

**REVISING “MONSTROUS-FEMININE”:
MADNESS, SEXUALITY, PERVERSION
IN CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOHORROR**

by

Kateryna Burkush

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Gender Studies*

Supervisor: Professor Erzsébet Barát

Budapest, Hungary
2012

Abstract

In my thesis I explored various forms of female filmic monstrosity in *The Piano Teacher* (2001), the *Black Swan* (2010), and the *Antichrist* (2009) arguing that they belong to the hybrid ‘post-modern’ genre of psychohorror. Having compared the main characters of these films to the ‘empowered’ figures of female castrating monsters such as Ripley in the *Alien* (1979) and Carrie in *Carrie* (1976) and a trope of the ‘final girl’ I identified a conservative ‘backlash’ in the genre of horror. I argued that the main site of ‘abjection’ of these characters and the root of their monstrosity is uncontrolled un-reproductive sexuality, represented in films as perverse and dangerous for social order and therefore subjected to further repression. The ways of ‘monstrification’ of female sexuality overlap through films along the lines of fear of ‘maternal authority’ (*The Piano Teacher* and the *Black Swan*), madness, and heroines’ engagement into sphere of artistry (*The Piano Teacher* and the *Black Swan*) or academic research (the *Antichrist*) that forms the binary of production/reproduction in which (creative) production is connoted as anti-feminine in terms of its narrative alignment with excessive (perverse) sexuality and identity crisis.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
1. Introduction: Psychohorror as a hybrid genre and its discontents	1
2. Ambiguity of Horror: Scared and/or Pleased?	6
2.1. Cognitivist Approach to Pleasure of Horror	6
2.2. Psychoanalysis and Pleasures of Horror	8
2.3. Defining ‘Monstrous-Feminine’: What is Scary About a Woman?	10
3. ‘Maternal authority’ and the pathological female bond in the <i>Black Swan</i>	15
3.1. ‘Ejecting the object’: castrated and castrating monsters in the horror genre	15
3.2. Psychoanalytic explanation of gender difference	19
3.3. Female interrelations of monstrosity in the <i>Black Swan</i>	22
4. Masochist monster and ‘maternal authority’ in <i>The Piano Teacher</i>	26
4.1. Monstrosity as ‘social sickness’ in <i>The Piano Teacher</i>	26
4.2. Maternal authority and the origins of masochist monstrosity	27
4.3. The reverse of bourgeois ‘normality’	34
4.5. Creativity/insanity relationship in <i>The Piano Teacher</i>	37
5. Mad embodiment and monstrosity of difference in <i>Antichrist</i> (2009)	39
5.1. Woman and Madness in <i>Antichrist</i>	40
5.2. <i>Antichrist</i> as symptom	48
6. Conclusion	53
Bibliography	56

1. Introduction: Psychohorror as a hybrid genre and its discontents

What art makes us *see*, and therefore give us in the forms of '*seeing*,' '*perceiving*,' and '*feeling*' ... is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes.

Louis Althusser¹

All films and all works of art are products: products of an existing system of economic relations, in the final analysis. Film is also an ideological product—the product of bourgeois ideology.

Claire Johnston²

Horror genre for a long time occupied the lowest stages of cinematic hierarchy. Film academics did not see it as a cultural product deserving for close scrutiny, considering such movies as mere entertainment, a 'primitive' mass product directed to invocation of 'instinctual' response in viewer and therefore accessible and 'cheap'. Nevertheless, the popularity of the genre among the audience and growing academic interest to mass culture itself made scholars to turn their attention to the cultural meaning of the phenomena of freight, horror, disgust and their functioning in the horror films and address the hold horrors have on public imagination. Linda Williams observed that "[f]ilm academics have turned to horror cinema ... because it reveals cultural sores, symptoms of our guiltiest pleasures and incomplete repressions."³ Feminist film critics (Carol J. Clover (1992), Barbara Creed (1993), Cynthia A. Freeland (2000)) tackled the genre from the perspective of gender difference and particularities of representation

¹ Althusser, Louis. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, New York: Monthly Review Press, p. 222.

² Johnston, Claire. 1973. "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema." In *Notes on Women's Cinema*. London: Society for Education in Film and Television, p. 28.

³ Brooks, Xan. 2009. "Antichrist: A Work of Genius or the Sickest Film in the History of Cinema?" *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jul/16/antichrist-lars-von-trier-feminism>> [Accessed: 25 May 2012]

of feminine/masculine in horrors to show the various forms of power relations saturating the opposition victim/monster and the kinds of gender differentiated pleasure derived from the genre.

In my thesis I will argue that the films *The Piano Teacher* (2001), directed by Michael Haneke, the *Black Swan* (2010) by Darren Aronofsky and the *Antichrist* (2009) by Lars von Trier are 'postmodern' horrors that employ conventions of the slasher films⁴ to construct a certain type of monstrous femininity. The generic hybridity of these films allows combining the 'realistic', narrative representation (in contrast with more likely for horrors fantastic representation) with abnormal violence, which, I argue, positions the main heroines of these films as 'monstrous by nature', where 'nature' is aligned with their gender and sexuality. Thus, I approach genre as not a template of textual patterns, classificatory category with a fixed amount of cinematic conventions, but rather "an ongoing series of contestations regarding cultural values and legitimacy."⁵ As a grid of cultural meanings, a hybrid genre of a 'cerebral horror'⁶ or a 'psychohorror,'⁷ emerging on the verge of drama and slasher film, displaces a female subject from symbolic by abjectifying her through uncontrolled sexuality and 'madness'.

The Piano Teacher and the *Black Swan* construct the female artistic subject as emotionally unstable, sexually pervert, and potentially self-destructive. The main heroine of the *Antichrist* is also involved into 'creative' profession – she is an academic. Female artistic subjectivity, attributed with signs of monstrous abnormality (repressed sexuality, mental illness, masochism), is represented in the films as inherently distorted and dangerous, literally 'unbearable' for a woman. A strive for artistic perfection becomes a trigger for sexual perversion, signaling incapability of a woman to embrace creativity without sliding into abnormality. On the basis of my analysis I will argue that in contemporary Western cinematic imagery female creativity is constructed and performed through the figure of monster and a trope of sexual excess that threatens symbolic order.

⁴ Slasher film is a type of horror film showing violence in an explicitly graphic manner often with using of cutting tools such as knives, scissors, axes, chainsaws, blades, etc.

⁵ Huang, Han-yu. 2007. "Monsters, Perversion, and Enjoyment: Towards a Psychoanalytic Theory of Postmodern Horror." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, p. 89.

⁶ Hoberman, J. 2002. "Prisoner's Songs," *Village Voice*. [online] Available at: <www.villagevoice.com/film/0213,hoberman,33363,20.html> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

⁷ Crocker, Jonathan. 2009. "RT Interview: Lars von Trier on *Antichrist*." *Rotten Tomatoes*. [online] Available at: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1210830-antichrist/news/1833302/rt_interview_lars_von_trier_on_antichrist/> [Accessed 24 May 2012]

Also these films (the *Black Swan* and *The Piano Teacher*) allow to see the cultural pattern of pathologizing of mother/daughter bond (and broader – the feminine bond) as potentially harmful for subjectivity formation. I will emphasize that the social fear of ‘maternal authority’ that threatens ‘paternal law’ discloses the contradictions in cultural construction of the image of maternity. On the one hand, motherhood is traditionally perceived as a culturally acceptable and anticipated gender role for a woman, on the other, her ‘excessive’ presence and influence, strengthened by the absence of the father, invokes fear and represented as culturally destructive.

The theoretical framework of my thesis will include the analysis of feminist literature that develops a concept of monstrous femininity in horror films. This corpus of literature mostly takes psychoanalysis and semiotics as its methodological approaches to decode patriarchal constructions of representation of a woman in horrors. Feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis, French structuralism, and semiotics dominated in British film studies in 1970s – 1980s and was elaborated by Claire Johnston (1975), Anette Kuhn (1985), Pam Cook (1985), and American critic Laura Mulvey (1975). They contributed to developing the key influential concepts for feminist film analysis, such as “the male gaze, the female voice, technologies of gender, queering desire, the monstrous-feminine, and masculinity in crisis.”⁸ Barbara Creed’s (1993) work is especially significant in foregrounding ‘monstrous-feminine’ as a cinematic construction developed within and by patriarchy. Creed emphasizes the cultural construction of ‘shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject’ by carving a concept of ‘monstrous-feminine’ in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. She claims that “[t]he reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience.”⁹ To deconstruct cultural meaning of ‘monstrous-feminine’, interpreted through the Freudian notion of castration anxiety, she draws on feminist rereading of psychoanalysis (mostly by Julia Kristeva’s semiotic, applying her concepts of *abject* and *maternal* to representation of female body in the cinema). Drawing on a significant amount of popular horror films, Creed argues that “the presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror films speaks to us more about male fears than about

⁸ Chaudhuri, Shohini. 2006. *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaya Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed*. London: Routledge. p. 11.

⁹ Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London and New-York: Routledge, p. 3.

female desire or feminine subjectivity.”¹⁰ Thus, Creed traces the impact of patriarchal ideology in the horror film construction.

I will in detail examine Creed’s concepts of ‘monstrous-feminine’ and ‘maternal authority’, as well as her appropriation of Kristeva’s notion of abject for explaining the pleasure of horrors, in the Chapter 2. What is important to underline now is that Creed finds transgressive potential in some female monsters, such as vampires, witches, obsessed. They subvert patriarchal logic of voyeuristic and sadistic ‘male’ pleasure, explored by Laura Mulvey (1975) in her pioneering essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, performing female as a *femme castrice*, a castrating monster, frightening not because of the fact of her sexual difference and being a ‘sign’ of castration, but actually because she herself has a power to castrate. For Creed Ripley in *Alien* (1979) and Carrie in *Carrie* (1976) are examples of female castrating monsters which ‘return the gaze’, possess active desire. I will compare the main characters of the *Black Swan*, *The Piano Teacher*, and the *Antichrist* to the figure of female castrating monster and the trope of a ‘final girl’ (a girl who confronts the killer, survives and becomes ‘her own hero’), discussed by Carol J. Clover (1987) in relation to the horror films *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), to identify the conservative ‘backlash’ in representation of a woman in the genre, a ‘regressive’ shift that invites the return of the ‘male gaze’ as guarantee of symbolic order and censors unproductive female sexuality as ‘perverse’ or ‘abject’ through ‘slasher’ tropes of violence and bodily excess.

To explore how the ‘psychohorror’ monster is constructed and which function it fulfills in the narrative I will do a semantic analysis of the films relying mostly on feminist psychoanalytic theory (Creed 1993, Luce Irigaray 1985, Jaqueline Rose 2005). I will also discuss the reception of the films by studying the reviews. The reviews of critics will help to identify the general reaction to the films and reveal the meanings that were derived from the films by the audience.

As long as the research is restricted to semantic interpretation, the investigation of the (gendered) spectatorship is beyond the scope of my analysis.

The thesis consists of four main chapters. In the Chapter 2 I discuss the specificities of the pleasure of horrors, comparing two fundamental approaches – cognitivist and psychoanalytic, and more explicitly

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7

draw the methodological framework of my topic. Each of the Chapters 3 – 5 are dedicated to the separate analysis of the film where I explore the ways of construction of the monstrous-feminine in the *Black Swan*, *The Piano Teacher*, and the *Antichrist* and identify the cultural meaning of female filmic monstrosity in a ‘post-modern’ psychohorror.

2. Ambiguity of Horror: Scared and/or Pleased?

Can it be that in the West, in our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment—not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order?

Elisabeth Grosz¹¹

Genre of horror, perceived not just as a mass entertainment, but taken seriously and interpreted as social (pathological) fantasy, becomes a cultural milieu that revels (repressed) fears of society and turns into the arena of their dissolution. Taking into account high popularity of the genre, we are entitled to ask: Can the film that contains disturbing, unpleasant and horrifying images be pleasurable for the viewer? What kind of pleasure do the horror films offer? What kind of disposition the viewer acquires while watching the horror film and in which ideological structures does the film engage its viewer? The answer to these questions will lay the ground for my further interpretation of the films. I will first discuss cognitivist and psychoanalytical approaches to the pleasure of horror, and then examine Barbara Creed's concept of 'abjection' aligned with femininity.

2.1. Cognitivist Approach to Pleasure of Horror

The cognitivist approach to horror genre and its pleasures was elaborated, for example, in the works of Noel Carroll (1990) and more recent surveys by Torben Grodal (1999), Cynthia Freeland (2000), and Danial Shaw (2001). For Carroll, audience's pleasure from watching horrors is derived from 'co-existence' with negative emotions represented in film: audience "seek[s] horror fiction

¹¹ Grosz, Elisabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Theories of Representation and Difference)*. Indiana University Press, p. 203.

simply to be horrified”¹². ‘Co-existential’ pleasure is also linked to the fascination about the disclosure of the plot and the monstrous representation itself, as well as viewer’s ability to withstand the fright of the image. Similarly, Yvonne Leffler points out that pleasure from the horror film stems from “the experience of seeing, and coping with seeing, something repugnant.”¹³ Carroll argues that audience’s curiosity about ‘knowing’ the monster is of a cognitive nature. The viewer finds satisfaction “through a continuous process of revelation, enhanced by imitations of (admittedly simplistic) proofs, hypotheses, counterfeits of causal reasoning, and explanations whose details and movement intrigue the mind in ways analogous to genuine one.”¹⁴ Thus, Carroll poses pleasure from the horror films on the meta-emotional cognitive level, leaving out the specificity of horror pleasure itself.

In her book *The Naked and the Undead* (1999) Cynthia Freeland explores ‘graphic horror’ (which emphasize special visual effects in the narrative of the film) and ‘uncanny horror’ (that avoids representing actual ‘monster’ as vampire/zombie/alien and locates monstrosity in ‘possessed’ human body). Matt Hills argues that “Freeland’s approach displaces Carroll’s emphasis on horror’s monsters with a feminist focus on art-horror’s representation of evil and its special effects spectacles of confrontation with evil.”¹⁵ In her feminist reading of horrors Freeland pays attention to differences between the gendering of power on narrative level where “a strong, virtuous, rather pure young woman emerges victorious”¹⁶ and a metalevel of the film where she finds the linkage between the male monster and director. She concludes that the horror film is morally enjoyed as an artifact and fiction, and similarly the gender ideologies of narrative triumphant femininity are undermined by meta-narrative masculine (directorial) power.¹⁷ The ‘gendered pleasure of moral ambivalence’ is informed by the category of power/control.

¹² Carrol, Noel. 1990. *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, London: Routledge, p. 193.

¹³ Leffler, Yvonne. 2000. *Horror as Pleasure: The Aesthetics of Horror Fiction*, Almqvist & Wiksell, 57.

¹⁴ Hills, Matt. 2005. *The Pleasure of Horror*, London: Continuum, p. 19.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶ Freeland, Cynthia. 2000. *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror*, Boulder, CO: Westview, p. 267.

¹⁷ Hills, Matt. 2005. *The Pleasure of Horror*, London: Continuum, p. 23.

Hill criticizes cognitive approach to horror for limiting it to specific ‘object-directed’ audience emotions like disgust, fright, and cognitive reflection on evil.¹⁸ According to Hill, cognitivists underexplore the specificity of horror pleasure itself, since it is provoked not only by object-directed emotions, but also objectless states of anxiety.¹⁹

2.2. *Psychoanalysis and Pleasures of Horror*

On the other hand, horror genre got subjected to various psychoanalytic interpretations that rely on the concepts of ‘unconscious’, ‘repression’, and ‘abjection’.²⁰ As horror pleasures are linked with anxiety,²¹ psychoanalytic approach may introduce potentially useful tools for revealing the contradictions of horror, although psychoanalysis often underlined horrors’ cultural value as a “sign of transhistorical, psychical processes (e.g. ‘the unconscious’, ‘the Oedipal complex’), and thus the validation of psychoanalytic theory itself.”²²

Freudian psychoanalytic theory found vast support among film critics who turned their attention to horror genre. According to Andrew Tudor, “by far the most common accounts of the appeal of horror are grounded in concepts from Freudian theory.”²³ Similarly, Jonathan Lake Crane notices that “Freud ... constitutes the lingua franca of horror ... criticism”²⁴. Hill argues that Freud’s essay on “The Uncanny” (written in 1919) inspired later development of psychoanalytic approach to horror, having found the elaboration in the scholarships of Robin Wood (1986), Carol J. Cover (1992), and Barbara Creed (1993). Freud discusses *das unheimlich* (literally, unhomely) as “undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror ... we may expect that a special core of

¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹ Ibid., 25.

²⁰ Hills, Matt. 2005. *The Pleasure of Horror*, London: Continuum, p. 45.

²¹ Urbano, Cosimo. 2004. “‘What’s the Matter with Melanie?’ Reflections on the Merits of Psychoanalytic Approaches to Modern Horror Cinema.” In *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud’s Worst Nightmare*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 28-9.

²² Hills, Matt. 2005. *The Pleasure of Horror*, London: Continuum, p. 46.

²³ Tudor, Andrew. 1997. “Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre,” *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No 3, p. 446.

²⁴ Crane, Jonathan Lake. 1994. *Terror and the Everyday life: Singular Moments in the History of Horror Film*, London: Sage Publications, p. 24.

feeling is present which justifies the special conceptual term.”²⁵ The specificity of the uncanny is in discovering something unfamiliar and dreadful in old and familiar phenomenon. Thus, the concept of uncanny indicates the restoration of the repressed material or “primitive beliefs that have been surmounted”²⁶. Robin Wood (1986) developed the concept of the ‘return of the repressed’ that appears with the uncanny in regard of horror films, paying attention not merely to ‘basic’ repression that constitutes the Oedipal complex, but also the necessarily politicized ‘surplus repression’ (the term taken from Herbert Marcuse) that poses a challenge to dominant social order:

central to ... [the horror film] ... is the actual ... dramatization of the ... repressed in the figure of the Monster. One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses, its re-emergence dramatized ... as an object of horror ... and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression.²⁷

The figure of the monster acquires the meaning of culturally repressed groups of society. Wood lists culturally coded groups of ‘Others’, marginalized and repressed by dominant social order, which appear as monstrous in horror films: women and female sexuality; the proletariat; other cultures; ethnic groups within the culture; alternative ideologies or political systems; bisexuality and homosexuality; and children.²⁸ Importantly, Wood registers the shift in the horror functioning beginning from 1980s: “Where the traditional horror film invited, however ambiguously, an identification of the return of the repressed, the contemporary horror film invites an identification (either sadistically or masochistically) with punishment.”²⁹ Thus, monster is no longer a symbol of unconscious that threatens to disrupt dominant symbolic order of society, but rather signal of super-ego that avenges “itself on liberated female sexuality or freedom of the young.”³⁰ Wood points out the ‘progressive’ and ‘reactionary’ potential of the horror genre that may be both challenging or affirmative for dominant ideological cultural order.

²⁵ Freud, Sigmund. 1990. “The Uncanny,” in *Art and Literature (Penguin Freud Library)*, Penguin Books Ltd, p. 339.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 372.

²⁷ Wood, Robin. 1986. “The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film,” In *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 75.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 74 – 76.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 195.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 195.

I consider Wood's concept of 'reactionary' pleasure specifically important for my research since it indicates the repressed social fears of the feminist movement and liberated female sexuality that saturate three films that I analyze. By abjecting female desire through constructing woman as embodied monster, her very body as monstrous, the gender ideology of horror proposes the interpretation of female monster as the 'uncanny'. In the *Black Swan*, *The Piano Teacher*, and the *Antichrist* woman appears monstrous and therefore dangerous for social order because of her uncontrolled sexual desire, rejection of heterosexuality (*The Piano Teacher*), and failing maternal obligations (the *Antichrist*). She appears as 'disorder that threatens all order', perceived by consciousness as dehumanized, ugly, horrible, and obscene therefore provoking punishment and further repression, while staying totally 'human' in sense that she differs from 'classical' monsters of horrors – vampires, zombies, witches, werewolves. A woman in these films does not transcend the boundaries of natural/supernatural, realistic/fantastic – the 'realistic' narrative of these films³¹ depicts female body, marked by difference and sexual excess, as the only source of her abnormality and monstrosity, which define femininity itself as the 'uncanny' and potentially dangerous if not taken under control on time (the *Black Swan* and the *Antichrist* end up with the death of the monster – classical 'happy end' of restoring the order by eliminating the threat). Taking pleasure in monster's narrative destruction, the audience is engaged into 'reactionary' scenario of horrors. Wood classifies such outcome as a 'restoration of the repression', which signals the desire for reinstatement of the social order.

2.3. Defining 'Monstrous-Feminine': What is Scary About a Woman?

In *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) Barbara Creed proposes yet another post-Freudian rereading of pleasure of horror. Instead of 'repression', the key concept of her approach is the notion of 'abject', introduced by Julia Kristeva in *Power of Horror: An Essay of Abjection* (1982) concerning psychoanalysis and literature. Creed applies the concept of 'abject' to genre of horror to analyze the representation of woman as monstrous.

³¹ Except the *Black Swan* where the scenes of hallucinations evoke main character's imaginary monstrous double.

‘Abject’ is defined through the relation to physicality, bodily excess, religious rituals, and social and cultural taboos concerning bodily processes like “sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest.”³² The protection of ‘clean and proper body’³³ is crucial for subject to maintain his/her place in the symbolic.³⁴ Thus, ‘abject’ as a ‘place where meaning collapses’³⁵ must be radically excluded to protect the imaginary border between the ‘clean’ and the ‘unclean’ that demarcate cultural boundaries of the self. The ultimate symbols of abject in horrors are corpse and cannibalism, being the threat of culturally constructed borders between life and death, the proper and the improper.

‘Abject’ in horror films threatens cultural borders of the subject by depicting physical self-disintegration. According to Creed, the pleasure taken from experiencing abject in horrors is inevitably ambiguous: “The subject is constantly beset by abjection which fascinates desire but which must be repelled by fear of self-annihilation. A crucial point is that abjection is always ambiguous.”³⁶ Creed’s argument about abject’s function is close to that of Wood about the function of restoration of symbolic order of horrors: the confrontation with the abject (monstrous-feminine, corpse) is brought up only to finally separate “the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability.”³⁷ Thus, the ‘purification of the abject’ turns to be the main ideological function of horror.

Creed traces the ambiguous pleasure of fascination/repulsion of the abject to the pre-Oedipal phases of subject development where ‘maternal authority’ of mother-child relationship is still not broken by the ‘third term’, paternal symbolic order of the society. As a result, abject can function as a guide to the pre-symbolic pleasurable unity with the mother free from social taboos:

images of bodily wastes threaten the subject that is already constituted, in relation to the symbolic as ‘whole and proper’. Consequently, they fill the subject ... with disgust and loathing.

³² Creed, Barbara. 2000. “Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection,” In *The Horror Reader*, ed. by Ken Gelder, London and New York: Routledge, p. 64.

³³ Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 72.

³⁴ Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 9.

³⁵ Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 2.

³⁶ Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 10.

³⁷ Ibid, 14.

On the other hand they also point back to a time when ‘a fusion between mother and nature’ existed; when bodily wastes ... were not seen as objects of embarrassment and shame. ... At a more archaic level the representation of bodily wastes may invoke a pleasure in breaking of taboo on filth ... and a pleasure in returning to that time when the mother-child relationship was marked by an untrammelled pleasure in ‘playing’ with the body and its wastes.³⁸

Introducing the concept of maternal authority, Creed negotiates the wide-spread assumption that horror is generally misogynistic and the pleasure derived from it is inherently masculine. While, according to majority of feminist film critics, for example Linda Williams (1996), the woman audience is left without a powerful character to identify with in horror film,³⁹ Creed argues that in such classical horrors like *Alien*, *Exorcist*, and *Carrie* the female character appears not as a victim, tortured and murdered by a killer, castrated and as a result frightening. For Creed the figures of women-as-monsters turn to be horrible exactly because of their active and aggressive position, castrating power. Creed asserts that all societies developed myths of a monstrous-feminine “of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject”⁴⁰ and that the notion of abject is firmly linked to sexual difference.

According to Creed, woman has a special relation to abject through her body and female connection to the ‘animal world’. In horror femininity gets equated with monstrousness and abject. So, for Creed abjection “is a function of the ideological project of the horror film – a project designed to perpetuate the belief that woman’s monstrous nature is inextricably bound up with her difference as man’s sexual other.”⁴¹ The concept of monstrous-feminine is particularly used by Creed to emphasize the impact of gender difference in constructing the monster.⁴²

As Creed underlines social anxiety surrounding the maternal and femininity, her concept of maternal authority, which appears to be disruptive for paternal law and social order, is of particular interest for my research. Through the analysis of the *Black Swan* and *The Piano Teacher* I will show

³⁸ Ibid, 13.

³⁹ Williams, Linda. 1983. “When the Woman Looks,” In *Re-Vision: Essays on Feminist Film Criticism*. Eds. Doane, Mellencamp and Williams, American Film Institute Monograph Series.

⁴⁰ Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, London and New-York: Routledge, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid, 83.

⁴² Ibid, 3.

how the fear of maternal authority functions in favor of construction of the representation of femininity as monstrous in its nature. I will also address the issue of female (mother/daughter) bond/age as a site of cultural pathologization and repression. I will argue that such pathologization of female sexuality and female bond through the gesture of abjection (character's alignment with blood, self-mutilation, violence, excessive sexuality, madness) has a political aim of restoration of the symbolic order where woman's desire is controlled across the (patriarchal) lines of traditional gender roles, primarily the roles of mother and wife. Moreover, it tends to reclaim the father figure as a necessary 'third term' that guarantees the stability of order. In the *Black Swan* and *The Piano Teacher* it is the absence of father figure that allows inflation of pre-symbolic maternal authority and provokes the development of mental disturbance (necessarily accompanied with sexual perversity) in daughters. In the *Antichrist* main character's 'madness' is provoked by her failing maternal obligations, that also leads her to identity disintegration, outbursts of uncontrolled sexuality, and unsuspected inclinations to violence, which allow to tie her figure to Freud's notion of the 'uncanny'.

From my perspective, the female characters in these films cannot be defined as active, castrating monsters, in Creed's terms, primarily because they subject themselves to masochist violence (sexual self-mutilation in *The Piano Teacher* and the *Antichrist*) or a suicide (the *Black Swan*). The violence directed to themselves makes the identification with the characters painful and impossible, as a result self-mutilation in these films plays the part of the main cinematic device of abjection of feminine as monstrous and female desire as dangerous and culturally destructive. I will compare the specificities of the female characters represented in these films with the castrating female figures described by Creed in films *Alien* and *Carrie* and the trope of the 'final girl' discussed by Carol J. Clover (2000) to show the conservative backlash in representation of femininity in horror genre. Importantly, the female character re-appears in the genre not as a victim of a killer or monster, but as a self-punishing masochist that, so to speak, 'withdraws her rights' from the symbolic. Interestingly, all the three characters of chosen films are engaged in 'creative' professions: ballets, music playing, academic research. Thus, these spheres of occupation also get connoted as potentially damaging for female psyche and form the opposition production/reproduction in which (creative) production is connoted

as anti-feminine in terms of its narrative alignment with madness, uncontrolled sexuality, and identity crisis.

In my interpretation of these films I will mostly rely on the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis (both Freudian and Lacanian) described above. Despite this theory is being traditionally criticized by feminists (Mitchell 1982, Irigaray 1985, Rose 2005) as phallogentric and degrading of women, it is also a discourse that describes the gender identity and sexuality construction within patriarchy through the socialization of infant in nuclear family. Taken as descriptive, and not prescriptive, psychoanalysis allows revealing cultural patterns of 'order disruption' that I identified in all three films.

As I want to move forward from overall universalist claims of psychoanalysis based on the concepts of (seemingly historically unchangeable) 'unconscious', 'repressed', 'desire', I will trace how the representation of femininity in these films is informed by the (masculine) fear of liberated female sexuality and the achievements of feminist movement, trying to 'contextualize' the symbolic in view of these processes through analyzing also the reviews of the films.

3. 'Maternal authority' and the pathological female bond in the *Black Swan*

In this chapter I will discuss Darren Aronofsky's film, *Black Swan* (2010) as an example of the persistence of the representation of woman as monstrous in Western cinema. It is a film that, in spite of its controversy, was positively perceived by critics and brought Natalie Portman an Academy Award for Best Actress for leading role. Comparing Natalie Portman's character Nina to female 'castrating monsters' Ripley from *Alien* (1979) and Carrie from *Carrie* (1976) I will identify the backlash in the horror genre.

3.1. 'Ejecting the object': castrated and castrating monsters in the horror genre

Black Swan's plot unfolds in the setting of the ballet world. Nina Sayer, a ballerina in her 20s, wins the lead role in the new production of *Swan Lake*. The plot develops while she attempts to embody two different incarnations of the same character – seductive Black Swan, which needs to be danced with unrestraint, and the White Swan, the one that demands technical preciseness and delicate control of every movement. The film portrays the gradual disintegration of Nina's identity expressed in a straightforwardly violent and disturbing manner.

Nina's body, as well as her psyche, is a central matter of the film: on the one hand, it is a spectacle as long as the ballerina profession as such implies theatricality, on the other hand, it is flesh in its most disturbing appearances of bleeding, crunching, scratching, and wounding.

In her research on 'body genres', Linda Williams (1991) distinguishes three 'gross' or 'sensational' film genres, pornography, melodrama and horror. They are differentiated in terms of the specific (bodily) reaction to be evoked by their representation of the body, particularly that of the female body, in the spectator. The horror genre is to evoke the specific (bodily) reaction of terror, while pornography is argued to evoke sexual arousal, and melodrama is oriented to emotion in relation to the female body. She argues that violence in horror movies produces the effect of seemingly excessive and 'gratuitous' terror,

although it has “its system and structure as well as ... effect on bodies of spectators.”⁴³ Apparently, the excess of physicality in Aronofsky’s film (such as bleeding toes, Nina pricking ex-prima ballerina Beth with a nail file) was a reason for disappointment and criticism from the side of those critics and viewers who disapproved his experimentation with combining ‘genre elements’ (in their devaluing low-brow meaning) with the ‘realistic’ shaky camera of the auteur film, nominated for an Oscar award.⁴⁴

It seems reasonable to pose “a question of gender construction as well as gender address in relation to basic sexual fantasies”⁴⁵ concerning *Black Swan*.

In her critical account of *Black Swan* Danielle Mortimer (2010) also turns to psychoanalysis to explain the representation of femininity as monstrous in this film. She argues that Nina’s body is narratively constructed as a monstrous figure through such tropes of horror genre as bleeding (Nina’s toes, damaged by fierce rehearsals, are constantly bleeding, and she has hallucinations about her fingers bleeding) and identity disintegration.⁴⁶ I suggest that monstrous-feminine in *Black Swan* is not restricted to Nina alone (although she embodies monstrosity), but she is constructed as such through interrelations with other female characters of the film – ex-prima ballerina Beth, her rivalry Lily, and, most of all, her mother, an unsuccessful dancer who brought Nina up by herself.

The concept of monstrous-feminine was developed by Barbara Creed (1993) in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* in reference to horror films. She draws on Julia Kristeva’s concept of abject as a polluted object frequently associated in culture with images of blood, vomit, pus, or shit. These images, Creed argues, are central in Western cultures for the construction of the notion of horrific, undifferentiated, unsymbolized. For Kristeva, abject is identified with the maternal body in so far as she is the first person who teaches a child about the difference between clean and unclean. ‘Maternal authority’ is characterized by the sheer pleasure of unity, and only in the symbolic ‘phallic

⁴³ Williams, Linda. 1991. “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 3.

⁴⁴ See Honeycutt, Kirk. 2010. *The Bottom Line*, [online] Available at: <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/black-swan-film-review-29918>> [Accessed 5 May 2012], Calhoun, Dave. 2010. “Black Swan,” [online] Available at: <http://www.timeout.com/film/reviews/88567/black-swan.html#top_comments_main> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

⁴⁵ Williams, Linda. 1991. “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Mortimer, Danielle. 2010. “Darren Aronofsky’s *Black Swan* and the Monstrousness of Lack.” [online] Available at: <<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/mortimermpaper.pdf>> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

order' the institutions of shame, embarrassment, guilt come into play to signify the abject as differentiated from 'proper' parts of the body.⁴⁷ Thus, 'maternal authority' becomes abjected in the paternal symbolic order and represented in horror films as a figure of 'monstrous-feminine'. Creed argues that 'ejection of the abject' fulfills the ideological function of the horror: "The horror film attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and the non-human. They signify a split between two orders: the maternal authority and the law of the father."⁴⁸ Setting the horror film in Kristeva's theoretical framework of abjection, Creed argues that the representation of monstrous-feminine always relates to woman's reproductive and mothering functions, i.e. her sexuality. Moreover, examined closer, monstrous-feminine appears to play a significant role in relation to castration and the passage of a child into the symbolic order.⁴⁹ Creed's detailed investigation of the monstrous-feminine in horror films posed a significant challenge to Freud's theory of sexual difference and feminine passive disposition. She claimed that, on the one hand, representation of the female as monster may "reinforce the phallogentric notion that female sexuality is abject"⁵⁰, on the other hand, *femme castrice*, the castrating mother and other monster figures of the genre might evoke terror not as castrated subjects, but as aggressive agents of castration⁵¹ like Ripley in *Alien* (1979) or Carrie in *Carrie* (1976) who horrify male viewers. Creed describes Ripley as a pre-phallic mother giving birth to the monster. For Kristeva, mother is associated with semiotic or pre-verbal which threatens to disrupt symbolic order. Creed finds the signs of 'archaic mother' in different mythological systems of the world. It is "a Mother-Goddes who alone creates the heavens and earth. In China she was known as Nu Kwa, in Mexico as Coatlicue, in Greece as Gaia (literally meaning 'earth') and in Sumer as Nammu."⁵² In *Carrie*, a schoolgirl Carrie gains the powers of telekinesis which come along with her puberty. Her classmates bully her at school, so she finally uses her supernatural powers to kill them at school prom.

⁴⁷ Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 74.

⁴⁸ Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge: London and New-York, p. 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 151.

⁵¹ Ibid., 151.

⁵² Creed, Barbara. 1986. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection." *Screen*, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 58.

Mortimer employs Creed's 'progressive' concept of monstrous-feminine (discussed in detail in Chapter 2) as a castrator to point out the 'backlash' tendency of female representation in *Black Swan*. She claims that Nina is shown as a castrated female character blindly driven by penis envy, unlike 'castrating' characters Carrie in *Carrie* (1976) and Ginger in *Ginger Snaps* (2000). Nina is unsatisfied with her body, what is manifested in scratching and bleeding hallucinations, and she reveals attachment to phallic objects (a lipstick and an emery board which she finds in a dressing room of ex-prima Beth). Also she devalues the pressure of social situation Nina finds herself in: "she portrays a character who exists in a high-pressure world - that of the prima ballerina - she is shown already at odds with her body before she is cast as the Swan Queen"⁵³ and she is shown to vomit and scratch her back before the competition for the leading role begins. However, she spent all her life in a highly competitive surrounding of the world of ballet, and the fact that she was already 'at odds with her body' can be interpreted as a marker of interplay of social factors influencing identity formation. But what is more important, and what was overlooked in Mortimer's analysis, is the origins of Nina's self-negation that culminates in her stabbing herself with a piece of glass (rightly interpreted by Mortimer as a phallic object).

Nina's monstrosity is portrayed not only by means of her bleeding body, but also through her gradually destabilizing identity, accompanied with releasing repressed sexual desires. From the very beginning of the film a viewer notices her neurotic constraint, excessive hankering to self-control and discipline which, as Nina supposes, will help her to reach perfection. This modernist motive of 'perfection', which really manifests several times in the narrative, was interpreted by Mortimer as penis envy, Nina's rejection of the fact that she's castrated, what supposedly triggered her maniac perseverance in struggle for the leading role. The struggle, as it was understood through the interplay of doubles, she led with her alter ego.

To explain the structure that underpins Nina's relations with her mother I will address Culler's reading of Freud's theory of female sexuality. Employing Derridean deconstructive approach to Freud's writing, he

⁵³ Mortimer, Danielle. 2010. "Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* and the Monstrousness of Lack." [online] Available at: <<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/mortimermpaper.pdf>> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

claims that psychoanalytic theory ‘deconstructs itself’ (its hierarchical structure where the male is a dominant in the binary) through ascribing to female originally bisexual disposition.⁵⁴

3.2. Psychoanalytic explanation of gender difference

The overview of female sexuality as it is constructed in psychoanalytic theory is necessary to establish a conceptual basis for further discussion about the female monster as a representative figure of fear in the cinema in general, and in the horror genre in particular. It makes possible for me to argue that Nina is constructed in *Black Swan* as a monster primarily by means of representing her ‘abnormal’ sexuality (first – sexual anesthesia or ‘frigidity’ and later sexual perversion manifested through homosexual fantasies) as well as her damaged body. But, following William’s inquiry about ‘body genres’, it is more important to explore the function this sexualized female monstrosity fulfills in the film and which meanings it implies.

Psychoanalysis as a theory aims to explain gender identity constitution and the processes of formation of feminine and masculine dispositions. Sigmund Freud made explicit attempts to solve the ‘riddle of femininity’ in his essays “Female Sexuality” (1931) and “Femininity” (1933). In “Femininity” he emphasizes the decisive role of castration complex for sexual identity formation in girls and boys. However, it is significant that Freud took the profile of a little boy as an ideal model of psychosexual constitution and described the process of female identity acquisition with reference to this masculine-centered model. The model supposes that a little boy presumes that every human being has a penis, an organ that he values very highly because of the pleasure he learned to take out from it in the period/course of pre-Oedipal masturbation. The girl also discovers a difference between male organ and her own (clitoris).⁵⁵ The discovery of difference in sexual organs leads to castration complex in boys and penis envy in girls. The boy perceives a girl as castrated being with a ‘mutilated organ’⁵⁶ and as an embodiment of horrible threat of being castrated himself. The girl is said to discover is that the boy’s penis is bigger than her clitoris. At the same time, unaware of the existence of her vagina, the girl feels that the boy is ‘more

⁵⁴ Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Cornell University: Ithaca), pp. 169 – 170.

⁵⁵ Freud thought that girls are unaware of having vagina in the early childhood, that is why both sexes identify in relation to ‘visible’ penis.

⁵⁶ Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Cornell University: Ithaca. pp. 169 – 170.

equipped’⁵⁷ and develops a complex of inferiority accompanied with penis envy. Thus, for Freud a female comes into being in this moment of gender differentiation. Having realized that her clitoris is not actually a penis and won’t ‘grow any bigger’⁵⁸, the girl accepts her castration as an established fact: “She acknowledges the fact of her castration, and with it, too, the superiority of the male and her own inferiority.”⁵⁹

For Freud, the castration complex becomes an organizing principle of the psyche. For the boy it is the last stage of the Oedipal drama when he abandons his mother as then object of his desire, fearing that he will be castrated for it by the father. The desire is then reoriented to other objects of the female sex. Object-cathex with mother is abandoned and exchanged for identification with father, and his paternal authority is introjected as an organizing point of super-ego. However, fear of castration has a long-lasting effect and may manifest in adulthood.

On the other hand, Freud describes the girl as having a ‘bisexual disposition’. Freud makes an assumption about female bisexual disposition on the ground of the fact that for the girl first pre-Oedipal object-cathex is also a mother, but, as Freud thought, later she represses not only her attachment to mother, but also reorients her desire to the objects of another sex. So how does a girl with bisexual disposition end up having a heterosexual orientation? Freud explains that after the girl discovers her lack of penis, she blames her mother in not giving her it: “...girls hold their mother’s responsible for their lack of the penis and do not forgive her for being thus put at a disadvantage”.⁶⁰ Driven by penis envy, the girl chooses the father as an object of desire, perceiving him the one who can give her what the mother failed to give. Concurrently she abandons her active ‘masculine’ libido, accepts passive disposition, and develops hostility to the mother as her rival for the father’s love. Later penis envy is replaced by wish to obtain an Oedipal child from the father, which is, as Freud claims, the mythic equivalent of the penis. Such scenario, according to Freud, is a pass to ‘normal’ femininity.⁶¹ The failure to accept castration may lead to neurosis

⁵⁷ Freud, Sigmund, 1933. “Femininity”, [online] Available at:

<http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/ewaters/345/2007_freud/femininity.pdf> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Freud, Sigmund. 1931. “Female Sexuality,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works*, pp. 221-244.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

or ‘masculinity complex’ in the girl which in its “extreme achievement... would appear to be influencing of the choice of an object in the sense of manifest homosexuality.”⁶²

Feminist critique of Freud is focused on his phallocentrism in the explanation of psychosexual identification. As early as in 1922 Karen Horney revealed observations that contested Freud’s assumptions about castration complex and penis envy in girls as a constructive principle of sexual identity claiming that female children are aware of their vaginas.⁶³ Jacqueline Rose (2005) points out psychoanalysis’s ‘functionalism’ as a paradigm and argues that in the Freudian model women “are psychically ‘induced’ into femininity by a patriarchal culture,”⁶⁴ and then this process is sustained by either prescriptive (what women *should* do) or descriptive (what they are *expected* to do) arguments without acknowledging historical conditions of such identity formation and leaving little possibility for change.⁶⁵ For Jonathan Culler (1983) the emphasis on penis envy in the center of feminine sexuality is the source for mastering women: as long as women are led by penis envy the value of the penis itself stays unquestioned and can really be perceived as a ‘superior equipment.’⁶⁶ The idea of penis envy in women serves as validation of the phallic order perceived as a norm in a bourgeois patriarchal society, positioning the woman as a sexual object waiting for “awakening”.

For girl’s ‘successful’ passage into symbolic order, her pre-Oedipal bond with mother has to be broken by ‘the third term’ represented by father figure. This process, according to Freud, assures shaping feminine identity and heterosexual object-choice in girls. Speaking broadly, positive Oedipus complex assures stability of patriarchal symbolic order: “To Freud, if psychoanalysis is phallocentric it is because the human social order that is perceived refracted through the individual human subject is patrocentric. To date the father stands in the position of the ‘third term’ that must break the asocial dyadic unit of mother and daughter.”⁶⁷ For Lacan, ‘paternal metaphor’ or ‘phallus’ establishes gender identity and subject’s place in

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Horney, Karen. 1926. “The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and by Women.” In *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 7, pp. 324-339, unpaginated.

⁶⁴ Rose, Jacqueline. 2005. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso: London, New York, p. 89.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 89.

⁶⁶ Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Cornell University: Ithaca), pp. 169 – 170.

⁶⁷ Mitchel, Juliet and Rose, Jacqueline, eds. 1982. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, trans. Jacqueline Rose, London: Macmillan, p. 23.

the Symbolic.⁶⁸ Symbolic is a Lacanian term which means the order of subject constitution through language and the associations of signifiers. The function of symbolic order is organization of subject's psyche, a guarantee of psyche's accessibility. For Lacan it is associated with and created through words, language, symbols, and signifiers.

3.3. Female interrelations of monstrosity in the Black Swan

I would argue that the couple mother-daughter in *Black Swan* lacks the 'third term', the father figure, and this condition, according to the narrative of the film, leads to establishment of pathological mother/daughter bond, which determines Nina's monstrosity. Nina, a young woman in her twenties, lives with her single mother. Nina's room connotes her childishness and pre-Oedipal fixation: pink walls, fluffy toys, a music box with a tiny ballerina. The sings of physical contact between mother and daughter (mother puts Nina into bed, brushes her hair, undresses her, and pairs her nails – a scene excessively invested with abject and symbolism of castration as mother forcefully and cruelly cuts them with scissors, hurting Nina) also reveal this long-drawn pre-Oedipal bond. Their claustrophobic flat with narrow corridors reflects languorous and isolated existence outside paternal symbolic order.

Nina's introjection of the maternal super-ego leads to regression of her sexuality and appropriation maternal desire for phallus (as a metaphor of power in the symbolic). Lacan theorizes desire as always desire of the Other, and Other is a metaphor of symbolic order. Nina's psyche was constructed not in response to the penis envy, but through identification with maternal desire. If desire is always desire of the other, 'reaching perfection' (an often used trope in a film) means to give the mother phallus, as long as desire of the mother transcends her child ('she wants something else', i.e. phallus). Wanting a 'phallus' differs from Freud's 'penis envy' in a sense that it is allegedly detached from actual biological male organ and transformed into a signifier of power in the symbolic.

The figure of the father, ('the third term') which, according to the mechanism of Oedipal complex, has to disrupt an 'anti-social' bond between mother and daughter is represented by director of the ballet Thomas (the only 'unambiguous character' of the film establishes a male as a 'norm'). He performs the

⁶⁸ Rose, Jacqueline. 2005. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso: London, New York, p. 64 – 65.

function of seduction, which Freud interpreted as one of the primary fantasies, and releases her sexual desire repressed by maternal super-ego. This is what also is supposed to channel her desire in 'normative' heterosexual course. The fact that Nina is situated outside heterosexual matrix is confirmed by her lesbian fantasy about Lily.

However, the Oedipal drama takes place too late. The situation of 'paternal seduction' is represented through Nina's relationship with Thomas who strives to 'awake' Nina's (hetero)sexual desire to help her to nail the Black Swan role. He kisses her, touches, and asks to masturbate at home. But Nina fails entering the phallic phase without the damaging outcome for her psyche. The 'monster' with ambiguous sexuality cannot obtain a place assigned, in Freud's terms, to 'normal' femininity in the phallic symbolic order.

It is remarkable that the only un-abjectified female character in the film is Lily, Nina's competition. She may lack technique, but she 'just has it' as if (hetero)sexuality is a 'natural' attribute of 'normal' femininity. She emphasizes her heterosexuality by sharp rejection of Nina's fantasy that they had sex. It happens after the party in the club, where Lily persuades Nina to take drugs. Afterwards Nina has a hallucination about them having sex, which reveals the conflict of her sexual orientation – on the one hand she yields to Thomas's persistent attempts to seduce her. On the other, she has lesbian fantasies about Lily. Lily's harsh reaction on Nina's mentioning their sexual contact (which she believes took place in reality) presents Nina's sexual desire as perverse, obscene, and monstrous. Moreover, Lily is not that invested in the struggle for the leading role in performance, which once again proves that this competition takes place inside Nina's split psyche, and she tends to project her repressed alter ego onto Lily, who supposedly has what she lacks. The conflict deepens with Nina's desire for Lily and her perception of Lily as competitor, which also contributes to her identity split.

Further conflict, which unfolds between Nina's identification with maternal desire and her rebellious alter ego, is represented by the struggle of White Swan and Black Swan identities.

I would argue, the real object of Nina's desire is not Lily, who turns to be a figure revealing Nina's homosexuality, but Beth, ex-prima ballerina of the company. Nina does not perceive her as a competitor, unlike Lily, she rather wants to resemble her or even be her. It becomes clear when Nina steals Beth's things from her dressing room and puts on her lipstick when goes to ask Thomas to give her the role. Lipstick and nail file are only fetishes, symbols of the phallus Beth obtains. According to Thomas, Beth is

a pure perfection. And this is what Nina wants to achieve to satisfy mother's desire. The real disappointment comes to Nina when retired (already castrated once) Beth gets run over by a car, and her crippled body becomes an ultimate confirmation that she lacks phallus. From now on her psychosis progresses and the identity of revengeful *femme castrice* manifests more often. The day before the performance Nina comes to Beth's hospital room to give her back her things, but desperate Beth grabs the nail filer and stabs herself in the face. In the elevator frightened Nina discovers bloodied nail filer in her hand.

Nina turns into *femme castrice* once again in one of the final scenes of the film. While dancing the part of the White Swan she is distracted by hallucination and her partner drops her. Filled with feeling of guilt, she comes back to her dressing room and finds there Lily who is preparing to replace her in the second part of performance. She stabs the rivalry with a piece of glass and finally accepts the monstrous identity, which her Ego struggled for so long. The fact that she crosses the border between castrated and castrating, active subject of desire is proven by an unexpected kiss which catch Thomas by surprise after her perfect performance as a Black Swan – in her performance of the Black Swan part she really turns into it, becomes an embodiment of her monstrosity, liberated by the killing of a competitor (and her alter ego – a White Swan). Still, the castrating monster in which Nina turned into is not without controversy. Obviously acting as a *femme castrice*, described by Creed, positioned as active and not passive, Nina-Black Swan attacks not Thomas (a male character), but two women – Beth and herself.

Moreover, price she has to pay for transgression from castrated to castrating subject is her death. After returning to her dressing room again Nina meets alive Lily and realizes that she actually stabbed herself. Mortimer claims that “the shard of glass she removes can be taken to represent the castrated phallus”⁶⁹. Which is true, but this act of symbolic castration was performed by her own alter ego, the *femme castrice* who was revealed not only as a sign of a final dissolution of Nina's identity, but also to bring to the conclusion the pass to monstrous-feminine.

In the last scene Nina dances as a White Swan knowing that she's dying. Before she has to jump from the pedestal she finds the eyes of her mother in the crowd to reassure herself that her desire is fulfilled.

⁶⁹ Mortimer, Danielle. 2010. “Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* and the Monstrousness of Lack.” [online] Available at: <<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/mortimermpaper.pdf>> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

To conclude, I tried to make the point that in *Black Swan* monstrous-feminine is constructed as an outcome of negative Oedipus complex where the phallus does not function any more as a guarantee of symbolic order. In the film the monstrous couple mother-daughter disturbs the phallic order. Kaja Silverman employs Jacques Rancière's concept of 'dominant fiction' which corresponds to the notion of 'ideology' to explain the functioning of Western cultural imagery: "The dominant fiction brings individuals into line with a given symbolic order by encouraging normative desires and identifications. The main vehicle of 'our' current dominant fiction is the positive Oedipal complex, which accommodates us to the Name-of-the-Father, soliciting our belief in the (paternal) family and the sufficiency of the male subject."⁷⁰ The fear that *Black Swan* invoked through abjectifying female sexuality as monstrous exposes the fear of 'maternal authority' that threatens to overturn the Oedipal structure of patriarchy. And horror, in this respect, fulfills the function identified by Creed: it tends to reaffirm 'the law of the father' according to which the monster has to die.

⁷⁰ Chaudhuri, Shohini. 2006. *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed*, Routledge: New York, p. 108.

4. Masochist monster and 'maternal authority' in *The Piano Teacher*

The concept of maternal authority in horror films as it was discussed in Chapter 3 may serve as the link to the analysis of Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher*, the film that has evoked equally strong and controversial reaction in audience and critics.

4.1. Monstrosity as 'social sickness' in *The Piano Teacher*

Robin Wood saw awarding *The Piano Teacher* with a Grand Prix in 2001 and the awards to its two leading actresses as an 'act of courage'⁷¹ on the part of the jury against the background of the alleged strong 'bodily' effect of rejection and disgust the film induces at least in part of the audience⁷². J. Hoberman called the film a 'modernist, cerebral horror'⁷³ for its scenes of brutal sexual violence, self-mutilation, and the shots of pornographic content underscoring the melodramatic narrative about a psychically 'perverse' relationship between mother, daughter, and daughter's lover, while Jean Ma defines the film as melodrama or anti-romance.⁷⁴ Christopher Sharrett also classifies the film as horror, but, calling the film 'the horror of the middle class'⁷⁵, adding the important dimension of class. He claims that the postmodern reconceptualization of the horror genre exceeds stylistic conventions and that its major contribution lies "within human relationships and the collapse of a false social order about which we are in great denial"⁷⁶.

As Creed argues it is important to underline that the 'horrific' resides in the everyday. The 'postmodern' mix of melodrama and horror does not represent the monster as merely the violator of

⁷¹ Wood, Robin. 2002. "Do I Disgust You?" or, tirez pas sur La Pianiste," *Free Online Library*, [online] Available at:

<<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22Do+I+disgust+you%3F%22+or,+tirez+pas+sur+La+Pianiste.-a094843210>> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Hoberman, J. 2002. "Prisoner's Songs," *Village Voice*. [online] Available at: <www.villagevoice.com/film/0213,hoberman,33363,20.html> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

⁷⁴ Ma, Jean. 2010. "Discordant Desires, Violent Refrains: La Pianiste (The Piano Teacher)." In *A companion to Michael Haneke*, A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication.

⁷⁵ Sharrett, Christopher. 2004. "The Horror of the Middle Class", *Kinoeye 4:1*. [online] Available at: <kinoeye.org/04/01/sharrett01.php> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

⁷⁶ Ibid.

the border between human and non-human, man and beast (*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *King Kong*), natural and unnatural (*Carrie*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Candyman*), or the border between normal and abnormal sexual desire (*Cruising*, *The Hunger*, *Cat People*)⁷⁷. Implemented into a realistic narrative, the monstrous confuses and defamiliarizes these oppositions, making 'abnormal' the derivative of the 'normal', pointing to the Janus face of 'good' and 'evil'.

Here we are made to ask: If *The Piano Teacher* is a 'horror of the middle class' as Sharrett argues, then how does the middle class see its monsters? What assumptions about gender and sexuality undergird that monstrosity? What is still there assumed as abject and monstrous regarding feminine sexuality in the award winning movie indicative of the so-called 'developed' and 'liberated' world of cinema? *The Piano Teacher* is a complicated cultural text, and it may be considered as a 'postmodern' critical comment on the persistence of traditional bourgeois values as well as the underside and oppressiveness of the ideology of 'romantic love'⁷⁸ but in the framework of my research interest I will mostly focus on the bourgeois visions of social 'sickness'⁷⁹ and those circumstances that are considered to be responsible for shaping the monster: the family, the mother-daughter bond/age, the infringement of the heterosexual matrix, and the reproduction/creativity dichotomy in relation to assumptions about 'proper femininity' in patriarchal society.

4.2. Maternal authority and the origins of masochist monstrosity

The Piano Teacher (2001) was filmed after the novel *Die Klavierspielerin*⁸⁰ (1983) by the Austrian playwright and novelist Elfriede Jelinek. Erika Kohut (Isabelle Huppert) is a piano tutor in a

⁷⁷ Creed, Barbara. 1986. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," *Screen*, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 49.

⁷⁸ See Sharrett, Christopher. 2004. "The Horror of the Middle Class", *Kinoeye 4:1*. [online] Available at: <kinoeye.org/04/01/sharrett01.php> [Accessed 17 May 2012];
Ma, Jean. 2010. "Discordant Desires, Violent Refrains: La Pianiste (The Piano Teacher)." In *A companion to Michael Haneke*, A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication.

⁷⁹ Wood, Robin. 2002. "Do I Disgust You?" or, tirez pas sur La Pianiste," *Free Online Library*, [online] Available at:
<<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22Do+I+disgust+you%3F%22+or,+tirez+pas+sur+La+Pianiste.-a094843210>> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

⁸⁰ As Robin Wood (2002) rightly noticed, English translation is slightly misleading, as long as the name of the novel emphasizes Erica's "personal musicianship and her commitment to music", not merely her profession as a tutor.

Vienna conservatoire. She is respected for her talent and self-discipline, but also known for a strict and demanding conduct of her students. Erika is in her mid-thirties or near her forties. She is single and lives with her elderly and possessive mother (Annie Girardot). She is an over-caring and controlling woman who is obsessed with her daughter's career as a guarantee of her own social status and financial well-being. She rudely interferes in the daughter's personal life (for instance, she fumbles in her purse, calls to work when Erika is late home), which, according to the logic of the narrative, effects Erika's sexual life. Erika finds a way for satisfying her 'deformed' sexual desires in voyeurism, watching pornography, and masturbatory techniques that involve genital mutilation – practices that is usually not associated with the image of the respectable Viennese teacher and transmitter of high art. In the private home concert Erika's performance of Bach's concerto attracts the attention of a young and musically gifted aristocrat, Walter Klemmen (Benoit Magimel), who falls in love with her and pursues her favor in spite of Erika's outward coldness. After being accepted to her musical class, Walter makes an attempt to seduce Erika. Faced with her masochistic erotic demands, he at first refuses to participate, although later, filled with anger and humiliation, he reverses her fantasy into a brutal rape scene.

Unlike in *Black Swan*, where the mother/daughter relationship is narratively outbalanced by Nina's identity struggle, in *The Piano Teacher* this 'bond/age'⁸¹ is foregrounded. Nevertheless, both films reveal a similar structure of this relationship and outcomes concerning maternal authority. Except that the drama of the subject takes place in the realm of family in the *Black Swan* and *The Piano Teacher*, both films are situated in the settings of high culture – the extremely competitive domains of ballet and classical music, respectively – where professional success demands full commitment and self-restriction.

Barbara Kosta (1994) in her critical comment on the Jelinek novel underlines that the figure of the mother has gained central place in women (often autobiographical) literature from early phases of

⁸¹ See Kosta, Barbara. 1994. "Inscribing Erika: Mother-Daughter Bond/age in Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Klavierspielerin." *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86, No. 2.

second-wave feminism, and moved from desire of separation to a dialogue across generations, discovering the constraints which influenced the mothers' lives.⁸²

In *The Piano Teacher*, as well as in *Black Swan*, female identity formation is represented as rooted into pathogenic mother/daughter bond in the absence of the father figure. Authoritarian behavior of frau Kohut in relation to Erika reveals the classical model of the monstrous-feminine that is explored by Barbara Creed in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and defined as 'archaic mother'. The 'archaic mother' is a castrating figure, who refuses to release her child, denies his/her autonomy, and prevents him/her from taking a proper place in relation to the Symbolic.⁸³ In other words, social conceptualization of these representations propose that the monstrous child – whether it is a serial killer (Norman Bates in *Psycho*) or a sexual 'pervert' (Erika Kohut) – is always an effect of the mother's behavior.

The problem with this psychic scheme lies in its gender imbalance typical of psychoanalysis with the male figure as its ultimate referent. While Norman Bates from *Psycho* experiences an Oedipal drama – killing his mother of jealousy to step-father and and internalizing her 'bad', 'revengeful', 'castrating' identity - frau Kohut and Erika constitute a couple embedded in "the socially inscribed structures that perpetuate a relationship of domination and subservience."⁸⁴ The narrative suggests that such proximity of the maternal provoke masochism, dependency, and repression of female sexuality.⁸⁵

Gilles Deleuze discusses the nature of masochism in his book *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1991) based on his studies of Sacher-Masoch's novels. Unlike Freud, Deleuze differentiates sadism and masochism and denies their reciprocity.⁸⁶ Following Deleuze, Gaylyn Studlar (1984) locates masochism in the pre-Oedipal phase of infancy, where the child's goal is unity with the mother. It contrasts with sadistic genital sexuality, which desires to control the other and has its central aim in the pleasure of the orgasm. Masochism, on the other hand, draws on pregenital sexuality and derives

⁸² Ibid, 218.

⁸³ Creed, Barbara. 1986. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," *Screen*, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 50.

⁸⁴ Kosta, Barbara. 1994. "Inscribing Erika: Mother-Daughter Bond/age in Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Klavierspielerin." *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86, No. 2, p. 219.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Deleuze, Gilles. 1991. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, New York: Zone Books.

pleasure from suspension and symbolic bond.⁸⁷ Analyzing the paradoxical pain/pleasure structure of masochism, Studlar asserts that:

Overriding the demands of the incest taboo, the castration complex, and progress into genital sexuality, masochism is a “subversive” desire that affirms the compelling power of the pre-Oedipal mother as a stronger attraction than the ‘normalizing’ force of the father who threatens the alliance of mother and child.⁸⁸

Still, Deleuze’s discussion of masochism applies only to men as far as in Zacher-Masoch’s novels a woman (the “oral mother”⁸⁹) is always the cold dominator and a man is the one who seeks submission. Moreover, Freud describes masochism as a specifically male form of perversion, which emerges as a result of negative Oedipal complex. While for him positive Oedipal complex in boys is characterized by abandoning the mother as a first object-cathex and the introjection of the sexually neutral super-ego as a ‘law of the father’. The masochist super-ego becomes sexualized and the mother takes the place of that who beats as a result of repression of homosexual choice.⁹⁰ For girls, argues orthodox Freudism, masochism is not perverse, as long as for girls it is an outcome of ‘positive’ Oedipal complex when they learn passivity and submission. Such vision, of course, can and should be critically challenged at the very least on the ground of shifted social and material conditions of existence since the beginning of 20th century, when Freud was conducting his research, and the patriarchal assumptions implicit for psychoanalysis in general,⁹¹ although this model, further developed by Deleuze, may be helpful in investigating the mother/daughter and daughter/lover relationship in *The Piano Teacher*.

In addition to Deleuze’s emphasis on the pre-Oedipal bond with the mother in the shaping of masochist desire for submission, object-relation theory also shows how women develop the relationships of dependency which throttles them into the situation we might call masochistic

⁸⁷ Studlar, Gaylyn. 1985. “Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of Cinema,” in *Movies and Methods: An Antology*, Volume II, ed. by Bill Nichols, Univeresity of California Press: Berkley and Los Angeles.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 609.

⁸⁹ Oral mother is one of three ‘primitive’ mothers (alongside with uterine, or punishing, mother, and oedipal mother). Oral mother is a ‘good’ nurturing mother, with whom subject seeks unity.

⁹⁰ Silverman, Kaja. 1993. “Masochism and Male Subjectivity,” in *Male Trouble (Camera Obscura)*, ed. by Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, Univ Of Minnesota Press.

⁹¹ See Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Ithaca: Cornell University.

bondage. Nancy Chodorow discusses the gender-specific effects of subjectivity shaping as an effect of separation and individualization. She claims that while the male child's right for independence in the social structures of Western societies has been encouraged, the daughter's autonomy was denied and no strong emotional bond could ever yield.⁹²

In *The Piano Teacher* the mother takes a central place as a caretaker and the “replica of the Deleuzian oral mother”⁹³ who nourishes the daughter, but at the same time makes her indebted for the care and takes her advantage in control over the daughter and denies her separation. Her primarily maternal function is emphasized by the absence of a first name: she is either ‘frau Kohut’, which underlines her belonging to the patriarchal tradition of using the husband's last name, or ‘Mother’, a derivative of the reproduction function of a woman.

In the first scene we see Erika who rushes into the flat where she lives with her mother, exposing her adolescence in gestures and lying to the mother about why she's been late at home, like a delinquent teenage girl. From the very beginning of the film this scene draws attention to the “unnaturally prolonged symbiosis between mother and daughter”⁹⁴ that defines power imbalance between the two parties within the family structure. The matrix of maternal control prevents Erika from individuation and assertion herself as a subject. Erika fights for gaining maturity and seizing control in her life by reproducing the situation of domination/subordination with her students, by taking the mask of a firm and uncompromising professional when the conversation turns to the subject of music, and by stealing for herself the scraps of forbidden, ‘dirty’ pleasure. Still, she paradoxically experiences the need for pre-Oedipal intimacy with the mother, as we see it in the scene of incestual manifestation of desire after Walter Klemmen rejects Erika.

The ‘pathological (-gized)’ symbiosis of mother and daughter also informs the inversion of gender roles. The socially oppressed, properly ‘castrated’ mother finds in her daughter the material provider and in her carrier the means for social mobility. Kosta assumes that the failed separation of the

⁹² See Chodorow, Nancy. 1974 “Family Structure and Feminine Personality,” In *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Luise Lamphere. Palo Alto: Stanford UP. Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California.

⁹³ Kosta, Barbara. 1994. “Inscribing Erika: Mother-Daughter Bond/age in Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Klavierspielerin,” *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86, No. 2., p. 220.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

daughter is rooted in the network of dependencies that historically situate woman exclusively as a mother: “Within traditional white, middle-class Austrian culture, particularly within the generations like that of the mother in *Die Klavierspielerin*, the mother is economically powerless, isolated and without social recognition.”⁹⁵ On the other hand, Erika’s social status is secured by her talent and professionalism. And the mother has her own interest in Erika’s success: she plans to buy a new apartment and rigorously controls her daughter’s spending. Not only does Erika appear in public events in the mother’s company, she also shares bed with her, both as if she were a small child dependent on her mother and a husband who sleeps beside his wife. Led by the fear to lose her daughter, the mother maniacally ‘protects’ her from male attention, asks whether someone approached her, and loses her temper when Erika and Walter barricade themselves in her room.

It is also notable that the ‘perversions’ attributed to Erika are ones that are usually associated with male pleasure. I already mentioned the ambiguity of masochism concerning female subjectivity. When buying a ticket to watch pornography in a separate cabin, Erika waits in line with men (for whom such kind of pleasure is considered to be culturally acceptable, though not tolerated by middle-class moral standards) and their reaction to her presence explicitly reveals the oddity of her desire. Erika’s voyeuristic habits put her in the position of the male gaze, but they do not make her an empowered subject. On the contrary, in view of her submission to the mother, her voyeurism only abjectifies her even more. Both phallic and castrated, monster and victim, Erika appears to be caught in-between the traditional patriarchal order (exemplified by her mother) and the emancipating educational and professional possibilities.

Erika’s sexual desires constitute one more problematic issue. Kosta suggests that, “Erika is denied *her own* sexuality because it represents a process of maturation and separation.”⁹⁶ But from the film we know that Erika has sexual desires and lives a sexual life, just the means of sexual gratification she practices are connoted with activities as the opposite to ‘normal’ female sexuality. It is hard to escape the conclusion that ‘her own’ sexuality is defined in terms of heterosexual relationship.

⁹⁵ Kosta, Barbara. 1994. “Inscribing Erika: Mother-Daughter Bond/age in Elfriede Jelinek’s “Die Klavierspielerin,” *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86, No. 2, p. 223.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 224.

Cinema as a medium that appeals to visual perception engages the viewer in the process of identification. Cinematically the impression of Erika's 'abnormality' is created as a result of representation of violence and self-mutilation. In this context the scene in the bathroom is exceptionally eloquent. We see Erika sitting in a robe on the edge of the bath, holding a mirror in one hand and a blade in the other. She sits sideward, so we don't see what exactly she does with the blade but a stream of blood that flows down the bath from the direction of her genitalia in a second after manipulation leaves no doubt that she hurts herself, imposing the feeling of disgust. It even strengthens when she enters the living room for a dinner and the mother, seeing the stream of blood that drains down her leg, misrecognizes it as menstrual blood, admitting that 'it's not very appetizing'. For Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed blood and specifically menstrual blood, are the signs of abject that has to be ejected.⁹⁷

If we accept the claim of Christopher Metz's apparatus theory that the viewing of the film is connected to unconscious processes and 'double' identification, which repeats the Lacanian mirror stage, first with a camera as the main cinematographic medium and then with a character, then at the moment when Erika wounds herself, the identification is interrupted and the viewer literally 'cannot watch'. The explicit representation of pain on the screen invokes bodily reaction of shock and disgust, and the character (Erika) is rejected by the viewer on the 'bodily' level, so to speak. The rejection facilitates her construction as a monster, but more importantly for us, the means of construction of such monstrous-feminine are her body implicated in 'perverse' sexuality. Through Erika's abject body sets up the 'normal' and 'abnormal' distinction of female sexuality. Sexuality that is considered 'normal' or 'healthy' is opposite to voyeurism, the pleasure from pain, and interest in pornography. Inasmuch Erika is also represented as dependent on her mother and immature, which causes her perversion, it is implied that the guarantee of the female subject's autonomy is heterosexuality. All of Erika's perversions stem from the pre-Oedipal mother/daughter bond/age. As

⁹⁷ Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 1.

Kosta noticed, “The narrative implies that the absent father within the nuclear family and the mother's traditional role as primary caretaker both contribute to Erika's dysfunctional development”.⁹⁸

The absence of the father as a ‘third party’ in the Kohut family returns us to the discussion about the ‘negative Oedipal complex’ in girls and the ‘normalizing’ power of the paternal signifier, which I analyzed in Chapter 3 concerning Nina in *Black Swan*. Erika’s ‘deformed desires’ stem from the claustrophobic bond of two women in absence of the father figure that is culturally anticipated to guarantee the daughter’s successful entrance into the Symbolic by her acceptance of ‘proper’ (heterosexual) femininity. In this structure the father represents a ‘difference’, ‘agency’, ‘excitement’, and ‘otherness’⁹⁹ but it only confirms the patriarchal archetype that mother is associated with tradition, stasis, backwardness, and father embodies mobility, freedom, and agency, as if they were cultural constants and not the historical outcomes of the patriarchal regime. So, here we are entitled to ask: whether the mother/daughter bond/age, represented in *The Piano Teacher*, is a critical exposure of cultural structuring¹⁰⁰ or a continuation of long-lasting (at least since Freud’s works) incrimination of motherhood as a cultural danger which prevents the child to gain subjectivity?

Such logic not only privileges and re-affirms the dominant position of the father figure as a ‘guarantee of social order’ and a bourgeois model of nuclear family but also pathologizes a female bond as such, demanding the interference of the ‘third party’ (whether it is a father or a male lover) to ‘save’ the woman from potentially dangerous mother/daughter, or woman/woman bond.

4.3. The reverse of bourgeois ‘normality’

At first sight Walter Klemmen, Erika’s student who falls in love with her, is the most appealing identification figure. His manners, talent, charm, and ‘natural’ heterosexual desire are embodiment of bourgeois ‘normality’ and the ideal of romantic love. It is not surprising that he rejects Erika’s masochist scenario of sexual relationship, in which he is assigned a domineering part. Their first

⁹⁸ Kosta, Barbara. 1994. “Inscribing Erika: Mother-Daughter Bond/age in Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Klavierspielerin,” *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86, No. 2., p. 225.

⁹⁹ Jessica Benjamin. 1988. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problems of Domination*, New York: Pantheon Books, p. 125.

¹⁰⁰ Kosta, Barbara. 1994. “Inscribing Erika: Mother-Daughter Bond/age in Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Klavierspielerin,” *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86, No. 2., p. 231.

sexual encounter takes place in a public lavatory of the conservatoire, where Erika first reveals her 'perverse' inclinations. Erika rejects his attempts to seduce her and imposes her control over the situation. Erika transfers the asymmetry of mother/daughter power relations into her relations with Walter, taking the position of control by demanding Walter's obedience while she masturbates his penis. She forbids him to move or reveal any sign of agency. Her postponement of Walter's consummation indicates masochistic desire controlling pleasure. Drawing on a Deleuzian understanding of masochist pleasure as postponement and finally disavowal,¹⁰¹ Gaylyn Studlar explains that "masochism contains a temporal paradox of anticipation and suspense that is at the heart of the perversion's psychosexual dynamics."¹⁰² Erika prolongs this anticipation by declaring that she will write a letter to Walter where she will describe what and how she can do with her.

According to Deleuze, masochist pleasure is formalized and defined by a strict order, it is inscribed in the aesthetics which is orchestrated on "the arena of artistic form, language, and the production of pleasure through text."¹⁰³ The masochist contract establishes the dialectical relations of domination and submission between the partners through detailed instructions, rules, and prescriptions. Thus, as long as the masochist is always the one who invents the dramatic scenario of his/her own suffering, s/he is in control of pleasure. The letter Erika sends to Walter is a replica of a masochist contract where she reveals her desire for victimhood, which exposes her pre-Oedipal fixation and almost mirrors her domination/subordination relationship with mother. Almost, because with Walter in her fantasized scenario she defines the rules of the pain/pleasure game and leaves him in the position of executor of her fantasy. She describes in detail how exactly she wants to be beaten and punched, but it is noticeable that coitus itself is absent in the scenario – Erika negates heterosexual pleasure and deprives Walter of it.

When Walter reads out Erika's letter in her room, it sounds like a disclosure – now we (and Walter) know who she really 'is' – a pervert who does not deserve love but only humiliation and

¹⁰¹ Deleuze, Gilles. 1991. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, Zone Books: New York., p. 30.

¹⁰² Studlar, Gaylyn. 1994. "Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in "Letter from an Unknown Woman," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 44.

¹⁰³ Studlar, Gaylin. 1985. "Masochism and the perverse pleasure of the cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy, 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 774.

negation. She is not the object of admiration for Walter any more, she is a 'sick' abjected monster. The realization that he desired her offends his presumable 'normality'. Erika's question "Do I disgust you?", as Wood noticed¹⁰⁴, is addressed not only to Walter, but to the audience itself, to the viewer who finds fragile comfort in identification with Walter's disgust and distancing from Erika.

Walter's resentment and wounded masculinity (he says to Erika: "You cannot do it to a man"¹⁰⁵) lead to building up aggression, he breaks into her apartment in the night and violently 'realizes' her desire expressed in the letter. He locks Erika's protesting mother in the room and without paying attention to her screams cites lines from Erika's letter and performs the actions she was 'asking' for: hits her in the face and stomach and doesn't stop when she asks, taking visible sadistic pleasure in her humiliation and suffering.

One would wonder whether Walter actually realizes Erika's masochist desire or violates it. The fact that he rather punishes her for the 'dirtiness' and humiliating passivity in which she involved him is obvious after he re-establishes his masculine position in raping Erika. With his comment "I can play any games, but you have to leave something for me," he claims the right to get what he wants after Erika (as it may seem) has got what she wanted. The heterosexual contact as an attribute of romantic love is turned into the scene of brutal rape after which no one gets what one wanted. Erika's body is violated and Walter's satisfaction is also ambiguous as long as it is accompanied with shame which he represses by blaming Erika with his spontaneous 'abnormality'. Walter's explicit aggression undermines the viewer's belief in 'normality' showing its outward conventionality, almost etiquette "conformity to dominant norms of the culture"¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁴ Wood, Robin. 2002. "Do I Disgust You?" or, tirez pas sur La Pianiste," Free Online Library, [online] Available at:

<<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22Do+I+disgust+you%3F%22+or,+tirez+pas+sur+La+Pianiste.-a094843210>> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

¹⁰⁵ Subtitles to The Piano Teacher [online] Available at < <http://www.allsubs.org/subs-download/the-piano-teacher-la-pianiste-cd-1-eng-2-5-fps-2001/260605/#captcha>> [Accessed 31 May 2012]

¹⁰⁶ Wood, Robin. 2002. "Do I Disgust You?" or, tirez pas sur La Pianiste," *Free Online Library*, [online] Available at:

<<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22Do+I+disgust+you%3F%22+or,+tirez+pas+sur+La+Pianiste.-a094843210>> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

4.5. Creativity/insanity relationship in *The Piano Teacher*

Erika's fascination with Schubert and Schumann is also presented as aligned with her psychical disturbance. During her first conversation with Walter on the home concert Erika tells him about Adorno's interpretation of Schumann's C-major fantasy as 'twilight' of his mind, his incipient madness, about which the composer is aware. Erika obviously identifies with him and speaks about sensing music on the edge of sanity. Then she mentions that her father died in the asylum. This remark adds tension to the first scene of argument with the mother, and Erika's character is being written in the context of psychic pressure and madness even before the viewer is introduced to the details of her sexual life. It is important that Schumann as a metaphor of 'high art' in general is inscribed into this situation in the light of Erika's madness, in contrast to her professionalism or musical taste.

Thus, Erika's artistic sensibility is pathologized from the very beginning of the film. Her mastery is not only the result of long practicing, self-discipline, intelligence, and technique – all this has its ground in her disturbed psychic organization. In music she finds asylum from the unbearable psychological hell of her single-parent family.

It is also doubtful though if music was Erika's free choice. One of Erika's students finds herself in a very similar situation: the student is talented and hard-working, but her mother is so obsessed with her success and control over the daughter that the girl shows obvious signs of nervous instability – the similar way of psychic development that Erika went through. Thus, Erika's creativity is submerged into the network of her psychic disturbance and is influenced by it. Her rejection of 'reproductive' heterosexuality is narratively connected to a choice to have a professional career, but the story also problematizes this choice in the light of the mother's personal interest in her daughter's success and her power upon her.

Erika's insanity is nearly established in the last scene of the film, when after the last meeting with Walter in the hall of conservatoire she does not go to the concert where she had to accompany on the piano instead of her student. Having wounded the student's shoulder with a knife, Erika runs out of the building and rushes along the street. She does not die, like Nina in *Black Swan*. Haneke alludes to resembling destiny of his main character – the thickenings twilights of the mind, Erika's immersion

into madness which decisively ‘withdraws’ her from symbolic. We can assume that the concert is wrecked but Erika is too consumed with her emotions to care. Hence, it is only left for the viewer to set Erika’s sexual abnormality rooted in upbringing by a despotic monstrous mother in parallel with a deep sense of Schubert’s and Schumann’s music and her mentally ill father.

To conclude, in this chapter I argued that the triangle of madness shapes Erika as the monster generated by contradictions of society where gender roles are displaced. In *The Piano Teacher* not only the mother/daughter bond is pathologized, mental sickness itself is considered to have its source in the family (more specifically in the family where the father figure is absent) and not in social organization itself. This allows me to draw a parallel with *Black Swan* where Nina’s monstrosity also stems from the mother’s overwhelming presence in her life, preventing them from separation. Pathologizing of mother/daughter bond in the film supports Adrienne Rich’s claim that “cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused is the great unwritten story”¹⁰⁷, and that “this relationship has been minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Rich, Adrienne. 1995. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, W W Norton & Company: New York, p. 226

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 226.

5. Mad embodiment and monstrosity of difference in *Antichrist* (2009)

Woman, as sign of difference, is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-a-vis the norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of fascination and horror.

Rosi Braidotti¹⁰⁹

In the last chapter of my thesis I turn my attention to the film *Antichrist* (2009) directed by Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier. While *Antichrist* received controversial critical responses for its explicit scenes of genital (self)mutilation and sexual intercourse that were seen as pornographic and shocked ecumenical jury of the Cannes festival during its premiere, I argue that the inclusion of this film is important in the given framework of investigating female filmic monstrosity at the intersection of horror and slasher genres. Taking into account viewers' actual cinematic experience of displeasure manifested in numerous reviews and comments on the film,¹¹⁰ I will explore how female sexuality, submerged in the discourse of madness, appears to be the means of creating an effect of abjectification as discussed by Barbara Creed concerning horror films. I will also rely on the Lacanian understanding of the symbolic order as a *law of the father* to show how the production of sexual differences inside the symbolic assigns certain position to woman in relation to speech and knowledge. The goal of this chapter is to answer the question: How does the construction of unproductive female sexuality combined with mental breakdown in *Antichrist* contribute to the production of the fiction of monstrous, 'dangerous' femininity? Does it challenge or re-assure the 'patriarchal gaze' and its impact on imagining female mental illness?

¹⁰⁹ Braidotti, R. 1994. *Nomadic Subjects*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 81.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Brooks, Xan. 2009. "Antichrist: A Work of Genius or the Sickest Film in the History of Cinema?" *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jul/16/antichrist-lars-von-trier-feminism>> [Accessed: 25 May 2012]

5.1. *Woman and Madness in Antichrist*

In his interviews on *Antichrist* von Trier claims that his first intention was to create a film in the genre of horror because “you can put a lot of very, very strange images in a horror film.”¹¹¹ The director underlined that the film turned out to be difficult to place in the frame of conventions of any genre¹¹², while one can argue that “strange images” actually occur in the film, for example, a scene with an (in)famous talking fox announcing that “Chaos reigns” that was supposed to induce horror effect, but evoked laughter in audience on the premiere in Cannes. However, the employment of tropes of explicit graphical violence characteristic of slasher movies (sexual (self)mutilation) combined with the development of psychic drama and nightmarish dark atmosphere created by the camerawork¹¹³ made some critics tag the film “tough to swallow but even harder to ignore” “psychohorror”¹¹⁴ containing images that are like “fork in the eye”¹¹⁵. For others such form of expression seemed “needlessly graphic”¹¹⁶ and exploitative, producing the double effect of disgust and boredom. This viewer-torturing strategy of horror combined with boredom, reached partly through long Tarkovsky-style shots and absence of actual action (especially in *Grief* and *Pain (Chaos Reigns)* chapters), which is unlikely for conventional horror, puts the viewer in occasionally unbearable masochistic position, which, to my mind, became the main cause of accusations in director’s ‘sick’ imagination and made some critics interpret the

¹¹¹ Macaulay, Scott. 2009. "Civilization and its discontents". Filmmaker (Los Angeles, CA: Independent Feature Project) [online] Available at: <<http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/issues/fall2009/antichrist.php>> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

¹¹² Goodsell, Luke. 2009. "I Don't Hate Women': Lars von Trier on *Antichrist*," *Rotten Tomatoes*. [online] Available at: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1210830-antichrist/news/1856901/i_dont_hate_women_lars_von_trier_on_antichrist/> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

¹¹³ Ebert, Roger. 2011. "Lars von Trier and the Antichrist," *Chicago Sun-Times*. [online] Available at: <<http://blogs.suntimes.com/foreignc/2011/05/lars-von-trier-antichrist.html>> [Accessed 25 May 2012]

¹¹⁴ Crocker, Jonathan. 2009. "RT Interview: Lars von Trier on *Antichrist*," *Rotten Tomatoes*. [online] Available at: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1210830-antichrist/news/1833302/rt_interview_lars_von_trier_on_antichrist/> [Accessed 24 May 2012]

¹¹⁵ Ebert, Roger. 2009. "Cannes #6: A devil's advocate for "Antichrist"," *Chicago Sun-Times*. [online] Available at: <http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2009/05/a_devils_advocate_for_antichri.html> (Accessed 27 May 2012)

¹¹⁶ Tookey, Chris. 2009. "Antichrist: The man who made this horrible, misogynistic film needs to see a shrink." *Daily Mail*. [online] Available at: <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CFEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Ftvshowbiz%2Freviews%2Farticle-1201803%2FANTICHRIST-The-man-horrible-misogynistic-film-needs-shrink.html&ei=BDvCT6i_AsrHswaMIYjdCg&usq=AFQjCNGD0DTPuLVS_KGC48f5Y9-MVTzsAw&sig2=Gv4ejx52AhuR3pC1yq_mvg> [Accessed 23 May 2012]

film as strongly influenced by von Trier's own long-lasting depression.¹¹⁷ The film denies viewer's pleasure or at least relative comfort till the last scene. Here the main male character 'comes to terms' with dangerous Nature by eliminating the threat to an orderly life posed by his wife's alleged insanity in response to their child's death in the accident (a boy falls out of the window).

However, I did not refer the reader to the director's statements to acknowledge director's intention (or his political views, biography, mental state) as the source of meaning. That would merely bring us back to the modernist belief in the author's creative force and authority upon the text. As Roland Barthes has long established in "The Death of the Author" "to give a text an Author" and thereby assign a single interpretation to it "is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."¹¹⁸ Instead he advocates to see the text as a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture"¹¹⁹ open for diverse and multiple reader's interpretation. The text as a cultural product doesn't belong to the author as a sole possessor of ultimate truth on its meaning. From Barth's post-modernist position the *Antichrist* may be explored as a complex net of (sometimes contradictory) meanings that undergird the dominant fiction of femininity in Western culture and fears connected to it. One may even argue that it works like an aggravator for the 'collective unconscious' in that cultural tradition. Even considered as a provocation, a derisive quirk of eccentric nature, the film induces the reaction that uncovers the pressure points of contemporary Western society, which is of no less importance than the film itself.

The majority of critics disliked the film for its misogyny. Chris Tookey announced that "von Trier had earned himself an unenviable reputation for misogyny through *Breaking The Waves* (1996), *Dancer In The Dark* (2000) and *Dogville* (2003)"¹²⁰ with *Antichrist* being "the most openly, psychopathically

¹¹⁷ Brooks, Xan. 2009. "Antichrist: A Work of Genius or the Sickest Film in the History of Cinema?" *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jul/16/antichrist-lars-von-trier-feminism>> [Accessed: 25 May 2012]

¹¹⁸ Barthes, Roland. 1977. "The Death of the Author," In *Image, Music, Text* ed. by Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath. Fontana Press, p. 147.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 146.

¹²⁰ Tookey, Chris. 2009. "Antichrist: The man who made this horrible, misogynistic film needs to see a shrink." *Daily Mail*. [online] Available at: <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CFEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Ftvshowbiz%2Freviews%2Farticle-1201803%2FANTICHRIST-The-man-horrible-misogynistic-film-needs-shrink.html&ei=BDvCT6i_AsrHswaMlYjdCg&usq=AFQjCNGD0DTPuLVS_KGC48f5Y9-MVTzsAw&sig2=Gv4ejx52AhuR3pC1yq_mvg> [Accessed 23 May 2012]

hostile towards women.”¹²¹ Von Trier’s most recent film *Melancholia* (2011), which also has Christian connotations developing the apocalypse theme, continues the director’s gallery of female characters.

Antichrist tells the story of a grieving couple that lost their child in a terrible accident. The film opens with the image of a small boy falling down from a window ledge while his parents are having sex in the room. This scene – the seven-minute prologue – is aesthetically stylized in black and white and slow motion to the accompaniment of Handel’s music. In the next scene we see the funeral of the boy where the mother loses consciousness. Mother’s ‘atypical grief’, influenced by her sense of guilt, leads her to deep depression. The husband, an experienced psychotherapist, wants to treat his wife himself and decides to conduct an exposure therapy. He takes his wife back to the place she fears the most – a forest where she with the son spent the summer writing her thesis on genocide.

The film is loaded with Christian references – from the metaphor of original sin, which becomes the cause of parents’ loss of their child and deprivation of allegedly ‘paradisiac’ marital life, to the remote cabin in the forest ironically named Eden, to the representation of Nature as anti-Culture and literally the ‘church of the Satan’, according to the words of the mother. After the death of the child there are only two characters, the father (Willem Dafoe) and the mother (Charlotte Gainsbourg) in the movie. Their names are not mentioned; their identities are constructed solely through power relations inside the couple and emotions they experience without any reference to social connections, historical context, and cultural specificity of the ‘outside world’. The husband is a psychotherapist and the mother is a researcher, but her emotional state and not the profession is foregrounded. The choice of the professions, to my mind, is selected to emphasize male rationality and authority inside the couple.

The absence of proper names, which would identify the two characters as concrete subjects accompanied with their claustrophobic isolation from the world creates the effect that it may be the story of ‘everyman’ and ‘everywoman’. Hence the only aspect of identity that comes to be strongly emphasized in *Antichrist* is gender relations abstracted into some universal dimension on the “human race”. Von Trier’s narrative explicitly proposes that the difference between the characters’ reaction to the son’s death – the mother’s uncontrolled destructive mourning and the father’s emotion-rejecting rationalization – is inherently ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’. As Roger Ebert pointed out, “‘Antichrist’

¹²¹ Ibid.

swings fluidly between Faith and Reason”¹²², except Reason and Faith (or madness, depression, mental breakdown) are sharply gendered in the film.

Despite the scene where the woman passingly observes that “Freud is dead”, this explicit claim sounds ironic because the film invites a psychoanalytical reading, presenting heterosexual difference (the central topic for *Antichrist*) as one of the most fundamental laws of “human nature”.¹²³ I now will not stop on the discussion of feminist critique of Freudian (as well as Lacanian) phallocentrism and fundamental asymmetry of Freud’s account of sexual difference that works to actual and theoretical disadvantage of the female, as well as universalizing pretensions of psychoanalysis, partly because von Trier locates his characters in similarly decontextualized situation that complies with the laws of sexual difference. The process of acquiring sexual identity through castration anxiety and positive Oedipal complex, as it was seen by Freud, was already discussed in the Chapter 3 in context of analysis of *Black Swan*.

Thus, According to Stephen Heath, the “function of castration” in psychoanalysis is “the articulation of the subject in difference.”¹²⁴ Constructed through lack, woman as absence of masculine presence (of the penis) induces castration anxiety by her very bodily specificity. According to Jacques Lacan, in the realm of the Symbolic the phallus functions as a privileged referent, the master signifier in relation to which woman is positioned as different, the Other of man. The Symbolic functions to induce the production of differences “as chain of signifiers in which the subject is effected in division.”¹²⁵ For Lacan it is important to spell out that the phallus is not the same as the penis (neither man nor woman can *have* it) but it represents symbolic power in society. However, the fact that its symbolic power is derived from the actual male organ keeps the Lacanian theoretical framework caught in some biological determinism.

In *Antichrist* the woman, distraught from her sorrow, becomes a patient of her husband who makes an attempt to cure her by analyzing and deciphering her unconscious fears. This gendered binary of rationality and madness repeats the psychoanalytic narrative: woman is represented as an ‘enigma’, a

¹²² Ebert, Roger. 2011. “Lars von Trier and the Antichrist,” *Chicago Sun-Times*. [online] Available at: <<http://blogs.suntimes.com/foreignc/2011/05/lars-von-trier-antichrist.html>> [Accessed 25 May 2012]

¹²³ Rose, Jackueline. 2005. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso: London, New York, p. 7.

¹²⁴ Heath, Stephen. 1992. “Difference” in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, Routledge: London, p. 49.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

‘dark continent’, resistant to reasoned understanding. Shoshana Felman points out that hysteria was long conceived as an exclusively female complaint¹²⁶ and cites from Phyllis Chesler’s book *Women and Madness* (1972): “Women more than men, and in greater numbers than their existence in the general population would predict, are involved in ‘careers’ as psychiatric patients”¹²⁷. Stephen Heath also points out that in contemporary analytical practice ‘feminine’ and ‘hysterical’ are taken more or less interchangeably.¹²⁸ Chesler also argues that ‘female psychology’ is conditioned by the oppressive patriarchal culture which extorts women to comply to socially expected stereotypes of female gender roles of mother/daughter/wife and considers the deviations from the established norm as ‘madness’. Felman argues that socially defined help-seeking and help-needing behavior in women is not only the “part of female conditioning, ideologically inherent in the behavior pattern and in the dependent and helpless role assigned to the women as such”¹²⁹, “but rather the very status of womanhood in Western theoretical discourse”¹³⁰ – including psychoanalysis.

In her feminist attempt of radical questioning and deconstruction of Western philosophical and psychoanalytical discourse, Luce Irigaray draws on the Derridean notion of ‘logocentrism’ as a general paradigm of Western metaphysics to explore how Western philosophical tradition has developed through valorizing the category of presence.¹³¹ In the metaphysical tradition, beginning from Plato, presence organizes the world around the categories of Truth, Being, Origin, God and establishes their hierarchical authority to other elements of the same ontological system.¹³² Through the mechanism of hierarchization inside the binary (Truth/Error, Being/Nothing, Presence/Absence, Identity/Difference, Masculine/Feminine) the second element of the binary is attributed ‘negative’ value and so becomes subordinated to the ‘positive’ one, as a rule of differentiation as such. Irigaray claims that theoretically constructed as subordinate to masculinity, woman is perceived as his opposite, difference, other.¹³³

¹²⁶ Felman, Shoshana. 1975. “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy,” *Diacritics*, Vol 5, No 4, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Chesler, Phyllis. 1973. *Women and Madness*, New York: Avon Books, p. xxii.

¹²⁸ Heath, Stephen. 1992. “Difference” in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, Routledge: London., 51.

¹²⁹ Felman, Shoshana. 1975. “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy,” *Diacritics*, Vol 5, No 4, p. 2-3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹³¹ Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press.

¹³² Felman, Shoshana. 1975. “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy,” *Diacritics*, Vol 5, No 4, p. 3.

¹³³ Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press.

According to the same logic of hierarchical organization of the binary, madness is subjected to reason, considered in its dichotomous opposition to sanity and comes to be rendered as 'feminine'.

For Lacan the subject is constituted in symbolic in relation to sexuality.¹³⁴ In his account of Lacan's understanding of sexual difference Heath writes: "Caused in language, which is division and representation, the subject is taken up as such in an interminable movement of signifier, the process of the symbolic, and in a structure of desire, the implication of the subject's experience of division, of lack, in language."¹³⁵ The subject is produced as a result of structuring of desire in language through the relation to the Other as a site of distribution-circulation of the signifiers. According to differentiating logic of the Symbolic that functions in relation to sexuality, woman must be distinguished from man in psychoanalytic theory as long as she is designated a "specific function in the symbolic order."¹³⁶ Constructed as lack in relation to the phallus, woman is positioned as negative in the Symbolic realm. If woman is positioned as lack according to the symbolic order (i.e. the order of language), she is inevitably positioned negatively in relation to the 'nature of words'¹³⁷ failing self-representation in the symbolic realm.

In *Antichrist* the man/husband/psychotherapist is the agent of the symbolic order: he possesses the words for curing his wife from emotional obsession. Words are in actual fact his instrument of control and authority as it is through language and speech the psychoanalytic 'talking cure' itself can be performed. The woman in her deepening mental disorder falls short of words and law itself, regressing to the body and the excess of sexuality it brings along with it. Her regression is so strong that she seems highly resistant to her husband's attempts to 'fix' her. In this regard the scene in which the man finds the woman's materials for her dissertation is most indicative.

After yet another unsuccessful session of psychological treatment, the man climbs up to the attic where he finds numerous pictures of tortured women of gynocide (her primary data for the thesis) hanging on the walls. The dark images of physical violence and pictures of demonic creatures reflect the stressing atmosphere the woman is working in. Finally the husband finds her notebook. As he thumbs

¹³⁴ Heath, Stephen. 1992. "Difference" in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, Routledge: London, 57.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 57.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 57.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 57.

through to the end he notices that her writing becomes broken and eventually turns into illegible doodles, expressive of her failure to signify and ongoing regression from the symbolic.¹³⁸

At the same, the female character is constructed as being rooted in the symbolic though her position is rather implied to be the reason for her deterioration. She is an academic, involved in the critical and creative activity of knowledge production. However, her academic activity functions in the narrative as the pretext (if not a main cause) of her mental illness. It is through her absorption into the topic of gynocide she comes to (mis)believe that femininity is inherently evil in its 'nature' and stops writing because, as she tells her husband, the research has lost its sense or even turned to be lies. Engagement in academic research delivers only an identity crisis and her position in the symbolic order becomes questionable.

The husband, having found new 'evidence' of possible reasons for the wife's madness, conducts another psychoanalytic session to ask what she thinks about human nature. Their dialogue goes like this:

Woman: I discovered something ... in my material than I expected. If human nature is evil, then that goes as well... for the nature of...

Husband: Of the women? Female nature?

Woman: The nature of all the sisters. Women do not control their own bodies - nature does.¹³⁹

The man attacks her for being uncritical to her primary material and for taking the literature "as proof of the evil of women."¹⁴⁰ He once more asserts his firm position in the symbolic vindicating himself the ability to criticize and analyze, to distance himself from prejudice, emotions, and everything opposite to reason and scientific facts, while the woman at some point loses her critical ability and takes everything at face value, immersing into oblivion of aberration. She is positioned as the Other of reason.

¹³⁸ It is worth mentioning that Ebert (2010) suggests a different interpretation of the scene in the attic. In his opinion it symbolizes man's experience of self-analysis and facing his own unconscious fears of femininity that is explicitly represented by dreadful demonic images of 'evil witches'.

¹³⁹ Antichrist Script – Dialogue Transcript. [online] Available at: <http://www.script-orama.com/movie_scripts/a/antichrist-script-transcript-chaos-reigns.html> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

¹⁴⁰ Antichrist Script – Dialogue Transcript. [online] Available at: <http://www.script-orama.com/movie_scripts/a/antichrist-script-transcript-chaos-reigns.html> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

Importantly, the man is the one through whom the viewer comes to know the ‘truth’ about the woman’s mental illness – he finds the photograph of their son with his boots wrongly put. At this point he ‘realizes’ why the autopsy report showed slight deformity of the bones in his feet. Through his eyes the spectator comes to see that the woman’s ‘madness’ manifests through subtle aggression towards the son. Photographs, reports, images, language, all these attributes of the reason, science, objectivity are presented through the male character, proposing different (gendered) paradigms of vision and judgment (man) and uncritical perception and emotion (woman).

Regarding the monstrous-feminine created through the abjection of sexuality, it is important that woman’s continuous regression from the symbolic in *Antichrist*, manifested in dyslexia and inability of critical thinking, leads to bodily regression, difference, and pure *jouissance*. Heath explains the Lacanian notion of *jouissance* as follows: “Sexual *jouissance* is phallic, *jouissance* – enjoyment, pleasure – of the organ; it is not a sexual relation, a relation to the Other as such. The order of the symbolic, the phallus being the privileged signifier of that order, causes and limits *jouissance*, the phallic being that limitation, and for both men and women.”¹⁴¹ *Jouissance* is a threat to the symbolic order, a destructive force which negates the power of the phallus. Equated with female sexuality and, moreover, female nature, and madness, *jouissance* becomes a sign of monstrosity, abject, contamination of the order. In the last scene, after going through the ordeal of violence initiated by his insane wife, the man finally kills her and burns the body – direct allusions to reprisals against witches during witch hunt. The previously hostile nature around the house again becomes neutral. He moves down the hill and sees hundreds of women moving towards him and passing him. Their faces are blurred. They present lack but this time no longer dangerous, pure negation, difference, absence. As Lars von Trier himself explained this scene in one of his interviews, “I think that it’s about anxiety towards sexuality and that it’s female sexuality against male sexuality.”¹⁴² As I tried to explore in my analysis, it is not only the last scene, but the whole structure of the film built on the idea of sexual difference that reveals anxiety of female sexuality.

¹⁴¹ Heath, Stephen. 1992. “Difference” in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, Routledge: London, p. 54.

¹⁴² Goodsell, Luke. 2009. “I Don’t Hate Women’: Lars von Trier on *Antichrist*,” *Rotten Tomatoes*. [online] Available at: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1210830-antichrist/news/1856901/i_dont_hate_women_lars_von_trier_on_antichrist/> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

5.2. *Antichrist as symptom*

To make explicit my point about the backlash in the horror genre, manifested in the *Antichrist*, I will examine Carol J. Clover's discussion of the trope of the 'final girl' and compare its functioning to the functioning of the trope of monstrous-feminine in the *Antichrist*.

In her analysis of slasher films (*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), *Scream* (1996)) Carol J. Clover turns away from the tradition of analyzing the construction of woman-as-victim in horrors and the 'masculine' sadomasochistic pleasure traditionally attributed to such films. She turns her attention instead to the trope of the 'final girl', the woman who confronts the killer inviting the viewer's identification with a female character. She argues that the pleasure in such films is constructed in terms of a gender-identity game. Explain/sum up here: what does this game mean?! While some critics praise the 'final girl' as an empowering female figure, Clover argues that it is profoundly 'immasculated':

The Final Girl is a male surrogate in things oedipal, a homoerotic stand-in, the audience incorporate; to the extent if she means 'girl' at all, it is only for purposes of signifying male lack, and even that meaning is nullified in the final scenes. ... The discourse is wholly masculine, and females figure in it only insofar as they 'read' some aspect of male experience.¹⁴³

In addition to the acknowledgment of the underlining phallocentric organization of the 'final girl', Clover does not merely register that the "Final Girl is nothing more than a figurative male"¹⁴⁴ but moves on and suggests that the spectator's pleasure "lies precisely in the resulting 'intellectual uncertainty' of sexual identity."¹⁴⁵ The visual identity game becomes the aesthetic base of the genre – especially in the cases when the gender of the killer is disguised till the last scenes of the film and the viewer is teased only with ambiguous 'signs' of killer's identity: leather gloves, booted feet. The gender game of identification in slasher films, however, does not dismiss masculine power while masking it under

¹⁴³ Clover, Carol J. 2000. "Her Body, Himself," in *The Horror Reader*, Routledge: London and New York, p. 301.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 303.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 303.

feminine costume.¹⁴⁶ The female body of the ‘final girl’ is both represented as body of the victim (as far as she is tortured, frightened, abjected) and the figure of masculine power, as long as she does not die (like, for example, Marion in *Psycho* – a classical victim of the killer) but saves herself and becomes her own hero.

Clover indicates the ambiguity of the gender game in horror films. She notices the productive shift inside the genre: the foregrounding of the female protagonist as an empowered hero: “Abject terror may still be gendered feminine, but the willingness of one immensely popular current genre to re-represent the hero as an anatomical female would seem to suggest that at least one of the traditional marks of heroism, triumphant self-rescue, is no longer strictly gendered masculine.”¹⁴⁷

Importantly, Clover chooses to analyse the films produced in late 1970s and early 1980s and emphasizes that the figure of the ‘final girl’ as an embodiment of the heroic function previously represented in males can be located in the films in the years following 1978.¹⁴⁸ She points out the importance of the historical context for production of such cultural representations:

The fact that the typical patrons of these films are the sons of marriages contracted in the sixties or even early seventies leads me to speculate that the dire claims of that era – that the women’s movement, the entry of women into the workplace, and the rise of divorce and woman-headed families would yield massive gender confusion in the next generation – were not entirely wrong. ... The fact that we have in the killer a feminine male and in the main character a masculine female – parent and everyteen, respectively – would seem, especially in the latter case, to suggest a loosening of the categories, or at least of the category of the feminine.¹⁴⁹

Clover’s analysis casts new light on the interpretation of *Antichrist*. As it was already defined, film falls into the category of the slasher movie, considering the scenes of explicit violence. Contrary to Clover’s conclusions about ‘massive gender confusion’ in the genre, I argue that the *Antichrist* (2009) collapses gender and sex to the point that ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ turn to be naturalized instead of ‘loosening the categories’. The film develops the topic of the ‘evil human nature’, strengthened by the

¹⁴⁶ Showalter, Elaine. 1983. “Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year,” *Raritan*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Clover, Carol J. 2000. “Her Body, Himself,” in *The Horror Reader*, Routledge: London and New York, 305 – 306.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 306.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 306.

visual tropes of ‘horror’ present in actual nature¹⁵⁰ – the man sees the deer with a dead fetus falling out of its uterus, the fox eats out its own bowels, the woman sees a flapper falling out of its nest (reminding her of her own son’s death). The state of nature becomes the analogy of psychological state of depression and feeling of loss, but it is the woman who is equated with nature through her uncontrolled and self-destructive sexuality and her (mis)belief that femininity is of evil nature. The female body collapses into chthonic intimacy with nature in the scene of the Geinsbourg’s character’s masturbation under the roots of a tree. Moreover, the outbursts of sexual violence she inflicts on herself and her husband are connected to this essentialized representation of the evil. The violence is either a punishment for psychological violence she experienced while going through the process of exposure therapy (here von Trier is utterly literal – the act of castration is performed directly and not symbolically) or a self-punishment (also through the act of castration) for failing her maternal duty. Her feeling of guilt is explained in the flashback when the viewer understands that she actually saw her son falling out of the window, but was too consumed by orgasmic pleasure to stop him. Nevertheless, we cannot be sure whether it really was so or she just experienced neurotic hallucination caused by the feeling of guilt, this is her sexuality that she herself blames in her carelessness.

Furthermore, her depression may be a symptom of the abstinence syndrome of motherhood. On seeing the pictures in which the son is depicted with the boots wrongly put on his feet – it stays unclear whether the mother did it on purpose or unconsciously but it signals that her mental illness started developing prior to the tragic accident (and particularly during the time when she worked on her thesis on gynocide). Interestingly, her mental illness is represented to have manifested through her rejection of maternal duties and turned into subtle acts of violence against the son. Female sexual pleasure is implicated to undermine the maternity function. Thus, the intersection of madness, unproductive sexuality, woman’s relation to knowledge and the Symbolic construct a binary in which femininity is defined as monstrous in itself. Female desire thus gets abjected as unproductive and dangerous. As Clover explains: “To the extent

¹⁵⁰ In his interviews Lars von Trier mentioned that before starting filming *Antichrist* he watched documentaries about original forests in Europe and was fascinated by the contrast between the romantic imagining of nature as a place of peace and harmony and the actual pain and suffering that take place there as species fight for survival killing and devouring each other. The interesting thing about this wording is that the terms ‘killing’, ‘pain’, and ‘suffering’ by themselves anthropologize nature, turning it into a projection screen for human understanding of cruelty and barbarism.

that the monster is constructed as feminine, the horror film thus expresses female desire only to show how monstrous it is.”¹⁵¹

Such construction of female sexuality as monstrous, abnegated through madness and (indirect) infanticide is hardly new in the various Western cultural discourses. What is interesting and is worth exploring though is the fact that it is not overcome in the genre of horror through the trope of the ‘final girl’ in the slasher movie through the mixing of gender roles that came with it. On the contrary, the *Antichrist* illustrates a ‘return of the repressed’, a misogynist backlash that crosses out the achievements of women’s movement. To my mind, the ‘return of the repressed’ was the main reason of irritated reception of the film, especially in USA and France. The prohibition on spectatorial pleasure coming from the violence performed on female body (and psyche) became part of the contemporary Symbolic order and the old Hitchcock rule ‘Torture the woman’ has lost its sadistic and voyeuristic appeal partly by virtue of feminist critique of cinema and its disclosure of a ‘male gaze’ and partly by the shifts in gender representation in the horror genre itself. The *Antichrist*, a film that can be easily classified as misogynist, turned out to be a slap in the face to the ‘enlightened’ Western society where women are considered to be emancipated, actively participating in the workforce, and where female sexuality is not simply reduced to reproduction. That is why I argue that the reception of the *Antichrist* can be regarded as symptomatic in a society that considers itself post-feminist. The scandalous disgust to the film reveals the desire for ‘sterile representation’, a wish to clear the sphere of image from the scenes of violence over women. To some extent it is also the desire to ‘eject the abject’, according to Kristeva’s formula of subject constitution and its longing for demarcation of boundaries between the ‘clean’ and the ‘unclean’.

Tabooing the monstrosity of violence could be judged as progressive if it were not cynical in its roots. As Linda Williams put it in her comment on *Antichrist*: “If only tabloids campaigned against real clitorectomies, done on real baby girls, rather than fabricated ones done in fiction movies.”¹⁵² On the other hand, as Linda Williams noticed, *Antichrist* is not the only film that exploits the horrority of

¹⁵¹ Clover, Carol J. 2000. “Her Body, Himself,” in *The Horror Reader*, Routledge: London and New York, p. 298.

¹⁵² Brooks, Xan. 2009. “Antichrist: A Work of Genius or the Sickest Film in the History of Cinema?” *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jul/16/antichrist-lars-von-trier-feminism>> [Accessed: 25 May 2012]

torturing the sexed body. She mentions Brazilian film *Embodiment Of Evil* (2008) that includes “scenes of somebody eating their own buttocks and a rat running up another character's vagina”, then she adds: “To my knowledge, no one has condemned this as the most obscene film ever made (in contrast with the Sun's outrage over *Antichrist*).”¹⁵³ This comment reveals the priorities existent in contemporary Western society regarding cultural production: it still depends on the authority of acknowledged masters (like Lars von Trier) and ‘expert’ institutions (like Cannes Film Festival) and delegates them credit of trust for meaning production, flying into a rage when they do not coincide with public anticipations and strike at pressure points like in the case of the ‘return of the repressed’ monstrous-feminine in *Antichrist*.

To sum up, in this chapter I discussed female monstrosity in the *Antichrist* to show how its naturalizing approach to femininity represents femininity itself as monstrous. Having compared the female monstrosity constructed in the *Antichrist* with the trope of the ‘final girl’, I pointed out the conservative ‘backlash’ in the horror genre.

¹⁵³ Brooks, Xan. 2009. “Antichrist: A Work of Genius or the Sickest Film in the History of Cinema?” *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jul/16/antichrist-lars-von-trier-feminism>> [Accessed: 25 May 2012]

6. Conclusion

In my thesis I explored various forms of female filmic monstrosity in *The Piano Teacher* (2001), the *Black Swan* (2010), and the *Antichrist* (2009) arguing that they belong to the hybrid ‘post-modern’ genre of psychohorror. Having compared the main characters of these films to the ‘empowered’ figures of female castrating monsters such as Ripley in the *Alien* (1979) and Carrie in *Carrie* (1976) and a trope of the ‘final girl’ I identified a conservative ‘backlash’ in the genre of horror. I argued that the main site of ‘abjection’ of these characters and the root of their monstrosity is uncontrolled unproductive sexuality, represented in films as perverse and dangerous for social order and therefore subjected to further repression.

The ways of ‘monstrification’ of female sexuality overlap through films along the lines of fear of ‘maternal authority’ (*The Piano Teacher* and the *Black Swan*), madness, and heroines’ engagement into sphere of artistry (*The Piano Teacher* and the *Black Swan*) or academic research (the *Antichrist*) that forms the binary of production/reproduction in which (creative) production is connoted as anti-feminine in terms of its narrative alignment with excessive (perverse) sexuality and identity crisis.

The fear of ‘maternal authority’, so explicit in *The Piano Teacher* and the *Black Swan*, reveals cultural inconsistency about the imagining of the maternal function – on the one hand, woman is traditionally interpellated in various Western cultural discourses as mother, on the other hand, her excessive influence (in view of absence of father figure) is represented as socially destructive, especially in the realm of family, which is a site of subjectivity construction and *socially accepted* desire structuring, according to psychoanalysis.

One more important point is ‘monstrification’ of the female bond, a female relationship, the most brightly manifested in the *Black Swan*, where Nina’s character’s monstrosity is apparently constructed through her ‘perverse’ interrelations with other female characters of the film – mother, Beth, and Lily.

The accomplished analysis allows to conclude that the social fear induced by ‘monstrous-feminine’ in these films is evoked not only by ‘maternal authority’, which threatens to regulated universe of paternal law, but also, and more importantly, by very female liberated sexuality and desire not bind by socially

accepted reproductive function. In psychoanalysis female desire is constructed through the ‘positive’ Oedipal complex which predeterminedly structurally positions a woman as a mother or potential mother (who is determined by penis envy), and female sexuality is regularized with the demands of patriarchal symbolic order (monogamy, heterosexuality, ‘passive’ social disposition). Manifestation of autonomous, ‘pure’ desire, free from any social teleology (and therefore ‘destructive’) – this is what arouses disguised moral panic and brings to life ‘monstrous’ images of Nina, Erika, and anonymous female character of the *Antichrist* that alludes to universalized notion of ‘femininity’. Female desire is the subject to be repressed in these films. The acknowledgement of an ‘autonomous’ desire in women, free from patriarchal logic of desire would need a reconceptualization of the very notion of desire and, maybe, moving away from the psychoanalytic monopoly on interpretation of sexuality as long as its theoretical perspective determines female desire through ontology of lack and as dependent on phallus as master signifier. In this sense I think that Elisabeth Grosz’s (1998) rethinking of desire may be a productive path to consider. She does not deny that any type of sexuality exists “beyond or outside the limits of patriarchal models,”¹⁵⁴ but she also suggests that “not ... all forms of human sexuality are equally invested in patriarchal values, for there are clearly many different kinds of subversion and transgression, many types of sexual aberration that cannot be assimilated into historically determinate norms and ideals.”¹⁵⁵ By defining sexuality and desire in terms of “energies, excitations, impulses, actions, movements, practices, moments, pulses of feelings,”¹⁵⁶ she strives to liberate the concept of desire from its genital centeredness in the Western patriarchal culture.

The reason why I used psychoanalysis as an analytical tool for interpretation of these films is because, as Mortimer noticed regarding the *Black Swan*, their narrative construction is saturated with psychoanalytic allusions. Taking into account that Freud elaborated his theory in the beginning of the 20th century, it is both interesting and worrisome that such films occur, evoke vast critical interest and receive awards in the beginning of the 21st century, after the breaking of colonial system, LGBT and feminist movements. All three films engage a viewer in the disposition that provokes dis-identification with the

¹⁵⁴ Grosz, Elisabeth. 1998. “Refiguring Lesbian Desire.” In Naomi Zack et al (eds.) *Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: The Big Questions*, Blackwell, pp. 268 – 280, p. 275.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 275.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 276.

female character through ‘painful’ scenes of self-mutilation which leads to marking out of an imaginary borderline between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ female sexuality. Manifestation of such ‘monstrification’ and ‘abjection’ of female sexuality, to my mind, signals the conservative ‘backlash’ in representation of femininity in horror films.

Furthermore, as far as the effect of ‘abjectionification’ is reached through the radical dis-identification with the character and the experience of ‘painful’ watching, film theory needs a more profound elaboration of the concept of displeasure, which, being ‘obvious’ concerning horror films did not get much attention from the scholars. However, such films as *The Piano Teacher*, the *Black Swan*, and the *Antichrist* pose the necessity to conceptualize displeasure as an ideologically charged tool of cinematic apparatus.

Bibliography

Antichrist Script – Dialogue Transcript. [online] Available at: <http://www.script-orama.com/movie_scripts/a/antichrist-script-transcript-chaos-reigns.html> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

Althusser, Louis. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, New York: Monthly Review Press,

Barthes, Roland. 1977. “The Death of the Author,” In *Image, Music, Text* ed. by Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath. Fontana Press.

Benjamin, Jessica. 1988. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problems of Domination*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Braidotti, R. 1994. *Nomadic Subjects*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brooks, Xan. 2009. “Antichrist: A Work of Genius or the Sickest Film in the History of Cinema?” *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jul/16/antichrist-lars-von-trier-feminism>> [Accessed: 25 May 2012]

Carrol, Noel. 1990. *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, London: Routledge.

Calhoun, Dave. 2010. “Black Swan,” [online] Available at: <http://www.timeout.com/film/reviews/88567/black-swan.html#top_comments_main> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

Chaudhuri, Shohini. 2006. *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaya Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed*. London: Routledge.

Chesler, Phyllis. 1973. *Women and Madness*. New York: Avon Books.

Chodorow, Nancy. 1974 “Family Structure and Feminine Personality,” In *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Luise Lamphere. Palo Alto: Stanford UP.

_____. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California.

Clover, Carol J. 1992. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, Princeton University Press.

_____. 2000. “Her Body, Himself,” in *The Horror Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

Creed, Barbara. 1986. "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection". *Screen*, Vol. 27, No. 1.

_____. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London and New-York: Routledge.

_____. 2000. "Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection," In *The Horror Reader*, ed. by Ken Gelder. London and New York: Routledge.

Crane, Jonathan Lake. 1994. *Terror and the Everyday life: Singular Moments in the History of Horror Film*. London: Sage Publications.

Crocker, Jonathan. 2009. "RT Interview: Lars von Trier on *Antichrist*." *Rotten Tomatoes*. [online] Available at: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1210830-antichrist/news/1833302/rt_interview_lars_von_trier_on_antichrist/> [Accessed 24 May 2012]

Culler, Jonathan. 1983. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell University. pp. 169 – 170.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1991. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*. New York: Zone Books.

Ebert, Roger. 2009. "Cannes #6: A devil's advocate for "Antichrist"," *Chicago Sun-Times*. [online] Available at: <http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2009/05/a_devils_advocate_for_antichri.html> (Accessed 27 May 2012)

_____. 2011. "Lars von Trier and the Antichrist," *Chicago Sun-Times*. [online] Available at: <<http://blogs.suntimes.com/foreignc/2011/05/lars-von-trier-antichrist.html>> [Accessed 25 May 2012]

Felman, Shoshana. 1975. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," *Diacritics*, Vol 5, No 4.

Freeland, Cynthia. 2000. *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Freud, Sigmund. 1931. "Female Sexuality," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works*, pp. 221-244.

_____. 1933. "Femininity", [online] Available at: <http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/ewaters/345/2007_freud/femininity.pdf> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

_____. 1990. "The Uncanny," In *Art and Literature (Penguin Freud Library)*. Penguin Books Ltd.

Goodsell, Luke. 2009. "I Don't Hate Women': Lars von Trier on *Antichrist*," *Rotten Tomatoes*. [online] Available at: <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1210830-antichrist/news/1856901/i_dont_hate_women_lars_von_trier_on_antichrist/> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

Grosz, Elisabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Theories of Representation and Difference)*. Indiana University Press.

_____. 1998. "Refiguring Lesbian Desire." In Naomi Zack et al (eds.) *Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: The Big Questions*. Blackwell, pp. 268 – 280.

Heath, Stephen. 1992. "Difference," In *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. London: Routledge.

Hills, Matt. 2005. *The Pleasure of Horror*, London: Continuum,

Hoberman, J. 2002. "Prisoner's Songs," *Village Voice*. [online] Available at: <www.villagevoice.com/film/0213,hoberman,33363,20.html> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

Honeycutt, Kirk. 2010. *The Bottom Line*, [online] Available at: <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/black-swan-film-review-29918>> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

Huang, Han-yu. 2007. "Monsters, Perversion, and Enjoyment: Towards a Psychoanalytic Theory of Postmodern Horror." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, pp. 87 – 110.

Horney, Karen. 1926. "The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and by Women." In *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 7, pp. 324-339.

Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Cornell University Press.

Johnston, Claire. 1973. "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema." In *Notes on Women's Cinema*. London: Society for Education in Film and Television.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kosta, Barbara. 1994. "Inscribing Erika: Mother-Daughter Bond/age in Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Klavierspielerin." *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86, No. 2.

Leffler, Yvonne. 2000. *Horror as Pleasure: The Aesthetics of Horror Fiction*, Almqvist & Wiksell.

Ma, Jean. 2010. "Discordant Desires, Violent Refrains: La Pianiste (The Piano Teacher)." In *A companion to Michael Haneke*, A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication.

Macaulay, Scott. 2009. "Civilization and its discontents". Filmmaker (Los Angeles, CA: Independent Feature Project) [online] Available at:

<<http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/issues/fall2009/antichrist.php>> [Accessed 27 May 2012]

Mitchel, Juliet and Rose, Jacqueline, eds. 1982. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, trans. Jacqueline Rose. London: Macmillan.

Mortimer, Danielle. 2010. "Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* and the Monstrousness of Lack." [online] Available at: <<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/mortimerpaper.pdf>> [Accessed 5 May 2012]

Mulvey, Laura. 1992. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *The Sexual Subject: Screen Reader in Sexuality: A "Screen" Reader in Sexuality*, ed. by Mandy Merck. London: Routledge.

Rich, Adrienne. 1995. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W W Norton & Company.

Rose, Jackueline. 2005. *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*. London and New York: Verso.

Sharrett, Christopher. 2004. "The Horror of the Middle Class", *Kinoeye 4:1*. [online] Available at: <kinoeye.org/04/01/sharrett01.php> [Accessed 17 May 2012]

Showalter, Elaine. 1983. "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year." *Raritan*.

Silverman, Kaja. 1993. "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," in *Male Trouble (Camera Obscura)*, ed. by Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, Univ Of Minnesota Press.

Studlar, Gaylin. 1985. "Masochism and the perverse pleasure of the cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy, 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____ (1994), "Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in "Letter from an Unknown Woman," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3.

Tookey, Chris. 2009. "Antichrist: The man who made this horrible, misogynistic film needs to see a shrink." *Daily Mail*. [online] Available at: <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CFEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymail.co.uk%2Ftvshowbiz%2Freviews%2Farticle-1201803%2FANTICHRIST-The-man-horrible-misogynistic-film-needs-shrink.html&ei=BDvCT6i_AsrHswaMlYjdCg&usg=AFQjCNGD0DTPuLVS_KGC48f5Y9-MVTzsAw&sig2=Gv4ejx52AhuR3pC1yq_mxg> [Accessed 23 May 2012]

Tudor, Andrew. 1997. "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre," *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No 3, pp. 443-463.

Urbano, Cosimo. 2004. "'What's the Matter with Melanie?' Reflections on the Merits of Psychoanalytic Approaches to Modern Horror Cinema." In *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17 – 34.

Williams, Linda. 1991. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4.

_____(1983) "When the Woman Looks," In *Re-Vision: Essays on Feminist Film Criticism*. Eds. Doane, Mellencamp and Williams. American Film Institute Monograph Series.

Wood, Robin. 1986. "The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film," In *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press.

_____. 2002. "Do I Disgust You?" or, tirez pas sur La Pianiste," *Free Online Library*, [online] Available at: <<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22Do+I+disgust+you%3F%22+or,+tirez+pas+sur+La+Pianiste.-a094843210>> [Accessed 17 May 2012]