The Cinema of Darren Aronofsky -
A Phenomenological Case Study

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Abstract

This thesis contextualises phenomenology in relation to film, exploring what phenomenology is and how it can be used as a tool to analyse film. Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological framework (which promotes the embodied experience of the spectator) provides the method of inquiry into the films studied here. This method employs five hermeneutic rules that ask the spectator to first experience a phenomenon and then attempt to analyse it. An analysis of American director Darren Aronofsky's first five feature films is undertaken using this phenomenological optic. *Pi* (1998), *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), *The Fountain* (2006), *The Wrestler* (2008), and *Black Swan* (2010) all elicit embodied responses in the spectator with the intention of using such responses as a vehicle to convey meaning. Theories of non-cognitive processes, such as emotional contagion, non-cognitive affective responses, and mood are presented as an explanatory model for the experience of embodied responses to film by the spectator. This research identifies and analyses four core elements within the structure of Aronofsky's films that promote these embodied responses, and lead the spectator to identify so intensely with the protagonist. These elements are the musical score, colour complexion, visual composition, and the exposition of body.

Key findings of this study reveal Aronofsky to be an auteur with existential concerns, akin to the nihilistic outlook described by German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger. This subtext is revealed through the practice of phenomenological viewing and is promoted by the physicality of Aronofsky's cinema which prompts the spectator's embodied response, which is then followed by an examination of "self". Furthermore, this thesis suggests that the practice of phenomenological viewing could be applied to other auteurs' work in order to expose new meanings and subtexts. The exposure of Aronofsky's "nihilistic" subtext highlights Sobchack's phenomenological method of cinematic viewing as a valid way to both experience *and* analyse cinema.

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Introduction

Although there is significant academic literature on the cinema of Darren Aronofsky, the tendency has been to observe his films through a psychoanalytic and formalist lens. Such perspectives have often scrutinised a single film (as opposed to his entire body of feature films) against a theoretical backdrop of psychoanalytic theories, with little regard for the physical experience of the embodied spectator. Paul Eisenstein's *Devouring Holes: Darren Aronofsky's Requiem for a Dream and the Tectonics of Psychoanalysis* provides a good example of this[1]. Eisenstein argues that *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) is a reflection of a world where the "characters' conduct is so explicitly motivated by the fundamental fantasy of direct access to pre-Oedipal jouissance" (2007, p.5). Similarly, Ben Tyrer sees *Black Swan* (2010) in terms of Lacanian film theory. He argues that *Black Swan* presents enjoyment in a way that circumnavigates Lacan's "Graph of Sexuation". Tyrer considers the body to be a central theme in *Black Swan*, however, he explores this theme in psychoanalytical terms and concludes that "if we speak of the body in cinema, it seems Lacan has not made his exit yet" (2014, p.11).

In looking at Aronofsky's first five feature films, the phenomenological perspective has garnered substantially less academic attention. Perhaps Steen Christiansen (2011) best bridges the gap between the psychoanalytical and phenomenological approach with his account of the transformative state of Nina (Natalie Portman), the protagonist in *Black Swan*. This film easily lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading, and Christiansen lays the groundwork for viewing Nina in these terms (specifically the Oedipal trajectory and scopophilia). Whilst making valid assertions, Christiansen concludes that the best method of understanding *Black Swan* is through the "affective image". This is illustrated in the final scene, where Nina:

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[1] For further examples see Brian Collin's paper *The Sacrificial Ram and the Black Queen: Mimetic Theory Fades to Black* (2013), Joesph Darlington's lecture *The Mirror Stage and the Wrestler* (2014), and Julie Sexeny's chapter *Identification and Mutual Recognition in Darren Aronofsky's Black Swan* (2014).

oversteps mere representation and fantasy and instead becomes the *Black Swan* in a moment of affective desire, a moment also meant to transgress the boundary between screen and spectator. We as spectators are clearly meant to be not simply shocked and startled by Nina's physical transformation but also to be elated by Nina's virtuoso performance (Christiansen, 2011, p. 312).

In this thesis, I will demonstrate how phenomenology, when applied to the cinema of Aronofsky, brings forth an understanding of his films that is different and perhaps more enlightening, than if they were to be viewed in a non-phenomenological manner. Specifically, I will examine Aronofsky's first five feature films: *Pi* (1998), *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), *The Fountain* (2006), *The Wrestler* (2008) and *Black Swan* (2010).

Involving many disciplines, phenomenology is the philosophical study of the structures of subjective experience and consciousness. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that phenomenology explains the fundamental role that perception plays in the understanding of the world. Strongly influenced by the German philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty emphasised the body as the primary site of knowing the world. This was an evolution from existing theories that placed consciousness as the primary site for knowing the world. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology:

tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking into account of [sic] its psychological origins and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or sociologist may be able to provide (1945, p.vii).

Phenomenology has recently emerged as a scholarly field of research, accompanied by increased interest and efforts to rethink its place in the social sciences and humanities. This was witnessed in the recent U.K. conference, Conditions of Mediation[2]. The

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[2] See *http://conditionsofmediation.wordpress.com*

methodological importance of phenomenology as an approach to films (and its frequently understated nature) is aptly highlighted by Vivian Sobchack in her chapter from the Australian online journal *Senses of Cinema*:

> Nearly every time I read a movie review in a newspaper or popular magazine, I am struck once again by the gap that exists between our actual experience of the cinema and the theory that we academic film scholars write to explain it — or, perhaps more aptly, to explain it away (Sobchack, 2000).

Cinema (or filmmaking) can leave an impression on the spectator and trigger thought processes that may be transformative. This is the kind of film experience that film phenomenologists describe as vital to the understanding of cinema as embodied response on the part of the spectator. This thesis considers cinema as the locus of this phenomenological subjective experience, and explores why it is that we undeniably experience tangible affects whilst watching film. An investigation into the experience of cinema poses a number of questions that need further exploration and answers. Notably, *What is phenomenology?* and *How does this approach advantage a reading of the cinema of Aronofsky?* Indeed, what does it mean to talk about a film (or a body of films as will be the case in this thesis) using a phenomenological approach?

The cinema of Aronofsky lends itself to a phenomenological reading due to the visceral nature of his films. They offer an opportunity to study a concise body of work that is deeply concerned with its physicality. Indeed, Director Darren Aronofsky appears to make a conscious effort to bring the spectator towards the sensory experience of the protagonist, specifically so that the spectator experiences the physicality of his cinema. He states:

> When you're trying to bring an audience into a visual experience, one way to do it is to use all of our different senses and to bring the audience into a character by feeling their senses. I try to connect an audience to how they

feel, how something tastes, how something sounds, because I think that it's something you can relate to that doesn't need description (*The Daily Californian*, 2006).

My methodology will utilise a reading of Aronofsky's films through a phenomenological optic, hypothesising that meaning within his work is rooted within the physicality of the text. Through a close textual analysis and deconstruction of his films, I will explore the extent to which his cinema can be defined as a work of "bodily intent", that is, a work that attempts to evoke bodily responses in the spectator with the intention of using these as a vehicle to convey the meaning of the text.

As an auteur, Aronofsky is not alone in his endeavour to intentionally evoke a physical response within the embodied spectator through his text. However, I will argue that his reasons for doing so provide distinctive insights for the spectator. The underlying purpose for his construction and deployment of such cinema is not merely entertainment. Instead, it is an existential statement, or enquiry into our place in the world — a place where understanding and meaning are brought about through the spectator's examination of "self" prompted by the physicality of the cinema.

Chapter One will present the method of investigation and will outline the necessary tools to embark on a phenomenological reading of Aronofsky's first five feature films. It will present accounts of phenomenology according to five key theorists: Hugo Münsterberg, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Daniel Frampton, Vivian Sobchack, and Don Ihde. This chapter will contextualise the study of phenomenology in relation to film, beginning with Münsterberg's early theory of cinematic experience. Münsterberg provides a solid theoretical foundation to the study of phenomenology in film, most notably in his central consideration of the spectator and her relationship with film. The role that the body plays in perceiving film is further explained by Merleau-Ponty. His concept of the "primacy of perception" posits that we first perceive the world, and then we conceptualise it. Although not necessarily concerned with cinema, "primacy of perception" makes central the concerns of the body — a concept that phenomenologists

Frampton and Sobchack apply to cinema. Their filmic models of the embodied spectator will be discussed, and Sobchack's examination of phenomenology using Ihde's five hermeneutic rules will be described. Sobchack creates a methodology by which film is experienced then analysed. Importantly, this allows for an *analysis* of cinema rather than solely the experience of it. I will argue that Sobchack's application of Ihde's rules to cinematic reception provides the necessary method to proceed with a phenomenological investigation of Aronofsky's films.

Chapters Two and Three will explore Aronofsky's filmic methods and their intention to physically stimulate the spectator through non-cognitive processes. In order to examine the intention of film to elicit physical responses from the spectator, an exploration of the major theories of cognitive and non-cognitive responses to the stimulus of cinema will be undertaken. I will argue that a distinction must be made between meaning that is obtained through cognitive evaluation, and meaning that is obtained through non-cognitive processes. Although both occur, I will argue that they result in different kinds of meaning. While not attempting to discredit cognitivist theories, I do not share some suggestions[3] of its exclusivity and will argue that non-cognitivist processes enable a deeper experience for the lived body.

Chapter Two will begin with a discussion of theories of non-cognitive responses by Amy Coplan, Jenefer Robinson, and Noel Carroll. These are: emotional contagion, automatic affective response, and mood. This exploration will aim to demonstrate how non-cognitive responses to the stimuli of cinema can encourage the onset of emotional states. I will argue that as a filmmaker, Aronofsky intentionally provokes non-cognitive responses within the spectator. This permits phenomenological reception and, in turn, encourages the onset of emotional states. Through reflection, this can result in a more meaningful and profound cinematic experience for the spectator.

This chapter will employ the methods outlined in Chapter One, namely Ihde's five hermeneutic rules. To that end, this method will be used to examine the opening

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[3] See William Lyon (1980).

sequences of the five films, analyse the film experience, and describe any significant "features". Furthermore, I shall investigate the films' musical scores and how these can be described in phenomenological terms as provoking a non-cognitive response. To do this I will chart the musical shifts throughout each film. This will be illustrated using music maps, which allow a more thorough analysis of the musical score. The musical score presents a paradox; it has the ability to reach into my lived body and alter the way I feel without requiring visual representation to give reason to this change. Why is it that the musical score can make me feel a certain way? How can *The Fountain*'s score imbue a sense of wonder in me, or *Pi*'s score a feeling of anxiety? How can this be done when Aronofsky does not have direct access to my somatic triggers? Chapter Two will attempt to answer such questions and in doing so will present Peter Kivy's (2007) theory of musical emotion, which I will expound upon.

Chapter Three will continue with similar ideas in relation to the films' "affective image"; specifically how films complexion[4], composition, and the portrayal of the body affect the spectator. The ability of a film's complexion to reach into my lived body and alter the way I feel operates with a similar currency to the musical score. Notably, it presents the same paradox that music does — affecting me yet not having access to my somatic triggers. Like music, the relationship between complexion and non-cognitive responses appear to share a natural connection. However, complexion does not offer a definitive and tangible form of representation and objectification, yet it still has the power to affect me non-cognitively. At this point, I will discuss how cinematic complexion can operate beyond the visual realm. As an embodied spectator, my experience of complexion can inform my other senses. Vivian Sobchack posits that:

> We do not experience any movie only with our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and knowledge of our sensorium (Sobchack, 2000).

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[4] By the term "complexion" I am referring to the film's colour in a holistic sense. That is, the film's dominant hues that coalesce over the length of the film to bring about its collective colour identity, or complexion.

The phenomenon of sensory crossover that the embodied spectator sometimes experiences is referred to by Sobchack as the "cinesthesia". Chapter Three will discuss this concept in relation to Aronofsky's work and will illustrate each film's complexion with colour signatures and barcodes. The signatures and barcodes offer a concise visualisation of the film's complexion and colour shifts, and these will be analysed in relation to the theme of each film. Furthermore, the effect this might have on the spectator will be discussed.

Chapter Three will also explore the visual composition of Aronofsky's films, specifically framing and editing. This section will compare the visual style of each film and argue that Aronofsky's oeuvre can be split into three aesthetic categories. A comparative analysis is made of the aggressive visual and subjective story telling style of *Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream* — which are in stark contrast to *The Fountain*, whose framing and editing patterns bring about a sense of contemplative harmony. Finally, *The Wrestler* and *Black Swan* exhibit a looser style that is, in parts, similar to *cinéma vérité*. The portrayal of the protagonist is investigated in terms of their visual composition. This portrayal is crucial to understanding how framing and editing imbricate the spectator with the concerns of the protagonist.

Finally, Chapter Three will also explore the treatment of the body in each film. The body as a signifier is an important notion common to Aronofsky's films studied in this thesis. I will argue that the protagonist's body becomes the lens through which the spectator perceives the film. In doing so I will discuss Bertolt Brecht's (1990) concept of "gestus" and how this relates to depictions of the protagonist. The gestus constitutes a visualisation of how a protagonist physically interacts with his or her surrounding world, and therefore can be used as a phenomenological tool to analyse the protagonists' relations to the spectator.

I will argue that Aronofsky's filmic methods offer the spectator an "affective image" — that is, an image that provides a non-cognitive form of communication between the

filmmaker and the spectator. The content of Aronofsky's communications will be addressed in Chapter Four.

The cinema of Aronofsky poses questions that examine humanity's problematic pursuit of existential purpose. Chapter Four will aim to investigate this and explore how (or if) this exposes meaning in his films. The films examined present their inquiry through an optic that firmly fixes its focus on the human body, both of the protagonist and, most pertinent to the phenomenologist, the spectator. The key to understanding Aronofsky's investigation into humanity's inherent problem lies in the protagonists' corporeal representations and how these engage with the embodied spectator. As will be illustrated in Chapters Two and Three, music, composition, and colour complexion play an important role in the exposition of the protagonists' bodies. These elements are treated in a way that help a dialogue to flow between the spectator and the film. Most importantly, they operate as a conduit for phenomenological reception and help the spectator to *feel* the film. But why is feeling the film important? What purpose does it serve? Chapter Four will present a theory regarding Aronofsky's purpose in employing such body-centric cinema. I will suggest that this physicality significantly enhances the transfer of meaning from filmmaker to spectator. Finally, I will argue that the cinema of Aronofsky represents a "return to nature" and will present this using the framework of German existentialist Martin Heidegger. His outlook on modernity and its treatment of technology offers interesting insights that, when applied to Aronofsky's films, offer new meanings. Heidegger's framework helps to distinguish between phenomenological and non-phenomenological modes of spectatorship. In particular, he makes a distinction between "challenging-forth" nature (using technology to "make" something from nature), and "bringing-forth" nature, (using technology to "reveal" something from nature). This chapter will apply the two modes of "challenging-forth" and "bringing-forth" to Aronofsky's five films and investigate how these films, through the phenomenological practice of "bringing-forth" meaning, offer different insights quite distinct from the non-phenomenological practice of "challenging-forth" meaning.

Chapter 1: The Method of Inquiry

Black Swan opens in darkness as classical music washes over me, facilitating a mood of anticipation and curiosity. Out of the darkness a single light source illuminates a young woman dressed in white. She looks happy and at peace, as she begins to dance effortlessly around the semi-darkened space. The dance is beautiful and its movement encourages this sense of beauty within me. As she comes to rest the music changes, becoming more sinister, darker in mood. An ominous feeling begins to overwhelm me as I watch a man dressed in black appear from the darkness, walking towards her in a predatory fashion. I am now following him as he stalks her. I am feeling uncomfortable as I am drawn into this scene against my will. I see her anxiety, and likewise feel anxious for her. The man dances aggressively around the young woman, and I hear and see her fear. She struggles to escape and upon this, the man is magically transformed into a monster. The dance becomes more violent and as the struggle reaches its climax, she is magically transformed into a swan. She breaks free and flies serenely into the distance, back into the darkness. I feel relieved that the struggle is over, but pained at her experience. My moment of fantastical reverie is unceremoniously broken as I now return to nature, and am shown the same young woman waking in a bed, bathed in natural daylight.

— My phenomenological description of the opening sequence of *Black Swan* (2010).

In this chapter, I will present a method of investigation that will allow a close textual reading of the cinema of Aronofsky. To that end, I will lay the groundwork for a phenomenological framework suggested by Vivian Sobchack, who employs Don Ihde's five hermeneutic rules. However, before framing this phenomenological structure, it is important to contextualise the study of phenomenology in relation to film. In order to apply a method of investigation into the cinema of Aronofsky, it is important to establish the terms in which phenomenology is applied to the study of film, and give it some historical context within film studies.

Involving many disciplines, phenomenology is the philosophical study of the structures of subjective experience and consciousness. I shall consider cinema as the locus of this phenomenological subjective experience, and explore why it is that we experience tangible effects whilst watching film, such as the kind in the opening sequence of *Black Swan* described above. In this chapter I shall give a brief account of the phenomenology of film covering five key theorists: Hugo Münsterberg, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Daniel Frampton, Vivian Sobchack, and Don Ihde. Although I focus on theorists whose methodologies pertain specifically to film, it is important to touch on the phenomenologists who informed their foundations, such as Edmund Husserl. This investigation will provide the necessary tools to embark upon a phenomenological reading of Aronofsky's first five feature films in the subsequent chapters.

The consideration of the cinema as an analogy of the human mind reaches back to the early stages of film theory. Early philosophers and commentators, such as Henri Bergson, Rémy de Gourmont, and Edmondo De Amicis,[5] expressed insights that the medium of film could be used as a vehicle of interiority and subjectivity, despite its initial purpose as an apparatus to reproduce external and concrete reality. Although not a dominant theory, Hugo Münsterberg, in his book *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), made the first concerted examination into the cinema of experience and modelled his theoretical approach around cinema based upon mental processes. Münsterberg's approach represents one of the early spectator theories and posits that film is based on psychological phenomena, requiring mental co-operation from the spectator. He maintained that film could be considered an art form in its own right rather than solely a machine brutally recording a concrete reality.

Key to Münsterberg's viewpoint is his focus on cinema and its relationship to the spectator, rather than its relationship to reality. This focus on the spectator, and in particular the active mental cooperation of the spectator in relation to film, is perhaps the first major example of a pseudo-phenomenological study of film. The art is dependent on the spectator's experience of it, considering it "the elementary excitation

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5 See Moure (2011, p.23).

of the mind which enters into our experience of the moving picture" (1916, p.19). Dudley Andrew (1976) clarified Münsterberg's view of film, explaining that cinema does not exist simply in a physical form. It is not merely a culmination of celluloid, projection, and a silver screen; instead, cinema exists because of the spectator's mind. It is the spectator's mind that brings cinema to life through granting a "dead series" of pictures, movement, memory, and emotion. Furthermore, this "dead series" of pictures, for Münsterberg, is necessarily perceived by the spectator to have depth and movement despite their static and flat nature as still frames. He writes that we "are in the midst of a three-dimensional world, and the movements of the persons or of the animals or even of the lifeless things, like the streaming of the water in the brook or the movement of the leaves in the wind, strongly maintain our immediate impression of depth" (1916, p.22). Therefore, the *objective* nature of the raw material (a series of flat and static pictures) is *subjectively* experienced by the spectator and, for Münsterberg, allows character movement and development, which gives rise to subjective emotion through contextualisation.

Below is a series of stills taken from the opening sequence of *Black Swan*. It represents a twenty-seven-second take of Nina dancing. Each frame is taken three seconds apart. Seen on the page like this, they impart little affective response, but seen through the context of perceived movement (which clearly, cannot be shown here), Nina's dance is expressed and therefore, so is the affective art of the film. Each frame supplies the

Figure 1.1 (a-i)
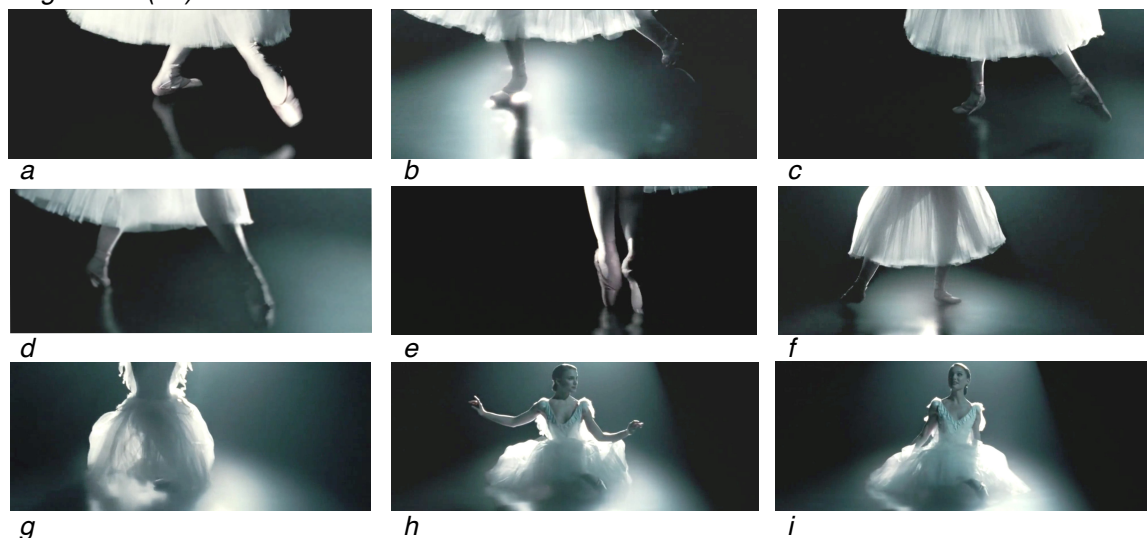
building blocks to which perceived movement can be applied. This perceived movement imparts a subjective experience within the spectator, and in the instance of my phenomenological description, manifests "a sense of beauty within me". *Black Swan*'s opening ballet sequence, and my experience of it, exemplifies why Münsterberg considers the spectator's experience of central concern to film; hence, he analyses cinematic emotion from the viewpoint of the spectator. He maintains that two kinds of emotions exist in film. First, the emotions obtained through characters in the film, and second, the emotions obtained through physical scenes. The most frequent spectatorial emotions, Münsterberg claims, are of the first kind, specifically the *imitations* of the characters. For example, if the protagonist cries, then the empathising spectator would be compelled to cry (or at least feel sadness). Through this imitation, the spectator would receive "vividness and affective tone into our grasping of the play's action" (1916, p.53). Laughter would bring about laughter, anguish would bring about anguish, and so on. Figure 1.2 is another still from the opening sequence of *Black Swan*. In this sequence, Nina is dancing the part of Odette in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. Figure 1.2 depicts Odette's anxiety as Von Rothbart stalks her. Her expression affects me as "I see her anxiety, and likewise, feel anxious for her." Münsterberg explains that "we sympathize with the sufferer and that means that the pain which he expresses becomes our own pain" (1916, p.53). Furthermore, through a process of objectification, Münsterberg claims that the spectator projects the emotions back towards the character and scene. Hence, the emotion that we express is both a product of Odette's pain and our own pain; however, this is focussed and directed back toward the cinema screen from which it originated.[6]
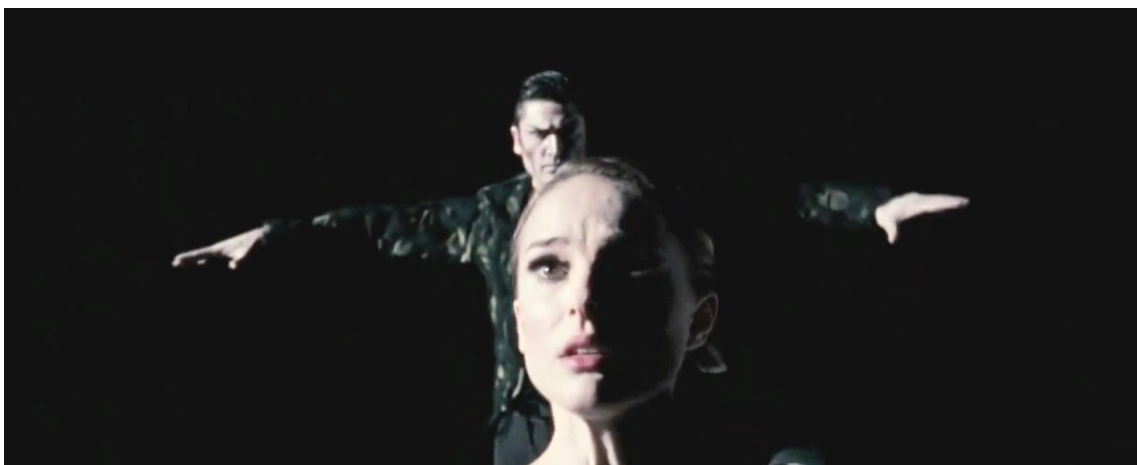

<div align="right">*Figure 1.2*</div>

Münsterberg maintains that this projection of spectatorial emotion towards the screen also encompasses his second grouping of emotions. José Moure (2011) explains that spectatorial reaction to the mise-en-scène, whereby the spectator "superadds" emotional qualities to a scene that is shown on screen, formulates a fundamental concept of film narrative theory. This formulation is crucial to defining suspense and creates a situation where, due to the spectator's privileged position as an observer of the mise-en-scène, the spectator knows and feels differently to that of the character. That is, the emotional participation that the spectator feels is a direct response to the narrative situation on screen as created by the setting. I react to the white swan's predicament because the mise-en-scène tells me that Von Rothbart is behind her while she remains unaware of his presence (although her facial display of fear and anguish tells me that she suspects some baleful presence).

Münsterberg makes an important distinction between the "material side" of film and the formal side, and in doing so he makes a distinction between the stage and film. What can be achieved on film through a formal method suggests more than what the stage offers. He states that the "material side is controlled by the content of what is shown to us. But the formal side depends on the outer conditions under which this content is exhibited" (1916, p.54). These "outer conditions", such as out of focus shots (spatial), slow and fast motion (temporal), or method of editing, can arouse bodily sensations in the spectator unique to cinema. Interestingly, Münsterberg makes a distinction between "sensation" and "emotion" but also acknowledges that one necessitates the other, stating "the changes in the formal presentation give to the mind of the spectator unusual sensations which produce a new shading of emotional background" (1916, p.55). Although Münsterberg does not give a thorough account of the formal camera (which creates such "unusual sensations" within the spectator), he does foresee a time when the art of the cinema confers a sensory experience upon the spectator.

To summarise, Münsterberg offers some basic phenomenological concepts useful for an investigation of the cinema of Aronofsky, most notably, Münsterberg's central consideration of the spectator and her relationship with film, as exemplified through his

formative ideas on "emotion contagion". Such considerations are implicit within a framework that focusses on the affective responses of the spectator. Whilst the affective response of the spectator is fundamental to a phenomenological approach to film studies, Münsterberg's framework is questionable insofar as it treats the spectator as a separate entity from the film she experiences.
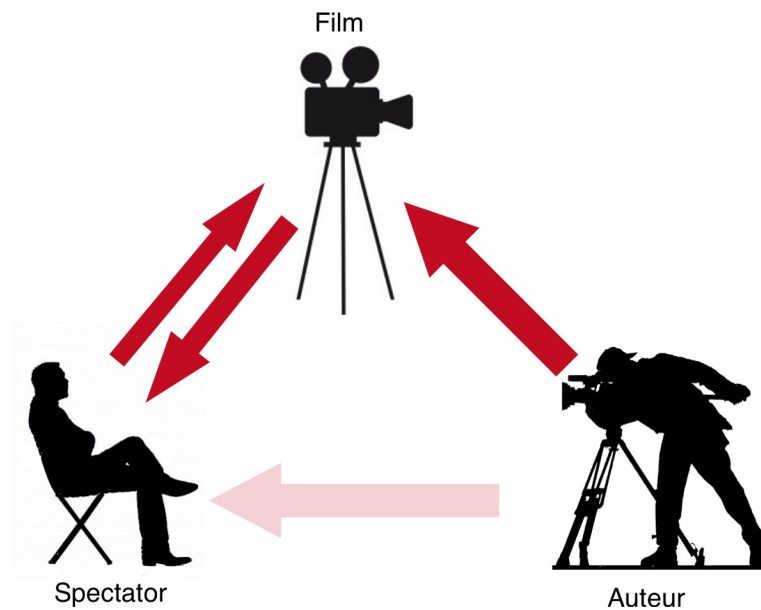
Figure 1.3

Münsterberg's model separates the Auteur-Film-Spectator relationship into separate components of a triangular communicative model. Through a formalist framework, this model considers the auteur and his intent towards, firstly, the film, and then, by proxy, the spectator (see Figure 1.3). Hence the director indirectly communicates with his audience through the medium of film. This model appears deficient, or at least incomplete, insofar as the spectator and cinema are considered mutually exclusive, despite Münsterberg's insistence on the spectator's projection of emotion back towards the screen. I would argue that the spectator's intent towards the screen necessitates a crucial relationship that is co-dependent, yet Münsterberg considers them separate entities. Whilst Münsterberg offers some very useful theories on the affective nature of film, notably his concept of emotional contagion and the spectator's intent towards the screen, his framework of the film model as a whole differs significantly from later film phenomenologists. What Münsterberg lacks in his consideration of affective cinema, is

the "lived body" experience, which I consider crucial to the understanding of Aronofsky's films (discussed further in Chapter Four).

Fundamental to the lived body is the insistence that it can only exist through the phenomena of experiences (in this instance, film) and conversely experience can only exist through the lived body. In the early twentieth century this concept was new to art, and a consideration the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty sought to develop further.[7] Specifically, Merleau-Ponty takes issue with the separation of the three entities: the spectator, the film, and the auteur. He argues that there should instead be a synthesis of these units. He sees the mutual production of such relationships between the perceiver and the world; the object and the creator; and the viewer and the viewed. He asserts that one cannot exist without the other, and therefore necessitates the other and that "movies were peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other" (1964, p.58). Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the behavioural, experiential, and embodied nature of art is as much a philosophical investigation about *being* as it is a model applicable to art. Greg Tuck (2011) explains that his philosophy is not a mechanical notion of ontological cause, but instead points to a diverse and rich artistic practice and experience that tells us something profound about our essential being. For Merleau-Ponty, this is a primordial concept that reminds us that *being is a being with phenomena*.

Critical to the theory of "being and phenomena" is the consideration of the role of perception. Heavily influenced by Edmund Husserl's work on semiotics, Merleau-Ponty investigated the phenomenological structure of perception in his book *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). This work focusses on what he calls the "primacy of perception". In essence, he theorises that we first perceive the world, and then we conceptualise it. In particular, his insistence on the part that the *body* plays in the perception of the world is integral to understanding Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. The world is experienced through our bodily perception of it; in essence we

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[7] Although Merleau-Ponty's investigation is predominantly focussed on art, he does make direct claims about film.

are embodied subjects, involved in existence. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's "primacy of perception" implies, by its very title, that perception is the prime bodily interaction with the world, and beyond that is our ability to reflect on this perception.   In other words, we perceive phenomena first through bodily functions such as the senses (touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting) then instantaneously reflect on them. This concept is what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the "embodied being".

For Merleau-Ponty, the embodied being refers to the body's interaction with worldly phenomena. Although he does not predominantly concern himself with the specifics of cinematic phenomena, he does apply his philosophy to artistic reception. Therefore, it seems logical to extend his philosophy to accommodate cinema. More recent film-philosophers, such as Daniel Frampton and Vivian Sobchack embrace Merleau-Ponty's notion of the embodied being and integrate it into their cinematic models.

In his seminal book, *Filmosophy* (2006), Daniel Frampton surmises that film can be conceptualised in a similar way to (but not "identical" to — Frampton is careful not to anthropomorphise) the act of "thinking". Frampton's *Filmosophy* hypothesises that cinema should be understood as an act of thinking, not by the spectator but by the film itself. Theories that consider film as a system of conscious expression are not new revelations to the field of film phenomenology.[8] Where Frampton differs from earlier theorists is his insistence that film is a new and objective reality, cut loose from any external influences. He names this mode of objective reality "film-being". For Frampton, film-being cannot be thought of in terms of directorial proxy thinking but must be considered a new type of thought, free-floating and detached from such influences. His main departure lies in what he refers to as the "filmind". This "trans-subjective no-place" (2006, p.47) removes any sense of director/spectator relationship, thereby, negating cinema as a communicative medium between filmmaker and filmgoer (see Figure 1.4). Rather, cinema is seen by Frampton as a creation of new experience.

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[8] Sobchack acknowledges film as *presenting* experience, not just *representing* it (1992, p.9).
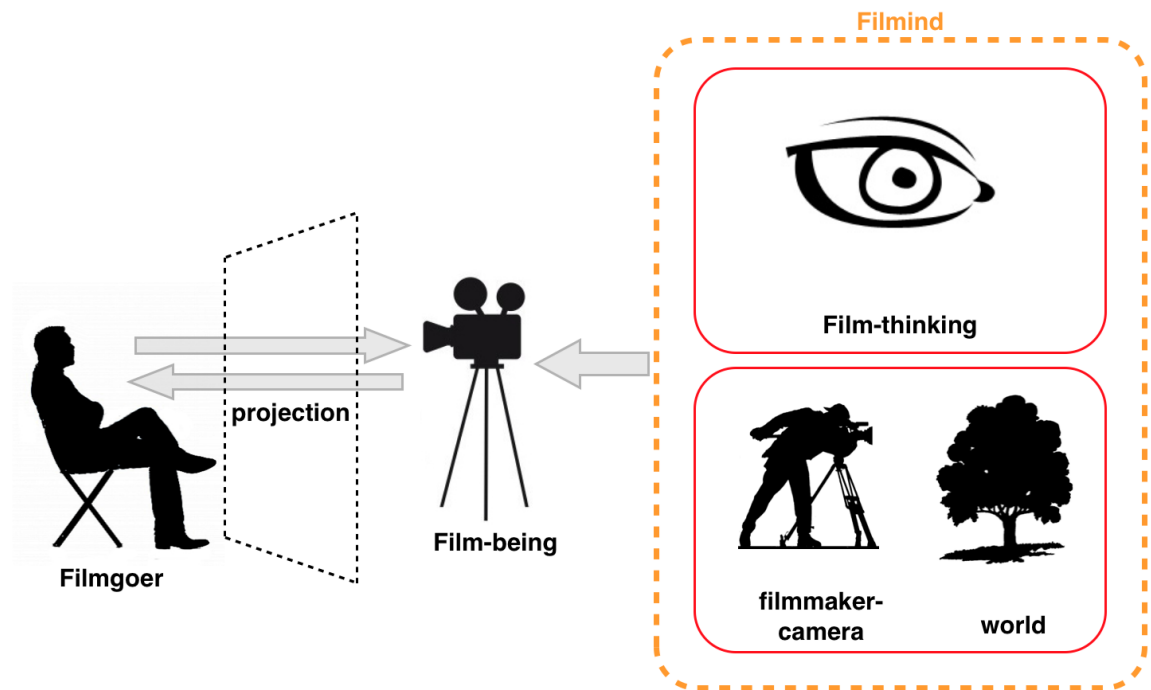
Figure 1.4

The filmind is a conceptually different way of thinking, and Frampton is explicit in his rejection of an anthropomorphic understanding of the filmind. Instead, Frampton uses the analogy of the film as possessing a mind, purely as a way to functionally explain the concept of film as an organic whole. As a result, Frampton rejects the formalist approach to film analysis, arguing that "we should not be taught to see 'zooms' and 'tracking shots', but led to understand intensities and movement of feeling and thinking" (2006, p.169). Frampton also rejects any direction towards a narrational power or authorship of film. In essence, the film is its own being and must be conceptualised as thinking about its inhabitants, characters, and subjects organically and without the external tooling of an invisible narrator. The film, therefore, is the master of its own experiential nature.

At this point it is difficult to see how I can reconcile Frampton's removal of directorial concerns with my own intentions to analyse the bodily intent of the cinema of Aronofsky. An intent that, if my hypothesis is correct, is inextricably linked to the experience of the embodied spectator. In light of Frampton's model, must I re-evaluate the locus of meaning? Does it lie in the spectator's experience or the film's experience? Phenomenologists such as Sobchack place the locus of meaning within the spectator's

experience of the film; however, Frampton argues that the focus of experience lies within the film as a "thinking" entity (filmind). Crucially, he distinguishes this from the thinking processes of the human mind. It is important to realise that Frampton does not set out to offer a model for film analysis, but instead offers a holistic, sense-poetic approach to which the spectator applies her viewing. Frampton's terms are not sufficiently setup to supply the spectator with an empirical toolkit with which she can analyse meaning in the way a formalist would.[9] Indeed, that is most likely not Frampton's intention. To use formalist terms to conceptualise a "living" film seems paradoxical. Frampton argues that this practice would obscure the possible artistic experience of film. He cites Parker Tyler (1972)[10] who analogises how anatomy lectures on the human body explain how a living human operates, but do little to explain a life lived. Likewise, technical descriptions of a film deprive it of any poetic life, and render it devoid of an infinite number of new realities on offer through the interpretive experience of the embodied spectator. Frampton instead supplies a model of philosophical guidelines that, when adhered to by the spectator, supply an experience of meaning that is different (and arguably deeper) than that of other models. He argues that ultimately, it is "a decision by filmgoers whether to use this concept when experiencing a film. The film is just light and sound. I am simply arguing that filmgoers *should* use the concept of the filmind, in order to experience film as a *fully expressive* medium" (2006, p.172). Whilst I maintain Frampton's philosophical stance has value for the spectator, I must stress that to maintain this practice *exclusively* is problematic. Frampton offers very little in the way of a practical methodology for experiencing film, and even less on how to analyse a film. He gives vague suggestions, describing the process of film analysis as something that should refer to the thinking behind the "feelings and questions and motives of the forms." For example, in order to analyse *The Matrix* (1999), Frampton argues that one should view the film as "on one plane of film-

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9 Terms such as "panning, tracking, zoom-in, close-up, off-camera, shot/reverse shot, long take, hand-held, medium shot, filter, deep focus, asynchronous sound" (Frampton, 2006, p.172) are examples of the kind of technical reference that Frampton rejects. For a further example of the formalist approach see David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985).

10 See Frampton, 2006, p.172.

reality: there are no 'recorded' and 'digitally animated' parts, just one level of film-world" (2006, p.205).

Furthermore, Frampton maintains that any analysis must be "loose in meaning" as it is dependent on the film's thoughts, each of which is different; the "concepts and attentions of *Filmosophy* are not intended to provide complete interpretations, but can be used as a first step, a route to larger interpretations" (2006, p.180). These assertions bring about an ambiguous form of film analysis that does not appear to clearly distinguish film analysis from the film experience. Does the practice of film analysis exclude the film experience, or vice versa? There are two ways to accommodate this mutually exclusive arrangement; one is to check my analytical mind in at the cinema door before entering, in order to fully experience the film. To analyse the film whilst watching is to cognitise the process, and thus deprive me of the full experience. The other maintains the opposite — that to be well versed in methods of film analysis is to be better equipped with tools of understanding; this heightened level of understanding enhances the film experience. In this thesis, I am concerning myself with an auteur's body of work. It is therefore necessary to analyse why a grouping of style and form offers the embodied viewer a common experience. I argue that one must be able to switch modes between filmgoer and film analyst. Formal analysis should be undertaken by the film scholar, *external* to the spectator and apart from the embodied viewer, whilst wishing to explain the phenomenon that the embodied viewer experiences.

Frampton suggests that, as spectators, we leave our bodies behind when watching a film; the experiential relationship between film and spectator is a "mix of *minds* rather than bodies - that our bodies remain with us, merely forgotten, redundant" (2006, p. 160). Furthermore, Frampton argues that the filmworld is an *example* of spectatorial experience by virtue of its nature as an observing entity, albeit without an anthropomorphised mind. My stance is quite contrary to Frampton's in this instance. As discussed in the Introduction, my hypothesis is that Aronofsky's cinema offers a mental mode of meaning through its physicality. It therefore follows that the genesis of any meaningful experience must begin with the spectator's physical body, and as Merleau-

Ponty would maintain, the body's ability to perceive the film. Frampton's structural model has merit insofar as it privileges a spectatorial engagement with cinema. However, his focus on the mind (and thus away from the sensory experience) does not, I believe, fully explain the meaningful experience of the embodied viewer.

In contrast to Frampton's bodiless mode are Vivian Sobchack's central concerns with the embodied spectator. Sobchack provides what I consider to be a more practical and methodological approach to the phenomenological study of film — one that accommodates both the physical and mental states of the spectator. Importantly, my filmic study involves both sensual experience and textual (and experiential) meaning, and Sobchack's method provides a mode of qualitative and empirical research that allows a focus on cinematic experience, as well as the cinematic text. The temptation when embarking on an analysis of Aronofsky's first five feature films is to rush intellectually into a reflective abstraction of film theories and ideas. However, imperative to Sobchack's phenomenological method is an embodied engagement with film as well as a reflective one. As I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, it is only through an experiential grounding in the film that a reflective analysis can take place, and only through reflection that a genuine sense of meaning can be obtained. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty points out that cinema is a separate expression of the body and mind, but is also a union of them both. That is, both are separate entities but one is dependent on the other to create a union of meaning. Sobchack points out that cinema "makes the phenomenological concept of 'intentionality' explicit; it becomes *sensible* as a materially-embodied and actively directed structure through which meaning is constituted" (2011, p.192).
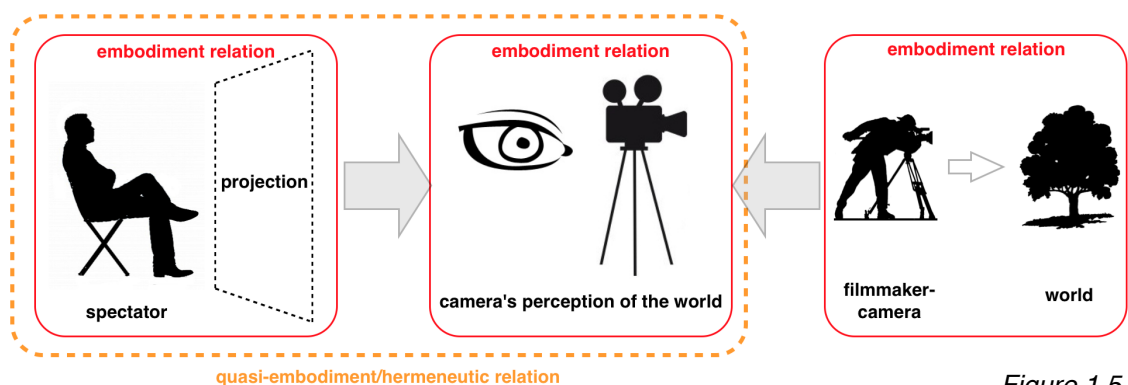

Figure 1.5

Sobchack argues that the film experience involves two viewers in the viewing process; the spectator, and the film, and these two operate in a dynamic relational structure (see Figure 1.5). What exactly is this structure? In her seminal book on phenomenology and the film experience, Sobchack claims that the "embodied activity of perception and expression — making sense and signifying it — are given to us as modalities of a single experience of being in the presence of and producing meaning and diacritical value" (1992, p.8). Importantly, Sobchack refers to the reception of watching the screen as a "single experience" from multiple modalities. That is to say, the spectator perceives what is seen, and at the same time and within the same experience, expresses this perception through revelation of meaning. It is important to note that exactly what the meaning is, is not important at this stage of analysis. Of concern is the production of meaning within the embodied viewer as necessitated by their "presence" to the film viewing process. That is, the embodied viewer's presence to this process *necessitates* that they find meaning. These modalities are inseparable and key to understanding how value and meaning are produced from spectatorship. Further to this, Sobchack argues that as the spectator we are addressed by an anonymous, yet always present "other" (similar to Frampton's "transubjective no-place"). Sobchack's "other" refers to what is sometimes called "film consciousness".[11] What is more, film consciousness also perceives and experiences, and as we watch this other's experience, we too express our perceptive experience. In some cases the result is similar to Münsterberg's "projection of spectatorial emotion towards the screen" as discussed earlier. Sobchack suggests that:

> Through the address of our own vision, we speak back to the cinematic expression before us, using a visual language that is also tactile, that takes hold of and actively grasps the perceptual expression, the seeing, the direct experience of that anonymously present, sensing and sentient 'other' (1992, p.9).

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[11] See Spencer Shaw, 2008.

In her endeavour to "do phenomenology", Sobchack employs Don Ihde's five operational hermeneutic rules to guide her phenomenological inquiry into film.[12] Ihde does not concern himself with film, but instead focusses on the visual field of the illustrated printed page, explaining its static nature through a simple but standard vocabulary. Here Ihde presents exercises in "phenomenological seeing" of the printed objects, offering a range of simple visuals and illusions such as reversible shapes and Necker Cubes, challenging the reader to perceive these objects beyond their initial appearance. How does Ihde's visual focus help my engagement with film? An examination of his exercises reveals new ways of seeing the same static object through different modes of contextual viewing. Similarly, Sobchack sees Ihde's approach to experimental phenomenology as a valuable qualitative method of empirical research. In her methodology for cinematic viewing, she borrows heavily from Ihde, and proceeds to apply his five hermeneutic rules to a phenomenological reading of experience.

In an effort to illustrate Ihde's hermeneutic rules, one must initially position oneself away from a self-referent perception of the film. Instead, the focus moves from that which is experienced (the film), to the reflexive concern of how this experience is taking place. The spectator of the film only takes on phenomenological significance (and indeed existence) when viewed in conjunction with the encounter of the film. I shall likewise, explore Ihde's hermeneutic rules in more detail in what follows.

Rule one: "Attend to the phenomena of experience as they appear" (Ihde, 2012, p.34).

Remove any other predefined conceptions or theories that are a distraction from the brute reality of what is before you. You are not a spectator watching a film. To take on any notion, preconceived ideas, or assumptions, is to neglect the experience of the film as it happens. To concern oneself with the notion of film is to employ theories of what film is and all that it entails. Film conceptually does not exist; only the experiences that film offer exist. In other words, I check my analytical mind in at the cinema door. Similarly you, the spectator, do not exist. Only your experiences exist. You are

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12 For a good example of this see Sobchack, 2011.

attending only to these experiences.   Having set up this conceptual environment, one can move to a descriptive mode.

Rule two: "Describe don't explain" (Ihde, 2012, p.34).

What did you see and hear? Describe these experiences. Such descriptions, although seemingly obvious and easy to achieve, are quite complex. This is a form of "careful looking" and precedes any formal classifying systems of structure or style. Ihde insists that we must dismiss any sort of explanatory comment relating to structure or style. He describes an explanation as "any sort of theory, idea, concept, or construction that attempts to go *behind* phenomena, to give the reason for a phenomenon, or account for it in terms other than what appears" (2012, p.34). To illustrate such descriptions, I shall contrast my phenomenological description at the beginning of this chapter, with my perception of the opening sequence in *Black Swan* in *non*-phenomenological terms below:

The opening sequence of Black Swan is 130 seconds long, and consists of only three takes. There is no dialogue, only classical music and sparse diegetic sounds.   The sequence opens with shot one: this sets up the mise-en-scène with a still long shot of a young female ballet dancer standing on a darkened stage under a single white spotlight. This spotlight creates a chiaroscuro effect around her figure. The familiar music, along with the fact that I am watching ballet, implies that this character is Odette from Swan Lake. She wears a white ballet costume, symbolising purity. The spotlight singles her out, and she is focussed in the centre of the frame, implicating her importance to this scene. She appears serenely content and the music buoyantly reinforces this. As she begins to dance, the film cuts to shot two: a mid-shot of her legs, smoothly tracking them as she dances around the stage. The film cuts to shot three: the sudden appearance of Von Rothbart (again, this character is assumed), dressed in black, entering from the darkness of the side-stage. His dark costume, along with the ominous change in music, reinforces his role as antagonist. This shot is hand-held and follows Von Rothbart as he stalks his prey. Music builds as the hand-held camera that facilitates the inclusion of the spectator within the scene, circles the action in a fast and

disorienting fashion. The lighting is, as are the costumes, bereft of any colour, implying a struggle between light and dark, good and evil. The antagonist's confirmation is realised for the spectator with his transformation into a monster. The diegetic sounds of Odette's desperate gasps are faintly heard along with the sounds of the costume transformation. Further to this, the protagonist's transformation into the titular Swan confirms her role as she escapes and solemnly flies away. The scene fades to black. The following scene opens with Nina, waking in her bed with a slight smile. Clearly she has dreamed these events.

I wrote the above description with an intentional formalist understanding of this sequence, with little regard for the phenomenological method. Have I described the events as they appear? Not entirely. Clearly my description of this opening sequence is littered with more explanations and assumptions than descriptions — assumptions that light/dark equate to good/evil, that white symbolises beauty, explanations of music being used as a reinforcing agent, and the hand-held camera being used to include the spectator. Furthermore, my attention to form is apparent throughout, with descriptions of shot length, the number of takes, the style of camera movement, and the type of lighting. Immediately there appear to be phenomenological problems with my description. If I compare this with my phenomenological description at the beginning of this chapter, there is a clear distinction between the former as an open description, allowing for all possible phenomena to come to the fore, and the latter as a closed description, forestalling potential phenomena.

Rule three: "Horizontalize or equalise all immediate phenomena" (Ihde, 2012, p.36).

This rule stipulates that we must describe the "naturalised" attitude toward film description. Sobchack suggests that to do so, we must not "assume an initial hierarchy of 'realities' that might foreclose the phenomenon's possibilities" (2011, p.195). To describe a film as "avant-garde", or some other formalist description, is not careful seeing and is to enframe this interpretation and thus "foreclose" any other potential styles, forms, or realities. Ihde defines "horizontalization" as the treatment of all phenomena as "equally real". For example, my assumption that Nina has dreamed these

events is based upon the conventional relationship between the opening sequence followed by the shot of her lying in bed waking from sleep. If this were to be experienced explicitly then perhaps the more logical order of events would first be a shot of Nina falling asleep (with the dream sequence to follow). However, the ambiguous ordering in *Black Swan* allows for multiple modes of reality, giving the spectator the opportunity to "horizontalise" the phenomena before them. This rule calls for a certain suspension of belief, and requires "that looking precede[s] judgement and that judgement of what is 'real' or 'most real' be suspended until all evidence (or at least sufficient evidence) is in" (2012, p.20).

In my formalist description, I state that Von Rothbart transforms into a monster. This description is phenomenologically correct insofar as it is a description of what happens, not how it happens, or why it happens. I might interpret his transformation as a special effect within a stage show, or interpret it as an element of Nina's dream. Alternatively, I might conclude that it is not a reality within a reality at all, and interpret what I see as the film's true nature. Either of these might be true, but neither can be assumed. Such assumptions are, according to Ihde, a result of not suspending belief, thereby reducing the spectrum of revealed possibilities.

In summary, the three rules above offer a phenomenological starting point from which to analyse the cinema of Aronofsky. However important as these rules are, the phenomenologist must proceed beyond them in order to find meaning. If we were to remain at this gratuitous descriptive stage, we would become lost within an infinite universe of descriptive possibilities, never reaching any purpose for the film. I maintain that the purpose of widening the spectrum of possible realities and perceptions creates a sense of confusion and philosophical perplexity, or as Ihde puts it, "Aristotelian wonder" that carries significant worth. Indeed, it is my aim to show that Aronofsky uses this sense of "Aristotelian wonder" as his transportation method of philosophical meaning in his films — a meaning that can only be garnered through a phenomenological reading of his films. An attempt to view his films otherwise might be met more with frustration than a meaningful experience.

To pursue the philosophical meaning within Aronofsky's films we need to establish a further method of investigation. For that I now turn my attention to Edmund Husserl and his concept of essence. Husserl's concept of essence I shall refer to here, as Ihde does similarly, as "structural features".

Rule four: "Seek out structural or invariant features of the phenomena" (Ihde, 2012, p. 39).

This "seeking" refers to the search for a constant in the film, any repeated patterns that "are significant and must be probed" (2012, p.22). The method of "probing" as set out by Ihde employs Husserl's model of essences — that is, to look not just at the phenomena and their external characteristics, but to also examine their motivational features. Ihde refers to this method of investigation as the "variational method". This method states that to discover the structural feature being sought, the phenomenologist "must go through all the variations that will lead to an adequate insight or solution" (2012, p.23).

In my formalist description of *Black Swan*'s opening sequence, I mention the use of a hand-held camera, and the phenomenological effect (as per my phenomenological description at the beginning of this chapter) of which is to make me feel closer to the dancers, to feel involved in the dance. If I were to break this down using Ihde's method, the phenomena are the effects that make me feel included in the dance. The structure, or invariant feature, is the hand-held camera technique, a structural feature that suggestively implicates the spectator within the scene. Therefore, am I to conclude that I have discovered the structure of the phenomena using Ihde's variation method? Not entirely; the variational method implies that *all* of the variations that lead to a solution of the phenomena must be investigated. What of other structures within the mise-en-scène, such as lighting, colour, composition, and temporal concerns? Here, I have investigated only one and I must consider other structures that could be at play. Therefore, it is necessary to consider frequency and its correlation to the effect. Certainly in this instance, it is difficult to understand how I could conclude that a hand-

held camera shot equates to the phenomena described from just one scene. This does not comply with Ihde's terms of "repeated patterns". However, upon examination of the whole film, I start to observe that this repeated structural feature occurs in conjunction with the accompanying phenomenon — a hand-held camera structurally informing the phenomena of physical inclusion within the mise-en-scène. Sobchack explains that the correlation of the phenomenon's reduction in relation to its previous description is specific to its meaning, and that this meaning is "intentionally and significantly *lived*" (2011, p.203). Furthermore, an investigation of the filmography of Aronofsky uncovers this structure across most of his films and suggests that further investigation to its meaning and significance should be undertaken.

Ihde's first three rules are essentially phenomenological "descriptions", whilst his fourth rule is a phenomenological "reduction".[13] His fifth and final rule allows for the phenomenological interpretation of the correlations found in rule four.

Rule five: "Every experiencing has its reference or direction towards what is experienced, and, contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present" (Ihde, 2012, p.42-3).

Ihde argues, as Husserl (1970) does, that the correlation between the two sides of experience necessitates each other, that one cannot exist without the other.[14] Husserl refers to one side of experience as *noema,* or that which is experienced. Its correlate is the mode of experience, or *noesis*. The correlation between these two is referred to as the *intentionality* and refers to the direction of consciousness. A schematic would be as follows:

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[13] Applying the word's Latin meaning "to lead back", Ihde explains "reduction" as encouraging the phenomenologist to lead the inquiry back to "the things themselves" (Ihde, 2012, p.41).
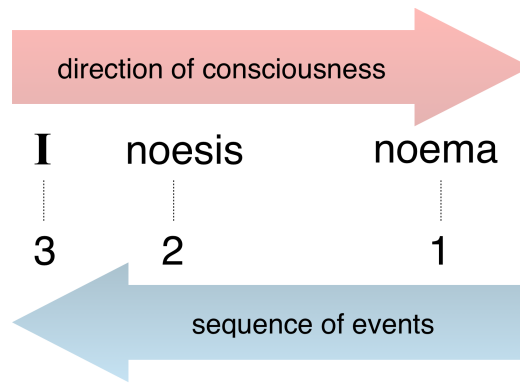
[14] Husserl, 1970, p.151.

Figure 1.6

The schematic illustrates how the intentionality (direction of consciousness) flows in the opposite direction to the sequence of events. The phenomenon that is experienced (the noema) happens first. The reflection of this phenomenon results in an experience (the noesis). Further reflection reveals the subjects personal experience of the event (the "I"). Upon watching the opening sequence of *Black Swan*, I might choose to focus on the feeling of "inclusion" that the scene offers me. Even if structures are at play, such as camera work, lighting, or music, it is the experience of "inclusion" that is the core phenomenon, or noema. My attention to the experience and reflection on why this is so (the hand-held camera, or at least my position as spectator within the mise-en-scène), is the noetic activity. The result of this process reveals itself to the spectator, the "I", or as Sobchack would maintain, the "lived body". It is my lived body that obtains significance and meaning through my encounter with this phenomenon of "inclusion". Crucial to Husserl's model of phenomenological analysis is the order in which it happens. My experience of inclusion occurs. Then, through reflexive awareness, I am able to correlate between what is happening (inclusion) and how it is happening (specific structures, such as camera movement). This correlation forms the experiencing "I", the spectator, as a lived body. It must happen in this order. "I" can only exist if I am constituted through my conscious experience of the world. Concurrently, I can only obtain meaning through this correlation.

In this chapter, I have briefly outlined phenomenological theories by Münsterberg and Merleau-Ponty, which laid the foundation for the more recent methodologies of Frampton, Sobchack, and Ihde, all of which perform different functions for spectatorship and analysis. Where Frampton's model can be used by the spectator to experience a film by Aronofsky, it cannot be effectively used to dissect it. Frampton's

rejection of technical terms makes it difficult to proceed with any kind of inquiry into the cinema of Aronofsky; however, his philosophical outlook could bring about a deeper meaning. Therefore, in the interest of using a phenomenological framework that allows me to analyse the cinema of Aronofsky and its impact on the embodied spectator, I will argue that it is imperative to be able to interrogate cinematic form and style. It is one thing to explain away a spectator's experience of a single film; however, when an experience is consistent across an auteur's body of work, it points to an external structure beyond the spectator. Indeed this consistent manifestation must hold the filmmaker, and their unique form and style, accountable to some extent. Perhaps Philipp Schmerheim best sums it up, arguing that academic film philosophy requires both:

> The 'technicist' approach which is able to describe the actual instruments by which a film is constructed and the more or less general cognitive predispositions in a filmgoer on the one hand, and a 'poetic rhetoric' which is possibly more suited to describe the moods, emotions and other responses a filmgoer experiences when going to a film on the other hand. Both science cultures have to join forces, because each side alone will not manage to gain a better overall comprehension of film (2008, p.121).

What will follow here is an effort to employ both a "technicist" and "poetic rhetoric" approach to my engagement with the cinema of Aronofsky. To do this I shall follow Sobchack's lead and base my viewing experience upon Ihde's hermeneutic rules that, as I have demonstrated, will satisfy both of these approaches.

Chapter 2: Mood and Music

It is safe to posit that to some extent Aronofsky's films stimulate physical responses in the spectator. This is unsurprising considering that most films do (or at least intend to do) the same. Indeed, it is the prerogative of the filmmaker to stimulate his or her audience. This is often manifested in the physical responses of the spectator, most obviously with laughter, tears, and involuntary flinching, to name a few.

The next two chapters will cover the bodily intent of Aronofsky's films, specifically exploring his cinematic methods and their intention to physically stimulate the audience through non-cognitive processes, specifically mood. This chapter will focus on mood that is generated through the use of music, followed by an exploration of colour and composition in the following chapter. I will present theories on non-cognitive processes put forward by Amy Coplan (2011) and Noel Carroll (2003), and demonstrate how a non-cognitive physical response to stimuli can encourage the onset of a particular mood. As outlined in the previous chapter, I am conscious of employing Ihde's first four hermeneutic rules. In summary, this would mean an unbiased analytical examination of the film experience, describing any significant "features". Here I shall demonstrate how music is experienced affectively and can be described phenomenologically as eliciting a non-cognitive response.

In order to examine a film's intention to elicit physical responses from the spectator, some exploration of the major theories of cognitive and non-cognitive responses to the stimulus of cinema is necessary. In order to apply a phenomenological approach to the cinema of Aronofsky, as outlined in the previous chapter, an important distinction must be made between meaning that is garnered through cognitive evaluation, and meaning that is garnered through non-cognitive processes, such as mood. Although both these processes occur, I maintain that they result in different kinds of meaning. While not attempting to discredit cognitivist theories, I do not share suggestions[15] of their

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[15] See William Lyon (1980)

exclusivity and will argue that non-cognitivist processes enable a deeper experience for the lived body. I will argue that as a filmmaker, Aronofsky intentionally provokes mood. This aids phenomenological reception resulting in a more meaningful and profound cinematic experience.

Responses to cinematic stimulus can occur in multiple ways. Most notable are the two broad groupings of cognitive and non-cognitive processes. These two theoretical processes often share acute physical responses but have foundational differences. The term "cognitive processes" refers here to the mental process by which perceived information is transformed into propositional form for the understanding of the spectator (Choi, 2003 p.149). It is generally accepted that emotional states employ a level of cognition. Noel Carroll argues that all emotions "process cognitive states directed at objects subsumable under general criteria" (2003 p.522). That is, the cognition of the spectator is directed towards an object (in the case of the cinematic model, this is the screen and what it represents). The resulting emotional response can often manifest as a somatic reaction.

Cognitive processes suggest that the spectator's physical response to cinematic stimuli arrives via reflective cognition. Upon watching Randy (Mickey Rourke) in *The Wrestler* pleading with his daughter Stephanie (Evan Rachel Wood) for forgiveness, I find myself overwhelmed with emotion. As I watch tears roll down both their faces, I begin to cry. Despite attempting to experience the film using a phenomenological approach (choosing to experience the scene without prejudice and foreclosing the reasons for his tears), I still experience Randy's sorrow and it moves *me* emotionally to tears. According to cognitivist theories, my emotional and physical responses to this scene can only be fully realised when I have cognitively evaluated what is happening. Furthermore, this evaluation needs to be reflectively projected from information preceding this scene (Randy's hardship, poor judgement, and so on). Conversely, non-cognitive processes lack this reflective judgement, and are considered to be an immediate response to cinematic stimuli. The non-cognitive theorist would posit that my physical response above would be a result of emotional contagion — that seeing

another person cry on screen compels me to do the same. Both theoretical positions validate my physical and emotional responses but offer different explanations for them. I would argue that the cognitivist and non-cognitivist approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather work together in a "technicist and poetic" way (Schmerheim, 2008, p.121). However, I would also argue that Aronofsky's filmic methods privilege non-cognitivist effects, thereby encouraging a phenomenological reception of his films.

In her debate with Derek Matravers, Amy Coplan (2011) highlights that non-cognitive processes can be grouped into three categories: emotional contagion, non-cognitive affective responses, and mood (all of which, I argue, are imperative to a phenomenological reading of the cinema of Aronofsky). These responses do not rely on cognitive reflection on the part of the spectator, but are instead a response to the situation of the film as it unfolds. Hence, they lend themselves well to the phenomenological model and also fit with Ihde's hermeneutic model. Carroll postulates that through various techniques and manipulations employed by cinema (lighting, shot scale, speed, setting, and sound, etc.), the filmmaker can exploit these non-cognitive responses within the spectator. It is almost as if the filmmaker has "direct access to our nervous system, bypassing the cerebral cortex and triggering automatic affective reflexes" (2003 p.524).

Coplan credits Jenefer Robinson and Jesse Prinz as having challenged the cognitive theory of emotion in recent years. Whilst both Robinson and Prinz accept, as I do, that there must be some form of cognitive function for emotions to exist, neither hold the view that cognitive judgement is essential for emotion. Therefore it is possible to perceive something and respond emotionally in an automatic fashion without pre-vetting the response with a cognitive evaluation. For example, as I walk through my garden, running my hand through the flowers, I spot something small with yellow and black stripes. I recoil in fear, until I apply cognitive judgement to the situation and realise that the small, yellow and black object is not a wasp but instead a discarded lolly wrapper. Therefore, my cognitive judgement relies on my reflective knowledge of wasps and their potential danger. On the surface, my initial response appears to be at

the expense of Ihde's third rule, that I must be open to all possibilities — that to assume the object is a wasp is to "foreclose" other potentialities. However, I think this misses the point. Surely upon seeing Beth (Winona Ryder) unexpectedly stab herself in the face in *Black Swan*, I am not expected to be reaction-*less*. On the contrary, I will most likely react in a flinching fashion. Sobchack (2011) asks us to freely react to the film as it occurs and not apply a cognitive assessment until all possibilities have been presented. We will not always succeed in this but we should nevertheless try. Coplan agrees that:

> one of the distinguishing features of film as an artistic medium is its ability to produce non-cognitive affective responses, which viewers experience as a result of film's direct sensory engagement. Through the deployment of visual and aural information, film can evoke intense feelings in us that are independent of and sometimes even incompatible with our cognitive judgements of what we are watching (2011 p.120).

Coplan's "affective responses" refer to a broad category that involves a wide range of physiological and mental states. She argues that affective responses:

> are not necessarily directed at specific objects nor do they necessarily involve cognitive evaluations or appraisals so even if there can be no non-cognitive emotions, there can be non-cognitive affective experiences including emotional contagion, moods, and automatic affective reflexes (2011 p.119).

I maintain that the three affective states of emotional contagion, automatic affective reflexes, and in particular, mood, are crucial to the understanding of the cinema of Aronofsky. They are states that can be the result of the correct application of the cinematic apparatus, leading to a broader understanding of its art. Although not prevalent in Aronofsky's first five feature films, the first two affective responses (emotional contagion and automatic affective states) are sufficiently present to make a

significant contribution to his films' physicality. In particular, they contribute to the cultivation of the third affective state, mood (which I will argue is very prevalent), and therefore warrants further investigation.

Emotional Contagion

As described above, our affective responses to perceived stimuli are often a result of complex cognitive processes. However, as a phenomenologist I am concerned with the affective responses that are purely non-cognitive, involuntary, automatic reactions to stimuli. Emotional contagion is a very good example of this. Perhaps the most familiar illustration of emotional contagion is laughter, where the emotion of happiness, as demonstrated through the act of laughing, is transmitted from one person to another. Most people have experienced the phenomenon of a person near them laughing, and having the compulsion to laugh themselves (or, at the very least, smile), despite not knowing what the initial laughter is about.[16] We perceive laughter, and our automatic and involuntary response is to mimic what we perceive. Crudely, emotional contagion can be defined as mimicry between two people. However, it is important to highlight that emotional contagion must not be viewed as mere mimicry but also as a transfer of emotion. Mimicry is a physiological reaction to an external stimulus alone, and by definition this physiological reaction is only a component of emotion. However, this physiological reaction is referenced by emotion, and researchers have found a correlation between the two — the physiological reaction in turn stimulates an emotional reaction subjectively within us (Dimberg, Thunberg, and Elmehed, 2000). In a sense, emotion takes its cue from this physiological reaction and this occurs independent of the subject's awareness of their physiological reaction. So we can see here that a chain of events is forming; the external stimulus (someone laughing) leads to physiological desire in me (I laugh), which influences my subjective emotional experience (I experience joy).

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[16] For further reading on recent theories of why people mimic, and the brain systems that implement mimicry in social psychology and cognitive neuroscience, see Yin Wang and Antonia F. de C. Hamilton (2012).

Furthermore, empirical data from the field of social and emotional development presented by Bavelas (1987) strongly suggests that emotional contagion can occur in the interaction between the film and the embodied spectator. Bavelas expounds on data that suggests smiling, laughter, embarrassment, disgust, pain, and ducking away from attack are just some of the mimicry that are reliably evoked. Further research in the field of psychophysiology has shown that affected individuals experience subsequent automatic nervous system activity, such as muscle tension, temperature fluctuations, and heart rate changes, which encourage the emotional response (Levinson, Ekman, and Friesen, 1990 pp.382-3).

The concept of emotional contagion is very important to the study of phenomenology within film for two reasons. First, it requires a direct sensory response that is expressed physically by the spectator. Yet this physical expression is not motivated from within the body of the spectator but from an external source. Second, such responses are triggered automatically and not coloured by a sense of imagination or a belief system. Most importantly, emotional contagion transfers from the screen in virtually the same way as real world experiences. The implication is that the spectator can watch a film and experience aspects of it as it happens without a preconceived belief system; they can essentially experience the film phenomenologically. One could conceivably watch clips, removed from the context of their associated film. For example, I could watch Tommy (Hugh Jackman) cry at his wife's death in *The Fountain*, or Randy's tearful apology to his daughter in *The Wrestler*, and still be moved to tears. Lauren Wispe suggests that such a response "involves an involuntary spread of feelings without any conscious awareness of where the feelings began in the first place" (1991 p.7) .

It is important not to confuse this emotional process with that of empathy. If I were to empathise with Tommy or Randy, I would be attempting to cross the screen's divide and understand their situations. Hence, empathy is a cognitive process that requires reflection on the part of the spectator. Emotional contagion is the transfer of raw emotion and does not necessarily transfer an *understanding* of the emotion. This would require a further cognitive process. Preston and de Waal (2002) give an excellent

empirical account of this concept. Based on the existence of emotional contagion within other species, they theorised that emotional contagion developed or evolved prior to more complex emotional processes. Emotional contagion involves processes within the brain found at the sub-cortical level where reflexes result from the following route: sensory cortices - thalamus - amygdala - response. According to Preston and de Waal, this differs from a more complex emotion such as empathy, which involves a slower cortical process (with the following route: thalamus - cortex - amygdala - response). Preston and de Waal's hypothesis could explain why emotional contagion is such an immediate and automatic response, as opposed to the kind of emotional exchange that results in a more thorough understanding of the initiator situation, such as empathy. Therefore, when considering the filmic model, the distinction between contagion and understanding is crucial as it prompts the spectator to question their emotions, and because of this, I maintain that emotional contagion has the power to influence understanding. The residual emotion that has been "caught", as in the examples of Tommy and Randy, lends itself to the cultivation of mood.

Automatic Affective Responses

The second group of non-cognitive affective responses is "automatic affective responses". This group refers to the physical responses the spectator experiences due to the kind of cinematic stimulus that presents as sudden movements or loud sounds. As with emotional contagion this response is involuntary and universal, and therefore does not depend on a prescribed belief system. The physiological response manifests itself as changes in bodily features such as posture, facial expressions, eyes closing, cardiac changes, and breathing patterns (Choi, 2003).

Robinson (1995) argues that a prevalent type of automatic affective response is the "startle" response. *Black Swan* employs startle to great effect and uses this to cultivate both the film's mood as well as an understanding of its protagonist. Nina's anxiety is conveyed to the spectator through multiple uses of scenes that foster the response of fear and surprise. Interestingly, the affective response of the spectator mirrors the affective response that the protagonist is experiencing herself. For example, Thomas

(Vincent Cassel) senses that Nina is sexually repressed. He recognises that Nina must find a way to sexually unwind in order to tap into her darker side, as required for her role as the Black Swan. He offers the advice that she should go home and masturbate. Later that night Nina is in her bedroom and decides to take Thomas' earlier advice. Just before her climax she notices that her mother (Barbara Hershey) is asleep on a chair right next to her. This realisation is presented to the spectator with a sudden contrast of slow to fast-paced editing, and quiet to loud sound. There is also a change in shot scale that incorporates the deliberate use of off-screen space, which brings in visual information previously unseen. This new visual information (Nina's mother) unsettles the intimacy of the moment for both Nina as well as the spectator. As well as communicating Nina's emotional state to the spectator, this scene also uses the startle response to encourage a link between this automatic affective response and subsequent emotion. Furthermore, the emotion in the spectator further helps usher in the mood-state of free-floating anxiety.

Choi addresses the link between the startle response and emotion, arguing "we should conceive of emotion in light of its evolutionary history" (2003 p.156). He argues that the startle response is more than a mere non-cognitive physiological reflex, instead claiming that it is part of an evolutionary spectrum of emotion. The startle response is "the developmentally early stage of two paradigmatic emotions: fear and surprise" (2003 p.155). Choi's position suggests why a startle response has the ability to usher in a non-cognitive state of mood. Likewise, this explains the experience of multiple scenes in *Black Swan* that startle the spectator and usher in a mood of free-floating anxiety. In essence, the startle response operates as a primitive precursor to emotion that informs one's mood. Furthermore, the role of the startle response in the cinema of Aronofsky is essential to open up the "mood glands" of the lived body, and as I shall examine further in Chapter Four, this allows the reception of a deeper meaning.

Mood

Moods are not to be confused with emotions; they are affective states similar to emotions, although they differ in a number of ways. First, moods are more diffuse and

drawn out in duration. As a result, they have a slower onset and likewise, dissipate more slowly. Second, moods are less likely to have an intention towards specific objects or events like emotions do (Carroll, 2003 p.539). For example, the emotion of anger implies that you are angry at someone, something, or some situation. The mood of irritability however, does not have the caveat of a focussed object or situation; one is simply in an irritable mood. Therefore, the causal chain of moods is more ambiguous and difficult to define than emotions. Moods seem to lack a particular object at which they are directed, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain the specific elements of a film that create a specific mood.

Carroll (2003) argues that all processes involving the outflow of mood begin with the lived body (spectator), and that our cognitive biases are ultimately informed by the body and its ability to cope with the environment that is encountered. For example, if I feel irritable, then this mood has its locus within me and it emanates from me. Despite the physiological reasons why I may feel this way, my body biases me to act irritably to stimuli to which I might otherwise respond differently. The suggestion here is that mood operates independently of an external stimulus. It is driven by the state of the lived body rather than an external stimulus such as film, a gesture, or a look from someone.

Emotions on the other hand are more dependent on external stimuli or point of focus, and therefore are less dependent on the body's state of being. I may be in a joyful mood but quickly charged with the emotion of anger due a particular event. The suggestion here is that emotions are not driven by the state of the lived body but rather by external stimuli. The conundrum presents itself when one questions a film's ability to affect the spectator's mood. If film is not part of my lived body then how can film influence my mood? Carroll writes:

> Put baldly, artists seem to have no direct access to the kinds of somatic levers that influence or determine mood states. So how is it possible to

maintain that artworks arouse or elicit moods? On the face of it, it is a mystery (2003 p.539).

Why is it that before watching *Pi* I may be in a calm mood, whereas afterwards I may be in an anxious mood, or watching *The Fountain* changes my mood from sadness to wonderment? How could this be possible if Aronofsky has no access to my "somatic levers"?

Carroll solves this by offering the following: filmmakers who elicit mood states successfully, elicit them indirectly rather than directly (Carroll, 2003 p.539). They do this initially by arousing certain *feeling states* in the spectator (somatic, phenomenological ones such as emotional contagion, and automatic affective responses as outlined above). Following this the filmmaker arouses *emotional states* in the spectator which linger and transform into mood states.

Emotional States

The relationship between mood and cognitive states such as emotion is dynamic. Indeed, Carroll maintains that mood creates a judgement bias in the spectator, citing Richard Davidson who argues that mood "serves as a primary mechanism for shifting modes of information processing. Mood will accentuate the accessibility of some and attenuate the accessibility of other cognitive contents and semantic networks" (1994 p. 52). That is, moods are not essentially cognitive, but they are related because they predispose the spectator to particular cognitive emotive states. Furthermore, Carroll claims that not only do moods usher in cognitive responses but the opposite also occurs, arguing that the "capacity of emotional episodes to bring on mood states is an important factor in the capacity of artworks to arouse and elicit moods" (2003 p.532).

As I have already outlined, cinema cannot elicit mood directly, as the critical determinants of a mood state lie within the spectator's body, thus making the altering of mood beyond the filmmaker's artistic reach. However, film can elicit emotions. Mood

states are engendered by emotional episodes and may emerge in the wake of emotions.[17] Therefore, if moods can be drawn out through emotional episodes, and film can elicit these emotional episodes, then it follows that film has the capacity to bring forth such moods indirectly from the spectator.

In the cinema of Aronofsky the spectator is presented with provocative sequences that encourage emotional episodes early in the cinematic experience. This is unsurprising when one considers that most feature films express tonal qualities to its audience at the beginning of the film (with varying success). Indeed, it is rare to see a film in which tonal qualities are not recognised at some level, or at least perceived by the spectator, within its opening sequence. It is in these opening sequences that we see a film's first attempt to create an emotional connection with the spectator. Therefore, it is a good location in which to investigate affective techniques employed by the filmmaker to provoke emotional episodes that may lead to mood states. As Carroll writes:

> The beginnings of temporal artworks, especially narratives, have the important function of establishing the mood for much of what is to come. Thus, they are a particularly useful place to look for the strategies artists use to enlist audiences in mood states, not only in the opening of the work, but throughout. Moreover, even a cursory look at the beginnings of narratives confirms that the provocation of emotions is a frequently recurring technique for instilling or setting the mood pertinent to the work (2003 p. 542).

Therefore, in what follows, I will offer phenomenological accounts of the opening four minutes of Aronofsky's first five feature films, followed by a brief analysis, which will highlight any emotional episodes, automatic affective responses, or emotional contagion that may elicit the beginnings of mood. As explained in Chapter One, by "horizontalising" my experience, the phenomenological description may highlight any potential explanations or patterns. My account will employ Ihde's hermeneutic rules,

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[17] For further reading on empirical research see Roland Neumann and Fritz Strack (2000).

describing my experience before attempting to seek out structural or invariant features that give rise to this experience.
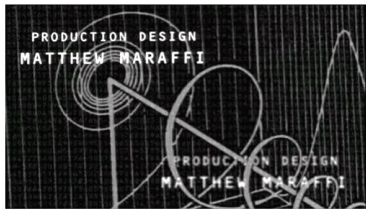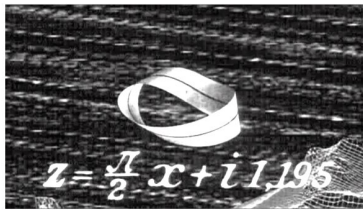
Pi (1998)

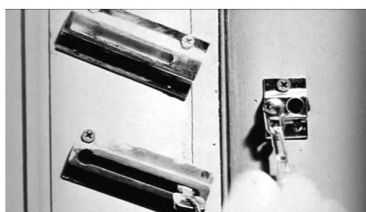Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

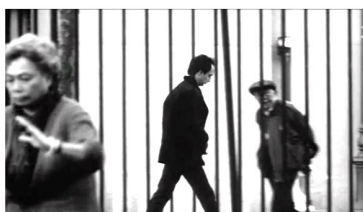Figure 2.3

Figure 2.4

Figure 2.5
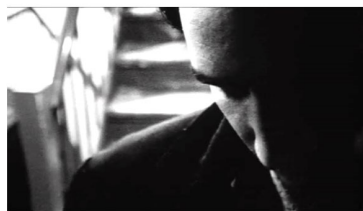

Figure 2.6

Figure 2.7

Figure 2.8

Figure 2.9

As the opening credits begin, and the Pi *title appears, I hear haunting and mysterious music that transforms into a frenetic industrial electronic drum-and-base score. The music increases in pace and pictures appear rapidly before me. They appear to be a combination of black and white organic and electronic images overlaid with further opening credits. I am starting to feel overwhelmed by the sheer pace at which the pictures are appearing and moving before me, making it difficult to comprehend; the sequence crescendos in an aural and visual explosion. I feel relief at the peace of the ensuing silent white screen. However, I am now met with the same haunting and mysterious music, and a background industrial hum that I find unsettling. There is a feeling that something is unresolved. A man is lying on his side. The frame looks awkward. I realise that the scene is black and white and very striking. Perhaps it is the picture's lack of colour and abrasive nature that continues the unease that I am now feeling, a feeling that something is about to be revealed. As the man prepares to leave*

his house he tells me the story of his childhood and his interest in numbers. As he walks the street I feel confused. I am unsure if I am seeing what he sees or am watching him. All the while a low-level industrial shrill sound keeps me on edge. I am starting to feel anxious.

This phenomenological description of the opening sequence of *Pi* exemplifies how emotion relates to mood in the absence of a strong narrative. In this opening sequence, narrative is not important to the setup of mood. I am not concerned with why the man (Max played by Sean Gullette) has left his house, or where he is going, but my emotions are aroused due to the abrasive nature of the visual and audio experience. This abrasive nature is brought about through such filmic techniques as the use of rapid editing, quick camera movements, stark and granular cinematography, and a jarring and frenetic score. The film begins with a barrage of rapid visual and audible movements (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) that *overwhelm*, *relieve*, *unsettle*, and leave me feeling *unresolved*, and *anxious*. Physical elements within the mise-en-scène augment this emotive affect: the peep hole in the door as a point of view shot (Figure 2.3), the multiple door locks (Figure 2.4), and the prison-like bars (Figure 2.5) connote voyeurism and paranoia. The awkwardness I felt about the man lying on his side (Figure 2.6) is constructed by the camera that has been rotated ninety degrees clockwise, creating spatial confusion, and hence, *awkwardness*. Techniques such as chiaroscuro lighting (Figure 2.6), disorienting angles (Figures 2.7 and 2.8), changes in film speed (Figure 2.9), harsh and constantly changing sounds, and the musical score accompanied by a persistent background hum, stir my lived body and ultimately elicit a mood of *anxiety*.

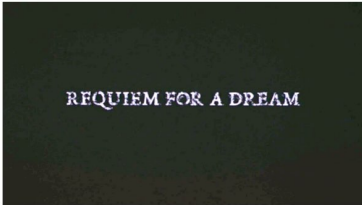***Requiem for a Dream* (2000)**

Figure 2.10

Figure 2.11

Figure 2.12

Figure 2.13

Figure 2.14

Figure 2.15

Figure 2.16

Figure 2.17

Figure 2.18

Curiously, the film begins with opening credits appearing over the top of an abrupt and boisterous "Juice by Tappy" infomercial. Meanwhile, discordant music plays quietly in the background. I feel uncomfortable, as if something is not quite as happy as the infomercial is telling me. My suspicions are confirmed by the abrupt pulling of a television set plug, and an ensuing argument between a mother and her son. This is clearly an apartment and the setting looks depressing. They are arguing over her television set that he wants to take away. I feel like I am being pulled between points of view and all the while I am struggling to understand why he wants his mother's television set. She locks herself in her bedroom, and as he bangs on the door, I am starting to feel a foreboding tension as the potential for violence looms. This never eventuates and the son takes the television away with the help of his friend who is waiting outside the apartment. In her darkened bedroom, the mother attempts to comfort herself saying, "It will be alright"; to which the film responds startlingly with the title of the film: "Requiem for a Dream". This event causes me to catch my breath as the title is brought before me with a sudden loud clattering thump, and slowly crumbles like crackling embers. Clearly, there is a question of whether everything will turn out "alright". The son and his friend roll the television past a line of old ladies sunning themselves outside the front of the run-down apartment block. The son clearly looks

embarrassed for some reason and politely says "hello". This comically breaks the tension that I have been feeling. The couple continues to push the television through what looks like a deserted cityscape. It feels like a wasteland — barren, bleak, the sun is low and cold, and I have a nervous curiosity as to where they are heading.

The opening sequence of *Requiem for a Dream* offers a number of emotionally provocative elements that the spectator has to deal with. As with *Pi*, there are physical elements within the mise-en-scène that suggest paranoia — the keyhole as a point of view shot (see Figure 2.10) and the chain (see Figure 2.11). The sudden appearance of the film's title (Figure 2.13) is both visually and audibly startling and my response to it is a good example of an "automatic affective response". Furthermore, the sequence presents various dichotomies that bring about an uneasy tension in the spectator. The uplifting, yet cheesy, infomercial (Figure 2.12) is paired with an uneasy and sinister score. Similarly, the argument between the son and his mother is portrayed using a split screen (Figures 2.10, 2.11, 2.14) that tugs the spectator frustratingly between the two characters. This technique locks off both characters visually from one another creating an alienation and estrangement effect. This scene is also scored with the non-diegetic sound of a discordant orchestra warming up, with ebbs and flows depending on the intensity of the argument.   The city feels barren and deserted, despite some shots depicting streets populated with people (Figures 2.15-8) such as mothers with their children (which alone implies the opposite of barren). The situations noted above are examples of conflict between what the spectator is seeing (e.g. uplifting, cheesy, populated), and what the spectator is feeling (e.g. ominous, foreboding, deserted). This suggests the persuasive power of *Requiem for a Dream*'s music, colour, editing, and visual composition. These elements encourage in the spectator an emotive state that is often at odds with, and even override, elements in the mise-en-scène that are traditionally represented in a more positive way. The result is an orchestration of filmic methods that privileges feeling over seeing in order to elicit what has been described above as *uncomfortable, foreboding tension,* and *nervous curiosity*.

The Fountain (2006)
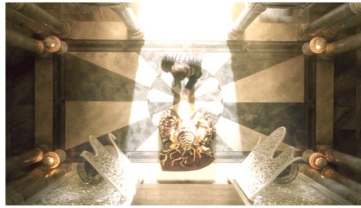

Figure 2.20

Figure 2.21
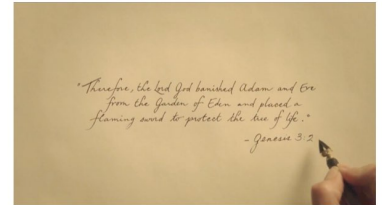

Figure 2.22

Figure 2.23

Figure 2.24

Figure 2.25

Figure 2.26

Figure 2.27

Figure 2.28

The Fountain begins slowly with a hand writing a verse from the biblical book of Genesis on a piece of paper. It tells of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Life. Immediately I feel a sense of wonder, which is reinforced by the accompanying music. It is night and I hear a faint chorus of insects. The film shows me an ornate locket containing hair that sits on a pedestal and a man who is kneeling before it. The setting, his attire, and the candles tell me that he is from another time. As he produces something from his pocket and smells it, I feel that I am transported with him to another place, another time, looking at a beautiful woman as she looks at him. It feels warmer here, much brighter, and she is smiling at me reassuringly. The sense of wonder remains, along with a feeling of peace and tranquility. She hands him a ring. It is the same ring that he produced from his pocket earlier in the scene. I return to the darkness and watch him pocket the ring again. He seems to be looking at me when he utters with complete determination: "Let us finish it." I sense his resolve and wonder what it is that he needs to finish. The title, "The Fountain", appears and I can hear a low rumble of thunder. I am now in the jungle and the chorus of insects is louder. The sense of wonder has gone and everything feels more real, more immediate. It is still dark and a slow rhythmic beat accompanies the man. He is armed, and accompanied by two others. Looking at their attire, I now think it likely that they are Spanish conquistadors and this is a Mayan

temple. It is dark as they cautiously approach the Mayan pyramid and I am aware of a low and slow breathing sound, which fills me with doom. The men are scared and mention the possibility that this might be a trap. Slowly, rhythmic music builds and I feel their tension as they approach what appears to be a mysterious looking figure at the base of the pyramid. I am given a fright as I hear a sudden loud cacophony of noise, the trap is sprung and the men are surrounded by Mayans. I have a feeling of fear, dread, doom and curiosity.

Whilst *The Fountain* sets up mood efficiently, the method used differs from the two previous films. It proceeds to make an emotional connection with the spectator using a slower pace, but does not appear to be any slower at eliciting mood. The title is introduced visually using a slow fade in and out (Figure 2.20), and a soft rumble of two drumbeats ends the slow musical score. This differs quite dramatically from *Requiem for a Dream*'s title, which is introduced with an abrupt and loud thud, or *Pi*'s title which is presented amid a cacophony of fast-paced images and music. *The Fountain*'s title sequence suggests *wonder* and *curiosity*, encouraged through a musical score dominated by minor chords, accompanied by the foreshadowing of threat that the drums deliver. Interestingly, I have described these drumbeats as *thunder* when in fact they are not. Likewise, the *low and slow breathing* I hear as the protagonist approaches the pyramid is, in fact, the sound of lightly crashing cymbals.

The visual composition of the mise-en-scène appears very measured with all shots using a one-point perspective — where the focal point of the shot is in the centre of the frame (Figure 2.21). The protagonist (Tomas, played by Hugh Jackman) constantly occupies the centre of the screen, allowing the spectator to emotionally connect with his cause and *sense his determination* (Figure 2.22). Furthermore, this emotional connection with the protagonist is facilitated by the contrast between Figure 2.23 where he is looking above the camera at the idol, and Figure 2.24 where he is almost looking directly at the spectator, saying: "Let us finish it". The mood of *wonder* is brought on very early in the setup, but in equal measure, there is a sense of dread. The *sense of wonder* is solicited during the opening shot when the biblical verse is written (Figure 2.25), most likely due

to previous experiences with biblical verses. Furthermore, the mood is reinforced by the musical score, a dulcet tone that connotes mystery and wonder due to its frequent use of minor notes. This sense of wonder dissipates when the title sequence score ends and the diegetic sounds of the protagonist's surroundings are audible. Their claustrophobic surroundings are reinforced through a set design that encloses the protagonists and dim lighting, making it difficult to discern precisely what is happening. The protagonists wear battle gear and have their swords drawn; makeup is used to emphasise the look of fear upon their faces. An "automatic affective response" is triggered upon the introduction of the Mayans, and this is elicited through the use of sudden loud sounds and fast editing (Figures 2.26-8). Likewise, makeup, costume, set design, and lighting also contribute towards the Mayan's role as antagonists in this scene.

The Wrestler (2008)

Figure 2.30

Figure 2.31

Figure 2.32

Figure 2.33

Figure 2.34

Figure 2.35

I hear a crowd chanting as the opening credits show over a black background. The address of an announcer can be heard and it is clear that I am listening to some sort of stadium entertainment. This is confirmed when the music starts and I am introduced to a collage of magazine and newspaper clippings, and commentator announcements of a wrestler called Randy "The Ram" Robinson. Hard rock music energises me as I cast my eye over this exposé of the wrestler's career through the 1980s, catching snippets here and there about his glory days at Madison Square Garden, culminating in a bout with "The Ayatollah". Just as the exposé and music finish on The Ram's euphoric defeat of The Ayatollah, I am plunged into silent darkness. I can only hear a man's laboured

coughing. I am told that it is now twenty years later and I am shown the sad sight of Randy, still in wresting attire, hunched over a chair, post bout, in what appears to be the back room of a preschool. Clearly his glory days are over, and he has washed up on the small-time wrestling circuit. I feel sorry for him. I no longer feel that this is a movie about wrestling but instead, a story about a man. I follow him as he grabs his bag and heads out through the school hall where the temporary wrestling ring is now being dismantled. I feel a foreboding heaviness and a curiosity to know more about this man.

As with the previous films, *The Wrestler* begins with contrasting moods. The opening pan over the collage of press snippets (Figure 2.30) positively observes the heyday of Randy's wrestling career, *energising* me. The musical score and enthusiastic commentary elicit an aggressive and energetic mood. The collage sequence uses a warm palette of browns, reds, and oranges (Figure 2.31). This is suddenly contrasted with the *heaviness* of the "washed up" Randy slumped over his chair in the opening sequence of the film, through the use of sound, colour, and composition. The latter sequence operates with a cooler palette, using blues and deep blacks (Figures 2.32-5), with the initial energetic musical score and commentary replaced by mumbled and sombre dialogue, and the clanging of packing up sounds in the background. A handheld mobile framing follows Randy through halls into a wrestling ring area. The composition frames Randy at the centre of the screen in mid shot, although the frame never fully reveals his face, choosing instead to shoot from his back or side (Figures 2.32-5). At no stage does the spectator see his face clearly, which fosters a *curiosity* about the protagonist. There is a discordant ominous score as the scene ends, encouraging a mood of *foreboding heaviness*.
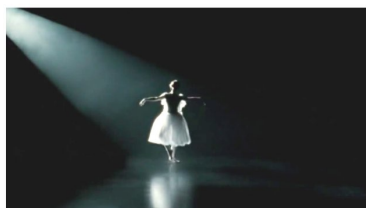
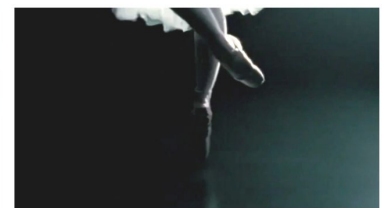### *Black Swan* (2010)

Figure 2.40
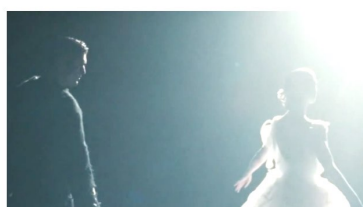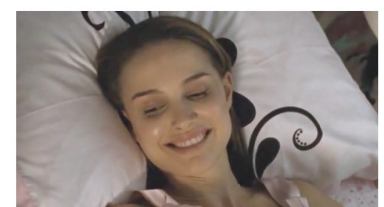
Figure 2.41

Figure 2.42

Figure 2.43

Figure 2.44

Figure 2.45

Black Swan opens in darkness as classical music washes over me, facilitating a mood of anticipation and curiosity. Out of the darkness a single light source illuminates a young woman dressed in white. She looks happy and at peace, as she begins to dance effortlessly around the semi-darkened space. The dance is beautiful and its movement encourages this sense of beauty within me. As she comes to rest the music changes, becoming more sinister, darker in mood. An ominous feeling begins to overwhelm me as I watch a man dressed in black appear from the darkness, walking towards her in a predatory fashion. I am now following him as he stalks her. I feel uncomfortable as I am drawn into this scene against my will. I see her anxiety, and likewise feel anxious for her. The man dances aggressively around the young woman, and I hear and see her fear. She struggles to escape and upon this, the man is magically transformed into a monster. The dance becomes more violent and as the struggle reaches its climax, she is transformed into a swan. She breaks free and flies into the distance, back into the darkness. I feel relieved that the struggle is over, but pained at her experience. My moment of fantastical reverie is unceremoniously broken as I now return to nature, and am shown the same young woman waking in a bed, bathed in natural daylight.

Similar to *Requiem for a Dream*'s infomercial sequence, *Black Swan* opens with a scene that is disorienting for the spectator insofar as there are no other scenes, characters, or realities to reference. Is the spectator to suppose that the film will continue in this fashion? At this stage of the film the spectator is unaware that this dance sequence is a dream. There simply is not enough referential information, and this lack of reference forces the spectator to cautiously privilege this reality. The musical score is integral to the creation of mood, as it foregrounds *anticipation and curiosity*, initially without the aid of visuals, through its buoyant minor tones. The central composition of Nina and the contrasting of white on black (Figure 2.40) constructs a visual singularity and focus for the spectator to concentrate on. Her movement in response to the music encourages a *sense of beauty* that is constructed compositionally through the steady use of a centrally focussed mid-shot of her dancing legs (Figure 2.41-3). Upon the introduction of the antagonist the composition changes; the camera work becomes unsteady, matching the now *darker* mood of the musical score. Nina is no longer in the centre of the frame

(Figure 2.44) and this fosters a sense of *discomfort*. It is not until the spectator's *fantastical reverie is unceremoniously broken* with a cut to Nina waking in her bed (Figure 2.45), that the spectator is provided with a reference point; the dance was a dream.

The phenomenological descriptions above and their accompanying analyses have sought to highlight the emotive use of sound, music, colour, editing, and composition. They emphasise the impact that these formal elements have on the spectator's emotions, which also influence the onset of mood. Importantly, the phenomenological descriptions illustrate how spectatorial emotion correlates with a tangible object on which the spectator is focussing. In *Pi*, I am *overwhelmed by the sheer pace at which the pictures are appearing*, and *I feel relief at the peace of the ensuing white screen*. In *Black Swan* Nina's dancing *encourages this sense of beauty within me*, and *The Wrestler* encourages a *curiosity* through the treatment of Randy's framing.

All of these descriptions demonstrate areas where the spectator can rationalise their emotions. The opening sequences also exemplify the desire by the filmmaker to emotionally connect and create a "feeling state" in the spectator. What is also apparent in these phenomenological descriptions is the elicitation of mood through these feeling states. Specifically, this refers to feeling states that are not associated with tangible objects. Instead, they are encouraged through the use of ambiguous and less visually signified elements, such as music or sound, in order to create a feeling in the spectator: for example, the background *industrial hum that I find unsettling* in *Pi*; the opening score in *Requiem for a Dream* that encourages me to *feel uncomfortable as if something is not quite as happy as the infomercial is telling me*; and the score in *The Fountain* that initially gives me a *sense of wonder* before changing, eliciting *tension* as the *music builds* and the rhythm changes.

Feeling States

The capacity of the musical score to reach into my lived body and alter the way I feel without requiring visual representation to give reason to this change raises many

questions. Why is it that the musical score can make me feel a certain way? How can *The Fountain*'s score imbue a sense of wonder in me, or *Pi*'s score a feeling of anxiety? How can this be done when Aronofsky does not have, as mentioned earlier, access to my somatic levers? The relationship between mood states and the musical score appears to share a natural connection, despite a lack of visual representation. It would seem logical to conclude that various kinds of music connote certain moods: upbeat jazz or hip-hop encourage an energetic mood, whereas chamber music in adagio encourages a more reflective mood; minor chords suggest mystery or wonderment, whereas major chords suggest assurance and safety.

However, unlike mood states that are born from the emotion/object relationship discussed above (as created by tools of visual representation such as the film camera), music does not offer such tangible forms of representation and objectification. How, then, can music carry the power to manipulate moods within the spectator? Indeed, the musical score can sometimes be a more powerful influence on mood than visual representation, as evidenced by the opening infomercial sequence in *Requiem for a Dream,* where the score makes me *feel uncomfortable* yet is completely at odds with what *the infomercial is telling me.* The suggestion here is that music does have representational content, and whilst different in nature to what the camera offers, music nonetheless provides emotionally appropriate objects. The emotions of surprise, relief, and bewilderment are examples used by Peter Kivy (2007), who claims these emotions are often stimulated by the music itself, suggesting that music itself is the object. For example, we may be bewildered by the sudden shift in the score from a major key to a minor key, perhaps anticipating the unknown within the narrative, and then relieved upon its return to the major key. These emotions are stimulated by the music itself, and are often narrative signposts, audible cues that take precedence over visual cues for the spectator.

Carroll writes "In these cases, the objectlessness and vague, diffuse or even ambiguous affective profile of instrumental music is supplemented by other representational devices which make definite, focused, contentful emotional responses possible, and, in

consequence, emotional spillover as well" (2003 p.546). That is, the musical score gives the spectator something to imagine, thereby providing the requisite object. For example, an intentional beat that implies marching, or a musical structure suggestive of conversation might be enough to provoke the imaginary visualisation of such a scene. Furthermore, a conversational piece of music might convey the structure of an angry conflict, thus encouraging the affective state of anger. The provocation of affectively charged sensations is leveraged significantly by the impression of movement that music gives. Music offers the listener a sense of spatial movement due to tempo and rhythm, all of which is enhanced through adjustments of volume creating additional acoustic depth (if something is far away it sounds quieter than something that is closer).

For example, in the opening sequence of *The Fountain*, the increasing volume and rising tempo of the score further impress on the spectator's imagination the ensuing Mayan trap. In *Black* Swan, music creates a sense of movement that is complimented by Nina's movement. As the tempo changes, her movement does likewise, suggesting to the spectator that it is the music that is dictating Nina's movement rather than her movement that is dictating the music. In a sense the music is being experienced in the body of the spectator in a similar way to that of Nina's. The spectator's body feels a genuine sense of movement through the music, which is reinforced by Nina's rising and falling, swooping and gliding within the mise-en-scène. Of course it should come as no surprise that the music in this scene has this effect, as it is common for music to motivate the body to dance or at the very least tap one's foot. Music that prompts the spectator to move also prompts the spectator to imagine how another person or thing would similarly move. This is exemplified through Nina's dance.

In her investigation into why some people have profoundly meaningful bodily experiences in response to music, Jenefer Robinson (2005) arrives at the same conundrum as Carroll: emotions require cognitive objects, and given that music does not provide these objects, how does it affect the listener emotionally? Robinson answers this by suggesting "emotions simply do not require cognitive objects" (2005 p.382).

She defends this notion by claiming that music can operate in a similar to way to odours, cueing an associated memory which in turn may affect the listener emotionally.

When the spectator hears Clint Mansell's variation of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, he or she may imagine a ballerina gracefully moving in the way Nina does. Similarly, if they hear Quiet Riot's classic eighties hair-metal anthem *Bang Your Head*, they may imagine a wrestler leaping off the ropes as Randy does. This is simply because we have experienced the same (or similar) music before in films or television shows that make use of a similar sonic cliché. It is not solely the music that evokes the imagination but the link to previous experience. Robinson argues that memories triggered by music can be as old as a childhood memory or a more recent event. A tune similar in sound and melody to a musical box might remind one of childhood bedtimes. A lazy tune strummed on a ukulele might, for instance, remind one of a recent holiday in Hawaii (or of films or television shows that make use of a similar musical motif). Contained within these memories are the associative emotions, wonderment for the former, and serenity for the latter. Similarly, a musical score can be used to trigger memories not only from the spectator's past experiences outside of the cinema, but also reactivate newer experiences inspired by the film. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the score associated with the antagonist in Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) where the spectator is reminded of the shark's presence through the score alone. Aronofsky uses audible cues (albeit in a less overt fashion to Spielberg), to similar effect.

The figures below are musical score maps[18] for Aronofsky's first five feature films. Each map presents a timeline upon which is listed the musical score variants as they happen from the film's start to finish. I initially listened to the audio for each film with the pictures removed. A second listening included the pictures. The first listening occurred in order to experience the score phenomenologically without the influence of visuals, and the second listening aimed to examine the relationship between the score and the picture. The results are broken down into the score's phenomenological descriptive terms (their variants, according to Ihde) and are labelled with their

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[18] The musical score maps are the result of a method I have devised in order to visually render a film's musical score in relation to the feeling states experienced.

associated feeling state. The purpose of the musical score map is to expose features that highlight Robinson's premise — that even an original score can cue an associated memory. Furthermore, this memory is created and repeated throughout the film, soliciting the spectator's short-term memory in order to encourage a feeling state. The maps are also useful to highlight points where the musical score prompts a feeling state that is either in harmony or at odds with visual information.

Although a relatively short feature-length film at 83 minutes, *Pi* has a very busy and intense musical score that begins with an energised feeling state and ends with a peaceful feeling state, both of which match their respective visuals. The first twelve minutes establish all of *Pi*'s musical score variants, which range from "slow, warm, love", to "pulsing, abrasive, shrill". Most of *Pi*'s musical score variants are attached to a repeated character or event and are not at odds with the visual style or narrative. For example, "pulsing, abrasive, shrill" (black) is heard just prior to and during Max's seizures, and is repeated six times throughout the film. The feeling state of "pain" that is experienced, due to the musical score's uncomfortable pitch, matches (albeit not to the same extent) what Max is experiencing.

Pi

Key:

Description of score (feeling state)

- Busy, fast beat (energised)
- Light hum (contemplative)
- Ominous hum (anxious)
- Sparkly, angelic (warmth, love)
- Ticking beat (productive)
- Pulsing, abrasive, shrill (pain)
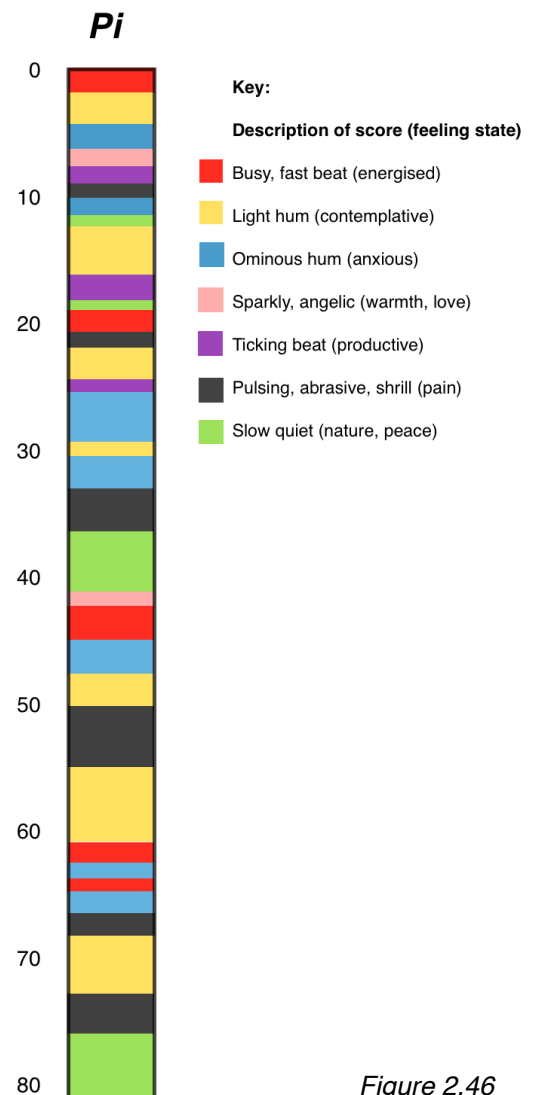- Slow quiet (nature, peace)

Figure 2.46

Similarly, the "ominous hum" (blue) is heard just prior to and during scenes with Marcy (Pamela Hart) the antagonist, and is repeated seven times throughout the film. The "ominous" nature of the musical score matches the narrative threat that Marcy poses. Interestingly, in both these examples, the musical score precedes the event or character.

The "ominous hum" begins as the phone rings, indicating to the spectator that Marcy will be on the other end. Likewise, the pulsing can be heard before a seizure, indicating to the spectator that a seizure is imminent. This prepares the spectator's feeling state prior to the event. Hence, in *Pi*, the spectator experiences the feeling of *pain* in preparation for a seizure scene. Likewise, the spectator experiences the feeling of *anxiety* in preparation for a scene with Marcy.

Requiem for a Dream offers more musical score variants than *Pi*. This is not surprising considering the film is longer and has more characters and several narrative arcs. Again, the film sets up most of its musical score variants in the opening portion. The antagonist of the film comes in the form of addiction and obsession, rather than being embodied in any specific character/villain. Therefore, the variants and feeling states tend to be associated with a theme rather than a character. The vices of the four protagonists are illustrated through the musical score and this often cross-pollinates across each character. For example, a "haunting, curious" melody (dark green) illustrates Sara Goldfarb's (Ellen Burstyn) unhealthy ambition to be on television, as well as Harry (Jared Leto), Tyrone (Marlon Wayans), and Marion's (Jennifer Connelly) pursuit of money and drugs. This suggests that the musical variant communicates a theme: the pursuit of shady desires rather than designating a specific character.

Requiem for a Dream

Key:

Description of score (feeling state)

- Busy, fast beat (energised)
- Orchestral melody (sad progressive)
- Slow Sinister melody (dread)
- Soaring, angelic. (positive, love)
- Ticking/methodical beat (ominous)
- Orchestral abrasive/beat (pain, revealing)
- Simple melody (wonderment, curious)
- Discordant orchestral (anxious)
- Light electronic beat (playful)
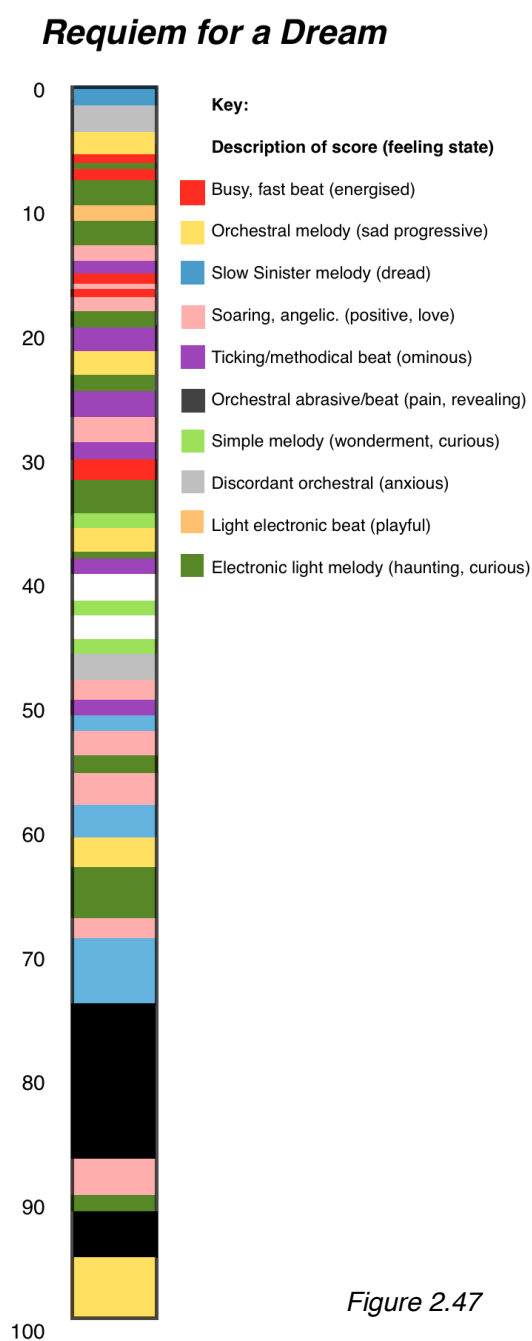- Electronic light melody (haunting, curious)

Figure 2.47

However, there are portions of the score where the theme is character specific. For example, Sara's obsession with weight-loss comes with an ominous "ticking methodical beat" (purple) that is not heard at any other portion of the musical score. Likewise, the "angelic, love" score (pink) is only associated with Marion and Harry's relationship. As the musical score progresses throughout the film it changes less often, and settles on fewer combinations, resulting in a final climactic mélange of all the thematic variants depicting the descent into an ultimate infernal degradation via their vices. After this very abrasive and painful climax *Requiem for a Dream* ends with a "progressive" yet "sad" feeling state (yellow).

Many aspects of the *The Fountain*'s musical score differ significantly from the previous two films. The musical score is a lot slower, more sombre and quiet, and is less aggressive, but is no less affective. There are often periods where music is absent, which is not surprising considering the film's slower editing pace and longer takes. All but two of the musical variants are set up in the first thirteen minutes of the film. Again this suggests the film uses the score in conjunction with the establishment of character, theme, narrative, and its associative properties. The "abrasive" variant (black) occurs at the introduction of the protagonist. The "loud" variant (red) occurs during the climactic ending.

What is most notable in *The Fountain*'s musical score map is the clear musical

The Fountain

Key:

Description of score (feeling state)

■ Slow, orchestral, melodic (intrigue, wonderment)

■ Slow, low, rhythm (brooding, suspense, fear)

■ Faster rhythm, melodic (progressive, determined)

■ High pitched, rhythm (fear, suspense)

■ Quiet, slow, orchestral (sombre, melancholy)

■ Modern, electric, slow (love, affection)

■ Abrasive, high pitched (sinister, antagonising)
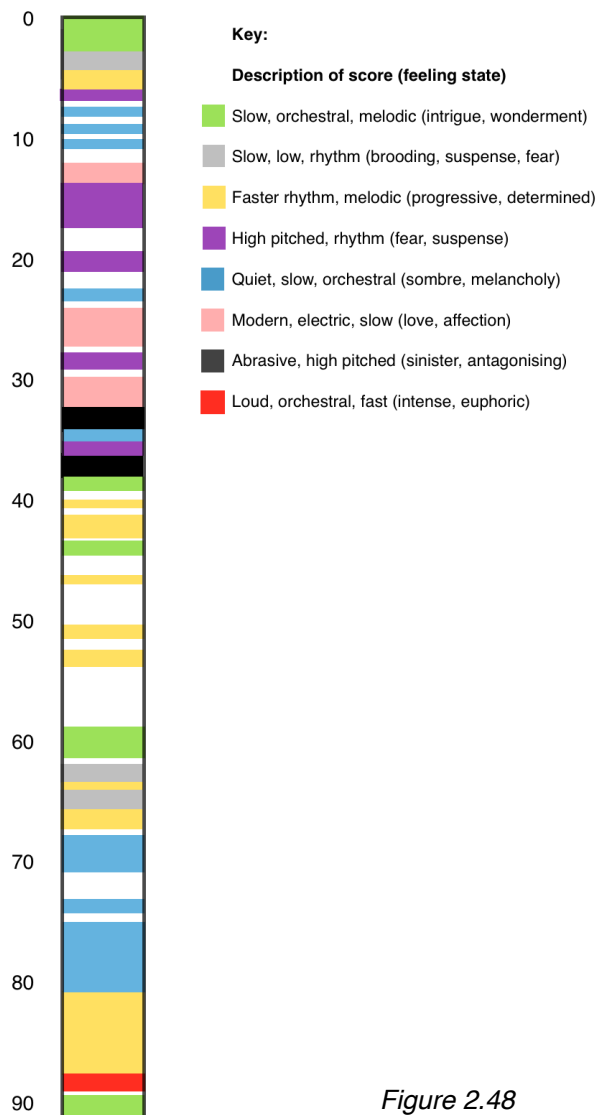
■ Loud, orchestral, fast (intense, euphoric)

Figure 2.48

distinction between the film's three narrative time periods. Scenes set in the past musically create a feeling state described as "intrigue, wonderment, progressive, determined, sinister, antagonising" (as can be seen by the clustering of black, green, and yellow on the map). Scenes set in the current time period create a feeling state described as "fear, suspense, love, affection" (purple and pink). Scenes set in the future create feeling states described as "sombre, and melancholy" (blue). At no stage is the musical score at odds with the pictures as it harmoniously matches the tone and mood of the visuals. The film ends melodically, encouraging a feeling state of "intrigue and wonderment" (green).

Similarly, *The Wrestler*'s musical score harmoniously matches all of its associated scenes and characters; the "tackiness" of the sexualised hip-hop score depicting the sleazy strip club; the "energised" eighties metal score depicting Randy and his Wrestling vocation; the "affectionate love" theme bolstering Randy's relationship with his daughter, Stephanie. However, the musical score map from *The Wrestler* does illustrate the sparser deployment of this music.

Furthermore, a significant portion of the score is diegetic, often coming in the form of a car stereo or sound system at an event or bar, rather than a non-diegetically overlaid sound track, as is the norm in *The Fountain*, *Pi*, and to a lesser extent, *Requiem for a Dream*. The only exception is the "discordant, slow, modern" score

The Wrestler

Key:

Description of score (feeling state)

Eighties metal - hard (energised, rebellious)

Eighties metal - soft (nostalgic, tacky)

Sexualised Hip hop (sleazy, tacky)

Elevator music (bored, temporary)

Discordant, slow, modern (sad, curious)

Modern, electric, slow (love, affection)

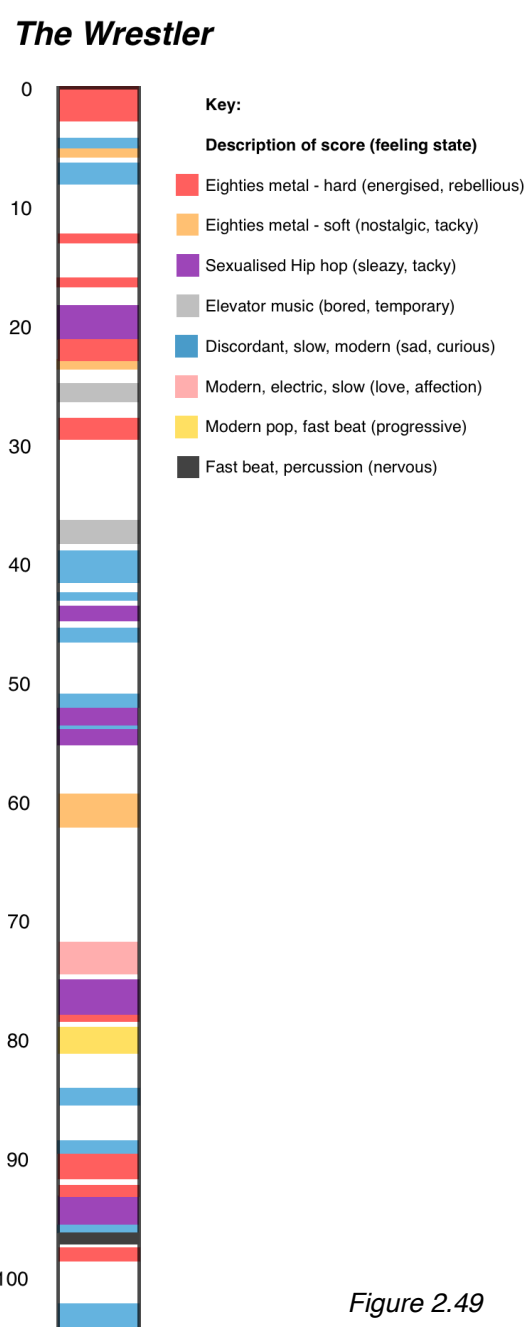Modern pop, fast beat (progressive)

Fast beat, percussion (nervous)

Figure 2.49

(blue), and the "modern, electric, slow" score (pink). This use of diegetic and non-diegetic music sets up a dichotomy between the external and internal. That is, the diegetic musical score constructs and conveys the feeling state of a specific scene to the spectator, whereas the non-diegetic musical score communicates the feeling state of a character.

Similarly, (although technically not part of the musical score) it is worth noting the use of crowd sounds that also encourage this dichotomy. Figure 2.51 shows Randy about to enter the arena. At this moment the crowd sound is diegetic and represents acoustically his immediate surroundings. Figure 2.52 shows Randy about to enter the delicatessen. Identical crowd sounds can be heard, but in this instance they are illustrative of Randy's internal feeling state, thus requiring the spectator to remember the earlier scene in order to fully engage with and feel Randy's emotional state.

Figure 2.51

Figure 2.52

Musically, the film ends on a discordant note, encouraging a "sad and curious" feeling state. This specific musical motif is played in several scenes throughout the film but is only fully realised at the climactic end. There is a further dichotomy between the dissatisfaction of a sad and curious feeling state (that the music encourages) and the satisfaction of hearing the full extent of the score (that the spectator had only been previously teased with), which makes a significant contribution to the unresolved nature of *The Wrestler*'s ending.

As the musical score map suggests, *Black Swan* has a very complex structure, offering twelve variants that play at seventy-four periods throughout the film. The score attaches itself to character, location, and theme. For example, the location of the dance hall where Nina practices is represented with diegetic music that offers a feeling state of

"busy, clean, disciplined" (light green), and this is in keeping with the feeling state that the location or setting offers. The character of Beth is always illustrated with slow, light, classical music that conveys a feeling state of "intrigue, trepidation, and worry" (light grey), and this is in keeping with Nina's attitude towards her. The theme of safety and comfort has a music-box score that encourages an "innocent, calm, safe" (light blue) feeling state. This association is a "musical odour" that relies on the spectator's previous similar experience with music boxes (most likely from their childhood) in order to foster this feeling state.

The theme of mental illness, as told through Nina's story, is further enhanced by the film's score. As Nina struggles with her grasp on reality, the film similarly plays with the reality of its score. The dichotomy between diegetic musical tones

Black Swan

Key:

Description of score (feeling state)

Diegetic, classical (busy, clean, disciplined)

Music-box, classical (innocent, calm, safe)

Swan Lake, orchestral (glorious, euphoric, sad)

Classical, slow beat (fear, suspense, horror)

Light clarinet, classical (happy, joy)

Slow light classical (intrigue, trepidation, worry)

Slow dark classical (sinister, suspense, scary)

Classical, fast, loud (triumphant, progressive)

Electric, slow, pulsing (sensual, determined)

Background, jazz, classical (convivial)

Modern, electric, heavy beat (disorienting, hazy)

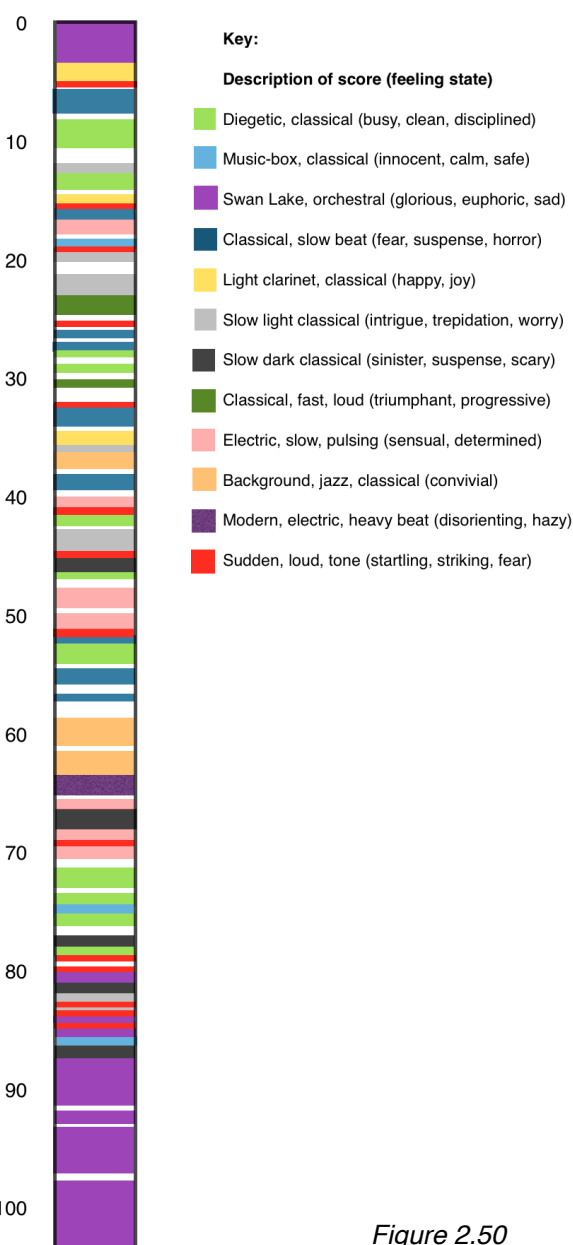Sudden, loud, tone (startling, striking, fear)

Figure 2.50

are intertwined with tones that are non-diegetic, and this mirrors Nina's oscillating mental state between what is real and what is not. This can be observed in the period before her mental transformation into the Black Swan, and is illustrated acoustically through the use of "sudden, loud tones" (red) that occur during Nina's episodes of heightened mental instability. For example, there is an abrupt cutaway to Nina on a train which is amplified acoustically by the diegetic sound of a train's sudden screeching and thudding. This sound is remarkably like that produced by musical instruments. Its non-diegetic counterpart comes in seven other horrific scenes where Nina is harming herself

by, for example, peeling back her skin, or imagines seeing something that may or may not have occurred. Again, there is the sudden sound of screeching and thudding. However, in these instances the sound is properly orchestral, although it sounds remarkably like a train screeching or thudding.

The musical score maps seek to demonstrate that Aronofsky often pairs a musical score variant with a theme, narrative, or character, and that this pairing is repeated throughout the film. The score itself encourages feeling states in the viewer that match the feeling state the scene offers. The repeated use of this technique provides an audible cue to arouse the spectator's memory, whilst also arousing the feeling state of a previous event in the film; and in some instances it allows the spectator to feel or intuit a scene prior to its appearance.

In all five films, the changes in musical score variants become less frequent as each film settles on its dominant themes, narratives, and characters. All of the films offer climaxes that encourage feelings states such as "intense, energised, euphoric, painful, exciting" but ultimately end on a quieter note, encouraging feeling states such as "nature, intrigue, wonderment, sadness, curiosity, peace".

As exemplified in the maps, the musical scores in all instances affect a feeling state at some level. However, it must be noted that there are some scenes that do not have a musical score associated with them, and yet they still affect mood through other means. For example, Sara Goldfarb's monologue to her son Harry, mid-way through *Requiem for a Dream*, provides the spectator with a moving and poignant scene creating mood without the use of music. It may be that the lack of music helps to create a spectatorial focus upon other elements within the mise-en-scène that encourage an affective response. This is something I will explore further in the next chapter.

In this chapter, I have outlined theories of non-cognitive processes as presented by Coplan, Caroll, and Robinson, and explored how, through processes such as emotional contagion, non-cognitive affective responses, and, in particular, mood, a film can be

experienced phenomenologically. This enables the spectator to freely react to the cinema of Aronofsky as the events, situations, and characters are presented narratively, and, by applying Ihde's third hermeneutic rule as outlined in Chapter One, not apply cognitive assessment "until all evidence is in".

I have demonstrated through the use of Ihde's hermeneutic method which moods and feeling states are prevalent in the opening sequences of Aronofsky's first five feature films. In doing so, it is apparent that some elements within the structure of the cinema of Aronofsky stand out more than others in providing an affective response, a prime instance of which is the musical score. This has led me to explore the use of music within his films as a tool to stimulate feeling states in the spectator. I argue that as a filmmaker Aronofsky employs the musical score to great effect (and affect).   The musical score assists the spectator's sensory ability to "feel" the film, which in turn, makes him or her more receptive to the cognitive concerns, intentions, and messages that the film (or filmmaker) may have.

In the next chapter, I will examine phenomenologically how colour and visual composition are used in the cinema of Aronofsky. Specifically, I will examine Vivian Sobchack's "cinesthetic subject" and how this relates to feeling colour in Aronofsky's work.

Chapter 3: The Affective Image

The relationship between colour and mood appears to share a natural connection. Colour has the capacity to reach into my lived body and alter the way I feel. Notably, it can do this without having direct access to my physical body. It presents the same paradox as music, affecting my mood yet not having direct access to my somatic levers. This conundrum raises many questions, which I will explore in this chapter. Indeed, how can the colour of a film make me feel a certain way and alter my mood? Why does the changing complexion of *Requiem for a Dream* give my body a sense of morbid descent, and yet *The Fountain* makes me feel quite the opposite? Here, I refer to the term "complexion" as the film's holistic colour — that is, the film's dominant hues that coalesce over the length of the film to bring about its collective colour identity, or complexion.

It would seem logical to affirm that different colours encourage certain moods; a "vibrant" yellow encourages quite a different mood from a "gloomy" green. Here, I am mindful of my subjective use of descriptive terms. Such terms should not be dismissed due to their lack of objectivity. Instead, they provide an important descriptive tool that can be used to express an embodied experience. To describe colour using terms such as "vibrant" or "gloomy" is an appropriate way to apply Ihde's second hermeneutic rule: "Describe, don't explain." As art theorist W.J.T. Mitchell suggests:

> Figurative labels ("blue" moods and "warm" colours) apply as firmly and consistently as literal ones and have as much to do with actual experience. That images, pictures, space and visuality may only be figuratively conjured in a verbal discourse does not mean that the conjuring fails to occur or that the reader/listener "sees" nothing. That verbal discourse may only be figuratively or indirectly evoked in a picture does not mean that the evocation is impotent, that the viewer "hears" or "adds" nothing in the image (2009, p.119).

As with music, colour does not offer a definitive or tangible form of representation and objectification. Nevertheless, colour still has the power to affect our mood. The suggestion I make here is that colour in the cinematic model operates with a similar currency to that of the musical score, by providing emotionally appropriate objects. Kivy's (2007) model of musical emotion can be applied to the use of colour; emotions are often stimulated by colour itself, suggesting that colour itself is the object. For example, we may be agitated by the sudden shift in a film's complexion from an uplifting colour to an aggressive one, perhaps foreshadowing an unpleasant turn in the narrative. These emotions are stimulated by colour and are often narrative signposts or colourific cues that can sometimes take precedence over other narrative devices. In *Black Swan* colour is used to signpost a narrative turn during a night-club scene. Unbeknownst to Nina, her drink is drugged, leading her evening down an unscrupulous route. As she descends into her drug-addled haze, the film illustrates this by bathing the mise-en-scène in a deep red. This colour is used to visually emphasise a shift in narrative as well as illustrate the darker side of Nina. It also foreshadows the film's climactic ending, where Nina's darker side is fully realised through use of the same colour.

Furthermore, cinematic colour paradoxically operates beyond the visual realm. As an embodied spectator, my experience of colour informs my other senses. As Vivian Sobchack posits that "We do not experience any movie only with our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and knowledge of our sensorium" (Sobchack, 2000).

In this chapter, I will examine two components that exemplify how Aronofsky creates feeling states that lead on to mood: complexion and visual composition.

Cinematic Complexion

Aronofsky's first five feature length films utilise colour (or lack of, as is the case with *Pi*) to assist in the creation of mood. This is perhaps an unsurprising statement given that most directors have a colour scheme as part of their mise-en-scène. However, I want to stress the attention that Aronofsky gives to the *complexion* of each of his films. Moreover, I will investigate his intention to utilise this as a tool to alter the way the embodied spectator feels. I will avoid the question of how colour should be interpreted, thus avoiding psychoanalytical tropes, but rather ask: how does colour in his films make me feel and why? Like Jenefer Robinson's audible odours (discussed in Chapter 2), colours operate in a similar fashion, cross-pollinating with other senses. A reddish hue might make me feel warm because of my memory of the colour's natural occurrence within nature. Likewise, a bluish hue might make me feel cold because my natural experience of it is with cool items such as ice. Furthermore, these feelings are reinforced by signifying curators such as advertising, film, television, and other forms of media. That is, I see white and blue and feel cool not only because of my experience with nature but also because of its culturally appropriated representation in, say, a toothpaste advertisement. This cross-pollination of senses allows for the lived body experience of cinema. A question still remains: how does one *feel* colour? How does vision become a tactile experience? If, for example, I see a scene that is strongly tinted with orange, how does this imbue a feeling of warmth, or a blue scene imbue a feeling of cold? In order to answer this I will now return to Sobchack, whose phenomenological approach has been the philosophical backbone of this investigation.

In her article for *Senses of Cinema* (2000), Sobchack explores the relationship between the sensory experience of the spectator and the film.

> We are in some carnal modality able to touch and be touched by the substance of images, to feel a visual atmosphere envelop us, to experience weight and suffocation and the need for air, to take flight in kinetic exhilaration and freedom even as we are relatively bound to our seats, to be

knocked backwards by a sound, to sometimes even smell and taste the world we see on the screen (Sobchack, 2000).

Sobchack's comments are not meant metaphorically. That is, our "need for air", or to "smell and taste", are not mere thoughts but tangible urges — physical responses to what has been presented before us. However, how can I smell, taste, or for that matter feel, when I am as Sobchack states, bound to my seat? When a film only presents itself within the sensory modes of sight and sound, how can this affect my other three senses? When I watch Tom (Hugh Jackman) eat the Tree of Life's bark in *The Fountain*, I taste what I imagine the bark would taste like. When I watch Randy cut himself with a razor in *The Wrestler*, I feel what I imagine the pain would feel like. I *hear* the bark being cut and chewed by Tom, and I *see* Randy cut himself. Yet somehow my body responds to the sights and sounds presented with the senses of taste and touch.

Sobchack offers an explanation for my responses to this phenomenon. She argues that the spectator does not experience a film exclusively through the sensory modes of seeing and hearing, but instead with their entire "bodily being", claiming that there is a dominant "cultural hegemony" of vision that prevents many spectators from fully experiencing film. She sees the sensory model as a series of interconnected modes rather than isolated senses, claiming that "vision is only one modality of [the] lived body's access to the world" (2004, p.64).

Sobchack explains this interconnection of sensory modes through a concept she calls the "cinesthetic subject" — a contrivance born out of synaesthesia and coenaesthesia. Both of these conditions involve the interconnection of senses. Synaesthetes experience one sense as another, for example, sound is experienced as a colour, or a colour is experienced as a taste. Coenaesthesia refers to the spectator's perception of their senses as a whole. Sobchack uses the example of the new born baby, who is only aware of his or her senses and has not yet been influenced by a cultural hegemony that privileges one sense over another.

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Through these two conditions, Sobchack arrives at the "cinesthetic subject" — a constructed spectator whose senses inform each other, enabling and offering a reason why, as a spectator, one can touch, taste, and smell the cinematic image. Consequently, the borders between the senses are blurred as the cinesthetic subject experiences film through their lived body, not just through vision and hearing. Sobchack argues that the lived body coalesces the senses in a "cross-modal sensory exchange" (2004, p.69).

The cross-modal sensory exchange is processed by the spectator instinctively, through a form of "primary engagement" with the film. Sobchack explains that through this process, the lived body subverts the divide between the spectator off-screen and the character on-screen. That is, the spectator's engagement with the film unsettles the established cinematic relationship between the subject (the spectator) and the object (the character). The lived body supplies a conduit for the cinematic experience as the spectator responds, thus blurring the boundary between spectator and character. The spectator feels what the character feels. For example, in *Requiem for a Dream* Harry lies on a prison floor suffering from a badly infected arm. His infected arm becomes a sensory experience that goes beyond mere sight and sound. My lived body becomes aware of Harry's pain as I suddenly become conscious of myself rubbing my arm in response. Therefore, my skin is now not exclusively my own but has become part of an embodied experience, which is also Harry's skin. In her phenomenological analysis of *The Piano* (1993), Sobchack experiences a similar affect, stating that "my skin is both mine and not my own" (2004, p.66). Thus, the spectator feels what the character feels through a reversibility of perception between the cinesthetic subject and, as Sobchack explains, the screen's "figural objects of bodily provocation" (2004, p.79).

If the spectator is in an exchange of sensual connection with the character, to what extent does this exchange occur? Clearly I will not feel the same physical trauma of Sara Goldfarb's electrotherapy, Max's seizure, or Harry's infected arm (all in *Requiem for a Dream*). To do so would create an untenable experience for the spectator. However, Sobchack suggests that the cinesthetic subject does at least to some extent experience the character's physicality, due to the structure of subjective

interchangeability with the character. This helps to explain why, upon seeing Harry's infected arm I feel a discomfort in my own and am provoked to rub it. Jennifer Barker (2009, p.12) suggests that as a cinesthetic subject, I am engaged in "fleshy, muscular, visceral contact" with Harry; I feel a portion of his pain, and thus express a physical reaction to this pain by rubbing my arm.

GENERAL SPECTRUM

Figure 3.1

Sobchack's cinesthetic subject can bring about acute sensory awareness and experience. However, there are multiple factors at play. Scenes concerning Harry's infected arm are made up of many sonic and visual components that help provoke a bodily experience in the spectator. I am not just presented with an infected looking arm, but rather I am presented with Harry's arm through the cinematic optic of the mise-en-scène. Elements such as music, colour, and composition perform functions that operate within the visual and acoustic realm but manifest as felt experiences beyond just sight and sound. Consider the scene of Harry lying on the prison floor, writhing in agony with an infected arm (see Figure 3.1). The mise-en-scène consists of the blue and grey hues of Harry's prison attire and the prison floor. These hues are contrasted with the warmer skin tones of Harry's arm and face. The colour complexion enhances the spectator's engagement with the visceral nature of this scene. The blue/grey hues command the

greater portion of the screen's real estate and therefore create a cold environment. However, the contrast between these hues with Harry's pale pink skin highlights the infected area of his arm. This contrast brings the infection to the forefront of the spectator's attention, highlighting the pain and allowing the spectator, through cinesthesia, to feel a portion of the same. I am mindful here of colour's power to influence the spectator. It is worth noting that colour alone does not produce such responses, but must work in conjunction with other cinematic elements of the mise-en-scène such as sound, performance, and framing.

Figure 3.2

I have adjusted the original still (Figure 3.1), adding browner hues (see Figure 3.2), and have found the result to exhibit a different set of qualities. The cold tonal range is greatly reduced and the scene feels warmer and less hostile. Harry's pale skin now looks more healthy. This small colour grading adjustment illustrates how the complexion of a scene has the potential to alter spectatorial response and engagement.

In her analysis of Derek Jarman's monochromatic film, *Blue* (1993), Sobchack argues for a multi-sensory experience, despite the fact that *Blue* contains no image other than the unchanging titular hue for the entire film. The experience of a single hue, Sobchack

argues, affects the embodied spectator profoundly when one chooses to experience the film phenomenologically:

> The phenomenological method 'fleshes out' our initial interpretations and reveals that *Blue* is not only objectively about the richness, complexity, and sensuality of audiovisual perception [but also] reveals that *Blue* is performative: through its seeming 'minimalism', subjectively constituting for its viewers/listeners a meaningful experience of extreme self-reflection on the dynamics, habits, creativity, and plenitude of their own embodied perception (2011, p.204).

Blue may be an extreme case, and the assaultive experience of being subjected to a single colour for the entire length of a feature film is perhaps unsurprising. However, Sobchack's approach can be extended to considering the dominant and holistic hues of standard cinematic fare, as will be demonstrated. When one considers a film's complexion phenomenologically, it provokes a primary response, one that has no immediate cognitive assessment. Consider Aronofsky's first five feature-length films: I am immediately aware of their chromatic complexion after a single viewing. I feel that *The Wrestler* is green, and *The Fountain* is gold, and so on. The impression that colour indelibly stamps on us as embodied spectators, encourages feeling states and leads to the onset of mood.

To illustrate this I have laid out below the colour signatures and colour barcodes of each film.[19] This technique offers a concise visualisation of a film's dominant colours. The colour signatures are a consolidation of all the colours used in a film and serve to distinguish a film's propensity to lean towards a particular hue. The signatures are broken down into the RGB (red, green, blue) colour-space and the values represent the brightness of each hue (the higher the number the brighter the hue). The colour barcodes represent the colour of each frame in the film. Each frame has been captured

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[19] Further barcodes can be found at www.moviebarcode.com. Although these barcodes are intended for artistic purposes, I have found their method of production ideal for creating a colour signature of the films studied here.

and squeezed into a strand of colour. When the colours are placed side-by-side chronologically, the result reads like a colour barcode of the film. Starting from the beginning of the film at the left, the barcode can be read as a colour timeline and indicates the dominant colours for large portions of the film.
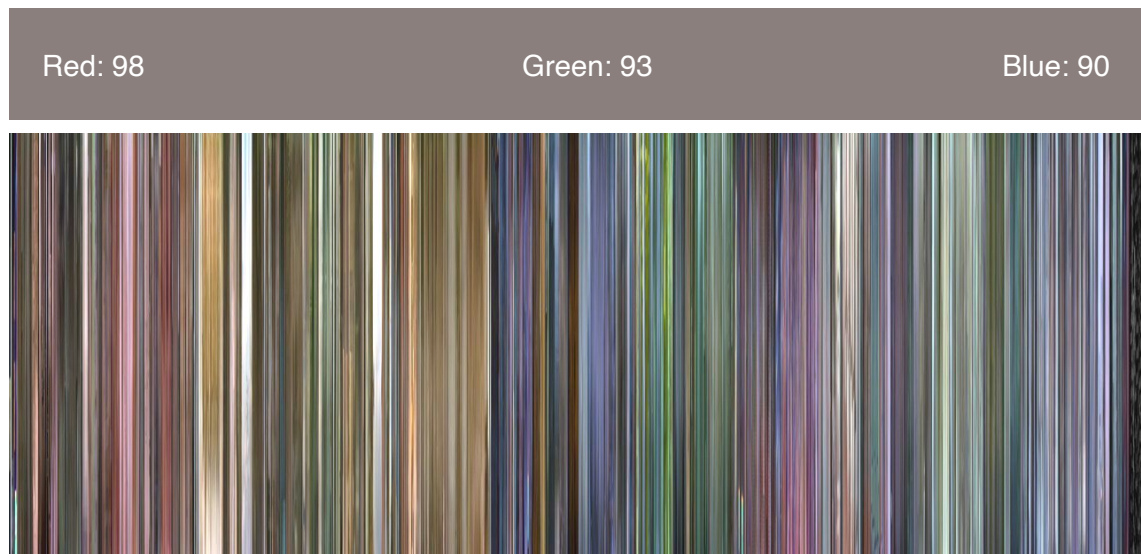
Requiem for a Dream **(2000)**

| Red: 98 | Green: 93 | Blue: 90 |

Figure 3.20   *(Moviebarcode, 2011).*

Requiem for a Dream operates within a relatively cool and light palette. As the colour signature shows, it has the highest values along all of the RGB hues, indicating that it is the brightest of Aronofsky's films. Of the three other colour films studied, the value of the red hue in *Requiem for a Dream* is higher than the green and blue hues. In particular, the red hue makes a stronger representation in the darker tones.[20] However, *Requiem for a Dream* indicates a relatively higher propensity of blue, in relation to the other two hues. *Requiem for a Dream* changes hue throughout its timeline, and this change takes inspiration from the seasons. The chapters of summer, autumn, and winter are used to mark the harmful progression of addiction and also provide a context of time in the narrative. The colour barcode illustrates how the colours match both the seasons and the film's metaphoric descent into winter: summer is dominated by warmer reds; autumn by earthy hues; and winter with "cold" colours, such as blues, purples, and greens. The film is able to utilise colour to make us *feel* seasonal variation. This

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[20] This may be typical of American cinema in general, although, this assertion is based on a random selection of only twenty films and further research would be required.

operates on a phenomenological level and allows the spectator to feel the anxiety of descent — a feeling inextricably tied to addiction. Throughout *Requiem for a Dream*, the seasons are not expressed explicitly through traditional representations, such as the cracking ground of summer, the falling leaves of autumn, the snow of winter, and so on. Instead, the camera is firmly fixed on the protagonists as the denizens of artificiality. The protagonists are trapped within man-made environs, and by proxy the spectator is also trapped within this synthetic environment. Yet a sense of seasonal change is still experienced beyond what the signposted inter-titles indicate, and the seasons are felt through the use of colour. The spectator's embodied cinesthetic experience allows the colours of *Requiem for a Dream* to be felt non-cognitively, allowing for the onset of mood before proceeding with cognitive assessment using Ihde's fourth rule (which prompts the embodied spectator to seek out structural or invariant features) and fifth rule (which prompts the embodied spectator to ask why these structural or invariant features affect him or her).

The Fountain (2006)

| Red: 72 | Green: 63 | Blue: 45 |

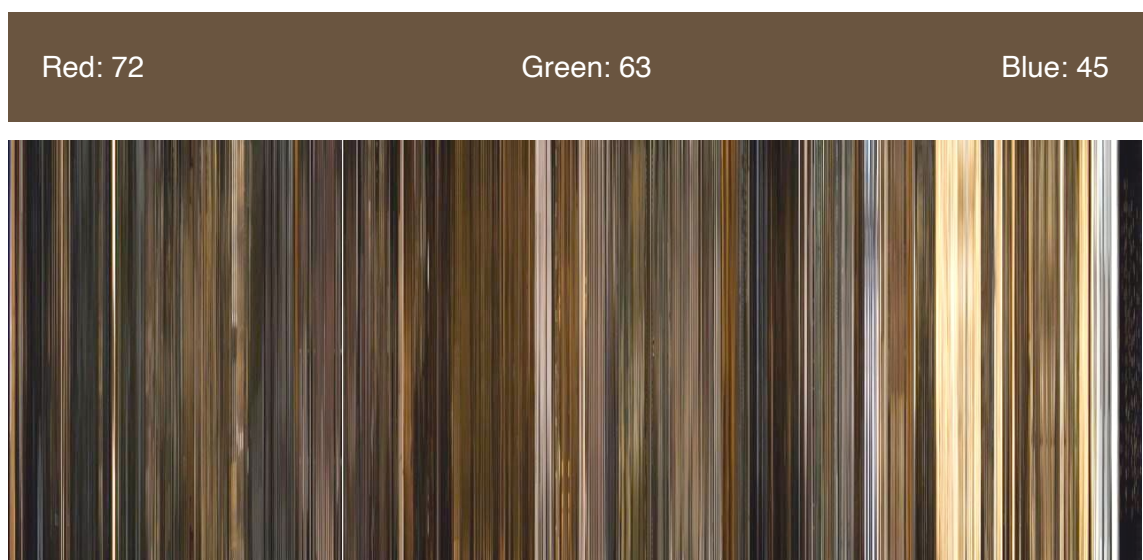Figure 3.21   (Moviebarcode, 2011).

The Fountain has the darkest complexion of the colour films studied here, as indicated by the lower colour signature values. The significantly lower blue value confirms the film's propensity towards golden and earthy hues. Unlike *Requiem for a Dream*'s changing hue, *The Fountain* only changes the brightness of the same hue. Furthermore, *The Fountain*'s colour palette operates in the opposite temporal direction to *Requiem for*

a Dream's undulating descent towards the winter of addiction. As the title suggests, the *The Fountain* thematically explores ascent rather than descent as is immediately apparent in the barcode's increasing brightness from left to right. It achieves this structure through various methods. The theme of ascent is illustrated through the progression of multiple narrative arcs: Tomas' progress through his quest, the completion of Izzi's (Rachel Weisz) book, and Tom's progress towards Xibalba. There are also visual motifs that support this theme: Tomas' ascent of the Mayan pyramid, Tommy and Izzi's constant gaze towards the heavens, and Tom's vertical (as opposed to horizontal) ascent through space. These motifs dramatically illustrate the film's progression from dark into light. However, these thematic markers require immediate cognitive assessments on the part of the spectator. Consider Tom's ascent towards Xibalba. His journey towards this dying star represents his journey towards accepting death. The journey lasts for the entire film, and, as the spectator, I am cognisant of his progression due to narrative clues contained within the film's script, paired with visual clues, such as stars flying vertically past the spaceship. However, the *feeling* of ascent is strengthened through the treatment of colour. *The Fountain*'s colour barcode clearly illustrates the film's ascent from darkness towards light. This gradual treatment of colour is something that the spectator is not immediately cognisant of. Through the use of colour, *The Fountain* helps the spectator to feel the theme of ascent non-cognitively, and therefore phenomenologically.

The Wrestler (2008)

Red: 94   Green: 87   Blue: 74

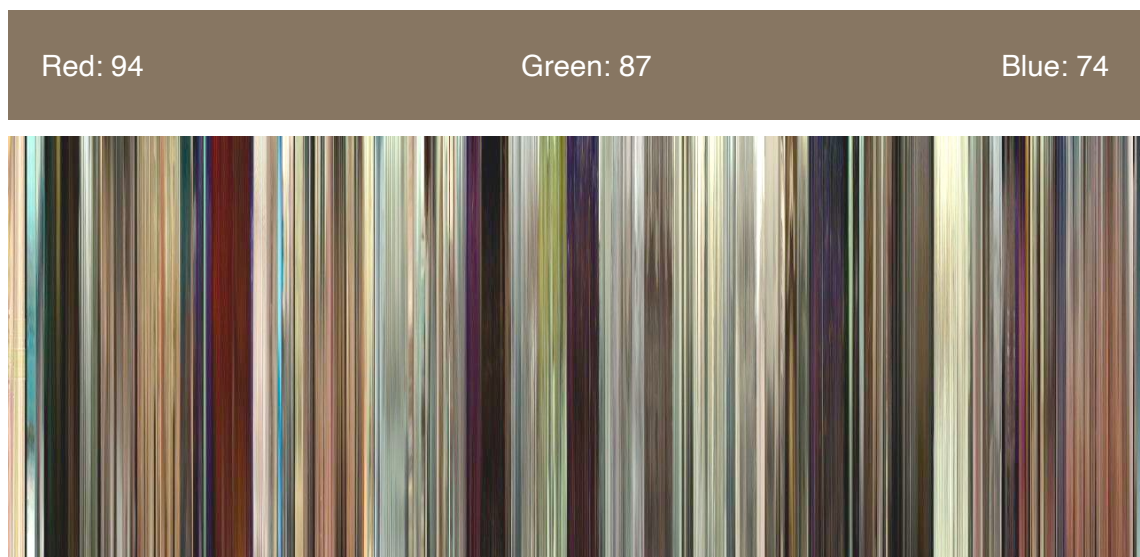*Figure 3.22*   (Moviebarcode, 2011).

Upon initial inspection it would appear that *The Wrestler* employs minimal colour manipulation, due to its realist sensibilities. However, the intentionality of the film is still significantly expressed through its use of colour, in particular red and green. Of the five films studied, *The Wrestler* is clearly Aronofsky's most realistic in terms of story and setting, which is supported by an aesthetic that uses a more natural palette. The film's complexion is lighter than that of either *The Fountain* or *Black Swan*, although the colour barcode exhibits oscillating patterns of lighter and darker periods. The latter are often representative of Randy's life outside of the ring and are located at the seedier or more depressing moments in the narrative, such as Randy's trailer park home, the strip club, and Randy's troubled moments with his daughter, Stephanie. The colour signature indicates a dominant green hue that reflects Randy's work-place in and around the wrestling ring, whereas his life outside of the ring often contains a higher instance of the red hue. Perhaps the most notable example is the strip club where Cassie (Marisa Tomei) works, which is heavily saturated with red. This colour is diametrically opposed to the green hue, largely associated with Randy's life as a wrestler. What is evident is the play between green and red, where red codifies Randy's life outside the wrestling ring and green codifies his life inside the ring; red is also the dominant hue in the darker periods and green is dominant in the lighter. Furthermore, the concluding chapter of the film combines the two colours as Randy's two worlds come together. The ensuing muddy green/red hue is a colourific manifestation of the film's final concern. This final mélange expresses the anguish over Randy's decision to wrestle despite his heart condition; hence red or green equates to stop or go, to wrestle or not. Phenomenologically, the bringing together of these diametrically opposed colours provokes an anxiety in the cinesthetic subject that matches the film's ambiguous ending, where the spectator is left to decide whether Randy suffers a second and fatal heart attack or goes on living.
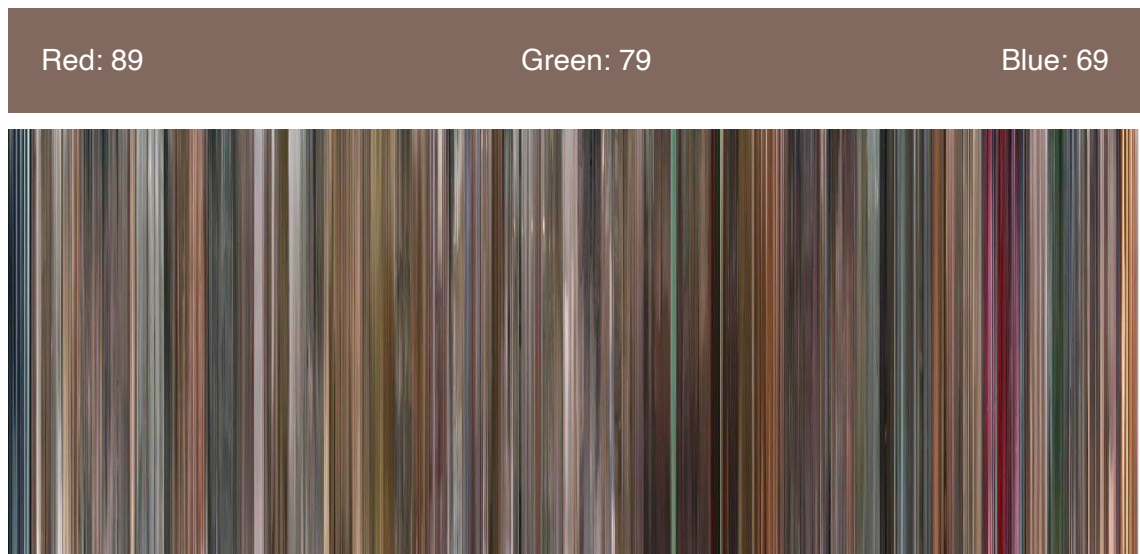
***Black Swan* (2010)**

| Red: 89 | Green: 79 | Blue: 69 |

Visually, *Black Swan* is a darker film than either *Requiem for a Dream* or *The Wrestler*. Despite the film's binary nature (purity vs. corruption, light vs. darkness, white vs. black), its colour signature and barcode patterns do not, on initial inspection, reflect this quality. The film's dualism is explicit in the transformation of Nina from white to black swan. As expected, many elements within the mise-en-scène are portrayed through a desaturated, almost monochromatic palette, aiding the theme of white versus black. Characters in *Black Swan* are framed in a way that emphasises their costumes. In her naive and repressed state, Nina wears monochromatic costumes dominated by lighter shades of white, pale pinks, and light greys; whereas her antagonists, Lily (Mila Kunis) and Nina herself (as the black swan — her other self), wear darker monochromatic shades (predominantly black).   However, the colour signature of the film exhibits a dominant red hue, which seems to be at odds with the monochromatic colour palette of the characters' costumes. An explanation for this could be that pale pink indicates white and dark red indicates black. *Black Swan* discreetly exhibits a significant quotient of red hue contained in other elements within the mise-en-scène, such as the small but bright flashes of red lipstick, dark red blood, the black swan's eyes, the saturation of red light in the night-club, and the stage lighting in the climactic black swan transformation. Furthermore, there is also a heavy use of pink in Nina's bedroom, e.g. her soft toys — this colour being a derivative of the red hue. These elements are easily overlooked due to the conflict between white and black. However, the link between pink and dark red

equates to the same conflict. What is evident in *Black Swan*'s colour barcode is the film's temporal transformation from pink to dark red. The film begins with red mixed with white, and as the film progresses, the same red is mixed with black. Therefore, red is the constant with the differentiate being the amount of white or black. The pink/dark-red dichotomy equates to the white/black dichotomy, and the latter controls Nina's transformation from innocence to corruption, from white to black swan. Pink indicates white, and dark red indicates black. As the film's complexion changes, so too does the mood of the spectator. The spectator's embodied cinesthetic experience allows the colours of *Black Swan* to be felt non-cognitively, as if they were monochromatic shades of white or black, allowing for a shift of mood that again is a descent into anxiety that parallels Nina's descent into mental illness.

Pi (1998)

Figure 3.24   (Moviebarcode, 2011).

Although this investigation into colour excludes *Pi*, there are still some salient points that can be garnered from its "colour" barcode. I have illustrated that Aronofsky's first four colour films make deliberate use of their tonal range. *Pi*'s tonal range, albeit monochromatic, is also employed deliberately. Where the other films favour a hue to communicate and engage the cinesthetic subject, *Pi* achieves the same through the monochromatic treatment used to portray Max. For this character (who is constructed as being somewhere on the autistic spectrum), the world is black and white, reduced to a binary world of numbers and mathematical equations. Max's world is presented in monochromatic terms. This is evident in *Pi*'s "colour" barcode, with its binary nature presenting frames of deep blacks or stark whites. In *Pi*'s synthetic world, black tones

are either on or off, and are emphasised by chiaroscuro lighting and high-grain film (shot in high-contrast black and white reversal film stock). The feel of the film, which is insistently stark, aggressive, and high contrast, emphasises the obsessive nature of Max's quest for a mathematical answer to the world: "I'll find this structure, this order, this perfection." The binary nature of *Pi*'s cinematography leaves little room for the middle ground of greys and soft lighting. Grey is associated with the realm of nature, which the film only shows twice: first when Max visits the beach post-seizure, and then, significantly, at the end of the film after Max has had a mental breakdown, thus escaping his mathematical obsession. In *Pi*'s final moments Max looks at the trees in blissful ignorance of the mathematical world. The trees sway in the soft greys and *Pi*'s final softer tones suggest to the spectator, through cinesthesia, an experiential return to nature.

What is immediately apparent when examining the colour barcodes and signatures of each film is how they all differ in their dominant hue and shade. The role that colour plays in feeling these films cannot be understated. Colour not only provides a background, colouring the spectator's mood so to speak; but more importantly, hue and shade are not static but shifting, assisting mood change. As illustrated above, the films present the change of hue and shade deliberately — to generate a non-cognitive feeling state cinesthetically, which alters the mood of the spectator.

Composition

The visual style of Aronofsky's work can be broadly differentiated into three aesthetic periods. His early films, *Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream*, offer a very aggressive visual style, whereas *The Fountain*'s visual style is more measured in order to accommodate narrative complexities. Finally, *Black Swan*, and in particular *The Wrestler*, bring about a more mobile visual aesthetic that occasionally resembles cinéma vérité.

The early period

The aggressive style of Aronofsky's first two features are manifest in their technical demonstrations of bodily functions. The composition of *Requiem for a Dream* and *Pi* resonate with subjectivity. In the director's commentary of *Requiem for a Dream*, Aronofsky refers to his style as "subjective storytelling". This is clearly evident in the unconventional ways in which Aronofsky's "subjective camera" remains consistently focussed on the characters in both *Requiem for a Dream* and *Pi*. At the beginning of *Requiem for a Dream*, Harry argues with his mother through the bedroom door. This scene depicts the perspective of both characters at the same time through the use of a split-screen — one shot on Sara's side of the door, and the other on Harry's (see Figure 3.3). Both characters are in physically separate spaces and only connected through a keyhole and a door knob. The keyhole offers a point-of-view shot from Sara's perspective and the doorknob from Harry's perspective.

Figure 3.3

Figure 3.4

The split-screen is a device that Aronofsky uses throughout the film, yet not always with the same intention. In a later scene Harry and Marion are depicted using the split-screen similar to Sara and Harry. However, this time they are not separated physically. Instead, they lie beside each other within the same space. Despite their immediate presence to one another, they are still depicted with a split-screen. Harry caresses Marion and their bodies are intertwined and present to each other on both sides of the screen (see Figure 3.4), and yet they are separated into different spaces by the screen's division. The split-screen performs two tasks. First, it distances the characters by separating the screen. This occurs regardless of their spatial presence to each other within the narrative. Second, it disorients the spectator, who is unaccustomed to having her attention torn between two subjects. The decision by Aronofsky (and editor Jay

Rabinowitz) to use the split-screen not only encourages mood but also intensifies the subjective nature of *Requiem for a Dream*. By isolating the characters through the screen's composition, the film communicates the growing separation of Harry and Marion, despite their physical intimacy.

Requiem for a Dream offers a visual style replete with unconventional camera and editing techniques that reinforce the disorientation experienced by the protagonists through their drug use. The film shifts abruptly from fast motion to slow motion, the frame vibrates, and the use of a fish-eye lens disorients the spectator and distorts the observation of the bodies on screen. Furthermore, Aronofsky plays around with time in order to create confusion. In *Pi*, as Max wanders the streets, the film plays at normal speed when Max is in the frame, but then speeds up when framing what Max sees. Similarly, in *Requiem for a Dream*, the use of time-lapse photography during a drug-taking episode emphasises the disorientation and rush experienced. This technique offers the spectator a visual style that gives both an objective and a subjective view of the protagonist's bodily state. This is then amplified by alternating extreme close-ups with wide-angle long shots, forming a juxtaposition that both familiarises the spectator with and alienates her from the protagonist's body.

Another technique Aronofsky uses is called "hip-hop montage", which abruptly breaks the narrative flow to give the spectator a vivid experience of the protagonist's bodily state. This technique consists of a rapid edit that compacts the drawn-out event of drug taking into a few seconds. The montage is framed using extreme close-ups that fragment the protagonist's body and portrays in a very short period their transition from sobriety towards intoxication. In *Pi*, this is exhibited through Max's self-administration of his medicine (see Figure 3.41). In *Requiem for a Dream*, this technique similarly depicts drug taking episodes (see Figure 3.42). These sequences are musical in nature employing rhythmic editing patterns that are accompanied with percussive non-diegetic sounds. The pace of the hip-hop montage is contrasted against a backdrop of slower editing patterns, and this serves to create a stark difference that highlights the bodily state of the protagonist.

A further form of subjective story telling in *Requiem for a Dream* and *Pi* comes as another display of bodily state. The Snorri-cam is a specialised piece of equipment that attaches a camera to the body of the actor. The result implicates the spectator in a reversed point-of-view (POV) shot that frames the character, fixing him or her at the centre of the screen whilst the world around moves. This device allows the spectator to partake in a type of emotional contagion, or confusion, with the protagonist.

In *Pi*, the spectator is frequently "yoked" in such a manner to Max through the use of the Snorri-cam, such as when he moves through the public spaces of Coney Island. During his malaise of confusion and anxiety (see Figure 3.5), the background moves wildly around him, making it difficult for the spectator to gain an understanding of spatial positioning. The only solid point of reference is Max's anxious and bewildered expression, which prompts the spectator to experience emotional contagion, as well as serving to highlight Max's experience.

Similarly, *Requiem for a Dream* offers multiple uses of the Snorri-cam. For instance, when Tyrone witnesses an assassination, he flees through the back streets with the police in pursuit (see Figure 3.7). Marion is repulsed by her first experience of
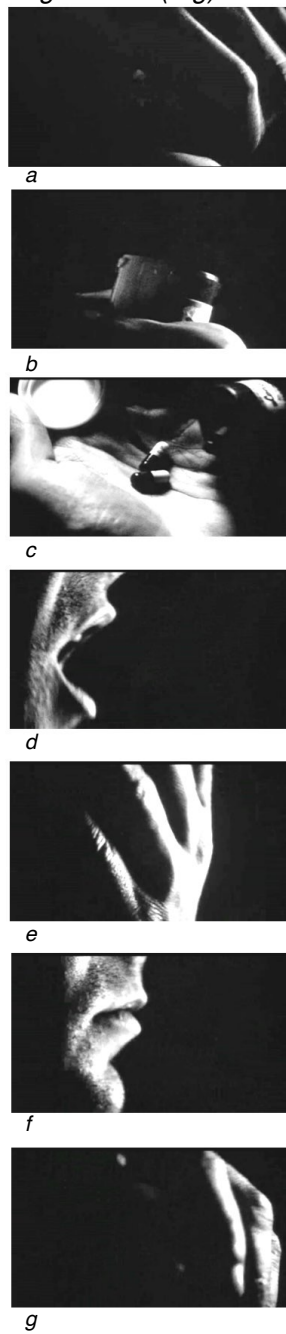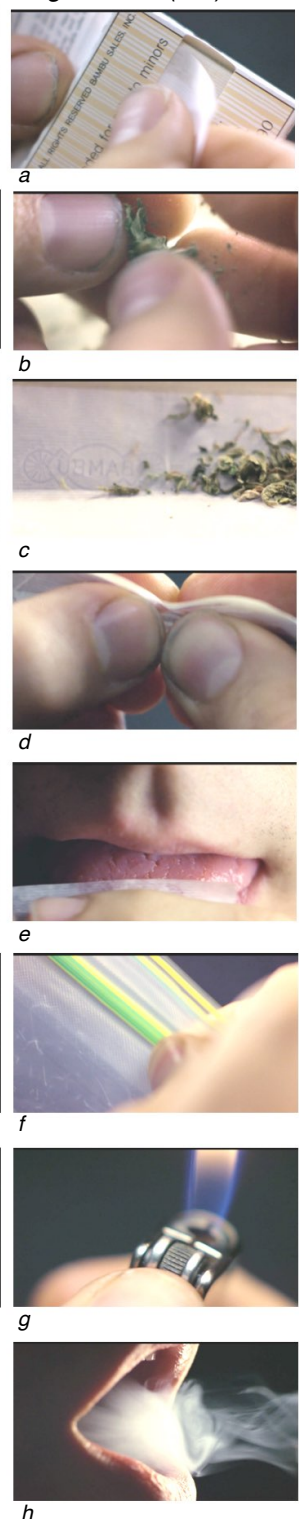

Figure 3.41 (a-g)

Figure 3.42 (a-h)

prostitution and exits the building hastily to vomit on the sidewalk (see Figure 3.6). Sara, paranoid and emaciated, wanders around her apartment in distress as a result of her hallucinations about a man-eating fridge (see Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.5

Figure 3.6

Figure 3.7

Figure 3.8

Each scene that uses the Snorri-cam depicts a character in desperate flight from a disturbing crisis; it is a technique that does not allow the spectator to look away from the character's reaction to the experience. The spectator is locked in, unable to avoid the experience of the protagonist. The Snorri-cam intensifies the process of emotional contagion. I see Marion's face as she suffers the indignant shame of prostitution. I see her reaction and disgust to the point where she vomits. Thus do I share in her disgust and through contagion I share her pain.

The Middle Period

The visual style of *The Fountain* is dramatically different to Aronofsky's first two features. *The Fountain* is constructed with an elaborate production design that incorporates many special effects, and yet *The Fountain* is far more restrained in pace than its predecessors. With its slower editing patterns, sustained shots, and consistent colour pallet, the film elicits contemplation and reflection. Harmonising with a slower

pace, the mise-en-scène and cinematography of *The Fountain* have a propensity for wider compositions. Likewise, the protagonists are more consistently portrayed through medium shots. To facilitate the construction of an otherwise complex narrative, the film employs visual motifs to mark shifts in time and location. For example, Tommy's gaze at Izzy as she leaves the house, Tomas' strike towards the Mayan priest, and Tom's meditation are all repeated throughout the film. Similarly, the movement through space of Tomas on horseback, Tommy in his car (see Figures 3.31, 3.32, 3.33), and Tom in his spaceship, are deployed with an unusual elliptical camera pan that begins upside down and ends the right way up. The resulting flourish of filmic technique assists the spectator to remember these markers as narrative devices/techniques that are used to shift the spectator to a different time and space.


Figure 3.31

Figure 3.32
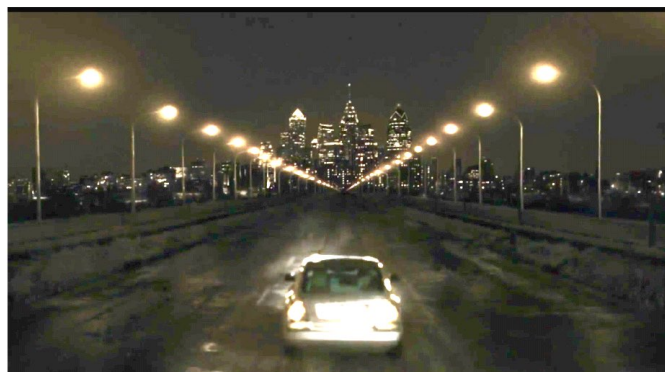
Figure 3.33

Perhaps the most significant visual device used by Aronofsky is found within the innovative framing. The impact this has on the spectator as the cinesthetic subject needs comment. *The Fountain* is framed with great attention to symmetry, and throughout much of the film uses a one-point perspective — where the focal point of the shot is in the centre of the frame (see Figure 3.43 — guides have been added to the stills to highlight their one-point perspective).

Figure 3.43 (a-f)

a

b

c

d

e

f
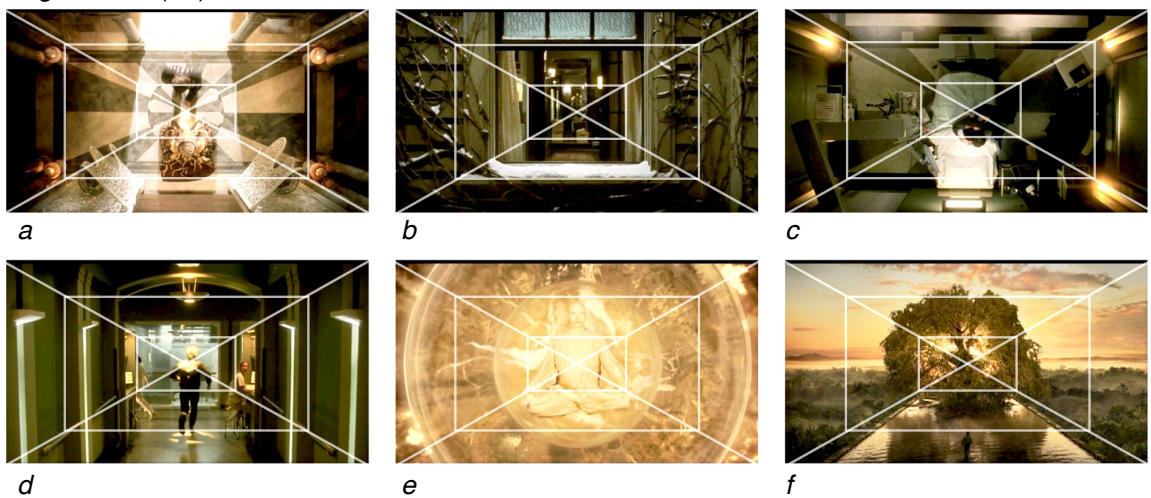
Aronofsky uses symmetry to express harmony by carefully positioning the physical elements of the mise-en-scène in relation to the camera frame. When the film breaks from this symmetry, such a departure signifies a break from harmony, and often carries with it the threat of physical discomfort to both the protagonist and spectator. In the sequence below, Tomas reaches the top of the Mayan pyramid (Figure 3.09) and faces the Mayan priest. It is interesting to note that although the set and framing are symmetrical, its occupant, the Mayan priest is not (Figure 3.10), suggesting the priest as a threat. However, the priest then turns and symmetry is restored (Figure 3.11). The two meet in symmetry (Figure 3.12), and this code is then reinforced (Figure 3.13). However, when Tomas breaks the symmetrical code and lunges at the priest (Figure 3.14), he is physically wounded (Figure 3.15), and the bodily stress (Figure 3.16) is felt by both the protagonist and the spectator through cinesthesia.
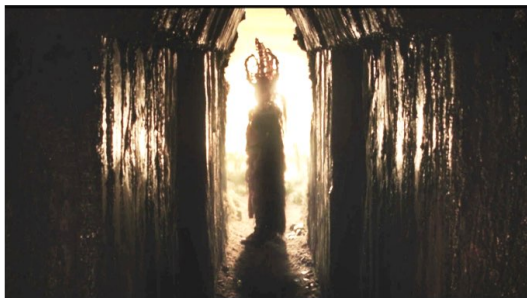
Figure 3.09

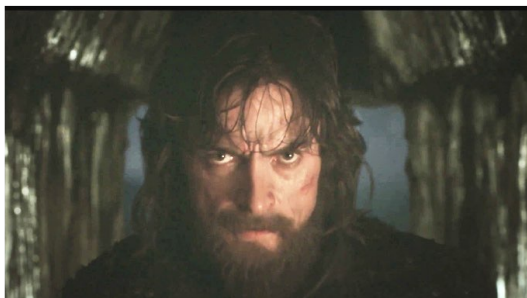Figure 3.10

Figure 3.11

Figure 3.12

Figure 3.13

Figure 3.14

Figure 3.15

Figure 3.16

The Late Period

While less experimental than Aronofsky's early works, *The Wrestler* and *Black Swan* also differ from *The Fountain* insofar as they exhibit an apparently looser style. This is most visible in an extensive use of the handheld camera. It is this technique, in conjunction with the films' protagonist-centric tracking shots, that gives both films the

semi-realistic aesthetic of cinéma vérité. As with all the films studied here, the camera attempts to get physically close to its characters. The compositions frame the protagonist in mid-shot, and sequences are more sustained, as illustrated by tracking shots that follow the protagonists through hallways and back streets for long uninterrupted periods. The POV shot is used throughout both films, and allows for a close spectatorial-protagonist relationship. Both films use this visual style to explore the psychological states of their respective protagonists, although they are constituted in different ways. For example, *The Wrestler* operates at a more laboured pace, emphasising Randy's hulking physical state. His melancholy is embraced by this shooting style as it follows Randy's doleful physique. *Black Swan*, on the other hand, explores schizophrenia through the lens of the horror genre, appropriating the more assaultive style from *Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream*. Intrusive close-ups, changing focal lengths of different lenses, and curious camera positions express the film's themes on mental health and perceptual subjectivity. The camera teases the spectator by presenting both subjective and objective perspectives. These perspectives are far from absolute as both oscillate between truth and lies. The camera becomes an unreliable narrator. That is, at no stage in *Black Swan* can the spectator trust that what they are seeing is reality. Is the spectator seeing what is presented before Nina, or just Nina's perception of it? For example, when Nina leaves for home after training, the spectator closely follows her out of the building and along the street. The hand-held camera follows her using an over-the-shoulder tracking mid-shot. The style of this shot reminds one of cinéma vérité, a documentary mode of film-making employed here to persuade the viewer that what they are seeing is objectively real rather than Nina's perception of it. The camera's perspective is an objective POV shot; the spectator sees what Nina sees but not quite. As she walks into a dark alley and spots a woman walking towards her, an interesting change occurs. The camera perspective shifts from the subjective POV shot (see Figure 3.17) to the objective POV shot (see Figure 3.19). At this point the editing oscillates between the two. To aid continuity, these shifts are separated by reaction shots of Nina's worried face (see Figures 3.18, 3.20, 3.22) as the woman approaches. Instead of seeing a stranger walk past, Nina sees her own self. What is interesting here is that Aronofsky chooses to reveal this through the objective POV shot rather than the subjective POV

shot. In essence, we experience Nina's subjective perception through an objective shot; a shot that up to this point was a reliable marker of truth has now become less reliable. Furthermore, the same shot is also used to clarify that she was mistaken; she did not actually see herself walk past but just saw a stranger (see Figure 3.24). Like *The Fountain*, *Black Swan*'s body-centric exposition is rendered unreliable through its composition.
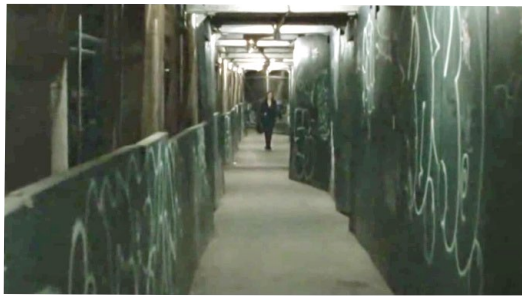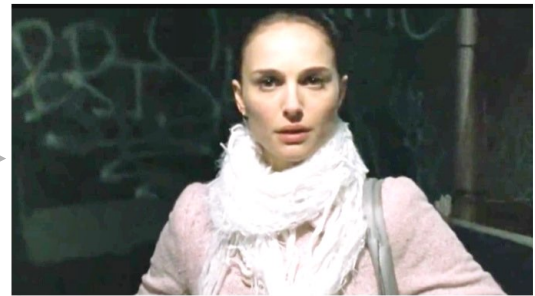

Figure 3.17

Figure 3.18
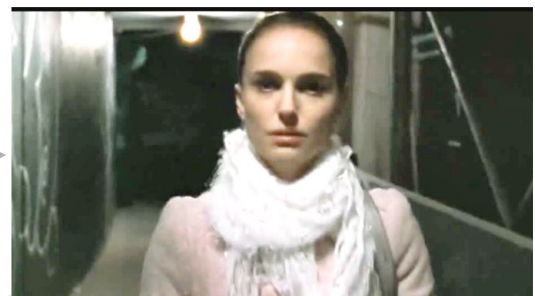
Figure 3.19

Figure 3.20

Figure 3.21

Figure 3.22

Figure 3.23

Figure 3.24

The Portrayal of Body

The body as a signifier is an important notion common to all of Aronofsky's films. It is possible that the spectator's physical engagement with the protagonist's corporeal representation supplies an important insight into the protagonist's suffering. As I have outlined above (and in the previous chapter), the protagonist's corporeal representation comes in a form that utilises music, colour, and composition. As an embodied spectator, I physically experience Harry's suffering through my interaction with music (loud orchestral with an abrasive beat), colour (cold blues, contrasting with pale skin tones), and composition (changes in film speed, extreme camera angles and distances, Snorri-cam, and visceral editing techniques, such as the hip-hop montage). Similarly, I experience Nina, Randy, Max, Tyrone, Sara, Marion, and Tommy through the same bodily optic. In a sense the body has become the lens through which I perceive the film. Furthermore, Aronofsky uses the body of the protagonist as a conduit to externalise internal concepts. Bertolt Brecht refers to this concept as the "gestus". John Willet summarises Brecht's notion as meaning "both gist and gesture; an attitude or single aspect of an attitude expressible in words or actions" (1990, p.42). The gestus constitutes a visualisation of how a protagonist physically interacts with his or her surrounding world, and can therefore be used as a phenomenological tool to analyse the cinema of Aronofsky. All of the protagonists relate to their milieu by drawing on specific bodily characteristics. It is through this context that the gestus is formed; the spectator can not only look at the protagonist's body, but can look beyond the mere body image and have access to internal emotional states. Béla Balász argues that the mere visibility of characters depicted on screen renders them coherent as phenomenological and semiotic entities, but "it is the heart, not the eye, that has perceived them" (1979, p. 289). And as Sobchack has already reminded us, the bodily image can be read hermeneutically.

This line of inquiry has proved fruitful when investigating the gestus of the protagonists in Aronofsky's work, an inquiry that locates humanist themes within the body. It is important to note that my interpretation of Brecht's gestus is a filmic one. That is, where

Brecht's meaning of gestus refers to body language on stage, my reference here refers to the representation and use of body within the cinematic medium. Filmic techniques that constitute a corporeal body on screen can (and often do) differ dramatically to the stage. Bodily posture is as dependent on the director's artifice as it is on the actor, and in the case of Aronofsky, the body is often fragmented through composition and tempo. For example, *Requiem for a Dream*'s gestus is made explicit through the use of the hip-hop montage style. This montage visually (and audibly) fragments the bodies of Harry, Marion, Sara and Tyrone, but then recombines them through astute editing. This corporeal representation fragments their bodies but coalesces their attitudes of pure drug-addled hedonism.

In *Pi*, Max's gestus is evident in his shaking hand. This physical feature is a recurrent motif that places him within his milieu. At a cafe, Max meets Lenny Mayer (Ben Shenkman) for the first time. "You alright? You alright Max?", Lenny asks, as he spots Max's shaking hand. His shaking hand foreshadows his seizures — the most somatically acute episodes for both Max and the spectator within *Pi*.

In *The Fountain*, the gestus occurs during multiple recurring shots. Split into three timelines: the protagonist(s), Tomas (the conquistador), Tommy (the scientist), and Tom (the spaceman); each gestus is similar in attitude but rendered in a different fashion. Tomas' gestus is his failed attempt to strike the Mayan priest. His violent act represents desperation and futility, and is communicated (as I outlined above) through a physical disruption of the symmetrical composition. Tommy's gestus occurs during a recurring shot of him seated at his desk. As a scientist he is working on a cure for his terminally ill wife Izzi. When she interrupts him to encourage him to come out and see the first snow, his reaction is curt. His posture is tense and projected more towards his notes than towards Izzi; he is clearly occupied by his work and does not want to be distracted. His body language is reinforced verbally by his stated refusal to accompany Izzi outside. As with Tomas, the gestus is repeated throughout *The Fountain*, often visually intersecting with Tom's space stanza (Figure 3.44). Finally, Tom's gestus is depicted through his

consumption of bark from the Tree of Life. This repeated motif is rendered in extreme close-ups and again represents an act of desperation and futility.

Figure 3.44 (a-c)

a   b   c
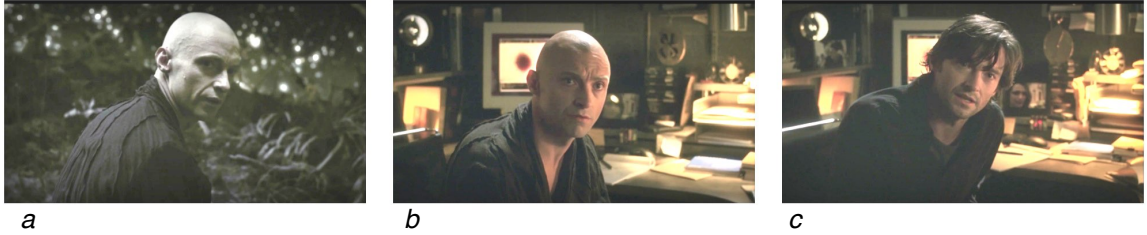
The final shot of *The Wrestler* succinctly summarises Randy's gestus. The Ram Jam, a trademark finishing manoeuvre in his wrestling routine, is representative of his wrestling persona both inside and outside the ring. In the ring, he uses the manoeuvre to communicate with his audience, ceremoniously rousing the crowd, who chant "Ram Jam" back at him before he executes the signature move. Outside of the ring however, the Ram Jam takes on a different meaning. The gestus becomes the nexus, a conduit that compares the old with the new. Randy calls Adam (John D'Leo), a young boy, over to play *Wrestle Jam* on the Nintendo. During their virtual wrestling match, Adam praises a new game called *Call of Duty 4*. Just prior to Randy performing an in-game Ram Jam, Adam says "This game is so old", under his breath. The connection between Randy's wrestling persona, as expressed through the gestus of the Ram Jam, and an "old" game highlights Randy's ageing body. Similarly, while working at the delicatessen, Randy encounters a customer who seems to recognise him. As he seeks to place him in his memory, the customer exclaims, "The old wrestler from the eighties. Ram Jam! Wow, that's freaky. You look just like the dude. Except older." Again, the Ram Jam has become the gestus that signifies his deteriorating body. Randy's gestus blurs the boundary between his world inside and outside of the ring, between his vocation and his age, and it becomes apparent that Randy's ability to keep the two worlds together is waning.

Unsurprisingly, *Black Swan* renders Nina's gestus through her dance. Specifically, the comparison between Nina as the white swan and then as the black swan is portrayed through body-related parameters. The white swan is presented as a collection of broken

shots of Nina's body. Whilst in a few instances Nina's body is presented as whole, she is often framed within a mirror (Figure 3.26), or using a long shot, and she is rarely at the centre of the frame (Figures 3.27,3.28). Predominantly, however, her body is fractured through editing and framing. The mise-en-scène of the white swan's dance sequences is comprised of elements that fragment her body through the use of close-up shots, mirrors and lighting. Her body is often divided by elements of the set, such as the ballet rail or other dancers (Figures 3.25, 3.27). The fragmented corporeal representation of Nina's body is then recombined through astute editing and framing that brings forth the white swan as a corporeal whole. Precise but timid, Nina's gestus as the white swan is portrayed in this fragmentary style to stress the incomplete nature of her character. This is exemplified in a scene where Thomas confronts Nina during rehearsals. He calls her "weak" and a "coward", to which Nina apologises. The acknowledgement of her weakness is exemplified through the comparison of her fragmented body to that of Thomas' who is portrayed as whole (Figure 3.30). As the film progresses, Nina starts to take on traits of the black swan. Her expression changes, becoming dark and brooding (Figure 3.29). She begins to have violent episodes, lashing out at Thomas, Lily, and her mother. Nina's gestus as the black swan emerges through the use of the opposite filmic technique to that of the white swan. Shots become wider, showing her whole body, and she is centrally framed; the editing is slower and the takes are longer (Figures 3.31, 3.32, 3.33). The mutually exclusive portrayal of these two sub-characters assists the film's exploration of the theme of schizophrenia.
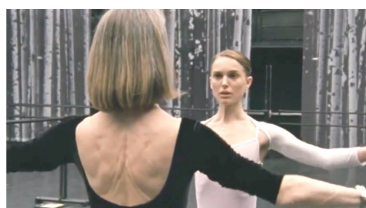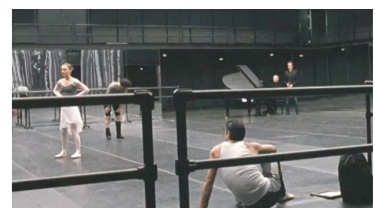

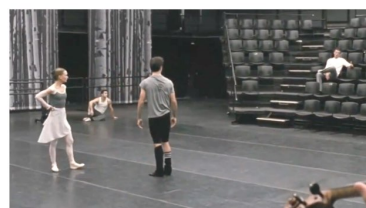Figure 3.25

Figure 3.26

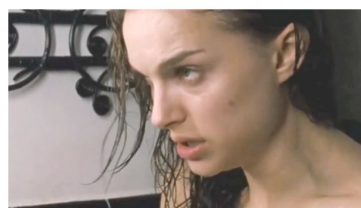Figure 3.27

Figure 3.28

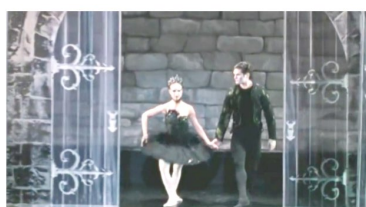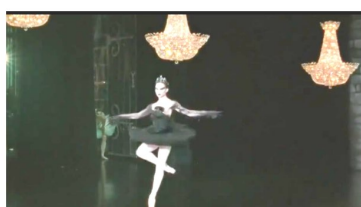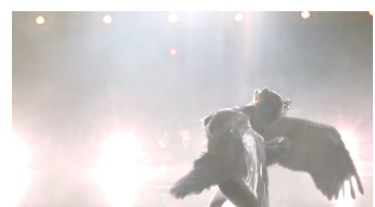Figure 3.29

Figure 3.30

Figure 3.31

Figure 3.32

Figure 3.33

I have suggested in the last two chapters that Aronofsky's first five feature length films affect the spectator non-cognitively through special treatment of certain filmic techniques. Although there are many techniques at play, I have highlighted in this chapter three elements that I feel warrant special attention due to their unorthodox deployment: the composition, the exposition of body, and the colour complexion. As I have shown, the exposition of body is demonstrated through the compositional strategies of Aronofsky's early period, the careful use of symmetry in *The Fountain*, and the unreliable play on cinéma vérité of Aronofsky's later works. The portrayal of the body is presented through the protagonist's gestus, and these films examine the protagonist's body that is constantly present to the spectator. Sobchack posits that the body on screen equates to the body of the spectator, and that the cinesthetic subject therefore experiences the same "concerns" that the protagonist experiences. I shall explore these "concerns" in the next chapter. Furthermore, I have argued that the filmic complexion alters the spectator's mood by providing emotionally appropriate objects (to use Kivy's assertion on music). This is one of the reasons why *Requiem for a Dream* lowers my mood, whereas *The Fountain* lifts it. Through cinesthesia, we receive the complexion of Aronofsky's films non-cognitively. As I have illustrated through the use of colour barcodes and signatures, the range of hues used, as well as their tonal shifts, affects our bodies phenomenologically. This is exemplified in *Requiem for a Dream*'s seasonal descent; *The Fountain*'s enlightenment; *The Wrestler*'s attempt to reconcile red with green; *Black Swan*'s transformation from pink to dark-red; and *Pi*'s binary logic versus an organic one. The shift in complexion provides a form of communication between the filmmaker and the spectator without the need for cognitive assessment. What it is that Aronofsky is communicating is something that I will address in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: A Return to Nature

The cinema of Aronofsky poses questions that examine the problematic pursuit of existential purpose within humanity. The first five films present their inquiry through an optic that firmly fixes its focus on the human body, both of the protagonist and, most pertinent to the phenomenologist, the spectator. Aronofsky's exploration of humanity's inherent problem is illustrated through the protagonists' existential angst as they question their place in the world. A key to understanding this lies in the protagonists' corporeal representation, and how this engages with the embodied spectator. As I have illustrated in the previous two chapters, music, composition, and colour complexion play an important role in the exposition of the body. These elements are treated in ways that assist a dialogue to flow between the spectator and the film. Most importantly, they operate as a conduit for phenomenological reception and help the spectator to feel the film. But why is feeling the film important? What purpose (or purposes) does it serve? In this chapter, I will present a theory regarding Aronofsky's employment of such body-centric cinema. I will suggest that this physicality significantly enhances the transfer of meaning from filmmaker to spectator. Furthermore, I will argue that Aronofsky's films represent a "return to nature" and will discuss this using the framework of the German existentialist Martin Heidegger.

To understand the significance of feeling a film, one must understand the link between sensory engagement and meaning. Here, I will briefly revisit Vivian Sobchack, who provides the backbone to this phenomenological investigation. As I have outlined in Chapter One, Sobchack's method provides a mode of qualitative and empirical research that allows a focus on the cinematic experience, as well as the cinematic text. Imperative to Sobchack's phenomenological method is an embodied engagement with film, as well as a reflective one. It is only through an experiential grounding in the film that a reflective analysis can take place, and only through reflection that a genuine sense of meaning can be obtained.

The transfer from sensory engagement to meaning occurs through a single process of reflection. Employing Ihde's five hermeneutic rules, Sobchack explains that the "embodied activity of perception and expression — making sense and signifying it — are given to us as modalities of a single experience of being in the presence of and producing meaning and diacritical value" (1992, p.8). Importantly, Sobchack refers to the reception of watching the screen as a "single experience" through multiple modalities. The spectator perceives what is seen and simultaneously expresses this perception through a revelation of meaning. That is, an embodied viewer's phenomenological engagement with a film necessitates that they find meaning. These modalities are inseparable and key to understanding how meaning is produced from spectatorship.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) argues that the cinema is both a separate expression of the body and mind, as well as a union of them. Although they are separate entities, one is dependent on the other to create unified meaning. Sobchack suggests that the cinema "makes the phenomenological concept of 'intentionality' explicit; it becomes sensible as a materially-embodied and actively directed structure through which meaning is constituted" (2011, p.192). Hence, Aronofsky's "intentionality" is manifest in his "actively directed structure". This structure becomes sensible to the spectator. Thus, his films are in constant communion with my senses, providing I am phenomenologically engaged with the film. I feel Aronofsky's films when I engage with them, and through reflection, this elicits meaning. Sobchack (2000) summarises: "The film experience is meaningful not to the side of my body, but because of my body".

I have briefly outlined that sensory engagement with film is fundamentally linked to the enhancement of meaning. Crucially, Aronofsky's first five films utilise filmic techniques that solicit sensory engagement with the spectator. It follows, therefore, that these filmic techniques indirectly solicit meaning. For example, Aronofsky's "actively directed structure" of the changing colour complexion (as outlined in Chapter Three), enables me to feel the change of seasons (*Requiem for a Dream*), the sense of elevation (*The Fountain*), the anxiety of ageing (*The Wrestler*), the metamorphosis from light to dark

(*Black Swan*), or the binary logic of mathematics (*Pi*). By activating my bodily senses, such filmic techniques help me to feel, and therefore assist my reception of meaning. It must be noted that the activation of bodily senses through filmic technique is common to many films (indeed Sobchack's theory of filmic reception is a general theory that applies to all films). However, Aronofsky utilises these filmic techniques in a unique way (as I have argued in Chapter Three), and this forms an engagement with the spectator that *enhances* meaning.

The question of what meaning Aronofsky's oeuvre imparts to the embodied spectator remains. Is there an all-encompassing message (or series of themes) behind his body of work that distinguishes him as an auteur of note? Since his films are an exposition of body, it seems logical to first examine the portrayals of body, specifically a body that is constantly present to the spectator, namely the protagonist.

An examination of the protagonists in the five films reveals that they all engage in self-destruction. Many scenes depict the self-mutilation or self-degradation of their bodies. For example, Max drills into his head (*Pi*); Harry, Sara, and Tyrone fill their bodies with drugs and Marion prostitutes her body (*Requiem for a Dream*). Tommy tattoos parts of his body (*The Fountain*); Randy takes steroids and flays his body in the wrestling ring (leading to his heart failing) and Cassie prostitutes her bodily image as an erotic pole and lap dancer (*The Wrestler*). Finally, Nina harms her body deliberately (*Black Swan*). This compulsive behaviour results from an impossible ideal that the protagonists set for themselves. Max strives to find a mathematical equation that explains nature. This idealistic formulation proves more elusive as his failing physical and mental state come to the fore. Harry, Tyrone, and Marion feverishly pursue wealth by selling drugs, but their ideal is thwarted by their desire to take the drugs they sell. Sara pursues an ideal body image that is derailed by her mental state. Tommy strives for perfection through medical science. His pursuit for an antidote for mortality is hampered by Izzi's rapid decline in health. Randy strives to maintain his wrestling career despite his failing body. Nina strives for perfection in ballet, which is increasingly hampered by her fragile mental state. When the protagonists' ideals are not realised, they attempt to compensate

through acts of self-destruction. The protagonists are always future-focussed and they are never satisfied with their present situation. In the DVD for *Requiem for a Dream*, Aronofsky (2001) states:

> You create a hole in your present because you're not there ... and then you'll use anything to fill that vacuum. It doesn't matter if it's coffee, if it's tobacco, if it's TV, if it's heroin, if it's ultimately hope. You'll use anything to fill that hole. And when you feed the hole—just like the hole in [Harry's] arm—it'll grow and grow and grow until eventually it will devour you.

Aronofsky maintains that *Requiem for a Dream* is not an anti-drug film, although some may perceive it as such. Rather, it is a film about the compulsion to fill the "vacuum" that is created through not living in the present. The process by which Harry, Marion, Tyrone, and Sara fill this vacuum creates a larger vacuum. The apparent nature of this paradox requires clarification. It is important to note the distinction between "intent" and "process". The protagonists' "intent" is to fill the vacuum. However, the "process" by which they do this achieves the opposite. Their processes are unsuitable in that they deepen the problem and perpetuate a destructive pattern. For example, in one scene of *Requiem for a Dream*, Tyrone returns to the flat with some drugs that he and Harry intend to sell. Harry is convinced by Tyrone to try the drugs in order to gain knowledge of what they are selling:

Tyrone: There it is Jim.

Harry: Huh?

Tyrone: There it is baby.

Harry: Shit!

Tyrone: Shall we try it?

Harry: What? Ty, look, this is our chance to make it big. We play it right and we can get a pound of pure. But if we get wasted, we'll fuck it up.

Tyrone: Right on. Look, I ain't trying to jive you Jim. But I don't want to be running the streets my whole life with my sneakers all ripped up and my nose running down to my

chin. All I'm saying is that we should take a little taste so we know how much to cut. It's business.

Harry: Fair enough.

Harry and Tyrone's "intent" is to lift themselves out of poverty by selling drugs. This is a future-focussed initiative. However, their future intent corrupts their present actions. The action of trying the drugs creates a larger problem. As Aronofsky would claim, this action represents the compulsion to fill the "vacuum" in the present that is created through focussing on the future.

Aronofsky's comments can be applied to the other four films. Attempts by the protagonists to obtain drugs and money, or to master medical science and maths, or to reach youth and perfection, result in their self-destruction. As the spectator, we feel the protagonists' compulsion more intensely through the physicality of Aronofsky's films. The films solicit feeling and mood states that synchronise the protagonist's body to the spectator's body. Each protagonist is inextricably linked to the spectator and therefore this strengthens the bond between the film's feelings and our own feelings.

The protagonists' plight in these films presents a problem with modern society that relates to concepts introduced by twentieth century philosopher (and phenomenologist) Martin Heidegger. In his seminal work, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954/1977), Heidegger claims that modernity sickens humankind. He attributes this sickness to modernity's one-dimensional view of "technology", suggesting that it will ultimately bring about our destruction. The term "technology" (or techné) refers to a mode of "doing" or "making". Hence, technology refers to both art and artifice. Crucially, this differs from nature (physis). Nature arises out of its own causality, whereas technology arises through human mediation. Heidegger argues that technology is an essential part of humankind's interaction with nature. This relationship is an important part of "being-in-the-world" (*Dasein*)[21]. However, he observes that

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[21] For a complete treatise on "*Dasein*", see Heidegger's (1996) magnum opus *Being and Time*. However, in brief, "*Dasein*" is a German word meaning "presence". This term is used by Heidegger to express the experience of being that is unique to humanity. This form of being is self aware among nature, and must confront paradoxical issues, such as mortality, and being alone with oneself yet still living in relationship with other human beings.

humankind's state of Dasein has become corrupted, asserting that man "everywhere, remain[s] unfree and chained to technology" (1977, p.287). This corruption is said to have risen from humankind's distorted view of technology. Heidegger is critical of how modern technology perverts the order of the natural world, re-organising our cognitive perception of reality. In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger examines these ideas with the aim of returning to more "primary meanings" that have been eclipsed by technological modernity. Heidegger refers to these "primary meanings" as the ways of thinking that lay behind the use of technology prior to modernity.

Heidegger outlines two ways of viewing technology. The first is from a modern perspective. Modern society views technology as a means to control nature, transforming nature into a commodity. Technology is considered a means to an end, a process of "making" (or challenging-forth) rather than a fundamental mode of "revealing" (or bringing-forth). For example, the modern sculptor will "make" a statue from a block of stone, rather than "reveal" the stone's natural potential. In *The Fountain* and *Pi*, this concept is clearly dramatised. In *Pi*, Max ponders his next move on the Go board. His opponent is his old professor, Sol (Mark Margolis), who notices that he is over-thinking his next move, and says, "Stop thinking Max. Just feel. Use your intuition." Max is feeling stressed about his next move and cannot "make" sense of the Go board. He is adamant that there is a pattern, an order underlying every Go game. However, Sol insists that there is no pattern and that order will "reveal" itself as the game progresses. In *The Fountain*, the terminally ill Izzi implores Tommy to finish her book. Clearly frustrated, he states, "But I don't know how it ends." He cannot "make" an ending and does not accept Izzi's advice that the ending will "reveal" itself to him. Such positivist perspectives regard nature as an energy resource for human consumption. The stone is the resource that the sculptor uses to attain his goal. Similarly, Max sees the Go board as an equation to be solved rather than a game to be enjoyed, and Izzi's book is seen by Tommy as a story for consumption rather than a cathartic experience for the author.

The positivist perspectives of Max and Tommy are echoed in the final sequences of all five films. By trying to make sense of the ending, the spectator is implicated in a similar role to that of Max and Tommy. It is common to read of spectators expressing similar sentiments to that reflected in Tommy's comment, "But I don't know how it ends".[22] The open-ended conclusions to these final sequences appear to put the spectator through the same frustrations as their protagonists. After witnessing the tragic narrative arc of each protagonist, the spectator is left searching for closure. Consider each ending:

Pi's final sequence shows Max at some undisclosed period of time after he drilled into his own head with a power-tool. Max sits on the park bench looking at the trees blowing in the wind, as the little girl, Jenna, (Kristyn Mae-Anne Lao) asks him to play a calculator equation game.

Jenna: Can we do one Max? Can we? How about 255 times 183. I got it, I got it!! What's the answer?

Max looks calm and smiles as he responds.

Max: I don't know. What is it?

Max appears to take pleasure at his ignorance, and looks up back at the trees blowing in the wind whilst Jenna can be heard in the background.

Jenna: 46,665. See?! How about 748 divided by 238 ... I got it! What's the answer?

Jenna's final question, "What's the answer?" can also be read as the film's final challenge for the spectator and has implications beyond Jenna's equation. Although it is clear that Max has lost his genius, this is not explicitly explained to the spectator. Max's new state of mind is implied by comparing this scene with an earlier similar exchange between Max and Jenna. However, there are two key differences between these two scenes. First, the earlier scene is shot with high contrast cinematography and chiaroscuro lighting, whereas the latter scene uses significantly softer cinematography. Second, Max's reaction to Jenna's mathematical equation is one of blissful ignorance; he does not know the answer, whereas in the earlier scene he would immediately reply

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[22] For exaimple, see https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090422034435AA1yaDy

with the correct answer. Beyond this, the ending does not give the spectator any indication of where his life might lead from this point onwards.

Requiem for a Dream offers perhaps the most conclusive ending of all five films. In its concluding chapter, the film illustrates the fate of the four protagonists. However, the very final moments of the film deal with Sara's dream. In this sequence, Sara lays on her hospital bed after having electric shock therapy. Clearly distressed, her expression changes to that of joy as she imagines herself on the *Juice by Tappy* infomercial show. She rolls onto her side and peacefully curls into a foetal position as the scene cross-fades from her bed to the TV show. The infomercial's host announces to Sara in front of the adoring crowd that she has won the grand prize and that her son, Harry, is a successful businessman who has recently announced his engagement. Sara and Harry hug and express their love for each other.

In *The Fountain*'s final sequence Tommy comes to terms with the loss of his wife Izzi. In a snow-covered field, Tommy plants the seed that Izzi had offered him earlier in the film. Upon planting the seed Tommy utters "Bye Izzi". This moment of catharsis causes him to smile. He looks towards the sky where a star explodes, expanding across the horizon. The film cuts back to Tommy kissing Izzi's nape.

Tommy: I've finished it.
Izzi: Is everything alright?
Tommy: Yes, everything is alright.

This scene appears to confirm Tommy's personal catharsis, although it offers little to unravel the mystery that surrounds which of the three timelines are reality, and which are in his mind.[23]

The Wrestler's end sequence depicts Randy's final wrestling bout with his arch rival, The Ayatollah (Ernest Miller). Under the weight of a bad heart condition Randy wrestles on

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[23] This seems open to interpretation, as Aronofsky has indicated (Kolakowski, 2006).

to finish the bout with his signature move, the Ram Jam. Climbing the ropes it is clear that he is struggling, however, just prior to jumping he offers a brief cathartic smile. The final shot shows Randy's leap from the top ropes. This shot inconclusively ends the film, leaving an obvious question for the spectator. Does Randy live or die?

In *Black Swan*'s final moments, Nina is finishing the ballet as both the Black Swan and the White Swan. As part of her final choreography she falls backwards from the top of the stage onto a waiting cushion. She is surrounded by her adoring peers and the cheers of the audience can be heard. Her final words are "there is perfect". *Black Swan*'s final sequence is similar to *The Wrestler* in many ways. It makes clear that Nina has obtained a sense of catharsis through her achievement of "perfection". However, what is not so clear is her fate. Does she live or die? This is left open since she does not actually die on screen. However, clearly Nina's life has become the *Swan Lake* story, so to complete the story, just like the White Swan, there is the suggestion that she does die in the end by her own hands.

Figure 4.0 (a-e)

a   b   c   d   e
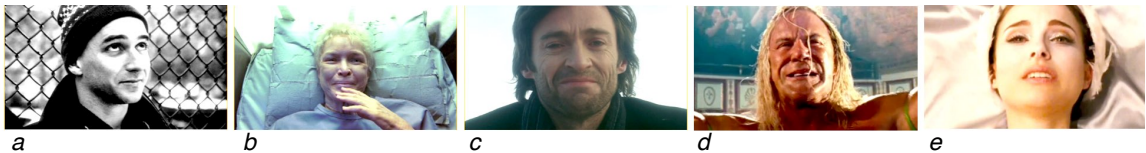
These sequences present endings that are not immediately conclusive. They leave the spectator asking further questions about the fate of the protagonist. They also present a juxtaposition between the protagonists' personal catharsis (which can be observed by their expression. see Figures 4.0) and their tragedy. Max's catharsis results from escaping his mathematical obsession, Sara's results from the belief that she has made it onto television and that her son is successful, Tommy's results from the completion of Izzi's book and the acceptance of her death, Randy's results from his continuation to wrestle to the bitter end, and Nina's results from her attainment of perfection. This is juxtaposed with the tragedy of Max's inability to grasp the mathematical equation for nature after coming so close, Sara's mental illness, Tommy's loss of his wife, and Randy's and Nina's possible deaths. These sequences challenge the spectator's positivist mindset — a mindset that is attempting to "make" meaning, and to find closure through the narrative. However, "making" meaning is the practice of "challenging-forth", and

risks transforming the film into solely a form of entertainment, thus turning the film into a commodity. This is distinct from the phenomenological "reveal" that I claim is Aronofsky's agenda. The phenomenological perspective is woven throughout these films and offers signposts on how to deal with such ambiguous endings. Take for instance the above examples of Tommy and Izzi, and Max and Sol, but applying spectatorial questioning instead:

Spectator: Can I make sense of this film?

Izzi: You can. You will.

Spectator: How do I make sense of this film?

Sol: Stop thinking. Just feel. Use your intuition.

Such instances remind the spectator to experience the film phenomenologically rather than "challenging-forth" the meaning.

Heidegger argues that the process of "challenging-forth" nature into a resource leaves what he calls a "standing reserve". Nature has essentially been turned into a commodity to be stored for later use. In other words, under modernity's view of technology, trees become wood, rivers become power, ore becomes iron, animals become meat, and so on. Modernity views nature's potential as it benefits humankind. Heidegger argues that the concept of "challenging-forth" is a recent phenomenon that has been brought about through modernity. However, it is somewhat tenuous to claim that this phenomenon is exclusively a modern one. For example, consider a farmer from the Middle Ages, who sells his or her produce at the city market; is this farmer "guilty" of considering their produce in the same way that a modern farmer does? Both have created produce and, therefore, have transformed nature into a commodity to store and sell. Although Heidegger does not address this issue in a satisfactory manner, it seems reasonable to consider that the notion of "challenging-forth", and thus transforming nature into a commodity (or "standing-reserve"), is more prevalent in modern times (although further study would be needed to confirm this). Accepting that this phenomenon is not exclusive to modernity but is simply more prevalent, one must still question why this view of technology should be considered a negative one. Heidegger does not appear to acknowledge any positive benefits of "challenging-forth" nature. However, there are

many examples where modern technology has improved humanity's standard of living. For example, wind or solar farms are an arguably "clean" form of technology that brings power to houses of many people and improves their lives. Heidegger does not appear to concern himself with this contentious issue and considers all "challenging-forth" of nature as a "monstrous" force. Although debates concerning modernity's impact on humanity have not arrived at a particular conclusion, there are clear cases where modernity does appear to be "monstrous". In his analysis of *The Question Concerning Technology* David Waddington (2005) notes that "Even the most rabid capitalists may become uneasy when forced to watch a tree 'harvester' in the process of liquidating a forest; intuitively, one can see that there is a certain monstrousness about this kind of wholesale destruction" (2005, p.573).

Heidegger states that the "challenging-forth" of nature "puts to nature an unreasonable demand that it supply energy, which can be extracted and stored" (1977, p.296). What does Heidegger mean when he refers to humanity's demand on nature as "unreasonable"? It would appear that "unreasonable" might relate to what environmentalists term "sustainability", in that the unreasonable challenging-forth of nature is a non-sustainable practice. Heidegger argues that challenging-forth of nature is future focussed, and a means to an end, rather than operating in the present. Therefore this practice creates a "vacuum" in the present that will ultimately "devour" humanity. When considering Heidegger's view in relation to Aronofsky's comments ("you create a hole in your present because you're not there" and "it'll grow and grow and grow until eventually it will devour you") one can see how the protagonists in his films, and their situation, could be considered an allegory for Heidegger's concerns. They all make their life "unsustainable" by putting "unreasonable" demands on their bodies. Heidegger argues that the compulsion for humankind to fill this vacuum will ultimately bring about destruction by rendering humans as resources themselves. He argues, "Man is the 'most important raw material' because he remains the subject of all consumption" (1993, p.84).

The cinema of Aronofsky can be read in terms of Heidegger's nihilistic outlook. The protagonists struggle to operate in the present, choosing instead a troubled quest to control nature. Their failure to do so is observed in the exposition of the body in all five films. These accounts render the protagonists' failed bodies as "raw material". In *Pi*, Max explains nature in mathematical terms. In his attempt to understand the stock market, he reduces human nature to mathematical equations. His quest for control over nature ultimately fails, and he breaks down physically. His inability to operate in the present is gruesomely illustrated with Max's own body: his seizures, nose bleeds, shaking hands, his brain in the bathroom sink, and ultimately drilling into his own head (Figures 4.1 - 4.3).
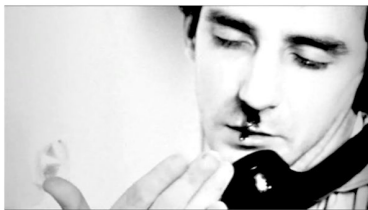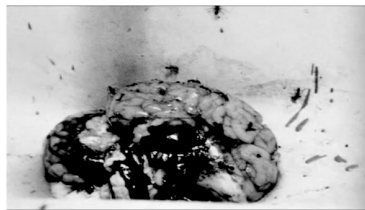

Figure 4.1   *Figure 4.2*   *Figure 4.3*

In *Requiem for a Dream*, Harry, Tyrone, and Marion's quest for happiness is seen in terms of their acquisition of drugs. Likewise, Sara's quest for happiness can be observed in her desire to appear on television. When neither of these eventuate, their inability to operate in the present is illustrated by their failed bodies. Now raw material, their bodies are shown as broken versions of their former selves. Harry lies in hospital as an amputee, Tyrone is in jail recovering from drug addiction, Marion prostitutes herself for money, and Sara undergoes electric shock therapy. The film's final shots show each character curled up in the foetal position. This display of bodily regression portrays their "devoured" (to use Aronofsky's term) state (Figures 4.4 - 4.6).

Figure 4.4   *Figure 4.5*   *Figure 4.6*

In *The Fountain*, Tommy's quest is to control the natural state of death. To do so, he employs medical science as his resource, in particular a Central American plant that he

insists holds the key to unlocking immortality. When Tommy's medical quest for immortality fails, the film depicts his frustration and despair through his bodily gestus. His struggle to live in the present is further illustrated by his self-administered tattoos that liken his arm to tree rings. These rings signify his body's struggle through time as he journeys towards his goal (Figures 4.7 - 4.9).
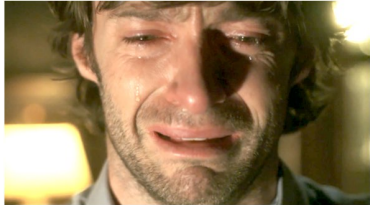

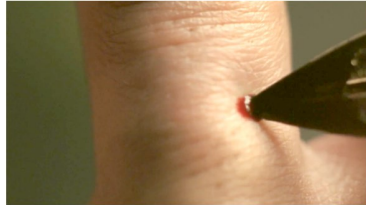|		
Figure 4.7	*Figure 4.8*	*Figure 4.9*

In *The Wrestler*, Randy and Cassie's bodies are portrayed as raw physical forms that are to be looked at by the denizens of the wrestling ring and the strip club. Their bodies become the resource (and therefore the raw material) they use to maintain their vocation. However, their quest to maintain their fading youth starts to fail, and this is illustrated by the erosion of their physical form in both of these arenas. As Randy struggles to maintain his form inside the ring, his body is rendered by the film as raw material — body parts that no longer perform their operations. Ultimately, the brutality inside the ring takes its toll on his ageing heart (Figures 4.10 - 4.12).

Figure 4.10	*Figure 4.11*	*Figure 4.12*

In *Black Swan*, Nina's quest for perfection is observed through the artifice of dance. Like Randy, the resource she employs is her body. However, where Randy's failure is predominantly the result of age, Nina's failure is due to her declining mental state. Her quest for perfection is observed against the demands of ballet as a commodified art form. This takes its toll on Nina, and her struggle for perfection results in the self-mutilation of her own body (Figures 4.13 - 4.15).
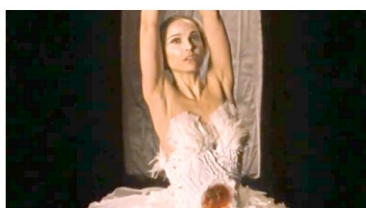

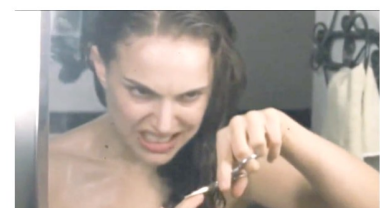|		
Figure 4.13	*Figure 4.14*	*Figure 4.15*

The pursuit of control (*Pi*), happiness (*Requiem for a Dream*), life (*The Fountain*), youth (*The Wrestler*), and perfection (*Black Swan*), are observed through the body-related parameters of the protagonists. The challenging-forth of nature into art and artifice is illustrated in terms of the protagonists' feverish pursuit of this future goal. As Aronofsky posits, their bodies are "devoured" by the growing vacuum that results from their failure to achieve what they seek. They fail because they put an "unreasonable" demand on their bodies. Their bodies are rendered as raw material against the backdrop of their resources (maths, drugs, TV, medicinal science, wrestling, strip dancing, and ballet).

Heidegger's second view of technology offers a response to modernity. He replaces modernity's closed one-dimensional view with an open view or "multiple disclosures of Being". This view is similar to Ihde's second hermeneutic rule[24] and identifies technology as possessing the capacity to reveal nature's truth through "bringing-forth" into the present that which is already there. Bringing-forth centres its concern on the process (present based), rather than the goal (future based). This process is referred to as poiesis. Heidegger sees this form of techné as having once existed before modernity:

> There was a time when it was technology alone that bore the name techné. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendour of radiant appearing also was called techné. Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called techné. And the poiesis of the fine arts also was called techné (1977, p.34).

Heidegger implies that through the sculptor's hand, the marble is chipped away to reveal what is already there in nature. Hence, the potentiality of nature is revealed through poiesis. Similarly, in *The Fountain*, Izzi sees her book quite differently from Tommy. She sees the potentiality of nature in the final blank pages of her book. When Tommy

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[24] As I have outlined in Chapter One, this rule requests that the spectator "attend to the phenomena of experience as they appear" (2012, p.34). To take on any notion, preconceived ideas, or assumptions, is to neglect the experience of the phenomenon as it happens.

states "But I don't know how it ends," Izzi replies "You do. You will." The nature of the book has revealed itself to Izzi before coming into being (a revelation that Tommy only realises at the end of the film).

Heidegger argues that to overcome modernity, humanity must not search for an alternative; the attitude "we must master history" is to ask for a technological solution to technology itself. Through such practices as meditative thinking one can escape the positivist thinking of modernity, thus achieving a sense that this view of technology is only one of many possibilities. Similarly, applying a meditative process to the viewing of film might also assist in achieving this goal. However, cinema is a technological apparatus and such a fundamental part of modernity. It is difficult to imagine how it might be used as a redemptive force against that which it is made out of. Indeed, how can cinema be a technological solution to technology itself? This paradox requires further explanation. As I have noted, the sculptor uses a hammer and chisel to reveal a statue, bringing-forth his or her art. Likewise, a director uses the many filmic devices to reveal his or her art. The focus is on the mode of artistic thinking. Waddington supports this: "The great breakthrough of *The Question Concerning Technology* is that it shifts the focus away from specific technologies and toward the modes of thinking that lie behind these technologies" (2005, p.577). Here I must briefly return to Heidegger's concept of "primary meanings". As I have stated, it is not the existence of technology that brings about modernity. It is the ways of thinking that lie behind the use of technology. Although cinema "is technology", the way of thinking that motivates the filmic apparatus defines its "validity" as a tool that might help save us from modernity.

All films are forms of technology that bring-forth *and* challenge-forth. The distinction between "bringing-forth" and "challenging-forth", revealing meaning and making meaning, is differentiated through the mode of reception by the spectator. Making meaning is what the film pushes towards the spectator and is, therefore, heavily reliant on narrative. Revealing meaning is obtained through a phenomenological examination of the self by the spectator. Asking questions like: how did this film make me feel? This is distinct from: what does this film mean narratively? The phenomenological

questioning by the spectator opens the potential to reveal new meanings. Therefore, through an application of Ihde's hermeneutic rules by the spectator, film has the *potential* to reveal cinema in Heidegger's redemptive terms. Likewise, Sobchack's phenomenological approach implores that we experience the film "as it happens" and so too must we experience our lives as they happen. Our Being must be rooted in the present rather than the future. Hence, viewing cinema in this phenomenological way *could* assist a shift away from modernity. Heidegger refers to the power of art as having the capacity to "foster the growth of the saving power" (Heidegger 1977, p.317). Marshall McLuhan (1964, cited in Eastham, 1990, p.50) supports the redemptive power of art: "The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He ... builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change at hand."

Because all films can be experienced narratively and phenomenologically, one might consider that *all* films have the potential to fit Heidegger's model of redemption. However, I do not believe this to be the case. A distinction must be made between films whose primary purpose is to communicate deeper meanings and challenge the spectator, and those that have other concerns (such as entertainment). Heidegger considers the task of art to be a tool for communication rather than a form of aesthetic pleasure and entertainment. Karsten Harries (2009) explains:

> When Heidegger links the aesthetic approach to the death of art he presupposes a very different understanding of the task of art. The point of art, he insists, is neither to describe, nor to occasion aesthetic pleasure, but to place us in our world in such a way that our understanding of reality is no longer shadowed by a sense of what Milan Kundera called the unbearable lightness of being (2009, p.186).

In other words, a film's redemptive concern must guide us away from nihilism. For example, a successful Hollywood blockbuster film such as *Transformers* (2007) challenges-forth a narrative and brings-forth a phenomenological message, as does *The*

Fountain. However, they differ considerably in their redemptive concerns. *Transformers* challenges-forth a simple narrative for the spectator to easily comprehend and digest. Likewise, its phenomenological qualities are very accessible to the spectator and provide a physical thrill that has entertainment as its primary motivation. *Transformers* is fundamentally a form of entertainment, and does little to "place us in our world" in a way that alters our understanding of reality and guide us away from nihilism.

My claim is that Aronofsky's films are art that "foster[s] the growth of the saving power" (Heidegger 1977, p.317). He utilises his technological tools in a way that encourages the spectator to practice "meditative thinking". It offers the spectator a turning point (a concept referred by Heidegger as "the turn", or *die Kehre*). The films paint Heidegger's gloomy picture of nihilism and then urge us to return to nature, to the "present". They do not offer an explicit answer, as this would be akin to answering the problem of techné with techné. His films "make" meaning through their narrative, however, more importantly to Heidegger's cause, the films "bring-forth" meaning through the practice of phenomenological viewing. The films reveal themselves to the spectator through their physicality, a body in crisis, and upon the process of reflective thinking this brings about meaning for the spectator. We are made to feel the protagonist's suffering in order to return to the present. To reflect, and then turn back to nature (*die Kehre*). Danlly Domingo's (2007) comment on *Requiem for a Dream*, I feel, is an apt summary of the cinema of Aronofsky:

> Through its subjective style, *Requiem for a Dream* puts us in the shoes of characters who experience the worst of what happens when we fail to curb those desires and refuse to embrace reality, so that maybe we can learn to balance a strong desire for change and contentment with what's already present in our lives (2007, p.5).

In this chapter I have outlined the link between sensory engagement and meaning in cinema. For the spectator, this link is enhanced by Aronofsky's "actively directed structure". Key to this structure is his treatment of the body, in particular the

protagonist and their feverish pursuit of transforming nature into art or artifice. The protagonist is inextricably linked to the spectator and therefore *the film's feelings become the spectator's feelings*. I have illustrated how Aronofsky's cinema can be viewed in terms of Heidegger's nihilistic outlook, and yet offer a turning point away from nihilism and self-destruction. The films portray a body in crisis, revealing through this body the destructive influence of modernity. Central to this destruction is the enslavement of the body that is compelled to perform the future-focussed challenging-forth of technology, in order to transform nature. Upon reflection, the spectator is urged to shift their focus to the present. For it is only in the present that we can practice the Heideggarian virtue of "bringing-forth" and thus bring about "contentment with what's already present in our lives."

Conclusion

"But I don't know how it ends."

"You do ... you will."

— *The Fountain*

This study aimed to demonstrate how phenomenology, when applied to the cinema of Aronofsky, brings forth an understanding of his films that is more enlightening than if it were viewed in a non-phenomenological manner. Specifically, this thesis has examined Aronofsky's first five feature films as case studies, encompassing enough of his oeuvre to be representative of his work as an auteur. This study has also sought to investigate phenomenology as a valid method for both experiencing *and* analysing film. Theoretical literature on this subject, specifically the phenomenological study of Aronofsky's films, is sparse and inconclusive on several vital questions, which this study has sought to answer. Notably, *What is phenomenology?*; *How does this approach advantage a reading of the cinema of Aronofsky?*; *Why is* feeling *his films important?*; and *What purpose does it serve?* Finally, *Does this phenomenological investigation uncover any significant meaning in his work?*

The methodology used involved a reading of Aronofsky's films through a phenomenological optic, with the hypothesis that meaning in his work is rooted within the physicality of the text. Through close textual analysis and deconstruction of his films I have explored the extent to which his cinema can be defined as a work of "bodily intent". That is, a work that attempts to evoke bodily responses in the spectator with the intention of conveying a common subtext in the films.

In order to define phenomenology and how it relates to cinema, theories by Münsterberg and Merleau-Ponty have been outlined. These theorists have laid the foundation for the more recent methodologies presented by Frampton, Sobchack, and Ihde, all of which perform different functions for spectatorship and analysis. Where the spectator can use Frampton's model to experience a film by Aronofsky, it cannot be

effectively used to analyse it, as his rejection of technical terms makes it difficult to proceed with any form of inquiry. Therefore, in the interest of using a framework that allows analysis of both these aspects, I have argued that it is imperative to interrogate both cinematic form and style. This thesis has thus utilised the phenomenological methodology justified by Sobchack and has based the viewing experience, as Sobchack has, upon Ihde's hermeneutic rules. These five operational rules have demonstrated through their systematic nature, a simple method to investigate film. Ihde's exercises in "phenomenological seeing" challenged me to view Aronofsky's films beyond their initial appearance. This method allows the shift in focus from that which is experienced (the film), to the reflexive concern of how this experience is taking place. The spectatorship of the film only takes on phenomenological significance when viewed in conjunction with the encounter of the film. Hence, this satisfied both the approach of experience and analysis and in doing so, also uncovered new subtexts.

Theories of non-cognitive processes presented by Coplan, Caroll, and Robinson were examined next. These theorists further demonstrated ways in which a spectator can experience a film. The processes of emotional contagion, non-cognitive affective responses, and mood were highlighted as common to the phenomenon of cinematic experience. My employment of Ihde's hermeneutic method further highlighted which moods and feeling states were predominant in the opening sequences of Aronofsky's five feature films. This was helpful to distinguish four elements within the structure of the films that significantly impacted on the spectator's affective response. These were the musical score, colour complexion, composition, and the exposition of the body. A deeper examination of these elements was undertaken in order to investigate the nature and extent of their influence on affective responses. This made it possible to see if the films treated these elements in a unique fashion.

An exploration into music, the first of these elements, highlighted aspects of the musical score that were utilised to stimulate particular feeling states in the spectator. A "musical map" of each musical score was created, which allowed each score to be represented visually. These maps enabled tracking of the shifts in mood provoked by each musical

score. They also offered a concise visualisation of how these shifts related to the narrative changes and plot devices within the film. Analysis of the musical maps revealed that Aronofsky often pairs an aspect of the musical score with a theme, narrative, or character, and that this pairing repeats throughout the film. Notably, when the score is heard without the visual accompaniment, it encourages feeling states in the viewer that match the feeling states provoked by the mise-en-scène. Furthermore, the repeated use of this technique provides an audible cue to arouse the spectator's memory, whilst also arousing the feeling state of a previous event in the film — in some instances allowing the spectator to feel or intuit a scene prior to its occurrence.

Aronofsky's use of the musical score could be considered unremarkable in that the same techniques are used by many other filmmakers. This conventional deployment of the score nevertheless aligns itself to Sobchack's phenomenological mandate, which provided the methodology for this exercise. The musical score still assists the spectator's sensory ability to "feel" the film, which in turn, makes us more receptive to the cognitive concerns, intentions, and messages that the film (or the filmmaker) may have.

The other three elements (colour complexion, composition, and the exposition of the body) offered a more unorthodox deployment. I have argued that the colour complexion alters the spectator's mood in a similar way to music by providing an "object-like representation" that triggers an emotional response. This is one of the reasons why *Requiem for a Dream* lowers my mood, whereas *The Fountain* lifts it. Through cinesthesia, we non-cognitively receive the colour complexion of Aronofsky's films.

A visualisation of each film's colour complexion that was independent of its narrative concerns was presented. The resulting colour signatures allowed me to examine the complexional tone of the film and how this impacted on particular feelings the film attempted to convey. Furthermore, the colour barcodes were useful to examine the range of hues used, as well as their tonal shifts. The tonal shifts were examined against the film's themes to see how this correlated with phenomenological reception of the films. The results showed that the colour complexion brought about a subtext that was not

immediately apparent in the film's narrative. This is exemplified in *Requiem for a Dream*'s seasonal descent; *The Fountain*'s enlightenment; *The Wrestler*'s attempt to reconcile red with green; *Black Swan*'s transformation from pink to dark red; and *Pi*'s binary logic versus an organic one.

An investigation of the third and fourth elements (composition and the exposition of the body) revealed that they are closely related to each other. I have argued that the exposition of the body is enhanced through Aronofsky's compositional strategies. The aggressive visual tempo of Aronofsky's early films, the careful use of symmetry in *The Fountain*, and the unreliable play on *cinéma vérité* of Aronofsky's later works all use varying styles yet keep the body in constant presence of the spectator. Furthermore, an examination of the protagonists' gestus revealed a corroboration with these compositional strategies. Sobchack posits that the body on screen equates to the body of the spectator and that the cinesthetic subject therefore experiences the same "concerns" that the protagonist experiences.

The in-depth examination of the four elements successfully demonstrated their use in influencing affective responses in the spectator. Furthermore, this analysis has shown that these four elements, when combined in a single body of work, provide a form of communication between the filmmaker and the spectator that operates beyond initial narrative interpretation. Narratively, one may see *Pi* as a film about mathematical predictions, *Requiem for a Dream* as a drug film, *The Fountain* as a quest for life, *The Wrestler* a treatise on ageing, and *Black Swan* about perfection in ballet. However, the practice of phenomenology exposes a subtext that is quite different. The subtext highlights an oeuvre that has fundamentally existential concerns. An examination of those concerns required an explanation of the link between sensory engagement and meaning in cinema. For the spectator, this link is enhanced by Aronofsky's "actively directed structure", key to which is his treatment of the body, in particular the protagonist and their feverish pursuit of transforming nature into art or artifice. Each protagonist is inextricably linked to the spectator and therefore this strengthens the bond between the film's feelings and our own feelings.

I have also illustrated how Aronofsky's cinema can be viewed in terms of Heidegger's nihilistic outlook, which sees humanity to be at the mercy of modernity's one-dimensional view of technology. This view sees technology as a means to control nature through challenging-forth or "making", rather than bringing-forth or "revealing". Aronofsky's response to this problem reflects Heidegger's response. His films portray a protagonist attempting to control nature by a process of challenging-forth, and it is the protagonist's body in crisis that reveals the problems of modernity to the spectator. By practicing a phenomenological mode of spectatorship, the spectator identifies more intensely with the protagonist's bodily experience. Then upon reflection, the spectator is urged to shift their focus to living in, or returning to, nature rather than remaining with a future-focussed pursuit of controlling nature.

The decision to use Aronofsky's films as a phenomenological case study ran the risk of revealing nothing remarkable. Any number of auteurs could have been investigated, resulting in a similar conclusion. However, I believe that this particular phenomenological case study has revealed two significant features.

First, this study has highlighted Aronofsky as a director with existential concerns — a concept that is not immediately apparent if one considers his films non-phenomenologically. It has revealed Aronofsky to be a director who is deeply concerned with the physicality of his cinema. Through his "actively directed structure", he appears to make a conscious effort to draw the spectator towards the sensory experience of the protagonist, and in doing so exposes a subtext that implores humanity to turn away from modernity.

Second, this study has demonstrated how phenomenology, when applied to the cinema of Aronofsky, brings forth an understanding of his films that is more effective than if it were viewed from other established film theories. This investigation has highlighted Sobchack's phenomenological method of cinematic viewing as a valid form of experiencing cinema *and* analysing it. Furthermore, it highlights that this method could be applied to other auteurs' work in order to expose new meanings and subtexts.

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