

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA MINISTRY OF HIGHER
EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
MOHAMED KHEIDER UNIVERSITY – BISKRA FACULTY OF LETTERS AND
LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE



**The Individual's Psychological Transformation under the Influence of
Discourse, Society, and Political Conditions in Cinema and Postmodern
Realistic Fiction:**

**The case of *The Joker* (2019), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), Chreyl .L Reed`s
Poison Girls (2017), and Arthur Weissmann`s *Going the Wrong Path* (2017)**

A thesis submitted in candidacy for the degree of "LMD Doctorate" in the English

Language Option: Language and Literature

Submitted by
Mrs. Mariya Slimani

Supervised by
Prof. Ramdane Mehiri

Board of Examiners		
Prof. Ahmed Chaouki HOADJLI	Mohamed Khider University of Biskra	President
Prof. Ramdane MEHIRI	Mohamed Khider University of Biskra	Supervisor
Prof. Salim KERBOUA	Mohamed Khider University of Biskra	Examiner
Dr. Elhamel LAMDJED	Mohamed Khider University of Biskra	Examiner
Prof. Mohamed NAOUA	Chahid Hamma Lakhdar University of El Oued	Examiner
Dr. Hicham SOUHALI	Mostefa Ben Boulaïd University of Batan 2	Examiner

Academic Year 2024/2025

Declaration

I, Slimani Mariya, hereby give an affidavit avowing that this thesis is a presentation of my original research work, and has not been submitted before to any other institution or university for a degree.

I seriously declare that all the needed academic rules and ethical matters are, to the best of my knowledge, highly respected. Wherever contributions of other researchers were involved, every effort was made to indicate this clearly with due reference to the literature. This work was conducted and completed at Mohamed Khider University of Biskra, Algeria.

Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral thesis to my small family, the large family, and myself.

I am indebted to my dear husband Bachir who has been patient and supportive with me during my research process. Moreover, I dedicate the work to the jewel of my life, my son Ilies, and the most beautiful emerald Cilia, my daughter. It is dedicated to my mother, who has been the source of my happiness, support and inspiration. I am also indebted to my father who has always believed in my abilities encouraging me throughout my educational path. I am grateful and privileged of being the daughter of the most kind and loving parents in the world. I cannot express enough my deepest gratitude for your presence in my life with my children who are overwhelmed by your love. I can not forget the enourmous help and motivation received from my grandmother, Barkahom, that should be mentioned here. Her charismatic words of encouragement are engraved in my mind. Besides, I also dedicate this work to my uncles and aunts who have always been by my side. Furthermore, I extend my gratitude to my siblings, Aziz, Wassim, Lamis and Rayan whose friendship, help, and guidance have been immeasurable. I am the luckiest person to have you all as my family.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. Mehiri Ramdane, for his expertise, patience, and guidance. His immense support facilitated my journey.

My heartfelt gratitude extends to the jury members Prof. Ahmed Chaouki HOADJLI, Prof. Salim KERBOUA, Dr. Lamdjed ELHAMEL, Prof. Mohamed NAOUA, and Dr. Hicham SOUHALI for their patience, understanding, and participation in my defense.

This adventurous journey was made both fruitful and easier with your collective support. I am extremely grateful to each of you. Thank you.

Abstract

Contemporary realistic fiction and audiovisual productions contribute in portraying the humanity's issues of the postmodern age. This study aims to investigate how an individual experiences psychological transformation under the influence of society, discourse and political conditions in postmodernity. This is examined through the cinematic work of *Joker* (2019) and the Television series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013). It is also analyzed in the American literary work Chreyl L. Reed's *Poison Girls* (2017) and the novel of Arthur Weissmann's *Going the Wrong Path* (2017). The chosen productions rise several concerns that are lived by individuals who undergo psychological changes, issues, if not disorders because of the influence of today's powerful surrounding circumstances. This is one of the most urgent, as well as hotly disputed, topics in literary and media studies. This research approaches this inquiry mainly from psychoanalytic perception using Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian concepts. However, the analysis delves in the works to analyze the reasons and extract valuable information that requires other theories and schools of thought such as postmodernism and critical discourse analysis. This thesis presents cinematography analysis and semiotic study of the audiovisual's scenes in relation to the topic. The dissertation offers thematic, linguistic, and cinematographic study of the psychology of the individual. This multi-dimensional analysis focuses on characters, theories, and context through answering questions of why and how psychological changes affect the individual's identity. Employing the combined philosophical and critical approaches in the analysis has generated several research results revealing the inevitable change behind the psychological transformation which directs the individual's mind and identity towards either rebellion or conformism, depending on the personal traits and the experiences. In postmodernity, the endured change filters individuals as powerful or weak in an age that requires strength at different levels.

Keywords: Individual, Postmodernism, Realistic Fiction, Rebellion, Conformism, Discourse.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	I
Dedication.....	II
Acknowledgments.....	III
Abstract.....	IV
Table of Content.....	V
List of Figures.....	XIV
General Introduction.....	1
Theoretical Part	
Chapter one: Postmodernism as a Rebellion in Art Expression and a Change in Political Conditions and Thought.....	35
Introduction.....	35
1. Defining The Term Postmodernism.....	35
1.1. Anti-authoritarian Nature of Postmodernism.....	36
1.2. Postmodernism an Artistic Rebellion from Modernism.....	37
1.3. Pop Art the Achievement of the Postmodern Culture.....	40
1.4. Media and Consumer Society.....	44
1.5. Postmodernism's Intellectual Foundations.....	45
2. The Political Conditions of the Postmodern Age.....	46
2.1. The Collapse of Metanarratives and the Crisis of Legitimacy.....	47
2.2. Hyperreality and the Mediatization of Politics.....	47
2.3. Identity Politics and the Pluralization of Struggle.....	47
2.4. Neoliberalism and the Post-Political Condition.....	48
2.5. Digital Sovereignty and the Crisis of Democracy.....	48
2.6. Michel Foucault and the Political Conditions of the Postmodern Age.....	49
Conclusion.....	50
Chapter two: The Discourse Analytical Approaches in Studying the Powerful Influence of Language.....	51
Introduction.....	51
1. Textual Analysis.....	51

1.1. Dealing with Media through Textual Analysis.....	52
1.2. Rhetorical Criticism.....	54
1.3. Textual Analysis in Literature.....	60
2. Discourse Analysis.....	61
2.1. Approaches of Discourse Analysis.....	64
2.2. The Interrelationships between the Approaches of Discourse Analysis.....	69
3. Critical Discourse Analysis.....	70
3.1. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.....	72
Conclusion	76
Chapter three: The Film Criticism Approaches used in Studying the Individual's Psychological Change.....	78
Introduction	78
1. Mise-en-scene study.....	81
2. <i>Joker</i> (2019) and <i>Breaking Bad</i> (2008-2013) Through Genre Studies.....	92
2.1. The Genre of <i>Joker</i> (2019).....	96
2.2. The Joker's Start as a villain in Comic Books	96
2.3. The Genre of <i>Breaking Bad</i> Series.....	102
3. Semiotics.....	108
Conclusion.....	111
Chapter four: The Psychoanalytic and Social Approaches in Studying the Individual's Transformation in the Postmodern Age	113
Introduction	113
1. Psychoanalytic Approach.....	113
1.1. The Diversity and the Development of Psychoanalytic Criticism.....	114
1.2. The Individual's Psychological Transformation through Freud's Developmental Stage Theory.....	116
1.2.1. The Concept of the Id.....	117
1.2.2. The Concept of the Ego.....	119
1.2.3. The Concept of the Superego.....	123
1.2.4. The Concept of the Unconsciousness.....	125
1.3. Neurosis and Psychosis.....	125

1.4. The Individual's Psychological Transformation Through Jungian Analytical Approach	127
2. Gustav le Bon's Crowd theory as Social Approach.....	129
Conclusion.....	137
Analytical Part	
Chapter five: Discourse as a Mirror of the Mind and a Weapon for Change and Control.....	138
Introduction.....	138
1.1. Critical Discourse Analysis of <i>Joker</i> (2019) Through a Foucauldian Lens.....	138
1.1.1. Power and Knowledge in the Construction of Truth.....	138
1.2. Madness as a Societal Construct.....	139
1.3. Counter-Discourse and Resistance.....	140
1.4. Counter-Hegemonic Discourse in Arthur's Stand-Up Monologue.....	141
1.5. The Diary as Counter-Narrative.....	142
2. Arthur's Diary as a Foucauldian "Limit-Text": Madness, Language, and the Unsayable in <i>Joker</i> (2019)	142
2.1. Foucault's "Limit-Texts" and the Collapse of Discourse.....	142
2.2. The Body as Text.....	143
2.3. Intentionality vs. Compulsion.....	144
3. The Hyperreal Spectacle: Media Discourse in <i>Joker</i> (2019) Through Baudrillard's Postmodernist Lens	144
3.1. Simulacra and the Construction of Social Reality.....	144
3.2. Talk Shows as Sites of Postmodern Alienation.....	145
3.3. The Collapse of Meaning.....	145
3.4. Media's Distortion of Reality.....	146
4. Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Arthur Fleck's Transformation in the Bathroom Dance Scene..	146
4.1. Choreography as Psychotic Discourse.....	147
4.2. The Semiotic Chora in Sound: Dissonance as Pre-Linguistic Chaos.....	148
4.2.1. Microtonal Dissonance and the Collapse of Symbolic Order.....	148
4.2.2. Rhythmic Irregularity as Psychotic Temporality.....	149
5. The Semiotics of Color in <i>Joker</i> : A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Chromatic Meaning-Making	149

6. A Lacanian Analysis of Language and Psychological Transformation in <i>Joker</i> (2019): The Postmodern Subject's Descent into the Real.....	152
6.1. The Symbolic Order's Violence: Arthur as the Failed Subject of Language.....	152
6.2. The Comedy Club: A Parodic Failure of the "Other".....	152
6.3. The Talk Show: The Joker as 'Empty Signifier'.....	154
7. Critical Discourse Analysis of Arthur Fleck's Comedy Show Monologue in " <i>Joker</i> "...	154
7.1. Textual Analysis.....	155
II. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of <i>Breaking Bad</i> : Language as the Catalyst and Consequence of Walter White's Transformation into Heisenberg.....	155
1. Institutional Discourse and the Construction of Walter's Subjugation.....	155
1.1. The Meth Drug Trade as a Counter-Institution.....	156
1.2. Family Discourse and the Collapse of the Domestic Sphere.....	157
1.3. Discourse as the Site of Transformation.....	157
2. A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of <i>Breaking Bad</i> : Language as Power, Performance, and Subversion.....	158
2.1. Linguistic Power Dynamics: Walter White's Rhetorical Transformation.....	158
2.2. Cinematography as Linguistic Counterpoint.....	159
2.3. Silence as Resistance.....	159
2.4. Close Reading of Walter White's "I Am the Danger" Monologue (<i>Breaking Bad</i> , S4E6).....	160
2.4.1. Text of the Monologue.....	160
2.4.2. Context and Framing.....	160
2.4.3. Syntactic analysis.....	160
2.4.4. Lexical Brutality.....	161
2.4.5. The Structure.....	161
2.4.6. Visual and Paralinguistic Elements.....	161
2.4.7. Intertextuality.....	161
3. Linguistic Dominance in <i>Breaking Bad</i> through Gustavo Fring's Discourse.....	162
3.1. The Use of English and Spanish as an Appearance of Criminality.....	162
3.2. The Mastery of Linguistic Duality.....	163
III.1. Critical Discourse Analysis of Arthur Weissmann's <i>Going the Wrong Path</i> (2017)..	164
1.1. Criminality as a Normative Discourse.....	164

1.2. Education contrasted with Street Hierarchy.....	164
1.3. Antonio's Divided Self.....	165
1.4. Silvio and Grady as Agents of Power:.....	165
2..Baudrillardian Hyperreality and the Simulated Violence of Virtual Gaming in <i>Going the Wrong Path</i>	166
2.1. Language and the Normalization of Simulated Power.....	167
2.2. The Game as Metaphor for Entrapment.....	168
3. Psychological Transformation and the Normalization of Violence in <i>Going the Wrong Path</i> : A Trauma Theory Analysis.....	168
3.1. The studied passage	168
3.2. The Paradox of Painlessness.....	170
3.3. Trauma as a Site of Invisible Warfare.....	171
IV. Natalie's Psychological Transformation in Cheryl Reed's <i>Poison Girls</i> (2017): Critical Discourse Analysis.....	171
1. The studied passage	171
1.1. Textual Analysis: Lexical Choices and Ethical Awakening.....	172
1.2. Discursive Practice: Journalism as a Site of Power and Complicity.....	172
1.3. Sociocultural Practice: Empathy as Counter-Discourse.....	173
1.4. Discourse as a Site of Moral Reckoning.....	173
Conclusion	174
Chapter six: Society as Influencing and Influenced Postmodern Element in the Individual's Psychological Transformation.....	175
Introduction	175
I. Society as an Influencing Factor in Arthur's Psychological Transformation into Joker	176
1. Cinematographic Analytical Overview of the Film <i>Joker</i> (2019).....	177
2. The Influence of Society on Arthur Flick.....	179
2.1. Thematic and Cinematography Analysis of the Scene of Arthur's Violent Beaten....	179
2.2. The Development of the Psychological and Mental Issues of Arthur.....	185
2.2.1. The Emotional and Physical Abuse During Childhood.....	185
2.2.2. The Influence of Penny Flick's Mental Illness on Upbringing Little Arthur.....	186
2.2.3. The Abusive Adoption of Arthur	186
2.2.4. The Emotional Breakdown When Meeting the Alleged Father Thomas Wayne.....	188

2.2.5. The Influence of the Absence of a Father Figure on Arthur's Personality Development	190
2.2.6. Arthur's Parental Vacuum Through Freudian Psychological Vision	191
2.2.7. The Influence of the Father's Absence in the Development of Arthur's Id, Ego, and Super ego	192
2.2.8. Arthur's Defense Mechanisms.....	193
3. The Psychological and Mental Issues Experienced During the Abusive Childhood.....	194
3.1. Arthur's Childhood Trauma.....	194
3.2. Traumatic Brain Injury and Pseudobulbar Affect as Consequences of Domestic Abuse.....	196
3.3. Antisocial Personality Disorder Resulting from Childhood Trauma.....	198
3.4. Arthur's Personality Struggle between Narcissism and Depression.....	200
4. The Struggle with Gotham's Social Stratification.....	203
4.1. Psychological Effects of Social Inequality.....	205
5. The Concept of Smile Regarding Arthur Fleck's Personality Development.....	206
5.1. Arthur's Smile as a Feature of Performative Identity.....	207
5.2. The Smile as a Mask.....	209
5.3. Arthur Fleck's Impulse of Driving people to Smile.....	213
5.4. The Joker's Realization of the Perception of Smile.....	215
5.5. Smile as a Reflection of Pain.....	217
6. Arthur Fleck's Transformation to Joker	218
6.1. Arthur Fleck's Embrace of his Shadow.....	218
6.2. Arthur Fleck's Metamorphosis into Joker.....	222
6.2.1. Reasons of Embracing the Shadow.....	223
6.2.2. The Symbolism of the Bathroom as a Framed Location.....	225
6.2.3. The Symbolism of the Contrasting Checkerboard Floor.....	227
6.2.4. Arthur's Dance in the Bathroom.....	229
6.2.5. The Cinematography of the Metamorphosis Scene.....	230
6.2.6. The Symbolism of Arthur's Reflection on the Mirror.....	233
6.2.7. The Music Score.....	234
II. The Influence of Joker on Gotham's Society	240
1. The Self-created Character of the Joker.....	240

1.1. The Subsequent Committed Crimes.....	241
1.1.1. The Joker's Murder of his Mother.....	241
1.1.2. Killing The Coworker Randal.....	242
1.1.3. Murdering the Media Figure Murray Franklin	243
2. Joker as a Source of Influencing Inspiration for the City's Rebellion.....	244
2.1. The Rise of Protest Movements in Gotham City.....	244
2.2. The Creation of a Mob Mentality.....	246
2.3. Social Unrest as a Result of Collective Consciousness.....	248
2.4. Transformation of Arthur Fleck into a Symbol.....	249
2.5. Le Bonian Concepts through the Train Scene.....	250
2.6. Graffiti as Postmodern Text in Joker's Train Scene.....	255
3. The "Kill the Rich" Movement in <i>Joker</i>	256
4. The Joker as the Leader of Gotham's Rebellion.....	257
4.1. Deindividuation and Anonymity.....	258
4.2. The Joker as an Archetypal Leader.....	258
4.3. Cinematography analysis of the scene.....	259
III. The Societal Influence in the Transformation of Walter White into Heisenberg in <i>Breaking Bad</i>	259
1. Discrimination and Walter White's Descent into Heisenberg.....	259
1.2. Professional Disrespect and the Waste of Potential.....	260
1.3. Healthcare Failures and Forced Criminality.....	260
1.4. Moral Hypocrisy.....	261
1.5. Washing Away Dignity: Cinematic Language and Societal Brutality in Walter's Car Wash Humiliation.....	261
1.5.1. Visual Subjugation.....	262
2. Le Bonian Analysis of Heisenberg's Created Identity.....	263
2.1. Heisenberg as the Leader	264
2.2. Cinematographic Analysis of the Scene "I Am the Danger" in <i>Breaking Bad</i> Through a Le Bonian Lens.....	266
2.3. Isolation and the Illusion of Invincibility.....	267
2.4. The Power of Repetition and Rhetoric.....	267

2.5. The Collapse of Rationality.....	268
Conclusion.....	268
Chapter seven: Postmodern Political conditions as Underlying Catalyst for Psychological Deterioration.....	270
Introduction.....	270
I. 1. The Political System as a Reason Behind Walter's Transformation into Heisenberg.....	270
1.1. Capitalist Realism in the Face of the Absence of Alternatives.....	271
1.1.1. Cinematography & Political-Psychological Analysis of "Say My Name" in <i>Breaking Bad</i>	271
1.2. Depressive Hedonia and the Narcissistic Change.....	273
1.3. The Spectacle of Hyper-Criminality as Rebellion.....	273
1.4. The Breakdown of Social Safety Nets.....	273
1.5. Cinematography and Political Analysis of the Ozymandias' Scene.....	274
1.6. The Neoliberal Anti-Hero as Cultural Symptom.....	276
1.7. Heisenberg as a Capitalist Realist Monster.....	276
2. The Psychological Metamorphosis of Walter White into Heisenberg: A Foucauldian Analysis.....	276
2.1. Disciplinary Power and the Failure of Institutional Identity.....	276
2.2. Biopolitics and the Cancer Diagnosis as Catalyst.....	277
2.3. The Meth Lab as Heterotopic Space of Resistance.....	278
2.4. The Performance of Power: Heisenberg as Social Mask.....	278
2.5. Systemic Complicity and the Limits of Resistance.....	279
3. Walter White's Transformation Through Žižek's Postmodern Lens: When Fantasy Meets the Real.....	279
3.1. The Fantasy of the "Good Man" and Its Collapse.....	279
3.2. "I Am the Danger": The Jouissance of Self-Destruction.....	280
3.3. Heisenberg as the "Symptom" of Late Capitalism.....	280
4. The Psychological Transformation of Walter White Through Byung-Chul Han's Political Theory	281
4.1. Gustavo Fring: The Mask of Neoliberal Rationality.....	281
4.2. Jesse Pinkman: The Hysteric Subject of Late Capitalism.....	282
5. The Logic of Late Capitalism in <i>Breaking Bad</i> : A Critical Analysis.....	283

5.1. The Commodification of Identity and Branding Under Late Capitalism.....	284
5.2. <i>Breaking Bad</i> as a Critique of Capitalist Realism.....	285
6. <i>Breaking Bad</i> Through Félix Guattari's Schizoanalytic and Political Lens.....	285
6.1. Subjectivity under Capitalism: Walter White as a Desiring-Machine.....	285
6.2. The Meth Economy as a Capitalist Rhizome.....	286
6.3. Collective Affect and the Breakdown of Social Production.....	286
II.1. Arthur's Psychological Transformation into Joker through Political Lens.....	287
1.1. The Joker as Anti-Capitalist Realist.....	288
1.2. Cinematography and Political Analysis of Arthur's Therapy Scene in <i>Joker</i> (2019)	288
1.3. Depressive Hedonia: The Crisis of Pleasure.....	291
1.4. The Joker's Euphoric Nihilism.....	291
2. Arthur's Futility.....	292
2.1. The Joker as the End of Futurity.....	292
2.2. Mental Health Under Neoliberalism.....	292
3. Joker as an Invited Figure in the Murray Franklin Show.....	293
3.1. Cinematography Analysis.....	295
3.2. The Joker as a Fisherian Symptom.....	297
4. The Psychological Transformation of Arthur Fleck into the Joker: A Foucauldian Analysis.....	297
5. The Psychological Transformation of Arthur Fleck Through Byung-Chul Han's Political Theory.....	299
5.1. The Psychological Unraveling of Arthur Fleck: A Byung-Chul Han Perspective in Cinematic Form	301
5.2. Cinematic Language as Theoretical Argument.....	304
Conclusion.....	304
General Conclusion	306
Works Cited.....	329
Résumé.....	347
المخلص	348

List of Figures

Fig.01.	Screenshot of ‘The Scene of Arthur Beaten by a Group of Teenagers’ (0:03:35) Todd Philips, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	179
Fig.02.	Screenshot of ‘The Scene of Putting Clown Makeup and a Smile’ (0:01:21) Todd Philips, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	209
Fig.03.	Screenshot of ‘Arthur Forcing a Smile on the Face of Young Bruce Wayne’ (0:53:25) Todd Philips, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	213
Fig.04.	Screenshot of ‘Arthur Looking to his Mirrored Reflection Before the live TV show’ (01:36:45) Todd Philips, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	215
Fig. 05.	Screenshot of ‘Smile with Blood’ (01:51:48) Todd Philips, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	217
Fig.06.	Screenshot of ‘Arthur’s Shadow (00:34:16) Todd Philips’, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	218
Fig.07.	Screenshot of ‘Arthur’s Metamorphosis’ (00:36:11) dir. Phillips Todd. <i>Joker</i> (2019).	222
Fig.08.	Screenshot of ‘Gotham’s protest adoption of the Symbol of Clown’ (01:02:30) Todd Philips, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	244
Fig.09.	Screenshot of ‘The Train scene’ (00:36:11) dir. Phillips Todd. <i>Joker</i> (2019).	250
Fig.10	Screenshot of ‘the Car Roof Scene’ (01:52:13) dir. Phillips Todd., <i>Joker</i> (2019).	257
Fig.11.	Screenshot of ‘The Car Wash Scene’ (00:10:17) (Season 1, Episode 1).dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. <i>Breaking Bad</i> (2008).	261
Fig.12.	Screenshot of ‘I am the Danger’ (00:09:15) (Season 4, Episode 6).dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. <i>Breaking Bad</i> (2011).	266
Fig.13.	Screenshot of ‘Say My Name’ as Walter’s Capitalist Megalomania’ (00:02:13) (Season 5, Episode 7).dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. <i>Breaking Bad</i> (2012).	271
Fig.14.	Screenshot of ‘Ozymandias’(00:10:57) (Season 5, Episode 14) dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. <i>Breaking Bad</i> (2012)	274
Fig.15.	Screenshot of ‘Arthur’s Therapy Scene’ (00:40:26) dir. Phillips Todd., <i>Joker</i> (2019).	288
Fig.16.	Screenshot of ‘Arthur’s Appearance on The Murray Franklin Show’ (01:39:16) dir. Phillips Todd, <i>Joker</i> (2019).	293

General Introduction

Jean Baudrillard, the French Philosopher, has once said, ‘Postmodernity is said to be a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which the traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, and authenticity are evacuated or dissolved amid the random swirl of empty signals. (323)’. The quotation reflects the changed conceptual content that forms the postmodern culture and lifestyle, and this puts the individual in a different experience of life. The World Wars and the non-stoppable technological development are the strongest landmarks that have constituted throughout history the postmodern conditions that are seen today. These turning points are fueled by the struggle for power shifting the human thought to unprecedented behaviors and actions. Thus, the individual witnesses a large-scale change in the surrounding institutions. The latter have introduced instability, alienation, fragmentation to the self that has lost its essence in a world dominated by late capitalism, cynicism, and consumerism which have shaken one’s psychology and thus identity. The lived postmodern conditions create a mental and psychological health crisis that require analytical study. This Ph.D. dissertation is grounded on the research question that investigates the individual’s psychological transformation under the influence of discourse, society, and political conditions in postmodern setting. The research is implemented on works from cinema; *Joker* (2019), television series; *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), and postmodern realistic literary fiction; Chreyl L. Reed’s *Poison Girls* (2017) and Arthur Weissmann’s *Going the Wrong Path* (2017). The study approaches the question from several theories such as psychoanalytic, cinematography, and critical discourse analysis.

This research work studies the individual’s psychology because it is pivotal in shaping one’s thought, behaviors, and feelings that direct decision making in life. The latter determines one’s successes or failure, happiness or misery, strength or weakness. On

pragmatic level, a person's psychology is behind the development of the state of mind that influences one's productions and achievements. It is the force that stands behind the ability of solving problems and managing intense situations that witness the rise of the spirit of leadership in guiding effective process. Besides, the positive psychological impulses create motivational power and strategies in managing stress, and unexpected hindrances through communication and intelligent plans. One can adapt to unprecedented circumstances and learning from mistakes if not succeeding in overcoming challenges. This takes the mindset to developed grown level where one can analyze his or her own thoughts and conducts as well as his surroundings, which encourages recognizing problems and demanding help in critical situations. This leads to stepping out of psychological issues easily when encountered in one's life like depression and anxiety. Concerning social life, individuals with stabilized and strong psychology constitute healthy relationships and they positively influence others. Thus, violence and antisocial behaviors are reduced and replaced by cooperative and humanist conducts.

After showing its drastic effect, one can realize that the individual's psychology operates as a directing compass in one's life. As a first step in introducing the topic of this thesis, one should define the term psychology. Actually, Lester M. Sdorow, in his book *Psychology* (2019), presents it through simple expression saying, 'the science of behavior and cognitive processes. (2)' Psychology provides concepts and theories that help in understanding the human mind and behavior. As Sdorow's book affirms, engaging in psychological research means dealing with a sociocultural context. The dissertation works on the life of fictional characters and societies that belong to realistic fiction genre, which mirrors the individual's real life.

Edward O. Wilson, American pioneer of evolutionary sociobiology, in his speech in TED talk in April 2012, says, 'The most important discoveries of the next century will not be

in technology or medicine, but in the exploration of the human mind.’ After working on more than 400 species of ants and receiving more than 150 international awards, including Pulitzer Prizes for his books *On Human Nature* and *The Ants*, *The Ant Man's World* has valued the importance of studying the human mind on behalf of other disciplines (Wilson, 170). Similarly, this dissertation revolves around the study of the human’s mind and specifically the psychology that has great influence on one’s life.

Exploring the human’s psyche is the motive that stands behind this study especially in a postmodern world that has changed the references that used to maintain the psychological stability. In this introduction, one needs to present the term postmodernism that is the subject area of the study as well as one of the literary theories that are applied in this dissertation. Postmodernism is a complex and multifaceted concept. First of all, it is defined as a cultural and intellectual movement that appeared during the late years of the 20th-century challenging the foundational principles of modernism (Bertens 3). It is also referred as a trend because it presents a peculiar influencing style in all the fields such as cinema, fashion, and digital culture. It has a rich conceptual content that has spread through media and published valuable works produced by many theorists, writers and philosophers. This has led the term to develop and obtain profound meaning achieving significant accomplishments reaching the level of an ideology. French and American Theorists and critics like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard argue that postmodernism is an ideology because through its content it has the ability to challenge dominant structures of power, knowledge, and meaning (Bertens 5-7). Detailing the major concepts and conditions of postmodernism is essential in understanding the research’s scope, question, and thesis.

Postmodernism rejects the usual ideas and convictions in presenting the world with all its ramified fields. It has revolutionized contemporary art, architecture, politics and many other disciplines. In fact, the powerful factors that have led to the emergence of this

movement resembles to those of modernism. It is a reaction to fundamental historical landmarks such as the industrial revolution, the world wars, and globalization that have long-term effects throughout history. It stretches to nowadays, and will continue to influence humanity in the future. What is peculiar about this trend is its reliance on skeptical perception towards one's surrounding. This helps in analyzing and criticizing the existed ideas in society, political system, and religious beliefs. In a way or another, the postmodernist thought seems to embrace the contradictions and complexity of contemporary life.

One cannot surpass the technological development as a powerful source of impact for the movement and on the individual who faces the force behind ordering the world through enframing. The latter is Martin Heidegger's concept of defining technology in the postmodern age. In the essay of the German philosopher "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954), he describes how technology tends to place the world in paradigm converting its content to resources for exploitation or rather a commodity for calculation. In other words, any content in the world is seen through mathematical logic that considers its utility and efficiency without valuing its essence or meaning. Enframing develops thoughtlessness way of dealing with objects that seems to be based on only calculating (8). However, technology in the postmodern age provides enormous capacities and facilities for people who are encouraged for self-improvement through the digital inventions. It enhances connectivity between individuals through social media platforms and applications. It is also regarded as a successful tool for learning and developing one's educational and cultural level. Technology helps in cultivating talents and encourages the spirit of expression and invention.

Although the postmodern thought has offered positive facilities and key philosophical ideas in criticizing powerful institutions and dogmatic ideas, it has strengthened the disconnection, with the self and with others, as well as creating a crisis of loss of meaning. In fact, postmodernism rejects the notion of absolute truth because it is regarded as relative and

subjective (Bertens 188). Moreover, encouraging the freedom of expression has led to the acceptance of any perception. This has led to complex differentiation between a point of view and a fact. It is known as post-truth that can be found to a great extent in contemporary politics where citizens, critics, as well as politicians themselves has lost belief in the significance of facts especially in public discourse (O'Callaghan 339-345). They work hard on developing and encouraging personal opinion and do not make efforts in improving the accuracy of facts. This issue even penetrates to science, rational discourse, objective journalism that cannot avoid bias or personal beliefs and emotions. It is true that postmodernism support skepticism; however, it has surpassed the usual limits which has led to rejection of objectivity and strong belief in Albert Einstein's relativism and excessive subjectivity (Bertens 149). Pioneers of postmodernism and post-structuralism as Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida have developed the concept of subjectivity. They claim that there is no single objective truth but rather a postmodern subjectivity, which is decentered, fluid, and shaped by external forces such as discourse, power structures, and cultural practices rather than innate essence (Diaconu167). This confuses the human's mind in dealing with his or her surroundings. At this point, the fragmentation of meaning and identity rises as one of the disturbing issues in the postmodern world. In his book *Liquid Modernity* (2000), the Polish-British sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman states that the postmodern individual is condemned to construct his or her own identity in a world without fixed reference points (135).

From the notion of no single objective truth to the fragmentation of meaning and thus identity, which loses its solid pillars and foundation (Bertens 220). Postmodernist philosophy is in conflict with the coherence and unification of identity. It assumes that the identity of the self is fluid, multiple and formed through power structures, cultural conducts and beliefs, as well as discourse (Bertens 225). This leads to the realization of the instability of the self that

exists as non-autonomous being. Furthermore, the movement regards meaning as unstable, conditioned, and formed by the socio-political, and historical context eliminating the idea of universal defined and innate meaning. This leaves the self's identity in fragmented situation that is described by Sigmund Freud's student Jacques Lacan as a cracked entity between the conscious and unconscious. Here, philosophy intersects with psychology, sociology, and even structuralism in explaining the condition of the individual in the postmodern age.

The subjectivity, the fragmentation, and skepticism do not leave any other choice for the individual but not believing in the existed stories and definitions related to history, knowledge and human existence. This what defines the postmodernist concept of metanarrative introduced by Jean-François Lyotard. The theorist has presented postmodernism as 'incredulity toward metanarratives (24)'. He as well as the other thinkers of the movement refer to it as grand narratives that are refused for being a tool in the hands of some people in societies and political systems to oppress, allude, and control the minds of ordinary powerless people. In his famous referential work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), the French philosopher and literary theorist Lyotard discusses the influence of this concept in previous movements like modernism when the individual has followed the grand narratives in building his knowledge, identity, and productions. This is the recommendation that has existed from scientific movements like enlightenment, political philosophies as Marxism, dogmatic institutions such as religion. For instance, reason is used as a convincing tool to promote the human development in the world. The stratification of society is an exploited issue to empower the idea of the proletariat revolution. Earning God's redemption and fulfilling the divine purpose are also a created motives for certain purpose. Above all, the example of technological development and economic prosperity are secrets behind elevating standards of living. Such metanarratives have a purpose that relies in validating knowledge through structures of social, educational, and political systems. Michel

Foucault in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (1969), he explains how this concept operates in silencing marginalized communities and ideas by turning metanarratives to dominant discourses (110). His explanation is supported by another poststructuralist Jacques Derrida through his theory of deconstruction that proves that grand narratives are characterized by having unstable meaning that is introduced to individuals with no stable origin or/and end (246). In short, it is imposing one single total truth in the individual's mind, which is regarded as an oppressive and destructive conduct to one's thought and identity.

When meaning is regarded as unstable entity with lost referential, its definition can be presented through differing it from other meanings or entities which leads the introduction to present Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*. The latter is intrinsic concept to understand the postmodern thought. It explains the instability of meaning through scientific poststructuralist way. In his work *Positions* (1973), He argues, 'Différance is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other (21). 'Différance shows that each term depends on its opposite; that is to say, A word is explained using other words. The latter require definitions, and thus leading to unlimited regression. Postmodernists believe that the meaning of a word is not stable entity or idea, but a group of contrasts and differences that function with the meanings of other words (25). Thus, language is seen as self-reference system that exist in discourses. This opens the realm of multiple interpretation of texts, which is further developed by Roland Barthes through his work *The Death of the Author* (1976). The latter has emphasized the importance of the reader in interpreting the text. The poststructuralist writer has rejected the idea of the author as the center of the literary text. Such ideas have opened the horizons for unlimited and diverse literary interpretations freeing texts from structuralism's vision of fixed structures of meaning. In other words, poststructuralist linguistic concepts are foundational to

postmodernist thought especially in supporting the idea of multiplicity of meaning, and negating the existence of one single correct interpretation. Concerning the text itself, it is seen as mosaic painting composed from pieces that come from different resources; likewise, the text is produced from literary passages and ideas extracted from other texts. This is known as intertextuality. Barthes regards the text as tissue of quotations from cultural, linguistic, artistic sources. Thus, the text is seen as a site of play where multiplicity of interpretation, subjectivity, and intertextuality have revolutionized literary theory encouraging freedom of analytical criticism.

Not just meaning that has lost its essence, even the concept of reality is redefined in postmodernism that challenges its originality and regards it as a copy. The philosophy of postmodernism argues that there is no original one truth or reality because it cannot be fixed, objective or universal. Reality is formed by the received cultural narratives, the used discourse, and power structures (Hulst et al 77). Thus, reality is a social, cultural, historical conceptual construct and it exists according to one's experiences. The technological development including digital inventions and social media platforms represent copies of real or the first existed copy because for the postmodernists the original and real is lost in the postmodern age. This idea is grounded on the belief that the existed institutions in the individual's life like media organizations, governments, scientific reports provide information that is accepted as real. Biased journals and TV channels produce news or realities that correspond to their political affiliation and interest, so it is created subjective reality. The theorists of this movement claim that the postmodern world deals with copies without having their original versions; for instance, the speeches, the figures, and the artistic productions created by artificial intelligence. The latter can produce a political chauvinistic discourse introduced by a president agitating for war that has never happened which may influence citizens' reaction and the stability of the country. This virtual realm opens the door for

humans and non-humans calling themselves influencers to present their fake idealized life and unreal identities as real ones. The influencing humans are not selected on a basis of certain educational or artistic characteristics, but for their ability to be well known among people. The non-human influencers are digital fictional characters produced by artificial intelligence to propagate a story, a product, or a certain thought such as the Brazilian model Lo Do Magalo. As a result, the world witnesses performative identities that do not carry authentic essence, and they only imitate and perform for certain purposes.

In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard claims, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning (79)." This reflects his developed idea about the existed reproduced copies of reality that are regarded as representations called simulations or simulacra replacing reality and creating a hyperreal world that serves the demands of the age of media, consumerism, and political control. Images, signs, expressions become referent to other signs and not external objective truth. The representations are manufactured experiences that replace reality creating shallowness and cultural vacuum. Unfortunately, the original experience of reality is substituted by mixture of representations and references. This concept is known as pastiche, and it is discussed by Fredric Jameson in his influential book *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). The American philosopher considers pastiche as a key aesthetic postmodern strategy that is based on artistic recycling of historical styles without conveying their ancient deep meaning (53). In his criticism, Fredric Jameson regards the postmodern culture as a space of pastiche; that is to say, an empty imitation of styles without depth or historical grounding (53-55). Such a way of production removes the critique, novelty, and singularity of art, so it becomes a process of recycling ancient dead styles. The concept includes intertextuality in relying on references from other works that belong to different cultures; hence, the produced

work is characterized by being a hybrid. To explain more, the postmodernist artist plays with distinct styles and genres and combines them into one hybrid work.

Such artists use individualist aesthetic strategies and methods like copying, replicating, and merging elements, and they do not believe in the principal of the originality of the production. This corresponds to Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyper reality where copies replace originals entities. Producing a work relying on the concept of pastiche does not include ironic or mockery style like parody. The latter is another concept that is explained by Fredric Jameson who states, "Parody capitalizes on the uniqueness of styles and seizes on their idiosyncrasies to produce an imitation that mocks the original. In postmodernism, however, parody has given way to pastiche—blank parody, without satirical impulse (17).’ The postmodernist theorist explains the concept highlighting imitation and mockery as the most important aspect of this notion. Works that are produced through parody are based on distorting and exaggerating the content, the style and the form of the original work. It approaches existed works through playfulness, comic and critical style of reproduction. It is a way of recycling and mixing cultural materials and concepts, and reproducing it with new purposes and meanings. To demonstrate, memes are well known example of parody that expresses ideas through humor. According to the Oxford English Dictionary website, it is a cultural item exists as image, video, piece of text, etc. that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users. This mirrors the virtual world of media applications and platforms where memes circulates between internet users who are presented in front of its adopted irony and satire as purposes beyond such creation. This is why the concept utilize hyperbole, absurdity, and incongruity as techniques in making ironic critique. It is a simplified way of expressive creation that can encourage people with low educational level to create productions that criticize dominant powers. The postmodern techniques, strategies, and concepts can be seen as a weapon to empower marginalized voices and help them to criticize others.

Intertextuality, Pastiche, parody are key elements of postmodernist thought and expression that are used in making consumerist products that reinforce the commodification culture that characterize this age. The mentioned elements that should criticize and challenge authority, they are exploited to promote commercial products. In his book *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism* (1991), Jameson states that consumerism may seem as purchasing items and good from stores, but it is more than that. It is a dominant cultural logic that forms the individual's social relations, identity, and art (200-209). The theorist discusses this important concept and shows its implications on different levels of the individual's life. Under the economic system of late capitalism, the meaning of consumption has changed and become a life style of expressing one's self through trademarks, symbols, and simulations. One's identity is commodified following the motto 'You are what you buy'. This idea is further studied in Jameson's work who states, 'Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process (10).' People have become attached to the culture of purchasing as a way of finding their stability and peace of mind. The British philosopher Bauman Zygmunt has developed this in his famous work *Consuming Life* (2007) where he relates the feeling of happiness nowadays with the thrill of new purchases (80-97). Concerning commodification, Jameson criticizes consumerism in its way of reducing artistic productions, political acts, and personal identity to products in the market. The mentioned key elements that should criticize and challenge authority, they are exploited in promoting commercial products and strengthening the capitalist system. In his work *The Consumer Society* (1970), Jean Baudrillard explains how the consumer society is grounded on valuing signs and symbols that are used in products exhibited for purchase. Art is used in creating advertisement that is the vehicle that pushes the consumption force forward. This reflects Jameson's study in proving how culture has strong identifying correlation with economy.

On the level of political sphere, the individual in the postmodern age tends to be paralyzed and influenced by pessimism and cynicism towards politics. The postmodernist adherence of skepticism towards grand narrative of historical revolutions and rebellions has affected the thought of the individual in fragmenting the formed opinion and thus reaction towards political acts. The movement's belief in relativism, hyperreality, and media saturation direct the individual's response to power. To illustrate, media saturation influences his or her behavior by constantly bombarding them with information until they reach the level of fatigue and they withdraw from the debated cause. This may lead individual to conform to the lived political situation and give up the idea of resistance. The political consciousness in this age endures a critical crisis that leads people to a state of political apathy that refers to passiveness towards politics. Terry Eagleton details this idea in his book *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) where he argues, the movement leads to a behavior of abandonment and passive acceptance of the lived status under the political conditions (27-30). This leads the introduction to reach a paramount realization about the life of the individuals who live in the postmodern conditions. They tend to be overwhelmed by their complex personal struggles to the point that they cannot participate in other political or cultural causes. This presents a side of the study that analyzes the struggle of the individual in the postmodern age.

After detailing the term postmodernism, it is evident that it has changed the individual's life through its conceptual and concrete content that have affected one's psychology. The philosophy's iconic thinkers Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard have discussed in their powerful referencing works the intense influence of the conditions of this era on the individual's psychology. The instability of meaning in the postmodern thought results in losing one's self in existential doubt where individuals experience fragmentation and alienation. The individual's usual sense of belonging to certain religious doctrine, ideological adherence, and nationality have been shaken because of

decentralization, consumerism, and performative behavior. The individual's psychological state is exacerbated by the implications of late capitalism that has spread the consumer culture taking advantage of fragmented identities and unstable psychological states. One may think that the technological development has offered facilities and freedom to individuals, but in fact this has resulted in losing one's self in the process of liberation from metanarratives. This includes distrusting the stories told by the surrounding institutions like the government. The individual moves to experience the hyperreal through media in its most developed technology which has put the individual's mind in a position of disappointment, disconnection and failure with the actual reality. This has led to embracing inconvenient lifestyles and fake identities or personas as products chosen by individuals. Identity has become a chaotic creation from a diverse range of available influences without true references. In short, the psychology of the individual suffers from the drastic change of the environment that has forced detachment from pre-postmodern lifestyle.

The situation of the individual in the postmodern age is the subject of many literary productions in different genres, which have offered fertile materials for research. Through their unique styles, writers have presented stories of characters who undergo complex journeys in postmodern settings where they struggle in maintaining their mental stability and protecting their identity. Writers from the precedent movement are known for their modernist quest for meaning in a chaotic world; however, the postmodern authors avoid, in playfully way, the possibility of the existence of meaning. The postmodern novel is often a parody of this quest through ambiguous plot structures and surprising postmodern twists. They adopt certain literary conventions like fragmentation, unreliable narrators and complex plots. They inject their style with postmodernist elements like parody, dark humor, and playfulness rejecting the boundaries between high and low forms of artistic expression. This has led to the creative style of magical realism that combines realism with fantasy as a

postmodernist style of critique. Globalization and multiculturalism are frequent themes in postmodernist works. The characters generally embody gloomy characteristics like confusion, detachment, and disappointment that are developed throughout the narrative. They often experience psychologically complex issues that lead to breakdown or transformation that is considered as the climax of the stories.

Choosing the materials of the research is motivated by a personal inclination towards characters that experience transformation of their psychological state that may culminate to schizophrenia or madness. The reason behind such a choice is the researcher's impulse of exploring the extreme cases of the influence of the postmodern age on one's psychology. This may uncover a lot about the research's problematic in analyzing the reasons behind the change and coming out with profound analysis and valuable results that help in understanding the human mind and nature. Recent published materials provide new exploratory journey for the researcher who works on new data that have not been a focus of study in the field of scientific research. Analyzing updated topic on fresh works generates beneficial results and findings that help in constituting an advantageous vision about the endured struggles in one's reality.

Realism as a characteristic exists in ancient literary classics of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. As a movement, it has appeared in the second half of the 19th c after the French Revolution that has pushed writers and artists to depict the lower-class society without idealization or dramatization. The French Honoré de Balzac is known for the iconic multivolume work *The Human Comedy* (1829-48) or in French *La Comédie Humaine* that is considered the masterpiece of the movement. Realistic fiction has developed throughout the years to become more than portrayal of reality, but a conscious and creative vision of human life and the external world. It is a depiction of institutions and circumstances that confine, persecute, and damage individuals through undergoing different struggles and crises. This

genre is founded on strong sensibility about one's surrounding including social injustice and moral decay. When realism is combined with postmodern fiction, they offer splendid artistic painting that shows the stories of people's conditions and challenges in the course of their difficult lives. To illustrate, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*, and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* are famous works that reflect this literary style. Besides, it is attractive as a chosen genre for this research because of employing the concept of self-reflexivity. The latter is a metaphor for the ontological questioning, discussion, and anxiety of the present age (Bagal, 359). It is a technique that captures the readers' attention to its composition that creates relationship between fiction and reality through introverted experience. Postmodern realistic fiction presents an inquiry and critique to the nature of reality itself.

One of the two studied literary works in this research is *Poison Girls* (2017) by Cheryl L. Reed that explores the journey of the crime reporter Natalie Delaney who investigates the death of young women after consuming a lethal form of heroin. The novel's author is a former journalist, editor, and reporter at the Chicago Sun-Times and other publications. Based on true story, her work *Poison Girls* (2017) won the Chicago Writers' Association Book of the Year Award. Its themes revolve around drug addiction, dark side of journalism and media, corruption of police forces and politics. In the summer of 2008, the protagonist Natalie Delaney submerges deep in the struggles of young women with drug consumption, social and political oppression in Chicago. The city witnesses the campaign of the senator Hyde Park to be elected as the American president. Simultaneously, this place is marked with successive death of more than 250 people including young girls from prominent families because of the consumption of new kind of heroin. After discovering that daughters of Democratic powerhouses are the real targets, the protagonist immerses in the city's underworld of drug consumption, mafia organizations, and political deception for the aim of

finding who is behind the killings. Natalie becomes entangled in the story that develops with the lives of other flat characters, the two cousins Anna and Libby as she tries to uncover the truth. Risking her security, her job, and her mental stability, Natalie becomes obsessed with breaking layers of deception leading the way to the truth; however, she becomes involved in one of the deaths where she struggles in regaining herself. Based on real events, the novel reflects the corrupted power of American politics, the societal oppressive norms, as well as the normalization of drug consumption. This reflects America's opioid crisis that is promised to be a subject of change by the President Trump. This successful work is suggested to be made into a film or TV series because it reflects the real struggles of individuals in the United States of America as well as the other world.

The other novel is Arthur Weissmann's *Going the Wrong Path* (2017) that presents the story of The Botelho family that emigrates from the African country of Angola to the United States of America seeking a better life and future; However, their life path changes as they do not experience the expected circumstances. The eldest son Silvio changes from being an intelligent boy who is granted university scholarship to finish his studies to a drug dealer and criminal. His young brother Antonio is smart kid who has plans for his future; nevertheless, he faces serious issues that prevent his success for a while. After a traumatizing tragedy occurs in the family, Antonio is left under the care of Silvio. His brother forcefully drifts him to the world of drugs and easy moneymaking. Since Silvio is Antonio's only adult relative in the country, he is faced with a difficult choice between staying with his drug dealer brother or live on the street. This captivating realist novel describes the lives of emigrated young brothers who choose different paths despite the difficult circumstances.

This research does not only work on literary productions, but it varies the studied materials by choosing audio-visual works from cinema and Television series for several reasons that elevate the quality of the challenging investigation to another high level.

Christian Metz, French film theorist, in one of his interviews, once said, 'Film tells us continuous stories; it "says" things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations.' This quote shows the research's interest in analyzing the directors' ways in reflecting the narrative and literary elements such as setting, characters and themes of postmodern realistic fiction through the screen. Metz states that the film convey meaning differently than language. Film is a sensory experience than reading. Besides verbal language, there is also color, movement, and sound. This makes watching a film an experience in which the individual interacts with the screen. Through the individuals' reactions and visions of the film, they understand themselves. In answering the journalist's question, Audrey Hepburn, a film and fashion icon, says, 'Everything I learned I learned from the movies.' Again, this is a reminder about the important roles of film, in specific, and media, in general, which influence people. The film and television series, like other forms of media, informs, entertain, educate, and socialize people. In the postmodern world, media has invaded one's life and has become necessary in achieving one's daily tasks. In brief, analyzing media works is an adventure worth taking for its significant impact on the reader, spectator, and the analyst.

As it is explained, strong motives and passion stand behind choosing audio-visual materials of study. Nadine Labaki, Lebanese and Canadian director as well as social activist, says, 'Cinema is not only about making people dream. It's about changing things and making people think.' This profound quotation brings the researcher's impulse close to the reader's perception. Analyzing visual storytelling is a modernized experience in understanding the power of the image presented through smartphones, Television screen, and laptops and so on. Watching a cinematic work can inspire and change the humans' thought that motivates for conducting new acquired behaviors and actions in real life, let alone analyzing its content and

form. Through the imagination of filmmakers and the lenses of their cameras, they introduce new perspectives for audience and defy the existed dogmatic social and cultural beliefs as well as institutions. They even criticize political laws and governmental policies as a way of opposition and rebellion against the existed system. Cinema opens a door for expression and offers a powerful tool of influence that is reflected as cultural and social identity. In a globalized world full of complex challenges, the introduction of creative influential art is an exquisite task. The latter induces discussions between people, and this operates as a catalyst for emerging movements that seek changing the quality and the direction of one's artistic vision and even life perceptions. Passion for cinema and television programs is accompanied with curiosity to know more about the world and the human life experience. Such curiosity is constructive characteristic for the researcher who seeks knowledge that cultivates and frees one's mind from traditional confining thought.

This study has chosen *Joker* (2019) as one of the selected works of this research, which is fruitful decision that has benefited the analytical process and generated useful results because of its rich data. The film is directed by Todd Phillips and starring Joaquin Phoenix. It has breathed new air in the story of the iconic DC Comics villain Joker by giving this character an imagined past. The filmmaker and the scenarist have produced a psychological thriller that presents an origin story for the well-known character of Joker. The narrative is set in Gotham city where struggling comedian named Arthur Fleck suffers from psychological and mental issues deteriorated by the fact of being marginalized by society. The antihero experiences disappointing and brutal setbacks such as losing his job, being mocked on TV, and discovering painful truths about his past. These events ultimately lead to his transformation to Joker, who is a violent revengeful unpredictable character. The film does not resemble traditional superhero movies because it presents the villain's story as a character study that reflects the story of any ordinary individual. If not winning the highest prize, the

cinematic work was nominated in most categories of film festivals and Academy awards. It has witnessed a groundbreaking success that marked the history of cinema, and it was criticized by the most successful artists, critics, and filmmakers. Joaquin Phoenix's performance earned widespread acclaim, including an Academy Award for Best Actor. *Joker* was awarded the Golden Lion, the festival's highest prize, at the 76th Venice International Film Festival. It has won the awards for Best Original Score and Best Actor in 73rd British Academy Film Awards, 77th ceremony of Golden Globe Awards, and 25th Critics' Choice Awards (Sreepada & Partida). Moreover, the Icelandic musician and composer Hildur Guðnadóttir has become the first woman to win an original score Oscar since *The Full Monty* (1997) in 1998. The work's ambiguous storytelling and dark atmosphere have generated discussions about how it comments on the state of the postmodern society. In brief, the film is a presentation of a chaotic identity that undergoes a psychological transformation thereby symbolizes a rebellion against the cruelty of today's world.

Breaking bad (2008-2013) is a Television series adopted as one of the analyzed materials that deals with several postmodernist themes and employs narrative and stylistic techniques enriching the study, which immerses in investigating rich realistic fiction. Vince Gilligan's created work is also considered crime drama that presents the transformation of Walter White, starring Bryan Cranston, who undergoes tough circumstances in his city Albuquerque, New Mexico between 2008 and 2010. The protagonist is an ordinary frustrated high school chemistry teacher who changes into a criminal and drug baron. The story starts with the motive of Walter's diagnosis with terminal lung cancer which leads him to agree with his former student, Jesse Pinkman, starring Aaron Paul, to cook and sell high-quality of drugs. It is known as methamphetamine that is produced and sold for the aim of securing his family's financial future. Their blue meth has created high demand in the black market

driving Walter to change his name to Heisenberg in order to mask his identity and manage his new illegal business. Unfortunately, dealing with dangerous men and embarking in criminal acts put his family's lives at risk. It also threaten him at the beginning of the story because his brother in law Hank Schrader works for Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The story explores the human's mind ability in dealing with surprising devastating trauma and persecution. *Breaking Bad* premiered on AMC on January 20, 2008, and concluded on September 29, 2013. Through five seasons consisting of 62 episodes, it exhibits the human's eagerness that leads him to become criminal fighting for power. Moreover, it examines the social relationships with the issues of Partnerships, Betrayals, and loss thereby revealing the individual's moral decay and selfishness. *Breaking Bad* is considered one of the greatest TV productions in history that has enormous viewership in the United States and the world. In 2013, the TV series has entered the Guinness World Records as the most critically acclaimed TV show (Verma & Goswami 91-93). It is even ranked as the best TV series in the last 25 years by critics in a poll conveyed by Rotten Tomatoes. It has received more than 35 awards in several categories from the British Academy Television Award, Primetime Emmy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, and so on (Verma& Goswami 91,92). After *Breaking Bad*'s success, *Better Call Saul* is created a prequel series featuring Odenkirk, Banks, and Esposito reprising their *Breaking Bad* roles. The director has also released a sequel film in 2019 titled *El Camino: A Breaking Bad Movie* in theaters and on Netflix platform (Verma & Goswami 91, 92).

Through profound analytical reading of the four selected materials of study, it is deduced that the narratives reflect transformations of characters in postmodernist settings where they are influenced by several factors especially society, discourse, and political conditions. This rises the central research question: how the individual undergoes psychological transformation under the influence of discourse, society, and political

conditions in Cinema and Postmodern Realistic Fiction. This research investigates the development of characters under strong sources of influence in the postmodern context. Language, Society, and politics put the individual in conflicting dichotomies, respectively: individual versus individual, discourse, and society, the governmental system. This rises sub research questions. For instance, how do societal behaviors and conducts transform the individuals by changing their minds and turning them into criminals? Another sub research question is; in which way discourse affects the individuals' thought influencing their cognitive knowledge, social interaction, and perspectives? The sources of influence do not stop at this level; the study uncovers the political conditions as another factor, which develops further inquiry: in postmodern world, how does the political system affect the characters' psychology and thus changing their attitudes in life? The sub questions develop throughout the analysis that generate other questions like what leads characters to perform criminal and illegal practices. What is the motive behind such conducts that have appeared after the character's psychological transformation? At the end, the researcher asks the question what are the possible solutions that may help the individual to resist the destructive psychological transformation.

The central and sub research questions reflect the purposes of conducting this research that is guided by central aim of exploring the experience of the individual's psychological transformation in postmodern settings. This incorporates studying the reasons or the factors that stand behind the change of the character. Analyzing the psychological issues that lead to madness or schizophrenia. Tracing the motives behind the criminal acts. The criminal is always the guilty person that is accused for illegal and inhuman acts that spread chaos and corruption. What if the focus is directed to investigate the path that stand behind the madness, the violence, and the murders. This uncovers the institutions and the elements that push the characters to such situations. The mad person is regarded an archetype

that has not received enough attention in studying it from different perspectives. What has led Arthur Fleck to become joker? What has brought Walter White to embrace the criminal identity of Heisenberg? How Silvio has abandoned his university scholarship and become drug dealer? How Natalie finds herself in a community of drug consumers murdered by lethal form of heroin? How they arrive to such a situation after being stable individuals? As it is demonstrated, it is not just exploratory research, but it is also an explanatory study, since it has intended to explain the reasons of the character's becoming a criminal or/and mad person throughout the story as well as drawing the correlations between the studied concepts. Conducting this research is for the aim of promoting awareness about the effects of the received and produced language, the society in which one interacts, the surrounding political conditions. Another aim is unsettling if not changing the stereotypes or commonsense ideologies of regarding psychologically-disturbed people as guilty for their state of being. Criminalizing the only apparent convicted criminal without questioning the incident and learning about the motives. Furthermore, spreading the humanness sense in understanding the other different kinds of individuals by taking a close look on their lives' circumstances and personal motives including psychological issues, which is a part of the significance of this study.

The mentioned central research inquiry and its sub research questions evoke ideas that lead to the formation of the main thesis as well as the sub thesis which need to be investigated, challenged, and proved throughout the analytical work. The postmodern conditions make the individual undergo psychological disorders like repression, oppression, and depression, which may even culminate to insanity. The main thesis suggests that the individual's psychology resists the powerful influence until identity transformation becomes a way of rebellion and thus survival. The society is both an influencing factor for the psychology of the conformist individual as well as an influenced crowd by the strong

individual in a world that praises the powerful side. The societal behaviors can create a harmful collective consciousness that damages the individual's psychology which may turn a decent person to a villain. Discourse exercises power in manipulating the individual's perspectives towards the self and the surrounding institutions in a way that changes one's psychological state. Ultimately, this threatens the identity and its free will. It is a manipulative power that forms the individual's mindset and construct their attitudes in a life of consumerism. The political conditions are controlled by the ruling system that is an untrusted repressing powerful institution that leads individuals to either conformism or rebellion depending on the personality of the individual and the challenging behaviors of the crowd. In addition, the research suggests that postmodern conditions create psychological issues that destruct the identity formation of the individual. Not handling the hardship of the surrounding circumstances exacerbates the state of mind of the character and derives him to commit violent acts.

This kind of questioning and hypothesizing to the narrative materials position the research in a qualitative content analysis that is defined as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning when individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell 22). Qualitative research is particularly useful to learn inductively about a social phenomenon from the perspective of individuals and small groups. It allows to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, people, or artifacts, build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life, or to study the meanings embedded in texts (Leavy 146). The researcher's use of qualitative content analysis is also motivated by the fact that it enables interpreting complex experiences through analytical way. It is a useful tool because it conveys the use of textual and visual materials in studying the research problem. In methodology, it includes processing data from texts and images to constitute meaningful ideas in the analytical interpretation to provide an answer or thesis to the research

question. Working with a mix of two types of data, text and image, is an adopted strategy throughout the research process from collecting data to its analysis and interpretation.

As it can be noticed, this kind of approach values people's subjective experiences and the way of forming meanings. Out of this chosen type of analysis, the study selects psychoanalytic theory to answer the research principal inquiry of the characters' psychological transformation along with its sub-questions that involves tracing the psychological effect of society, discourse and political conditions as influencing factors. It is important to mention that the founded theoretical lens shapes and directs the path of the research question aimed at exploring the research problematic of the psychological transformation of individuals. This leads to satisfactory results, which enable forming an interpretation that can inspire, reform and change. Going back to the chosen theoretical lens, the research requires mixing analytical approaches and different data to process the study's inquiries. That is to say, working with text and image to answer diverse research questions approached from different theories that follow several philosophies.

Image and language require different effective theoretical approaches that enable profound analysis that drains the material from the existed data to form grounded ideas. As far as the audiovisual analysis concerned, shot-by-shot analysis and semiotics are employed in studying the techniques and symbols of the cinematic production and the television series. This includes examining the use of the techniques of cinematography in conveying the works' themes. Interpreting the frame and the content of the image as an artistic production that carries rich meanings related to the study. Besides this, discourse analysis, post structuralism, postmodernism are other theories of analysis employed in this research to examine language as well as other conditions that surround the characters of the works. Through studying the image and language, the researcher investigates the characters' developments and transformations through the chosen theories in the selected materials. The

aim of this theoretical study is to show how the suffering of the postmodern individual under the circumstances of this age can transform him/her to a person no one expects.

In approaching the discourse used in the works, discourse analysis and post structuralism are literary theories employed in analyzing the language of texts and films. As far as the discourse analysis is concerned, it is defined as a linguistic study used in analyzing discourse, writing, conversation, communicative event. This is achieved through close reading and analysis of the used sentences, prepositions and speech. Discourse analysis not only studies language, but also it goes beyond the sentence boundary to reveal socio-psychological characteristics of persons. Moreover, post structuralism is another literary theory that analyzes the structures of linguistic expressions and attempts to understand the human culture behind it. In the poststructuralist Michel Foucault 's work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), he affirms that the term discourse no longer refers to formal linguistic aspects, but to institutionalized patterns of knowledge that become manifested in disciplinary structures and operate by the connection of knowledge and power (22).

As far as the society is concerned, the research uses concepts from socio-psychological theories that facilitate the study of the societal behaviors and their effects on individuals. It examines factors that cause behaviors to unfold in a given way in the presence of others. Investigating the conditions under which certain behaviors, actions, and feelings occur. Social psychology is concerned with the way feelings, thoughts, beliefs, intentions, and goals are cognitively and collectively constructed and how these mental representations, in turn, influence the reactions of the individual towards others. Moreover, the work depends on Gustave Le Bon's work *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) in analyzing the psychology of society that enables understanding its influence on the psychology of the individual.

Concerning the analysis of political conditions, the research employs several concepts of postmodernist political theorists like Mark Fisher, Michel Foucault, and Byung-Chul Han whose perceptions help in understanding the impactful relation between the political system and the individual. The Slovenian Marxist philosopher, cultural theorist and public intellectual Slavoj Žižek is also a theoretical reference in analyzing the political structures and institutions in relation to the observed psychological change in the development of characters. The fact that the chosen concepts are introduced by theorists who belong to postmodernism school deepens the study of the psychological transformation of the individual and expands the perception of the surrounding political circumstances.

This research relates the surrounding societal behaviors, the communicated language, the political conditions and conducts during the characters' development with the resulted psychological changes of their minds. The study attempts to understand the character's mind under the influence of society, discourse, and political conditions and how the factors seem to create aspects of criminality and inhumanness that appear later after the character's climax or transformation. Here, the analysis depends on the views of several philosophers, sociologists and psychoanalyst such as Michel Foucault, Gustave Le Bon, and Carl Jung.

An appropriate methodological plan is compulsory for the theoretical framework in order to approach the research inquiries. This is fundamental for ensuring reliable and valid results that address the aims and objectives. The methodology is founded on taking the textual passages and the scenes' shots to analyze its explicit content as well as digging deep to process the implicit data that requires interpretation. Extracting data leads the process of research to another phase: organizing and classifying the collected data into categories that represent the studied themes such as the social, the linguistic, the political, as well as the psychological factors. This is referred to as coding data that comes before the interpretation

process that identifies the existed concepts and relate it to each other, which is in a way relational analysis. Submerging in the analysis of the coded data enables the formulation of results. Here, one can produce an interpretation based on the founded proofs using different strategies.

To clarify the methodology of the work, after collecting the data, the study has undergone the phase of coding the data into categories that represent the variables of the study such as society, politics, language/discourse, cinematography and so on. Then, this coded and categorized data is presented for analysis by going deeper in understanding the meaning behind the existed data. As stated in Creswell`s book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2009), some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back the layers of an onion (171). In processing the underlying meaning of this complex data, the study decodes the provided information. Here, it comes the phase of detailing an explanation for the presented data, which involves description in order to come up with deduced ideas that lead the researcher to constitute an interpretation of the larger meaning of it. For instance, this involves describing the features of the characters` development along the work. This ultimately leads to answering analytical questions around several literary devices such as the setting, characteristics, and themes to come up with a coherent and unified interpretation. Analyzing these codes, in a way, is studying the concepts of this investigation forming the theoretical perspective of the research. This involves employing the concepts of the chosen theories in processing the founded data. This phase proves the reciprocal relationship between the existed data and the researcher`s chosen theories of analytical interpretation. After discussing the decoded data, one moves to linking and connecting the data through meaningful relations that correspond to the narrative and the chosen theory as a step towards developing the thesis of the work as well as its findings. In qualitative research analysis,

one's interpretation follows the research design of the study that is founded on the chosen theoretical approach.

This research methodology may generate new questions in the course of research that were not introduced at the beginning of the study by the researcher. This happens in deep analysis of shots, characters, and quotations or textual passages, which may involve comparison to the content of the foundational literature and theories. Such generated questions and their analysis are considered as the researcher's personal interpretation that is inspired from one's cognitive and cultural background. This ultimately creates multilayer of complex interpretative analysis. This process is done for each case of study of the selected literary and audiovisual materials. The researcher here forms a fundamental essence of the deduced ideas and findings to state the results (Lincoln & Guba 45).

The theoretical framework of the study includes several schools of thought that create its paradigm. This includes postmodernism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction that overlap with each other in investigating the discourses that normalize dominant ideology. Patricia Leavy explains, 'Those lines of thinking that become so 'taken-for-granted' that people may fail to realize that they are power-laden discourses' (Leavy 130). This concern for challenging dominant ideology leads the path of this investigation to tackle different research areas developing an interdisciplinary study that intersects between psychology, sociology, linguistics as well as politics. In Leavy's book *Research Design* (2017), the writer states that Jacques Derrida, a pioneer in post-structuralism, has promoted a strategy of critical deconstruction as a way to break down unities to expose what has been rendered invisible (131). This is similar to Poststructuralist method in focusing on breaking down unified narratives to see how dominant ideology works in texts. These theories are applied to media production as well as language, which are constructive for the research in providing analytical insight into human thought and discourse.

The dissertation's outline is divided into theoretical and analytical parts as two large spaces where chapters are organized in presenting the research theoretical concepts and then analyzing the content. After the general introduction, the researcher chooses to split the work into two spaces that reflect the paradigm of the research. The reason behind this decision is the fact that the research works on several materials and variables, so it is preferable to order them in a long outline that guarantees clarified organization of the content.

The theoretical part is founded on conceptualization that starts with a chapter that introduces the concepts that are used in analyzing the political conditions as well as explaining the postmodernist art, context and theory. The politics of the postmodern age are related to the existed culture, mentality and production of this epoch and trend. This is why this chapter presents the important and useful content for the analytical part. The second chapter introduces the linguistic theories, methods and strategies of studying discourse. Analyzing Language is explained in this space to prepare readers to understand and follow the critical discourse analysis in the analytical part. The third chapter provide the essential information of shot-by-shot analysis with its techniques of cinematography as well as semiotics. Media analytical study is not familiar to all readers, which requires enough explanation of this approach. The fourth and last chapter of the theoretical part provides the needed concepts of psychoanalytic analysis as well as the theory of studying the psychology of society. The theoretical chapters are not condensed information about the scholars' concept; on the contrary, they are presentation of an analytical approach to the chosen theoretical concepts. They explain the concepts and relate them to the studied topic. That is to say, they show how they are related to the content of the narratives and in which way they enable the analyst to answer the research inquiries.

Moving to the analytical part, it is grounded on operationalization that uses the three chapters to operate the introduced theoretical concepts on the content of the materials

providing analytical and interpretative study. The first chapter studies society as an influencing and an influenced element that is involved in the characters' psychological transformation. The second chapter studies language as a powerful discourse that stand behind the influence on the individuals' minds. The third and final chapter investigates the postmodern political conditions that influence the character's psychology. Through a general conclusion, the work presents the research's findings that enable constituting results and encourages for further questioning and research.

Reading several scholarly Books, articles, and dissertations about the chosen topic and using them as a departure to find the research gap have facilitated concentrating the inquiry on non-studied parts. Throughout history, the individual showed different psychological reactions to societal influence and the change of environment. This was the interest of many researchers who centered the focus of their studies on multiple sides of this subject area. After engaging in a long background reading, previous resources have lightened the way to form the needed pillars of this study, recognize the gap, and form initial idea about the thesis of the study.

Many texts have studied Postmodernism and its conditions providing valuable information through exquisite materials. *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* is an influential book written by Madan Sarup who has introduced surveys of current topics such as consumerism, pluralistic identity, and popular culture. He explains the conditions of postmodernity through its emergence as a reaction to modernist thought. This work is founded on the works of several the pioneers of this movement such as Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. The book contributes through simple explanation that uses illustrations to clarify complex concepts that belong to this broad subject area. Similarly, Steven Corner's book *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* analyzes the ideology presented by Jean Lyotard and Fredric Jameson and

compares them to ideologies and criticisms of new emerging theorists. The work discusses the circumstances of new areas of postmodernist culture. This includes technology, cinema, and theories. Both books provide developed explanation and an updated vision to the postmodern thought and conditions; however, they do not offer enough study to its effect on the individual.

Concerning the individual's psychology in relation to postmodern conditions, many works have analyzed this cause-and-effect relationship through valuable works. Morris, D. B's work *Illness and Culture in the Postmodern Age* is an influential production that relates emotional and body illnesses to the postmodern experience arguing that illness has changed since the Second World War. He relates this change to the development of technology, transportation, and the texture of everyday life. Nevertheless, he concentrates on the crossroads of biology and culture without valuing the psychological side enough. The latter may be well elaborated in the book of *Psychology and Postmodernism* by Steinar Kvale that is considered the first groundbreaking book that examines the effects of postmodernist ideas on psychology. It works on detailing the postmodernist themes and how they change the psychology and mentality of individuals. Nevertheless, the production does not concentrate on the analytical theories of approaching the psychological change. This is elaborated in the book *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* by Stephen A. Mitchell, Margaret J. Black that offers profound analytical presentation of the history of psychoanalysis with the introduction of current approaches of psychoanalytic. It is a rich source of developed definitions of the theory's concepts like unconscious, trauma, and psychosis. It revisits the psychoanalytic thought and methodology of work by tracing the enormous expansion and transformation of the concepts since Freud's death in 1939. However, the book does not relate psychoanalytic to societal environment or the communicated discourse.

As far as society, discourse, and political conditions are concerned, writers have produced works that demonstrate the updated definitions of the terms in relation to the circumstances of the new age as well as providing the adequate theories for its conceptual analysis. David Harvey's work *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* discusses the influence of society and political conditions as powerful institutions of postmodern thought which are products of the age's new intensity in what Harvey terms 'time-space compression'. It offers socio-analytical concepts and political theories as approaches of study. *Postmodern Social Theory* by George Ritzer is the favorite book of many researchers in this subject area because it facilitates the understanding of postmodern social Theory. It offers a developed view of the postmodern condition through sociological perspective. Besides, the article of Thomas Dunn and Antonio Castro titled "Postmodern society and the individual: The structural characteristics of postmodern society and how they shape how we think we are" analyzes the postmodern society and psychology to expose the relations between them. It shows the postmodernist elements' influence on the individual's assimilation of the concept of the self. It offers a number of psycho-sociological hypotheses that includes the culture of consumption and the development of technology. Concerning Discourse, Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough's valuable work titled *Discourse in Late Modernity Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis* that combines critical discourse analysis with social theory. The work illustrates the presented study with examples from postmodernist approaches as well as late modern works such as the productions of Giddens, Habermas, and Harvey.

Several productions have analyzed the research's audiovisual works, the film *Joker* and the TV series *Breaking Bad*. "Beyond Good and Bad: The Linguistic Construction of Walter White's Masculinity in *Breaking Bad*" by Andy Peters is a thesis presented for B. A. degree issued in the University of Michigan. It studies the concept of masculinity in relation

to the communicated discourse in the media work. Discourse and postmodern conditions are discussed in this work; however, they are not analytically linked to the individual's psychology as much as they are related to the theme of masculinity. Furthermore, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Douglas Rasmussen have produced a Master dissertation titled "Intertextual Representations of Drugs, Violence, and Greed in *Breaking Bad*" that approaches the work through intertextuality as postmodernist concept and neoliberal economic policies. Now, the review of literature moves to the film of *Joker*. The movie is a material for a master thesis titled "My life is nothing but a comedy": madness and revenge tragedy in Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019) by Akoo Selma. This dissertation studies the theme of madness through the narrative concept of the revenge tragedy by focusing on the causes that lead the protagonist to its destructive end. Akoo discusses the use of blood revenge because of the societal system that acts like a villain. The work offers analysis to the character's mental illness with the examination of societal behavior. "Bullying and its Implication to Character Building in Philips' *Joker* Movie (2019): A Psychological Perspective" is another dissertation by Rometa Dinda Sarasa who analyzes the indicators of bullying and its impact on character building. This study uses Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theoretical approach to show the psyche's deterioration because of the societal's behaviors and conducts of bullying. In fact, the conducted dissertations on the film and TV series study some postmodernist concepts, and they use psychoanalytic approach; however, they do not invest in studying the psychological change of the individual according to several postmodernist factors in one work.

This dissertation presents a thematic, linguistic, and cinematographic study of the chosen literary and audiovisual works. As it is noticed in reviewing the literature, a significant gap in the existing research lies in studying the audiovisual works in individual way and not combine them together or with novels before. It is true that psychoanalytic is

used in approaching the works in previous studies; however, there is a lack of focused exploration on the psychological transformation of the individual. Postmodernism as a theory and subject area includes works that detail the conditions, the psychological approaches, and literary criticism; nevertheless, they are not applied together in one work that come up with results that gather the study of all the postmodernist elements. Concerning the chosen literary texts, they are not a topic of study or reference in the literature because they are new and they did not receive attention. This thesis analyzes the individual's psychological transformation under the influence of discourse, society and political conditions by using two texts and two audiovisual works as postmodern realistic fictional case studies. The thesis approaches the work through multidimensional theories because the topic and the different materials require several analytical dimensions to conduct the research investigation.

This study will serve to gain knowledge about the challenges of the postmodern age and the suffering of the individual under the powerful sources of influences. It contributes to the understanding of the contemporary surrounding institutions: society, politics, and discourse. This study contributes to the realm of research by collecting new data from recent literary and film productions that have not been studied before. This puts the study in a path where promising perspectives and results are worth the long course of research. Researchers and readers will gain close study of the contemporary age, which permits them to understand their surroundings and themselves more effectively.

Chapter One: Postmodernism as a Rebellion in Art Expression and a Change in Political Conditions and Thought

Introduction

A culture, a theory, a movement are some of the terms given to define Postmodernism which is presented through different perceptions by theorists that do not bound its meaning; instead, it is introduced to create new conceptual horizons to human thought. This background chapter is devoted to discuss postmodernism as the subject area of this research that studies literary works and cinematic productions, which belong to the postmodernist genre. Discussing this term evokes different questions: when and where this movement started? Why did it appear? What are its characteristics? Who are its pioneers and what are their major introduced concepts? However, answering these questions is not enough to discuss this complex term that stretches its philosophical dimensions to different spheres. It requires deep analysis throughout its pillars, goals, influential consequences.

1. Defining the Term Postmodernism

Postmodernism, also spelled post-modernism, is a late 20th-century broad movement that first appeared in Western philosophy, Europe. Clearly, this movement does not only defy definite definition but also rejects Modernist principals. It is a novel movement that appeared as a reaction against its precedent one, Modernism. A number of experts believe that due to the fundamental differences between modernism and postmodernism, both trends present different senses of social life that stem from distinct thinking styles. While Modernism emphasizes the discovery of realities, Postmodernism stresses the instability of pre-conceived notions and the creation of realities. The Modernist theorists believe in certainty and meta-narrative which what the Postmodernists reject under no circumstances. In other words, this rejection is against universal and constant theoretical foundations particularly in the areas of

values, moralities, politics as well as education. In short, Postmodernism is a defiant and ejective movement that presents a sort of transition from modernist thought in different spheres such as art, politics, and society.

Modernism is generally based on idealism and a utopian vision of human life and society as well as a belief in progress. It assumes that certain ultimate universal principles or truths such as those formulated by religion or science can be used to understand or explain reality. Modernist artists experiment with form, technique and processes rather than focusing on subjects, believing they can find a way of purely reflecting the modern world. While modernism is based on idealism and reason, postmodernism is born out of skepticism and suspicion of reason. It challenges the idea of universal certainties or truths expected to be believed by people in the world. Postmodern art drew on philosophy of the mid to late twentieth century, and advocates that individual experience and interpretation of our experience is more concrete than abstract principles. While the modernists championed clarity and simplicity, the postmodernists embraced complex and often contradictory layers of meaning.

1.1. Anti-authoritarian Nature of Postmodernism

Anti-authoritarian by nature, postmodernism refuses to recognize the authority of any single style or definition of what art should be. This refuse stretches to the classification of art as a production far from everyday life. Because postmodernism has broken the established rules about style, it has introduced a new era of freedom and a sense that ‘anything goes.’ Often funny, tongue-in-cheek or ludicrous; it can be confrontational and controversial, challenging the boundaries of taste; but most crucially, it reflects a self-awareness of style itself. It does not support the distinction between high culture and popular one. For instance, postmodernist art may be presented through mixing different artistic and popular styles from media. Another example is that postmodernist art can also consciously borrow from and/or

comment on a range of styles from the past in an ironic way. As a result of these creative ideas of producing art, Postmodernism has created different faces to its philosophy of art.

1.2. Postmodernism an Artistic Rebellion from Modernism

At the heart of Postmodernism is conceptual art which proposes that the meaning or/and purpose behind producing art is more important than art itself. This perception strongly believes that anything could be used to make art, that art could take any form, and that there should be no differentiation between high art and low art, or fine art and commercial art. These latter terms that classify art are explained throughout this section where the genre of the literary and the cinematic materials of this thesis become clear for further analysis. What is noticed about Postmodernist artistic expression in literature, cinematic production and even other fields of art is that there is a tendency to deal with themes that used to be taboos in previous artistic movements. For instance, sexuality, drug addiction, and the psychology of the mind are examples of these daring topics which are central themes in the studied works of this thesis. This is achieved through creative artistic styles that distinguish itself from the works that belong to previous periods. Moreover, Postmodernist art criticizes the governmental systems in complex literary styles. This art is urged by strong support for human's artistic expression that goes beyond the usual limits to challenge solid institutions in society, politics, and religion. This reflects the well-known idea about this art which is: 'anything goes in this art.' However, this art that deals with such bold themes in new artistic ways by different kind of artists did not reach this sort of level without witnessing turning points that create the conceptual pattern of this artistic movement.

One of the most important features of Postmodernism is the celebration of the world of everyday objects. As far as the visual art is concerned, it marks a transition to a changed outlook and powerful sensibility which is shown in the artistic works of Robert Rauschenberg. Before coming to this influential artist, the expression of visual arts needs to

be clarified to carry on discussing this topic. According to Britannica's website, it refers to the arts that meet the eye and evoke an emotion through an expression of skill and imagination. They include the most ancient forms, such as painting and drawing, and the arts that were born thanks to the development of technology, like sculpture, printmaking, photography, and installation art, the latter a combination of multiple creative expressions. Going back to Rauschenberg, He was an American painter and graphic artist whose early works anticipated the Pop art movement. Rauschenberg is well known for his Combines, a group of artworks which incorporated everyday objects as art materials and which blurred the distinctions between painting and sculpture. This artist was criticized by Calvin Tomkins, an author and art critic for *The New Yorker* magazine, as being the one who views the artist as not the controlling element, imposing his personality, his emotions, his ideas, his taste on the creative process. Rather, the artist interacted with the materials he found in the world, letting them speak for themselves under his creative influence. For Rauschenberg, painting is more than just an expression of one's personality: it is closer to a collaboration with materials than to any kind of conscious manipulation and control (Tomkins 204). Out of this claim, it is clear that this artistic production does not value the aesthetic side of art like the previous periods.

Most postmodernist artists are against the Avant-gardist view of aesthetics as a crucial value for a work of art. Avant-garde is defined as the ongoing practices of radical innovation in art, literature, and fashion in the later twentieth century. It is also seen as artistic productions of movements that radicalized innovations in aesthetic forms and content, while also engaging viewers and readers in deliberately shocking new ways. For instance, Modernism is marked by historical avant-garde movements such as Dada, Futurism, and Vorticism that have reattached aesthetics to the sensory world of everyday life. Anarchism and Constructivism are other art movements of the 1960s that have displaced the aesthetic

value to the realm of reception. This has transformed the content and increasingly the form of art in populist directions, opening it to popular values (Dunn 125). The 1960s art successfully has assaulted the category of what has been known as high art by reintegrating the values of daily life into artistic activity.

According to Free English Dictionary website, High art deals with lofty and dignified subjects and is characterized by an elevated style avoiding all meretricious display. From this definition, it is clear that this art is not accessible to all people for many reasons such as the themes of this artistic work that revolves around the realm of high class's life. Another reason may be detected is that most of the high art's artist belong to the bourgeoisie who do not share their lives and works with all people. The way of producing such art and the materials needed for its artistic expression are expensive and obviously not available for all artists. Thus, this Avant-gardist high art is restricted to limited artists, audience, and goals. Besides High art, there is fine art which refers to an art form practiced mainly for its aesthetic value and its beauty "art for art's sake" rather than its functional value. Fine art is rooted in drawing and design-based works such as painting, printmaking, and sculpture. It is often contrasted with applied art and crafts which are both traditionally seen as utilitarian activities. Which means that they are produced for their utility as the main motive of their creation. Historically, the five main fine arts were painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry, with performing arts including theatre and dance. In practice, outside education, the concept is typically only applied to the visual arts. For more clarification, the word fine does not denote the quality of the artwork in question, but the purity of the discipline according to traditional Western European canons.

Throughout history, people interacted with art in different ways because of many fundamental factors such as the socio-political context, the value of art, the background of artist and audience. The conditions lived by the society under a certain political system affect

the people's creation and reception of art. For instance, on the one hand, art can be used by the government to affect public opinion. On the other hand, it can be used by people as an expression of despair and to revolt against the system. Many works of art have been instruments serving a purpose to accomplish certain goals. For example, art has served to indoctrinate people about the importance of particular political and religious personages and beliefs. There are other functions for art such as expression of art for art's sake. What is noticed here is that the art's nature and function affect how people interact with it. For instance, different interactions are found in the fine art and craft which stem from the way they imply different values. The fine art view holds in esteem one way of interacting with art, which is aesthetic contemplation; however, craft art values the utility of the work. Art had other functions before the fine art distinction was made and continues to have those functions now.

1.3. Pop Art the Achievement of the Postmodern Culture

Tracing the concept of art is a long philosophical debate that takes our main topic far from its goals; nevertheless, the mentioned traditional forms of art witnessed a rebellion by popular and commercial culture in the Western world. This marked the born of Pop Art as new movement that is inspired from the new dominant culture in that period. Pop Art emerged during the 1950s in America and Britain and peaked in the 1960s. Pop artists felt that the art exhibited in museums or taught at schools did not represent the real world, and so looked to contemporary mass culture for inspiration instead. At the height of its heyday, Pop Art was often heralded as 'anti-art' for refusing to abide by contemporary art standards at the time. Post-modern work in the 1970s was derided as "art for art's sake," but it gave rise to the acceptance of a host of new approaches. Among these new forms were Earth art, which creates work on natural landscapes; Performance art; Installation art, which considers an entire space rather than just one piece; Process art, which stressed the making of the work as

more important than the outcome; and Video art, as well as movements based around feminist and minority art.

The 1980s saw the rise of appropriation as a much-used practice. Painters like Jean-Michael Basquiat and Keith Haring directly mimicked graffiti styles, while artists like Sherrie Levine lifted the actual work of other artists to use in their creations. In 1981, Levine photographed a Walker Evans photo and represented it as a new work questioning the very idea of an original photo. Post-modern art has since become less defined by the form that the art takes and more determined by the artist creating the work. American artist Jenny Holzer, who came to prominence in the 1970s with her conceptual art made from language, embodies this model. Holzer's "Truisms" are deceptively simple sentences that communicate complicated, often contradictory, ideas, such as "Protect me from what I want." She has also produced a body of work from the American government's use of torture during the Iraq War. Holzer's creation of text, rather than any visual motif, is the consistent aspect uniting her work.

As an experience of the materiality of mundane objects and everyday life, postwar art corresponded to the decline of its authorial conception that transformed artist's role from pictorially representing subjective experience to performing a set of operations in a medium- or form-independent field of signifying practices (Burgin 39). These avant-garde artistic practices reestablished a connection between art and life, opened artistic practice to possibilities lying beyond the museum and gallery, and revalued the aesthetic consciousness of the recipient of art (Dunn 117). With Roy Lichtenstein's comics and Andy Warhol's soup cans, Pop art appropriated the aesthetics of mass media in an expression of the experience of commodification and image saturation of everyday life. Using consumer goods, urban landscapes, and media images as contemporary iconography and experimentation objects, Pop artists explored aesthetic possibilities beyond the modernist isolation of high art, in order

to incorporate mass culture, technological reproduction, and media images into artworks as mundane, concrete, and popular objects (Dunn 117).

From Victor Burgin, Robert Dun, and Andreas Huyssen `s claims, we may define Pop art in simple terms: it is an art in which commonplace objects such as road signs, hamburgers, comic strips, or soup cans are used as subject matter and are often physically incorporated in the work. During the 1960s, the neo-avant-garde movement appeared as an artistic force limited to either commenting on the aesthetic practices of corporate capitalism, such as Pop art, or withdrawing into the abstraction of Minimal, Conceptual or Kinetic art, whereas cultural avant-gardes asserted plural cultural representations of otherness and difference in the 1970s and 1980s (Dunn 125). If we come to the 1970s, new social movements criticized art and politicized popular culture in the context of struggles over the issues of gender, ethnicity, and ecology (Dunn 124), these movements were bringing subcultural politics into mass culture less by aesthetic innovation, than by the autonomy and self-determination of cultural expression. Cultural expression was a form of resistance against commercial cooptation and consumer society, as politics of representation entered mass culture through marginalized and powerless voices. These subcultural politics also led to the support of group-based identities by cultural avant-gardes (Dunn 124-125), as art based on technological reproduction (Huyssen 196) was replaced in the 1970s with “feminist, racial and ethnic art; guerilla and street theatre; gay and lesbian culture; graffiti” (Dunn 125). Together with peace and ecology movements, these alternative cultural forms challenged Enlightenment thought, dominant culture, and authority structures. These movements were influenced by poststructuralist theories and deconstruction, practices alternative to modern art and mass culture, and anti-hegemonic cultural representations (Wallis xiii-xiv). Art integrated into consumer culture through the mass media, advertising,

and marketing by using technological reproduction that brought artists into accord with capitalism (Dunn 125).

Artistic works are not merely aesthetic creations but cultural artifacts shaped by historical, social, and economic forces. They transcend their immediate context—both in production and reception—to achieve a lasting impact through their formal complexity, material presence, and endurance over time (Lyotard 120). Postmodern movements, in contrast to modernism's universalism, drew upon communal traditions, local autonomy, and the fragmented nature of everyday life to assert cultural distinctiveness (Bauman 230). This shift was further complicated by the commodification of culture (Baudrillard 16), which destabilized the hierarchies that once separated institutionalized "high art" from popular and subcultural expressions (Dunn 115).

In architecture, figures like Robert Venturi pioneered a break from modernist elitism, embracing instead a design philosophy rooted in populist aesthetics. Charles Jencks later theorized this as double-coding—a postmodern approach that blended vernacular styles, regional motifs, and historical references, rejecting modernism's rigid functionalism (Dunn 115). This democratization of aesthetics first emerged in 1950s and 1960s painting, where American artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg rebelled against abstract expressionism's detachment from lived experience. Instead of critiquing mass culture, they celebrated it, integrating commercial imagery, industrial objects, and everyday sensibilities into their work (Dunn 115-116).

These anti-representational movements dismantled traditional notions of artistic autonomy and unity, instead positioning the audience as co-creators of meaning. Art became more participatory, blurring the lines between creator and consumer (Dunn 118). Avant-garde artists embraced mass culture, rejecting elitist distinctions and prioritizing popular reception.

This transition from production to consumption as the focal point of aesthetics was accompanied by an emphasis on play—a deliberate subversion of modernism’s solemnity (Dunn 118-119). Pop art, for instance, appropriated mass media’s imagery of leisure and desire, privileging sensory pleasure over intellectual interpretation (Dunn 119).

As Lash notes, postmodernism dismissed modernism’s reliance on rational analysis, instead framing culture through a Freudian lens—where unconscious drives, not meaning, dictate engagement (Dunn 119). This shift is epitomized in Susan Sontag’s concept of Camp, which elevates style, theatricality, and exaggeration over ethical or narrative depth (Sontag 288). Postmodernism thus redefined art as an arena of sensuous enjoyment, where style itself became the primary subject (Dunn 119-120).

The rise of mass culture further eroded modernism’s seriousness, replacing it with instant gratification, media-driven pleasure, and purposeless play. Postmodern art reveled in surface over depth, signifiers over referents, and fragmentation over coherence (Dunn 121). Baudrillard observed that technology and media dissolved stable meanings, rendering social relations fluid and indeterminate. By aestheticizing the mundane, 1960s avant-garde movements bridged the gap between art and everyday life, making culture more accessible yet more commercially entangled (Dunn 121).

1.4. Media and Consumer Society

The globalization of bohemian lifestyles through media highlighted generational divides between countercultural youth and consumer capitalism (Wilson 20). By the 1960s, rebellion—expressed through drug use, Eastern philosophy, and experimental living—had been absorbed into mainstream culture, morphing bohemianism into the mass hippie movement (Morgan 365 and Wilson 20). Capitalism commodified avant-garde shock tactics,

blending high and low culture, artistic innovation, and commercial appeal against a backdrop of urban decay and luxury (Ronay 184 and Stallabrass 43).

Cultural theorists since the 1970s have debated whether mass culture subverts or reinforces dominant power structures. De Certeau, for instance, argued that marginalized practices and everyday creativity could resist homogenization (Wilson 25-26). Yet, as Wilson notes, both elite and popular forms of culture contain elements of resistance and pleasure, reflecting broader societal fragmentation (Maffesoli 77). The aestheticization of daily life now spans from TV shows and pop music to the mass reproduction of Impressionist art (Wilson 26-27). Unlike early 20th-century bohemians, contemporary society absorbs avant-garde transgression into consumerism, erasing boundaries between rebellion and commodification (Martin 23).

Urban spaces, particularly in cities like Las Vegas, exemplify this trend. Themed environments, hotels replicating Venetian canals, casinos mimicking ancient Rome, merge entertainment, commerce, and architecture (Schmid 348-356). Such developments prioritize spectacle over authenticity, fostering what Baudrillard termed the "hyperreal," where simulations replace reality (Baudrillard 75). Consumers, overwhelmed by sensory stimuli, grow dependent on curated fantasies, further divorcing experience from meaning (Schmid 354).

1.5. Postmodernism's Intellectual Foundations

Postmodernism's pioneers like Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Rorty rejected Enlightenment ideals of reason, truth, and progress, viewing them as tools of oppression (Hicks 1). Their work emphasized skepticism, relativism, and the ideological underpinnings of power (Hicks 3). For postmodernists, the 20th century's wars and technologies exposed

reason's destructive potential, leading figures like Lyotard to equate rationality with control (Hicks 10).

Foucault, though resisting the "postmodern" label, dismantled universalist claims, arguing that knowledge and truth are constructs of power (Hicks 17). Similarly, Jacques Lacan reinterpreted Freud through linguistics, asserting that the unconscious operates like a language, destabilizing rigid binaries between rationality and desire. His concepts mirror stage, *jouissance*, and the symbolic order reshaped psychoanalysis, feminism, and film theory.

Postmodernism's core lies in its rejection of centralized authority, embracing instead plurality, surface over depth, and pastiche over originality (Dunn 113). It advocates for cultural tolerance, social equity, and the inclusion of marginalized voices, geographically, economically, or socially (Dunn 112). While postmodernism critiques modernity, it also inherits and transforms its ideas, creating a paradoxical legacy that continues to influence philosophy, art, and politics.

2. The Political Conditions of the Postmodern Age

The postmodern age, emerging in the latter half of the 20th century and persisting into the contemporary moment, represents a decisive rupture from the political paradigms of modernity. Where modernity was anchored in Enlightenment rationality, faith in progress, and the dominance of grand narratives such as liberalism, socialism, and nationalism. Epistemological skepticism, the erosion of metanarratives, and a radical pluralization of political discourse characterize postmodernity. This shift has engendered a political landscape marked by fragmentation, hyperreality, and the reconfiguration of power in ways that defy traditional ideological categorizations.

2.1. The Collapse of Metanarratives and the Crisis of Legitimacy

Jean-François Lyotard's seminal thesis in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) posits that postmodernity is defined by incredulity toward metanarratives. The decline of universalist ideologies whether Marxist teleology, liberal progressivism, or conservative traditionalism has left a vacuum in which no single political framework claims absolute legitimacy. This erosion has not merely led to ideological diversification but has also precipitated a crisis of authority in traditional institutions. Governments, political parties, and even the nation-state itself face declining public trust, as citizens increasingly perceive these structures as contingent rather than immutable. The postmodern political subject, no longer interpellated by a singular ideological apparatus, in the Althusserian sense, instead navigates a fragmented terrain of competing truths, where legitimacy is perpetually contested.

2.2. Hyperreality and the Mediatization of Politics

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality where simulations precede and displace the real has profound implications for postmodern politics. In an age of digital saturation, political representation is no longer a transparent mediation of public will but a spectacle governed by semiotic excess. Political campaigns, for instance, are less about substantive policy debates than about curated images, viral misinformation, and affective appeals divorced from material conditions. The rise of populist leaders who thrive on symbolic gestures rather than institutional governance such as Trump's Twitter presidency, the performative rhetoric of figures like Bolsonaro or Le Pen exemplifies this shift. In this environment, politics becomes a theater of signs, where authenticity is perpetually deferred, and power operates through the manipulation of perception rather than concrete ideological hegemony.

2.3. Identity Politics and the Pluralization of Struggle

The postmodern condition has also reconfigured the terrain of political struggle, displacing class-based movements with decentralized identity politics. While modernity framed emancipation through universal categories, the proletariat, the citizen, the human, postmodernity fractures these into intersecting vectors of race, gender, sexuality, and ecology. This shift, articulated through theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw 45) and queer temporality (Halberstam 88), resists homogenizing narratives in favor of localized, particularized resistance. However, this pluralization has also generated tensions: the emphasis on micro-politics risks obscuring structural economic critiques, while the commodification of identity dilutes radical potential. The challenge for postmodern politics lies in negotiating solidarity across difference without reinscribing the very universalisms it seeks to dismantle.

2.4. Neoliberalism and the Post-Political Condition

Some theorists, such as Slavoj Žižek and Chantal Mouffe, argue that postmodernity has converged with neoliberalism to produce a post-political order, a depoliticized governance model that replaces ideological conflict with technocratic management. Under neoliberalism, politics is reduced to administrative efficiency, where debates are framed not as clashes of values but as pragmatic adjustments within capitalist realism, Fisher's term for the pervasive sense that no alternative to capitalism exists. The result is a paradoxical scenario: while postmodernity celebrates plurality, neoliberal hegemony constrains political imagination, rendering systemic alternatives unimaginable. The rise of centrist "third-way" politics in the 1990s and the austerity regimes of the 2010s exemplify this trend, where dissent is absorbed rather than confronted.

2.5. Digital Sovereignty and the Crisis of Democracy

Finally, the digital turn has introduced new vectors of power that destabilize traditional democratic forms. Algorithmic governance, surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 99), and decentralized disinformation networks undermine the liberal ideal of an informed citizenry. Social media platforms, functioning as postmodern agoras, amplify affective polarization while eroding shared epistemic foundations. The result is a polity in which truth is tribalized, consensus is elusive, and democracy itself appears as just another contested simulation.

2.6. Michel Foucault and the Political Conditions of the Postmodern Age

The postmodern political landscape, as theorized through Michel Foucault's work, is defined by a radical transformation in how power operates when no longer centralized in institutions but dispersed through discourses, technologies, and everyday practices. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that modern power functions through invisible mechanisms of surveillance and normalization, epitomized by the panopticon, where individuals internalize discipline under an anonymous gaze (Foucault 201). This framework extends seamlessly into the digital age, where social media platforms and algorithmic governance amplify these disciplinary logics. As Shoshana Zuboff notes, surveillance capitalism thrives on "behavioral modification," turning users into self-regulating subjects under the guise of connectivity (Zuboff 195). Here, Foucault's analysis reveals how postmodern power operates not through coercion but through voluntary participation in systems of control.

Foucault's concept of biopolitics from *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 further clarifies how contemporary states govern populations by regulating life itself including health, reproduction, and mortality. The neoliberal era, far from diminishing state power, intensifies biopolitical control through mechanisms like biometric borders (Amoore 137) and

public health surveillance. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, exposed how governments leverage crises to justify expanded biopolitical interventions, from vaccine mandates to contact tracing (Agamben 12). Foucault's notion of governmentality explains this paradox: power operates by fostering individual autonomy while embedding subjects within structures of precarity, as seen in the gig economy's celebration of flexibility alongside eroded labor protections (Brown 67). Postmodern politics, then, is marked by a double movement, emancipatory rhetoric coexisting with deepening subjugation.

Foucault's theories remain indispensable for diagnosing postmodern power, but their limitations invite dialogue with other critical frameworks. Gilles Deleuze's "societies of control" updates Foucault's disciplinary model for digital capitalism, where power operates through decentralized networks rather than enclosed institutions (Deleuze 7). Meanwhile, Achille Mbembe's necropolitics expands biopolitics to account for racialized violence, exposing how certain populations are rendered disposable (Mbembe 92). These intersections demonstrate Foucault's enduring relevance, not as a definitive map but as a provocation to rethink power in an era of algorithmic governance and neoliberal crisis.

Conclusion

The political conditions of the postmodern age are thus defined by a fundamental paradox: the liberation from totalizing narratives coincides with new forms of domination, digital, neoliberal, and hyperreal. Whether this fragmentation enables emancipatory multiplicity or merely masks deeper structures of power remains the central question of our time. What is certain is that the postmodern political landscape demands new theoretical tools, ones that can navigate ambiguity without succumbing to apathy or nihilism.

Chapter Two: The Discourse Analytical Approaches in Studying the Powerful Influence of Language

Introduction

This theoretical chapter discusses discourse and the concepts related to it such as language, knowledge, and power. The latter are parts of the research's conceptual foundation, which is constructed to reach the aims of this thesis by answering the sub-research questions. One of them deals with the influence of discourse on the individual as well as the whole society that may influence the individual as well. Another question digs deep in the core of discourse to investigate the use of language in changing the mindsets of individuals into resisters or conformists. Language is traced by another inquiry that traces the influencing users of language, which are media and both institutions of society and politics. This thesis does not stop at the level of tracing the mentioned influencers but it also questions the psychology of the influenced: how individuals are transformed into consumers of the products of discourse and mass media. Therefore, these inquiries require a solid knowledge of discourse as well as the chosen theories of analysis that deal with the language presented by the characters and institutions. Besides other methods and concepts, this research basically depends on Michel Foucault's critical discourse analysis as the main theory that seems to be adequate in the study of language in the literary works as well as the media studied in this thesis.

1. Textual Analysis

No matter how a researcher uses different theories and methods of analysis, he or she cannot abandon the use of textual analysis as a key to open a door that reveals many linguistic dimensions. As it is known textual analysis is a basic form of critical methodology utilized by researchers to analyze the content of texts, accomplished through close reading (Fürsich 36). The methods used to conduct textual analysis depend on the field and the aims

of the research. In literary and media studies, this analysis is considered the most prominent one in dealing with texts that may be novels, films, and series. (Wilson 63).

1.1. Dealing with Media through Textual Analysis

Approaching media through textual analysis adheres to certain methodology respected in criticizing productions of cinema and television. According to Jack Caulfield, literary scholar and a former editor for Scribbr academic website, in the fields of cultural studies and media studies, textual analysis is a key component of research, which is fundamentally based on taking media and cultural objects – for example, music videos, social media content, billboard advertising – and treat them as texts to be analyzed. Then, a researcher seeks to connect elements of texts with issues in contemporary politics and culture through deconstructing the content of text. One of the most important media literacy skills is deconstruction that refers to close examination of the product of media to understand its messages and the way it is produced. This form of close reading is derived from the theory of Deconstruction introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida whose concepts are presented in another chapter that shows the used theories of media and film analysis. Going back to the study of text, deconstructing a media message not only helps in understanding the creation of the message but it also shows its intended receivers, audience.

From the ideas discussed in Lewis Turco `s book titled *The Book of Literary Terms* published in 1999, this method can expose the point of view of media makers, their values, and their biases. It can also uncover hidden meanings – intended or unintended. This analytical step uncovers the hidden meanings that require further theoretical study; for example, using postcolonial theory, media theory, or/and semiotics. This other step of analysis depends on different aspects of text: word choice, design elements, and relationship with other texts. Usually working within a particular theoretical framework also involves the location of the text and the target audience as important elements that have to be taken into

consideration. All these elements can reveal how media producers construct the embedded messages. In Turco's book, Rebecca Goldstein, American novelist and philosopher, asserts that "In deconstruction, the critic claims there is no meaning to be found in the actual text, but only in the various, often mutually irreconcilable, 'virtual texts' constructed by readers in their search for meaning". In short, extracting the text, deconstructing its elements, and uncovering hidden meanings through textual analysis enable researcher to relate the analyzed text to other dimensions that suggest different interpretations and state more questions.

In interpreting media texts through textual analysis, a researcher experiences the significance of secondary textual meanings that lead to multiple dimensions enabling one to know more about society and popular culture. Douglas Kellner, a leading theorist of media culture, claims that "various forms of discourses, ideological positions, narrative strategies, image construction and effects" (Kellner 10) can be included in secondary textual meanings. In more simple words, this quotation shows how this method can help a researcher to understand and have detailed ideas about how people communicate their ideologies, styles, and experiences through texts. Although film scholars have employed this method for decades, researchers only began in the 1970s applying textual analysis to television productions. Gradually throughout the years, discussing the content of media become more dependent on textual analysis that has evolved into an important method within the field of television studies as stated by Jonathan Gray and Amanda D. Lotz in their considerable book *Television Studies* (2012). Concerning the social and cultural content of media, popular culture's producers tend to adhere to the 'rigidly defined values and beliefs of the social institution within which their work is produced and circulated' (Kress & van Leeuwen 115). This may reason the researchers' choice in depending on this method to unveil the cultural ideology that stands behind a certain society or individual. J. Armstrong supports this claim in an article titled "Applying Critical Theory to Electronic Media History" by stating, 'who

conduct textual analysis of media content are confident that it will yield evidence about a culture in a particular time and place' (*Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media* 155). Through conducting such a study, this research explores the language of *Joker* (2019) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) to show the underlying dimensions of the second textual meanings that unveil the society's popular culture; however, this study needs another method that helps in understanding the power of language persuasion presented by these media products.

1.2. Rhetorical Criticism

Presented as a form of textual analysis, rhetorical criticism is chosen as methodological tool to study the embedded persuasive messages within oratory and visual communications, as well as evaluate their influential capability (Jasinski 2001). Choosing rhetorical criticism has demonstrated one's interest and curiosity in discovering the impact of language in influencing individuals. Language has the potential of urging audience to think, feel, and act in an expected way. This influence has exacerbated through media that uses language that engages with the audience's senses affecting it through creating reactions. Such language communicates readers or/and audiences through speeches, advertisements, dialogues and so on. Out of the immense influence of media languages, this study employs rhetorical criticism for the aim of studying the persuasive messages within oratory and visual communications.

In the words of the scholar William W. Hallo, rhetorical criticism has undergone a long course of development traced back before the time of Plato, in Classical Greece (5th–4th c. BC). Rhetoric began as a civic art in Ancient Greece where students were trained to develop tactics of oratorical persuasion, especially in legal disputes. This golden epoch has introduced the methodical core of Aristotle's Rhetoric. It is the theorem that suggests three

‘technical’ *pisteis*, i.e. ‘persuaders’ or ‘means of persuasion’. Persuasion comes about either through the character (*êthos*) of the speaker, the emotional state (*pathos*) of the listener, or the argument (*logos*) itself. For *ethos*, it is used to convey the writer’s credibility and authority whereas *pathos* it is to persuade an audience by purposely evoking certain emotions to make them feel certain feelings. Concerning *logos*, it means to appeal to the audiences’ sense of reason or logic through the argument. These three old analytical strategies are still the basis of Rhetoric and successful method in understanding how persuasion works although they are no longer enough tools to analyze today’s persuasion of media language.

There is no way of defining rhetorical criticism without defining rhetoric; however, its definition is not definite one because each scholar seems to have a slightly different version. This difference is both necessary and significant in adding more clarification to the explanation of this term. In Edwin Black’s book *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (1965), considered one of the most important books in contemporary rhetorical theory, the writer attempts to open the spaces of rhetoric, which were previously dominated by Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism. In his work, Black examines the assumptions and principles underlying neo-Aristotelian theory and suggests an alternative approach to criticism due to the limitations of the old way. To clarify Black’s view, in his book, he states the claim of the scholar Wicheln dated in 1925 who defined rhetorical criticism as “necessarily analytic careful attention to speaker, audience, style, and habit,” following the Neo-Aristotelian prospect. Black criticizes this definition that neglects other necessary elements important in the course of studying the text’s persuasion. In his book, Black analyzes different texts with a neo-Aristotelian lens, thereby exposing the limitations of this rhetorical theory. As a conclusion of his work, he injects the Neo-Aristotelian way by many concepts relating it to rhetorical theories.

In *The Prospect of Rhetoric* (1971), Black as well as other scholars have exposed the limitations of neo-Aristotelian and have turned to rhetorical theories that take into account different perceptions: communicative technologies, widening the scope in both theory and practice, clarifying the theory of reason, the restoration of rational invention, and cultural and historical specificity in rhetorical situations (238–39). Further in the book, Leff and Sachs, two scholars, discuss this idea through an article titled “Words Like Most Things”, which introduces a definition that encompasses the concept rhetorical criticism and the critic’s role. They claim, “Working from the evidence within the text, the critic proceeds to make inferences about what the work is designed to do, how it is designed to do it, and how well the discourse is framed within its context” (256). This shows the importance of analyzing the text in relations to its essential elements like the introduced arguments, the intention of the writer, the tone, the type of text, and its context. Black reinforces this idea claiming, “Rhetoric is an architectonic art, ‘an art of structuring all principles and products of knowing, doing, and making’” (*The Prospect of Rhetoric* 23). This shows that rhetorical criticism may analyze all human activity because it can be applied on different surfaces of human life.

Using rhetorical criticism in analyzing texts requires consideration of its context in order to constitute valid results of criticism that presents its popular culture. The *Western Journal of Speech Communication* has published an article written by Michael McGee, an American rhetorical theorist, who insists on keeping the orality and performativity of rhetoric alive during the process of rhetorical criticism. In his words, “Rhetoric is artful, but it is artful as a performance, not as an artifact. When rhetoric dissolves into literary criticism, the performative skills of the rhetorician are devalued...” (276). Out of this quotation, it is clear that the rhetorical critic needs to be informed about the historical and cultural situation in which rhetoric is performed. In “*Foucault’s Rhetorical Theory*,” Michel Foucault argues that the notion of argument and persuasion must be contextualized within discursive

formations supported by systems of authority and control. He uses the term of discursive formations as a developed concept in his theory that is detailed in the next sections. What can be deduced is that contextualization is highly required in applying rhetorical criticism. Further in his work, He states that Context itself has been a key term in the development of critical rhetoric (78).

McGee's article "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture" focusses on text and context within a postmodern culture following different approach in reading rhetorical texts. He describes his approach saying,

My way of stating the case (using the concept "fragment" to collapse "context" into "text") emphasizes an important truth about discourse: Discourse ceases to be what it is whenever parts of it are taken "out of context." Failing to account for "context or reducing "context to one or two of its parts, means quite simply that one is no longer dealing with discourse as it appears in the world. (283)

This reflects the importance of considering the context of the text in the course of the rhetorical analysis. In other words, neglecting the context simply means that the critic cannot constitute, through analysis, results related to the time and place of the produced discourse, which may uncover a lot of meaning about the work. The socio-historical context has a tremendous influence on production of the speaker/writer of the discourse as well as the reception of the audience/ reader.

Text and context cannot be fully comprehended without appreciating the role of the audience/consumers. Especially with postmodern texts, the audience is indulged in creating the meanings of the work by the deduced interpretation. In his article, McGee says: 'The only way to 'say it all' in our fractured culture is to provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue them to produce a finished discourse in their minds. In short,

text construction is now something done more by the consumers than by the producers of discourse (288)'. As it is stated by the scholar, audience has a powerful role in reading postmodern texts, which are characterized by being fragmented. This characterization is studied in more details in the chapter that deals with postmodernism. This postmodernist concept is embodied in individual's mind as well as the text that has shown departure from wholeness and conclusiveness and diving into interruptions, isolations, and instability. Thus, the postmodernist critic, reader, and audience have a powerful role in reading text fragments because it is based on decoding language according to its social-cultural significations. If we look to this from a broader angle, we may deduce that is a ping pong game between the text's producer and the consumer, which work on the intellects of both players: the producer uses persuasion to influence the consumer whose reaction depends on his intellectual and cultural background that affects his reception of the perceived ideas.

Away from the consideration of context in analyzing discourse through rhetorical criticism, the theory demands other elements in order to study the persuasion of the text. The Western Journal of Communication's summer 1990 special issue on rhetorical criticism complicates and opens up the possibilities of methodologies in rhetorical criticism. The journal combines many articles that discuss the application of rhetorical criticism in relation to postmodernism as a context and culture. The rhetorical critic has to consider the form of the text as it is related to its meaning and the message behind it. "Words the Most Like Things: Iconicity and the Rhetorical Text." is an article published in the journal where the two scholars Leff and Sachs offer iconicity as a means of revealing "a cooperative interaction between form and meaning" (260), which will provide the rhetorical critic the available theoretical tools to engage in analyzing the persuasion of the text. They claim that content and style are inseparable saying: "Form and meaning are imbricated at every level—the sentence, the paragraph, and the discourse as a whole, and all the elements...interact

cooperatively to produce a structure of meaning” (268–69). This embarks the critic in criticizing the stylistics of the text from the level of sentence to paragraph, and the whole text.

Analyzing the persuasion of the text is a way of argumentation as it includes discussing and proving through arguments the content, the style, the form of the text in convincing its meanings. For Wayne Brockriede, “useful criticism, whatever else it may be, must function as an argument” (165), which may bring response or confrontation. He adds on his claim saying, “It may begin or continue a process enhancing an understanding of a rhetorical experience or of rhetoric. [. . .] The product of the process of confrontation by argument and counterargument is a more dependable understanding of rhetorical experience and of rhetoric” (174). Out of his claims, it can be deduced that rhetorical criticism is seen as an argument that can posit readings of texts to add to our understanding of how texts or speeches work by building on previous speeches and means of persuasion.

At the end of the 20th century, rhetorical criticism has been used in criticizing language and image of visual works in a way that has developed this field of criticism (Blair 46). This new pivot has appeared as a reaction to the increased interest in the field of media that has started to influence individuals from different classes and backgrounds. This statement is backed by Margaret Laware’s study which is published in the journal of *Argumentation and Advocacy* that presents a discussion about the interest in media. The American professor claims that the reason behind this interest is the increase of “visual orientation of contemporary society and the richness and complexity of visual images” (La Ware 140). Most of scholars at that time confessed that the ignorance towards these visual symbols would prevent the understanding of the changing world that surround individuals. (Birkholt, Hatfield & Hinck 145). In the 21st century, many rhetorical scholars study the persuasive messages of the existed visual works, which represent the popular culture of societies. This is considered a noticeable change in the realm of academia that has devoted

much attention of studying popular culture through the language of visual works. *In Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media*, John Armstrong discusses this idea in an article titled *Applying Critical Theory to Electronic Media History* where he says: ‘popular culture was driven by the recognition that much of the power in society was defined and negotiated in people’s everyday encounters with the messages of popular culture’ (151). Criticizing the rhetoric of visual works seems to uncover the concepts of popular culture that is a fact that encourages this field to develop.

Rhetorical criticism’s interest in studying media has continued widening its horizons by applying its methodologies on different visual works. Buchanan-Oliver & Bulmer has stated in their published article *Visual rhetoric and global advertising imagery*, “...it gained wide acceptance as scholars strove to understand the power of visual persuasion in ‘texts’ such as paintings, films and commercial websites” (55). Besides, media scholars also use the methodologies of this criticism to determine how far persuasive messages in popular visual texts can influence audiences’ perceptions. These texts may be extracted from any visual work consumed by individuals such as movies, television episodes, and shows. Scholars study the created influence towards particular subjects that belong to different fields including social, political, and religious topics. Rhetorical criticism is a powerful tool for social criticism analyzing how communication texts influence audience through commenting on current sociocultural trends. Even though the language of visual works has become more influencing to the individuals’ minds that consume it as a product, literary works are still a source of impact by using language without image.

1.3. Textual Analysis in Literature

The importance of textual analysis lies in distinguishing “between the primary, linguistic meaning of a text’s component parts and the secondary, or textual meaning which

those parts acquire through a structuring process internal to the text” (Altman15). In other words, this method helps in analyzing the language of a text as the first step, and then it relates the founded linguistic elements with the broader meanings of the text. As far as this thesis is concerned, the method places greater emphasis on the deliberately constructed elements of the novels such as characters, setting, and themes. In the studied novels of L Reed `s *Poison Girls* (2017) and Arthur Weissmann`s *Going the Wrong Path* (2017), the aim exceeds the level of understanding and explaining how the literary elements contribute to the text`s meanings. It goes beyond that in connecting the text to broader social, political and cultural dimensions. In this work, this method is used to explore the underlying layers of the text and unveils its truths to reach the aims of the research. In short, textual analysis is ubiquitous in studying literature as well as popular media studies and commonly employed in critical discourse analysis. (van Dijk 1991).

2. Discourse Analysis

In the course of studying the reality that surrounds us, the social sciences have witnessed a ‘discursive turn’ along its development which is marked by an increased interest in the role of language in the creation of reality. (Vijay, Flowerdew and Jones 01). This is done through analyzing discourse, and this raises a question here: what is discourse?

Scholars have introduced many definitions that share some common features and differ in other ones. In a short sentence that carries a strong explanation covering the concept`s dimensions, The British professor Dan Laughey defines discourse: “it is a linguistic form of knowledge and power” (139). If we take the expression ‘a linguistic form’, it refers to the level of the phoneme/morpheme, the word, the clause or the sentence, which are formed and structured according to grammatical correctness. These mentioned linguistic sequences constitute a text /paragraph through coherent series of sentences, which present ideas that turn

around a single topic. Language can be analyzed on this linguistic level, but also on the level of the text. In other words, analysts may study language as an abstract set of rules, but more interesting analysis is done by analyzing the level of ideas and how they work as a tool for social action. Here, we understand why Laughey moves from defining discourse as ‘a linguistic form’ to completing the subject of his sentence by referring to it as a form of ‘knowledge and power.’ If we take the word knowledge, according to the oxford dictionary, it is defined as facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Thus, we notice that most of one’s knowledge is acquired by spoken and written communicated language, discourse. Teun A. van Dijk expands this statement by arguing that even our ability to produce and understand discourse is impossible without the activation of massive amounts of knowledge of the world (06).

Coming to the word ‘power’, in the words of the online English Dictionary, it refers to the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Individuals, organizations, political parties and many other sources exercise power by acquiring knowledge, informational power, transmitted through discourse which influence the receiver in a way that urges for certain active or passive reactions. Actually, one cannot discuss the concept ‘power’ without referring to Michel Foucault. This French postmodernist has been hugely influential in shaping understandings of power by relating it to discourse and knowledge. Without expanding more on the concepts of this scholar that are detailed in a coming section, he strongly believes in the idea that ‘power is everywhere’, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault 67). In short, discourse, knowledge, and power are fundamental concepts of the humanities and social sciences.

In linguistics, discourse refers to a unit of language longer than a single sentence. The word discourse is derived from the latin prefix *dis-* meaning "away" and the root word

currere meaning "to run". Discourse, therefore, translates to "run away" and refers to the way that studying discourse is analyzing the use of spoken or written language in a social context. Further in his article, "Definition and Examples of Discourse", he states that discourse studies look at the form and function of language in conversation beyond its small grammatical pieces such as phonemes and morphemes. This is supported by the view of the famous Dutch linguist Teun van Dijk who has largely contributed in developing discourse analysis. Dijk's account of this field of study is interested in how larger units of language—including lexemes, syntax, and context—contribute meaning to conversations.

Studying the concept of discourse requires more clarification by suggesting examples that illuminate its ideological dimensions. Through their edited book *New Perspectives on Grammar Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* (2002), the scholars Eli Hinkel and Sandra Fotos argue: "Discourse in context may consist of only one or two words as in 'stop' or 'no smoking'. Alternatively, a piece of discourse can be hundreds of thousands of words in length, as some novels are. A typical piece of discourse is somewhere between these two extremes." The mentioned examples of oratory or/and written language suggested by the scholars are produced in settings that effect its meanings. This idea can be explained through a quotation from the successful book *Discourses of Domination* (2002) of the two Canadian scholars Frances Henry and Carol Tator. Their work explores the issue of racial bias in the Canadian English-language press that investigates about the way in which the media produce, reproduce, and disseminate racist thinking through language and discourse. In their work, they argue: "Discourse is the way in which language is used socially to convey broad historical meanings. It is language identified by the social conditions of its use, by who is using it and under what conditions. Language can never be 'neutral' because it bridges our personal and social worlds," (Henry and Tator 22). Here, it is clear that the multiple meanings of discourse are produced under the conditions of its time and the society that surround its

production. They do not only affect its production but also its reception and understanding by people. The social and historical context is paramount in the analysis of discourse.

Not only the socio-historical context but also the attitude of the discourse's producer and analyst have led to different labels of discourse. For instance, an analyst may find texts described as being environmental or colonial discourses due to particular attitudes towards certain topic. For more clarification, people engaging in environmental discourse would generally be expected to be concerned with protecting the environment rather than wasting resources. Labeling discourse is discussed in a book titled *Key Terms in Discourse Analysis* by Paul Baker and Ellece Sibonile who claim that discourse can be used to refer to particular contexts of language use. In this sense, it becomes similar to concepts like genre or text type. In their words: 'we can conceptualize political discourse (the sort of language used in political contexts) or media discourse (language used in the media).' Consequently, the label and the conceptual dimensions of discourse are formed by the linguistic production of the conditions and the practices of the social and historical context. Not far from this concluding sentence, Foucault has a quotation that expresses this view and also defines discourse more ideologically as 'practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak.' (Bloomsbury Academic 37).

2.1. Approaches of Discourse Analysis

With a history of less than 50 years discourse analysis has acquired the status, stability, significance and integrity of a well-established discipline, extending the conventional boundaries of linguistics (Vijay K 12). Vijay K. states that Since the 1960s, it has been defined as the analysis of linguistic behavior, written and spoken, beyond the limits of individual sentences, focusing primarily on the meaning constructed and interpreted as language is used in particular social contexts. Though it is located within the discipline of

linguistics, it is in fact an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. In other words, the early conceptualizations of discourse analysis were seen as a branch of linguistic analysis, focusing more on the ‘language as text’. However, in its present form, it has moved to concentrate on ‘language in use’, drawing on insights from sociology, psychology, and communication studies. Besides the latter, it also depends on other disciplines like semiotics and rhetoric, which are widely used in media studies. There are also other fields that use discourse analysis in its inquiries like business and marketing, accountancy, organizational studies, law and information technology (Vijay 12). In short, it has developed as a productive way of knowing more about the use of language in different institutional, academic, and professional settings.

As far as the interdisciplinary side is concerned, this research methodology has attracted the interest of not only linguists and applied linguists, but also other researchers from different fields like socio-political theorists, sociologists, and anthropologists. Organizational theorists, computer and communication experts, business and legal specialists have also adopted discourse analysis in their inquiries. The reason behind this interest lies in the importance of language in unveiling a lot of facts. Thus, theorists from different disciplines depend on this analysis in discovering more about fields of study. As a result, this methodology has witnessed massive development because of its application in varied subject areas. This is how discourse analysis is found in several schools that adopt different approaches, frameworks, procedures and methodologies. They all focus on different kinds of semiotic data, with the aim of deriving insights for a variety of research purposes.

After mentioning the disciplines that has adopted this methodology of analysis, this chapter moves to present the new approaches derived from applying discourse analysis in different research arenas. The editors of *Advances in Discourse Studies* (2008) discuss the development of these approaches mentioning the most used ones:

The discourse analytical approaches that have grown out of these interdisciplinary developments are many, including register and genre analyses, critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, the ethnography of communication, stylistics, mediated discourse analysis, corpus-based analysis, narrative analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, rhetorical-grammatical analysis, argumentation analysis, and many others, and no book on discourse could hope to cover all of them. (2008)

Though all of the approaches demonstrate a concern for the use of language in the social world, they focus on different aspects of its use. They thus introduce many definitions for this world placed in different contexts; for instance, from the immediate conversational context to the larger political, social or economic one. The social context is regarded as the central aspect of communication where this methodology is used; however, there are several ethnographic approaches to discourse analysis that draw their inspirations from anthropology and social psychology.

The distinct approaches vary notably in terms of their focus on text and context. One unchangeable element found in all of them is taking textual, linguistic, data to be the primary resource for social interactions. Conversation analysis is one of these approaches that is rooted in ethnomethodology, a branch of sociology developed by Harold Garfinkel. The central goal of conversational analysis, as Atkinson and Heritage emphasize, is ‘the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction’ (1). Analysts of this approach seems to work on naturally occurring and closely transcribed conversational data. They regard observational data as prone to manipulation by researchers or the subjects themselves. They work on a selection of data, which is conversational and not observational, consisting of

very detailed transcriptions of natural talk like ethnographers. This way of studying the Communicative competence of individuals involves not just mastery of the linguistic system, but the ability to use language in conjunction with social practices and social identities.

Many recent accomplished researches have created a widespread belief that textual data is not necessarily the most important mode used for the construction and interpretations of social meaning. This what the theorists of Multimodal discourse analytical approach believe in their studies. They regard text as just one of the many modes of communication available for social interaction. One of them is semiotic modes that can include gestures, posture, proxemics, visual images, document layout, music and architectural design, to name a few. In a book titled *Reading Images: the grammar of visual design*, the writers Kress, G. and van Leeuwen explain:

The new realities of the semiotic landscape are ... primarily brought about by social and cultural factors: the intensification of linguistic and cultural diversity within the boundaries of nation-states, and by the weakening of these boundaries, due to multiculturalism, electronic media of communication, technologies of transport and global economic developments. Global flows of capital dissolve not only cultural and political boundaries but also semiotic boundaries. (34)

As the scholars state in the quotation, semiotic mode of communication has become a trend in a globalized world where multicultural society rely on developing technology. Multimodality is a constructive for the methodology of this thesis because it is executed in media analysis such as film and TV, which is the scope of the corpus of this research. To illustrate more the new multimodal approach to discourse analysis, the scholar Rick Idema

claims in his book *'Multimodality, Resemiotization: Extending the Analysis of Discourse as Multi-semiotic Practice'* (2003):

In general terms, the trend towards a multimodal appreciation of meaning making centers around two issues: first, the de-centering of language as favored meaning making; and second, the re-visiting and blurring of the traditional boundaries between and roles allocated to language, image, page layout, document design. This blurring of boundaries among the different semiotic dimensions of representation has been linked, on the one hand, to changes in our 'semiotic landscape', and, on the other hand, to analysts' realization that our human predisposition towards multimodal meaning making, and our own multi-semiotic development or ontogenesis, requires attention to more than one semiotic than just language-in-use

The ideas that can be deduced from this illustration is that this approach does not only attempt to integrate all the possible semiotic modes of expressions, but can also integrate various other approaches to discourse analysis. This approach is thus a multidimensional methodology that integrates text, space, social context. In other words, it seems to combine a number of other approaches like conversational and mediated approaches to a single framework.

Mediated discourse analysis (MDA) is an approach that focuses on social action rather than on discourse. Its central concern is analyzing language through interpretation and explanation of social issues. To clarify, it studies the social practices in relation to the society's institutions and power relations. According to Vygotskian psychology, this analysis aims to understand how discourse is used to take concrete social actions, and how, in those social actions social structures and ideologies are created and re-created (Wertsch, J.V. *Voices of the Mind: a sociocultural approach to mediated action*, 1991). In terms of

methodology, Scollon explains in his published work *Mediated Discourse: The Nexus of Practice* (2001), mediated discourse analysis uses resources from different frameworks, which include critical discourse analysis, ethnography and interactional sociolinguistics, and multimodal discourse analysis. Accordingly, it shares several common aspects with other approaches in its focus on the relationships between the society's actions, practices, and relations that reproduce a certain ideology. Focusing on this aim makes mediated discourse analysis in a close position with ethnographers of language along the spectrum of discourse analysis approaches and closer to Critical discourse analysis, which is developed in a coming section.

2.2. The Interrelationships between the Approaches of Discourse Analysis

The approaches of discourse analysis differ in terms of motivations and inspirations that are driven from distinct sources; however, they share characteristics developed from the influence between them. For instance, the multimodal approach to discourse analysis concerns studying texts in other forms of discourse analysis such as visual texts that encompass three modalities simultaneously interacting: the spoken words, the visual text, and the images which intersects with corpus-based discourse analysis and conversation analysis. The latter stems from the concern for social structures and theories in the current approaches of sociology. Mediated discourse analysis has appeared as reaction to what was seen as an excessive emphasis on the analysis of discourse without an adequate understanding of the individuals' concrete social actions. If we take a close look to all of these approaches, we find out that they can be organized along major dimensions: Text/Context and Semiotic Mode. What can also be noticed is that all of these in some sense distinct approaches to discourse analysis differ from each other depending upon the extent to which they regard social context and/or semiotic forms that are used to construct discourses. For instance, multimodal analyses of discourse extend to include other semiotic modes. Going to the extreme of social context,

we find ethnographic approaches to discourse focusing almost entirely on social contexts, whereas conversation analysis shifts the focus to the other extreme, focusing almost entirely on textual data. Mediated discourse analysis seems to be paying varying attention to both textual and other semiotic modes, on the one hand, and social context on the other. The other important common feature common is the use of varying combinations of frameworks and methodologies, which gives a kind of multidimensional perspective on discourse. However, they differ essentially in terms of the objectives they serve and the applications to which they are suited. With the consideration of the texts and the social contexts, in which they are grounded, they produce fruitful perceptions about the use of both language and social practices. No matter how the approaches seem to be different, they overlap between each other in terms of using common tools that combine them on basic theoretical roots, which enable them to develop the analysis of different forms of discourse in new ways. (Vijay K. 12).

3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one of the most prominent methods of analyzing texts in the social sciences besides content and thematic analysis. It is also one of the well-known approaches in the realm discourse analysis. According to the editors of *Advances in Discourse Studies* (2008), it focuses on socio-political domination, which includes issues of social change, power abuse, ideological imposition, and social injustice by critically analyzing language as social action. In the thesis, this approach is one of the foundational theoretical theories that studies the social and the political institutions of the corpus through language. The latter's analysis provides insightful information on social issues as they are largely constituted in language itself. This is traced in the used language of characters as well as the social and political institutions that exist in novels, film and TV series that expose conflicts through its plots. These conflicts concern the institutions, the individual, and the relation between them in the postmodern historical contexts of the stories.

By studying the discourse of the individual and the institutions, the analysis aims to investigate its influence on the practices of society and characters in depriving the free will from conducting decisions freed and independent from mind manipulation. In this case politics and media are seen as threats against individuality. As a result, the characters' path is marked by rebellion or surrendering to the conformity of the mass that rise issues such as unfairness and lack of democracy in society. Van Dijk, one of the founders of CDA, typically characterizes its focus as the study of relationship between discourse, power, dominance and social inequality (van Dijk 14). This analytical approach regards discourse as an essential component of the constitution of society and culture and is viewed as a major form of social action. In this regard, Fairclough, professor of linguistics at department of linguistics and English language at Lancaster university and one of the founders of critical discourse analysis, views this approach as exploring relationship between discourse and social actors (15). For him discourse has potential for the expression of particular ideologies and identities. This view of discourse is also in line with social psychological theories of discourse (Discourse and Social Psychology Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour, Potter, J. and Wetherall, M 1), which regard discourse as a primary vehicle for the construction of social and individual identities.

Critical discourse analysis offers different several approaches to critical discourse analysis and multi-dimensional frameworks that differ from a scholar to another. For Fairclough, he presents studying discourse three separate forms of analysis onto one another: 'analysis of discourse, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice'. As far as Van Dijk is concerned, he regards ideology as the basis for the representation of social groups and hence he finds a useful link between social structures and discourse structures. Generally, van Dijk adopts a more socio-cognitive approach to analysis.

Another scholar named Wodak uses this method to study the issues of racism and anti-semitism by looking critically at the historical dimension of discourse. Each one has a different angle of research in using this approach.

3.1. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Michel Foucault's views on critical discourse analysis theories have been concerned largely with the concepts of power, knowledge and discourse, and his influence is clear in a great deal of post-structuralist, post-modernist, feminist, post-Marxist and post-colonial theorising. The works of this theorist provides the research with different concepts necessary in the analysis of the studied themes. The impact of his work has also been felt across a wide range of disciplinary fields, from sociology and anthropology to English studies and history. His idea has caused heated – and very productive – debate from the 1960s and 1970s, when he emerged as a key theorist, through to the present

Besides focusing on the meaning of a given discourse, the distinguishing characteristic of this approach is its stress on power relationships. These are expressed through language and behavior, and the relationship between language and power. Additionally, the method analyzes how the social world, expressed through language, is affected by various sources of power. This approach is close to social constructivism, as the scholar tries to understand how our society is being shaped, or constructed, by language, which in turn reflects existing power relationships. The analysis attempts to understand how individuals view the world, and studies categorizations, personal and institutional relationships, ideology, and politics. Foucauldian analysis offers a simple recognition that discourse is a body of statements that are organized in a regular and systematic way. This approach studies how those statements are created, what can be said /written, and its context. Kendall and Wickham are two scholar that introduce a methodology of Foucauldian

discourse analysis in their work that first suggests a clarification that discourse is a culturally constructed representation of reality, not an exact copy. In other words, discourse constructs knowledge and thus governs, through the production of categories of knowledge and assemblages of texts, what it is possible to talk about and what is not. the taken for granted rules of inclusion/exclusion. As such, it re/produces both power and knowledge simultaneously as discourse defines subjects framing and positioning who it is possible to be and what it is possible to do. They also add on their view that it is possible to examine regimes of power through the historicised deconstruction of systems or regimes of meaning making constructed in and as discourse. That is to see how and why some categories of thinking and lines of argument have come to be generally taken as truths while other ways of thinking/being/doing are marginalized.

Foucault's focus is upon questions of how some discourses have shaped and created meaning systems that have gained the status and currency of 'truth', and dominate how we define and organize both ourselves and our social world, whilst other alternative discourses are marginalised and subjugated, yet potentially 'offer' sites where hegemonic practices can be contested, challenged and 'resisted'. He has looked specifically at the social construction of madness, punishment and sexuality. In Foucault's view, there is no fixed and definitive structuring of either social (or personal) identity or practices, as there is in a socially determined view in which the subject is completely socialized. Rather, both the formation of identities and practices are related to, or are a function of, historically specific discourses. An understanding of how these and other discursive constructions are formed may open the way for change and contestation.

Foucault developed the concept of the 'discursive field' as part of his attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power.

Discursive fields, such as the law or the family, contain a number of competing and contradictory discourses with varying degrees of power to give meaning to and organize social institutions and processes. They also offer a range of modes of subjectivity (Weedon 35). Foucault argues though, in *The Order of Discourse*, that the 'will to truth' is the major system of exclusion that forges discourse and which 'tends to exert a sort of pressure and something like a power of constraint on other discourses'. He goes on further to ask the question 'what is at stake in the will to truth, in the will to utter this 'true' discourse, if not desire and power?' (113-4). Thus, there are discourses that constrain the production of knowledge, dissent and difference and some that enable 'new' knowledges and difference(s). The questions that arise within this framework, are to do with how some discourses maintain their authority, how some 'voices' get heard whilst others are silenced, who benefits and how - that is, questions addressing issues of power/ empowerment/ disempowerment.

Although discourse seems to encompass almost everything, there does exist a realm of the non-discursive. Foucault has often been interpreted as saying that there is no non-discursive realm, that everything is constructed and apprehended through discourse. For example, the body, while it is clearly a material object – our body feels pain, it is subject to gravity, it can be harmed in accidents. Nevertheless, the body can be apprehended only through discursive mediation, that is, our understanding of our body occurs only through discourse. We judge the size of our body through discourses which delineate a perfect form, we interpret feelings of tiredness as indicative of stress because of discourses concerning the relation between mental and physical well-being, and so on. Foucault is not denying that there are physical objects in the world and he is not suggesting that there is nothing but discourse, but what he is stating is that we can only think about and experience material objects and the world as a whole through discourse and the structures it imposes on our thinking.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to think and express oneself outside these discursive constraints because, in doing so, one would be considered to be mad or incomprehensible by others. Foucault alluded to this difficulty of expressing oneself in discourse when he started his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970. He said: 'I think a good many people have a desire to be freed from the obligation to begin, a desire to be on the other side of discourse from the outset, without having to consider from the outside what might be strange, frightening or perhaps maleficent about it' (51). It is for this reason that Foucault suggests that there are rituals at the beginnings of discourse; to give a banal example, when people begin a conversation in English they will generally begin with 'small talk' that is non-serious talk. It may be about the weather or health, before they begin to discuss seriously; on the telephone, there are a series of ritualised openings and closing routines, which help to get conversation going. We do not often think about these ritualised utterances; we only notice them when someone does not use them.

What interests Foucault in his analysis of discourse is the way that it is regulated. He states 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality' (52). It is this sense of the structure of discourse and the control that these exercises on what can be said which interests Foucault. He describes, in his article 'The order of discourse', the procedures which constrain discourse and which lead to discourse being produced: the first set of procedures, he suggests, consists of three external exclusions, and they are taboo; the distinction between the mad and the sane; and the distinction between true and false. Taboo is a form of prohibition since it makes it difficult to speak about certain subjects such as sexuality and death and constrains the way that we talk about these subjects. The second external exclusion is the distinction between the speech of the mad and the sane,

as Foucault has shown in his book *Madness and Civilisation* (1967), since the speech of those people who have been considered to be insane is not attended to; it is treated as if it did not exist.

In short, discourse should therefore be seen as both an overall term to refer to all statements, the rules whereby those statements are formed and the processes whereby those statements are circulated and other statements are excluded. Within the theorising of discourse, Foucault also uses some other terms: épistémé, archive, discursive formation, and statement, which have become important for those drawing on his work and which help us to outline the structure of discourse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis studies the language of the novel of Chreyl L. Reed 's *Poison Girls* (2017) and Arthur Weissmann's *Going the Wrong Path* (2017) as well as the movie of *The Joker* (2019) and the TV series of *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) through different approaches to reach the aims of the research. Textual analysis is used as a primary tool to study the linguistic dimensions of texts in order to carry on the analysis to other thematic levels. Beside this method, this study also benefits from rhetorical criticism that unveils the persuasive linguistic ways in changing the ideas of characters and thereby shifting the development of the story's plot. Language is also studied from different discourse analytical approaches that offer distinct insights on the ethnographic, anthropologist, and psychologist sides of the study. This is all in an analytical process that work on the underlying meanings beyond sentences. Usually, much linguistics focus on studying the sentence: sound sequences, words, phrases; however, discourse analysis in all its forms extends beyond the sentence boundary to examine extended stretches of naturally occurring language. All the approaches of discourse analysis overlap with each because they are based on one foundation,

which is that of discourse analysis. They may differ in their focus that varies from text, context to semiotic modes.

All these linguistic approaches are employed in this research to answer research questions and sub questions that are centered on the used the influence of the used language. The latter has the ability to turn the thought of characters and societies to conformist or rebellious attitude. In essence, discourse is inescapable, since any use of language will have an effect on individual perspectives. In other words, the chosen discourse provides the vocabulary, expressions used for transmitting knowledge. This is why political science sees discourse as closely linked to politics and policymaking. Likewise, different theories among various disciplines understand discourse as linked to power and state, insofar as the control of discourses is understood as a hold on reality itself.

For the aim of concluding the use of critical discourse analysis as a paramount approach in this study, one quotes Michel Foucault in his saying ‘discourse is power’ to strengthen the aim behind the use of this approach. the research depends on this approach to dig deep in the language of the corpus. Foucauldian analysis is part of this approach that seems to be more suitable for the studied works. Foucault’s work on discourse and power is useful in helping theorists to consider the way that we know what we know; where that information comes from; how it is produced and under what circumstances; whose interests it might serve; how it is possible to think differently. This is in order to be able to trace the way that information that we accept as ‘true’ is kept in that privileged position. At the end, studying the written and spoken language is not enough to reach the aims of this study that requires other critical theories to analyze the chosen film and TV serie of the thesis’ corpus.

Chapter Three: The Film Criticism Approaches used in Studying the Individual's Psychological Change

Introduction

Nadine Labaki, once said 'Cinema is not only about making people dream. It's about changing things and making people think.' The statement of the Lebanese and Canadian actress and director about her work *Capernaum* (2018), which has won a major prize at Cannes' Festival, shows the ability of the visual work not only in stimulating the imagination but also to reconsider one's thought. It is one of the strong influences of art that does not just settle with the aesthetic side, but it drives the mind to think about the existed ideas and fosters new ones. This chapter presents the theoretical approaches employed in studying the cinematic work *Joker* (2019) and the TV series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), which are used in analyzing the visual works to answer the research questions related to the psychology of the individual affected by society, discourse and political conditions.

Before indulging in discussing the chosen theories of film criticism that deal with the visual works discussed in this thesis, one should clarify some basic notions that are needed in approaching media productions. In other words, understanding both the form and the content of the work is an important step before answering the analytical questions related to the chosen theory of criticism selected to approach the introduced thesis. For the form, or the structure as it is referred by some film scholars, it is understood through two levels: micro and macro levels. It starts from the level of composing individual shots, fragments of picture and sound to the arrangement of these elements into scenes, sequences and finally reaching the level of the entire film (Bakilapadavu 02). This microstructure level shows any film as a designed work constituted from visual and aural fragments joined through the concept of editing. According to Blain Brown, filming is ultimately shooting for editorial that transforms

the shots into a complete work (74). Out of his claims in the book *Cinematography Theory and Practice* (2016), Brown believes that the primary purpose of shooting is not taking great shots but giving what the editor and director need in order to constitute a finished product. To explain more, camera shooting must serve the purpose of the film that is actually piecing together completed scenes and sequences. This technique is paramount to form a finished product that holds different themes, has emotional impact, and accomplishes its initial purposes.

Applying the technique of editing through composing sequences of scenes has an impact on the signification of images and what may convey to the viewer and hence how the complete film is experienced. Explaining editing in the theoretical part is for the intention of using it as one of the tools of analyzing the cinematic composition of the images in the studied works. The *Joker*'s film editor Jeff Groth has handled an intrinsic approach to edit the work with extreme care to truly reflect the vision of Arthur Fleck's transformation. He states, in an article titled *Joker: Behind the Scenes with Editor Jeff Groth* published in Film Supply magazine, "Previously, I cut scenes as they came in, but since this is such a character study, we wanted to be able to watch his progression from where he starts the film to where he ends up character-wise...'. Groth has used other techniques of editing to produce the character of Joker as it is reflected through the scenes. To clarify more the importance of this operation, one needs to detail the production of shot as a small element.

The Indian scholar Geetha Bakilapadavu, in her article titled *Film Language: Film Form and Meaning*, states, 'In an individual visual shot, there are many elements like camera placement, lighting, lenses, relationship of frame outlines with elements contained within the frame outlines, duration of the shot etc. that go into its composition. (4)'. In designing a film, producers and directors concentrate on the composition of such individual shots and aural fragments that may be a piece of music, short dialogue, or/and an incidental sound. When we

move from this basic level to higher levels, the film's design emerges throughout the gradual progressive development of this operation. The formation of the work's design shows that these individual fragments are composed to make various segments combined in the production of scenes, sequences, and finally the entire film. From the latter clarification, one can notice that this procedure reflects the inner structure of the produced work. Concerning the macrostructure level, it consists of several elements that form the narrative and the stylistic techniques used in the production such as script writing.

Criticizing both of micro and macro levels of the work's structure/form goes hand in hand with analyzing the language and meaning in order to decipher the coded messages. As far as the film language is concerned, the research studies all the elements that make the film communicates with audience like visuals, sound, editing, acting, lighting etc. The latter help in constituting the meaning of the work that refers to the essence reflected through the story's plot, themes, and characters (Geetha 2). The *Joker's* s film producer Todd Phillips and *Breaking Bad* TV series 's producer George Vincent Gilligan Jr has used the elements of communicating through the screen to form inner structures in filming the events or actions of the works in order to have certain significant expressions. All the mentioned elements are employed followings certain pattern or style to create a complete whole work that has an aesthetic appeal of its own. Here, aestheticism plays an important role in the film's production in reflecting the quality of the created content. What can be understood from discussing the aesthetic aspect of grouping the film's elements are that the communicated content from the screen is substantially related to how or the way it is produced. When the research analyzes these structural aspects of the film, it permits the study to go beyond the apparent meaning.

Structuring the elements of any film is directed by essential leading standards that help in the creation of the film's style. First function, all filmmakers choose the elements of

work for at least one purpose that play functional role in the production. This function may be in the elements' placement, value, motivation in the story (Lacey 16). Another guiding principle is repetition; filmmakers repeat certain elements in their produced works for purposes. Analysts pay attention to these repeated elements for the significance they hold in understanding the story and its layers of meanings. Repetition may be found in the literary devices of the story such as characters, setting, and characterization ...etc. Elements of music, camera positions, or even certain lines of dialogue may be also repeated at different phases in the work. At this level, it is important to state that a repeated element in a film is regarded as a motif that marks the work's style and development. They can be any used element or technique in the work like a symbolic color, significant sound, or a certain type of shot. Other standards that may be opposite to repetition are variation and difference; they introduce contrast and change with different characters, setting, camera movement as well as other elements. This standard is essential in the progress of the work. As it is explained, the presented guiding elements help the research to develop an analytical approach to the productions. By segmenting a film into various scenes and sequences, we can perceive similarities, dissimilarities, and overall progression within the film. (Lacey 18).

1. Mise-en-scene Study

For the aim of reaching the research's objectives in studying the chosen media productions, this thesis uses mise-en-scene analysis to approach the scenes of the film *Joker* (2019) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013). In the case of study *Joker* (2019), the film's scenes are marked by frames filled with tension and other intense emotions felt by spectators through watching the development of the protagonist Arthur Fleck whose role is played by the actor Joaquin Phoenix. Similarly, the TV series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) represents a unique television experience through the style of building the episodes' scenes. Thus, the research's use of mise-en-scene analysis discusses selected scenes that are paramount in the

narratives and its structural foundation. Mise-en-scene is a combination of what audience views on screen as it is and the way they are invited to view it (Gibbs, 2002 p). In simple words, this approach focusses on what can be seen in the picture projected on the screen and the methods used to transmit the messages through the image. This refers to the choice of the filmmaker in selecting the elements included in the shot as well as the style or the way of shooting. For John Gibbs, 'Mise-en-scène' is used in film studies in the discussion of visual style. The word is from the French, although it has been employed in English since at least 1833, and has its origins in the theatre. Literally translated it means 'to put on stage' (5-17). Gibbs' clarification shows the origin of this borrowed expression in English as well as its employment in the field of film criticism.

According to James Monaco, American film scholar, in his book *How to Read a film* (2009), he states; 'the codes of mise-en-scène are the tools with which the filmmaker alters and modifies our reading of the shot.' (47) From this quote, it is clear that this kind of film analysis refers to investigating the director's choices in showing the story of the work. One of the advantages of mise-en-scene analysis is dividing the scene as a large unit of meaning into microelements to concentrate on its communicated codes. Film scholars David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson in their book *Film Art* (1979) state that mise-en-scene consists of setting, lighting, costume, actor's performance. Bruce Kawin in his book *How Movies Work* (1992) includes also the elements of camera placement and movement as well as sound environment. Filmmakers making consistent choices in this area can even determine the nature and tone of a film.

In studying the mood of characters or the whole scene, this analysis explains the significance of placement of subjects and objects as well as the amount of space in the frame, which is informative about the perception of the scene and the narrative. For instance, analyzing the scenes of the protagonists of *Joker* (2019) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013)

requires insightful descriptive analysis to the position of the character and its surroundings in relation to the existed space in order to develop advanced critique to the presented psychology in the scene. The producers of the media productions that are under study in this thesis employ different kinds of space; for instance, they use open space and closed space according to the nature of the scene through filming inside a studio or in an outdoor location (Monaco 6). James Monaco says, ‘Setting up a scene is as much an organizing of time as of space. The aim of this is to discover in film a psychological reality that transcends physical... reality.’ (88) In other words, it gives audience a sense of place, mood and the character’s mindset. They also purposely choose negative or positive spaces through deep or shallow perceptions to reflect the target messages to audience (Cassidy 45 and Pierson 27). The set conveys a specific theme that makes audience indulge in deep thoughts to develop interpretations. (Sreekumar and Vidyapeetham 29). Spectators and critics’ perceptions of media works are affected by the producers’ use of space that controls how the way the work is read. This idea is more clarified through the analytical parts of this dissertation; however, it can be simplified through taking into consideration the strong effects of the choice of space. For instance, when watching a film, a viewer forms his ideas about a scene through several factors that are related to space such as the depth of field, distance from one character to another, size of people, places and props within a certain frame (Sreekumar and Vidyapeetham 28).

The choice of colors, costumes, and make-up in media works has an extreme importance especially the development of the protagonists the Joker and Walter White because it actually does not just show only the internal and the external change of the character but it also directs the narrative. Sean Redmond, Associate Professor of Media and Communication in the Australian University Deakin, explains in his article Explainer: mise-en-scene that the use of certain colors is often adopted to display an emotional or symbolic

meaning. Indeed, this meaning is even included in understanding the characterization of characters; for example, in Gilligan's series *Breaking Bad* first season (2008), Walter white is shown in a green apron cooking meth for the first time, which is thought to represent greed, desperation, and envy. This explains the state of mind of Walter when he starts this business out of desperation, and he continues to do so due to his greed for money and power (Rhea Srivastava). Concerning costumes, the American professor Inga Pierson describes them as 'the most easily noticeable aspect of mise-en-scene' (02). Filmmakers employ costumes to achieve several targets such as presenting characters' personalities, emphasizing particular themes, and revealing social status or/and historical context. Sometimes costumes become the identity of certain characters and symbolize their power, as it is the case of the *Joker* (2019) (Bakilapadavu 08). The actor's make-up also plays an important role in presenting the characterization of characters and bringing their imagined images closer to audience.

Lighting is a key element of mise-en-scene because it directs the vision of audience towards objects and characters under focus and hides others in the shadow for purposes. This technique helps in forming the themes of the work and presents it in a certain style of production. Lighting is used in different ways according to the optimized effect aspired to be reached to audience. This discussion of lighting cannot miss the iconic example of the English producer and director Alfred Hitchcock who mastered this technique in his productions that elevated the technique's value in the realm of cinematography. According to Sreekumar and Vidyapeetham's article, through films like *Notorious* (1946) and *Psycho* (1960), Hitchcock introduces distinct kinds of lighting such as the high-key lighting technique. The writers state, 'it involves the use of fill lights at part with key lights to make the scenes bright and devoid of shadows' (28). Another way of utilizing this element is three-point lighting that increases the depth of the frame and makes the people and objects in the background visible in certain scenes (29).

The performance of actors is another core element in mise-en-scene analysis that stands behind the success of Films and TV series that shine through the roles of characters. Actors are regarded as the face of the audiovisual work that affects the narrative either in a positive or negative way. In other words, the high level of professional performance of actors can be one of the strongest reasons behind the success of the work and the impressive effect of the story. In addition, the incompetent and low level of acting reduces the quality of the work and may lead to its failure. This is why the directors of *Joker* (2019) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) have made wise and visionary decisions in choosing the cast of actors that can depict the roles of the narratives. The actors' performance is important in creating the right mood and conveying the right meaning (Sreekumar and Vidyapeetham 30). For instance, the actor Joaquin Phoenix professionally presents the character of the Joker in a way that reveals the depth of the villain story and gives explanations to his evil characteristics. Through the performance of this Oscar winning actor, he contributes to the cinema with an outstanding iconic character presentation that has become a landmark in the history of artistic and audiovisual productions. Sreekumar and Vidyapeetham explain, 'The modulation in expressions and dialogue deliveries helps the audience to understand the mindset of the character at various parts of the film' (31). Indeed, Joaquin Phoenix' acting uncovers different layers of psychological transformation experienced by the individual who lives in such harsh environment, which is under study in the analytical chapters.

Film sound is an interesting stylistic tool used by filmmakers in producing cinematic works that can be explored through mise-en scene analysis that reveals its massive creative options. Several questions may be introduced in dealing with sound such as how sound can serve the image? What is its source? Audio-visual works may include diegetic and non-diegetic sounds which are two different types of sound distinguished on the basis of their sources. First, Diegetic sound comes from within the story/narrative world within the film's

diegesis (Bakilapadavu 15). In other words, this type of sound naturally occurs within the screen space, which may be the voice of characters and/or sound from objects that are in the story world (Susan Hayward 85). As far as the non-diegetic sound is concerned, it refers to sound that clearly is not being produced within the on-screen space (Susan Hayward 85). These two types of sound split up to other sorts of sounds explored in the analytical chapters. For instance, in the third season of *Breaking Bad* series, Walter white is seen in the second episode singing along with broadcasted song on the radio titled '*Horse with No Name*' by the American singer Neil Young. This song is regarded as a film soundtrack used as both diegetic and non-diegetic sound because its source is from the story and it fills the background of the scene in the same time. The music-soundtrack is an example of non-diegetic sound that contributes in forming the theme of the scene along with time and place through the lyrics and the reaction of the character to this music. In the mentioned scene from the TV series, the song or the soundtrack as it is called has symbolic codes communicated to audience about the thoughts that exist in the mind of the character and the context of the scene. James Monaco, American film critic, states in his work *How to Read a Film* (2000), 'Much of the language we employ to discuss the codes of soundtracks deals with the relationship between sound and image' (Monaco 214). This statement shows the relationship of sound to visuals, that is to say how it works together with the image in conveying the target meaning of the filmmakers (Bakilapadavu 16).

The film score is a non-diegetic sound that refers to an original music written specifically to accompany a film. According to an article published in the BBC by the Australian film director Mark Savage, 'the score comprises a number of orchestral, instrumental, or choral pieces called cues, which are timed to begin and end at specific points during the film in order to enhance the dramatic narrative and the emotional impact of the scene in question'. Despite the fact that music is used for its aesthetic appealing, it is found in

cinematic and television works because it underlines unspoken feelings or psychological states of characters. It may also convey a convincing atmosphere of time and place as well as bridge between scenes. Another fact that has to be stated here is that sound is like the other elements of mise-en scene and editing; it contributes in manufacturing realism in cinema (Bakilapadavu 16). Susan Hayward explains in her book *Cinema Studies: Key Concepts* (2001), 'Of course film is about the illusion of reality into which the spectator gets comfortably stitched' (85). The utility of using these types of sound as well as the creativity of filmmakers in employing this tool is implemented in analyzing the studied media works of the thesis.

The choice of the frame as well as the camera's position and movement form the scene's aesthetics and direct the audience's perception of the film. Framing the scene is one of the elements included in mise-en scene and it is regarded as the fundamental act of filmmaking. In his book *Cinematography and Practice*, Brown claims, 'Choosing the frame is a matter of conveying the story, but it is also a question of composition, rhythm, and perspective (4).' From this statement, it is clear that the filmmakers forge the narrative through the screen by starting to choose what can be seen in the image and thus what can be reached to audience. To detail more this exquisite element, Bakilapadavu explains in her paper saying 'it is the border that contains the image. (12)' In fact, this definition shows that the frame is created by the edges of the projected image, which means that it controls the inclusion and exclusion of what exist in the scene. Film directors tend to employ shooting techniques with the frame to produce creative scenes of different film genres. For the Indian professor Bakilapadavu, this comprises 'the angle of the camera to the object, the aspect ratio of the projected image, the relationship between camera and object, and the association of camera with character, placement of subject and so on (12).' These framing techniques are basic tools of studying the scenes in the analytical chapters in which they will be clarified

through the analysis. However, this part of the thesis explains the most important elements that are included in the frame such as the angle of filming.

In their book *The Filmmaker's Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age* (2012), Steven Ascher and Edward Pincus state that shooting angle marks the specific location at which the movie camera or video camera is placed to take a shot (214). The camera can film a subject from different positions: high, low, or/and the same level. It is important to note that a scene may be shot from several camera angles simultaneously (Bakilapadavu 12). The filmmakers use the mentioned levels' positions in different creative ways that may be more elaborated in the analytical chapters. However, it is worth noting the explanations of the basic angles such as the high angle, which is explained by Brown through the position of the camera 'that is placed above eye height (42).' According to this scholar, the viewer seems to dominate the subject when he or she watches a scene through this angle that reflects the subject as a reduced element in stature and perhaps in importance. For instance, this kind of angle is used in the first episode of the TV series *Breaking Bad* in which Walter White is shown lying on the floor of his bathroom after collapsing. Here, the high angle exposes his fragility and mortality that are studied in the psychological development of this character.

Concerning low angle, Monaco states, 'it goes without saying that high-angle shots diminish the importance of the subject while low-angle shots emphasize its power (Monaco.198).' the scholar's comparison clarifies the purpose behind this type of angle, which is filmed from below the subject with the camera pointing up showing it with magnified size. The same level eye angle is considered as the standard default setting by several scholars including Brown who claims that its use is a general rule when dialogues and ordinary people are shot (42). The use of varied lens height influence audience who is involved in the scene through its reactions that prove its effect and depth to the scene.

Besides, angle of framing can be used to indicate the relation between a character and the camera's point of view (Bakilapadavu 12). Steven Ascher and Edward Pincus develop this element in their mentioned work that shows the individual camera angles and moves as exposers to the camera's point of view. In some cases, they represent a character's experience as it is seen through filming the protagonists Arthur Fleck and Walter White in the studied works (28, 30).

This discussion moves towards introducing camera movement as an integral part of mise en scene analysis employed in studying the directors' choices in reflecting the characters' developments as well as the themes. In this chapter, the aim is not to cover all types of camera movement, but to introduce the most used ones in the studied media works and how they are employed to carry certain narrative, aesthetic, and influential values. Camera movement is a way to amplify Todd Phillips and Vince Gilligan's visual storytelling in reflecting the narratives of Arthur Fleck and Walter White with other literary devices such as tone, narrator, and characteristics. Capturing these elements through different techniques of camera movement show the directors' intentions in creating certain effects through the produced shots.

Audience who interacts with the demonstrated visual elements forms an attitude towards the presented product based on the received effect. Brown states in his book, 'the movement contributes in audience's interactive experience with the action through receiving different senses such as energy, joy, menace, sadness, or any other emotional overlay (Brown 303).' Succeeding in producing an influential effect enables the directors to turn a simple scene into a spectacular moment praised by the critics and viewers. This shows the importance of the skillful and creative use of camera besides keeping up with the revolutionary technological innovations witnessed in film industry.

Before presenting the types of camera movement, it is essential to start by mentioning the absence of movement that refers to static shot employed in dialogue scenes as well as highlighting the actors' performances. Placing the camera in a position without any possible movement is a way of producing many types of effect shots. However, there are variety of ways to move the camera that may be grouped in basic categories to provide a general vocabulary of camera dynamics used in the analytical part. According to Geetha Bakilapadavu, 'to keep a moving figure onscreen, i.e. within the frame, the shot may require any of the following camera movements: panning, tracking, tilting or craning (14).'

For panning, it is the horizontal movement of the camera to the right or the left sides, which refers to panoramic shots (304 Brown). According to cinematographers, it is regarded as an ideal way to reveal the context of the narrative, the setting of the scene or even create suspense in the action. When it is used with a whip, it becomes dynamic in transitioning the view between characters in a scene or between different scenes. Actually, directors claim that moving shots can happen in all kinds of ways nowadays because of the new technology that has helped in making cameras smaller and lighter, and it even created new inventive camera supports. Thus, there are few if any limits on how the camera can move.

As far as tracking is concerned, it is a movement that is also called as travel or dolly, and it is executed by mounting a camera on a pedestal and moving it forward, backward or lateral (Hayward p 442, Bakilapadavu p14). Hayward explains this technique by detailing the execution of the movement that is applied by a low-wheeled platform on which a film camera is moved by means of wheels on tracks in a trolley, a car or even a train (442). The other type of movement is tilting and it is the opposite of panning. It is based on moving the camera up or down in a vertical rotation without changing position (Brown 304). According to Brown, this movement is used to create three-dimensional space by breaking the confined horizontal plane and producing scenes that are close to reality (304). This cinematographic goal requires

another kind of movement called craning, which is referred by cinema critics to any shot from a camera mounted on a robotic crane that explores the characters and their worlds from a bird's eye view. According to Bakilapadavu, the movement signals 'a change in framing rendered by having the camera above the ground and moving it through the air in any direction.'(14) Craning may also incorporate all other types of camera movements like tracking, panning, tilting, etc. the mentioned camera movements are not the only ones that exist in cinematography, but they are the most used ones by the directors who creatively use them for different visual purposes. Brown detail this point in his book where he states, 'moving the camera is much more than just going from one framing to another. Each movement chosen by the director is executed for the aim. The movement itself, the style, the trajectory, the pacing, and the timing in relation to the action all contribute to the mood and feel of the shot (Brown 566).' Here, it is clear that the employment of camera movement results in obtaining various camera angles, perspectives, and shots.

Charlie Chaplin once said, "Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up but a comedy in long shot." (Geduld 156). While this figurative speech reflects strong philosophical view of life, it demonstrates to what extent the shot' choice can drastically affect the tone of the scene from being tragic to comedic. Scholars in this field of study have introduced several definitions to the term 'shot'; however, Brown has an intelligible presentation. He claims, 'If we think of a language of cinema, these shots are the vocabulary; how we edit them together would be the syntax of this language (60)'. Film scholars divide it into two general types: framing shots and function shots. The first mentioned type refers to the included objects and characters in a shot whereas the second type implies the purposes aimed by the director in the shot that serve the phase of editing. Medium, close-up, and wide shots are some examples of framing shots category. Each shot may vary according to the director's objectives; for instance, capturing the face, just above the shoulder, is called close up that aims to show the

emotions of characters. It magnifies the details of the subject by enabling audience to see facial expressions that uncover the thought or/and feelings. The variation of this shot may appear through becoming extreme close up that concentrates on the face. This shot shows mid-forehead to just above the chin, or even closer. Directors use it to submerge in details, which enables them to emphasise the captured expressions, and sometimes it reflects the threat of the subject (Bakilapadavu 13). As far as the category of function shots is concerned, it encompasses several examples like establishing, connecting, and transitional shots. Some shots are not parts of a scene themselves but instead serve to connect two scenes together like transitional captures. This kind of shots is used at the end of a scene, at the beginning, or between scenes like the view of the city, landscape, or sunshine which are regarded as a sort of visual codes to viewers (Brown 66).

As it is noticed from different resources of film criticism, the foundation of this field of study incorporates the interaction of different elements of mise-en-scène that provide a wide range of creative options to filmmakers in order to produce expressive visual experiences. After presenting different aspects of mise-en-scène in this chapter, it becomes clear that explaining each element requires mentioning its relation to the others. In fact, the produced effect is the result of the combination of elements. This is why the description of each element is essential in showing its potential for expression when it is put into practice with others where its role in the interplay becomes significant.

2. *Joker* (2019) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) Through Genre Studies

Studying media productions requires categorizing the research corpus to facilitate the process of analysis that generally depends on genre studies in this field of research. First, clarification is needed for the term genre that comes from the French and originally Latin word for 'kind' or 'class'. This term is widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory,

and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of ‘text’ (Chandler 1). As long as genre studies is concerned, many scholars have introduced different definitions that are founded on one fundamental aim. The latter is stated by the leading media scholar Amanda Ann Klein who claims ‘The aim of genre studies is to bring order, structure, and stability to a group of texts sharing similar characteristics—including characters, plots, themes, and settings—so that these texts can be studied collectively and comparatively (Kackman & Kearney 195).’ This quotation shows that the focus of genre studies is to organize productions on a basis of criteria like literary devices in order to choose the most adequate analytical theories that assure successful study.

Therefore, it is seen as a blueprint or structure that works as a foundation of any text. For audience, it is regarded as a sort of a label that marks the produced work, which helps them in knowing more about their preferences in choosing their favorite production. Actually, the genre of any media work reflects an established relation between the perceptions of the text, the director, and the audience that is founded on the communicated language between them (Kackman and C. Kearney 195). In this relation, audience or spectator is regarded as a consumer of this product including the audiovisual content, the transmitted themes, and the communicated language. The latter is a system of signs decoded by spectators that permits them to constitute knowledge about the media production, environment, as well as themselves.

Not far from Amanda Ann Klein’s definition, Jeremy G. Butler argues, in his book *Television, Critical Methods* (2012), that the conceptualization of a particular genre requires watching many different TV programs as well as knowledge of the characteristics of each genre. Here, Butler expands in the field of criteria in which he states that it may differ from a viewer to another because it depends on cultural conceptions. This is why he refers to the term as a cultural consensus that may be seen from historicist perception. The latter suggests

definitions of genre based on three categories: style, audience response, and subject matter. These categories do not exist in isolation because they frequently overlap one another. As far as style is concerned, it categorizes the TV productions based on how the material is presented. In other words, it concentrates on the techniques of sound and image that are used to construct the program. For instance, techniques of singing and dancing are used in film genres known as musicals that tell stories through characters' performance of songs and chorographical dances. Kevin Tancharoen's movie *Fame* (2009), for example, belongs to musical genre because it follows talented students of The High School of Performing Arts in New York City where they perform designed sequences of movements while singing different songs that express their emotions and attitudes. The latter are involved in the development of characters, forming the tone, as well as constructing the plot of the work that reflects the musical style.

Concerning audience, it is also an interesting element in categorizing productions that obtain its definitions from the critics' expectations towards the responses of viewers. To illustrate, the reaction of laughing normally suggests that the genre is comedy (G. Butler 297). Another important information should be pinpointed here is the variation of each genre that stretch to several subgenres. For instance, the genre of comedy consists of situational comedy which is a genre centered on a fixed set of characters who mostly carry over from an episode to another one. According to an article published on the website of *Punch Line Post*, the genre also incorporates other subgenres like sketch comedy, stand-up and many others that exist in this stream, which is known as a diverse genre in the field. Each genre can be a ramified stream when it includes creative variations in execution and the used elements in production that work for the same goal like driving audience to laugh.

The third and last factor that joins media works into groups is subject matter that refers to the content including the presented stories and the thematic structure (Butler 297). Each genre

presents stories that share similar narrative techniques and structure that reflect conventional characters archetypes. In fact, the narrative structure is considered the first level of content in any cinematic production, TV series, and program (Butler 298).

It is important to mention in this section that genre study is not only about classifying work and grouping films or other productions, it is more about offering a comprehensive presentation to the reader, spectator, or/and the analyst. It is true that this study results in classifying, labeling, and defining different genres; however, it presents certain systems of expectation and theorizing. The latter are paramount in the field of film criticism even to common viewers who bring with them to the movie theaters preconceived ideas about the work. This helps them to undergo a successful constructive experience by interacting with any work and allowing them to form their opinions. The study clarifies the work's elements and characteristics and offers conceptual interesting points from the beginning such knowing the nature of events that happen, the type of the characters' customs, and the plot's developing directions (Grant 181).

This creates systematic ground for anticipation and developed criticism or analysis. John Ellis develops further this point stating that this study offers the construction of a narrative image for each work, he says; "An idea of the film is widely circulated and promoted, an idea which can be called the 'narrative image' of the film, the cinema's anticipatory reply to the question, 'What is the film like?'"(30). It is true that other elements interfere in forming the narrative image like advertising the work through posters and trailers in the press, television, and social networks; nevertheless, the genre is what stands behind all the mentioned elements in constructing the features of the narrative image. It is noteworthy to mention that the assimilation of the dimensions of the work's genre paves the way for understanding and analyzing the content.

2.1. The Genre of *Joker* (2019)

The genre of Todd Phillips' work is a subject of debate by several critics and researchers because of its diverse content, multifaceted representation and quality of performance; as a result, the title of this film 'Joker' is found in several categories. When analyzing the work through the standards of genre studies such as the audience's response, the director's style, and the text's characteristics, one can form a clear image about the genre of 'Joker' (2019). It is important to underline the fact that the character of the Joker has a historical dimension that can be traced since 1940 through the first comic book, which has introduced him as the villain in Batman narratives (Goodwin and Tajjudin 385-402). After that, the character continued being part of the comics' stories until it has appeared on screen and it has evolved through time with the development of technology and the change of media along with it. This leads the discussion to go back to Phillips' production which has created strong response among audience. This may be due to the representation of the protagonist that has changed through the performance of the actor Joaquin Phoenix and the director's individualistic adaptation of the story, which has employed developed techniques of cinematic production. Actually, this representation has shown the past of the character 'Joker' that was not revealed in previous narratives and contexts of produced films and TV series. The historical background, the narrative structure, and the actor's performance are some elements that stand behind the unique representation of the story and the categorization of its genre.

2.2. The Joker's Start as a villain in Comic Books

The character of Joker was first appeared in a comic book before becoming a famous villain in several films and TV series, which are usually related to the well-known hero Batman, and this has always been the initial reason why the work stretches to several genres.

Being brought into existence in the realm of comic books offers this character ramified dimensions through the characteristics of comics. One of the recognized popular traits of comic book stories is that it deals with a combination of elements, a hybrid genre, through a diverse style. The American professor Henry John Pratt writes in his article titled *Narrative in Comics*, ‘comics have both literary and pictorial narrative dimensions: it is a hybrid art form that employs narrative strategies closely connected to literature, on the one hand, and other pictorial narrative media, on the other (107).’ This quotation shows that dealing with a comic story means decoding both language and image, which demonstrates the multilayers of the communicated meanings in the production. This also explains why many of the popular movies, animated cartoons, and video games launched today are adapted from graphic narratives. The latter provide creators with wide range of coded data that enable them to transform the narratives to other types of media.

In their rich illustrated study of approaching media ‘*Remediation: Understanding New Media*’, Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter Clarify the comic’s narrative through concepts of transmedial, remediation and intermedial. In their work, they suggest that such narratives are transmedial phenomena because they can present interaction between different forms of communication, audiovisual and linguistic. They have also the quality of remediation due to their ability of being processed to become another type of production. The other introduced conceptual dimension is that this type of narrative is intermedial in a way that words and images collaborate to relate stories. Creative teams consisting of writers, scripters, and plotters who outline the complete story whereas pencilers, inkers, and colorists render the story in visual form (20-33). This kind of narratives is produced sequentially. Sequential art is an ancient form of expression found in cave paintings, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Ancient Greek pottery, which stimulates the imagination of the viewer to visualize other non-mentioned details of the story. Concerning the mentioned details, they are

included in the images that propel the story forward with the required textual exposition on the page. Such visual elements create transition in the story by moving the narrative from one scene to the next. They may increase the intensity of textual and verbal elements as they may lower or elide it. Additionally, the narrative is also founded on framing techniques that set the setting, tone and other devices needed for the verbal and textual narration. As a result, the characteristics of comic genre contribute to a complex narrative method.

The stories that are produced through comic books are designed to attract the reader's intention through tackling universal themes such as evil, revenge, sacrifice and so on. The scholars Pizarro and Baumeister believe that these stories urge sentiments that are associated with human and social psychology (19-36). Affecting the psychology of audience leads to their reconsideration of previous perceptions, changing ideas or creating new viewpoints. This shows that such stories are presenting cultural products aimed to reach the ideology of the recipient. This idea is developed in Miettinen's work in relation to American society where he states that the superhero comics have strong and fast influence on America's national identity and ideology because of their status as a "disposable commodity" that corresponds and/or responds to the existed cultural trends (Miettinen 12). He says in his own words, 'the overarching belief that American popular culture as a whole somehow mirrors from year to year the deep social responses and evolution of the American people in relation to the fate which has overtaken the original concepts of freedom, free individuality, free association etc' (12). From this quotation, one can deduce that the characters of the superheroes or even the villains that exist in the narratives of comic books possess influential identities that play an important role in affecting the ideology of the spectator.

The strong influence is created through the characterization of the hero or/and the villain that develops along the narrative that has complex plot with several twists. In addition, this kind of characters becomes a product of market that is commercialized through media

and other types of marketing that have developed with technology. Society consumes it as a sort of popular culture item that carries ideals and symbols (Miettinen 12).

The fact that the character of the Joker belongs to comic narrative has granted the story multidimensional characteristics categorizing the film in several genres such as crime thriller and superheroes. Both genres are related by violence as a common feature and constant theme found in comic books, and it is present in the production through different states (Tan & Scruggs 579–583). Physical violence may be the most known and apparent kind of this feature in the movie, which is shown in several scenes such as showing Arthur Fleck, the joker, being assaulted and beaten by five young boys in an alley when the joker performs his job as a clown. Another example of brutal physical violence can be seen when Arthur is being abused by three well-dressed, seemingly drunk strangers on the train. In this scene, audience witness the first crime of the Joker when he kills the attackers. This reflects the revolutionary violence of the antihero resulted not only from the physical violence but also from the psychological violence.

This crime is an action of revenge demonstrated as the mission of the character that proceeds with the development of the plot. Though it is not noble, but this does not change the fact that it is still a mission which is highlighted by Weston (2013) and Darowsky (2014) as one of the three aspects of the superhero genre next to powers and identity (Weston 223-234 and Darowski 3-16). The character of the Joker may lack apparent superpower, but he definitely has the power of influencing his surroundings. Concerning identity, the protagonist expresses his personality through a costume and codename. Another factor that should be mentioned in this analysis is the use of Computer-generated imagery (CGI), which is a technology of computer graphics for creating or improving images that is used in superheroes films such as those of Marvel productions.

Most critics and authors of the superhero genre state that audience shows a surprising reaction towards super villains like fascination and curiosity not necessary hate and antipathy. In the work of Ewald and Richardson (2017), they present etymological study to the origins of the word villain to reach an analysis of the characteristics of this anti-hero. They claim that it is originated from the word 'Village'. The word's meaning is close to rural, freedom and uncontrolled (10). Their analytical study reaches a conclusion that the word villain means a rebellious troublemaker. The characteristic of becoming rebellious seems attractive to audience who is captured by the upheaval in the development of this character, which marks a climax in the narrative. In most cases, audience has the tendency to judge and even hate the super villains in stories; however, this attitude has changed recently due to the directors' styles in introducing the story of the anti-hero in the superhero narratives. According to Darowsky's study of this genre, he traces the change of the audience's reaction to villain characters to 1980s. He refers to this period by the Deconstruction Era when productions witnessed a change in the usual narratives as well as the introduction of several dark anti-heroes who became popular (3-16). This popularity is the outcome of the directors' style in presenting the philosophical dimension of the villain's thought in showing how he becomes rebellious, why he commits evil acts and his relationship with his surroundings.

Philips presents psychological thriller in dramatic way by focusing more on the psychology of the character than just his evil actions, which depicts his relationships with other influencing individuals and institutions. The content of the production revolves around the historical period that witnesses the development of Arthur Fleck to the character of the Joker, and this involves the psychological change that happens to this individual. The director approaches this psychological side of the character by depicting the toxic environment and its relation with the imbalanced psychology and depressed representation of the protagonist. Although the film maker exposes the symptoms of the lead character's mental disorder and

shows his psychological status, but he does not specify the enduring neurosis and psychosis and it is left to the audience's interpretation. The director mentions some crucial details like his traumatic brain injury and his difficult childhood, but he does not reveal clear information. This arose a series of controversial reactions and viewpoints expressed by critics. At this level of discussing the genre of the work, it is important to mention that in the thesis the analytical theories approach the protagonist's personality traits for the aim of clarifying the Joker's mental and psychological status to reach conclusions about his diagnosis and further information. Studying the psychology of the protagonist involves his relationships with his influencing environment including society.

The film of *Joker* (2019) belongs to social genre in dealing with the issues and phenomena experienced in society through the story of Arthur Fleck. Poverty, ignorance, and criminality are some examples of the film's themes that portray the social conditions in the protagonist's society. In fact, the powerful effect of the film lies in representing the story of the famous super villain Joker through Arthur Fleck, an ordinary civilian who endures hardships that may be lived by any other individual in the postmodern age. This is presented through the choices of the filmmaker in portraying an imaginary city, Gotham, in a fictional historical context, but this setting is inspired from the contemporary social world. The latter may be presented with exaggeration, but it is still built on lived phenomena. For example, the production discusses the conflicts between different economic and social classes that culminates to crime commitment. Through the eyes of the Joker, audience notices the deterioration of the city and the inhuman society that seems to not care about the crimes committed to low-class civilians. This includes theft and harassment that seem to be an everyday part of reality.

Concerning violence, it starts in the surrounding society as a visible phenomenon, and it ends with its appearance in the characteristics of sadistic killer clown or the human behind

the mask, Arthur Fleck. The movie's social portrayal depicts the family side of the protagonist in uncovering his hidden past, which is actually one of the reasons of his mental and psychological disorders that appear in his adulthood. The film depicts violence as the result of endured psychological states derived from social issues. In his dialogue with Murray Franklin, the Joker is asked if his rebellious acts are related to politics, and his answer is 'it is not political'; nevertheless, the motives in the Joker's story are inspired from dark political aspects as much as social ones, which are going to be analyzed in the analytical part. Discussing the film's genre reaches a level where it is clear that the production mirrors social realities. Of course, this depiction is not necessarily explicit, but it offers a certain vision and interpretation to the social and political reality. Phoenix's representation of the Joker is different from all other previous productions of this particular character, introducing him in a way less cartoonish and more realistic.

2.3. The Genre of *Breaking Bad* Series

Breaking Bad is a Television series known by its characteristic of belonging to mixed genres which stems from its complex narrative. In this case of genre mixing, the TV series can be considered as a hybrid production that stretches to different genres based on the themes discussed in the story's plot. It is an episodic serial program based on an open-ended episode or show where most story lines continue from an episode to another. The series may be strongly categorized in the new western, contemporary, or modern-day western genre due to the dominant elements present in the production. For instance, the producer Gilligan refers to the presence of Albuquerque city in calling the show a Western. This place is New Mexico's largest city that lies in in the Chihuahuan Desert, in a broad valley. It is not just a location, but it is also the name of a famous American western film produced in 1948 directed by Ray Enright and starring Randolph Scott. This film is based on the novel *Dead Freight for Piute* (1986) by the western writer Luke Short whose works, at least ten of his

novels, were adapted into films. Actually, location is an important key element in defining Western films, and Albuquerque is a famous location known for western themes. Barry Langford, a theorist of genre studies, states: ‘The Western is, of course, supremely a genre of exteriors. More accurately, it is a genre where definitive experiences and understanding are usually found out of doors, preferably in the unconfined spaces of prairie, sierra or desert’ (Langford 64). The theorist’s quotation shows that this genre and its characteristics are founded on the location of the film that is situated outside the confined places. For example, *Breaking Bad*’s first episode starts with impressive opening that reflects vast lands of New Mexico desert through long shots without capturing other elements in the scene.

The work maintains some traditional characteristics of the western genre as well as introducing modernized and new elements. In an interview with Bill Nevins, *Breaking Bad* creator Vince Gilligan said: “Gradually, after the first *Breaking Bad* episode, it started to dawn on me that we could be making a contemporary Western. So you see scenes that are like gunfighters squaring off, like Clint Eastwood and Lee Van Cleef. (2013)” The producer was sure from the beginning that the work belongs to the western genre; however, the creative style of production and the narrative have placed the series in a contemporary sub-genre of the western. The story presents Walter White as a responsible father who takes care of his family like most western protagonists; however, he is not shown as a lonely gunman. On the contrary, he appears as a skillful modern entrepreneur who wants to invest his intelligence and education in illegal business in the frontiers, which brings money to his family. Beyond this fact, Walter demonstrates violence in his pursuit for a feeling of masculinity more than his desire to protect his family, which does not correspond to the western characteristic. The latter usually shows the protagonist as a character who uses violence for the aim of keeping the family safe and united, but unlike the Westerns’ traditions, Walter’s violence breaks the family’s bound at the end.

The western genre is redefined by the filmmakers' new styles who constantly reinvent and modify what is familiar to audience. The New York Times writer Segal discusses the series' genre by claiming, 'The story and setting were an update of the spaghetti Western, minus the cowboys and set in the present' (Segal 19). This critique compares the production to the sub-genre of spaghetti western without the use of cowboys' characters because the story is set in a contemporary time. Indeed, *Breaking Bad* shares several features with spaghetti western sub-genre, which is known for its heavy names of directors and successful productions in the history of cinema. Actually, the spaghetti western is created in Europe, and it is generally directed by Italian filmmakers who dealt with the theme of money making in immoral way, which is a central theme in *Breaking Bad* series (Tuncel 14).

This sub-genre is characterized by exaggerated use of violent scenes that incorporate battles with shootings, dynamite, and bloody injuries, which are generally associated with stories of revenge that glorify the concept of manhood. This reflects the common narrative and thematic aspects between this genre and Vince Gilligan's series. This sub-genre does not only differentiate from others genres at the thematic level, but it has distinct visual style that is shown through unique use of cinematography techniques. For example, most of the produced films like *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), and *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) are characterized by individualistic filming of wide screen images. According to Jakob Straub's article *The Ultimate Spaghetti Western Film Guide* (2022), Directors use spherical lenses that refer to optical lenses employed with curved surfaces that cause light rays to converge or diverge the shot. They reflect impressive effect by using both close-ups and extreme close-ups with dramatic zooms in depicting the intense confrontations between characters who undergo tough battles and are expected to make moral choices.

Concerning film scoring and soundtracks, the Spaghetti Western films are famous with the employment of a new style that resonated on a long scale through the score of the composer Ennio Morricone in the film *For A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) where he used whistling and introduced electric guitars. After mentioning the most essential details of this sub-genre, this discussion cannot skip the name of Sergio Leone who is one of the most representative directors of the genre. He made the famous Dollars Trilogy sequels starring Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and Eli Wallach. This film director and screenwriter was a source of inspiration for Vince Gilligan who admitted this fact in several interviews, and it was proved by the critical studies of the series that have shown the cinematic influences of the producer (Tuncel 14).

Due to the complexity of the narrative and stylistic features of the series, *Breaking Bad* also belongs to crime, thriller, and gangster drama genres. The fact of belonging to contemporary Western genre demonstrates other thematic layers that may be shown through plotting, gun firing, and murder scenes, which place the work in these genres. The story of Walter White with his psychological transformation reflects the moral dilemmas faced by this antihero. The latter changes from being a high school chemistry teacher to methamphetamine producer after discovering his lung-cancer. Finding out that working in this governmental job cannot help him to afford the money for medical treatment puts this character in economic issues that made him lose faith in the government system.

At this point, he decides to gain money for curing himself and taking care of his family, thus he commits illegal crime by preparing methamphetamine drug. This genre deals with illegal and ethical complexities that are shown throughout the work's long plot. This includes actions that create exciting elements especially when Walter and his brother-in-law Jess are about to commit crimes. Such features create thriller and make audience feel the tension of the story and enjoy suspense. This is part of the gangster drama genre, which

portrays the antihero in idealistic way driving audience to the side of the criminal. Vince Gilligan 's genius script and production take a distinct approach in presenting an antihero whose characteristics situated between legality and criminality, which cannot be found in traditional crime dramas. Usually, protagonists believe in legal lifestyle or they are against the law; nevertheless, Walter white or Heisenberg, his created name, reflects an intriguing duality that captures the audience' attention and gives the narrative an innovative angle.

Vince Gilligan's inventive narrative angle has created a diversified story that is categorized in political genre and social drama because it deals with the individual 's issues with the political system and society. The producer presents a common character who is a loving husband and father working as a high school chemistry teacher known as a nice citizen with high moral values. However, this presented image changes in dramatic way when Walter white faces the harsh truth about his tragic diagnosis, lung cancer. Then, he uses his scientific knowledge in preparing drugs, which creates a secret life of criminal activity. Through such narrative, the work shows the struggle of middle-class workers in not obtaining standards of a decent life that ensure the ability of medical care in sickness as well as enough money to the family after death. The political system does not afford secure medical and financial insurance to government workers let alone when the government faces economic crisis of 2007-2008, recession period. The series depicts the fragile government's economy who fails in protecting the citizens' right of having a decent life.

The crush of the market economy has led the protagonist to challenge the untruthful political authority. In other words, this derives this individual to commit illegal conducts against his ethical standards to obtain money. The television production immerses in the development of the character reflecting social and psychological issues lived in real life by showing how chasing illegal money can blur one's sense of morality and derives him to aggravated criminal path. Additionally, the narrative discusses conflicts between the

individual and society such as the theme of social discrimination and bullying. This is shown in different scenes when Walter's disabled son Flynn is bullied by other teenagers in public places.

In order to create a realistic fiction work, the producer presents the series' plot in several styles such as black comedy and film noir to demonstrate the different moods and atmospheres lived by individuals. Some actions and dialogues are realized with comedic devices such as the dissolving bathtub scene. In this example, Walter white uses his scientific knowledge of chemistry in his plan of getting rid of dead bodies that is based on dissolving the corps in Hydrofluoric acid. Nevertheless, Jesse, his crime partner, does not find the specific plastic bin Walt instructed him to use, so he decides to dissolve the corpse in his upstairs bathtub. The joke here is that he is ignorant about the characteristics of the acid that reacts with ceramic, metal, and glass except plastic. However, the hydrofluoric acid dissolves the ceramic and metal bathtub along with the body resulting in a huge hole that breaks the second floor. This creates a comedic scene deriving audience to laugh on the unsuccessful experiment of Jesse. The dialogue between Jesse and Walter contains parody and satire as comedic devices used in the discourse of black comedy genre.

As far as the film noir is concerned, several critics and producers agree that *Breaking Bad* has strong Neo-noir or film noir elements though the production is a series and not a film. Indeed, the production reflects several elements and characteristics of the genre such as stark lighting effects, which are used to create a dramatic effect achieving a unique cinematic look. The created contrast of light and shadow affects the viewer's perception leading him or her to see different layers of the presented character or object. In other words, the producer chooses this technique for several purposes such as showing the superficial meanings by putting them under lighting whereas others are placed in the shadow receiving more depth. This provokes an emotional drive among audience who is faced in such scenes with

underlying existentialist philosophy that is achieved along with other elements of the scene such as the character's performance. *Breaking Bad*'s producer uses the genre's characteristics to achieve a social commentary production. By using intricate plot, the narrative reveals the flaws in the government's institutions while showing the individuals' struggles that expose the dangerous, self-damaging side of human nature. In short, the work belongs to homogeneous distinctive genres that have created a dedicated audience fascinated by the narrative's updated life commentary.

In Marisa Mazart's work *Breaking Bad: On the Western Genre and Audience* (2014), the writer compares the TV series with the comic-book based *Batman Begins* stating, '...the action, crime film-noir style of Christopher Nolan's Batman films is similar to the dark, crime, film-noir component of *Breaking Bad*. What comes out of the collaboration, the pressures and constraints, is an American Western aesthetic mixed with dark crime, film-noir and science (18)'. The chosen film noir's cinematic aesthetics enable Vince Gilligan to reflect the journey of a common high school chemistry teacher who becomes a master wealthy Crystal Meth cook in all New Mexico's Albuquerque as a unique existential life experience. Being on the top of a drug empire requires more efforts and sacrifices from the protagonist who refuses to give up his criminal life to save his family; instead, his desire for criminality has increased by his enjoyment of power and crime.

3. Semiotics

Cinematic productions and TV series are intrinsically and primarily iconic works that embody sensory experience in its visual and auditory form, which is closely seen through semiotics. The element of sign constitutes a large part of media works, and it is regarded as the center of study of several schools such as the Tartu–Moscow School and the Belgian Mu School. Each school presents certain theoretical concepts in approaching the element of sign.

For instance, the Belgian Mu School studies visual semiotics considering it as an interesting subject area of analysis in contemporary studies. The scholars who belong to this school analyze the sign in all its forms that can be a word, a sound, a touch or a whole image. They question the relationship between sensorial experience and its signification. For example, Belgian theorists such as Jean-Marie Klinkenberg and Jacques Dubois have published articles and books like *A General Rhetoric (1970)*, demonstrating that investigating the signs through linguistic structures, structuralism, is not enough. Their research stresses several points including the study's requirement in broadening the scope of research to cover storytelling, anthropological and social criteria to come up with complete images of investigated structures. An important remark has to be mentioned here is that all the schools that exist in the semiotic scope are unified by the perception of regarding all phenomena as signs that embody layers of meaning and carried by systems of relations.

Ferdinand Saussure and Charles Sanders Pierce are regarded as the origins of the two famous branches to all of semiotic theories. One branch is known as semiology derived from the productions of Saussure. This Swiss linguist has contributed to linguistics as well as other fields like psychology and anthropology, and he set the ground for developed semiotic theories that appeared in recent times. The other branch is based on the works of the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce. He has created theoretical perception with distinct characteristics known as Peircean semiotics. He focuses on the detail of sign typologies and the process of semiosis. There are several differences between the Saussurean and the Peircean approaches; nevertheless, the major distinction lies in their vision to the model structure of the sign. For instance, the Saussurian School believes in the two-part signifier-signified distinction; however, the Peircean school favors the three-part model that constitutes of Representamen, Object, and Interpretant. I believe his Phaneroscopic categories

of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness describe all forms of semiosis from the molecular to intellectual.

Most of media critics who use semiotic analyzing in studying visual works advocate Peircean approach because, in short words, they regard it as an interactive system involving many levels of thought. For more clarification, this study permits the analyst to deduce several *interpretants* to the same object, which opens multiple possibilities to the analysis. In short, Pierce` semiosis provides a wide range of meaning to studies especially that of cognitive science psychoanalytic, and film analysis (Yakin and Totu 4-8).

For semioticians who study visual works like films, television, and advertising consider the image a central part of our mass communication sign system that requires insightful analysis. Alex Sobur, associate professor, states that films are not only composed of signs but they also include various sign systems that work together to achieve the desired effect (59). In fact, the strongest characteristic and effect of films may be its resemblance to reality no matter how artistically presented. To achieve such effect, Producers use different signs such as indexical and iconic signs to reflect universal meanings. Actually, they are used in the *Joker* film (2019) as social objects reflecting the lived conditions and phenomena, and they contribute in presenting the work as a single character-based work through concentrating on the protagonist`s life. This kind of study deconstructs the used symbols to investigate the meaning behind them in order to analyze the journey of Arthur Flick from a decent man to the famous villain Joker.

According to Umberto Eco, semiotics is a theory about the study of signs and meaning in language and culture. Semiotics is a discipline that investigates how signs (both linguistic and non-linguistic) are used to convey message, create meaning and influence human understanding of the world around them (Hoxha 12). In her article Semiotic Analysis

of Valak and Lorraine in ‘The Conjuring 2’ film Yulia Sofiani Zaimar provides clear definition of semiology stating it is as a qualitative method of research that was successfully transferred to media studies by researchers, who needed more approaches to explain media studies (220). Indeed, Eco and Zaimar show that this approach has helped in investigating the meanings behind the signs especially with employing the concepts of connotation and denotation that are applied in this thesis. The roots of the latter concept are actually founded in Saussure’s famous work of *Course in General Linguistics (1916)* where De Saussure explains that a sign consists of signifier/signifiant and signified/signifie. The latter are being an entity as paper sides like structural aspects and the sign relation to its context, the users of the sign (society) as reference. This theorist has developed the concept of (signifier/signified), and explained the notions of connotation and denotation. However, they are more developed by the French Theorist Roland Barthes who extended Saussurean semiology to the contemporary mass media fields, especially popular culture. In semiotics, the dichotomy is used in describing the sign (signifier) and its concept (signified) relationship. Denotation is treated as definitionall, literall, obviousl, or common sensell meaning of a sign, while the connotation refers to additional cultural meanings found from the image or text (227).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presents with analytical lenses mise en scène analysis, genre studies, and semiotics as the approaches that are used in analyzing the film of the *Joker* (2019) as well as the TV Series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) studied in the thesis. This theoretical part explains the choices behind the chosen approaches that are seen suitable to answer the questions introduced in this research work. For Mise en scene analysis, it is chosen to study the cinematography elements of scenes and their utility in building the thematic and narrative structure of the story. Using this cinematic analysis permits the analysis to reach the motives of the producer behind the used techniques. It is important to

mention that mise-en-scene has a considerable influence on the audience in terms of their understanding of the work, which makes it an interesting analytical method to enrich discussing the effect of the production. As far as genre studies is concerned, the analyst cannot work on a cinematic and a TV production without knowing the characteristics of the genre that help in building the analytical work. This is why genre study is chosen in this dissertation to facilitate investigating the research inquiries and uncover other sides of the analysis related to the type of the studied material. This chapter has clarified the strategies and the features of categorizing the visual work and how they are reflected on the analysis. Concerning semiotics, it is an intrinsic approach used in studying the signs that are used in the image shown to spectators, which reflects the presented narrative and the producer's style as well as constituting the opinion of the viewer. Additionally, the purpose behind this choice is analyzing the signs as one of the means of communication in the film and the ways in which they work out an expressive narrative pattern. Studying the correlations between the signs and considering the context in which they are presented unveil the purpose of their utility and uncover their meanings related to the story. At the end, this theoretical chapter explains the chosen approaches applied in the analytical part in studying the visual works, and it justifies their beneficial utility in answering the research questions of the study including the impact of society on the psychological transformation of the individual.

Chapter Four: the Psychoanalytic and Social Approaches in Studying the Individual's Transformation in the Postmodern Age

Introduction

Albert Einstein once said, 'All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual (15).' Through the Nobel Prize winner's quote, it is evident how the success of society is related to its constructive impact on the individual, but what if it has destructive impact that breaks down the individual by affecting his or her psychology. The progress and prosperity of society are directly related to the chances that exist for the individuals' development. Understanding the psychology of the individual in contemporary life and its complex relation with society leads to the conscious awareness about the experienced issues. This may enable resolving the problems in order to know what is necessary for a stable state of mind. Investing in the individuals' capacities is ultimately an investment for the success of society through the collective capabilities. This thesis studies the dichotomy of individual and society in the postmodern age through the chosen literary and media works. This theoretical chapter presents the foundational theories and concepts used in studying the impact of society as well as the psychology of the characters.

1. Psychoanalytic Approach

Throughout time, the psychological dimensions of literature have been the center of interest of many philosophers, theorists, and critics who study texts for different aims such as investigating the author's motivations and the audiences' response. Such studies are relatively considered recent in the realm of literary research because it is founded on applying principles of psychoanalysis to the study of literature. This science is founded on the works of Sigmund Freud and carried on by other philosophers such as Alfred Adler and Carl Jung

(Tarzian 2). Most historians state that the early 20th century marks the beginning of modern psychology that has led to the development of the psychological analysis of literary texts, or as it is known psychoanalytic literary criticism (Schultz 301). In simple words, this analytical critique is based on using the concepts introduced by well-known psychologists to analyze literary texts.

Before the series of developments that marked the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud had introduced a way of thought to one's self through his theories that stretched to several fields including literature. Understanding literary texts is elevated to another high level because of the valuable psychoanalytic theories that help readers and researchers to develop more questions and reach answers concerning the content of literary production. Such investigation enables the researcher to discover facts that are not said directly through the text about the human psyche such as the consciousness, the unconsciousness, and the ego, which are introduced by Sigmund Freud and then developed by other psychologists such as Carl Jung. Investigating the psychological transformation of the individual in the postmodern conditions requires psychoanalytic theory that provides the concepts and tools to analyze the protagonists Walter white, Arthur Fleck, Natalie Delaney, and Silvio Botelho. The foundational concepts of psychoanalytic are introduced in this theoretical chapter to clarify the investigation performed in the analytical part.

1.1. The Diversity and the Development of Psychoanalytic Criticism

Before explaining the needed concepts, it is important to mention that various forms of criticism are introduced as approaches under the umbrella of psychoanalytic theory, which are presented by theorists who have continued developing the theoretical research from Freud's concepts. For example, the French poststructuralist Jacques Lacan has adopted Freudian perception and reinterpreted the concepts from linguistic point of view creating

what is known as lacanian approach (Manjunath 2). The starting point of his theoretical view is the concept of the unconsciousness that is seen as a linguistic manifestation (Manjunath 3). Out of this claim, he has developed several psycholinguistic concepts such as Mirror stage. Other theorists such as Julia Kristeva has reinterpreted the psychoanalytic concepts from feminist approach producing the concept of '*écriture féminine*' (Kale3). These examples are mentioned in order to explain the diversity of this theory, serving the study of different fields, and the researcher's choice of the approach among this theory.

It is essential to note the figures that have developed psychoanalytic criticism after Freud, and have benefited the field of literary criticism. The first theorist that should be mentioned here is his biographer Ernest Jones who published well-known book titled *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1948) (Young 2). The latter has been a reference for many studies. It deals with the interpretation of Hamlet's indecisive behavior in committing the crime of murdering his uncle. He studied this literary classic in terms of the protagonist's ambivalent feelings toward his mother. Another influential writer is Otto Rank who produced *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909), which visited Freudian concepts that revolve around the artist's productions that are analyzed as fantasies of wish fulfillment (Singh and Luthra 11). An example of these fantasies is the visualization of the image of the hero that can save people from evil sources. Ella Freeman and Marie Bonaparte also contributed to this field through their notable works (Alexander et al, 410). Their works deal with the psychoanalytic dimension of language and more specifically figures of speech like metaphors and alterations. For instance, Marie Bonaparte produced expanded research on the literature of Edgar Allan Poe that has shown his orphan reality and his influence by the death of his mother. the psychoanalytic criticism has revealed the secret beyond the writer's creativity (Alexander et al 411). I. A. Richards, William Empson, Lionel Trilling are other pioneers in the development of psychoanalytic

who belong to different generation that has elevated the level of this kind of criticism (Hickman 17-23).

Sigmund Freud developed most of the foundational concepts of psychoanalytic on biological basis (Yılmaz 9). At the end of the nineteenth century, he was trained as a medical doctor in Vienna where he could observe and test his psychological ideas (Yılmaz 9). The clinical treatment and therapy of patients have led the Austrian Neurologist to be close to the psychological issues of his patients; as a result, he could explore the psyche's enigmas (Sibi 3,4). Sigmund Freud's work in the field of psychoanalysis was ground breaking because it answered questions about the human psyche in a way that no one else had before him. He has introduced several concepts that are crucial in this research because it helps in understanding the psychological transformation of the studied characters in this thesis. In this theoretical chapter, one cannot detail all his concepts, but it is essential to explain the major ones that are needed in the analytical part. For instance, in the cinematic production *Joker* (2019), the antihero Arthur flick undergoes psychological issues that lead to instable mental state that is understood by some critics as mental illness. To dig deep in his case, one has to clarify the essential concepts needed to analyze the psyche of the character.

1.2. The Individual's Psychological Transformation through Freud's Developmental Stage Theory

To understand the development of the personalities' characterizations, the research demands Freud's personality theory that is structured on three parts: the id, ego, and superego (Schultz 310). According to Freud, the human behavior is formed through an interaction between three components of the mind. These three parts are located in other parts of the psyche, which are the consciousness, precociousness, and unconsciousness (Schultz 311). Sigmund Freud compared the conscious to a small portion of an iceberg that is visible above

the surface of the water. In the book of *A History of Modern Psychology*, the writer explains this Freudian theory of the iceberg by claiming that the conscious portion, is small and insignificant. It presents only the surface or the visible part of an iceberg; that is, only a superficial glimpse of the total personality. Freud compared the submerged portion to the unconsciousness because the conscious mind is not aware about the submerged part. Actually, this what may mistake the real cause of the individual's behavior to an observer. Freud stated that part of our mental functioning is unconscious (Schultz 99). The iceberg theory suggests that 'The vast and powerful unconscious—like the portion of the iceberg that exists beneath the water's surface—contains the instincts, those driving forces for all human behavior' (Schultz 309). Freud believes that the mentioned three parts develop at different stages in the individual's lives (Schultz 312). They are regarded as systems or in other words hypothetical conceptualizations of important mental functions. Although each part of the personality contains unique features, they interact with each other to form a whole body of attributions. It is important to note that these parts make a relative contribution to an individual's behavior.

1.2.1. The Concept of the Id

Out of Freud's studies on the id, it can be defined as the primitive and instinctive component of personality (Sibi 4). It belongs to the unconscious part of the psyche, and it is characterized by being an impulsive part that responds directly and immediately to basic urges, needs, and desires (Sibi 4, 5). It is important to mention the example of the newborn child whose personality is all id. Later In his or her life, the child develops an ego and super-ego (Sibi 4).

In order to understand the character's psychology, it is notable to understand how the psyche's part works. This is the first step before collecting the data that helps in forming

psychological hypothesis about the state of the characters. The id is involved in understanding the thought and reactions of characters to their social, political and economic environment. For instance, in order to analyze the psychology of Walter white or Arthur Flick when both find themselves facing an economic breakdown, it is intrinsic to trace the apparent formed reactions from the internal parts of the psyche including the id. Coming back to presenting this part, it is known as the source of the primary process of thinking. Psychoanalysts characterize the id by being primitive, illogical, irrational, and fantasy-oriented (Endrawti et al 2). Their studies also show that this version of process thinking has no comprehension of objective reality, and is selfish and wishful in nature (McLeod 4).

Moving from the id's characterization to the point of how this part of the psyche operates in the individual's life, taking into consideration that the thesis revolves around studying the individual's psychological transformation. Actually, it operates on a foundational concept called the pleasure principle (Freud 40). Its objective is to immediately satisfy every unconscious wishful impulse no matter of its consequences (Freud 43). The explanation behind the name of this concept is the basis of its operation in the psyche. In other words, when the id succeeds in achieving its desire, the individual experiences pleasure. However, when this desire is rejected, the individual experiences unpleased feeling or tension (Shill 2). The work of this principle is also embodied in the id's two powerful biological instincts or drives as they are named in psychology's books and articles. According to Freud's description of instincts or drives, they are regarded as innate and universal notions. They are also constant feelings that accompany the individual during his or her whole life. The formation of one's personality incorporates several elements including instincts which foster one's acts and form his or her behaviors (Schultz 368). The first one is sex or life instinct, it is called Eros, and it operates by a moving impulse named Libido. The latter is the form of energy through which life instincts are manifested (Schultz 309). The second one is

death or aggressive instinct, and it is called Thanatos. Freud states in his book *The Resistance to Psycho-analysis* (1925) that the life instinct is needed for the survival of the individual because it controls life-sustaining activities such as respiration, eating, and sex (Freud 1925). On the contrary, the psychoanalyst as well as other theorists claim that Thanatos, or death instinct is a set of destructive forces in all human beings (200). When this energy is directed outward onto others, it is manifested in aggressive and violent acts. According to the Freudian approach, Eros is stronger than Thanatos because it is the moving force behind people's survival rather than self-destruct. As the id operates within the unconscious part of the mind, it is not affected by reality, logic, or daily life. It does not have a direct way of being in touch with the external world; as a result, it does not change with experience or time and it remains infantile in its performance throughout a person's life. (Kli 2,3,5)

1.2.2. The Concept of the Ego

Now, the theoretical discussion moves to present Freud's concept of the ego, which is another notion essential in understanding the individual's psychological state. The Austrian Neurologist defines the ego as 'the rational part of the psyche that mediates between the instinctual desires of the id and the moral constraints of the superego, operating primarily at the conscious level.' (McLeod 5). In his *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud compares the ego as being similar to the id with the exceptional feature of being modified by the direct influence of the external world (Freud 25). The latter is included in the ego's operational equation, which is based on arranging between the unrealistic id and the real external world as it is mentioned. It belongs to the conscious part, and it is projected in self-thought and the apparent personality. Unlike the chaotic and unreasonable id, the ego is driven by reason. This is why it is the decision-making component of personality (Freud 30).

The development and the operation of the ego are combined with the other parts of the psyche. Concerning the development, the ego generates from the id during the infancy phase (Kli 5). The ego develops its functions following the reality principle by fulfilling the id's desire in secured conditions and accepted social principles (Kli 5,6). This component of the psyche works both in the conscious and unconscious parts not like the id. The ego's reasoning includes the consideration of social realities and norms, etiquette, and rules in deciding the conducted behavior (Schultz 321). The purpose of the ego is to find realistic ways of answering the id's requests through compromising or postponing satisfaction to avoid negative social consequences (Kli 8). In Freud's work, he clarifies the ego and the id through an analogical expression in which he compares the id to a horse while the ego is the rider. He says, 'The ego is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse' (15). In other words, both the id and the ego seek pleasure like the horse and his rider. To explain more his vision, these two parts of the psyche work to reduce tension and avoid painful feelings. However, the ego has different function of reaching a realistic strategy to achieve pleasure. In some cases, the id and the ego compete to take the control of decision making; nevertheless, the ego struggles to be resistant in order to direct the id's desires to the most possible safe way. The ego does not choose between right and wrong as much as reaching the decision that causes less damage to the self or others.

The work of the ego confronts several issues that may trouble its function in the individual's psyche. For instance, it may not succeed in applying the reality principle; consequently, the individual experiences anxiety or other psychological issues. Here, the individual's psyche develops a way out through what is known as unconscious defense mechanism. In her book titled 'The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense' (1936), Anna Freud, the daughter of the theorist Sigmund, clarifies the defense mechanisms as an operation of protection to the ego from anxiety (53). This may assist the individual in avoiding

disturbing feelings and enhance the psychological state of the individual toward himself or the external world.

Explaining these psychoanalytic concepts is paramount in understanding the analysis of the studied works such as the film of *Joker* (2019). The latter is a psychobiography of an antihero's journey into his political and social realm. The work is thus a foreshadowing narration to a coming revolution in Gotham city. Several critics compare this work to the iconic cinematic work *Taxi Driver* (1976) that also shows the psychotic issues experienced in the mind of an antihero (Ravlić 7). Todd Phillips's production *Joker* has certain evident characterizations that requires psychoanalytic reading. The discussion cannot surpass the multidimensional features of this work that not only focuses on psychological issues but also deals with social ones lived in the postmodern environment. This opens a certain freedom of interpretation that encourages audience to make efforts in understanding this stereotype of people who undergoes psychosis or/and mental illness because of the mentioned issues.

For example, in the film *Joker* (2019), the character Arthur Flick reflects several defense mechanisms created out of the endured issues at the level of the ego and the id. This stems from the troubled personality development of the character who experiences traumatic abusive childhood. In Freud's theory, the unhealthy and troubling upbringing of the infant may result in a weak and fragile ego that is unable to contain the id's desires (Acat and Hisar 12). This is the case of Arthur Flick's childhood which is characterized by living with a cold, rejecting, and 'schizogenic' mother. Through Freud's psychoanalytic perspective, this character commits violent and criminal acts under the name of Joker because of psychological issues formed by the non-development of the superego. In other words, he does not realize the immorality of his actions. From the movies' scenes and dialogues, it is understood that Arthur experiences troubling childhood characterized by the absence of moralistic role model that may direct his identification of himself. Here, the parental void in

the life of this character contribute in non-assimilation of social values and morals. At the level of the psyche, the ego may be broken apart in its endeavor to contain the id in these conditions like parental void. This leaves the total control of the psyche to the id. In short, this is to show the researcher's intention from choosing these psychoanalytic concepts in studying the character's transformation, which is more developed in the analytical part.

The literary and cinematic worlds have witnessed many different villains who provoke feelings of fear and danger; however, the evil character of Joker has intrigued mixture of fascination, mystery, and fear through a psychoanalytic perspective. His strange personality has surpassed the strong weapons and superpowers used to petrify audience. This interesting fictional character is worth the study for its captivating influence. Psychoanalytic is the study approach that can lead the research to answers for the introduced questions revolving around this character. This is achieved through following the concepts of Freud and other theorists in the process of digging deep in the unconsciousness of this controversial phenomenon, Joker, because the unconsciousness is the source of all the manifested behaviors. The latter is also developed because of being raised in different environments and undergoing distinct childhood experiences (Acat and Hisar 12, 13). This is put under analytical study in the following chapters where research questions are answered through investigating the work. Here, it is exquisite to mention the importance of symbolism in analyzing the works through psychoanalytic, which is praised by Freud himself. He claimed in more than a work his recognition for the complex symbolism in Literature that leads to a new awareness of what symbols mean in life (Schultz 294). He states that symbols uncover the truths that reside in the unconsciousness. This statement is expressed in his explanation of dreams that are regarded as symbolic expressions of repressed desires. According to Freud, the interpretation of dreams is more personal and individualistic (Schultz 293). The Freudian approach including the model of dream interpretation to literary texts seems to convey to this

study in its view of dreams as expressions of wish fulfillment and gratifying projections of the ego of the author.

1.2.3. The Concept of the Superego

Unlike the id's demands, the superego directs one's behavior in a way that satisfy the moral and social standards (Schultz 310). The Freudian approach views the superego as the part that represents the internalized values that are developed from the external world. This moral component of the psyche combines the values and morals of society which are acquired from parents and surrounding individuals or /and groups. In the phase of identifying with the same sex parent, the child develops the superego that dictates the moral standards that should be followed. The operation of this part of the psyche works according to the morality principle that urges the individual to pursue certain behavior and manners, which are socially acceptable (Schultz 310). The superego is located in the unconscious and presents the voice of conscience that analyzes and criticizes one's self thought and conducts. It provides both feelings of reward and punishment that depends on the individual's behavior (Lapsley 8). In some cases, one may receive feelings of pride and satisfaction. In other cases, one may feel shameful and guilty. The superego presents the unconscious moral and ethical codes that permit or prohibit the id's desires such as sex and violence. In addition, it stimulates the ego to follow moralistic ends rather than realistic ones and encourages for perfection (Lapsley 2).

These mentioned superego's operations are based on the work of two conceptual systems the conscience and the ideal self. As far as the conscience is concerned, it is the feeling that is experienced when the individual acts in unacceptable way, and it is known as the 'inner voice'. It punishes the ego by causing feelings of guilt (Lapsley 7). For instance, when the ego answers the id's desires, one may feel guilty as a consequence of the superego's operational reaction. For the ideal self, the superego shows its deceiving version through

presenting the person's desires in impressive manner. This stems from the individual's first emotional attachment which is in most cases one of the parents (Holmes 8). In other words, the principle of the ideal self visualizes a perfect image of the self. It shows the self in its most wanted position and best aspired social life. Both principles are developed during childhood experience that encompasses the upbringing instructions dictated by parents (Lapsley 6). They raise the child according to certain values and standards. The latter are rewarded with much love when they are achieved whereas receiving punishment when they are not being followed. Childhood experience Form the mentioned psychological principles of the superego. When guilt is experienced through conscience principle, the individual escapes this feeling by various ways called defense mechanisms (Lapsley 7,8).

Demonstrating a short example from the TV series Braking Bad shows that this theoretical chapter details this kind of concepts to help in understanding the psychological transformation of the studied characters. For instance, the protagonist of the TV series experiences drastic change from specific characterizations demonstrated through the character of Walter white to other different ones reflected under the name of Heisenberg. The character's psychological state reflects a change of behavior that comes from defense mechanisms such as rationalization. Walter white endures contradictory radical emotions in the same time. He feels guilty for committing criminal acts such as killing people and preparing crystal meth drug, but this feeling fades away and it is replaced by a feeling of pride. The latter stems from the fact that his violent and criminal acts produce great amount of money, which he need for his therapy and family. Actually, the change of this feeling is due to his superego's conscience that produces the feeling of guilt after committing criminal acts. This is a consequence of answering the id's commands and desire for money making and failing the ideal self. His superego handles this feeling through rationalization defense mechanism. According to Freud's book *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense* (1894),

‘rationalization allows people to justify their thoughts or behaviors without experiencing conflicts, anxiety, or shame if they face their true motivations’ (41-60). In short, this example is to approach the intention behind detailing the psyche’s concepts which are important in studying the psychological transformation that witnesses several psychological operations at the level of the characters’ psyches.

1.2.4. The Concept of the Unconsciousness

The unconsciousness is one of the concepts that revolutionized psychology. The unconscious mind comprises mental processes inaccessible to consciousness that influence judgment, feelings, or behavior (Wilson 2002). Actually, the concept is mentioned in former works published before Freud’s productions like the romantic thinkers’ writings including those of Schlegel, in Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche (Cybulska 2). The Swiss neurologist, Freud, brought the concept of unconsciousness under scientific and systematic study that details the workings of this mysterious part of the mind. He introduced specific terminology that permits discussing the realm of unconsciousness through scientific language. This removes all sorts of ambiguity in arguing about this psychological concept and allow clarifying its operations. It is probably considered the most significant aspect of the Freudian Theory.

1.3. Neurosis and Psychosis

According to the studies of Freud and other theorists, conflicts in the unconscious between the id, ego, and superego is said to be the source of the apparent mental illness that can happen to an individual (Acat and Hisar 2). This includes Neuroses and Psychosis. Concerning Neurosis, it is a concept that requires definition because it is applied in the analytical chapters in the characters’ study. In the Freudian approach, it is defined as ‘a situation caused by an over dominant superego, the resultant defense mechanisms

implemented by the ego in an attempt to regain control' (Schultz 353) when an individual undergoes difficult circumstances that influence his or her psychology, the normal operations of the psyche are crashed. Here, it overuses the defense mechanisms that consumes too much psychic energy allowing the emergence of maladaptive behavior (Schultz 373). It is considered as mild mental illness involving certain symptoms such as stress, depression, anxiety but not radical loss of touch with reality. Psychosis is a severe mental disorder in which thought and emotions are so impaired that contact is lost with external reality such as schizophrenia (Acat and Hisar 2).

These psychoanalytic concepts of Neurosis and psychosis are introduced here because they are applied on the studied materials such as the literary work of Chreyl L. Reed's *Poison Girls* (2017), through the characters' internal conflicts and mental breakdowns. Natalie Delaney, a crime reporter from the Chicago Times, investigates in the death of young women who are daughters of democratic powerhouses. Her journey of searching the truth behind the overdose of fentanyl-laced heroin leads her to know more about the emotional and mental struggles of women in a harsh society and corrupted political system. Natalie Delaney is the story's protagonist and Ana and Libby are strong girls who struggle in a world that is marked by drug consumption if not addiction as a trend, and not caring about the danger that exists behind such acts. They eager desire for popularity and experiencing new adventures in life exceeds their consideration for the risk taking.

The characters of the two cousins Anna and Libby as well as the reporter Natalie exhibit psychoanalytic paradigms of neurosis and Psychosis through their struggles in the environment of Chicago. As far as neurosis is concerned, the cousins seem to engage in a journey of self-destruction through their desperate endeavors of trying to be accepted by others, toxic individuals, in unhealthy relationships. Their blind obsessions about their appearances, social image, and apparent identity stem from their feelings of insecurities and

lack of self-confidence. Neurosis in this work is reflected through the characters who are included in the story's building pillars for the themes of the impact of society and media as well as self-worth. Concerning psychosis, it is developed through the mental breakdown of the protagonist who endured traumatic events, physical and emotional oppression, that leads to a state of detachment from reality. This is evident through several symptoms such as hallucinations. In this part of the work, the researcher's aim is to show how the existed data of the studied materials dictates the chosen concepts of study, psychoanalytic theory. The path of research is built on strong foundation of adequate theoretical approaches that lead to answers for the research questions.

One of the well-known methods of therapy is psychodynamic approach, which is applied by therapists to find solutions to the psycholgocial issues endured by individuals such as neurosis and psychosis (Schultz 317). The psychodynamic approach includes all theories that were based on Freud and his followers, including Carl Jung (1912) and Melanie Klein (1921) (Schultz 321). They attempt to resolve this kind of problems by helping the individual in going back to the buried memories of childhood where most psychological issues emerge. Finding out the actual source of the psychological issue is an important step for the individual's recovery (Lapsley and Stey 7). In other words, the identification of the issue means facing it in the conscious realm where psychological balance can be achieved through the operations between the id, ego, and superego. This eliminates the dependency on the defense mechanisms that developed to mental illness.

1.4. The Individual's Psychological Transformation Through Jungian Analytical Approach

The Jungian psychoanalytic criticism is another approach in psychology that provides suitable concepts for the research's aims. Choosing Jung's concepts is a decision

that was made after reading his influential book *The Undiscovered Self* (1957). It is an inspiring work that formed the choice of the chosen concepts. Actually, Carl Jung was a Swiss physician, a psychiatrist, and philosopher. He eventually broke from his mentor, and then built on his teacher's ideas, Freud, in ways that made him an important figure in the field of Psychoanalysis. Its most important concept is the Self, which is the archetype of the Center of the psyche of a person, one's totality or wholeness. Jung states the center is made of the unity of consciousness and unconsciousness reached through the individuation process. Starting by consciousness, for Jung, it is the part of the psyche where the conscious awareness resides, the sense of identity and existence (Iqbal 3). This research uses Jung's concept of unconsciousness, one of Jung's great contributions, it is divided into two very unequal levels: the personal unconscious, the more superficial, and the deeper Collective Unconscious. The first one consists of psychic contents which are either too weak to reach consciousness, or they are actively suppressed by the ego, because the latter is threatened; for instance, the one's suppressed and forgotten memories, traumas, and so for. The second one consists of archetypes that are psychic innate dispositions to experience and represent basic human behavior and situations such as the shadow and persona. It is shared with other human beings, and it includes knowledge, experiences, and images of the human race (Bolea 3).

He believed that the unconscious mind powerfully directs much of our behavior. (Bolea 4). He explains the shadow as the dark side of one's self that is preferred to be not confronted. His other concept anima is referred to as the soul image or the force that pushes one to act in his or her life. Concerning persona, it is another conception that means the image shown by an individual to others (Bolea 3,4). According to an article titled "Jung and his Individuation Process" published in the online Psyche journal, individuation can be defined as the achievement of self-actualization through a process of integrating the unconscious into consciousness. Individuation, to Jung, is the quest for wholeness that the

human psyche undertakes. It is the journey to become conscious of one's self as a unique human being, by revealing the hidden parts of the self.

In one of his interviews, Carl Jung said, 'The cinema like the detective story makes it possible to experience without danger all the excitement, passion and desirousness which must be repressed in a humanitarian ordering of life' (Alister and Hauke 6). From Jung's vision of cinema, it is clear that the choice of using his theory in analyzing the movie lies in its capability in providing mirrors to understand one's self and the society by experiencing different feelings, as it is the case for understanding the studied characters. Jung noted that a number of archetypes exist within the collective unconscious, which is part of Jung's model of the psyche, which can be recognized by anyone (Jung 66). An archetype is the model image of a person or role, which are often incarnated as characters in myths, novels, and films (Schultz 327). This analysis can be applied to images, symbols, plot patterns, themes, and character types. Most of the Jungians analyze the film archetypes through symbols of shapes, objects, colors, numbers and nature because these symbols constitute images that are meaningful to the one's cultural and personal background. In *Jung and Film* (2001), Christopher Hauke and Ian Alister say, 'The work of Jung is not useful only for therapy, but also as a way of understanding the world, transcending many areas, including film' (7). This shows why many film critics praise the Jungian film analysis because it provides deep insights into one's individual and cultural maturity.

2. Gustav le Bon's Crowd theory as Social Approach

In this section of the theoretical chapter, the research shows how society is studied as an influencing factor to the characters' psychological transformation that is approached from social theoretical perception by using Gustav le Bon's Crowd theory. The complexity of the postmodern world involves the influence of society on individuals that, in fact, can be

studied through several theories showing the fragmentation and alienation lived in contemporary life. The postmodernist thought and style of life are characterized by loss of tradition, disillusionment of ideals, moral decay, cultural nihilism, anti-essence, and anti-law and other ideological concepts that reflect cultural crisis (Wang 10). The individual falls in confusion and uneasy situation where he or she feels lost in society that drives him or her to exile their ideals, and thus losing the direction of life development (Wang 10). The postmodernism trend of thought causes nihilism of value that leads to form new thoughts about how society shapes individuals. Gustav le Bon's Crowd theory is employed to answer questions such as how society contributes to the characters' psychological transformation of Joker and Heisenberg.

The crowd has always been the center of study for many thinkers and different scholars who have suggested various perspectives on how crowds influence individual behavior and the nature of collective action. Scottish journalist and writer Charles Mackay wrote *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* in 1841 exploring the history of mass hysteria, manias, crowd behavior and the psychology of collective actions (Odyzko 2,3). French sociologist Gabriel Tade explored imitation and the shaping of individual behavior in the group setting in his book *The Laws of Imitation* written in 1890 (Djellal and Gallouj 3,18). In the early 20th century, the British-American psychologist William McDougall wrote *The Group Mind* in 1920 about the influence of groups on the individual (McDougall 12). However, the French polymath social psychologist Gustave Le Bon stands out as the most influential thinker in crowd psychology.

Le Bon is famously known for his book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895). In his book, he analyzes the mentality of society by concentrating on the change of behaviors of individuals when they are in groups. It can be regarded as both sociological and psychological approach since it demonstrates the change at the level of the individual's mind

and within the society. He argues how an individual's behavior changes when he or she is part of a collective group (Le Bon 13). When individuals join a crowd, they often lose their reasoning potentials and can become irrational and prone to suggestibility, often leading to destructive or impulsive behavior (Le Bon 32). In his book, Le Bon states,

We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts; these, we see, are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will (Le Bon 13)

From this quotation, it is clear that the writer emphasizes the fact that the individualistic personality of an individual is lost in favor of the group's behavior. Individuals no longer hold responsibility over themselves and they act with impetuous drive. Le Bon's statement shows that his theory is based on a set of concepts that can be applied on the societies of the studied characters.

One of the most noted concepts of this theory is deindividuation that refers to the loss of self-awareness and personal responsibility when an individual becomes part of a crowd (Le Bon 5). When an individual is being in a numerous group of people, this can drive him or her to be irresponsible for one's actions. The feeling of irresponsibility may lead them to behave in unacceptable violent ways that are unlikely to happen when the individual is alone and out of the group (Le Bon 13, 14). The first introducer of this concept explains it as the result of the influence of the collective mind who controls the thought of the individual (*Le Bon* 15). Immersing in this theory has enabled Le Bon to investigate the individual's acquired behaviors in groups producing significant concepts. Actually, his work was carried on by

scholars like Festinger, Pepitone and Newcomb who are pioneers in the same field of study, which has developed through their several published books. (Felipe et al 14)

Conformity is another concept of this theory based on the powerful social influence of the crowds that works on a principal of social contagion. In a group of people, it is noticed that the same emotions, behaviors, and even actions spread between individuals who are influenced by this social principle (Felipe et al 17). People find themselves conformists to the prevailing ideas that are presented in the group that shares the same feelings of enthusiasm, fright, and hostility (Le Bon 55). This is what is noticed in the cinematic film *Joker* (2019) where people are rapidly engaged in aggressive riots without their conscious thought. Individuals seem to lose their potential in assessing their thoughts and actions in critical way (Le Bon 76). This leads the discussion to introduce the other concept of the theory: collective emotion and suggestibility.

Groups of masses seem to magnify emotions that result in performing unexpected collective actions. Suggestibility is manifested in feelings of intense excitement, fury, or hysteria (Le Bon 96). In fact, when individuals are positioned in crowds, they develop a tendency to comply with the thought, emotions, and actions of the group. Such actions can be irrational as the crowd can lose the capacity for critical judgment, driven rather by instincts and emotions over logic and level headedness. This is what is observed in riots and rebellions where such suggestibility is rapidly spread among people who are influenced by opinions of others. In other words, they conform to the followed mentality of the crowd, which changes the individuals' behaviors in an intense way (Le Bon 107). In his famous work, Le Bon states that in such situations, there is one individual who has the ability to provide and influence others with illusionary thoughts, and through an easy way he eventually becomes the master of this crowd (Le Bon 68). In the book, he explains that whoever attempts to destroy their illusions is always their victim. This forms the ideology of propaganda witnessed throughout

history. Le Bon developed his theory stating in pessimistic way that crowds are always unconscious and eventually always barbaric (Le Bon 68).

Le Bon's concept of collective emotion and suggestibility is employed in analyzing the societies of the narratives such as that of *Breaking Bad* TV series, which may uncover a lot about the influence of the postmodern society. As Walter's influence grows, the violence around him escalates, demonstrating how an individual's actions can ripple out to affect the larger group, leading to chaos. This mirrors the theory of how violent acts within a crowd can escalate, with each member feeding off the collective emotion and sense of power. Walter's actions, initially for self-preservation, evolve into a pursuit of power that shapes the actions of those around him.

In fact, both of the cinematic work of *Joker* and the TV series of *Breaking Bad* are fertile productions for the application of the Crowd Theory because of the existed societies in both narratives. The works highlight the ways in which individuals can influence and be influenced by crowds or groups. For instance, Arthur, the antihero of the *Joker's* film, struggles to survive in a city and a society, that doesn't care about people like him, mentally ill and poor individual. He is faced with a harsh society and a system that fails him, and leads him to be marginalized and powerless. Because of Arthur's extreme desire to be accepted, noticed, and loved by society, he is just happy to show how violence, crime, and mental illness may be the result of people not having power. Through this chosen social theory, both works show how ordinary people can be transformed into leaders or symbols for a larger cause or movement. In *Joker*, Arthur Fleck becomes a symbol of rebellion, while in *Breaking Bad*; Walter White becomes a feared criminal mastermind. Their rise in influence is driven by their ability to resonate with or manipulate others, showing how individual actions can take on a larger social significance.

Going back to discuss the theory's concepts, there is another significant conception called anonymity that refers to the individuals' feeling of being less visible and accountable for their actions (Felipe et al 7). Crowds often provide a sense of anonymity that can encourage people to act in careless ways that are far from being performed when the individuals act alone. In more clear words, this anonymity can lead to a decreased fear of social consequences and a willingness to engage in behaviors that might not be considered when alone (Felipe et al 11). Individuals in a crowd tend to feel a sense of anonymity, which diminishes their sense of personal responsibility for their actions. In Le Bon's words 'an individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will.' (Le Bon 19). Crowds seem to others as a united group that has a certain level of homogeneity. This is in fact developed through their collective unconsciousness that produces a sense of unity within a crowd that can lead to intolerance and hostility toward outsiders or non-conformists (Le Bon 23). This is what is noticed in the Gotham city's rebellion in the film of *Joker*. The crowd in *Joker* is a powerful force that gives individuals a sense of anonymity, allowing them to act in ways they might not have if they were alone. This plays into the theory of deindividuation, where the anonymity of the crowd leads to people losing their sense of personal accountability and acting impulsively or violently.

On one side of the coin, Walter White's rise as a drug kingpin shows how individuals, even when part of a small group or community, can use their influence to manipulate others into supporting them. His ability to sway people like Jesse Pinkman, Gus Fring, and the various people in his network reflects how a leader can control the behavior of those around them through authority, fear, and charisma. White or Heisenberg reflects clever management of power dynamics and influence. On the other side of the coin, there are instances where characters, especially Jesse and Hank, are drawn into groupthink or crowd behavior, where their judgment is clouded by the collective mindset. For example, Jesse's involvement with

the "family" of criminals or Hank's eventual involvement in criminal activities is shaped by the culture of those groups.

The individual can be lost in the crowd under the control of a powerful leader. Actually, Le Bon recognized that crowds often require strong leaders or agitators who can shape their collective will. These leaders, who may possess charisma and a talent for rhetoric, can guide the crowd's actions and emotions (Le Bon 43). Le Bon describes such leaders as men of action rather than just words. Acts of heroism, self-sacrifice, even violence or cruelty can be at the command of the strong, sometimes worshipped, leader of a crowd (Le Bon 109, 43). They have a great tendency towards hero worship. Le Bon noted that a charismatic and persuasive leader could play a significant, even essential role in manipulating a crowd. This is the result of the individuals' sense of self-merged with the group releasing them from the usual constraints of the individual. As it is noticed in previous studies, the feeling of enthusiasm is transformed to hatred (Le Bon 20). Taking the example of Arthur Fleck, who begins as a struggling, isolated figure, unintentionally becomes a symbol for the oppressed people. His actions, starting from his violent revenge against his bullies, spark a wave of unrest. The crowd theory can be seen in how the isolated and voiceless masses rally behind a single individual, amplifying their emotions and grievances.

The crowd reflects collective behavior formed from a developed collective consciousness that leads to performing spontaneous, unstructured, and often irrational acts in the beginning, which they develop through repetition (Le Bon 17). Collective behavior can take many forms, from protests and demonstrations to riots and celebrations, and often lacks clear leadership or organization. This French thinker insists on the idea of consistency that is based on extensive repetition of certain messages spread through various media (Le Bon 119). The repeatedly reinforced message embeds in the collective consciousness of the crowd and attempts to counter that consciousness is met with great resistance. This is why such

messages are usually presented in familiar and persuasive way. Symbols, images and slogans are used in the repeated messages to reinforce it in the collective consciousness (Felipe et al 7). These visual elements can evoke strong feelings and reactions, often by-passing rational thought about the introduced ideas in the crowd. They convey a complexity of thoughts and emotions, and to which the crowd rally around as emblems of their will and desire. Under a single banner, the crowd acknowledges common goals and shared identity (Le Bon 68).

The film of the *Joker* comments on the way crowds, stirred up by media and social movements, can act irrationally and destructively. As Joker's popularity grows, the crowd becomes more chaotic, reflecting the instability of society and the breakdown of traditional social norms. It highlights how an individual, who might initially be dismissed or ignored, can become a focal point for societal rage, transforming from an outcast to a leader of a riotous movement. *Breaking Bad* TV Series also explores the crowd theory through the lens of Walter White's transformation into a criminal mastermind and the way his decisions affect those around him. The crowd behavior here is less about mass movements in the traditional sense but more about how groups and collective psychology shape individuals and actions.

Just like in *Joker*, where the Joker's image becomes symbolic to the disaffected, Walter White's transformation into Heisenberg creates a persona that attracts people to him. The crowd is not always literal in *Breaking Bad*, it can be represented through the loyal followers or even the people who fear him, such as Tuco, the drug dealers, and the cartels. These groups act based on collective perceptions of power, danger, and reputation, much like how a crowd forms around a common leader or cause in *Joker*.

Conclusion

In one of his conversations, Metz state, 'The goal of psychoanalysis is a cure. One psychoanalyses a patient and the idea is that something will change and there will be a cure'.

In order to access the minds of the protagonists Walter white, Arthur Fleck, Natalie Delaney, and Silvio Botelho Gustave le Bon's crowd theory is a social approach that enables studying the postmodern societal influence reflecting the difficult challenges of contemporary life that leads to psychological transformation of individuals. His writings had a profound impact on the understanding of group psychology and collective behavior. Such a theory is constructive to the thesis in a way that reveals the endured difficulties lived by individuals in this age that is centered around the idea of change in a way that stops one's thought from believing in fixed truths and objective reality. Society itself has changed by the influence of technological development including social media global networks reshaping the source of power that has become decentralized in this world. Here, the individual and the society are both the influencer and the influenced to each other through taking part in this kind of networks. The behaviors and even the identity of individuals are always changing because of contemporary life challenges.

Chapter Five: Discourse as a Mirror of the Mind and a Weapon for Change and Control

Introduction

"The subject is constituted through discursive practices that precede and shape individual consciousness, making discourse analysis essential for understanding psychological transformation" (Fairclough 73). This quotation from Norman Fairclough's work *Language and Power* (2015) introduces the main studied elements in this analytical chapter. Indeed, conceptual framework of discourse analysis is essential in producing a study that investigates language in relation to its influence in transforming the psychology of individuals in postmodern circumstances. The research examines the used language in the studied works to generate conceptual ideas about the power of discourse in changing the individual's thought and reflecting his or her psychology. The research also follows the trail of language itself, identifying its key architects including media outlets, political institutions, and social structures. The analysis goes beyond studying the psychological dimension, by asking how ordinary people become consumers of discourse and mass media narratives.

I. 1. Critical Discourse Analysis of *Joker* (2019) through a Foucauldian Lens

Michel Foucault's theories on power, discourse, and madness provide a solid framework for analyzing the linguistic and ideological dimensions of *Joker* (2019). This film, directed by Todd Phillips, serves as a case study for examining how institutional power constructs societal "truths" and how marginalized individuals resist or conform to these dominant narratives. By applying Foucauldian concepts such as power/knowledge, disciplinary institutions, and the construction of madness, this analysis deconstructs the film's dialogue, visual symbolism, and narrative structure to reveal how language functions as an instrument of control and subversion.

1.1. Power and Knowledge in the Construction of Truth

The postmodernist philosopher argues that power is not merely repressive but productive, forming what society accepts as truth through discourse (Foucault 131). In *Joker*, Gotham's elite, embodied by Thomas Wayne and Murray Franklin, dictate societal norms through language that pathologizes and marginalizes the poor. For instance, Wayne dismisses protesters as "clowns" in a televised interview, reinforcing a discourse that combines poverty with criminality. This lexical choice corresponds to Foucault's statement that dominant group "define the limits of thinkable thought" (*Discipline and Punish* 27). It is important to note that Arthur Fleck's psychiatric records label him with mental illness medicalizing his suffering and thus legitimizing institutional control. The film thus mirrors Foucault's critique of how expert discourses such as psychiatry and media manufacture "truths" that justify social inequality.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* examines how institutions like prisons and hospitals regulate behavior through surveillance and normalization (Foucault 195). This is depicted in the cinematic work through Gotham's failing social services, which discipline Arthur via mandatory therapy and medication, yet abandon him when cutting funding. The withdrawal of the state's healthcare system reveals its true function as not healing, but suppressing deviance. Similarly, the police symbolize the state's monopoly on violence; their brutal repression of protests reflects Foucault's panopticon, where visibility ensures compliance (*Discipline and Punish* 201). murdering the Wall Street bullying businessmen on the subway leads to Arthur's transformation as a way of resisting the imposed discipline. In Fact, it is a developmental phase described as the "insurrection of subjugated knowledge" in Foucault's terms (*Power/Knowledge* 81).

1.2. Madness as a Societal Construct

In *History of Madness*, the writer states that madness is not an inherent condition but a category created to exclude the "irrational " (Foucault 64). Arthur's pseudobulbar laughter epitomizes this fact by marking him as mad in a society that pathologizes non-normative behavior. His diary entry includes the statement "The worst part of having a mental illness is people expect you to behave as if you don't", which critiques how discourse demands performative sanity. The film's climax, where Arthur embraces his "Joker" shadow who is also reflected in new persona, rejects this binary thought. Foucault mentions, "madness is the absolute break with the work of art" (*Madness and Civilization* 285). He is empowered by his marginalization and turning his madness into a tool of defiance and resistance.

1.3. Counter-Discourse and Resistance

Foucault's later work emphasizes resistance through counter-discourses (*The History of Sexuality* 95). The film visualizes this idea in the clown-masked protesters, who adopt Arthur's image to challenge Gotham's elite. Their chants "We are all clowns!" subvert the term's negative meaning, exemplifying Foucault's "reverse discourse" (*History of Sexuality* 101). Arthur's televised confession "You get what you deserve!" similarly exposes systemic violence, rupturing the media's sanitized narratives. His final dance on the police car, wordless yet strong, embodies Foucault's idea that resistance can exist outside language (*The Subject and Power* 212).

Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1965) posits that psychiatric institutions construct definitions of sanity to reinforce societal control (Foucault 72). This is epitomized in Arthur Fleck's interactions with his social worker, where clinical language pathologizes his existence. In their first session, Arthur states, "They tell me my laughter's a condition." The sentence obscures power, reflecting Foucault's concept of "medicalized subjectivity" (*Birth of the Clinic* 54), wherein institutions dictate the terms of mental health. The social

worker's response "Your file says you have narcissistic personality disorder" changes Arthur's anguish to bureaucratic classification, demonstrating how power operates through documentation (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 191). When Arthur's therapy is abruptly terminated due to funding cuts, the film underscores Foucault's argument that welfare systems function as tools of discipline rather than care (History of Madness 210).

1.4. Counter-Hegemonic Discourse in Arthur's Stand-Up Monologue

Arthur's failed comedy routine demolishes normative discourse through linguistic instability. His opening line "What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him?" begins as a conventional joke setup before devolving into accusatory rhetoric. Foucault's notion of "reverse discourse" explains this shift: Arthur hijacks comedy's structure to indict societal neglect (*History of Sexuality* 101). The audience's silence and discomfort reveal comedy's unspoken rules. In simple words, it is a disciplinary mechanism that rewards conformity among people (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 131). Arthur's involuntary laughter further damages the performance, embodying Foucault's description of madness as "language that escapes reason" (*Madness and Civilization* 290). Where the crowd expects punchlines, Arthur delivers raw affect, exposing the violence of discursive expectations.

The Murray Franklin Show scene stages a collision between hegemonic media discourse and Arthur's insurgent speech. Murray's superior tone "You're awful, Arthur" mirrors what Foucault calls the "policing of statements" (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 112), wherein media figures regulate permissible speech. Arthur's reply "You ask me to act normal? I don't have a name. You gave me nothing!" replaces passive syntax with active defiance, enacting Foucault's "subjectivation" (*Hermeneutics of the Subject* 156). His final declaration "You get what you deserve!" is a speech act that fractures televised properness,

showing Foucault's "transgressive discourse" (*The Order of Discourse* 230). The gunshot that follows literalizes Foucault's claim that resistance often emerges through "non-linguistic rupture" (*Discipline and Punish* 272).

1.5. The Diary as Counter-Narrative

Arthur's journal entries function as a heterotopia that refers to a space where marginalized discourse escapes surveillance (Foucault, *Of Other Spaces* 4). Phrases like "HAPPY?" beside violent doodles reject linear logic, embodying Foucault's assertion that madness "defies syntactic order" (*History of Madness* 72). The repetition of affective lexemes "Nobody's civil," "I'm tired of pretending" constructs what Foucault terms a "resistant subjectivity" (*Security, Territory, Population* 210). Unlike his performative public speech, the diary's raw incoherence resists institutional interpretation, making it a site of pure counter-discourse.

Joker dramatizes Foucault's axiom that "discourse is the power to be seized" (*History of Sexuality* 110). Arthur's linguistic trajectory from institutional object to anarchic subject reveals how marginalized voices exploit discursive fractures. The film's power lies in its insistence that madness, far from being silence, is the ultimate critique of oppressive language.

2. Arthur's Diary as a Foucauldian "Limit-Text": Madness, Language, and the Unsayable in *Joker* (2019)

2.1. Foucault's "Limit-Texts" and the Collapse of Discourse

Foucault's *Death and the Labyrinth* (1963) analyzes Raymond Roussel's avant-garde writings as "limit-texts", works that destabilize language to expose the boundaries of rational discourse (Foucault 42). Like Roussel's repetitive, self-erasing prose, Arthur's diary entries operate at the limits of clarity. His scribbled phrases "HAPPY?" beside a gun doodle, and

fragmented syntax "They don't / listen / never" mirror Foucault's observation that limit-texts "make language stammer" (*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 54). Where Roussel's *Impressions of Africa* uses rigid structures to paradoxically produce nonsense, Arthur's diary employs chaotic graphology to similar ends: both reveal the failure of language to contain lived experience.

Foucault contrasts literary limit-texts with institutional archives, which impose order on chaos (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 129). Arthur's diary exists in tension with his clinical file, the Diagnosed Pseudobulbar effect and narcissistic traits, which reduces his subjectivity to medical jargon. The diary's unchecked rage shown in "I hope my death makes more cents than my life" resists this classification, functioning as what Foucault calls a "counter-memory" (*Language, Counter-Memory* 160). It is a site where marginalized voices evade bureaucratic capture. Unlike Roussel, whose texts were deliberately constructed puzzles, Arthur's writings are raw eruptions of the "unsayable" (*History of Madness* 550), making them a more radical limit-text that no one designed, but forced into being by oppression.

2.2. The Body as Text

Foucault argues that limit-texts tend to form materialize linguistic expressions in the body (*Death and the Labyrinth* 87). For instance, Arthur's pseudobulbar laughter as a neuropsychological disorder manifested in physical symptom replaces speech whenever he wants to express his thoughts through language. Actually, this corresponds to the idea of the French thinker Raymond Roussel in using of homophonic wordplay in disrupting meaning. Similarly, Arthur's diary entries include bodily traces of sweat stains, smudged ink, and even blood after the subway killings. These material interventions with language are related to Foucault's study of Antonin Artaud, whose work of theater of cruelty sought to break language's bones, in his words (*Madness and Civilization* 285). In short, Arthur's journal is

less a written record than a performance of psychological breakdown, blurring Foucault's line between text and corporeal rebellion.

2.3. Intentionality vs. Compulsion

The idea of limit-texts is analyzed to show how language can be used with other tricks like the body (*Death and the Labyrinth* 73). It is important to underline the fact that Arthur's written diary starts as a compulsive need. In simple words, he has irresistible urge to reduce the repressed emotions through expressing his inner thoughts. This can be further understood through Foucault's theory that regards Arthur's limit-texts as expressive productions generated unconsciously from marginalized subjects, compared to avant-garde artists. His final entry "I just hope my death makes more cents than my life" echoes Foucault's claim that madness speaks through "the absence of the work" (*History of Madness* 537). That is to say, the diary includes incomplete linguistic thoughts and crossed-out lines that literalize the absence of stabilized mind making the limit-text concepts as a symptom of desperation, not design work.

Following Foucault's theoretical frame, Arthur's diary can be seen as a proof to how "limit-texts" manifest outside literature as a fractured produced writings symbolizing the silenced individuals. Unlike Roussel's idea of controlled experiments, Arthur's journal demonstrates Foucault's dark vision about limit texts stating that when discourse excludes the mad, their language becomes "a scream without a mouth" (*History of Madness* 600).

3. The Hyperreal Spectacle: Media Discourse in *Joker* (2019) Through Baudrillard's Postmodernist Lens

3.1. Simulacra and the Construction of Social Reality

Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) argues that media representations precede and distort reality, creating a "hyperreal" order where signs replace

meaning (Baudrillard 1-3). Joker manifests this theory through Gotham's televised narratives, which manufacture public perception. The film's opening montage of garbage strikes and rat infestations mirrors Baudrillard's precession of simulacra. As it is shown in the film, the mediated image of news reports becomes more real than the actual unrest. Thomas Wayne's interview, where he dismisses protesters as clowns, exemplifies Baudrillard's claim that media murders the real by reducing class struggle to caricature (Baudrillard 27). This mediation reaches its climax when Arthur watches himself on Murray Franklin's show, his lived experience replaced by its televised distorted version, a clear Baudrillardian simulation example (Baudrillard 12).

3.2. Talk Shows as Sites of Postmodern Alienation

The Murray Franklin Show mirrors Baudrillard's critique of media as a medium that control the state's opposed public opinion through spectacle (*Requiem for the Media* 22). Murray's patronizing interview style "You're awful, Arthur" transforms suffering into entertainment, reflecting Baudrillard's assertion that television absorbs all meaning into its empty form (Baudrillard 79). Arthur's forced laughter during the broadcast mirrors the audience's sarcastic laughter which are both examples of Baudrillardian concept of empty signifiers, ritualized behaviors stripped of authentic emotion (*The Ecstasy of Communication* 65). When Arthur shoots Murray in a live show, the act becomes what Baudrillard calls a hyperreal event, that is to say, its televised repetition via news cycles erases its material violence, leaving only a consumable image (*Simulacra* 55).

3.3. The Collapse of Meaning

Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1991) explains how media's produced spectacle renders political action obscure. The clown-masked protesters in *Joker* exemplify this notion as their movement adopts Arthur's image without embracing his

ideology. Their chants "We are all clowns!" reflect Baudrillard's implosion of meaning, where revolutionary symbols become aesthetic commodities (*Simulacra* 43). The film's iconic scene where Arthur dances on the top of a police car amid riots echoes Baudrillard's description of postmodern revolt as aestheticized chaos (*The Transparency of Evil* 72). The protesters' mimicry of Arthur's makeup and gestures reveals the Baudrillardian idea that resistance is merely another media script.

3.4. Media's Distortion of Reality

Joker demonstrates Baudrillard's fundamental concept that postmodern media no longer represents reality, but it actually produces it (*Simulacra* 120). Arthur's transformation from marginalized bullied individual to mediated icon highlights how capitalism absorbs the objected side into spectacle. The film's final riot scenes filmed through neon glow of television cameras, demonstrates Baudrillard's warning statement, "We live in a world where the highest function of the sign is to make reality disappear" (*The Evil Demon of Images* 13).

4. Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Arthur Fleck's Transformation in the Bathroom

Dance Scene

The bathroom dance sequence in *Joker* serves as the film's powerful turning point, where Arthur Fleck's psychological fragmentation culminates in a speechless performance of self-actualization through embracing the psyche's dark shadow and violence. This scene exemplifies how Todd Phillips employs multimodal semiosis through integrating visual composition, movement, sound, and mise-en-scène to externalize Arthur's mental collapse (Kress and van Leeuwen 15). By deconstructing these elements through social semiotic theory, the scene reveals cinema's capacity to articulate psychosis beyond dialogue.

The scene's cinematography systematically isolates Arthur through oppressive framing. The initial tight close-up of his smeared clown makeup forces viewers into

uncomfortable proximity, fulfilling the interpersonal metafunction by simulating claustrophobia (van Leeuwen 92). As the camera pulls back, the mirror reflection fractures his identity into dual selves, an allusion to Lacan's mirror stage, where the ego confronts its illusory coherence (Lacan 76). The low-key lighting and sickly greenish hues as textual metafunction encode decay, while the shallow focus blurs the background, metaphorizing Arthur's detachment from reality (Bordwell and Thompson 112).

4.1. Choreography as Psychotic Discourse

Arthur's movement evolves from restricted chained gestures to fluid, almost balletic motion. Early in the film, his body language is shown through hunched shoulders, protective arm crossing signifying victimhood (Halliday 45). Here, however, his flexible contortions give way to a slow swaying dance where arms outstretched like a marionette severed from strings. This shift mirrors Judith Butler's theory of performative identity in regarding Arthur's dance as not merely expression but a constitutive act of becoming the Joker (Butler 136). The improvisational quality of his motions, contrasted with his earlier rigid clown performances, rejects societal scripts in favor of anarchic self-definition (Schechner 88).

The soundscape alternates between diegetic silence, Arthur's ragged breathing and Hildur Guðnadóttir's impressive cello score. The latter's effects audibly mirror Arthur's mental rupture (Chion 54). Notably, the music's synchronicity with his movements. Arthur dances near but not to the rhythm enacts what Michel Chion terms *anempathetic* sound, where auditory indifference heightens the horror of dissociation (Chion 62). The absence of dialogue privileges embodied semiotics, reinforcing that Arthur's transformation transcends language.

The bathroom's *mise-en-scène* as a grimy liminal space aligns with Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*, a site where deviant identities are materialized (Foucault 24). Arthur's

bloodstained hands lit dimly by flickering fluorescents evoke Julia Kristeva's abjection theory of the visceral horror of bodily transgression (Kristeva 3). The scene's lack of witnesses except the mirror and the audience implicates viewers in his metamorphosis, commenting on voyeuristic complicity in media driven violence.

This scene highlights Joker's foundational idea that identity is not narrated but performed through multimodal orchestration. By privileging non-linguistic modes distorted visuals, anarchic movement, and dissonant sound. Moreover, Phillips constructs a semiotic discourse of psychosis that resists simplistic diagnosis. For film studies, this analysis demonstrates how multimodal discourse analysis can deconstruct psychological arcs beyond script-based interpretation

4.2. The Semiotic Chora in Sound: Dissonance as Pre-Linguistic Chaos

Hildur Guðnadóttir's cello score for Joker operates not merely as accompaniment but as a manifestation of Arthur's disintegration, mirroring Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic chora, the prelinguistic, rhythmic space of drives and bodily pulsions that underlies symbolic expression (Kristeva 25). Kristeva's chora, derived from psychoanalytic and poststructuralist thought, describes a realm of nonlinear sound, gesture, and affect that precedes and occasionally deconstructs the structured symbolic order of language (Kristeva 26). Guðnadóttir's composition embodies this theoretically through three key strategies.

4.2.1. Microtonal Dissonance and the Collapse of Symbolic Order

The score's glissandi, sliding pitches, and microtonal intervals reject Western music's harmony corresponding to Arthur's rejection of societal norms. Kristeva argues that the semiotic chora surfaces in art through ruptures in the symbolic, which are moments where rhythm, noise, or dissonance overwhelms linguistic coherence (Kristeva 40). For example, the cello's descending minor-second motifs during Arthur's bathroom dance create

unresolved tension, sonically approximating the undeclared bodily drives like hunger and rage which are associated with Kristeva's chora theory (41). This aligns with the scene's lack of dialogue, privileging pre-linguistic sound as the primary conveyor of meaning.

4.2.2. Rhythmic Irregularity as Psychotic Temporality

The score's asymmetrical phrasing and rubato, fluctuating tempo mirror Arthur's fractured psyche. Kristeva notes that the chora's rhythms are cyclical and repetitive reflecting the drives of the unconscious rather than logical progression (Kristeva 28). Guðnadóttir's use of ostinato repeating figures with slight variations such as the three-note motif during Arthur's subway killings echoes this idea, musically rendering his compulsive thoughts. When juxtaposed with Arthur's laughter, a failed linguistic act, the score's arrhythmia underscores his retreat from symbolic communication into the chora's pre-verbal chaos (Kristeva 64).

Kristeva emphasizes the chora's proximity to silence and the murmurs including breaths and bodily noises that evade linguistic expression (Kristeva 36). The bathroom scene's surprising shifts between diegetic silence, Arthur's breaths, and the cello's non-diegetic intrusion reflect the liminality of the action. The score's sudden emergence as if emanating from Arthur's mind literalizes Kristeva's claim that the semiotic irrupts into the symbolic (Kristeva 50). This is particularly evident when the cello's harmonic screeches coincide with Arthur's head movements, fusing sound and gesture into a choric spectacle of disintegration with the persona.

5. The Semiotics of Color in *Joker*: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Chromatic Meaning-Making

Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019) employs color as a sophisticated visual language that articulates Arthur Fleck's psychological transformation and critiques societal structures

through deliberate chromatic coding. This analysis combines principles from social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen), film color theory (Eisner; Bordwell and Thompson), and psychoanalytic theory (Kristeva; Lacan) to demonstrate how the film's palette functions as a narrative and ideological system. The dominant green-gray spectrum, punctuated by strategic deployments of red and yellow, constructs a visual discourse of urban decay, mental instability, and violent rebirth that parallels Arthur's journey from marginalized victim to anarchic icon.

The film's pervasive use of sickly green tones in Arthur's apartment and throughout Gotham's infrastructure operates as a visual metaphor for both psychological and societal sickness. These olive and mossy hues, particularly evident in the welfare office scenes and subway sequences create what Eisner terms chromatic environmental psychology (112), where color physically embodies the city's moral decay. The green-tinged fluorescent lighting that bathes institutional spaces recalls Foucault's carceral architectures, visually reinforcing systems of control that contain marginalized subjects like Arthur (Foucault 195). This color choice extends to Arthur's clown makeup, where the smudged green around his eyes and mouth suggests both professional humiliation and the literal seepage of his psychological turmoil into his physical appearance. The gray tones dominating Gotham's urban landscapes and Arthur's early costumes similarly function as semiotic markers of erasure, with Bordwell noting how desaturated palettes visually manifest social alienation in contemporary cinema (78).

The film's chromatic break occurs with the strategic introduction of red during Arthur's violent transformation. The subway murder scene marks a pivotal shift when bright red blood suddenly stains the previously muted color scheme, visually actualizing Kristeva's concept of abjection as that which disturbs identity, system, and order (4). This violent chromatic interruption evolves into Arthur's adoption of the vibrant red suit during his iconic

talk show appearance as a choice that Barthes would interpret as semiotic excess (45), deliberately rejecting his earlier gray invisibility. The red suit's intertextual resonance with Travis Bickle's bloody climax in *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976) further positions Arthur within cinema's lineage of alienated antiheroes whose violence becomes a form of self-actualization. The film's careful restriction of red to moments of transformation and performance suggests what Kress and van Leeuwen identify as modal emphasis (146), where selective color saturation directs viewer attention to narratively significant elements.

Complementing this chromatic system, the film employs yellow and gold tones to signify media spectacle and psychological delusion. The warm amber lighting of the Murray Franklin Show creates what Baudrillard would term a hyperreal space (12), where television's simulated warmth masks societal violence as entertainment. This stands in stark contrast to the buttery yellows that characterize Arthur's hallucinations, particularly in his fantasy sequences with Sophie where the golden hues signal what Elsaesser identifies as cinema's capacity to visualize the unreliable psyche (203). The film's use of blue, notably in Thomas Wayne's corporate outfit and Arthur's final asylum gown establishes what Strohmayer describes as chromatic ideology (325), with tones representing both the illusion of neoliberal stability and the melancholy of institutional confinement.

The culmination of this chromatic discourse occurs in the asylum's white-tiled interview room where Arthur's blood-smeared smile creates a visceral contrast that embodies the film's central paradox. This final image, reducing Arthur's complex transformation to a primal color opposition exemplifies what Kristeva theorizes as the semiotic chora (25), a pre-linguistic expression of psychic drives through color and form. The film's color language thus operates on multiple discursive levels: as psychological portrait, as societal critique, and as cinematic intertextuality, demonstrating how contemporary auteur cinema employs color as a sophisticated narrative and ideological system.

6. A Lacanian Analysis of Language and Psychological Transformation in *Joker* (2019): The Postmodern Subject's Descent into the Real

In *Joker*, Arthur Fleck's metamorphosis from a socially marginalized clown to the anarchic Joker exemplifies what Jacques Lacan terms the foreclosure of the Symbolic, a psychotic breakdown wherein the subject fails to integrate into the linguistic structures that govern identity and meaning (Lacan, *Écrits* 214). Set against the hyper-mediated landscape of late capitalism, Arthur's psychological disintegration reflects the postmodern subject's alienation from dominant discourses, where language no longer functions as a stable mediator of selfhood but as an instrument of oppression and exclusion. This analysis employs Lacan's triad of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real to interrogate how Arthur's failed interrogation into language leads to his violent rebirth as the Joker.

6.1. The Symbolic Order's Violence: Arthur as the Failed Subject of Language

Arthur's pseudobulbar affect, which causes uncontrollable laughter, embodies what Lacan calls *jouissance*, an excess of psychic energy that disrupts the subject's integration into the Symbolic order (Lacan, Seminar XX 73). His laughter is literally unspeakable; it erupts involuntarily, marking him as an abject figure who cannot conform to societal demands for coherent self-expression. In Lacanian terms, Arthur's condition signifies the concept of the "whole in the Symbolic" (Žižek, *The Sublime Object* 121), a traumatic kernel that resists linguistic mediation. When he attempts to articulate his suffering such as in his journal "I just hope my death makes more cents than my life" his words are rendered absurd, mirroring the postmodern erosion of stable signification.

6.2. The Comedy Club: A Parodic Failure of the "Other"

Arthur's failed stand-up performance represents the collapse of the Symbolic pact. Comedy, as a form of discourse, depends on shared linguistic norms of the Lacanian "Big

Other". Yet, Arthur's jokes, stolen from Murray Franklin's show, are met with silence and ridicule, exposing his exclusion from the communal space of meaning. His diary, filled with fragmented phrases and doodles, further illustrates his failed fulfillment with language; where the Symbolic order should provide structure, it instead abandons him to the chaos of the Real.

It is noticed that the imaginary is collapsed through the shattered identification, seeing a fractured self-image in mirrors. Lacan's mirror stage theory claims that identity is formed through misrecognition when the infant idealizes its mirror image as a coherent self (Lacan, *Écrits* 76). Arthur's relationship with mirrors is a source for developing key ideas. His practiced smiles in the mirror reveal a desperate attempt to simulate a socially acceptable identity. The bathroom dance scene fractures his reflection into multiple selves, symbolizing the implosion of the Imaginary ego. This fragmentation culminates in his delusional relationship with Sophie, where fantasy, the Imaginary, replaces the unbearable Real of his isolation.

Arthur's eager desire to meet Thomas Wayne reflects Lacan's concept of the Name of the Father, the patriarchal signifier that stabilizes meaning (Lacan, *Seminar III* 320). Wayne's public dismissal of Arthur "You're nothing but a clown" constitutes a symbolic castration, denying Arthur's access to the familial and social legitimacy he always craves. The revelation that Wayne is not his father destroys Arthur's last established signifier, accelerating his descent into psychosis.

Arthur's first killings mark his violent entry into the Lacanian Real, the domain of unmediated trauma that exists beyond language. The blood, strikingly red against the subway's green-gray palette, materializes the unsymbolizable (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 23). Unlike Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, who narrates his violence through diary entries, Arthur

does not speak his murders into meaning; they exist as pure, wordless acts. This demonstrates violence as Postmodern Discourse exhibiting the Real as unleashed phase.

6.3. The Talk Show: The Joker as ‘Empty Signifier’

In Lacanian words, the Joker is an empty signifier, a symbol that absorbs all projections but has no fixed meaning (Lacan, *Seminar XI* 218). Arthur’s televised confession "I killed those guys" parodies the Symbolic order’s demand for confession, reducing it to a grotesque performance. His final act of shooting Murray live on air personifies the postmodern subject’s revolt against mediated discourse, replacing language with the bullet’s immediacy. Joker presents Arthur’s transformation as a Lacanian example of the postmodern condition, where the Symbolic order’s collapse leaves the subject adrift in the Real. His psychosis is not merely personal but structural, a consequence of late capitalism’s failed promises of identity and belonging. In an era where language is increasingly weaponized by social media and political rhetoric, the Joker emerges as the ultimate postmodern anti-hero. An individual who rejects speech entirely, choosing instead the pure, anarchic discourse of the body.

7. Critical Discourse Analysis of Arthur Fleck's Comedy Show Monologue in *Joker* (2019)

Arthur Fleck’s failed stand-up comedy routine serves as a pivotal moment where discursive power relations become violently apparent. Drawing on Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of text, discursive practice, and social practice (*Language and Power* 73). This analysis examines how Arthur’s monologue exposes the intersection of class marginalization, mental health stigma, and media exploitation. His performance as an attempt of humor, instead reveals the structural violence embedded in societal expectations of coherence and productivity.

7.1. Textual Analysis

The monologue's linguistic features demonstrate Arthur's exclusion from legitimate discourse. Hesitation and false starts are seen in "I, uh... I had a joke... um..." This is the dysfluency that shows the fact that he is an incompetent speaker (Goffman *Stigma* 15), reinforcing his social invisibility. Moreover, unsuccessful humor is noticed in the linguistic extraction "What do you get... when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him?" In fact, the setup follows comedy structure, but the absence of punch line subverts expectations, mirroring Arthur's own denied catharsis. Semantic ambiguity is shown in "I just hope my death makes more cents than my life." The pun on "cents/sense" critiques capitalist reduction of human value to economic productivity (Marx *Capital* 186). In the live show, Murray Franklin later edits the footage to frame Arthur as "dangerously insane", exemplifying Fairclough's concept of "recontextualization" (*Media Discourse* 46) to serve dominant narratives.

Arthur's performance ultimately deconstructs comedy itself, exposing it as a discourse that demands marginalized individuals perform their suffering. When he finally shoots Murray on live TV, it is not just an act of violence, but a rupture in mediated discourse and a refusal to let his words be edited or laughed away.

II. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of *Breaking Bad*: Language as the Catalyst and Consequence of Walter White's Transformation into Heisenberg

1. Institutional Discourse and the Construction of Walter's Subjugation

The early episodes of *Breaking Bad* frame Walter White's identity through institutional discourses that present him as powerless, exemplifying Michel Foucault's assertion that power operates through regimes of truth (*Power/Knowledge* 131). As a high school chemistry teacher, Walter is subjected to the infantilized discursive of the education

system where students mock his lessons, and his salary is inadequate to cover his medical bills, reducing him to what Foucault terms a "docile body" (*Discipline and Punish* 138). The medical establishment further reinforces his subjugation through clinical language. In other words, his lung cancer diagnosis, inoperable of stage three, is delivered with detached professionalism, objectifying his body as a site of pathology rather than agency. Even his brother-in-law Hank, a DEA agent, embodies state power through his authoritative jargon, cook labs and cartel activity, which Walter initially absorbs passively. These discourses collectively represent Walter as a failed subject of late capitalism, a man whose labor as a teacher is devalued, whose body is medicalized, and whose economic precarity is normalized.

However, Walter's transformation begins precisely when he appropriates and weaponizes these discourses. It is evident in his chemical expertise "This is not meth, holds up vial, it is chiral." This becomes a linguistic tool to assert dominance, mirroring Foucault's argument that resistance emerges from within power structures (*History of Sexuality* 95). The name "Heisenberg", a reference to quantum physics' uncertainty principal functions as a counter-discourse, destabilizing the fixed identities imposed by institutions. By adopting the lexicon of the drug trade batch, product, and territory, Walter penetrates and ultimately rewrites the discursive rules of the criminal underworld. This demonstrates Foucault's fundamental idea that power is not merely repressive but productive (*Power/Knowledge* 119).

1.1. The Meth Drug Trade as a Counter-Institution

Foucault's concept of heterotopia that refers to spaces existing outside normative structures finds a clear analogy in Walter's meth empire (*Of Other Spaces* 24). The lab, hidden beneath an industrial laundry, operates as a shadow institution, replicating corporate hierarchies, Gus Fring as CEO, Walter as R&D, and Mike as logistics, while subverting legal and moral codes. Here, language becomes a technology of control. In Foucauldian sense,

Corporate Euphemisms resonates with Gus referring to murders as "resolving inefficiencies" and drug distribution as "supply chain management," illustrating how capitalist discourse normalizes violence.

Walter's Scientific Rhetoric: His insistence on "purity", 96% vs. 99%, mirrors the neoliberal glorifying of metrics, a critique of how late capitalism reduces morality to quantitative benchmarks. Yet, as Walter ascends to power, his discourse grows increasingly authoritarian. His infamous declaration "I am the danger" rejects the passive voice of his earlier self "I'm just... I'm just an ordinary guy" in favor of a performative speech act that constitutes his new identity (Austin 6). This shift reflects Foucault's observation that subjects are constituted through discourse, not prior to it (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 131).

1.2. Family Discourse and the Collapse of the Domestic Sphere

The White household serves as a microcosm of competing discourses that fracture under Walter's transformation. Skyler's initial role as a moral arbiter "We don't lie to each other" is eroded by Walter's gaze lighting "You're acting crazy", corresponding to Foucault's argument that truth is contingent on power relations (*Truth and Power* 132). Their marital conflicts often manifest as linguistic battles. It is evident in Skyler's Tax Fraud Spreadsheets when she attempts to launder money through bureaucratic language "It's a car wash" mirrors Walter's rationalizations, revealing how legal and illegal discourses converge under capitalism. Walter Jr.'s Stutter represents a linguistic metaphor for the disruption of paternal authority; his struggle to articulate "Heisenberg" underscores the name's destabilizing power.

1.3. Discourse as the Site of Transformation

Breaking Bad positions language as both the medium and the outcome of Walter's metamorphosis. His journey from "Mr. White" to "Heisenberg" is not merely a change in actions but a radical reconfiguration of discursive identity exposing the violence inherent in

all institutional speech. Thus, the series can be seen through Foucault's most provocative claim, "Discourse is not life; its time is not your time" (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 211). Walter's tragedy lies in his inability to escape the very discourses he seeks to master.

2. A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of *Breaking Bad*: Language as Power, Performance, and Subversion

2.1. Linguistic Power Dynamics: Walter White's Rhetorical Transformation

From the outset, *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) establishes language as a battleground for identity and control. Walter White's evolution from a chemistry teacher to a drug lord is not merely physical but discursively constructed through shifting speech patterns, lexical choices, and performative utterances. In early episodes, Walter's dialogue is marked by hesitation, self-deprecation, and passive constructions "I just—I need to make sure we're safe", reflecting his subordinate position within institutional hierarchies (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 27). By contrast, Heisenberg adopts imperative syntax, Latinate vocabulary "fulminated mercury", and tautological declarations "I am the danger", weaponizing language to assert dominance (Austin 12). This linguistic shift after his psychological transformation mirrors Judith Butler's theory of performative identity shown in Walter's repeated speech acts "Say my name" that does not describe reality, but it is new self-creation (*Gender Trouble* 136). Even his cancer, framed initially through medicalized victimhood "inoperable", is later reclaimed as a rhetorical device "I have nothing to lose", demonstrating how discourse transmits bodily experience (Lacan, *Écrits* 104).

The series further critiques institutional euphemisms that sanitize violence. The DEA's jargon "blue sky" and "known associate" as well as Gus Fring's corporate doublespeak "acceptable losses" exemplify what Bourdieu terms officializing strategies, where bureaucratic language obscures moral responsibility (*Language and Symbolic Power*

109). Walter's eventual mastery of this discourse, his cold calculation of business over lives, reveals the hollow core of neoliberal rationality.

2.2. Cinematography as Linguistic Counterpoint

Breaking Bad's visual power subverts, amplifies, or ironizes its dialogue through cinematographic choices. One of the strong scenes is "I Am the Danger" when Walter manifests his verbal assertion of power which is undercut by the camera's claustrophobic close-up, framing him against a peeling wallpaper backdrop. The visual semiotics show domesticity enclosing his performative boldness, and exposing the fragility of his linguistic self-mythologizing (Kress and van Leeuwen 45). In another scenes in episode 14 from the second season, Skyler confesses about betraying Walter is filmed with a wide shot emphasizing her isolation in the White living room. The contrast between verbal briefness and visual emptiness constructs what Barthes calls a "hermeneutic code", a gap between what is said and what is shown, mirroring the family's communicative breakdown (*S/Z* 19).

Color symbolism further enriches this discourse. Walter's transition from beige, invisibility, to black, Heisenberg's threat, parallels his linguistic hardening, while Jesse's consistent red hoodies visually scream his emotional rawness against Walter's calculated rhetoric. The infamous "pink teddy bear," charred and floating in the pool, becomes a silent lexical item in the show's visual vocabulary and a symbol of innocence destroyed by unspoken violence.

2.3. Silence as Resistance

The series equally deconstructs language through its strategic omissions. Mike Ehrmantraut's silence "No more half-measures" operates as what Foucault calls counter-conduct, a refusal to participate in the explanatory regimes that justify violence (*Security*,

Territory, Population 201). When comparing this to Walter's monologues that become increasingly theatrical, language is revealed both as a weapon and crutch.

Jesse's fragmented cries "Yeah, science!" changing into "They can't keep getting away with it!" exemplify linguistic collapse under trauma. His eventual muteness in Season 5, punctuated only by the whispered "Just do it" to Walter, signals the failure of discourse to articulate suffering (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 51).

2.4. Close Reading of Walter White's "I Am the Danger" Monologue (*Breaking Bad*, S4E6)

2.4.1. Text of the Monologue

"You're right. I'm not in danger, Skyler. I am the danger. A guy opens his door and gets shot, and you think that of me? No. I am the one who knocks!"

2.4.2. Context and Framing

In *Breaking Bad* Season 4, Episode 6 "Cornered", Walter delivers a pivotal monologue to his wife, Skyler, after she warns him about the dangers posed by Gus Fring. The scene occurs at their home, with Walter standing in the living room, his posture rigid, while Skyler sits, visually reinforcing their power imbalance. This speech marks Walter's full discursive embrace of the Heisenberg persona, rejecting victimhood in favor of authoritarian rhetoric.

2.4.3. Syntactic analysis

Walter's language undergoes a stark rhetorical shift from defensive to declarative. From Passive to Active Voice; Earlier in the series, Walter uses qualifiers "I just need more time" or diverts blame "This isn't my fault". Here, he employs first-person present-tense assertions "I am", eliminating hesitation.

2.4.3. Lexical Brutality

The monosyllabic violence of "shot" and "knocks" contrasts with Skyler's abstract fear from "danger". His phrasing reduces human life to transactional imagery "a guy opens his door"; mirroring Gus's dehumanizing corporate discourse.

2.4.4. The Structure

The repetition of "I am" mimics dictatorial self-declarations, framing Heisenberg as an absolute authority. This speech exemplifies "reverse discourse" (*History of Sexuality* 101), where Walter appropriates the language of threat "danger", once used to describe him, and redefines it as self-empowerment. His syntax enacts what Foucault calls "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (*Power/Knowledge* 81), overthrowing Skyler's narrative of caution.

2.4.5. Visual and Paralinguistic Elements

For Lighting, harsh overhead light casts shadows on his face, splitting his identity between Walter, illuminated forehead, and Heisenberg, shadowed eyes. Concerning Camera Angle, a low-angle shot as he declares, "I am the one who knocks!" visually elevates him to the status of mythic antagonist. Bryan Cranston's delivery shifts from a trembling whisper "You're right" to a guttural growl "knock", embodying Lacan's "full speech" (*Écrits* 106), a vocalization of the unconscious desire for dominance. The door metaphor "the one who knocks" functions as a cultural signifier of invasion. Walter's phrasing mythologizes him and transforming a middle-aged man into an archetype of terror (Barthes, *Mythologies* 143).

2.4.7. Intertextuality

Walter's line subverts crime-drama tropes in reflecting traditional antiheroes such as The Sopranos' Tony Soprano in avoiding explicit self-identification as monsters. Walter's declaration "I am the danger" rejects euphemism, aligning with *Breaking Bad*'s theme of disillusioned of American masculinity. The shift from "a guy gets shot", third-person

detachment, to "I am the one who knocks", first-person agency, mirrors the series' broader movement from fate to volition.

The monologue reveals Walter's "fetishistic disavowal" (*The Sublime Object* 29) shows how he knows he's a criminal "you think that of me?", but derives pleasure from the performative admission. The knock is an off-screen sound in the viewer's imagination that is the Lacanian concept of objet petit, the unattainable object of desire of fear or respect.

3. Linguistic Dominance in *Breaking Bad* through Gustavo Fring's Discourse

The character of Gustavo Fring in *Breaking Bad* demonstrates how language functions as an instrument of power. His deliberate alternation between English and Spanish exemplifies Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital where fluency in multiple registers becomes a means of social navigation and control (*Language and Symbolic Power* 55). Rather than merely reflecting cultural background, Fring's bilingualism serves as a tactical tool, allowing him to shift between legitimate business interactions and underworld negotiations with precision. This analysis examines how his linguistic choices reinforce authority, manipulate subordinates, and obscure his criminal operations beneath a veneer of professionalism.

3.1. The Use of English and Spanish as an Appearance of Criminality

Fring's public persona as a fast-food entrepreneur requires a specific linguistic register. His English is measured, grammatically precise, and devoid of contractions which are features associated with corporate professionalism (Fairclough *Language and Power* 102). Phrases such as "I don't think fear is an effective motivator" mimics neoliberal business rhetoric while concealing the violence underpinning his empire. Similarly, his assertion "A man provides" appropriates paternalistic discourse to justify illicit activities, blending moralistic language with criminal enterprise.

In contrast, his Spanish-language exchanges with cartel members operate under different rules. The formal address "Don Eladio" conveys deference while masking hostility, and statements like "Los cárteles no son lo que eran" frames provocations as nostalgic reflections. His strategic pause before killing Don Eladio "Por mí..." weaponizes silence, demonstrating that meaning resides not just in words, but in their deliberate omission. Foucault's concept of heterotopic space clarifies this duality claiming that English constructs legitimacy, while Spanish facilitates lethal intimacy (*Of Other Spaces* 24).

Fring tailors his speech to manipulate different characters. With Jesse Pinkman, he adopts a simplified, almost paternalistic English "You are not a killer", reinforcing Jesse's subordinate position. This contrasts sharply with his interactions with Walter White, where he shifts to Spanish for maximum psychological impact. The phrase "sangre por sangre" is untranslated, forcing Walter to confront the visceral reality behind euphemisms like "business." Kristeva's theory of abjection (*Powers of Horror* 4) explains how this linguistic choice strips away abstraction, reducing conflict to its most primal terms.

Some of Fring's most chilling moments rely on nonverbal communication. His silent stare at Hector Salamanca, and his half-smile after being called "gran general" convey meaning beyond words. These instances exemplify Derrida's *différance* where meaning is perpetually deferred, and resisting fixed interpretation (*Of Grammatology* 158). By exploiting gaps in translation, Fring ensures that his threats remain ambiguous yet unmistakable.

3.2. The Mastery of Linguistic Duality

Fring's ability to navigate multiple linguistic registers underscores his dominance in *Breaking Bad*. Unlike Walter White, whose power stems from rhetorical boldness, Fring's authority lies in his precision in knowing when to speak, when to remain silent, and when to

let a single word "sangre" linger with devastating effect. His character demonstrates that true power is not merely about what is said, but about who controls the terms of communication.

III.1. Critical Discourse Analysis of Arthur Weissmann's *Going the Wrong Path* (2017)

The language of Weissmann's novel reflects rigorous realistic style of storytelling and character interactions demonstrating deep social power structures, biases, and cultural critiques. The Botelho family emigrates from the African country of Angola to the United States of America for a better life; however, they face several struggles reflecting the postmodern challenges.

1.1. Criminality as a Normative Discourse

The Silvio's phrase "they pay him for any activity in life on the street" shows how crime and drug dealing are naturalized as an economic system. This discourse forms a clear idea about living in American society in San Antonio Texas that requires strong will and capability of survival where illegal activity is legitimized by material necessity. This kind of activities are the refuge and in other cases choices of individuals who experience difficult economic and social circumstances. In the case of the Botelho family, it has started with Silvio's behavioral change because of non-successful assimilation in American society after Immigration from Angola, African country, to Texas in the United States of America.

After the death of Silvio and Antonio's parents, the young boy, Antonio, is forcefully drifted into his older brother's criminal world. This creates psychological internal conflicts in the psyche of Antonio. It is evident in his inner monologue expressed through the literary narrative technique of stream of consciousness "I never wanted to be the guy that everybody fears". This reveals how power shapes identity, he is interpellated into the role of "enforcer" through social pressure, Silvio's approval (Althusser 12).

1.2. Education Contrasted with Street Hierarchy

The school bell "the final bell rang" contrasts with the street's informal economy, highlighting competing institutions of power. School is a site of disciplinary power (*Foucault's Discipline and Punish* 14), but the intelligent and ambitious Antonio cannot escape his imposed drug deals loyalty in the street as obeying unofficial sovereignty of his only brother.

1.3. Antonio's Divided Self

His internal monologue "drives me deeper into this monster" reflects subjectivation, the process of becoming a subject within power structures. He is both producer and product of the criminal discourse. Antonio's inner turmoil "I never wanted this" hints at counter-conduct, but his lack of articulation shows how discourses constrain rebellion. The text illustrates Foucault's argument that power is not just repressive but productive, it creates identities, desires, and systems of truth. Antonio's trajectory exemplifies how subjects are written by dominant discourses, even as they harbor hidden rebellions

1.4. Silvio and Grady as Agents of Power

Their encouragement "enforcer against your rivals pays off" reinforces a discourse of hyper-masculinity where respect is tied to violence. Antonio's compliance "nodded his head in agreement" shows internalized discipline he performs the role expected of him. The promise of Port Aransas "college girls" ties pleasure to power, using biopolitical control, Foucault's term for regulating bodies through desires. Port Aransas is framed as a site of licensed transgression, Foucault's "heterotopia", where temporary freedom such as alcohol, sex mask deeper control. The trip is a disciplinary tactic to reintegrate Antonio into the group's norms. Antonio lies "it was alright" to appease Silvio, demonstrating how subjugated knowledge, his true feelings, are suppressed to maintain social order.

2. Baudrillardian Hyperreality and the Simulated Violence of Virtual Gaming in *Going the Wrong Path*

Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, a condition in which simulations replace reality to such an extent that the distinction between the two dissolves finding a striking manifestation in the virtual reality (VR) gaming scene in *Going the Wrong Path* (Baudrillard 1-3). The passage depicts Silvio and Antonio engaging in a virtual reality fighting game, where their physical movements dictate the actions of on-screen avatars in a constructed digital arena. This scenario exemplifies Baudrillard's assertion that contemporary existence is increasingly mediated by simulacra, or copies without originals, which supplant authentic experience (Baudrillard 6). The virtual reality game does not merely represent combat; it replaces real-world violence with a sanitized, rule-bound simulation, rendering physical aggression a consumable spectacle rather than a lived act. In this way, the game functions as a third-order simulacrum, where the simulation, the digital fight, no longer refers to any actual violence but instead operates within a self-contained system of signs punches, kicks, and health bars that exist solely within the game's coded logic (Baudrillard 11).

The implications of this simulated violence extend beyond the game itself, infiltrating Antonio's perception of power and agency. When the text notes, "the character emulated every action he did," it underscores Baudrillard's argument that technology does not merely imitate reality but reconfigures human behavior to fit its own parameters (Baudrillard 16). Antonio's fascination with the game's responsiveness "The character punched exactly like he punched"(141) reveals a dangerous feedback loop: the simulation validates his physicality, reinforcing the illusion that his actions, even violent ones, have immediate, uncomplicated consequences. This stands in stark contrast to the moral ambiguities of his real-life role as an enforcer, where violence carries irreversible social and psychological weight. The virtual reality game thus becomes a hyperreal refuge, a space

where Antonio can rehearse dominance without confronting its ethical ramifications, a phenomenon Baudrillard might describe as the "ecstasy of communication," wherein the subject is absorbed into a spectacle that neutralizes critical reflection (Baudrillard 27).

2.1. Language and the Normalization of Simulated Power

From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, the language surrounding the virtual reality scene naturalizes the conflation of play and violence, exposing how hegemonic discourses of masculinity and control are reproduced even in leisure (Fairclough 54). Silvio's transactional framing of the activity "Whatever you want to play" reduces agency to consumer choice, mirroring the neoliberal logic that permeates the novel's criminal underworld, both systems demand performance within predefined structures. The imperative syntax of the game's interface "The countdown hit zero and the match started" mirrors the coercive discourse Silvio employs elsewhere "We'll make sure you get laid", suggesting that even entertainment is governed by the same authoritarian rhythms as street life.

Moreover, the lexical field of combat, "punches," "kicks," "health bar," "knocked out", constructs violence as a gamified ritual, devoid of corporeal consequences. This aligns with Baudrillard's critique of "war as a video game" in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, where mediated violence becomes a detached, aesthetic experience (Baudrillard 59). The boys' seamless transition from virtual fighting to "air hockey and several shooting games" further illustrates what Fairclough terms interdiscursivity the blending of discourses, militarism and recreation, to sustain ideological power (Fairclough 89). The mall, as the setting for these activities, epitomizes late capitalism's places of consumption (Ritzer 34), where even rebellion, through gaming, is commodified and contained. The used language in late produced virtual games seems to change the thought of gamers throughout time. It is evident in the non understood behaviors of the young adult gamers.

2.2. The Game as Metaphor for Entrapment

The virtual reality scene in *Going the Wrong Path* crystallizes Baudrillard's dystopian vision of a society where simulations supersede reality. For Antonio, the game offers a fleeting sense of mastery, yet it is ultimately another "desert of the real" (Baudrillard 1). It is a space where agency is illusory, and all actions are pre-scripted by the machine's algorithms. The text's insistence on the boys' exhaustion "until they were out of tokens (141)" mirrors Antonio's broader entrapment: just as the game demands endless coins to continue, the hyperreal economy of crime and masculinity demands perpetual performance. A Critical discourse analysis of this passage reveals how language and technology collaborate to simulate freedom while reinforcing submission, leaving Antonio, and the reader, to question whether any path exists outside the code.

3. Psychological Transformation and the Normalization of Violence in *Going the Wrong Path* (2017): A Trauma Theory Analysis

3.1. The Studied Passage

Oh. This looks pretty bad," she said pointing at Antonio. But I'm okay," insisted Antonio "Honey, you're bleeding all over the place," said the nurse. Antonio looked down and saw blood stains all over his shirt and does. He touched his face and felt blood pouring out of his nose and mouth, I don't understand how I can be bleeding like this and not be in pain. "Said Antonio confused. That's called fight or flight response," explained the nurse as she cleaned up Antonio's face. "When your body senses imminent danger, it produces adrenaline to numb all your pain receptors. Without that, humankind would not have survived (Weissman141).

The extract depicting Antonio's physical injuries and his interaction with the nurse offers a profound case study in psychological transformation amid pervasive violence.

Applying trauma theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's conceptualization of trauma as an unassimilated event that disrupts memory and perception, this scene illustrates how Antonio's psyche adapts to the brutality of Silvio's world (Caruth 4). His dissociation from pain "I don't understand how I can be bleeding like this and not be in pain" represents the numbing effect of chronic violence, a survival mechanism that Freud terms as the "protective shield" against overwhelming stimuli (Freud 29). However, this very numbness signals a deeper psychological fragmentation, wherein Antonio's ability to process harm is systematically dulled, mirroring the desensitization required to endure Silvio's criminal milieu.

The nurse's explanation of the "fight or flight response" situates Antonio's physiological reaction within a broader discourse of biological determinism, suggesting that his tolerance for violence is both innate and inevitable. Yet trauma theory explains this narrative through Caruth's theory claiming that trauma is not the event itself but its belated and unresolved recurrence in the survivor's consciousness (Caruth 17). Antonio's confusion "I'm okay" despite visible injuries reflects this latency; his body bears the marks of violence while his mind postpones its emotional reaction. The nurse's questions "When's your birthday?" standard protocol for concussion assessment, further underscore the institutional normalization of injury, framing violence as routine rather than aberrant. Her clinical detachment mirrors the broader societal indifference to the cyclical harm inflicted on young men like Antonio, whose pain is treated as a logistical problem rather than a human crisis.

The juxtaposition of Antonio's bleeding body with the nurse's procedural care "cleaned up his face, handed him an icepack" reveals the commodification of trauma in hyper violent environments. Drawing on Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, one might argue that Antonio's wounds are not merely physical but testimonial, his body becomes a text that inscribes Silvio's world's unspoken rules (Herman 1). The icepack, a temporary palliative, symbolizes the superficial remedies offered to those trapped in systems of perpetual violence.

Meanwhile, the nurse's repetition of the protocol with the "first joke" highlights the assembly-line nature of trauma management, where individual suffering is subsumed into institutional efficiency. This scene thus captures Antonio's psychological transformation, his gradual internalization of violence as unremarkable, even as it erodes his capacity for self-protection.

3.2. The Paradox of Painlessness

Antonio's lack of pain perception "not be in pain" invites analysis through relational-cultural theory, which shows that disconnection from one's body is a coping strategy forged in oppressive environments (Miller 45). In Silvio's world, where vulnerability is lethal, Antonio's dissociation is both adaptive and dehumanizing. The nurse's biologized explanation "adrenaline to numb all your pain receptors" naturalizes this dissociation, obscuring its psychosocial roots. Yet, as Bessel van der Kolk notes in *The Body Keeps the Score*, the silencing of pain often precipitates long-term psychic fractures (van der Kolk 21). Antonio's inability to feel his injuries mirrors his broader alienation from selfhood, a casualty of the hyper masculine codes related with survival.

The scene's intersection of gender and trauma is equally prominent. The nurse's maternal tone "Honey, you're bleeding" contrasts with the violent masculinity that necessitated her care, revealing the gendered labor of repairing what patriarchal violence destroys. Antonio's submission to her ministrations "let her clean his face" is a rare moment of permitted vulnerability, yet its medicalized context prevents any genuine emotional reckoning. Here, the text is a comment on what James Gilligan calls the death of empathy in violent subcultures, where pain is either ignored or weaponized (Gilligan 73). Antonio's psychological transformation is thus not merely personal but systemic, a reflection of how violence reshapes identity under hardship.

3.3. Trauma as a Site of Invisible Warfare

This extract positions Antonio's body as a battleground where the psychic costs of violence are rendered visible yet unspoken. Through trauma theory, his painlessness emerges not as resilience but as a pathology of survival, a fragmentation of self that enables endurance at the cost of wholeness. The nurse's clinic, far from a sanctuary, becomes a microcosm of the very systems that perpetuate harm, treating symptoms while ignoring causes. In this sense, Antonio's transformation is a harrowing study in how violence transforms the psyche, leaving wounds that no icepack can heal.

IV. Natalie's Psychological Transformation in Cheryl Reed's *Poison Girls* (2017):

Critical Discourse Analysis

1. The Studied Passage

Something inside me has altered. I no longer cared about finding the Poison Killer solely for a story. I wanted to stop the deaths. I was embarrassed that I'd been part of the newspaper's silliness, turning victims into cartoon characters with names like Dead Angles and Ghost Girl. And who could forget Heroin Superhero? In the beginning, the girls were just bodies at the morgue. Now I knew them. I'd read their emails and diaries. I'd studied their Facebook accounts. They had become real to me than most people in the newsroom. (204-205)

The extract from Cheryl Reed's *Poison Girls* (2017) presents a paramount moment in the narrator's psychological and ethical evolution, marked by a shift from detached journalistic objectification to empathetic engagement with the victims of the "Poison Killer." This transformation can be productively analyzed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of textual, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice alongside ethical criticism and media studies theory. This

is for the aim of uncovering how language constructs moral responsibility and challenges institutional dehumanization (Fairclough 9).

1.1. Textual Analysis: Lexical Choices and Ethical Awakening

The narrator's admission "Something inside me has altered" signals a discursive rupture, a departure from prior journalistic detachment. The verb "altered" suggests an irreversible change, framing the transformation as ontological rather than merely attitudinal. This shift is reinforced by the negation "I no longer cared," which explicitly rejects her previous role in the newspaper's sensationalism. The lexical field of objectification "cartoon characters," "Dead Angels," "Ghost Girl," "Heroin Superhero" criticizing the media's reduction of victims to consumable spectacles, a practice studied by scholars like Jean Baudrillard, who argues that media representations often replace real suffering with simulacra (Baudrillard 12). In contrast, the narrator's later discourse employs personalizing language "I knew them," "read their emails and diaries," "studied their Facebook accounts", which reconstructs the victims as subjects rather than objects. The comparative "more real to me than most people in the newsroom" underscores the ethical dissonance between institutional practices, dehumanization, and individual moral reckoning, empathy.

1.2. Discursive Practice: Journalism as a Site of Power and Complicity

The passage reveals the hegemonic discourse of crime journalism, where victims are routinely showing as unfamiliar to maximize reader engagement, a phenomenon Susan Sontag critiques in *Regarding the Pain of Others* as the aestheticization of suffering (Sontag 14). The narrator's retrospective shame "I was embarrassed that I'd been part of the newspaper's silliness" exposes the normalized violence of media discourse, wherein sensational nicknames "Dead Angels" sanitize tragedy. Fairclough's concept of "intertextuality" is relevant here where the newspaper's framing of victims borrows from

comic-book and pop-culture lexicons, embedding their deaths in a pre-existing discourse of entertainment (Fairclough 34). The narrator's turn toward intimacy such as reading diaries, emails, and social media mirrors Carolyn Ellis's autoethnographic method, where immersive engagement fosters ethical responsibility (Ellis 45). This shift from spectatorial to participatory discourse challenges the newsroom's ideology, aligning with Herman and Chomsky's critique of media's "manufacture of consent" (Herman and Chomsky 1).

1.3. Sociocultural Practice: Empathy as Counter-Discourse

The narrator's transformation reflects broader sociocultural tensions in crime reporting, where institutional demands clash with humanistic ethics. Her assertion that the victims have become more real than her colleagues is criticism to the alienating structures of late capitalism, which, as Marx argued, reduce human beings to abstract labor (Marx 30). The passage also engages with feminist media theory, particularly the work of Carol Gilligan, who posits that ethical development often involves a shift from impersonal justice to care-based morality (Gilligan 22). The narrator's empathy "I wanted to stop the deaths" resists the patriarchal discourse that often frames female victims as passive or expendable, a theme central to Reed's investigative focus.

1.4. Discourse as a Site of Moral Reckoning

The used language in this novel exemplifies how discourse mediates ethical consciousness, exposing the contradictions between institutional discourse and individual agency. Through Critical discourse analysis, it is seen how the narrator's lexical choices, intertextual references, and rejection of sensationalist tropes construct a counter-discourse of empathy, challenging the dehumanizing norms of crime journalism. The passage ultimately functions as a critique of media power, urging a rethinking of journalistic practices that prioritize spectacle over substance.

Conclusion

Joker (2019) exemplifies Foucault's theories by illustrating how discourse constructs madness, legitimizes power, and provokes resistance. The film's language from institutional labels to Arthur's fractured diary showing the mechanisms of control, while his rebellion underscores the potential for counter-discourse. This analysis not only enriches understanding of the film but also demonstrates Foucault's enduring relevance to critiques of media, psychiatry, and class struggle. The film suggests that when words fail, the body speaks through laughter, dance, and bloodshed. *Breaking Bad* positions language itself as the most drug an addictive substance that alters reality. Walter's final confession "I did it for me" strips away all discursive pretense, exposing the Real beneath his psychological transformation that led to a constructed identity. Studying the discourse of Weissmann's novel has revealed the power of the institutions in articulating social relations, the mind and the actions of characters. The literary work *Poison Girls* is a rich source to uncover the influence of language that is used in media to induce specific reactions among readers. It is important how the story unveil how media dopting real events and transforming them into a spectacle that changes true feelings of pain, loss, and empathy into other created effects that depend on the journal's agenda.

Chapter Six: Society as Influencing and Influenced Postmodern Element in the Individual's Psychological Transformation

Introduction

In the story of the Joker in the 1980s, the character is created after being thrown in a chemical waste while the presented version of the Joker in 2019 is the result of putting him in today's society. This is what can be noticed through the character's fictional narrative in describing the effect of the postmodern society in changing individuals. The introduced narrative contrast shows the destructive impact of society compared to the material's reaction to acid that transfigures the original substance turning it into different material. Through qualitative theoretical approaches that include concepts of sociology and psychoanalytic, this chapter analyzes the impact of society on changing the individual's psychology in *Joker (2019)* and the TV series *Breaking Bad (2008-2013)*. The thematic analysis stands beside cinematography criticism that is employed in analyzing the scenes. This study does not underestimate the effect of the powerful individual on directing the psychology of the crowd, which is also investigated throughout the works in this chapter.

This chapter studies the character of Arthur Fleck and traces his transformation into the Joker to analyze the social reasons that stand behind his descent into psychological breakdown. Actually, Todd Philips presents this film, *Joker (2019)* as an origin story of the well-known villain Joker. The psychological and mental transformation is displayed in a gradual manner with revelations about the society's impact on Arthur Fleck, and then the influence of the created Joker on the city's community. The birth of the character of Joker is visually presented in a narrative structure that contains several levels of the powerful conditions that surround the antihero. One of them is the social level and the other strong level is the psychological side, which is the most prominent.

Watching and analyzing this cinematic production is a life experience that teaches many lessons about how a decent and loving person can change into a criminal villain. It is not a story of an ordinary villain; it is the Joker, one of the greatest villain characters ever written in DC history. The character of Joker exhibits the societal treatment and reaction to the mentally ill people. This masterwork shows how an individual is stripped from his humane features in gradual dehumanizing way. Society is one of the responsible factors that stand underneath this transformation.

The chapter studies White's transformation into Heisenberg in the masterful television work *Breaking Bad* that presents the antihero's gradual and profound transition from a humble overqualified high school chemistry teacher into a dangerous immoral kingpin. At the beginning, Walter White is driven by desperation after being diagnosed with cancer and fearing financial breakdown. Walt justifies his criminal act of cooking meth by the purpose of securing his family's future. However, as he gains power in the criminal underworld, his motives shift from necessity to ego and control.

The influence of the created characters Joker and Heisenberg towards the crowd is approached through the crowd theory, also known as mob psychology or crowd behavior theory by Gustave Le Bon. It is a concept from social psychology that studies how powerful individuals affect the mind of others. It also explains how individuals behave differently with the crowd than they would alone, following a collective mindset.

I. Society as an Influencing Factor in Arthur's Psychological Transformation into Joker

In the case of *Joker* (2019), directed by Todd Phillips, this chapter approaches the work from psychoanalytic perspective to study the influence of society on the psychology of Arthur. Then, the analysis moves in another section to investigate the impact of the mind of the powerful individual on the crowd. This analytical approach is paramount in understanding

the transition of the protagonist, Arthur Fleck, and his interaction with the crowd in the context of his rise as the Joker.

1. Cinematographic Analytical Overview of the Film *Joker* (2019)

One of the characteristics of this cinematic production is its genuine vision of the past story of the joker that does not rely on any other references of the past productions that involve the character of the Joker. Nolan's Dark Knight trilogy and several comic books are strong references that can inspire the production of the joker; however, this cinematic movie broke his own way of creating this well-known character that defies its other clichés. This is due to the methodology of work depended by the director. For the NPR media organization, Todd Philips has admitted to the journalist Terry Gros in a movie interview about his reliance on the flexibility of production and not being chained by the script and the written plan. In another interview with the journalist and film critic Jack Giroux executed for the Film news blog Slash Film, the cinematographer Lawrence Sher states, 'I think one of the biggest challenges on this movie but it's also a challenge on every movie I have done with Todd is to always be super ready to just be flexible (Giroux)'.

Studying the cinematography of the film has shown that the success of the work is the result of the captivating imagery and the creation of new perspective of the Joker, which is a character that existed for decades in comic books, cinema, and TV series. Presenting a version of the untold past of this famous and loved character is challenging mission that requires creativity at different levels and attention to the small details of the protagonist. The cinematographer Lawrence Sher is the mind behind the astonishing look of the joker and the image seen on the screen. He relies on specific equipment in producing lightning and colors in the scenes.

Lawrence Sher has presented several suggested attempts to create the Joker's aspired look by trying different cameras and lenses. At the beginning, the director Todd Phillips was going to photograph the character Joker by using 65-millimeter camera; however, this did not succeed because it is an expensive equipment in comparison with the existed film budget. The director, the producer, and the cinematographer negotiated several plans and scenarios about producing the adequate look of the Joker while not surpassing the financial limits 50 to 60 million dollar, which is the available budget of the film production. After several attempts and long discussion with the crew of the film production, the decision has settled in using multiple cameras, which are Arri Alexa 65 and Arri Alexa mini. Each one is used for specific purpose that serves the director and the cinematographer's aims. The first one with its large sensors provides the aspired expensive look with great quality that includes the vivid colors and the perfect image that is produced nowadays. Employing the second one is for its flexibility with its multitude lenses in order to achieve the look of the Joker. Actually, the cinematographer admitted in his interview that they used other cameras because photographing some complex scenes required other equipment (Giroux). For instance, they used lenses of 65 with signatures Nikon nickel; lenses Zeiss CP2s Leica's r series, Aries macro lenses, and a Vintage Array 65.

Improvisation as a way of experimenting with art in shooting the film's scenes is Todd Philips' way in producing the work's narrative. This improvisation is employed with the choice of equipment, the script, and the actors' performance. Todd's improvising and flexible style of production is seen in the way of creating scenes through pushing actors to experience new situations that generate hidden talents in their personalities. Joaquin Phoenix's improvised gestures such as lighting a cigarette and preparing his journal are examples of the success of the director's ensuring of freedom as a strategy of cinematic production. The cinematographer with the film crew have been ready during shooting the scenes for the

possible unpredictable improvised gestures and expressions. This is why they have used large shooting format to not miss any creative performed action that may add artistic dimension to the film and persuade audience. This is a truthful and authentic source of influence that indulges audience to the psychological transition of Arthur and leads viewers to sympathize with the character's descent into chaos and madness.

Achieving authenticity through providing freedom to the actor's performance is an original way of producing such a cinematic masterpiece. According to Sher's statements in his interview with Jack Giroux, the production crew has depended on a clever idea of not rehearsing the acts; instead, they have relied on shooting the scenes directly to capture the actor's performance as a fresh artistic experience. This cinematic technique liberates the actor and the story from the usual shooting protocols that blurs the artistic and authentic side of the work, especially when the narrative is told by an unreliable narrator.

2. The Influence of Society on Arthur Flick

2.1. Thematic and Cinematography Analysis of the Scene of Arthur's Violent Beaten



Fig.01. 'The Scene of Arthur Beaten by a Group of Teenagers' (0:03:35) Todd Philips, *Joker*, (2019).

The second part of the opening scene of the movie reflects several dimensional perceptions including the societal influence. In the scene (0.01.29) Arthur Flick, Joaquin Phoenix, *performs* his usual job as a hired clown and entertainer wearing the customs of clown and dancing while holding signboard. Next to him, a musician plays on piano. He tries to present an entraining show in a crowded street where pedestrians walk by him without showing any interest in his presented show. The latter is performed to advertise for Kenny's Music Shop that is a failing business where he stands holding an advertisement signboard signifying 'Going out of Business, Everything Must Go'. He tries to attract people to buy from the music store; however, people ignore the show, the store, and the played music. People seem to not care about Arthur's entertaining show nor buying music instruments. From the scene, it seems that Gotham's individuals reflect ignorance and carelessness which is shown through their straight walking and their expressionless faces that characterize their cold attitude to the entertaining show and the played music. They even try to avoid the accumulated garbage as if it is not in their sight. The architecture, the cars, the clothes reflect the late 70's that is marked with the economic crisis in the historical context of the United States.

As an entertainer, he exhibits certain harmony with music reflected in his dancing to Temptation Rag song. His steps and the movement of his body coordinate with the flow of the music as an attempt to present a show that can attract the walking people. He keeps his smile while moving the signboard to capture the attention for the music store. His job is to persuade others to come to the store and buy the musical instruments. However, the reaction of people is not just ignorance, but attacking the entertaining clown.

While he is presenting his show, Arthur is surprisingly attacked by a group of teenagers who insult him and steal his signboard. Arthur follows them running down the street to retrieve the board of advertisement that belongs to the music store. He crosses the

traffic street in dangerous way chasing them to a deserted alley. His customs and oversize pair of shoes of clowns make this chase more difficult. As he enters the alley, he is beaten with the sign that becomes broken to pieces. The teenagers continue beating Arthur as if he is not a human being. Then, they leave him on the ground gasping for air and holding his body and touching the places where he is painful attacked.

This iconic scene from the movie reflects Arthur Fleck and Gotham city as two characters with similar characteristics. Arthur seems a man who is devoted to his job as an entertaining clown despite the neglecting and violent society. Likewise, Gotham city seems vivid place though it is abandoned by the system that rules this territory. This is evident through the thrown garbage that is accumulated for a long period in the streets. The failing business of the music industry is a sign of the breakdown of the city's economy. Kenny's Music Shop is a symbol of Fleck's daily struggles in keeping his job as an entertainer despite his devotion for this work. The teenagers' beating of Arthur and breaking of the store's signboard are foreshadowing actions that pave the way to the upcoming rising actions of the narrative. This foundational scene anticipates Arthur Fleck's psychological break down as well as Gotham's rebellion through the violent attack of the teenagers and the broken signboard.

The film's score or music is one of the cinematographic choices of production that is used in this scene to present the society's violence, discrimination, and bullying through the screen. In this iconic scene, audience listens for the first time from the beginning of the film to the notes played from the musical instrument of cello, which is the film's music score. It is played in a moment when Arthur is left on the ground suffering from the bruises on his body after being violently beaten. This chosen moment of introducing the movie's score moves audience closer to the mind of Arthur Fleck. The music is presented as the sound that exists in the mind of this protagonist. Notes played from a lonely solo cello that tells a story

inducing different reactionary emotions such as pain, anger, and anguish. Actually, according to the BMI website, Broadcast Music Inc, the music score is produced through a large orchestra, which is what the audience cannot realize in this scene because it seems as one instrument. The music intensifies as his feelings become stronger. When his anger, disappointment and frustration grow throughout the progression of the narrative, the orchestra's music grows too. In an interview with the journalist Nina Pacent, the Icelandic musician and composer Hildur Guðnadóttir claims to the media incorporation the BMI, Broadcast Music Inc, 'Through all of this, I wanted to ensure the music remained very simple and uncomplicated, naïve and not particularly cool – very similar to how the audience sees Arthur.'

The beating scene of Arthur Fleck is a pivotal moment that underscores the film's themes of societal cruelty, isolation, and Arthur's descent into madness that require skillful use of cinematography techniques. The Cinematographer Lawrence Sher employs a combination of framing, lighting, movement, and color to heighten the emotional and psychological impact of the scene.

Close reading of the illustrated shot reveals the purposes of Sher's choices of framing and composing the scene that revolve around the aim of inducing the internal feelings of the protagonist such as confinement and oppression. In cinematography, it is known as - claustrophobic tight shots It is defined as a shot in which the camera appears to be very close to the subject, as in an extreme close-up (Brown 7). In fact, the sense of claustrophobia in the film comes from different sources such as cinematography tools, the actor's performance and the director's style. This film does not explicitly declare that claustrophobia is a one of the work's themes, but it is perceived by audience from the created cinematic effect. The film does not directly depict or refer to claustrophobia but it creates feelings of confusion, discomfort, and the illusion of pressure with different cinematic techniques. This achieved

effect is the result of the immersive feature of cinema. Corbin claims, ‘most narrative films encourage this ‘insideness’ or absorption into the cinema space, through photographic realism, camera movement and editing, and character identification’ (319–320).

To achieve the desired effect and create feeling of discomfort, the filmmakers convey these feelings through soundtrack and the masterful employment of technology. Through the use of developed tools of cinematography, the claustrophobic feeling is felt from the camera’s shots of confined and open spaces as contrasted settings that evokes the feeling of confinement. This scene is shot in a narrow alley, with tight framing that emphasizes the physical and Arthur’s entrapment that is both physically and metaphorically. The walls seem to close in on him, reinforcing his powerlessness. This contributes to the experience of audience in understanding the journey of Joker. The latter is another source of this created feeling that makes spectators feel his inner struggle of being imprisoned through his convincing performance.

The cinematographer depends on specific angles and color palette in order to reflect the societal oppression and its effect on Arthur. To emphasize his victimization by society, the scene is shot from a high angle depicting Arthur on the ground where the camera looks down at him, making him appear small and vulnerable. It is clear that the cinematographer relies on handheld camera because viewers can notice slight shakiness that adds a sense of raw, unfiltered brutality, making the violence feel immediate and visceral. As far as the camera movement and pacing are concerned, it concentrates on demonstrating Arthur’s feeling of pain through slow shots that drive audience to experience the brutal treatment with the protagonist. In fact, Sher switches between static shots and sudden camera movements in shooting this scene. For instance, when the beating begins, the camera remains static to capture the detailed image of beating making violence feel more abrupt and shocking. Later, as Arthur curls into a fetal position, the camera moves directly to slowly capture Arthur’s

agony. Concerning lighting and the adopted Color Palette, Sher uses cold, greenish degradations in portraying the location and the antihero. The alley where he is beaten is shown in sickly green with some blue hues. Actually, this is a recurring palette in the film that reflects Gotham's decay and Arthur's deteriorating mental state.

Low key lighting is the used technique of achieving the desired contrast of light and dark that reflects the aspired look of the used colors, the alley, and Arthur in the frame. According to Brown, it is a fundamental visual component in creating depth, spatial relationships, and it certainly carries prominent emotional and storytelling weight (51). In the scene, it is noticed that shadows are dominated with harsh contrasting effect between light and dark, symbolizing the moral ambiguity of Gotham and Arthur's fractured psyche. In the context of visual contrast, the bright red of blood is presented as a highlighted color in comparison with the other muted colors signifying the considerable suffering of the antihero. The uncontrollable laughter of Arthur contrasts horrifically with the received violence and the endured pain reinforcing the tragedy of this character who can't even express his suffer in ordinary way. He is silenced in the oppressing society that does not provide an individual a chance for expression and listening only to the powerful ones. This is evident through the sounds of the teenagers' punches and kicks that are heard clearly while Arthur's cries are almost drowned out, mirroring how society ignores the suffering of the marginalized persons.

This scene is produced with clever and artistic use of cinematography tools and investment of the creative ideas of the director as well as the film crew that have succeeded in developing a narrative and emotional weight. The choice of the visual elements serves to immerse the viewer in Arthur's suffering leading to his eventual transformation into the Joker that appears tragically inevitable. This fundamental choice places the two identities of Arthur and Joker in different atmospheres that can be notice by audience.

2.2. The Development of the Psychological and Mental Issues of Arthur

The psychological state of Arthur Flick as an adult is the result of the influence the societal environment that starts with the mother. His parent's upbringing has left traumatic consequences generated from the protagonist's childhood that has affected his wellbeing and behavior as a child and an adult. Trauma often has serious mental health consequences for individuals which is seen through Arthur Flick's mental issues. Audience does not know about the traumatic childhood of Arthur until the end of the work, which is a narrative twist created by the scenarist and the director Todd Philips. He presents to audience an example of a category of people who are not well demonstrated in today's media. The latter is marginalized group of individuals who suffer from mental and psychological states. They are seen as disturbing evil individuals born with abnormal traits that threaten the other members of society. This is not always the case of such people, which is shown through this psychological thriller work.

2.2.1. The Emotional and Physical Abuse During Childhood

Through several scenes, Arthur is presented as mentally ill patient who attends therapy sessions for a long time. He lives under prescribed several psychotropic medications that does not seem enough for him to be psychological stable in his life. He even asks the social assistance to give him more drugs saying 'I need my medication to be increased'. This shows the serious psychological anguish of Arthur that seems to suffer from profound issues. The progressive development of the narrative slowly uncovers the sources of his mental and psychological issues. The story shows studied and selected information about the family history of the protagonist to introduce societal environment as the first generator of Flick's mental health problems. However, the narrative does not expand in revealing the details of the character's past in order to widen the audience's imagination in analyzing and interpreting of the story of the antihero.

2.2.2. The Influence of Penny Flick's Mental Illness on Upbringing Little Arthur

As it is revealed at the end of the story, Arthur is raised by a mentally disturbed adoptive mother, after being abandoned as a child, who has caused permanent psychological damages to the protagonist. His mother Penelope Fleck who is known as Penny, starring Frances Conroy, has a long medical history of diagnoses and treatments collected in a medical record at the archives of Arkham mental health hospital. Her son Arthur Flick steals her medical file from the hospital after being informed about her hidden past from his alleged father, Thomas Wayne. Reading his mother's medical chart is a traumatic incident for Arthur who is shocked by his mother's psychiatric diagnosis, and neglectful parenting that result in Arthur's violent emotional and physical abuse as a child. In addition, he discovers the fact that she is not his biological mother through the file's documents that include child adoption application from Gotham city's orphanage. The initial reason behind Penny's residential treatment in Arkham hospital is her claim about having an affair with Thomas Wayne beside other unreasonable acts. The clinical evaluation executed by the psychiatrist Benjamin Stoner who has analyzed her exhibited bizarre behavior results in diagnosing this case as delusional psychosis and narcissistic personality disorder. According to the pages of her file shown in the scene of Arthur's traumatic incident of discovering his mother's past, Penny has received in-patient therapy in the institution. As stated in Behavioral hospital of Belarie's website, 'An inpatient program, also known as residential treatment, involves living at a treatment facility for a set period of time to receive mental health services.'

2.2.3. The Abusive Adoption of Arthur

Arthur's mental instability is the result of social abuse that stretches from his childhood when his foster mother is considered as the main responsible for his emotional and physical abuse. The adult Arthur does not remember his abusive childhood because it is considered as traumatic phase in his lifetime. Arthur has been ignorant about the past that

relate him with his mother until he reads penny 's medical file. This is a narrative twist that is left at the end of the film that makes audience the other shocked side who discovers the truth behind the hidden past of Arthur. This is a paramount action in the transformation of the character into Joker as well as the narrative progress of the story. The unveiled facts like the court's decision of finding the foster mother guilty for exposing her child's welfare to danger shows the immense physical abuse of Arthur. It is true that the mother suffers from mental issues, but this does not affect her only wellbeing as much as exposing a little child to dangerous situations. Penny has exercised thoughtless actions on Arthur as it is proved in her medical chart. The latter includes documents that demonstrate the protagonist's exposure to violent treatment by the adoptive mother as well as her boyfriends. In fact, Penny has been beaten by her boyfriends and was responsible for letting her adopted child to be abused repeatedly by them before being caught by the authorities. However, Arthur does not remember these past events, but the fact of losing his childhood memory is a sign of psychological trauma.

In addition, loss of memory and the involuntary laughter are also caused by brain damage from the received abuse. The mother's medical chart plays an important role in revealing the state of her psyche as well as discovering the past of Arthur to understand his characteristics, and analyze his transformation. It contains official documents and news clippings that prove the stated information; for instance, the papers claim that Penny's adopted little son was found by the police chained to a radiator in squalor. Moreover, the reports of her recorded conversations with the psychiatrist state that she has been oblivious and unconscious about what has been happening in her home. Her obsession with Thomas Wayne is one of the reasons that stand behind these actions. This is proved by the fact that she considers her adopted child as her biological son with Thomas Wayne. She has not done any serious action to redeem her mistakes with Arthur during his childhood or help him to get

well from the caused mental damages. This exacerbates Arthur's situation in his way of thinking about his mother.

The received violent physical abuse has led to severe head injury that is the cause of his mental illness, uncontrolled laughing. As an inconsiderable gesture of redeeming her fault, his foster mother always describes his nature when he was child as a fun and kind boy as a way to cover the truth about the experienced events and cover her mistakes. It is her way to obtain remorse from causing painful damages to the mental and the psychological health of little orphan Arthur.

Arthur's ignorance about his childhood has led him to take care and infirm his old mother as a little spoiled girl. He gives her bath while he jokes with her as a way of trying to make her happy. Besides, he prepares her meals, nurture her, and obey her demands without questioning or complaining. For instance, he sends her letters to Thomas Wayne, former employer, asking for his help. Moreover, he ensures taking her medicines. Entertaining his mother is present in several scenes such as asking her to dance with him and watching TV live shows with her. The idea of Spreading happiness and encouraging people to smile has started with his mother who always used to tell him 'Always smile and not be bothered by the past'. Succeeding in taking care of his mother and believing her words have motivated Arthur to hold on his dream to be comedian, which suits his durable mental illness, involuntary laughing. This has encouraged him to work on his sense of humor despite his illness and try to have a stand-up comedy career. He always keeps his mother's repeated statement in his mind as slogan of his life 'always smile', which has been expressed as a comic joke in his stand-up routine.

2.2.4. The Emotional Breakdown When Meeting the Alleged Father Thomas Wayne

Arthur's attempt to meet his alleged father has had enormous psychological harm on his ill psyche that has deteriorated as a result of Thomas Wayne's uncovering of the truth

about his mother and his tragic past. Fleck's reading of his mother's letter to Thomas Wayne who is addressed as the father of Arthur has led him to know about the other missing parent. Presenting the figure of Mr. Wayne as the biological father in his life for the first time has revived and created new emotions. He experiences curiosity, anger, and need towards the discovered father who is missing since his was born. Growing up without a father has created several serious psychological issues in the formation of the personality of Arthur. Penny's obsessive interest for Mr. Wayne, staring Brett Cullen, has led her to present him as the father of Arthur. This alleged father figure is running for Mayor of Gotham City, which makes him present in media programs and newspapers. In fact, Penny used to be a troubled former employee for Mr. Wayne who is said to be in relationship with her when she was a young adult. After that, Penny assumes that a separation happened between them, and she ended up living in the darkest places in Gotham city. Her obsession and severe narcissism have led her to send him letters everyday asking for his help and talking about their son Arthur, but she has never received a reply. Penny's obsession with Thomas Wayne appears in present time through her insistence on sending him letters and always telling Arthur to check the mail for a letter that has never appeared.

In his novel *World Enough and Time* (1950), the American novelist and literary critic Robert Penn Warren writes, 'You live through that little piece of time that is yours, but that piece of time is not only your own life, it is the summing-up of all the other lives that are simultaneous with yours. . . . What you are is an expression of History.' This quotation symbolizes Arthur's influence by his past childhood trauma that encompasses the abuse of his mentally ill adoptive mother and the oppression of the whole society. Penny's mental illness extends to Arthur causing durable damages from his childhood that complicate his life on the personal, social, and economic level. The traumatic and tragic childhood of Arthur that has made him exposed to violent beating and inhuman treatment explains his endured issues

in his adulthood. Actually, penny is not shown as a cruel person, but her lack of reasonable and sage thought leads to damaging results. The story has several characteristics including the surprising twists especially the medical history of Penny and its influence on Arthur. This is considered as one of the darkest peculiarities of the narrative.

2.2.5. The Influence of the Absence of a Father Figure on Arthur's Personality Development

The absence of a father figure has exacerbated Arthur's emotional and psychological instability caused by his adoptive mother. The feelings of abandonment, loneliness and unworthiness are increased in the absence of the father, which lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Even the formation of his identity is shaken when he cannot answer his questioning about the appearance, preferences, mentality of his biological father. Such innate questions stem from the child curiosity to acknowledge the father figure in his life. Knowing one's biological parents is important to constitute ideas about one's self and origin which are paramount in developing one's personality and thus identity. Here, Arthur loses the feeling of belonging to a family with acknowledged biological parents. This leads to the formation of insecurity issues that create a feeling of yearning for validation far from the parents' figures through unreasonable ways such delusions or even violence. Arthur always watches Murray Franklin in amazement, because this public figure is seen as his imagined father. This is why he experiences delusions of being praised by Murray Franklin in his TV show.

The failure of communication and connecting with others is also one of the outcomes of the absence of the father during the upbringing of Arthur. Furthermore, the feeling of not belonging in society is a result of the parental void that drives Arthur to a state of losing the strong referencing origins in this world, father. One of the main reasons of Arthur's fractured identity is the absence of his father figure. Besides, he experiences psychological breakdown

when his alleged father Thomas Wayne does not recognize him as his son in a harsh way.

2.2.6 Arthur's Parental Vacuum Through Freudian Psychological Vision

The absence of the father figure deteriorates the psychological development of Arthur from his childhood to his adulthood that witnesses his transformation to Joker. According to the Freudian concept of Oedipal complex, Arthur misses an important phase in his childhood that marks the child's feeling of desire for the opposite sex parent and jealousy toward the same sex parent (Trotta and Formica 4). According to the studies of psychoanalysts like Freud, the father of psychology, the little boy develops mixed feelings of hostility, admiration, and love towards the father who is seen as a rival and an example (Freud 42-44). Arthur misses this developmental phase that nurture paramount features in forming the personality and the identity of the individual. The boy identifies with the father and internalizes his authority and position in his life (Freud 43). In his book (1930), *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud asserts, 'In particular, this ambivalent position generates the essential component of guilt that tempers the son's murderous impulses to displace his father in his mother's affections through forming a self-regulating system of moral constraint' (42-44). In the absence of his father, Arthur cannot undergo the development of this phase, which deforms his sense of masculinity (Diamond 66). In his book, *Masculinity and Its Discontents* (2021), the American clinical psychoanalyst Michael J. Diamond explains, 'the phallic ego ideal becomes needed in order to manage narcissistic anxieties arising in the complex reality of gender differentiation.' Here, the theorist shows the importance of the phallic ego in forming the masculine gender identity. Phallic ego refers to the phallic development stage in Freudian Psychoanalytic that occurs between the age of three and six years old (Boothe 1-5). It symbolizes power, authority, and dominance. Moreover, it results in the child's identification with the parent of the same gender, and it includes integration of societal norms related to gender roles (Freeman 20). Ultimately, the child develops a true

sense of self and identity because the healthy gender and identity development certainly emerges from reciprocal identification with both mother and father.

2.2.7. The Influence of the Father's Absence in the Development of Arthur's Id, Ego, and Super ego

The personality and psychological development of Arthur are deteriorated by the absence of the father that has harmed the healthy formation of the psyche including ego, id, and super ego. Concerning the id, Arthur reflects features of strong id because of his profound pain and crave for recognition and validation by others. The id is responsible for primal desires and impulses and follows the pleasure principal, as it is explained in the theoretical part. Arthur develops the id without authoritarian parental figure of a father that is supposed to guide and check such psychological progress. This is why Arthur cannot control his primal urges; for instance, he commits violent crimes as a reaction to his disappointment from societal rejection and neglect without thinking about the outcomes of his act. As far as the ego is concerned, its function is to operate on the reality principle collaborating between the id and the external world. Arthur suffers from his inability to form adequate perception of real situations that happen with society. He cannot develop a vision of expecting others' reaction in real life as well as acting with them following the known social norms of his society.

The weak ego development also leads to complicated expression of desires in socially acceptable way. Thus, he uses his comedic talent and humor as a way to communicate and connect with the other. Although, he tries to direct his involuntary laughter through his performing talent, but he seems to fail in maintaining his desired expression under the societal norms. This ends in behaving in unacceptable and violent way. The superego is explained in the theoretical chapter as the part that internalizes societal rules and works as the conscience for the person's thought. The father presents a parental authority that contributes

in forming a moral compass for Arthur; nevertheless, his absence creates uncontrolled and chaotic management of ideas. As stated in Freud's book *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis*, 'The appearance of the father thus compels the child to achieve a separate identity and moral consciousness, initiating an internalization of authority that is synonymous with the development of the super-ego (78).' From the theorist's statement, one can realize Arthur's issue of the undeveloped superego shown in his inability of directing his behavior in a way that satisfies the known moral and social standards. The impact of the father's absence shown in Arthur's abandonment of moral consciousness is embodied in his committed murder crimes. Moreover, his negative experiences with society solidifies the fragmentation of his superego that cannot act with conscience in moral issues. As a result, he does not believe in the known social norms in his city and thus reacts with defense mechanisms rebelling on all his surroundings turning into Joker.

2.2.8. Arthur's Defense Mechanisms

Arthur's psyche has faced traumatizing incidents and development issues throughout his life, which has generated defense mechanisms as a way out from the experienced problems. As it is explained and detailed in the theoretical part, in the Freudian approach, defense mechanism is defined as 'a situation caused by an over dominant superego, the resultant defense mechanisms implemented by the ego in an attempt to regain control' (Schultz 353). The protagonist's struggle with the influencing issues experienced in society leaves long lasting psychological issues or neurosis at the level of the psyche that led to the appearance of several defense mechanisms. The issues have started with his family in which he has been abused by his mother and raised without a father leaving him with severe childhood trauma. The outsider society has treated him in a harsh way through bullying, violence, and depriving him from his job. Looking at him in a strange despising way if not hurting him because he laughs involuntary in unexpected situations without knowing that it is

a mental disorder caused by traumatic brain injury during his abusive childhood. All this endured hardship is answered by the exhausted psyche through several defense mechanisms.

The first evident mechanism is isolation; he seems to isolate himself from the small community and the whole society. For instance, he does not have friendships with his co-workers, neighbors nor other people from outside his small circle of community. Though he initiates some attempts in socializing with the little boy on the bus and helping Sophie, his neighborhood, he is answered by rejection. His failed social attempts have solidified his solitude that has led him to sink in his delusions and fantasies as another defense mechanism to escape his pain and reality. His imagined fantasies are reversed stories of his life with his neighbor and others like Murray Franklin. His hallucinations reveal his suppressed feelings, reactions, and thoughts that are not expressed, but buried in his unconsciousness as another defense mechanism called repression. This involves feelings like anger and grief as well as other reactions blocked by his traumatizing experiences. Identification is used as a psychological technique, closed in meaning to fantasy, to create a missed feeling of belonging to a family and community. For instance, he imagines himself as a successful comedian and presenter imitating the famous media figure Franklin Murray picturing him as a father. Ultimately, the several defense mechanisms project the received societal inhuman treatment, and they pave the way to other serious neurosis and even psychosis that culminate to his transformation into joker.

3. The Psychological and Mental Issues Experienced During the Abusive Childhood

3.1. Arthur's Childhood Trauma

The traumatic childhood of Arthur Fleck is paramount reason behind his transformation into Joker. This destructive experience is one of the causes that form his mental and psychological issues, which constitute the characteristics of Joker who seems to reach the level of madness. Several psychiatrists have introduced definitions for childhood

trauma such as Judith Herman and John Bowlby; however, Bessel van Der Kolk presents well-clarified explanation that is adopted in this study. He states in his book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014) that this trauma is ‘experiences that overwhelm a child’s ability to cope (58).’ It is characterized by events that are either directly experienced, such as abuse, or witnessed, like domestic violence, which lead to permanent psychological effects (58). Little Arthur has received abuse and neglect from his foster mother, Penny, who is mentally unstable. During his upbringing, he experiences physical and emotional abuse like imprisonment and violence. The governmental social system has not protected Arthur from the childhood abuse received from Penny. Bessel van Der Kolk develops this idea, concerning parent’s abuse, claiming, ‘Studies on the sequelae of childhood trauma in the context of caregiver abuse or neglect consistently demonstrate chronic and severe problems with emotion regulation, impulse control, attention and cognition, dissociation, interpersonal relationships, and self and relational schemas (60).’ Most of the mentioned issues are found in the characteristics of the antihero who experiences several disorders that stem from the received parent’s neglect and abuse.

Throughout the childhood and into the adulthood of Arthur, he feels isolated and unloved by the surrounding individuals leading him to alienation as another experienced state caused by bullying from others. This exacerbates his traumatized psyche causing more hardship experienced with social exclusion. As a result, Arthur is left with a feeling of unworthiness that is supposed to be reversed through connecting with others and seeking validation outside his comfort zone. However, Arthur’s severe trauma leads to his disconnection from reality that witnesses his imagined delusions and hallucinations, which complicates identifying the imagined from the real experience as it is shown on through the scenes. The disappointments witnessed in his failed relationships and attempts to communicate with others, like his colleagues, boss, and neighbor Sofia, reflects how he is

misunderstood or he is oppressed by the cold-hearted bullying people.

The ignorance of Arthur about his past is part of the symptoms of his trauma during his childhood. In other words, he experiences dissociative amnesia that appears as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. It is defined by the authors of the book *Shorter Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry* as ‘... inability to recall important personal memories, usually of a stressful nature, that is too extensive for normal forgetfulness (62).’ This is why Arthur does not remember about the abusive psychological and physical incidents that happened to him when he was a little child. When the narrative proceeds to the phase when Arthur realizes the harmful durable damages caused by his adoptive mother, he embraces another attitude towards penny that is analyzed in the part of Arthur’s metamorphosis into Joker. Actually, this is a sign of the several risk factors caused by childhood trauma that includes mental disorders and criminal activities.

3.2. Traumatic Brain Injury and Pseudobulbar Affect as Consequences of Domestic Abuse

As it is explained in previous paragraphs, Arthur has been exposed to severe injury affecting his brain, which has led to serious repercussions that can be analyzed according to psychoanalytic approach. The most noticed feature in the characterization of the antihero is the uncontrollable episodes of laughing. Actually, this is one of the symptoms of Pseudobulbar affect that is explained by Jeffrey Cummings and his colleagues in their article as ‘Pseudobulbar affect (PBA), appearing as abrupt episodes of uncontrollable laughter or crying that are incongruent or independent of mood, occurs in many neurological brain diseases or following brain injury.(01).’ These episodes are known to be excessive and inconsistent and do not correspond to the Patient’s circumstances or their mood at the time of their happening. In their paper, they explain the cause as ‘...recognized as a frequent manifestation of acquired brain damage with upper motor neuron dysfunction’ (01). Arthur’s

experienced urban violence is accompanied with the absence of medical care that is important in such cases. Several published articles and online studies have stated the lack of awareness of PBA within societies, patients, and even some medical workers because they are not informed about its symptoms, causes, and treatments. It is often recognized as a sign of depression or neurological disease.

Audience may regard the hysterical laughing of Arthur as a super villain's laugh who is stereotypically insane (Skryabin 330). Valentin Skryabin has stated in his article titled *An Attempt to Establish Diagnosis for a Film Icon that PBA is experienced after being exposed to severe traumatic brain injury (TBI)*. He explains that TBI increases 'the risk of mood disorders, personality changes and substance use disorders (01)'. Actually, TBI involves damages at the level of frontotemporal regions of the brain and, in particular, the lateral aspect of the left frontal lobe (Giuseppe Zappala et al 158). The frontal lobe is part of the frontal cortex, which is a part of the brain that plays a role in memory, attention, judgment, and other vital functions (Giuseppe Zappala et al, 159). His paper details this diagnosis by explaining the pathological laughing and crying (PLC) after traumatic brain injury through studies experienced on patients. They show significant depressive, anxious and aggressive behaviors and they have difficulties in socializing (Fleminger 167–279). PLC is neurological symptom that can be described as uncontrollable episodes of laughing that are intrigued by a stimulus that would not normally cause such an emotional response (Demas and Tillot 2).

It is important to mention that Arthur's case requires analysis from neuropsychologist standpoint because he has been exposed to both psychological and physical abuse during childhood from society, which has caused traumatic brain injury. The societal influence has caused psychological and neurological damages that have destroyed Arthur as a child and an adult. Unfortunately, the destructive impact of society has started with his family, the

smallest unit of society, and typically his mother who has demolished his mental health and personality development from his childhood. This is why the social study intersects with psychology and neurology, which have thin boundaries between them that can be expressed through neuropsychology, the scientific branch that gathers them. In their book *Learning and Memory: From Brain to Behavior* (2019), Mark Gluck and the co-authors explain, 'neuropsychology is a branch of psychology concerned with how a person's cognition and behavior are related to the brain and the rest of the nervous system (57).' Professionals of neuropsychology analyze how injuries or illnesses of the brain affect cognitive and behavioral functions (Mark Gluck et al 57, 58). When examining the character of Arthur, one can notice several psychotic symptoms like delusions as well as both auditory and visual hallucinations, which are revealed through certain scenes. For instance, Arthur's imagination of being present in Murray Franklin TV show and Fleck as one of the audiences who obtains everyone's attention in the show through his expressed dreams and life story. The other delusion is experiencing a romantic feeling towards his neighbor Sophie that seems to be his desired woman. These symptoms correspond to Pseudobulbar affect caused by traumatic brain injury, which is the diagnosis that suits this case. Arthur also experiences loss of childhood memory, which is considered as one of the symptoms of this diagnosis as well.

3.3. Antisocial Personality Disorder Resulting from Childhood Trauma

Because of his childhood trauma, Arthur develops anti-social personality disorder, but he tries to defeat this issue through his comedy tips. The antihero suffering from psychological trauma during childhood has left remaining repercussions that can be seen through psychoanalytic prospect as post-traumatic stress disorder. It is defined as '...prolonged and abnormal response to exceptionally intense stressful circumstances such as a natural disaster or a sexual or other physical assault (Harrison et al 138)'. The incident of the first murder may show the apparent characteristics or symptoms of this disorder. When

Arthur witnesses the harassment of a woman by three young bullying adults, his uncontrolled laughter is stimulated which outraged the arrogant men. It is important to know that Arthur at that night is informed by his boss that he has lost his job at Ha Ha's agency, which means that he is in a miserable state. The men do not stop bothering him, and they dare to attack him. As an over reactionary attitude, Arthur pulls out the gun that is in his bag and start shooting with an attention to end their lives. This marks his first murder that has happened not only as a reaction to the men's harassment and attack, but Arthur seems to commit this crime as an outburst reaction to all the oppression he has experienced from Gotham society. Arthur's uncontrolled laughter complicates his interaction with society.

His childhood's physical and psychological abuse have harmed his psyche and brain affecting his faculties of socializing with others. This ultimately has destroyed his social life because the episodes of uncontrolled laughter occur at socially inappropriate times such as during the assault of a woman on the subway. This is detrimental to his social life that is destroyed by the difficulty of expressing his thoughts in the presence of involuntary episodes of laughter. This complicates his ability of assimilating other people's minds and reactions. Unfortunately, this is conflicting with his dream to be a comedian that is based on learning what makes people laugh in comedy clubs. Ultimately, the antihero develops social cognitive dysfunctioning, which a symptom of anti-social disorder. It is defined as a widespread pattern of antisocial, irresponsible, or illegal behavior among individuals. It is a reflection of impulsive and violent actions towards others, with little concern for the harm or suffering caused to them. This disorder is also characterized by difficulty of establishing long-term social and personal connections (Xinyue Chang and Jiaxin Li 273). The two researchers Pooja Gahlot and Aniket Biraje explain the reasons behind this disorder in their article titled *Antisocial Personality Disorder, Its Risk Factors and Treatment* (2024) published in the *International Journal of Indian Psychology*. They state, 'Childhood emotional and physical

abuse are often comorbid with ASPD (anti-social and psychological disorder). ASPD and physical neglect are significantly correlated. Children who experience abuse or neglect and poor parental connection are more likely to develop ASPD (160). This leads to receiving assaults and being bullied by an already harsh society. This ends with violent reactions that culminates to crime commitment.

3.4. Arthur's Personality Struggle between Narcissism and Depression

In psychiatry, professionals work according to certain symptomatology to reach the correct diagnosis of a patient. In other words, there are listed symptoms for the diagnosis of depressive disorder that determine the various levels of the severity of this psychological illness (Harisson et al 194). The authors of *The Shorter Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry* (2018) state that the major symptoms are negative thinking, disturbed sleeping, and diminished appetite. Besides, the depressed mood and ideas of self-harm are also present in the list of the clinical symptoms of depressive disorder. In fact, these are the characteristics of the antihero Arthur; for instance, in the scene with the social assistant, he answers her question saying; 'all I have are negative thoughts.' He even asks to increase his medications hoping to reduce the other endured symptoms such as insomnia, suicidal ideas, and the lost appetite. The negative thoughts are referred as depressive cognition. This is well explained by Harisson and his co-authors who detail this point stating,

In feeling worthless, patients think that they are failing in what they do and that other people see them as a failure; they no longer feel confident, and discount any success as a chance happening for which they can take no credit. Pessimistic thoughts concern future prospects. Patients expect the worst. They foresee failure in work, the ruin of finances, misfortune for family, and an inevitable deterioration in health. These ideas of hopelessness are often accompanied by the thought that life is no longer worth living and that death would come as a welcome release. These gloomy preoccupations may progress to thoughts of, and

plans for, suicide (194).

What is noticeable about the character of Arthur is that he reflects a high level of intelligence presented in controlling what he shows to others about himself. For instance, he does not exhibit clear symptoms of thought disorder in front of the social assistant, which is actually present symptom in his case through several scenes. Additionally, when he is with the therapist, he does not talk about his hallucination or delusions concerning the Murray Show and his neighbor, his subject of affection.

In one of the strangest scenes, he is reflected in a miserable state with very skinny body from the loss of appetite. He sits in a room with a weak deeming light on which he is supposed to write his jokes preparing for comedic stand up; however, he cannot redact funny stories. On the contrary, he writes negative disturbing ideas. In a surprising way, he climbs inside his refrigerator and close the door on himself. He tries to isolate himself from the world and hide away from what he has learnt about his traumatic past. He is broken by what has happened to him; the alleged father's denial of his parenthood to Arthur and his violent oppressive reaction. Sitting in a confined space may induce a feeling of comfort from the external world with all its misery such as the bullying society and the unfair political system that rules the city, which does not provide the accepted standards of living for the people who belong to low social classes. The act of putting himself in the refrigerator may also be seen as an attempt to suicide through suffocation or hypothermia. Arthur in this scene has all the reasons to end his life. His possible attempt is interrupted by a phone call from Murray Show. What can be deduced from this scene is that he bears all the symptoms of depressive disorder; however, they are not always clear to audience through the whole narrative because he tries to hide this feeling behind his narcissist aspirations and clever self-control.

Arthur's complex personality features exhibit contradictory signs that refer to several psychoses, namely narcissistic personality disorder that works as a cover to his severe

depressive disorder. Narcissism is another psychological issue noticed in the story of Arthur who seems to long for attention through comedy and violence after being psychologically, mentally, and economically broken by family, society and the political system. On one hand, he tries to develop himself as an entertaining comedian. On the other hand, he demonstrates no empathy in killing his victims, which is an act far from the notion of spreading happiness, and trying to draw smile on the faces of people. In fact, they are both considered as narcissist features because they are developed throughout the narrative as personal choices that stem from the self with premeditation.

If the features are examined through thorough analysis, one can notice the dream of being a comedian exists before and after Arthur's transformation into Joker that meets his first murder while the other killings are done with premeditation. At the beginning, the dream is the only positive catalyst for the character against the destructive social and political environments. It is urged by his yearning for attention that he could not receive during his miserable life without forgetting his mother's belief that he is meant to spread happiness. Nevertheless, the perception of this dream changes from a way of attracting attention and self-fulfillment to sarcastic and ironic expression of his disappointments and loss of hope in the society and the system. Throughout the narrative's rising actions, he shows growing wild motives against the surrounding social environment that has harmed him. Here, the narcissist feeling develops from fulfilling his personal dream to eagerness of obtaining revenge from the people who hurt him with any possible way. As it is evident, Arthur experiences two different phases in his life separated by two actions: before the first murder and the discovery of the truth about his past. In the first phase, not feeding enough his narcissism made him depressive while in the second phase it empowers his personality and works as a revengeful destructive weapon against others. In short, enduring severe depression while acting with narcissist feeling is the result of the harsh lived circumstances that have destabilized his

mental and psychological health and turned him to a revenge craver.

4. The Struggle with Gotham's Social Stratification

Todd Phillips' work offers a vision of social stratification through the narrative of Arthur Fleck and Gotham society that reveal the influence of society on the individual in the postmodern age. The sociologist scholar Pitirim A. Sorokin defines stratification in his book *Social Mobility* as,

Social stratification means the differentiations of a given population into hierarchically superposed classes. It is manifested in the existence of upper and lower social layers. Its basis and very essence consist in an unequal distribution of rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and privations, social power and influences among the members of a society (11).

As it is stated by the social theorist, stratification is based on the division of society into two major classes upper and lower ones. This division has always existed in societies since ancient times; however, in postmodern times it carries different hardship. When analyzing the protagonist and the flat characters of the story, one can realize that the majority belong to low classes whereas the upper classes consist of Thomas Wayne and his family. This shows the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities. In the postmodern world, the division exceeds the level of unequal distribution of material possessions and chances of success; it reaches oppressive conducts and policies operated on lower class people. This includes exploitation and discrimination in health services.

In the scene of the conversation of Arthur with the social worker, she informs him about the government's sacrificing of the low-class health services saying 'Arthur, I have some bad news for you. The city (the government) cuts funding across the board, social service is part of that. This is the last time we'll be meeting.' She has informed him that the government budget for public health insurance had been cut including medicines for sick

people like Arthur, who is already in need for elevating the dosage of his treatment. In the economic instability of Gotham city, the government has directed its policies of saving the economy to the poor classes by depriving them from their simple rights like health insurance. The government has not reached an agreement with the workers who have embarked strikes for a long time. This has drowned Gotham city in squalor through the condensed garbage in the streets and neighborhoods. However, the garbage is not found in front of the house of the wealthy Thomas Wayne.

Phillips' work presents the upper wealthy class of society as being distanced and passive to the suffering of the lower classes. This explains the social worker's saying, 'They (the city's rulers) don't give a ... about people like you, Arthur, and they don't really give a ...about people like me either.' Her statement demonstrates the disappointment of people of lower class in the divisional policies of government. This makes the division more profound. Arthur finds himself hopeless in this situation because he belongs to the low social class where oppressive governmental policies are applied to the poor and the undervalued people. Actually, the lower marginalized class of people is viewed as group of clowns that do not deserve to be the center of the government's interest. In the conversation with the psychiatrist, Arthur asks question that can be regarded as ironic figurative expression: Where am I supposed to get my medications now? Whom I talk to? This reflects the hopeless situation of Arthur as one example from this social class that is failed not just by the individual, but by the whole system including institutions of healthcare and mental health. In short, the stratification of Gotham society includes class struggle that involves economic hardship for lower class people like Arthur, who develops resentment and sense of injustice leading to his violent reaction.

4.1. Psychological Effects of Social Inequality

The societal stratification in Gotham city has destructive psychological impact on

Arthur who is already influenced by his familial abuse. The feeling of Arthur's alienation is exacerbated by the society's division as well as its inhuman behaviors and conducts. For instance, he has received humiliation, oppression, and deprivation from people of upper class like Thomas Wayne as well as others like Franklin Murray and the agency's boss. The performed societal practices and manners are presented as themes in the narrative's process of studying the character of Joker. Maybe the less painful behavior of this society is regarding him as an invisible man. The story expresses the outcomes of stratification in different settings such as Ha Ha's agency, the streets, the studio, comedy club, the theatre. Not only the people outside mock him, but also the live show entertainer Franklin laughs at him on the TV with all the audience in the studio and behind the screen. At the beginning, Arthur feels surprised and delightful to watch his attempts of standup comedy broadcasted on his favorite TV show hoping that this is the start of achieving his dream of being a comedian. Nevertheless, he is soon devastated when he realizes the purpose behind showing this video. Franklin Murray bullies him by making fun of his jokes and involuntarily laughing live on the show to entertain his audience. This enrages Arthur against the bullying TV presenter and the laughing audience.

The societal behaviors and conducts make him trapped in all the places where his feelings and reactions are repressed. Here, repression is a defense mechanism by which the ego protects itself from inner conflicts by rendering at least one of the mental states that create the conflict unconscious (Ulemann. 5). As a result, he finds himself disconnected and trapped inside and outside his mind, and this culminates to self-destructive neurosis. Flick's psychological issues are not adequately treated due to the governmental policies of depriving his social class from such civil rights. The economic instability tends to solidify the stratification because the people from the bottom of social hierarchy are the ones who pay the price of the failure of system.

5. The Concept of Smile Regarding Arthur Fleck's Personality Development

Arthur's involuntary laughter has symbolic meaning to the development of the character throughout the film in showing the different facets of the societal influence on his psychology. What is peculiar about the film is that as audience and analyst, Arthur is discovered more as a human than a patient or a villain because his hardship and pain can be experienced by anyone in the world. In fact, the antihero's uncontrollable laughing is neuropsychological condition caused by traumatic brain injury during his abusive childhood, which occurs in inappropriate situations. To illustrate, his sudden involuntary episode of laughing on the subway when the three young wealthy adults are harassing a passenger woman. His laughing outrages the group of men who attack him and they end up killed by Arthur as a reaction that has started as a self-defense and has developed to revenge. This is an example of laughing as a reaction to witnessed harassment, which is not the appropriate reaction in such a situation. Actually, in several interviews, the actor Joaquin Phoenix explained that he had observed people with neurological disorders to create his character and to forge the most realistic laughter possible (Demas & Tillot 2).

The clown imagery in the film is figurative metaphor that signifies the persecution, exploitation, and ignorance of the low working classes. The latter are driven to their extreme ability of resisting the oppressive life in Gotham city; as a result, they reach a level where they revolt against the rolling system. The protest against the wealthy ignorant politicians has adopted Arthur's first murder as a rebellious incident against the living circumstances that have ended their paralyzed reaction to the situation. This is why they have adhered the mask of the clown as a symbol of their rebellion. What may be peculiar about the film is the idea of choosing the clown as representative symbol of tragic comedy. In the existed literary and cinematic productions, the clown symbol has always been present to symbolize several notions that depend on the work's narrative. For instance, in the famous literary as well as the

film adaptation of 'It' by Stephen King', the clown is a symbol that refers to violence and danger and contradicts with laughter.

After embracing his shadow, the film presents the antihero with an ironic smile reacted to the unjust life in Gotham city. The smile appears as a truthful expression of sarcastic reaction to the exercised oppression, violence, and anarchy. It is regarded as a response to several traumatic incidents and constant pain that has paralyzed the emotions. When he suffers, the character does not cry like ordinary people. It is evident that throughout the development of the antihero Arthur, the signification of the smile differentiates from a scene to another depending on the desired purpose for such an expression. In his daily life, he shows a certain smile that is considered as a mask or a persona to face the society and interact with its people, which is a feature of performative identity.

5.1. Arthur's Smile as a Feature of Performative Identity

Arthur is trapped in postmodern alienation, media's sarcastic representation, social exclusion that create a performative identity reflected in the protagonist's characteristics. The cinematic work critiques how identity is formed through performance, societal expectations, and violent self-creation. In her theoretical contribution of studying the individual's identity in gender studies, Judith Butler has adapted the concept of Performativity as identity's formation in relation to repetitive linguistic and social process (Butler 15). The theorist's concept is a postmodernist and poststructuralist vision of the notion of performativity. For her, the communicated discourse and nonverbal communication create actions, behaviors, and gestures of the individual's identity, which is continuously being redefined according to the surrounding social conditions and its demands (Cavanaugh 114). Performativity is an unconscious and compulsory process embedded in power structures (Salih 66).

As it is seen through the narrative, Arthur has failed to be in several roles such as a comedian, a friend, and a lover. He is a marginalized lonely individual whose identity is imposed on him through his mother's influence and the surrounding societal discourse and behavior. The series of failed performances have generated certain forced features in the antihero's personality. It is true that his pathological laughter, pseudobulbar affect, is uncontrolled bodily performance that generally contrasts with the adequate reflected emotions; however, it is also a symbol of the age's demand of performative feelings and actions. Here, laughter does not express joy, but it exposes his trauma. He is forced to smile to perform his tasks. Postmodern circumstances drive the individual to unconsciously involuntary and non-intentionally to acquire characteristics that are socially produced through repetitive conducts. This is why postmodernist thought rejects fixed identities that are regarded as fluid changeable concepts that correspond to performativity's demand.

The forced smile and clown makeup are masking persona that are regarded as performances to co-exist with society and they help in hiding his internal upheaval. Arthur's identity before transformation is not innate but formed from such repetitive performative behaviors. His failure of continuing performing normalcy or in other words the accepted behaviors of society is also a reason that drives him to identity recreation. The latter is a harsh deconstruction of performative identity rebelling against society and disciplinary power. This idea of rebellion starts from rebelling against the humiliated, discriminated, and oppressed version of Arthur who can not find the value of his existence in Gotham's society. This what leads to embracing the suppressed painful emotions, desires, and reaction further in the story when Arthur transforms into Joker. The evilness of this character is not innate; it is constructed by a failing society. However, the adoption of the Joker's persona is not an expression of his true self, but in fact it is also another performance in itself that subverts societal expectations. Indeed, performativity can destabilize identity.

5.2. The Smile as a Mask



Fig.02. ‘The Scene of Putting Clown Makeup and a Smile’ (0:01:21) Todd Philips, *Joker*, (2019).

This shot presents the contrasting truth of Arthur Fleck who smiles and laughs when his inner state is the opposite of his facial and body expression signifying the paradox of internal feelings and external appearance. In this scene, he cannot prevent his tear from falling down on his painted face while he prepares forcing the smile that has to be present in performing his entertaining show as a clown to advertise for Kenny’s Music Shop. This smile is often at odds with his internal sentiments of sadness, hopelessness, and disappointment. Although he suffers from severe depression, he tries to bring smile and laughter to people’s faces because he regards this activity as the only source of hope in his life. However, Arthur feels obliged to manifest in smiling look that contrasts with his depressive feelings as a persona in front of the harsh society. In the social unrest and class

struggle experienced in Gotham city, Arthur finds himself compelled to smiling as a mask of his persona.

According to Jungian Psychoanalytic, persona is a social and psychological construction embraced by individuals for a certain purpose (Stein133). In exploring the Jungian thought, Murray Stein explains in his book *Jung's Map of The Soul* (2021) that the perception of persona for people may vary or it is broken in certain situations due to the complexity of human personality (133). In his social interactions, Arthur appears in a way that employs the smile as part of the adopted persona presented to the surrounding society. It is the outcome of the individual's management of his reaction to the society's oppression and expectations. It is compared to a borrowed identity that enables Arthur to manage his social life outside his home, in the street, at work, and with people. It is regarded as a tool but it is not the true self of this individual. The smile is a typical symbol of Arthur's persona. This corresponds to the statement of the Canadian –American Sociologist Erving Goffman who says, 'We are all just actors trying to control and manage our public image, we act based on how others might see us (22).'

This important opening scene of the movie places audience inside the mind of Arthur through subjective perspective that includes close-up shot, wide angle, and tight framing. At the beginning, the camera is placed behind him, and then it follows his gestures on his reflected image on the mirror to capture his face at the end, in front of the actor. Through a full shot, audience watches his sad face while forcing a smile and listening to his recorded voice saying, 'My mother always tells me to smile and put on a happy face. She told me I had a purpose, to bring laughter and joy to the world.' The chosen cinematic techniques minimize the distance between audience and the protagonist. They enable viewers to experience life through the vision of the antihero. In this shot, the cinematographer Sher chooses close up shot to capture the details of the painted face of Arthur, his expressions, as well as the falling

tear. The famous comedian Charlie Chaplin Once said, ‘life is tragedy when seen in close up, but a comedy in long shot.’ This is what the cinematographer meant by using such a cinematic technique; he wants to explore the sad desperate hidden facet of Arthur’s smiling persona. Through his camera, Sher captures Arthur applying his clown make up, and he focuses on his facial expressions as he chooses the colors to paint his face. This is a personal artistic moment that reveals his sensation to colors and his connection to the work of clown. The cinematographer choses an isolated frame thereby selecting the lonely place of Arthur in Ha Ha’s agency to depict his marginalized, isolated, and disconnected status in society. He does not have any kind of conversation with the other workers; he just sits in front of the mirror applying his make up while contemplating the reflection of his face. He holds small mirror to his face reflecting an image that symbolizes his broken self. He seems trying to acknowledge his identity through the reflection on the mirror. As far as the camera movement is concerned, in fact, it moves slowly to capture static shots showing the disconnected Arthur. The camera focuses on depicting his isolation and alienated self through moving beside him with no other partner next to him.

The film’s cinematographer has chosen specific colors to reflect the inner self and the setting of the anti-hero. Sher uses dark degradation of dull green, yellow, and brown exhibiting feelings of depression, deterioration, and gloominess that prevail the space of the character. As it is evident, the color green is used in filming the scene, which may symbolize the mental and psychological issues of Arthur as well as the envy towards the upper class’s life. The creative cinematographer has withdrawn the scene of natural vivid colors to maintain the somber temper of the movie. The chosen color palette, in fact, mirrors Arthur’s mind as well as Gotham city, where he lives his entire life. The presentation of colors is reinforced through the absence of soundtracks and the focus on the diegetic sounds of

Arthur's slow movements. This includes the sounds of applying his clown makeup, which makes audience in uneasy situation.

The harsh fluorescent lights are the chosen lighting for this scene that plays an important role in showing Arthur's psyche behind his persona. The lighting evokes uncomfortable emotions of an image that is drained of life and full of indifferent and cold atmosphere. Such a choice is a glimpse into the protagonist's troubled psyche that lives in dehumanized environment. In Sher's close-up of Arthur's face, he creates lit spaces while others stay in shadows. This is done in purpose to mark the contradiction between his true self and the adopted persona. In psychoanalytic terms, the character has dual identity that consists of the shown smiling clown and the hidden depressed individual. The painted face is presented as persona or a mask needed to stay alive in Gotham city and among its society.

This scene reveals the psychological weakness of Arthur who struggles to appear in the most convincing persona to conform to his harsh oppressive society. The smile is a central part of the created persona generated from his mother's discourse and way of upbringing. That is say, her usual instruction of always smiling. This has paved the way to master drawing a smile on his face despite the odd social, economic and political circumstances in his life in Gotham city. In this phase of his life, he seems broken by the idea of not being qualified to fit in his society despite his conformist attitude to its norms. The forced smile with his two hands is not an expression of happiness, but a screaming gesture indicating that feelings are being falsified to the eyes of others. Smile is a tool to obtain acceptance and avoid criticism in his surrounding community. Such a gesture shows that living in Gotham society requires non-honest feelings and unrealistic expressions. The best survival way to survive is to wear a mask and conform to societal norms and expectations. The concept of happiness has become formed on a foundation of artificial emotions and hiding the true inner issues and feelings.

5.3. Arthur Flick's Impulse of Driving people to Smile



Fig.03. ‘Arthur Forcing a Smile on the Face of Young Bruce Wayne’ (0:53:25) Todd Philips, *Joker*, (2019).

Arthur's gesture of forcing a smile on a little Bruce Wayne, starring Dante Pereira-Olson, is a substantial scene that carries symbolic meaning to the character's development and the narrative. In his attempt to meet Mr. Wayne, his alleged father, Arthur encounters young Bruce Wayne, his supposed half-brother. Arthur acts in a polite way saluting the boy and trying to entertain him by presenting a circus act that includes a red nose and a magic trick. The composition and the framing of the scene is constructive to the themes of the work. The producer shortens the distance between Arthur and Bruce, yet he separated them by an iron gate. They can see and even touch each other through the gate's bars, but they remain secluded from each other.

The filmmaker's choice of capturing a medium shot from a low angle behind Arthur's back exposes several thematic and stylistic features. The shot shows Arthur sitting on his knees looking up to Bruce who appears in a high level looking down to Arthur's kneeling

position which expresses several significations. For instance, stratification and class division placing the wealthy people in an elevated level while the poor in a low level. In relation to the narrative's thematic presentation of social issues during postmodern age, the shot refers to the class division between the haves and have not in Gotham society and the almost nonexistent hope of agreement or reconciliation between the two social classes. Arthur's attempts of driving little Bruce to smile symbolizes the lower class's cooperative relation with the upper ruling class though the latter reacts in selfish way. This is a visual metaphor representing the oppressive decisions towards the lower class during the economic instability. This includes the government's not responding to the workers' strikes and issuing tyrannical 's budget cuts of insurance to the poor and so on. Arthur's gesture of forcing a smile on Bruce's face by using his fingers to lift the corners of the boy's mouth echoes the gesture of Arthur in the opening scene.

This shows Arthur's connection with Bruce who appears sad and isolated. The fact that he plays alone in his huge house's garden and does not enjoy or smile to Arthur's funny tricks signifying the alienated childhood of Bruce. Arthur is able to recognize his sadness, which makes him forcing the smile as he does in front of others because he does not show happy reaction to any of his gestures. He puts his fingers in the corners of the boy's mouth and forces them to create a smile that resembles to the forced smile of the protagonist in the opening scene. This resonates the reality performative happiness as a reflected image but not a true feeling experienced by the individual. This exemplifies what can be experienced in the filmed happy events in social media. Going back to Arthur, he does the same act at the beginning of the movie when he forces a smile on his face while looking in the mirror with a falling tear from his eyes. It is an essential moment in the narrative that foreshadows the hero and villain future relationship that exists between Batman and Joker in the known comic realm.

5.4. The Joker's Realization of the Perception of Smile



Fig.04. ‘Arthur Looking to his Mirrored Reflection Before the Live TV Show’ (01:36:45)

Todd Philips, *Joker*, (2019).

The facial expressions of the character in this shot are the manifestations of the true self; however, they are veiled behind the clown makeup colors as obligatory custom to face the world. He stares to his reflection in the mirror where he has written ‘put on a happy face’ by using red lipstick. It is written with the color of blood signifying the cost of embracing smiling face as a persona during his whole life. Arthur’s gaze to his reflection on the mirror implies powerful meanings. His glittering eyes full of tears looking straight into their reflection as if he is looking inside himself, the chaotic broken ill product of society. They eyes are known to be the mirror of the soul. Besides, the mouth is regarded as a window to emotions. In the case of Arthur, he squeezes his mouth that is set in a hard line in a way that he seems to silence his loud screams. This hard expression is painted with red smile. The muscles of his jaw are tightened as if he suppresses anger and strong impulse for revenge.

The theme of colors is present throughout the film's scenes that is formed around the clown character, which is known to be presented by the colored face and custom. In their work *Masters of Light: Conversations with Contemporary Cinematographers* (2013), Schaefer and Salvato, state, 'in psychoanalysis, every color represents something specific in an emotional sense. It's not something that I made up; it's something that scientists and researchers have studied' (225). In the research paper *Color, Form, and Movement Are Not Perceived Simultaneously* (2001), the scholars Viviani and Aymoz clarifies the conception of color in film analysis stating that color and form are almost experienced simultaneously while movement is delayed by about 50 milliseconds (07). This shows that colors are considered as one of the first perceived elements in the produced scene.

Blain Brown discusses in his work *Cinematography: Theory and Practice* (2013) the role of colors in producing visual work. He states that cinema is essentially moving colors. He adds on his declared statement arguing that color is a spectacle and just as important as the narrative (209). In this film, the color red is present in the scenes that follow his transformation to Joker. In this scene it is used in writing the imperative sentence 'put on a happy face' to create a threatening tone full of anger. It is also used as the color of the painted smile on Joker's face to symbolize the bloody evil smile of criminal. Phil Malpas regards red as the "most powerful color in our compositional armory" (24). Indeed, in the movie, it refers to strong emotions and signifies the murders committed by the character.

Moving from the used color in painting the protagonist's smile to the nature and the characteristic of the smile itself. In this scene, only a painted smile is seen because the character is not smiling, he is having a moment of self-recognition to his hidden inner side. The usual artificial smile that is seen in precedent scenes is gone, and it is replaced by a wicked and malicious one. The first smile presented in the movie is the ordinary forced smile as a persona used to interact with society whereas the second it is the manifestation of his

developed accumulation of suppressed traumas and feelings that has created an evil shadow. The latter is the joker's smile; it is the reflection of the major twist in the narrative and the climax of the character's development. It signals Arthur's embracement of his shadow smile that has become his adopted version of himself after his psychological transformation.

5.5. Smile as a Reflection of Pain



Fig.05. ‘Smile with Blood’ (01:51:48) Todd Philips, *Joker*, (2019).

The smile in this shot indicates another phase in Arthur's development that marks the integration of the shadow and the destruction of the persona. Here, the work presents another kind of smile that it is not expressed to satisfy the other, society, but it is a mark of the dehumanized society and political system. The bloody smile is created in a substantial scene at the end of the story. In this scene, Arthur is rescued from the police forces by the outraging mob through a car accident that has left injuries on his body. However, he is freed and celebrated by the crowd as their leader. Here, Arthur paints a red smile on his face by his bloody stained fingers and smiles with eyes full of tears. This shows that the smiling persona that exists in the previous phases of Arthur's life has hurt him in profound way. In other

words, Arthur, in this phase of his transformation, he does not care about an appearance to manage his existence in Gotham society. On the contrary, he adopts a sinister smile of his evil shadow that is created from the painful psychological issues endured in his life. The destruction of the societal mask proves the failure of society that witnesses the born of a criminal from its womb. This attitude appears after embracing his chaotic shadow as his identity known as Joker. The new presented smile is an ironic symbol of rebellion that expresses the rejection of the societal oppression. Destructing the persona or the mask that has existed all his life forced by neuropsychological issue and social pressure. The smile becomes honest despite its pain and evilness to become a symbol of the new embraced identity of Joker. In short, the bloody smile gathers the character's psychological struggle between wearing a smiling mask as a way to survive in despising society and expressing the internal anguish.

6. Arthur Fleck's Transformation to Joker

6.1. Arthur Fleck's Embrace of his Shadow

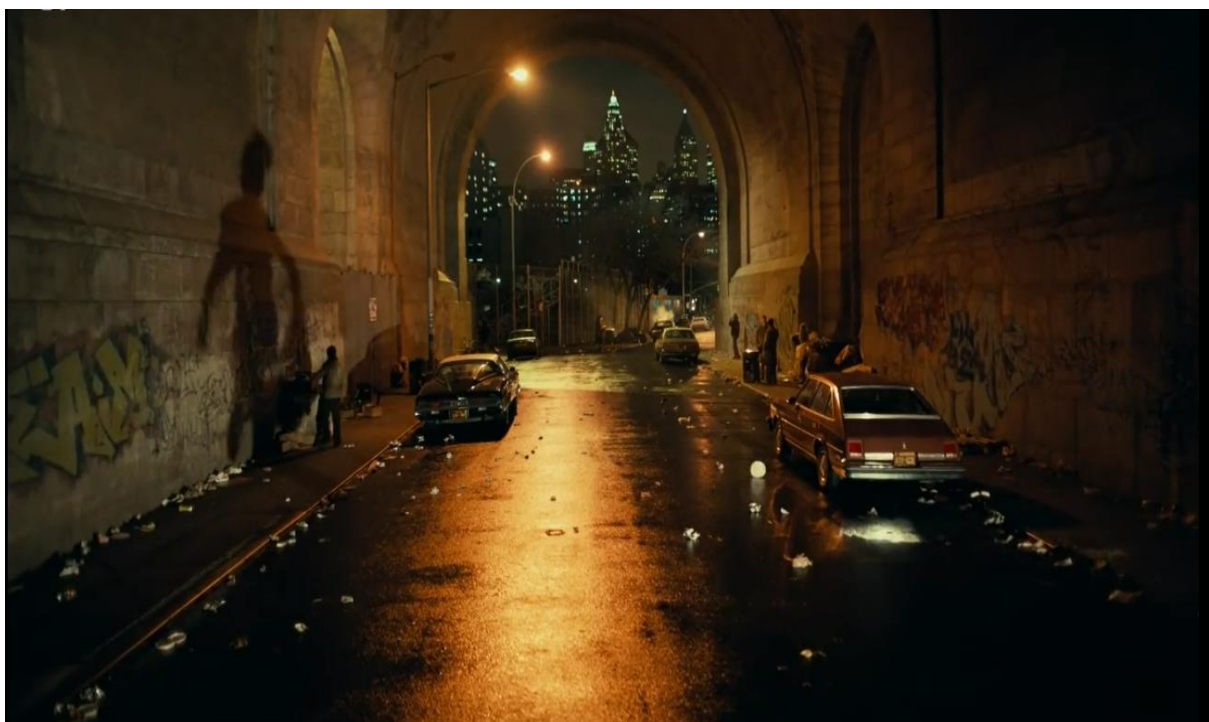


Fig.06. 'Arthur's Shadow (00:34:16), Todd Philips, *Joker*, (2019).

The scene of Arthur's shadow follows committing the first triple murder that marks significant narrative and thematic change in the story's plot reflected in the used cinematography. Before the murders, Arthur does not possess any kind of weapons. One of his coworkers has given a gun to the protagonist as a way for protection after he is attacked by the teenagers in the street. Randall, starring Glenn Fleshler, is a vicious coworker because he is the first one who has encouraged Arthur to carry the weapon, and normalizes the idea of violence as a reaction. During the night and in an almost empty subway, he is attacked another time by three arrogant drunken young adults. This has led Arthur to use the gun and kill them.

Arthur's shooting of the three people who have attacked him inflamed the media news that has turned the incident to public opinion issue against the lower class. Without investigating the true motives and the details of the crime, Gotham's media has accused the lower class as the mastermind of the homicide. The accusations that have pervaded the newspapers and TV programs are judgmental in pointing fingers towards the undervalued communities. The reported statements of Thomas Wayne in written audiovisual media imply social discrimination denotations like '...the shooter was a poor person.'

The cinematographer Lawrence Sher and the director Todd Phillips choose symbolic location of the first murder that has ended with the transformation into Joker to highlight several foundational themes. Arthur emerges as a killer from the underground subway station, which is a dark place that does not receive the day sunlight. It resembles to the character's shadow that is hidden in the unconscious part of the character. The murder shows different characterization of Arthur; for instance, his walk towards the last victim is steady, fast, and confident steps that do not resemble to his usual walk to his home, work, and therapist. The walk towards his victim reflects anger and determination for revenge. His raging feelings do not seem to be related to the attackers, but culmination of repressed reactions to the

oppressive society and system with all its precedent discriminative actions towards Arthur. After killing the first victim, Arthur is fueled of power as he seems strong in pointing directly the gun towards the second and then the last fleeing victim. He almost finishes the bullets of the gun on the third murdered body.

Here, it marks substantial moment of the starting symptoms of the transformation of this character from Arthur to Joker. He starts hearing loud voice in his ears and breathing in a heavy way. His breathing seems like a communicative language used a creative narrative technique in this moment. He escapes the crime scene in a way that sounds as if he is freed from chains not fleeing from police forces. Moreover, he mounts the stairs in powerful daring way that does not reflect the usual slow tired man. The camera shows the longue and large street under the bridge that reveals the lightning Gotham city on the horizons. The shadow is the first apparent element in the shot that is reflected on the wall, which becomes larger as Arthur appears running away in the scene. This is symbolism for the developing control of the Joker's shadow over his fractured, and weak human self. The view of the shadow on the wall reflects dreadful view indicating the threat represented by Arthur. It is a clever creative way to indicate Arthur's embracement of his shadow.

The cinematographer has used the tools of cinema production in creative way that has made the Joker's shadow scene one of the outstanding parts of the film because it presents thematic and technical weight. Sher has played with the elements of lighting and shadow to highlight the contrast of the duality of the protagonist's identity. The produced effect between light and shadow is cinematographic metaphor to his psychological internal issues that end up with pushing the shadow as the dark chaotic self of the person. This technique of lighting resembles to film noir as it is stated by Brown, 'It employs hard light Fresnels individually aimed for the actors, objects on the set, the background, and so on (271).' The motive behind this is creating gloomy mysterious mood reflected through the visual style of the narrative. It

introduces the story as it is played in a confined dark place. It is founded on using plain lightning mechanisms through producing the high contrast in a way that designs shadows. In an interview with the journalist Darrell Hartman, Werner Herzog, the German filmmaker, states, 'I think there are specific times where film noir is a natural concomitant of the mood. When there is insecurity, collapse of financial systems—that is where film noir always hits fertile ground. The whole thing was conceived and done before the financial collapse, so it was a premonition.' The director mentions the suitable conditions for film noir techniques, which are present in the narrative of *Joker*. The film noir techniques reflect paramount themes such as duality of the protagonist's identity shown in his contradictory persona and shadow.

The contrast of light and dark highlights the buried internal issues in producing the shots; the cinematographer has relied on sources of light that create dramatic view of shadows exhibiting threatening effect. Experimenting this cinematic technique goes hand in hand with investing in the talented performance of the actor Joaquin Phoenix who performs the troubled dual identity of Arthur/Joker. The shadow exposes the dual nature of Arthur's identity the vulnerable man versus the chaotic and anarchic Joker. In fact, this duality is central to the film's exploration of identity and madness.

The cinematic style of composing the shot aims to show domination of the antihero's shadow in the narrative. The shadow is at the center of the scene's frame to direct the attention on the development of the character's psychological state, that is to say, the embracement of the shadow. It is isolated on the wall where it appears next to a painted graffiti symbolizing the popular culture as a postmodern origin of this identity. It is surrounded by empty dirty space that shows the lights of the city from a far distance. She uses low angle to depict the shadow as a strong force in the scene where it reflects two

different kind of moves: moving without the appeared body of Joker, and moving along with the character. This is done in purpose to show the uncontrollable power of the shadow.

The shadow scene carries great emotional influence leaving audience marked with different feelings of admiration, astonishment, and attachment to the narrative with questions about the psychological state of the character and the coming events. The power resides in the conflicting pressure between the humanist Arthur and the broken ill version that ends up embracing the evil angry revengeful part of the self, the shadow. This results in producing iconic scene that marks not just the film but also the 21st century cinema. This is reached through several cinematic techniques such as the German Expressionism that is based on the dramatic use of shadow and lighting as it is produced in classic films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) that reflects the psychological state. The achievement in this scene proves the influencing works that inspire the filmmakers such as Scorsese's works like *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *The King of Comedy* (1982). In short, this scene is regarded as a referential and iconic production in the realm of cinematography and visual storytelling as it deals with psychological transformation in impressive way.

6.2. Arthur Fleck's Metamorphosis into Joker



Fig.07. 'Arthur's Metamorphosis' (00:36:11) dir. Phillips Todd. *Joker* (2019).

The iconic scene of the transformation of Arthur Fleck into Joker is creative cinematographic production that marks the narrative's climax. The visual techniques and ideas invested in building the scene and performing the role have generated memorable experience to audience that has expressed positive views about its visual and emotional weight around the world. The bathroom's scene may seem only a chosen setting where Arthur escapes from his first murder. However, it is the moment when the protagonist faces his repressed feelings and accepts his hidden shadow that signals the appearance of new identity different from the old Arthur. The first homicide signifies the peak of his psychological instability that hides turmoil of repressed feelings and angry reactions that reside in the unconscious part of his mind. Killing the three young adults has triggered the shadow to come to the surface of the conscious mind of the character.

6.2.1. Reasons of Embracing the Shadow

The reasons behind embracing the shadow are ramified to social, psychological, political factors that have damaged the character's psychological health creating complex psychosis. At the level of his family, Arthur has realized that the repeated statements and stories told by his mother, or rather adoptive mother, are not true, and they are just lies. They are made up by Penny to reduce her feeling of guilt towards her irresponsible upbringing of Arthur, as well as easing her life with him. Her treatment and upbringing are the first reasons behind the weak persona of Arthur. The protagonist has always believed in her ideas and has felt proud of taking care of his mother regarding himself as a decent man and son. In his delusions about attending Murray Franklin Show, he says 'I've been the man of the house for as long as I can remember. I take good care of my mother.' He imagines receiving appreciation for his sacrifices that create his style of life. The other destructive socio-psychological reason is the abusive childhood of Arthur including the traumatic brain injury, which is a drastic cause behind the deterioration of his mental and psychological health.

Arthur reaches an idea that his politeness and peaceful way of dealing with his issues is unsuccessful way to survive in his world. Thus, he realizes that the forced and powerful damages that have destroyed him require powerful reaction and not repressive responses. In other words, he now believes that he must use power to defeat power.

Concerning political reasons, the government's cuts of budgets to the insurance of the lower-class people has led Arthur to be unable to have access to his prescribed medications. The poor Arthur can no longer take the drugs that used to help him in controlling his negative thoughts, involuntary laughter, and depressive symptoms. At this point, the shadow finds an easy path to control his conscious mind and eradicate the persona after a long inner struggle. It is noticed that Gotham's political system supports the social stratification and inequality through governmental policies that crush the poor lower large class which is sacrificed to save the city's economy. The political issued policies to resolve the economic crisis are not directed to the upper wealthy class. Along the film's scenes, the filmmakers intentionally depict the sight of the condensed garbage that is left on the streets to show the consequences of the government's not responding to the workers' strikes. It indicates the state's refusal to yield to the working class's demands. This rises the level of poverty and develops feeling of grudge among Gotham's citizens. The city's elite, the government administration, and high authorities intentionally neglect chaos, squalor, people's dissatisfaction in this ruled place. Unfortunately, this fuel the citizens' resentment turning them like a time bomb. This political and social narrative happens in the background story of the protagonist Arthur who struggles with the society's oppressive treatment.

At the level of Arthur's professional life, the first murder happens after being expelled by his boss who finds out that he dropped a gun during Arthur's performance in the children's hospital. An important idea should be recalled here is that the weapon has been given to him by his hypocrite coworker Randall who has encouraged him to use violence.

This news has depressive effect on Arthur who has already experienced enough disappointments that have left serious mental and psychological issues. This leads him to undergo psychological metamorphosis that destructs his usual persona and embraces the dark buried side, his shadow. The latter is described as a mad monster who does not believe in the usual social standards. The persona of Arthur Fleck does not exist now, and the narrative witnesses the emergence of the shadowing character of the Joker.

The cinematography of the scene, led by Lawrence Sher, plays a crucial role in conveying the metamorphosis of Arthur's psychological breakdown and his embrace of a new shadow identity, the Joker. The choice of the setting embodies strong symbolism to the narrative and the character's development. Choosing dirty public bathroom to be the place that witnesses the born of Joker has underlying meanings that need to be deciphered.

6.2.2. The Symbolism of the Bathroom as a Framed Location

From simple human vision, the bathroom is regarded by anyone as space for privacy that can be found anywhere such as house, commercial buildings, and work. When one is at the bathroom, he or she is kept away from other people, and what may happen outside the place's four walls. When being alone in this place, one is not obliged to behave according to social norms and standards. In fact, in this place, humans are free to perform their animalistic features eliminating their body wastes, which reduces the civil image. The bathroom is where personal hygiene is maintained and one can find privacy and solitude. Therefore, this place is found in the works of the famous American film director and screenwriter Stanley Kubrick who uses the bathroom as an information background to unveil the characters' hidden thoughts such as their features, intentions, and feelings. The suppressed fears and desires can be expressed in a closed space where there are no other eyes watching to criticize or judge.

In his successful produced psychological horror film *The Shining* (1980), co-written with novelist Diane Johnson, the bathroom is used as a setting for the iconic scene 'Here's Johnny!'. The scene shows Jack breaking the bathroom's door with an axe trying to kill his abused wife Wendy who hides in the bathroom (Ferrier). The scene reflects Jack's madness and loss of humanity. For Wendy, it shows her rebellious revengeful power in cutting her husband's hand with a knife, despite her terrifying feeling, and escaping with her child. Because of her abusive relationship with Jack, Wendy has always been passive and subdued woman; however, in the scene of the bathroom she gathers her inner strength and appear as a strong survival woman. In Kubrick's scene of 'Here's Johnny!', privacy, power, and survival are some of the developed themes that are similar to Philips' scene of the transformation of Arthur into Joker. In short, the setting of the bathroom has powerful cinematic symbolism in film production related to the ability of change from a state to another.

Going back to the Todd Philips' scene of the film's climax, the director uses the setting of the bathroom to depict the juxtaposition, the change, and the emergence of the antihero through building a moving and expressive experience of the character's metamorphosis. After the murder, the only safe place that is found as a refuge when he is running away from anyone who may catch him is dirty public bathroom. This shows the servility of the life of Arthur as an ordinary man from poor lower class. Earlier in the work, the filmmakers present another scene in the bathroom that contradicts with the scene of the transformation. It is a luxurious bathroom in Gotham's theatre where Arthur tracks down Thomas Wayne to verify if he is his alleged father. Arthur is shocked by the reported information regarding the mental illness of his mother, his adoption, and his traumatic abusive childhood. Above all, he learns that Mr. Wayne is not his father. At that moment, Arthur's involuntary laugh has resulted in receiving a painful punch from his alleged father.

Consequently, in this fancy bathroom, Arthur breaks down traumatized, disappointed, aching to the revealed harsh truth and the received treatment. Philips has presented the two-bathroom scenes to strengthen the theme of the society's stratification, and prepares audience for the protagonist's scene of transformation. In other words, the first bathroom scene shows the luxury of the wealthy upper class and the oppression of the lower-class man Arthur as an annoying intruder. The second bathroom scene shows the griminess of the places designed for people such as Arthur and his unexpected frightful strength that contradicts with his attitude in the luxurious bathroom.

In this scene, he seems to embrace isolation and loneliness, and it is evident in the way he shuts the door on himself and puts his hands on the door. Though he is still shaking and breathing heavily, he tends to be relieved. The place inside the bathroom is designed to reflect Arthur's shadow. It is dark with a deeming electric light on the roof that rapidly flickers changing the weak brightness of the space. Turning off the light for a second and bring it back is a way of presenting the shadow that hides in darkness to audience. This puts them in the new consciousness of the protagonist who lost the usual vision and turns to new dark perception. The camera moves to capture the movement of his feet and the symbolic colors of the floor. The latter is checkerboard opposing white and black squares that is a symbol that carries several connotations.

6.2.3. The Symbolism of the Contrasting Checkerboard Floor

The white and black contrasting checkerboard is a symbolic metaphor with a long history, appearing in cultures such as the Egyptian, the Chinese and the Persian civilizations. It is present in tomb decorations, game boards, and architectural elements. It indicates rich and diverse meanings that are centered on the duality of existence. The colored squares symbolize opposing forces like day and night, life and death, or order and chaos (Martin).

Social division and hierarchy are the emphasized connotation for this discussed symbol in the Medieval and Renaissance Periods. According to Christian religious architecture, it reflects moral duality because it is considered as metaphor for the complexity of faith and the struggle between sin and salvation. This symbolism is found in most churches where checkerboard floors may represent the right noble choice of human being. It can be seen that each step on the floor requires a choice between right and wrong. In American literature, Nathaniel Hawthorne's novella "The Scarlet Letter" includes checkerboard patterns demonstrating the complex situation of Hester Prynne that finds herself between sin and redemption in the puritan society.

In Chinese philosophy, the image of checkerboard floor may be found in its famous symbol of yin and yang that represents the interconnected and interdependent forces of right and wrong, evil and good in the universe. Yin refers to darkness, passivity, and femininity while yang is associated with light, masculinity, and activity (Fang26). The contrasting black and white squares visually echoes the yin-yang symbol. It is noteworthy to mention that the squares are not isolated entities but they exist in relation to each other, representing the balance and harmony achieved through the interplay of opposites (Fang28).

As far as Jungian psychoanalytic is concerned, the checkerboard pattern is seen as a connotation for the human psyche. Carl Jung believes that the psyche is constituted of consciousness and unconsciousness. As it is explained before, the conscious part in the mind includes the present thoughts and feelings, while the unconscious mind consists of the hidden instincts, desires, and memories. The checkerboard's black and white squares represent the two parts of the psyche, with the conscious mind operating the complexities of the unconscious. Here, the director chooses the checkerboard pattern because it is a symbol with historic, philosophical, and psychological dimensions that transcends its simple geometric form to embody profound concepts of duality. The latter is a central theme in the

development of the character that reflects dual identity. Arthur embraces his hidden shadow in this scene to become Joker, the suppressed chaotic rebellious evil monster who does not care about doing wrong acts.

6.2.4. Arthur's Dance in the Bathroom

The first dance as Joker is choreographical performance that carries several meanings. As he closes the door of the bathroom on himself, he starts moving his body in a way that expresses a change in his internal thoughts and feelings. The music used is a mixture of cello and heart beating of the character's heart. The movement of the hands and his body tell a story that should be analyzed. The look on his eyes and the way he moves his feet steady and confidently. He embraces his shadow that has been at the background of his mind and personality. It seems a moment of triumph not fear from the aftermath of the committed crime and not worrying about the hidden future.

The Dance is an artistic expressionist experience that reflects the character's psychological metamorphosis, the climax and the major turning point in the story. The slow balletic movements of Arthur contradict with the terrifying crime that has just happened and the depressive setting of the bathroom; however, it demonstrates an experience of liberation. There is a sense of grace in the dance movements as well as the facial expressions that are not seen in previous scenes. Arthur enjoys the transformation into the character that he becomes. This is achieved through the director and the cinematographer's style in showing contrast Between subsequent experiences: the commitment of the crime and hiding in the public bathroom. The first exhibits high tension of the murder and the escape while the second demonstrates a sense of release. The scene starts with Arthur gasping for air after killing the Wall Street men, but as he dances, his breathing steadies. He ceases fighting his violent motives, and he seems to embrace them.

6.2.5. The Cinematography of the Metamorphosis Scene

The cinematographer has used colors of sickly green and the degradation of blue that are found in the bathroom. In fact, the setting is shown to audience with an effect of fluorescent lighting that creates a feeling of being in a surgery room at the hospital. This lighting technique is employed to build themes of depression and melancholy that prevail the antihero's life. This kind of cinematography technique of colors' choices are implemented throughout the production to reflect the gloomy city of Gotham that is considered as a character too.

As far as the camera movement is concerned, one can notice that the scene is filmed through slow moves when shooting with the camera. This is chosen for the purpose of delivering detailed event to audience as if they are present in the story experiencing the protagonist's change. It is an expressionist technique of filming that approaches Arthur's dance and feelings to audience leading them to understand the character through undergoing an immersive experience. The other used technique is static shots; that is to say, the cinematographer invests the influence of static shots in filming the scene to induce a claustrophobic feeling of being in a confined space. It is the case of Arthur's depressive world that suffocates him, and drives him to craziness through psychological influence. The technique is achieved by making the camera in unmovable position. It is used when the filmmaker concentrates on the theme of confinement or/and the general frame of the shot.

The camera starts locked in place framing the image of Arthur through a wide angle showing his breakdown with clinical detachment. When he starts dancing, the camera follows his moves as if it participates in his transforming moment and not just takes the side of an observer. When it turns around him through a slow circling, it creates of him an axis to the framed scene. It is a cinematographic metaphor as if he is in the center of uncontrolled mad

world. For the character, the camera captures the actor by using close up shots and extreme close-up shots highlighting his captivating performance. The latter shines through his face such as the vacuous eyes and the trembling lips as well as his body language.

Arthur's transformation proves the extreme deterioration of his mental and psychological issues that have led to the growth and the control of his shadow. In Jungian psychoanalytic, Arthur experiences the destruction of persona by disintegrating the mask. It is evident at the end of the work when he is shown without the usual smile that is present at the exposition of the story. He is no longer the fearful ordinary man who hides behind a mask to show the opposite of what he thinks and feels. Arthur embraces the chaotic shadow that has lived in his unconscious mind. From this moment, Arthur becomes Joker with a different smile that has distinguished look and meaning. It is no longer a mask but an expression of truthful sinister self. In the subway train, he has not intended to kill the three Wall Street men; he has fought back and has defended himself. This first act of violence towards others stimulated the full-suppressed reservoir in his unconscious mind permitting the shadow to have the control of his initiative actions. Unfortunately, Arthur is pushed to violence by society that has created the criminal mind. For his conscious mind, he is finally able to stand up for himself. The committed crime gives him a sense of self-fulfilment. This is proved in his short and long-term reaction to the murders. He does not regret ending the life of those men. To put it in another way, he considers the violent crime as a way of achieving justice in a place of marginalized poor lower class dominated by dishonest oppressive people.

From cinematographic perception, spotlight effect is used when Arthur faces the mirror at the end of his dance to detail and attract attention of audience to his gestures and the grimaces of his face. The effect also gives an impression of watching a performer on stage. The dance sequence in the bathroom scene is one of the most influencing moments that

carries strong reflection to the work's core themes. It is a physical expression of internal mental collapse that is a manifestation of Arthur's psychological metamorphosis that witnesses the first movements of the Joker's shadowing identity.

The movements of the choreographical dance change from the beginning to the end to indicate the internal development of the character. Initially, he moves in a stiff mechanical way reflecting his imposed atomized performative identity. This is shown through his clenched fists and rigid shoulders. Then, the dance progresses showing the change of his motions through smooth elegant gestures demonstrating his full surrender to his chaotic violent suppressed id. These movements include extension of his arms as he is freeing from the chains of his ego, and also reflects fluid but well shown movement of his feet as if he is stepping to another phase in his life. Extending his arches to the back and then standing straight seems like cutting the chains that imprison the marionette body that comes to its instinctual state. In this *mise-en-scene* analysis, one should not forget to mention the artistic beauty and effectiveness of Joaquin Phoenix's performance and Physicality. Through his movement of twisting spine and unhinged position, Phoenix tells a story of a struggling body at war with itself, reflecting Arthur's internal fight in a fractured psyche. The psychological instability demonstrated on screen shows the character's descent into madness in a way as if it exhibits a beautiful artistic painting.

This dance is a rebellion against his conformist self that used to act according to a performative identity as an obedient answer to societal norms when society does not respect and care about him. The dance is the first authentic performance in his life because he is not forced to smile or convince anyone about his created show. This is why he has failed as a standup comedian because he is used to worry about the others' expectations, reactions, and thoughts. The scene marks Arthur's voiced rejection of order, and a celebration of his violent actions as a revenge. It is a catharsis moment after killing the three Wall Street men who

symbolize the upper social class and the political system. After embracing the chaotic side of his psyche, the character does not have predictable motions, which reflects the declared Joker's philosophy in Franklin Murray's show when he says, 'Nobody's civil anymore, nobody thinks what it's like to be the other guy.' The chorographical movements reflect his unconstrained created self that does not care about societal expectations, but it enjoys unlimited and excessive freedom, which is in other words madness. Here, Arthur Fleck dies and audience witnesses the born of the Joker.

6.2.6. The Symbolism of Arthur's Reflection on the Mirror

The mirror in this cinematic work is presented with a profound symbolic weight that echoes several narrative and psychological themes. One should state the nature and function of mirror to study its relation to the character's representation in this scene. In fact, a mirror is a reflective surface, typically made of glass, and coated with a metal amalgam (mercury and other metals). Reflective surfaces such as windows and shiny objects function as mirrors, albeit not always with a clear image (Freysteinson 1). They are used as reflected shot in several scenes that demonstrate the fragmented image of Arthur. Actually, these objects offer a visual field ordinarily not seen from the standpoint of the first person. Looking into a mirror is not just seeing the image of one's self, it is also an experience of mirroring the reflected feelings, gestures, and actions that characterize the personality. It is only in mirrors and reflective surfaces that one has access to the whole or broken bodies, a view that research suggests is equivalent to direct observation of one's self (Jenkinson & Preston, 2017).

Several studies have proved that victims of abusive childhood trauma suffer from lack of self-awareness and it is evident when looking in mirrors. That is to say, they are unable to acknowledge or be satisfied with their reflection in a mirror (Freysteinson 3). This is a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In other words, Arthur suffers from

dissociative reaction after his traumatic experience. According to the results of brain scans, they show inattention and negative reactions to the brain's structures when the victim is in self-recognition experience (Crespo & Fernandez-Lansac, 2016; Gordon, 2019). In this state, individuals that suffer from consequences of PTSD experience emotional detachment or dissociation with the image of the injured self.

Mirror is a recurrent leitmotif throughout the cinematic work that uses the reflection of shots to symbolize Arthur's fractured and fragmented identity. It is used in the scene of forcing a smile when doing his makeup clown, shedding a tear as he is obliged to conform to the societal expectations. However, in this scene the reflected shot on the mirror shows the character's acceptance and embrace of chaos. Usually, one looks to his or her reflection on the mirror to find what cannot be seen or felt without a reflecting image. In this case, the mirror exposes the duality of the character who sees his reflection contradicting with what he feels towards himself. This is due to the internal conflict between the shadow and the persona, the id and the ego. In other words, the conflict is between the present self and the desired one that include the suppressed emotions, desires, and anger. At this moment, Arthur chooses one of the two odd fractured parts of his reflected identity.

6.2.7. The Music Score

The scene witnesses Hildur Guðnadóttir's haunting cello musical score as complementary narrative technique that helps in demonstrating the turmoil inside the mind of Arthur Fleck. It introduces an immersive experience to audience who becomes an experimenter with this this artistic work. The music is indeed considered as one of the most individualistic and influencing elements of the film. Moreover, it is characterized by being minimalist composition of the instrument of cello as it succeeds in reflecting the atmosphere of the story. In the metamorphosis scene, it adds profound dimension to the character's experience of his mental breakdown and psychological transformation affecting the emotions

of audience. Alphonse de Lamartine, French poet, says, ‘Music is the literature of the heart; it commences where speech ends (Pizoń 4)’. The writer’s statement shows the expressionist effect of music on humans who indulge in the notes’ rhythm and reacts to its powerful impact. Through the score, audience is placed not just inside the story but in Arthur’s mind. This is why It appears in other scenes as a recurring motif that demonstrates the antihero’s journey of isolation, despair, and transformation.

The cello or violoncello is a middle pitched bowed string instrument. It can be found as a solo instrument, and it is used as bass voice in a standard orchestra. Besides, the cello is a solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra as it is the case in this film’s score. In more clarified words, it is a stringed instrument between the viola and bass in pitch (with some overlap), and it is often used as a solo instrument. The peculiar characteristic of this instrument is that it has a special sound that extracts from the bow sinking into the strings, creating vibrations that spread inside of the instrument (Pizoń 5). Its sound is often attributed to the following characteristics: deep, dark, warm, rich, mellow, melancholic, powerful, and sad (Pizoń 6).

In his book *The Violoncello and Its History* (1968), the music historian Wilhelm Wasilewski quotes Charles Baudiot, who used to be his cello tutor, in describing the cello saying, “stirs the soul by [...] the pathos of its expression” (213). Indeed, his claim denotes the public’s view of regarding the cello as the most instrument that influences one’s emotions and induces sad emotions. In previous studies, it is considered as the saddest musical instrument, and it is proved to have a high potential of expressing sadness comparing to other 43 instruments (Pizoń 7). This may be due to the low pitch level permitting the slow play of musical notes. It is noticed that humans are captured by the voice of the cello in sorrow circumstances emphasizing the connection of the human soul with the instrument’s sound. This may be explained from psychological perception to music that is studied by the

psychology professor and musician Alf Gabrielsson who has later become commissioner of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. In his book *Music psychology: An Introduction* (2003), he explains that individuals connect with music because of the consciousness reaction to the music notes. It creates sensations, thoughts, and emotions affecting one's behavior and forming a unique human experience. Musicians often describe it as the language of emotion. Gabrielsson has analyzed the music's capacity in impacting the human's psyche; as a result, he has reached an important idea that the music leads to expressing emotions as well as awakening them like recalling memories (150).

Music's effect on human nature exists since ancient times. In primeval civilizations and cultures, societies had strong belief in the music's healing powers. This is why several history books mention performing musical rituals to cure a mentally or physically ill persons (Pizoń 14). According to Dominika Pizoń, in ancient Greece people used to employ music in regaining harmony, healing illness, and achieving mental balance (14). This technique is also invested in liberating a person from uncontrolled feelings and repressed emotions which leads to an experience of catharsis (14). When listening to the cellist's piece of music and watching Arthur dances in the bathroom, audience can feel the instrument's mysterious nature that is involved in portraying the character's inner monologue between the shadow and the persona, the id and the ego. This indicates that music is a passage to unseen reality. Its sound carries depth that stretches to the story by adding a certain profound dimension to the character, the setting, the themes and the entire scene. In musical terms, the bravado of a cello creates an eeriness that reveals the power of the instrument through sounds that produce a sort of explosion of notes.

The cello is known for his long history, talented players and composers which correspond to the narrative history, actors and directors that produced the story of the Joker's character. This connection between the cello and the character is evident from the scene. The

slowly gestures of Arthur starting with moving delicately his feet across the floor, one in front of the other, occur simultaneously with the character's sound of breathing and the cello's diegetic sound. Slowly, the music score dominates the produced sound of the scene reflecting the antihero as two characters fighting in the same body, and then one only voice is heard which is the cello's voice. The character of Joker is slowly manifested through the sound and the body of the protagonist Arthur as well as the background diegetic music. They contribute in presenting the emergence of the Joker as a corporeal possession of Arthur, as if the Joker seized control of his body. In fact, in this scene, as the camera lingers on Arthur's body as it interacts with the cello score, presents the moment of the Joker's first physical manifestation. In other words, his transition from spectral haunting to embodied figure. The shadow of Joker starts controlling the mind of Arthur, and he is exposed to both Arthur and audience through Guðnadóttir's score.

In fact, Joaquin Pheonix has succeeded in demonstrating a captivating image of the two characters Arthur of Joker. In a Q&A with The Academy, the film director Philips describes the character of Fleck as full of grace and someone who 'has music in him' (Shine 152–168). Pheonix as a talented actor manifests the character's features through influencing performance that shows his body's interaction with the music as he dances to both the soundtrack and the score. It is most evident in the manifestation of the shadow character Joker through choreographic dance to Hildur Guðnadóttir's composed score giving physical form to his metamorphosis. This creates from this production a profound musical film.

The musicality of the film is evident in Arthur's interaction with music that is seen throughout the narrative that marks the character's stimulated pieces of dance. When he experiences intense and raw emotions, he expressively reacts through dancing, like a speechless monologue. The dance sequences are performed only for himself and most of them when he is alone. He has a deep connection between his soul and music. There are

several examples that show his relation with music such as when he asks Penny to dance with him to the instrumental version of the song *That's Life* at the end of the Murray Franklin show. At the end of his date with his neighbor Sophie, he tries to make her dance as a reaction to his joyful feelings. Another example is dancing with the received gun as he is celebrating the power of this weapon between his hands that feeds his masculinity. He starts pretending that he is praised and complimented on his skills by others. He dances to the song of *Slap That Bass* performed by Fred Astaire as a segment from the musical *Shall We Dance* played on TV. He has powerful sensibility to music that moves his body in expressive movements at times of sorrow and happiness.

The costume, the make-up, the choreographic dance along with the music score are complementary elements that produce sensuous experience and a feeling of closeness to Arthur in his most private moments. Music helps in having a close insight to the protagonist's suppressed desires and anguish that form his individuality. The Irish musicologist Danijela Kulezic- Wilson mentions in her book *Sound Design* (2019), 'And in the same way as our bodies surpass the limits of nonverbal communication through kinesics, so film uses its own body—image, sound, music, movement, and rhythm—to transform the technical and industrial into the sublime (116).' The scholar details the work of the director in combining music with other cinematography elements.

The Icelandic Hildur Guðnadóttir's chosen score for the film is centered on the instrument of cello in conveying the film's essence. The solo cello focus forms an intimate yet unsettling atmosphere. The notes and pitch shifts are created through techniques known as drones and micro tonality that evoke eeriness and uneasy feelings (Shine152–168). She also creates an influencing effect through silence in the music, which is as a Tool used to create space for imagination and reaction in the minds of audience. Just like the character Arthur, she has high sensibility with music demonstrated in choosing the right moments where she

employs cappella elements that produce cello's music sound without instrumental accompaniment.

In addition, she invests in the characteristics of the sound of the halldorophone to presents Fleck's voice. The halldorophone is another form of cello that works with electro-acoustic string. It is invented by the Icelandic musician Halldór Úlfarsson whom Guðnadóttir helped on the project of producing the music score for the film of the Joker. To explain more his effect, the instrument creates ambient music qualities in the score that intensifies as sustained electronic tones, devoid of persistent beats, craft an atmospheric soundscape that immerses the audience in the psychological turmoil experienced by the protagonist during crucial scenes (Shine152–168). The orchestra is built around the solo music of cello that delivers the sound of the internal struggle and the development of the character's shadow, Joker. even if the background sound of the orchestra gets louder in some scenes, the cello's voice is always there as a muffed conductor. The sound of the orchestra presents the suppressed desires and the driving forces inside the psyche of Arthur while the cello is the Joker's voice. Those forces intensify with time leading to the breakdown of Arthur and his transformation to Joker. Indeed, Guðnadóttir's produced score is avant-gardist work that goes hand in hand with the film's narrative, thematic, and cinematography elements. Guðnadóttir offers a musical identity to the protagonist through an individualistic multilayered work that corresponds to his emotional depth and descent into madness.

It is important to underline the fact that the production of the film's music score has witnessed an interesting and perpetual cooperative relation between the score and the filmmaking process. Definitely, the movie's scenario and the voice of the antihero have contributed in imagining and dictating the music notes of the score; however, the actor is also moved by the score when performing some scenes such as the metamorphosis. In her

interview with Tim Greiving for the American National Public Radio, Hildur Guðnadóttir declares,

I sat down with the cello to kind of just find my way into his voice and into his head. And I'm just like kind of holding onto this feeling that I had after reading the script. As soon as I played those first notes, it really hit me in the chest somehow, and it was a really strong, physical reaction that I got. And I was like, yes, this is it.

Her statement to the journalist shows her contemplating connection to the film's antihero and her talent that is manifest in her achievement of reaching a convincing presentation of the character's dark side.

II. The Influence of Joker on Gotham's Society

1. The Self-created Character of the Joker

After the first murder and undergoing the transformation into Joker, the protagonist's characteristics have change as if he has become a different person. Although, in one of the scenes after transformation, he tries to end his life with the gun, but his desire for revenge and reverse his life style is powerful than suicide. It is evident when he uses a felt pen to erase the word 'don't' and leaves the expression 'forget to smile' in the agency's wall when he is leaving the workplace for the last time as an expelled worker. The look in his eyes, the way he walks, and dance's movements reflect another person not Arthur, Joker. Even his way of holding and smoking cigarette has changed.

The scene of the stair dance is one of the powerful moments that marks the born of the Joker. It indicates the change of his routine life style and believing in the idea of enjoying his moment. He descends the stairs to go to attend Murray Franklin show as an invited person, which is his dream. However, he is invited after being bullied on TV and he was famous because audience enjoy laughing on his failed performance as a comedian. He does not go to

the show with negative thoughts, but with joyful vengeful spirit. Moving down the stairs of his neighborhood is symbolic action of going into darker part of himself. He celebrates this descent into madness. This is shown through the cinematography techniques that captures him through low angle signifying his undefeated power, confidence, and control as a person who has lost his conscious mind destructing his superego. Placed in the center of the frame signals another phase of the story as if he is the one that is going to dictate the end of the narrative. This influences his reflection in the minds of audience who are recognizing this character for the first time.

1.1. The Subsequent Committed Crimes

The Joker has continued his violent acts through committing several crimes after the subway triple murder strengthening the embraced evil shadow. Each crime has added another vicious feature to the embraced shadowing identity of Joker. This also exacerbates his mental health and accelerates his descent into madness and villainy. He has created a record of murdered victims proving his monster-like created personality.

1.1.1. The Joker's Murder of his Mother

The fourth murder after the subway killings has solidified the embraced identity of the joker empowering the evil and dehumanized features because the victim Arthur's mother, Penny Fleck. At the beginning, Arthur is shown in miserable state missing his mother who is sick in the hospital. In one of the scenes, he is depicted smelling her pillow and sleeping in her place yearning for his mother's tenderness and love. However, when Arthur learns the truth about the mental disorder of his and his abusive childhood after stealing her file from Arkham Asylum records, he experiences traumatic moment of discovering his unrevealed past. He finds out about his adoption, and Penny's non rational treatment of allowing her boyfriends' violent abusive treatment to Arthur. The traumatic abusive childhood has left permanent damages to the psychical, psychological and mental health of the protagonist. At

this moment, Arthur's anger is mixed with feelings of betrayal, persecution and injustice towards Penny. This woman is not just a liar about his father's identity and herself, but she is a criminal in the way she has allowed his hurt that has left long lasting health issues.

Killing her for the new embraced identity of the Joker seems the right way to obtain revenge. In the scene of her murder, the director intentionally employs pillow as the crime's tool used by Joker to smother his adoptive mother during his visit to the hospital where he used to wait for her to be cured and comeback home. The pillow is seen in a previous scene as a source of tenderness and recalling nostalgic feelings of his mother's smell and love. This harsh contradiction reflects Arthur's destructed psychological state. He uses an item that belongs to penny and it is related to him through an emotional connection as a weapon to murder a person he used to live with her and love her as a true mother all his lifetime. When he ends her life, he says, 'I always thought my life was a tragedy, but now I realize, it's a comedy.' This marks a crucial phase in his life that freezes his human side if not eradicating it. He embraces his Joker's shadow as his true identity in the cruellest way. Murdering his mother is a paradoxical step against penny's misleading repeated statement to her son; she used to say, 'smile and put on a happy face. You are put here to spread joy and laughter.' Now, after murdering her, he redirects his life path and recreates the controlling ideas and values of his thought.

1.1.2. Killing The Coworker Randal

The fifth victim killed by Joker is his former colleague Randall who is the person that has encouraged Arthur to react violently by giving him a gun and use it against oppressors. In fact, this has led to expelling him from Ha Ha's agency and leading him indirectly to the committed triple murder and the flowing destructive events. When Randall visits Arthur after the Wall Street killings and Penny's murder asking him to not involve him in the police's investigations, Arthur reacts angrily and does not hesitate to kill him. He murders Randall in

a very cruel way stabbing him in his neck and eye with a knife, and then smashing his head against the wall repeated times. His cold awful way of murdering Randal reflects his repressed anger towards the bullying people who have mistreated, betrayed, and expelled him from society. Then, he looks to the terrorized Gary saying ‘you are the only one who was nice to me.’ He does not kill the other coworker because he has not hurt him and he has treated him in a polite human way. Another reason is that Gary is a dwarf and he always suffers from daily bullying and similar social torture due to his small size, which resembles to Arthur’s struggle with society. Actually, when this murder happens, Arthur is stained with blood especially on his painted white face as if his clown make up is made up of blood symbolizing the criminality and evilness of the Joker. This foreshadows the unstoppable crimes of the antihero.

1.1.3. Murdering the Media Figure Murray Franklin

Murray Franklin is Joker’s another victim who is murdered by his invited guest in his late-night talk show that is streamed live on TV. Franklin as a comedian and media figure is used to be Arthur’s example in following his dream as a comedian and an imagined absent father in his delusions. His adoptive mother, Penny, also has liked watching the show with Arthur. However, one day he presents a video that shows Arthur’s attempt as a standup comedian in a sarcastic way to drive audience to laugh. He mocks of his gestures, involuntary laughter, and introduced jokes. As a result, Franklin has become one of the bullying and haters in the eyes of Arthur who used to consider him as an idealized person in his life. He goes to Murray Franklin show under the name of Joker who is presented to audience with his clown custom and make up. He feels proud of his new embrace identity, and he does not seem to search for acceptance. After confessing the murder of the three Wall Street men, he shoots Murray in the head killing him with one bullet. He is not afraid to propagate his new identity and committed crime live on TV as if he takes revenge from media as well.

2. Joker as a Source of Influencing Inspiration for the City's Rebellion

Arthur's long endured psychological hardship has led to his transformation into Joker after his committed murder; however, killing the three Wall Street workers is a catalyst for change for Gotham's low class citizens. The triple homicide of upper-class individuals has pushed people to unite for collective uprising against the oppressing social class and the political system. the Joker's violent actions that are a culmination of several psychological and mental issues inspire a mass movement, signifying how a single individual's mental breakdown can trigger a revolution. In fact, when he has committed the first murder, the city has been on the brink of chaos due to the government uncooperative attitude to the workers' strikes and the miserable situation of citizens and the entire city. After media's depiction of the killer as a man who wears a clown mask, the latter has become a symbol of opposing and rebelling against the elite and the ruling system. This witnesses the rise of the Joker as a symbolic figure of rebellion. The citizens identify with his violent confident vengeful reaction against the Wall Street businessmen. Citizens thrive to adopt the same attitude against the systematic oppression and neglect faced by the lower classes.

2.1. The Rise of Protest Movements in Gotham City



Fig.08. 'Gotham's Protest Adoption of the Symbol of Clown' (01:02:30) Todd Philips, *Joker* (2019).

Gotham's working class has found a voice through the story of the Joker's murder adopting the figure of clown as a symbol of their rebellious movement after not reacting to the miserable situation for a long time. The angry and unsatisfied low class has always had conflicts with the ruling system that has finally ended in causing mass protests, acts of violence, and a high crime rate in Gotham City. The low marginalized social class has suffered from issues of poverty, inequality, and unemployment as the most crucial problems introduced in the cinematic work. The government's administration and elite social class have expressed their rejection of helping the low class of society in easing their lives and finding solutions for their problems. Their unwillingness and incapability are demonstrated through Thomas Wayne's discourse in media and the government's oppressive policies of sacrificing the lives of the poor people to save the city's economy and maintain the upper class's prosperity.

The mass protest scene in front of the opera building is a crucial moment in the story reflecting the work's narrative and thematic direction in dealing with the common people's right in having decent lives and reject injustice. The cinematographer Lawrence Sher uses tools and techniques in stylish way in producing a powerful scene of protest. He succeeds in conveying themes of anarchy, anger, and uncertainty along with the powerful symbol of clown. The cinematography strengthens the Joker's core themes such as political injustice, stratification of society, and social oppression. The used location, angle, lighting contribute in producing influencing protest scene that informs audience about the change of the attitude of Gotham citizen, from paralyzed community to rebellious mass against the system.

As far as Lighting is concerned, Sher uses technique of contrasting lights of glowing neon creating effects of shadows and lights. Lighting cooperates with the chosen color palette that demonstrates the view in clod teal color creating furious effect. The protesters's details are hidden because they appeared as shadowed figures emphasizing their anonymity and

collective power. The clown masks and the drawings are under moderate lighting to expose the Joker figure as their inspiration for their symbol of their uprising. Sher is assiduous in delivery realistic image, and it is clear in his choice of using handheld camera shot capturing the scene's frame. Intentionally, he relies on shaky, documentary style in capturing the protest and later on the riots. This enhances the quality and the evoked sense of chaos and danger. This is the opposite of the static controlled shots of Arthur at the beginning of the film. concerning the location, it has symbolic signification because the poor angry unsatisfied citizens are protesting in front of the city's opera building where the elite and upper-class people attend entertaining films and shows as one of their routine rituals of their life style. Inside the building, people enjoy their time watching Charlie Chaplin's film in luxurious comfortable way laughing on Chaplin's gestures while people are screaming for their rights and holding expressive posters, flyers and banners. Though the police forces control the protests, citizens seem angry because they are not answered by the government and the elite.

The cinematographer chooses low angle in capturing the shots to depict the citizens as a growing power under the control of more powerful side. It is more evident in the shot of Arthur descending the opera building stairs when he is reflected as a strong confident individual. He also employs wide shots of the crowd to portray the immense protesting mass power that exists in front of the building. The influence of the 70s and 80s cinema is intelligible in the choices and decision of Sher and Phillips in the course of filmmaking. The depiction of lighting and color palettes as well as other techniques are found in the prominent cinematic works *Taxi Driver* and *The King of Comedy* that induce the same reflection of urban decay and psychological instability as the film of Joker.

2.2. The Creation of a Mob Mentality

Gustave Le Bon's theory of psychology of the crowd is perceivable in how Arthur's actions start to become an inspiration for massive social movement. The triple murder of the

three Wall Street businessmen is presented through media as an action against the elite and the system committed by someone from the poor low class. The chosen discourse to present the incident has ignited the citizens' desire to express their resentment against the unjust system and their demand for their deprived rights. Arthur's homicide has been transformed as a public opinion issue. It is framed by media as a rebellious reaction against the political system, and it is understood by the citizens as their call for a massive rebellion. Gotham's society forms a misleading idea about the killer who wears clown mask as the poor citizen who becomes a hero after standing against the unaccepted living situation in the city. His committed violent actions have empowered the crowd who has formed thoughts of uniting against the oppressive system through not only peaceful protests, but violent rebellious reactions in case their demands are not answered.

This is what is known as mob mentality that is based on collective belief of the group of society in adopting an individual's thought. Le Bon states, 'In a crowd every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest. This is an aptitude very contrary to his nature, and of which a man is scarcely capable, except when he makes part of a crowd (12)'. From the theorist's quotation, it is evident that the believed idea spreads in a fast way among the crowd that demonstrates strength in their unity and capability of committing unpredictable action for the sake of fulfilling the believed idea.

The film *Joker* presents a disturbing evolution in Gotham's social fabric, as ordinary citizens gradually adopt the clown mask as a symbol of rebellion. What begins as isolated acts of violence by Arthur Fleck transforms into a broader social movement, with the clown imagery becoming a unifying emblem for collective dissent. This transition illustrates Gustave Le Bon's observation that crowds develop their own psychology distinct from individual members (*The Crowd* 23). The masks serve multiple functions: they anonymize

participants, create visual solidarity, and ironically repurpose Arthur's former profession into a revolutionary icon. As more citizens don the clown disguise, their actions escalate from chaotic protests to organized resistance, demonstrating how symbols can mobilize populations when combined with existing social grievances. The narrative suggests that Arthur's violent outbursts, rather than being condemned, become mythologized through media coverage and public discourse, ultimately inspiring imitation. This phenomenon reflects contemporary concerns about how acts of violence can be transformed into ideological symbols when contextualized within broader societal frustrations. The film's portrayal of this social transformation offers a critical commentary on the relationship between individual actions and collective movements in modern urban environments.

2.3. Social Unrest as a Result of Collective Consciousness

Arthur Fleck begins as a socially isolated and psychologically vulnerable individual, existing on the fringes of Gotham's deeply unequal society. His metamorphosis into the Joker represents more than personal madness; it embodies the explosive convergence of individual trauma with collective societal dysfunction. As Fleck's violent outbursts escalate, he inadvertently becomes a symbolic figurehead for Gotham's oppressed masses, transforming from social outcast to revolutionary icon. From a Jungian perspective, this transformation channels the collective unconscious, where the Joker persona emerges as an archetype of chaos and rebellion against oppressive order (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 42). The clown imagery evolves into what Jung might call a "psychic infection," spreading through society as a visual manifestation of shared, repressed frustrations. Simultaneously, Gustave Le Bon's theories of crowd psychology illuminate how Fleck's actions catalyze the masses (*The Crowd* 23). The crowd's rapid shift from shock to admiration exemplifies Le Bon's observation that collectives operate on emotion rather than reason, with individuals surrendering critical judgment to group mentality. The film's depiction of mob dynamics

reveals several key Le Bonian principles such as contagion. It is the rapid spread of revolutionary sentiment through the crowd.

Jung would argue the Joker persona resonates because it embodies a shadow archetype - society's repressed anger and desire for destruction. When unleashed, this collective shadow overwhelms individual morality, leading to the film's climactic social explosion. The crowd's adoption of clown masks demonstrates how archetypal symbols can unite disparate individuals into a powerful, if destructive, collective force.

2.4. Transformation of Arthur Fleck into a Symbol

Arthur Fleck's evolution from a psychologically distressed outsider to the Joker demonstrates how crowds transform individuals into symbolic vessels for collective sentiment. As Le Bon observed, "The crowd is always dominated by considerations of which it is unconscious" (*The Crowd* 17), which explains why the masses reinterpret Fleck's violent acts as revolutionary gestures rather than personal outbursts. The crowd demonstrates no genuine concern for Fleck's individual suffering; instead, they project their own systemic grievances onto his actions, exemplifying Le Bon's principle that crowds "think in images" rather than rational narratives (45). This phenomenon reveals the dangerous alchemy of crowd psychology: Fleck ceases to be perceived as a human being and becomes what Le Bon termed "a collective hallucination" (72) - in this case, the living embodiment of class resentment. The Joker persona achieves what Le Bon described as the "magnetic fascination" (89) that symbolic figures exert over collectives, where the crowd's enthusiastic adoption actually accelerates the individual's transformation. Fleck no longer needs to demand recognition as a person; through the crowd's worship, he becomes what Le Bon would call "a slave to the collective mind" (102), now existing primarily as a conduit for mass fury.

The film's climax powerfully illustrates Le Bon's assertion that "in crowds, the foolish become as influential as the wise" (56), as the masked rioters blindly follow the Joker's lead without understanding his personal motivations. This dynamic confirms Le Bon's warning about crowds' tendency toward "exaggeration and simplification" (34), where complex individual trauma gets reduced to a crude symbol of systemic rebellion.

2.5. Le Bonian Concepts through the Train Scene



Fig.09. 'The Train Sence' (00:36:11) dir. Phillips Todd. *Joker* (2019).

The filmmaker chooses specific frame, angle, and techniques of cinematography to produce the scene on the train that holds several significations including the psychology of the crowd. The selected frame here is inside the train where crowded people with masks of clown are looking angrily to the two coming police officers, who are not shown in this shot. The officers chase Arthur Flick for interrogation about the incident of killing the three young adults in the subway. In fact, the chosen frame is fundamental step in building the scene because filmmakers direct the audience's attention: "look here, now look at this, now over here..." (Brown 4).

The story is narrated through the selected frame that affords the needed information for audience about characters, setting, themes and so for. In this shot, the filmmakers include Gotham citizens, Arthur Fleck, the train's car as characters that reflect certain features, which are a focus of study, and they exclude the police officers. The aim behind this inclusion and exclusion is directing the audience's vision to the reaction of the characters not as much as the action of the officers. The producers want the audience to concentrate on how the crowd and the protagonist react to the incident of the officers. This explains the choice of the camera position and lenses that dictates the projected selected view of the scene. This is where the cinematographer and the director use techniques of cinematography to produce the shot that shows their creativity on the screen.

A tighter shot is chosen for this scene because the filmmaker wants to concentrate on the details from the larger scene of the train. In his view, audience should know the details of the present elements because they are important to understand the narrative. The shot is called in Brown's words an informational insert (9). The concentration is on the worn masks and the shared emotion of anger and shock on the faces that do not put masks. The producer's aim is to make audience close to the action that happens in the shot by observing people's expression, the way they are dressed, and so on. This involves the audience in the used discourse, the actions of the narrative. In addition, the producer wants audience to notice how Arthur is almost not seen among Gotham citizens who seem similar in their appearances and attitudes in comparison with Arthur. This reflects the theme of anonymity; one of the concepts of the crowd theory. Succeeding in projecting such themes requires techniques of cinematography.

The cinematographer Lawrence Sher chooses certain techniques in filming the shots that reflect the transformation of the character and the themes of the work after editing the work. Brown explains the cinematic techniques, 'it means the methods and practices we use

to add additional layers of meaning, nuance, and emotional context to shots and scenes in addition to their objective content' (9). In this shot, he positions the camera in the right side inside the train's car as if the camera, the eye of the audience, is one of the passengers who are present in that action. This has a positive impact on the perception of the audience that can immerse in the narrative through such cinematographic choice; thereby the producer and the cinematographer provide audience with the intended information about the story. Brown acknowledges this way of filming as point of view shot that make audience engaged in this fiction because they see and hear what the character does in the scene in the same time (10). In this shot, the cinematographer uses wide lenses to create a vision close to human being. The use of wide lenses portrays the depth relationships of objects in a way fairly close to human vision (Brown 12). Creating a sense of depth is one of the features provided by lens selection. It is important to mention that all optics, including the human eye, work by projecting the three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional image, which is the job of lenses.

In this scene, is in fact, the cinematographer depends on the use of handheld camera from a compositional standpoint for several purposes to achieve the goals behind this shot in the narrative. The central aim behind this method is not being at the protagonist's eye level to give him the freedom to succeed in showing how Arthur acts among the crowd. The flexibility of the handheld camera work allows the cinematographer to reflect the action of chasing Arthur by the police officers as a live show projected to audience. It provides the fluidity in moving around with the characters and shooting from different angles. It also permits audience to notice the graffiti on the inside walls of the metro's car as well as the subway in other shots from the scene. Graffiti is one of the characteristics of postmodernism that reflects the pop culture of people.

As far as lighting is concerned, Sher seems to depend on the concept of hyper-realistic lighting that concentrates on protecting the authentic image of the characters. It is evident in this shot where we see the details of the metro's car from inside as if the view is lit by the electricity of the metro. Audience do not focus on the faces as much as the general view and the themes behind Arthur's easy escape between the crowd. In one of his interviews, he clarifies this way of lighting through his special statement 'lighting the space and not the faces'. It is a successful way of lighting because it conveys with the characteristics of both the actor Joaquin Phoenix and the character Arthur Flick who demand freedom in leading the act. This assures the reflection of the authenticity of the character as well as giving the needed space for creativity of the actor to perform the role with his own transcending mind.

This lighting of this production is characterized by the use of the technique of sodium vapor light chosen by the cinematographer Cher to create effects on the shots of the antihero. Most of the shots that are produced outside includes this technique that reflect hints of orange and green in the set of scenes by adding a filter of green to the fluorescence and natural cyan hint. The cinematographer Cher has played with this technique in the scenes that are shot inside and outside closed space. This technique of lighting helps in creating depth besides playing with the contrast of colors. The look of the protagonist throughout the scenes that reflect its transformation from Arthur Flick to Joker is achieved by using different techniques including the color of the background. Audience may notice that some scenes consist of prominent orange color whether others are greenish teal, which create influencing emotional arc on screen. Sher uses certain amplified normal colors palette that consists of normal colors, but in exaggerated state to reflect the stereotypical contradicted emotions of the character. For instance, yellow represents envy and jealousy while preserving orange reflects balance, as they are almost complementary colors. They create balance in the frame of the shot as a

balancing color, which is a way of telling the story through colors and images. The Visual rules of light, color, depth depended by the cinematographer create the look of Arthur Flick and Joker and bring audience to immerse along the emotional journey of the visual narrative.

The filmmaker produces a shot that shows the inner life of the antihero Arthur Flick and Gotham's citizens through their reaction to the officers' incident. The chosen techniques of cinematography project the setting of Gotham city as a character in the narrative through showing its characteristics and its influence on the characters that inhabit this place. Not just as an influencing character, the place is also regarded as an influenced element by other factors such as the ruling political system and its inhabiting citizens. One of Gotham's characteristics is dirtiness that is shown in this shot through the unclean subway and the train's car. This dirtiness is caused by its citizens who seem careless about their place of living because they are not satisfied about the life that it is offered to them in this place. The low standards of living, the stratification of society, and the unjust political system are all factors that lead the citizen not just neglect Gotham city but also harm this place.

Going back to the scene, Cops chase fleeing Arthur Flick who is supposed to answer questions about the murder of the young men in the subway. His escape from them made him a suspect that has to be caught and brought to the police station. However, Arthur flees in a way that carries multiple meanings. Audience received several messages through the producer's proficiency in selecting the frame where people with clown masks are angry from violent policemen. The latter treat the passengers in a harsh way for the sake of chasing an individual dressed in clown costumes, the symbol of the movement of Gotham city's citizens. The frame shows one character who looks to the opposite way of the passengers, Arthur. He almost not seen because all the people in this shot are similar; they put masks, costumes, or/and makeup of clowns.

Anonymity and deindividuation are evident in this scene through the escape of the antihero and the presentation of Gotham citizens as one unanimous individual. In the crowded subway and the subway car, individuals reflect a sense of anonymity shown in how they dare to attack the police officers without considering the aftermath of this action on themselves. Wearing the mask of joker withdraws the individual's responsibility towards one's actions and thoughts. In fact, it empowers the individual to act in any possible way. For instance, following the crowd's action of harming the police forces as it is shown in the scene though it is a reaction for their mistreatment of the citizens. The fact of being anonymous through wearing masks empowers the crowd that is driven to a psychological state of deindividuation. The latter is generated from the feeling of irresponsibility of the collective nature of the crowd. They tend to form collective thought that drifts them to act in violent and unaccountable way. This is more evident in other scenes that show the riots and the protests of Gotham's citizens. Deindividuation is a characteristic of the theory of the psychology of the crowds that permits people to think and act in ways that are not acceptable when they are separated individuals. Here, the passengers' violent and chaotic behavior is the result of the collective consciousness of the crowd driven from the deindividuation feeling of being anonymous.

2.6. Graffiti as Postmodern Text in Joker's Train Scene

The graffiti-covered subway train is pivotal confrontation scene functions as a postmodern palimpsest of urban decay and cultural fragmentation. The spray-painted tags and anarchic symbols adorning the train's interior exemplify Jameson's concept of "schizophrenic" postmodern space (27), where visual noise replaces coherent narrative. These fragmented markings ranging from crude clown faces to political slogans visually echo Arthur Fleck's fractured psyche while mirroring Baudrillard's notion of simulated rebellion (12),

where countercultural symbols become commodified aesthetic gestures devoid of revolutionary substance.

The graffiti's most striking feature is its intertextual borrowing from actual New York City subway art of the 1970s-80s, a deliberate citation that transforms urban blight into nostalgic pop culture reference. This aligns with Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism as complicitous critique (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 4), where the film simultaneously critiques and romanticizes urban decay.

When Arthur commits his first murder amidst these graffiti-covered walls, the scene visually merges high-stakes drama with street art aesthetics, exemplifying the postmodern collapse between "high" and "low" culture (Huysen 58). The spray-painted tears on one clown face ironically mirror Arthur's later makeup, suggesting his violence was always scripted by the city's visual language a postmodern twist on determinism where environment literally writes itself onto the body.

3. The "Kill the Rich" Movement in *Joker*

The emergence of the "Kill the Rich" slogan throughout the film serves as a symbol of Gotham's escalating class warfare. This graffiti-turned-movement embodies the film's central tension between systemic oppression and anarchic rebellion, operating simultaneously as genuine protest and empty spectacle. The phrase's evolution from marginalized scrawl to unifying chant demonstrates how revolutionary rhetoric gains power through collective adoption, regardless of its original context or intent. As the movement grows, the slogan undergoes what Baudrillard terms "implosion of meaning" (*Simulacra* 10). What begins as specific critique of Gotham's economic inequality becomes reduced to a viral catchphrase, particularly during the influencing Murray Franklin show massacre. The crowd's transformation of the phrase into performative chant "We are all clowns!" demonstrates

Adorno's warning about protest being absorbed by the culture industry (*Culture Industry* 34), where even anti-capitalist rage becomes commodifiable entertainment.

4. The Joker as the Leader of Gotham's Rebellion



Fig.10. 'The Car Roof Scene' (01:52:13) dir. Phillips Todd., *Joker* (2019).

As he stands atop the vandalized police vehicle, the film visually actualizes what Foucault terms technologies of the self, demonstrating how societal rejection forces the creation of a new identity (*Ethics* 225). The camera's low-angle perspective elevates Arthur both physically and symbolically, transforming him from an invisible nobody to the focal point of collective attention. This moment crystallizes the film's central paradox - Arthur achieves visibility only through embracing the very madness that society feared in him. The climactic moment when Arthur Fleck, now fully transformed into the Joker, stands atop a police car surrounded by an adoring mob perfectly illustrates Gustave Le Bon's foundational theories of crowd psychology. This scene serves as a case study in how individual identity dissolves into collective frenzy, with the Joker emerging as what Le Bon would term the hypnotic leader who gives form to the crowd's latent desires (Le Bon 68).

4.1. Deindividuation and Anonymity

The sea of clown-masked rioters demonstrates Le Bon's concept of deindividuation, where the individual disappears in the unconsciousness of the crowd (Le Bon 32). The masks provide literal anonymity that enables extreme behavior, creating what Festinger later called reduced self-awareness (12). This visual uniformity transforms diverse individuals into what Le Bon described as a provisional being composed of heterogeneous elements, united only by their shared symbolism and rage (23).

The crowd's rapid shift from chaotic rioters to organized followers exemplifies Le Bon's principle that ideas, sentiments, emotions, and beliefs possess in crowds a contagious power (102). As the Joker dances on the car roof, his movements become what Milgram would later identify as behavioral contagion (*Social Psychology* 1974), with the crowd mirroring his ecstatic gestures. Their immediate acceptance of him as leader demonstrates Le Bon's observation that crowds demonstrate the docility of beings who cannot survive without a master (71).

4.2. The Joker as an Archetypal Leader

Le Bon's description of crowd leaders as men of action rather than thought perfectly captures the Joker's appeal (75). His violent actions, the subway murders, rather than any coherent ideology make him what Le Bon would call a powerful will that focuses collective energy (78). The bloody smile completes his transformation into what Jung might identify as an archetypal shadow figure embodying the crowd's repressed desires for destruction (*Archetypes* 45).

This scene visually actualizes Le Bon's famous assertion that in crowds, the foolish, ignorant, and envious persons are freed from their insignificance (56). The rioters' clown masks create what Durkheim would term collective effervescence (*Elementary Forms* 1912),

with individual psychology subsumed into group identity. The Joker's ascent mirrors Le Bon's warning that crowds are only powerful for destruction as their collective behavior manifests from shared grievances rather than rational political goals (118).

4.3. Cinematography Analysis of the Scene

Cinematographer Lawrence Sher employs a dynamic visual strategy that mirrors the crowd's escalating frenzy. He uses extreme low-angle shots of Arthur's dancing figure, and high-angle wide shots of the undulating crowd. Canted Dutch angles are employed during moments of particular intensity. This creates what film scholar Bordwell describes as parametric narration (*Narration in the Fiction Film* 274), where visual style becomes an active narrative agent. The chiaroscuro lighting, with its stark contrasts between the police floodlights and the surrounding darkness, visually materializes the Jungian shadow archetype (*Archetypes* 45), externalizing Arthur's internal duality.

The scene's power derives from its careful choreography of collective behavior. As Le Bon observed in his crowd psychology studies, "The masses have never thirsted after truth" (*The Crowd* 56), and the film visually reinforces this through the rioters' blind adulation. The sea of clown masks creates what Bakhtin would call a "carnavalesque" inversion of social order where society's marginalized temporarily become the dominant force (Rabelais 10). The police car, now serving as Arthur's stage, becomes a potent symbol of institutional authority overthrown.

III. The Societal Influence in the Transformation of Walter White into Heisenberg in *Breaking Bad*

1. Discrimination and Walter White's Descent into Heisenberg

Walter White's evolution from a meek chemistry teacher to the feared drug leader Heisenberg in *Breaking Bad* is as much a product of systemic societal failures as it is of

personal ambition. The series deals with how economic neglect, professional dismissal, and institutional inequities corrode Walter's morality, pushing him toward crime. His journey reflects a broader critique of a society that marginalizes individuals while demanding conformity to rigid expectations of success, masculinity, and survival. Walter's financial desperation working two jobs, yet still unable to afford cancer treatment exposes the hollowness of the American meritocracy. His humiliation at the car wash, where he endures condescension from wealthier customers, underscores his fallen status (Gilligan, "Pilot"). Meanwhile, the success of his former Gray Matter colleagues, Elliott and Gretchen Schwartz, amplifies his resentment toward a system that rewards connections over genius (Johnson 112). Society's refusal to value his intellect legitimizes, in his mind, his turn to illicit means.

1.2. Professional Disrespect and the Waste of Potential

As a high school teacher, Walter faces apathy from students and indifference from peers, a stark contrast to his groundbreaking early work in chemistry. The pilot episode's classroom scene where students mock him during a lesson mirrors society's dismissal of educators (Smith 89). This professional erasure fuels his need to reclaim authority, first through meth production, later through violence.

1.3. Healthcare Failures and Forced Criminality

Walter's cancer diagnosis lays bare the cruelty of the U.S. healthcare system. His insurance denies adequate coverage, and his pride rejects charity from the Schwartzes. Here, discrimination against the uninsured intersects with class stigma, leaving crime as his only recourse to secure his family's future, an indictment of societal neglect. Walter's insecurity is exacerbated by comparisons to Hank, whose law enforcement career embodies traditional masculinity. His adoption of Heisenberg's brutality from demanding "say my name" to orchestrating Gus Fring's demise is an overcorrection for years of emasculation (Wright 56). Society's narrow definitions of male success trap him in a cycle of performative violence.

1.4. Moral Hypocrisy

While Walter's actions are indefensible, the series contrasts society's revulsion toward him with its tacit acceptance of systemic harm. Skyler's horror at his meth empire ignores her earlier complicity in laundering money, mirroring societal choice of acceptable immorality. The media's demonization of Heisenberg further reflects how society scapegoats individuals while ignoring the conditions that create them. Walter's rejection of the Schwartzes' help is rooted in class shame. His insistence on self-sufficiency "I did it for me" reveals how societal myths of success warp pride into self-destruction. The drug trade, with its illusion of autonomy, becomes his answer to a rigged system. As a mirror to society's complicity, Walter White is not presented as a villain but as a grotesque product of societal indifference. From economic instability to gendered expectations, each discrimination he faces strips away his alternatives, making Heisenberg inevitable. The series challenges viewers to interrogate how society's structures not just individual choices fuel corruption.

1.5. Washing Away Dignity: Cinematic Language and Societal Brutality in Walter's Car Wash Humiliation



Fig.11. 'The Car Wash Scene' (00:10:17) (Season 1, Episode 1). dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. *Breaking Bad* (2008).

The car wash scenes in *Breaking Bad* particularly in Season 1's "*...And the Bag's in the River*" use visual storytelling to show Walter White's societal marginalization. Director Vince Gilligan frames Walter's degradation through oppressive cinematography, sound design, and narrative irony, transforming a mundane setting into a microcosm of class warfare.

1.5.1. Visual Subjugation

Walter is frequently filmed from high angles while scrubbing tires, his body cramped in the frame, visually reinforcing his powerlessness. In contrast, his boss Bogdan is introduced via low-angle shots, his sneering face dominating the screen as a visual metaphor for their employer/employee hierarchy (Smith 143). The sickly yellow of the car wash uniforms mirrors Walter's cowardice early in the series, while the gleaming cars he cleans reflect the wealth he's denied (Johnson 27).

The diegetic sounds in the scene are designed to reflect the society's discrimination of Arthur. The hiss of water sprayers and whirring of vacuums drown out Walter's dialogue, mirroring how society silences the working poor. The lack of non-diegetic music in this scene presents the bleak realism, denying viewers the emotional relief of cinematic manipulation.

The scene's cruelty lies in Walter's wasted potential. A close-up of his hands—later shown expertly handling lab equipment, scrubbing grime underscores the tragedy of his underemployment. The script underscores this when Bogdan says, "You missed a spot, college boy," weaponizing Walter's education against him. This moment crystallizes society's discrimination for intellectual labor when they are not wealthy.

The car wash embodies service-sector exploitation demonstrating Walter as he endures humiliation for minimum wage while Bogdan profits. The setting's banality, a staple

of suburban life, makes its brutality more insidious. As critic Laura Smith notes, “Gilligan turns the car wash into a slaughterhouse of dignity, where class resentment festers in plain sight” (151).

This sequence is not just backstory; it’s the first fracture in Walter’s morality. The cinematography’s claustrophobia, sound design’s abrasiveness, and narrative’s irony collectively argue that Heisenberg is forged not by choice, but by systemic dehumanization.

2. Le Bonian Analysis of Heisenberg’s Created Identity

Gustave Le Bon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) provides a foundational framework for understanding collective psychology and the transformation of individual identity within group dynamics. Applying Le Bon’s theories to Walter White’s evolution into Heisenberg in *Breaking Bad* reveals how the adoption of a new persona is both a psychological rebellion against societal constraints and an assertion of dominance within a lawless subculture. Le Bon argues that when individuals immerse themselves in a crowd, or by extension, a new social role, they undergo a “disappearance of conscious personality” and are guided by a collective unconscious that often regresses to primal instincts (Le Bon 12). Walter White’s transformation into Heisenberg exemplifies this phenomenon, his conscious identity as a meek chemistry teacher dissolves as he embraces the amoral tendencies of the drug trade. The alias “Heisenberg” becomes a psychological mask that allows White to cover his actions, illustrating Le Bon’s assertion that individuals in altered states of consciousness such as those assumed in criminal environments are susceptible to “hypnotic” influences that override rationality (Le Bon 23).

Furthermore, Le Bon’s concept of contagion explains how Heisenberg’s identity spreads influence, instilling fear and obedience in others. Le Bon describes contagion as a process whereby emotions and behaviors rapidly disseminate through a group, leading to uncritical adoption of extreme ideologies (Le Bon 19). In *Breaking Bad*, Heisenberg’s

reputation becomes a self-perpetuating myth; the mere utterance of his name triggers compliance among low-level dealers and rivals, demonstrating the psychological power of a constructed identity. Jesse Pinkman's gradual assimilation into Heisenberg's world mirrors Le Bon's observation that individuals in crowds sacrifice their personal interest to the collective interest, even when that collective interest is destructive (Le Bon 41). The more Jesse aligns with Walter's operations, the more he internalizes the violent codes of the drug trade, reinforcing Le Bon's argument that identity is malleable under group pressure.

However, Heisenberg's identity also reflects Le Bon's warnings about the fragility of constructed personas. Le Bon notes that crowd mentalities are inherently unstable, as they rely on emotional fervor rather than sustained rationality (Le Bon 56). Walter's eventual downfall stems from the unsustainable contradictions within his dual identity, the family man cannot coexist with the drug kingpin. This duality echoes Le Bon's assertion that the unconscious aspects of the mind dominate in crowd settings, leading to eventual psychological disintegration (Le Bon 67). Walter's final confession in "Felina" "I did it for me" signifies a fleeting return to self-awareness, yet it arrives too late to prevent his demise. Thus, a Le Bonian analysis of Heisenberg underscores how constructed identities, while temporarily empowering, are ultimately governed by irrational and self-destructive crowd psychology

2.1. Heisenberg as the Leader

Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) offers a compelling framework for understanding Walter White's transformation into Heisenberg and his subsequent rise as a criminal leader. Le Bon argues that effective leaders in crowd settings possess an almost hypnotic power, displaying simplified, emotionally charged ideas to dominate their followers (Le Bon 68). Heisenberg embodies this archetype, leveraging fear, mystique, and calculated brutality to command loyalty within the drug trade. Unlike the

indecisive Walter White, a man constrained by societal norms, Heisenberg operates with the efficiency of a Le Bonian strongman, exploiting the psychological vulnerabilities of those around him. Le Bon asserts that crowds crave domination and are drawn to leaders who exude unshakable conviction, a trait Heisenberg cultivates through performative acts of violence and strategic unpredictability (Le Bon 71). His infamous declaration, “I am the danger,” exemplifies the Le Bonian leader’s need to project absolute authority, reducing complex power dynamics into an easily digestible mantra that subordinates individuals.

Moreover, Le Bon emphasizes the role of prestige in leadership, stating that a leader’s influence depends largely on their ability to cultivate an aura of invincibility (Le Bon 82). Heisenberg constructs this prestige through reputation management by eliminating rivals like Gustavo Fring and Tuco Salamanca while enforcing his dominance through mythmaking. The whispered legends about Heisenberg “A guy opens his door and gets shot, and you think that of me?” mirror Le Bon’s observation that crowds are swayed not by logic, but by the prestige acquired by the leader (Le Bon 84). This manufactured prestige allows Heisenberg to control his underlings, including Jesse Pinkman, who hesitates between rebellion and terrified obedience. Le Bon notes that followers in a crowd mentality lose their capacity for critical judgment, instead adopting a state of expectation where they await the leader’s direction (Le Bon 89). Jesse’s psychological dependency on Walter, even as he resents him, demonstrates this dynamic, as he repeatedly returns to Heisenberg’s orbit despite recognizing his manipulation.

However, Le Bon also warns that a leader’s power is inherently unstable, as it relies on the perpetual reinforcement of fear and admiration (Le Bon 102). Heisenberg’s eventual downfall stems from his inability to sustain his mythos in the face of escalating paranoia and internal dissent. The erosion of his authority becomes evident when Todd and Jack’s gang disregard his orders, illustrating Le Bon’s principle that once a leader’s prestige is

questioned, the crowd's loyalty fractures (Le Bon 108). Walter's desperate, isolated final stand in "Ozymandias" underscores the fragility of his leadership, once stripped of his empire, he reverts to a solitary figure, no longer commanding the collective fear that defined Heisenberg. Thus, while Heisenberg exemplifies the Le Bonian leader in his prime, his trajectory also confirms Le Bon's thesis that crowd dominance is a temporary illusion, vulnerable to the very irrational forces that created it.

2.2. Cinematographic Analysis of the Scene "I Am the Danger" in *Breaking Bad* Through a Le Bonian Lens



Fig.12. 'I am the Danger' (00:09:15) (Season 4, Episode 6).dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. *Breaking Bad* (2011).

Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) argues that leaders dominate groups through psychological manipulation, emotional contagion, and the projection of an irresistible persona (Le Bon 68-72). The "I am the danger" monologue from *Breaking Bad* (Season 4, Episode 6, "Cornered") visually and thematically embodies

these concepts through its stark cinematography, framing, and tonal shifts. Director Michael Slovis crafts this scene as a psychological unveiling, demonstrating how Walter White fully embraces the Heisenberg persona by weaponizing Le Bon's theories of charismatic authority and crowd control.

2.3. Isolation and the Illusion of Invincibility

The scene begins with Walter and Skyler standing in their bedroom, framed in a tight two-shot that emphasizes their emotional and physical divide. As Walter's rant escalates, the camera slowly pushes in on his face, transitioning to a suffocating close-up that dominates the screen. This visual isolation mirrors Le Bon's assertion that leaders must stand apart from the crowd to cultivate mystique (Le Bon 82). The shallow depth of field blurs Skyler into the background, symbolizing her psychological erasure; she becomes part of the crowd that Walter seeks to dominate. The cold, blue-tinged lighting sharpens Walter's features, giving him an almost spectral presence, while Skyler remains bathed in softer, warmer tones, visually reinforcing his detachment from human empathy.

2.4. The Power of Repetition and Rhetoric

Le Bon emphasizes that effective leaders use "affirmations" and "repetition" to implant ideas in the minds of followers (Le Bon 101). Walter's speech builds rhythmically, with phrases like "I am not in danger, Skyler. I am the danger" delivered in a measured, almost hypnotic way. The camera holds unflinchingly on his face, denying the viewer any escape from his intensity, a technique that mirrors Le Bon's description of how leaders fascinate their audiences into submission (Le Bon 75). When Walter snarls, "A guy opens his door and gets shot, and you think that of me?", the camera abruptly cuts to Skyler's horrified reaction, illustrating Le Bon's concept of contagion, the rapid spread of emotion from leader to crowd (Le Bon 19). Her fear validates his authority, proving the success of his performance.

2.5. The Collapse of Rationality

The scene's climax occurs when Walter steps into shadow, his face half-obsured in darkness, a visual metaphor for Le Bonian idea that crowds, and, by extension, their leaders operate on primal instinct, not reason (Le Bon 56). The abrupt silence after his outburst, paired with Skyler's stunned retreat, mirrors Le Bon's warning that charismatic dominance is inherently unstable. Walter's momentary triumph is undermined by the very irrationality he exploits; his family's terror foreshadows his eventual isolation. The composition of a lone figure in a barren, over-lit bedroom echoes Le Bon's thesis that leaders who rely on force eventually stand alone, having destroyed the bonds that once sustained them (Le Bon 108).

This scene's visual language of close-ups, controlled movement, and lighting translates Le Bon's theories into cinematic art. Walter's transformation into Heisenberg is not just narrative but aesthetic, with the camera acting as a tool of psychological domination. By isolating Walter, amplifying his rhetoric, and contrasting his menace with Skyler's vulnerability, the cinematography mirrors Le Bon's blueprint for how leaders hypnotize, intimidate, and ultimately alienate their followers.

Conclusion

Arthur and Walter are not anomalies; they are products of societal failure. Their transformations into the Joker and Heisenberg demonstrate how neglect and humiliation breed charismatic tyrants, and how crowds willingly follow those who vocalize their repressed rage. Yet, as Le Bon predicts, their leadership is unsustainable, because it depends on perpetual conflict. In the end, both characters become cautionary tales, not just about individual evil, but about how easily the marginalized can become monsters when society abandons them. Societal discrimination plays a significant role in Walter White's transformation into Heisenberg. Economic marginalization, professional disrespect, health

care challenges, and societal expectations of masculinity all contribute to his sense of inadequacy and drive him toward crime. As he becomes more deeply involved in the drug trade, he faces increasing moral judgment and stigma, both from those around him and from society. Walter's story is a cautionary tale about the consequences of societal neglect and the ways in which discrimination can push individuals toward desperate actions. By exploring these themes, *Breaking Bad* offers a nuanced critique of the societal structures that contribute to Walter's downfall. The *Joker* (2019), film shows how easily a crowd can be manipulated by a symbol of rebellion, how collective emotions can drive social movements, and how anonymity within a crowd can lead to deindividuation and escalating violence. Arthur's evolution into the Joker is not just a personal downfall but also a reflection of how societal pressures, combined with a volatile crowd mentality, can fuel chaos and unrest. This commentary on the power of crowds and their impact on both individuals and society is a central theme in the film.

Chapter Seven: Postmodern Political conditions as Underlying Catalyst for Psychological Deterioration

Introduction

In his impressive book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009), the English theorist Mark Fisher states, ‘The pandemic of mental anguish that afflicts our time cannot be properly understood, or healed, if viewed as a private problem suffered by damaged individuals (23).’ The quotation demonstrates the deterioration of the psychological state of individuals as a common case of many people who are surrounded by destructive capitalist political system. The political conditions do not just affect the civil life of people, but it determines their social and economic statuses and most importantly their psychological state. Late capitalism as a prominent feature of postmodernism leads to unstable mental health as systemic resulted issue related to political structure that is based on economy. This analytical chapter employs psycho-political concepts of postmodernists theorists such as Fisher, Foucault, as well as Žižek and even Byung-Chul Han’s in understanding the influence of political system on the psychological transformation of individuals. The concepts are applied in investigating the characters’ endured mental and psychological issues and its relation with the political conditions as an underlying impactful reason.

I.1. The Political System as a Reason Behind Walter’s Transformation into Heisenberg

The political thinker Mark Fisher, in his writings on capitalist realism and depressive hedonia, gives a useful perspective on Walter White’s transformation into Heisenberg in *Breaking Bad*. Fisher’s writings are concerned with the ways in which late capitalism limits personal agency, brings about the sense of ‘no alternative’, and produces the nihilistic desire to be empowered in self-destructive ways. This is how the political conditions dictated by the system, interpreted according to Fisher’s model, help in driving Walter toward his transformation. The government’s neoliberal policies that organize the individual’s life led to nihilistic situations where there is no direct way out.

1.1. Capitalist Realism in the Face of the Absence of Alternatives

Fisher's notion of capitalist realism in his book is stated as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative" (45). This reflects Walter's early captivation. Walter, a bitter high school teacher with a PhD, represents the broken promise of meritocracy in the age of neoliberalism. Despite his intelligence, he is financially precarious, burdened by medical bills, and humiliated by his former peers such as Gretchen and Elliott's charity offer. The system offers him no dignified way out. His turn to meth production is not just a criminal choice, but a perverse adaptation to a system that valorizes hyper-individualist success while structurally denying it to most.

1.1.1 Cinematography & Political-Psychological Analysis of "Say My Name" in *Breaking Bad*



Fig.13. 'Say My Name' as Walter's Capitalist Megalomania' (00:02:13) (Season 5, Episode 7). dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. *Breaking Bad* (2012).

In this Scene, Walt arrogantly demands respect from Declan. In this shot, Late capitalism is personified through Walter's illegal business. He is not just selling meth, but he is forming himself as a product branding the embraced identity of Heisenberg. He treats

crime like a business, mirroring corporate ruthlessness. He privatizes violence by outsourcing murder of Mike's men, evading taxes, and monopolizing the market just like a corrupt CEO.

The "Say My Name" scene in *Breaking Bad* (Season 5, Episode 7) is a crystallizing moment in Walter White's transformation into Heisenberg, embodying the ruthless individualism and performative dominance of late capitalism. Byung-Chul Han's critique of neoliberal subjectivity where self-worth is tied to achievement and recognition finding its cinematic expression in Walter's demand for acknowledgment. The scene unfolds in a desolate desert, a visual metaphor for the moral barrenness of Walter's empire. His insistence that Declan utter "Heisenberg" is not merely about identity but about brand validation, mirroring the capitalist logic where reputation is currency. The camera lingers on Walter's face, cold and unyielding, as he enforces his authority, framing him as both tyrant and product of a system that rewards aggression under the guise of entrepreneurialism.

Cinematographically, the scene employs stark contrasts to underscore Walter's psychological and political shift. The wide shots of the desert evoke a lawless frontier, reinforcing the idea that Walter operates in a space beyond ethical constraints—much like unfettered capitalism itself. The low-angle shots of Walter during his "Say my name" command visually elevate him to a mythic figure, while the high-angle shots of Declan and his crew diminish them, illustrating the power dynamics at play. The absence of non-diegetic music amplifies the tension, making Walter's words the sole authority in the scene. This stylistic choice reflects Han's argument that contemporary power no longer operates through overt repression but through internalized competition and the demand for self-assertion.

Politically, the scene critiques the illusion of autonomy within capitalism. Walter's megalomania is not true freedom but a form of enslavement to his own constructed persona. His violent imposition of his name, "You're ...right", reveals the hollowness of his triumph; he has become the system he once resisted, a sovereign only within the confines of his own

destructive narrative. The cinematography's clinical precision mirrors the dehumanizing logic of late capitalism, where individuals are reduced to transactional value. In this moment, Walter is no longer a man but a brand, a manifestation of Han's warning that self-exploitation is the darkest form of modern domination. The scene, thus, serves as both a character study and a political allegory, exposing the psychosis of a world where identity is forged in the crucible of competition and recognition.

1.2. Depressive Hedonia and the Narcissistic Change

Fisher analyzes late capitalism's depressive hedonia that is a condition where subjects are trapped in cycles of fleeting pleasure, unable to invest in long-term fulfillment. Walter's initial motivation, securing his family's future, quickly morphs into an addictive pursuit of power, recognition, and empire. The political system, in Fisher's terms, has eroded collective solidarity, leaving only self-interest as a viable mode of being. Walter's famous line "I did it for me. I liked it. I was good at it." This epitomizes this neoliberal subjectivity, where worth is measured by individual dominance rather than ethical community.

1.3. The Spectacle of Hyper-Criminality as Rebellion

Fisher's analysis of how capitalism absorbs dissent applies to Walter's "Heisenberg" persona. In a world where legitimate avenues for agency are closed off, Walter's turn to violent, spectacular criminality mirrors what Fisher calls the slow cancellation of the future. In other words, the drug trade becomes Walter's way of performing power in a system that rendered him impotent. His transformation is not just personal but a grotesque postmodernist parody of capitalist entrepreneurship. It is complete with branding the Heisenberg hat, market expansion, and monopolistic violence.

1.4. The Breakdown of Social Safety Nets

Fisher's work highlights how neoliberal austerity dismantles public support systems, forcing individuals into brutal self-reliance. Walter's lack of healthcare access is a direct

result of this political reality. His cancer diagnosis is not just bad luck; it is a symptom of a system that abandons its citizens. The show's setting is reflected as a decaying Albuquerque, where law enforcement is underfunded and schools are dysfunctional. It demonstrates Fisher's "zombie neoliberalism," where institutions persist as hollow shells, unable to address real human needs.

1.5. Cinematography and Political Analysis of the Ozymandias' Scene



Fig.14. "Ozymandias"(00:10:57) (Season 5, Episode 14) dir. Vince Gilligan Jr. *Breaking Bad* (2012)

The episode "Ozymandias" (Season 5, Episode 14) marks the irreversible unraveling of Walter White's constructed identity, serving as both a psychological breakdown and a political allegory for the fragility of authoritarian power. The title, drawn from Percy Bysshe Shelley's sonnet about a fallen tyrant, frames Walter's downfall as an inevitability, not just of criminal overreach, but of the neoliberal delusion that one can sustain absolute control. Byung-Chul Han's critique of late capitalism's burnout society is reflected in Walter's frantic desperation; having internalized the myth of the self-made sovereign, he is left with nothing but the ruins of his own making. The opening flashback to Walter's optimistic beginnings contrasts sharply with the present, where he crawls through the desert, stripped of his empire.

This visual juxtaposition underscores Han's argument that the pursuit of total autonomy leads not to freedom, but to exhaustion and isolation.

Cinematographically, "Ozymandias" employs a series of destabilizing techniques to mirror Walter's psychological disintegration. The camera frequently adopts shaky, handheld movements during moments of violence such as Hank's execution and Walter's physical struggle with Skyler forming a visceral sense of chaos. Wide shots of the vast desert, where Walter is reduced to a tiny, crawling figure, emphasize his insignificance in the face of his own hubris. The use of extreme close-ups, especially on Walter's shattered expression as he witnesses Hank's death, foregrounds the human cost of his megalomania, resisting the dehumanizing gaze of power. The episode's color palette, drained of warmth, reinforces the collapse of Walter's carefully curated mythos. Unlike earlier seasons, where cool blues and greens suggested calculation, the washed-out tones of "Ozymandias" signal the erosion of control, aligning with Han's assertion that the neoliberal subject's self-destruction is an inherent consequence of unsustainable self-exploitation (Han 11).

Politically, the episode dismantles the illusion of Walter's sovereignty. His final phone call to Skyler that is regarded as a performative act of false confession reveals the paradox of his power: even in defeat, he clings to narrative control, manipulating perception to cast himself as both villain and victim. This moment reflects Han's concept of the transparency society, where identity is reduced to a curated performance (Han 23). Yet, the cinematography undercuts Walter's theatrics; as he flees in the van, the camera lingers on his hollow stare, exposing the void beneath the persona. The episode's closing shot of Walter stumbling away from his buried money, a literal and metaphorical burial of his capitalist dream serves as the ultimate indictment of his ideology. In the end, "Ozymandias" is not just the story of a fallen king, but of a man who mistook accumulation for meaning, and domination for transcendence. Through Han's lens, Walter's tragedy is not his failure to

maintain power, but his realization that power itself was never the answer

1.6. The Neoliberal Anti-Hero as Cultural Symptom

Fisher argues that pop culture's obsession with anti-heroes as Walter reflects a broader political disillusionment (14). In a world where collective change seems impossible, audiences are drawn to figures who seize agency through monstrous individualism. Walter's arc is not just a personal tragedy; it is a symptom of a system that offers no redemption except through self-annihilating defiance.

1.7. Heisenberg as a Capitalist Realist Monster

Walter's transformation is not just a psychological breakdown, but a political one. Under capitalist realism, the only paths available are submission or hyper-individualist destruction. Walter chooses the latter, becoming Heisenberg not despite the system but because of it. Fisher's theory helps us see *Breaking Bad* not just as a crime drama but as a dark allegory for how late capitalism corrupts agency, leaving only monstrous solutions to systemic failures.

2. The Psychological Metamorphosis of Walter White into Heisenberg: A Foucauldian Analysis

Walter White's transformation from a meek chemistry teacher to the ruthless drug lord Heisenberg in *Breaking Bad* offers a compelling case study of Michel Foucault's theories on power, discipline, and resistance. This evolution reflects how institutional structures and societal expectations shape identity, while also demonstrating how individuals can reclaim agency through transgression. Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power, biopolitics, and the technologies of the self provide a robust framework for understanding Walter's psychological unraveling and reconstruction.

2.1. Disciplinary Power and the Failure of Institutional Identity

Early in the series, Walter exists as Foucault's fundamental concept of docile body

constrained by the disciplinary mechanisms of modern institutions, which is discussed in the book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) (25). As an underpaid teacher, he endures humiliation from students and financial stress, embodying Foucault's assertion that schools function as apparatuses of control that normalize compliance. His second job at the car wash, where he meekly accepts degradation from his former student, further illustrates how economic precarity reinforces subjugation. The camera often frames Walter in these early scenes through tight, claustrophobic compositions, visually reinforcing his entrapment within systems that demand obedience while offering no meaningful reward. This institutional subjugation creates the conditions for his eventual rebellion, as Foucault predicted when describing how disciplinary power inevitably generates its own resistance.

2.2. Biopolitics and the Cancer Diagnosis as Catalyst

Walter's lung cancer diagnosis triggers his transformation by exposing the biopolitical nature of his existence. In his work *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (196), Foucault's concept of biopower that refers to the state's management of life through health systems becomes starkly personal when Walter confronts the financial impossibility of treatment. The medical establishment, rather than offering care, presents him with impossible choices that reduce his life to calculable risk and economic burden. This moment of crisis lays bare what Foucault terms the subjugation of bodies under modern power structures (56). Walter's decision to enter the drug trade represents not mere criminality, but what Foucault might call a "reverse discourse." It is actually seizing control of the very mechanisms, the illegal market, that typically enforce subjugation. The series visually marks this transformation through Walter's physical appearance, his shaved head and later Heisenberg attire serving as what Foucault called "technologies of the self," deliberate reconstructions of identity in resistance to assigned social roles. It is explained in *Technologies of the Self* (1988) as methods and practices through which individuals actively shape their own identities, ethics, and modes of

existence, they are often in dialogue with or resistance to societal power structures (45).

2.3. The Meth Lab as Heterotopic Space of Resistance

Foucault's concept of heterotopia discussed in his work *Of Other Spaces* (1986) refers to spaces that exist outside normal societal structures finds perfect expression in Walter's mobile meth lab (22-27). This rolling laboratory becomes a liminal space where normal rules are suspended and Walter can reconstruct himself as Heisenberg. The visual contrast between the bright, sterile purity of the lab and the dark violence surrounding it mirrors Foucault's description of heterotopias as both mythical and real spaces. In this controlled environment, Walter exerts what Foucault called "pastoral power" which is a complete authority over the production process and, by extension, over his own destiny (24). The lab's evolution from crude beginnings to professional operation parallels Walter's own transformation, each refinement in equipment mirroring his psychological hardening.

2.4. The Performance of Power: Heisenberg as Social Mask

Walter's adoption of the Heisenberg persona exemplifies Foucault's analysis of how power operates through performance and perception (Foucault 45). The black hat and sunglasses are not just disguise, but they refer to what Foucault might term as "instruments of subjectivation", which are tools for self-creation that simultaneously intimidate others (Foucault 45-47). The series increasingly uses low-angle shots when Walter appears as Heisenberg, visually reinforcing his newfound dominance. This performative aspect reaches its zenith in Walter's famous "I am the danger" monologue, where he articulates his transformation in explicitly Foucauldian terms of power relations: "I am not in danger, Skyler. I am the danger." The scene's tight framing and intense close-ups create a claustrophobic intensity that mirrors Foucault's description of power as capillary - operating at the most immediate, personal levels (Foucault 64).

2.5. Systemic Complicity and the Limits of Resistance

Walter's story reveals the paradoxical nature of Foucauldian resistance. While he successfully subverts the systems that initially oppressed him, he merely recreates their oppressive structures in microcosm. His empire building mirrors the very institutional power he sought to escape, complete with hierarchies, disciplinary measures, and biopolitical control over his subordinates. The series' conclusion, with Walter admitting, "I did it for me," confirms Foucault's warning that resistance often reproduces the forms of power it opposes. The final shots of Walter dying in the meth lab, having come full circle to the site of his transformation, serve as a powerful visual metaphor for Foucault's assertion that all rebellions are ultimately constrained by the systems they emerge from, or in other words the political conditions.

3. Walter White's Transformation Through Žižek's Postmodern Lens: When Fantasy Meets the Real

Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytic-political framework reveals Walter White's metamorphosis into Heisenberg not as a simple descent into evil, but as a terrifying collision between ideological fantasy and the traumatic Real, the unmediated truth that shatters the individual's comfortable illusions. *Breaking Bad* series becomes, in this analytical reading, a dark allegory about what happens when a man confronts the cruel void at the heart of late capitalism, and instead of escaping, he embraces the destructive side.

3.1. The Fantasy of the Good Man and Its Collapse

At the beginning of the narrative, Walter embodies what Žižek calls ideological fantasy that refers to the myth of the moral and hardworking person who plays by the rules and expects fair rewards, which is well developed in his iconic work *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) (36). His teaching job and family life are performances of this fantasy that covers the system's indifference to the individual. When cancer is revealed as a narrative twist, the fantasy crumbles, exposing the concept of the Real in the story. It reflects

meritocracy as a lie, and it demonstrates the failure of the system's institutions that do not save him along the story. His life has been structured around repressed desires. His decision to cook meth is not just pragmatic choice; it is disidentification referring a violent rejection of the symbolic order that has failed him (40). In one of the foundational scenes, the camera lingers on Walter's face during his first criminal act, capturing the exhilaration of someone who has glimpsed the arbitrariness of social norms and realized he never truly believed in them anyway.

3.2. "I Am the Danger": The Jouissance of Self-Destruction

Walter's famous monologue "I am not in danger—I am the danger" is Žižekian concept of *jouissance* that refers to the perverse pleasure derived from transgressing boundaries (61). For Žižek, capitalism demands turning one's aggression into productivity; Walter inverts this, finding ecstasy in becoming the system's obscene underside (61). The more he loses his family and his morality, the more he enjoys his own ruin. This is not rational profit seeking; it is what Žižek calls the death drive in political economy. It is a compulsion to push beyond the pleasure principle into self-annihilation (51). The meth itself becomes a metaphor to the capitalism's endless growth, Walter's empire is unsustainable, yet he cannot stop.

3.3. Heisenberg as the "Symptom" of Late Capitalism

Žižek argues that every system produces its own "symptom" indicating that the repressed truth returns as a damaging power (60). Heisenberg is a symptom of the monstrous embodiment of capitalism's hidden violence. In fact, at the beginning, Walter justifies his actions declaring, "I did it for my family" while clearly enjoying the feeling of power. This hypocrisy mirrors the collective unconscious lie that capitalism serves the common good, when in fact it thrives on exploitation. The show's setting of Albuquerque's sunny dry is a studied symbolic location for the story. In Žižek's political theory, the desert refers to the

Real, where the American Dream's illusions evaporate, leaving only brutal destructive self-interest (61).

4. The Psychological Transformation of Walter White through Byung-Chul Han's Political Theory

Walter White's evolution in *Breaking Bad* from an ordinary high school teacher to a criminal drug lord Heisenberg mirrors the psychological shifts described in Byung-Chul Han's critiques of late capitalism. Han's theory of the achievement society that refers to the situation where individuals are driven by self-exploitation and the illusion of limitless freedom can be seen in Walter's descent into Heisenberg (Han 11). Initially, Walter is a subdued man, constrained by societal expectations and financial insecurity. His cancer diagnosis acts as a catalyst, thrusting him into Han's paradigm of self-optimization, where he no longer seeks external validation but instead embraces a destructive form of self-realization (Han 12). The line between victim and perpetrator blurs as Walter internalizes the neoliberal belief of success at any cost, transforming his despair into a violent assertion of power.

Han's concept of burnout society introduces further explanation to Walter's psychological unraveling. In a world that prizes productivity and individualism, Walter's meth empire becomes a perverse manifestation of his repressed ambitions. His relentless pursuit of control and recognition reflects Han's argument that late capitalism fosters exhaustion not through external oppression but through the tyranny of self-imposed demands (16). Walter's slogan, "I am the danger," expresses a shift in the character's mind that he no longer resists the system but weaponizes its logic, turning his own psyche into a battleground of hyper-competitiveness and paranoia. His transformation is not one of empowerment but of enslavement to his own insatiable drive for dominance.

4.1. Gustavo Fring: The Mask of Neoliberal Rationality

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Gustavo Fring embodies the Lacanian symbolic

order, a figure whose meticulously constructed persona conceals a repressed void of trauma and vengeance. His outward presentation as a disciplined, calculating entrepreneur mirrors the neoliberal ideal of rationality and self-control, yet his true motivations stem from an unresolved past. The Chilean exile's history with Pinochet's regime suggests a foundational rupture, a loss that fuels his obsession with order and retribution. His dual identity of fastidious businessman and ruthless cartel leader reflects the Lacanian split subject, forever swinging between the ego, the polished Los Pollos Hermanos owner, and the Real, the violent underworld kingpin. His eventual demise, literally half-faced after the explosion, visually literalizes this psychological fragmentation, exposing the impossibility of sustaining such a bi-furcated self.

Politically, Fring operates as an allegory for late capitalism's most insidious mechanisms: efficiency concealed in exploitation and civility masked in brutality. His empire thrives on the illusion of legitimacy, much like corporate power structures that sanitize their violence through bureaucracy. His cold and executive approach to drug trafficking mirrors what Byung-Chul Han describes as the achievement society's paradox of self-discipline as a form of self-destruction (49). Fring's downfall, however, reveals the instability of such control; his reliance on absolute dominance, embodied in his demand for respect, ultimately collapses under its own contradictions, exposing the fragility of authoritarian power in a world driven by unpredictable human desires.

4.2. Jesse Pinkman: The Hysteric Subject of Late Capitalism

Jesse's character arc follows a distinctly psychoanalytic trajectory of the hysteric who repeatedly confronts the failures of the symbolic order. Unlike Walter, who represses guilt through rationalization defense mechanism, Jesse embodies the Freudian return of the repressed, his suffering manifesting in self-destructive behavior, nightmares, and hallucinations. His addiction, emotional volatility, and moral anguish mark him as a subject

caught between the pleasure principle, his initial hedonism, and the reality principle, his futile attempts at redemption. His repeated cries of "I can't keep doing this!" signal a Lacanian lack of an unconscious recognition that the system whether criminal or societal offers no vile identity for him.

Politically, Jesse represents the disposable laborer under neoliberalism, exploited, traumatized, and ultimately discarded person. While Walter and Fring adopt capitalist logics of accumulation and control, Jesse remains the perpetual outsider, too sensitive for the brutality of the drug trade, yet too entangled to escape. His forced enslavement in the final season literalizes Marx's concept of alienated labor, where the worker is reduced to a mere instrument of production. Yet, Jesse's eventual escape, his lone screaming flight into the night, suggests a rare moment of authenticity in the series, a rejection of the systems that sought to erase his humanity. In this sense, his trajectory critiques the illusion of agency within oppressive structures, offering a glimpse of resistance, however fleeting.

Fring and Jesse exist as opposing poles of *Breaking Bad*'s psychological and political landscape, one a master of repression and the other a vessel of raw, unprocessed suffering. Fring's death exposes the futility of absolute control, while Jesse's survival, despite being traumatized and fractured, and hints at the possibility of resistance. Together, they illustrate the show's central tension: the human cost of systems, whether criminal, economic, or psychic, that demand self-annihilation in exchange for power. Through a psychoanalytic lens, their characters reveal the unconscious drives beneath capitalist subjectivity; through a political lens, they embody its casualties.

5. The Logic of Late Capitalism in *Breaking Bad*: A Critical Analysis

Walter White's transformation from an underpaid high school teacher to a drug kingpin mirrors the neoliberal valorization of entrepreneurship and self-reinvention. Fredric Jameson's assertion that late capitalism dissolves traditional social bonds in favor of

individualized economic agency is vividly embodied in Walter's trajectory (34). His decision to "break bad" stems not merely from financial desperation but from an internalized capitalist ethos; the belief that value is self-generated through risk, innovation, and ruthless competition. The methamphetamine trade, much like deregulated markets, thrives on precarity and exploitation, with Walter adopting the language of business strategy of "I'm not in the meth business, I'm in the empire business" to justify his actions. His empire-building reflects what David Harvey terms "accumulation by dispossession" in *The New Imperialism* (2003), wherein wealth is extracted through the systemic destabilization of others such as Jesse's labor, Gus's infrastructure, or the addicts who consume his product (12).

5.1. The Commodification of Identity and Branding Under Late Capitalism

The series further critiques late capitalism's reduction of identity to transactional value through the construction of "Heisenberg"—a brand as carefully managed as any corporate logo. Byung-Chul Han's concept of the achievement-subject is evident in Walter's obsessive self-reinvention, wherein his worth is measured by market dominance rather than moral integrity. The iconic "Say my name" scene crystallizes this logic: Walter no longer operates as a person but as a commodified symbol of fear and respect, his identity contingent on recognition within the marketplace of violence. Similarly, Gustavo Fring's dual existence as fast-food entrepreneur and drug lord exemplifies capital's ability to mask exploitation behind a veneer of respectability, echoing Naomi Klein's analysis of corporate branding as a tool for obscuring unethical practices. In this world, reputation is currency, and selfhood is perpetually performative, a condition that ultimately hollows out Walter's humanity, leaving only the shell of a brand.

While Walter embodies capitalism's mythologized entrepreneur, Jesse Pinkman represents its disposable labor force, a figure whose exploitation underscores the system's human cost. His cyclical suffering, emotional breakdowns, addiction, coerced labor, mirrors

the precarity endemic to late capitalism, where workers are simultaneously overworked and expendable. His futile attempts at escape (rehab, relationships, flight) reflect the crisis of social reproduction under neoliberalism: the system erodes the very conditions necessary for sustaining life outside its logic. The final season's depiction of Jesse's enslavement literalizes Marx's theory of alienated labor, wherein the worker becomes a mere appendage to production, stripped of autonomy. Meanwhile, Skyler White's arc—her transformation from homemaker to unwilling money-launderer—exposes the gendered dimensions of this crisis, as domestic spheres are forcibly integrated into capital's encroaching reach.

5.2. *Breaking Bad* as a Critique of Capitalist Realism

The series' unflinching portrayal of collapse—Walter's empire, his family, his body—serves as a rebuttal to Mark Fisher's notion of capitalist realism, the idea that no alternative to capitalism is imaginable. Walter's pyrrhic victory (financial gain at the cost of everything else) exposes the nihilism at the heart of the neoliberal project, wherein self-destruction is framed as agency. The desert, a recurring motif, becomes a metaphor for late capitalism's psychic landscape: a wasteland where human connection is supplanted by transactional survival. In the end, *Breaking Bad* does not merely narrate a criminal descent but stages an immanent critique of a system that mistakes accumulation for meaning, and individualism for freedom.

6. *Breaking Bad* Through Félix Guattari's Schizoanalytic and Political Lens

6.1. Subjectivity under Capitalism: Walter White as a Desiring-Machine

Guattari's concept of the subject as a desiring-machine, constantly produced and disrupted by social, economic, and libidinal flows, finds a stark embodiment in Walter White. His transformation from repressed chemistry teacher to drug lord exemplifies Guattari's critique of capitalist subjectivity, wherein desire is related into exploitative, hierarchical structures (15). Walter's initial motivations, financial security and reclaiming masculinity, are

not personal but collective assemblages of expressed products of a society that ties self-worth to economic productivity. Yet, as his empire grows, his desire mutates into a micro-fascism, a self-destructive obsession with control that mirrors Guattari's warning about the capitalist absorption of revolutionary energy. The meth lab, a literal machine of production, becomes a metaphor for Walter's psychic imprisonment: he is no longer a man but a function of his own destructive output.

6.2. The Meth Economy as a Capitalist Rhizome

Guattari's rhizomatic model of power as decentralized, proliferating, and resistant to rigid structures is reflected in *Breaking Bad*'s drug trade. Unlike traditional hierarchies, the cartel's archaic violence, Walter and Gus Fring operate through molecular capitalism: adaptable, franchised, and ruthlessly efficient. Gus's fast-food drug distribution, Los Pollos Hermanos, as a front exemplifies Guattari's integrated world capitalism, where legality and criminality blur into a seamless profit machine. Yet, this system is inherently unstable. Jesse Pinkman, as the deterritorialized element, disrupts flows with his moral crises, embodying Guattari's schizo figure who resists codification (23). The Salamancas, with their tribal codes, represent the territorialized past clashing with capitalism's fluidity as a conflict that ultimately destroys both of them.

6.3. Collective Affect and the Breakdown of Social Production

Guattari's three ecologies of mental, social, environmental collapse are well seen in *Breaking Bad*. Walter's psychosis is not individual but transversal, infecting everyone around him: Skyler's mental unraveling, Jesse's trauma, and even Saul's cynical compliance reflects Guattari's idea that capitalism corrodes collective mental health. The suburban home, a Guattarian black hole of normalized repression, becomes a site of silent violence, where Skyler's forced smiles mask disintegration. Meanwhile, the New Mexico desert, stripped of life and a dumping ground for bodies, mirrors Guattari's environmental devastation under

late capitalism, where human and natural landscapes are equally expendable (25). The series' pervasive loneliness, characters isolated in their own crises, highlights Guattari's fear: when social production is replaced by atomized exploitation, no one is left to care (25).

Jesse's arc embodies Guattari's schizoanalysis, a resistance to capitalist subjectification. Walter embraces his role as Heisenberg, a molar identity fixed by power, Jesse is molecular, fluctuating between addiction, guilt, and fleeting attempts at redemption. His torture by Todd's neo-Nazi gang literalizes Guattari's deterritorialization, the stripping of identity into raw, exploited labor (24). Yet Jesse's final scream-escape a line of flight from the system offering the closest notion to liberation in the series. Unlike Walter, who dies clinging to his empire's ruins, Jesse's survival suggests the potential for resingularization, the reclaiming of desire from capitalist capture.

Breaking Bad dramatizes Guattari's worst fears: a world where desire is weaponized by capital, where subjectivity collapses into profit logic, and where escape is nearly impossible. Walter's tragedy is that he becomes the system's perfect agent, a subjected group (the family man) mutated into a subject-group (the monopolist), only to implode. The series embodies Guattarian diagnosis: without collective resistance, without new assemblages of enunciation, individuals are all just variations of Walter, Jesse, or Skyler, trapped in machines of their own making (25). The desert's silence is the sound of desire extinguished by capital.

II.1. Arthur's Psychological Transformation into Joker through Political Lens

Mark Fisher's political theory, particularly his concepts of capitalist realism, depressive hedonia, and the slow cancellation of the future, provides a compelling lens through which to analyze Arthur Fleck's transformation into the Joker in *Joker* (2019). Fisher's work critiques late capitalism's erosion of mental health, political agency, and collective hope, all of which are central to Arthur's descent into violent nihilism.

Fisher defines capitalist realism as the pervasive ideological belief that capitalism is

the only viable economic system, rendering imagination of alternatives impossible (12). This creates a sense of entrapment, where suffering is individualized rather than politicized. Arthur is a victim of systemic neglect; he is overworked, underpaid, and denied access to mental healthcare. His attempts to conform to societal expectations, being a "good clown," caring for his mother, seeking validation through comedy, fail because the system is structured to discard people like him. His eventual rejection of society mirrors Fisher's observation that under capitalist realism, the only "alternatives" that emerge are pathological such as self-destruction, violence (15).

1.1. The Joker as Anti-Capitalist Realist

Arthur's transformation is a violent rupture in the capitalist realist order. By embracing chaos, he rejects the idea that he must "play by the rules" of a system that has already abandoned him. His well-known line "I just don't want to feel so bad anymore" reflects Fisher's argument that mental health crises under capitalism are often responses to an inhuman system.

1.2. Cinematography and Political Analysis of Arthur's Therapy Scene in *Joker* (2019)



Fig.15. 'Arthur's Therapy Scene' (00:40:26) dir. Phillips Todd., *Joker* (2019).

The scene where Arthur Fleck meets with his social worker before the government cuts the program is one of the film's most quietly devastating moments. Through its cinematography, framing, and dialogue, it critiques neoliberal austerity, institutional indifference, and the abandonment of the mentally ill. The used cinematography aims to visualize neglect as one of the central themes in the work. The cinematographer depends on claustrophobic framing through tight close-ups. The camera lingers on Arthur's face in shallow focus, emphasizing his isolation. The social worker is often slightly out of focus, symbolizing her emotional distance. Static unmoving shots reflect the lack of camera movement mirroring bureaucratic stagnation that does not improve the citizen's situation. The Flickering light is a dying fluorescent bulb flickers above the characters, which is visual reinforcement of the collapse of public infrastructure.

In this scene, cold and greenish color are used in filing the room that is bathed in sickly institutional lighting, evoking the view of prisons and hospitals. This is related to spaces of control, not real care. The small and barred window is considered as a motif in the scene. It lets weak light enters the room, but Arthur is never near it symbolizing the outside world and society as a visible but inaccessible to him.

The Political Analysis of the scene demonstrates the cruelty of neoliberalism philosophy of the system. When the social worker says, 'they're cutting the program,' Arthur seems sarcastically surprised by the austerity of politics. The woman adds on her saying, 'they don't care about people like you, Arthur' reflecting the real-world welfare cuts. This is a reminder of the real events that happened during Reagan-era that marks mental health defunding as well as the UK austerity under Thatcher and Cameron as historical allegory.

The theorist Mark Fisher's concepts of *Capitalist Realism* (2009) is based on the idea that the system can't imagine alternatives, so it discards the vulnerable. This is exactly what is seen in the scene that displays Arthur as the sacrificed weak individual who does not

benefit the system. the conversation between the two characters demonstrates the social worker's negligence in the way she checks boxes on a clipboard but doesn't listen to Arthur's speech. She performs the role of a caring therapist, but in fact, she does her work in automatic way. Foucault's concept of biopolitics is also noticed in the state's procedures that are not aimed to heal ill people, but manage populations by sorting the useful from the waste (Foucault 60).

Arthur's laughter during the monologue is a symbol of rebellion. It is true that he endures pseudobulbar affect, forced laughter, that erupts conversations uncontrollably, but it is used in the scene as signifying symbol of Arthur's rebellious attitude. It can be regarded as the filmmaker's technique of creating political symbolism. The laughter is a physical rejection of the system's fake empathy. The cynical laughter is mentioned in Žižek's works where it is explained as an expression that exposes the absurdity of seeking help from a system designed to fail him (33). The end of the scene holds several underlying political meanings that helps in understanding the dysfunctional indifferent system. In the moment of Arthur's departure, the social worker drops his mental and psychological health file into a pile. It is cinematic metaphor that denotes his insignificance to the system, and it manifests that he is just another case in a broken machine.

This scene foreshadows the Joker's rise through Arthur's expressed feelings and the social worker's reaction. The woman proves the state's failure in creating vigilante justice to the citizens. Although Arthur tries to follow the government's rules of therapy and taking medications, but at the end the system abandons him. His later violence is the logical outcome of this neglect echoing real-world cases where mental health cuts lead to tragedy. His statement 'I don't even know if I exist' reveals the serious issue of postmodern crisis of identity. Without social support, Arthur's sense of self dissolves making him embrace the chaos of the Joker.

This scene does not need riots or gunfire to make its point. Through subtle cinematography and crushing dialogue, it shows neoliberalism withdraw of care. Bureaucratic dehumanization that turns people into case files. When the system and society abandon the ordinary low class ill individual, chaos seems as the only answer. The Joker is not born in a vacuum; he is manufactured by Gotham's cruelty. This scene is the origin of the coming explosion.

1.3. Depressive Hedonia: The Crisis of Pleasure

Fisher describes depressive hedonia as a state where individuals are unable to imagine a future that isn't just a repetition of the present, leading to anhedonia, inability to feel pleasure punctuated by fleeting and hollow distractions (25).

Arthur's forced laughter, pseudobulbar affect, symbolizes his inability to experience genuine joy. His fleeting moments of "happiness" like fantasizing about appearing on Murray's show and his delusional romance with Sophie are quickly shattered by reality. This aligns with Fisher's critique of a culture that offers only superficial escapes such as TV and consumerism while denying meaningful fulfillment (26).

1.4. The Joker's Euphoric Nihilism

When Arthur fully becomes the Joker, he replaces depressive hedonia with a perverse euphoria, dancing on the stairs, embracing violence as liberation. This mirrors Fisher's warning that when people are denied positive futures, they may turn to destructive forms of release (25). Fisher argues that late capitalism has eroded the collective belief in a better future, leading to cultural and political stagnation. The future feels like an endless extension of the present, breeding hopelessness.

2. Arthur's Futility

Arthur's aspirations of becoming a comedian and finding a father figure in Thomas Wayne are repeatedly crushed. His mother's slogan "Smile and put on a happy face" reflects the neoliberal demand to perform optimism while systemic decay continues. His eventual rejection of this performance "I used to think my life was a tragedy, but now I realize it's a comedy" is a dark parody of Fisher's "cancelled future."

2.1. The Joker as the End of Futurity

The Joker does not seek a better world; he revels in collapse. His uprising inspires riots not because he offers a political program, but because he embodies the release of accumulated rage as a Fisherian "negative solidarity" against a system that offers no hope.

2.2. Mental Health Under Neoliberalism

In *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), Fisher ties the epidemic of mental illness to neoliberalism's dismantling of social safety nets and its insistence that suffering is a personal failing (16-36). This is traced through Arthur's Abandonment. In other words, the closure of Gotham's social services, echoing Reagan-era austerity, leaves Arthur without therapy and medication. His file, tossed aside, symbolizes how capitalism discards the unproductive. His violent breakout is, in a twisted sense, a refusal to be pathologized for reacting rationally to an insane world. "The Worst Part of Having a Mental Illness? People Expect You to Behave as If You Don't": This line embodies Fisher's argument that capitalism demands performative wellness while structurally exacerbating misery. It is true that Gotham's citizens bully Arthur for his character and issue of involuntary laughter; however, their acts do not negate the fact that they are all victims of the neoliberal harsh system. Their behaviors also echo the fact that they endure psychological issues that are buried under the life's routine.

3. Joker as an Invited Figure in the Murray Franklin Show



Fig.16. ‘Arthur’s Appearance on The Murray Franklin Show’ (01:39:16) dir. Phillips Todd, *Joker* (2019).

According to several reviews, the most rated political scene in *Joker* (2019) is Arthur’s appearance on The Murray Franklin Show because it includes profound dialogue before ending the life of Murray on live television program. This scene demonstrates confrontation between two individuals from different social classes reflecting class struggle, media exploitation, and the damaging consequences of unjust political system. The scene employs several elements that reflect the powerful effect of political conditions. For instance, media is used as an oppressive tool to manipulate and present the image that benefits the system. Murray Franklin represents the liberal media elite in presenting ironic discourse and performative show that mocks of the marginalized individuals. It is well evident in its comments and presentation of Arthur’s video as failure in the world of comedians.

Arthur’s dialogue with Murray embodies political facts that stand behind the

psychological deterioration of individuals. Arthur's statement of 'You don't care about me or anyone like me!' is a direct declaration that media helps in dehumanizing the poor and mentally ill. The scene resonates with Guy Debord's work *Society of the Spectacle* (1995), which is a critique of contemporary consumer culture. In his book, he criticizes contemporary society in the way it gives importance to the appeared image not its essence replacing genuine human interaction (17). The represented image is a spectacle for others who are expected to criticize it as a product. As it is evident in Murray Franklin show scene, media turns the individuals' suffering into an entertainment spectacle without any consideration of other meanings or dimensions of this feeling.

In his statement, 'what do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him and treats him like trash? I'll tell you what you get, you get what you deserve!', Arthur confidently expresses his accusation against neoliberalism's abandonment of the vulnerable. The rich upper class that is represented by Murray and Thomas Wayne do not care about the poor, or clowns, until they revolt and threatens their economic, political and social stability. The live TV execution is actually a spectacle of revolution. Arthur kills Murray on air, turning the spectacle back against its creators. The act is not just personal, but it is a symbolic overthrow of the ruling class's narrative control. The scene evokes how economic despair fuels unrest reminding about parallel real-world uprisings such as events of Occupy Wall Street and the 2011 London riots. Through Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, the murder becomes instant myth, sparking riots where protesters wear clown masks. In fact, it a copy of a copy, detached from Arthur's actual motives (Boudrillard 21).

The Crowd's Reaction marks the Birth of a rebellious movement demonstrated through riots after the broadcast show. The protesters do not know Arthur, but they know the image of the Joker, proving Fredric Jameson's point that postmodern revolt often lacks coherent politics. Indeed, it is a powerful political scene through condensing themes of

capital realism like austerity, media exploitation, and class rage (Jameson 46). The scene is a dark mirror for Late Capitalism not offering a solution, but a warning. When media trivializes suffering, elites store wealth, and the state cuts social programs, the only choices are compliance or chaos, violence becomes the inevitable way out of the unheard. The Joker is not a hero; he is the monstrous product of a broken system.

3.1. Cinematography Analysis

The climactic scene where Arthur is invited on stage, confesses to the subway murders, and executes Murray Franklin live on air. It is the film's most politically charged moment. Through striking cinematography, performative framing, and explosive dialogue, it critiques media exploitation, class warfare, and the spectacle of violence.

The setting of the stage is considered as a political arena where the talk show set is a theater of cruelty. The cinematographer uses Warm, Golden Lighting: Unlike the cold tones of Gotham's streets, the set is bathed in artificial TV glow as a presentation of Baudrillard's concept of hyperreal, masking the brutality beneath. Sher uses wide shots showing audience reflecting them as viewers of the spectacle. The shots show audience's laugh, clap, and boo on cue, representing society's complicity in media sensationalism. He also employs close-ups on Arthur's sweat & smears showing his makeup running, revealing the man beneath the performance, a visual metaphor for the collapse of his sanity. Concerning camera movement, it is noticed that the cinematographer switches from reflecting control to chaos through static shots and shaky moving ones. Murray is framed in composed medium shots, reinforcing his authority as the host. Handheld camera technique is used in showing chaos as a theme. It is employed in shooting the scene when Arthur kills Murray, the camera becomes shaky, disoriented, mirroring societal breakdown. Sher's choice of using red lighting creates influencing view of presenting Joker as an antihero. It is used after the murder when the stage lights turn blood red, and Arthur dances like a demonic performer. It is a symbolic

presentation that introduces the TV studio as a circus of violence, with Arthur as the ringmaster.

Media commodifies suffering until it backfires on the liberal media elite presenter Murray Franklin and the entire city. Murray represents smug, condescending liberalism. He mocked Arthur's comedy tape earlier, and then invites him on for ratings. His line: "You're getting all this attention, isn't that what you wanted?" exposes media's exploitation of suffering for profit. Arthur's monologue is a manifesto of the oppressed people. The scene emphasizes class war through Arthur's performance. He frames violence as retaliation against systemic neglect like welfare cuts, lack of healthcare, and elitism. Mark Fisher mentions like idea in his theory of Capitalist Realism stating that the system offers no solutions, so the oppressed turn to destructive nihilism.

The Live execution is a rebellious act presented as a Spectacle. Arthur's murder of Murray on live TV is a way of turning the media's own weapon against itself. Guy Debord's book of *Society of the Spectacle* mentions that murder becomes instant myth, stripped of real politics. The myth is also shown in rioters' wearing of clown masks without understanding Arthur's pain. Arthur's fantasy of being loved on TV, earlier in the film, is perverted into disgrace. The applause that never came symbolizes a world that denies dignity, choosing notoriety over invisibility. The Joker's final pose after shooting Murray is a symbolic indication of media's performative show. The Political reading of this act shows that he has become the created monster of the system.

Class resentment is dangerous because when it is ignored, it turns explosive. Violence becomes the only language that the powerful ones understand. The Joker does not win, but he exposes several concealed facts about corruption and moral decay. As the screen cuts to

black, audience are left with the echo of his laughter: the sound of a society reaping what it sowed. The last image is Arthur's bloody footprint on the studio floor, a metaphor for the indelible stain of inequality. Once ignored, now impossible to clean away.

3.2. The Joker as a Fisherian Symptom

Arthur's transformation is not just a personal breakdown; it is the logical endpoint of capitalist realism's failures. The Joker emerges as a monstrous embodiment of what Fisher calls "the excremental sublime". It is the repressed violence and despair of late capitalism erupting into view (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 39). Unlike a traditional revolutionary, the Joker does not propose a new order; he embodies the system's inevitable collapse under its own contradictions.

In Fisher's terms, the Joker is the specter haunting capitalist realism. In a way, he is a proof that when people are stripped of futures, dignity, and care, the result is not apathy but explosive and chaotic negation. The film's ambiguity may be stated: is Arthur a revolutionary or a lunatic? However, this reflects Fisher's pessimism: under capitalism, even resistance is often co-opted or pathological (Fisher 40). The Joker's uprising is not a solution; it is the system's grotesque mirror.

4. The Psychological Transformation of Arthur Fleck into the Joker: A Foucauldian Analysis

This paper examines Arthur Fleck's disturbing metamorphosis into the Joker through the theoretical lens of Michel Foucault's concepts of power, discipline, and resistance. The analysis reveals how institutional systems simultaneously create and fail to contain the very forms of deviance they seek to control, resulting in catastrophic social consequences.

Foucault's framework of psychiatric power provides critical insight into Arthur's

initial psychological state. Modern psychiatric institutions, as Foucault demonstrated in *Madness and Civilization* (1961), function primarily as mechanisms of social control rather than healing. Arthur's experience with Gotham's mental health services perfectly illustrates this dynamic therapy sessions that consist of questioning from an overburdened social worker who barely engages with Arthur's humanity. When budget cuts eliminates even this minimal support, the system's true purpose becomes clear: it exists to monitor and manage marginalized populations, not to cure or care for them. This institutional abandonment serves as the catalyst for Arthur's transformation, demonstrating how the withdrawal of disciplinary structures can unleash dangerous forms of agency in those individuals they once controlled.

The film meticulously depicts how various disciplinary institutions fail to socialize Arthur into a compliant subject. His precarious employment as a clown-for-hire leaves him vulnerable to physical abuse, revealing how neoliberal economic systems exploit and discard the vulnerable. His attempts to participate in cultural institutions, through his comedy aspirations, meet only with mockery and exclusion. Even the familial institution proves deceitful, built on his mother's pathological fantasies about Thomas Wayne. Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) that modern societies maintain order through networks of disciplinary institutions that produce docile bodies (69). Arthur's case shows the limits of this system. In other words, when individuals cannot or will not be disciplined, they become threats to the very social order that has failed to assimilate them.

Foucault's concept of biopower helps explaining how Arthur's bodily existence becomes a site of political struggle. His pseudobulbar effect, the pathological laughter condition, marks him as biologically deviant, making him subject to medical and social stigmatization (*Discipline and Punish*, 12). However, in a brilliant inversion of biopolitical control, Arthur eventually weaponizes this same biological deviance. His clown makeup and performative violence transform his marginalization into a source of terrifying power. This

mirrors Foucault's observations about how systems of control inevitably produce their own forms of resistance. In this case, Arthur's is the embodiment of the "madness" that society and the political system have tried to medicalize his state.

The climactic television studio murder scene represents a Foucauldian spectacle of inverted punishment. Where pre-modern societies used public executions to demonstrate sovereign power, Arthur turns this dynamic on its head by executing a media figure on live television. This act transforms him from a subject of disciplinary power into an agent of chaotic resistance. The subsequent riots, with their sea of clown masks, demonstrate how individual resistance can spark collective uprising when disciplinary systems fail. Foucault warns in his works that systems of control contain the seeds of their own resistance, and the Joker's origin story tragically confirms this insight.

Actually, Arthur Fleck's transformation into the Joker offers a disturbing case study in Foucauldian social theory. His journey from institutionalized subject to anarchic force demonstrates how systems of power inevitably produce forms of resistance they cannot control. The film suggests that when social institutions prioritize control over care, when they medicalize suffering rather than address its causes, they risk creating monsters. In this light, the Joker emerges not as an aberration, but as the logical consequence of a society, that manages its marginalized populations through discipline rather than justice, through control rather than compassion. His infamous declaration "You get what you deserve!" becomes not just a personal manifesto, but an indictment of the systems that created him.

5. The Psychological Transformation of Arthur Fleck Through Byung-Chul Han's Political Theory

Arthur Fleck's metamorphosis into the Joker in *Joker* (2019) can be critically examined through the lens of Byung-Chul Han's theories of neoliberal subjectivity, self-exploitation, and the society of exhaustion. Han's work provides a compelling framework for

understanding how late capitalist societies produce psychological breakdowns not through overt repression, but through insidious mechanisms of internalized pressure and compulsory positivity. Arthur's descent into madness reflects the destructive consequences of a society that demands relentless self-optimization while offering no meaningful avenues for recognition or care.

Han's concept of the achievement-subject is central to understanding Arthur's initial psychological state. Unlike Foucault's disciplinary subject, who is controlled through external constraints, Han's achievement-subject is governed by internalized demands to perform, succeed, and self-improve. Arthur desperately tries to conform to these expectations practicing his comedy routine, seeking validation through stand-up comedy, and clinging to the myth that hard work will bring him happiness. However, his failures as his jokes falling flat and his career going nowhere are not interpreted as systemic issues but as personal shortcomings. This aligns with Han's argument that neoliberalism individualizes failure, transforming social and economic precarity into private psychological burdens. Arthur's laughter, a medical condition that erupts uncontrollably in moments of distress, becomes a grotesque parody of the enforced cheerfulness demanded by a society that pathologizes negativity.

The psychopolitics of late capitalism, as Han describes it, replaces overt repression with subtler forms of control that penetrate the psyche (26). Arthur is not simply oppressed; he is abandoned, left to self-manage. His suffering in a world that offers therapy as a hollow performance of care rather than genuine healing. His social worker mechanically asks scripted questions, the mental health system withdraws support, and even his mother's love is conditional upon his ability to fulfill her fantasies of connection to the wealthy Thomas Wayne. Han's notion of the burnout society is evident here: Arthur is not crushed by external tyranny but by the absence of meaningful solidarity, leaving him in a state of profound

isolation. His eventual rejection of this system, embracing the Joker's shadow, is not just a rebellion but a collapse of the neoliberal fiction that he could ever "succeed" within its terms.

Arthur's transformation into the Joker exemplifies Han's idea of the transparency society, where one's self and surroundings are exposed, yet they are not truly seen. His suffering is rendered visible through his laughter, his failed performances, and his marginalization, but never truly acknowledged. The more he seeks recognition, the more he is met with mockery or violence. In this sense, the Joker's clown makeup serves as a perverse inversion of Han's critique: if society demands that individuals perform happiness, Arthur performs madness, exaggerating his stigmatized identity until it becomes a weapon. His infamous line "I just don't want to feel so bad anymore" captures the exhaustion of a subject who can no longer sustain the emotional labor required by neoliberalism.

Ultimately, Han's concepts reveal that Arthur's breakdown is not an anomaly but a logical outcome of a society that pathologizes vulnerability while demanding impossible resilience. The Joker emerges not as a villain in the traditional sense, but as the monstrous embodiment of a system that grinds people down until they have nothing left to lose. His final act of televised violence is less a calculated rebellion than a surrender to the chaos that lurks beneath the facade of neoliberal positivity. In Han's terms, Arthur's tragedy is that he is both a victim and a symptom of a world that has replaced solidarity with self-exploitation, and care with cruel optimism. His laughter, once a cry for help, becomes the sound of a society destructing itself.

5.1. The Psychological Unraveling of Arthur Fleck: A Byung-Chul Han Perspective in Cinematic Form

Joker (2019) presents Arthur Fleck's transformation not merely as a character arc, but as a visual embodiment of Byung-Chul Han's critiques of neoliberal society. Through deliberate cinematography, lighting, and framing, the film externalizes Arthur's psychological

collapse under the weight of late capitalism's oppressive demands. Each scene functions as a clinical study of how self-exploitation, forced positivity, and systemic neglect manifest in both mind and body.

The film opens with Arthur forcing a smile in his dingy apartment mirror, his fingers physically pulling his cheeks upward. The cold, blue-tinged lighting creates a sterile atmosphere reminiscent of institutional spaces, while the extreme close-up emphasizes the grotesque artificiality of his expression. Tears cutting through clown makeup visually demonstrates Han's concept of compulsory happiness, the neoliberal mandate to perform positivity even in despair. This moment perfectly illustrates the "achievement-subject" paradox: Arthur must smile to maintain his clown job, yet the very act of performing happiness deepens his alienation. The mirror, a classic symbol of self-surveillance, reflects not authentic emotion but the internalized pressure to conform.

In Arthur's final therapy session, the cinematography speaks volumes about institutional abandonment. A static wide shot frames him alongside his indifferent social worker, with a barred window symbolizing the trap of pseudo-care. The shallow focus keeps Arthur sharp while blurring the social worker, visually representing how systems render pain hyper visible, yet it systematically ignores it. The flickering fluorescent light above them serves as a perfect metaphor for the decaying welfare state. This scene embodies Han's psych political analysis, therapy functions not as genuine healing but as bureaucratic theater, maintaining just enough illusion of support to prevent revolt while offering no substantive help. When funding is cut and Arthur's file is discarded, the film makes literal Han's argument about neoliberalism disposing of the "unproductive"(17).

The iconic staircase dancing sequences show Arthur's psychological transformation through visual poetry. Early in the film, he is seen walking heavily up the stairs with exhaustion; after his first murder, he descends in fluid, unburdened movement. The camera's

low-angle tracking shots and eventual spinning motions mirror his psychological unshackling from societal constraints. The shift from cold blue tones to warm golden-hour lighting marks his transition from repressed subject to liberated monstrous agent. This sequence visually articulates Han's concept of burnout society demonstrating Arthur's violent break that represents the inevitable collapse of a subject pushed beyond the limits of self-optimization. Where neoliberal society demands endless resilience, Arthur chooses the freedom of negation.

The impressive talk show scene crystallizes Han's critique of emotional decay in digital capitalism. Extreme close-ups highlight Arthur's sweating, smeared makeup as his psyche visibly fractures under the studio lights. When he murders Murray Franklin, the stage floods with red light simultaneously evoking blood and the hypervisibility demanded by the "transparent society." The slow-motion shots of horrified audience members critique the voyeuristic nature of contemporary media (68). Arthur's confession "I just don't want to feel so bad anymore" lays bare the cruel irony of neoliberal psychopolitics: it demands sufferers perform their pain for recognition, yet offers no actual relief. His violent outburst becomes the ultimate indictment of a system that commodifies mental anguish while providing no meaningful solutions.

The film's final scenes leave audience with haunting visual metaphors. Arthur's bloody shoe print, captured in a slow zoom, becomes a mark on the studio floor. The high-contrast lighting casts deep shadows, emphasizing the irreparable rupture he has created. It manifests Han's warning about the "return of the repressed"; the violence inherent in neoliberal structures cannot be permanently contained or cleaned away. The footprint serves as a literal trace of Arthur's actions and a reminder that societies built on abandonment and exploitation will inevitably face the consequences of their systemic failures.

5.2. Cinematic Language as Theoretical Argument

Through these meticulously crafted sequences, *Joker* translates Han's abstract theories into visceral cinematic language. The progression from tight, claustrophobic framing to expansive, liberated movements mirrors Arthur's psychological journey. Color palettes shift from sickly institutional hues to the violent warmth of rebellion, charting his transformation from repressed subject to anarchic force. The camera's evolving perspective, beginning with Arthur as object of the gaze and ending with him controlling the frame, visually enacts Han's argument about the achievement-subject's potential for destructive self-actualization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Joker* and *Walter* offer more than a character study in providing fruitful cinematic data on mental health under late capitalism. Through the *Joker*'s visual storytelling, the film demonstrates how neoliberal psycho-politics with its demands for constant self-optimization, its performative care systems, and its voyeuristic relationship to suffering does not just fail people like Arthur, but actively creates the conditions for their monstrous transformations. The haunting final images remind us that the blood on Arthur's hands is ultimately a societal stain, the inevitable residue of systems that value productivity over humanity. The film does not just tell Arthur's story; it embodies Han's warning that a society built on self-exploitation will eventually consume itself. The *Joker*'s laughter, then, is the sound of the achievement-subject breaking under its own impossible demands. Walter's journey aligns with Han's warning about the transparency society, where authenticity erodes under the pressure of performance. As Heisenberg, Walter constructs a new identity, but it is one devoid of genuine connection, sustained only by fear and manipulation. His final moments of dying alone in a meth lab symbolizes the hollow victory of self-made

sovereignty. Through Han's framework, Walter White emerges not as a rebel but as a tragic product of a system that glorifies self-destruction in the name of success. His psychological transformation reveals the dark underbelly of an era that mistakes self-exploitation for freedom.

General Conclusion

In T. S. Eliot's work 'Little Gidding', from his fourth and final poem 'Four Quartets', he says "We shall not cease from exploration/ and the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started/and know the place for the first time. (lines1-4)" In essence, these closing lines of the poem can be seen as a profound meditation to the research journey on the individual's psychology in the midst of powerful postmodern environment. The quote is an affirmation that the quest for knowledge and understanding the surrounding world is never-ending task. T. S. Eliot asserts substantial idea that is reached after engaging in a long process of research: the true deduced wisdom comes not from reaching somewhere new, but from seeing the familiar with enlightened eyes. Psychoanalytic criticism has generated several findings that shows the complexity of the individual's life in the postmodern age.

Psychoanalytic study as well as the intersected theories that are used in this research have highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary research in providing detailed analyzed data and the correlations between them. This has helped in understanding the cultural environment of the individuals as a whole entity. Indeed, analyzing the mental and psychological issues require several theories and diverse materials which have been executed in this study.

The proposed thesis reflects the reached result at the end of this research in demonstrating the resistance of the individual's psychological state to the strong impact of society, discourse and political conditions until identity transformation becomes a way of rebellion and thus survival in this postmodern realm. The postmodern society overvalues powerful individuals while oppressing and dehumanizing the fragile weak and even mentally ill individuals. The social oppression keeps this vulnerable category as conformists to the dominant and unjust social standards. The other concluded sub thesis is the potential of the

powerful individuals to exercise strong influence on the crowd that is directed and manipulated by the mind of the powerful leader. Furthermore, the study has proved the sub thesis suggesting that the societal behaviors can create a harmful collective consciousness that damages the individual's psychology which may turn a decent person to a villain. Additionally, discourse exercises power in manipulating the individual's perspectives towards the self and the surrounding institutions in a way that changes one's psychological state. The political system operates its institutions in forming individuals that work a productive power for the benefit of the government and the economy system. Ultimately, the central thesis and sub thesis have mentioned strong influencing factors of the postmodern age that threaten the one's identity and its free will. Indeed, they are manipulative power that forms the individual's mindset and form their attitudes.

The research has succeeded in uncovering the layers of the relationship between the political system and the individual as well as its effects in creating the catalyst for rebellion or paralysis for conformism. Besides, the study's findings have revealed the exhausted psychological state of individuals that suffer from depression, repression, anxiety and son on, which create vulnerable attitude in life caused by the pressure of the postmodern conditions. This may even lead to the normalization of drug consuming as a way out of the endured psychological anguish. This may be the start of transformation into criminals in some cases that are ignored and exacerbated by the society's harmful behavior towards this category of individuals. The research study has proved that the solution out of this enduring psychological turmoil of the individual is not underestimating the powerful influence of society as well as dealing with psychological problems in their initial development phase. Individuals with psychological issues should not be embarrassed of asking help from adequate sources of help and psychologists because today's life requires psychological and mental health care.

Applying psychoanalytic theory in studying Arthur Fleck's metamorphosis into the Joker has produced several findings that have clarified the relation between the individual and the postmodern factors. Investigating the character's transformation through the fundamental Freudian concepts has shown that the witnessed change of the protagonist is the result of the accumulation of the influences of the surrounding postmodern conditions. The latter have created buried psychological issues that burdens the unconsciousness of the character. Through the development of the character, signs of childhood trauma, abuse, and repressed desires appear in the features of the character. The Traumatic Brain Injury experienced in his childhood results in and Pseudobulbar affect, involuntary laughter, as a consequence of domestic abuse. Other apparent problems are depression, anger and anxiety, which are signals of neurotic issues that develop to psychotic illness in advanced phases of the character's journey. Psychosis is shown, at the beginning, through hallucinations and delusions. The psychotic condition of Arthur is the result of external oppression that has culminated to the fracture of his identity and the transformation into the Joker.

The Freudian and Jungian theoretical approaches have proved that Arthur's to psychotic mental disorder is the result of the long untreated psychological issues that have started from non-usual operations of the id, superego and ego. Arthur has reached a certain phase in his life journey when his ego has given up conducting the usual operation in the psyche. In other words, the ego has stopped balancing the produced decisions, behaviors, actions between the other contrasting components of the psyche, the id with its uncontrolled violent impulses and the superego with its societal and maternal expectations. Embracing his shadow and his chaotic internal world the outcome of the heavy burden of repressed anger, stemming from his childhood traumatic abuse and neglect. This has resurfaced in destructive and explosive ways expressed through violent criminal acts. Murdering his mother denotes the collapse of attachment to reality and sanity. It marks the beginning of his criminal path

because it has triggered the complete descent into the Joker as the new embraced identity. Switching into another identity is the result of being psychologically exhausted from the society, the political and the economy systems' demands for validation according to its standards. Instead, He is indulged in liberating himself from the chains of the postmodern system through taking revenge that has created anarchy in the city.

Freud's concepts have exposed several truths behind the effects of the traumatic childhood abuse, poverty, and social mockery that are repressed in the unconsciousness of Arthur and released in uncontrollable violence. His psychological breakdown implies the collapse of the ego that has ceased mediating between the superego's dictation of societal expectations and the id's suppressed rage. The film is critique of how late-capitalist system changes the behaviors of the whole society that exacerbates the state of mentally ill people through physical and emotional bullying as well as exclusion. They are supposed to receive support, but they are driven to serious phases of mental disorders. Embracing the Joker persona denotes the culmination of the psychological deterioration of this individual.

Adopting the Lacanian analytical approach in the study has generated an interesting insight to the research problematic in exposing the reasons and implications of the individual's psychological transformation. Clearly, Arthur struggles with the symbolic order, the societal values and standards. He fails in satisfying the society's codes and principals which has led him to non-integration to its system. His neuropsychological issue that causes his involuntary laughter is subject for bullying and discrimination by others. Arthur does not find any refuge in his postmodern world that attacks him through all the possible ways. Adopting the Joker identity is not just a mere personal and psychological transformation, but it is a rebellion against the system that has broken the personality of Arthur. The created identity of Joker transcends the mirror stage in abandoning the exhausting endless mission of seeking and

idealized self accepted by others. Alternatively, he embraces fragmentation and chaos as his true characteristics.

What is deduced from analyzing Arthur's psychological breakdown and transformation to the identity of Joker is that uncured psychological issues exacerbate to inevitable serious psychological and mental illnesses. The antihero's tragic transformation is the result of the society, economy, political system and the communicated language that have corrupted a decent man and put him in irreversible way to madness. The cinematic production presents the protagonist's evolution not as a mere villain's origin but as a dark commentary on how societal neglect, trauma, and unjust political policies can fracture one's identity, leading to a complete rejection of reality in favor of a destructive, yet liberated, new self. The surrounding institutions, society, and systems play the role of the blind figure to the individual's endured pain and refuse to offer assistance. This is what Arthur experiences in his postmodern world. An evident result is that the character of the Joker is not born; he is created when the world refuses to see the man behind the pain.

Arthur Fleck's metamorphosis into the Joker reveals the powerful effect of the perpetual oppressive societal conducts, political neglect, and dehumanizing discourse. Through a psychoanalytic lens, his transformation reflects the failure of society to accommodate the mentally ill people, the marginalized, and those abandoned by system's institutions. His impressive journey from a fragile dreaming comedian to a symbol of rebellion and anarchy unveils the devastating repercussions of societal exclusion and political indifference. His neuropsychological disorder of Pseudobulbar affect or involuntary laughter is evidence of the internal psychological torment, and it also denotes his inability to conform to dominant discourse. Adopting the Joker identity is a rejection of the symbolic order in Lacan's terms. That is to say, he believes in chaos rather than order, murder rather than the police system. This shows the fragility of the social norms, political policies, and the

communicating discourse in protecting the humane features of individuals. Thus, the character's transformation is not falling into madness, but a sort of resistance to exercised power and rebellion against the system that regards him as invisible or/and undesired being.

Another reached result is that the film presents Arthur's metamorphosis as a reaction to class struggle, social stratification, and institutional fragility. The wealthy upper class or elite, symbolized by Thomas Wayne, turns down the misery of the poor low class; meanwhile, the government cuts funding for mental health services leaving Arthur without medications or social assistance. His raging reaction through violent actions unintentionally induces a crowd uprising guided by him as a supposed leader. This underscores the strong impact of societal and political neglect that ultimately led to extremism. Here, the Joker is both seen as a product and a critique of a broken system that creates its own enemy and monsters through indifference and inequality.

The research's findings proves that Arthur Fleck's transformation into the Joker is a psycho-political allegory of the lived postmodern conditions. Considering the the fact this cinematic production is released in 2019; however, it deals with issues that still exist today. This means that this work reflects problems that have not been solved since a long time. The development of Arthur's psychosis is not merely an individual pathological and psychological experience but a symptom of a sick society. Without decoration or filters, the film forces audience to face unbearable truths; for instance, madness can be a reaction to oppression as well as identity is unconsciously formed by power structures. Another painful truth is that when society relinquishes its most fragile and vulnerable individuals, it is answered by anarchy and violence as the only language left for the unheard. The Joker is not just a super villain, but he is the created monster by a world that has failed him.

The use of Lacanian approach in this research has resulted in uncovering the struggle of the characters with the symbolic order because of the influence of societal standards and the postmodern economy. For instance, the collective consciousness of society includes conceptions of success, self-worth, and masculinity that operate as obstacles in the life path of Walter White. For the postmodern economy, Walter is an employee with stable job and status; however, he is not the self-sufficient worker and disregarded man in his social surroundings. The traditional indications of male achievements have become unstable. Confronting failure as a father, man, and husband because of believing in the known social and economy's structures have fractured the character's initial identity that appear as a meaningless conceptual construction. He rejects the illusion of the symbolic order that results in his transformation into Heisenberg. This has led to embracing opposite personal characteristics that have made him the controller of his life. In fact, this achieved through illegal and unethical conducts that have secured his financial instability and regained his psychological welfare. Heisenberg is not just the name of the second embraced identity of Walter, but in it is a reference for the uncertainty principle, also known as Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle. It is a fundamental concept in quantum mechanics that states that one cannot measure or calculate exactly both the position and the momentum of an object. This is a symbolic representation to the instability of identity in a world without fixed truths.

Applying the classical Freudian concepts on the characters has generated several findings that revolve around psychological dysfunction. From a Freudian perspective, the development of the character Walter witnesses the destruction of the ego, the responsible part for mediating between the id and the superego to make rational realistic decisions. The psyche's conscious negotiator between societal expectations, superego, and primal desires, id, does not execute its mission in producing balance between the component of the psyche. To illustrate, the character Walter has suppressed his true different feelings for a long time. He

has blocked his ambitious dreams as a person and a father because of the overwhelming responsibility and exercised pressure. Walter has not expressed his dissatisfactions towards his situation and the treatment of the surrounding people to maintain peaceful life. This conformist attitude to the situation of the undervalued teacher and underappreciated husband and father have created immense repression that resides in the id. Walter has transformed from conformist to rebellious man after being diagnosed with cancer that is regarded as a catalyst, releasing his repressed id. This has outraged Walter who has adopted revengeful attitude towards his pre-cancer life. This is shown through his hunger for dominance, recognition, and control. He has abandoned his previous identity as Walter and embraced the Heisenberg persona. He has developed strong will to power that gradually has eradicated the moral restrictions, the id, and replacing it with criminality and violence.

The studied characters have undergone metamorphosis in their development throughout the narratives that were stimulated by societal influence. For instance, Walter White's transformation from a gentle high school chemistry teacher into drug baron under the name of Heisenberg is a profound exploration of how the individual experiences a change of identity and greed for power as a rebellion against the disillusionments of postmodern society. Through social concepts and psychoanalytic lens, Walter's transformation shows the fragmentation of the self under societal persecution, the erosion of traditional concept of masculinity, and the destabilizing effects of a society where cognitive concepts are constructed through power rather than morality.

Analyzing the characters' journeys from the studied cases reveals the psychological toll of the postmodern society where the individual's identity is performative, morality is negotiable, and power is the only true currency. Walter White's transformation into Heisenberg, the postmodern anti-hero, is not just an ordinary story of an individual's descent to the criminal world, but a mirroring example to the reality of the postmodern society.

Psychoanalytically speaking, the individual in this society is a fractured self demolished by the other individual's thought, discourse, and treatment. In this age of instability, most of the individuals that form the postmodern society experience psychological issues due to the overwhelming conditions that surround them. Their harmful reaction towards each other creates destructive social influence. Self-destruction and adopting different features that form new identity is the adopted path by several individuals who live in the postmodern age. For them, it seems as an escape from the experienced psychological struggles in the postmodern life. In other sense, immorality, criminality, and moneymaking empower their fragile essence and create attractive image of new identity in the age of strong impressions.

Studying the society of Walter has facilitated the analysis of Heisenberg as a created identity. He is not any criminal; he is a created monster out of the postmodern disillusionment. Choosing revenge or '*breaking bad*', in the series' terms, after being destroyed by the postmodern conditions is a psychological phase in the development of the character.

The creation of identity, the greed for power, and strong instinct for survival are shaped by the societal oppression, capitalist alienation, and moral decay of the postmodern age. By using psychoanalytic lens, the analysis of the secondary characters of Jesse Pinkman and Gus Fring in *Breaking Bad* through their life tracks in the series' seasons has unveiled several findings concerning the characters' interconnected reactions to the broken social order of postmodernity. Although the two characters belong to different race and motivated by distinct impulses, they show similarities in coexisting with the postmodern social reality. The Fragmentation of is one of the prevailed psychological issues that occur to the characters who experience fracture or break down of identity and emotions. It seems as a phenomenon that occurs in the lived postmodern circumstances. In some cases, it may be considered as the

psyche's defense mechanism; a response to experienced trauma, stress, or conflicting emotions in a World Without Meaning.

Studying the characters through Freudian perspective has revealed the neurotic struggle of the individual who is disrupted between societal rejection and the internal repressed desire for belonging and being accepted to a social community. Jesse Pinkman is one of the strong cases that embodies this reached result in studying the individual's psyche. The impulsive behavior, drug addiction, and emotional volatility are referencing symptoms to a weak ego. The latter is the result of the incapability of the ego to reconcile between the pressure of the demands of the hyper-capitalist society, superego, and the internal deficiency of love and validation, id. Jesse internalizes his traumatic experiences leading him to become a victim of the postmodern social and political system. In contrast, the case of Walter turns his struggle into an impulse for transformation into another identity, Heisenberg that weaponizes the internal resentment against the system.

Using the Lacanian approach reading has permitted uncovering underlying conflicts behind the crisis of identity that is considered as a postmodernist feature. Ignorance and rejection if not criminalization is the society's reaction to individuals who experience social, psychological, and financial struggles. The postmodern society seems to be less engaged in understanding the other's motives, issues, and circumstances. Efforts tend to be invested in judging others based on their actions and behaviors without knowing how and why they are executed. An inclination towards exclusion of unproductive, weak, and struggling individuals out of society. Anyone who has a powerful influence is the one who is praised in the group without any consideration of the kind of power. In most cases power refers to wealth, but it also signifies control, authority in influencing other's behaviors, beliefs, and actions. This is noticed with the contemporary trend of individuals that have become influencers through social media. In the studied thesis, Jesse is the weakest character in this research that exhibits

his crisis of identity. Applying Lacan's concepts show his struggle with the symbolic order in experiencing symbolic exclusion. He is constantly castaway for being an addict, junkie, and a failure. Although he has tried to succeed and acquire power, all his attempts have turned futile. His repeated setbacks to quit the drug trade mirrors the postmodern condition: no exit from a system that has already defined him as disposable. Enduring severe pain in silence is not just the case this fictional character, Jesse, but also many others in the real world who still struggle with drug addiction. The society's formed collective consciousness adopts dehumanizing treatment towards individuals whose identity is already fractured by the chaos of the postmodern world. In short, it is deduced that criminalization of addicts rather than addressing the societal decay that produces them exacerbates the psychological state of struggling individuals.

Under the influence of postmodern conditions, identity seems as a battlefield of several clashing forces that surpass the individual control. Violence, economics, politics are some of the influences that are involved in the formation of identity. Most of the studied characters struggle in stabilizing the foundation of their identities due to the uncontrolled powerful conditions postmodernity. The performative identity is the result of the change of the concept of morality. It has become a tool to achieve self-interest and exhibit a certain satisfying image in society. For instance, Gus Fringe engages in charity despite his brutal nature because he has to reflect the image of good-hearted businessperson to the surrounding society. It is also seen in Jesse complicity despite his feeling of guilt. In other words, morality has become performative.

It is substantial to mention The Paradox of Pain as one of the concluded ideas in this research that has demonstrated pain as a constant element of the postmodern Identity. By applying Lacan's *Jouissance* concept on the case of Jesse Pinkman's Suffering, it is evident that pain has become a feature of the postmodern identity. Jesse reflects not just addiction to

drug but also to pain. He does not abandon the feeling of guilt, sorrow, and pain because it is a way of making him feel real in a world that has rendered him invisible. Using guilt as a way of self-punishment after experiencing the traumatic event of Jane's death. Ultimately, this has led him to immerse in heroin addiction and careless behavior as a self-destruction that operates under the form of unconscious self-affirmation. Destructing one's self in pain to prove one's existing is a harmful way of treating the self, yet it avoids the feeling of emotional paralysis. In the case of Jesse, *jouissance* seems a way of freeing the psychological pressure created from the several traumatic events. Destructing the self is his way of revolting against the inhuman system. Suffering is a way of consolidation of identity. It is a paradoxical form of excessive because the individual cannot articulate the endured traumas, so a painful pleasure arises from the unconscious repetition of trauma.

Analyzing the end of the characters' trajectories exposes several results about the extent of the influence of the postmodern conditions. The unpredicted Jesse's survival seems as a triumph comparing to Walter's ending, but in fact it is a proof that the only way out, in the postmodern age, is through unbearable suffering. This is the left reality for the surviving Jesse: a continuous anguish. The death of the evil drug baron Gus Fring's death is an affirmation that no matter the strength of control, it cannot achieve stabilize a world built on contradictions. The ends of the two characters demonstrate the psychic cost of living in a postmodern society that demands self-destruction as the price of acquiring power.

Adopting criminal features is a rebellious reaction to the hyper-capitalist system that exists in the postmodern age. For instance, the story of Walter White's transformation into Heisenberg shows how human values are dictated by market logic rather than morality. His success as a teacher is not appreciated due to the low financial return that determines his life style and social class. His salary is regarded as worthless comparing to his educational level

in the legitimate economy. However, in the drug trade, his skills and educational intelligence provide not just high financial success but also power and respect.

Studying this character throughout the series uncovers important idea about the ability of late capitalism in corrupting the individual's ambition. The political systems adopt an economy apparatus that pushes individuals to follow illegitimate ways of earning money when legal methods fail to provide accepted standards of living according to contemporary lifestyle. This is one of the exquisite findings of the research that filters one's vision to nowadays individuals. It helps in understanding a certain category of individuals who have found themselves in criminal world. It is also seen as the collapse of the American dreams that appears as a myth.

Through the path of the characters' transformations, it can be deduced that the self is contaminated by the surrounding corrupted system. The political system's institutions of healthcare, education, judiciary are depicted as corruptible as the drug trade itself. Thus, the government's fight against drug consumption and dealing is chaotic and ineffective in a hypocritical fragile system. This facilitates the development of drug trade and criminality in this environment. For instance, Walter manipulates the hypocritical police system in managing his drug deals. This characterizes the postmodern conditions that emphasizes the role of power in forming the individual's reality, not ethics. Morality is seen as weakening factor that pushes individual to the bottom of financial failure and social marginalization.

Through the character Gus Fringe, the research succeeds in reaching conclusions about the individual's change under the influence of political system and how it leads to the instability of the psyche and the deformation of identity. The Television production presents Gus as the assimilated subject of the government's adopted economy system, late capitalism. This example facilitates understanding the mind of the drug barons and mafia's leaders that

exist in this age. Gus is man who has succeeded in getting through the symbolic order, but after losing his humanity. Through psychoanalytic terms, he is in an advanced stage of repression where the id is the controller of his mind. The id also manipulates others through using certain persona for protection and managing his hypocritical social life through the image of well-mannered businessman who owns legitimate chain of successful fried chicken restaurants called Los Pollos Hermanos. He protects his satisfying public image by supporting Albuquerque civic causes that includes the local Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) office. He even supports their office with large donations in public charitable events where he is seen as a friend of the agents.

It is a mask that hides the monstrous id of dangerous cruel drug lord. The mask is invested as a useful utility in managing a vast drug empire. This duality of identity represents the schizophrenia of postmodern power, where legitimacy and criminality are two sides of the same coin. What is deduced through studying this character is that politics is hypocritical; it is managed by dishonest and corrupted individuals who work in the DEA and the drug cartels. Gus, DEA agents, and the other criminals share common way of thinking that is based on exploiting people, materials, and space for self-interest. This exploitative logic is seen in the government's policies and its intuitional laws.

The interesting character study of Gus has revealed that his clever criminal dual identity is the result of his past life before becoming drug lord. The fact of migrating to Mexico as Chilean citizen who used to live under the dictatorship and the military government of Pinochet's regime explains his violent cold characteristics. He is a product of a history of political violence. His story is another political dimension that supports the idea of the hypocrisy and carelessness of politics. This emigrant has used the economic and political philosophy of late capitalism to succeed as a legitimate businessman, but as drug lord that runs a large empire of drug dealing. The striking truth is that this empire is built on

the same neoliberal logic that governs legitimate corporations: efficiency, branding, and expendable labor. Gus Fringe is postmodern villain created from political turmoil and corruption where power is the purpose.

Foucault's Biopolitics theory has shown that power in Gus Fringe's drug empire is operated as a controlled instrument for destruction. Its precision, calculation, and planning echo Foucault's idea of the government's administering the life and the death of its citizens through institutional control. Gus's business is not just about selling drugs, it is also about engineering bodies, spaces, and even time to increase productivity and decrease resistance. In addition, the organization of the superlab in the series with Gale's meticulous logs of information about the production and the workers that are under constant camera surveillance is a reflection of Foucault's concept of disciplinary regime. Gus' work disciplines workers into efficient and silent producers. The biopower exists in calculating and planning the excision of worker through considered violence. Killing seems to be included in their legitimate rights, and it is evident in several example like killing Victor with a box cutter. This murder is not just punishment; it is a spectacle of biopower reminding other workers and subjects that their lives are cheap and conditioned on their productivity.

One of the findings in this research is that the characters Jesse and Gus reflect two different radical representations of late capitalist philosophy who subjectivity. On the one hand, Jess's failure as an addict, excluded, painfully repressed individual exhibit the struggle in an oppressive system. According to Foucault's political theory, Jess is seen as biopolitical subject in a system that uses his suffering as an exploited subordinate, and this, unconsciously, becomes his identity. He highlights an important political connotation about the system's exploitation of the psychological state of the individual. Jess is an exploited subject because his suffering is not just personal but structural. In other words, he is a product of a failing society and political system that dismiss him as an addict while profiting from him in

economy exploitation. In fact, Jess' experienced *jouissance* is a manifested symptom of the consequences of late capitalism, where the marginalized are conditioned to reproduce their own suffering. Jess is benefited as a drug consumer and/or dealer in this illegal market. On the other hand, Gus is a dehumanized cold architect of power who has destructed himself and created a rebellious man who work with and against the system for his own benefit. In Foucauldian terms, he represents the biopolitical master, who considers bodies as data, death as logistics. This character proves that power is no longer about feudal dominance but cold, algorithmic governance. The TV series reflects as two symmetrical sides of the same broken system showing their psyches as critique to the postmodern world.

Using discourse to define the believed version of reality through linguistic referencing to individuals has either destructive or supportive effect on the psychological state. For instance, mentioning Jess in a conversation through the expression 'just a junkie' while referring to Gus as 'respectable businessman'. Analyzing the communicated discourse has manifested embedded truth about the lack of empathy in the used language addressed to the individuals especially the ones with mental and psychological issues. *Moreover*, the discourse that revolves around 'right and 'wrong', 'good' and 'evil' has become fluid and not related to strict and rigid concepts that keeps the bounds of such moral and ethical concepts. For instance, walter's justification of his criminal actions is based on using twisted rational language following the Nietzschean idea that "whoever fights monsters should see to it that he does not become a monster." The used language operates as a powerful tool that affects if not changes the human's thought and manipulates behaviors and actions. It is used in a more advance way through media that reaches everyone everywhere and anywhere today.

The Critical Discourse Analysis has revealed how *Joker* (2019) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) the embedded meanings of the used language is actually a critique to societal power structures, ideological conflicts, and marginalized identities. The used language of

characters, narrators, media inside the narratives have shown the effect of the communicated discourse on the psychological state of individuals. The two audiovisual works have exhibited the impact of discourse on protagonist that under radical psychological and mental transformations that reveal the failure of institutions, economic inequality, and dehumanizing discourse.

The discourse that is used by the followers of late capitalist philosophy is cruel mechanical and dehumanizing language reflected in the dialogue with the system's representatives. For instance, In *Joker*, Arthur Fleck's descent into violence criticizes the neoliberal abandonment of mental health care and class oppression. The language that is directed to mental ill and needed individuals have created violent and rebellious reactions as a response to verbal societal rejection and the system's neglect. This questions the real monsters in this system. *Breaking Bad*'s discourse also reflects the institutional power, and moral hypocrisy, using Walter's linguistic and behavioral shifts to mirror his ideological corruption.

By analyzing their discourses through dialogue, symbolism, and media representations, it is evident that both works challenge dominant ideologies while reinforcing or subverting stereotypes of madness, masculinity, and resistance. Their narratives compel reflection on real-world issues of alienation, inequality, and the consequences of systemic failure. The film criticizes postmodern alienation, where media narratives such as talk shows, protests, and rhetorical manipulation distort reality, turning Arthur into both a victim and a symbol of anarchic resistance.

Through Critical Discourse Analysis, it is concluded that Arthur and Walter are not merely evil individuals but products of postmodern discourse, where institutions fail, identities are unstable, and media shapes perception. Their psychological transformations

expose the darker consequences of postmodernism. By analyzing their linguistic shifts, interactions with power structures, and media representations, it is clear that postmodern discourse not only influences, but creates these antiheroes, challenging audiences to interrogate the societal forces that produce them.

The Textual analysis of the novels shows that the realistic narration reflects intertextuality and self-reflexivity as postmodernist literary features. They complicate the narratives by using several narrative shifts with reference and extracts from other works. It is included in conversations between characters and descriptive paragraphs. The realistic fictional novels are multi-layered in its themes and meanings that present the postmodernist concept of reality.

The postmodernist analysis of the novels *Poison Girls* and *Going the Wrong Path* have shown the rejection of traditional notions of objective reality. It has emphasized the importance of context and perspective in shaping one's understanding of truth. The postmodernist critique of truth is a reminder that one's understanding of reality is perpetually related to a certain historical and cultural context, it is always a topic of constant interpretation and reinterpretation. Thus, the postmodernist analysis has proved reality has a complex and dynamic nature. It is true that it rejects the notion of objective truth and scientific knowledge, but its emphasis on context, perspective, and diversity it indeed highlights how power dynamics shape one's understanding of the world. As a result, Analyzing the texts through postmodernist theory denotes that the concept of reality asserts the fact that approaching knowledge should be through humility and curiosity. In other words, one's recognizing and comprehending reality develops constantly and is dependent on one's cultural and historical background as well as context.

The research has discussed ethics, ambition, and human nature because they are evoked by the content of the studied works. To illustrate one of the works, Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* has introduced several themes and sub-themes that has enriched the analysis because of its undeniable impact that transcends narration and entertainment provoking profound conversations. The work has pushed boundaries in realistic fiction and storytelling creating unforgettable work of television drama. It has changed the characteristics of high-quality television work for its thought-provoking scenario, cinematography, and acting. Its positive critical acclaim, high ratings, and large fan base mirrors its long-lasting legacy. The success of *Breaking Bad* helped establish the anti-hero trope, paving the way for shows like *Ozark* and *Fargo*, which explore similar themes of moral complexity. *Breaking Bad* is a remaining cultural masterpiece that presents profound exploration of human psyche.

Todd Phillips and Sher Lawrence employ a masterful use of cinematography to visually convey Arthur Fleck's gradual descent into madness and his transformation into the iconic villain, Joker. Through framing, lighting, color, camera movement, and composition, the film creates an immersive psychological portrait that mirrors Arthur's unraveling psychological and mental state in a toxic postmodern environment.

The study has concluded that in reflecting the strong emotions to audience, the filmmakers have depended on lighting and color as Emotional Indicators. The fact that the character is a clown has permitted the use of this technique in individualist way especially in demonstrating the change of his inner psychological state. For instance, it is evident when showing the shift from cold, desaturated blues and grays in Arthur's depressive state to warmer, blood-like reds as he embraces his violent persona, Joker, symbolizing his psychological liberation through chaos.

The cinematography analysis has shown that the strong postmodernist themes of isolation and alienation are presented with the use of tight close-ups, shallow focus, and symmetrical framing, emphasizing Arthur's loneliness and detachment from society. Manifesting the fractured identity as a feature of the life of the individual in the postmodern age through locating the antihero in empty spaces trapped by the pressure other people and system. The chosen frames have contributed in demonstrating of the reflections of the broken image of the individual. Furthermore, Sher and Philips have used mirrors and reflections as a recurring motif throughout the narrative to highlight Arthur's distorted self-perception. Seeing himself in a shattered reflection is a used symbol that has culminated to full embrace of the Joker persona.

The use of claustrophobic locations as well as vast expansive Spaces is cinematography strategy it is evident in depicting Arthur's cramped apartment and narrow hallways and then showing him in the vast chaotic city of Gotham. This is a visual reinforcement to the character's sense of oppression and eventual explosive rebellion as the Joker. The peculiar use of camera is a cinematographic successful key in producing an unforgettable visual production. In the case of the joker, the unstable camera work has played an important role in displaying the transition from steady, controlled shots to erratic, handheld movements that mirror Arthur's deteriorating grip on reality, particularly in moments of distress or violence.

In short, the used cinematography in *Joker (2019)* is not just a stylistic choice, but a narrative and thematic device that attract the audience to immerse in Arthur's psyche. The visual language follows the antihero development and transformation creating masterful audiovisual production that shows the descent of an individual into madness. The film's power lies in its ability to urge the spectators to feel Arthur's internal struggles from isolation, rage, and delusions through every meticulously crafted shot.

Moving to the conclusion of the cinematography analysis of *Breaking Bad* that has proven to be substantial in depicting Walter White's psychological transformation from an undervalued high school teacher to a dangerous drug baron; meanwhile, it succeeds in reflecting to audience the reasons and consequences of this change such as the postmodern conditions of identity, morality, and existential crisis. Vince Gilligan's visual style of storytelling includes the clever use of color symbolism, dynamic camera movements, and thoughtful framing to incarnate Walter's internal moral decay and fragmentation.

Studying the character's psyche and its relation to the themes of this work has included analyzing the signification of the used colors in the scenes that has resulted in uncovering the filmmakers' recurrent employment of specific color palettes. As a Psychological Markers, the work has depended on shifting different color palette to exhibit what is going in inside the psyche of Walter. The muted neutral colors are used in showing his depression, alienation and fragmentation while the oppressive dark colors reflect his moral descent. The work includes recurring motifs such as green signifying greed, red for violence, and blue that refers to meth and cold detachment with reality reinforcing his psychological transformation.

The has not depended only on colors, but on Visual Motifs and Foreshadowing – Recurring imagery such as reflections, masks, and chemical reactions. The latter solidify the duality of Walter's identity and the inevitability of his downfall. Concerning camera perspectives, the series' director and cinematographer have relied on using extreme close ups, Dutch angles, point of view shots to indulge the audience in Walter's destructed vision of the world. The theme of alienation is achieved through isolating his place in the frame, highlighting his developing alienation and narcissism. As far as space is concerned, the analysis has concluded that the theme of confinement is manifested as a purpose of using narrow and claustrophobic shots in laboratories and other locations. These shots are usually

contrasted to vast desert landscapes symbolizing Walter's psychological instability in being trapped between staying in his conformist position or continue his quest of freedom and power. This signifies the postmodern fragmentation lived by the individual that is emphasized through the show's visual style of reflecting contrasted colors, spaces, emotions. This leads to visual demonstration of the state of identity crisis and moral relativism.

In short, *Breaking Bad*'s cinematography is not merely aesthetic but profoundly psychological, using visual language to explore Walter White's disintegration and the postmodern collapse of fixed identity. The camera becomes an active participant in his journey, forcing the audience to witness both his power and his delusions. Ultimately, this makes his transformation a visually compelling experience.

TS Eliot says, 'All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance. (12)' Indeed, the poet's line captures the essence of the researcher's long journey in the pursuit of knowledge that reveals the limits of human understanding. The statement also reflects the research thesis in showing the paradox of progress in the postmodern age that displays advancement in knowledge and technology as reasons behind the psychological transformation and alienation from fundamental truths, leading to existential or moral confusion. Moreover, the poetic line affirms the finite human knowledge and the futility of the intellectual pride in front of scientific research. The pursuit of knowledge humbles the human mind when it faces the vastness of the unknown. This aligns with the Socratic idea that true wisdom lies in recognizing one's own ignorance and limits of one's knowledge. As the saying goes, 'The more we learn, the more we realize how much we don't know.' Scientific and intellectual progress reveal deeper complexities by enlarging one's awareness of life's mysteries.

Knowing more about discourse, society and politics develop profound vision to understand one's self and its connection to the present time. Indeed, the research journey

changes the researcher not the destination. listing the findings and the research's results in this conclusion lead to introducing new questions, opening space for more continuous research. As T.S Eliot says in his poem Little Gidding 'To make an end is to make a beginning' (line 2) the end of this conclusion is a beginning for introducing new questions that open the scope for further research.

Works Cited

"Andros, Sir Edmund to Anise." Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., vol. 2, part 1, Project Gutenberg, 8 Oct. 2004, www.gutenberg.org/files. Accessed on 22Dec2024.

"Where Was Joker Filmed?" Giggster, <https://giggster.com/guide/movie-location/where-was-joker-filmed>. Accessed 12Jan2025

‘ Advice to young scientists - E.O. Wilson’, YouTube, Uploaded by TED-ED, 5th July 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptJg2GScPEQ>, Accessed 10April2025

“Film Culture.” Accessed on <https://rfc.completechaintech.com/film-culture.rfc.com>. 14Mar2025,

Acat, Ömer, and Kemal Macit Hisar. "Childhood Traumas, Ego Defense Mechanisms, and Happiness Level in Medical Students." *Journal of General Health Sciences (JGEHES)*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2023, pp. 34-46, doi:10.51123/.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford UP, 1998.

Alexander, Franz, et al., editors. *Psychoanalytic Pioneers*. Transaction Publishers, 1995.

Amoore, Louise. *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security Beyond Probability*. Duke UP, 2013.

Anandi, Rizki, et al. "Psychoanalysis of the Main Character in The Joker Movie." *Faculty of Language Muara Bungo University Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, June 2020.

Armstrong, James. "Applying Critical Theory to Electronic Media History." *Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media*, edited by Donald G. Godfrey, Routledge, 2006.

Arnason, H. H. *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. Harry N. Abrams, 1968.

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things With Words*. Harvard UP, 1962.

Bagal, Shivaji Digambar. 'Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity: A Study of George Bowering's *Burning Water*', *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, ISSN 2249-9598, Volume-VI, Issue-I, Jan-Feb 2016, 357.

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford University Press Inc., NewYork, 2008

Barthes, Roland. **S/Z**. Translated by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, 1974.

Baudrillard, J. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Theory, Culture & Society. New York: Nottingham University. (1970).

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Consuming life*. Cambridge Polity Press. (2007).

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2000

Bertens, Hans. *The Idea of The Postmodern*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005

Bhatia, Vijay K., et al. *Advances in Discourse Studies*. Routledge, 2008.

Boothe, B. "Oedipus Complex." *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, edited by Virgil Zeigler-Hill and Todd K. Shackelford, Springer International Publishing, 2017.

Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 12th ed., McGraw-Hill, 2019.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Translated by Gino Raymond, Polity, 1991.

Breaking Bad. Created by Vince Gilligan, AMC, 2008–2013.

Brinich, Paul, and Christopher Shelley. *The Self and Personality Structure*. 2nd ed., Open University Press, 2002.

Britt, David. *Impressionism to Post-Modernism*. Thames & Hudson, 2008.

Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books, 2015.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

Cavanaugh, Jillian R. "Performativity." *Oxford Bibliographies in Anthropology*, edited by Jillian R. Cavanaugh, Oxford UP, 2015, www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0132.xml.

Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman, Columbia UP, 1994.

Clowney, David. "Definitions of Art and Fine Art's Historical Origins." *The Journal of*

Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. 69, no. 3, 2011, pp. 309-20.

Coleman, Gabriella. Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous. Verso, 2014.

Crespo, María, and Violeta Fernández-Lansac. "Memory and Narrative of Traumatic Events: A Literature Review." Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, vol. 8, no. 2, 2016, pp. 149-56, DOI: 10.1037/tra0000041.

Creswell, John.W. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, SAGE Publications, USA, 2009

Cummings, Jeffrey, et al. "Pseudobulbar Affect – A Disabling but Under-recognised Consequence of Neurological Disease and Brain Injury." European Neurological Review, vol. 8, no. 2, 2013, pp. 74–81, DOI: 10.17925/ENR.2013.08.02.74.

Debord, Guy. The Society of the Spectacle. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Zone Books, 1995

Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." October, vol. 59, 1992, pp. 3–7.

Derrida, Jacques. Acts of Literature. Routledge, 1992.

Derrida, Jacques. Of Grammatology. Translated by Gayatri Spivak, Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. Positions, University of Chicago Press, (p. 21), 1982.

Diaconu, Mircea A. Truth and Knowledge in Postmodernism, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences ,Volume 137, Published by Elsevier, July 2014,165-169

Djellal, Faridah, and Faïz Gallouj. The Laws of Imitation and Invention: Gabriel Tarde

and the Evolutionary Economics of Innovation. 2014,. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1405-2.

Dunn, Robert. "Postmodernism: Populism, Mass Culture, and Avant-Garde." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 8, 1991, pp. 111-35.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1996

Einstein, Albert. *Out of My Later Years*. Philosophical Library, 1950.

Eliot, T.S. (1934) *Choruses from the Rock*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2015

Fang, Tony. "Yin Yang: A New Perspective on Culture." *Management and Organization Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, Mar. 2012, pp. 25-50, DOI: 10.1111/j.1740-8784.2011.00221.x.

Ferrier, Aimee. "Why Did Stanley Kubrick Love Featuring Bathrooms in His Movies?" *Far Out Magazine*, 4 Jan. 2023, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/why-did-stanley-kubrick-love-featuring-bathrooms-in-his-movies/>. Accessed 12Dec2024

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books, 2009.

Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life*. John Hunt Publishing, 2014

Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York : Harper & Row, 1976.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, Translated by Jay Miskowiec. 1986, pp. 22–27.

Foucault, Michel. **Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977**. Edited by Colin Gordon, Pantheon Books, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. *History of Madness*. Edited by Jean Khalfa, Routledge, 2006.

Foucault, Michel. *Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*, Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Routledge Classics, 2002

Foucault, Michel. *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*. 1967. Translated by Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité*, 1984.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978

Fraser, Nancy. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. U of Minnesota P, 1989.

Freeman, Tabitha. "Psychoanalytic Concepts of Fatherhood: Patriarchal Paradoxes and the Presence of an Absent Authority." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2008, pp. 113-39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240650801935156>.

Freud, Anna. *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. 1936. *The Writings of Anna Freud*, vol. 2, International Universities Press, 1966, pp. 3-191.

Freud, Sigmund. "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey, vol. 3, Hogarth Press, 1962, pp. 41-60. Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing,

pep-web.org.

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by James Strachey, Norton, 1961.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1923. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, pp. 1-66.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence*. White Press, 2014.

Freysteinson, Wyona M. "Demystifying the Mirror Taboo: A Neurocognitive Model of Viewing Self in the Mirror." *Nursing Inquiry*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2020, p. e12351, DOI: 10.1111/nin.12351.

Freysteinson, Wyona M., et al. *Reflections of Healing: Viewing Self in the Mirror After an Amputation*. Produced by Texas Woman's University, 2017, YouTube, www.youtube.com/channel/UCRmul9Eqw_HUgeV97on6H8g. Accessed 15 Feb 2025

Fürsich, Elfriede. "In Defense of Textual Analysis." *Journalism Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2009, pp. 238-52.

Gabrielsson, Alf. *Musikpsykologi: En Introduktion*. Gidlunds förlag, 2020, p. 150.

Gaventa, Jonathan. "Foucault: Power Is Everywhere." Powercube.net, www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/foucault-power-is-everywhere/. Accessed 16 Aug 2023

Gilligan, James. *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*. Vintage, 1997.

Gilligan, Vince, director. "...And the Bag's in the River." *Breaking Bad*, season 1, episode

3, Sony Pictures Television, 2008.

Gluck, Mark, et al. Learning and Memory: From Brain to Behavior. 4th ed., Worth Publishers, 2020.

Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Anchor Books, 1959

Gordon, Gail S. The Transformation: Discovering Wholeness and Healing After Trauma. HarperCollins, 2019.

Gray, Jonathan, and Amanda D. Lotz. Television Studies. Polity Press, 2012.

Greene, Tim. "Composer Hildur Guðnadóttir Finds The Humanity In 'Joker'." NPR, 3 Oct. 2019, www.npr.org/2019/10/03/766172923/composer-hildur-gu-nad-ttir-finds-the-humanity-in-joker. Accessed 12Mar2025

Gross, Terry. "'I Didn't Want It to End': Why Director Todd Phillips Came Back With Another 'Joker'." NPR, 23 Sept. 2024, www.npr.org/2024/09/23/nx-s1-5120599/joker-todd-phillips-joaquin-phoenix-lady-gaga. Accessed 20Feb2025

Guba, E.G & Lincoln, Y.S. Naturalistic Inquiry. SAGE, Thousand Oaks, 1985

Habermas, Jürgen. Cunoaştere şi comunicare [Knowledge and Communication]. Political Publishing House, 1983.

Halliday, M.A.K. Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning. Edward Arnold, 1978.

Halliday, M.A.K. Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning. Edward Arnold, 1978.

Hallo, William W. "The Birth of Rhetoric." Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks,

edited by Carol S. Lipson and Roberta A. Binkley, SUNY Press, 2004.

Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burn-Out Society*. Stanford University Press, 2015.

Harvey, David. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Hassin, Ran R., et al., editors. *The New Unconscious*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays", Translated by, William Lovitt, Garland Publishing, INC. New York & London 1977

Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books, 1992.

Hickman, Miranda B., and John D. McIntyre. *Rereading the New Criticism*. Ohio State UP, 2012.

Holmes, Jeremy. "Superego: An Attachment Perspective." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 92, no. 5, Oct. 2011, pp. 1221-40, doi:10.1111/j.1745-8315.2011.00411.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2000

Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide*. Indiana UP, 1986.

Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Indiana University Press, 1986.

Ian, Alister, and Christopher Hauke. *Jung and Film*. Routledge, 2001, p. 7.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. *Post-Contemporary Interventions*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. *Post-*

Contemporary Interventions. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992

Jenkinson, Paul M., and Catherine Preston. "The 'Not-So-Strange' Body in the Mirror: A Principal Components Analysis of Direct and Mirror Self-Observation." *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol. 48, 2017, pp. 262-72, DOI: 10.1016/j.concog.2016.12.007.

Johnson, David. *Breaking Bad and Color Theory: A Visual Dissection*. McFarland, 2016.

Joker. Directed by Todd Phillips, Warner Bros., 2019.

Jung, C.G. *Man and His Symbols*. Translated by Clara Winston and Richard Winston, Aldus Books, 1964, p. 66

Kale, Manisha. "Julia Kristeva: Feminism and Psychoanalysis." National Conference on 'Gender Studies: Literature, Culture, Media and Society'. Yeshwantrao Chavan College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Sillod, Maharashtra, India, 2020. *Lang Lit Journal*, 2020.

Kellner, Douglas. "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Culture." *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, edited by Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, Sage, 1995, pp. 5-17.

Khofifa, R., et al. "Analysis of Id, Ego and Superego of the Main Character in the Movie Script Cruella by Tony McNamara and Dana Fox." *JoTELL: Journal of Teaching English, Linguistics, and Literature*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1285-300.

Kli, Maria. "Eros and Thanatos: A Nondualistic Interpretation: The Dynamic of Drives in Personal and Civilizational Development From Freud to Marcuse." *The Psychoanalytic Review*, vol. 105, no. 1, Feb. 2018, pp. 67-89, doi:10.1521/prev.2018.105.1.67.

Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual*

Design. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1982.

Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Translated by Margaret Waller, Columbia UP, 1984.

Kulezic-Wilson, Danijela. "Sound Design Is the New Score: Theory, Aesthetics, and Erotics of the Integrated Soundtrack."], Oxford UP, 2019, pp. 1-26, doi:10.1093/oso/9780190855314.003.0001

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Tavistock, 1977.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Russell Grigg, Norton, 1993.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan, Norton, 1998.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Bruce Fink, Norton, 1999.

Lapsley, Daniel K., and Paul C. Stey. "Id, Ego, and Superego." *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*, 2nd ed., Academic Press, 2012, doi:10.1016/B978-0-12-375000-6.00199-3.

Leavy, Patricia. *Research Design Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*, Guilford Publications, 370 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1200, New York, NY 10001 USA, 2017

Lishman, William A., et al. *Lishman's Organic Psychiatry: A Textbook of Neuropsychiatry*. 4th ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Lyotard, François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester University Press, 1979

Malpas, Phil. *Capturing Colour*. AVA Publishing SA, 2007.

Manjunath, Chethan B. "Lacanian Theory in Literary Criticism." **International Conference on Influence of Neo-Freudian Theories in 20th Century Literature**, edited by Liminy Mathew and Gayathri R., SFS College Publications, 2017, pp. 97-104.

Marga, Andrei. *Filosofia lui Habermas [The Philosophy of Habermas]*. Polirom, 2006.

Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran, Duke UP, 2019.

McDougall, William. *An Introduction to Social Psychology*. Methuen & Co., 1919.

McGee, Michael Calvin. "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture." *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, vol. 54, no. 3, Summer 1990, pp. 274-89.

McLeod, Saul. "Kolb's Learning Styles and Experiential Learning Cycle." *Simply Psychology*, 19 Mar. 2025, www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html. Accessed 16Jun2022

Met, Christian. *Interviewee, Conversations with Christian Metz Selected Interviews on Film Theory (1970–1991)*, Edited by Warren Buckland and Daniel Fairfax, Amestrdam University Press, 2017

Miller, Jean Baker. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Beacon Press, 1976.

Mills, Sara. Michel Foucault. Routledge, 2003.

MLA. Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacra and Simulation. Translated by Sheila Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Mulvey, Laura. Visual and Other Pleasures. 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

O'Callaghan, Cian. Post politics and Post-Truth, International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, edited by Audrey Kobayashi, Second Edition, Published by Elsevier, 2020, 339-345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10683>

Odlyzko, Andrew. Charles Mackay's Own Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Railway Mania. Revised version, University of Minnesota, 26 Feb. 2012, www.dtc.umn.edu/~odlyzko.

Positions" by Jacques Derrida, University of Chicago Press, (p. 21), 1982.

Ravlić, Gabrijela. Joker: A Critique of Society. Undergraduate thesis, University of Zadar <https://repozitorij.unizd.hr/islandora/object/unizd%3A5463/datastream/PDF/view>, 2021.

Reed, Cheryl L. Poison Girls. Diversion Books, 2017.

Salih, Sara. "On Judith Butler and Performativity." Judith Butler, Routledge, 2002

Schaefer, Dennis, and Larry Salvato. Masters of Light: Conversations with Contemporary Cinematographers. Reprint ed., U of California P, 2013.

Schechner, Richard. Performance Studies: An Introduction. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2013.

Schultz, Duane P., and Sydney Ellen Schultz. Modern Psychology: A History. 10th ed., Cengage Learning, 2012.

Sdorow, Lester M. *Psychology*. USA, Academic Media Solutions, 2019

Shine, Jessica. "He Has Music in Him': Musical Moments, Dance and Corporeality in *Joker* (2019)." *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 27, 2024, pp. 152-68, doi:10.33178/alpha.27.14.

Sibi, K. J. "Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalytic Theory." *LangLit: An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal*, special issue on Trauma Studies, May 2020, pp. 76. www.langlit.org.

Singh, Nahakpam Tarunkumar, and Sonia Luthra. "A Freudian Analysis of Christopher in the Film *Cuttputli*." *Tuijin Jishu/Journal of Propulsion Technology*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2024, ISSN: 1001-4055

Skryabin, Valentin Yurievich. "Analysing *Joker*: An Attempt to Establish Diagnosis for a Film Icon." *BJPsych Bulletin*, vol. 45, no. 6, Dec. 2021, pp. 329-32. Cambridge University Press, 7 Jan. 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjb.2020.146>.

Smith, Laura. "Labor and Power in *Breaking Bad*." *Journal of Television Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2017, pp. 140–155.

Sreepada, N & Partida Domínguez, G. 'Exploring Affect, Identity, and Populism in and Around Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019)'. *Revista Panamericana De Comunicación*, vol.4 no.2, Ciudad de México, December 2022. 177–193. <https://doi.org/10.21555/rpc.v4i2.2713>

Stein, Murray. *Jung's Map of the Soul: An Introduction*. Illustrated ed., Shira Media, 2021.

Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*. Seal Press, 2008.

T.S. Eliot. 'Four Quartets', Little Gidding, edited by, edition, publisher, 1942

Tan, Cenk. "A Jungian & Nietzschean Approach to Todd Phillips' Joker." *Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2021, pp. 423-44, DOI: 10.26650/LITERA2020-802745.

Tarzian, Martin, et al. "An Introduction and Brief Overview of Psychoanalysis." *Cureus*, 13 Sept. 2023, doi:10.7759/cureus.45171.

The Royal Film Commission - Jordan (RFC), 'Film Culture' , Accessed on 14/04/2025

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Russell Grigg, Norton, 1993.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan, Norton, 1998.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Bruce Fink, Norton, 1999.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso, 1989

Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage, 1985.

Tomkins, Calvin. *The Scene: Reports on Post-Modern Art*. Viking Press, 1976.

Trotta, Antonella, and Ivan Formica. "The Oedipus Complex in Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Freud's Clinical Cases." *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, ISSN: 2282-1619 Doi:10.6092/2282-1619/2018.6.1633

Turco, Lewis. *The Book of Literary Terms*. 1999.

Unknown. "Jung and his Individuation Process." *Journal Psyche*.
<https://journalpsyche.org/jung-and-his-individuation-process/> Accessed 12 Oct. 2024.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Penguin, 2014.

van Hulst, M., Metze, T., Dewulf, A., de Vries, J., van Bommel, S., & van Ostaijen, M. (2024). Discourse, framing and narrative: three ways of doing critical, interpretive policy analysis. *Critical Policy Studies*, 19(1), 74–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2024.2326936>

Verma Alope & Payal Goswami. 'Breaking Bad a Cultural and Narrative Analysis of a Landmark Television Series'. *Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 1, Issue 2, 91-95,2024

Vilanova, Felipe, et al. "Deindividuation: From Le Bon to the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects." *Cogent Psychology*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2017, p. 1308104, DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2017.1308104.

Wang, Zhiguo, and Xueping Wang. "Postmodernist Critical Spirit: Its Cultural Influence and Impact on Music and Schools of Thought." *Trans/Form/Ação*, vol. 47, no. 5, May 2024, pp. e02400160, DOI: 10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n5.e02400160.

Weissmann, Arthur. *Going the Wrong Path*. Independently Published, 2017.

Wexler, David B. "The Broken Mirror: A Self Psychological Treatment Perspective for Relationship Violence." *Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research*, vol. 8, no. 2, Spring 1999, pp. 129-41, PubMed Central, PMCID: PMC3330535.

Wilson, Edward O. *On Human Nature*, Harvard University Press, 2004

Wilson, Graeme J. *Angry White Men: How Breaking Bad and The Walking Dead Predicted the Trumpian Zeitgeist*. Dissertation, [University Name], 2019.

Wright, James. *Soundscapes of Crime Drama*. Oxford UP, 2019.

Yılmaz, Yunus Anıl. "Freud and Claus: Biological Roots of Psychoanalysis." *European Yearbook of the History of Psychology*, vol. 7, 2021, pp. 77-106, doi:10.1484/J.EYHP.5.127019.

Young, Sandra. "Recognising Hamlet." *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, vol. 26, 2014, pp. 13-26, doi:10.4314/sisa.v26i1.2.

Zachary, Brandon. "Joker: [SPOILER] May Be More Psychologically Broken Than Arthur Fleck". CBR, 15 Oct. 2019, [www.cbr.com](https://www.cbr.com/joker-penny-more-psychologically-broken-than-arthur-fleck/). /joker-penny-more-psychologically-broken-than-arthur-fleck/. Accessed 26 December 2024.

Zappalà, Giuseppe, et al. "Traumatic Brain Injury and the Frontal Lobes: What Can We Gain with Diffusion Tensor Imaging?" *Cortex*, vol. 48, no. 2, Feb. 2012, pp. 156-65, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2011.06.020>.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. MIT Press, 1991.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso, 1989.

Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Public Affairs, 2019.

Madjar, Shahar. 'What to learn from movies', Published on 25 Sep 2023, <https://www.mininggazette.com/news/health/2023/09/what-to-learn-from-movies/>.

Accessed on 10Mar 2025

"Visual Arts." Encyclopaedia Britannica, 12 May 2023, www.britannica.com/art/visual-arts. Accessed 13 Sep2023

"meme, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press,
www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=memes.

Résumé

Les fictions réalistes contemporaines et les productions audiovisuelles contribuent à dépeindre les problématiques humaines de l'ère postmoderne. Cette étude vise à explorer comment un individu subit une transformation psychologique sous l'influence de la société, du discours et des conditions politiques dans la postmodernité. Cette question est examinée à travers l'œuvre cinématographique *Joker* (2019) et la série télévisée *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), ainsi qu'à travers l'analyse de l'œuvre littéraire américaine *Poison Girls* (2017) de Cheryl L. Reed et du roman *Going the Wrong Path* (2017) d'Arthur Weissmann. Les productions choisies soulèvent plusieurs préoccupations vécues par des individus traversant des changements psychologiques, voire des troubles, en raison de l'influence des circonstances sociétales et politiques contemporaines. Ce sujet est l'un des plus urgents et des plus débattus dans les études littéraires et médiatiques. Cette recherche aborde cette question principalement sous l'angle psychanalytique, en utilisant les concepts freudiens, jungiens et lacaniens. Cependant, l'analyse approfondit également les œuvres pour étudier les causes et extraire des informations pertinentes, nécessitant d'autres théories et courants de pensée tels que le postmodernisme et l'analyse critique du discours. Cette thèse propose une analyse cinématographique et une étude sémiotique des scènes audiovisuelles en lien avec le sujet. Elle offre également une étude thématique, linguistique et cinématographique de la psychologie de l'individu. Cette analyse multidimensionnelle se concentre sur les personnages, les théories et le contexte en répondant aux questions de comment et pourquoi se produisent les changements psychologiques affectant l'identité de l'individu. En combinant ces approches philosophiques et critiques, cette thèse vise à fournir une base solide pour examiner comment un individu vit une transformation psychologique sous l'influence du discours, de la société et des conditions politiques dans des cadres postmodernes.

Mots-clés : Individu, postmodernisme, fiction réaliste, rébellion, conformisme, discours.

الملخص

تُساهم الأعمال الروائية الواقعية المعاصرة والإنتاج السمعي البصري في تصوير قضايا الإنسانية في عصر ما بعد الحداثة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية تأثير الفرد بالتحول النفسي في ظل المجتمع والخطاب والظروف السياسية في عصر ما بعد الحداثة. يُدرس هذا التحول من خلال عملين أدبيين، فيلم سينمائي ومسلسل تلفزيوني:

The Joker (2019), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), Chreyl .L Reed `s *Poison Girls* (2017), Arthur Weissmann`s *Going the Wrong Path* (2017)

تُثير هذه الأعمال المختارة العديد من المخاوف التي يعيشها الأفراد الذين يمرون بتغيرات نفسية، ومشاكل، إن لم تكن اضطرابات، نتيجةً لتأثير الظروف المحيطة القوية في عصرنا. يُعد هذا الموضوع من أكثر المواضيع إلحاحًا، وأكثرها إثارةً للجدل، في الدراسات الأدبية والإعلامية. يتناول هذا البحث هذا التساؤل بشكل رئيسي من منظور التحليل النفسي، مستخدمًا مفاهيم فرويد ويونغ ولاكان. ومع ذلك فالتحليل يتعمق في الأعمال لدراسة الأسباب واستخلاص معلومات قيّمة تتطلب نظريات ومدارس فكرية أخرى، مثل ما بعد الحداثة وتحليل الخطاب النقدي.

تقدم هذه الأطروحة تحليلًا سينمائيًا ودراسة سيميائية لمشاهد الأعمال السمعية البصرية في علاقتها بالموضوع. الأطروحة تقدم دراسة موضوعية ولغوية وسينمائية لنفسية الفرد. يركز هذا التحليل متعدد الأبعاد على الشخصيات والنظريات والسياق من خلال الإجابة على أسئلة حول كيفية وأسباب حدوث التغيرات النفسية التي تؤثر على هوية الفرد. من خلال الجمع بين هذه المناهج الفلسفية والنقدية، تهدف الأطروحة إلى توفير أساس متين لدراسة كيفية تجربة الفرد للتحول النفسي تحت تأثير الخطاب والمجتمع والظروف السياسية في ظروف ما بعد الحداثة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفرد، ما بعد الحداثة، الخيال الواقعي، التمرد، الرضوخ، الخطاب