"BLACK SWAN" BY DARREN ARONOFSKY OR DECOMPOSITION OF A BEING IN THE CULTURE AND ITS REINTEGRATION IN THE ANIMALISTIC

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Abstract

Using the example of the film Black Swan (2010), directed by Darren Aronofsky, this paper will question the relationship between man and animal. We will show the basic characteristics of Darren Aronofsky's directing style, and in so doing we will warn that the works of film art are often not to be seen exclusively in the context of structural components. The centre of our interest is the questioning of relations between black-white, culture-nature, man-animal, with all of which we will try to show that the tragic fate of the heroine is primarily associated with the repressive and narcissistic moment which greatly marks the life of a modern man.

Key words: *Darren Aronofsky, body, the collective unconscious, archetype, C. G. Jung, black swan*

1. INTRODUCTION, OR HOW TO INTERPRET A FILM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ANIMALISTIC

The study of the relationship between man and animal in various products of multi-cultural production is a complex and demanding task that opens up a number of issues and problems. How to access the interpretation of animals in a cinematographic work?, does the animal appear in such a work of art as a character, as a metaphor or a symbol?, does it have influence on genre specification of the work?, etc., - all of these questions at the same time open up a number of different, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary opportunities for discussion. Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that methodological diversity is one of the fundamental characteristics of cultural animalism.[1] During the different historical, cultural and stylistic periods the animals were and indeed are present in abundance in different areas of art, but they have rarely occupied the central place of systematic scientific studies. The above remark especially relates to research in the field of social sciences and humanities in the Croatian language area. In that matter, only a few domestic and translated works of scientific and literary animalism have been published that contribute to the importance of access to the study of cultural issues from the perspective of animal studies.[2] Animal studies in our country are still under-represented and present a real challenge for researchers from different scientific fields.[3]

However, our task is to find ways of organizing systematic cultural history of animals in order to prove that the human existence has always been related to wildlife. Animals are beings close to humans both psychologically and biologically, and they have also been present in all forms of human existence, as

[1] Look for more detail about the problem of methodological approaches in the field of, for example, literary animalism in: Susan McHugh, *Jedna ili više animalistika?*, Zarez, X/230, 2nd May 2008., pages 12-14, or in the original work: *One or Several Literary Animal Studies?*, Susan McHugh (Department of English, University of New England) at http://www. h-net.org/~animal/ruminations_ mchugh.html.

[2] The following publications are included: *Cultural Animalism, Anthology of works at the symposium held on 29th September 1997*, Split, ed. Nenad Cambi and Nikola Visković, Literary Circle, Split, 1998.; P. Singer, *Liberation of Animals*, Ibis Graphics, Zagreb, 1998; J. M. Coetze, *Life of Animals*, AGM, Zagreb, 2004; Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, Genesis, Zagreb, 2005; *Cultural Bestiary* and *Literary Animal, Cultural Bestiary Part II,* the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb, 2007; magazine *Treća* 1/2008 of the Centre for Women's Studies on ecofeminism and animalism (cf. Visković 2009: 8); N. Visković, *Cultural Zoology*, Jesenski and Turk Edition, Zagreb, 2009. The above should also involve *Zarez – A biweekly for cultural and social happenings,* which mostly publishes journalistic texts in the field of cultural animalism.

[3] This is an area that, though through the back door, is entering the national system of higher education. For now there are no independent study programs, but there are courses that are mostly held within the Department of Cultural Studies, designed on the principle of study of man and animals. At this point, the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research should be added, which carries out various scientific and expert projects in the field of study of the relationship between man and animal, cultural animalism, etc.

well as in cultural activities (Visković 2009, p. 10). There is no comprehensive study in the Croatian scientific literature on the relation man-animal, for example, in the theoretical systems of modern economics, sociology, linguistics, political science, journalism, mediology, etc. (cf. ibid., 11). We will, therefore, agree with Nikola Visković and say that it is time to leave the strict anthropocentric approaches to nature. Researchers in the field of social, liberal, and other sciences should notice the importance of the role of the animalistic, or they should access the reinterpretation of national cultural canon from the perspective of animal studies. Aware of the fact that this call may be dangerous and subversive, particularly because of the potentially open political debate, but also the one of religious nature - we deem it necessary precisely because our pre-cultural history is animalistic. What is more, we have put aside this fact during evolution intentionally or not, allowing, thereby, consciously or unconsciously, that animals occupy a very important place in our narrow living environment.

In the following part of this paper we will focus on the position, role and importance of animals in works of cinematic art. It is not our intention to use this opportunity to give a historical overview of development of animalistic film, but our goal is to show that the interpretation of certain works of particular historical and cultural periods contribute to, among other things, the creation of a comprehensive image of the observed period. Thus, the works of this kind can be considered basic for further studies which are then capable to present the characteristics of a particular director's filmography, or more widely, a certain stylistic period. The centre of our discussion will be a movie *Black Swan* directed by Darren Aronofsky, because we consider it highly incentive to examine the relation between man and animal.[4] The film confirms the view of Jonathan Burt, according to which the diversity of animalistic characters provides ways in which film reflects the cultural need for representation of animal characters, reminding us at the same time of the abundance of animalistic images, as well as their symbolic potential (Burt 2002, p. 20). However, it should be noted that, due to its specific and heterogeneous directing style, *Black Swan* cannot be unambiguously determined by a genre, therefore it cannot be defined solely in terms of animalistic films.[5] We would rather say that through the symbolism, a viewer 'is pulled' into the world of the unconscious, into the natural world, and finally into the animalistic world. Just to mention briefly that the director found the inspiration for this film in Dostoyevsky's novella *The Double* (1846) in which the author shows the madness, hysteria and anxiety through the main character, Golyadkin. Preoccupied with his psychological characteristics Dostoyevsky delves deep into the mind of his hero, presenting him as a fragmented, non-unique, non-permanent identity (Zvedeniuk 2012, p. 110), and this is exactly where we should look for a possible link to the heroine of our film.

[4] With its topic, directing style and mise-en-scène, this film represents an ambitious joint of European art film and Hollywood melodrama (Skorin-Kapov 2015, p. 66).

The release of the film was on 30th November 2010, in New York City. Director: Darren Aronofsky, Music by: Clint Mansell. The film was awarded with many prizes and acknowledgements, some of which include: the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role (Natalie Portman) 2011, the Golden Globe for Best Actress (drama, Natalie Portman) 2011, Screen Actors Guild Award for the Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role (Natalie Portman), 2011, BAFTA Award for the Best Actress in a Leading Role (Natalie Portman) 2011, Independent Spirit Award for Best Film 2011, Premio Marcello Mastroianni (Mila Kunis) 2010, Independent Spirit Award for Best Director (Darren Aronofsky) and Independent Spirit Award for Best Cinematography (Matthew Libatique) 2011, etc. (see: https://www.google.hr/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=fMc9WOWHJYWu8wf2pI_YCQ#q=black+swan+nagrade&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LSz9U3sMw2NUsy15LNTrbSTyxPLEqBkPHlmXl5qUVWYE4xANIGGg4tAAAA, accessed on 29th November 2016). More about the specifics of Darren Aronofsky's poetics, especially the characteristics of some of his other commercial films (e.g. *Pi, Requiem for a Dream*, *The Fountain*, *The Wrestler*, *Noah*, see in, for example: Skorin-Kapov, 2015 or Laine 2015).

[5] While exploring the specifics of animalistic film, and looking at the film story as a metaphor of human life, but also as a lesson on how to build relationships with animals, Hirschamn and Sanders found that this type of film provides a variation of several most frequent topics. For example, encouraging dominant concepts of gender roles, portraying and encouraging happy family pictures, dogs as surrogate parents and guardians of children, support to cultural values and equality in a democratic society. Likewise, these films portray three different types of animals: useful animal (farm animal), which is often treated as an object, a wild animal (shown as friendly, dangerous or as food) which presents nature beyond human control, and pets (shown in the context of humans, have a voice and most often their gender position is determined) (Lerner & Kalof, 1999, p. 568).

However, in our further presentation we will focus on the element of the animalistic which especially attracts Aronofsky and which he uses to show one possible exit option from the oppression of the modern era. Finally, we aim to make this paper a step forward and closer to those Croatian authors who advocate for the promotion of cultural animalism and we wish to contribute to the popularization of the discipline in the context of national, but also foreign academic community.

2. FILM SYNTAX OPENS UP THE WORLD OF THE ANIMALISTIC

According to Burt, it is symptomatic that many papers about animals have a tendency towards homogenization of cultural structures associated with the animals while at the same time the animal appears as a floating signifier (Burt 2002, p. 27), so, as something which only seeks to be a sign, and finally the carrier of meaning. A large number of authors write about an animal in the movie from a general, or rather, from a cultural perspective while ignoring the more precise positioning of the natural and animalistic world in the film world. In that sense, Jonathan Burt made a big step forward with his book *Animals in Film* (2002) by introducing animal film in the historic outline, hence his book can truly be considered as the basic literature in this area.

However, it is interesting to pause at Burt's interpretation of an animal character. He believes that animal character cannot be generalized, or reduced under the abstract theory of semiotics. As he continues, animal cannot be reduced to a sign that would be equal to any other sign, primarily because the animal is a carrier of specific connotations, especially in cases where its social role is emphasized, or where its role is related to, for instance, various medical purposes and circumstances (cf. ibid., 29). But, there are also numerous films where animals should be seen as a metaphor, metonymy, or a textual being. According to Burt, these are the so called *rhetorical animals,* which should be analysed in a significantly different way. In this regard, we hold that semiotic instruments can be a very potent area for deeper reflection, which then spreads into wider psychological or cultural considerations.

As the starting point of the paper is not research of the film semiotics problematics as a direction which, according to Turković, represents speculative theory of film, or a *new general philosophy of the film*,[6] we will stay within the limits of this theory just as much as we need it for further explanation of the central topic of the paper. For this reason, we defer to the opinion of Hrvoje Turković who says that a theoretical method postulated by semiotics is on the one hand structural (i.e., it searches for the structure of some relevant factors in a particular film), and on the other hand it is cultural (cf. ibid., Turković). With our approach we try, through structural characteristics, to reach out to the broader, cultural connotations. In this sense, we will focus our attention on editing, then on the concept of the body as a sign that rises to the level of symbol, and then on the concept of the unconscious that finally brings us closer to the world of animal.[7] We shall find that editing on the structural level, and the body and the unconscious on the cultural level, are both focused on the contrasting between good-evil, white-black, conscious-unconscious, cultural-animalistic, in order to create a unique image of a woman who is close to the natural and animal due to her psychological and biological characteristics.[8]

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[6] Cf. http://elektronickeknjige.com/knjiga/turkovic-hrvoje/strukturalizam-semiotika-metafilmologija/4-semiotika-i-filmologija/

[7] We will not pause here to discuss the definitions of sign that are offered by de Saussure, Peirce, Sanders, and so on. However, we will stop at general quotes by Hrvoje Turković which point to the importance of recognizing the object as a sign. A similar procedure, namely, is also applied in this paper. Why do we highlight some elements of film syntax, and others not? why are they the carriers of meaning? Answers to these questions will not be found within exclusively semiotic considerations, but more broadly, in the context of cultural questioning of various aspects of the human body and psyche that afterwards open the door to the animal. Therefore, as Turković says: *A sign means empirically distinguishing phenomena. Now, there are many, many types of empirically distinguishing phenomena. By distinguishing, a sign is just one discernible object among others. Semiotics is interested to determine 'what is it' that makes some distinguishing phenomena a sign while the others are not a sign, what conditions should an empirical phenomenon meet in order to be a sign* (Turković, ibid.).

[8] Generally speaking, characteristics of Aronofsky's directing style are based on erasing the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Thus he creates a unique style that simultaneously varies in different characteristics of the genre, from science fiction, psychological thriller, melodrama, fantasy to horror movie (Laine 2015, p. 4).

Furthermore, we will agree with the thought that the goal of art (including the film) is not a simple copying of an object, but the aim is to make that same object the carrier of meaning (Lotman 1976, p. 16). *Art is not merely transferring the world with lifeless automatism of mirrors - it transforms images of the world into signs and thus fills the world with meanings. Signs cannot be without meaning, nor can they lack information* (cf. ibid., 15). Therefore, the basics of film semiotics figure - editing, camera movements, sequence shots, the relationship between image and speech, sequences - are potential carriers of meaning which explicitly communicate with the viewer, as well as with the relevant cultural moment. The study of the ways in which film communicates, i.e. in what way it affects the viewer, his cognitive and affective mechanisms – makes the basis of both the semiotic approach to the study of film, and the basic analytical concept that we apply to the film *Black Swan*. We could conclude that the semiotics of film is largely focused on the viewer, on his ability to 'read out' the meaning and inference. For example, the observed film can prove Lotman's claim according to which everything that belongs to art carries meaning, or other information. The power of *Black Swan* lies in the diversity of structures, complexly organized and concentrated information, which affects the totality of various intellectual and emotional structures that are transmitted to the viewer. It creates deep psychological experiencing of the heroine; her twin and neurotic nature leaves a strong impression on the viewer and has the power to inspire thought in many different directions. However, (we will see this also in further text), the obvious heterogeneity of the film can be discussed within the context of fundamental semiotic settings. The causes of complexity should be sought in the story, or narrative, which lies in those elements that Lotman holds as the very nature of the film.

Continuing with the above, we will accept the view that the film is a synthesis of two narrative tendencies - image ('moving picture') and verbal (Lotman 1976, p. 37). At the bottom of each narrative there is an act of communication which includes: a) a transmitter of information (addresser), b) the recipient of information (addressee), c) a channel of communication between them and d) a note or text (cf. ibid., 36). In the movie *Black Swan*, the fourth component, a note or text, is particularly interesting. We are, as we have previously indicated, interested in the latter component, so it will not hurt to recall the story whose contours Aronofsky used to build his film. Namely, prince Siegfried grew to the moment of man's initiation, and on his birthday he had to choose the woman of his life. He desperately wandered through the woods and thought about what to do. Suddenly, he saw a flock of swans. He grabbed his bow and just as he wanted to fire an arrow, a swan gave him a sign that it is not an animal but a woman trapped in bird's body by the spell of a dreadful wizard. Siegfried fell in love with a beautiful swan. However, the wizard turned out to be more cunning than the prince could expect, so he planted him his own daughter who was by all means the same as the white swan. But, this swan was black. Siegfried did not see the difference (which is no surprise, since princesses sometimes dress in white and sometimes in black), so he announced the wedding with the wizard's daughter. He soon realized that he had made a mistake and that his love will stay imprisoned in a swan's body forever, so he commits suicide together with his swan lover in the lake of tears.[9]

This story is at the basis of *Swan Lake* ballet by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, one of the most famous works in the history of performing arts[10] and it is still considered to be *canonical base of white ballet while the music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is* (as) *unbearably cute and beautiful and reaches even the hardest ear* (ibid., Jergović). According to Jergović, it is puzzling how such a story is so deeply rooted in our everyday lives, and it is particularly interesting that it has been educating our civilization for so long and persistently (ibid.). Aronofsky is also aware of the above mentioned, so he builds his film on the contours of myth and ballet, and the film is polysyllabic in terms of communication due to previously listed components. He plays with intertextuality and intermediality, so the fairy tale and ballet combine in a new form, that of a film. These extratextual links are directly projected on intertextual ones (and vice versa) which makes *Black Swan* show its affiliation to ideological struggle, culture, and art of modern times. It shows us its connection with the different sides of life, which are not exclusively cinematic, and that is the path that produces a variety of meanings.

[9] Source: http://www.jergovic.com/subotnja-matineja/cajkovski-kako-ostati-bijeli-labud/. Accessed on 24th November 2016.

[10] *Swan Lake* ballet was premiered on 20th February 1877 at the Bolshoi Theatre.

But, let's return for a moment to the communicative features of the film. The basis of Aronofsky's film is the word, or a myth that represents a classic story about the struggle between good and evil and that crucial moment permeates simultaneously both the image element of the film, but also the musical one. Regardless of conclusions through our hasty overview that the story of this film is predictable and a bit worn out (the classic story of the ballet, the hard work and training, bloody toes, discipline of dancers, etc.) – it is on the very example of *Black Swan* that we can prove that film editing truly is one of the key moments in the creation of the art world, as evidenced by the fact that this is one of the key figures in the semiotics of film in general.[11] Because, according to Pudovkin, editing is the language of a film director. *What we can say about the living language, we can also say about editing: there is a word – a fraction of recorded film, an image and a sentence – a combination of these fractions* (Pudovkin in Carrol 2001 p. 3). Regardless of the above stated claims being often criticized in the literature,[12] let's just stick to the basic thesis that editing, in a certain sense, is the director's language, it is the way the director organizes the story inviting viewers to induction and inference.[13] Generally speaking, the centre of Aronofsky's directing style includes extremely tight framing, the use of *snorricam*, alternation between extremely large and extremely long shots, with the aim of creating the impression of isolation (Laine 2015, p. 2). We can see the heroine separated from the outside world, Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) enters the viewer's world step by step, presenting a drama of her fragile, (self)destructive being.

It is possible to observe in *Black Swan* the dominance of so-called *global contextual editing* on examples of elliptical interruption in the scene in medias res (Carrol 2001, p. 7). This procedure is manifested precisely in those parts of the story in which Nina is faced with her other "self", her dark/black side. We are talking about the scenes in which she loses contact with reality and she faces a vulnerability of her own physical body (self-harm), as well as the scenes that suggest a sexual innuendo. These scenes are particularly interesting because they can be interpreted as a result of Nina's repressed sexuality, which are now explicitly calling for debauchery in which she basically becomes an object. Emotional and sexual frigidity is a result of her neurotic nature and obsessive-compulsive disorder, and whose causes should certainly be sought in a relationship with her mother, Erica Sayers (Barbara Hershey). Her sexuality becomes her suffering, and, finally, Nina becomes a victim of herself.

The director shows this excellently by juxtaposing a silent scene in the train in which Nina is approached by an elderly man who calls for sex with mime and gesture. With that moment, the director introduces a cut for thinking and enhances the viewer's inductive activity, emphasizing at the same time the effectiveness of narrative.

[11] According to Carrol, editing is communication practice based on the cut. It encourages viewers to the conclusion about the meaning that we are provided by a series of shots (Carrol 2001, p. 13). *The foundations for inference are diverse and numerous, and include several types of narrative bases, sensory and thematic comparisons and contrasts, as well as linguistic and conceptual evocation. (...) The viewer will not interpret the explanation, he will come to it through inference. If there is no explanation, the viewer will assess the editing as meaningless or as a mistake* (ibid.). It is therefore not difficult to conclude that editing is a key point for understanding and explaining what the viewer sees on the big screen. Thanks to the editing the viewer is able to express the meaning which is closely related with the current cultural moment.

[12] See for example the mentioned Carrol's article.

[13] Eisenstein says that editing is a combining procedure of shots unique in their meaning and neutral in their context, into an intellectual context and sequence (1992, p. 129). To Eisenstein, editing is an idea that arises from collision of independent shots – even the ones that are mutually contradictory. In contrast to Pudovkin, who sees editing as epic principle, Eisenstein considers it to be dramatic principle (understood at the level of form, rather than contents or plot) (cf. ibid., 140).



Figure 1. Facing one's own self.[14]



Figure 2. A pervert showing obscene gestures.[15]

Contextual style is thus used to achieve a dense *experience of the psychology of the character or his experiences by imitating the ease with which the mind moves from the present to the memory, anticipation, desire or anxiety* (ibid.). The way of presenting the heroine is further enhanced by context ellipticity which leads us to conclude that these scenes *belong to another time or to the imagination as they represent the character's thought processes* (ibid.). We could finally determine that the entire film is outlined somewhere between reality and imagination of the heroine which greatly complicates its genre specification. It is interesting to note how different Internet sources classify this film in different genres. In some places we find a label of drama, thriller, and in some others, a horror or psychological film. Of course, the psychological moment plays a key role in its understanding, but we will agree with Laine and say that this director's films elude particular genre definitions, they are genres and styles completely independent and unique (Laine 2015, p. 5). Accordingly, we can conclude that narrative editing (although it does not have to and it is not its fundamental determinant) develops in terms of psychology, or *imitation of mental processes of the characters* (ibid.). Using cuts, as one of the most potent means of narrative editing, Aronofsky shows everything that could or should be. Cuts are in principle used to reduce redundancy, in order to show two opposing worlds, so in that way Aronofsky transmits great information richness of the film work.

However, Aronofsky uses cuts in another sense as well, that is to change the modality. This opens up a space to highlight the moral significance and complexity of his story. In other words, it is those specific processes of editing that bring to life those segments of the film that allow us to find a moment in which we return to nature and even identify with it, and within which the heroine takes on the characteristics of animal. Namely, the viewer meets two Ninas: the hard-working, miserable, pale girl under the strong control of her mother who wants to accomplish her dreams at any cost; and the other one, wild, dark, animalistic girl who revives with the help of her director, producer, and teacher – Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel). Thomas appears in 'this second story' as a kind of leitmotif who has the task to introduce Nina into the world of passion and instincts, and bring her closer to nature. Such methods force the viewer into a constant comparative analysis of these two Ninas. So, Aronofsky uses contrast as the means for understanding interpolation, and this contrast is thematic and is based on the eternal battle between two opposing forces that are, in principle, deeply rooted in the culture in general. The cuts in the film allow thematic return of the repressed, the collective unconscious, which ultimately opens up possibilities for its interpretation from a broader perspective in which the animalistic figure becomes the dominant one.

Accordingly, contrasting transfers into the symbolism through which the main character can be interpreted as the one line that takes us into the animal world. Generally speaking, this method is particularly interesting because it introduces abstract concepts in the viewer's consciousness with complete absence of any auxiliary or intermediate means (cf. 1992, p. 126). From all of the above

[14] Source: www.pinterest.com

[15] Source: http://vigilantcitizen.com/moviesandtv/the-occult-interpretation-of-the-movie-black-swan-and-its-message-on-show-business/

mentioned, we accept Laine's opinion according to which relations between the viewer and the film represent a reciprocal and joint creative process, which is deeply emotionally presented.

Finally, editing reflects the director's basic intention – reinterpretation of the world's mythical state which questions space-time continuum. In this regard, the category of time is especially interesting, as well as alternating of white and black Nina, black and white swan, exchange of past and present, pre-cultural age where humans were far closer to their animal origin than they are today. In this sense Aronofsky suggests that our modern age, which is centered in the area of language and culture, is in fact neurotic and narcissistic. Return to the nature means the return of archaic human, a human who lived in compliance with his instincts. The consciousness of such a man, just like Nina's, *is composed of darkness and spots of brightly lit places where the intensity of mythical thinking is collected* (Biti 1981, p. 80). It is for this reason that the director concentrates on a small number of events which create a single impression that reflects the central law of the film and the world in general.

3. DECOMPOSITION OF THE BODY AND CREATION OF A NEW UNITY

In general, animalistic films have some typical basic motif features, but also many elements of plot, such as, for example, overcoming the loss, family problems, the reintegration of identity (Burt 2002, p. 55), which is repeatedly present in the film *Black Swan*. Aronofsky reinterprets the mythical, well-known story which is at the bottom of one of the most beautiful ballets of all time, and he does it from the point of view of postmodern image of the world which explores complex family problems (the mentioned Nina's relationship with her mother), attitude towards your own body, decomposition of that same body, as well as the decomposition of identity in general.

Darren Aronofsky's directing style joins the works of those filmmakers who gather under an especially popular phrase over the last twenty years – *cinema (film) of the body* (Laine 2015, p. 2).[16] The stated aesthetics can best be explained as an affective, direct and sensual, while fundamental characteristics of these films consist of deep questioning of the body, immersing into the body and thus enabling the affective sharing of film event. Films of this kind do not ask the viewer to identify with the film heroes, but require a plunge into the film's living space, which then causes affective responses (ibid.). In the sense of questioning the body, according to Laine, Aronofsky is a very peculiar film director. His films are packed with tensions and conflict arising from the relations of body-mind, body (self-harm)-cognitive disorders (ibid.). We are, however, interested in the way Aronofsky presents the drama of decomposition of the body and mind of the main character, whereas we find especially interesting the fact that the heroine can experience a transformation in the moment in which she approaches the natural element, or the animalistic.[17] Body and mind of Nina Sayers are in a sort of proportional relationship, they experience a simultaneous meltdown, with the aim of establishing a new unity – a strong one, focused on the unconscious, passion and instincts. Such a fragile body that is exposed to extremely exhausting trainings, starvation, and self-harming becomes a strong one which is, in the end able to undergo transformation. Aronofsky shows us that Nina basically lives her own body, and the viewer can exactly through the body understand her actions, thoughts, emotions, traumas, etc.

It is interesting in this context to point out that the nature, where culture takes away rationality, involves the emotions, body, passion, animalistic, uncivilized, experience, irrational, in short all that excludes reason belongs to nature (Plumwood 2003, p. 19). In this respect, women are often equated with nature, and men with culture so according to this, mind belongs to a man, or a dominant position in the civilized world. However, the woman's closeness to the natural does not have *a priori* negative connotations according to which she would be entitled to subordinate position in society. Hence, Nina's connection and tendency towards the animalistic will not be seen as an instrument of oppression, or the way in

[16] The phrase is mostly used to mark the aesthetic style of French filmmakers, such as Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis, Philippe Grandrieux, Gaspar Noé, Marina de Van, etc. It is equally encouraging in explaining directing styles, e.g. of Michael Haneke, David Lynch, Lars von Trier, etc. (Laine 2015, p. 2).

[17] Let us mention here that frequent problems of Aronofsky's films often tend to focus on the issues of mathematics, madness, hallucinations, obsessions, social anxiety, psychosis, schizophrenia but also neuroscience.

which a woman's position in a patriarchal world is defined as the one of less valuable, subordinate being. But, we will accept Plumwood's view who thinks that the establishment of these relations (man – culture, woman – nature) is traditional and somewhat conservative, so we are primarily interested in man as a being who simultaneously belongs to both worlds and who develops various relationships with the animalistic in modern environment. Our opinion is therefore close to the one of Susan Griffin's where a woman carries and treasures the richness of the affective (and thus the natural) which does not deprive her of the possibility of equal, objective and logical thinking.[18]

Nina is a being which unites culture and nature, reason and passion. Culture is an oppressive instrument that prevents the realization of her art, and it grows on the foundations of prohibitions and laws. Nina is a prisoner of that same culture, she is a prisoner of her own body which she then, justifiably, has to destroy. In contrast, it is the animalistic that allows the realization of fantasies, spontaneity and freedom. Therefore, we connect the moment of re-creation and new birth to the moment of returning to nature. The above stated is confirmed by the position of Beth Macintyre (Winona Ryder) who is at the same time a symbol of ideal and trauma, she represents everything Nina wants to become (a top dancer who everybody admires and envies) and what she will necessarily become (an old, rejected, incapable, worn-out body). Aronofsky thus sketches the body as an object of competition, as *an object of desire between conflicting forces* (Brstilo 2009, p. 296), as a place that reflects the sociological, cultural and political image of testing the forces of the weak and the strong.

In *Black Swan,* the culture prevents the progress of the heroine, it is actually a postmodernist painting scattering physical body that strives for new, different reconstruction and re-union, which is realized by transformation into an animal, i.e. a swan. In this way, the director sends a suggestive message on the need to return to some of our previous states, into the periods during which our lives and our consciousness used to be closer to nature and natural, than it is the case today, in a time when the culture writes its goals and practices onto the body, and in a time where each body has a pre-determined position. This leads us to the view of perceiving the body as potential state and revising process, and it is shown that analysis of the body always enters the society and culture within which it operates (cf. Crossley in Brstilo 2009, p. 291). *Body is the centre of the storm, a constant place of stress ... Everything revolves around the body and feels from its point of view. Experience of the world has always been in line with our bodies as a centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest* (James in Laine 2015: 11). Our bodies, as Laine continues, are a place of intentionality, consciousness, emotional and reflexive orientation in the world (ibid.).

In other words, today's man is trapped in a form and if only he could get out of his own thoughts, out of his own body, he could fully comprehend the world (Eagleton 2003, p. 24). Therefore, Nina is presented from the perspective of post-modern world where it is impossible to imagine the individual as a complete, centered, stable and complete self (ibid., Hall, p. 27). White swan represents the animal of culture, the black one symbolizes the animal of sky and while the former is weak and prone to destruction, the latter rises with his power and strength.[19] Nina's body, therefore, is a place of fight between the earthly and otherworldly, it offers ways to understand and learn about the world, it offers shelter, sensory security and ensures passion (cf. ibid., p. 82). Because of these characteristics, it functions as a link between culture and nature at the same time offering certainty and subtlety (ibid.). The postmodern paradox drama is acted on the contours of the body of modern man, which Aronofsky explicitly depicts in a scene which shows the penetration of black feathers on Nina's back and that suggests her final transformation into a black swan.

[18] This thought is emphasized throughout the book *Woman and Nature – The Roaring Inside Her* (1980), in which the author tries to explain the logic of civilized (man's) world, and she does it with the reverse logic, while reaching for associativity, intuition, or the uncivilized part of ourselves.

[19] Aronofsky maps a principle that is present in folklore, and in mythical stories, according to which the physically weaker animals are shown wiser and able to beat the much larger and stronger than themselves (cf. Handoo 2005, p. 35). Thus Nina will replace her poor physical body with a stronger and more resilient one and will rise above the culture and above all the determining factors of the earthly.



Figure 3. We follow the process of bestialization on the body.[20]

On the one hand, a body is shown as an entity that seeks integrity, organization and uniqueness, as a form which is directly related to consciousness and culture, and on the other hand it dissolves, it strives for reorganization and decomposition with the aim of creating a new, different form. A man is a being who has the ability of constant transformation, it is created in pain and is destroyed by pain, but through imagination it can transform suffering and pain in the material and/or spiritual gain. Fragmentation of Nina's body is carried out at the level of metaphorical reconstruction of substitution not only of the physical, but also of the psychological. Precisely, therefore, we consider that her body represents something *on which something needs to be done* (Merleau-Ponty ibid., p. 83), it must be withdrawn, alienated, (self)ruined, separated from consciousness in order to seek reintegration with nature and animalistic in the depths of the unconscious.[21] Since, as Thomas Leroy says in the film, perfection is not only to control, perfection is to loosen, *if you surprise yourself, you can surprise the audience. Transcend! (Black Swan)*. Through Nina's body, which is actually a body in pain and suffering, Aronofsky sketches the way back to self, nature, animal. He shows a human as a being who is forced to break with the traditional attitude towards the animalistic, who is forced to definitely break with the Cartesian dualism and who, faced with his own desire exceeds the limits of the wild (or returns to them) in an effort to establish some new hierarchies. Therefore, we can say that the film sends a very clear message about the need to replace the mind-body dualism with the nature-man dualism. Following such thinking body will no longer have a crucial role in understanding the human position in the modern world. Point of view will move from the body to the animalistic which is part of the human mind and which, because of its specificity, must redefine relations with the nature that surrounds it, with another man, the culture and the world in general.[22]

[20] Source: www.mundodvd.com

[21] This is also explained by interpretations of body and conscience being in a tight relationship. In the moment when one component is shaken, the other one also suffers. The pain is the best proof of the above stated, since when the body goes through pain, a man's psychism gets struck by a sequence of negative events, and vice versa.

[22] For more detail on the mind-nature dualism see in Plumwood 2003, pp. 120-141.



Figure 4. Final transformation into the black swan.[23]

4. THE UNCONSCIOUS CHERISHES THE ANIMALISTIC

Reintegration of Nina's identity is possible only after identifying with the animal in herself. In other words, we can see the process of bestialization which is initiated by the unconscious, showing us, in Burt's words, that the animals are a unique initiator of fantasy and they have the power to fully complete the human being. And it is not important that the animal is artificial and raised to the level of metaphor in an observed film - its role is twofold. On the one hand, it represents an element that destroys a weak man/woman, and on the other it propels the transformation of woman into the animal, which is manifested as passion, strength, instinct, art.

Therefore, the source of the animalistic can be found in the unconscious and the latter, according to Jung, covers two areas, the individual and collective (cf. Jacobi 2006, p. 46).[24] On this occasion, we are particularly interested in the area of the collective unconscious as a warehouse of innate traits of a being, as a place that marks the psychic structure of the human species, but which at the same time has the power to reach out to the individual psyche (cf. ibid., pp. 49-50). Namely, the collective unconscious covers not only contents that are typical of our individual Self or the ones arising from individual knowledge, but also *those of inherited possibilities of psychological functioning as such*. *This heritage is universally human; indeed it may even be generally animal and forms the foundation of all individual psychological* (cf. ibid., p. 19). In this matter, we must not forget the fact that *psyche indicates a conscious-unconscious entity, whose touching boundaries continuously rotate* (cf. ibid., 48), but we will mostly pause, according to Jung, in the area of phylogenetic development of mental and its importance in the psychism of an individual.[25] Accordingly, we will try to outline the origins of the animalistic in the heroine.

In order to make this presentation more clear, the following diagram shows Jung's explanation of origin and contents of the collective unconscious.

[23]Source: http://spanish.fansshare.com/gallery/photos/14146582/meet-the-man-who-gave-black-swan-wings-rotator/?displaying

[24] Contents of the individual unconscious consist of the *forgotten, suppressed, perceived under the conscience threshold, imagined and feeling of any kind* (Jacobi 2006, p. 46). More detail on the structure of unconscious area as shown by Jung see, for example in Jacobi 2006, pp. 17-46.

[25] Ontogenetic development of the psychological represents psychological development of the individual.

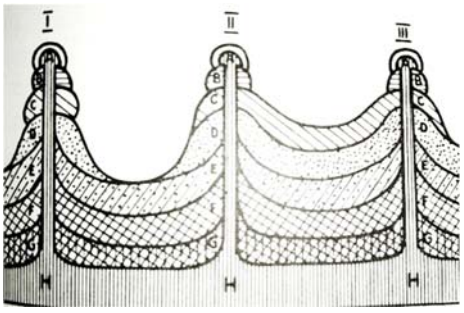


Figure 5. Mental genealogy according to C. G. Jung[26]

Number I stands for an isolated nation, numbers II and III are national groups (such as Europe), the letter A indicates the individual, the letter B family, C is a tribe, D nation, E ethnic group, F human ancestors, G animal ancestors, and H is the central power (cf. ibid., p. 51). The letter H is interesting because it is common to everyone, it resides in all of them and it is *the central force from which individual psyches were isolated* (ibid.). According to Jacobi, we are talking about a unique force that goes through all layers and it stretches to the individual psyche (ibid.). In other words, the letter H is marked by what Jung calls the collective unconscious, and that represents *a tremendous spiritual legacy mass of the development of humanity that is reborn in each individual (...) structure* (Jung ibid., p. 49).

For us, the area marked with the letter H is significant as Nina's actions are followed by its activation, which is realized by means of identification with a swan as a symbol that contains the archetype and that simultaneously interprets the collective and individual. In this matter, it should be pointed out that archetype is *the primal source of all human experience, it is located in the unconscious, where it has a strong impact on our lives* (Jacobi 2006, p. 65); archetype is *the organ of soul* (Jung), *unrealized eternity* (Bergson), something pre-existing and inherent in the unconscious area of the psyche (cf. ibid., pp. 59-60).[27] Therefore, the drama of the main character begins at the moment of activation of content deposited in the area marked with the letter H, and this area is actually a reflection of the experience of everything animalistic. Following these thoughts, we will conclude that the psyche is ahistorical and universal, while psychic energy is shown by means of symbols that likewise exist in human history in the form of the collective unconscious, so the individual is characterized by a specific inter-permeation of this unique principle (cf. Easthope 2003, p. 136).

In our heroine's case the archetype has a double face, on the one hand it is the source of neuroticism and psychological disturbances that are channelled by characters that surround her (her mother, Thomas, Beth, Lily), and on the other hand it initiates transformation into the animal which in her case actually means freedom, and breaking with traditional cultural norms and values. The transition to death means overcoming loneliness and creating integrity, or overcoming the female/animal principles. In this respect, an element of animalistic carries the meaning, so it should be seen beyond those basic semiotic questions. It includes a moment of abstraction that manifests itself through motifs such as savagery, freedom, slavery, but it includes, as we have seen, different concepts of human spirituality (cf. Peterson 2007, p. 38).

It should be further noted that the initiator of the imaginary film layer is the previously mentioned choreographer Thomas Leroy who is trying to show Nina the true power of art, passion and lust, spaces in our psychism dominated by instincts. Nina eventually becomes aware that she can become a good artist only if she rejects reality, her strict mother, an asocial and asexual life that she used to live. Entering the world of art means entering the world of dreams and fantasy where Thomas and Lily (Mila Kunis)

[26] Adapted from Jacobi 2006, p. 51.

[27] Archetypes for an individual *exist a priori*; *they are inherent in the collective unconscious and therefore devoid of individual origin and disappearance. Archetype is of metaphysical nature, since it transcends consciousness; in its essence, it belongs to "psychoid" area i.e. the one that is similar to the psyche. Archetype is an eternal presence and the only question is whether it is perceived by consciousness or not* (Jacobi 2006, p. 61).

become the main characters, and where Lily can be seen as Nina's alter-ego, her rival, the other, darker side of herself. The world of fantasy is, therefore, filled with contents not only of the individual unconscious but also the collective unconscious. These contents, which *transmit the voice of ancient nature*, are not subject to criticism or self-regulation and cannot be steered (Jacobi 2006, p. 50). Nina's transformation into a black swan and her final acceptance of the other, wild herself are a necessity which she could not consciously influence on, and as such, they belong to the archetypal sphere reflected by instinctive reactions which bypass consciousness in order to *represent and personify certain instinctual endowments of primitive, dark psyche of real, though invisible roots of consciousness* (cf. ibid., p. 58).[28]

As we have already pointed out, the battle between good and evil, conscious and unconscious, culture and nature that we track throughout the entire film, is determined by the content of the collective unconscious.[29] These contents appear in Nina's psychism in their new lives, they perform magical action and condensate into a kind of individual mythology (cf. Jacobi 2006, p. 64).[30] Let us mention here that a large number of myths, legends and songs glorify the swan, which due to its whiteness, dignity and beauty *seems as an alive epiphany of light* (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 2007, p. 365).[31] But, there are two whitenesses and two lights, one of which is solar and masculine, the other is nocturnal, lunar and female. As there is black sun and a black horse, there is a black swan *that is not desacralized but filled with mysterious and reverse symbolism* (ibid.).

It is exactly in Nina's case that we can see how traditional mythology lives in psychism of every individual and that the archetypal, according to Jung, *embodies the set of all the latent possibilities of the human psyche: the vast, inexhaustible material of ancient knowledge of the deepest relationships between God, man and the cosmos* (cf. ibid., pp. 64-65). Nina's task is to revive traditional mythology, invoke its contents to the level of viewer's consciousness and thus call to mind that central energy and even identify with it (the letter H in the diagram) which we all have in common and which has the potential to revive in each individual. Finally, this force is the mental life force that Nina presents in all her seriousness and that, although it is unusual, it still fully masters her personality. This way we are shown that the unconscious is still older than consciousness, *it is what was originally given from which the consciousness always rises* (cf. ibid., p. 19).

5. CONCLUSION IS IN THE POWER THAT ORIGINATES FROM THE LOOK

In earlier discussion, we have tried to show the fundamental characteristics of Darren Aronofsky's directing style by pointing out that film art cannot often be seen exclusively in the context of structural components. Films of this type are so complex in their communication paradigm so they inevitably draw a broader, cultural explanation. It is necessary, however, to point out that on the film syntax level Aronofsky draws extremely suggestive procedures that are then reflected in the semantic structure referring to the different possibilities of interpretation. At this point, a motif of mirrors should be especially set aside, which runs almost through the entire film. The gym and locker rooms are filled with mirrors, the scenes depicting Nina in her exercises and training at the same time show her in the mirrors

[28] *Motives of archetypal images are equal in all cultures and correspond to phylogenetically conditioned component within the structure of man. We encounter them in all mythologies, fairy tales, religious traditions and mysteries* (Jacobi 2006, p. 64).

[29] It is fair to warn that psyche, according to Jung, is a self-regulatory system that works on the principle of contradiction (cf. ibid., p. 71). *Heraclitus discovered the most miraculous of all psychological rules, namely the regulatory function of opposites which he called enantiodromia which means that everything turns into its opposite at one point* (ibid.).

[30] Contents of the collective unconscious, except for myths, include the characters of snake, fish, sphynx, good helpful animals, the trees of the world, the Great Mother, enchanted prince, magician, the wise man, paradise, etc. (cf. Jacobi 2006, p. 64).

[31] In different countries (from ancient Greece through Asia Minor, Slavic and Germanic peoples, and all the way to Siberia) the symbol of swan is present in many songs, myths, stories and legends in which the swan is mainly celebrated as a perfectly clean bird. The Buryats, for instance, tell a story *that one day a hunter met 'three beautiful' women bathing in an isolated lake. They were the swans, which, to enter the water, took off their feather cloaks. The man stole one of these cloaks and hid it, so after the bath only two women-swans could take their wings and fly away. The hunter married the third woman. She gave birth to eleven sons and six daughters, and then she took her cloak and flew away. 'You are earthly beings and you will stay on earth, while I am not from here, I come from heaven and I must return there* (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 2007, p. 365).

that surround her on all sides, and very often we see her in a close-up. Close-ups are marked by long shots, and this is the way to transfer the heroine's discomfort. Aronofsky uses the mirroring effect to suggest that Nina is everywhere around us, she is (our) cry for change, but also the other/different which we should strive for to set foot outside the control imposed on us by culture and society. Thus, the director immediately conveys the message of the body that does not exclusively have to be a dungeon, but it can represent freedom *towards the experienced and experiential*. *It is a valuable feature without which we would not be complete beings* (Brstilo 2009, p. 294). And, indeed, Nina's body is a prison in the embrace of contemporary culture, but the transformation into the animal shows the body, more precisely the complete being, in the embrace of power. Animal body represents a way out of the oppression of contemporary culture and allows the reintegration of woman's/man's identity.



Figure 6. Eyes filled with blood.[32]



Figure 7. Eyes of the White swan.[33]

We shall emphasize yet another exceptionally important motif. It is, in fact, the motif and the symbolism of Nina's eyes which Aronofsky presents as a kind of leitmotif which explicitly hints, but also shows the changes that occur to the body, and in the psychism of the heroine. The eyes, too, have the function of mirror that has the task to present to the viewer the identification process in a relation animal-man. From the eyes that dread and reflect the fears and insecurity to the eyes that are filled with blood, which at the same time reflect the security, power, victory - a complex drama unfolds in front of us, the process of bestialization of the heroine by which she rises above all repressive factors of society that surrounds her. The eyes mirror the tragic fate, but also the force of nature that is hidden in our unconscious, they project the new worlds and evoke ancient myths. By becoming a swan she is no longer an earthly being, and just like in the above mentioned legend about Buryats, Aronofsky suggests her return to heaven:

You are earthly beings and will remain on earth, and I'm not from here, I come from heaven and there I must go back. Every year in the spring when you see us flying to the north, and each autumn when we descend to the south, you will praise our passage with special ceremonies (Chevalier, Gheerbrant 2007, p. 365).

[32] Source: www.filmphilosophy.wordpress.com

[33] Ibid.

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