenes of police troops fighting against the fanatics the mother gives birth to a son. However, the poet has stolen the baby from mother and presents him to his fans. The raving lunatic crowd tears the baby apart and eats parts of his body and then attacks the woman. These incidents can be interpreted as psychotic perceptions of mother. Because her hallucinations are the visual depiction of her unconscious breaking into her conscious, cinematically conveyed by the parallel image of her body breaking apart – indicative of the psychotic individual whose symptoms manifest from a divided subject who is struggling for, but failing at, an integrated identity.

In the end, mother gets furious with the death of her son, takes a glass from a broken window and stabs it towards the crazy people and keeps killing as many as she can. She accuses the poet of being a murderer; but he wants her to forgive the crowd for killing the baby. Mother accusing him 'insane' rushes through the basement, cracks open the fuel tank with a wrench and sets the whole house on fire. A zoom out shows the explosion of the house and the nature around it. Everything is ruined and destroyed, except the poet. After a 'fade to white' only two left alive; burnt mother and unburnt poet. Seeing the scars on his face are healing mother asks him what is he and she adds that she is not enough for him. The poet answers as: "It's not your fault. Nothing is ever enough. I couldn't create if it was. And I have to. That's what I do. That's what I am. And now I must try it all again." Then he takes her 'to the beginning' and the last thing he still wants is the love contained in her chest. So the

poet takes the mother's gem-stone heart which is the same crystal formation and put it on a stand.

The rest of the film that portrays a rejuvenation of the house, emerging a new body in bed and birth of a woman/mother calling out to her husband is same with the opening of the film. A new cycle begins with the same creator, same house but a different woman. Aronofsky on the one hand portrays the transformation of nature, on the other depicts a woman's psychotic hallucinations.



CONCLUSION

In my analysis of Aronofsky's 'Perfection and Body Trilogy', I started with the investigation of the perfection and body mutilation issue. My first aim was to put the body mutilation act as a result of perfection. However, as I read about madness/psychosis I saw that perfection is not the reason of body mutilation; on the contrary perfection can be seen as one of the compensatory tools that psychotic inclined subjects like the protagonists of *Pi*, *Black Swan* and *Mother* refer to stay away psychotic breakdowns resulting with body mutilation. The reason of my inference that perfection is one of the compensatory mechanism against madness takes shape step by step during this thesis.

Firstly when I examine the Lacan's three order I saw that if the dissolution of Oedipus complex which enables the entry into the Symbolic isn't accomplished, to put it in another way, if there is an inability to access to the Symbolic order, then psychotic dimension comes to the fore as a consequence. The reason of this failure of transition from Imaginary order to Symbolic order is the rejection/foreclosure of the primordial signifier/ the Name-of-the-Father by the child who is in the stage of dissolution of Oedipus complex. The first and most important consequence of the foreclosure of the primordial signifier is gaining a psychotic structure like Schreber whose case is examined both Freud and Lacan.

The primordial signifier is very crucial because it starts the signification chain in language as it is linked to the mother's desire as signified. But since desire is not a knowable concept and the mother's desire has no equivalent; so the Name-of-the-Father as a signifier doesn't have a signified. Therefore, as a primordial signifier, the Name-of-the-Father remains as the first substitution tool to which other signifiers are connected, thus leads to flexibility of language and association of ideas. In brief the acceptance of the primordial signifier enable the transition to Symbolic order however its rejection amounts to psychotic structure. The people who have psychotic structure can live normally for years like Schreber, be successful in their profession unless they encounter triggering factors that they

cannot interpret and symbolize. They prefer to form connections and relationships based on Imaginary order as the Symbolic is assimilated and imaginized for them.

Indeed the second consequence of foreclosure of this primordial signifier is that as the Imaginary register cannot be supplanted by the Symbolic order; the subject is stuck in the Imaginary level. When I examine the Aronofsky's 'Perfection and Body Trilogy', there are abundance of examples of Imaginary order; mirror reflections, doppelgängers, identification with role models, delusions and hallucinations. Besides, the Real order glimpses via white voids, unsymbolizable organ shape things, unrepresentable bleeding holes and alike. In contrast, these elements which could be associated with the Imaginary and real order, the Symbolic order is seen as very limited in all three films and what's more the characters don't regard Symbolic interdictions. They prefer to stay in dual relationships, don't need any Symbolic recognition by others. But above all, they disavow, more precisely reject the advices and orders of the figures (their mentors, director, creator) that function as the Name-of-the-Father and take their own ways. These facts resemble the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, hence the psychotic structure.

In addition, the characters attribute specific and fixed meanings to certain things unlike the logic of language/Symbolic order. More importantly they want to literalize the meaning of the primordial signifiers which indeed have no meaning. In sum, the rejection of the obligation of signifying function of the primordial signifier without being significant seem to prevent the characters to be able to stay in the Symbolic order and psychotic position inevitably becomes a current issue for them. Therefore, they are obliged to find compensatory mechanisms to overcome the deficiencies of Symbolic order because "the Symbolic is the structure that informs and gives a form to the Reality that we experience. The Symbolic is the specific structure of signifiers that creates meaning in the world and that gives us a sense of identity. Without the Symbolic order, nothing would have any significance at all. It provides a common background for us to interact with each other" (McGowan, 2015: 31).

The compensatory mechanism that the characters of 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' is perfectionism. Other mechanisms are identification with role models, imitation, dedication oneself to a profession, making an invention and alike. Indeed the perfection acts of characters incorporate most of these mechanism as we witness in all three films. Therefore, psychoanalytically speaking the most important conclusion to be derived from this thesis is the characters' struggle for resorting to perfectionism as a compensation against the inefficacy of Symbolic order is very valuable since for the human subject there is no home outside a Symbolic system.

Another conclusion that can be obtained is that Aronofsky prefers to show the Imaginary order bereft of the fantasy frame. In other words Aronofsky as an *auteur* doesn't reduce the Imaginary order to the domain of specular images of wholeness in these three films. In fact, he brings the spectator "face to face with that side of the Imaginary that borders on the Real" (Eisenstein, 2004: 22). Maybe that's why Aronofsky uses hallucinations as the indicators of madness/psychotic breakdown in a manner to show this side of Imaginary in his trilogy.

Apart from the struggle for perfection, the films of 'Perfection and Body Trilogy' all share, is the inner battles of protagonists that turn out body mutilation in each film. The bodies of characters become the battlefield of libido that cannot attach itself to Symbolic signifiers. When the compensatory function of perfectionism is disrupted by some agents of Symbolic order, the bodies of characters are invaded by libido resulting with self-mutilation.

In my analysis of films, I analysed pi number, the ballet director and poet as the primordial signifiers/ the Name-of-the-Father that don't have an inherent meaning in as much as the primordial signifier is nothing but only a function. Therefore, as examples of primordial signifier; pi number, the ballet director Thomas and poet don't have any significance; they only help signifying. However, the characters try to find certain and absolute meanings under the veil of these primordial signifiers. In *Pi*, the protagonist Max concludes that the pattern in pi number is the true name of God and vivification of God. In *Black Swan*, the ballet director has a God status

for Nina. In *Mother*, the poet reveals himself as creator/God from the mother's point of view. However, Aronofsky shows the nothingness beyond and beneath these primordial signifiers via the blinding white voids shown as fades to white. If these three inferences are taken together, it could be concluded that the idea of God implies no significance, it is only a function according to Aronofsky's 'Perfection and Body Trilogy'. In the last instance Aronofsky tries to imply that attributing certain meanings to God is only a psychotic fantasy and far from the Realities of Symbolic world.



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